

CHEIKH ANTA DIOP

**THE CULTURAL UNITY
OF
BLACK AFRICA**

**THE DOMAINS of PATRIARCHY
AND of MATRIARCHY
IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY**



KARNAK HOUSE

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The Cultural Unity of Black Africa
The Domains of Patriarchy and of Matriarchy
in Classical Antiquity
by Cheikh Anta Diop

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cheikh Anta Diop was born in Senegal in December 1923 and died of a heart attack in February 1986. His entire life was devoted to scholarship and to retrieving ancient Egyptian history as an intrinsic part of Black African history. He was a lone voice in a sea of opposition. His early education was at Muslim schools and he later obtained the baccalaureat in Senegal before going to Paris to study mathematics. While at the Sorbonne, Diop also took courses in sociology, anthropology, ancient history, prehistory and linguistics under French scholars André Aymard, Gaston Bachelard, André Leroi-Gourhan, Marcel Griaule and Lille Homburger. Diop also studied hieroglyphics, Egyptology and nuclear physics, and was granted his Docteur es Lettres, after much controversial debate, in 1960. Diop was responsible for the UNESCO-sponsored conference on the peopling of ancient Egypt and the deciphering of the Meroitic script in Cairo, 1974, and was a vice-president of the UNESCO committee responsible for the *General History of Africa*. Diop participated in the political life of Senegal and was subjected to house arrest and the confiscation of his passport by the Senghor regime. He founded the radio-carbon laboratory at the University of Dakar in 1966, and since his death the university has been renamed in his honour. In 1966, at the world festival of Black arts in Senegal, Diop, along with W.E.B. DuBois, was voted the most influential scholar of the 20th century on the black world.

Diop is survived by a wife and three sons.

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INTRODUCTION

Cheikh Anta Diop's theory of Matriarchal values as the basis for African Cultural Unity

Ifi Amadiume

It was in 1983 that I nearly met Cheikh Anta Diop in a sufi community in Madina-Kaolack in Senegal. The Imam and Shaikh of that community, knowing my political and intellectual interests, said to me as soon as I arrived there that I had just missed Cheikh Anta Diop. Then again in 1985, I found myself standing right before the great African savant. The organiser of that 1985 conference, the very first time Cheikh Anta Diop delivered a paper in London, knowing how the news would affect me, urged me to meet him. Even though very pregnant at the time, I leapt up and went to him. I made as if to talk to him. He stretched out his hand in returned salutation, when someone came between us and started talking to him. I let it be and returned to my seat.

Later in 1985, I wrote *Afrikan Matriarchal Foundations: The Igbo Case*¹ in which I tried to substantiate some of the ideas raised by Diop in *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Patriarchy and of Matriarchy in Classical Antiquity*². I dedicated the book to Diop with the Igbo eulogy, *Ebunu ji isi eje ogu*, 'brave ram who fights with his head'. Of course I meant fighting fearlessly with both courage and intellect; what Diop himself called 'rationalization'. Then in 1986, I read without warning in a Nigerian newspaper that our great philosopher had died of a heart attack and I wept. He was only 62 years old. By being invited to write an introduction to the Karnak House edition of *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa*, I find myself again on the path that Cheikh Anta Diop threaded. Hopefully, I shall not be lost in blind adulation, but will assess objectively the merits of this book, not so much as an ammunition for fighting the racisms

against Africa, but its relevance in contemporary African political thinking and for the development of a more progressive class and gender-aware African studies programme.

Diop wrote this book during the 1950s nationalist struggles and general debate for African independence. As a foremost pan-Africanist, he attacked those who could not conceive the idea of an independent African federation or a multi-national African state. He therefore undertook to demonstrate 'our organic cultural unity' in spite of a 'deceptive appearance of cultural heterogeneity'. Why did Diop adopt this organic approach? One reason could be the fact that that was the period of the organic approach (the concept of the homogeneity of a specific society which precludes social contradictions) followed by the formalists in the social sciences. This approach was later discredited by the functionalists and the structuralists. Yet, Diop's work makes better sense in the structuralist school, as he is basically dealing with ideas. The other reason could be that in this particular issue, Diop was not simply concerned with pure abstract armchair academics, but had a political commitment to his people to try and reconstruct a history and culture, which had been subjected to nearly 900 years of plunder by both the Arabs and the Europeans. This does not even include the destruction of the ancient African Egyptian civilization. Diop therefore argued that that which unites us is much more fundamental than our superficial differences, and that these differences are externally imposed. They derive from colonial heritage.

What Diop took firm grip on and used to argue the 'profound cultural unity' of Africa is the history of African matriarchy. He thus proceeded from analysis of material conditions to ideological superstructures. By so doing, Diop reclaimed our Afrocentric history, applying both an holistic account and a structural analysis of myth in order to expose the ideas behind events. The result is a blueprint for a comprehensive African social history.

The racist, colonialist and imperialist forces that Diop was confronting at the time compelled him not to dwell solely on an account and analysis of matriarchy in Africa. He had to confront the so-called world 'experts' on the subject. Diop thus proceeded to do an extensive and devastating critique of Bachofen's theory of matriarchy and Morgan's theory of the family.

The evolutionist matriarchy theory of Bachofen was based on the analysis of classical Greek literature. From this limited Greek source, he proceeded to generalise for the whole of human social organisation the evolution of a period when there was no marriage but 'barbarism' and 'sexual promiscuity' based on a matrilineal descent system to a period of marriage and matriarchy based on the supremacy of the woman. The final stage was the period of masculine imperialism, that is, patriarchy. As Diop points out, Bachofen did not stop at fabricating these evolutionary periods, but also imposed a prejudiced judgement, concluding that patriarchy is superior to matriarchy.

Even so, what is interesting in Bachofen's analysis of the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus is not so much the defeat of matriarchy by patriarchy, but the fact that in order for patriarchy to make these false claims of either defeat or superiority, it had to invent a kind of pseudo-procreation in abstract rituals or religions and appropriate the basic factual procreative role of natural biological motherhood and that 'closest bond of love'. This is basically what the roles of priesthood and imamate have done. In these roles men assume the nurturing roles of the mother; they even go to the extent of imitating women's wear. In patriarchal rituals in which this construct is more overt we see men dressed as women. This is why real women are banned from these roles. This was the role of Apollo and Athena. Also, in order for this pseudo-construct to succeed, there must be re-classified collaborating women like Athena. Once we can grasp this analysis, then we need not go to antiquity to see this struggle or contest between matriarchal and patriarchal thought systems. Many present-day feminist theorists are also unable to handle the issue of matriarchy, as they are still bogged down by Bachofen's periodisation. Or perhaps, because they have neither historical nor cultural memory of matriarchy, they understand matriarchy, not so much in the sense of social institutions, kinship organisations, women's institutions and culture, but as a society totally ruled by women. When they cannot find such a society, they dismiss the issue of matriarchy as myth.

Diop illustrates how Morgan's understanding of marriage and kinship systems remained chaotic. From the study of the Iroquois Indians of North America, Morgan had, based on his ethnocentric concepts of the nuclear family structure of European civilization,

postulated four stages in the evolution of marriage and the family from primitive 'promiscuous intercourse'. He therefore distinguished matrilineality and matriarchy of 'barbarian' peoples from the patriarchy and monogamy of 'civilised' Greece and Rome. As Diop shows, Morgan's classification was basically this equation: Aryan (Indo-European) = white = civilized and non-Aryan = others = savages. Morgan was a racist. This theory was racist.

In their theories of a universal organic matriarchy, both Bachofen and Morgan established a false and racist hierarchy of social systems and values. The colonial subject of anthropology reinforced this division and racism as a result of its zoning of humanity into its so-called primitive societies = others, and modern = theirs = civilized societies. These racist and ignorant notions of high and low cultural civilizations equated feudal, pyramidal, bureaucratic and imperialistic political systems with 'high' culture and decentralised and diffused political systems with 'low' and primitive culture. How today's political awareness seeks to reverse this fallacy, is marked by the movements for horizontal communication and decentralisation.

Diop's position is that matriarchy is specific, not general, given the influence of ecology on social systems. He therefore put forward his hypothesis of a double cradle and went ahead to argue two geographical zones of North and South. His thesis is that matriarchy originated in the agricultural South, using Africa to illustrate his argument, while patriarchy originated in the North, being nomadic. The middle belt was the Mediterranean basin, where matriarchy preceded patriarchy. Whereas in Western Asia, both systems were superimposed on each other.

Comparing these North and South cultures on the basis of the status of women, systems of inheritance, dowry and kinship affiliation, Diop shows how the Northern Indo-European cultures denied women rights and subjugated them under the private institution of the patriarchal family, as was argued by Engels. The Northern patriarchs had women under their armpit, confining them to the home and denying them a public rôle and power. In this system, a husband or father had the right of life and death over a woman. The travelling out of women for marriage compounded this patriarchal control. This Northern system was characterised by dowry, fire-worship and cremation.

In contrast, in the matriarchal culture of the South, typified by

the agricultural system and burial system, husbands came to wives. Wives were mistresses of the house and keepers of the food. Woman was the agriculturalist. Man was the hunter. Woman's power was based on her important economic role. This system was also characterised by bridewealth and the strong tie between brother and sister. Even in the marriage, where a woman travelled out, this bond was not completely severed. Most of the funeral rules prescribed the return of a wife's corpse to her natal home. Funeral exchanges also indicated compensation for the loss of a woman, as my own researches confirmed.

This Southern matriarchal system was also marked by the sacredness of the mother and her unlimited authority. There were oaths invoking the power of the mother, that is, the ritualisation of that matricentric, mother and child, 'closest bond of love' quoted even in *Eumenides*. This is the 'spirit of common motherhood', generally symbolised in African religions. In Igbo, it is *Oma*, *Umunne*, *Ibenne*. In this African religious concept, it is the mother that gives her children and society in general the gift of 'the pot of prosperity', which in Igbo is called *ite uba*.

The mother also gives the pot of secrets/mystery/magic/sacred knowledge/spiritual power. In Igbo, this is called *ite ogwu*. In Wolof, it is *demm*. All the unadulterated African myths, legends and stories of heroism attest to this. As Diop says, these ideas 'go back to the very earliest days of African mentality. They are thus archaic and constitute, at the present time, a sort of fossilization in the field of current ideas. They form a whole which cannot be considered as the logical continuation of a previous and more primitive state, where a matrilineal heritage would have ruled exclusively'. (p.34) The social or cultural construction of fatherhood in these matriarchal systems led prejudiced and ignorant social anthropologists to assume that our societies did not know the facts of conception!

Diop's theory is that these two systems are irreducible, 'it has been shown that these things still occur under our own eyes, in both cradles and with full knowledge of the facts. It is not therefore logical to imagine a qualitative leap which would explain the transition from one to the other'. (p.41) Diop therefore insisted on attributing social change primarily to external factors, as a result of his organic view of society. This organic understanding of society and culture contributed to his attribution of the mixed systems of the Oceanic societies to the role of migration and dispersion.

This attribution of social change to external factors alone presents not only an organic but a static view of society. Diop saw aboriginal Africa as the continent where ancient civilizations have remained preserved, since Africa seemed more substantially resistant to external factors. Thus, Diop was able to present two polar systems of values for his North and South cradles. Africa, as representative of the Southern cradle of matriarchy, valued the matriarchal family, territorial state, the emancipation of women in domestic life, the ideal of peace and justice, goodness and optimism. Its favoured literatures were novels, tales, fables and comedy. Its moral ethic was based on social collectivism.

The contrasting Northern cradles, as exemplified by the culture of Aryan Greece and Rome, valued the patriarchal family, the city-state, moral and material solitude. Its literature was characterized by tragedy, ideals of war, violence, crime and conquests. Guilt and original sin, pessimism, all pervaded its moral ethic which was based on individualism.

Diop, having thus contrasted one system with the other, went on to provide a general history of both cradles and their areas of influence. In order to prove his point that African women were already Queens and warriors, participating in public life and politics, while their Indo-European contemporaries were still subordinated and subjugated under the patriarchal family, Diop presents us with an array of powerful ancient African Queens and their achievements. In Ethiopia, there were Queen of Sheba, Queen Candace, who fought the invading army of Augustus Caesar. In Egypt, there was Queen Hatshepsut, described as 'the first queen in the history of humanity'. Cleopatra was titled 'Queen of Kings'. Even in the huge and powerful empires of Ghana in the Third Century A.D., matriarchal values were the norm. It was the same in the Mali empire.

Consistent with his theory of the external factor in social change, Diop attributes the introduction of patrilineality in Africa to the coming of Islam in the tenth century. Even then, he argues that patrilineality was on the surface and did not penetrate deep into the basic matriarchal systems. He attributes the more recent changes towards patriarchy to more external factors such as Islam, Christianity and the secular presence of Europe in Africa, symbolised by colonial legislation, land rights, naming after the father, monogamy and the

class of Western educated elites and moral contact with the West.

Diop's theory of two irreducible systems seem to me difficult to accept academically, given the limitations imposed on the organic approach to societies which leads to the portrayal of society as static rather than dynamic in itself. I do however accept the irreducibility of the matricentric unit as a social fact. Patriarchy can only be based on a denial of this fact, hence its falsifications and fabrications. Patriarchy is both a social and cultural construct, consequently the equation of patriarchy with the control and oppression of women. The 'natural' and social fact of the matricentric unit is basic to all societies, as symbolised by the pregnant woman. Consequently, the question is whether this basic structure of mother and child is acknowledged in social organisation, culture and politics. Where it is acknowledged, women would obviously be so organised to safeguard that acknowledgement. For all we know, women were that organised in indigenous African societies. Igbo women, for example, still sing, 'woman is principal, is principal, is principal', repeating and repeating the statement and message. So too is the sacredness and infallibility of mothers sung repeatedly – by women. African women were that socio-economically organised that they were involved in and in control of certain areas in the ideology-making processes.

It is therefore necessary to apply a multiplicity of theoretical approaches in order to gain insight into the internal dimensions of social and gender relations. It would be necessary to apply social process, conflict and dissent theories, in order to gain a much fuller picture of societies and cultures, not just a given and unchanging organic concept of so-called formal systems. Men and women are rational animals, who are able to form political and conflicting interest groups on the basis of sex, age, class, etc., differences or similarities. Even the individual can be in conflict with the institution as is argued by difference/different deconstructionists.

This is why I took a different position in *Afrikan Matriarchal Foundations* and argued that at all times in human history, matriarchal and patriarchal principles of social organisation or ideologies have presented two juxtaposed and contesting systems. For example, if these queens listed by Diop were functioning in solely matriarchal systems, one wonders why they had to wear men's symbols of authority, like Nzinga of Angola who dressed in men's clothes, or

Hatshepsout in Egypt who wore a beard. The masculinism of most of these warrior queens has earned them such descriptions as iron maidens and Boadiceas³.

It can however be argued that as a result of the basic matriarchal differences in social values, centralisation and feudalism in Africa would throw up 'Queen Bees', sitting comfortably on their female selves, while Indo-European patriarchal values and centralisation would produce the Boadiceas and iron maidens, generally alienated from their female selves. In the traditional African decentralised political systems, the symbolic representation of the goddesses was simply in titled women, who were neither 'Queen Bees' nor iron maidens, as for example, Igo *Ekwe* titled women⁴.

This debate was also taken on by Diop, when he deconstructed the classical Amazon myth, showing how it was derived from an Eurasian cradle, where 'a ferocious patriarchy reigned'. It is the patriarchal malice against women, fabricated in the classical Amazon myth, which led Diop to make this statement: 'Matriarchy is not an absolute and cynical triumph of woman over man; it is a harmonious dualism, an association accepted by both sexes, the better to build a sedentary society where each and everyone could fully develop by following the activity best suited to his physiological nature. A matriarchal regime, far from being imposed on man by circumstances independent of his will, is accepted and defended by him'. (p.108)

As Diop says correctly of militant or military female contingents in Africa, 'the hatred of men is foreign to them and they possess the consciousness of being 'soldiers' struggling only for the liberation of their country'.

What is important to us today is not the legacy of warrior queens, but a thorough analysis of the primary system of social organisation around an economically self-sufficient or self-supporting matricentric cultural unit and a gender free or flexible gender linguistic system, which is the legacy of African matriarchy. We need to understand its associated goddess-focussed religions and culture which helped women organise effectively to fight the subordinating and controlling forces of patriarchy, thereby achieving a kind of system of checks and balances. This is basically what the so-called monotheistic and abstract religions of Islam and Christianity ruling Africa today subverted and continue to attack. The fundamental question to those

proposing these religions as a possible means of achieving a pan-African unity or federation is this: are these religions able to accept and accommodate our goddesses and matriarchy, that is, African women's true primordial cultures in the present politics of primordialism, manipulated by nationalists and fundamentalists?

Hinterland Africa proper which had such structures which favoured the rule of goddesses, matriarchy, queens, etc., is indeed still present with us today. But, these systems are facing erosion, as elite African men manipulate the new and borrowed patriarchies to forge a most formidable 'masculine imperialism', yet unknown in our history. How are we ever going to subvert this, since the first casualty has been the autonomy and power of the indigenous women's organisations?

In contrast to the seeming collusion of present-day African daughters of the establishment, the issue of women's role and status in society, far from being a nineteenth century debate, has since the 60s gathered a new force in Western feminist literature and scholarship. In Germany, for example, inquiry into matriarchy is taken very seriously⁵. In the U.S. and Latin America, women's search for spirituality predominates. In Britain, it is a search for ancient goddesses⁶. There is also a revival of witchcraft cults. The whole Green and Ecological movement derives its concept and ideology from the so-called African animism, which is now being acknowledged as a worship of nature. In all this, African ethnography serves as a databank, but with little acknowledgement from the users. Is the history of Greek appropriation of African philosophy and science in the nineteenth century' repeating itself on this eve of the twenty-first century?

Ironically, in all these movements, it is that continent of matriarchy, Africa, where there is no such concern in African scholarship. Is the reason because it is still in the control of christian and islam-produced elite men and women? Is it also because we are now ruled directly by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), The World Bank and foreign aid agencies and the neo-missionaries 'dashing' us money, food, clothes and their books/knowledge, including their toxic waste? In a kind of abstract denial of the social and material reality of the experience of every African child and its mother, as is characteristic of new masculinist patriarchal fabrications by especially elite African men, this continuous copycatting performance and its symptomatic

schizophrenia remains the lot of the colonised African mind.

Because Diop took on the fundamental issue of matriarchy from an Afrocentric perspective and interest, as opposed to a compromised struggle for women's rights in patriarchal systems, what scholar will match the feminism of Cheikh Anta Diop? For him, matriarchy is an 'ensemble of institutions favourable to womanhood and to mankind in general'. As he said, male controlled social science has only seen in this 'dangerous freedom which is almost diabolical'. One wonders why Western matriarchy theorists do not cite the work of Cheikh Anta Diop?

The rage against Diop by white scholars and Western self-interest has not abated. If anything, it is very often, these days, parroted by a particular class of Africans themselves, who are still under their tutelage, supervision and control, the copycats. As for African men, they feel contented to cite only those aspects of the work of the great thinker which serve their purpose, especially the reclaiming of ancient Egyptian civilization. The fundamental thesis of his work, which rests on African matriarchy, is the least given importance and applied.

In the most recent findings in Western search for human racial origins, a racist invention and concern of the West alone, Diop is vindicated time and time again as the primary role of the African mother, whether in the bequeathing of the gene⁸ or language⁹ to the human race continues to be 'very scientifically proved'. But racist appropriation continues, even in this era of deconstruction – if these youngest of our children do not call humanity's African mother Lucy, they call her Eve! So, we see again in this, the appropriation of the nineteenth century. To even scientists, it is unthinkable that the fossil of our African mother, found on the African continent, should retain an African name! This crystallises and symbolises the nature of the relationship of European civilization with that of Africa. This structure of appropriation can be found in every other field of relations.

Diop had prayed, 'may this work contribute to a strengthening of the feelings of goodwill which have always united Africans from one end of the continent to the other and thus show our organic cultural unity'. He made it imperative that a full knowledge of lessons must be learnt from the past in order to 'keep one's consciousness the feeling of historical continuity essential to the consolidation of a multinational state'. Like Cheikh Anta Diop, because of our history

of colonialism, African intellectuals, if they are to be free from self-negation, must deconstruct, invalidate and reconstruct. The enforcement of a common currency and a common language above our local languages is an imperative. It does not matter which language, as long as its morphology and syntax have African origin, especially its gender formation. There is no point imposing on us a creole which has incorporated all the patriarchal and racist structures from its parent source. Everyone can in fact start at the same take-off point, if we were to pick the remotest of African language from deep inside the bush and let it grow with us. In which case, there will be no question of imperialism and distrust.

In this project of reconstruction, a gender and class aware social history is a priority. The racist term anthropology, which really should have been social history, must be banned altogether. We must adopt and elaborate the historiography of Cheikh Anta Diop, using his multi-disciplinary approach to write an African social history¹⁰ and enforce the teaching of social history in our curriculum. Present day African scholarship only knows the chronological history of kings, queens and conquest. Since in our schools and colleges, there is no social history, nor grassroots history from the bottom and the history of our indigenous social institutions, how then can we begin to build an Afrocentric history and unity without this knowledge? As our great African philosopher and political activist said, let the general commitment of intellectual activism lead to the liquidation of all colonial systems of imperialism. His vision of the universe of tomorrow is that imbued with African optimism. Did Diop thus predict the ecological movement?

This book will remain a classic as long as there are men and women in this world and as long as the West persists in its history of patriarchy, racism and imperialism.

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

I have tried to bring out the profound cultural unity still alive beneath the deceptive appearance of cultural heterogeneity.

It would be inexcusable for one led by chance to experience deeply the living reality of the land not to try to furnish knowledge of the African sociological actuality.

To the extent that sociological facts are at the outset based on some motivation instead of existing freely in themselves, it suffices to grasp the guiding thread in order to extricate oneself from the factual maze.

From this point of view, this work represents an effort of rationalization.

It is clear that an African researcher is in a more privileged position than others and consequently there is no particular merit in this attempt to unearth the sociological laws which seem to be the foundation of the social reality in which he lives.

Moreover, had many scholars not preceded us we might not have attained today any of our results.

We must therefore express all our thanks to those scholars of whose work we have made use.

I must recall here the memory of my late professor, Marcel Griaule, who until a fortnight before his death never ceased to give the closest attention to my research work. Equally, I owe a debt of gratitude to M. Gaston Bachelard. To professors André Aymard and Leroi-Gourhan, whose student I was, I must also express my gratefulness.

To come back to the subject of this work, I shall give an indication of those facts which are calculated to reveal my approach.

I have tried to start from material conditions in order to explain all the cultural traits common to Africans, from family life as a nation, touching on the ideological superstructures, the successes and failures and technical regressions.

I was thus led to analyse the structure of the African and the Aryan families and to try to show that the matriarchal basis on which the former rests is not in any way of universal application in spite of appearances.

I have touched briefly on the notions of the state, royalty, morals, philosophy, religion and art, and consequently on literature and aesthetics.

In each of these varied domains I have tried to bring to view the common denominator in African culture as opposed to that of the Northern Aryan culture.

If I have chosen Europe as the region of cultural antithesis, it is because in addition to reasons of a geographical nature the documentary evidence which comes from the Northern Mediterranean lands is more abundant at the present time.

If I were to extend my comparative study beyond India to China, I would run the risk of affirming things of which I were not thoroughly convinced because of lack of documentation.

It will be realised that a work of this nature, which it is hoped will be logically conclusive, could not avoid the gathering and assembling of evidence to support its case instead of referring to this briefly in a more or less offhand manner. The reader would have the right to be sceptical and he could, at the end of the book, have such a feeling of doubt as to have the impression that he had just been reading a work of fiction.

This has obliged us to refer to the documents in question wherever we have considered it necessary.

Obviously I have not been a slave to intellectual conformism. If I had not quoted writers such as Lenormant, who appears now to be old-fashioned, I would have been unable to bring out the caste stratification of the Babylonian, Indian or Sabine societies.

May this work contribute to a strengthening of the feelings of goodwill which have always united Africans from one end of the continent to the other and thus show our organic cultural unity.

FOREWORD

Intellectuals ought to study the past not for the pleasure they find in so doing, but to derive lessons from it or, if necessary, to discern those lessons in full knowledge of the facts. Only a real knowledge of the past can keep in one's consciousness the feeling of historical continuity essential to the consolidation of a multinational state.

Classical psychology argues that human nature is essentially universal. This is because it wants to see the triumph of humanism. For the latter to become possible, man must not be by nature impervious to any manifestation of feeling, etc., on the part of his fellow man. His nature, his consciousness and his spirit must be capable of assimilating through education everything which is initially foreign to him.

But this does not mean to say that human consciousness has been modified since the very earliest days by the particular experiences undergone in communities which developed separately. In this sense, there existed in the beginning, before the successive contacts of peoples and of nations, before the age of reciprocal influences, certain non-essential relative differences among peoples. These differences had to do with the climate and the specific conditions of life. The peoples who lived for a lengthy period of time in their place of origin were moulded by their surroundings in a durable fashion. It is possible to go back to this original mould by identifying the outside influences which have been superimposed on it. It is not a matter of indifference for a people to devote itself to such an inquiry or to acquire such a recognition of itself. For by doing this the people in question becomes aware of what is solid and valid in its own cultural and social structures and in its thought in general; it becomes aware also of what is weak therein and consequently what has not been able to withstand the passage of time. It can discern the real extent of its borrowings from others and can now define itself in a positive fashion

using not imaginary but real indigenous criteria. It will have a new consciousness of its worth and can now determine its cultural mission, not in a prejudiced, but in an objective manner; for they can better understand the cultural values which it is most fitted to develop and contribute to other peoples, allowances being made for the state of evolution.

Avant-garde ideas should not be developed prematurely. It is only necessary to refer to the preface of *Nations Nègres et Culture* published in 1953-1954. Since September 1946, in lecture after lecture I had familiarized African students with the ideas which were developed in that work. Until these last two years, not only did African politicians not accept these ideas but certain ones even attempted to criticise them on a purely doctrinal basis.

The very people who in their writings or in their speeches wished to show that national independence is a phase in the evolution of peoples which is now out-of-date, and who could not raise themselves to any form of independent African federation or the idea of a multinational African state, are the ones who are today surreptitiously fostering the ideas contained in the preface to *Nations Nègres et Culture*. Their actual political platforms appear to be simply copies of that preface, when they are not still short of the ideas which are developed therein.

CHAPTER I

AN HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF MATRIARCHY

An Account of the theories of J.J. Bachofen, Morgan and F. Engels with a Criticism of these.

This chapter is devoted to a concise statement of the theories relating to the reign of matriarchy considered as a general stage in human evolution. The first historian to deal with this subject was J.J. Bachofen who in 1861 published *Das Mutterrecht*. In 1871 an American, Morgan, confirmed the views of Bachofen on the evolution of the earliest societies, in his work *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity*. Finally, in 1884, Frederick Engels related the points of view of Bachofen and Morgan, relying on their discoveries as authoritative sources of material the better to affirm and demonstrate the historical basis of the family in his work, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.

THEORY OF BACHOFEN

The account of this theory is taken mainly from the work which Adrien Turel devoted to its author: *Du Règne de la Mère au Patriarcat* (From Mother-Right to Patriarchy). It is, as far as I am aware, the only work on the subject which exists in French.

Bachofen considers that mankind in its earliest states underwent a period of barbarism and sexual promiscuity, so that descent could only be reckoned through the female line, all paternal descent being doubtful. Marriage did not exist.

A second stage, called the gynaeocratic, follows on the first as its logical sequel. It is characterized by marriage and the supremacy of the woman; descent is still reckoned following the female line as

during the preceding period. This is the real age of matriarchy according to Bachofen. Amazonism is equally characteristic of this stage.

Finally there comes a third stage, distinguished from the others by a new form of marriage under the domination of the male, by masculine imperialism: this is the reign of patriarchy.

Patriarchy is superior to matriarchy; it represents above all spirituality, light, reason and delicacy. It is represented by the sun, the heavenly heights, where reigns a sort of ethereal spirituality. In contrast, matriarchy is linked with the cave-like depths of the earth, to the night, to the moon, to material things, to the 'left' which belongs 'to passive femininity in opposition to the right which is linked with masculine activity'.

Bachofen takes his principal argument from an analysis of the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus which he considers as describing the struggle between mother-right and father-right. In the heroic age the Greeks were ruled by a gynaeocracy.

Gradually this deteriorated and, being no longer adapted to circumstances, had to be eliminated, together with old attendant earthly gods, the Eumenides. They gave way to the young heavenly deities of patriarchy; Apollo, and Athena, the motherless maiden.

The subject of the play is as follows: Agamemnon, the commander of the Greek armies, returns from the Trojan War and finds his wife with a lover, Aegisthus. Clytemnestra rids herself of her husband by murdering him. Orestes, the son of Agamemnon, avenges his father by killing his mother: he is then pursued by the protective goddesses of mother-right, the Eumenides, or Furies. For them, the gravest murder that can be committed, the only one for which no atonement is possible, is matricide.

In the choephoroi the Furies express themselves as follows:

Chorus Leader: *The prophet-god bade thee thy mother slay?*

Orestes: *Yea, and through him less ill I fared, till now.*

Chorus Leader: *If the vote grip thee, thou shalt change that word.*

Orestes: *Strong is my hope; my buried sire shall aid.*

Chorus Leader: *Go to now, trust the dead, a matricide!*

Orestes: *Yea, for in her combined two stains of sin.*

Chorus Leader: *How? Speak this clearly to the judge's mind.*

Orestes: *Slaying her husband, she did slay my sire.*

Chorus Leader: *Therefore thou livest; death assoils her deed.*

Orestes: *Then while she lived why didst thou hunt her not?*

Chorus Leader: *She was not kin by blood to him she slew.*

Orestes: *And I, am I by blood my mother's kin?*

Chorus Leader: *O cursed with murder's guilt, how else wert thou
The burden of her womb? Dost thou forswear
Thy mother's kinship, closest bond of love?*¹

The case is all the more significant since it is Apollo, who, according to the will of Zeus, commanded Orestes to commit the crime; in addition he undertakes his defence. Athena presides over the court which is to judge Orestes. Here is Apollo's speech for the defence before the vote of the Areopagites:

Apollo:

*This too I answer: mark a soothfast word
Not the true parent is the woman's womb
That bears the child: she doth but nurse the seed
New-sown: the male is parent; she for him,
As stranger for a stranger, hoards the germ
Of life, unless the god its promise blight.
And proof hereof before you will I set.
Birth may from fathers, without mothers, be;
See at your side a witness of the same,
Athenoa, daughter of Olympian Zeus,
Never within the darkness of the womb
Fostered nor fashioned, but a bud more bright
Than any goddess in her breast might bear.*²

After the speech of Apollo, the contrast between the two systems and their irreducible character is sufficiently manifest. The Areopagites vote. A second ballot is necessary, both parties having cast the same number of votes; but Athena, who presides at the hearing and who has not yet taken any part in the voting, gives her vote to Orestes, who is thus acquitted of the murder of his mother. This gesture seals the triumph of the new regimes: Athena explains herself as follows:

*Mine is the right to add the final vote,
And I award it to Orestes' cause.*

*For me no mother bore within her womb,
And, save for wedlock evermore schewed,
I vouch myself the champion of the man,
Not of the woman, yea with all my soul,
In heart, as birth, a father's child alone.
Thus will I not too heinously regard
A woman's death who did her husband slay,
The guardian of her home; and if the votes
Equal do fall, Orestes shall prevail.*

*Ye of the judges who are named thereto,
Swiftly shake for the lots from either urn.*³

For Bachofen the ubiquity of matriarchy is undeniable; it is not the distinctive trait of any particular people, but has controlled at a given time the social organisation of all the peoples of the earth: from whence the numerous traces found in the classical literature of antiquity.

There was therefore a universal transition from matriarchy to patriarchy, which does not of course imply that this took place during the same period for all peoples. But according to the evolutionary conception of the author, it was undoubtedly a transition from an inferior to a superior state, a veritable spiritual ascension by humanity taken in its entirety.

THEORY OF MORGAN

Though using different methods, Morgan arrived at the same conclusion as Bachofen as far as matriarchy and the female line of descent are concerned. He used the system of consanguinity practised by the Iroquois Indians of New York State, as a basis for reconstructing the primitive forms of the human family. In this way he built up a theory which he used to explain obscure points in the social and family organisation of classical antiquity (genos, phratries, tribes, etc.). His theory, fully set down by Engels (*op. cit.*), is as follows:

Morgan, who spent a great part of his life among the Iroquois Indians settled to this day in New York State and was adopted into one of their tribes (the Senecas), found in use among them a system

of consanguinity which was in contradiction to their actual family relationships. There prevailed among them a form of monogamy easily terminable on both sides, which Morgan calls the 'pairing family'. The issue of the married pair was therefore known and recognised by everybody: there could be no doubt about whom to call father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister. But these names were actually used quite differently. The Iroquois calls not only his own children his sons and daughters, but also the children of his brothers; and they call him father. The children of his sister, however, he calls his nephews and nieces, and they call him their uncle. The Iroquois woman, on the other hand, calls her sisters' children, as well as her own, her sons and daughters, and they call her mother. But her brothers' children she calls her nephews and nieces, and she is known as their aunt. Similarly, the children of brothers call one another brother and sister, and so do the children of sisters. A woman's own children and the children of her brother, on the other hand, call one another cousins...⁴

Engels thinks that these are not just simple names, but terms which express the real degrees of consanguinity or more precisely the ideas which the Iroquois themselves have on consanguinous relationships. Next, he insists on the extent and vigour of this system of consanguinity which is found all over North America – no exception having been met with amongst the Indians – and in India among the Dravidians in the Deccan and the Gauras in Hindustan. More than two hundred degrees of consanguinity are expressed in the same terms by the Tamils of India and the Iroquois. Moreover among both these peoples there is a distinction between the real kinship arising out of the existing family system, and the way in which this is expressed in the language.

Morgan finds the explanation of this anomaly in a type of family existing in Hawaii in the first half of the nineteenth century which he called *punaluan*: this will be analysed later.

For him the family is the dynamic element with constantly changing forms, while the terms used to express these forms remain static during a relatively long period of time. In this way there is produced a sort of fossilisation of the system of consanguinity in so far as this is expressed in words. It is long afterwards that language registers any progress which has been made.

...But just as Cuvier could deduce from the marsupial bone of an animal skeleton found near Paris that it belonged to a marsupial animal and that extinct marsupial animals once lived there, so with the same certainty we can deduce from the historical survival of a system of consanguinity that an extinct form of family once existed which corresponded to it.⁵

By working his way back from the 'historical survival of a system of consanguinity', Morgan reconstructs the history of the family and uncovers four main types which followed one after the other.

The oldest, which arose out of the primitive state of promiscuous intercourse, is the family which is said to be consanguine: it is marked by the fact that marriage is only forbidden between parents and their children. All the men of one generation are married to all the women of the same generation; all the 'grandfathers' to all the 'grandmothers' and so on, and consequently all the brothers and sisters are married to each other. The consanguine family has disappeared even among the most primitive peoples; but Morgan affirms its existence on the basis of consanguinity found in Hawaii.

The second is the *punaluan* family. As humanity had become dimly conscious of the disadvantages resulting from the union of brothers and sisters which causes debility in the descendants, the forbidding of such union would have appeared as a necessity. From this point on, it is a whole group of sisters or of cousins which will be wed by a group of brothers or cousins outside their circle. These brothers call each other *punalua*, as do the women. Hence the name given by Morgan to this type of family. The *punaluan* family occupies a position of great importance in the theory of Morgan, in the sense that he derives from it the *genos* which is the basis of the whole politico-social organisation of classical antiquity.

...How powerfully the influence of this advance made itself felt is seen in the institution which arose directly out of it and went far beyond it - the gens, which forms the basis of the social order of most, if not all, barbarian peoples of the earth and from which in Greece and Rome we step directly into civilisation.⁶

For Morgan this type of family accounts completely for the system of consanguinity of the Iroquois. In fact, sisters have, as it were, all

their children in common. Reciprocally, all brothers are fathers in common: all common children consider themselves to be brothers and sisters. But since marriage is forbidden between true brothers and sisters, the children of one sister will be the nephews and nieces of a brother who will be their uncle, while her sister is the aunt of the children of the latter. Children are thus divided into two classes: on the one hand, sons and daughters and, on the other hand, nephews and nieces; these two groups are cousins of each other.

Morgan derives the descent in the female line from these two first stages in the history of the family. Matriarchy is implied in this type of group marriage since only the matrilineal line of descent is evident; it therefore precedes patriarchy.

The third form is the pairing family. This is monogamy with mutual facilities for divorce: this was the type which existed throughout American Indian society when Morgan carried out his investigations. The line of descent is matrilineal and it is the man who brings the dowry to the woman. The latter does not leave her family group and can turn out her husband (who necessarily belongs to a different gens) if he fails to provide enough food for the common provender. Whatever may be the reasons for any separation, the children remain entirely in the mother's gens.

The matriarchal system in its most highly developed form is thus handed down to us by the pairing family.

The fourth type is the monogamous patriarchal family where divorce is rendered if not impossible, at least extremely difficult, where the woman lives in total dependence on her husband and is legally subjected to him. In this family the line of descent is patrilineal.

Another discovery made by Morgan, whose importance has been emphasized by Engels, is the identification of the 'totemic' clans of the American Indians with the Greek *genos* and the Roman *gens*. He established that it was the Indian forms of social organisation which are the more ancient and that the Greco-Latin forms are derived from them: it is the 'totemic' clans which gave rise to the *genos*.

...This proof has cleared up at one stroke the most difficult questions in the most ancient periods of Greek and Roman history, providing us at the same time with an unsuspected wealth of information about the fundamental features of social constitution in primitive times - before the introduction of the state...⁷

While Bachofen has taken the traces of matriarchy which are contained in the classical literature of antiquity – and in particular, in the *Oresteia of Aeschylus* – as confirming the universality and precedence of matriarchy, Morgan reaches the same conclusions from his study of the Indian societies of America. He finds there a system of consanguinity which impresses him by its unusual character. He initiates an investigation by the American government throughout the whole of the territory occupied by the Indians and is thus able to establish the generality of the system. Work carried out in other parts of the world (Africa, India, Oceania) confirms his observations.

At the same time as he is reconstructing the history of the family from these data, Morgan is studying the organisation of the Iroquois clans and arrives at the conclusion that the matriarchy which rules there is of a universal type similar to that which, at a given moment in their evolution, has governed all peoples.

THEORY OF ENGELS

The conclusions of Bachofen and Morgan are of the greatest importance to a Marxist such as Engels, who was interested in demonstrating the historicity, the temporary nature of all forms of political and social organisation. The facts mentioned above served him as material for showing that the traditional bourgeois monogamous family, far from being a permanent form, will be stricken by the same decay as previous institutions. It is clear, therefore, why he was led to adopt the theories of Morgan and Bachofen on a universal matriarchy. He attempted to enrich these by a contribution on *The Gens among the Celts and Germans* (Chapter VII of his book).

In so far as Engels especially contributed his arguments to support the theories of matriarchy which he needed for his own thesis, it is in Chapter II, devoted to a criticism of this work, that we shall return to his ideas. The examination of which these ideas will be the object is in no way intended as an attack on the principles of Marxism: it is intended only to show that a Marxist has made use, in a theoretical work, of material the soundness of which had not been proved.

Aeschylus, the Creator of the Attic tragedy, was convinced that every human act posed a problem of law and of justice; thus drama must of necessity deal with justice. This seems to be the end that

the author was consciously trying to attain. He was thus led to use material pertaining to a period in which the idea of justice was practically identical with a kind of stoic resignation to fate, to fatality. To this severity of custom of the earliest societies, Aeschylus, who lived in another age, wished to propose a more flexible justice, more suited to the progress of the human consciousness of his time, and less rudimentary.

However, all the cultural material used in his work is equally a reflection of the conscious struggle between the social principles of the North and the South. It is for this reason that Bachofen had no difficulty in seeing in *The Oresteia* the struggle between matriarchy and patriarchy, with the triumph of the latter.

To return to the idea of justice, the attitude of the chorus of Furies, hostile to Orestes, can be mentioned.

*Hist – he is there! See him his arms entwine
Around the image of the maid divine –
Thus aided, for the deed he wrought
Unto the judgement wills he to be brought.
It may not be! a mother's blood, poured forth
Upon the stained earth,
None gathers up: it lies – bear witness, Hell! –
For aye indelible!
And thou who sheddest it shalt give thine own
That shedding to atone!
Yea, from thy living limbs I suck it out,
Red, clotted, gout by gout...⁸*

Orestes appeals to Athena, explains his action to her and asks her protection. Athena replies in terms which call attention to the problems of this new justice: a justice which seems to transcend the frailty of mortal's conscience which is laden especially with feelings of vengeance and of hatred; in short, a justice which is absolutely serene.

Athena:

*Too mighty is this matter, whoso'er
Of mortals claims to judge hereof aright.
Yea, me, even me, eternal Right forbids*

*To judge the issues of blood-guilt, and wrath
That follows swift behind...*

*Yet, as on me Fate hath imposed the cause,
I choose unto me judges that shall be
An ordinance forever, set to rule
The dues of blood-guilt, upon oath declared.
But ye, call forth your witness and your proof,
Words strong for justice, fortified by oath,
And I, whome'er are truest in my town,
Them will I choose and bring, and straitly charge,
Look on this cause, discriminating well,
And pledge your oath to utter nought of wrong.*⁹

The chorus reacts as might be expected, by expressing its concern regarding the new laws, which the goddess wishes to establish for all time, as soon as the judgement of the heavenly tribunal has been given.

Chorus:

*Now are they all undone, the ancient laws,
If here the slayer's cause
Prevail; new wrong for ancient right shall be
If matricide go free.
Henceforth a deed like his by all shall stand,
Too ready to the hand:
Too oft shall parents in the aftertime
Rue and lament this crime,
Taught, not in false imagining, to feel
Their children's thrusting steel...*¹⁰

A new edition of the complete works of Bachofen was published in Basle between 1943 and 1948¹¹. Volumes II and III are devoted to matriarchy. In these Bachofen studies the manners and customs of the Aegean populations such as the Lycians, the Cretans, the Athenians, the people of Lemnos, the Egyptians, the Indians and the inhabitants of Central Asia, the Ozolians, Locrians and the people of Lesbos. He finishes with a study of Pythagoreanism and its later aspects. The complete work contains one thousand pages.

The author reveals among all the peoples studied the cultural features which he attributes to matriarchy, the very ones which are set forth in his work. He sees a matriarchal element in the role played by the woman in Pythagorean initiation. Our criticism of Bachofen's theory will consist mainly of an analysis of these facts.

The work of Morgan is made up of three parts¹². In the first, after a general introduction devoted to the system of consanguinity, the author shows the existence of two systems, the one classificatory or non-Aryan; the other, descriptive or Aryan (Indo-European). Proceeding from this distinction he studies the system of consanguinity of the Indo-European, Semitic and Uralian families.

In the second, he makes a study of the Ganowanian family (American Indians) and that of the Eskimo.

In the third he examines the Turanian family, the Malayan family, and those of other Asiatic peoples.

At the end of each study of a particular group is shown a diagram of the corresponding system; two of these are reproduced here dealing with consanguinity in the non-Aryan classification scheme.

According to Pastor Leenhardt, duality and equality play an essential part in the Melanesian ideas of consanguinity.

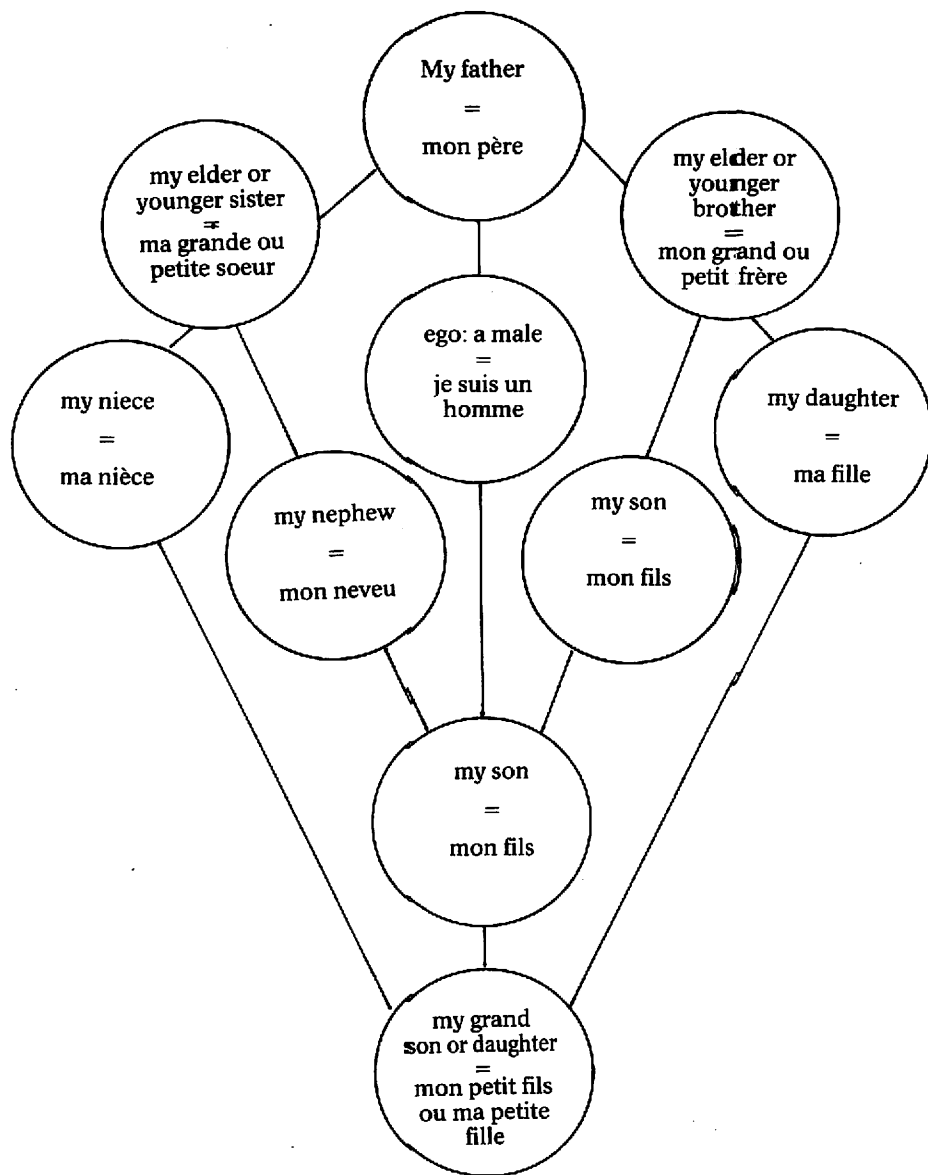
Duality: when the basis of the relationship appears to be organic, such as mother and child, brother and sister and also on another level, as father and son or husband and wife.

Equality: when the two members are in a reciprocal position, equal in right and each constituting the counterpart of the other. E.g. maternal uncle and nephew, etc. Equality is more concrete than duality...

The dual (duality) helps the Kanaka to place human equality in different domains, spatial, social and parental. In these domains only one has clearly defined boundaries and is divided into restricted parts: the parental domain.

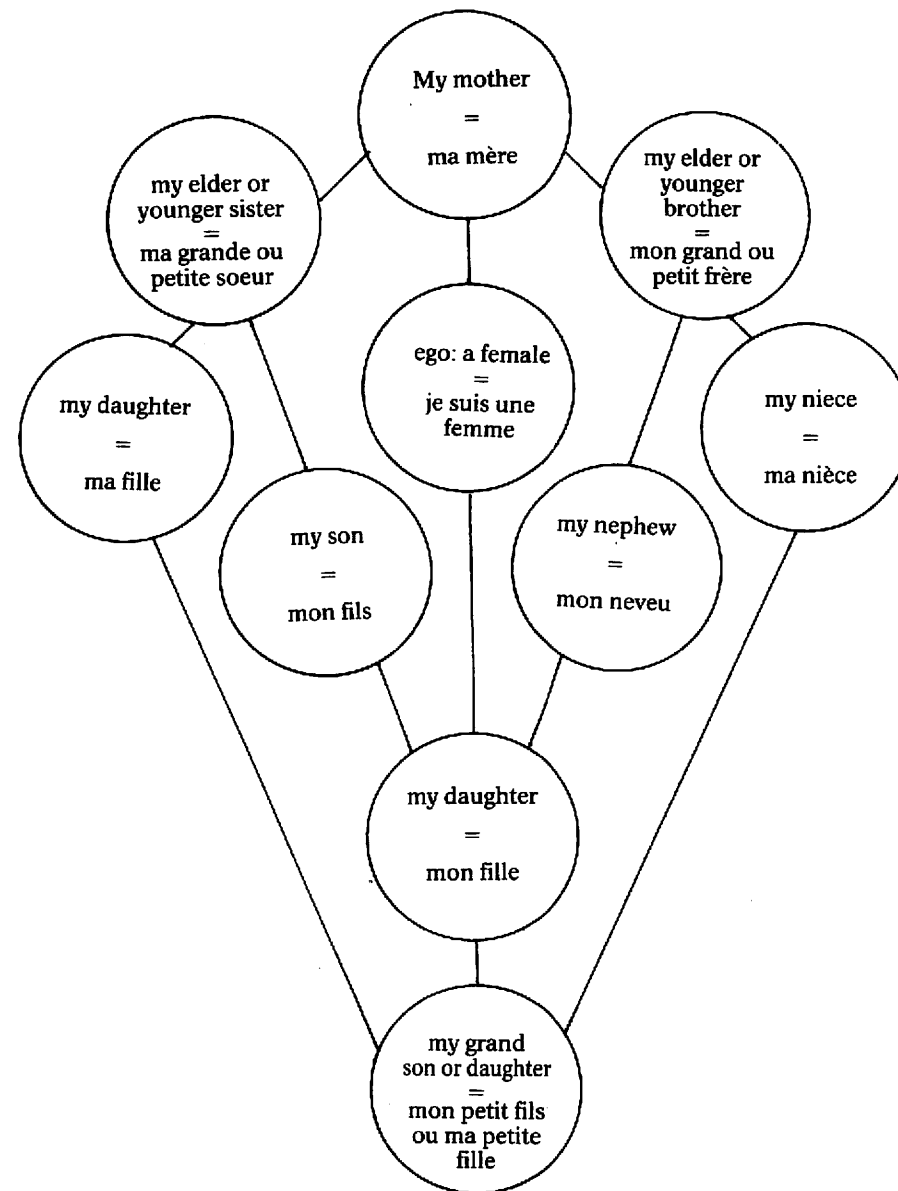
The dividing lines which mark these divisions are permanent, as is the territory within them. They surround it like a plot of land and the Kanaka sees in this the proper domain in which takes place the relating of two kinsmen, confounded in an equality.

He calls this ensemble by a single substantive dual: thus *duaeri* means: equality between grandfather and grandson; *duamara* means: equality between a uterine uncle and a nephew;



ego: a male

Diagram of consanguinity: Seneca Iroquois
extracted from: *System of Consanguinity (Morgan)*.



ego: a female

Diagram of consanguinity of an Iroquois
woman after Morgan.

duawe means: conjugal equality;
duavene means: homonymous equality since the homonym corresponds to the identity of individuals.

The analysis of Maurice Leenhardt¹³ could equally have been compared with that of Pierre Metais in *Mariage et Equilibre Social dans les Sociétés Primitives*.

CHAPTER II

CRITICISM OF THE CLASSICAL THEORY OF A UNIVERSAL MATRIARCHY

This criticism could be of appreciable use in the field of historical research. In fact, if it were proved – contrary to the generally accepted theory – that instead of a universal transition from matriarchy to patriarchy, humanity has from the beginning been divided into two geographically distinct ‘cradles’ one of which was favourable to the flourishing of matriarchy and the other to that of patriarchy, and that these two systems encountered one another and even disputed with each other as different human societies, that in certain places they were superimposed on each other or even existed side by side, then one could begin to clarify one of the obscure points in the history of antiquity. A criterion would then exist enabling one to identify certain vestiges of the past, such as the undeniable traces of matriarchy during the Aegean age.

The classical theory, which has also been adopted by most sociologists and ethnologists – that of Durkheim – has already been questioned by Van Gennep, who himself relied to a certain degree on the work of Graebner.

The standpoint taken by Graebner with regard to this problem is, if I properly understand his words, the following:

‘It seems to me’, he wrote, ‘that at least in Australia one of the systems of consanguinity is not a continued development of the other, but that they have met and mingled with each other, one system predominating in one region and the other, in another.’ This is to say, I think, that peoples reckoning their descent in the male line would have come in contact with peoples reckoning theirs in the female line and that there would have been an interpenetration of the two systems, both of which were originally autonomous institutions.

The fact is, that among several tribes of Central Australia, one finds both systems of descent applied side by side.

Among the Arunta, for example, where male descent rules the greater part of the institutions, there are to be found at the same time undeniable traces of female descent, 'which is evidence - according to Durkheim - of its prior existence'.¹

Van Gennep shows that the attitude of Durkheim to this problem was not clearly defined, and that at times he seemed to admit the original autonomy of each system. It was following his '*critical study of the second volume of Spencer and Guillen*' that his position was finally determined: Resuming his argument, he at last states clearly: "the priority of maternal descent over paternal descent is so evident among the different societies of which we have just spoken, and is demonstrated by such an abundance of proof, that it seems difficult for us to cast doubt upon it."²

Van Gennep accuses Durkheim of having resolved the problem without having formulated it properly. The only thing that the latter had shown in his extensive study of matrimonial relations in the societies of Oceania, is that there exists an infinite combination of both these systems of descent but not the antecedence of one over the other.

The antecedence and the inferiority of the system of maternal descent could well be due, in our opinion, to a preconception: our European civilisations, while revealing in certain places traces of female descent, are to such an extent based on the other system, that our unconscious tendency is to consider male descent as superior and culturally posterior to the other. It is this principle that we apply to other peoples.

As it is only just, this *a priori* theory was explained after the fact: it was said that the relationship of the child with the mother could not admit of any doubt, while the relationship to the father could scarcely be other than questionable, especially among savages. But great care was taken not to precede this assertion by a thorough study of the opinions of savages on the mechanism of conception, a study moreover which, in spite of a few detailed works on the subject, still remains to be carried out to this day.³

It seems that the '*unconscious tendency*' mentioned by Van Gennep

when describing the West - whose civilisation is 'to such an extent based' on patriarchy - justifies the hierarchy, established by Bachofen, between matriarchy and patriarchy. It will be remembered that for him, patriarchy was synonymous with spiritual yearning towards the divine regions of the sky, with purity and moral chastity, while matriarchy was synonymous with the passive dependence on earthly life, material things and bodily needs. Instead of the expansion of those - particularly the woman - who are linked to matriarchy and the respect with which the matriarchal woman is surrounded appearing to him as the real advancement, aiding him to establish an objective hierarchy of values, he can only see in this ensemble of institutions favourable to womanhood and to mankind in general the expression of a dangerous freedom which is almost diabolical. The hierarchy thus existing between the two systems lacks, therefore, any objective foundation.

A first important criticism which can be made of the theory of Bachofen is that it makes an important omission, which has not been given sufficient prominence. The demonstration of a universal transition from matriarchy to patriarchy is only scientifically acceptable if it can be proved that this internal evolution has definitely taken place among a specific people. Now this condition has never been fulfilled in the works of the author. *It has never been possible to determine the existence of a historical period during which the Greeks and the Romans might have lived under matriarchy.* This difficulty is gotten round by replacing the Greeks and Romans by aboriginal peoples which they found on the spot at the time of their becoming sedentary, peoples whom they destroyed as the representative of an alien culture. Thus it is therefore necessary to go back to the time of the Etruscans, who were completely destroyed by the Romans, in order to show the existence of matriarchy in Italy. Now, nothing is more doubtful than the gynaecocracy of Etruscans, as will be shown later. When discussing the Athenians, the factors justifying the existence of matriarchy must be sought among the Pelasgians.

When it is examined closely, the theory of Bachofen appears to be anti-scientific. It is unlikely that such geographically different cradles as the Eurasian steppes - favourable to a nomadic life - and the Southern regions of the globe and in particular Africa - favourable to agriculture and a sedentary way of life - could have produced the

same types of social organisation. This criticism gains in importance if the influence of environment on social and political forms is admitted. In supposing that matriarchy originated in the South and patriarchy in the North, that the former preceded the latter in the Mediterranean basin, and that in Western Asia both systems were superimposed on each other in certain regions, the hypothesis of a universal transition from one to the other ceases to be necessary; the gaps in the different theories disappear and the ensemble of facts can be explained: the status of women, modes of inheritance, dowries, the nature of consanguinity, etc.

As far as one can go back into Indo-European history, especially by means of comparative linguistics, only one form of patriarchal family can be found which seems to be common to all the tribes before their division (Aryans, Greeks, Romans). Verbal expressions relating to nomadic life are common to all these people, unlike those terms which concern the political and agricultural way of life:

The common roots for designating live-stock bear witness to pastoral customs. The flock of live-stock (*pacu* in Sanskrit, *pecu* in Latin, *fihu-vieh* in German) was the principal wealth (*pecunia*). It consisted mainly of cattle (Sanskrit and Avestan, *gau*; Armenian, *kov*; Greek, *bous*; Latin, *bos*; Irish, *bō*) and sheep (Sanskrit, *avi*; Lithuanian, *avis*; Greek, *ois*; Latin, *ovis*; Irish, *oi*; High German, *ouwi*; Ancient Slav, *ovinu*). The ox, like the horse, was yoked to the waggon, for the name 'yoke' is remarkably well preserved in different languages (*yuga* in Sanskrit, *jugum* in Latin, *zygon* in Greek, *juk* in Gothic, *jungas* in Lithuanian). In the same way, root can be found which is applied sometimes to the waggon itself (*ratha* in Sanskrit, *rathō* in Avestan), and sometimes to the wheel (*rota* in Latin, *roth* in Old Irish, *ratas* in Lithuanian, *rad* in Old High German).

From the foregoing it would seem to follow, that the Indo-Europeans, towards the end of their common life, were a people of shepherds, sheep- and cattle-raisers, and as such, were if not semi-nomadic, at least fairly mobile.⁴

This nomadic life is characteristic of the Indo-European races. According to Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus, the Scythian's house was his waggon. The same thing occurred during a later period among the Germans. This is confirmed by the absence of any generic term

denoting the word 'city' in the primitive foundation of the vocabulary:

The head of the family 'head of the house': Sanskrit, *dampati*; Greek, *despotes* (for *demspota*); Latin, *dominus*. A common root designates sometimes the house, sometimes the groups of houses or village (Sanskrit, *vic*; Avestan, *vis*; Latin, *vicus*; Greek, *oikos*), with a village head (*vicpati* in Sanskrit, *visipaiti* in Avestan, *vėszpats* in Lithuanian). There is, at first, no expression for the city, but a word which stands for 'fortified place', which at some future period will signify 'city' (*pur* in Sanskrit, *pilis* in Lithuanian, *polis* in Greek).⁵

In this existence which was reduced to a series of perpetual migrations, the economic role of the woman was reduced to a strict minimum; she was only a burden that the man dragged behind him. Outside her function of child-bearing, her rôle in nomadic society is nil. It is from these considerations that a new explanation may be sought to account for the lot of the woman in Indo-European society. Having a smaller economic value, it is she who must leave her clan to join that of her husband, contrary to the matriarchal custom which demands the opposite.

Among the Greeks, the Romans and the Aryans of India, the woman who leaves her own *genos* (or *gens*) to join her husband's *gens* becomes attached to the latter and can no longer inherit from her own; she has broken with her natural family, in the eyes of which she is no more than a stranger. She can no longer take part in the family worship, without which no relationship is possible; she must even compensate for her economic inferiority by the dowry she brings to her husband. *The latter has the right of life and death over her: he is not answerable to the state in regard to the lot to which he can submit her.* This private institution, preceding that of the state and going back to the period of communal life on the Eurasian steppes, remained inviolable for a very long period. The husband was able to sell his wife or to select an eventual husband for her, in anticipation of his own death.

For a long time after the Indo-Europeans established fixed settlements, their women remained cloistered. Engels recalls that at best they learnt to spin, to weave, to sew and to read a little; they could only come in contact with other women: they were secluded in the gynaeceum, which formed a separate part of the household, either

on an upper floor or at the rear of the main house, to remove them from the view of men, and especially from strangers. They were not allowed to go out without being accompanied by a slave. The making of eunuchs to watch over the women is typically Indo-European and Asiatic: at the time of Herodotus, the principal centre of this traffic was Chios⁶.

A sort of incipient polygamy also existed among the Indo-Europeans:

...the entire *Iliad*, it will be remembered, turns on the quarrel of Achilles and Agamemnon over one of these slaves. If a hero is of any importance, Homer also mentions the captive girl with whom he shares his tent and his bed. These girls were also taken back to Greece and brought under the same roof as the wife, as Cassandra was brought by Agamemnon in Aeschylus; the sons begotten of them received a small share of the paternal inheritance and had the full status of freedom. Teucer, for instance, is a natural son of Telamon by one of these slaves and has the right to use his father's name. The legitimate wife was expected to put up with all this, but herself to remain strictly chaste and faithful...⁷

Polygamy was equally in force among the Germanic aristocracy at the time of Tacitus.

Monogamy, which seems at first sight to be the prerogative of the Indo-European world and expresses an almost religious respect for women, in contrast to the disdain of which she would seem to be the object in more southerly regions, has only very painfully been established through the years, as a result of economic pressure.⁸

Matrilineal consanguinity does not exist among the Indo-Europeans: the children of two sisters belong to different families, those of their fathers. In contrast to the matriarchal customs, these children have no tie of consanguinity. It is the same with their mothers, who cannot inherit one from the other. Only the eldest child of male sex inherits; if there are no children, it is the brother and not the sister of the deceased who then inherits. If there are no brothers, a male ancestor of the nearest collateral branch is sought and one of his living male descendants becomes the heir.⁹

Under this regime, where all rights, especially political ones, are transmitted by the father, it will be understood how the various

languages do not express precisely female consanguinity.

In all the Indo-European tongues, say the linguists, the terms of consanguinity are remarkably well preserved in the case of the family of the man. In contrast there is complete lack of precision in the case of the family of the woman.¹⁰

During a difficult and lengthy journey the woman becomes a useless mouth to feed. This is the only sociological explanation that can be given for the suppression at birth of female children among the nomadic tribes. With the attainment of a more settled existence, this practice lost its utility and was forbidden by the Bible and the Koran. In the preface of the work by Engels can be found a criticism directed to an author, MacLennan, who attempted to explain the origin of matrilineal descent, which he also considered to be the oldest and the most primitive type. MacLennan proceeds from a hypothesis according to which the matriarchy is linked with the forcible capture of women and the murder of children. That is only a hypothesis which, if it is correct, must be confirmed by the facts. But experience proves the contrary and MacLennan was sincere enough to acknowledge this with surprise, as Engels notes:

Apparently MacLennan's theory, plausible though it was, did not seem any too well established even to its author. At any rate, he himself is struck by the fact that *'it is observable that the form of capture is now most distinctly marked and impressive just among those races which have male kinship' (should be "descent in the male line")*... And again, *'It is a curious fact that nowhere now, that we are aware of, is infanticide a system where exogamy and the earliest form of kinship co-exist'*... Both these facts flatly contradict his method of explanation, and he can only meet them with new and still more complicated hypotheses.¹¹

WORSHIP OF ASHES

From the hypothesis of a double cradle the practice of cremation becomes intelligible. It is certain, in fact, that under nomadism one could not direct one's worship to permanent tombs; now ancestor worship already existed and was expressed in the form of a domestic

religion, to which we will return. The only solution which was available was to reduce the bodies of the dead to a minimum weight and volume so that they could be easily transported. Thus the urns containing the ashes of one's ancestors were nothing but travelling cemeteries which followed behind the herds seeking new pastures. It is known that the most immutable, the most difficult practices to abandon are those which are dependent on religion; thus the worship of ashes was perpetuated even after the establishment of permanent settlement in Greece, Rome and in India. It ceased then to appear to be a logical practice which could be explained within its local context. It became all the more unintelligible by the fact that the tomb, which had since become a necessity, was adopted parallel to it; and this resulted in rites which were somewhat curious in the sense that since the past always insists upon its rights, the dead were frequently cremated before they were buried. Caesar was cremated, as were Gandhi and Einstein.

FIRE WORSHIP

The peace of the Manes, or spirits, depended on keeping alive a fire which must never be allowed to go out. This was the domestic fire lighted upon an altar. The peculiarity lies in the presence of the fire, for ancestor worship is the prerogative of no single people: its universality can easily be admitted. As a result, the altars consequent upon it are to be found equally in all countries, but it is only among the Indo-Europeans that they will be found surmounted by a sacred fire, which must never be extinguished. It is difficult not to link the presence of this fire with the cold characteristic of the northern climate; its beneficial rôle is of prime importance. Because it was so useful, it became sacred and was worshipped as such. It is thus that the worship of fire is characteristic of the Northern cradle; if one studied the 'sociology' of the everlasting flames of, say, war memorials, it would be difficult not to trace these back to this source.

The hypothesis of the double cradle has permitted us therefore to account for those facts which are characteristic of Indo-European society, of which, in the beginning, nomadism was undoubtedly the principal trait:

The term 'to till' is common to all tongues except the Indo-Iranian (*aroô* in Greek, *aro* in Latin, *airim* in Irish, *arin* in Armenian). The absence of the word 'to till' among the Indo-Iranians can be explained by supposing that these people had lost its usage completely during their lengthy migrations following a transitory period of nomadic life.¹²

It can be assumed that if the language had recorded the term before the separation of the Indo-Iranian branch, then the cultivated areas and the fields which were crossed during the migration would have kept some memory of it in the language.

A language can contain expressions which apply to plants without it being necessary for the people who speak the language to cultivate these. One cannot therefore deduce from the existence of a word which refers to a cereal, the agricultural character of a people.

It is therefore almost certain that at the moment of their division, all the Indo-European tribes were still nomadic. Their sedentary way of life and their practice of agriculture post-dating this division, it is comprehensible that those who almost simultaneously settled to the north of the Mediterranean, would have adopted similar terms while the Indo-Iranians would have adopted a different one, perhaps by contact with the Dravidian agricultural populations.

SOUTHERN CRADLE AND MATRIARCHY

The preceding account establishes that when the social structure is such that on marriage the woman leaves her own family to found one jointly with her husband, one is in the presence of a patriarchal régime; in the beginning the family was evidently merged with the clan. Conversely when the social structure is such that the man who marries leaves his clan to live within that of his wife, one is in the presence of a matriarchal régime. Now the first example is only conceivable in nomadic life and the second only in a sedentary and agricultural way of life: in fact it is only in this framework that the wife can, in spite of her physical inferiority, contribute substantially to the economic life. She even becomes one of the stabilising elements in her capacity as mistress of the house and keeper of the food; it also seems that she even played an important rôle in the discovery of agriculture and in plant selection while the man devoted himself

to the hunt. In those primitive ages when the security of the group was the primary concern, the respect enjoyed by either of the sexes was connected with its contribution to this collective security. In an agricultural régime it can thus be expected that the woman receives a dowry instead of bringing one to her husband, as happens in nomadic life. Sociologically, the significance of the dowry must be explained thus: it is a compensation or a guarantee provided by the less economically favoured sex. If the Indo-European woman in providing the dowry cannot be said to be buying her husband, no more can the African man in providing one be said to purchase his wife.

It can equally be understood that descent should be reckoned, in these two social structures, from that married partner who does not leave the clan after marriage. With the Indo-European nomad descent will be patrilineal, his wife being only a stranger in his *genos*; in contrast to this, among sedentary peoples descent will be matrilineal because it is the man who is a stranger, whom the woman can at any moment repudiate if he does not perform all his conjugal duties satisfactorily.

...Usually, the female portion ruled the house. The stores were in common; but woe to the luckless husband or lover who was too shiftless to do his share of the providing. No matter how many children, or whatever goods he might have in the house, he might at any time be ordered to pick up his blanket and budge; and after such orders it would not be healthy for him to attempt to disobey. The house would be too hot for him; and... he must retreat to his own clan (*gens*); or, as was often done, go and start a new matrimonial alliance in some other. The women were the great power among the clans (*gentes*), as everywhere else. They did not hesitate, when occasion required, 'to knock off the horns' as it was technically called, from the head of a chief, and send him back to the ranks of the warriors.¹³

This text by a missionary, Arthur Wright, quoted by Engels, relates of the customs of the Iroquois. He could have saved Engels from an error of interpretation of a cohesive matriarchy based on the idea of a primitive state of promiscuous intercourse; for he shows that the woman owes her social rank and her esteem exclusively to the structure of the society which allows her to play a leading economic

rôle. It is unfortunately that this 'economic' factor should have escaped a Marxist.

The existence of the 'blue families' of Ireland is an illustration of what has just been stated. The necessary conditions having been realised we can see a matriarchy rise before our eyes in modern times, independent of race.

'When the husband, on the other hand, is a stranger, having no family in Ireland, the small family which he founds is incorporated into his wife's family: it is called the "blue family" (*glas-fine*), because the husband is considered to have come from across the sea; it is then said that the "marriage" belongs to the man and the "property" to the woman.'¹⁴

The immigrant who leaves his country, his 'clan' so to speak, is thus at a disadvantage although the patrilineal system is in vigour in Ireland.

The system of inheritance is consequently subordinated to that of descent. In the matriarchal system, in its purest form, a child does not inherit from his father: he inherits from his maternal uncle and is married to his uncle's daughter, so that the latter is not completely disinherited. All political rights are transmitted by the mother, and except for the possibility of usurpation of power no prince can succeed to a throne if his mother is not a princess. The importance of the uncle on the mother's side lies in the fact that it is he who aids his sister, is her representative everywhere and, if need be, takes her defence. This rôle of aid to the woman did not originally fall to the husband, who was considered to be a stranger to his wife's family. This conception is diametrically opposed to that of the Indo-European. The uncle, in certain African languages, means someone who has the right to sell (implying: his nephew); that is to ransom himself by giving his nephew in his place. Hence the definition of nephew, in the same language: he who can serve for ransom, who one sells to liberate himself from the bonds of slavery.

In Walaf, a language spoken in Senegal, the following terminology exists:

Na Diây = one who sells = uncle

Djar bâ = to be worth a ransom = nephew

That these customs were general throughout Africa is vouched for in a study by Delafosse:

Moreover, this does not prevent the rôle of head of a family being filled by a man, although it is sometimes occupied by a woman: but among the peoples who do only admit of female consanguinity, the head of the family is the blood brother of the mother. Among the other peoples, it is the father....

In reality, nowhere among the black peoples is the woman considered to belong to the husband's family; she continues to belong to her own family after marriage, but she is separated temporarily from it for the benefit of her husband and consequently for the benefit of the latter's family. This is why the custom universally acknowledged in Black Africa, makes exigent, for there to be a valid and regular union, the payment of an indemnity by the family of the husband-to-be to that of his wife, as compensation for the wrong caused to the latter family by the taking away of one of its members. There is no purchase of the woman by her husband, as has been wrongly alleged, since the wife does not legally cease to belong to her own family and in no way becomes the chattel of the man she has married; there is simply the payment of an indemnity or, more exactly, of a bond, which moreover varies enormously with different countries and with the status of the future couple ranging from several hundreds of pounds to an object which is only worth a few pence; in the latter case, it is only the fulfilment of a simple formality required out of respect to traditional customs.¹⁵

Among the Southern societies all that relates to the mother is sacred; her authority is so to speak, unlimited. She can choose, for example, a partner for her own child without previously consulting the interested party. This custom, which is linked with agricultural life, exists likewise among the Iroquois.

...In general, whether among the American Indians or other peoples (at the same stage), the conclusion of a marriage is the affair, not of the two parties concerned, who are often not consulted at all, but of their mothers. Two persons entirely unknown to each other are often thus engaged: they only learn that the bargain has been struck when the time for marrying approaches. Before the wedding the bridegroom gives presents to the bride's gentile relatives (to those on the mother's side, therefore, not to the father and his relations) which are regarded as gift payments in return for the girl. The marriage is still terminable at the desire of either partner...¹⁶

Any oath invoking a mother must be fulfilled under penalty of one's debasement: in the beginning, the most sacred were those which were pronounced with the arm stretched above the mother's head. Her curse destroys irredeemably her child's future: this is the greatest misfortune that could happen and one to be avoided at all costs. An African who has received part of his education at a Western university (who should be free from this superstition) is hardly affected by a curse flung at him by his father; it would be quite different if this came from his mother's lips. Every society of Black Africa is convinced of the idea that the destiny of a child depends solely on its mother and, in particular, on the labour which the latter will provide in the matrimonial home; thus it is not rare to see women quietly putting up with unfairness on the part of their husbands, from the conviction that the greatest benefit for their children will result from it. It must be understood by this that the children will be given every opportunity to succeed in any of their undertakings and that they will be spared from 'bad luck' and misfortune of all sorts, that they will be successful and not social failures. A precise sociological concept corresponds to this idea in the African mind: thus in Walaf one finds the expression:

N'Day dju liguèy = a mother who worked.

Ethnologists and sociologists have tried to base the matriarchy disclosed among the Southern societies on the ideas of the latter on the question of heredity. They do not, strictly speaking, hold, as do Bachofen, Morgan and Engels, that the uncertainty which reigns in paternity is due to a primitive state of promiscuous intercourse; in their case, the primitive is not incapable of recognising the rôle of the man in the conception of children: there is no doubt at all of the participation of the father, *but the social structure does not permit his identification with conception and this would appear to be the sole reason that descent would be, at first, matrilineal.*

To ethnologists and sociologists, the 'primitive' cannot raise himself to an understanding of the 'abstract' idea of the father's participation. The rôle of the father is more tenuous, more difficult for the human mind to grasp; its conception requires a maturity and a logic which are in the primitive mentality. It can thus be seen by what expedients these specialists come to adopt the same scale of

values as Bachofen; the superiority of patriarchy is open to no doubt and its spirituality contrasts strongly with the materiality of the earliest ages. There is, therefore, a universal evolution, transition from an inferior to a superior state.

It is unfortunate that this theory could only have been formulated after the study of Oceanian societies made by the ethnologists and sociologists previously mentioned: the very ones whose works were criticised by Van Gennep (cf. p. 25). In fact, if it is desired that a problem of the social sciences remain unsolved, it is sufficient to pose it by starting with Oceania. The dispersion of habitable lands throughout the Pacific Ocean and their small size for the most part, the migrations whose directions crossed and recrossed the number of races which have come into contact with each other, have lived side by side, been superimposed one on the other or have fused with each other, all combine to give, to what is called by convenience the Oceanian continent, an aspect whose irregularity stands in the way of the solution of every human problem.

The phenomenon of regression and degeneration born of such a state of affairs can only further confuse the mind of the researcher. It would have been important to pursue these researches in another 'backward' continent, Africa or America, where the native benefits from a more substantial basis of resistance to external factors.

It seems rather, that in so-called primitive societies, the native had never doubted the participation of the father and mother, but that he did not assign to each the same degree of importance. In the particular case of Black Africa, it is almost everywhere thought that a child owes more from a biological point of view to his mother than to the father. The biological heredity on the mother's side is stronger and more important than the heredity on the father's side. Consequently, a child is wholly that which its mother is and only half of what its father is. Here is an example taken from African beliefs which illustrates this idea.

In Senegal, as in Uganda and in Central Africa, a being is believed to exist among other human beings who should properly be called 'magician-eater-of-men' to distinguish him from the traditional doctor mentioned in the work of ethnologists. Only the first, in the eyes of Africans, deserves the name of magician; the second is only the possessor of a secret science of which he is very jealous and which

he only reveals at the time of initiation to those who merit it, either because the society confers this right on them (age-groups) or because they are his personal followers. The first is gifted with a supernatural power, thanks to which he can transform himself into all sorts of animals to frighten his victim, generally at night, and thus chase the 'active principle' from his body (*fi* in Walaf). As soon as the victim, who is considered to be dead, has been buried, the magician goes to the grave, exhumes the victim, brings it back to life and really kills it in order to devour the flesh, as he would ordinarily butcher meat. This magician is supposed to have a pair of eyes at the back of his head, in addition to his normal ones, which rend it unnecessary for him to turn his head. He possesses extra mouths with powerful teeth at his elbows and knee joints. He has the power to fly in the air by expelling fire from under his armpits or from his mouth. He can easily see the entrails of his table-companions and the marrow of their bones; he can see their blood circulate and their hearts beat; he has the strange power of a being of the fourth dimension who could take away one of our bones without breaking our skin; in fact our body is only hermetically sealed or protected by nature in the three dimensions of our normal spatial existence. If there existed a being having the sense of a fourth dimension, who could live beside us, he could in reality see our entrails and could, thanks to this fourth dimension, whose existence escapes our detection and with respect to which we are open, take away one of our bones without breaking our skin. When one of these magicians is identified and beaten by the people for having been responsible for the death of a victim, the magician has the power to dissociate his being: to keep in his body his 'vital principle', to remove his 'active principle' which is linked to sensibility and to pain, and to rest it on some neighbouring object. From this moment on he can no longer feel the blows, until such time as the new 'object-bearer' of his 'active principle' is discovered and beaten in turn. In a like manner he possesses a mediumistic power. This detailed description of the supernatural powers of the magician aims at throwing better into belief the ideas which Africans have on patrilineal and matrilineal heredity. It is only possible to become a magician gifted with all the qualities thus described, that is to say a 'total magician', if one is the child of a mother who is a magician of the same degree; it is of little importance what the father is. If

the mother is gifted with no power at all and if the father is a total magician (*dem* in Walaf) the child is only half one; he is *nohor*. He possesses none of the positive qualities of a magician, but only the passive ones.

He will be incapable of killing a victim to feed upon his flesh, which is the principal quality of the *dem*. In contrast, he can, of course, contemplate in a passive manner, the entrails of his table-companions.

It can be seen here that the participation of the father in the conception of a child is not at all in doubt, nor is one unaware of it, but that it is secondary and less operative than that of the mother. While it is known that the father does supply something, the identity of the child and the mother is a matter of conviction.

These ideas, by their very nature, go back to the very earliest days of African mentality; they are thus archaic and constitute, at the present time, a sort of fossilization in the field of current ideas. They form a whole which cannot be considered as the logical continuation of a previous and more primitive state, where a matrilineal heritage would have ruled exclusively.

ANCESTOR WORSHIP

It is within the framework of sedentary life that the existence of the tomb can be justified. Thus it is impossible to find any trace of the practice of cremation in an agricultural land such as Africa from antiquity to the present day. All of the cases mentioned are unauthentic; they are only the suppositions of researchers in whose minds the demarcation between the two cradles is not clear and who, referring to the Northern cradle, tend to identify any trace of fire as a vestige of cremation, even when no religious objects can be found nearby. The practice of cremation was also unknown in ancient Egypt.

Everywhere where the practice of cremation is found - whether in America or in India - it is possible to discern an Indo-European element which came from the Eurasian steppes. The formation of pre-Columbian America cannot be explained without introducing a nomadic element which entered by way of the Bering Strait; this is the theory generally acknowledged and it permits an explanation of the funeral rite superimposed on the practice of burial among the

American Indians. In Mexico the chiefs, that is to say, the ruling class, were cremated while the mass of the people were buried. This seems to attest to a victory by conquering nomads from the North, perhaps of Mongol origin, over a sedentary agricultural population.

The fact that the expression used to name the pirogue or dugout canoe, that is to say, the sole element which could serve to link Africa and America, is the same in several African languages (*lothio* in Walaf) and in certain Indian languages of Pre-Columbian America, seems to prove that there were maritime links across the Atlantic between the two continents. There would thus have been, in this instance as well, two peoples of different origins living side by side; one of Southern origin, the other from the North. Tombs constitute the dwelling places of ancestors after death. There, libations and offerings are brought; there one prays. When it is desired to increase one's chances in daily life, concerning some precise event, a visit is paid to the tomb of one's ancestors. Hence the expression in Walaf: *ver-seg* = to visit the cemeteries = luck.

But nowhere in Africa does there exist this multitude of domestic altars surmounted by sacred fires which must be kept burning as long as the family exists, a custom which seems to stem directly from the Northern worship of fire.

Such are the general views which can be set over against the system constructed by Bachofen on the basis of the traces of a matriarchy discovered in classical antiquity - traces which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. However, we can wonder if, to the arguments mentioned earlier to prove the existence of matriarchy among the Southern peoples, it would not be wise to add a further argument dealing with the cycle of plant life. In fact, it is known to be certain that with the discovery of agriculture the earth appeared as a goddess periodically made fertile by the sky, by means of the rain which fell. From this moment the rôle of the sky is finished and it is the earth who nurtures the seeds implanted in her bosom; she gives birth to vegetation. Hence the chthonian-agrarian triad: sky-earth-vegetation. In certain countries, such as Egypt, this eventually became identified as a triad of demi-gods: Osiris-Isis-Horus. It could have helped to form the ideas of the Southern peoples relative to biological heredity such as it has been described above. These, in

turn, could have reacted upon the existing matriarchal conceptions by reinforcing them.

CRITICISM OF THE THEORIES OF MORGAN AND ENGELS

In the theory of Morgan, we shall call attention to two precise ideas which are the basis of the system.

On the one hand, the systems of consanguinity which allowed him to reconstitute the history of the family do not correspond to the interpretation that he gives of them; they reflect purely and simply the social relations of the peoples among whom they are in force.

On the other hand, he has clearly brought out the sociological significance of the totemic clan based on matriarchy, but he has been unable to establish the logical connection in consanguinity permitting the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy, and the affirmation of the universality of the process leading from the one to the other. Now as long as this demonstration has not been made, one may rightly suppose, in the light of all that has gone before, that it is a question of two irreducible systems, each adapted to their reciprocal environments and born of that dialectical relationship which links man with nature.

Neither does Engels explain this process any more clearly:

...As to how and when this revolution took place among civilized peoples, we have no knowledge. It falls entirely within prehistoric times. But that it did take place is more than sufficiently proved by the abundant traces of mother-right which have been collected, particularly by Bachofen. How easily it is accomplished can be seen in a whole series of American Indian tribes, where it has only recently taken place and is still taking place under the influence, partly of increasing wealth and a changed mode of life (transference from forest to prairie), and partly of the moral pressure of civilization and missionaries...¹⁷

In the following chapters it will be seen that one must distinguish the evolution of a particular people which under the influence of exterior factors changes its system of consanguinity without changing its material conditions of life. In this quotation from Engels it

will be seen that the process in question is merely postulated, but that its existence has not been demonstrated.

It is necessary to underline the fact that the historical basis of the different forms of the family is not in any doubt and that they do constantly develop; it is almost as certain, also, that the group marriage mentioned by Engels and Morgan did exist, but this was neither at the origin of the 'system of consanguinity' of Morgan, nor at the origin of matrilineal descent.

In all forms of group family it is uncertain who is the father of a child; but it is certain who its mother is. Though she calls all the children of the whole family her children and has a mother's duties towards them, she nevertheless knows her own children from the others. It is therefore clear that in so far as group marriage prevails, descent can only be proved on the mother's side and that therefore only the female line is recognised. And this is in fact the case among all peoples in the period of savagery or in the lower stage of barbarism. It is the second great merit of Bachofen that he was the first to make this discovery...¹⁸

The assumption on which the system is built – as can be seen from the above and previous quotations – is that all the gradations of objective consanguinity are, primitively, expressed in speech. The latter can only register the ties which actually existed at a given moment. But then it is not comprehensible why in the case of group marriage the mother, knowing perfectly well that the other children are not hers, should nevertheless call them her own children. Here speech intentionally plays false with reality and does not express a real relationship, but a social one; and the fact is all the more serious in that this kind of falsification due to society goes back to the earliest period, that of the '*lower stage of barbarism*'. Thus from the very beginning society introduces, insidiously, the grounds for error and the system, whose objectivity would seem guaranteed, is vitiated at its foundations. The system requires in its elaboration, first, that all the mothers be confounded and rendered common to all the children, to justify a way of addressing them: the aunt is then called mother by her sister's children. It then requires, in a second operation, that these mothers be distinguished to account for the matrilineal descent.

The contradiction inherent in these foundations has not been

surmounted in the correct way, but has been stifled and crushed by the theoretical structure. It seems rather that the system of consanguinity, whose discovery by Morgan appeared to be so important, is only an expression of purely social relationships. If it were otherwise, one could ask oneself why the system has not survived in the form of vestiges, however small, in the Northern cradle, among the prototypes of the Indo-Europeans whose mythological traditions and history we knew with certainty (Greeks, Romans and Germans). As far as we can go back into the Indo-European past, even so far back as the Eurasian steppes, there is only to be found the patrilineal genos with the system of consanguinity which at the present day still characterizes their descendants.

It is difficult to maintain that at the period of the steppes the Indo-Europeans were already too evolved to preserve the system of consanguinity found among the American Indians in Africa or in India, that they had already passed the *lower stage of Barbarism* and that in consequence they were destined to discard this system of consanguinity even to its smallest traces. One could then ask how it was able to continue to exist among the builders of the empires of Black Africa: the empire of Ghana lasted from the third century to 1240, thus preceding by 500 years the empire of Charlemagne; it subdued the Berbers of Andaghost who paid tribute to it. The social and political organisation which reigned there will be described in the following chapters. Its renown extended as far as Asia. Now, the system of consanguinity which existed in Ghana and still does today among the Sarakolle, the descendants of the emperors, is the same as that described by Morgan, although they had been converted to the Moslem faith. Ghana, in 1240, gave way to the empire of Mali about which Delafosse wrote:

However, Gao had recovered its independence between the death of Gongo-Moussa and the coming of Soliman, and, about a century later, the Mandingo empire (Mali) was beginning to decline under the attack of Songay, though it still possessed enough power and prestige for its sovereign to be treated on equal terms with the king of Portugal, then at the height of his glory.¹⁹

The Iroquois system of Morgan has equally well survived – and still does – among the Mandingos of Mali, even though it had already

disappeared among the Indo-Europeans of the steppes who had attained 'the upper stage of barbarism', after which it is no longer supposed to exist, the next stage being civilization.

It turns out from what has been said before, that this system ought not to be linked with a more or less historically primitive stage or with the degree of evolution of societies. It is characteristic that it is only to be found with any degree of certainty among the Southern and agricultural populations (Black Africa, the Deccan, Melanesia and Pre-Columbian America). It is known that the population of America came from elsewhere since no traces of early human skeletons have been found there.* Therefore it is not universal and it can only be considered to be so if the gaps are filled by assumptions. It seems evident that, like matriarchy, it arises from a system of political and social organisation, from a sedentary and agricultural way of life, irreducible to the type of Northern nomadic life.

As has been said above, this system has only a social significance. What a Walaf or another African calls his father's brother, father, or his mother's sister, mother, he knows that they will serve as his real parents in case of death, illness or extinction. The structure of African society – such as it will be described later – necessitates this assimilation of aunts and uncles with real parents. There springs from this a collection of reciprocal obligations, which Delafosse did not fail to point out:

In addition, it can rightly be said that there are no orphans among the blacks. It could also be added that neither are there any widows, or at least, any widows exposed to misery, since a widow returns to her own family, which is responsible for her as long as she does not remarry, unless she forms part of the heir of the latter.²⁰

In reality a shade of meaning is often introduced to underline the fact that the real fathers and mothers are not put in question. A Walaf will always call his father's brother *Bay-bu-ndav* = little father. In the same way he will say *Yay-dju-ndav* = little mother. These expressions have only a social value for him.*

* For further elaboration on this, see Ivan Van Sertima: *They Came Before Columbus: The African Presence in America* (Random House, 1976).

* They signify 'secondary' parents.

It is characteristic that Morgan was never able to point out any coincidence between his system of consanguinity and the real relationship which exists in the families where he found the system. Among the Iroquois any correspondance to the Pairing family is missing: it is in Hawaii and in Polynesia in the so-called *punaluan* family, that Morgan finds the type which corresponds to the Iroquois system of consanguinity.

But now comes a strange thing. Once again, the system of consanguinity in force in Hawaii did not correspond to the actual form of the Hawaiian family...²¹

This contradiction is explained by saying that the family continues to develop, while the language spoken ossifies and is oustripped by reality:

...While the family undergoes living changes, the system of consanguinity ossifies; while the system survives by force of custom, the family outgrows it...²²

It may then be asked why it has been impossible to find a similar phenomenon of ossification, revealed by language, in the Indo-European system of consanguinity over a period of 4,000 years.

The sacred character of the mother in the societies which are sedentary, agricultural and matriarchal is ill-suited to the idea of a primitive stage of promiscuous intercourse which they are said to have passed through. Wherever this latter has existed, it seems to have led directly to amazonism, which must not be confused with matriarchy: this distinction will be made later.

The easiness of divorce in marriages of matriarchal origin can not objectively be considered as a sign of its inferiority or priority, to the point of distinguishing the ancient Pairing family from the monogamous family, where divorce is virtually impossible. Facility of separation must not be considered as a revelation of mores which have undergone disintegration, but as an index of the degree of freedom which a society grants to all its members, without distinction of sex.

The African woman, even after marriage, retains all her

individuality and her legal rights; she continues to bear the name of her family, in contrast to the Indo-European woman who loses hers to take on that of her husband.

Such are the outstanding traits of the two régimes: matriarchy and patriarchy. Their exclusive characters, as far as consanguinity and the right of inheritance are concerned, reveal a conscious systematic choice and not an impossibility of choice arising from the uncertainty of any given paternity. It has been shown that these things still occur under our own eyes, in both cradles and with full knowledge of the facts. It is not therefore logical to imagine a qualitative leap which would explain the transition from one to the other. It seems more scientific to consider the two systems as irreducible; but if this is so, one must be able to prove it by rapidly retracing the general history of the two cradles and their zones of influence. This will be the object of Chapter III.

Piganiol, in his work on the origin of Rome, is categorical: it was the Indo-European nomads of the Eurasian steppes, the Celts, Germans, Slavs, Achaeans and Latins who introduced cremation and the worship of fire to the Mediterranean. The agricultural peoples who lived in this region practised burial. Also, it is not rare to find the two rites among mixed people such as the Pelasgians. He criticises the view of Fustel de Coulanges that all ancient institutions were derived from ancestor worship, and he is thus led to see in the two rites of burial and cremation two different conceptions of the beyond. It will be seen below how difficult it is to uphold this point of view.

According to Fustel de Coulanges, all the institutions of the ancient city are connected with ancestor worship. Now the ancients were divided into two peoples: those who buried their dead and those who cremated them. Have we not the right to wonder if the different practices were not inspired by different beliefs, if those who cremated their dead, and those who buried them, did not conceive in different ways the relation between the dead and the living? The problem is posed in the same terms in Italy and in Greece: the Umbrians, who cremated their dead, subdued the Ligurians, who buried theirs, in the same way as the Achaeans, again cremators, subdued the Minoans, who practised burial....

It was the invaders from Eastern and Central Europe who

introduced the rite of cremation into the Mediterranean world and to Western Europe: Umbrians, Aechaeans, Celts – these are the same peoples who brought the Indo-European languages. From the persistence of the rite of burial can be measured the resistance of the Mediterranean basin....

The Pelasgians, who are a mixed people, practised both rites. An immensely precious legend makes us understand the perplexities of conscience at this time. Pollis and Delphos established in Crete a mixed colony of Tyrrhenian Pelasgians and Laconians; the colonists, after a period of uncertainty, divided into two groups: one faithful to the Minoan tradition and one which practised the new gospel.

The first colonists of Albi practised cremation; this is affirmed by the upper stratum of tombs of the forum: legends say that Numa refused to be cremated. The Sabine rite would perhaps have triumphed had it not been for the Umbrian-Etruscan invasion at the end of the sixth century...

Between the two rites cases of contamination are frequent...

So, although at this period of history cremations and burial were practised simultaneously, both these customs were derived from the practices of two distinct worlds: the pastoral world of the North, which burnt its dead, and the agricultural world of the South, which buried them.²³

We agree entirely with this conclusion, which is one of the fundamental ideas of our own theory. The nomadic origin of cremation and the sedentary, agricultural origin of burial could not be emphasized more clearly. But contrary to the opinion of Piganiol, we think that the question is not one of two different beliefs about life after death, but of the same religious thought – ancestor worship – differently interpreted by the nomads and the sedentary peoples respectively.

The author has not tried to discover the material cause which prevented the nomads from consecrating their worship to fixed tombs; he would have realised that cremation was the only means for a people with no fixed dwelling place to carry the ashes of their ancestors and to worship them. He would seem to have agreed with Fustel de Coulanges who talks of ancestor worship in the ancient world, without insisting too much on its two variations.

Tombs and statues are meaningless in a nomadic life; their absence is explained logically, instead of being an expression of

particular intellectual inclinations. Thus, instead of believing that it is material conditions which imposed two different forms on the same religious idea, Piganiol maintains that we are dealing with two fundamentally distinct conceptions.

These rites seem to correspond to two differing beliefs regarding life beyond the grave....

The man who practises burial lives in a constant state of terror, whereas the man who believes in cremation reminds one of a free thinker. These beliefs, which are so distinct, do not allow of a common formula; the same institutional systems could not be derived from each of them. Has the assumption of Fustel de Coulanges not already been shaken? To tell the truth, to confirm our conclusions would require a close study of comparative religions. Let us observe at once that there is to be found in the Rig-Veda this Aechaeon or Homeric free thought, such as Rhodes was able to restore it. The Brahman laughs at ghosts; cremation entrusts the dead to Agni so that he may carry them to the world of their ancestors, and the urns are simply left somewhere in a wood, most of the time without any funeral monument. Among the Jews it seems indeed that there are to be found both types of belief which we have defined... We think we should have a satisfactory answer to this if it were admitted that the Canaanites practised ancestor worship, according to rites analogous to Chthonian ones and that the nomadic Israelites introduced if not cremation, at least different customs regarding the dead, analogous to the Aechaeon or Brahman indifference towards their dead.²⁴

The contrast between the Canaanites, leading a sedentary and agricultural life, and the Israelite nomads, is exactly the one which we have made; it confirms the theory which has been developed as to the zone of confluence of the two cradles. But the point of view of Piganiol regarding the Northern and Southern religions must be completely set down before it is criticised.

To the school of English philologists we owe an interpretation of the Greek religion which is very subtle, very tempting and widely disputed. The Greek religion, according to this theory, was born of the fusion of Chthonian and Uranian cults. The Uranians, the gods of manifest will, are the objects of a *tsrapsia*; they are honoured in

the expectation of a future benefit. The Chthonians on the contrary are evil spirits which the cult aims at warding off....

The struggle between these two religions corresponds to the war between the Pelasgians and the Northern invaders, whose fusion produced classical Greece...contrast between the Northern fire worship and Mediterranean stone worship.

The peoples who worship the heavens have in their minds the idea of a kinship between the fire in their hearths, the atmosphere and the sun. By means of fire, the offerings which are burnt are scattered across the ether which is identical with the great god who is dispersed everywhere; and this invisible god condenses and becomes tangible in the flames. The earth worshippers communicate with their gods by bringing their offerings to caves, by throwing them into abysses or by letting them slowly sink into swamps....

A tradition exists that the worship of fire which was entrusted by Romulus to some priests, passed later to the priestesses according to the will of Numa, the Sabine....

It was the nomadic invaders, pastoral tribes, who introduced the worship of fire. Sacrifice by fire was unknown in Athens before the time of Cecrops, who was also the first to give the title of Almighty to Zeus.

The peoples who introduced fire worship into the Mediterranean basin strove at the same time to eradicate savage superstitions.²⁵

This last opinion is certainly exaggerated. After the triumph of the Northern elements, during the classical age of Rome, there were more gods than there were citizens: Fustel de Coulanges was careful to enumerate them precisely. The text quoted clearly reflects the persistent tendency among many Western writers to exalt the superior qualities of everything which is Northern. In fact there is to be found again the classical contrast between the religion of the caves and swamps and that of the manifest will of the heavens.

It must be said, first of all, that nothing is more doubtful than the attribution of a heavenly or solar religion to the Indo-Europeans to the exclusion of all other peoples. It is much more likely that such a religion would be the prerogative of the South, where the sun shines brightly and where the sky is really clear. It is in the Mediterranean and not in the Northern sky that a Zeus, god of light, should reign.

Several arguments permit us to justify this view. Ra is indeed a solar god of the South. On the other hand, Grenier is led to record

the absence of a solar divinity in the Roman religion, which seems to him unexpected to say the least, after all the thought he has given to the etymology of Zeus; but with regard to this, we must again refer to the written word to understand that it is extremely doubtful and open to discussion.

The sun and moon governed the Roman calendar; the names Sol and Luna however, did not appear in it. The Sol Indiges of Rome, which had his temple on the Quirinal, was a god of Lavinium: Luna had a temple which was erected by Servius Tullius on the Aventine, but the Roman Empire and foreign influences had to come into being before their worship was developed. They are probably represented in the former Roman religion by names under which they have not yet been recognised.²⁶

In so far as the Roman calendar is an adaptation of the Egyptian calendar it is not surprising that the terms sun and moon are to be found therein. In spite of the fact he had just established – that of the absence of a solar divinity among the Romans – Grenier is still able to write, but, let it be said, without too much conviction:

In general, the gods of heaven are Indo-European; those of the earth, on the contrary, the gods of the underworld and the caves, represent the avatars of Mother Earth, the great primitive Mediterranean divinity: Uranian worship on the one hand, Chthonian on the other.²⁷

In reality, Grenier summarised all that is known to be most certain about the Northern beliefs; that is, their decaying character. There is a poverty of religious thought. Documents pertaining thereto are rare and comparatively recent.

The oldest record we possess referring to the Indo-Aryan religion, the poems of the Rig-Veda, only date from the sixth century B.C. The Greek religion, such as we find it in Homer, allows us to go back a little further, but this religion appears to have a strong admixture of elements foreign to the Indo-European world. The religions of the Celts and Germans are only known to us from the period nearest to our own times. The information we possess about the ancient religions of the Lithuanians and Slavs scarcely goes back

before the sixteenth century A.D., due entirely to the priests who taught them Christianity. It is only by a comparison of these very different indications that a deduction can be made of the religions of the Indo-Europeans before they were split up about 2,000 B.C.²⁸

It follows from this comparative study that fire worship was common to all the Indo-Aryans up to the time of the Prusso-Lithuanians of the sixteenth century.

To the leading Brahmans must be given rice at the same time as other presents, in the area sacred to the fire-offering.²⁹

To all the reasons which have been invoked to explain fire worship, the one which has already been put forward is to be preferred; in the icy northern cold, the god benefactor *par excellence* is the fire; thanks to its incomparable usefulness in these latitudes, the primitive northern soul was not long in coming to its worship. This would be the material base, which subsequently gave birth to a religious superstructure. It is evident from the study of Piganiol, of Grenier and of the *Lois de Manou* that cremation and fire worship arise from a specifically Indo-European tradition, a tradition which has perpetuated itself until the present day in the consciousness of men who have forgotten its origin; the everlasting flame, the Olympic torches, the associations whose members, although Christians, allow themselves to be cremated, can probably be explained in the light of this Aryan tradition. It is likely that certain Europeans would not allow themselves to be cremated today, even for reasons of hygiene, were it not for this tradition handed down from their Aryan ancestors. It is remarkable to observe that cremation is the ethnological and cultural trait which distinguishes the Aryan world from the southern world, and in particular from the African one. It is impossible to identify a single authentic case of cremation in Black Africa, from antiquity until the present day. This is a fact which has never sufficiently been stressed.

CHAPTER III

HISTORY OF PATRIARCHY AND MATRIARCHY

The Southern Cradle, the Northern Cradle and the Zone of Confluence

Properly speaking, there is no question here of summarising, even briefly, the history of the three 'cradles' since this would scarcely offer any interest for the purpose we have in mind. The method which will be applied consists of choosing in each cradle, the outstanding historical facts, whose nature is such to prove that a particular cradle is indeed characteristic of such and such a system.

THE SOUTHERN CRADLE

The study will be limited to Africa, to limit the bounds of the subject to cogent facts. In fact, Africa is the Southern continent which has been the least changed by exterior influences. The Arab penetration was stopped by the forests to the South, because of the tsetse fly which killed most of their horses; the first expeditions to reach the heart of Africa, those of Livingstone and Stanley, came later than 1850.

ETHIOPIA

We shall deal with Ethiopia as it was described by Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus. Its capital, Meroë, situated near the junction of the White and Blue Nile was discovered by Cailliaud at the time of the Restoration. Its placement corresponds approximately to that of present day Sudan; it was also called Nubia and the Land of Senar. The Ethiopia of today, whose capital is Addis-Ababa, was only an outlying province.