

## The Philosophy of the Margin or the Space Which Cannot Be Utilized : Structuralist Analysis of Mandari Myths

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# 11 The Philosophy of the Margin or the Space Which Cannot Be Utilized: Structuralist Analysis of Mandari Myths

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## SYMBOLIC SPACE AND ITS PERIPHERY

The places in which we as individuals and as mankind live are not simply a physical environment. To a certain extent we attach meaning or value to places. Mountains and forests that are located at a distance from the human habitat are often regarded as sacred places where spirits reside, places which are divided from the secular world. Also, the houses in which we live are perceived to be a pure replica of the universe itself, within which the space is demarcated into men's space, women's space, formal ritualistic space, and a private living space (Carmichael, Hugh-Jones, Moser and Tayler 1985: 76-93). In this way, symbols are attached to places and one of the main themes of social anthropology is to clarify the meaning of the symbolism, and thus contribute to the understanding of how a certain group views the world (cosmology). The analysis of the symbolic dualism represented by "right" and "left" is an example of such an endeavor (Needham 1973).

However, people are not always aware of the symbolic meaning of "places." In our daily lives, the symbolism of a place cannot be immediately and easily actualized. Rather, it is through the acts of rituals and the narrations of myths which are in and of themselves symbolic that we are made aware of the symbolic nature of places. Therefore, social anthropologists who are involved in the research of cosmology attempt to reconstruct symbolic spaces through the analysis of rituals and myths or to construct a model of a symbolic space (Beidelman 1986: ch. 3, 4). The symbolic space model which is derived from their efforts is given an order and systematized.

However, is it only the place which has been reconstructed from such a model that is indispensable to the existence of human beings? By actualizing something, and incorporating it into a system, unconsciously, we are simultaneously eliminating and hiding the parts that are peripheral to the model. In the process of extracting a system, are there not places, or spaces which are actually indispensable to life but which cannot be easily actualized and therefore have been eliminated without our awareness (not only by the researchers but the members of the group as well)?

This paper will attempt to approach such a place by analyzing the myths of the Mandari, who live in southern Sudan. These myths tell us how the earth was divided from the sky<sup>1)</sup>.

### **MANDARI MYTHS: THE ORIGIN OF THE DIVISION OF SKY AND EARTH, AND THE ORIGIN OF DEATH**

The Mandari have myths that explain how the earth was divided from the sky, which also simultaneously explain the origin of death. The following myths, M1 to M4, were collected and translated by Buxton (Buxton 1963: 19-23).

#### **M1**

[Long ago] the earth was joined to the sky by a rope and the people of the earth and those of the sky went up and down it in order to attend each other's dances. There was no grass on the earth and no trees, neither was there illness or death, nor pain at childbirth. The people otherwise were very many, like the people of today.

One day, two men fell to earth from Heaven. They were Mar Nykwac and Ruli his brother. A woman fell with them with a brush in her hand. Ruli went back to heaven, saying that the earth did not suit him, and the woman followed. Mar Nykwac remained on earth and eventually engendered two sons name Juṅdor and Mardesa. Their people lived in Bora country outside Mount Tindalu, where the rope was tied, and their old village sites can still be seen today.

The children of Mar Nykwac were many and began to quarrel among themselves. One named Juṅdor was a miracle-worker and warrior. He and his brother Mardesa went into the bush with their young men to hunt. Mardesa and his people suffered from thirst, but when Juṅdor saw that his men were short of water he made a pool out of a dried up water-hole by sweeping the surface with his arm; and all his people drank. Mardesa at last sent a messenger to Juṅdor to find out how he fared, and when he heard that Juṅdor had not called him to drink he was angry and sent two men to kill him. But Juṅdor escaped them in the bush. Mardesa then sent them out again but they could not trap Juṅdor. The latter then sent a messenger to Mardesa saying "If my brother wishes to kill me let him come and do so himself." So Mardesa came and threw a spear at Juṅdor, which went into his side. Juṅdor took the spear out of the wound and rubbed the place with his hand, and the injury disappeared. Then he asked Mardesa why he had tried to kill him without reason when he was his brother. And Juṅdor cursed Mardesa, foretelling that from the moment of his own death, trees and grass would appear on the earth, and death and sickness and suffering of all kinds would come upon men.

After three days, during which time he slept, Juṅdor died. Everything then happened as he had foretold, and for the space of a year everything on earth became barren: all women and female animals; and the men and male beasts were impotent, and people began to die.

When the people of the Above heard that Mar Nykwac's sons had fought, they sent a hyena to cut the rope, and the sky separated from the earth, and most of the people remained above. The descendants of Juṅdor and Mardesa began to separate into groups, and eventually produced the following clans: Jarra, Mijiki, Jokari, Lomore, Boreng, Bari Kujutat, Rume, and Jungwa.

## M2

Jakda (Mar Nykwac) was the ancestor. He came from the sky in Bora country. He had two sons Juᅇdor and Mardesa. They went through the forest to hunt, and Juᅇdor found good places where grain was ripening and there were pools, while Mardesa and his followers suffered from thirst. Mardesa was jealous of Juᅇdor and sent his young men to kill him, and the latter went home to his wife and said, "Come, we must flee because the people are coming to kill me." But his wife replied, "Are you so afraid, that you wish to flee?" So Juᅇdor waited and Mardesa's people came and threw spears at him, which passed backwards and forwards through his body from both sides, leaving holes through which light could be seen. But he felt no pain, and when his people came to mourn over him they found no sign of wounds.

A few days later the time came for Juᅇdor to die. At this point the earth separated from the sky and grass and trees began to grow. Death also came. Before that time there was no death. If people became old and feeble they were taken to the country of Juᅇdor and laid on a frame over a fire on which medicines were burning. There they recovered, and went home.

When Juᅇdor died, he ordered his body to be buried in the ground and grave poles placed over it. From then on everybody has been buried in this way. Bonlek, a brother of Mardesa, also quarreled with Mardesa because of the killing of Juᅇdor. He left Bora country when Juᅇdor died and settled in Jarra country, where his descendants are today.

### THE THEME OF MYTHOLOGY

As the contents of M1 and M2 amply illustrate, the death of Juᅇdor is linked to the separation of earth from heaven. That separation occurred at the time of his death. In this myth the origin of death, that is the separation of life and death, is perceived as being analogous to the separation of earth from heaven. In other words, the deep abyss between life and death is perceived to be analogous to the cleavage that exists between the earth and heaven. Life and death, heaven and earth are each a part of a continuing flow in a kind of time and space where the experience of human beings cannot intervene, and for which boundaries cannot be set. (It is difficult to determine the point where heaven begins, or where heaven is located. Also, as to the problem of how we die, even today the recent controversy regarding brain death illustrates that modern medicine is still grappling with the issue of determining the exact timing of a person's death.) Nevertheless, in order to be accorded a position in culture, death and heaven must be incorporated into a category of discontinuity with differential features, the implications of which can only be determined in the relations with others. To this end, an invisible, absolute abyss must exist between life and death, and heaven and earth. It is because of this commonality that the relationship between life and death, and heaven and earth are metaphorically expressed, or are perceived to be analogous.

There is a myth in which a miracle-worker corresponding to Juᅇdor is not murdered. Let us look at it. Here, only the origin of the division of clans is explained.

## M3

There were two brothers, Mar Gila and Gwonshuka. Gwonshuka was a miracle-worker; he used to take his cattle outside into the bush and sweep the ground with his elbow, and water and grass would appear in the scorched earth. His cattle grazed and drank all day and his people bathed. In the evening he returned to camp. His brother, on the other hand, took his cattle to the swamp in the usual way. One day one of Mar Gila's retainers followed Gwonshuka and, seeing all that happened, went back and told the chief, who became very angry, refusing to believe him.

Then the time came for cultivation, and the brothers prepared their fields. After Mar Gila had planted his, the rain fell in torrents, and continued all day on the fields of Mar Gila, which were utterly destroyed and all the seeds washed away. No rain fell over those of Gwonshuka, and the people worked successfully and completed the planting. When Mar Gila saw what had happened, he remembered the story told by his retainer, so he trailed Gwonshuka and hid in a tree and saw the latter produce a fertile place out of waste land. In the evening Mar Gila returned to his village and found Gwonshuka lying on his face (because he was exhausted from having used his power) and he challenged him, asking why, if he had these powers, he had not helped his brother, and he said in a rage, "You are not my brother," and cursed him. Then the latter said, "How am I not your brother? Why do you curse me without cause? I will take my people and leave." Mar Gila replied, "All right, go." So Gwonshuka called his people together with their cattle and families and left. They settled in Jurbeling, and his descendants still live there.

In this manner, the discrepancy between myths with respect to whether the miracle man was killed or not, as pointed out by Buxton (Buxton 1973: 23n.1) may show that the motif of the separation of heaven and earth, which is widely spread among such Nilotic people as the Dinka and Nuer, and the Uduk people of the Koman group of Southern Sudan (Lienhardt 1961: 33; Evans-Pritchard 1956: 10; James 1979: 68), might have been grafted onto a different motif adopted in the legends explaining the division of clans. And in fact, the myths of the Dinka, Nuer, Atuot<sup>2</sup>, and Uduk contain no motifs that pertain to the division of clans. (Nuer myths will be referred to later.) On the other hand, as we have seen in M3, myths that limit their narration to the separation of clans do not refer to the separation of earth and heaven, nor to the origin of death, which are a given that underlie those myths. (Also, the groups which have separated differ from the motifs of M1 and M2 in that the separation is limited to the two groups founded by two brothers who are in conflict.) By grafting the motif of heaven and earth separation to on M3, we are able to obtain myths such as M1 and M2. The following is an example of such a grafted myth. This myth is grafted rather coarsely when compared to M1 and M2, which are so sophisticated that the grafting is hardly discernible.

## M4

Long ago a man named Mar Nykwac fell to earth from heaven. His brother Ruli also fell with him, but returned. At that time there was no illness on the earth, there were no grass or trees, and the people were very numerous. The sky was tied to the earth with a rope, and the people of the earth and sky attended dances together. Owing to

fighting and the fear of blood between them, they decided not to see each other again. So the rope was cut by a hyena on the orders of the people of the sky.

Mar Nykwac married a girl named Are and produced Gumbiti, who in turn had two sons, Tokiri and Mardesa.

One day Tokiri, who was a wonder-worker, found a precious bead lying on the ground, which was invisible to Mardesa: the latter became very angry that he, as the eldest son, could not see it. He asked Tokiri to hand it over, but the latter refused, saying that he was the finder. So there was hatred between them. Then Gumviri, the father of the ancestors, called both in front of him and told Tokiri to move to Dogomi country, to the side of Bora, and Mardesa to Reilly.

Mardesa produced the great-great-grandfather of the present Mandari Bora Chief, Janaba Lakule, and Tokiri bore various sons but his line ends in Fulai of Rume.

As with Gwonshuka in M3, Tokiri of M4 (he corresponds to Junjor of M1 since he is a miracle-worker and is in conflict with his elder brother Mardesa) is not killed. Though M3 does not refer at all to the separation of heaven and earth, as with M1 and M2, M4 refers to the separation of earth from heaven. However, the reference to the separation of heaven and earth appears at the very beginning of the myth, and is not linked to the quarrel between the two brothers. In M1 and M2, both are linked, with the abyss that exists between heaven and earth, and the abyss between life and death having a metaphorical relationship. However, in M4 we do not see this relationship. That is why this myth does not answer our question about the origin of death. When a quarrel erupts between the brothers, since the division of heaven and earth is already assumed, the myth seems to imply that the origin of death need not be discussed. Though M4 refers to the division of the earth from heaven, it "forgets" to elaborate on the origin of death, and instead the contents drift towards the direction taken by those myths which tell us about the division and origins of the clans. That is why I mentioned that the myth was grafted coarsely. Why then should myths that have different motifs be grafted together?

Junjor or his counterpart in other myths invites the wrath of his elder brother because the brother wants to obtain water, grass or beads. The capability to miraculously generate water is due to the supernatural power bestowed upon the younger brother, who also discovers beads and water by using his clairvoyant power. In any event, a quarrel between the brothers erupts because of the younger brother's ability to work wonders, and his unwillingness to give the object that had been miraculously discovered to the elder brother.

The motif of the beads brings to mind the group of myths concerning the spear masters, as well as the numerous myths of beads that are widely prevalent among the Nilotic peoples, which were analyzed by Lienhardt<sup>3</sup>). The spears and beads that appear in these myths, according to Lienhardt, embody the identity of the owner and therefore cannot be parted with (Lienhardt 1975: 229-230). This feature is even more pronounced in the Mandari myths. In these myths, the items that cannot be parted with are not just water and beads, but the ability to work miracles

in order to gain those things, since it is a part of the personality of the owner that cannot be given to another. The fact that the older brother demands to have possession of something that embodies the personality of the younger brother, and therefore cannot be transferred, indicates that the relationship between the two is so excessively close that the older brother is unaware of how unnatural a demand he is making. It is precisely because of this extreme closeness that the relationship becomes ill fated and hatred is intensified (Buxton 1973: 233).

So the challenge in the myths is to transform this extremely close relationship to one which is more appropriately distanced, and by doing so to avoid a further deterioration of the situation. To solve this problem, the brothers were separated into different clans and lived in different lands, though they were kin from the same ancestor. The result of that solution is the distribution of clans as is observed today. In particular, in M4, the father of the two brothers, Gumbiri, appears as a mediator, and sets that appropriate distance between the two. In this way the separation myth attempts to explain why members having the same ancestor have been divided into the different clans that are observable today.

On the other hand, myths evolving around the separation of heaven and earth are also related to the issue of "spacing, or distance." Those myths tell us why the abyss that separates heaven and earth, and life and death exists today. In other words, the myths that describe the separation of the earth from heaven, and the clan separation myth are similar in their attempts to transform an abnormal closeness into a more distant relationship, the only difference being that the former encoding is cosmological and eschatological while the latter is sociological. It is precisely because of this commonality that the two myths are grafted and combined, at which time the separation of heaven and earth, life and death and the separation of clans are metaphorically connected into a relationship.

A distance is set in the relationship by inserting a margin. But before we move on to this issue, let us examine more closely the world preceding this, that is, the world of abnormal closeness.

### THE PRIMORDIAL WORLD

According to M1 and M4, in the world preceding the separation of heaven and earth, there was no grass nor trees on earth, which seems to contradict the utopian image of the world before the present features of earth and man were established, such as the lack of pain at childbirth, freedom from sickness, and immortality<sup>4</sup>. This is because we would perceive a grassless, treeless earth as being barren. So how are we to explain this part of the narrative that states that there was no grass or trees on earth?

Following the example of the American anthropologist, Beidelman (cf. Beidelman 1970), the individual conditions that the myths attribute to the primordial world can be regarded as an inversion of the conditions that prevail today. It is, however, also true that the over-simplified analysis often employed by

American and British structural anthropologists such as Beidleman and Leach does not contribute much to our understanding. Though the utopian conditions and the totally barren condition attributed to the primordial world are both "inversions" of the present, the characteristics of those conditions differ radically. In other words, there are many types of inversions. If we are to attempt to elucidate the structure of myths, we cannot simply be satisfied with the explanation that the beginnings of myths tend to be like that. We have to proceed further by explaining the mutual relationship between the inverse conditions. Otherwise, it is difficult to establish a convincing interpretation from this type of analysis.

Let us consider this issue while looking at the context of the myth. By doing so, it will become clear that the primordial condition is not merely a simple inversion of the present, and that the absence of grass and trees is deeply related to the issue.

In M1, the earth was once tied to the sky with a rope, and the people of the earth and the people of the sky went up and down it to attend each other's dances. In this age, there are no features to differentiate the sky and the earth as discrete social categories. There is no difference in the motions of the people. The motions of going up and down the rope, and the multi-directional motions that are symbolized by dancing are only being repeated uniformly. Therefore it is difficult to read from this mythological scene the distinction between heaven as a natural as well as a cosmological category (the place where the Creator and heavenly spirits are perceived to reside) which existed at the time of the narration and earth. The Creator and spirits do not appear in this myth. As Lienhardt has stated with respect to a similar mythology of the Dinka, myths "do begin with the state of affairs now known, but assume (or create) an original conjunction for which there is no basis in the simple natural observation of earth and sky as they now are" (Lienhardt 1961: 37).

What this scene depicts is a primordial sky and a primordial earth which are completely unified, from which the present heaven and earth are separated and created. The homogeneity of the primordial sky and the primordial earth is emphasized here, rather than its heterogeneity. The absence of grass and trees is also related to this fact. The primordial earth was a smooth and flat space, which implies that the primordial earth was homogeneous, and did not differ from the primordial sky. The lack of sickness and pain implies the same. Since the two are completely fused into one, movements of dispersion towards multiple directions are the only motions that can be described. Moreover, we can describe the situation which creates the earth and sky and separates them as the "in-between," (*aida* in Japanese) by borrowing an expression by the Japanese psychopathologist, Bin Kimura.

An "in-between" space is commonly shared by oneself and another, and in the past, it was a "place" through which each could directly transfer to the other. That is also the "place" from where the self, the other and the world are for the first time separated and established. This "place" is not a static actualized space, but is



“something like the fundamental motion which generates all things belonging to this universe” (Kimura 1987: 57). Therefore, this place should not be understood to be an “object” which is actual, static or has been given a stereotypical prescribed style, which would make it a socially condensed object. It should be regarded as a world of an absolute and direct *koto* (actuality, *Sein*) which one cannot be conscious of, a world which cannot be objectively perceived, or is impossible to express in words<sup>5</sup>).

Though *koto* exists at a place which cannot be described by words and cannot be heard from words, if the object (we can think of language) cannot express *koto*, we cannot even say that *koto* exists. As the Japanese philosopher Toshiaki Kobayashi points out, fundamentally, *koto* cannot exist apart from *mono* (objective reality, *Seindes*), and therefore, *koto* are predestined to become absorbed into *mono* (Kobayashi 1989: 231). In this sense the notions of *koto* and *mono* are very similar to Jacques Derrida's *différance* and *différence* (cf. Derrida 1982). By fully utilizing socially condensed words, and the symbolic expressions attached to words, myths attempt to move near and objectively grasp “the ‘in-between’ space which is the world of the primordial *koto* that cannot be grasped in reality.” In that sense, myths are a method of expressing objectification (*Verdinglichung*). The primordial worlds that are described in M1, M2 and M4 are symbolic expressions of such an “in-between.” In particular, the existence of the object, the rope, is what makes the primordial heaven the place “in-between” different from the present sky.

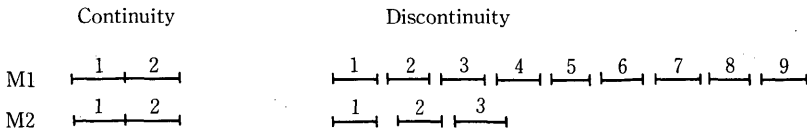
From here division or separation takes place. From the “in-between space,” substantive *mono* are created. The narrative gives us the impression that in the process *mono* was carved out of *koto* and created<sup>6</sup>. (The sky and earth, life and death, and clan which were thus created then take on the role of supporting *koto* which we are made unaware of.) As the primordial homogeneity was expressed as motions without any differential features, the separation is triggered by motion as well. This refers to the movements of two brothers. For the first time here different motions are introduced, the difference being that Ruli moves back and forth between heaven and earth, while Mar Nykwac moves unidirectionally from heaven to earth. Furthermore, the difference is emphasized by the existence of a woman. Ruli descends to the earth with the woman, and returns once again to heaven with her. On the other hand, though Mar Nykwac descends from heaven to the earth with the woman, he parts with the woman and remains on earth. So one of the features that differentiates the two brothers is whether they stay with her or not.

Furthermore, the characters of the myth are anonymous until this point in time when, for the first time the brothers are each given names to distinguish them from the anonymous mass (for similar analysis of the structural role of the proper name, see Lévi-Strauss 1995: 19). The brothers are identified by their individual names, with Ruli remaining with the woman in the primordial sky, and Mar Nykwac remaining alone on the primordial earth. Thus, the two brothers are differentiated from each other due to the difference in their movements, whether or not they

accompany a woman, and by their names, and the primordial sky and primordial earth as the resting places for each brother (resting is also a negative form of movement) begins to separate as well in step with the differentiation of the brothers.

On earth, the differentiation process proceeds internally as well. Mar Nykwac produces offspring, among which a brother named Mardesa murders his younger brother named Juṅdor, both of whom are distinguished by their individual names<sup>7)</sup>. On the other hand, the myth does not mention heaven until the very end, and it almost seems as though heaven has once again recovered its anonymous status. Compared to what is occurring on earth, we receive the impression that differentiation is not proceeding in heaven. In this manner, the mutual difference between heaven and earth is due to the difference in the degree to which internal disintegration occurs. In response to the murder incident, heaven orders the hyena to cut the rope, because it dislikes the earth where a murder has occurred. The people in heaven gain the initiative, and as the differentiation becomes absolute, heaven and earth as the present Mandari cosmological categories are created and separated.

As shown by the works of the French structural anthropologist, Lévi-Strauss and the French philosopher Girard, in order to make the gigantic leap from an unvaried continual state to a state of culture which is a system of differentiations, the portion of the primordial continuity must be culled or eliminated, and the continuity must be transformed into a discontinuity. And the power to eliminate it is often represented by "violence" (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 52-55; Girard 1977; Deguchi 1983). For the individual categories that together comprise a culture to take on an identity, each category must be clearly differentiated from the other, without any confusion; in other words there must not be any continuity between one category and the other categories<sup>8)</sup>. Therefore, in order for space to be divided into heaven and earth, and for a mutually repulsive discontinuity such as life and death to be introduced into time, the rope must be cut for the former, and Juṅdor must be murdered for the latter. The murder of Juṅdor creates the internal differentiation within human groups on earth. Not only do the descendants of Mardesa and Juṅdor divide into two different clans, but, as we have seen in M2, it is only after the death of Juṅdor that their younger brother, Bonlek (and his descendants) appears. Until that time, this man was an anonymous being, hidden behind the shadows of a continuity, but by culling Juṅdor, for the first time the younger brother could appear as a differentiated individual, and with his appearance, the number of clans which are created and separated after the death of Juṅdor is not limited to two. The nine clans were established simultaneously as a separate, discontinuous social unit (cf. Figure 1).



(cf. Lévi-Strauss 1969: 55)

**Figure 1.** The mythological transition from continuous to discrete quantity

### THE ABSENCE OF JUŃDOR

However, though it would not appear so on the surface, the “margin” part which was eliminated violently, by its sheer absence, provides the rationale for the discontinuity in this world. As has already been mentioned, in M1 and M2, JuŃdor was “culled,” triggering the separation and differentiation of clans. However, it must be noted that the “direct cause” of JuŃdor’s death was not the spear that was thrown by his elder brother. Even though JuŃdor was wounded, the affected area returned to its former state, and JuŃdor did not experience any pain. Death is an event that occurs while JuŃdor is sleeping. If the experience of sickness and pain cannot be experienced in place of another, and therefore, illustrate the absolute individuality or differentiation of a person<sup>9)</sup> (Watanabe 1990: 3–7), JuŃdor, who has never experienced such suffering, cannot be an individual. JuŃdor is an existence preceding the creation of individuality, and as such, JuŃdor is the embodiment of the “space in-between,” a place where it is possible for oneself and another to mutually and directly become interchangeable<sup>10)</sup>. Furthermore, the outstanding feature of JuŃdor is his capability to bring forth water from parched lands. The Mandari consider this water to be heavenly water that is found on earth (rain). In other words JuŃdor is associated with the smooth, homogeneous and formless water, and in particular with the fluid rain. This symbolizes JuŃdor’s relation to the “space in-between” which is “a homogeneous and smooth place”<sup>11)</sup>. And, the world of discontinuity, that is, the world where the uniqueness of oneself and others is clarified, can only be completed with the elimination and/or absence of JuŃdor, who is the embodiment of the “space in-between” which allows the substitution (interchangeability) between oneself and others. (Conversely, in M3 and M4 where the discontinuity, that is the separation of the earth from heaven is a given, JuŃdor does not need to be absent, since he does not embody the “space in-between” but exists as an individual.) In M1 and M2, in a world where discontinuity has been established, in order to provide the rationale for that world, JuŃdor was relegated to the position of a “margin.”

### MARGINS AND RITUALS

With the cutting of the rope, heaven and earth, which until then had been in a state of continuity, are recreated into discontinuous categories as they are positioned in

the cosmology of the Mandari. The rope which lies "in-between," is extinguished, in the sense that the rope cannot be understood at the same level as the categories of heaven and earth. The rope, as a substantive and fixed "object" (*mono*) by disappearing, becomes the margin and provides the basis for heaven and earth. (Conversely speaking, if the rope were to continue to exist, then heaven and earth could not exist as totally separated and ruptured categories.) In other words, "the space in-between" in the object-like world that appears after separation, must become a margin, and not be perceived as an "object." Unless there is a margin between heaven and earth which cannot be substantiated nor objectified and cannot be called to the surface of our consciousness, heaven and earth cannot be differentiated, and the cosmology itself cannot be completed. In this sense, the margin is indispensable, for providing the basis for heaven and earth. This would imply that the cosmology, which is composed of various systems of categories such as heaven and earth, does not internally contain the rationale for its own existence. It is already deprived of its own basis. Myths then imply the fact that the basis for the existence of cosmology has been deprived. In this manner, myths narrate not only the creation and separation of the earth from heaven, but implicitly also attest to the intervention of the margin.

It is fruitless to try to substantiate the margin. Even if we were able to grasp the "ground" as a "figure," conversely, that which was until then a "figure" will disappear in the "ground" and become the "ground." The margin of the margin would slide inside. Previously, in referring to the issue of *koto* and *mono*, I pointed out that we could only attempt to grasp *koto* through language which has already been transformed into *mono*. Since the essence of *koto* is hidden in a place which cannot be explained by language, and cannot be heard from language, the "in-between" as *koto* has an aspect which cannot be understood or grasped from the perspective of a *mono* (object) (Kobayashi 1989: 231). That aspect is the margin. As long as the cosmology exists as a system of discontinuity and differentiation, the margin is an abyss which cannot be filled in even though we might create terms that intermediate between the different categories.

For example, let us look at the myth of the Uduk of Sudan which narrates a similar myth regarding the separation of the earth from heaven. In the Uduk myth, it is the Birapinya tree which connects heaven and earth. After this tree was burnt, the people who were left in heaven jumped down onto the earth but were broken into pieces and scattered all over the ground. However, when a short man hoisted a tall man onto his back and they came down together, they were able to land safely on the ground (James 1979: 68-69).

The pair of people, one a very short person and the other a very tall person, play the role of the mediator which attempts to fill in the abyss between the now separated earth and sky. When we compare the tall person with the short one, we can see that a dualism exists here, with the tall one being closer to the sky, and the short one closer to the earth. When the two of them jumped down together, the tall one on top of the short one, the digitized and conflicting relationship between

heaven and earth, was transformed to an analog type of adjacent relationship. (The heaven-the one which is closest to the sky-the one which is closest to the earth-the earth.) It almost seems as if the continuity between the sky and earth have been restored. However, there is no way left to return to the sky, and therefore, the link between the primordial heaven and earth has been totally ruptured, and cannot be restored. An incomplete mediator cannot fill in the margin. What is attempted here, rather, is to rectify the extreme separation between the sky and the earth (Deguchi 1989: 63-64).

Quite to the contrary, none of the Mandari myths attempt to fill in the abyss between heaven and earth within the time frame of the narrative. In Lévi-Strauss style, we can say that whereas the Uduk myths describe the intervention as evolving through a series of stages, starting from a situation of extreme proximity, to one of extreme separation, and finally to the establishment of a moderate distance between heaven and earth, in the Mandari myths the last stage of that process is left up to rituals. In particular, in the ritual for praying for rain, which is conducted next to the shrine of a heavenly spirit owned by the "priest," the skin of a sacrificed sheep is torn apart "like a rope," and then strung between the priest's shrine and the roof of the hut where the priest's wife lives. This rope is believed to tie the rain onto the earth. Since the Mandari themselves use the term "rope," it can be speculated that this tattered piece of sheep skin is a representation of the primordial rope that appears in the myths (Buxton 1973: 336-337). Also, as a part of this ritual, the people pray to the heavenly spirits and to the rain while spraying the air with the rain water that has accumulated on the ground and in rivers (which is the heavenly water found on earth). The action of stringing the sheep skin and spraying water into the air are attempts to restore the continuity between the separated heaven and earth. However, the fact that the ritual has to be conducted repeatedly illustrates that the intervention (the medium) can never be complete or fulfilled<sup>12</sup>.

The reason why we cannot observe the pairing of myths with rituals among the Uduk as we do among the Mandari is probably due to the difference in the religious beliefs (cosmology) between the two societies. The Mandari believe in a God of creation, heavenly spirits and earthly spirits, and have rituals that are associated with those beliefs. But traditionally, the Uduk do not hold similar beliefs. The Uduk myth must internally attempt to fill in the margin that it has created itself. Conversely speaking, the role of the Mandari belief complex in spirits and ancestors is to fill in the margin, and restore continuity in the world<sup>13</sup>. However, that role can never be perfectly fulfilled. That imperfection is predestined. The rituals are not imperfect because they are pseudo-scientific and cannot be expected to effectively transform the world and experience, as some neo-Tyler anthropologists such as Horton would argue.

### THE SYMBOLISM OF THE HYENA

As we have already mentioned, the "in-between" only exists as a margin in the

“object-like” world after the separation which is triggered by the cutting of the rope in the case of M1 and M2. The responsibility for cutting the rope that serves as the margin and separating the sky and the earth is delegated to the hyena in the Mandari myth. However, why was the hyena chosen? In the myths of the Atuot who live in an area adjacent to the Mandari, this role is given to a bird named *aduc* (durra bird) (Burton 1981: 60). Is there a reason why the Mandari chose the hyena instead of a bird which can fly freely back and forth between heaven and earth?

In the past the Mandari would leave the corpse of an executed criminal or a newly born handicapped baby to be eaten by the hyena, which is a carrion eater. The myth uses this characteristic of the hyena. As we can speculate from these customs, the hyena, which eats dead and rotten meat, is much more strongly associated with death, than a leopard or any other meat-eating animal. Also, underlying the death of Jun̄dor in M1 is the hateful and cursed relationship between him and his brother. In M4 as well, the quarrel between people triggered the severance of the rope. The glittering eyes of the nocturnal hyena as it roams in the dark of the night are associated with wickedness by the Mandari. The hyena frequently forages for garbage and human excrement on the boundary between the houses and villages which are social spaces, and the bush which is a natural space. The space where the hyena appears is both a social and natural space, or does not belong to either, that is it is an “in-between” space (Buxton 1968: 37–43). The rope was the margin which existed between heaven and earth, and wickedness and death are associated with the action of cutting the rope. It is precisely because the hyena is associated with death, wickedness and marginality that it was selected as the executor of the rope cut.

As was previously mentioned, in the myths of the Atuot, the rope is cut by the durra bird. Why was the durra bird chosen instead of the hawk, or the ibis or the crowned stork? In considering this problem, it will be useful to look at an identical myth of the Nuer, which was originally recorded by J. P. Crazzolaria, and was later adopted by Evans-Pritchard. The text is summarized by myself.

Long ago there was a rope between heaven and earth. When people grew old, they climbed up that rope and went to God, who made them young once again. Then they would return to the earth by climbing down that rope. One day the hyena and the durra bird (weaver bird) sneaked into heaven in the same way. God kept close watch on these two guests, who would certainly bring on disasters if they climbed down to the earth again. God commanded that they not be allowed to return to earth. However, one night the two fled, and tried to climb down the rope to earth. When the two had nearly reached the earth, the hyena cut the rope. The upper portion of the rope was pulled up to heaven. In this way the connection between heaven and earth was ruptured. And since then, old people must die (Evans-Pritchard 1956: 10).

The hyena appears in the Nuer myth for the same reasons that it does in the Mandari myths. As for the durra bird, speculating from the text of the myth, most probably the bird was positioned not above, but either at the same level or below

the hyena. (It is the hyena that cuts the rope, and everything above the cut is pulled up into the heavens. And the myth does not say that the bird flew back to heaven.) In other words, this bird is positioned closer to the earth. In the ethnography of the Nuer, birds are generally divided into two categories. The first is the *gaat kwoth* (the children of God) which include goshawks, vultures, pied crows and so on. The other category is called *gaat nya kwoth* (sons of daughters of God), which include the weaver birds, guinea fowls and bats etc (Evans-Pritchard 1956: 90). Though the difference between these two categories is not clear, according to M. Oda, who analyzed this myth, birds belonging to the latter category fly relatively low or cannot fly well at all, and therefore can be considered to be creatures that belong to heaven but are positioned close to the earth. The durra bird is well known for frequenting the sorghum fields and eating the seeds (Evans-Pritchard 1956: 71). The durra birds display both heavenly and earthly characteristics, and that is why the bird can traverse back and forth between "heaven" and "earth," as well as the space "in-between" which is common to both heaven and earth (and from which heaven and earth as we know it today were divided and created) (Oda 1994:166-167; Lévi-Strauss 1970: 131-132). Linguistically and culturally, there is a close similarity between the Atuot and the Nuer, and given the fact that the Atuot are even regarded by some as being a sub-group of the Nuer, one can posit that the durra bird plays the same role in the Atuot myth. (Burton's research concerning the Atuot is far from complete, and it does not provide a useful hint in studying this problem<sup>14</sup>.)

However, one must be careful not to define the role of the hyena and the durra bird as being that of a mediator which bridges the chasm between the two worlds and two states, just because the two are characterized by their ability to exist on the boundaries and assume duplicate roles. As with the pair of short and tall people that appear in the Uduk myth, they are not attempting to mediate between the separated heaven and sky, but are quite to the contrary, the medium through which the rupture between heaven and earth have been introduced, and thus the medium through which heaven and earth have been created. The image of the hyena and durra bird that is presented by the series of Nuer, Mandari and Atuot myths is that of an obstructor who attempts to create two different worlds by inserting a wedge of marginal space and thus interrupting the continuation. It is impossible to erase that margin.

#### **EPILOGUE: THE MYTH THAT DEVIATES FROM THE COMMUNITY**

In this paper an attempt has been made to analyze the "in-between" and "margin" as it appears in Mandari myths from the perspective of structuralism. Symbolic anthropologists, whose analysis of myths are greatly influenced by the structural approach, however, tacitly tolerate the functionalistic approach, which would argue that myths exist for the sole purpose of reinforcing the social relationships and value systems created to maintain the tribal society (Da Matta 1971: 272).

Viewed from such an approach, myths describe the process by which the tribal communities attempt to create and then recreate their own identity or self image, and therefore the analysis proceeds in line with this understanding. Myths were orally handed down as an embodiment of a theme evolving around the recreation of a self-image of a self-contained community, thus regarded as an orderly system. The basis for the myth was the self-sustained community. Therefore, the myth reflects a structure which is identical to the dualism of the community's cosmology, and the rites of passage that are based on that dualism (Da Matta: 285-286; Turner 1985, 1988). The pitfall of such an approach is that because it would allow for only a single interpretation, the motifs of the myth which are not coherent with the identified theme, and are thus difficult to explain, will be ignored or left out of the analysis, either consciously or unconsciously by the anthropologist himself.

However, in fact, myths, while confirming the values of the community, also attempt to take away the basis for its own existence from the community. Though the myth explains the origins of the social relationships and cosmology of a particular community by using as its reference source things that are available to the community itself, by attempting to explain the origins, the myth will attempt to liberate itself and go beyond the confines of those origins which are regarded as a self-sufficient truism by the community. The community does not develop into itself solely on its own account.

For example, the Mandari myth, an analysis of which has been attempted in this paper, has been handed down through each territorially grouped clan. As the myths illustrate, these clans are not an independently existing, self complete, substantive entity, but were created out of the process of anti-exchange, and negative exchange with other clans. In some cases, the relationship with the heaven is referenced, and furthermore, the clans are divided on earth, not through their own initiative, but through the initiative of the heavenly people. Also, as in M5, there are even oral traditions that hint at the connection with the neighboring Dinka. (Furthermore, the myths hint of a great possibility that the current clans will further split up into a multiple number of clans.)

In other words, what myths teach us is that a self complete and self evident community (this is not limited to tribal society), is only an illusion which was created according to a *mono* like cosmology (this illusion is commonly shared by even anthropologists who analyze myths such as Terence Turner), and that its identity is always determined by its relationships with others, and therefore, is not a substantive and determining condition that supersedes relationships. And in their tales of origins, myths surreptitiously slip into the narrative a margin or "in-between" from where the community is divided and created in keeping the relationships with others.

If there should be a significance attached to the analysis of myths as has been attempted in this paper, it is because though the "place" and "place of existence" that support the community may be perceived to be stable and complete, a slight change of perspective would reveal that it is actually quite unstable, and that there



is a condition which constantly slips away and cannot be grasped by such concepts. We should give due consideration to the fact that reality includes such elements which seem suspicious from the perspective of the community. I believe that myths teach us the skills to intellectually enjoy the dubious rather than simply suppressing it.

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### NOTES

- 1) The analytical method employed here has been greatly influenced by Lévi-Strauss' structural analysis (Lévi-Strauss 1976, 1979).
- 2) The following text is from an Atuot myth.

At one time the sky and the earth were very close and people walked back and forth between them by means of a rope like a ladder. This was when if a person died, Decau would raise him up and he would have life again. When the people were hungry the woman would put one grain of durra in the mortar to pound it into flour and there would be enough to feed everyone. One day a newly married woman said she would pound more. She lifted the pestle so high that it hit God, and he was angry and said, before you were always satisfied with only a little food, but from now on you will always know hunger, even if you cultivate a great deal. Then *atuc* (durra bird) flew by and cut the rope, later a man died, and people were stricken with grief. They covered themselves with ashes (Burton 1981: 60).

- 3) Lienhardt argues that the theme of these myths is to get back a thing which was taken away by another ("Getting Your Own Back" is the title of his paper) (Lienhardt 1975). One is reminded of the Japanese myth related to two brothers Yamahiko and Umihiko, because of its similarity to the African myths which can be categorized as anti-exchange or negative exchange myths, because of the refusal to either give away something, or accept a substitute (Oda 1983: 1). With respect to anti-exchange, we can say that the Mandari myth dealing with the division of clans also belongs to the identical group of myths. However, the degree of anti-exchange has become even stronger. This is because in the Mandari myth, one is not attempting to "get one's own back" but one's own thing has not even been given in the first place.

The Mandari also have myths about spears and beads.

Gworoŋa came from Föjelu of Chief Goro Gurnu. The ancestor (name unknown) had two sons. The younger borrowed his elder brother's spear and went hunting. He speared an elephant, which made off with the weapon in its body. The boy returned and explained what had happened but his elder brother was angry and refused an offered replacement. So the youth set out to track the elephant. He was away three years, but eventually met a herd of elephants with their chief, who

questioned him about his journey. The boy explained what had happened, and the elephant chief offered to help, telling him to wait until all the elephants were sleeping. Then he called the youth to identify the spear. (Each time an elephant is struck it runs away and pulls out the spear with its trunk and these are all stored together.) The boy found his spear and returned home.

After some months he arrived, but his family had meanwhile given him up for dead, and his wives had been inherited. One day, when he was threading his beads, the baby daughter of the elder brother, who was playing nearby, swallowed a bead. The younger brother demanded its return, refusing all substitutes. The child was eventually divided down the belly and the bead extracted. Then the brothers separated; the younger migrated to Panabang in Dinka, where he died. His name was Mendik. His son, Mar Yaro, later left there because of the mosquitoes, and after his subsequent death "on the road" his people reached Mandari (and settled there)... (Buxton 1963: 31-32).

- 4) The promised land that appears in the master of the fishing spear myth of the Dinka is described as a utopia where there is no death, and where there is abundant pasture (Lienhardt 1961: 173).
- 5) It is not a simple inversion of the present values, as would be concluded from the analytical methods preferred by such people as Leach and Beidelman.
- 6) As Kimura and Kobayashi point out, it is an unavoidable illusion of the *mono* way of thinking to regard the *koto* as being the original state in terms of time, from which *mono* are created (we cannot escape from this *mono* way of thinking).
- 7) This statement is insufficient. Please refer to the next section.
- 8) Strictly speaking, the identity of a category, or the scope-boundary of a category is not always the same. Through incessant repetition, it attempts to become itself (Kimura 1981).
- 9) Watanabe argues that illness and death expose the individual mode which is "impossible to substitute" or "impossible to repeat." By "individual," Watanabe means the way of existence which is impossible for the community or society to incorporate, and which appears to be absolutely external to the community or society. It corresponds to Lévi-Strauss' "history," which is an event that cannot be repeated because it cannot be incorporated into the structure of the group transformations that the relationship has undergone (Lévi-Strauss 1973: 474-475; Karatani 1990).
- 10) It is true that Juṅdor has a name which is proof of his individuality. However, in various clan myths, some parts of the narratives suggest that Juṅdor could be substituted with Mardesa. According to Buxton, Juṅdor's ability to discover water symbolizes the ritualistic power to control rainfall, while Mardesa symbolizes the secular authority which is in conflict with that ritualistic power. However, in a number of clan myths, Mardesa is attributed to having transmitted the ritualistic power to the priest who conducts the prayer for rain (Buxton 1973: 330-331, 343, 345). In other words, Juṅdor and Mardesa are often substitutes for one another.
- 11) In M1 in particular, Juṅdor discovers water by "sweeping" the ground. The act of sweeping the ground is also linked to homogeneity and smoothness, which means that the woman who appears in M1 with the tool to sweep the ground can be said to be related to the "in-between" as well.
- 12) It would be worthwhile to recall Lévi-Strauss' interpretation of myths and rituals. According to Lévi-Strauss, the mythological mind attempts to divide the continual and fluid reality of life into discontinuous units. Because of life's fluidity, however, life

cannot be completely separated into discontinuous units, and some parts will protrude. By conducting rituals then, an attempt is made to gather together the parts which have protruded from the units and restore the continuity. However, since the ritualistic activity is internal to the discontinuous world, and therefore cannot overcome the state of that world, that effort is not rewarded. Rituals, therefore, are a response to mankind's concept of life, and not a response to life itself (Lévi-Strauss 1981: 674-681).

The relationship between the Mandari myth and the rituals is such as Lévi-Strauss discusses. The ritual to pray for rain is undertaken in order to restore the continuity between heaven and earth, which have been divided into two separate entities in the myth. The Mandari are not responding to life as they experience it when they engage in rituals, but are rather responding to a world which has been conceptualized through myths. It is in this context that we must understand Buxton's statement that "the separation is incessantly actualized in the Mandari ritual" (Buxton 1973: 20). In contrast, it is the protagonists that appear in the Uduk myth (the pair of short and tall people) who perform the function which corresponds to that of the Mandari rituals. In the Uduk myths, the ritualistic activity for restoring continuity is not performed externally to the myth but within the myth.

Lévi-Strauss attempted to establish a type of conceptual model. He did not attempt to describe the individual, specific myths and rituals observed in the respective ethnographies. There are many cases similar to the Uduk in which both the mythological concept and the ritualistic activity coexist in one myth. Therefore, it is fruitless to criticize Lévi-Strauss on the basis that specific myths and rituals do not match the arguments posited by him, as has been pointed out by de Heusch (Heusch 1972). Lévi-Strauss' arguments correspond in many ways to Kimura's theories of "in-between," *koto* and *mono*. The theme of "margin" and 'in-between' is one which interested Lévi-Strauss from early on, which is clearly illustrated by the fact that he has repeatedly argued that the theme of myths is to set an "appropriate distance" (Lévi-Strauss 1969). What is important is how we understand continuity and discontinuity.

- 13) Therefore, God does not appear within the Mandari myth itself, but the myth is thoroughly man-oriented (Lienhardt 1970: 289). According to Buxton, in the myth, when the sky and the earth were tied by a rope, God the creator and man could freely go back and forth between the earth and the sky (Buxton 1973: 22). Unfortunately, the text of a myth in which God the creator appears cannot be found in Buxton's works. She also introduces the comment of a Mandari person stating that "at the time of separation, God the creator remained in heaven with the people" (Buxton 1973: 23), but it can be pointed out that this is an interpretation that appeared after the myth was created. It is not necessary to consider and interpret this earth and sky separation myth as a story that is directly related to God the creator.

A reference has already been made about the observation that heaven and earth, life and death and the division of clans are metaphorically linked. If the ritual for praying for rain is conducted in order to moderate the distance between the sky and earth, then by the same token, funerals and memorial services for the dead are conducted in order to moderate the distance between life and death (Buxton 1973: ch. 4, 5). Furthermore, in order to set a more comfortable distance between clans, the lineal groups are repeatedly divided. Since the appropriate distance cannot be unconditionally measured with absolute values, efforts are incessantly repeated in search of that most moderate distance.

- 14) Beidelman also criticizes the poor ethnographical descriptions of Burton (Beidelman 1990: 193).

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