



Matrilineal motives: kinship, witchcraft, and repatriation among Congolese refugees

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This article explores the significance of matrilineal descent among Congolese refugees in camp Kala, Zambia. Matriliney mattered in Kala, I argue, because it motivated repatriation, generating witchcraft accusations stemming from variations of the matrilineal puzzle. On the surface, Kala did not 'look' particularly matrilineal, given the *ad hoc* domestic arrangements of surviving refugees. But when placed against the backdrop of matrilineal descent – expressed in broader kinship networks between refugee households, and as an evaluative discourse of illegitimate accumulation – witchcraft-driven repatriation makes sense as an 'extreme' form of lineage fission. Within the confines of the refugee camp, a Central African model of matriliney was effectively reduced to its core dynamics, highlighting a bio-social economy of the womb and its witchcraft conversions of blood into money. After examining three social dramas of witchcraft and repatriation in Kala, I engage broader considerations of gender and history to recast descent as a regenerative scheme.

Over sixty years have passed since Audrey Richards (1950) published her now-classic account of the 'matrilineal puzzle' in Central Africa, and although much has changed both on the continent and within the discipline of social anthropology, her key perspectives on the micro-politics of the womb continue to resonate with realities on the ground.¹ In this article, I focus on matrilineal descent among Congolese refugees in camp Kala, Zambia, where an influx of displaced civilians sought sanctuary from 'the Second Congo War' (1999–2003) and the armed militias and rebel groups that have flourished in its wake. Harboured different ethnic groups that are primarily matrilineal in their reckoning of descent, camp Kala represents the remaking of society *in extremis*, under violent conditions of forced migration and mandated UNHCR management – hardly a typical environment for returning to 'first principles' of social organization, yet tragically emblematic of Africa's post-colonial conflicts and predicaments (Mbembe 2001). In this sense, life in camp Kala is *symptomatic* not just of 'failed states' and collapsed economies but also of new forms of sociality and sovereignty emerging across the continent (J.L. Comaroff & Comaroff 2006). Highly regulated from the outside yet extremely dynamic and unstable from within, Kala provides a particular perspective on the core institutions of kinship in crisis, one that speaks to the specificities of refugee communities

while returning to a historic dialogue about the meanings and models of matrilineal descent.

Matriliny matters in Kala, I argue, because it generates negative ‘push factors’ motivating repatriation, represented by patterns of witchcraft accusation stemming from variations of the matrilineal puzzle. On the surface, Kala does not ‘look’ particularly matrilineal. Residential groups represent a wide variety of *ad hoc* arrangements between surviving adults and children, siblings and cousins, lovers and spouses – with relatively high rates of polygyny – that appear cognatic or patrilineal at first glance. It is only when seen against the backdrop of matrilineal descent – expressed in broader kinship networks between refugee households, and as an evaluative discourse criticizing patrilineal trends – that the implicit dynamics of matrilineal descent can be discerned and their impact on repatriation appreciated. Such an association between matrilineal descent and the ‘witchcraft’ of repatriation is of some interest to UNHCR officers and NGO workers in Kala, who have sought positive inducements over negative push factors in encouraging refugees to choose to return. But it also sheds theoretical light on what we mean by ‘matrilineal descent’: that is, how we understand its various ‘locations’ and transformations within dramatically ‘displaced’ historical contexts. In Kala, Central African matrilineality was stripped to essentials, highlighting a bio-social economy of the womb and its witchcraft conversions of blood into money. After examining three social ‘dramas’ of witchcraft and repatriation, I engage broader considerations of gender and history to recast descent as a regenerative scheme.²

From camp to community

The standard narrative of the Second Congo War begins with the First Congo War of 1996, when Laurent Kabila, with support from Rwanda and Uganda, brought his rebel army (the ADFL) from Katanga to Kinshasa, where he overthrew Mobutu Sese Seko and his thirty-year dictatorship. If Kabila used Rwanda for military support, Rwanda allied with Kabila’s movement to support ethnic Tutsis (the Banyamulenge) living in Katanga, rout genocidal Hutus (the Interhamwe) hiding in Zaïre, and establish a stake in the mineral-rich resources where the Banyamulenge had settled earlier. When Kabila assumed power, however, he turned his back on the ethnic Tutsis and Rwandans who had supported him. Responding to Congolese fears of ‘foreign’ influence and favouritism, he dismissed ethnic Tutsis from their government posts and ordered the Rwandans out of the country. The stage was set for a new conflagration. The Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) allied with the Banyamulenge-dominated Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie (RCD) in opposition to Kabila’s Forces Armées Congolais (FAC) and its newly forged alliance with those Rwandan Hutu rebels who had formerly supported Mobutu. Initial Rwandan victories in eastern Katanga, and the taking of Moba, Pweto, and Pepa townships, uprooted civilians who were caught in the cross-fire between Rwandan troops, government forces, and local militias that Kabila had funded. As eastern Congo became a battleground of local groups and regional interests, the conflict escalated into the Second Congo War.

The political upheaval and sheer violence of the Second Congo War involved no fewer than six African stakeholder nations, which, in addition to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), included Rwanda, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Angola, and Namibia, giving rise to its moniker as Africa’s World War (Prunier 2009). In a series of armed struggles, it spawned a proliferation of military organizations, local militias, proxy forces, and rebel groups that brought ethnic politics, territorial ambitions,

pillage, rape, and plunder to eastern Katanga as well as North and South Kivu.³ As a labile landscape of shifting alliances and agendas, it combined political calculations with economic interests in the rich deposits of gold, cobalt, coltan, and diamonds that were there for the taking. In a war that devolved into a Hobbesian state of 'warre', an estimated 5.4 million civilians died from 1998 to 2008, either directly by violent predation, or indirectly from disease and starvation. Many millions more were displaced, either internally to other parts of the DRC or across the border as refugees in Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, and Zambia.

It was against this backdrop of war and predation that thousands of refugees fled the Katangan territories of Pepa, Moba, and Pweto into Zambia. Camp Kala was founded in August 2000 after Mwangwe Refugee Camp to the east reached its capacity of 25,000 (Lloyd 2010: 10). Ten thousand refugees entered Kala within the first four months, but the influx continued after the war was formally concluded in December 2002 owing to the ravages of armed militias against the Congolese army and the local population. By 2005, Kala's population peaked at 26,000, and began to decline the following year when the UNHCR determined that conditions in Katanga were stable enough for the refugees to return safely. Repatriation, however, remains a right, not a duty, which a refugee – once recognized as such – must 'freely' exercise without undue pressure or coercion from host governments or UNHCR officials. During my field study in summer 2008, camp officials were frustrated by low rates of return. If some refugees still feared for their safety in eastern Katanga – not without reason, as subsequent outbreaks of violence would confirm – others used their professed anxieties to mask what were primarily economic motives for staying. Indeed, in eight years the camp had evolved into a more or less 'functioning' social system. Housed within an overarching administrative complex, Kalans – as the refugees came to be called – developed local forms of social, political, religious, and economic life through normative routines that were gradually institutionalized over time, bleeding beyond the boundaries of the camp itself into surrounding Bemba towns and communities, with trade networks extending further to Tanzania, Uganda, and even Dubai.

As a formally constituted administrative entity managed by the UNHCR and its implementing partners, camp Kala was organized into a rational grid of four major zones and thirty-three sections, with four streets per section and forty houses per street. The camp provided educational opportunities at preschool, primary and secondary levels, largely implemented by World Vision Zambia, as well as a health clinic, a mobile court, a resident police officer, a Sex- and Gender-Based Violence Center, and a variety of micro-finance, vocational training, and income-generating programmes. Food rations provided by the World Food Programme were channelled monthly through the distribution centre near the camp's main gate, consisting of sorghum as the main staple, supplemented with beans, peas, cooking oil, salt, and all-purpose soap used for dishes, laundry, and bathing (Lloyd 2010: 14). If the rations fell below the daily needs of the refugees, supplemented by smoked fish, garden produce, and locally raised chickens and ducks, it was sorghum that generated the greatest discontent – a grain not typically consumed by Congolese, who used it for animals and considered it fit for 'dogs'. It is thus not surprising that sorghum emerged as a key symbol of the refugee's dehumanized condition, a focus of resistance, and a significant marker of national difference since it figured positively in the Zambian diet.⁴ Indeed, for this very reason, sorghum became the key catalyst of an informal and expansive refugee economy connecting local relations of accumulation and distribution to regional markets and trading networks.

As refugees sold their rationed sorghum to Zambians at competitive prices, they transformed it into trading capital which they used to establish small shops and businesses within the camp, or invest in smuggled gold and gems originating from South Kivu.

Not all such investments were profitable, and many ventures failed. Nor did the multiplier effect of increased profits and spheres of employment yield purely 'positive' results; rather it strained the social relations of accumulation and redistribution within and between relocated families. Partly this was due to the exclusive allocation of ration cards to household heads, reinforcing the integrity of the domestic group as the locus of distribution and capital conversion while undermining norms of reciprocity between matrikin in different domiciles. The 'pull' of profits also destabilized relations of marriage and cohabitation, as successful businessmen attracted multiple wives and concubines away from husbands and boyfriends who couldn't produce the goods. Within the limited opportunities open to women, the majority of whom were uneducated and illiterate, becoming the second or third wife of a relatively wealthy protector and provider trumped marriage to a partner living on handouts. To be sure, women also engaged in business activities, particularly female household heads who sold fish, fruit, and vegetables in the camp's two markets. But the generally gendered spheres of exchange – locally produced foodstuffs for women, imported commodities and luxury goods for men, whose trading activities took them much further afield – created patterns of conflict and inequality in which men dominated not only as patrons and brokers but also invisibly as witches and sorcerers by converting reproductive value into personal gain.⁵ It is precisely because witchcraft was symptomatic of these intensified tensions within the camp that its idioms and accusations provide such an accurate lens for perceiving their core socio-economic conditions.

Witchcraft beliefs along the matrilineal belt of what is now the DRC and northern Zambia embrace a range of idioms and motifs that defy strict codification along ethnic lines. As one Kala refugee maintained, 'The witches know each other, they meet each other in the night, even from different tribes'. Generally, as MacGaffey (1986; 2000) and Fabian (1990) explain, Congolese witchcraft and sorcery involve powers of consumption and expressions of 'eating', whether by local chiefs in contests for power, when 'the chief as killer in defense of the public good readily slips into the mode of the chief as sorcerer and cannibal' (MacGaffey 2000: 225), or by extractive politicians and businessmen accumulating wealth from the people through nefarious means. These idioms of ingestion and incorporation involve deep transmutations of blood, flesh, and bodily organs into accumulated wealth, whether in bundles of cash or truckloads of commodities.⁶ In some accounts, 'black money' is produced by business tycoons who collude with women to kill their husbands, who are said to have gone away on business trips but are secretly buried and later exhumed for magical maggots that turn into cash when picked from the rotting corpses. Reproductive organs, particularly the penis, figure prominently in witchcraft profiteering. Some strategies amount to explicit extortion, like the witches who 'steal' a man's genitalia and demand payment for their return. Corpses discovered *sans* hands, feet, penis, and eyes represent murdered victims of money-making magic. Copperbelt genres of devil pact narratives portray miners who 'sell their years' for quick profits and kill their managers to be promoted. But the most pervasive expressions of those vital transmutations associated with the wages of witchcraft and sorcery involve dissimulation and invisibility, converting the reproductive powers of blood and fertility into life-draining value-chains of profit and accumulation.⁷

One particularly dominant motif in Kala concerned male witches who ‘stole’ women’s pregnancies – referred to as their ‘luck’ or ‘chance’ – in order to convert them into illicit gains. The shadowy malefactors would ‘go through the face of the woman’s husband’ while she was dreaming in order to have sex with her, inverting the normal logic of insemination by appropriating the actual or potential foetus and converting it into business capital. Characteristic of such *majende* stories (also referred to as *ichiwo* or *ichiwa*) is their serial emplotment: female victims are pursued in succession, forming expansive circuits of accumulation that leave a trail of barren women. And characteristic of the alleged perpetrators is the lack of a material basis for their profits.

The witchcraft of accumulating pregnancies for profit represents a widespread logic of occult diversions of the positive values of social reproduction and fertility into anti-social and non-productive pathways of illicit gain.⁸ Roberts quotes a Tabwa aphorism that ‘theft and sorcery are twin brothers’ to underscore their intimate association and the general understanding ‘that when fortunes are so outrageous as to defy other, more benign explanation, then sorcery is suspected’ (1986a: 118). The Tabwa case is particularly linked to the dynamics of matrilineal descent, and the tensions identified so long ago by Richards (1934: 272–9) between fathers and mothers’ brothers.⁹ Both relations generate potential lines of witchcraft and sorcery. Like the Tabwa chief who can use his sorcery to protect his people or consume them, ‘a mother’s brother may be and, indeed, most often is, loving, caring and protective; yet he is feared as a sorcerer’ (Roberts 1986a: 118). A complementary ambivalence applies to the husband-father, who occupies a position of ‘paradox and ... tension’, according to Roberts, because he stands as ‘an “outsider” to his wife’s descent group, a mediator between that of his wife and children, and that of his mother and sisters’ (1984: 53). Quoting Tabwa author Stefano Kaoze that ‘the father [is] responsible for all illness and misfortune which may befall young children’, Roberts (*ibid.*) notes that although overstated, given alternative indigenous aetiologies and attributions, such a perspective confirms ‘that living the “matrilineal puzzle” is not without its difficulties’ (1984: 53).¹⁰

The matrilineal idioms and tensions brought out by Roberts are particularly relevant to life in camp Kala because an estimated 83–90 per cent of its refugees identified as ethnically Tabwa. The remaining ‘minorities’ included Luba, Lunda, Kasai, Bwile, Bemba, Bembe, Sanga, and Ndande – all matrilineal except arguably the Luba. Such ethnic differentiations and their ‘principles’ of descent, however, should not be taken too rigidly, not only due to the ‘tribal’ reifications of colonial administration and postcolonial patronage, but also because historically this area of Central Africa possesses an unusual degree of underlying coherence and relatedness. As MacGaffey (1998: 297) explains, drawing on Vansina (1990), ‘The apparently numerous social systems of Central Africa are not independent iterations but local versions of one another, diverse outgrowths of a single historical process analogous to that which formed European societies’. Thus even as the Tabwa dominated demographically in Kala, the camp *qua* community, like a displaced microcosm of Katanga province, exhibited remarkable underlying commonalities, not only in high rates of inter-ethnic marriage and cohabitation stemming in part from forced relocation, but in the very core vocabularies of focal kinship terms elicited from members of these different ‘groups’. In a survey of 113 refugee households tracing kinship relations within and between them, a remarkably restricted terminological set underlay imputed ethnic variations (Table 1). And clustering around these core terms and relations were a number of modal matrilineal configurations which, if not exactly mirroring Richards’s three varieties of ‘Central

Table 1. Focal kin terms in Kala.

	Tabwa	Luba	Bemba	Kasai	Bembe
M	mama	mama	mayo	baba (mau)	maha
F	tawe/tata	tata	taata	tatu (tau)	tata
B	kaka	tutu	mukalamba	tutu	ndome (yaya)
Z	dada	kaka	nkashi	yaya (yayi)	achi (dada)
S	muanalume	mwanamulume	mwana umwanme	mwana mulume	mmbaka (Mwana wa mlome)
D	mwana mwana kazi	mwanamulkaji	umwana kashi	wabakaji	msea (mwana wam-achi)
H	mulume	mulume	umulume	mulume	mlome
W	mukazi	mukaji	umukashi	mukaji	m-achi

Translation note: 'kaji/kashi' or 'achi' means 'female'; 'lume' or 'lome' means 'male'; 'mwana' means 'child'.

Bantu' family structure (Richards 1950: 211-41) and the four solution-types of the matrilineal puzzle (Richards 1950: 246-8),¹¹ none the less represented variations of its key contradictions.

In her original formulation, Richards located the matrilineal puzzle 'in the difficulty of combining recognition of descent through the woman with the rule of exogamous marriage' (1950: 246), such that women must reproduce the matriline through husbands who remain lineage outsiders. The naturalistic bias of presumed male authority whereby control over lineage property and affairs is assumed by the mother's brother has been criticized by feminist scholars – an issue we shall presently readdress – but the empirical tensions that play out on the ground hinge on the character of the marriage contract and norms of post-marital residence. The previously identified tensions between fathers and mothers' brothers are compounded by virilocal or uxorilocal residence patterns, the former strengthening the marriage relation and the father's authority, the latter weakening the marriage relation and enhancing the authority of the mother's brother. For example, Turner's rich symbolic exegeses of Ndembu ritual symbolism – particularly the Nkang'a female puberty ceremony – identify such a conflict between matrilineal descent and virilocal residence as a core contradiction requiring ritual resolution.¹² Roberts (1985: 5) documents the same contradiction among Tabwa in (then) Zaïre. But such classic variations of the matrilineal puzzle involved developmental cycles and degrees of lineage incorporation that were simply not possible in Kala, designed as a temporary safe haven geared towards resettlement, relocation, and repatriation. Granted that housing in Kala was semi-permanent, with funds allocated for building 'traditional' mud and wattle huts intended for years of anticipated shelter, but the UNHCR model was of a male-headed conjugal unit family with children and 'relatives' in *ad hoc* arrangements. Patterns of household residence ranged widely, with conjugality dominating sibblingship as the core relation of official domicile, but the casualties of war and persecution necessitated improvised accommodations with remnants of shattered families forming new domestic partnerships. As new unions developed among survivors, many of whom were accompanied by children of murdered spouses or siblings, it was difficult to observe the formation of localized matrilineal descent groups. Such patterns did reassert themselves in cases of single-women-headed households, and here the tendency of sons marrying out was encouraged by the allocation of ration cards 'per family' (Fig. 1). In larger families with many

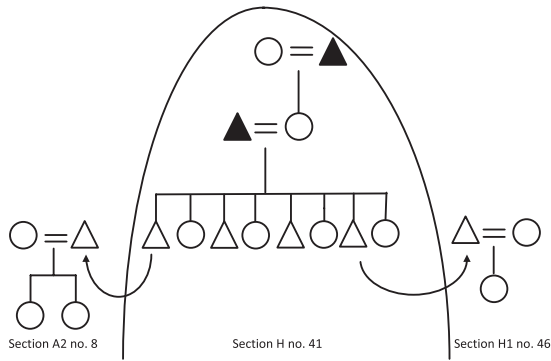


Figure 1. Tabwa sons marrying out to maximize ration cards.

children, out-marrying daughters tended to settle close by, creating localized groups of matrikin within adjacent houses, whereas the out-marrying sons settled in other camp sections further afield. ‘Borrowed husbands’ were also in evidence as men slept with their wives – who resided as daughters within established households – but took their meals with their matrikin. But such incipient patterns of matrilocality were complemented by patrilineal trends, particularly those fuelled by polygyny. In general, co-wives lived in different households, while the husband – officially settled with his first wife – visited the others in what appeared to be autonomous matrifocal units. In this way, polygynous husbands could maximize the rations allocated to their additional spouses as household heads, convert these rations into trading capital, and in some cases accumulate substantial holdings and political influence within camp sections and zones. As Kala developed from camp to community, institutionalizing new domestic arrangements that both reinforced and undermined the development of localized matrilineal descent groups, it was matrilineal *ideology* that provided an evaluative discourse to address the transmutations of blood – and bloodlines – into otherwise inexplicable losses and gains.¹³

To grasp the inner connections between witchcraft, matriliney, and repatriation, we shift to specific conflicts within Kala and their underlying motivations.

Three conflicts

Let us begin with the story of ‘M’, a suspiciously successful tailor and businessman whose wealth appeared to be disconnected from any material evidence of hard work or trading capital. Like many Kala traders, M claimed to buy goods in Nakonde – 588 kilometres to the east at the Tanzanian border – for resale in the camp, but these commodities were never seen. Somehow he was able to buy two Hammer grinding machines for six million kwacha each, and two others which he sent back to the DRC on a convoy. He also purchased a motorbike for four million kwacha, and was planning to buy a small Mitsubishi Canter truck and hire a Zambian driver to increase the volume of his Nakonde trade.¹⁴ His wealth bought him significant influence with refugee officers, whom he bribed for special favours.

M’s empty market stall provided scant evidence of legitimate commerce, and rumours circulated that he was ‘buying pregnancies’ to fuel his growing business empire. The story emphasizes the iniquitous conversion of reproductive value into

unproductive wealth, a dominant witchcraft idiom throughout the matrilineal belt where, as Richards so aptly noted, ‘metaphors of kinship stress the ties between people “born from the same womb”’, and where ‘blood is believed to be passed through the woman and not the man’ (1950: 207). As we also noted, not all conversions of blood into money follow lineage lines, since husbands and strangers can also be killed for money-generating body parts, but the key focus on the blood of wombs underscores the procreative powers of matrilineal reproduction and the socially destructive consequences of its transmutation into illegitimate wealth. And here the plot thickens, expanding on the theme of matrilineal divestment and decline.

When M began his tailoring business, he hired a woman to work for him. She was impressed by M’s wealth, and became interested in teaming up with him when she saw how he used the pregnancy-buying *ichiwo* witchcraft. M also used medicine to make the woman love him, and soon she demanded a divorce from her husband on the grounds that he didn’t take care of her. Two days after the divorce, the woman married the tailor and became his second wife. They bought a house together in section A, with M leaving his first wife and children in section X. At this point the infuriated ex-husband sought revenge. He went to a sorcerer to commission a ‘work’, and immediately afterwards the tailor was struck by lightning and became paralysed in both legs. After three months without walking, he was taken by his family members to Congo, illegally, where he was treated by a Congolese healer and given a strong protective medicine. His second wife accompanied him on this journey.

After three months, the tailor returned to Kala, healthy and fit. When the ex-husband saw him back on his feet, he went to try another medicine, but this time the lightning backfired because of the tailor’s protective medicine, and struck the ex-husband’s house, which burned. Then the tailor went to the man, saying, ‘I know you are trying to fight me, if you don’t stop I will destroy you. I didn’t take your wife by force, she loves me’. The ex-husband was a teacher and had nine children with his former wife. The children called their mother to find out why she had left them, and when she refused to come, they went to her new house to discuss the situation, exclaiming, ‘Mama, you have abandoned us, you have forced our father into a terrible condition. Mama, we can never forgive you for what you have done, but can you still come back to us?’ When their mother refused to change her mind, the eldest daughter advised her father: ‘This life is too tough. Why not let us repatriate as a family? I am old enough to take care of you’. Thereafter all of the children repatriated to Pweto with their father. The day the convoy for the DRC was leaving, the mother came to see them off for a final farewell, but the children would not greet her.

The story of M is clearly embedded within discursive genres and narrative conventions that are as ethnographic as the ‘underlying tensions’ that they represent, and was furthermore told from the sympathetic viewpoint of the victimized ex-husband’s friend. What is ‘true’, ‘fictive’, ‘objective’, or ‘embellished’, of course, varies with the epistemological commitments of the ‘participant-observer’, distinctions which have plagued social anthropology since its imputed positivism has been called into question. Refugee narratives are particularly structured by themes of massacre, exile, and reconstitution within the collective imagination, as Malkki (1995) has so brilliantly explicated among Hutu refugees in Tanzania. Indeed, ‘every refugee has a story’, UNHCR officers complained while processing their case-work, balancing unthinkable acts of violent persecution against inflated family head-counts that maximized rations. Seen as a relatively isolated event in Kala, M’s story recounts the social consequences of

entrepreneurial success and economic opportunism as a married woman with children leaves her husband to become the second wife of a wealthy trader. Difficult as it was for the ex-husband to accept, his wife was willing to leave him and her children for a better life with M. Embedded within idioms of witchcraft and sorcery, however, a broader social horizon emerges in which matrilineal descent and its kinship values are systematically violated and eroded. M's profits are nefarious, converting the blood of wombs – through 'stolen' and 'bought' pregnancies – into personal gain, thereby destroying the generative locus of matrilineal reproduction. His new wife personified this dispossession of matrilineal blood. Her refusal to see her children and honour their request for an explanation underscores her rejection of those 'born from the same womb'. It is M, however, who is identified as the witch, using medicine to attract the woman and fully appropriate her reproductive powers. In lineage terms, the appropriation is completed when the ex-husband repatriates to Pweto with his children, a splintered segment of a matrilineage with no viable future in Kala (Fig. 2). In a final moment of remorse, as the ex-wife attempted to bid her children goodbye, *they refused to greet her*, thus severing all recognized ties with the woman, and the womb, that gave them life.

The second conflict represents a variation on this matrilineal transfusion of blood into wealth, in this case emphasizing deteriorating relations between a mother's brother and his sister's sons. Days after arriving in Kala, I attended an elaborate funeral for a 15-year-old Tabwa boy, with hundreds of friends and relatives assembled to honour the family and bear witness to the corpse. Family clusters from different sections of Kala brought food, firewood, and financial donations to the event, with affines from Mwangi refugee camp also in attendance. The sponsor of the funeral – we can call him J – was the deceased's mother's brother, a prominent leader and businessman in Kala with several wives in adjacent households of section Q (creating an incipient polygynous compound), another wife in section C, and many siblings in the camp, some with sizeable families of their own.¹⁵ J's female matrikin sat together on benches, singing Catholic hymns in extraordinary harmony punctuated by periodic outbursts of crying and mourning by specific women within each group. In marked contrast to the assembled female mourners, two brothers of the deceased wandered on the periphery of the assembled groups, breaking into protestations of grief, repeatedly walking away and returning as if pulled back by an invisible cord.

Stories circulating around the event identified J as a powerful witch who consumed the blood of one of his sister's children to get rich and enhance his influence within the

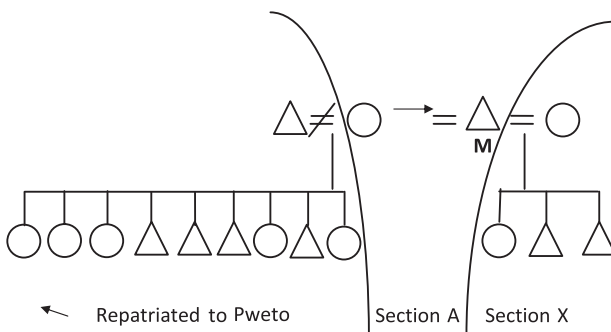


Figure 2. Repatriation in the story of M.

camp. Indeed, the deceased Tabwa boy was the fifth of nine children to die – two *en route* to Kala, three more within the camp – and suspicions were mounting that J was to blame. Had he not been a successful merchant with powerful medicines in Pepa? Was he not credited with using these medicines to bring down a Banyamulengue aeroplane that was bombing and strafing Pepa during the war, forcing him to flee? During the funeral, J stood centre stage, gripping the central post of the shelter next to the corpse, utterly speechless and immobile while cutting a sharp figure in his decorated cowboy hat – a primary axis, fixed to the earth, around which all activity revolved. Like M, J's wealth was not easily explained. He sold guinea fowl in Kawambwa, but was suspected of doing *majende* and selling money-making medicines to clients for killing enemies and even friends.¹⁶ Conspicuously absent from the funeral itself was the deceased's extremely ill and distressed father, who was effectively hiding in a nearby house with his two youngest surviving sons. Refusing to attend the public event, he was not only convinced that his wife's brother was consuming his children, but had evidence from a healer to prove it.

Pursuing both sides of the conflict, I heard later from J that his sister's husband was a 'useless' man, unsuccessful in business and farming, continually depending on his wife's family for support since they arrived together in Kala. J's full assumption of funeral responsibilities for his sister's deceased son was just another example of how seriously he took his matrilineal obligations – all the more so since his sister had died during the violence in Pepa. J's sister's husband was furthermore a 'sickla': that is, he suffered from sickle cell anaemia, which passed down to his children, causing several to die. The camp nurse confirmed this diagnosis with evidence from the clinic. But J's sister's husband told a very different story, which I reproduce at some length because it maps the bad blood of matrilineal witchcraft onto marriage, sexuality, and siblingship:

People say I am a sickla [i.e. have sickle cell anaemia] but it is different, my problem is much deeper. I lost my wife in Pepa, she died in a mysterious way, like my son we buried last week. She died of a short illness; during the time we were going to bury her fresh blood was coming out of her nose. After my wife, I lost my second-born in Pepa, who had been sick for some time. He was in hospital due to lack of blood. I was asked to donate blood for a transfusion, but the day after the transfusion my son was still without blood. I tried to get more donated blood from relatives, but nobody would help me.

During the war, when Pepa was invaded, we ran away as a family. My third-born died at Muchenja village, where I myself became sick. So I managed to run away with the remaining children. I had lost my wife and two sons, and then entered Kala camp with my remaining children and my [late] wife's brother, who came with his family as well. I was depending on my wife's brother, he was pretending to help me. In fact, he was destroying the family.

In the camp I lost another daughter at age 16. When I went to a traditional healer to find out the cause, he refused to co-operate, he was too afraid to help, and told me to find another healer. Then my wife's brother came to help me with the problem. He went to a healer and told me it was my own brother who was the witch, but I couldn't believe it. Then, when my sixth-born died at age 10, I went to the hospital and was told he died of sickla, but I couldn't believe this because the disease was never in the family.

I went to Kabuta [80 km away] in Zambia to find out from another traditional healer what was going on. He told me, 'Your brother-in-law is very dangerous, he is pretending to be a good man to you but he is eating your children. He even took you to a healer to "help" you, but that man was his friend, he tricked you. To prove this, you are going to lose another child because he is using your children in business. If you want help from me you must give me ZMK 800,000, because this man is very dangerous.'

I had no way to find that kind of money, which equals two brand-new bicycles. Since I couldn't find the funds, I just forgot about it. That is when the fifth death happened to my last-born [the 15 year old]. Out of my nine children, four remain. The problem will still continue until I settle this with a

powerful doctor. The healer said some insects were put into my blood to pollute it; this happened when I married my wife, then the bad blood went into my children's blood. Before I married, my wife-to-be was having sexual relations with my brother for money. I knew nothing about this. When I proposed to get married, my wife-to-be went to tell her brother and he got very angry and told her not to get married, that he preferred that she keep selling herself to my brother, since that was their 'arrangement' [i.e. J was pimping his own sister]. He said to his sister, 'Your future will be in darkness.' That was the beginning of our problems.

Only the wise can understand this situation, since I know what happened despite what the hospital says. I am praying that God will take me out of this world, I am a failure, I am isolated, people never come to visit me. I have no people to help me, that is why I am all alone, and why I was defeated. My first-born son is very poor, whenever he tries to start a business he ends up losing funds. We have no choice but to return to Pepa.

This poignant story of death and isolation represents conflicting explanations of misfortune in local terms. J knew that the husband of his now-deceased sister suffered from 'sickla', and that this inheritable disease had also killed his children. J had in fact honoured his matrilineal obligations by underwriting the elaborate funeral for his sister's son, even though that very sister had previously died in Pepa. As I later discovered, J was also using the funeral to accumulate political capital and regain his former position as a section leader in Kala, from which he had been removed by popular vote. The incumbent section leader so feared J and his witchcraft that he shifted his residence to another section. J's bid for reappointment was ultimately unsuccessful, but he did remain a street leader, although rumours were rife that he was not to be trusted.

For J's sister's husband, the affliction is framed by the systematic cannibalization of matrilineal values. In a descent system that characteristically privileges brother-sister ties over conjugal bonds (Schneider 1961: 11-13; Turner 1957: 78), J emerges as the ultimate betrayer, one who would pimp his sister for profit rather than marry her out for progeny, a crime that becomes a double betrayal when she ultimately marries her 'customer's' brother. Whether or not J's sexual exploitation of his sister actually occurred is less significant than the allegation, which violates the matrilineal brother-sister bond and diverts her procreative potentiality – hence the perpetuation of the matrilineage – into J's illicit fortune. When his sister finally married against his will, J wreaked havoc, polluting her husband's blood with insects, 'eating' several of the children to boost his business, and condemning her to a mysterious death, after which, with telling detail, the corpse continued to bleed.¹⁷ Clearly such blood-based tales of matrilineal subversion echo the wider dislocations of regional conflict: the brutal killings and rapes; the spread of diseases, including sexually transmitted AIDS; the bombing and strafing of civilians; the moral compromises and personal betrayals required to survive; the dangers of both moving forwards and staying put, of crossing borders and risking annihilation in a region of the DRC turned upside-down. What is striking, however, within these translocal contexts of regional violence and trade is the persistence of the matrilineal puzzle at the core of so many witchcraft accusations. Granted that smuggled gems have spirit doubles that must be ritually appeased, zombie workers travel from Kala to Lusaka and Dubai through invisible pathways of alienated labour,¹⁸ or that the *basakala* bogeyman kills women and children who stray beyond Kala's confines (Lloyd 2010: 26-7). Yet the witchcraft dramas associated with repatriation typically strike closer to home. The stories of M and of J's sister's husband involve polygynous profiteers who effectively diverted the blood of wombs into developing business empires. J was a big man in section Q, and a former section leader. His expansive web of matrikin throughout the camp (and beyond, in Mwangi camp) was

anchored within a developing virilocal compound of several wives in adjacent houses that began to resemble a business corporation. Does the story of J, like the story of M, represent the much-debated 'decline or demise of matriliney' (Holy 1986: 2) giving way to patrilineal trends associated with encroaching capitalism? Indeed, given the developing market relations that incorporated the camp into wider regional networks, was matriliney doomed in Kala (Douglas 1969)?

Before returning to this well-wrought theme, let us consider a final witchcraft drama that effectively *reconstituted* a localized matrilineage as a mobile unit of repatriation. The story is unusual because the witchcraft 'breach' begins in Moba, initiating a generational cycle of misdeeds that benefits the matriline.

The story emerged after an interview I conducted with a woman who was reputed to be the oldest person in Kala, a particularly honoured status in a refugee context where many elders had died in Congo or on the run. I learned that she was brought to Kala by one of her daughters, and that her brothers and sons arrived later. She was formerly a farmer, and brewed a local beer in Kalunga (in Katanga province), where her now-deceased husband had been a chief. Her husband had paid a hefty bridewealth to her older brother, boosting her status in the community, where she also settled marital disputes.

Several days later, I heard that she was a powerful witch, having fled Congo to Kala because she was nearly beaten to death. According to the story, after her husband had died in Kalunga, she went with three children, her sister, and her sister's son to live in Moba, taking up residence with her daughter in her daughter's husband's house, which included nine children of their own. There the old woman's children were successful, and depended upon their sister's husband, hence the old woman feared that she would lose her children when she decided to return to Kalunga. While in Moba, she organized her children to kill her daughter's husband, who was the owner of her house, and enlisted her sister's son – we will call him 'K' – to do the dirty work. K took his brother-in-law (his MZDH) to a beer parlour, where he was poisoned and died after a few hours. When the poisoning was discovered, K ran away into the bush, and his mother's sister was severely beaten. With her son-in-law dead and her family in disarray, the old woman was brought to Kala by one of her daughters, less a victim of the Second Congo War than a refugee from witchcraft retribution, and was later joined by her brothers, sons, daughters, and grandchildren, including the children of the poisoned victim. Three of her sons in fact married in Kala, making them an established family in the camp. But trouble returned through the same form of witchcraft devolving down to the next generation.

One of the old woman's grandsons (we will call him 'L'), a son of the first poisoning victim, built a bar in Kala where he sold soft drinks and Binga beer, and committed a money-making murder with a disreputable partner to grow his business and boost his profits. After inviting a 'friend' for a beer, they took him to a 'non-place' in the surrounding bush where he disappeared. The following morning the wife went to L's house looking for her husband, and he replied, 'I don't know where he is; he forgot his ration card in the bar, but he left to go home at 22 hours [10 p.m.]'. As the police pursued the case, L realized he would be caught and decided to repatriate. After he sold his beer parlour and returned to the DRC, he moved to Kirungu – about eight kilometres southwest of Moba – where he built a house with the help of financial remittances from a brother working as a night guard in England. Six weeks after he had departed, the Kala police found the corpse in the bush, with its hands, feet, penis, and

eyes removed, clearly the work of money-making medicine. When the victim’s wife recognized his cloth and wristwatch, L’s business partner fled Kala with his family and remained at large somewhere in Zambia.

Again, the story and its specific allegations are more significant than the truth or falsity of the ‘actual’ events and murders described. The original crime of the old female witch, who conspired with her sister’s son to poison her daughter’s husband, empowers the original matrilineage in Moba by maintaining the solidarity of the local descent group (keeping her children intact) at the expense of the very affine – the hospitable husband – in whose house they were residing. For this violation of kinship values, the old woman was beaten, banished from Moba, and sought refuge in Kala with her complicitous matrikin. Once in Kala, where the old woman reigned as the matriarch of a growing extended family, the very grandson whose father was killed deployed a similar strategy of beer-based murder – in this case against kith rather than kin – to profit not from blood as such but from ‘generative’ body parts. Unlike the stories of M and J, who used the blood of mothers to accumulate wealth that undermined the matrilineage, the old woman’s witchcraft and her grandson L’s crime used the bodies of men to reconstitute the matrilineage. In the old woman’s case, the murder of her daughter’s husband (an affine), who was also the father of her daughter’s children (complementary filiation), eliminated a figure who was exogamous to the matrilineage but was necessary for its survival and reproduction. In L’s murderous profiteering, the death of an ‘outsider’ led – by exposure – to the repatriation of a matrilineal segment. In a concluding detail, the narrator explained how L planned to ‘bring his mother, brothers, and sisters to build small houses around him’ in Kirungu, effectively *reconstituting* a matrilineal core through a process of transnational lineage fission (Fig. 3).

What is so striking in this last witchcraft drama are not just the patterns of the matrilineal puzzle as descent plays out against (exogamous) marriage and residence, but its local, regional, and global articulations with a civil war and overseas remittances. As the three conflict-driven cases of repatriation make clear, the witchcraft of the matrilineal puzzle in Kala is not some vestige of ‘traditional’ village life, but resonates with a prolonged regional crisis. It is by no means the only factor motivating repatriation to the DRC, but interviews with families preparing their departures, and with Congolese refugees returning in convoys, established consistent patterns of

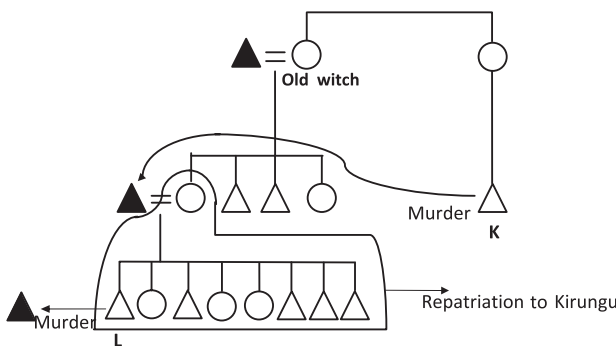


Figure 3. Witchcraft and matrilineal repatriation.

victimization associated with marginalization and isolation: single mothers rejected by their boyfriends, who usually had other wives; farmers and traders who could never get ahead; small households with no future in Kala, reconnecting with relatives in Katanga, and so forth. But in nearly all cases, the push factors were negative, framed by witchcraft idioms of stolen blood and body parts within a zero-sum calculus of losses and gains. Whether as a consequence of such conflicts matrilineal descent was strengthened or destroyed, it remained the structuring framework through which the conflicts and stories – indeed the witchcraft – of repatriation unfolded.

The three lineage conflicts explored thus far show how the witchcraft of repatriation in Kala was motivated by matriliney. Within the regimented boundaries of an official safe haven for victims of the Second Congo War, matrilineal descent was hardly torn asunder but remained a significant framework for remaking family and community. Not that Kala abounded with named corporate descent groups (although matrilineal relations between households did emerge); nor did sibblingship trump conjugality in the disposition of domestic resources. But matrilineal ideology remained a normative foil against which ‘cannibalistic’ accumulation was identified and evaluated, and in this capacity it motivated – ‘in the dual sense of “impelled motion” and “gave meaning to” ’ (J.L. Comaroff 1987: 71) – the witchcraft of repatriation.

These dual dimensions of structural motivation reframe matrilineal descent as a regenerative scheme, a portable model of lineage reproduction based on Congolese gender idioms and embodied historical memories.

Gender and history

Revisiting matriliney through the lens of gender, Peters (1997: 132-4ff.) highlights three significant studies which helped dislodge the implicit naturalism of the matrilineal puzzle. As Holy (1986), Lancaster (1981), and Poewe (1981) revealed, the androcentric conventions of an earlier anthropology underestimated the independence and authority of women in matrilineal societies while overestimating matriliney’s vulnerability to proletarianization and capital accumulation. Even Douglas’s important argument that scarcity rather than surplus motivated a shift toward patrilineal inheritance relied upon a naturalistic affinity between fathers and sons as ‘nearest kin’ (Douglas 1969: 132). Peters’s call for broadening our appreciation of the female public sphere throughout the matrilineal belt, however, does not particularly apply to Kala, where matrilineal forms of descent and sociality were heavily constrained by camp structures and regulations. Ironically, the very training programmes designed to enhance gender equity – with the laudable exception of microcredit – were spectacular failures, with little evidence that ‘talking the talk’ reduced chronic domestic violence against women. But there is another thread to this work, highlighted by Holy, which does illuminate the critical features of matriliney in Kala and beyond. In his fine-grained ethnography of matrilineal transformations among the Toka of Zambia, Holy argues that shifts toward patrilineal succession and inheritance do not undermine matrilineal descent as such, but represent a changing socio-economic topography on the ground. Since the ideology of genealogical descent traced through females defines matriliney, it follows that ‘any explanation of the decline or demise of matriliney as such is adequate only if it accounts satisfactorily for the weakening or disappearance of the notion of matrilineal descent itself’ (Holy 1986: 2). Relations of production and norms of inheritance may change as the Toka enter into the capitalist market system, but matrilineal descent – traced through females – remains coherent and intact.

Holy's defining focus on descent through females invites a gendered return to the matrilineal womb, not as a site of patriarchal fetishism but as a critical locus of social reproduction and transformation. Less an ideological reflex of a particular 'type' of social structure than a generative condition of its possibility, the matrilineal womb and its complementary forms of witchcraft and fertility identify a *regenerative scheme* at the core of matrilineal descent, one with expansive variations and social mappings throughout Central Africa as well as acute structural salience within Kala itself, where it motivated social life by imparting meaning (witchcraft narratives) and impelling motion (repatriation).

The primary sense in which gender enters Central African matriliney, not surprisingly, is semantic. In his illuminating study of medical pluralism in (then) Lower Zaïre, Janzen draws upon indigenous testimony as well as Laman's *Dictionnaire* (1936) to translate the KiKongo term *vumu* – which refers to both 'womb' and 'matrilineage' – as a set of homologies linking the female body to the social sphere:

Vumu ... embraces both physical and social referents. It denotes vulva, uterus, pregnancy, mother's breast, lactation, and abdomen, as well as family, or descendants of the same mother ... *Vumu* also refers to food substance or 'ball of meat'. It is a verbal category of congruent ideas, both physical and social, drawn from a dominant idea about subsistence, identity and well-being (Janzen 1978: 169-70).

To see the female body as a primary template that is metaphorically extended to the social sphere, however, misses the more dynamic homology between corporeal and social circulation so central to Janzen's exposition of Kongo witchcraft and healing. Of particular significance to our argument is his discussion of the witchcraft substance of *kundu*, understood as a blocked or 'strangled' ball of meat within the sack of the witch's stomach, a condition that relates 'illegitimately accumulated nurturance' (Janzen 1978: 175), or one of *false* pregnancy in women, to conflict and illegitimate accumulation within local clan sections.¹⁹ Thus within the very womb of matrilineal descent we find transmutations of reproductive value into unproductive and deceptive wealth.

Is it fair to extend Kongo aetiologies of witchcraft to eastern Katanga and throughout the matrilineal belt at large? Are womb-based homologies of corporeal and social circulation found throughout Central Africa? Morphological evidence comes from Vansina, who, deriving *edzumu* and *ivumu* ('womb, 'matrilineage') from the Proto-Bantu **-jçumçu* and **-bçumçu*, notes that 'the distribution of "womb" for "matrilineage" in the whole of Central Africa consists in a large block from Kongo to Kuba and Ndembu and formerly to Central Kasai ... and in a smaller block, including the Nyaneka languages and those on the Lower Okavango River' (1998: 15-16). The application of historical semantics to such broad morphological distributions indicates deep cultural commonalities underlying the multiple ethnicities of the matrilineal belt, establishing a womb-framed matrilineal ideology that for Vansina (1998: 16) predates the 1600s.²⁰ That elaborations of this gender ideology involve socio-somatic flows of reproductive value forms is evidenced by De Boeck (1994: 264), who relates Luunda idioms of hunger to the closed maternal womb that causes a 'lack of circulation' and 'constipates the social body'; and by Vuyk (1991), who explicates womb-based idioms of descent, marriage, and gift exchange among the Kuba, Lele, Bemba, Ndeumbu, Pende, and Tonga. Adding to this 'uterine' perspective, with particular relevance to Kala, is the illuminating study by Davis-Roberts (1981) of Tabwa therapeutics, bringing avenging

ghosts and ruptures in the lineage system to bear upon the afflicted body and its most intimate functions.²¹ Here she identifies a profound complementarity between the bio-social meanings of eating and coitus, the former associated with witchcraft and waste, modelled on the transformation of food into excrement, while the latter transforms blood and semen into life, generating value and vitality when appropriately framed.²² Of eating, Davis-Roberts explains: ‘When someone has expended the usefulness of an object or has illegally diverted funds for his own benefit, he says he has “eaten” the thing in question; and this brings to an end others’ efforts to retrieve it’ (1981: 311). Thus we see ‘eating’ as the diversion of value from social circulation, whether ‘chopping’ from a public treasury, consuming the blood of a sister’s son, or ‘accumulating’ other women’s pregnancies for dubious financial gain. At the core of Tabwa matriliney – and more broadly throughout Central Africa – we find a bio-social economy of the womb.²³

Placed within the broader social and historical contexts of Central African matriliney, the regenerative scheme of the body sketched above illuminates the structural status of matrilineal descent and its witchcraft idioms of money and blood. The precolonial history of pawnship and slavery throughout this area is crucial because it explains how the bio-social economy of the womb has come quite literally to embody its past.

In 1960, Mary Douglas published an article on blood-debt and clientship among the Lele, a vanishing institution which she believed was ‘altogether peculiar to themselves’ (1960: 1).²⁴ Underlying this peculiar institution was the principle of equivalence – a life for a life – as death was compensated by a female pawn who retained some ties with her original matrilineage while yielding reproductive rights to the compensated clan. Such deaths, however, were hardly restricted to the occasional homicide, but pervaded an economy of claims and counter-claims that attributed most deaths to witchcraft, subject to verification by a poison ordeal. Once a female pawn was provided as compensation, her ‘lord’, representing the offended clan segment, could marry her off to a clansman or client, thereby augmenting his social capital while adding numbers to his localized group. Such pawnship was commutative in both the mathematical and jural senses, since the children of pawns were also pawns, adding to the local descent group as followers, while serving as fungible resources for future blood-debt compensation. A pawn could be liberated, the sentence ‘commuted’, as payment for a counter-debt, or could have his or her status transferred to a new lineage ‘lord’ to settle a further blood-debt down the road. It is striking that only women were accepted as blood compensation, underscoring the transmission of rights *in genetricem* from payer to recipient in what amounted to a form of lineage appropriation. The ‘lord’ gained new wives, for himself or his junior clansmen. Their sons, moreover, could marry pawn women of the matrilineage without violating clan exogamy, thereby providing a jural solution to the matrilineal puzzle.²⁵ Because the principle of equivalence extended to her progeny, a female pawn was the seed of ‘pawn lineages’ associated with client matrilineal descent groups. ‘In effect’, Douglas explained, ‘a whole future section of the payer’s clan is marked off, and transferred, for those important purposes, forever’ (1960: 3). At the time, Douglas understood Lele pawnship as detracting from matrilineal descent, undermining the authority of the mother’s brother while peeling off matrilineal sections in support of client clans. As such, it deviated from ‘strict unilineal descent’ (Douglas 1960: 28), warranting comparison with similar anomalies in Africa.

Four years later, the Lele exception proved to be the Central African rule. Responding to new ethnographic disclosures that prompted her return to earlier missionary

writings, Douglas now argued that pawnship had previously ‘stretched from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean’ (1964: 302), but was later suppressed by colonial authorities who mistook it as a form of domestic slavery. The consequences of this suppression were manifold; severing the link between witchcraft and blood compensation, limiting a clan or village leader’s ability to accumulate social capital, and re-energizing the contradictions of the matrilineal puzzle that structural pawnship had somewhat resolved. But the overriding effect was on the corporate character of the lineage system itself. Reversing her earlier position that pawnship competed with matrilineal descent, now Douglas argued that pawnship *consolidated* corporate descent groups throughout the matrilineal belt: ‘Though at first glance the transferability of pawns would seem to work against the matrilineal principle, in practice it works in favour of it. For pawnship status is reckoned genealogically and the rights of owners are transmitted unilineally’ (Douglas 1964: 310). From this precolonial perspective, the corporate matrilineage was bolstered not just by extra-lineage support, but by the collective rights of ownership and disposal that were vested in the *unilineal* core as such. The suppression of pawnship therefore weakened the matrilineage as a genealogical and corporate body. For Douglas, the relative absence of corporate descent groups in Central Africa – an ethnographic conundrum first noted by Gluckman (1950) – was a historical artefact of colonial policy.

If Douglas’s discussion of matrilineity and pawnship reflects the contemporary concerns of a bygone anthropology, it opened up the way for a radical rethinking of kinship and history in Central Africa, linking Indian Ocean and Atlantic slave economies to their hinterland transformations. Matrilineal descent in Central Africa was largely a product of blood compensation.²⁶ Although Douglas was careful in distinguishing pawnship from true slavery, since, unlike the former, the latter severed all prior social ties, it is precisely when seen in continuous terms that the commodification of kinship relations, and its associated witchcraft idioms, both illuminates and animates the matrilineal womb.

Let us return briefly to the principle of equivalence underlying the logic of blood-debt compensation. The premise of Lele pawnship, we recall, was the jural substitution of one life given for one life taken, with the death usually attributed to witchcraft. The equivalence was initially gendered, in that that the primary pawn was always female, although her indentured status extended to her children, spawning the development of pawn lineages. In a sense, then, the fundamental principle of equivalence was of a womb for a life, converting the blood of pawns into pillars of matrilineal support. The degree and form of lineage incorporation varied. Although Lele pawns retained ties with their matrilin, who, under the appropriate conditions, could mobilize their own clan segments to retake their ‘payments’ (thereby triggering lineage and village fission), not all pawns appear to have been so resilient. Douglas (1964: 305) notes that among the Pende, when a man acquired a female pawn, he designated one of his own brothers as her *mother’s* brother, thereby diverting her progeny into his matriline. Among the Yao, male pawn ‘grandsons’ offered to sisters’ daughters in marriage produced matrilineal offspring, although in some cases they retained the father’s clan name. Clearly such ‘equivalence’ was qualified, and what interests me here is the systematic correlation between commodification and subjugation. Briefly stated, the more the pawn was commodified as an object of uterine reproduction, the more fully she broke away from her matrilineage to join that of her ‘lord’, converting her own bloodline into that of her keeper. The trend was of course accentuated by the Oceanic slave economies; on the

west coast arriving with the Portuguese, regulated by Kongolese intermediaries, and on the Swahili coast arriving with Omani Arabs, mediated by Yao middlemen. From both coasts, the influence spread considerably into the interior. Mitchell describes how a pawn's 'equivalence' extended to other commodities:

There is considerable evidence, both from my informants and the writings of early travellers, that ... trade goods – ivory, cloth and slaves – came to be used as currency, and most people recognized a fixed relationship between the three commodities. A *female slave* could be exchanged for an amount of calico or ivory that was constant over a fairly large part of Central Africa ... they could be used to *settle claims for compensation* from aggrieved neighbours (1956: 18, my emphasis).

It is noteworthy that only the female slave was so commodified, and that the same pawn used to settle a blood-debt could be fully alienated for ivory and cloth, thereby becoming a money form herself. Similar trends are documented by MacGaffey, who, assessing the impact of the Atlantic slave trade on Kongo lineage organization and political stratification, concludes that 'slaves, in short, were the basic "convertible currency", articulating domestic and Atlantic circulation: a slave could be both a unit of social reproduction and a commodity to be bought and sold' (2008: 75).

Placed in the historical contexts of pawnship and slavery, we see how the witchcraft of the matrilineal womb is associated with its progressive commodification – from pawn to slave to money form. The gendered dimensions of the uterine economy and its bio-social antinomies of coitus and eating reproduced not only a broader field of social relations, but also the history of their commodification as blood compensation yielded to profit. If pawnship generated its own witchcraft accusations by 'afflicted' lineages seeking jural redress, giving rise to client-clan segments serving matrilineal cores, slavery completed the conversion and assimilation of external wombs into lineage property, in effect 'consuming' wombs for lineage reproduction or exchanging them for valuable commodities. Whereas the witchcraft of pawnship was associated with blood, the witchcraft of slavery converted blood into money.

Conclusion

We can now return to Kala, where the economy of the womb re-emerged as a critically important regenerative scheme. Under 'normal' or 'stable' conditions, as we have seen, the social womb was always vulnerable to the complementary transmutations of coitus (fertility) and eating (witchcraft), the former ensuring matrilineal reproduction through procreative surplus, the latter diverting and 'consuming' the blood of wombs by converting it into excess or waste. In sociological terms, the witchcraft of accumulation triggered lineage segmentation and fission, typically articulated between mothers' brothers and sisters' sons in struggles over power and inheritance (Marwick 1967; Mitchell 1956: 179–82). Historically, we have seen, the witchcraft of division was driven by contests over blood compensation and pawn lineages, and by more totalizing forms of assimilation and alienation associated with slavery, as in the outright purchase of female slaves or by the mother's brother's sale of his sister's sons – a 'potential threat' identified by Richards (1950: 249) that extended throughout Central Africa. Within Kala, the salience of this regenerative scheme was negatively highlighted by witchcraft accusations stemming from the accumulation of trading capital and the competition for authority and control that it fuelled. As the stories of M, J, and the old witch from Moba revealed, nefarious conversions of blood into

money triggered repatriation along the very lines of tension and vulnerability initially located within the matrilineal puzzle – between patrikin and matriline, brothers and husbands over sisters and wives, and the conflicting interests and loyalties of the mother's brother and sister's son. In the relative absence of localized lineages that were reduced to the cores of refugee houses, the regenerative scheme of matrilineal descent remade shattered families. Where accumulation led to conflict, witchcraft shattered remade families, replacing fission with repatriation as the equivalent sociological response.

What, then, is matrilineal descent, and why does it matter in the conflict-ridden Congo? Thus far I have tacked between two fundamentally different approaches to descent: a 'structural' description of corporate groups; and an ideological emphasis on modes of genealogical reckoning, inclining towards the latter by following Holy's focus on indigenous models of groups on the ground (1986: 10).²⁷ But reifying the very distinction between corporate and symbolic registers reproduces more than solves the problem of 'locating' descent. I have coined the term 'regenerative scheme' to capture the actively structuring principles of descent that embrace social and symbolic registers simultaneously, a concept that evokes Bourdieu's 'generative scheme' (1977 [1972]: 96-158) with specific reference to the economy of the womb. As with Bourdieu's structuring structures, the *regenerative* scheme incorporates prior transformations within its reproductive logic, bringing the history of pawnship and slavery into gendered conversions of money and blood. But it is also quite specific, motivating the social field of lineage organization in the making and unmaking of corporate descent groups. If matriliney in Kala was difficult to see, its obverse side of witchcraft was in full evidence. There, what Geschiere (1997: 24) calls 'the dark side of kinship' motivated repatriation by impelling meaningful motion.²⁸

Further evidence that this regenerative scheme is more than a figment of the anthropological imagination comes from the systematic deployment of rape as a regional weapon of war. The figures are staggering, the violence is senseless. Or is it? Many of the personal testimonies I recorded in Kala described unthinkable acts of perverse brutality, as mothers, sisters, daughters, and wives were gang-raped in front of kith and kin while fleeing eastern Katanga. Dubbed by Csete and Kippenberg (2002) as the 'war within the war', rape is explained in the popular media as a tactic of humiliation. But there is a deeper logic of persecution involved that destroys the matrilineal locus of social regeneration, that 'ruins' not only women and their wombs, but the broader bio-social economy that they would otherwise re-create and sustain.²⁹ Systematic rape turns coitus into eating, transforming violated women into social excrement. When infected with AIDS, they become toxic waste. If matrilineal motives in the conflict-ridden Congo have theoretical implications for rethinking descent, for civilians caught in the chaos they became matters of life and death.

NOTES

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¹ For a powerful rethinking of 'Central Bantu' matriliney in the context of the Atlantic slave trade, with a corresponding critique of Richards's 'family types' and her misinterpretation of Congolese sources, see MacGaffey (1983).

² I do not engage the subsumption of descent into a lineage mode of production, *à la* Marxist anthropology, because it cannot account for the variation and autonomy of genealogical idioms that are not immediately grounded in productive relations. For the most compelling accounts of Central African matriliney as modes of production, see MacGaffey (1983) and Poewe (1981).

³ For example, the Hutu Mai-Mai (or Mayi Mayi) militias, Moyo wa Chuma (Hearts of Steel), and the many factions of the RCD.

⁴ See De Boeck (1994) for a rich explication of how idioms of hunger centre on the social circulation of food, gifts, and marriage payments among the Aluund of what was then southwestern Zaïre. His analysis suggests that much of the protest against sorghum in Kala represents the social dislocations of these spheres of circulation and the substitution of conventional staples as key symbols of value.

⁵ Lloyd (2010: 26-7) recorded stories in Kala of a notorious *basakala* or 'bogeyman' spirit that targeted women and children moving outside the camp at night, removing various organs from their bodies, and thereby preventing women from engaging in long-distance trade.

⁶ Blood also serves as a fuel that enables witches to fly.

⁷ For the first explicit analysis of witchcraft as negative value production, see Munn (1992).

⁸ See, for example, J. Comaroff and Comaroff (1999), who link occult perceptions of illicit accumulation to the crisis of social reproduction under neoliberal economic reform.

⁹ See also Richards (1950: 208), where she describes 'a constant pull-father-pull-mother's brother', and Richards (1956: 42).

¹⁰ The Kaoze quotation comes from Kimpinde *et al.* (1982: 174).

¹¹ The different solutions to the matrilineal puzzle include 'the matriarchal solution', 'the fraternal extended family', 'the borrowed [or 'detachable'] husband', and 'the selected heir'.

¹² See Turner (1967: 3-6, 25 *et passim*; see also 1957: 234-57; and 1969: 81-4).

¹³ De Boeck (1994) analyses an important association – among the matrilineal Aluund – between preferred 'inside' MBD marriages, associated with witchcraft, incest, and cannibalism, and subsequent 'outside' marriages that are relatively witchcraft-free because they break the closed cycles of lineage involution. Unfortunately, my data from Kala are not rich enough to seek parallel patterns of witchcraft and polygyny among the refugees.

¹⁴ The specification of brand names in these narratives not only punctuates the 'empirical' evidence but underscores the 'fetish' value of expensive imports.

¹⁵ The number of J's co-wives varied between three and five, depending upon which were considered official and which were considered concubines. J also had a wife who died during the violence in Pepa (DRC).

¹⁶ Interviews with several of his sons revealed that they sold rations for trading capital, buying cassava, tomatoes, fruit, and dried fish in Kawamba and beyond for resale in the camp, pooling their profits at home. J staunchly denied such labour-intensive family trade – conducted with bicycles on dusty dirt roads and covering hundreds of kilometres.

¹⁷ De Boeck (1994: 262-3) reports that the Aluund liken a maternal uncle who kills his sister's children by means of sorcery to 'a dog eating its own placenta', an expression that also refers positively to preferential cross-cousin marriage (see notes 4 and 13). For a discussion of insects (*wadudu*) as invisible agents of socio-somatic affliction and transformation among the Tabwa, see Davis-Roberts (1981: 311).

¹⁸ Interviews with Muloko Tambwe and Sydney Kaweme, September 2008.

¹⁹ See also Bockie (1993: 64), who explains how witchcraft *kundu* can be transferred to the foetus within the womb.

²⁰ Vansina uses these and other root-morphological distributions to 'excavate' features of Kasai socio-political organization before the seventeenth-century Lunda expansion, a specific concern that lies beyond the scope of my argument, although his broader concerns with the labile fields of ethnogenesis in Central Africa provide a relevant corrective to falsely historicized differences between discrete ethnolinguistic groups. As MacGaffey similarly argues, 'Kongo is not a discrete entity with either an independent history or a discrete social structure; it is a representative sample of the indigenous social system that prevails in most of central Africa' (1998: 297).

²¹ For a socially located explication of Tabwa 'birthing' in the ritual domain of Bulumbu spirit possession, see Roberts (1988).

²² When improperly framed by incestuous unions (*kisoni*) that violate kinship and lineage taboos, coitus generates witchcraft and sorcery. Thus Davis-Roberts (1981: 312) explains how certain sorcery amulets are activated by their physical proximity to forbidden acts of brother-sister or father-daughter incest.

²³ If these gendered dynamics of lineage production privilege the female body and its generative womb, they make no fast distinctions between gendered persons. Indeed, a male witch who 'eats' is like a pregnant woman, but with a blocked chunk of 'strangled meat' (*kundu*) that evokes a cannibalized foetus permanently lodged in his stomach. Similarly, the female witch who feasts on flesh has male witchcraft within her womb, consuming rather than producing life through failed reproduction and false pregnancies. In both cases, matrilineal reproduction is sabotaged by the witchcraft of 'eating' within bi-gendered persons. See Roberts (1986b: 26-7) for bi-gendered dualisms immanent within Tabwa men and women.

²⁴ See also Douglas (1963: 141-85) for even greater ethnographic elaboration within and between villages.

²⁵ Pawn progeny were classified as 'grandchildren' in relation to their 'grandfather' lords, patrilineal kin categories allowing pawn children to represent the matrilineage in various ritual capacities (MacGaffey 1983: 179) while enabling cross-cousin marriage with the 'owning' clan. For an illuminating discussion of the classificatory equivalence of alternating generations and cross-cousins in Central Africa, see Vuyk (1991: 73-104).

²⁶ For arguments that Kongo matriliney developed from Atlantic slavery, see MacGaffey (1983: 184-5; 2008: 56) and Thornton (2001). For a more balanced view of how slavery strengthened a pre-existing matrilineal system, see Hilton (1983). See Alpers (1969) for comparable influences from the Indian Ocean trade.

²⁷ Holy (1986: 6) further resurrects Caws's distinction between representational and operational models (1974: 3), but the proliferation of refined analytical distinctions cannot resolve a theoretical problem that requires a dialectical solution.

²⁸ For a similar focus on Kaonde witchcraft (*bulozhi*) as 'kinship turned upside down' in northwestern Zambia, see Crehan (1997: 186-223), who also relates matriliney to market forces and monetization. For a similar argument that matrilineal descent still matters in the changing postcolonial situation, see Crehan (1998).

²⁹ This is the theme of playwright Lynn Nottage's *Ruined* (2009), set in a Congolese brothel and based on the personal testimonies of women raped by rebels and government soldiers.

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Motifs matrilineaires : parenté, sorcellerie et rapatriement parmi les réfugiés congolais

Résumé

L'auteur explore l'importance de la descendance matrilineaire parmi les réfugiés congolais du camp de Kala, en Zambie. Il avance que la matrilinearité a eu une importance à Kala parce que c'est elle qui motivait le rapatriement, suscitant des accusations de sorcellerie liées à des écarts dans l'écheveau matrilineaire. Superficiellement, Kala « n'avait pas l'air » particulièrement matrilineaire, compte tenu des dispositions domestiques *ad hoc* prises par les réfugiés survivants. Pourtant, lorsqu'il est replacé dans le contexte de la matrilinearité, exprimée dans des réseaux de parenté élargis entre les foyers des réfugiés et au travers d'un discours évaluatif sur l'accumulation illégitime, le rapatriement pour motif de sorcellerie s'explique comme une forme « extrême » de fission lignagère. De fait, aux confins du camp de réfugiés, un modèle de matrilinearité centrafricain a été réduit à sa dynamique fondamentale, mettant en évidence une économie bio-sociale de la matrice et ses conversions sorcellaires du sang en argent. Après avoir examiné trois épisodes dramatiques de sorcellerie et de rapatriement à Kala, l'auteur s'engage dans des réflexions plus larges sur le genre et l'histoire, afin de recadrer la filiation comme un mode de régénération.

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