

NOAH AND CAM IN EAST AFRICAN MYTHOLOGY

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Many myths about the differentiation between blacks and whites - the latter being often represented as reds - have been gathered all around Africa (cf. Hofmayr 1911; Baumann 1936; Görög-Karady 1976). In these ethnogenic myths the trivial contrast of skin colours symbolizes the diversity of two societies. Their mutual relationships are shown as established from the beginning and irreversible. A primordial occurrence would have determined the present situation of subordination of one society to the other. This happening is perceived and represented by the subordinated society as a sin attributed to its ancestors. We ought to consider though that the concepts of primordial occurrence, sin and subordination could be too European to allow us to grasp the emic point of view about African mythology. In fact, the analysis of such a myth in a lotuho version - a segmentary lineage system society of south-eastern Sudan - invites us to reconsider these three concepts as the specific result of occidental history.

The lotuho oral tradition actually presents a myth on the differentiation between blacks and whites, as a consequence of a primordial sin which has founded relationships of subordination between men. The occidental, i.e. judaical-christian written tradition too, offers a myth on the differentiation between blacks, whites, but also yellows, following a primordial sin which has founded relationships of subordination even between brothers. The disrespectful behaviour of Cam in front of his father Noah's nakedness legitimates or has legitimated in the occidental perspective the necessary submission of Cam's descendants to his brother's descendants. In a similar way, the lotuho myth shows the descendants of the guilty black ancestor submitted to the descendants of his innocent white brother.

The Genesis of the Bible and the ethnogenesis of the lotuho oral tradition allow us then to make a stimulating parallel which requires some anthropological considerations. First of all on the conception of primordial occurrence, i.e. of origin in societies with a differing notion of time: a lineal time representation for the occidental society and a cyclical time conception for the segmentary society. Secondly, what is a sin considered in its ethical consequences in the first society, could also be a sin in the other society, but considered this

time in its sociological consequences. In such a case can we accept the term "sin" outside of an ethical context? Or should we rather employ the notions of social responsibility and political commitment? Finally, rethinking subordination, the apparently legitimate subordination of the black to the white reveals itself in the lotuho myth as a surprising inversion through which the white becomes subordinated to the black facing the moral order of the cosmos.