

THE WIVES OF THE SUN AND MOON

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In much Native American mythology marriage is conceptualized as a monthly honeymoon interrupted at each dark moon by menstruation. Woman's monthly alternation between marital sex and menstrual seclusion is coded as an alternation between her rival partners, Sun and Moon. Against this background, a Plains Indian myth attempts to come to terms with a novel problem. With the introduction of patrilocal residence, a woman must stay with her husband and his relatives even when she is menstruating. It is as if her two rival partners, instead of living apart, had come to occupy the same space together, limiting her movement and precluding her escape. Such permanency in marriage, overriding menstrual periodicity is experienced as a dangerous violation of ritual norms. Exploring the consequent difficulties and contradictions, the myth finds a way of validating the new arrangement. This story along with many others analysed by Lévi-Strauss analysis in the light of his own 'exchange of women' theory of human cultural origins. Re-analysed in the light of menstrual sex-strike theory however, it makes good sense, shedding light on the origins of women's oppression.

Intended as structuralism's crowning achievement, Lévi-Strauss's four-volume *Mythologiques* (1970; 1973; 1978; 1981) is today scarcely read. Its publication provoked not acclaim but puzzlement, irritation and widespread disillusionment, contributing to a repudiation of structuralism and a more general loss of theoretical confidence among social anthropologists which has lasted to this day (Knight 1991: 71—87, 480-513). In this article, I argue that the problem with *Mythologiques* was not that it treated mythology as a source of information about the origins of culture, but that it started out from a radically flawed set of assumptions about cultural origins. Like most of the myths examined by Lévi-Strauss, the Arapaho story of *The wives of the sun and moon* (1978: 214-18) defies interpretation in the light of standard alliance theory I show that once Lévi-Strauss's model is stood on its head, the problems raised by this and related myths central to *Mythologiques* yield to a compelling, parsimonious and elegant solution.

The origins of human culture: sex, blood and the moon

In the account of Knight *et al.* (1995), symbolic culture arose as a response to the heavy costs of encephalization as brain size maximized during the later stages of human evolution. Lactating mothers bore the brunt of sustaining brain growth in encephalized infants. There were two possible ways of meeting these increased costs. First, mothers could extract more provisioning and other assistance from males. Secondly, they could cut back on their own costs of travel. By

staying put at a home base and making sexual access dependent on males returning to camp with supplies, women achieved both objectives simultaneously.

Females now needed to be able to signal 'No' to unco-operative males. Knight *et al.* (1995: 84) hypothesize that females signalling 'no sex' to males should have (a) drawn on the support of male kin in defence against any threat of rape or harassment, involving their sons and brothers in their coalitions and (b) chosen the moment of menstruation for their strike action. Faced with male resistance, females should also have augmented any publicly displayed menstrual blood (real or cosmetic) with bodily displays of their inappropriateness as sexual partners for human males. Since courtship 'ritual' in the animal world involves signalling '*right species/right sex/right (fertile) time*', we expect systematic reversal of these signals as the signature of sex-strike. Females would therefore have signalled '*wrong species/wrong sex/wrong time*'. We expect culture's primacy over nature to have been asserted through such reality-defying ritual 'metamorphosis' (cf. Power & Watts in press).

It need hardly be stressed that for human females within coalitions to signal that they are in fact *males*, of a *non-human species* and *all simultaneously menstruating* was a fantasy not easy to convey. To overcome listener-resistance, such signalling was therefore amplified rather than whispered. Transmission involved energetically expensive, repetitive, highly iconographic pantomime. The corresponding fantasies, being shared, were now communicable for the first time. The model specifies that the first 'collective representations' (cf. Durkheim 1965) were women's assertion of their ritual inviolability through metamorphosis into '*wrong time/wrong sex/wrong species*'. Monstrous therianthropic fictions of this kind were the first 'gods'.

We must now ask: How might sex-striking females have prevented males from secretly eating their own kills out in the bush? Drawing on the signalling configuration already in place to inhibit such cheating, females could exploit the natural fact that hunted game animals visibly bleed. This would have been difficult without a previous history of 'symbolic' menstruation, establishing that red colorants of one kind could substitute for colorants of another. But given such a tradition, the blood of the hunt as a public, communal construct signalled 'menstrual blood', the symbolism of this prompting the same avoidance. Women could not have benefited economically from such blood taboos unless they had some means to *remove* visible blood from raw meat. The model specifies women as those most heavily investing in campsites, making them the most reliable custodians of cooking fire. With such fire under domestic control, women had an important resource complementing the efficacy of blood taboos. Men who had just killed a game animal were inhibited by the blood from eating it. To remove its 'rawness', they had to bring the meat home to be 'cooked' — whereupon it passed into female hands (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1970). Given such arrangements, cheating by hunters would have been minimized, reliable provisioning permitting the formation of relatively large and stable residential groups.

To counter outgroup male attempts at rape or other defiance of periodic sex-strike action, females needed to form coalitionary alliances with one another and with their male offspring and kin. The cultural construction of 'kinship' originated here (Knight 1991). To prevent highly mobile males from

sexual cheating, females had to maintain synchrony not just locally but right across the landscape. Each strike, in other words, must have been a general one, implying phase-locking to a universally accessible external natural clock. The only clock of appropriate periodicity is the moon. This compounds the improbability of the model. The whole system could only have worked if collective hunting was a periodic work/rest activity governed by a *monthly* on/off rhythm, with the proceeds of each large, ceremonially prepared ‘special’ hunt augmented during the rest of the month with food from less organized kinds of foraging or scavenging.

Lunar/menstrual time is most simply structured through bisection, yielding a waxing and a waning half of each month. A strike is an all-or-nothing event, either ‘off’ or ‘on’, giving two possibilities: either ‘on’ during waning moon and ‘off’ during waxing, or vice versa. Action during waning moon would schedule the climax of hunting, butchering and transporting activities within the darkest portion of each month. Since this would limit the effective day length available to complete such activities, we are led to posit the reverse polarity — strike action during waxing moon, climaxing with the return of the hunt by, or around, full moon. As ‘on’ switches to ‘off’ at this point, fires are lit, meat is cooked and marital relations resumed (fig. 1). Ritual signals cross—culturally should reflect this binary on/off logic, ‘on’ coinciding with crescent moon, ‘off’ with the moon’s waning (cf. Knight 1987; 1991).

Unlike Lévi-Strauss’s (1969) ‘exchange of women’ model, sex-strike theory specifies mythico-ritual time as essentially lunar; it also predicts *periodic female inviolability* as a discernible focus of early hunter-gatherer ritual traditions. Ritual potency more generally is predicted to display everywhere a characteristic signature, revealing its ancestry in menstrual inviolability. Power should be switched ‘on’ by one set of signals, and ‘off’ by another:

This is a tight set of constraints. It means, for example, that a menstruant (‘on’) may amplify ‘blood’ by signalling ‘hunger’, ‘kinship intimacy’, ‘gender inversion’ and/or ‘animality’ (all ‘on’). But she *cannot* enhance her potency by being seen in bright light, on dry ground, with her marital partner or by a cooking fire (all ‘off’). From one culture to another, political factors will natu-

TABLE 1.

<i>ON</i>	<i>OFF</i>
Loud signals	Weak signals
Waxing moon	Waning moon
Seclusion	Availability
‘Other world’	‘This world’
Night	Day
Wet	Dry
Bleeding/raw	Cooking/cooked
Hunger/being eaten	Feasting
Flesh taboo	Flesh available
Production	Consumption
Kinship	Affinity
Gender inversion	Heterosexual polarity
Animality	Humanity

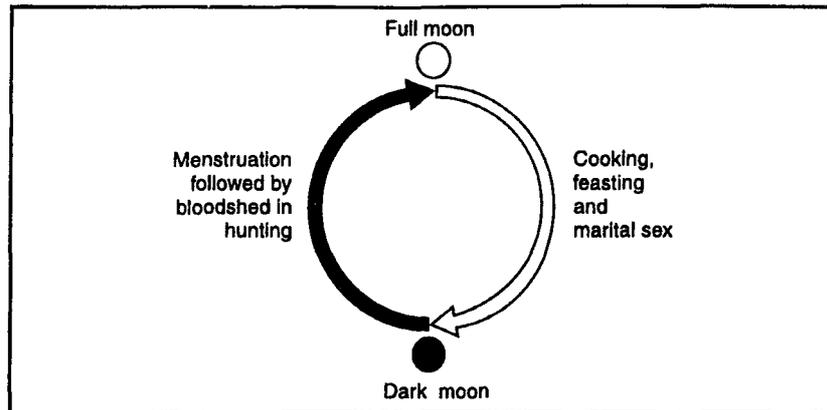


FIGURE 1. A model Ice Age hunting community's ritually structured schedule of work and rest. In addition to daily, seasonal and other periodicities, life normatively alternates to a fortnightly rhythm, switching between a 'production' phase of ritual power (initiated by menstrual onset, continued into hunting, butchery etc. and terminated as raw meat is transformed into cooked) and a corresponding 'consumption' phase of surrender or relaxation (beginning with feasting and celebratory love-making; terminated as meat supplies run low and the next menstrual onset approaches). The thick black line signifies the dominance of blood-relations while blood of any kind is flowing. The switch to white at full moon connotes cooking fire's lifting of the taboos associated with 'rawness' or visible blood, allowing feasting to proceed and marital partners to conjoin.

rally alter ideological *meanings*, that is, the positive or negative valuation of terms. Menstruation, for example, may appear as 'supernatural potency' or as 'pollution' according to women's political status. But through all such variation, I expect ritual traditions relentlessly to define menstrual potency as incompatible with feasting, strong light, cooking *or any other signal from the 'off' column*. I term such formal consistency — unchanging across all cultures and all historical periods — the lime-resistant syntax of ritual and myth.

Testing the model: Lévi-Strauss's Mythologiques

At first sight, it might seem that *Mythologiques* affords little opportunity to test this theory of the origins of human culture. Lévi-Strauss's findings in *Mythologiques* are presented as 'algebraic': the elements in his equations are said to be content-free. Lévi-Strauss notes, for example, that although the myths of the Americas make recurrent astronomical references, they convey no astronomical message.

The conclusion of *Mythologiques* is merely that the human mind succeeds in coping with differences by setting them in grids through which they appear as inversions or other logical transformations of one another. Nothing specific about cultural traditions is shown; anything which happens in one culture can be totally different in another; the only uniformity in the myths or traditions is the reality of systematic differentiation itself and the only lesson to be gleaned

from *Mythologiques* concerns the pervasiveness of this logical or mathematical differentiating activity of the human mind.

That is one reading of *Mythologiques*. A closer one reveals themes which remain mysteriously constant for all myths and all cultures across the Americas. An example is 'the theme of noise as being antipathetic to cooking, a theme which has played a major part throughout this work, and which has assumed increasing importance since the point at which we first encountered it' (Lévi-Strauss 1981: 307). By 'noise', Lévi-Strauss means specifically the sounds which emanate from clappers, rattles, drums, bullroarers and other 'instruments of darkness' prominent in ritual and typically connoting 'rotten stench' (Lévi-Strauss 1973: 359-422).

Such frightening sounds, all over the world, seem to have marked moments of cosmically-significant 'death' including, in medieval Europe, the death of Christ on Good Friday (Lévi-Strauss 1973: 405-6). In China, officials annually traversed the country with wooden clappers, commanding all to put out their fires:

This was the beginning of the season called Han-shih-tsieh, or 'eating cold food.' For three days all household fires remained extinct as a preparation for the solemn renewal of the fire, which took place on the fifth or sixth day after the winter solstice ... This annual renewal of fire was a ceremony of very great antiquity in China ... since it dates from at least two thousand years before Christ (Frazer 1926-36, 137; quoted in L 1973: 406).

Why the noises made by clappers should connote 'anti-cooking' is not fully explained, but menstrual blood features prominently in Lévi-Strauss's discussion (1973: 361-2, 373, 382-3). Lévi-Strauss refrains from deciding

whether or not the din made by the instruments of darkness survives as a relic of neolithic or even palaeolithic customs, or whether its occurrence in widely scattered areas merely shows that man, when confronted with the same situations, reacts with the help of symbolic representations suggested to him, or perhaps forced upon him, by the underlying processes which control his thought the world over (1973: 406).

Be that as it may, to add to the complexity of the problem, noise seems to be persistently associated (in the mythology of the Americas and beyond) with incest and a range of other phenomena which include eclipses, darkness, storms, rebellion and the flowing of blood. Lévi-Strauss links an array of myths from widely separated regions of Native America in demonstrating an internal logical association between such phenomena. He concludes that in native experience, eclipses, storms, incest, rebellion and bloodshed appear not as distinct, unconnected phenomena but merely as so many alternative manifestations of one and the same ultimate reality. To put the matter simply: an incestuous act of intercourse *is* an eclipse; an eclipse *is* a bloody and noisy rebellion — and so on (cf. table 1 on page 135).

After a preliminary survey, Lévi-Strauss (1970: 312) presents a Brazilian (Shipaya) version of a myth which sums up his case. In common with similar versions from across the Americas (Lévi-Strauss 1981: 219), it tells how Moon has sexual intercourse every night with his sister without revealing to her his identity. She rubs his face with genipa juice, the stain later exposing his identity, whereupon he escapes to the sky and becomes the moon. The spots on the moon are the stains left by his sister, who (and here this particular version makes its own specific contribution) at first rises into the sky with her lover but

then quarrels with him and crashes to earth ‘very noisily’. A rival brother orders arrows to be shot at the moon, wounding it:

The moon’s blood was of all colors, and men and women were bespattered with it as it streamed earthward. The women wiped themselves with an upward movement, so that they came under the moon’s influence. The men, however, wiped themselves clean with a downward movement. The birds bathed in the different colored pools, and each species thus acquired its characteristic plumage (Lévi-Strauss 1970: 312).

Lévi-Strauss takes the ‘moon’s blood’ to indicate an eclipse. He treats the first part of this myth as representative of a ‘vast group’ (1981: 218-19) of similar narratives, noting that all the myths of the Americas are logically derivable from this one widespread and almost invariant story. ‘We might even say’, he writes, ‘that it constitutes the most plausible initial state for the whole series of transformations’ (1981: 219), firstly because of its widespread distribution, and secondly because it appears subject to minimal variation. In other words, if a single story had to be chosen as the starting-point from which all the inter-linked myths of the Americas have been derived, this would be a strong candidate.

Regarding the Shipaya version, Lévi-Strauss comments that it ‘covers the complicated course we have followed by putting several myths end to end in order to move from noisemaking to eclipses, from eclipses to incest, from incest to unruliness, and from unruliness to the coloured plumage of birds’ (1970: 312). The final reference is to the widespread Amerindian use of birds’ feathers as body-adornments indicative of male ritual power, their brilliant colours deriving, mythologically, from spilled menstrual or other blood (Lévi-Strauss 1970: 306-17).

Lévi-Strauss dwells on the Shipaya myth because, taken as a whole, it confirms a persistent link between *noise* (in this case, the sister’s crashing to earth ‘very noisily’) and the phenomena he lists. He further connects these linkages to the fact that in many parts of the world, noises are traditionally made not only (a) at midnight in midwinter or on New Year’s Eve but also (b) during eclipses. ‘In twentieth century Europe’, he comments, ‘where scientific knowledge is so widespread, it is no longer conceivable that an eclipse should be greeted by noisemaking’ (1970: 301). Nevertheless noisemaking to mark lunar or seasonal ‘death’ still survives — for example, in Lithuania, where people strike pans during eclipses and also noisily break furniture to mark someone’s death and in particular Christ’s death on Good Friday. ‘Customs such as these’, Lévi-Strauss continues,

are part of a universal system, unmistakable vestiges of which still survive in Western countries — for instance, the smashing of china and exploding of fireworks in Italy on New Year’s Eve, and the chorus of automobile horns that ushers in the New Year in Times Square, Piccadilly Circus, and the Champs Elysees (1970: 301).

Across much of Native America, an eclipse prompted everyone to stop cooking, for fear of pollution from the ‘blood’ of the sun or moon (Lévi-Strauss 1970: 298-9). Since eclipses also invited noise-making (1970:287), the incompatibility between noise-making and cooking is confirmed by another route. Moreover, cooking, throughout *Mythologiques*, coincides symbolically with marital availability and legitimate (as opposed to incestuous) sex. If cooking is upset by noise,

then — given the symbolic equivalence between marriage and cooking (1970: 335-6) — marriage should suffer from noise in the same way.

Turning from the Americas to Europe, the *charivari* was a custom in which basins and saucepan lids were banged outside the bedroom of a honeymooning couple when it was thought necessary to highlight the union's incestuous or otherwise illegitimate character (Lévi-Strauss 1970: 287). Lévi-Strauss in turn links this custom to the previously-noted world-wide din accompanying eclipses (1970: 286-7), a din comparable with the medieval European use of 'instruments of darkness' which 'may have been intended to represent the marvels and terrifying noises which occurred at the time of the death of Christ' (Lévi-Strauss 1973: 405).

From no matter which angle matters are approached, in other words, death, fasting, the absence of marital sex, the absence of cooking-fire and the making of a din seem to go together, standing jointly in opposition to the quietness or calm of harmonious marital relations and of proper cooking. In ritual attitudes to noise, we have, then — as far as Lévi-Strauss is concerned — not a content-free algebraic formula but what he refers to as 'a universal system', unmistakable vestiges of which still survive even in Western countries (1970: 301).

Lévi-Strauss (1973: 373) investigates 'the instruments of darkness' by drawing particular attention to a Tucuna custom in which a girl, on perceiving signs of her first menstrual period, hides in a bush and responds to her mother's calls 'by striking two pieces of dry wood together'. Menstruation, even when not augmented by such means, is cross-culturally a potent and even frightening signal — a fact stressed in myths telling of the days when women ruled the world (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 222). A Yamana 'rule of women' myth features women emerging periodically from their Great Kina Hut, faces painted so as to be unrecognizable, beating the floor with dried skins 'so that the earth shook' and frightening husbands away with fearsome howls and roars (Gusinde 1961: 1238-49).

Just as a simple binary signal can be either 'off' or 'on', so the myths of *Mythologiques* assume a perpetual alternation between relations of marital union and relations of blood. Lévi-Strauss himself regards the opposition between '*lune de miel* (honeymoon)' and '*lune de fiel* or *lune d'absinthe* (sour moon)' as inseparable from 'the contrast between total and exclusive conjugal union and its reinsertion into the pattern of social relationships' (1973: 157). One kind of 'moon', then, cements a woman and her lover exclusively within the couple-relation; the other sends each partner back into wider social circulation. In this rhythmic pattern, cultural effort and intervention alternate with the absence of such effort: 'the power of culture disjoins the sexes, to the detriment of nature which prescribes their union; temporarily at least, family links are broken in order to allow human society to be formed' (Lévi-Strauss 1973: 412).

Sexual union in this perspective appears 'natural' — it is what happens when nothing prevents it. Disjunction, however — as Lévi-Strauss points out — requires the expenditure of collective energy and a special signal, such as the sound of a bullroarer. At the simplest conceivable level, the contrast, then, is between the presence of a signal and its absence. It is during the period of the moon's darkness — a time of seclusion, ritual potency and kinship solidarity as opposed to marital sex — that the primordial signal is switched 'on'.

The clinging woman

In the third volume of *Mythologiques*, Lévi-Strauss (1978) turns to a number of myths featuring a ‘clinging woman’. This character is a toad- or frog-wife who clings to her male partner and refuses to let go. Usually, she is contrasted with a different, more attractive kind of female partner.

These myths are particularly interesting because their basis in menstrual cyclicity is explicit. In what follows, I will argue that the ‘clinging woman’ contrasts with the ‘attractive woman’ as menstrual pollution contrasts with marital availability. The myths, in this menstrual perspective, express men’s fears of excessively ‘clinging’ kinds of male-female relationship. They voice concern at the possible consequences of turning marriage into a static, permanent bond instead of a periodically renewed, monthly honeymoon; frequently, they express this concern in an astronomical code featuring the moon, the sun and other heavenly bodies.

In examining these myths, Lévi-Strauss himself discerns a male fear of menstrual cyclicity beyond all control. As he puts it, women’s

periodic rhythm could slow down and halt the flow of events, or it could accelerate and plunge the world into chaos. It is equally conceivable that women might cease to menstruate and bear children, or that they might bleed continuously and give birth haphazardly. But in either case, the sun and the moon, the heavenly bodies governing the alternation of day and night and of the seasons, would no longer be able to perform their function (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 506).

In common with the belief systems he is examining, Lévi-Strauss considers culture to have been invented, and sustained since its inception, by men; he views the myths under discussion as confirming this. As he interprets them, the stories assume men’s responsibility for menstrual regularity. Men from the beginning have tried to make women menstruate and give birth ‘on time’. But, since time immemorial, women have rebelled. By menstruating haphazardly, women have always threatened to upset men’s orderly schemes and plans (1978: 221-2).

One view, then, is that human culture, including menstrual synchrony, was invented and shaped by men. The other—which is argued here—is that culture is based primarily on solidarity, that this solidarity is in the first instance sexual (manifesting itself among women as menstrual synchrony), that women’s ability to go ‘on strike’ is the primordial guarantee of their sexual solidarity and that the necessary periodic ‘sex strike’ initially took the form of collective and synchronized menstrual withdrawal (Knight 1991; 1996; Knight *et al.* 1995; Power & Watts 1996). In what follows, it will be shown that the task of making sense of the basic findings of *Mythologiques* requires that we jettison the first model of culture’s ‘initial situation’ in favour of the second.

As the centrepiece of the third volume of *Mythologiques*, Lévi-Strauss (1978: 214-18) presents an Arapaho (Plains Indian) story called ‘The wives of the sun and the moon’. It is in analysing this story that he presents his arguments concerning the centrality of the menstrual rhythm to Amerindian mythology as a whole.

The tale tells of two brothers and their two wives.¹ These wives are expected to eat noisily—a strange form of ‘table manners’ alluded to in the title of this volume of Lévi-Strauss’s work. The two brothers are sky-dwellers; their wives

live on earth. One brother is Moon; the other is Sun. One wife is a human female; the other is a toad. Out of these oppositions and alternations — between earth and sky, male and female, sun and moon, human and animal female forms — the thread of the narrative is woven.

As the story opens, the two brothers Sun and Moon are debating from the sky which kind of marriage is best:

Moon intended to look for a human woman or a ‘resurrected woman’; Sun wanted a water wife, for he maintained that humans looked homely and ugly about their faces: ‘When they look up towards me, their eyes almost close with a mean appearance. I cannot bear to see their disgusting faces. Batrachians are much prettier. When a toad looks at me she does not make faces like a human woman’ (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 215).

So women, in the eyes of the celestial beings, were divided into (a) ‘water-women’ or toads, and (b) ‘resurrected women’ or humans. Sun rejected ‘resurrected women’ since these unavoidably squinted when looking up at the sun.

The two brothers told their parents that they wanted to marry in order to settle down — once married, they ‘would be more often at home’ (1978: 215). They descended to earth and went their separate ways, Moon seeking a human wife and Sun searching for a toad:

The elder went downstream and the younger upstream. They set out the night of the disappearance of the moon, after the full moon. Their journey lasted six days. They had two days of cloudy weather, two days of rest (holy), and two days before the new moon (1978: 215).

Moon came upon ‘a huge camp circle’ (1978: 215). He turned himself into a porcupine, showed himself to some pretty young human women who were walking near the camp, and began climbing a tree. His trick worked: one of the human women, coveting his magnificent quills, began climbing the tree after him. He passed through a hole in the sky and she followed him. Hastily, moon now covered the hole in the sky ‘so that his wife might forget the position of the entrance’ (1978: 216). He did not want her to return home to her kin. Moon showed off his lovely wife to his parents. Some time later, Sun arrived — without his wife:

Sun explained that being shy, she had remained on the bank of the Eagle River. The old woman [mother of Sun and Moon] went after her: she noticed a toad leaping towards her, suspected the truth, and spoke graciously to the batrachian who changed into a woman and agreed to follow her. As she suffered from incontinence, her father-in-law [the father of Sun and Moon] gave her the name of ‘Waterwoman’ or ‘Liquid-woman’. Nevertheless she was given just as warm a welcome as the other one (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 216).

Sun was embarrassed, however. He looked contemptuously at the toad-like form of his new partner, could not take his eyes off Moon’s beautiful human bride and regretted his foolish choice.

Attempts were now undertaken to train the two women in horticultural tasks and other wifely duties. The human wife learned quickly; she was given a digging-stick and started to dig. ‘The “liquid-woman”, on the other hand, remained idly seated on her bed, with her head turned towards the wall, and was paralysed by her timidity. In vain did her parents-in-law encourage and reassure her: nothing did any good’ (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 216).

The old parents of Sun and Moon now organized a chewing contest. They wanted to see which wife could make the most noise in chewing boiled tripe:

The human wife relished the food, chewing noisily and cracking it nicely. The toad woman slyly put a piece of charcoal in her mouth; but since she had no teeth, there was no sound from her mouth. While she was chewing away, black saliva dribbled from the corners of her mouth. Moon laughed vigorously (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 216).

The human wife, making cracking noises with her mouth, won the contest. Suddenly — with no warning or even any indication of previous pregnancy — the human wife started giving birth. ‘Come over quickly’ (1978: 217), she cried, gasping for breath. The mother-in-law ran to her, felt her body and was astonished to discover a well-formed baby struggling for life under her limbs. Everyone was delighted about the baby, except the toad-wife, who sulked. Moon stared at her scornfully. In a fit of anger, she retaliated by rushing at Moon. ‘Because you criticise me inhumanely’, she cried, ‘I will be with you all the time. In this way people will see you plainly hereafter’ (1978: 217). She leaped onto Moon’s breast and adhered to it. The woman’s parents-in-law were pleased with the human wife’s child, but criticized her timing and lack of warning in giving birth. ‘I am very proud of your success’, as Sun and Moon’s old father put it,

but I don’t like this method of sudden deliveries, for it is not human. Ten moons should elapse between conception and birth, The last month in which the woman had her period is not counted. You then count eight months without a period, followed by a tenth month in which the confinement takes place accompanied by a discharge of blood. By counting in this way on all ten fingers, a wife knows that she has not been fertilised unawares by some wild beast. She can warn her mother and husband long in advance (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 217-18).

In Lévi-Strauss’s summary of this speech, there follows a stipulation that ‘each bleeding will last from the first to the last quarter of the moon, that is, the same period of time which elapsed between Moon’s departure to look for a wife until his return’ (1978: 218).

Discussion

This myth presents a number of problems. What can be the meaning of the lesson in gynaecology from the old father? What social significance can be given to the motif of ‘marriage with the Sun’ or ‘marriage with the Moon’? What do the terms ‘water-woman’ and ‘resurrected woman’ mean? ‘Why does the toad cling to the moon? Why does the human wife give birth without warning? And why ask the wives to eat making maximum noise? Lévi-Strauss suggests a series of separate answers to each of these questions, many of them complex. I will suggest a less complex, unified explanation.

To clear away at the outset a source of possible confusion, we may begin with the stated timing of menstruation. ‘Each bleeding’, says the old man as he teaches the wives the menstrual rules, ‘will last from the first to the last quarter of the moon’ (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 218). Ideally, then, the blood-flow should occur within the light half of each month, centred on full moon. This would be inconsistent with sex-strike theory which, as explained earlier, expects a ritually scheduled menstruation to occur at dark moon. The solution, however, is simple. Lévi-Strauss’s version is erroneously transcribed: the recording by Dorsey (1903: 221) — Lévi-Strauss’s source — reads: ‘Bear in mind that the time shall be from the last quarter to the first quarter of the moon’. Here as elsewhere, menstruation occurs — as theory would predict — in the dark half of the month,

centred on the period when Moon, no longer visible above, is assumed to have descended in search of his earthly bride.

The episode in which the toad-wife denounces Moon and leaps onto his breast is given by Dorsey in two versions:

- 1 The toad got mad at her sister-in-law and jumped to the breast of the moon, and has remained there ever since. That is what is seen on the face of the moon. That picture, visible to the naked eye, is the flow of the woman. The toad's appearance corresponds to that of a pregnant woman (Dorsey 1903: 177).
- 2 'Oh, pshaw, you make me tired of your foolishness; because you hate me and criticise my appearance inhumanly I will be with you all the time. In this way people will see you plainly hereafter' said the frog woman, leaping up and landing on Moon's breast and adhering (Dorsey 1903: 220).

To this, Dorsey (1903: 220) adds the following native information: 'So the moon bears the picture of Water-Woman ... The "face of the Moon" bears the mark of the first menstruation of the woman'. Also: 'The appearance of the toad on the belly [the Moon] indicates pregnancy of the woman' (Dorsey 1903: 220). The clinging toad-wife or 'water-wife' is, then, either menstruating, pregnant or both. If she is pregnant, however, it is strange — for she never produces a baby. We have, then, a menstruant who attaches herself to the Moon, her bloodstains explaining the origin of the spots on the moon. The idea that menstruating women copulate with the moon is in fact a widespread Amerindian belief (Goldman 1963: 180-1; Hugh-Jones 1979: 156-7; Karsten 1935: 218); versions of the stained-moon motif are also widespread in Amerindian mythology. The common element in all of these stories is that the spots on the moon are caused by genipa juice, menstrual blood or some other dark staining fluid; in almost all cases, Moon's lover is his own sister, who stains him in order to reveal his identity (Lévi-Strauss 1970: 312; 1978: 389; 1981: 219). The 'clinging toad' motif in the myth just examined is a variation on the theme, suggesting, incidentally, what is otherwise not explicit in this myth: namely, the incestuous nature of the relationship between toad and Moon.

In other Amerindian myths featuring such a character, the toad-wife is depicted not only as clinging tenaciously to her partner but as preventing him from eating and as excreting all over him (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 28, 54). She is also presented not as a producer of babies but as a childstealer (Lévi-Strauss 1978:

61-3, 71). Assuming the toad-woman to be symbolic of womankind in her withdrawn or polluted state, all this conforms nicely with sex-strike theory:

female pollution (which can be symbolized by urine or faeces) prevents the consumption of food. Given taboos on cooking at such a time, it is not difficult to see why a menstruating woman should be conceptualized as someone whose 'incontinence' has the effect of 'starving' those around her. Moreover — turning now to 'child-stealing' — strike action would inevitably involve withdrawing babies and children from circulation along with their mothers.

Remaining with the 'clinging toad' motif, Lévi-Strauss presents a clue to the meaning of this when he notes that 'the reader must already have been struck by the "lunar" aspect of myths featuring a clinging-woman or a frog-woman' (1978: 77). The 'lunar aspect' refers to the fact that the key myths in *The origin of table manners* all concern a woman who is (a) frog-like (or toad-like) and (b)

associated with the stained appearance and/or periodic darkening of the moon (1978: 225, 242). Moreover, the myths all concern a hero who — to quote Lévi-Strauss commenting on one example (1978: 178) — ‘finds himself between two kinds of women, and two forms of marriage’.

What are these ‘two kinds of women’ and ‘two kinds of marriage’? A Hare Indian myth begins: ‘The demiurge ... had two wives, one close, his own sister who was as sensible as he was; and the other very remote’ (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 147). A Taulipag myth is a variation on the same theme:

Kapei, the moon has two wives, both called Kaiunog, one in the east, the other in the West. He lives alternately with each. One feeds him well and he grows fat; the other does not look after him and he becomes thin. He moves backwards and forwards between the two, putting on weight with the first wife, then returning to the second and so on. The women are full of jealous hatred of each other, and so live far apart (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 46).

The waxing and waning of the moon, then, correspond to two different kinds of relationship with women. In the above myth, one kind of ‘marriage’ involves feasting and fattening, the other, fasting and growing thin. The fact that the wives are mutually incompatible yet bear the same name hints that they may connote alternative aspects of one and the same being — just as waxing and waning are alternative modes of being of the moon.

Lévi-Strauss however, derives less from the ‘two wives’ (1978: 178) or ‘two moons’ (1981: 599-602) motif than might have been expected. ‘What do the myths proclaim?’, he asks — and answers:

That it is wicked and dangerous to confuse the physical diffl between women with the specific differences separating animals from humans, or animals from each other (1978: 76).

Social life, he continues, ‘demands, on the contrary that as human beings, women, whether beautiful or ugly, all deserve to obtain husbands’ (1978: 76). The myths, he hastens to add, stress such egalitarian morality even though in doing so they

cannot but reveal a mysterious fact that society tries to ignore: all human females are not equal, for nothing can prevent them being different from each other in their animal essence, which means that they are not all equally desirable to prospective husbands (1978: 76).

So although it is only three paragraphs later that he notes the strikingly ‘lunar’ aspect of myths featuring a clinging woman or a frog-woman (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 77), a moral is attributed to these mythical contrasts which has no bearing on the moon. The ‘toad-wife’ — according to this reading — is simply womankind when considered ugly.

In pursuing this and other lines of interpretation, Lévi-Strauss fails to pursue the numerous clues which indicate that the ‘toad’ and ‘human’ females are counterposed as secluded to available or as wet to dry — this contrast articulating with the alternating presence and absence of alimentary and sexual taboos. Neither, when considering the markedly contrasting ‘wives’ of the Sun and Moon in the Arapaho myth just examined, does he suspect that the choice might be between womankind as withdrawn and as available. He does not suspect that ‘Liquid-woman’ might mean *menstruating woman*, although his comments at times come tantalizingly close (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 225). And he misses the inference that the term ‘resurrected woman’ refers to womankind

when maritally available — when emerged from the temporary death (death *as a wife*) which is a metaphor for her menstrual seclusion.

Instead, here as elsewhere, Lévi-Strauss follows a more complex line of reasoning:

The term *thawwathinintarihisi*, ‘resuscitated woman’, which refers to the human woman, presents a problem: it could allude to the belief in an era when humans, having become immortal, will be periodically rejuvenated every spring ... or to the belief that certain humans are reincarnated ancestors (1978: 221).

Lévi-Strauss presents very little evidence in favour of these possible allusions. Each of them implies a belief in rebirth which could be conceptualized, perhaps, as ‘like’ that of the moon or of a woman emerging from seclusion. Neither, therefore, would necessarily be inconsistent with the interpretations suggested here. Yet the myth itself in no way supports these particular formulations: there is no indication that the ‘human’ woman is supposed to represent an immortal being or reincarnated ancestor. There is no suggestion that she is anything other than simply ‘human’ -- a woman, as opposed to a toad. In any event, neither of Lévi-Strauss’s interpretations of the term ‘resurrected woman’ would seem relevant to the general thrust of the myth, whose moral evidently has something to do with the timing of birth and menstruation. In what follows, it will be shown that Lévi-Strauss’s comments fail to bring out the essential nature of this myth — namely, its simplicity and elegant consistency in setting out the solution to a genuine social problem.

Two marriages, two worlds

We may now decode the whole story. Each wife — liquid and human, toad-like and resurrected — represents not a particular individual character but womankind in general. There are two wives because there are two aspects of womanhood — one ‘available’, the other ‘not available’ — one ‘like a wife’, the other ‘like a sister’. That each is only one half of a composite image is clear since neither forms a whole: one gives birth but does not menstruate or show any signs of pregnancy; the other menstruates and looks pregnant but never gives birth. One presents only the ‘positive’ aspects of her sex (beauty, availability, fecundity), the other only the ‘negative’ ones (pollution, non-availability, sterility).

Like all magical myths and fairy tales, then, this story presents stark contrasts. It is about two worlds, two kinds of male-female relationship, two categories of men and two of women. The myth depicts womankind from a male point of view, coding menstruation as negative. Because menstruation signals seclusion or ‘sex-strike’, because success in refusing marital sex entails a woman’s coalitional reunion with her kin, and because signalling ‘no sex’ entails reversing the normal body-signals central to courtship (Knight 1991; Knight *et al.* 1995), it is fully expected that a menstruant’s blood (‘wetness’) will identify her as ‘sister’ rather than ‘wife’, and as ‘animal’ rather than ‘human’. The onset of menstruation involves an exchange of one role (‘skin’, ‘mask’, ‘disguise’) for another: light for dark. It may also be conceptualized as a temporary ‘death’. In menstruating, therefore, a woman may be depicted as metamorphosing into an animal, as temporarily ‘dying’, and as water-loving. The wife who is described in

the myth as Water-woman', 'Liquid-woman' and 'Toad' confirms these predictions: the toad-wife, quite simply, is womankind in her menstrual phase.

Not unnaturally, she is an extremely reluctant wife. She is not explicitly depicted as 'on strike'. But the picture is clear enough: she lingers by the river, is slow to arrive, is 'shy', refuses marital chores, fails to look attractive, secludes herself indoors, is 'incontinent', dribbles black saliva and stains Moon's white face. Each one of these characteristics may safely be read as a metaphor for menstruation and menstrual seclusion.

The other wife is womankind in a different skin — in the phase following her emergence from seclusion, when she is 'resurrected' from 'temporary death' and resumes a sexually attractive wifely appearance. Instead of secluding herself she digs outdoors; instead of withdrawing from housework, she eagerly works and learns. The 'good wife' and the 'bad wife' are polar opposites as different as light from dark, day from night or sun from moon. As Lévi-Strauss himself puts it (1978: 221), '[e]verything predestines the one for her vocation as wife and mother; everything precludes the other from such a vocation'.

Just as there are two kinds of female partner, there are two kinds of male. There is the male to whom a woman relates in her menstrual phase, and there is her partner in marriage. The myth depicts these two opposite phases or aspects of mankind as the characters Sun and Moon. Assuming the Sun to be 'dry' in comparison with the Moon, the first would be expected to relate to a woman in her 'dry' phase or state, while the second should relate to her in the 'wet'. The reasoning behind this (cf. Knight 1991; Knight *et al.* 1995) is that while an available ('dry') woman should be with her ordinary husband (Sun), her periodic bloody resistance to marital sex -and seclusion from the marital sphere imply a switch to the opposite kind of relationship, each menstruant ('toad', 'wet') reuniting temporarily with her 'Moon-husband' or brother (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1978: 404). If this logic is accepted, then the correspondences are as follows:

<i>Moon</i>	<i>Sun</i>
Dark	Light
Water-woman	(Fire-woman? Sun-woman?)
('Temporarily dead' woman?)	Resurrected woman
Frog woman	Human woman
Lazy woman	Hard-working woman
(Menstruating woman)	(= Maritally available woman)
(Woman clinging to kin)	(=Woman united with husband)

The menstruant should, then, attach herself to Moon — as indeed happens when the toad-wife clings to Moon's breast, staining him. In fact, however, the Arapaho seem to be somewhat confused about these matters. They say that the world's first menstrual flow was indeed caused through intercourse with the Moon (Dorsey 1903: 176-7). Yet, when this point is made, it is specified that it was the human wife whose moon-intercourse caused the flow. The Arapaho say, then, on the one hand that it was the frog (producer of the Moon's menstrual stains), but on the other that it was the human wife, who produced the world's first menstrual flow.

In the myth we have examined, we have just noted that the Moon ‘should’ have chosen the frog-wife, leaving the human woman to Sun. In fact, however, the frog-wife marries Sun not Moon, although she eventually clings to Moon. Correspondingly, Sun at first rejects human wives for squinting, although later he changes his mind. Ambivalence, uncertainty and the switching of partners seem, then, to characterize the sexual choices made.

The theme of uncertainty in fact strikes the reader from the outset. Sun and Moon are debating which kind of wife each should choose. What are we to make of their deliberations? The need to debate suggests a problem. Clearly, the answer is not — or is no longer — self-evident. In terms of the ‘initial situation’ of human culture specified in my theory of human origins (Knight 1991; Knight *et al*, 1995), Sun and Moon after their debate choose the wrong way round. A union of incompatibles is arranged — a union of fire and water, Sun and Water-woman, husband and menstruant. Meanwhile, a woman who is not menstruating is chosen by Moon — as if an available wife could be chosen in marriage by her own brother. Since the most fundamental laws of incest (codified menstrually — see Knight 1991) are here being violated, this cannot be right or natural. Evidently, then, a momentous and dangerous exchange has taken place, Sun taking Moon’s normal wife and Moon taking Sun’s.

The inference is confirmed by another Arapaho telling of the myth. Here, it is revealed that Moon has tricked Sun into giving him the ‘human’ wife, foisting the toad-wife onto his unfortunate brother. The original pattern has indeed been reversed:

The sun and the moon were two Stars. One day they had a discussion about the respective merits of human women and water animals. Moon praised the latter and Sun the former, because, he said, their bodies resemble ours. Moon first of all pretended to agree, and since his brother showed some misgivings he persuaded him to change his choice. Had he not said that human women were ugly, because their faces wrinkle when they look at you? Let him therefore take a water-wife; Moon would make do with a human wife (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 208).

So Moon only obtained the human wife by trickery. Otherwise, his wife would have been the frog. This indicates that the frog, in finally adhering to Moon’s chest, is asserting poetic justice: she should have been Moon’s partner all along. Sisters (women as menstruants or ‘blood’-relatives) should stay with their brothers — and for good.

The establishment of non-periodic marriage

Let me now summarize my argument. The entire myth makes sense in the light of the ‘sex-strike’ theory of cultural origins (Knight 1991). The narrative assumes an ‘initial situation’ in which a woman is with the opposite sex as sister while she is menstruating or giving birth, and with the opposite sex as wife during her maritally available phase. Such a pattern of to-and-fro moon-linked alternation between kin and non-kin is, however, in the process of being abandoned in favour of a new system in which people permanently occupy one role, one space, which is that of (patrilocal) marriage. The two brothers, Sun and Moon, decide to settle down at last — so that they will ‘be more often at home’ (1978: 215). Lévi-Strauss comments:

Among the arguments put forward by the brothers in favour of marriage, the most important is the one relating to a regular, sedentary life. Once they 'settle down', as the saying goes, the sun and moon are often together, instead of going their separate ways, and they help their parents. In relationship to each other, the brothers were then, at first, distant; marriage brings them close (1978: 219).

We need not discuss here the myth's implied linkage of this change with horticultural tasks, whose performance seems to be emphatically required by the father-in-law. What is important is that a woman now gets married and henceforth has to stay with her husband and in-laws. As the myth puts it, she climbs up to another world, and then finds that the hole in the sky is blocked by a potato plant (Dorsey 1903: 222), preventing her from returning home. Her wifely aspect shows willingness to stay, but what of her menstrual self? The new arrangement is that a woman should remain with her affines *even while menstruating or giving birth*, Pollution or no pollution, blood or no blood, she is no longer allowed to go home. She has to be induced to stay, despite her own strong inclination to withdraw, and despite her 'unattractiveness' in this phase. The myth pictures this beautifully. The toad-wife shows reluctance to leave her natal home, and is clearly mentally 'withdrawn' even while physically present among her parents-in-law. Yet she has to be accepted and induced to stay. As the myth puts it, despite her unappealing features as compared with the human wife, 'she was given just as warm a welcome as the other one' (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 216).

The new form of marriage is patrilocal: the wife has to leave home and live among her husband's folk. In the myth, both wives are, in effect, imprisoned in the sky. But just as it is womankind in both her aspects who is now retained in marriage, so a woman's marriage now binds her simultaneously to both capacities of her husband. A husband, now, is not merely a lover who has to leave during menstruation or the pollution of childbirth. He is not merely a 'visitor' who returns regularly to his own kin. He is now, as the myth puts it, 'more often at home'; he is 'settled down'; and in this new situation, he performs the functions of both sexual partner and kin. Correspondingly, a woman's marriage now compels her — pollution or no pollution — to give birth among her husband's people, so that her child will be theirs.

Indeed, from this standpoint, her husband has become a kind of 'brother' as well as a husband. A non-menstruating woman is now married to the Moon. The myth points this out: Moon and Sun, instead of occupying different worlds, are now together, so that marriage to one is in effect marriage to the other. At the beginning of the story, the two brothers made their separate choices and went their separate ways ('the brothers were then, at first, *distant*' [Lévi-Strauss 1978: 219]); at the end of the tale, they are pictured as each occupying the same household space at the same time ('marriage brings them *close*' [Lévi-Strauss 1978: 219]). In other words, sun-marriage and moon-marriage were at first opposites, each woman alternating between one and the other; the new form of marriage combines elements of both in the same relationship, negating alternation. It is as if Sun and Moon, day and night, light and darkness, summer and winter were now combined, fixed simultaneously in the same space and time.

The all-purpose wife

The final part of the myth can now be explained. Womankind in her 'resurrected' phase was originally 'pure' wife. That is, she displayed all the capacities appropriate to the state of 'marriage', but none of those traditionally associated with 'blood'. The toad-wife is pure anti-wife. We are specifically told by Dorsey that 'the toad's appearance corresponds to that of a pregnant woman', while the spots on the moon are menstrual stains (1903: 177, 220). We may assume, then, that all the signs which the human wife omitted to display before giving birth were omitted *because* these were the prerogative of the toad-wife. Everything to do with menstruation and pregnancy belonged, in the mythic initial situation, not to woman in her marital aspect but to woman as mother and sister. That is why the human wife neither menstruated nor showed signs of pregnancy, giving birth 'suddenly' and 'without warning'. Before the introduction of patrilocality, patriliney and permanent marital union, a woman's blood, babies and fertility would have been of concern only to her kin. Her babies would have belonged to her kin-group, as in any matrilineal system. They would have been of no legitimate concern to visiting husbands, no matter how long accepted; husbands, indeed, would have had to avoid the polluting blood.

The myth depicts this cleverly: the toad wife is, in a sense, pure menstruation, pure pregnancy, just as the human wife is pure marital attractiveness without menstruation or pregnancy. The new form of marriage, however, demands (a) that blood-pollution should be tolerated (the frog-wife has to be given 'just as warm a welcome as the other one') and (b) that a wife should give birth for her husband and his kin. How can a woman who never menstruates and is never pregnant produce a child? To the European mind, such a question might seem absurd. But given an indigenous logic according to which the very term 'wife' by definition means womankind while she is *not* menstruating, *not* pregnant, such a problem might seem pressing.

The solution, here as elsewhere, is to combine opposite roles in the same person. The woman who is a wife must now simultaneously present herself as the person who gets pregnant and bleeds. The human woman must incorporate the capacities of the toad-wife inside herself. This explains why she has to be 'taught' to menstruate and to show signs of pregnancy. She has never done so before. She has always been attractive as a sexual partner; now she must also perform reproductive functions for her in-laws — the functions of a kinswoman. She must become, in short, the all-purpose wife. Small wonder the toad-woman erupts into fury the moment her rival's baby is born! Her prerogatives are being stolen from her. The toad-wife is womankind in her menstrual, maternal and sisterly aspect, angry at being betrayed. She is every man's sister, bitter at being denied a role, furious that even the glorified function of child birth is now being credited to her brother's wife. All she can do is insist that, despite everything, the bonds of blood are indestructible. Moon has attempted to abandon her. She leaps, clings to him and bloodily stains him for eternity.

The noisy meal

Finally, why do the parents of Sun and Moon force the two wives to compete in noisy eating? Lévi-Strauss's (1978: 323) suggested explanation is that the

wives are expected to prove themselves good cannibals — eaters of human flesh as voracious as their in-laws.

Unfortunately for this interpretation, the old parents of Sun and Moon are nowhere stated to be cannibals at all; they are depicted as eminently moral personages. Lévi-Strauss derives the cannibalism motif from completely different, Mandan and other, myths. Secondly, even supposing the old parents had been cannibals, we would still want to know why this kind of eating should have to be so noisy.

The mystery clears when we remember the other characteristics being demanded of the human wife, and the manner in which the toad-wife is robbed of her former prerogatives. Let us suppose that this myth is being consistent, and that the chewing-contest motif is just another means of depicting the transference of menstrual, kinship and reproductive value from womankind as 'toad' to woman as 'wife'. The stealing of noise-making powers from monsters is a recurrent theme in myths linked with male initiation rites. In many parts of the world, myths state that the original owners of sacred bullroarers, rattles or other noise-making instruments were women. Later — say the myths — these instruments were stolen by men for their own ritual use (Knight 1987; 1991).

Now, when the myths depict women as owners of noise-making powers, these women are not 'good wives'; they are not women in their maritally-available state. They are women in their menstrual, ritually-polluting phase. Translated into the symbolism of the Arapaho, they are women as 'toads'. In a sense, then, taking such myths as a set, 'toad-women' are being deprived of soundmaking powers. The story of *The wives of the sun and moon* is attempting to come to terms with the problems presented by a profound sexual and social change. In place of a system in which men alternated between sisters and wives, with the menstrual flow periodically rupturing marital relations and sending men (actually or metaphorically) back to their kin, people are now (to use Lévi-Strauss's phrase) 'settling down'. Marriage is being made into a permanent, settled state.

Accordingly, the ritual potency of women's monthly 'sex-strike' is being overridden. Given my origins model's 'time-resistant syntax', in which a condition of the potency of all ritual action is ultimately the potency of the menstrual flow, a consequence is that there is now a danger of ritual power becoming lost. Thanks to the manner in which culture as such came into being, mythology links menstrual periodicity not only with the moon but also more generally with the periodicity of cosmic rhythms. For this reason, the collapsing or telescoping of sex and kinship — sun-marriage and moon-marriage — into one relationship presents dangers on a cosmic scale. The danger is of the collapse of periodicity in the wider universe, with night and day, winter and summer, dark moon and full, all becoming confused. It is to avoid this that men step in to rescue the ritual potency of women's monthly sex-strike — but now in a form detached from menstruating women themselves.

Loud noises can be regarded as an auditory dimension of the symbolism of menstruation. These noises feature as the sound of women's menstrual 'sex-strike' (Knight 1987; 1991; Knight *et al.* 1995). But in the myth we are examining, marriage is established as a permanent bond. A woman is married to her partner and remains with him. The worrying question is whether this new

situation is compatible with the cosmically-required preservation of ritually-potent 'noise'. Can a woman who remains always a 'wife' provide men with the source-material from which to ensure the alternation of day and night and of the seasons? Originally, it would have been woman as 'toad' who 'dribbled black saliva' to the accompaniment of the necessary 'noises', and who thereby prompted the rotation of the celestial bodies. Now, however, the toad's functions are being usurped by the 'human wife'. The questions for society then become momentous. Can the necessary noise-making powers be safely transferred from womankind as unco-operative menstruant to womankind as dutiful wife? Can the toad be successfully marginalized without ritual loss of her noisemaking powers?

An experiment is carefully set up. Both kinds of 'wife' are invited to compete using the organs with which they are endowed. The outcome of the contest, not surprisingly, validates marriage in its new form. The experiment provides the reassuring message that the 'human wife' is fully competent. Not only can she produce babies and learn to menstruate. She can also produce, with the strong 'teeth' in her 'mouth', the necessary ritually-potent sounds.² The human wife's success means that not just *some* of the former prerogatives of the toad-wife can be usurped by the human wife — all of them can be taken from her. The toad is depicted as toothless; chew as she might, 'there were no musical notes from her mouth' (Dorsey 1903: 219); all that emerged was black dribble, which no doubt symbolizes menstruation as little more than incontinence and an ugly nuisance. The human wife wins even this contest decisively.

The sun dance

The *Wives of the sun and moon* was ritually re-enacted in the renowned Plains Indian 'Sun Dance', aimed at tempering the fire of the summer solstice sun (Dorsey 1903: 12-13; Huger 1952: 93, 149). Lévi-Strauss (1978: 222-3) shows how the dance, which involved painful male self-laceration and bloodshed, drew on the symbolism of the menstrual cycle to help regulate the wider rhythms of the cosmos.

Plains Indian traditions, he writes, presupposed harmony: harmony between the menstrual cycle, the moon and the various other rhythms bearing on human experience. Alternation between day and night, lunar waxing and waning, summer and winter — these and other alternations were all seen as interlocked. For this reason, menstruation had to be very carefully controlled by men. And this, Lévi-Strauss continues, throws light on the entire pan-American system of mythology analysed in *Mythologiques*. As he puts it, referring to the father-in-law's 'training' of the human wife in the myth just examined,

the veil lifts to reveal a vast mythological system common to both South and North America, and in which the subjection of women is the basis of the social order. We can now understand the reason for this. The human wife's parents-in-law are not content just to present her with domestic utensils and to teach her the correct way to use them. The old man also proceeds to carry out a veritable shaping of his daughter-in-law. In her pristine innocence, she did not have monthly periods and gave birth suddenly and without warning. The transition from nature to culture demands that the feminine organism should become periodic since the social as well as the cosmic order would be endangered by a state of anarchy in which regular alternation of day and night, the phases of the moon feminine menstruation,

the fixed period for pregnancy and the course of the seasons did not mutually support each other (1978: 221-2).

Lévi-Strauss takes it that the Arapaho myth is about 'the transition from nature to culture'. Culture requires woman to be rendered periodic through training and subjugation under male power. As he continues:

So it is as periodic creatures that women are in danger of disrupting the orderly working of the universe. Their social insubordination, often referred to in the myths, is an anticipation in the form of the 'reign of women' of the infinitely more serious danger of their physiological insubordination. Therefore, women have to be subjected to *règles*.³ And the rules instilled into them by their upbringing, like those imposed on them, even at the cost of their subjection, by a social order willed and evolved by men, are the pledge and symbol of other 'rules', the physiological nature of which bears witness to the correspondence between social and cosmic rhythms (1978: 222).

Lévi-Strauss, then, takes chaos as the initial situation, and suggests (or at least allows his Amerindian mythmakers to suggest) that subsequent cultural order emerged under male ritual power. My analysis, on the contrary, shows male ritual 'order' to embody no special creativity. At best, it represents only an imprint made from a pre-existent template. It becomes established only through the replacement of its female counterpart, its condition being the collapse of synchrony and harmony between women's menstrual rhythms and the cyclicity of the moon (Knight 1983; 1985; 1988; 1991). In place of periodic 'honeymoon' (Lévi-Strauss 1973: 157, 283), male ritual power establishes marriage as a non-periodic bond. Far from producing periodicity in womankind, it acts as the agency of its suppression as a creative cultural force. Yet tradition holds that without women's 'noisy' and 'rebellious' periodic rupturing of marital bonds, all order, harmony, balance and renewal in the universe will be in danger of becoming lost. The world, fixed in permanent marriage, might then become fixed, correspondingly, in only one phase: in permanent day or night, summer or winter. To avoid this disaster, male ritual therefore seeks to make amends, preserving the forms of menstrual synchrony and alternation even as the menstrual potency of real women is being devalued and denied.

NOTES

¹ I am grateful to Hilary Alton and Camilla Power for help in discussing the complexities of this myth.

² For copulation as 'eating' and for the motif of the vagina dentata see Lévi-Strauss 1966: 105-6. The motif of the all-devouring 'rolling head', intimately associated with menstrual 'cannibalism', is a variation on the vagina dentata theme (Lévi-Strauss 1978: 94-7; 1981: 140, 267-8).

³ Lévi-Strauss is here playing on the fact that in French, the expression *les règles* means equally 'menstrual periods' and 'rules'.

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Les femmes du soleil et de la lune

Résumé

Dans une grande partie de la mythologie des Indiens d'Amérique, le mariage est conçu comme une lune de miel mensuelle interrompue à chaque déclin de la lune par la menstruation. L'alternance mensuelle pour la femme entre les relations sexuelles matrimoniales et la séclusion menstruelle est codifiée comme une alternance entre ses partenaires rivaux, Soleil et Lune. C'est la toile de fond sur laquelle un mythe des Indiens des Plaines essaie de résoudre le problème suivant. Avec l'introduction du mode de résidence patrilocal, une femme doit rester avec son mari et les parents de celui-ci même au cours de ses règles. C'est comme si ses deux partenaires rivaux, au lieu de vivre séparément, avaient décidé d'occuper le même espace ensemble, limitant ses mouvements et l'empêchant de s'échapper. Une telle permanence matrimoniale, outrepassant la périodicité menstruelle, est ressentie comme une violation dangereuse des normes rituelles. Le mythe explore les difficultés et contradictions qui en résultent et trouve une façon de valider le nouvel arrangement. Cette histoire, comme beaucoup de celles qu'analyse Lévi-Strauss, défie une analyse en termes de sa théorie de l'origine de la culture fondée sur 'l'échange des femmes'. En termes de la théorie de la grève du sexe menstruelle, par contre, cette histoire est parfaitement intelligible et elle projette des nouvelles clartés sur les origines de l'oppression des femmes.

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