CHAPTER TWO

THE SUBJECTS AS CONTAINERS

J. Laplanche and J.-P. Pontalis (1967: 187) give the following definition of the identification process: “It is a psychological process through which a subject\(^1\) assimilates an aspect, a property, an attribute of another subject, and transforms itself totally or partially on the basis of the model provided by the former. Personality constitutes and differentiates itself by a series of identifications.” As we shall see, people can also identify with objects.

A pot-king is a monarch that identifies with a container and behaves as such. If this is the case, it puts a premium on similar identifications by his subjects. They must embody the corresponding sensori-motor conducts. Otherwise, there would be a mismatch between them and the king, and possibly conflicts of identifications. The bodily conducts of the pot-king would not be in gear with the body politic. His saliva, so to speak, would go wasted. Similarly, if the subjects did not share the repertoires allowing them to tune into each other through what Foucault called a “device” (dispositif) made of material contraptions, sensori-motor conducts and systems of actions and reactions, including relations of production, then, this kind of mismatch would generate a cacophony of identifications and subjectivities.

Consequently, if a monarch is a pot-king, one can hypothesise that, insofar as his subjects act together with him, they are preferably constructed as envelopes or containers, and that the Mankon kingdom presents them with an array of practices to identify with and maintain their identifications. Foucault (1989: 134) called these “techniques of the self”, that is, “procedures that are probably common in every civilisation and are proposed or prescribed to individuals, in order to fix their identity, maintain or transform it, according to a number of goals, and this, by means of control of oneself by oneself or of knowledge of oneself by oneself”. One cannot hypothesise that such “techniques of the self” are fully consistent for a given subject or a given society. We

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\(^1\) The term “subject” is used with the caveat mentioned in chapter 1.
shall see that there are conflicts of subjectivity. However, we will start with the areas of consistency that are defined thanks to the descent groups, insofar as they give birth to the subjects, nurture them and provide them with “techniques of the self” according to which they can act upon themselves.

Mankon consists of 32 patrilineages belonging to 9 exogamous clans. Each clan or lineage is a corporate group headed by a “father of the descent group” who manages the corporate estate of the group and his rights on persons and things. Descent rules are patrilineal within the clan and the lineage. However, the Mankon have matrigroups placing each subject at the meeting point between matrilines and patrilines that transmit elements of inheritance from various sides. Each subject, for example, has a privileged relationship with his MoFa (tama, i.e. “father [of the] mother”), that is, on the mother’s side, because the tama is the man who provided his daughter as a wife to the patrilineage in which the subject was born, and as a mother to the subject. More details on Mankon kinship were mentioned in three past publications (Warnier, 1975, 1983, 1985a). The few details mentioned here suffice to analyse as a case study the identification of people as surfaces and containers in their kindred.

_A case of bridewealth settlement at Foba’s^2_

At the end of September 1973, a young man named Tsi Samuel died. The burial and the funeral ceremony took place in the compound of his father, Solomon. The latter was about 50 years old. He had eight wives. Tsi was young. His death caused deep emotion and bereavement.

His father consulted with the diviners (ngwon nikwab = “person [of] divination”) within a few days of Tsi’s death. The conclusions Solomon and his agnates drew from what the diviner said were twofold: Solomon had indeed paid bride-wealth for Maangye Bi, the mother of the deceased, but that he began living with her before having completed the payments. He was instructed by the diviner to repeat the last payments and to have the MoFa and the MoMoFa of the dead young man (that is, his tama, and the tama of his mother), anoint Maangye

^2 In this case-study, all the names have been replaced by pseudonyms, as some of the persons referred to are alive.