

“África, the thread”: About the ancestral presence in the unconscious

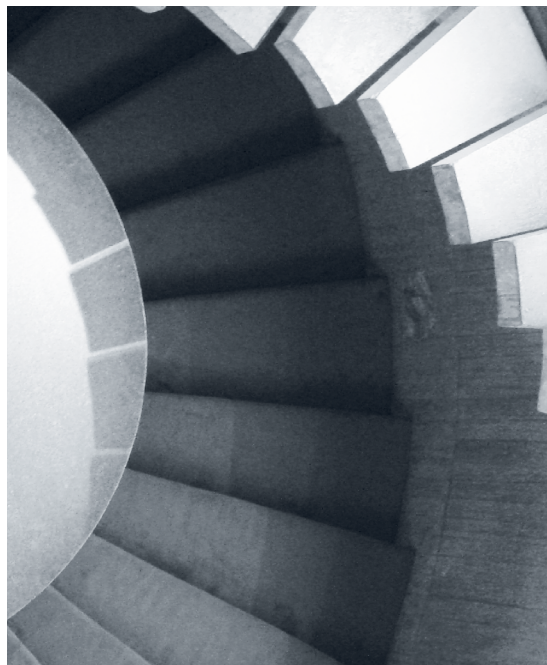
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Abstract

Questioning the oppositional thinking that ended up exaggerating the differences between Africa and “West”, we intend to 1) approach the sense of ancestry in traditional Africa, especially through the work of the Ghanaian philosopher Kwase Wiredu, 2) present the notion of “ancestral complex [or image]” in Jung, in order to reflect on the “ancestral presence” in the Jungian unconscious and on its role in psychic dynamics. Our objective is to test a “transcultural communication” between traditional African thinking and Jungian thinking, based on the assumption that there is something common between them. We conclude that a clinic founded on the principle of ancestry does not deny the roots of Jungian thought, on the contrary, it deepens an aspect of Jung’s work that at his time suffered much criticism, given the

colonialist look of the European world towards the Africas and the difficulties of the psychology in treating the so-called “religious and anomalous phenomena” as “psychic facts”. ■

Keywords
Ancestry,
analytical
psychology,
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Africa, Jung



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“África, the thread”: About the ancestral presence in the unconscious

Initial words - Advancing with the ancestors

One foot forward, one foot back
There they happily go
The new one with the ancestors
The back foot, the ancestor, does not go alone,
indicates, guides, feeds the new path
puts the foot forward, the present, in us
Ancestor: spyglass, beacon of all imagination
Ancestor: support, support pillar
The new-ancestor wise path
walks with a firm and soft step
Old-new different look
Good food for us
Good food inside us.
Advancing with the ancestors (TAVARES, 2012, p. 132).

As Roger Brooke noted in a lecture organized by Thiasos¹ in 2022, Jung left us an undeniable legacy of his rapprochement with Africa, but he also left his shadow and the shadow of his time. In order to “advance with our ancestors”,² we will need to recognize this and update the dialogue with Africa on a new basis. When looking at Africa, Brooke says, Jung saw it as a kind of humanity’s throwback in time. On his trip to the African continent, he yearned to be able to find a part of himself (and the European) that he considered to have been lost in the civilizing process. An expectation that responds in

part to the dating of his work and the degree of anthropological reflection dominant at the time. But the visit to Africa as well as to Mexico would never leave Jung alone, in such a way that his theory would be profoundly marked by this experience.

Thus, in *Seminars on children’s dreams: on the method of dream interpretation: psychological interpretation of children’s dreams* (JUNG, 2011), the initiator of analytical psychology denounces, somewhat uncomfortable with the adjective, that they were accusing him of being “primitive” and to practice “demonology”, precisely because of this approach to “traditional” thought, which it should be said is not exclusive to Africa (WIREDU, 1984). Jung’s audacity was to state that there were convergences in the psychic material of “[so-called] primitive men” and “[so-called] cultural men” (JUNG, 2011), an assumption that would later result in the thesis of the existence of a “collective unconscious”. His audacity was therefore to conclude, after years of comparative study of symbolic material from dreams, what should not have been necessary to prove, had it not been for the dominant Eurocentrism, the humanity of Africa!

As Eboussi-Boulaga underlines in an interview with Achille Mbembe and Célestin Monga (2009 apud KOM, 2009), the man of the African condition needed and still needs to assert himself today, overcoming everything that challenges and contests his humanity and puts it in danger. It’s up to you to assess your situation facing whatever and whoever it takes to find not only a place for himself, but his place in an ordinary world. To do so, it is undoubtedly necessary, as Mbembe (2014) observes, to take a careful look at the world of affections and the imaginary, given that over the centuries, we have maintained a fundamentally imaginary relationship

¹ We refer to Thiasos number 95, entitled “Jung’s fantasies about Africa and the cure of analytical psychology in Africa”, in the opening of which Marcus Quintaes explains how Thiasos was born and, therefore, what it means. It can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/@thiasos6881/videos>.

² The expression refers to the poem that opens the article “Advancing with the ancestors”, and to Jung, our ancestor in terms of Analytical Psychology.

with Africa, shaped by narratives of “facts” that were often invented.

This article seeks to resume the dialogue between Analytical Psychology and Africa on a new basis. We intend to establish a “transcultural communication” (SODRÉ, 2017, p. 194) between traditional African thought and Jungian thought, seeking not to fall into a very common trap in attempts to bring Afro and Amerindian thoughts closer together in psychology, which is the reduction of these thoughts to categories of Western thought. This implies an important epistemic shift, because what is at issue, as Sodr  (2017) underlines, is not the anthropological revelation of a coherent symbolic system, but the recognition of another way of *thinking* with which communication is possible, which the author (SODR , 2017) called transcultural.

Taking “Africa as a thread”³, and supported by the research and reflections of Afro-Brazilian intellectuals such as Muniz Sodr  (2017) and Eduardo Oliveira (2021), and African intellectuals such as Eboussi-Boulaga (1977), Mbembe (2014) and, particularly, by the Ghanaian philosopher of Akan origin Kwase Wiredu (1984; 2010), we first seek to approach one of the most central principles of traditional African thought: ancestry; then we aim at presenting the notion of “ancestor complex [or image]” in Carl Gustav Jung, identifying its approximations with traditional African thought, as well as highlighting the place that ancestors occupy in the Jungian unconscious and how they act in psychic life.

We will avoid oppositions between Africa and the West, as well as comparisons between a supposedly traditional Africa and a modern, civilized West, a type of relationship that ob-

scures the fact that all civilizations have some kind of traditional thinking as a background, including western civilization, as well as the fact that there are many Africas in the African continent, among them, traditional Africas, which nowadays coexist with modern Africas (EBOUS-SI-BOULAGA, 1977; WIREDU, 1984). We consider, with Eboussi-Boulaga (1977), that the having-in-common of tradition was a result of the historical fact of colonial violence, otherwise there would be no “African tradition”, because there was no “African”.

We emphasize that our objective is not to compare traditional African thought with Jungian thought, considering the pernicious effects of such a practice, described very well by Wiredu (1984). According to the author, this type of comparison, instead of taking the basic non-scientific characteristics of traditional African thought as a type of traditional thought in general – characteristics that are present in all traditional thought inside and outside Africa – concludes that these define a peculiar form of African thought (WIREDU, 1984). This type of approach ends up exaggerating the differences in nature between the way of thinking of African and Western peoples and creating an image of intellectual inferiority of African peoples, seen as people who tend to give explanations of natural phenomena from the activity of gods and ancestral spirits, that is, non-scientific explanations.

“The new with the ancestrals”

It is impossible to talk about Africa without referring to the ancestral question. Ancestry is a founding principle in traditional African thought. In contemporary Brazil, it ceases to refer to a simple blood kinship relationship, as it happened between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, to be raised by Afro-Brazilian intellectuals and activists to the analytical and metaphysical category capable of mythically recovering the meaning of africanity. Ancestry is the source from which the principles of the African tradition recreated in

³ We make reference to the title of the article: “ frica, o fio”, an expression of the poem “Aporte”, by Juraci Tavares, professor, poet, singer and black activist - author of the poem that opens and guides the entire writing of this article. We thank Juraci, and teachers Eduardo Oliveira, Rita Dias, and Cl udio Orlando for the affectionate readings! This article is the first result of an ongoing post-doctorate with the same title, in which I have the pleasure of having Professor Muniz Sodr  as my supervisor, and four years of training at the Institute of Analytical Psychology in Bahia.

Brazil by terreiro communities emerge, but it is not currently limited to the religious sphere and the borders of *candomblé*: it is a contemporary symbol of black resistance (OLIVEIRA, 2021).

But what does it mean to talk about ancestry from the traditional African perspective? An important question if we do not want to risk emptying the meaning and power of this founding principle of Afro thought in Brazil, as well as the broader sense of “ancestral images” in the Jungian unconscious. We will turn mainly to a Ghanaian African philosopher of Akan origin who introduces us in depth to the African sense of ancestry in his writings: Kwase Wiredu. With Wiredu (2010), we anticipate that talking about ancestry is more than talking about life after death, it makes us think of the very meaning and continuity of life. It is to speak, as in the poem that not only opens but also founds and guides this article, of the “new with the ancestors”, of the continuity of the latter, in the life trajectory of the former.

Wiredu (2010)⁴ begins by questioning the very idea of life after death. According to him, from the point of view of traditional African thought, it is not possible to say that the world of the dead is another world, it would be more correct to say that it is a part of this world. There is a cultural unity between the world of the living and the world of the dead, almost as if one were an extension of the other.

In his words, “[...] this life can be seen as a preparation for an afterlife, whose meaning, however, consists in securing the welfare of the living” (WIREDU, 2010, p. 141). There is an ongoing and constant relationship between the world of the living and the world of the dead, or as Wiredu (2010, p. 138) observes, “[...] perhaps we should say [the world of] the dead-but-living”.

The author explains that the descriptions of life after death in general include explicit indications that the transition from this life to the next is made by terrestrial travel, that is, from one re-

gion of the territory to another. The boundaries between one world and another are often marked by rivers and the high point of the post-mortem journey is the crossing of a river. It is, therefore, after crossing a certain river in the “vessel of the dead” (PARÉS, 2016, p. 70), that the person enters the land of the departed, thus joining the society of the ancestors.

In West Africa, the purpose of taking the last journey is to become an ancestor. But what does it mean to become an ancestor? Despite this last journey being an important milestone in the process, its deeper meaning is less related to the passage to the world of the dead and more to the responsibility that is assumed from then on: to take care of the affairs of the living members of their families, helping the deserving and punishing those who offend. The condition for becoming an ancestor in West Africa is not the fact of dying, but the fact of having lived a full and meaningful life and having left descendants who, honoring them, will continue their existence.

“A *nuer* or *dinka* elder, for example, though he takes the existence of life after death for granted, does not set much store by it” (WIREDU, 2010, p. 144, emphasis added). Wiredu (2010), citing the work of Evans-Pritchard (1956), notes that in Nuer society, “Every man has at least one son and through this son his name is forever a link in a line of descent. This is the only form of immortality in which the Nuer are interested” (WIREDU, 2010, p. 144).

Although it is not possible to universalize this thought to all African peoples, another curious aspect of this discussion is that, in the view of some peoples, such as the Akans of Ghana, a person whose life was interrupted by an accident or an “impure” disease or any other unpleasant circumstance, does not gain immediate access to the country or world of the ancestors, becomes a neighborhood *ghost*, a source of apparitions, haunting the living until it can be born again to build a full life, thus becoming an ancestor. Note that for these people there is a distinction between being a ghost and

⁴ Free translation by the author.

being an ancestor. Hence, while recognizing the value of the “ghost” image in Jungian work and in works such as Samuel Kimbles (2014) and James Hollis (2017), and its important consequences for understanding the invisible influence of ancestors in the psychic domain, we believe that something is lost in the sense of ancestry in this image, which is why we prefer the image of the ancestor.

According to Wiredu, among the Akans of Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire, the Yoruba (also known as Nagô in Brazil) of Nigeria and Benin or the Mende of Sierra Leone, “[...] ancestors are highly prized and respected, and the notion of one day becoming an ancestor is, indeed, music to their ears.” But the author underlines, “Yet, becoming an ancestor, as already pointed out, only enables one to help the living to realize human purposes” (WIREDU, 2010, p. 144). A meaningful life is one in which the person is committed to promoting personal, family and community well-being, such a life is meaningful, even if there is no belief in life after death. This is because in the Cosmo perception of these peoples, “human destiny begins and ends in this world” (WIREDU, 2010, p. 145).

It is noted, therefore, that the concept of immortality for these peoples is pragmatic. It is immortality in the service of the community or humanity. The African land of the dead is not paradise, and the life of the ancestors is not a happy life, but a life of dignity and serenity. “The one preoccupation of that existence is”, according to Wiredu (2010, p. 145-146), “with the good of the living wing of the Family and clan. It upon their ability to achieve this aim that importance of the ancestors is predicated”.

If, on the one hand, the ancestors are there to take good care of the living, on the other hand, the living feel not only indebted to the ancestors for their help and protection, but also obligated to honor them. There are two interconnected ways of honoring ancestors. The first is simply to live righteously. Living honestly is a way of honoring the family, and as the ancestors are part

of the family, honoring the former consequently means honoring the latter. Misconduct, on the other hand, brings disgrace to the living family and displeasure to the ancestors.

The ancestors, in their post-mortem condition, have a high moral status and therefore are not liable to be affected by misfortunes, but due to their higher morality, they feel more scandalized by the evil deeds of the living than the elders of the family. Wrong conduct can take three basic forms: disregarding the moral law, disregarding civil regulations or community customs and taboos, and failing to take good care of family matters.

The second form of honoring ancestors is of a less general order, and therefore more particular: a deceased family member may have left an incomplete project to his successor, together with adequate resources for its completion, completing it would mean honoring the ancestors; a deceased member left some debts to be paid, this could be an opportunity to defend his/her honor; that member may have left dependents to be cared for, or specific instructions may have been given before the death for certain things to be done. Since these issues relate to well-defined obligations, non-compliance can lead to punishment of the ancestor, which in general takes the form of unexplained illnesses, as Jung (2013a) would also have observed in his trip to the African continent.

The ancestral complexes (or images) in the Jungian unconsciousness

Talking about ancestry is not something foreign to analytical thinking. On the contrary. Jung’s own proposition of a personal, or subjective unconscious, and a collective, transpersonal, or objective unconscious, owes something to this founding principle of traditional African thought. Ancestry is the very basis from which the idea of the collective unconscious is built, in such a way that we could say that the Jungian unconscious is ancestral, or, in other words, there are ancestral images in the unconscious!

In Jung's words, "the collective unconscious comprises the entire psychic life of the ancestors from their beginnings" (JUNG, 2013a, p. 58), but the presence of ancestral images in the unconscious is not limited to their collective portion, it is also alive in the personal unconscious.

For Jung (2014a), there is a more superficial layer of the unconscious entity that is formed by contents of a personal nature, which he called – the personal unconscious. This one, however, rests on a deeper layer, which unlike this superficial one, does not have its origin in repressed personal experiences, forgotten or not assimilated by the conscious – rather, it is innate. This deepest and first layer was named by Jung the collective unconscious. The name "collective" points to the fact that its content is not of an individual nature, but "[...] of many individuals at the same time, that is, of a society, of a people, or of humanity" (JUNG, 2013b, p. 435). For Jung, human beings "[...] have, like all animals, a 'preformed psyche' according to their species, which also reveals clear traces of family background [...]" (JUNG, 2014a, p. 85).

The collective dimension of the unconscious in Jung is constituted by a kind of *common substratum* of a suprapersonal psychic nature – the archetypes – inheritance of a whole chain of ancestral experiences, which exists in everyone. This substrate common to all and prior to the personal unconscious and the I-conscious functions as a willingness to create images (JUNG, 2013c), which, because they express themselves in a typical way – "the mother", "the child", "the spirit", "the wise old man", etc., are named after archetypal images.

In other words, "the archetype is a tendency to create very variable representations [images] [depending on the historical time, the cultural context and the history of each individual], but without losing its primitive model [...]" (JUNG, 2013c, p. 247). But as Kast (2019) reminds us, archetypes are not just emotional and imagery impressions of experiences repeated by humanity, they empirically behave

as forces, tendencies to repetition, to a performance of a certain type, they (co)move us through image-forms(action).

"The collective unconscious is the presupposition and matrix of all psychic facts and therefore also exerts an influence that highly jeopardize the freedom of conscience, since it tends to put all conscious processes back on their old tracks" (JUNG, 2013a, p. 58). But it is not just the archetypes as repetitive-creative images and patterns of behavior that impairs our freedom. The personal unconscious complexes also do it!

What can we say about the complexes?

- The complex is an image (or group of related images) of a certain situation (or psychic situations) with a strong emotional charge, hence JUNG (2013a) sometimes uses "affective complex". The word complex has to do with the fact that Jung observed that, from the point of view of psychic life, there are no isolated psychic processes.
- The complexes are constellated by external situations evoking those contents and images related to them. The term constellate expresses the fact that the situation triggered a process of agglutination and updating of images loaded with psychoactive stories (HOLLIS, 2017).
- The complexes enjoy high psychic autonomy, in such a way that being active, i.e., constellated, they can place us for a while in a state of loss of freedom, of obsessive thoughts and compulsive actions (JUNG, 2013a, p. 43-).
- Complexes are formed around a central core of meaning, archetypal in essence, since "at the core of each and every complex is an archetype" (HALL, 2021, p. 21).
- Complexes are partial aspects of the psyche that have been dissociated because of trauma (individual or collective), an emotional shock, or a moral conflict. There is a pronounced unconsciousness about complexes, which is why we have such a hard time stop-

ping their effects. When they take us, our personality seems momentarily modified, we call this “identification with the complex” (JUNG, 2013b, p. 45).

- Conscious integration of the contents of the complexes has the effect of enlarging the ego’s sphere of activity and releasing the energy that maintained the dissociation (HALL, 2021). Complexes are neither good nor bad. They are ways of adapting to a reality that we do not control. Its biggest problem is its ability to remove any discriminatory judgment, in terms of criticizing the situation, and to impose a previous history on us (HOLLIS, 2017).
- The complexes personify, that is, when repressed by an inhibiting consciousness, they appear, in dream psychology, in a personified way. Jung also observed this in cases of psychosis in which “[...] the complexes ‘speak loudly’ and appear as “voices” that represent characteristics of people” (JUNG, 2013a, p. 45), sometimes, as we will see, of ancestors. Jung tended to reduce to autonomous complexes the belief in spirits and ancestors, as well as and the phenomena of “possession” that have been accompanying the entire history of humanity and that used to be very common among traditional peoples and communities of his time and in nascent spiritualism. At other times, however, he stated that complexes behave like spirits and ghosts, and not that the latter are complexes, which makes all the difference. This last form of elaboration is dialogical, based on a coming and going of analogies between two ways of thinking or images; the first is reductionist.
- There are complexes of various types: power complex, inferiority complex, abandonment complex, mother complex, father complex, ancestor complex, etc.
- By appearing in dreams in the form of an image, the ancestor, like other personifications

of the unconscious, acts to regulate psychic functioning. After all, the dream can be seen as an attempt to change the structure of complexes (HALL, 2021).

The idea of an unconscious made up of ancestral elements runs through all of Jung’s work, but it is in “Seminars on Analytical Psychology” (1925) (JUNG, 2014b), that Jung exposes, in a more systematic way, although still preliminarily, the theme of the ancestral presence in the unconscious, stating that his hypotheses around the subject were “experimental and not definitive”, as we can see in the answer he gives to Mrs. Keller: “[...] I would like to know a little more about the ancestral image and the way it affects the individual”. Answers Jung: “I’m afraid I don’t have enough experience to elucidate this question. My ideas on the subject, after all, are somewhat experimental and not definitive [...]” (JUNG, 2014b, p. 122, emphasis added), but gives him an example to explain how he figures out that the thing works. “Suppose a man has had normal development for about forty years and then he gets into a situation that awakens an ancestor complex”.

According to Jung, the image or complex⁵ – ancestral – would be activated by the fact that the situation experienced by the person in question constitutes a circumstance in which he adapts better through the attitude of this “ancestral figure”. That is, the situation constellated those contents and images related to the complex, activated stories. In the same work, Jung asserts that there is an I in the conscious and another formed by “unconscious ancestral elements”, warning of the fact that a person can be “himself” during a long period of his life and suddenly fall “under the dominion of an ancestor” (JUNG, 2014b, p. 76).

For the author, many of the cases described in the literature show these sudden personality changes, but he observes that they are not usu-

⁵ Jung uses these terms interchangeably, probably because complexes are related images and contents.

ally explained as “possession by an ancestor”, because “this last idea remains a hypothesis for which there is still no scientific proof” (JUNG, 2014b, p. 76). Seeking to understand this phenomenon, which he considers to be a “psychic fact” (JUNG, 2013a, p. 598) despised by the science of his time, Jung elaborates the following hypothesis about its etiology.

Perhaps certain traits belonging to the ancestors were hidden in the mind as complexes with a life of their own that were never assimilated into the individual’s life, and then, for some unknown reason, these complexes are activated, come out of obscurity in the folds of the unconscious, and begin to dominate the whole mind (JUNG, 2014b, p. 77, emphasis added).

From a psychic point of view, the “image” or “ancestral complex” (JUNG, 2013a; 2014b) has important relevance. According to Jung, the ancestral image or complex, which like every complex has an archetype at its core, can take the place of a lost adaptation or replace an inadequate attitude, whether of an individual, or of an entire people or nation (JUNG, 2013a; 2014b). When, however, this “ancestral presence” – a term we would like to propose considering that it is as “presence” that the psychic fact of ancestry is configured, as a temporary action [which occurs when a complex constellates], but also constant, fundamental in the dynamics of the psyche – manifests itself in a harmful way, it may happen that the individual experiences loss of libido, depression and other illnesses. Says Jung (2014b, p. 76): “continuing these ideas a little further, it is an interesting fact that among primitive [peoples] there is no disease that cannot be caused by spirits, which are evidently ancestral figures”.

At this point, it is worth underlining that although it is in *Seminars on Analytical Psychology (1925)* that Jung tries to think about the ancestral question from the point of view of clinical prac-

tice, it is in *The nature of the psyche*, especially in the text entitled *The psychological foundations of belief in the spirits*, that the author shows that, to some extent, his hypothesis owes something to traditional African thought. In this volume of his work, Jung (2013a) considers that, due to the psychological repercussions of the influence of parents being too powerful in relation to their children, many peoples have developed a whole system of worshipping the dead.

In his words, “the cult of the dead is, first of all, a protection against the ill will of the dead” (JUNG, 2013a, p. 575). Having said that, he resumes an experience lived on his trip to Mount Elgon, in East Africa, between the years 1925 and 1926. About that trip, he tells that one of the “water carriers”, in his words, a young married woman who lived in the neighborhood, fell ill, apparently from a septic abortion accompanied by a high fever. The young woman’s relatives sent for a “nganga”, according to him, “a kind of healer”. The healer concludes that the young woman was suffering the influence of her parents who died at a very young age, who now lived at the top of the bamboo forest.

Jung takes this example to illustrate the power that the “dead-but-alive” (WIREDU, 1984), from a psychic point of view, can have on the living, being able to cause loss of libido, thanks to the domain they exercise as ancestral complexes/images, that is, thanks to their autonomy. Another way to exemplify that is when Jung discusses parental imagos (JUNG, 2013a). This concept is constituted throughout the subject’s life history, and have, however, especially in their first formation, a close relationship with the maternal and paternal archetypes. When we demythologize our parents because of psychotherapy or life, they lose strength in our psyche; when these die, however, they gain in unseen influence. Thus, Kugler (2003) considers that “the imago can be compared to a “spirit of the dead” that lives after the death of its material referent”, it is a “ghost”, “sign of absence”. Along the lines of traditional African thought,

we would risk saying that the ancestral imago is, on the contrary, a psychic “sign of a presence”, which is experienced as an image.

The – ancestral – image, when it appears in dreams, is, in general, as Jung observes about other images: the expression of a living process, it is a “concentrated expression of the psychic situation as a whole and not simply and above all of the unconscious contents” (JUNG, 2013b, p. 458), is also an expression of unconscious contents, but only those that have been constellated.

In the clinical context, the interpretation to be made in this case is subjective, which would mean taking these images as symbols of psychic contents belonging to the person who dreamed (VON FRANZ, 2021). According to Jung (2013b, p. 450), two interpretive moves can be made depending on the case, one causal and the other finalist. From the causal point of view, the image is a *symptom*, linked to a previous event and with the purpose of self-regulation; from the finalist point of view, it is a *symbol* that seeks to point to a future development related to the person’s individuation process.

There are occasions, however, when the subjective interpretation is not the most appropriate, as underlined by Von Franz (2021), inspired by Jung himself. According to the author, there are dreams in which objective analysis is the most adequate. In this case, the dream should be analyzed as if it referred to the posthumous life of the deceased person and not to the life of the dreamer. The author says about this: “it seems to me that one can ‘feel’ whether the figure of a person who has already died in a dream is being used as a symbol of some inner reality or whether it ‘really’ represents the dead” (VON FRANZ, 2021, p. 24). He adds: “but it is difficult to establish universally valid criteria for this ‘feeling’”. As the author observes, “this is still an open area for investigation, since currently questions of this type can only be answered hypothetically” (VON FRANZ, 2021, p. 24). The fact is that sometimes the emotion triggered by that ancestral image is so strong that any attempt

by the psychotherapist to carry out a subjective analysis, in terms of the individuation process, can constitute a great violence.

Whether we are aware of it or not, the fact is that the ancestor, as a psychic image-presence normally charged with affection, “puts the foot in front, the present, on us”, its effect is prospective, it works by elaborating the future. Ancestry is also utopia, it is creation.

It is “the new with the ancestor”. In this first sense, it is possible to say that to speak of ancestry in the domain of the psyche is as much to speak of history as of creative and “creator” movement. Ancestry is a “place” of belonging to which we always return to creatively continue living, so that it is possible not only to endure “the painful process of tissue transformation” but also to “weave a new skin”, says poet and activist Ana Cruz (2020, p. 73) in *Raízes*, referring to the suffering caused by racism.

But as we said earlier, there are cases in which the image or ancestral complex acts in its negative counterpart, removing the vitality of the person psychically “possessed” by it. The sensation of this mode is not one of creative movement, it is of having been held back somewhere in the past, trapped in the painful wound of one’s ancestors. In this mode of operation, the ancestral image works, as observed by Kimbles (2014) and Hollis (2017), as a “ghost”, “invisibly” haunting us. But as Abraham and Torok (1995, p. 393) observe, when we speak of ghosts, we are not exactly referring to the deceased who come to possess the person; we mean an unconscious formation – the ancestral complex – which has the peculiarity of resulting of the passage from the unconscious of an ancestor or group of ancestors to the unconscious of a descendant or group of descendants. This complex – which can take the form of a personified image in the figure of a known or unknown ancestor, since, as we explained earlier, the complexes personify – would indicate the effects on the descendants of what for the ancestor had the value of wounding (ABRA-

HAM, TOROK, 1995). For Jung (2014b), these complexes, transmitted from one generation to another, can prolong their negative effects on descendants, but they may also not manifest in each individual. The latter can still integrate the contents of this complex of representations, breaking the transmission chain, or develop resources to deal with them.

Psychotherapy can be a good support in this path of construction, and it is always good to remember, when dealing with complexes of this order, that if at the core of every complex there is an archetype, the ancestral complex carries a repetitive force and a creative force, an impulse to do/live the same way as our ancestors and an impulse to create something new from this heritage. For as Jung (2013a) notes, archetypes are forms through which instincts express themselves and also the living source from which all that is creative springs. In this sense, the unconscious would not only be historically determined, but would also generate a creative impulse, confronting the conservatism of the human psyche with its historical and cultural conditioning, through its creative acts.

Talking about archetypes in Jung is, therefore, keeping the due differences, like talking about ancestry in traditional African thought. Because as we saw in Wiredu, ancestry in Africa is synonymous with continuity. But this continuity of ancestry, like the archetypes, is not exactly synonymous with repetition, as Muniz Sodré (2017) also observed when introducing us to “*Pensar Nagô*” – in Brazil. According to the author, what “the living tradition gives and transmits is the ‘betrayal’ of the equality of repetitions” (SODRÉ, 2017, p. 110). It is “in and through repetition” that we activate the powers of differentiation in ancestry.

It means that when we talk about ancestry, we are not talking about sameness, but about otherness that emerge from “inaugural principles” (SODRÉ, 2017, p. 97), to which we always return, in a creative spiral movement. Cosmological (gods, *orixás*) and historical (ancestors) principles in traditional African thought, and imag-

istic-instinctive principles (archetypes and their archetypal images) in Jungian thought.

Final words

We conclude by stating that each and every clinic is founded to some extent on the principle of ancestry, because, as the *babalorixá* Léo de Xangô⁶ says, “everyone has ancestry” and we cannot escape it. Jung talks about that when he brings us the idea of parental imagos and the power of influence they have on us. But the author does not limit himself to demonstrating the influence of father and mother in the unconscious. He considers that other ancestral forces/images make up the psyche and act to regulate psychic life. He labelled some of these images ancestors, meaning people who used to be part of the history of our family, cultural or human group. People whose power of influence is transmitted consciously or unconsciously from one generation to another and another... This transmission, as well as prolonging good memories (even if forgotten, unconscious), prolongs suffering, which, being aware of by descendants, can be transmuted or strengthened, depending on the good or evil they cause. Some of these sufferings require more than work in the personal domain: they demand a whole collective struggle to eliminate the causes that affect certain groups for generations, as is the case of socio-racial suffering in Brazil.

A clinic founded on this principle does not deny the roots of Jungian thought. Conversely, it reaffirms them through the deepening of an aspect of its founder’s work – the idea of ancestral elements or images in the unconscious – which at that time could not be better developed, in view of the colonialist view of the European world towards African and indigenous cultures

⁶ Pai Léo is the son of the terreiro Ilê Axé yá Omin, 17 years ago. It was started by the hands of its *lolorixá*, Mrs. Edna Maria Santana (Mãe Edinha de Oxum), and by her saint grandparents, Mrs. Antônia Salles (Mãe Tonha de Oxumarê) and Mr. Pedro Bispo (Pai Pedrinho de Oxóssi), in the city of Santo Amaro da Purificação, Bahia, on March 1, 2014. We’re grateful, Pai Léo!

and the difficulties of psychology of that time in dealing with the theme of anomalistic phenomena. Difficulties that Jung faced, but which cost him some disrepute in the scientific community. Today, however, psychology begins to open to these psychic experiences, through the expansion of the field of so-called Anomalistic Psychol-

ogy and Religion and other approaches that seek to deepen the understanding of the genealogical (and so to speak ancestral) dimension of psychic suffering and health. ■

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Resumo

“África, o fio”: sobre a presença ancestral no inconsciente

Questionando o pensamento opositivo que terminou por exagerar as diferenças entre África e “Ocidente”, pretendemos: 1) fazer uma aproximação ao sentido de ancestralidade na África tradicional, sobretudo através da obra do filósofo ganense Kwase Wiredu, 2) apresentar a noção de “complexo [ou imagem] ancestral” em Jung, de modo a refletir sobre a “presença ancestral” no inconsciente junguiano e sua atuação na dinâmica psíquica. Nosso objetivo é ensaiar uma “comunicação transcultural” entre o pensar tra-

dicional africano e o pensar junguiano, partindo do pressuposto de que há entre eles aproximações. Concluimos que uma clínica fundada no princípio da ancestralidade não nega as raízes do pensamento junguiano, ao contrário, aprofunda um aspecto da obra de Jung que à sua época sofreu muitas críticas, haja vista o olhar colonialista do mundo europeu para as Áfricas e as dificuldades da psicologia em tratar os chamados “fenômenos religiosos e anomalísticos” como “fatos psíquicos”. ■

Palavras-chave: ancestralidade, Psicologia Analítica, inconsciente, África, Jung.

Resumen

“África, punto de anclaje”: sobre la presencia ancestral en el inconsciente

Cuestionando el pensamiento opositor que terminó exagerando las diferencias entre África y “Occidente”, pretendemos 1) realizar una aproximación al sentido de ancestralidad en el África tradicional, sobre todo, a través de la obra del filósofo ghanés Kwase Wiredu, 2) presentar la noción de “complejo [o imagen] ancestral” en Jung, para, de ese modo, reflexionar sobre la “presencia ancestral” en el inconsciente junguiano y, sobre su participación en la dinámica psíquica. Nuestro objetivo, es ensayar una “comunicación transcultural” entre el pensamiento tradicional africano y

el pensamiento junguiano, partiendo del presupuesto de que hay entre ellos un “punto en común”. Llegamos a la conclusión, de que, una clínica fundada en el principio de la ancestralidad no reniega de las raíces del pensamiento junguiano, todo lo contrario, profundiza en un aspecto de la obra de Jung, la cual, en su momento, sufrió innumerables críticas, si tenemos en cuenta la mirada colonialista del mundo europeo de las diferentes Áfricas y las dificultades de la psicología para considerar, los llamados “fenómenos religiosos y anomalísticos”, como “hechos psíquicos”. ■

Palabras clave: ancestralidad, psicología analítica, inconsciente, África, Jung.

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