

SOME ASPECTS OF AFRICAN
EVOLUTION IN THE
SOUTH SAHARA

African evolution in the south Sahara traces its origin to very ancient times; it began when the Negroes established friendly or hostile contact with representatives of the Mediterranean and then of the oriental civilizations. From the fifteenth century on, attempts at colonization or penetration helped to accelerate a movement that was to precipitate the two world wars. Thirty years ago, when the so-called colonial problem moved from the national to the international level, these conflicts and their consequences had already given rise overseas to imperious material needs demanding immediate satisfaction as well as to social and political aspirations calling for appropriate reforms. In half a century African evolution had reached the prerevolutionary stage.

The European occupation certainly resulted in an unquestionable improvement in the health and living conditions of backward communities; it abolished a barter economy and introduced the products of the abo-

Translated by Elaine P. Halperin.

rigines to the world market. But, in addition to these positive gains, careful observers noted a formidable splitting-up of the family in black Africa, a breakdown of social structures, institutions, hierarchy, and morality, as well as the progressive disappearance of local beliefs.

UNESCO, alerted by the International Council of Philosophy and Humanistic Sciences, commissioned the International African Institute to study this complex problem of evolution. To begin with, the Institute was asked to initiate a twofold investigation: into beliefs and social values, on the one hand, and, on the other, into kinship, marriage, and current conditions of domestic life.¹

I. RELIGION AND SOCIAL VALUES

The theoretical and practical aim of this investigation required that those in charge should devote their first efforts to a statement on the varying ideas of Africans about the place they occupy in the world and their role in the community; to do this, observations of the beliefs and customs of the people had, above all, to be interpreted.

Long before Stace's stanzas, generally attributed to Lucretius' *De natura rerum*,

Primus in orbe deos fecit timor ardua coelo
Fulmina dum caderent . . . ,

men apparently feared the unleashed atmospheric forces. By studying them, they might discern an invisible, supernatural, governing world in the universe that influences and organizes a visible world through which it rewards or punishes the inhabitants. This belief gave rise to a distinction between the category of sacred, respected, forbidden things, with the accompanying religious or ritualistic obligations, on the one hand, and, on the other, the secular, ordinary things of daily life.

Until the end of the last century, religious science, which has inspired remarkable works, scarcely concerned itself with the beliefs of backward peoples; these remained almost unknown. One tended to associate them with the five main hypotheses that were entertained simultaneously and successively: first, Tyler's animism in his *Primitive Culture* (1871); then the theory of natural force and of a dynamism capable of being diverted or governed by magic; after that, in 1900, Marett's *Preanimistic Religion*. In

1. Daryll Forde, *African World-Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African People* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954); A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Daryll Forde, *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950); A. Phillips, *Survey of African Marriage and Family Life* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953).

Notes and Discussion

1910, W. Wundt, in his *Völkerpsychologie*, re-examined and modified prior conceptions about animism and magic. But, before then, around 1900, A. Lang introduced in *The Making of Religion* the notion of the Great God which, as early as 1906, R. P. W. Schmidt and the Vienna School were to support.

During the nineteenth century, except for rather rare instances, explanations of African beliefs were for the most part based upon observations which were frequently superficial or inexact. None of these explanations linked religious ideas and facts to the social structures and manifestations which, in all such investigations, generally shed light upon each other.

However, in 1864, in his preface to *La Cité antique*, Fustel de Coulanges stressed the necessity of contrasting these elements "in order to understand the inexplicable." But this wise precept was forgotten. The revival of ethnosociological studies in Europe and America at the beginning of the century should have served as a reminder at a time when on-the-spot investigations were inspired by new methods which enlarged their areas of operation.

In 1912 Durkheim contributed more than anyone else to a much needed revolution by publishing *Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse: Système totémique en Australie*. He demonstrated that, in the mentality of backward peoples, the notions that dominate the flow of images spring from the very core of religion. Such are images of time, of space, of gender, of the power of causality, of personality; philosophers have used the term "categories" for these images, and they govern all logic. Going back in search of the religious origin of the categories, Durkheim emphasized that they possessed an abundance of social elements.

Nevertheless, research did not progress immediately in this discipline. As G. Dieterlen stresses in her very interesting *Essai sur la religion Bambara*, every religion possesses an exoteric element which scientific and methodical observation can uncover in all its detail. But it is far more difficult to extricate the doctrine, the fundamental principles of which are revealed only to the older men and to the superior initiates, who are usually reluctant to divulge its secret.

Distrust has decreased with time, so that fruitful, basic inquiries are possible, provided that qualified investigators, armed with patience and perseverance, can do their work on the spot. And, thanks to the efforts of such men, thoroughly oriented in the principles formulated by Fustel de Coulanges and Durkheim, progress in the study of African communities has made itself manifest. It is evident that not only have beliefs and branches of knowledge sprung up from the religious framework of com-

munities in Africa (as they have done elsewhere) but also, and above all, the rules of conduct which, taken as a whole, represent the ideal force from whose core springs the collective judgment of a society in regard to its spiritual values.

Shall we nonetheless admit the existence, among these peoples, of an "ethics" that stems entirely from supernatural inspiration and decrees what is proscribed or forbidden by the invisible powers? The etymology and the meaning of the terms *ēthos*, *ἦθος*, and *ἦθιχὰ*, *mos* and *moralis*, and *Sitte* and *Sittlichkeit* suggest that we should not overlook the notion of habit and custom in this connection.

In Africa, as elsewhere, experience proves that there is no universal or eternal morality but only norms of behavior that are variable in space and time. In every human group these norms decide, by means of local opinion, what is acceptable or reprehensible, in short, "what is done." Our Western notion of good and evil plays no part here.

The essays collected in this first series stress the diversity of religious conceptions and cults. On this continent, as in other lands, the diversity is due to the variegated nature of the milieu. The environment imposes itself everywhere, upon members of the community who owe their livelihood to it, upon different ways of living, of forming groups, of doing and thinking that are appropriate to the time and the circumstances.

A man attached to his land organizes his life and works according to his needs; these differ, depending upon whether he is a hunter, a woodsman feeding on tuberous roots, a farmer who cultivates cereals in the plains, a fisherman, or a cattle breeder. Each group develops and perfects its structure with the means at its disposal, making use of whatever possibilities are suitable. This is why we encounter in Africa societies that have a rudimentary organization and religion, others that have evolved further, and, finally, hierarchized communities like the Ashanti of Ghana, the Fon of Dahomey in the west, and the kingdom of Ruanda in the east, which have a state cult.

Methodical study of religious systems has shown that Africans have long outgrown the stage of "common fetichism" usually attributed to them. During these last years remarkable investigations have opened up new perspectives to research. Among others, we must cite Griaule's studies on the Dogon cattle farmers in western Sudan and those of R. P. Tempels on the peoples of the Belgian Congo.²

The inquiries pursued by Griaule and by those whom he has trained

2. M. Griaule, *Dieu d'eau* (Paris: Éditions du Chêne, 1948); R. P. Tempels, *La Philosophie bantoue* (Elisabethville, 1945).

Notes and Discussion

during the last twenty-five years enable us to discover a logically constructed cosmology in the vast region of western Sudan. This cosmology, springing from an original vibratory movement, exhibits the unity of the solar universe even unto the grain of *Digitaria exilis*. Complicated in its conceptions and its consequences, it actually culminates in a philosophy. It is symptomatic that Tempels' exposition bears the same title.

For a generation, research has collected numerous facts about the peoples of West Africa and the Bantus which seem to conceal, beneath an apparent diversity, an identical pattern. This is particularly true of the various offshoots of the powerful Mandé branch, which has almost three million dependents and whose metaphysics and religion, like the Bambara's, seem to embrace every social, technical, and economic activity. Thus, as Daryll Forde quite correctly remarks in the Preface to this volume, the power of binding cultural ties is visible below the superficial stream of daily life. As long as it persists, it will continue to guarantee the group's stability and flourishing continuity.

Unfortunately, on the social and moral level, this stability or equilibrium is more and more threatened by the construction placed upon it by Europeans, which has destroyed many useful values without offering any substitute. As a result, the Africans must find their way between the ancient beliefs and customs which they are abandoning, and the West with Christianity, or the East with Islam, which enjoys increasing favor in certain countries. Among the values whose progressive disappearance gives cause for alarm must be cited, first of all, family solidarity.

II. KINSHIP

The best comprehensive study that has appeared on this complex subject is that of Claude Lévi-Strauss.³ Whoever examines family relationships among backward peoples must bear in mind the essential principle which he states: "Relationships of this kind can be defined in terms of both the individuals they involve and those they exclude." He adds: "While the absence of kinship determines a kind of 'neutral condition' in the conscience of so-called 'civilized' peoples, it is unknown in less developed communities where, within the group, the individual is necessarily either a real or fictitious relative or a stranger—in other words, an adversary or a virtual enemy."

3. *Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté* (Bibliothèque de Philosophie Contemporaine [Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1949]).

The importance of true kinship is so great in these circles that, when it does not exist, it is replaced by an artificial kinship. The best known of such relationships is the pact, or the fraternity of blood. To this can be added the corporative or work union and, finally, union by marriage, which will be discussed later.

In *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage* A. R. Radcliffe-Brown devotes an eighty-five-page introduction to fixing and assessing the problem of kinship in Africa. He presents numerous facts which emerge clearly, thanks to his ingenious analogies. We agree with the author that the family is always represented at the start by a necessary embryo, a biological nucleus, consisting of the mother and her children in a more or less close relationship with a genitor. But this elementary organization becomes more complex when the father controls many wives, for each wife, together with her children, forms a separate household.

In one form or another, the family embryo lives in the house and belongs to a stock which can be matrilinear, patrilinear, or bilateral and which, in turn, is integrated into the group of maternal or paternal relatives or into a mixed ensemble. The group is divided into generations and classes and, in addition, is subject to marriage regulations which at times are imposed by filiation.

Lineage, an essential element in the formation of groups, has as its original link the masculine or feminine ancestor that begot the succession of living descendents. If the agnatic ancestor has two sons, or if the maternal ancestor has two daughters, each of these children founds a new branch composed of the as yet-unborn masculine or feminine offspring. By virtue of this principle, the household thus augmented becomes an increasingly numerous and extensive family that develops into a clan.

It is regrettable that this interesting study makes no mention of a particular type of widespread family organization that was common in western Africa and elsewhere fifty years ago and that can still be found here and there. This group consists of from fifty to a hundred and twenty-five relatives, allies, slaves, or dependents of both sexes, cultivating common undivided lands, and all of them producing and consuming jointly under the authority of a chief, guardian of public worship, and administrator of property. During the past half-century this type of association gradually broke up under the influence of economic changes, and for the same reasons which precipitated the dismemberment of analogous European organisms like the *Geschlechthäuser* in Germany during the Middle Ages,

Notes and Discussion

the *communautés taisibles* in France, and, more recently, the *Zadruga* of old Serbia.⁴ Twenty-five years ago René Maunier noticed among the Kabyles of Djurdjura similar characteristics in a group which, according to him, is located there: an economic communality of ownership, production, and consumption and, at the same time, a “mystical and liturgical association for worship and religious observance.”⁵ The effect which the disappearance of this kind of association had on the deterioration of the bonds of kinship and of domestic life will be discussed later.

The progressive complexity of African kinship prevents authors from compiling at this time a complete and synthesized record of it. This explains why Radcliffe-Brown's book, although based on a very valuable outline, is confined to providing characteristic examples of structures drawn from the field by specialized investigators. One encounters in it, among other things, the example of the Ashanti of Ghana, who are of matrilinear descent and among whom religion and property are transmitted by the mother. The same custom with similar effects exists in eastern and southern Africa, among the Swazi, Zulu, Nyakusa, and Tswana, while double filiation with its consequences is to be found in the west among the Yaka of Nigeria and in the east among the Nuer of the Nuba country.

The normal evolution of customs, under the triple influence of colonization, the West, and Islam, has disturbed ancient structures everywhere and brought about adjustments. Thus, among the Bantu peoples of eastern and central Africa, an increase in paternal authority at the expense of that of the mother has been observed. The same is true of the sedentary Peul shepherds of western and central Africa, who have become more and more Islamized ever since the fifteenth century. An analogous evolution has been noted among the matriarchal Rhodesian and Nyassan tribes which today readily acknowledge the husband's authority over his wife and children, although in the last analysis the emancipated sons are intrusted to their maternal uncle, who educates them. As early as 1920 E. W. Smith and M. Dale, in their fine monograph on the Ila,⁶ underscored a similar mixing of the two customs.

Despite the extent of the possible variations in kinship and the diversity of combinations which they comprise, one can say that they embrace

4. H. Labouret, *Les Manding et leur langue* (Paris, 1934) and *Paysans d'Afrique occidentale* (Paris, 1941).

5. *Mélanges de sociologie nord-africaine* (Paris: Alcan, 1930), p. 83.

6. *The Ila Speaking Peoples* (London, 1920).

several general principles which characterize the system as a whole. Everywhere is observable a distribution of individuals according to generations, the latter being fixed by age. The members of the older generation assume the functions of authority and responsibility, while the young are expected to maintain toward their elders attitudes of respect and dependence in all relationships.

Individual conduct and a study of personal names reveal, moreover, that in each generation dependents of both sexes develop a reciprocal relationship in which some play the part of elders, teachers, and supporters and others that of protected younger children. Thus the first category has rights and duties toward the second that are included within the framework of the mutual obligations of the kinship system, which operates in regard to marriage.

III. MARRIAGE

It is hardly necessary to emphasize the importance of this major problem, which has been studied in a special volume entitled *Survey of African Marriage and Family Life*.⁷ This work and the various expositions it comprises are remarkable for their painstaking thoroughness and their praiseworthy effort to present clearly most of the aspects of a thorny problem. Given the magnitude of the subject, we must pay homage to Dr. L. P. Mair, who attempted the thankless task of collecting systematic information about all of Africa south of the Sahara. His data would be more complete if the French possessions had been included.⁸

Until recently, marriage possessed in the eyes of the Africans (a) a political aspect, its purpose being to cement an alliance between two groups; (b) a religious significance, by introducing the wife into the husband's cult; (c) a social quality, by integrating the household into the family, the basic unit of a collectivity; and (d) a self-evident economic role.

It was also an agreement with juridical consequences, since it conferred legitimacy and therefore the right of inheritance upon the children, within the kinship of a community. Finally, it sharply distinguished the occa-

7. It is divided into three parts, and there is a long introduction by A. Phillips: (I) "African Marriage and Social Change," L. P. Mair, professorial lecturer at the University of London; (II) "Lois concernant le mariage en Afrique," A. Phillips, professorial lecturer at the University of London; and (III) "Le Mariage chrétien dans les sociétés africaines," Rev. Lyndon Harries, missionary, professorial lecturer at the School for Oriental Languages of London.

8. The author would have found useful documentation in the publications of the Institut Français at Dakar (*Bulletin and Mémoires*); in the *Bulletins des Territoires de l'Afrique occidentale*, in those of *Études sénégalaises, éburnéennes, dahoméennes, camerounaises*, etc.; in *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie; Études; Le Monde non-chrétien*, etc.

Notes and Discussion

sional genitor from the "social father," since the function of the latter could and still can be discharged, for example, by a childless, rich woman who regularly marries another woman and pays the matrimonial tariff. The children of the latter and her lovers are considered to be the legitimate progeny of the former.

In marriage a pact between two groups, the choice of future partners, and their consent have been required only recently. A marriage that may be described as classical comprises two essential ceremonies upon which are grafted some secondary activities. The first is the agreement between the two parties, preceded by indirect, then direct, conversations which may begin even before the birth of the fiancée and often before she reaches puberty. The ceremony of "betrothal" signalizes the consent of the two groups by the presentation and acceptance of symbolical objects reserved for this purpose and possessing a distinctive meaning. These, for the most part, are tools and domestic utensils, and sometimes coins or animals given to the head of the fiancée's family. All of these, Leenhardt writes, are symbols of female life, to be exchanged for women who themselves are sources of life. The object is the sign, the attestation, the proof of the execution of the agreement. Among shepherds, the steer that figures in such ceremonies is, in the eyes of the interested parties, part and parcel of the life of the giving group; it is presented as a recompense for the girl who is to be received in the future. Thus this transfer is an exchange of life for life.

In this ancient procedure, which even today has not been completely abandoned, objects or animals represent affective values, difficult to tax; consequently, it is doubtless improper to consider them as money. But, later, when they lost their juridical character of proof and when the symbol they represented had been forgotten, other means were substituted for what they had signified: prestation, or money. The term "payment" could then be properly applied.⁹

In many African communities a marriage is considered to have taken place, even if it has not been consummated, as soon as the symbol has been delivered or a partial payment of the total sum agreed upon has been paid. And, indeed, it sometimes happens that debtors fail to pay what they owe. This calls for legal suits in order to arbitrate differences among the living as well as the dead who failed to keep their promises to pay the matrimonial compensation, which was subsequently being claimed from their heirs.

After what can truly be termed the "betrothal," a more or less lengthy

9. M. Leenhardt, "Cérémonie et sceau du mariage," *Le Monde chrétien*, XV, 321 ff.

period ensues during which the two parties exchange prestations, gifts and counter-gifts. In societies based on paternal authority and patrilocal marriage this interlude culminates in various ceremonies consisting of diverse rites. At times the bride is welcomed with great pomp and solemn reception; at others, on the contrary, there is a sham abduction to which the girl's relatives respond with gestures of protection and obstruction. It is obvious that in the case of a matrilocal marriage these customs are not observed, since the husband goes to the home of his parents-in-law, whom he serves with respect and humility in order to win their favor.

We must say a final word about the marriage ceremony, alluding to its last phase—a religious one. This consists in offering on the family altar sacrificial victims to the supernatural and ancestral powers and in presenting the young bride on this occasion, with entreaties that they should protect her. Frequently in such occurrences the young married couple partakes of a meal which some have interpreted as a kind of communion.

The exchange which we have described in general terms is often impractical or deemed inopportune, and so a more convenient procedure that derives from it is often substituted. In French this is called *mariage par achat*, a term that has its equivalent in German, *Kaufehe*, *Brautpreis*, and in English, “purchase money,” “bride price,” “bride wealth.” People who employ these expressions admit that they are inexact, since the property they designate cannot really serve as a payment, because the wife to whom this refers cannot be the object of an appropriation or a sale, nor can she be put to death. In Belgian and French studies the word *dot* is also used, which is no more satisfactory. Actually, the property in question does not accompany the bride but remains in her own family. Relying upon a definition in classical English, Radcliffe-Brown at times used the word “prestations” to denote the payments in money and in services required by custom which made a marriage valid. The expression “matrimonial compensation,” which has also been suggested, is perhaps more suitable for this purpose.

Quite apart from whatever term one might use to denote such a transfer of property, A. W. Hoernlé has stressed the special intermediary role that cattle have played among shepherds in this connection. “It makes its appearance in all relationships between human groups, first among the living in the form of compensation and expiation for homicide, then between groups of living persons and dead in the form of a sacrificial offering; finally among groups that intervene in marriage.”¹⁰

10. “The Importance of Sib in the Marriage Ceremonies of the Southeastern Bantu,” *Association for the Advancement of Science*, XXII (1925), 481.

Notes and Discussion

Shepherds who engage in this practice of exchange integrate the cattle into a kind of common flock, not to be sold or exchanged but eligible to serve a sacrificial purpose. In actuality, they usually become the object of a reinvestment. With these animals, delivered as matrimonial compensation for the girls of a group, the eldest of the family will procure wives for the brothers or cousins of the brides. In this way the special reserve of cattle varies and is constantly renewed. Levi-Strauss says apropos of this: "During the course of the marriage ceremony, prestations and counter-prestations, gifts and counter-gifts are exchanged back and forth between the interested parties and according to an alternating rhythm; the double circulation of wives and cattle insures, throughout the ages, the union of groups and of generations."¹¹

Arrangements varied among the farmers of western and central Sudan and among other peoples who either had very few cattle or none at all but who were organized in extensive families of the "clannish" type. Usually each family cultivated one particular field two days a week, the rest of the time being taken up by work in common. Each member of a communal group had some money or goods of his own which he could dispose of. The eldest of the group, the administrator of the common property, collected all ordinary and extraordinary revenues; included in these were the matrimonial compensations paid for girls given in marriage. He also paid all general expenses, especially those incurred in marrying off the young men of the family. In the recent past the eldest, as property manager and arranger of profitable marriages, was also, therefore, the donor of women. His prestige and his influence over his unified and close-knit group were considerable. The economic and political changes that occurred in the last fifty years were to modify the early stability. This becomes apparent when we examine actual family life.

We should mention, in this rapid exposition, that both Mair and Radcliffe-Brown referred briefly to the existence of marriage without compensation. The customs of the *pog-siuré* and the *zan-poko* among the Voltaiques and of the *nkap* among the Bamiléké of the Cameroons¹² merit a more complete examination than the outline I have given. A study of these special phenomena will shed light on the conception of marriage without compensation, on the eventual redemption that is liable to occur,

11. *Op. cit.*, p. 579.

12. H. Labouret, "Situation matérielle, morale, coutumière de la femme dans l'Ouest-africain," *Africa*, XIII, No. 2, 97 ff.

and, in such a case, on the value of this compensation and its relationship to the number of children born, to be born, or to be recovered.

IV. FAMILY LIFE

The extensive family corresponded to a situation arising from insecurity. Relatives, strongly united in a walled-in economy, represented a responsible association for protection against any hostile attacks. But these ancient family groups ceased to be indispensable when the colonial order was imposed and a new economy established. In these countries open to traffic and movement, the old community broke up, liberating the composite households, and what remained of them led, from then on, an independent existence. The consequence of the disappearance of the ancient extensive family was the weakening of domestic, village, and even regional cults. At the same time the regulations for local morals were no longer observed, since the sanctions that the elders, the domestic and village councils, had ordained in earlier days were abandoned. These were unsatisfactorily replaced by less immediate, and at times arbitrary, penalties inflicted by the chieftains, the tribunals, or the administration.

Nevertheless, the households, liberated from the extensive family, remained intact. They formed an apparently firm group made up of the father, the mother, and children of the same flesh and blood, who felt affection for each other and thus strengthened understanding and co-operation. It is true, of course, that polygenetic households, in which children of different mothers lived, were less united. Those who had the same mother and father were antagonistic toward their step-brothers and step-sisters, a situation made manifest in all tongues, in numerous proverbs, and in suggestive phrases. Step-brothers readily left their native home, while siblings usually remained until the father's death. Then they established their own households, sometimes with others, sometimes independently.

After this new scission, bonds of kinship either continued or weakened or even ended up by being broken, according to whether the new establishments were more or less distant from the old ones and whether or not they were surrounded by strangers. On the whole, the sense of co-operation and reciprocal obligation became blunted under the combined influence of colonization and economic evolution, and a sterile individualism took its place.

In the new atmosphere the woman acquired a more pronounced personality; she was rarely beaten or mistreated. Under the new economy

Notes and Discussion

she also acquired the right to possess and dispose of property. Some women owned plantations; others went into business and earned substantial profits. Sometimes women united to form corporations, and they learned over a long period to protect their highly won privileges by strikes, if necessary. As early as 1352 the Arabian traveler, Ibn Batouta, described a women's revolt in the Sudan. This sort of thing has not disappeared, as attested by the feminist movement of 1929 in the Nigerian provinces of Owerri and Calabar, whose purpose was to protest certain taxes that affected women in business; by the far more recent movement of the female Bamiléké farmers against concessionaries in the French Mandate of the Cameroons; and, finally, by the mass of female petitions addressed to the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations.

Freedom of choice in marriage, reluctantly granted in earlier times to women or to widows who wanted to remarry, is now officially accepted by custom and even recognized legally in certain parts of the country. However, in many places the young girl remains submissive to parental wishes in such matters, although she can escape by running away or by being abducted by the man of her choice. Otherwise she submits to marriage in the traditional fashion.

Actually, many heads of households still consider "the girl as family property in no way different from their house or plantation." The best possible deal for her must be negotiated. For the last forty years matrimonial compensations have been outrageously exploited. Before 1914, in certain parts of the country, these compensations did not amount to more than a thousand francs. Today they have reached several hundred thousand francs; in addition, the suitor is expected to pay other related expenses and to give sumptuous gifts—all of which often amounts to twice as much as the initial sum.

The young men suffer from this situation. Freed from family fetters, most of them are salaried employees who no longer contribute all their earnings to the head of the household. Consequently, they cannot ask him or other relatives to give them money for the marriage compensation. They are rightly indignant when they see the father of a marriageable daughter encouraging several suitors to compete in order to raise the marriage fee, accepting gifts from all of them, and then, when the marriage has taken place, encouraging the daughter to obtain a divorce so that she might be put on the market again. Hence the statistics show a regrettable increase in the number of bachelors, a parallel lowering of the age level of married men, more prostitution and adultery, and, generally speaking,

a grave deterioration in moral standards as well as growing instability in marriages. These disturbing facts are due not uniquely to the shortcomings of outmoded customs but also to the results of economic development. Still another factor is the absence from home of urban and rural wage-earners, leaving their wives and children without supervision or direction.

Governments and missions are attempting to remedy this situation, but, in envisaging appropriate reforms, both are limited by prior commitments on the part of the protective powers. The latter have pledged themselves to respect the rights and customs of subject peoples if these are not contrary to public order or to the principles of Western civilization, as slavery and cannibalism, for instance, would be.

The missions whose principles are clearest have adopted three directives: (a) to preserve and encourage customs that are not contrary to religious or natural law; (b) to assign to the missionaries the right to combat anything that is opposed to Christian ethics; and (c) to proscribe all customs that are contrary to natural law.

The colonial powers, after a good deal of experience, were finally obliged to choose a policy. Should they abolish local customs or preserve them temporarily? Should they further their development by slowing or accelerating their rhythm? In the latter case one ran the risk of precipitating crises of adaptation disastrous from a material as well as a moral point of view. Having weighed all the elements of the problem, the governments concerned thought it preferable for the time being to preserve the local customs. Further, they all agreed that it was not their role to act as civilizing agents in the area of private relationships or even in the public domain. Consequently, the thing to do was to safeguard local customs, supervising and, wherever possible, fostering their evolution.

The French government noted that in almost all of Africa south of the Sahara marriage had become virtually everywhere an individual contract. And so, on June 15, 1939, it sanctioned this by decree, fixed the marriage age for couples, and required the consent of both parties and, in the case of levirate, the consent of the girl. To remedy certain lacunae in this regulation, a second decree of September 14, 1951, granted Africans of both sexes liberties identical with those enjoyed by the French. In addition, it authorized entry in the state's registers of the husband's promise not to take another wife until his recorded marriage had been dissolved.¹³

13. J. Binet, French Overseas Administrator, "Aspects actuels du mariage dans le Sud-Cameroun," *Bibliothèque penant* (Paris), No. III (1952); Sister Marie-André of the Sacred Heart, *La Condition humaine en Afrique noire* (Paris, 1952).

Notes and Discussion

The missions generally believed that it was impossible to reconcile Christian principles with local tradition, and therefore refrained from adopting the common regulations in regard to African marriages. They did insist upon disseminating a Christian form of the sacrament, even though, here and there, they had to make certain compromises because of local tradition. But they were uncompromising on the subject of polygenetics. In 1948 Portugal imitated them, and in 1950 Belgium did likewise. France refused to follow suit in order to avoid conflicts with the law of the Koran, which many dependent Moslems obeyed. Moreover, African public opinion continues to value polygamy and would like to reserve the right to practice it.

V. PEACE, IMPROVEMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION

The changes which occurred in the domain of beliefs, kinship, and marriage envisaged by UNESCO's investigations are not the only ones that Africa in transition presents. History reminds us that Europeans, as soon as they arrived in the tropics, were confronted with a human problem that was extremely complex, the data of which can be summarized in three categorical imperatives: (1) to insure security, quiet, and order in regions where lawlessness and anarchical confusion reigned; (2) to conquer illness, endemic diseases, and tropical epidemics—the begettors of a terrible mortality rate, in some instances killing six out of every ten persons (those who escaped such dangers were not able to avoid a poor state of health that drained their strength, prevented them from working and eventually from eating, and forced them to vegetate hopelessly in the kind of poverty that decimated the race); and (3) to educate these backward peoples while respecting local customs, yet modifying them wherever such action would bring a better standard of living, and to transform barbaric illiterates into conscientious and effective workers in a democratic and peaceful society, in accordance with the terms of the United Nations Charter.

VI. ALIMENTATION—NUTRITION

These three objectives were realized without major difficulties. But, in implementing this program, the problem of human nutrition proved of capital importance in the twin sectors of economic production and management. Local authorities, it is true, have currently been successful in handling fortuitous and periodic famines, but they have not yet been able to abolish seasonal scarcity everywhere.

The world was informed of these problems in 1909 by Professor de Wildeman, who showed, with supporting evidence, that the natives of the Belgian Congo were undernourished. Thus alerted, the colonial powers made a genuine attempt to practice a policy aimed at improving the quantity and quality of nutrition in their overseas territories. The responsible administrators received instructions to remedy these insufficiencies, but the results achieved were negligible.

In 1931 the League of Nations became interested in the problem. Its Committee on Hygiene had just launched an elaborate investigation into the problem of nutrition and hygiene in Europe and soon extended its activities to the south Sahara and to certain regions of India. This inquiry attracted the attention of Sir J. H. Thomas, the British Colonial Secretary. Immediately, he got out a dispatch entitled "Nutrition in the Colonial Empire," which defined the framework within which studies were to be made and the program required to remedy an apparently disquieting situation. Thereupon action was taken. The governments concerned—France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy—set up committees and called congresses to study the problem of nutrition. The Institute of International Affairs focused on the question in a book which it had just published, *The Colonial Problem*. But the outbreak of war interrupted all this research.

It was resumed by the United Nations under the auspices of the Committee for Alimentation and Agriculture. The number of missions increased, and they met periodically to compare and discuss the results of their work. The most important mission set up in France was directed by Professor L. Pales. Aided by physicians and specialists, he spent the better part of two years in all the territories of French Overseas Africa. The program of this "Anthropological Mission (Alimentation and Nutrition)" comprised six parts: (I) Anthropology; (II) Physiology and Basic Metabolism; (III) Biological Chemistry, Blood Constituents, Vitamins; (IV) Alimentation, Daily Rations, Nutritional Analyses, Nutritious Diets; (V) Psychology; and (VI) Pathology.

The head of the mission insisted upon a thorough investigation into the mentality of the native peoples, believing this to be closely linked with the problem of the oxidization of food in the human body. This comprehensive inquiry has compiled records of thousands of precise studies. As for the principles of human nutrition, the mission carefully verified the main needs of the economy: caloric heat, nitrogen, preventives. The latter included vitamins, calcium, sodium, iron, etc. Attention was also directed

Notes and Discussion

to a special nutritional group in French Overseas Africa consisting of both vegetable and animal elements. The former are abundant but poorly selected and carelessly prepared; the latter are rare (milk, meat, fish). Information provided by interested services aided the cultivation of cereals, vegetables, and fruits as well as the organization and development of such industries as those concerned with the preparation of fresh and dried fish. Finally, the mission circulated balanced diets based upon the products of the country and also provided a list of items divided into protides, lipids, glucides, minerals, and 100-gram vitamins.

VII. STANDARDS OF LIVING

Vigorous action in solving the nutritional problem was coupled with a definite effort to survey standards of living and economic life overseas. But in the beginning very little attention was given to these problems except for a few review articles and M. Perham's book, *The Native Economics of Nigeria* (1945), which she wrote in collaboration with Daryll Forde and R. Scott. In France, too, an interesting study was prepared by R. Hoffherr and R. Morris.¹⁴

In 1936 the French colonial office decided to launch an analogous investigation in tropical Africa and in Madagascar; detailed questionnaires were sent out to guide the researchers. The inquiry, which elicited few helpful replies, was interrupted by the war in 1939. It was resumed in 1953 by the executive committee of the Fund for Economic and Social Development. This committee intrusted to the Ministry of Overseas France the responsibility of getting its High Council for Sociological Research to list and study family budgets in the cocoa area of the French Cameroons. The task was assigned to the head administrator, J. Binet,¹⁵ who devoted two years in the field to it. This initial investigation in the French mandate was duplicated on the Ivory Coast in the woodland cocoa, coffee, and banana zone by an analogous and parallel mission, the results of which are not as yet known.

Binet and his collaborators explored the Cameroons in the sector assigned to them, which contained an ethnically and linguistically homogeneous Boulu and Ewondo population that inhabited the regions of Nyong and Sanaga, of Dja, Lobo, and Ntem. In principle the object of

14. *Revenus et niveaux de vie des indigènes au Maroc: Études économiques et statistiques au Maroc* (Paris: Librairie Sirey, 1934).

15. J. Binet, "Budgets familiaux des planteurs de Cacao au Cameroun," *L'Homme d'Outre-Mer* ("Office de la Recherche Scientifique O.-M., Section des Sciences Humaines," No. 3 [Paris, 1956]).

their research was to determine and contrast family budgets and standards of living, which naturally involved looking into the circulation of money and goods. They also had instructions to examine savings, "these economic data being fixed within the human context whose structures and conduct the investigators were trying to understand." Actually, the study bore mainly upon monetary income in a rural economy of subsistence where food and lodging are almost entirely assured by local, non-taxable resources.

However, the division of labor according to sex reveals the principal source of income. The women work solely at the cultivation of produce which nourishes them, while the men derive 70 per cent of their revenue from cocoa. Ten per cent of the men do not own plantations and therefore are wage-earners, artisans, or functionaries. Annual monetary income, with the figures given in French African francs (official rate about 210 to the dollar), runs as follows: 45 per cent, 15,000–50,000 francs; 17 per cent, 50,000–100,000 francs. This income provides the funds for taxes, prestations, and various items purchased in the shops, always leaving an appreciable margin for savings, which amount to about 10 per cent in all budgets. Such savings reflect a profound change in the attitudes of the native peoples, who once were victimized by inordinate waste. The existence of these savings is a matter of concern to the tutelary powers, who are anxious to see such reserves used to make the new economy more productive.

The conclusions stated in this important report are favorable. Yet it is evident that changes in agriculture result, here as elsewhere, in the dissolution of the extensive family and in individualization of lands, home, and customs. Nevertheless, in this mixed economy, devoid of ancient structures and hierarchies, there is steady, undisturbed progress.

The outline attempted here ends upon a note of optimism, overlooking as it does the tragic consequences of the clash of cultures for which colonialism is held responsible. The example of the Cameroons is certainly not an isolated one. It proves that stability is possible in Africa. However, to build this stability upon solid foundations demands the interest, wisdom, and help of the sociologist, the educator, and the missionary rather than that of the all too frequently poorly informed legislator.