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magyar Afrika-kutatás, a hagyományos közösségi formákban élő afrikai népek erkölcsi felfogása és gyakorlata, Torday Emil úttörő megállapításai sokéves terepmunkája és széles körű olvasmányanyaga alapján

African studies in Hungary, the moral perception and practice of African peoples living in traditional social forms, Emil Torday's groundbreaking findings on the basis of many years of fieldwork and extensive reading material

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THE MORALITY OF AFRICAN RACES

TORDAY, Emil

International Journal of Ethics, 1929, Vol. 39, No. 2, January, pp. 167–176. old.

THERE was always something wrong with the African. At one time the word "dirty" was as inseparable can. At one time the word "dirty" was as inseparable from the word "nigger" as hokus is from pokus. That was in the good old days (and for a long time after) when Negroes used to be branded like cattle-"but we yet take all possible care that they are not burnt too hard, especially the women"¹ and then crammed, six or seven hundred, into a "foul, stinking ship,"² where, though the corpses were care- fully removed every morning during the passage, those who survived lacked all refinements of soap and perfumes. This is not so very long ago: the writer of these lines has still seen an old slave ship off the port of Banana, equipped with the bars to which the slaves used to be chained, though it was then put to more legitimate purposes. Now it is the fashion to denounce the Negro for his stupidity. Indictments of this kind never come from Nigeria, or Ashanti, or thereabouts, where prosperity, due to rational government, seems to have a salutary effect on the black man's brain; it is from the eastern part of Africa that they come in shoals. It is more than probable that the natives of Kenya, Tanganyika, etc., are inflicted with the kind of stupidity which would overcome us if, e.g., we received a hearty blow from Jack Dempsey on the jaw. The East African has received quite a number of blows, the knockout being the confiscation of his lands. What this means to him an Englishman cannot understand. The Englishman is a citizen of the world; he is, nominally at any rate, a Christian, and his God follows and protects him every-

¹ These words are quoted from Bosman, a slavetrader and apologist of his profession.

² Ibid.

where. Should divine protection prove insufficient, there is the navy to back him up with guns. The African has no high god; but he is guarded by the spirits of his defunct forebears. The tribal land is the resting place of the ancestors, who are so closely linked with it that in the native's mind soil and spirits are identical with it that in the native's mind soil and spirits are identical. The moment he leaves the land of his fathers he is like a tree. The moment he leaves the land of his fathers he is like a tree cut off from its roots. He faces a hostile world unprotected, and his own passions are no longer restrained by ancient laws which he used to observe out of respect for those who made them in days gone by. He no longer knows how to live, and death has terrors hitherto alien to his mind. On his tribal land he knew that his spirit, when leaving the body, would join the ancestors underground, and, after having received new virtue from contact with them, it would return to earth in the body of a newborn child of the clan. But in a foreign land, be it only a mile beyond the frontiers of his own, his soul will not know whither to go; there will be no ancestors to receive it and it will roam at night from place to place, wailing, cold, hungry, forever and forever. And the Negro, the most deeply religious being of creation, cannot even find consolation in prayer, as those to whom he is used to pray are beyond his reach, in the land from which he has been driven. The benign influence of the ancestors is gone.

There was a time when he believed in the white man's word, but his faith in it has been shaken. The government officials he knows to be as a rule fine, sympathetic, straight men; but he has learned by bitter experience that there is something above them, some invisible, nameless power not unlike the mysterious bwanga with which the cunning medicine man energizes his "fetishes." This evil principle thwarts his natural protectors whenever they make a stand in defense of the natives' rights and supports ruthlessly those who, according to his ideas, have robbed him of his land. Can the Masai forget the formal declaration of Sir Donald Stewart giving him and all his descendants in the name of the British Government certain lands for all times to come, and the subsequent disregard of this pledge? The Negro asks himself why he has been treated thus? What had he done to be punished so cruelly? He does not know and nobody can tell him. The black man is dazed. No wonder he is stupid.

There was a time when he was intelligent enough. He had his faults, but stupidity was not of them. He was too conserva- his faults,

but stupidity was not of them. He was too conservative, but it is difficult to see why this should be counted a fault, but it is difficult to see why this should be counted a fault in this country where all the best people are of the same disposition. He was improvident and took no thought of the morrow; but why should he in a land where "earth is so kind that just tickle her with a hoe and she laughs into harvest"? Lazy? Yes, when there was no special need for an effort; but he has shown during the Great War what he could do in an emergency. The authorities dare not publish the casualties among the native porters. He served his masters well on either side, and his faithfulness might justify us in dubbing him stupid. He was like the ivy "which dieth where it clingeth." Examples of this would fill a book. There are the porters of Livingstone; there are the two men who rushed unarmed to the rescue of Major Powell Cotton when lying beneath a lion and beat the brute off with a whip! The writer of these lines could tell wonderful tales of acts of devotion performed naturally, without a thought that they did more than their simple duty to friend, by Mayuyu, Makoba, Meyey, Gika, the thirty Bambala, and many others. But this is perhaps the one point in the black man's favor which has never been contested.

Before he was affected by foreign influences the Negro had given proofs of his aptitude for statesmanship. His political institutions were models of democracy, even though now and then they might be upset for a short time by a black Napoleon; after the disappearance of such a dominating personality the country reverted without fail to its primitive organization. Even the foreign conquerors, such as Arabs and Fulani, adopted this old constitutional system, their higher civilization being unable to produce anything better or as good. Nowhere else has British rule been so successful as in West Africa, where indirect government through the natural chiefs has been adopted. The old chief governed his people by their consent and took no decision without the advice of old counselors, and, in matters of great importance, of the whole nation. He had to lead a clean life; an Ashanti chief who exploited the people or seduced the wife of one of his subjects would be deprived of his stool by his elders. If one attempted to play the prived of his stool by his elders. If one attempted to play the autocrat, he might, as among the Yoruba, be presented with a autocrat, he might, as among the Yoruba, be presented with a basket of parrot's eggs and told that he was tired and that it was time he took a rest. And obedient-

ly he sent himself to rest, without axe or guillotine, by his own hand. In many tribes when the chief became old and decrepit, he handed over the reins of government to a virile successor and had himself removed, by the aid of a favorite wife or a trusted servant, to the happy land of the ancestors. Besides, everywhere we find that the ruler had to submit to considerable feminine influence which could not fail to restrain him from violent actions. This moderating power was exercised by his mother or his sister; in rare cases by his principal wife. The "queen" had the last word in all matters; she was practically a supreme court to which the nation and the individual could appeal. Nor were elaborate constitutions beyond the African's conception, as shown by those of Uganda, Lunda, Kongo, and Bushongo. In the last-named country the natives have had for over three hundred years a parliament, chosen by the popular will, in which not only the various territories were represented, but where every trade and craft had a voice, where women stood on equal footing with men and enjoyed the privilege of vetoing any war when they thought the cause of it did not justify taking the risk of losing their husbands and sons. But these particular barbarians had banned war three centuries before the birth of the League of Nations; the most powerful people of their part of the world, they scorned the idea of conquest. They had no army, but just a police force to protect themselves against aggression. This force was not allowed to use the traditional bow and arrow and the throwing knife, as these might wound or kill noncombatants; short swords were substituted for them. Commerce prospered and the arts flourished, as you may judge for yourself whenever a shower drives you to that weird place, the British Museum. Each province, each village, had self-government, and none but national issues were decided by the central powers. The king and his council of ministers were in constant touch with the outlying parts of the realm through agents-general which every province sent the realm through agents-general which every province sent to the capital to the capital.

It is time that the belief in an Africa steeped in blood by constant warfare before the white man brought the blessings of peace be eliminated to the realm of fables or of propaganda as excuses for our own iniquities. Of course not all countries had reached the high standard of political morality of Bushongo; there were wars between villages, between tribes, and between nations. It is well that we should consider the character of these terrible conflicts of which we have heard so

much in our youthful days when our pocket money was so cruelly mulcted for the benefit of missions. The grim warriors, armed to the teeth and daubed with glaring colors, would sally forth to an appointed place where the bush had been cleared for the bloody affray. The cutting of the grass on the battle-field was done in turns by the two inimical tribes. There, while still at a safe distance, Homeric boasts and vile insults were exchanged till everybody was hoarse. Behind the men stood the women, cheering them on, inventing new invectives for them when their own eloquence was at fault. Under their admiring eyes the warriors discharged arrows, hurled spears, wildly, recklessly, with utter disregard for the enemy's safety. This might go on for hours. But when the first blood was drawn, even if it was only from an unfortunate nose which had come into violent contact with a smartly hurled knobkerry, honor was satisfied and the path for peace negotiations open. Everybody retired happy to boast for the rest of his life how he had annihilated the enemy single-handed. Before the Ama-zulu had learned from the white man how war ought to be waged, the younger warriors used to send their shields and spears home by some friends and go themselves to the enemy's village to continue their courting which "the war" had interrupted. Battles were carefully timed so as not to interfere with the weekly market, and occasionally postponed when an important event, such as a wedding or a funeral, prevented one of the combatant forces from attending. Oh, yet, it was a terrible time. In some of the wars the casualties nearly equalled those of a baseball match. Yet they did not affect the density those of a baseball match. Yet they did not affect the density of the population. Wissmann, when he first crossed the Beniki of the population. Wissmann, when he first crossed the Beniki country, found villages fifteen miles long where today it takes hours to walk from one miserable hamlet to another. This devastation was the Arabs' work. But the white man has a record just as sinister. The Ova-Herero will never again lift cattle and the Wahehe will have no more of their little wars: the Germans have practically exterminated them to teach them the blessings of law, order, and civilization. The few that remain are stupid; how could they be otherwise?

Other pastoral people beside the Ova-Herero considered cattle-raiding the most pleasurable and profitable of sports. Before we condemn them, it will be wise to read the history of the Scottish border clans. I am not quite sure that they showed more sporting spirit in their

thieving than the black man. When it happened that a Herero tribe succeeded in capturing all the cattle from another, some of the loot was sent back to the defeated enemy that he might live to fight another day. The fighting men needed milk to keep them in good form, and the women and children could not live without it. The uncivilized Negro was too stupid to think it possible that a person who was hungry should not be given food; it made no difference whether he was friend or foe. When women were captured the victors married them; children were adopted. As the fortunes of war favored alternately one side and the other, this resulted in a constant infusion of new blood, which accounts for the natives' remarkable vitality. Another advantage was that ties were thus formed which united rivals in case of need against any foreign foe, as for example the Arab or Portuguese slave hunter or the hordes or mercenaries and bastards armed with guns by the white man. Their advent resulted in a real war, as we civilized men understand it, murder wholesale, without quarter. But the black did not want it; it was forced on him. With his back to the wall, his freedom at stake, he fought like a demon, regardless of odds.

In the administration of justice, the African chief was assisted by the whole population. Instead of twelve men good and true, the jury consisted of the whole manhood of the country who, though perhaps not specially good, nor exceptionally true, knew the contending parties and were acquainted with all the details of the case under trial. The witnesses stretched a point in favor of a friend or relation, but as they were expected to do so their deposition was taken with a considerable pinch of salt and miscarriage of justice was a very rare exception. In such parts, as among the Boloki, where no larger social grouping than the household was known, they devised a system, worthy of the wisdom of Solomon, which assured, not only impartial justice between weak and strong, but also enabled the judge to enforce his decisions. It was based on traditional law which dominates the African's social life and rests on the common consent of countless generations. It used to be taught to every child before initiation and was known and accepted by everyone. It required no sanctions; it was no more questioned than one's mother's virtue. One law decrees that a person who has wronged another cannot enforce subsequently any claim whatever against his victim until he has fully atoned for the original wrong. In some parts

(Baila) he was practically his slave for the time being. When a number of Boloki families and towns had made their choice of the wise and good man who was to administer justice in the region, they their decision by devastating his plantations, cutting down his trees, and throwing down his landmarks; every head of a family, as representative of its members, had to participate in this act of vandalism. The legal consequence of it was that the new judge had a case against every individual under his jurisdiction, and could give his decisions without fear of reprisals. Besides, his position as an offended party entitled him to call upon all the families to help him to enforce his judgment. His task was not too onerous; an excellent police system made crime very rare. It was based on collective responsibility, recognized throughout Africa. The whole tribe was responsible for every tribesman, the clan for its members, the village for its inhabitants, and the household for its dependents. Any interference with another's rights by an individual implicated all his social connections. Consequently every man, woman, all his social connections. Consequently every man, woman, and child had a personal interest that no breach of the law and child had a personal interest that no breach of the law should be committed and saw to it that his neighbors, relations, etc., kept to the straight and narrow path.

This feeling of solidarity was strong enough to overcome congenital improvidence. The Bantu have always been rightly reproached with destroying forests indiscriminately, and that not for the laudable purpose of producing paper for the spreading of truth and untruth, as we do in Canada, but simply to grow their daily bread in the clearings. But in Kongo, where timber is rare, the Bakongo have systematically afforested their country with useful trees which protect their villages and plantations from harmful winds. They have distinct names for natural (mfinda) and planted (nkunku) forests. Without a board of fisheries, the Awemba have successfully introduced young fish, transported in huge jars, into the fishless lakes and ponds of their country, and imported lechwe antelopes, captured alive in distant lands, to remedy the lack of game. After a few years' careful preservation they now derive an abundant supply of food and hides from these.

The black man's sanitary arrangements are not as perfect as those of modern London, but it cannot be denied that they compare favorably with those of Southern Europe – and one need not go very far south, either. Hygiene was among the Negroes in some respects in ad-

vance of Europe. Livingstone, in his book on the Zambesi, calls attention to the fact that, whereas the London of his times had no sanitary water supply, the "savages" in these parts never used any water for domestic purposes which had not been previously filtered, however clear the stream from which it was taken. Their method was to draw it through a thick layer of fine sand, as it is done now in civilized countries. People suffering from contagious diseases were isolated far from human habitations; it is by this means that sleeping sickness was kept in check till the advent of the white man opened the roads indiscriminately. Inoculation was practiced against smallpox and the genealogy of the men from whom the virus was taken was first most carefully investigated. They had an excellent knowledge of medicinally investigated. They had an excellent knowledge of medicinal plants, knew how to immunize against snake and scorpional plants, knew how to immunize against snake and scorpion poisonings, and used vapor baths rationally. In one tribe at any rate the vacuum needed for cupping was produced by burning grass in the cup – not a mean invention. Iron, the original discovery of which is attributed by such good authorities as Felix von Luschan to the Negroes, was hardened by dipping it, red hot, into cold water. Copper was smelted and cast.

New ideas, when fitting into their mode of living, were quickly adopted. Cassava, a plant immune from locusts, introduced about 1600, conquered the Continent in no time; rice spread even more rapidly. Any useful seed was planted and nursed with loving care. Make it worth their while and they will grow anything. The natives of the Gold Coast produce half the cocoa crop of the world on their small holdings. This tendency to adopt new things and imitate new ways is not without its disadvantages; many a native art has been killed by Sheffield, Manchester, and Birmingham. And don't let us forget Dingiswayo. He saw soldiers drilled at the Cape and conceived the idea of imitating the method at home; within a few years he changed a peaceful agricultural people into one of the finest fighting forces of the world. And it produced in Tchaka, the great leader, the tactician it required. Can the natives have forgotten him? It is to be feared that they have not, and that Isandhiwana has but increased in importance as the story of the victory was handed down from father to son.

When somewhere in East Africa the tired official retires to his tent to write his reports, and the new lords of the land sit down to their bridge and poker, there rises in the night the mysterious voice of Afri-

ca, the speaking drum. It speaks to the black man alone, and no stranger can understand what it says. It sounds like the echo of distant thunder, announcing the storm. Tribe whispers to tribe, nation to nation. And the helot in the east listens eagerly to the strange stories coming from far, far west. He hears the news of those who have been dragged to frosty Europe to keep a white race down which once lorded him. He hears of brothels filled with their daughters to cater to the lust of the black soldiery; of white women prostituting themselves for money to the "braves senegalais." And he is also told that there are parts of Africa where every able-bodied man is pressed into the army, to be drilled and taught to kill, kill white men. These warriors send him a message of brotherhood, claim solidarity with him. Perhaps they speak of "the day."

He turns in with a smile and in his dreams you can hear him howl the war cry of his forefathers.

LONDON, ENGLAND