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BRIDE-PRICE IN AFRICA

TORDAY, Emil (with Reg. PARRY)

Man, 1929, Vol. 29, Aug., 148. old.

SIR, Mr. Radcliffe-Brown's analogy between bride-price and blood-money is ingenious, but I doubt whether it can be sustained.

Among the Nilotic tribes a bride does not sever her connection with her family, who claim a share of her daughter's bride-price.

My impression was that among these tribes girls are definitely regarded as a source of wealth. Every effort is made to obtain as large a bride-price as possible, and sharp practices, such as falsely alleging that the sheep, etc., paid were insufficient in quantity, or inferior in quality, or obtaining part payment and then repudiating the contract, are of frequent occurrence.

I do not remember to have heard of such practices in connection with blood-money, and certainly never met with a case in which an attempt was made to obtain it from anyone other than the actual slayer.

The idea of obtaining blood-money by exposing superfluous members of the family to danger seems quite unknown, which would be surprising if the family were really, as Mr. Radcliffe-Brown suggests, a body corporate.

It is quite possible, I believe, that blood-money, in its essence, is compensation not to the relatives but to the spirit of the deceased.
Yours faithfully,

REG. PARRY.

SIR, When I suggested the use of the word "earnest" in place of the customary "bride-price" I did so moved by the desire to raise a discussion. My gratitude to Professor Radcliffe-Brown for responding to the call is mixed with regret that he should suspect me of wanting to commit others to a sociological interpretation with which he disagrees.

As I stated explicitly, my paper was not

"...written to impose a pet word of mine, but in the hope that criticism may produce a better one."

If I were free in my choice my preference would be for a native term, such as the Ashanti *azeda*, as interpreted by Rattray; but any word not clearly defined by standard English dictionaries would speedily share the fate of *lobolo* and be distorted by theorists to suit their convenience.

As I am dealing in detail with this question in a paper which is to be published in the next number of *Africa*, I must refer Professor Radcliffe-Brown to that. I will mention, however, that "indemnity" is scarcely applicable to a gift which, according to the findings of the South African Native Customs Commission, answers the same purpose if it consists of a basket of corn or several head of cattle. Nor would an indemnity be returned if the person for whom it was paid were to die.

In the great number of cases, when both the wife and the children belong effectively and permanently to the woman's clan, there can be no indemnity; besides, even in tribes with a patriarchal system it is an exception, a very rare one, that a woman should change her clan on marriage. Professor Radcliffe-Brown mentions Zulus and Masai; among the former, the woman never loses her *isibongo*, and among the latter, as Merker points out, the woman passes to her husband's family, but retains the membership of her clan.

As I have shown in a recent paper in the *J.R.A.I.*, I am fully aware of the religious aspect of marriage, and it seems to me that it is just its spiritual significance which makes the use of "indemnity" even less desirable than that of "earnest." Yours faithfully,

E. TORDAY.