

Abstracts of Some Recent Papers

ANTHROPOLOGY

DR. SJOERD HOFSTRA, 'The Ancestral Spirits of the Mendi', 'The Belief among the Mendi in non-ancestral Spirits', *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie*, Leiden; vol. xxxix, pp. 177-96 and vol. xl, pp. 175-82. These two interesting papers, published during the war, are some of the fruits of Dr. Hofstra's field-work during 1934-6 as a Fellow of the Institute. The Mendi are an agricultural people of some 600,000 souls living in central and eastern Sierra Leone. They have the familiar African categories of the supernatural: Supreme Being (*Ngewo* or *Levei*), spirits (ancestral ghosts, *ngafanga*, and bush-spirits, *dyinanga*), magic (*halei*), and witchcraft (*huanda hinda*). In the first article, published in 1940, Dr. Hofstra discusses the ghosts and their cult. He writes of Mendi ideas about survival after death and about sickness; and describes their mourning rites, giving some very interesting examples of the songs sung during wailing. Perhaps the most valuable part of this paper is the end of it where the relations between the dead and their living kinsmen are defined. There is a cult of the ghosts, each family making a routine offering to them at their graves once or twice a year and on such other occasions as they may require their help or fear their displeasure. At these sacrifices the names of the more important ancestors on the mother's side as well as on the father's side of the family are invoked. Besides families, other social groups, the secret societies and village communities in particular, make offerings to their special guardians among the ancestral ghosts; and in the gardens and at oil-palms offerings are made to the ghosts of famous rice farmers and palm climbers. Duties between the dead and the living are reciprocal. They are complementary to each other. The dead need the offerings of the living and the living need the protection of the dead. 'The moral relations which exist between human beings continue to a certain extent even when one of the parties dies.' The feeling of obligation, and of sin if obligations are not carried out, persists across the river of death. Hence, after any person's death, offerings are made for a few years to his ghost. They are made for a much longer period to the ghosts of persons who were socially important in life, even to ancestral ghosts of several generations ago. This reciprocal relationship between the living and the dead is founded on a sense of interdependency, of mutual interest. 'Fear is not the ruling sentiment with the Mendi in their relations to the *ngafanga*.' In the second paper, published in 1942, Dr. Hofstra discusses the *dyinanga*, bush-spirits who live in rivers and on earth. Some of these are good and some evil; and it was one of the evil kind which was supposed to have driven a boy to kill his father—an incident which enabled Dr. Hofstra to make some interesting observations on the part played in the social life of the Mendi by belief in bush-spirits. There is a reciprocal relationship between humans and these spirits, as there is between the living and the ghosts; and people make offerings to them. They are, however, less important than the ghosts in the life of the Mendi. It is to be hoped that Dr. Hofstra will publish similar studies of Mendi belief in magic and witchcraft and eventually write a comprehensive monograph on mystical thought among the Mendi. E. E.-P.

ALAIN MACLATCHY, 'L'Organisation sociale des populations de la région de Mimongo (Gabon)', *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Études Centrafricaines*, Brazzaville; vol. i, fasc. 1, 1945. This is one of several interesting articles in the first number of this Bulletin. It describes three tribes, Bakele, Masango, and Mitsogo, which inhabit mountainous forest land between the Ogowe and Ngunie rivers in the Gaboon. They speak Bantu languages.

Mitsogo and Masango are matrilineal. Marriage is patrilocal in each group, except in the so-called marriage *par prestation*. In this, the husband serves his father-in-law as a *mwiga*, takes his clan name and lives at his home. Among the patrilineal Bakele, the head of an important family dispenses wives to men on the sole condition that they place themselves under him and take his clan name; the children swell the numbers of his clan. Young girls are accorded complete sexual liberty. 'I witnessed in an Asango village a veritable feminine revolt. Protesting against I know not what obligation their husbands wished to impose upon them, they literally went on strike. They did no household work. The men abandoned their demands after two days.' According to the legends which relate the origin of the clans, each of these sprang from incest: this seems strange to the author in view of the actual horror with which incest is regarded. Clan exogamy is the rule among the Mitsogo and Masango. Every clan is under a chief who has his representative in each of its villages. Clans extend beyond the tribes so that the member of one tribe may find fellow clansmen in another. Clan ownership of land tends to become familial—a step towards individual ownership. The author notes to what extreme limits the sense of responsibility may be pushed. A chief is responsible for any accident to men whom he has ordered to clear the bush, and for any damage to their clothing; so chiefs are reluctant to supply labour for public purposes. Associations are numerous. Every individual male and female is enrolled in one or several 'brotherhoods'. These are 'secret societies' and the author was able to get information about only two of them. Mwiri is the most important of the men's societies; all men belong to it. It is a kind of secret police for punishing murderers and thieves. It is of economic importance, for when exploitation threatens to exterminate trees, fish, &c., Mwiri intervenes and decrees a close season for two or three years under penalty of death. Such a stream or patch of forest is called *musitu ba mwiri*. Mwiri also puts a salutary fear into women who are inclined to neglect their duties. The corresponding women's society is named Niembe. The author supposes its purpose to be chiefly defence against men. Male initiates are previously circumcised; there is no excision for girls. Masango and Mitsogo youth are circumcised at the age of 10–15; Bakele about 20. The author describes a ceremony at which he was present.

MELVILLE J. HERSKOVITS, 'Problem, Method and Theory in Afroamerican Studies', *Afroamerica*, Mexico, vol. i, nos. 1 and 2, Jan.–July 1945. To-day the scientific importance of Afroamerican studies is firmly established: they treat of peoples living in North, South, and Central America, the Caribbean and Africa. The study of New World Negro peoples can aid in the fuller comprehension of the cultures of Africa itself. Survival is an index of tenacity, which in turn reveals general orientations in parent cultures that may at times not be given proper stress without such background. Specific complexes of significance that have been quite overlooked in Africa are to be revealed by investigation in the New World. The very fact that to conduct Afroamerican studies calls on the techniques of many disciplines, and is carried on in many areas, gives them a special importance for the scientific study of man. Afroamerican studies are not to be limited to the study of Negro populations and their cultures alone, but must also assess the contributions Africa has made to the peoples among whom the Negroes live: investigation is called for, not only into the maintenance of African tradition in the New World, but also into how, and to what extent, African custom was diffused to the aboriginal Indian peoples and to those of European derivation. This field—a special instance of culture contact—derives its greatest significance from the fact that it so superbly documents the problems of cultural dynamics. The ethno-historical approach has been able to fix the African origins of New World Negro cultures, and also has been of great value in accounting for differences that are found between the cultures of Negroes living in different parts of the New World: thus it has been revealed

that the cultures of Dutch Guiana Bush Negroes and of the Maroons of Jamaica manifest their Africanisms predominantly in terms of Gold Coast retentions, while those of Haiti are of Dahomean and Yoruban derivation. Another methodological device that has proved its value is that of a scale of intensity of Africanisms over the New World. Professor Herskovits gives a table showing degrees of retention of certain cultural aspects classified 'very African', 'quite African', 'somewhat African', 'a little African', 'trace of African custom, or absent'. It shows that the carry-over of Africanisms is anything but uniform over the individual cultures, being far greater in some aspects than in others. Music, folklore, magic, and religion, on the whole, have retained their African character more than economic life, or technology, or art, while language and social structures based on kinship or free association tend to vary through all the degrees of intensity that are noted. As regards music, the Negroes of Guiana, Haiti (peasant and urban), Brazil (except the north-rural), Jamaica (Maroons), Trinidad (Port-of-Spain) are all 'very African'; and the rest (including Negroes of Cuba, Gulla islands and United States) are 'quite African'—'quite' being of less intensity than 'very'. In point of language only the Negroes of Bahia (Brazil) figure as 'very'; the Gulla islanders are 'trace', on a level with the Negroes of United States (north and south) [how does this tally with Dr. Lorenzo Turner's findings?].¹ The author suggests good reasons for the variations revealed in his table: these would seem to be due to the circumstances of slave-life.

The field of Afroamerican studies can make its greatest contribution in solving the problem of balancing the drives that induce acceptance of new customs as against the mechanisms that preserve earlier sanctioned modes of behaviour. The advantages which it has in the way of breadth of scope and historic control of data make possible the type of approach which, under proper methodological attack, permits assumptions within the field to be tested adequately before advancing them as applicable to other areas, under differing situations of historical development.

ECONOMICS

H. GILLMAN, 'Bush Fallowing on the Makonde Plateau', *Tanganyika Notes and Records*, Dar-es-Salaam; no. 19, June 1945. The agricultural system of the Makonde is an example of the ways in which the Africans have tried to overcome a failing soil fertility. It is a variation of 'shifting cultivation' that may be called 'bush fallow'. The Plateau is situated just north of the Rovuma river, is about 3,700 square miles in area, and reaches an altitude of 2,640 feet at its highest: the eastern end varies from 150–300 feet above sea-level. Geologically it is built up of sedimentary formations. The soils are mostly light sandy loams: there are small areas of an almost pure sand. The fertility is not high. Soil erosion is not as yet a serious problem, except in many parts of the eastern portion of the plateau where it is already in an advanced and dangerous stage. On the plateau proper water is virtually non-existent. Its main source for the population of over 100,000 is at the foot of the scarp and in the valleys of three rivers. Some villagers have to travel up to twelve miles to and from the nearest well. They say they prefer to have food in plenty and go far for water rather than sit near water and starve. It is impossible to keep cattle on the plateau, owing to the lack of water, and so there is little prospect for mixed farming. Vegetation consists mainly of an impenetrable deciduous scrub community called 'Makonde Thicket'; very little remains of the original vegetation. (The author names the trees.) In this setting the Makonde have evolved a system of agriculture which has in most years ensured them a sufficiency of food and enabled them to export a surplus. This is the procedure: a block of thicket which has lain fallow 6–9 years is selected; working usually on a communal basis men cut away the tangled growth, leaving stumps 6–12 inches high.

¹ See *Africa*, vol. xvi, No. 2 (1946), p. 118.

The thicket is left lying from July or August to November when it is burnt. On the breaking of the rains, maize, followed by sorghum, is sown without any preliminary cultivation. The spacing is fairly wide and when the grains have germinated a hill type of rice is planted at an espacement of 12-15 inches and when it is completely germinated a few cuttings of cassava are interspersed at fairly wide intervals. After the last harvest is gathered in June or July (leaving the cassava) the plot is allowed to regenerate by a process of coppicing until the middle of December, when all the suckers of the coppicing stumps are lopped back and burnt, and the remaining rice, maize, and sorghum stover is removed by the hoe; but the land does not receive a genuine turning of the soil. The crop complex in the second year comprises maize and sorghum and a fairly thick stand of cassava as well as various cucurbits, cowpeas, &c. By the third year fertility has declined so much that the plot is given over almost entirely to cassava; and when the third season's cassava has been taken up the plot is abandoned: within two years the tangled growth has become dense and impenetrable again and in a few years there is the typical 'Makonde Thicket'. After from six to nine years, when the thicket is considered to be fully mature, the cycle crop-cum-bush-fallow is repeated. Every cultivator clears a fresh block of thicket each year. The author proceeds to describe briefly the agriculture in the woodland area of the plateau, as distinct from the Thicket.

Wherein does the Makonde system differ from the usual shifting cultivation? Mainly it would seem in that, while ordinarily from 15 to 25 years are required to rehabilitate the soil, the Makonde are able to reduce the period to 6-9 years: why precisely this is so, the author is not prepared to say. The system of bush fallowing has everything to commend it. It solves the problem, where not abused, of restoring soil fertility, and at the same time provides a useful means of reducing to the minimum any damage due to erosion. The one serious limitation is that it requires so much land per family: on the assumption that each family clears about $1\frac{1}{2}$ acres of thicket each year a family requires 15-20 acres. The population seems to be growing, at least in some areas, and there the people say they are having to curtail the fallow period to four years. After discussing this aspect of the problem, the author concludes that the policy should be so to control the density of the population on the plateau as to ensure that bush fallow is not jeopardized by any shortening of the resting period.

DR. L. MORTONLE, 'Équilibre de l'alimentation chez l'indigène du Congo belge', *Lovania*, Élisabethville; No. 3, 2^{me} Trimestre 1944 (received Mar. 1946). Nutrition in many districts of the colony lacks balance among the native peoples apart from the labourers whose diet is fixed by law. This is partly due to the fact that they tend to choose as basic food that which entails the least effort to produce and prepare. The most nourishing grains, such as maize and sorghum, are too often neglected in favour of cassava. It is along the rivers that one finds the finest peoples.

'L'élément qui est le plus souvent déficient dans l'alimentation du noir est la protéine animale et parfois aussi la protéine végétale. Il est certain qu'il est impossible, et le sera peut-être toujours, de satisfaire en viande animale les besoins protéiniques de tous les noirs du Congo. Ce problème se pose d'ailleurs pour le monde entier. Mais il est certain aussi que la situation actuelle pourrait sensiblement s'améliorer dans la Colonie, par l'organisation du petit élevage et des pêcheries, ainsi que par l'introduction du soja dans toute la Colonie. Nous avons rencontré au cours de notre dernier voyage dans le Nord de la Colonie l'apôtre congolais du soja, Mgr Mathysen: les résultats qu'obtiennent les Révérendes Sœurs de ses missions dans l'alimentation des enfants, sevrés ou non, avec de la farine ou du lait de soja sont des plus encourageants. Pour le petit bétail, il conviendrait d'éduquer les communautés à former et rémunérer de petits pâtres communaux, qui

conduiraient les troupeaux de chèvres, de moutons ou de cochons en pâture, comme cela se faisait il n'y pas si longtemps encore dans nos villages d'Ardennes belges.'

COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION

ANON., 'La Politique indigène du Tchad', *Le Mois de l'Afrique Équatoriale Française*, No. 9, Sept. 1945. The late Governor-General Éboué's political creed, expressed in his Circular of 8 November 1941, continues to direct the Administration of A.É.F. Éboué, like Lyautey, put respect for existing institutions as a guiding principle. It is a principle open to diverse interpretations: the institutions may be respected as a necessary and irreplaceable instrument of action; or they may be respected as the best possible at any given moment. Lyautey adopted the latter thesis; he maintained a feudal structure. Éboué's doctrine was different: to say that it upheld government by the Chiefs is not enough. He did indeed insist above all on the necessity of recognizing the real Chiefs and in delegating to them the largest possible initiative in carrying out the government's projects. He was certainly not opposed to 'Indirect Rule'; he recognized that it was not applicable to the whole of A.É.F. but he made an exception in regard to the Tchad province. In fact, Éboué's doctrine drew fine distinctions (*était toute en nuances*). He spoke of delegating to Chiefs not the initiative of taking decisions but of executive action. He laid it down that all pre-existing institutions should be respected whether or no they were of monarchical form. He was equally precise in saying that there is no question of making a rigid framework of those institutions, but that they must follow their natural evolution—an evolution which involves the control and direction by ourselves of individuals. Éboué's directives, precisely understood, remain valid in any case and define, independently of all reference to this or that conception of what French Africa will be to-morrow, the only method possible for ruling, administering and educating politically the peoples of the Tchad. This observation distinguishes carefully between government through the Chiefs and indirect rule and denies the thesis that the former leads necessarily to the latter. It is one thing to give a primary position, among the men charged to apply *our* policy, to those who, holding in native societies the reality of power, are best placed to serve it efficaciously and the most qualified, other things being equal, to be examples to their companions; it is another thing to attach them by means of a kind of feudal bond and, in exchange for the certitude that they will regularly discharge the obligations contracted by their communities towards the French Community, allow them to carry out *their* own policy, conceived and realized according to their traditional methods. It would be pernicious to create a black feudalism too strongly tempted (helped by atavism) to abuse its power in order to be in a position to make use of it efficaciously. Is it possible to avoid this? Certainly; and first of all by availing ourselves of the Chiefs but also by giving a counterweight to that monarchical power, such as that of which native society furnishes an embryo or a survival: the Notables and the Councils, or in a general way the *élite*. So it is a matter first of finding among the Chiefs those who are capable, under our aegis, of carrying out a civilizing, social and humane policy; and then of seeking out the Notables and the Councils. Governor-General Reste in 1936 organized about the various chiefdoms village, cantonal and provincial commissions. And such was also Governor-General Éboué's desire. Anxious to give directives applicable to the actual phase of native evolution, he defined a status intermediary between that of yesterday (in which the principle of legitimacy is the chief basis of authority) and that of to-morrow (in which the structure of society will be nearer to our own); for he wished, according to the rule which holds good in all political action, to start from what exists, not to guarantee it but to make it evolve without shock. The Chief's Council should bring together men who exercise a moral authority over the community. That is what existed at one time. The foundations of that authority are multiple: legitimacy, so the Council will include leading

heads of great families; wisdom, so it will include those known for their integrity; wealth, so the Council will include representatives of commerce; place near the French authorities, so the Council will include delegates from the list of retired veteran soldiers and from the educated element. The aim of the Council is not to give a larger scope to the Chief's power but to balance it with another power. So one must not shrink from the possibility of opposition in the bosom of the Council: persons opposed to the Chief will not on that account be eliminated. Equilibrium will be attained on the day that the Chief is the executive of the canton and the Council is the legislature. From now on this régime—monarchical power tempered by a Council—will function in a certain number of cantons. Later a regulating act will fix their procedure; but in the absence of the precise mode of functioning the goal is already agreed upon: it is, according to Éboué's formula: 'Bring the Chiefs, Councils and Notables to act by themselves.'

DR. MENDES CORREIA, 'Política da população nas Colónias', *Boletim, Sociedade de Geografia da Lisboa*; serie 63, nos. 7, 8. This is an address given by the Professor of Anthropology, Oporto, at the opening session of Colonies' Week in 1945. Infantile mortality in Angola and Mozambique is enormous; in the latter physical inferiority is more noticeable in the north than in the south. In Lomués, north of the Zambezi, an investigator, Gonçalves Cota, registered mature males with an average weight of 38 kilos; and married girls of twelve years of age who weighed 30 kilos. Such wretchedness is incredible. He calls for a policy that will place the interest of Africans above that of the Whites. The Native when well fed, properly educated, medically assisted, and equitably paid is an excellent workman. Let there be war against infantile mortality; respect for native traditions; and a gradual development of an existence superior in all respects to what is found to-day. He is not opposing colonization by Europeans; but this must be carried out in conditions which preclude the formation of a 'poor white' class. A policy of miscegenation is not advisable, nor is one of absolute segregation. In Mozambique among 15,000 persons of mixed blood many are descended from white fathers; hardly one from a European mother. In late years over 50 per cent. of births in that colony have been illegitimate among the mixed folk, while the rate is insignificant among the Europeans.

EDUCATION

DR. NEIL MACVICAR, 'Africa To-morrow?', *Manpower* (official organ of the National Advisory Council for Physical Education), Pretoria; vol. iv, no. 1, Sept. 1945. Summarizes replies to a questionnaire addressed to Directors of Education in thirty-five African territories and other authorities with a view to gather such evidence as is at present available to show the capabilities of the African peoples, in respect both to their mental capacity and their character, and especially their ability to take responsibility. There seem to have been no replies from French territories. A list of facilities for primary, secondary, and higher education, and for technical training, is followed by a record of government and other posts held by Africans, as lawyers, medical officers, teachers, professors, editors, &c., and the position of Africans as skilled and unskilled artisans is illuminated by many facts and figures. There follows a collection of personal estimates of the mental capabilities and character potentialities of the African peoples. It appears that white men of long experience agree that in brain power there is no essential difference between Europeans and Africans. The acknowledged relative lack of initiative in Africans, their irresponsibility and unreliability, are due to environmental factors: this is said while allowing that a certain proportion of educated Africans show a high sense of responsibility. Sentences like this occur frequently in the replies: 'Pupils in our schools at present do not get anything like a properly balanced diet. The result is that they are intellectually dull. Their innate abilities do not get the

chance to develop.' The carefully balanced statement by Dr. A. Kerr, after thirty years' experience at Fort Hare College, is particularly significant. The only way of testing capacity, he insists, is by trying out Africans in suitable positions under normal conditions. Applying this test to the hundreds of Africans who have passed through the College and examining their record, he says: 'I am perfectly willing to maintain that there is no more limit to the mental capabilities or character potentialities of the African with whom it has been my good fortune to come into contact, than there is to any other racial group of which I have had experience.'

Dr. MacVicar adds his own experiences gathered in Nyasaland and in South Africa where for thirty-five years he was medical superintendent of the Victoria Hospital at Lovedale and as such supervised the training of African nurses. He also contributes an account of the educational progress in Cape Province. The closing years of last century and the first two decades of the present century were a 'dead period' during which educational results were disheartening in the extreme. The Education Department declined to subsidize any teaching beyond Standard IV except for individuals who wanted to become teachers and these were not allowed to go beyond Standard VI. It was regarded a waste of time to encourage the use of native languages; even in the sub-standards English text-books were used. In those days to 'learn' a subject meant to commit to memory as much as possible of the prescribed text-book. A small number tried to pass examinations. 'When the dread examination came they went forward with trembling hearts and splitting headaches and the agonised prayer on their lips—learned somehow from an English poet who seemed to know just how they felt—"Lord God of Hosts be with us yet. Lest we forget! Lest we forget!"' Missionaries complained to the Education Commission of 1919 about the failure to make use of the native languages; and with the appointment of W. G. Bennie as Chief Inspector of Native Education the 'dead period' closed: he himself edited a new series of Xhosa Readers going right up to Standard VII, and reformed the curricula. 'In the education of the African, although very much remains to be done, South Africa to-day leads the continent.'

LAW

V. DEVAUX, 'Le Mariage en Droit coutumier congolais', *Bulletin des Juridictions Indigènes et du Droit Coutumier Congolais*, Élisabethville; No. 7, Jan.-Feb. 1946. This is an examination of two propositions by Mr. A. Sohier in his book on marriage in Congolese customary law; viz. '(1) L'indigène, de par coutume, a le droit de s'engager à la monogamie et à l'indissolubilité du mariage, et de faire sanctionner ses engagements; (2) Il y a chez les indigènes un pouvoir législatif dont les décisions conservent leur entière force obligatoire sous le régime européen.' If these be accepted monogamy can be established without the intervention of the Belgian Government. Mr. Devaux contests the statement that customary law would sanction a solemn engagement entered into by a man and woman to live monogamously. He accepts, as against those who hold that the State alone has legislative power, Mr. Sohier's second proposition: if there is any doubt about it the Government should recognize the right of Native authorities to make laws. But he is in favour of a Statute, not to be imposed upon but adoptable by Native authorities when they are convinced of its value, sanctioning monogamous marriages.