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Paul Parin, Fritz Morgenthaler

Character Analysis Based on the Behavior Patterns of 'Primitive' Africans (1)

Ever since Frazer, (2) his contemporaries and followers turned anthropology into a psychologically useable tool, Western psychology has had much success in its efforts in studying primitive communities for apparent survivals of early stages in psychic organization.

The brilliant discoveries of Winthuis (3) about sexual ambiguity in the language of primitives, used in conjunction with Freud's interpretative and explanatory psychology, made it possible to compare the psychic processes of primitive people with those of neurotics, and to establish that the thought processes of savages obey the same laws which had been found to apply to the unconscious processes of civilized man. The animistic and magical view of the world prevalent in primitive communities matched the unconscious of healthy civilized individuals as disclosed by dream analysis; it had much in common with the symptoms of neurotics in whom the conscious processes of logical and causal thought seemed much distorted by irruptions of the unconscious.

This view of the 'archaic' nature of primitive people led to a rich scientific harvest: Freud (4) was followed by W. Reich, Malinowski, Róheim, Bonaparte and many others who made continued attempts to explore the psyche and the social and religious institutions of savages for psychological elements which could be related to basic conflicts in the psyche of children, e.g. the origin and subsequent course of the Oedipus complex. These correspondences turned out to be so fruitful and material for psychoanalysis and anthropology that modern anthropologists like Griaule (5) take magical and

(1) This paper first appeared in *Psyche*, 10 (1956/7), 311-29, and is published for the first time in English in this volume.

(2) J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, London : Macmillan, 1930.

(3) J. Winthuis, *Das Zweigeschlechterwesen*, Leipzig: Hirschfeld, 1928.

(4) S. Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (1913), *Standard Ed.*, 13. London: Hogarth Press, 1955.

(5) M. Griaule, *Dieu d'eau*, Paris, Ed. du Chêne. 1948.

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sexual ambiguity in the language, myths and ideology of the Dogon as self-evident.

The Freudian school was not the only one to be concerned with archaic thought processes. C. G. Jung and his disciples, in their investigations of symbols, paid special attention to myths and religions, whereas Levy-Bruhl (6) and other French researchers were more concerned with the thought processes among savages.

The need to find a psychological basis for sociology gave rise to a new application of psychoanalysis to anthropology which derived partly from psychoanalytic thinking about the influence of family structure and education in the formation of character. Kardiner and Linton (7) and their school were now studying entire communities, and they were no longer merely seeking fresh contents for the well-known archaic processes.

In the course of our journey across the Sudan and over British and French West Africa we tried to apply a different method of psychoanalytic investigation to the study of the psychology of 'primitive people'. We followed the views formulated by W. Reich (8) in his book *Charakteranalyse*, which are generally adopted today in any treatment of personality disturbances and have proved themselves also in coping with psychosomatic illnesses (Alexander Mitscherlich). We felt entitled to do this since the Kardiner-Linton school had demonstrated that character formation among primitives is subject to the same laws as that of healthy and sick civilized individuals.

We have, therefore, identified and isolated one particular character-trait which was frequently observable. We then studied its modifications, implications and vicissitudes, both in the same person and in other study subjects showing comparable traits. Then we used this, as well as any deviation from such typical behaviour, for a more detailed description and to check our views about the tendency isolated. Finally we correlated this isolated and observed material with the psychological factors known to us (the structural and dynamic point of view). Last of all we attempted to divine the tendency at the root of that particular character-trait.

In this we were no longer concerned with discovering neurotic

(6) L. Levy-Bruhl, *La Mentalité primitive*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1922.

(7) A. Kardiner and R. Linton, *The Psychological Frontiers of Society*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1945.

(8) W. Reich, *Charakteranalyse*, Copenhagen: Verlag f. Sexualpolitik, 1933.

traits or relating character-traits with childhood experiences. From behaviour we inferred tendencies, and from these, in turn, we deduced the specific psychic processes.

In so proceeding we had obviously to bear in mind that our scheme of reference was specific and unavoidably arbitrary: the familiar psychodynamics of Western Man, including our own 'personality structure'.

We were, therefore, taking the method of 'interpretation of behaviour by means of character analysis' (i.e. a procedure that is well known and thoroughly tested in individual psychoanalysis), and applying it to a new sphere of study. The inference drawn from 'behaviour' to 'tendencies' and thence to 'specific psychic processes' may appear abrupt. But this very direct, and often seemingly brutal, procedure has demonstrated and proved its validity and effectiveness in the individual analysis of neurotics. As far as we know its application to problems of social psychology is quite new, and is still inadequately supported by the limited material we collected. The present attempt is intended to delineate the procedure: similar investigations in the future will have to show how far it may prove useful.

We want to illustrate our procedure by means of an example which sets out by observing a few character-traits typical of many 'primitive' African negroes, throws light on the nature of their super-ego and helps to a better understanding of 'primitiveness' as an expression of a particular psychic process. Admittedly by adopting this method we did not gather any new material for 'Personality and Culture', such as was collected by cultural anthropologists such as Kardiner, Linton, Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead. (9) But we hope this approach will provide us with psychological equipment for a clearer understanding of the day-to-day activities of peoples still strange to us. The observations used in this study concern Negroes of the following tribes: Haussa, Mossi, Fulani (Peul), Malenki, Ashanti,

(9) Following a critical remark by Prof. W. Hochheimer (to whom we are grateful for his encouragement), we should like to emphasize that a paradigmatic presentation such as ours, though it may lead to some kind of hypothesis, can never in any circumstances take the place of full-scale structural investigation or provide any convincingly evident theory. The scope of a careful structural analysis in this field would make it impossible to publish in a periodical. An example of this would be the work which we quote by Kardiner, Linton and co-workers, or even Griaule, who for a structural analysis found they needed voluminous books or a lifework in many volumes.

Fanti and Bassari. The points we shall make were selected purely because members of these tribes, though often living far apart and belonging to very diverse cultures, again and again showed very similar patterns of behaviour. Those among them who were brought up in the Muslim tradition, or

had been converted to Christianity, could be included as long as they did not differ from their nonconverted relatives with respect to the character-trait under study.

With regard to our methods of research it must be said that unfortunately we did not master the various languages. To study the similarity of behaviour patterns among the members of different tribes in Africa one must either be able to speak numerous languages (more than a hundred for the area covered by our journey!), confine one's research to published material, or—as we did—rely on information from local residents in English or French and interrogation with the help of local interpreters.

For a more detailed description of our procedure we will take the example of 'native nursing staff in hospitals'. In the first of the larger clinics which we visited (Navrongo Medical Centre, run by the Mission of the White Fathers) it was the head of the Mission, who was the founder and superintendent of the clinic, who gave us a day's lecture about working conditions and the attitude towards work. This conversation was taken down in note form. The striking statement 'As soon as the doctor-in-charge is changed the trained personnel cease to be reliable' led on to an interrogation about the individual nursing staff on the subject which is discussed below in the example of the midwife. Statements analogous to these were collected, and noted down in three more clinics. A comparison was now possible, and this showed that, in about 100 persons, who although differing according to tribe and individuality were nevertheless living under similar conditions, the 'character-trait of the midwife' seemed to reveal itself, without exception, as the same in all cases. We then stayed for ten days in the third clinic, joined in the work, observed the work in operation, questioned the senior and junior staff further, wrote all this down in note-form, and followed up what were apparent or real exceptions. Individual research into motivation was undertaken only in so far as it proceeded directly from the behaviour itself. It follows that the number of those under investigation cannot be stated with any certainty. If one counts only those with whom we were personally acquainted, then the number is certainly limited; counting up the personnel in the various

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clinics visited we get a total of about 120. If one also takes into account the statements of a conscientious and outstanding Swiss physician, who has been acting as a medical officer in the Gold Coast for the last six years, then this figure must be doubled. A record is therefore sometimes a detailed individual description including the 'striking and predominant' character-trait; sometimes it reports a description of the behaviour of a person at second hand (viewed through a civilized 'personality structure'); sometimes it is a mere unit in a general observation. Our procedure in the case of 'Thieves', 'Religious Festivals', etc., was on the same lines.

The 'White Father' and his Native Teacher

There was an elderly French Catholic missionary belonging to the order of the 'White Fathers' who, after working for ten years in the French Sudan, had built up a good and efficient school (at both primary and secondary levels) amongst the coloured population. A few native teachers, all of whom he had at one time taught himself, were now assisting him with the work of teaching and with the administration of this boarding school. On a free afternoon the missionary was engaged in repairing the roughcast mortar on a wall of the school building. Towards evening there was still a small piece left to do for the work to be completed. But the missionary had to go in order to take part in a discussion at the local administrative council (*cercle*) in the interests of the school. One of the native teachers, who happened to be free from teaching that afternoon, chanced to pass by. The missionary said to him 'Would you mind finishing the wall for me, before the evening rain starts? I've got to go.' The teacher replied: 'No, I don't want to.' When the missionary went on to give an explanation of the motives that led him to make this special request (i.e. he had been called away on urgent school business; the work that had already been done would be completely destroyed by the rain if left uncompleted; and so forth), he still met with the same refusal. So the 'White Father' said: 'You must finish this work.' In fact he was not entitled to issue an order in such a case. For the working conditions and timetable of the school, which was well known to both parties, guaranteed the teacher his leisure time. But without any further opposition the African set to work on the task, and merely observed: 'You should not have asked me whether I minded doing it; you should have told me straight-away that I had to do it.'

The Good Midwife

Amongst the nursing staff of a public hospital in a small town on the Gold Coast, there was a young midwife (a girl of the Ashanti tribe). The Chief Medical Officer at the hospital, who was employed by the government and was the only white man in the organization (which employed about 60 native nursing personnel), received a report on

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his new employee from the school which ran a two-year course for midwives in the principal town (Accra). According to this she was very intelligent, a first-rate pupil, and certainly suitable for working independently as a midwife. Indeed this proved to be the case and after a few months the midwife was already fulfilling the expectations placed on her. She performed all her tasks with great accuracy. For example, when a maternity case was admitted to the hospital, she carried out measurement of the pelvis, took the patient's temperature, supervised the state of the birth, and throughout observed all the rules of surgical sterility. For two years the chief medical officer could

count on her as a competent and reliable member of his staff. Eventually, a different medical officer came to replace him, whereupon a sudden change occurred in the working behaviour of the midwife, which was repeated among all the trained personnel at the clinic. Initially she simply began taking the measurements inaccurately, then she stopped taking them altogether, and guessed the figures which were entered on the patients' charts, until finally she even stopped doing this. By failing to pay attention to the rules of hygiene and sterility during the initial examination of her patients she managed to produce several cases of severe infection. When she became aware of this, she ceased making any examination of the maternity cases, and her statements to the physician became totally unreliable. Whereas her living conditions and usual behaviour (her moods, and in short everything except her behaviour at work) all remained exactly the same as before, there was a difference in attitude between the new medical officer and his predecessor. Here one may mention that the previous doctor bore the following important characteristics: (i) He was medically competent: his operations were in the habit of being successful, his patients recovered, and his prognoses worked out in practice. (ii) He enjoyed great respect and prestige in a wide area, both with the Africans and with white people; he had an imposing presence and voice, in short he was a 'big doctor'. (iii) Quite consciously and deliberately he 'set an example'; he never neglected any duty that fell to him (e.g. in cases of emergency at night he always came straight away). (iv) He constantly also supervised all the work of his subordinates, including that of the midwife, even after the latter had shown herself to be reliable, at least by making random checks and punishing even small offences with a scolding or penalty. (v) Although all the personnel were adequately paid by the government, they also received from this doctor, regularly each month, a considerable gift (i.e. in money), which was graded according to their rank. In addition supplementary pay was given for special services, and deductions were very seldom made—only as the severest kind of punishment in a case of neglect. The hospital workers all knew that these additional payments came out of the doctor's private means, and that all together they were being paid a considerable portion of his income.

From a medical point of view the -second doctor was equally

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competent and successful: (i) In the first item listed above he was on a par with the first one. On the other hand he usually behaved quite differently in the hospital. (ii) He was young, and foreign to the country, and did not yet have any great prestige. (iii) He did not strive diligently 'to set an example', and often in cases of emergency he only came after he had finished his meal. (iv) He only supervised the work of those subordinates who were known to be unreliable (e.g. he did not

supervise the work of the midwife). (v) He gave no private presents; but, as part of his duties, put forward the names of efficient nursing personnel for promotion into a higher salary-bracket.

We have cited these instances of behaviour on the part of the 'teacher' and the 'midwife' as modes of expression of a particular character-trait that was to be investigated. We have selected these from among many similar observations.

The 'teacher' had misunderstood the question asked him by the 'White Father'. The latter supposed that the command 'the work must be completed' would have been sufficiently bolstered up by a joint knowledge of the circumstances, by a community of interest, and by the effectiveness of his authority, to the point at which a wish would arise in the 'teacher' that would be strong enough of itself to outweigh his reluctance to work. Yet a command issued from without had to take the place of such a resolution. It may also be said that the question was wrongly phrased. Instead of addressing himself to the teacher's feelings of conscience, i.e. to his ego, and in so doing also counting on assistance from an inner voice in the teacher. the 'White Father' should have assumed straight-away that he ought to bring into operation his authoritarian command in direct opposition to the pleasure-principle in the 'teacher'. The 'teacher' seemed to agree that he had to act in accordance with the command, whereas he had apparently felt no inner imperative.

The midwife had also clearly not introjected properly the moral requirements of her profession-she had not developed any professional ethos. It is clear, moreover, that it was not simply that she and her colleagues were merely disappointed about the financial change, which was so obviously unprofitable to her, nor indeed were they disappointed with the new medical officer. There was no trace of any hostile emotion against the latter; the midwife even showed some signs of sympathy for the friendly young doctor. Such a swift act of forgetting professional knowledge cannot really be put down to a failure in work, nor can it be attributed to the view

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that because the doctor did not understand the procedure all the hard work would be in vain.

We believe that the inner voice, the super-ego-as regards dedication to her work (10)-was lacking in the midwife, but that the traits which we have stressed in the behaviour of the first doctor were of a kind which would induce the midwife to behave 'as if she had a super-ego'. The prestige of the doctor was such as to put a premium on any identification with him by intensifying self-esteem; this is the feature which is described in our psychology as ego-ideal formation. The behaviour of deliberately setting an example tended to facilitate identification with a suitable model. Punishment and blame came from this model, legitimately and unavoidably, just as they would from a feeling of conscience. We can only be at peace when we have acted in accordance with our conscience. The

recompense for working reliably and industriously was therefore twofold: it produced both a material and an emotional reward. The earlier medical officer took a direct and external hold upon the pleasure-pain balance of the midwife. in that he rewarded good performance with money. But as this money was his own personal property, and he was renouncing it voluntarily in favour of the recipients, the gifts constituted an expression of the doctor's affectionate feelings towards them. This doctor assured us that a small and materially insignificant reduction in the monthly salary operated as the severest kind of penalty for various offences. Just as in the upbringing of our own children when not only punishment (including withdrawal of love), but also some sort of reward must come from outside. Inner satisfaction in a duty well done proved to be no longer effective, as soon as reward and punishment disappeared. Under the authority of the second doctor the impersonal, indirect and postponed reward by means of promotion was ineffective. As a result of these and similar interpretations we deduced that, in the case of the Africans under investigation, there was no ethos of work that existed as a continuing and effective inner structure. With regard to their working behaviour they did not seem to possess any super-ego; but seemed to operate solely on the pleasure

(10) We believe that very few civilized people enjoy working. But it cannot be denied that as a rule an English, German or Swiss midwife or nurse would continue to do her work properly, even if a new doctor were appointed. Here psychoanalysis discerns the operation of an inner motivation (namely, the super-ego). It was precisely the lack of this behaviour and not mere coincidence that determined our selection.

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principle, when inner satisfaction and feelings of guilt were not effective. Only such factors as a command from an external authority; imitation of, and identification with, a prestige-bearer; reward and punishment (particularly the sign or withdrawal of love) were of some efficacy. Since these factors impinged upon the person from the outside world, when they were no longer present it was just as if the person's code of professional behaviour ceased to function.

Numerous employers (both European and African) have assured us that their employees were lazy, had no sense of duty, and felt no sense of satisfaction in work well done. These statements are expressive of an economic, political and social problem, which struck us forcibly in every place where Africans came into contact with Western civilization. We shall give two more typical examples to substantiate such statements.

A road-overseer (a Frenchman) in Senegal had to maintain, with almost thirty African employees as workers, a stretch of all-weather roadway, 210 km in length. Although these workers enjoyed a good relationship with their foreman they only worked as long as they were under supervision. When asked about this, they entirely failed to understand: 'Neither you nor your deputy were watching us! As long as one of you is there, we will work quite willingly!'

An employee in a timber-exporting business in the southern part of the Gold Coast was building with the help of about 300 workers (mostly Mossi and Ashanti) a 40 km stretch of roadway with many wooden bridges over it. This road was to assist the export of timber and at the same time to serve as an important new link between two stretches of road already in existence. The workmen received a fortnightly payment. Only a few hundred yards were still left to be done, together with the completion of a bridge, presumably a few days work. After the last payment of wages about 90 per cent of the workmen gave in their notice; they did not feel it worth their while to stay just for two or three days pay. When it was pointed out that the work done by them all in common would, if left incomplete, be quite unusable, this failed to make a single workman change his mind.

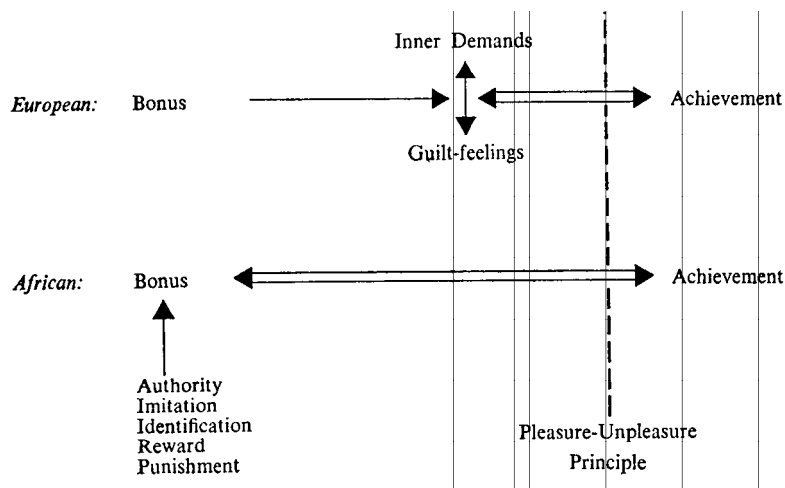
When we try to bring our motives into harmony with the demands of the outside world, it is, just as in the case of the African natives, in keeping with the reality principle. The intellectual evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of a particular type of working behaviour can be the same in equally intelligent Africans and Europeans. The differences between the often highly-differing

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standards of value in the two cultures can be ignored in those cases where almost the same standards of value apply, e.g. in the evaluation of remuneration (a bonus). A study of the emotional factors shows us that we usually carry out a professional task in such a way that the return for service (the bonus) only forms part of the motivation that enables the displeasure of working to be overcome. A failure to perform a duty, once undertaken, avenges itself on us in the shape of guilt-feelings. In the cases under investigation, a dereliction of duty calls down only external disadvantages.

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We shall now try to indicate, by means of a schema, how we represent to ourselves the effectiveness of the pleasure-principle in both a European ego and the ego of one of the 'primitive' people under discussion. (11)

The inner structure and dynamic of the African psyche, which we have illustrated by means of a single and superficially striking trait of attitude towards work, does seem to be essentially different

(11) It is quite deliberate when we speak synonymously of 'primitive' Africans, primitive peoples, Africans and natives (following Freud) on the one hand, and Europeans, civilized peoples, etc. on the other. By 'European', we do not, of course, mean the statistically most frequent type of European, or the 'normal person' of our civilization. Such a very generalizing expression can only be valid with reference to the equally corresponding character-trait (e.g. in work behaviour), or with reference to the similarly considered psychological factor (e.g. the super-ego). By the very nature of our material we *were bound* to renounce any statement by percentage figures. On the other hand, we *wanted* also to apply 'frequent observation and similarity' of a trait, rather than a statistical or norm concept.

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from our own. Moreover this is also borne out when we come to analyze any other common mode of behaviour. Cultural anthropologists have shown by means of a number of individual investigations, that there is scarcely a single mode of behaviour which is looked upon as normal in all cultures. We found, for example, that the cases observed by us appeared to have no barrier of disgust, though on the other hand they all revealed a strong threshold of shame. The conditions, under which people felt ashamed, tended to differ from tribe to tribe, but they were not altogether unlike our own. From these investigations into behaviour towards work, and from similar observations in other fields (family morality, education, criminality, etc.) we deduced that *the*

super-ego of primitive peoples was constituted differently from our own. We surmised the existence of another type of structure comparable to our own super-ego, though by no means absolutely identical with it. According to Freud, our super-ego is part of an intra-psychic system which we can distinguish quite clearly from the ego and the id. Our psychological views about the super-ego follow from a consideration of those tendencies in the personality, which appear to correspond neither to the direct requirements of the outside world, nor to the stirring of desires (in the id). We believe that the dynamic effectiveness of this 'authority' seems to stem from a consideration of the power of our conscience and, above all, from pangs of conscience or their chronic form, a sense of guilt. Feelings of guilt and conscience manifest themselves when instinctual drives that are incompatible with the demands of the super-ego gain access into the ego. We are limited to deducing the super-ego in this indirect manner, because both its contents and its energy functions belong largely to the unconscious. By the ego-ideal, we mean those patterns or models, which have been assimilated into the ego, after it has already developed its testing functions; patterns which are retained as a more or less constant constituent, separated from the ego, and finally linked up with the earlier introjects both as to content and emotion. By conscience we denote those parts of the super-ego that are either conscious or capable of arriving in consciousness. The most serious objection that arises here is the following: there is a probability that Africans simply have other contents in

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their super-ego; this would easily follow from their completely different social structure and the different circumstances of their environment and their ideals.

In fact, the Africans do have other 'contents'. But more than this, we take these to be a different category of contents. Theirs are only valid in a limited community, and are more concrete in conception. Ours are more generally valid and more abstract in conception. For example, all those we investigated remained aware, as we do, from childhood into adult life, of the command to honour father and mother and to obey them. The command to obey authorities in general, which is common to most civilized men, was nowhere in evidence.

We will not here pursue further the question of differing contents. We only wish to point out the differing dynamic factors that struck us. Above all, it was expressions of guilt-feelings, which we are accustomed to relate to an effective inner 'authority' in the ego resisting desires in the id.

Further, we shall consider a few instances of striking modes of behaviour in which inner demands seemed to be expressing themselves. Lastly, we shall consider the frequent examples of anxiety observed in our subjects, with a view to discovering whether these may be regarded as pangs of conscience.

We shall use the following six examples in order to investigate how far the inner motivation of Africans is different from that of Europeans, even when behaviour appears similar. We shall not, however, include any detailed discussion of the familiar depth-psychological interpretation of the behaviour patterns of civilized men:

The Loan

A. has been friendly with B. for a long time, and in fact they were also related by marriage. B. requested a comparatively large loan from A., who was well off. A. refused this by simply saying: 'I won't give you anything, because you may not give it back.' B. acknowledged this. His friendship with A. was not in the least affected by this refusal.

In the case of Europeans, such a refusal would generally awaken aggression in B. which would be incompatible with feelings of friendship for A. and would have to be repressed. Perception of these aggressive feelings would arouse guilt-feelings in B. In an 'injured' manner he would avoid further relations with A. Or, if they did have further contact, he would not be able to behave in an open and friendly manner towards him : *viz.* mobilization of guilt-feelings, or a return of the repressed feelings of aggression.

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On the other hand, A. would also have guilt-feelings on *his* side, as a result of the aggression which had been expressed in the shape of the refusal of the loan: A. would also shun B., or else would be restrained from expressing positive feelings towards B. Typical behaviour on the part of 'primitive' peoples does not exclude the possibility of B. being angry when his friend A. refused the loan. This anger is often expressed quite violently. We were unable to observe in the behaviour of either A. or of B. any sign of aggression, or any sign of guilt resulting from the reappearance of repressed aggression.

The Homicide

A man of the Fanti tribe (Gold Coast) had stabbed his brother-in-law after an argument when he was drunk. When confronted by the authorities he denied his crime, until the weight of evidence proved too much for him. After involved negotiations with the victim's family (a palaver) he paid the widow an agreed sum in compensation. Before the court (the death penalty was being invoked) he showed no kind of regret for what he had done, or indeed of anxiety about being executed; instead he obviously enjoyed his important role as the accused in a jury trial and all the special attention he was receiving from the authorities-in short, all the prestige which attends a capital

murderer, as distinct from an ordinary criminal. The man himself was an intelligent family man of about forty.

In this case--as among most of the 'primitive' subjects--it was impossible to establish the existence of any guilt-feeling in the shape of remorse or pangs of conscience after having committed a capital offence. Reconciliation with the spirit of the victim is sought by means of some magical method (a gift to the medicine-man or Chu-chu man, for the purpose of casting a sacrificial spell). The angry relatives of the dead man are recompensed in a material form for the loss they have suffered. Thus, in the psyche of the killer there is no effective principle at all which can express itself in the shape of guilt-feelings or a fear of death. The threatened death penalty is viewed not as a form of retribution, but as an incomprehensible and unpleasant peculiarity on the part of the European authorities.

Open infringement of the strict religious commands is hampered among civilized people by an intense feeling of guilt.

Participation in a Circumcision Ceremony

The ceremony took place in a village in Upper Guinea. The dance of the lion-man was in progress, which depicts how the lion seeks out

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adolescent boys in order to lead them into the secret grove. Three Europeans, unknown to the natives, Malenki, of this village, came and begged to be allowed to take part in the ceremony. It is expressly forbidden for any foreigners to participate. The spirit of the lion would take its revenge for this desecration. The Europeans offered the fetishman a gift, so that the spirit would be reconciled to the idea of unconsecrated persons taking part in the feast. The fetish-man agreed and accepted the gift. The Europeans were then able to take part in the ceremony without any more ado, and it was performed in their presence in an unperturbed way without any signs of irritation among the participants.

The demands of religion are fulfilled by means of a magical transaction. Thereafter, the behaviour of the participants is quite uninhibited, so that it is impossible to detect any feelings of guilt due to an infringement of religious customs. Instead of an inner demand in the mind of the participants, whose infringement calls forth a sense of guilt, there is an external demand of the 'spirit' (*l' esprit du lion*), which can be assuaged in a magical manner.

There is one seeming exception to our observation that Africans do not possess anything resembling our own conscience; and this is the fact that thefts of property are extremely rare among the inhabitants of a village.

Two Thieves

At a market in a suburb of Kumasi (Gold Coast) an African, probably an Ashanti, stole a few pieces of fruit from the basket of a marketing woman, and was caught in the act. The other visitors to the market all scolded him and showed their contempt. He did not run away but wept bitterly.

On a farm at Mamou, Guinea, a young man purloined certain implements. When caught in the act, he was forced to give them back. He did not, however, attempt to run away but instead remained weeping on the ground near the spot where he had committed the theft, while the neighbours tried to drive him off with blows and insults.

The infringement of social rules (the right of property) evokes ostracism from the community. But belonging to the community often has the practical effect of being a necessity for existence. So ostracism has the effect of capital punishment. It is not the command 'Thou shalt not steal' that prevents thefts of property, but being member of a community which can expel one. Foreigners who do not belong to the community in the capacity of guests, can therefore be robbed without any compunction even by the 'most

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honourable' of members. In a foreign country, where one does not belong to the community, e.g. in a big town, it is possible to steal without losing one's self-respect as an honourable man.

The 'Boy'

In a household in the South of the Gold Coast, there were two male employees (a cook and a servant) from the same village in the Northern Territories. A house-servant for rough work (a 'boy') was to be employed. One man of about thirty with good references presented himself. The two other employees refused to work with him. They said: 'He will steal and will run away where no one can find him, and the suspicion will fall on us.' They said to the employer: 'Why don't you take on a "boy" from our village? He won't steal because he will not treat us as foreigners.'

From the general behaviour of Africans we already have the impression that in those analogous situations where civilized people would show signs of possessing a super-ego, three groups of

phenomena emerge. The apparent exceptions to the rule which we have assumed, namely that primitive peoples do not possess a superego like our own, seem to reside in the same three groups of phenomena : (i) loyalty and a sense of duty towards the prestigebearer; (ii) a sense of belonging to, or separation from, a community (clan); (iii) behaviour within the clan. The prestige-bearer is interchangeable both in theory and in practice. Loss of prestige on his part, or the emergence of a more reputable model, will make it possible for the African to surrender his previous model promptly and without conflict (i.e. 'consciencelessly'). We can easily discern that in these relationships of loyalty and duty it is bound to be a matter of identification or participation. We can also see that this is not a case of introjection, of assimilation into the personality on the pattern of earlier introjects.

Outside the clan, or any corresponding community, primitive man behaves just as if he did not have an inner voice or conscience. Within the clan and towards all members of the community he seems to obey inexorable commands. These commands are all the more inescapable since to leave the clan voluntarily would mean not only sacrificing one's means of subsistence; but would generally for inner reasons be virtually impossible for the individual even at the prospect of great material gain. Ostracism from the clan will generally be felt as deprivation of the means of subsistence, and leads to severe depression, sometimes death, even in cases where

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no serious practical disadvantage ensues. It may be pointed out that something similar to this also occurs with civilized people, especially if one notes that by standards of psychological effectiveness our community is very much larger than that of the Africans. In certain circumstances we, too, are accustomed to assuage our injured religious feelings by some kind of magical transaction (re-dedication of a desecrated cult site). In war we can kill, without necessarily being tormented by pangs of conscience or remorse. Foreigners (e.g. these very Africans) may be robbed and deceived by 'honourable' Europeans. In a foreign city we find it much easier to infringe sexual codes of behaviour in a way that would be impossible at home. In a 'crowd situation' civilized people can allow themselves to do things that would not be condoned by the individual super-ego. We can say, however, that these modes of behaviour, whenever they occur with us, are considered regressive. Regarding asocial persons, in whom we assume a deficiency of conscience, we say that they place themselves *outside* the community. As for killing in war, it has been proved that this only seems to be unattended by pangs of conscience, if we are able to identify very strongly indeed with some Leader and Father. or with the Battle group.¹² Dissolution of the crowd-situation brings with it remorse and a 'sobering up' of the individuals

who had been behaving regressively in the crowd. These hints may suffice to indicate that similar factors (validity of our super-ego only within a definite community or situation, the efficacy of magic and spells in the face of inner demands and anxieties, etc.) do not rule out various differential devices of our super-ego. Within the clan, however, strict commands obtain, known to all. These obey the well-known laws of the taboo which need not therefore be restated here. It can easily be observed anywhere that such unquestionable laws are not merely insignificant remnants of a tradition but are thoroughly valid rules for the social behaviour of individual primitives within the clan. We shall give two further examples of this.

Poll-tax Workers

In the area of former French West Africa the colonial administration used to require every adult villager to pay an annual tax (this is a

(13) W. C. Menninger, 'Modern Concept of War Neuroses', *Bull N.Y. Acad. Med.*, Jan. 1946.

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poll-tax and is quite independent of property or income). This payment was made through the head of the 'Canton' to the Receiver of Taxes, who would act for the local administration (*cercle*), either once a year or in two instalments. The head of the 'Canton' appointed by the administration was often a man elected by the village or appointed as village-chief by the elders of the village. In numerous villages which have a self-sufficient economy or one in which money plays no part, several strong men were assigned by the community to earn the tax on behalf of the entire community by their work. The ones assigned to this task usually made no objection when asked to leave their family and their possessions for months at a time, or even for a whole year, and they often had to go hundreds of kilometers to some distant place where they would be able to find well-paid work. They would unfailingly return on the day when they had saved up the whole sum necessary for the entire village. No compensation awaited them. Their families were supported in the meantime by the clan.

The Guest

A member of a tribe from the north of the Gold Coast left home with his family and came about 1,000 km. further south, where he earned a meagre living by working in the cocoa plantations. One day he was visited by a member of his clan-but a man who hitherto has been unknown to him, let us say, a distant cousin. The latter received food and accommodation from his host, and had a claim on his host's income. The guest liked it there, and remained months and even years. It

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was not his duty to look after his own maintenance, by perhaps taking a job in the plantations. On the contrary, it was much more the duty of the host to support his guest. If the burden finally became too oppressive, he could simply go away unnoticed and leave his guest behind. But if he sent his guest away, then he himself would lose his membership of the clan and become an outcast. This had to be avoided at all costs; for should this happen, then the host would also be exposed to the utmost loss of self-esteem.

We have very little to add to the views which are current on the subject of taboo. Freud says: (13) 'It is possible, without any stretching of the sense of the terms, to speak of a taboo conscience or, after a taboo has been violated, of a taboo sense of guilt. Taboo conscience is probably the earliest form in which the phenomenon of conscience is met with'. And he goes on to say: 'Taboo ...is a command issued by conscience; any violation of it produces a fearful sense of guilt which follows as a matter of course and of which the origin is unknown.' Freud stresses the anxiety-character of this guilt feeling and describes it as 'dread of conscience'. He

(13) S. Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (1913), *Standard Ed.*, 13, pp. 67-74

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notes, 'In maintaining the essential similarity between taboo prohibitions and moral prohibitions, I have not sought to dispute that there must be a psychological difference between them.' Freud considers that this difference lies in the fact that the taboo is 'a social institution'. 'Only if the violation of a taboo is not automatically avenged upon the wrongdoer does a collective feeling arise among the savages that they are all threatened by the outrage; and they thereupon hasten to carry out the omitted punishment themselves.' On the one hand fear of the example spreading would explain the social nature of the taboo. On the other hand an excess of sexual urges over social impulses would explain the difference between neurotic fear and taboo dread of conscience. We may look upon the 'super-ego' and the 'Clan-conscience' as products of education. (14) The energy of the partial instincts, which have become attached to both, is directed against the desires which have secured entrance into the ego. As a result of our earlier observations and considerations, we can make a schematic representation of the differences between the two as follows :

Super-Ego

- (i) Differentiated from the ego
- (ii) Demands more inward

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- (iii) Valid in a wider community
- (iv) Are to be fulfilled continually
- (v) Infringements produce more chronic pangs of acute anxiety conscience = guilt-feelings
- (vi) Anxieties less accessible to mechanisms of banishing and projection
- (vii) Contents formulated in a more abstract manner

Clan conscience

- (i) Less differentiated from the ego
- (ii) Demands more outward, or more outwardly projected (society, taboos, animistic ideas)
- (iii) Valid in a narrower community
- (iv) Are to be fulfilled immediately
- (v) Infringements produce more acute anxiety
- (vi) Anxieties more accessible to mechanisms of banishing and projection
- (vii) Contents formulated in a more concrete manner

It could be the case that the more abstract formulation of our super-ego contents is founded on our greater capacity for abstract

(14) *Editor's note*: This statement is not in keeping with the generally accepted psychoanalytic theory. It is rooted in the bio-psychologically defined identification with the representatives of the child's early environment, generally the parents. This identification bears the mark of the moral standards but is primarily conditioned by the emotional conflicts aroused by the developmental conditions of the pre-Oedipal and phallic phase.

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thought. On the other hand, it could equally well be the case that the capacity for abstract thought is derived from the further differentiation of the super-ego.

The vicissitudes of anxiety to which 'primitive' man is subjected, seem to differ from our own pangs of conscience. Primitive people do not seem to suffer from inner tensions; it is not that which drives them on. Moreover, it seems to be the case that, among our 'primitive' Africans, illnesses due to high tension only occur very rarely, whereas among the 'civilized' Negroes of America these are frequent.

It is true that the evil demons have arisen by means of projection. But they are treated throughout as if they were external enemies. This is also the opinion of Hediger, (15) when he writes:

I know that it is difficult for us to obtain an adequate idea of the continuous possible threat to which the behaviour of an animal is subject. But anyone who has ever lived among really primitive people, as I have often on some South Seas island, can get some approximate idea. These natives of course felt little threat from wild beasts, but in an analogous fashion they did feel themselves to be continuously threatened by countless demons; and in every least action that they undertook-indeed literally at every step-they were obliged to be on their guard against evil spirits. They could not eat or spit, sit or speak, dance or hunt without taking appropriate measures to ward off the enemy - that is to say, the evil spirit.

The magical thought of primitive people and their animistic world image are characteristic of the struggle to master prevalent anxieties. Projection and undoing seem to us to be the prevalent defence mechanisms of the ego which provide a clue to character structure. The average healthy civilized adult only succeeds to a slight degree in warding off pangs of conscience in this manner. Numerous examples of these defence mechanisms have been described but deal for the most part with ritually fixed instances of projection and undoing. We would like to add a few examples from everyday life.

Most of the subjects under investigation paid anxious attention to their body functions. Bodily functions are being considered as the 'external environment' of the psyche. In particular, one matter of exceptional importance was that of excreting regularly and

(35) H. Hediger, *Skizzen zu einer Tierpsychologie im Zoo und im Zirkus*.
Stuttgart: Europa Verlag, 1954.

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frequently. Every individual seeks to aid his digestion with every conceivable kind of medicament, effective or harmful, domestic or imported. Mothers are in the habit of controlling their young children in this way, frequently resorting to the use of an enema which in most places is given by means of the mouth. Medicaments are taken everywhere even by healthy people in order to cast an effective spell on the anxieties projected into the body. The curative or prophylactic efficacy of the medicines themselves are of little concern; what is important is their source of origin (if possible from some prestige figure) and their price. In this way healthy people whom we should consider to be hypochondriacal, frequently have injections, without being in the

least concerned about the pharmacological value of the fluid injected. The whole point is that hypochondriacal anxieties are undone by the use of a therapy which has its origin in the White Man. Throughout the whole territory of the Gold Coast this eagerness to secure treatment by injection led to a state of affairs where medicine men, private persons and doctors were administering injections on a large scale to private people who paid the exorbitant prices demanded, and often suffered the after-effects of drugs injected indiscriminately. (16)

After a brief survey of the possibilities of applying psychoanalysis to the study of 'primitive' peoples, we have attempted to find a different approach to the same sphere. We proceeded on the lines of 'character analysis', highlighted a number of striking modes of common behaviour among Africans and compared their probable inner motivation with analogous phenomena in Western society. We investigated a definite, frequent and striking mode of the attitude towards work from which we deduced the lack of a professional ethos as a dynamic component of an effective inner structure. In the process we discovered certain other effective psychic mechanisms and finally arrived at the assumption that in Africans the super-ego must be constituted differently from ours. In following up this distinction we arrived at the conclusion that we could observe not merely a different category of content of the super-ego, but that a different type of psychodynamic seemed to be present. We investigated this by the use of examples which made it possible to infer from guilt-feelings and anxieties the existence of unconscious processes. Modes of behaviour which often seemed to be

(16) *Editor's note:* This entire behaviour pattern seems more prevalent in the area of the Gold Coast than in other parts of the African culture area.

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similar to our own furnished suitable examples. We recognized the importance of the clan for the behaviour of the individual African; and of the laws which govern his psychology within the community of the clan. After a brief review of the laws governing taboo, and after emphasizing their universal validity we went on to contrast the criteria of our own super-ego with those of the clan conscience. Finally, we touched briefly upon the process by which anxieties are dealt with or converted, as a further aspect important in judging psychodynamics.

The *results* of our investigation, by way of character analysis, of a peculiarity of 'primitive' Negroes in Middle and West Africa can be expressed in the following theory:

The ego of the subjects under investigation is not the arena of an inner conflict between the super-ego, on the one hand, and instinctual demands from the id on the other. Super-ego formation by

introjection of a frustrating parent or other frustrating authorities evidently did not occur as it does with us. In our own case instinctual demands become attached to the introjects and ensure that commands and prohibitions are observed by the ego. The violation of inner demands is either prevented by the release of pangs of conscience or else punished by chronic guilt feelings. In the case of primitive peoples the external environment, through the exploration of reality, acts directly in facilitating and frustrating instinctual desires. In this external world personal authority plays a significant part in the behaviour of the ego-not only by reward and punishment by the vouchsafing or refusal of love but especially by means of imitation and identification.

The fact of belonging to a clan, to a community, does indeed create within the individual a form of clan conscience of which taboo conscience has long been a familiar constituent. The difference from our own conscience consists in the greater social character of the clan conscience, for it is effective only within one particular society; and separation from this society destroys its effectiveness.

We could also say that clan conscience is only a less clearly differentiated preliminary stage of the super-ego; and that it protects certain social and magical demands, which we encounter in a more differentiated form elsewhere-as, for example, the Categorical Imperative of Kant.

What Europeans are wont to call the 'laziness and unreliability' of primitive peoples can now become explicable. External factors

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and interacting persons have a greater influence on the behaviour of their ego, or load the pleasure-unpleasure balance from outside, whereas in our case our behaviour is generally the result of an inner conflict between the super-ego and the id. Freud found in the psychic reactions of primitive peoples a higher degree of ambivalence than is usually to be found among cultured men alive today. The natural and infantile nature of primitive peoples has caused psychoanalysts to ascribe to the latter a higher degree of narcissism than is generally the case among civilized people.

Somewhat expanding this view, one of the authors made the following conjecture after investigating certain 'primitive' Yugoslavs: (17) 'The fact that primitive people appear to us as 'natural' and 'child-like' makes it very easy to see that, compared with their ego, their super-ego must be partly of a relatively frail structure, as well as variable and fairly undifferentiated.'

Our observations on the Africans appear to confirm both points of view. The strong ambivalence of emotions felt towards interacting persons prevents negative feelings from being fully introjected and therefore acting as external threatening demons rather than working from within. An ego that is less oppressed by a superego is more likely to be libidinally cathected. The

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narcissistic element of the libido will be large. The lack of 'inner demands' helps to contribute to the child-like character. (18)

In place of the super-ego there exists in primitive people the dynamic combination of those factors which we have described as loyalty and a sense of duty towards a prestige figure, the sense of belonging to, or being separated from, a community and the sense of clan-conscience.

Further attempts to answer problems of ethnopsychology applying methods of character-analysis to investigations of behaviour should help to indicate how far our approach is likely to be of use. The dynamically effective factors which differentiate the psychic life of primitive peoples from that of civilized people could then be more precisely defined and deduced with greater certainty. It is very probable that other significant differences would be found. The hypothesis which we have arrived at calls for additional exploration.

(17) P. Parin, 'Die Kriegsneurose der Jugoslaven', *Schw. Arch. f. Neurologie und Psychiatrie*, 61 (1948).

(18) *Editor's note*: As viewed from our position.