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Aspects of female psychology in some demographically isolated populations

The demographic isolation of numerically small human groups brings with it many consequences in the evolution of the groups themselves as a result of the ever closer endogamy over the generations, whenever the isolation is persistent. Usually these consequences are resolved in a gradual demographic decline that would lead to the complete extinction of the group if, at a certain point of the phase of decline, there were not contact and assimilation with other groups¹. But apart from these demographic consequences, one might ask if there are any possible relations between demographic isolation and psychological characteristics, if, that is, demographic isolation has an influence in determining particular forms of psychology or – at least – in keeping the primitive psychological characteristics of the group intact.

There can be various kinds of causes of demographic isolation: geographical, religious or racial. Isolation determined by geographical factors involves a more or less absolute lack of contact of any kind with other populations: in this way individuals belonging to a group living in the centre of a desert, or on an island far way from other lands and the sea lanes, or amid inaccessible mountain peaks, will rarely have the possibility or opportunity to stray far from their home or see individuals belonging to other groups in their land. But when it is other kinds of factors that impede the mingling of different population groups, the isolation will be relative, in that there will be some extra-demographic contacts between the different groups. When religious rules forbid unions with individuals from other groups, or traditions or racial feelings lead to such unions being avoided, the group will preserve its endogamy, but live in more or less direct contact with other

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¹ For example, Gini noticed symptoms of a relaxation of endogamy among the Samaritans of Palestine (a group of just 209 individuals) and a certain number of marriages with Jews, who until a short time before were considered their enemies. see C. GINI (1934-XII), "I Samaritani", in *Genus*, I (1-2), June.

groups, even though its social relations with them will be limited, as frequently happens in similar cases.

Now, in the case of absolute isolation, like that caused by geographical factors, the group's psychological characteristics will necessarily be preserved down through the generations and the only variations that can be created on them will be those connected with the gradual decline of the group itself. In the other cases, however, there will certainly be external influences from whatever limited, superficial contact there is with other populations. However, it will then be interesting to study to what extent the group will resist these extraneous influences.

An in-depth study of these problems is certainly not easy and the difficulties will be notable, as the interpretation of various group manifestations is always to some extent arbitrary and the comparative psychology of populations requires a profound knowledge of them. I have certainly no intention of tackling such a difficult subject here. I shall simply bring out some aspects of the psychology of some demographically isolated populations that I have had the opportunity to visit as a member of scientific expeditions conducted by the Italian Committee for the study of population problems (CISP)², referring exclusively to the psychology of the women in these groups, as I have had the opportunity of analysing some of their manifestations in my capacity as expert on the anthropometric observation of the female population.

The missions of the CISP in which I have taken part have always studied groups that were very different in race, environment and civil development: the Karaims of Poland and Lithuania, the Dauada of Fezzan (Tripolitania), some Berber tribes from Giado (Tripolitania), three groups of Albanians in Calabria, the colony of Ligurians at Carloforte (Sardinia) and of Ligurians and Piedmontese at Calasetta (Sardinia).

For all these groups, however, we can speak in terms of demographic isolation in the sense of endogamy – even though to a different extent in the six groups – that was brought about for different reasons and that will be illustrated in each case below.

But first of all it seems useful to distinguish those among the populations examined whose demographic isolation is flanked by another element of unquestionable influence on their group psychology: primitiveness. This distinction will allow us to identify any possible differential psychological manifestations in primitive populations and which can be regarded as the effect of conditions common to the various

² The investigations carried out by the CISP under the direction of its President, Corrado Gini, all had the aim of studying the demographic, anthropological and medico-biological characteristics of the various groups.

populations (ignorance, degree of isolation). Quite often, in fact, not coming into direct contact and not having considered from the same perspective populations with different degrees of civil development can lead one into errors of evaluation and induce one to consider as characteristic of primitives some particular elements that are actually also common to many other populations that have been in contact with more advanced societies for centuries.

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At first sight it might seem easier to understand the psychology of primitive populations compared with the more complex one of civilised peoples.

That is not actually the case: anyone who has had the opportunity of contact with populations as yet unreached, or only indirectly touched, by civilisation, knows how difficult it is to enter into the collective and individual psychology of these populations, which are generally closed and mistrustful to the point of becoming hermetic. Theirs is a world difficult to penetrate, being as it is an elemental world, reduced in most cases to primordial instincts and only complicated by beliefs and superstitions both mystico-religious and natural at the same time, but which for its very simplicity and absence of those elements that are now so deep-rooted in civilization as to seem almost instincts – and precisely for that reason, I repeat – is a world that is extremely difficult for civilised man to understand.

I said collective and individual psychology, because while among civilised people collective psychology is no more than a substratum in the variety and variability of individual psychologies, the importance of collective psychology and its predominance over individual psychology grows bit by bit as we descend the ladder of civilisation until – among primitives – differences of psychology from one individual to another are quite exceptional. When we speak here of collective psychology, this does not of course mean that particular psychology that is determined as a result of the instinct of imitation that easily takes over the masses among civilised people as much as primitives; but collective psychology in the sense of a homogeneity of individual reactions to external stimuli, which is typical of primitives, among whom individuality is relatively undeveloped. Here too we must, of course, be clear about our terminology: uniformity cannot and must not be interpreted as an absolute lack of individual variability, for among the most primitive peoples too there are the cowardly and the courageous, the sad temperament and the lighthearted one, the frank, open individual and the sly, mistrustful one. But it is certain that we meet marked

individual characteristics in them much less frequently: tradition, superstitions, the limited circle of ideas and the lack of contact with the outside world impede, if not prevent, the development of individuality.

It is interesting to learn about the psychology of any people, but this knowledge becomes fundamental when we are dealing with primitive groups where it informs the whole of social life and is –more than its consequence – its premise. If civilisation establishes social orders to which the individual psychology of those who are a part of it conforms to the point of acquiring many elements of it that are later confused with pre-existing ones and those characteristic of each individual, in primitive societies social organisation responds to group psychology and conforms with that, so much so that only by penetrating that can we make sense of some social characteristics of the group, which at first sight seem inexplicable.

We need to live for a long time in contact with a primitive population before we can be sufficiently familiar with its psychology; sufficiently, as I believe it is more or less impossible to reach the point of understanding it completely.

All the same, there can still be some interest in making some direct observations on primitive groups as a contribution, however limited, to our knowledge of their psychology.

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Of the six groups that I participated in studying for the CISP, only the Dauada can be regarded as primitives in the strictest sense of the word; the Berbers, however, are of particular interest as we can see in them the first effects of contact with European civilisation. So these two populations will be dealt with separately.

The Dauada can rightly be called primitives. They live in the centre of the Libyan desert (in the hinterland of Tripoli), separated – not only from the civilised world, but even from the Fezzan villages inland – by miles and miles of “ramla” (or sandy desert), which they can cross only on foot, being without any means of transport, including animals. Their geographical isolation is made more complete by the contempt with which they are regarded by the surrounding populations³.

³ The Dauada are regarded as an inferior race by the inhabitants of the Uadi, who have given them the disparaging name of “worm-eaters” (which is what the term Dauada means). Actually the Dauada are not the only people to eat the “dud” (Arabic word meaning worm), which they sell at the markets of the Uadi, where they are much appreciated. The so-called “dud” are the larvae of a crustacean (*Artemia salina*) which are plentiful in the Fezzan lakes of the oases inhabited by the Dauada.

Their life is spent in the circle of three groups (which I would not dare to call villages), each one a day's camel-ride away from the others, with few contacts between them⁴. Their homes are a few dozen "zeribe", built with palm leaves, near small lakes in the centre of oases that are less abundant in vegetation than other oases of Fezzan. Apart from the "dud", which they fish in the lakes, and dates of poor quality that they collect from the palms of the oases, barley meal or millet, a few vegetables (aubergines, courgettes, tomatoes and onions) make up their extremely frugal diet, which they cultivate with great labour in the "gardens", the normal form of cultivation in Fezzan, tiny allotments of sandy terrain, squared off symmetrically for ease of irrigation. Their clothes are usually of canvas, sometimes of wool, often torn and sometimes in rags. There is not the slightest trace of furnishing in the "zeribe", apart from some matting, a few utensils made out of palm-leaves and some roughly smoothed stones to crush the barley.

What is most striking about the Dauada villages is the dull apathy of the inhabitants, who spend their lives – or much of them, at least – in almost total idleness, not even enlivened – as we see in other Arab or negro populations – by the characteristic, constant chatter. Men, women and children spend most of the day sitting on the ground, silent and absorbed – or rather immersed – in a state more or less of stupor, from which they arouse themselves automatically if called, which makes it difficult to be sure if this costs them any effort. The children are no exception, nor did I ever see them play or fight with each other, as happens everywhere. This absolute apathy is an attribute that can be regarded as common to almost all the Dauada, and is probably the result of the state of degradation that the scanty means of life and their almost total isolation have now determined in these wretched outcasts of a population that, in some respects, can perhaps be considered as even lower than many completely savage populations, despite their living not far from more developed Arab populations, with whom they have the same language and religion in common⁵.

What is the position of the women and their psychological attitude in a population like this? They have many duties, so that in the general inertia they are, relatively, the least inert: they have the task of irrigating the "gardens", with water laboriously extracted from the distinctive wells by an ingenious, if primitive, system; they are also responsible for the annual

⁴ The three villages are Gabr'On, Bar-et-Truna and Mandara, situated on the banks of three lakes in the desert area between Uadi-el-Agial and Uadi Sciati.

⁵ The Dauada speak the Lybian dialect of Arabic, specifically in its Fezzan form, and follow the Malechite school of Islam.

fishing of the “dud”⁶, collecting wood, making the matting and the few utensils in use, and grinding the barley. The men only collect the dates, sell the “dud” in the markets of Dadi, and sometimes do the “gardening”⁷.

This is certainly not just a characteristic of the Dauada: in many other populations, particularly negro ones, it is common to leave the heavier work to the women⁸, although they are already burdened by those deriving from their specific functions. The Dauada women are in any case resigned to working more than their men, unlike the situation in many other extremely primitive populations⁹. This resignation is so innate that it cannot even be called that, as the term implies awareness of different possibilities in life and the sensation of sacrifice, features that the Dauada seem to have no conception of. Is it a tradition that has been handed down from one generation to another and has now become an instinct? Passivity? Unconsciousness? It is difficult to say: they are all elements that probably coexist and make the primitive women accept the destiny of work animals imposed on them by the more or less embryonic society to which they belong, with the same passivity with which they accept the destiny imposed on them by nature. The sexual division of labour is different in different primitive populations, fairer in some, absolutely irrational in others, but a similar psychological attitude of the women towards it has been found by researchers in all of them: there is a complete lack of awareness of labour as collaboration with men in the family and for the family, and it is only accepted as one of the tasks that necessarily falls to the woman.

Among the Dauada, collective female labour, like, for example, fishing for the “dud” in the lakes, is organised by the “scecha”, the female authority that all the women in the group obey and accept as in charge, and who sees to the fair distribution of water and wood among them¹⁰.

This form of female organisation led by an accepted authority on whom all the women of the village depend is typical of the Dauada¹¹. The “scecha”

⁶ The “dud” are fished once a year: in the summer at Gabr'on, and in the winter at Truna and Mandara.

⁷ In only one of the three Dauada villages do the men cultivate the land; in the others all work in the “gardens” is done by the women.

⁸ Cf. CUREAU AD. (1931), *Les sociétés primitives de l'Afrique Equatoriale*, Paris, Colin, 131-132.

⁹ Cf. LOWIE R.H. (1920), *Primitive society*, New York, H. Liveright,; VON REITZENSTEIN F. (1933-XI), *La donna presso i popoli selvaggi*, Milano, Universum.

¹⁰ Cf. too C. GINI, *Appunti sulle spedizioni scientifiche del Comitato Italiano per lo studio dei problemi della popolazione*, in “Genus”, vol. II, no. 3-4, June 1937-XV.

¹¹ As far as I know, there is no example of female authority over all the women of the village either among the Arab populations or the Berbers, or among other African populations. If

is feared and her orders obeyed immediately. There is no apparent conflict between the authority of the village-chief and that of the "scecha" as the latter exercises her command only over women, directing their work and transmitting any orders of the village chief.

What is the Dauada woman's position in the family? It is difficult to be sure. This is a field that escapes direct observation and in which investigation is not easy. Still greater is the difficulty as regards the Dauada men, among whom the influences of religion and Muslim tradition are conditioned by the mentality of the population, which is much more primitive than that of most peoples of the Muslim religion. In this connection it is worth noting that, for example, one of the most salient characteristics common to all Islamic populations is wholly lacking: the absolute ban on the woman showing her uncovered face to men outside her family. The Dauada women always go about with face uncovered, and if they sometimes partially cover it, it is mainly a precaution against the sand and the baking sun, a precaution taken by the men too. The custom of the Dauada women is to leave one arm and part of one shoulder completely nude, passing the only garment that covers them (a rectangular piece of material, usually of black canvas) under one of their arm-pits. Only the most affluent – and in exceptional circumstances – further cover themselves with a barracan, but in this case too leaving their faces more or less completely uncovered. This detail (which is not insignificant) suggests that the Dauada do not feel very strongly that special form of jealousy by virtue of which Muslim women are excluded from even the slightest freedom of life and activity outside the house. But though we are certainly far removed from this rigid confinement of women, we are also a long way from the conception that many primitive populations have of married life and the carelessness with which they admit

there are some examples of women with great authority, this authority is very different in kind from that of the Dauada "scecha", and is usually religious in origin, as in the case of the Mzab (Cf. GOICHON A.M. (1927), *La vie féminine au Mzab*, Paris, Geuthner). Moreover, the authority and timorous respect due to women who are regarded as having exceptional magical-religious qualities is utterly different in kind and is fairly common: thus, for example, women with psychic peculiarities are normally regarded as "marabouts" (Cf. GAUDRY M. (1929), *La femme chaouia de l'Aurès*, Paris, Geuthner) and among the Dauada too a woman afflicted by serious hysterical convulsions was respected and surrounded by the veneration of the whole population.

But all these forms have nothing in common with the authority exercised by the "scecha", who exercises this authority only over the women and does not form part of the "Council" presided over by the village-chief, which decides on questions that concern the whole village and passes judgment in disputes; it is, then, a different form of authority from that found in some populations – for example in the Carolinas – where the oldest women in the "clan" are always consulted by the chief in questions of any importance (cf. in this connection SIDNEY HARTLAND E. (1921), *Primitive society*, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London).

and sometimes encourage extra-marital relations: a case that was considered exceptional for its brutality, but also symptomatic, was that of a Dauada man who killed and horribly disfigured his unfaithful wife; all the more symptomatic as it was the only act of violence that we recorded in this extremely gentle population.

Nor is there a lack of affection between the spouses: when the plaster masks of Dauada women were made during our research, it was almost always in the presence of their husbands, and one of the few flickers of emotion that I ever noticed among the Dauada was in a man when the plaster was poured on the face of his young bride.

Overall, my personal impression (we are dealing here more with impressions than observations based on factual data) is that the subjection of women in the family is much less noticeable here than in other Muslim populations, not because the Dauada women are more highly considered, but rather because the conditions of life and family organisation are much less developed than elsewhere, and so give little occasion for a situation of clear inferiority.

However, the attitude of the Dauada women both towards their position in relation to men in general and in relation to their position in the family is, as has already been noted above, one of absolute passivity and submission, which is – almost, I would say – unconscious.

One of the most notable characteristics of the Dauada is a marked insensitivity in every field: lack of interest in the outside world, few feelings of any kind, and physical insensitivity. Unlike what I have observed elsewhere, our research, none of the tools we made use of, aroused any curiosity in the Dauada women, who submitted to our investigations with the same passivity with which they undertake their daily work, obeying the call of the “scecha” without objections or resistance, and waiting hours and hours for their turn without any sign of impatience, without showing either curiosity, or interest, or concern, or fear, or unease in the face of the variety and complexity of the examinations which each of them was subjected to. Their affective sensibility, however, is certainly feeble, but not wholly inexistent, at any rate as regards maternal feeling. The mother’s attachment to her children is generally a mixture of instinct and feeling, and it is difficult to establish where instinct ends and feeling begins. Thus it is difficult to evaluate precisely some manifestations of this attachment; I was, however, able to make one symptomatic observation, which led me to suppose that the Dauada women have something more than natural, instinctive attachment for their children: one of the rare occasions when the mask of apathetic and almost half-witted impassivity that is typical of the great majority of them was ruffled was when several times I saw a brief but painful contraction

cross their faces when their children were pricked for a sample of their blood group, and when they saw the blood emerge from the incision, while they seemed to feel no sensation when the injection was made on themselves.

Indeed, their physical insensitivity seems marked: in their sense of smell, at least for some odors (a wad dipped in alcohol and placed under their nostrils does not provoke any reaction, and they remain impassive without displaying the slightest contraction of the muscles of their face; insensitivity to pain (the prick for the blood sample leaves them, as we have said, equally impassive).

Is this a genuine lack of sense perception or an impassivity that is the result of long, atavistic training? The second hypothesis is, in any case, only admissible as regards insensitivity to pain, and might even seem acceptable at first sight. As is well-known, in primitive populations there are often ritual or aesthetic practices that involve extremely painful operations that make one shiver at the mere thought, as well as many civilised men and women¹². But apart from the fact that one might wonder in this case too if the apparent stoicism of the primitives is not rather due to their limited physical sensitivity¹³, it is certain that no ritual practice or ornamental operation is to be found among the Dauada, among whom there should therefore be no training in physical pain. The particular insensitivity of the Dauada women to pain is not only proved by their impassivity in the face of the prick they were given (which is not really very painful) but also by the same impassivity with which they extract the palm thorns that often penetrate deeply into their flesh and that are – as is well-known – extremely sharp, and also by the fact that they use an extremely painful therapy to cicatrise the wounds caused either by the palm thorns or anything else with absolute indifference, placing a live coal on the flesh that leaves on it prominent and disgusting scars that indicate how vigorous the treatment is.

Whatever explanation one wants to give of their insensitivity to pain, however, it is certain that, to a greater or lesser degree, it is fairly common among primitive peoples. Their poor sense of smell is more exceptional. The general uninformed opinion that the sense of smell among primitives is

¹² For example the perforations of the nose, lips and ears and the incisions on the face and body in Equatorial Africa (Cf. CUREAU, *op. cit.*); the terrible tattoos that young girls must submit to at the onset of puberty among some South-American tribes (Cf. VON REITZENSTEIN, *op. cit.*); or the mutilations customary among both Africans and Indians.

¹³ An investigation of the indigenous people of Torres Strait revealed a sensitivity to pain half that found in the English. Cf. *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Strait*, vol. II, part II, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1903.

particularly acute is supported by science¹⁴. But we might wonder if rather than an acute sense of smell it might not be an atavistic aptitude in recognizing particular odours and so having an immediate perception of them too. This might at least partly explain the reason for the Dauada women's limited sensitivity to the odour of alcohol, which is certainly unknown to them. This conjecture could only be a partial explanation, however, as it is difficult to accept that such a sharp smell does not provoke any visible reaction.

A possible exception to the limited sensitivity of the Dauada women is to be found in relation to the variations in temperature: the climate of the Sahara in Libya has the characteristics of the tropical desert climate: intense heat during the day, and equally intense cold during the night until sunrise. Although the indigenous people must be more than used to this imbalance in the temperature, I have frequently noticed that in the early hours of the morning the Dauada women seemed to suffer from the cold markedly to the point of their teeth chattering, if a fire was not lit from the brushwood round which they squatted until the sun once again warmed up the air and sand. But on various occasions I had the suspicion that this particular sensitivity of theirs was, at least in part, more simulated than real, although I can find no explanation for this simulation. Its inexplicability is in any case far from counting against my hypothesis as very often the motives for the actions of primitives escape us, and when we try to investigate them we are drawn to look for explanations that are quite often erroneous, precisely because of our logical tendency to generalise motives that are often contingent and our desire to relate actions that are unlikely to be connected with a precise intention which – even if it exists – does not give rise to similar manifestations in every case. The psychological relations of cause and effect are often very vague in primitive peoples, so that it is not always easy to move from a given action to its cause or predict the probable reaction to a given stimulus.

The desire for adornment and care for one's appearance is instinctive in women and usually very noticeable in primitive peoples. It can be found among the Dauada women too, though in accordance with the local aesthetic ideals. Bracelets and necklaces of pearls, string, interwoven palm leaves,

¹⁴ This heightened sense of smell has at least been noted among the indigenous people of Torres Strait in the investigation cited in the previous note; the sense of smell in this people proved to be on average superior to that of the English, although more variable. Cf. *Report, etc.*, cited.

and, infrequently, metal, are their only ornamentation, however¹⁵; they also use vigorous, primitive systems of depilation, and, though less than other women, braid their hair (to what extent depending on individual coquetry and aspirations). For lack of more sophisticated unguents, these plaits are smeared with fat and camel dung. On occasion they paint their nails with henna, as is common in the Muslim world. They have no other ornamentation or aesthetic treatment – not even tattoos, which are so widespread among primitive populations, the Arabs and Berbers in particular.

We can say, then, that among the Dauada women this aspect too of female existence is fairly insignificant, one might say as colourless as the rest of their lives.

Passivity, insensitivity – one often comes across savage and semi-savage populations that display primordial manifestations of life, however restricted and limited their societies, but that of the Dauada seems dull and muffled by a kind of unconscious degradation.

What might be the explanation? Partly, perhaps, a gradual degeneration, the consequence of an ever more restricted endogamy, not only because of their small numbers (391 individuals overall, with 184, 97, and 110 in each of the three villages) but also through custom – which allows few exceptions to marriage between cousins; partly too the extreme poverty which became quite exceptional during the domination of the rebels that preceded the Italian retaking of Fezzan. During this period the Dauada were plundered of their already meagre harvests and persecuted by the rebels. They fled both to the villages of the Uadi and to the heart of the desert, and quite a few of them starved to death. The return of the Italians is a point of reference for them that they have not forgotten, because, as they will say unanimously, it marked a return to life, which – however wretched, is at least calm and safe now.

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The conditions and characteristics of the Berbers of Giado are very different. With them we are at the heart of Islam.

Giado – about 250 km from Tripoli – in the Gebel Nefusa, is a discreet village, the home of one of the many ethnic islands of Berbers in North Africa.

¹⁵ By contrast, the greasy leather bags containing verses of the Koran that many women carry hanging from their neck on a string, like a necklace, has magical-religious, not ornamental, properties.

The lives of these Berbers is not very different from that of all the indigenous peoples of North Africa; on average, the population enjoys reasonable economic conditions.

The Berber women live essentially in the home, which usually they leave only to go to collect water. Their work is thus exclusively domestic, and, though it includes many varied tasks, less demanding than that of the Dauada women. But their position is more markedly inferior than that of the men, because Berber social life, being strikingly more developed, gives rise to a clearer differentiation, and also because religious precepts are followed much more rigidly, and female subjection is traditionally maintained.

Even at home Berber women are only mistress of the house up to a certain point, or rather they are so only as regards the other women living there. Genuinely hospitable and warmly welcoming, for all their natural reserve, they make a point of offering any guests the traditional “sciai”¹⁶ and are concerned to recognise and satisfy all their desires. They like to spend many hours of the day in conversation while getting on with their work. But as soon as their husband, their father or their brothers come back, they stop their everlasting chatter, as respect for the man makes it impossible to continue, and silently obey his orders or disappear if they are not required.

Loquacious with each other, they can also remain for long periods in absolute silence, answering only what is strictly necessary in the man’s presence: what could be more characteristic than the long silent lines of women wrapped up and hidden in their barracans during the interminable frenetic dances at weddings, while the Negros untiringly continue to drum out the same rhythm for hours and hours, accompanying themselves with the characteristic monotonous singsong?

Not only does female life unfold almost exclusively at home, but it also unfolds, for the most part, in separate places where all the women of the family gather and where men from outside the family cannot penetrate, and even those of the family only rarely. Usually the woman does not dine with her husband, but serves him and eats only when he has finished.

Over all the attitude of the Berber women towards men is one of solicitude and timorous respect.

Men regard them as very inferior and do not even consider the possibility of raising them up.

I do not know if this is a characteristic of the Berber women of Giado: according to Gaudry, the Chaouia women are significantly more important in the family life of Aurès, but I suspect that the author’s pride in her own sex has led her to interpret the lives of the women she has studied so

¹⁶ As is generally known, the “sciai” is the indigenous tea that is offered to all guests.

passionately according to her own modes of feeling, and has attributed them feelings and aspirations that may not really exist. She speaks of an ascendancy over the men such as to leave the latter no more than the illusion of an authority that is actually exercised by the women, and offers an apologia of the Chaouia women that is not justified by what she documents, and seems more an exaltation than the logical conclusion of her observations¹⁷.

Anyway, it is certain that none of this can be attributed to the Berber women of Giado: I carried out my work for a long period in the families of the place and was able to follow their lives. My impressions were perfectly in line with the declarations made by the Berber men themselves.

Even though some women seem lively and intelligent, they never try to free themselves from their state of subjection, and do not even try to seriously impose themselves on their man, trying to leave him only an apparent dominion¹⁸; they rather accept their traditional destiny, content with the few pleasures that the conditions and customs of their lives permit: chatting and gossiping with their friends and relatives, displaying their jewels, ornaments and hair-styles. Tattoos with often complex designs and not without a certain artistry adorn their faces, hands, arms and legs; henna on their fingers, and, in old age, in their hair too; elaborately braided hair styles, carefully glossed with unguents and fats; massive silver jewels on their heads; necklaces of silver and gold filigree, rings and bracelets at their wrists and ankles; woollen or silk barracans and footwear often richly worked in silver are the usual ornamentation of the women of Giado, worn from childhood on, the degree of display depending on their economic condition, though not even the poorest of them is completely without them.

Female vanity cannot be wholly satisfied, however, at least from the point of view of civilised women: for all this display can only be admired by female friends and family members; no man from outside the family should – in theory – be able to do so. I say, “in theory”, because in practice I have noted that the extremely severe rules imposed by the Koran forbidding women to show themselves to strangers of the other sex with their face revealed are not actually followed as rigidly as might first seem. Every so often a rapid movement reveals the face and shows a darting and often provocative eye, and the young men there admit (although the older men insist that the women observe the traditional rules absolutely) that the girls

¹⁷ Cf. in particular the conclusion of the above-mentioned volume by M. GAUDRY.

¹⁸ I am convinced that this is so for the Berber women of Giado; there are some, however, who agree with Gaudry that in Muslim society in general women really can be mistress in their home: Cf. MERCIER E. (1895), *La condition de la femme musulmane dans l'Afrique Septentrionale*, Alger, Jourdan.

often show their faces when they go to gather water at the fountain, only – of course – when they are quite certain that there is no one to admire them apart from the young man they have arranged to meet.

So the Berber women of Giado can be classified as women from a semi-civilised population: there is a mixture of primitive elements and influences from religion on the one hand, and civilisation on the other.

But in the main they remain absolutely unprepared to assimilate features of development: kept by the men in the most complete ignorance and closed in their traditional way of life, from which they do not even think of freeing themselves, the civilised world is only glimpsed by them. In many respects so different from theirs, our world interests them as an object of curiosity, but not as a possible aspiration. They seem fairly content with their lives, and do not consider the possibility of changing them; I do not say improving them, because it is doubtful if change could be an improvement for them.

Even in the most developed families – which are mainly also the richest – in which the husbands or brothers have assimilated European culture, the women are not different from those belonging to socially low and economically poorer families. They differ from them in their more gorgeous clothes and less demanding duties, as they have negro servant-girls to perform the most humble domestic tasks. But in nothing else: their husbands and brothers have double lives, living a traditional one in contact with their women, and taking on their civilised characteristics only when they are outside the house.

One might point out that, though less marked, the situation of women was until not long ago (and in some cases still is) in many respects similar in civilised peoples too, especially in inferior social classes. But what characterises more or less primitive women is not so much their condition in the family and society as their psychological attitude towards it, which shows how this condition is what is probably best adapted to their psychology, which is unable, not only to desire, but even to conceive of a different one.

* * *

It is less easy to grasp the psychological characteristics of women in the other populations examined, as their being on more advanced levels of civil development and, consequently, socially more differentiated too, means that individual variety is much more marked, so that shared psychological features seem less evident, altered as they are or at least less hidden by individual diversity. In addition, for the other populations we can only speak

of demographic isolation, as they are living, to a greater or lesser extent, in contact with different ethnic groups.

These considerations are particularly relevant for the Karaims in Poland and Lithuania¹⁹.

They consist of groups of Karaims who immigrated from the Crimea in the XIV century. Their racial origins are still uncertain, they speak their own language (which differs slightly from one area to another) and follow a religion similar to Hebraism, but with some differences. Their demographic isolation is religious in kind as marrying outside the faith leads to exclusion from the Community, and at the same time the Karaim religion does not accept neophytes. In this way, there is an absolute endogamy, in that the children of mixed marriages (of which there are few) are not accepted into the Community²⁰.

But though the social life of the Karaims goes on partly within the Community, it cannot be described as isolated, as they take part in the public life of the country in which they live, where they carry on various activities from farming to trade, from the professions to the civil service and teaching, where they are appreciated for their industriousness, orderliness, scrupulousness, diligence and, above all, for their proven loyalty towards officialdom.

Very probably living with populations of different race, language, religion and traditions (such as the Poles, the Lithuanians and the Jews) has modified some of the Karaims' original characteristics, particularly in their external manifestations. But this cannot and should not interest us, nor should an examination of the influence of the environment on psychological characteristics or their persistence be made on the basis of external manifestations, which are not – in our view – significant²¹. Rather we should investigate if, despite environmental influences, the fundamental, distinctive and differential psychological characteristics of the various groups are preserved.

¹⁹ The groups we examined are those of the five Karaim communities of Halicz, Luck, Troki, Vilno and Panevezys.

²⁰ Cf. for this information, GINI C. (1936-XIV), "I Caraimi di Polonia e Lituania", *Genus*, II(1-2), June.

²¹ This is the standard approach; an examination of this kind was carried out by Boas too on the psychological characteristics of Italian immigrants in the United States (BOAS F. 1937), "Heredity and environment", *Proceedings of the International Conference on Population*, Paris, vol. VIII.

We have already noted the limited value of the conclusions reached on the basis of research of this kind in a comment on Boas' work in the previous number of the same review (Cf. *Genus*, IV(3-4), 113-114).

And I have been able to see how some of these distinctive characteristics are common to the Karaim women, for all the multiplicity of individual types and the slight but noticeable diversity to be found in the five Communities. These include an open warmth that is never rumbustious, a direct and considerate hospitality, and a character that is generally more open than what one finds, for example, among the Poles, among whom courtesy and hospitality give more the impression of being cold superstructures over an innate hypocrisy.

However, apart from these general observations, I see no need to examine specific aspects of the psychology of Karaim women for a reason that might alter the value of such an examination: although we examined a significant proportion of individuals in the individual Communities (about 2/3), there is reason for thinking that those taking part tended to be selected: those whose greater intelligence or curiosity overcame their natural reluctance. In that case the interest that in most cases I noticed in our research and their relative good will in accepting the surveys may in part be due to this spontaneous selection. At the same time it may easily be explained by the fact that they are a civilised population in which it is therefore usually easier to inspire interest in scientific investigations. Moreover, the desire – common to all the Karaims – to distinguish themselves from the Jews, with whom they are sometimes assimilated because of their religious affinities, was sufficient to convince them to let themselves be examined²².

* * *

The Albanian groups studied by the CISP in Calabria are some of the many groups of Albanians who migrated to southern Italy at the time of Scanderbeg and who have remained more or less demographically isolated²³. As there was no particular reason preventing them mixing with the surrounding Calabrian populations, we cannot exclude the possibility that there have been contacts, so that their isolation cannot be considered absolute even from a demographic point of view²⁴.

²² As the Karaims are convinced that the blood group characteristic of the Jewish race is group B, they were extremely interested in verifying this and immediately wanted to know the result of the research

²³ The three groups studied are those of Carfizzi, S. Nicola dell'Alto and Caraffa, all in the province of Catanzaro.

²⁴ The demographic and genealogical research of the CISP has established many cases of inter-breeding.

The social differentiation of the individuals examined during our research was fairly limited: they were small farming centres that were all very backward, apart from Caraffa, which is much more developed as a result of its closeness to Catanzaro. However, almost all the Albanians in the three centres belong to low classes and so from this point of view are fairly homogeneous.

There was notable resistance to the research from the populations, and so the selection of families to examine could be made on the basis of criteria of greater or lesser purity of Albanian blood.

The women in the groups studied were much less willing than the men to submit to the research. I was able to establish that the reasons for their resistance had nothing to do with fear or prejudice (apart, perhaps, from some concern about possible fiscal motives) but was due above all to fear of being criticised for being willing to be photographed and, still more, to allow themselves to be shown more or less completely undressed, even to a woman. This fear was so strong and so general that we had to assure them that all the women in the village would be subjected to the same examination. This was the only way to calm their concern about criticism, so much so that we were obliged not to reveal our date of departure till the last minute – when our preparations could no longer be concealed – and promise that the mission would come back shortly and complete the examination of all the families. It was not, then, so much *pudeur* and reserve in the women examined, as worry about the judgement of others and the desire, almost, I would say, for the complicity of all the other women in an action that they considered, if not unseemly, then at least too much out of the ordinary to be performed without agitation and with a clear conscience. Several times I found myself having to examine some women, who – on the basis of the selection criteria indicated above – did not belong to the families included in the survey plan, because of the repeated insistence of some relative or friend or neighbour who had been rebuked or taunted by them for having submitted to the anthropometric examination, and who could not rest until I had shown that I really intended to examine all the women. The concern returned with each request: in one of the villages visited even the photographs of them in Albanian national dress (which some women still have, handing them down from mother to daughter) had to be taken in private and almost in secret.

Apart from this initial resistance, they proved to be docile during examination and their only concern was that of being pricked for the blood test; to calm their fears, it was very often necessary for me to prick myself first, showing them that there was nothing painful about it. The conviction

that examining their blood could establish if they were more or less healthy and robust²⁵ also helped overcome their fears.

At first they seemed suspicious and self-serving²⁶, but the Albanians of Calabria are basically good-natured and almost affectionate²⁷ when they have overcome their initial mistrust. After a few days in the village, I found myself the object of admiration and fondness from many of them, and they sometimes spent their free time in my company, trying to be useful. When the mission had moved on to another village, sometimes a woman from the previous village would come to see me, bringing me with moving simplicity a small gift of vegetables or eggs, which certainly meant a sacrifice for her, given the economically wretched conditions of most of the families in the area. These signs of warmth and affection led me to reconsider what at first sight had seemed evidence of a suspicious and self-serving temperament. Mistrust is indeed easily explained in ignorant people who are faced with something particularly unusual, while poverty is enough to justify the importance given to some minimum form of compensation.

It is not easy to establish if in general the characteristics of the Albanian women in Calabria are similar to those living in Albania, if they are the result of contact with the Calabrian populations, and if they can be regarded as more or less common to all the low population categories, as it seems to me reasonable to accept. On the other hand, living in not only social, but – as we have said – demographic contact with the Calabrians, the Albanians of Calabria can be regarded as in many respects assimilated to the populations with which they live. This assimilation, however, does not affect physical and psychic characteristics, life and customs in the same way. The language resists, for example: the Albanians of Calabria still speak an Albanian dialect that is also used by the Calabrian families who live in these centres where a different language is spoken. We may also be able to see the continuation of some original characteristics in the attitudes of men and women to each other within the family: I had a strong impression of the women having a certain autonomy and weight in the family, much greater than that to be

²⁵ As well as the blood group the level of haemoglobin was also verified, on the (somewhat shaky) basis of which it was expedient to offer some judgement about the constitution and health of the patients, to encourage them to submit to the examination.

²⁶ To make the research easier, it proved useful to give each woman who participated a small recompense in kind (one or two pieces of soap); the system worked well.

²⁷ Bourcart (BOURCART J., (1921), *L'Albanie et les Albanais*, Paris, Bossard) claims that the Albanians are usually trusting and quick to make friends, unlike other eastern populations; this characteristic has thus remained in the groups that have settled in Italy, although it is not easy to consider it as distinctive to them, as from this point of view the Calabrian peoples are similar.

found among the Calabrian farm-workers, whose women are completely subject to their men and feel for them a mixture of fear and admiration²⁸.

This notwithstanding, I do not think we can distinguish other definite characteristics that differentiate the Albanian and Calabrian women in the areas studied. Moreover, it is probable that, while the influence of the environment and contacts have made themselves felt on external manifestations of life, intermarriage has had the effect of modifying and standardising many of the original psychological characteristics.

There remain to be considered two alien groups of Sardinia: the Ligurians of Carloforte and the Liguri-Piedmontese of Calasetta.

Both are groups of advanced and now socially differentiated populations, though to a limited extent, as is always the case in numerically small centres.

The *Carlofortini* or *Carolini* are the descendents of a group of Ligurian families that moved to Tabarca (Tunisia) in the XVI-XVII century, and later migrated in mass in 1738-42 from Tabarca to the desert island of S. Pietro, where they founded the colony of Carloforte²⁹. The colonisation was thus both agricultural and demographic. The demographic isolation of the original group remained more or less absolute as later settlements in Carloforte of Sardinian and Neapolitan families led to a very limited amount of interbreeding, while – and this is interesting – there is no lack of interbreeding between *Carolini* and Ligurian families in Liguria, since contact with the region of origin has been maintained despite the passage of three or four centuries and the double migration, and the language is still the purest dialect of Pegli.

The origin of the group of Calasetta is less certain³⁰. It was probably begun by groups of Piedmontese³¹, later joined by less active members of the Tabarcan colony of Carloforte, who assimilated the Piedmontese. Today there are also Sardinian families living at Calasetta, and due to the mixing of the various stocks and their being less isolated from the Sardinian centres,

²⁸ Those who have become familiar with and studied life and customs in Albania have noted that Albanian women enjoy a certain independence and autonomy in the family and have a certain influence in it: Cf. BOURCART, *op. cit.*; GIBERT F. (1914), *Les pays d'Albanie et leur histoire.* Paris, Rosier.

²⁹ Carloforte is the only inhabited centre of the Island of S. Pietro, close to the south-west coast of Sardinia.

³⁰ Calasetta is on the Island of S. Antioco, very close to some purely Sardinian centres; today the island is actually linked to the Sardinian coast of Sulcis by an isthmus.

³¹ It is interesting to note that the topography of Calasetta, with its regular parallels and transversals, is very reminiscent of the topography of Turin, so much so that the inhabitants proudly call the village “the little Turin”.

the population of Calasetta is much more mixed than that of Carloforte. Nevertheless, it maintains the Ligurian dialect, even though it is not as pure as that spoken at Carloforte.

Although to a lesser extent, I noticed a similar concern as that of the Albanian women among the Ligurian women of Carloforte and Calasetta about being criticised for undergoing the examinations of the mission.

This concern struck me as in contrast with a highly developed way of life and a notable open-mindedness, but is limited to the young girls, who – unlike the adult women – showed notable resistance to undergoing the examinations. Their resistance can perhaps be explained by their fear that the questions or the examinations might lead to the discovery that they had lost their virginity: it is, indeed, standard practice there to have pre-matrimonial relations with the fiancé, though this does not have any character of sexual licence as it is exceptionally rare for marriage not to sanction the relations between the young couples. But this first explanation, which seemed the obvious one, is not actually convincing when one observes that the custom, which is tacitly accepted by the group's moral code, is not seen as improper and that the girls regard it as normal. I remember the typical case of a girl who arrived for the examination with her child in her arms, declaring, in answer to the question as to her marital status, that she was “engaged”. In the same way, in the demographic research, many women declared with calm sincerity and complete naturalness the children born before wedlock. So it seems to me fairer to think that the reason for the resistance is to be found – as with the Albanian women – in the fear of criticism in the village. This is a characteristic common to other populations and perhaps – I repeat – to all more or less ignorant women.

What is peculiar to the women of Carloforte (and less markedly so at Calasetta) is the apprehension, or rather fear, that possesses them at the sight of blood. This characteristic really deserves to be illustrated a little more because it indicates a strange and in many respects inexplicable weakness of spirit in the Tabarcan population, and the men of Carloforte, though to a lesser extent, also share it. The blood examination at Carloforte was a genuine problem for those conducting it, and in some cases they were even forced to give up. It has never happened to me anywhere else to see scenes of terror (the word is not excessive) as at Carloforte, when I had to carry out an insignificant prick. Women young and old turned pale, were seized by nervous trembling that could not be calmed, and sometimes they almost fainted; some of the younger ones sobbed for as long as half an hour during the examination (the blood sample was taken at the end) at the thought of what would happen.

I spoke of fear at the sight of blood: indeed, it was no more than that, for the women of Carloforte understood quite clearly (they are, I repeat, civilised and intelligent) that the tiny prick could not be very painful. But they insisted that they could not bear the sight of blood; the only remedy was that of making them look the other way during the operation. The sight of blood when they accidentally hurt themselves had the same effect on them, they told me, and one claimed to have fainted at the mere sight of blood, after having gone through childbirth stoically.

As I have already mentioned, this strange phobia for blood is shared by the men of Carloforte. How do we explain it? It is not easy: the *Carolini* certainly cannot be described as cowards generally: sailors by tradition, they face risks and the hard life of the sea bravely and unhesitatingly. I recall an episode whose significance for understanding the psychology of the Tabarcans struck me forcibly. One night, an exceptionally violent south-west wind had churned up the sea, endangering the fragile fishing boats that were moored in the harbour of Carloforte. The tall waves tossed the boats against the quay, breaking them away from their moorings, and the water poured over the whole square facing the harbour. The noise of the storm and the confused cries of the crowd that had come down to the harbour brought me out into the square. The sight could not fail to surprise anyone – like myself – who had doubted the courage of the Tabarcans: despite the fury of the storm, the men, bare-chested, with chords around their waists, threw themselves into the water among the colliding boats, to try to retrieve their drifting craft, while the women, who were also in the square with their men, calmly waited for the outcome of the retrieval work, ready to make themselves useful in any way they could. The sight was a surprise for me, and it made me reflect on the strangeness of the psychology of the *Carolini*. Was it the courage of despair that made them try anything to save their one and only source of wealth? Was it that they were used to facing the dangers of the sea, their atavistic second homeland? Perhaps both. But I think this episode, which also confirmed the claims the Tabarcan fishermen had made of their contempt for danger when at sea, may be significant as to the persistence of the original characteristics of the immigrant populations. Persecution by the pirates and their incursions at Tabarca, which obliged the Tabarcans to move to Carloforte, must have left the peaceful population of Ligurian fishermen an indelible trace that made them fearful, and above all having seen some massacres must have created in them a horror for blood. But these influences did not impinge on their passion for the sea, and the seafarer's instinct in their race lets them face calmly those dangers that they have faced for centuries with a boldness that would be hard to better.

Shocked by acts of violence contrary to their nature, there has remained in them an instinctive and uncontrollable fear of blood.

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Concluding these short notes, I think I can draw from the observations I have made the conclusion that demographic isolation is not in itself a determining cause of particular psychological characteristics. It serves, however, to preserve the fundamental original characteristics of the group, which are only attenuated when they are no longer isolated and when there is interbreeding with other populations, apart from those that are the external manifestations (language, customs, *etc.*), which may persist for any length of time in the latter case, but are anyway insufficient to establish the greater or lesser degree of racial fusion.

Of course, these conclusions are far from definitive: they emerge not from an in-depth, pre-arranged, systematic study, but only from personal observations and impressions.

I did not stay long enough among the various populations to be able to study their characteristics and lives in detail: so some of my impressions may be wrong, and if I had stayed longer might have been modified. I should also clarify that I never made deliberate investigations or proceeded to formal questions, but did nothing more than observe. I believe, however, that this should be rather a guarantee of the genuineness of my observations, since if it is true that this makes interpretation wholly personal, it is also true that it ensures against running into errors due either to difficulties of understanding or to the desire of those examined to conceal or alter the truth, or (and this is the most important thing) to the fact that, very often, even without any intention to conceal or lie, the replies are inaccurate – if not falsified – because of the difficulty in most cases that the people examined have in understanding the purpose of the questions and their exact meaning, a difficulty that becomes more marked in less developed populations.

I have also deliberately refrained from giving here a systematic and detailed description of the social and individual lives, customs, usages and superstitions of the various populations, giving only the bare minimum necessary to bring out their psychological attitudes. A detailed description would have exceeded the limits and purpose of these notes and in any case there are many well-known detailed sociological and ethnographic studies of many more or less primitive or relatively undeveloped populations, and the populations I visited did not have characteristics of particular interest from this point of view.

The investigation was, then, necessarily fragmentary, because it was limited to observations and impressions rather than the result of systematic enquiry. One might object that, particularly in evaluating the probable causes of some psychological manifestations of the two African populations, it would have been useful to consider the question of sexual relations in the two populations, since sexual life is extremely important among primitive peoples. But I did not want to tackle this problem as I did not have enough elements to do it, and in this field it is very dangerous to base oneself on uncertain elements that have not been properly weighed.

In any case, I did not intend – not having the necessary material to do it – to study the overall female psychology of the populations I visited, but I intended only to bring out some aspects of them that seemed to me of greater interest, dwelling longer on the Dauada women, who for some of their particular characteristics seem to me to occupy a unique position among the populations similar to them in race or religion or degree of development, and, drawing some general conclusions from the observations that do not seek to be any more than a very modest contribution, and more than anything else a reference point, to more detailed studies that may be carried out on the same populations or similar ones.