

Some Thoughts on the Changing World of the Bantu.

Hilliard S. Hurwitz 1968.

Change in Family Pattern

The tribal concept of the family was that of the extended family consisting of parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts, cousins and their kin all living as a socially integrated whole. This concept has now been broken down by the change in the economy of the Bantu from a subsistence economy dependant on the joint family venture of working the land to a money economy based on the breadwinner's earnings outside the home and independant of any co-operative family effort. This change has diminished or even broken the control of the family by the patriarch and led to a greater desire for social mobility and freedom from family control.

Urban homes designed for the simple family unit and influx control preventing the influx of dependants who are not able to work and contribute to the economy in an industrial environment, have fruther accentuated the change in pattern.

Following this change in family pattern, some of the following changes in the function of the family can be observed:-

a) Education and Rearing of Children.

Whereas previously the child became well versed in the mores of his group by the teaching of the older members of the family, his own age group as well as the initiation schools, in the urban environment these are lacking. The parents have not taken upon themselves the educative role of the old generation with the result that a generation is growing up who are inadequately equipped to fit in with a pattern of community living - a confused generation, more 'mixed up' than the corresponding generation of Ducktails, Hippies or Flower Children; a generation of criminals, tsotsis, delinquents and other social deviates.

Sex instruction, previously given by the elders of the tribe is no longer discussed and the parents of the cities avoid their responsibilities leaving the children to acquire their sexual knowledge

on the street corners, in the gutters and in (usually violent) encounters in dark alleys and dongas in the townships. This deficiency in teaching of sexual mores results in sexual assaults being rife and illegitimacy and prostitution a commonly accepted facet of life in the cities.

b) Leisure time occupations .

Use of leisure in the tribal environment was a matter of family participation - talking, dancing storytelling or worshipping. In an urban environment the use of leisure is an individual matter and the switch is from participation to spectator activities.

As conditions of employment improve and the amount of leisure time increases the gap will widen and more and more individuals will find time on their hands which they will have no concept of how to fill. The devil will doubtlessly find work for many more idle hands.

Even libraries generously provided by the Council are not used to anything near capacity while patronage falls to almost nil during the school holidays as reading is still associated with study rather than a leisure occupation.

Protection of the Aged and Handicapped.

The extended family was well equipped to care for its aged and handicapped members and true non-productivity was completely unknown. In the urban setting there is very little contribution that these people can make towards the family wellbeing and they are being neglected to an increasing extent. The concept of charity and community service are growing at a far slower rate than the build-up of of the hosts of aged and handicapped in need of care or protection.

The deciding factor in participation in community service organisations is often what the participant can personally get out of it - directly or indirectly.

As far as the structure of the family is concerned the greatest change which the impact of the European has wrought is in the gradual disappearance of the custom of polygamy. In a recent study (1965) by the research section of the Non-European Affairs Department it was found that only 9.93% of those studied were polygamously married and only one of these people had contracted a polygamous marriage in the city. 47% of those questioned were opposed to the practice and no other single custom had nearly the same degree of oppos-

ition. The diminution of the practice of polygamy is not without its problem. 62% of Bantu questioned in the N.E.A.D. survey believed in prolonged breast feeding of infants and coupled with this practice goes abstinence from sexual relations during lactation.

The result of diminishing polygamy and persistence of prolonged lactation is that of increase in family disorganisation as the male now tends to find ^{cl} sexual outlet with random extramarital contacts again promoting illegitimacy, prostitution and spread of venereal disease. ~~###~~

The breakdown in the authority of a family head or elder is by no means complete and an urban family may still retain as head a father, mother or grandparent. Without the consent of this head, no important decision may be taken. Often this person exercised the right of decision when a child may be weaned or whether a doctor or witchdoctor should be consulted in case of illness. All efforts directed at the patient or a parent of a child may be completely fruitless if another person is the decision making person in the family. //

Further difficulties arise when an operation or hospital admission is required and the decision making member of the family is several hundred miles away in a rural area.

As a vestige of the tribal family organisation, uncles and aunts may in some instances enjoy the status of parents and cousins be regarded as brothers and sisters., hence the puzzling requests received by employers by from their Bantu staff to attend innumerable parental funerals or to employ brothers and sisters who are not siblings.

Hygienic customs.

The practice of daily washing from head to toe in running water practiced in the rural areas has in many cases been lost in the process of urbanisation as has the rural care in the disposal of excreta. The tribal washing of the hands prior to eating has to a large extent been lost in the process of urban living.

Dietary Customs.

Certain tribal dietary taboos persist in the urban environments such as the belief amongst the Sotho that the eating of eggs by unmarried girls increases their ^{sc wantonness} lasciviousness. Thus the urbanite deprived ^{abundant} of good sourced of protein ^{cannot} will not readily make use of eggs. //

The Zulu taboo on the eating of fish is well known and fairly extensively practiced.

Tribal ways of preparation of meals - meat and vegetables as a relish with mealie pap are still regarded as desirable much to the chagrin of employers who may try and provide what they consider to be tasty well-balanced meals but which are completely rejected by the Bantu staff in favour of food prepared under the most dubious circumstances by back-yard or coffee-cart ~~mamas~~.

Although the drinking of beer has a social significance, the drinking of spiritous liquor has been tempered by the time when Bantu were unable to buy spirits legally. The result was the establishment of a habit of drinking the spirit in one gulp undiluted with minerals - a vestige of the drinking in shebeens where the drink had to be downed before the arrival of the police. The drinking of spirit is aimed at getting maximum intoxicating effect as rapidly as possible rather than enjoyment of the drink.

Traditional delicacies and foods such as wild spinach or cat/cerpillars which were eaten in the tribal state often fulfilled a valuable dietary need of vitamins or protein. With the non-availability of these commodities in the city, the Bantu will often make no attempt to find a substitute to meet the need but will continue on a diet similar to his previous one but without the necessary supplements with the result that vitamin and protein deficiencies soon become manifest.

Religion

A remarkable adaptation has been made by the Bantu whereby their own traditional adherence to the tribal belief in ancestor worship remains intact while the European religions are appended to this pattern. 82% of Bantu in the urban environment practice some form of ancestor worship. It is most revealing that members of recognised churches can reconcile christianity with ancestor worship while some of the separatist churches are basically constituted for ancestor worship with a veneer of Judeo-Christianity.

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