

against the law, and which actions are within the law. This utter and complete bewilderment of what are fundamentally peace loving, hard-working and law-abiding citizens is the greatest indictment of European "guardianship".

There is also the growing realisation that Europeans, as well as their own more enlightened sisters, look down upon ~~recently~~ precisely those things which are so dear to their hearts, which give them a little sense of belonging, of fellowship and purpose. Europeans will come and tell them that these things are "primitive", "useless" and "Backward"; Europeans will try and introduce changes which are not attuned to their needs and thereby take it out of their hands and impose on them something foreign and impersonal and efficient, which cannot gladden their souls and lighten their drab existence, and will only introduce a multitude of new complications and difficulties for which they are not yet prepared.

The reaction to my visit to one of the nicest, most respectable, funeral societies, whose secretary is my personal friend, typified this attitude.

At the meeting, which I attended, the women had been none too friendly, though the secretary had clearly explained my innocent purpose and quieted their suspicions.

Afterwards, they asked:

"Are we going to be taken over by the Europeans?".

The desire to left alone to do things themselves in their own way is growing amongst the women. European assistance, however well intentioned, has squashed their self-expression and smothered their sense of responsibility. They are, moreover, throughout suspicious of European motives.

Then there is yet another factor which can only be "sensed", and is difficult to define authoritatively by someone who is not an anthropological expert, and that is that one feels, always, with these urban women, something which I myself term a natural tendency towards the "secret society". Some of this is, of course, the typical development which usually takes place amongst suppressed groups, some of it, however, must be explained by mental attitudes further back in time.

I personally have no doubt that all these gift-clubs and funeral societies, and all the other stock-fel developments and groupings, with their pronounced anti-European atmosphere, their exclusive group-feeling, and the unhealthy atmosphere of having to hide, could be used politically, and may be so used in future when political consciousness has grown amongst the women, and as soon as they begin to realise their own (women's) real political power and their capacities for sudden and spontaneous mass-action, which are far greater than those of the men.

Some statements show how this fear and suspicion work:

"I don't know, I must try carefully. I know a lady, but I don't know. When people think I am selling them to you people, my house can be bombed. They are very rough, cccccchhhh! "

"I'll try, but you must not tell it's through me. With Natives you know with Natives, here..... (she points her finger to her forehead). They don't understand, they are short tempered."

"Alright, I shall try but you must not say that you know me. Maybe they have not even asked the permission for you, maybe they did not even dare to do that".

(A male informant)

"I went round houses on Sunday, and often found they did not even admit me. They do not want Africans either. They think we are detectives of the white people".

One here lifts the edge of a veil covering a world of gangsterism, "politics" in the American sense, and terrorisation of African against African, which inspires the women, even the most innocent, with a holy fear and terror, sometimes even of so little as being seen with a European woman.....

This general Fear-complex prevades the most innocent of "mutual aid" efforts for - and this is my point - the women no longer know what is considered "wrong" and what is deemed "right".⁽¹⁾

The equally irrational confidence.

The women trust each other and the system of reciprocal obligations set up by them beyond the bounds of rationality.

"Even the members themselves do not quite know when their turn comes. Years may pass before their turn comes. You ask one of them: "When is your turn?" "Oh soon" they say, "soon". And you say: "But you are always paying, always paying, when is then your turn?" But they do not know. They just wait and don't worry. They know their turn will come, and then they will have a lot of money".

"One blessed day....." as Mrs. X. put it!

Many of the women have not yet realised, pathetically so, that the money-economy of urban life, which has affected their lives so manifestly, has also affected them in less visible ways. It has introduced its own obligations, which are no longer those of the tribe.

The direct /.....

(1) A good example of this irrational secrecy as well as the irrational confidence is furnished in Case Nr. 23.

The direct concrete need

The necessity for this, in order to evoke group action has already been stressed earlier on ⁽¹⁾, and this is particularly strongly ⁱⁿ evidence in these stockfel groups. And when the most directly experienced and felt need, whether imaginary or real, is "money and only money", the only thing which satisfies the women in this need is the stockfel.

If money is collected without a direct, a concrete, a clear cut aim which is capable of realisation, then there are only two possible outcomes: either the women cannot think of anything else but "to make some more money", or they cannot possibly think up what to do with the money. ⁽²⁾

The need to earn more money is great, very great, as I stress all along in this investigation, but it cannot be satisfied unless a further need is also met, and that is the need to learn what to do with the money, how to spend it and how to spend it well.

The need to learn that there are other values besides money, and that money is not an end in itself and its mere accumulation the ultimate value. Here two trends influence the women: the tendency to see money and its very possession and accumulation very much in the same way as cattle were formerly regarded, ⁽³⁾ with all the magic-religious significance this had and, secondly, the influence from a European environment which is also not disinclined to "worship the Golden Calf".

All must benefit equally and individually.

In my opinion the worst, by far the worst, feature of the stockfel complex is that it does not help the women to escape from their imprisonment in the world of the "individual" and the "particular". This has already been mentioned in general ⁽¹⁾ and is particularly in evidence in the stockfel.

In this the stockfel does not only represent an organisational type, but it represents a state of mind: the state of mind which does not transcend the particular individual. The habit of thought holds that if money is collected or resources are pooled, these must do something for each member and for each member personally and equally, and anything a member has contributed must come back to her in exactly the same amount. "She must get out of it what she put into it". The stockfel mentality prevents the women from learning the transmutation of values from one order of existence into another. And the stockfel in all its forms perpetuates what is, in my opinion, essentially a primitive state of mind.

Hence /.....

(1) See section on "Mental attitudes and behaviour patterns" as well as "Women in organisations".

(2) See two very clear examples of this in Cases Mrs. 24 and 25.

Hence the money collected by Mrs. H's "Tickey-society" (1) cannot be used for visiting the manyano-sick, for then the men who have contributed towards the funds do not get their rightful share out of it. Hence the money the Club leaders have collected (1), cannot be used for a joint holiday, since the money would first have to be increased, and the new club leaders would then not have contributed equally with the old ones, yet would join equally in the fun. Hence, as in another case, the money cannot be used for sewing lessons, for some members do not need such lessons and they would, therefore, not get their share back.

"It would not be fair" the women say.

This is ultimately why, in my opinion, all the pooling-party institutions, in their hundreds of forms, are so popular and, as I see it, so bad for the women. They perpetuate the women's pernicious feeling of "that terrible sense of equality". They represent it ad ridiculum.

Accordingly I see the only sane development in the common funds variation, which ought to be assisted and encouraged, and helped towards new ideas.

I do not disapprove of these organisations primarily because of the waste involved or the debts incurred. This is amply counter-balanced by the enormous fun and enjoyment the women get. But and this is serious with their habit of mental quid pro quo, they tend to perpetuate what is basically a primitive mentality. (2)

For these people to become "civilised", in the real sense of the word, they must learn to see such notions as "society", "community", "nation" or "state" as well as "organisations", and all "group ideas" as universal, impersonal, unindividual and abstract.

(1) See two very clear examples of this in Cases Nos. 24 and 25.

(2) This is the stockfel's most pernicious influence in the two great European-inspired types of organisations: the Homemakers and the Service Committee types.

THE MUTUAL AID OR FUNERAL SOCIETIES

The Wednesday Stockfel

the transition from the Face-to-Face group to Organisation.

September, 1954.

INTRODUCTION

Reasons for separating funeral societies from the stockfel
for special study - General features - The societies studied.

ANALYSISHow the Funeral Societies started

- 1) The occurrence of a concrete definite need
- 2) The idea is brought from "somewhere else"

How the idea spreads

- 1) Transfers
- 2) Secessions

TravellingWhy the Funeral Societies started

"Poverty", "Alone-ness", "Services"
"The expenses of urban death"

The European Burial SocietiesLeadership-patterns

The Founder
The Group

The prestige of membershipThe members

Class, educational level, income level
The multiple loyalties
Where the members come from

The beneficiariesThe menThe relations between Manyano and StockfelAdditional functions of the SocietiesThe "money-business" at the meetings

Three examples of meetings attended

The values of these societies for their membersTransition:

The Transition from "face-to-face" group to "organisation"
The Change of Names
Four Signs of Westernisation
"Between two worlds"
The Transition from cattle to money

EVALUATION

September 1954.

DESCRIPTIONReasons for inclusion in this study

Several factors prompted me to make a slightly more detailed study of the funeral societies.

They appear to be the most stable, the most widely spread and popular, the most desperately serious, of the women's organisational efforts, all belonging to Type A2) and bb)

They may have been the first more purposeful groupings, aimed at a direct need-satisfaction, which the women formed entirely and wholly on their own. The Manyanos were, to my knowledge, originally formed on European incentive.

The funeral societies deserve closer attention, and they are also in need of help. They offer an extremely rich field for the study of behaviour patterns and mental attitudes showing various stages of transition between tribal and western ideas.

General

Some of these societies are entirely legitimate and within the law, others are in themselves legitimate enterprises but with intimate connections with Drink-Stockfels, some are possibly the "Wednesday" appearance of what is on Sundays the Drink-Stockfel.

They all have in common a pronounced atmosphere of secrecy, the greatest reluctance to give any information, the strongest objections to Europeans and European attendance at their meetings.

Figures are most difficult to obtain, membership and payments fluctuate, even office-bearers are vague and uncertain about the simplest and most obvious facts of their own organisations. Books are generally not accessible.

My own material is incomplete, as I was unable to give these societies the detailed attention required for a complete investigation.

My data have been obtained from observation of twelve funeral societies or of one of their branches, as well as from scattered observations about other similar societies.

ORGANISATIONS STUDIEDJOHANNESBURG.

The Bantu Burial Society (one of its branches) a large organisation with 4 branches.

Memberships: Sophiatown 150 members
 Springs 45 members
 Boksburg 86 members
 Pretoria 48 members
 Total memberships: 329

Activities: Burial fund - 5/- per member monthly, personal savings, hostess-contribution, loans.

Out-payments: Husband's death - £40 to widow, £10 for entertainment of guests,
 Child's death - £16 to mother, £4 for guests.

The Orphan's Children Society (one of its branches) a large organisation with 10 branches.

Memberships: Total + 250
Activities: Burial fund - 10/- per member monthly (some branches 5/- weekly), personal savings, loans against interest, hostess-contribution 1/- per member.
Out-payments: Husband's death - £12 to widow, £4 for guests, £10 for transport of guests.
 Child's death - £6 to mother, £4 for guests for other relatives they help with £2, without services.

(The branch studied also runs a mahodisano among its members with £5 in a rotating pool).

The Bakwena Women's Society (one of its branches).

Memberships: 56
Activities: 10/6 per member when death occurs, 6d. for buses 5/6 for distant relatives; loan fund, personal savings, miscarriages 1/6; hostess-contributions; loans are without interest.

The Bakhatla /.....

The Bakhatla Burial Society (one of its branches)

Membership : ± 60
 Activities : 5/- per member when death occurs
 personal savings, no hostess-contribution,
 loans are given without interest
 for "general funds" each member pays yearly: £1/16
 for funeral expenses
 £1/6/0 for special emergencies.

The Bapedi Funeral Society (one of its branches)

Membership : "close on 60"
 Activities : 5/- per member when death occurs
 2/- per member when wedding occurs
 personal savings, no loans, no hostess-
 contribution.

Arne Moeder Society (no branches)

Membership : 52
 Activities : Burial-fund 12/- per month, per member
 no hostess-contribution, no personal savings,
 no loan-fund
 Out-payments : £25./10/0 to the bereaved
 £5 to a miscarrying mother.

Golden Sunset Helping Society (no branches)

Membership : Between 30 to 45
 Activities : 5/- per member when death occurs, 2/- per
 member for buses per month, enforced saving
 2/6 per week; hostess-contribution ad lib,
 loans are given without interest.

Pimville Women's National Society (2 branches)

Membership : Pimville ± 140 Klerksdorp ± 65
 Activities : 2/6 per member when death occurs
 enforced savings - ± 3/- per week
 hostess-fee??
 Out-payments : in cash:
 in Johannesburg - adult £5 outside Johannesburg.
 child £3/10/ Adult £25
 Child £18
 Loans are given (when money available)
 without interest.

DURBAN .

DURBAN.Mutual Aid Society (no branches)

Membership : + 35
 Activities : 2/6 per member when death occurs
 6d. per month
 no other activities.
 Out-payments: For death of adult £7, for child £3.⁽¹⁾

The Helping Hand Society (now resting)

Membership : original membership of 54 now decreasing to ??
 Activities : 2/- or 2/6 when death occurs
 sickness, loans, wedding help
 Out-payments: for death of adult £7, for child £3.⁽¹⁾

The Abantu Bretheren Benefit Society (diéd off but is being resuscitated)

Membership : was some 50??
 Activities : 2/6 per member when death of an adult occurs
 1/- per member when death of a child occurs
 loans in trouble, sickness etc. against 10% interest,
 personal savings, no hostess-contribution.
 Out-payments: for death of adult £6/10/0; for child £3/5/0.⁽¹⁾
 (now defunct, is being revived).

All societies have a yearly "joining-fee" ranging from 2/6 to 10/-, as well as a small monthly contribution, generally of 3d. per member, towards the "books".

(1) How this £7 or £6/10/0 is made up and whether it is always possible to reach this amount by the subscriptions indicated could not be ascertained. It seems, in general, that such Societies have a death every two or three months.

ANALYSISHow the Funeral Societies started.

So far, two main ways in which the society started, have been traced:

1) The beginning is to be found in the occurrence of a concrete definite need in a personal situation.

An example: Mrs. J. of the Mutual Aid Society (Durban, Lamontville)

"It started in June 1939, long ago. A man died here, there was nobody to go and fetch him and take him to the cemetery. He was alone in the world. He was four days without burying. His wife had no work, he had no work, there was no money. He was an old man, so we look and see how we can do.

"Then seven women gather some money. Then there was a cemetery in Lamontville. It was till 1951. Now there is no cemetery. They say the place is finished. Now we bury everywhere.

"Then those seven women talk to other women. It is a bad thing if you die without society. Then we make society and help each other."

Here one sees the actual situation which calls for help, which inspires the spontaneous formation of a face-to-face group⁽¹⁾ as an expression of co-operation in which each person freely participates. There is as yet no chairlady and no members.

From this spontaneous neighbour-group to the actual organised group is a tremendous step. Much time may pass, when each individual case is still reacted to on its own particular needs.

Slowly, however, certain recurring patterns must have emerged: there is the same little nucleus of women who come together; there are the same actions to perform and the same events demand their attention. Gradually, certain women must have begun to take the initiative, and leadership emerges. It is the one who is slightly more creative and inventive than the others, the one who can in her mind form a total image of the total proceedings required, who will take the lead. She will have remembered what was done and needed on previous occasions, and also that these needs recur in each individual case. She will have

gradually/....

(1) This very expressive term has been taken from R.M. MacIver Society, a Textbook of Sociology Chapter XII p.p. 236 ff. Such grouping may still occur in towns e.g. in Beaumontville. There the Abantu Brethren Benefit Society ceased to function because "the Treasurer was dishonest, and the people found that they were not treated fairly and it died off", and the residents now "are just collecting from here and there, when there is a death.

gradually formed certain habits of action and organisation. She will have noticed recurring difficulties and possibilities of dispute. She might have spoken to some others to try and make the face-to-face group into a more regular, more dependable grouping.

The stage from this "speaking together" (as the women call it) to the actual conscious enterprise of "clubbing together with a definite aim", must have been long and arduous. Certain patterns of how this had to be done must have already been known and experienced. All my evidence has made me to understand a little, how extremely difficult conscious planning and shaping is for the women.

The oldest form of women's organisations amongst Africans, apart from the few, sporadic tribal ones, are the churchwomen's organisations. It may be surmised that these have in the main provided the prototype of "organisation" for the women.

How the pooling and party ideas intermingled herein cannot even be guessed. I can only believe that, what so many Africans have told me, namely, "Every stockfel has funeral help in it", is justified.

2) The founder or founders brought the idea and the know-how from "somewhere else".

From the conversations on this subject, two different lines of development have been revealed. My scanty knowledge cannot as yet reconcile these.

a) One line of origin became evident from the investigation of tribal societies.

Some of my informants seem to think that it is the Bakhatla who started it. The Bakhatla are important here, "because the Transvaal is their land. That's why they are so famous here".

The chairlady of one of the Bakhatla Funeral Society Branches (through an interpreter), said:

"They left their countries to come into a strange land, and so they put themselves together to help each other to feel homely. And if now for instance that mother there dies, perhaps her friend can gather up all the relatives from her home-country. Everyone, however many there are, they are there to help when she dies. They must all do their best to help each other. If it is needed the corpse must be taken to their home-country, that is if the dead wishes it so. And if she, for instance, would die away from here, and if she wishes to come back here, they must bring her corpse back here".

(It costs much money for a bus to carry a corpse from Johannesburg to Rustenburg. They have to pay up to £50).

"You see, it is very dear, because it is not a live person but a corpse.

One informant said,

"It started amongst the Rustenburg people. These people were so far away from their homes, and they wanted to bury their people in Rustenburg."

"They are all interrelated to each other, you know. They

speak/.....

FILE
CONFIDENTIAL

ROTOR
speak Khatla, but they call themselves Betswana."

Another informant said:

"The Bakhatla, I do not know. I think their chief is very strict. He wants them to be together. I have noticed they are not so much with other people, they are friends with themselves. And then, they are not so - how shall I say - they do not want to do as the Europeans do, they are not so with Europeans.(1) I think they want the corpse to go back to their country. I have noticed many funerals go that way (Rustenburg-way)."

I have received similar statements about the Bapedi Funeral Society, of which the one branch chairlady said:

"It is a national thing,⁽²⁾ an organisation only amongst the Bapedi, in Pietersburg, it is a big thing, and the whole town joins in. Then the Bapedi brought it with them from Pietersburg."

This, combined with the fact that, as I have been told, "Funeral Societies were first tribal", might point to the idea having originally been conceived by those tribes living nearest to Johannesburg. Could it be because their desire to be taken back to their home-country was possible of realisation? Or that these societies started in the towns Pietersburg (Bapedi) and Rustenburg (Bakhatla and Bakwena), where the population was still more homogenous, and that they then were "brought to Johannesburg"?

b) Another line of information, however points to Vrededorp, (and quite definitely Vrededorp and not Sophiatown)⁽³⁾ and in that case the society came into being through a "split-off" from an original Vrededorp society.

Fortunately one woman was found who still remembered, apparently quite clearly and definitely:

"In 1915 the first one started in Vrededorp. Somebody, a child, died, and the mother didn't know what to do and all the women came and gave shilling, shilling. That money kept them the whole nights' vigilance and then the funeral. Then all the women said: let's try it and pay shilling each when there is a funeral. That was when people used to live at 18th street. People living as far as 12th street, they were taken away and sent to Orlando.

"After that they decided on 1/- each at each death they knew of. Then gradually they started speaking to one another and clubbing together and they raised it up to 2/6.

"During /.....

-
- (1) This exclusiveness and withdrawal from Europeans, I have indeed experienced fully !
- (2) This word "national" could symbolise the whole duality and confusion of this period of transition. It sometimes denotes "tribal" as in the context above and sometimes "intertribal" "African" as in the Pinville Women's National Society.
- (3) I do not possess any equivalent and equally reliable information about Sophiatown. Whether this is due to the reality of historical development or the accident of my information cannot be ascertained.
- ROTOR

"During that first time the graveyard was near, and they did not need lorries and buses. Now it is more expensive the graveyard is at Croesus, next to Newclare.

"Then in 1928 I came to here, and I stayed a long time and watched what the other women were doing. Then in 1930, I decided to join the "Home Trust" (1) and was a member for 10 years. Then I think, I had better do my own."

"Why?

"Women too much"

"Women when they're together little bit ... trouble (my informant helps:)

"She does not want to say why, it was a misunderstanding."

This is the only instance in which I traced the actual origin of the society in Johannesburg out of the need-occurrence which took place as can be seen, quite long ago.

In Durban, however, the origin seems to be more recent. The Mutual Aid Society of Lamontville started in 1939; the Helping Hand Society was also started in Lamontville, probably in 1948, as a rival body, by a woman of exceptional enterprise; and the Abantu Bretheren Benefit Society of Beaumontville started in June 1930, originally as a more general savings and credit-society, which also helped in cases of death, although its constitution, expressly states "The Abantu Bretheren Benefit Society is not a burial society".

One would naturally expect the oldest society in Durban, as in Johannesburg, to have originated in the oldest location, which in Durban is Beaumontville.

In Johannesburg, the origin of this most powerful organisational movement seems to lie much further back in time, and this does not facilitate one's search. Added to this, is the difficulty that the women generally lack a historical sense. The idea that there must have been a beginning, which then developed, is difficult for them to grasp. I sometimes achieved something by explaining to them that I wanted it told "like a story".

But to get them off the "Norm" and the "Now"⁽²⁾ often took so much time that other information had to be sacrificed.

However, since it all happened within living memory, future more concentrated research ought to be able to throw more light on this question of origin, which, I am convinced, will afford a deeper insight into urban Native developments.

How the idea spreads

Leaving here the "tribal societies", and concentrating on the
inter-tribal/...

(1) Later she called it "Women's Trust". It was, however, emphatically by her not to have been a "tribal affair".

(2) See above under "Mental attitudes" and "Behaviour patterns".

inter-tribal ones, I can state that I have found two ways in which the movement extends:

- 1) By Transfers,
- 2) By "Split-offs".⁽¹⁾

1) Transfers.

Taking it then as historically probable that the first appearance of the societies occurred in the oldest locations,⁽²⁾ together with the fact that my information has for some reason or other always pointed to Vrededorp, one can surmise that from Vrededorp the idea spread to the other locations as and when these were established through the women carrying with them the idea and the experience of its benefits, as well as the knowledge of how to go about it. Hence in the above-mentioned case some of the women who were "sent to Orlando" could have carried the idea with them and recruited as their first members some of the veterans of their former locality.

Occasionally during my general investigation, echoes of such former mass-transfers reached me. For instance, the Pinville Women's National Society at Pinville had two branches - one at Randfontein, and one at Klerksdorp, "but" as the secretary told me, "Klerksdorp closed down and all the people were scattered".

Such truly biblical diaspora-movements have been and are continuously taking place in the history of Johannesburg's growth.

At the moment of writing, there is such a mass-exodus going on from Germiston to Natalpruit, and I have been able to watch its effect on existing organisations there. This effect often seems to be stimulating and conducive to new variations of the type. The resistance to change of or enlargement upon what the founder originally laid down as "the laws of the society", which often prevents any new developments, is sometimes reduced by the loosening of the personal relationships and ties, and gives a chance for creative ideas of the members to blossom forth.

In the near future one will be able to watch what happens to the dynamism of the old-established societies in the Western Native townships when these are removed to "pastures new".

2) "Split-offs".

On the whole these secessions seem to be subject to the same

factors /.....

(1) This is how the women call secessions.

(2) Sophiatown and Vrededorp are still the cradle and the matrix of the stockfel-movement, which is stronger and more demonstrative there than anywhere else, and more integrated in the life of the population.

factors as the Rev. Sundkler analysed in the church secession.⁽¹⁾ But, although the women wield considerable power in the churches, they are not the "splitting-off" bodies as such, nor do women generally start new churches. Their exclusive domain is the society!

An informant, acting as interpreter in a conversation with a strong funeral society leader explains:

"It is just like the church you know. First there is one society, then it splitted. She belonged to another society before, but they did not agree, so she founded this one. She splitted", he repeats once more.

Most societies, of which I was able to get at the origin, began from such a "split-off". The Golden Sunset Helping Society originated because of a secession from an older society. The Pimville Women's National society told me:

"They had a quarrel in 1952, and some women started their own society, "The African Women's Society of Pimville". It was a quarrel between the office-bearers, between the Treasurer, Mrs. ... No, it was not over money, I don't know what happened."

The society called "The Crying Children of Pimville" started because:

"The President, we know her a long time. She had a society in 1936, then she went away and it died out, and some members made their own society. That is now the "Amalgamated Society". Then about 1948/49 she reorganised it, she really revived her old society with those who had waited for her. And that is now the Crying Children."

The chairlady of yet another society tells me:

"I joined a society in Vrededorp in 1936, I was working then in Vrededorp, but I lived in Pimville. Then I thought I had better start my own, it was not alright with the money. They did not want to give the members back their money."

It is very difficult to find out why suddenly one or some of the leaders decided that "I'd better start on my own".

Two main reasons were found:

- 1) quarrels over money
- 2) quarrels over leadership

I, myself, have never found tribal disagreements at the basis, although they come in secondarily.

Whether the distrust about money is always justified seems an open question. It is often used as an excuse for a break-away by a leader-to-be in order to collect "followers". In my experience the quarrel does not start amongst the members, but amongst the office-bearers officially or unofficially, i.e. amongst those at the top. And it is generally because a strong personality feels she would rather herself exercise the authority and prestige which has been so far exercised over her!

In the/....

(1) Bengt. G.M. Sundkler: Bantu Prophets in South Africa, London ?,

In the stories which the women tell about their societies, one often hears them divide the past between what happened "before the break" and "after the break".

Such funeral society split-offs (contrary to the church-split-offs) are not as such a bad thing. There is a limit to membership numbers which can be managed effectively by an African woman leader. If membership becomes too large she cannot keep her women under control. (1) Moreover, it affords a new avenue for leadership and self-expression which might otherwise flow into less innocent channels. Further, if membership becomes too large those elements which constitute the most important values of these societies would be lost; their growth of personal relationships, the security offered to the women by a strong leader, their knowledge that they can appeal to her in trouble, the wonderful feeling of self-reliance, of being "amongst ourselves", and, finally it is greatly conducive to the spread of an idea which is basically valuable.

Travelling.

The transfer of one individual to another locality does not appear to be sufficient reason to make her change her adherence or to start "one of her own". Distances do not frighten her. On the contrary, part of the attraction is that the meetings rotate amongst the members, who live in different localities. Thus the weekly meetings take on the aspects of a little social outing. We shall see this in all organisations. The transport costs involved are never calculated. A woman will happily travel some hours there and back to attend a meeting which lasts an hour. It is all part, and a large part, of the fun which already starts while waiting together for bus and train. (2)

It is true that societies are often competitive. Once in Verdedorp, just when we had finished our opening hymn and settled down to business, lusty hymn-singing started next door. I asked about it, and my informant at once offered to take me there too, which was darkly frowned upon by the chairlady, and it took me quite a while to re-establish friendly relationships!

Once a group of women have accepted

you,/.....

-
- (1) I watched this in one society with a membership of nearly 150. The main "books" are split in two, each of about 75 members, one lorded over by the secretary and one by the assistant secretary, each of whom sits at separate tables and each collects the money of their own half of the membership, which "belongs" to one table. I can confidently predict that as soon as the assistant secretary has learned the job properly and feels confident that she can do it alone, she will split off and take most of the members of her "table" with her.
- (2) Since the meetings generally start at eleven, and include a hot midday meal, the women are away from home for most of the day.

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