The South-Eastern Bantu : The Zulu-Xosa Group.

I The Distribution of Tribes in South Africa. The aboriginal tribes of South Africa fall into three main groups, namely the Bushmen, the Hottentots and the Bantu. It is generally supposed that the Bushmen, who are now practically extinct, were the original inhabitants of Southern Africa. Their famous rock paintings found in diffenent parts of the country show that at one time they spread over the whole of South Africa. (See M.C.Burkitt's "South Africa's Past in Stone and Paint"). Of short stature, brownish-yellow in colour and with other peculiar racial characteristics, they had a fairly simple social structure--for they had hardly passed out of the hunting stage when the Europeans first settled in the country in 1652--they led a nomadic life, living on the flesh of the game in which the country abounded and on wild roots and honey. The Bushmen were gradually supplanted by a group of people rather superior to them known as the Hottentots. The latter are closely allied to the Bushmen in race and their languages are of a somewhat similar type. But they differed from the Bushmen in that they were a pastoral people and kept herds of sheep and cattle. They lived a more settled life in communities with a social organisation somewhat more complex than that usually associated with the Bushman. The Hottentots, now generally confined to the southern parts of South-West Africa, have also declined considerably in numbers, have lost their language and general culture, owing to their contact and conflicts with both the Europeans and the Bantu.

The Bantu who were on a much higher level of culture and whose original home is placed in East Central Africa, followed the Hottentots in their migration southwards, driving before them as they went both the Bushmen and the Hottentot and leaving in their wake a long line of Bantu settlements. Although they migrated in this way, it is not to be supposed that their life was as nomadic as that of the Bushmen, for they combined their hunting with a pastoral culture and with agriculture as their principal means of subsistence; they lived in large communities with a fairly well worked out system of social organisation.

2. Divisions of the Bantu in South Africa. The Bantu also fall into three sections

(i)The South Eastern Bantu consisting of (a)The Xosa who live in the Eastern Province and in the Native Territories of the Cape of Good Hope;(b)the Zulu who also live along the coast further east in Natal and Zululand.

(ii)The Central Bantu consisting of (a)the Basuto who live in Basutoland and in the Orange Free State,(b)The Bechuana who inhabit part of the Orange Free State and extend across British Bechuanaland right up to the Bechuanaland Proctectorate which includes the Kalahari Desert where the extant remnants of the Bushmen are to be found.

(iii)The Northeastern Bantu consisting of (a)the Swazi who are closely related to the Zulu and live in the Eastern Transvaal,(b)the Bapedi,sometimes known as the Northern Basuto because of their close relationship in language and customs to the Basuto,and (c)the Bavenda,both groups living in the Northern Transvaal,and (d)the Thongas who are partly in the Northern Transvaal and partly in Portuguese East Africa.

3.It is proposed to deal in this paper with the social organisation of the South-Eastern Group of the Bantu in South Africa. With this as a background,it would be possible to show that such great similarity exists between the social structures of the different tribes mentioned above as to compel us to come to the conclusion that that they derive from a common stock. Admittedly,there are differences in customary observances,in material culture,in the types and construction of their houses,etc,but generally speaking the fundamental features of Bantu social organisation are the same everywhere.

4.<u>The Family in Bantu Society</u>. The Family is the unit of society among the South Eastern Bantu. There is no person in the group here who is not directly connected with or attached to some family or other. All the relationships into which one enters with one's fellowmen,all the contacts that one makes,are determined by and depend in a large measure upon one's connection with some family or other. Whether the individual is liable or not for his actions,whether he can sue or be sued in legal disputes,whom he may marry and on what conditions,what he may do with his property during his lifetime or what his kinsmen may do with it after his death,under what conditions he may make a valid contract either binding himself or another--all these and many more are questions

which can only be solved when a man's family position has been fully determined. By far the greater percentage of cases which fall to be dealt with in Bantu courts have to do with family law.

5. The Nature of the Bantu Family. The Zulu-Xosa family is in some respects similar to the agnatic family of early Roman Law, i.e. the aggregate of those who belong to the same household or come under the potestas of a single individual known as the Mnumzana i.e. the head of the settlement, commonly called in South Africa, the Kraalhead. The Kraalhead is generally the oldest living male in the family--females being perpetual minors were not eligible for the position of kraalhead. Under his power the Mnumzana had (i) his wife or wives, for the Zulu-Xosa practised polygyny, (ii) the children of his different wives, (iii) his younger brothers with their wives and children, (iv) any other persons not necessarily blood relatives who having abandoned the potestas of their own natural kraalheads had voluntarily placed themselves under that of another. The Kraalhead was the only person who was sui juris i.e. a major, in this group of people. He owned all property in trust for the household, although he allocated it to the different "houses" forming part of his "muzi". He alone could make binding contracts, although he might use any of the members of his family as an agent. He alone possessed the right to sue and be sued unassisted, and he was responsible for the peace, order and good government of his establishment. Married males forming part of the establishment came next to the kraalhead in power, especially with regard to matters affecting their particular "houses"; but no important step was taken without the knowledge and the permission of the "Mnumzana". Unmarried males did not possess even this limited autonomy. Married women and widows, while they were minors under the double guardianship of their husbands (or their heirs) and the general kraalhead, had the duty of protecting the rights of their children. Each married woman lived in a separate house, and to each house was allotted a certain piece of land for cultivation, and a number of cattle, sheep and goats, if any, for the maintenance of the house. If the Husband who had the general management of this property misused or alienated it to the disadvantage of the house concerned, it

was the duty of the wife to appeal to the kraalhead, and if not satisfied, to the chief for protection. On the other hand after the decease of her husband when she had to look to the heir for maintenance, it might also become necessary for the widow to appeal to the kraalhead or the chief for protection against the heir. Thus widows also had the right to protect their "house property" and their children. But divorced women and unmarried women were perpetual minors who were always under the tutelage of some member of the family.

6. <u>The Triblet</u>. Although the family was thus almost a self-sufficient unit or group, the Bantu lived together in communities consisting of a number of families such as the one described above. As a rule these communities were simply enlarged families in which the group as a whole claimed to be descended from a common ancestor. Thus in any particular area we might find a number of separate families living in separate establishments, but all answering to one family name, e.g. Makanya or Msomi or Guma, and all claiming to be descendants of Makanya or Msomi or Guma as the case might be. These enlarged families or triblets are sometimes called clans. The triblets were exogamous. This was strictly observed, especially by the common people, and breaches of this rule were punished by death in extreme cases or by banishment. Occasionally a chief ignored the rule and married a woman belonging to the same clan as himself. Where this was done, the particular family from which the girl was taken had to change its name immediately and so a new clan was formed. Thus Chief Mpambili of the Makanya clan desiring to marry a girl of the Makanyas (virtually his sister) would order her kraalhead to take the name Mapumulo, thus giving rise to a new clan. Each triblet or clan was under the rule of a headman, i.e <u>Isibonda</u>, and generally lived in a particular locality.

7. <u>The Tribe</u>. A larger unit than the clan was the tribe. This was made up of a number of clans owing allegiance to to one Chief having over the different clans under his jurisdiction the same powers which the Kraalhead or the Headman exercised over their respective groups. The tribes lived independently under their separate chiefs as is still the position among the Bechuana today. Thus Chief Khama has authority only over the

Bamangwato and has no power over the Bakhatla,although they also belong to the Bechuana section of the Bantu. Occasionally a chief arose who by superior military strategy conquered a number of tribes and made himself king over them. A good example of this was Chaka,the great Zulu chief who during the early part of the I9th century united all the Zulu tribes,and spread his kingdom over the greater part of South Africa. His power or that of his successors was later broken by the white man,and to day we find no such paramount chif among the Zulus,although they still live under tribal conditions. In Basutoland on the other hand we have an example of a chief--Moshesh who combined a number of tribes in a peaceful way,and thus formed the Basuto nation of moderntimes which still has its paramount chief,andsuccessively resisted the attempts of the Dutch to break them up into separate tribes again.

6.Marriage.Marriage among the Zulu-Xosa is a group affair--a matter of arrangement between two families,in which the wishes of the bride and bridegroom, especially the former,were of far less importance than that of the kraalhead and the family councils which generally handled the delicate situations arising out of this contract. An essential feature of the marriage is the making over by the prospective husband or his representatives to the guardian or guardians of the prospective wife of valuables in the form of cattle or sheep or goats or hoes or latterly even money. This contract is not one of purchase and sale,as might easily be supposed,and never is there any confusion in the mind of the Zulu-Xosa between "Ukutenga" which is a sale and "Ukulobola" which is the method of acquiring a wife. In fact normally the Bantu do not, in their own culture,buy and sell. Each village is an independent unit economically,and all the exchange that went on in Bantu society was an insignificant amount of barter. Neither can "lobola" be regarded as a dowry,because the lobola cattle are never where the woman is,so that in no sense can they be her dowry. Her real dowry was as a rule provided by her own father in the form of stock which she took with her to her new home. In a sense "lobola" was a guarantee of good behaviour on the part of both the wife and the hus-

husband,because if the husband ill-treated his wife he ran the risk of losing both his wife(who would in such cases desert him)and his cattle which were not returned to him if he was found to be at fault in any matrimonial dispute. On the other hand the wife could not leave her husband without good reason, for in that case her parents would have to return the "lobola" to the husband and rather than do that the parents would do their best to effect a reconciliation. The true function of "lobola" seems to be that it is part of a complex series of ritual acts by means of which three changes take place:-

(i)The bride and bridegroom are transferred from the group and status of the unmarried to that of the married. As already pointed out above,married men and women differ in ceftain respects from the unmarried.(vide supra).

(ii)The bride is gradually incorporated in the group of her husband with the consent,not only of the living members of her own sib,but with the consent an blessing of the ancestors of that sib. Among the Zulu in particular the departure of the bride from her home was a very solemn occasion. A sacrifice was offered,to receive the blessing of the spirits,and the members of the sib sang their "Ihubo" or sib song,which is sung only on sacred occasions. By the passing of "lobola" the children of a woman were incorporated into the sib of their father. According to fundamental Bantu thought,"a woman makes no bastard" i.e.the children of a woman belong to her and her family. It is only by the passing of "lobola" either in the form of goods or in the form of service rendered to her family that a man can earn the right to supreme control of hes children. If he has not fulfilled this obligation,the woman's family can claim the children,and they will not inherit from the father. "Lobola" is thus necessary to make marriage legally effective,i.e.to give to the family of the man the right to the woman's function as wife and mother: hence it is said "it is the cattle that beget children" and "the children are always where the cattle are not".

(iii)The members of the two sibs enter into friendly relations with one another. Marriage here is a contract,not between two individuals but between two groups. The loss of a member disturbs the equilibrium between the two sibs.

This disturbance requires setting right,and this is done by means of compensation,in the form of lobola. In normal circumstances the "lobola" was invariably used for the purpose of procuring an addition to the family which had lost a member through the marriage of one of the male members of the group concerned. This process was of course interrupted where the girl had no brother who could marry and so bring into the group another member. On the other hand the addition of a member to a group was no less of a distrubance to the group than the loss of one. It took a long time for the husband's sib,including the ancestors,to become used to the addition and so the new wife was denied access to the inmost or intimate observances of the family until she had been ritually inducted into them and this was a gradual process. Marriage thus serves a double purpose:(i)it is a gradual loosening of the woman from her own group and a passage to a new condition of life. Both bride and bridegroom pass from the position of single persons to that of married people. (ii)it is a gradual rapprochement of the two groups,in which we find actions and reactions proceeding between them in order to produce a relation of friendship and stability.

Marriage was sometimes dissolved for various reasons such as desertion,permanent impotence on the part of the husband,repeated acts of adultery on the part of the wife,cruelty and ill-treatment of the wife by the husband,refusal on the part of either spouse to render conjugal rights. In each case the question had to be settled as to what would happen to the "lobola" cattle. Death was not necessarily regarded as sufficient cause for dissolution. Upon the death of a wife,if the husband could show that the marriage had been only for a short period and had not resulted in the birth of a sufficient number of children,he demanded another girl from the family of his deceased wife. On the death of her husband the widow did not automatically return to her family,but remained at her deceased husband's kraal,and one of the brothers of her deceased husband took her to wife,"and raised up seedffor his brother" especially if no male child had been born prior to the death of her husband.

The Kinship System. The kinship system of the Bantu plays a large part in their moral,juridical,economic and religious institutions. Whatever may be the position elsewhere,among the Bantu kinship terms are always closely connected with certain types of behaviour. Siblings are replicas of one another in social relationships and come as near being socially identical as human beings can. Thus the substitution of one sister for another or of one brother for another will least upset social relations,and so on the death of a wife or a husband the sister or brother of the deceased quite readily and naturally takes her or his place. The terms "mzala"(cousin) and "dadewetu"(sister) are not mere labels but symbolise or imply definite types of behaviour in the mind of the Zulu. The relationship between granddparents and grandchildren is one of indulgent affection towards one another which we do notfind between children and their father.

The Zulu-Xosa,like all other Bantu tribes in South Africa,have the classificatory system of relationship. Here we find the merging of the lineal and collateral kin,so that we get no denotative terms,but mainly classificatory terms, i.e.each term of relationship is applied to a whole group of persons. Thus my father,my fathers brothers,my father's father's brother's sons etc are all called by the same term "Baba" or BBawo". Similarly not only my mother,but all her sisters are my "Mame". Among the noteworty features of the Bantu kinship system is the great attention which is paid to age. Often this predominates over difference of sex,so that all people of the same generation are called by one term irrespective of sex. For example all grandparents are called by one term among the Zulu,"Ugogo";so with all grandchildren "Umzukulwami". Again among the men called "father" those older than the actual father are called "big father",while those younger are called "little father".So too with the mother's sisters,with brothers and with sisters. Another feature to be noted is the difference in the terms used for cousins of different kinds. Parallel cousins are invariably called "sisters" and "brothers". Cross cousins have terms applied to them according to the behaviour pattern in use towards them,and this depends to a large extent on the marriage relationships,