

Social Security in Folk Religions

"Social Security" issues are those that involve developing security in the social setting. They include success in love, in bearing children, in advancement up the social ladder (from infant to youth to adult to elder to ancestor) and wealth. The folk religious dynamics of each of these varies widely, but the thread of scripting for success is interwoven throughout.

4. Folk religions and love: a smattering of ideas and practices
 - a. Selected North American folk concepts and ideas about love (Schwartz, Cross Your Fingers):

Pull a hair from the head of someone you love, and he will love you deeply.

If you fill your mouth with water and run around the block three times, you will learn his name. For the first person you see after you stop will have the name of your future husband.

If you soak a shoelace in water, then throw it at the ceiling, the mark it leaves will look like your future husband's initial.

He will also love you if he eats a bowl of soup to which you secretly have added three drops of your blood, or if he drinks a glass of lemonade to which you have added your fingernail filings or in which you have soaked your toenail clippings.

- b. Documents from the Spanish inquisition show that women changed Catholic prayers into love spells (Valbuena, "Sorceresses, Love Magic"). Traditional Spanish societies (such as Estremadura) adhere to myth and magic practices as key ingredients in love and marriage (Gonzalez-Pozuelo, "Cultural Features").
 - c. Among Italian women, the prevalent rituals for guessing about their future spouse are based on folklore and affective types of magic (songs, spells, potions; De Sanctis, "Spells, Love Potions, and Other Tricks"). Local wise women are frequently asked for potions which secure a lover or bring back an errant lover (Scalise, "Magic Themes")
 - d. Men and women in Australian aborigine communities engage in love rituals (including love songs) to establish and and maintain marriages of their own preference (Bell, "Women's Business is Hard Work"). The women's version is referred to as "*yilpinji* business", and its power is released through a creative integration of myth, song, gesture, dance, and design (body paint, dance configurations, etc.) in the context of a particular geographic location. It may be conducted for several purposes:

- i. Attracting a lover
 - ii. Force a wayward husband to return
 - iii. Remind a wife of her duty to family and country
 - iv. Repulse the unwanted advances of a spouse or lover
- e. The practitioners of Santeria have a multitude of potions, rituals, etc. for attracting a lover, seducing a chosen person, keeping a spouse faithful , binding a lover to you (see Nuñez, Santeria: A Practical Guide, pp. 149-62 for examples).
- f. Love magic among the Kikuyu (Kenya; Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, pp. 151-55):
- i. Magic which helps those who seek after the love of many (*moreria* or *monyenye*):
 - (1) Made only to a person who dedicates his life to pursuing the love of as many as he can (to the exclusion of possessions, such as cattle, goats, sheep, etc.)
 - (2) Kenyatta relates that display the effects of this magic generally are held in contempt and are banned from holding any important public office since they are viewed as irresponsible.
 - ii. Magic which helps those who seek after the love on one (*mothaiga wa rwendo*; much more popular than the other form of magic)
 - (1) If a rival is in the way, the first step is to use a magic of dislike to ensure the rival has no chance with the intended lover
 - (2) The type of magic used requires contact with the intended lover, either verbal or physical. This can be accomplished through fingernail or hari clippings, so the Kikuyu are careful to dispose of them so that magic might not be used against them.
- g. Folk religious aspects of North American weddings (origins behind our wedding customs; Schwartz, Cross Your Fingers):
- (1) *The bride's veil*: protection from a jealous person who might harm her with the evil eye; to disguise her from evil spirits

- (2) *A maid of honor, a best man, bridesmaids, ushers*: Makes it harder for evil spirits to know who was being married.
- (3) *Rice*: To ensure prosperity in both food and children for the newly married couple.
- (4) *Horns and bells*: To drive away any persistent evil spirits.

5. Marriage (see Kirwin chart, pp. 77-78)

6. Folk religions and bearing children:

- a. The necessity of children in many folk religious settings can be seen in the following story from India

The renowned ascetic Jaratkuru, full of merit and great spiritual power derived from his sustained asceticism, was wandering around the world when one day he came across a deep pit. In this pit, the spirits of his ancestors--the pitris--were hanging head down, their feet tied to a tree trunk by a single skein of rope that was gradually being nibbled away by a large rat. It was evident that the pitris would soon fall down into the deep darkness of the pit. Moved by their pitiable condition, Jaratkuru enquired whether he could somehow save them from this fate, expressing his readiness to do so even if he had to give up all rewards to which his great asceticism entitled him. "Venerable ascetic," the spirits of his ancestors answered, "Thou desirest to relieve us! ... O Child, whether it is asceticism or sacrifice or whatever else there be of very holy acts, everything is inferior. These cannot count equal to a son. O child, having seen all, speak unto Jaratkuru of ascetic wealth ... tell him all that would induce him to take a wife and beget children!

Kakar, "The Child in India," p. 91.

- b. In China (Taiwan), "the essential reason for marriage remains unchanged: to produce a son to succeed the family, to share the family's burden, and to increase the family's wealth" (Tai-Li, "Marriage Transformation")
- c. How many children will you have? Schwartz collected the following North American ideas:
 - i. The number of lines in your forehead.
 - ii. The number of X's in your palm
 - iii. The number of seeds in a seed head of a dandelion after you have blown on it three times.
 - iv. Take all the seeds of an apple, spit them into your palm, and slap your palm to your forehead. The number that stick is the number of children you may have.
 - v. If you trip on a flight of stairs, you will have triplets!

- d. What gender will your child be? American folklore says this can be determined by suspending a needle on a piece of thread over your wrist. A circular motion of the needle indicates a girl, a straight swing indicates a boy.

7. Folk religions and social advancement (rites of passage)

- a. Becoming human
- b. From infancy to childhood
- c. The child becomes adult
- d. The adult becomes an elder
- e. The transition to ancestorhood

8. Folk religions and wealth

- a. Securing traditional business success
- b. Adaptations in cash economies