

**THE CONSTRUCTION OF 'RELIGION'  
AND THE PERPETUATION OF 'TRADITION'  
AMONG POGORO CATHOLICS, SOUTHERN TANZANIA**

**Maia Green**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is an ethnographic account of contemporary religious practice among a Bantu agricultural people in Southern Tanzania, the majority of whom are affiliated to the Roman Catholic Church. It examines the dialectic between Christianity and what the Pogoro consider to be 'traditional' practice as resulting in a locally defined Catholicism and in the separation of formal, official Christianity from 'traditional practice'. The thesis looks at how the existence of an institutional religion, in this case Catholicism, defines some aspects of local practice as traditional in opposition to it, while, at the same time, elements of Christian practice have been adopted by the community in a non institutional way. The thesis describes Pogoro Christianity, the role of the Church and Pogoro perceptions of it and gives an account of that which they consider to belong to the realm of 'tradition'. Traditional practice is not in actuality unchanging, but any changes in traditional practice must be legitimated by the authority of the dead and the spirits.

The first part of the thesis provides the historical and geographical background. This is followed by a chapter on the Catholic Church in the area and official Catholic practice. Local Catholic practice and perceptions of the church and Christianity are described and accounted for. The next section looks at what is constituted as belonging to the realm of 'tradition'. The core chapters in this section describe girls puberty rites, funerals and the relationship with the dead. It is here that Catholic practice enters the realm of 'tradition'. A chapter examines the place of witchcraft eradication movements among the Pogoro, and in East and central Africa, to demonstrate how 'tradition' can and does change, and to provide a contrast with the position of Christianity among the Pogoro. This is dealt with in the final chapter in which I argue that there are limits on the 'traditionalisation' of Christianity among the Pogoro, and in other similar societies, and that these limits are to some extent a function of the institutional nature of Christianity.



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## PREFACE

This study is based on twentyone months of fieldwork in Ulanga District, Tanzania, with some additional research at the Tanzania National Archives and the University of Dar es Salaam. The research was carried out between November 1989 and July 1991. It was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council of the United Kingdom and the University of London's Central Research Fund. I am grateful to both organisations.

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## **One: INTRODUCTION**

The majority of the Pogoro population of the Mahenge highlands, southern Tanzania, are at least nominally affiliated to the Roman Catholic Church and choose to define themselves as Catholic in opposition to the religious affiliation of other groups in the area. With a presence in the area which stretches back almost a century, the Church and Christianity are taken for granted aspects of local society. This thesis gives an account of that society and the place of Christianity in it.

### **The Anthropology of Christianity**

Although the majority of the world's Christians now live in the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America, many of them in the kinds of communities conventionally studied by anthropologists, it is only comparatively recently that Christianity outside Europe has become a major area of concern within the discipline. This initial lack of concern with Christianity is explained by the history of the discipline itself. Anthropology originally concerned itself with the study of small scale societies, which were classified as 'primitive' and were, by definition, non Christian (Fabian 1983:27; Mudimbe 1988:20). These same societies, located within the new colonial territories of Africa, Asia and the Pacific, were to become the focus of intense interest from both anthropologists and Christian missionaries, the former attempting to describe and record the ways of the 'traditional' society while the latter attempted to undermine what made it 'traditional' through, amongst other things, 'conversion' to Christianity. These conflicting interests to some extent explain the ambivalence expressed by anthropologists towards Christianity as personified by missionaries, an attitude exemplified by Beidelman in his study of 'colonial evangelism' (1982). The structural functionalist paradigm which dominated British anthropology until the 1970's continued to recreate the timeless 'traditional' society from which Christianity was necessarily absent, even though it was both long established and important. During this period, two of the most important studies of the historical transformation of religion in Africa and in Melanesia were the work of sociologists, Worsley (1968) and Peel (1968), not anthropologists.

The demise of empire brought a gradual change of direction in anthropology, leading to a shift in the way in which societies in Asia and Africa were perceived. These were now considered as part of newly independent nation states, rather than as the states within the

state of indirect rule. This gave them a kind of conceptual equality with the small scale communities of Europe which had become an accepted field of enquiry, inevitably entailing the study of Christianity. Of these, perhaps the best known is Christian's (1972) account of Catholicism and identity in Spain. At the same time the boundaries between the British social and American cultural schools partially collapsed, while the influence of French Marxist anthropology generated an interest in social transformation. For Africa, this work confined itself to the study of economic relations,<sup>1</sup> but, on the whole, interest in the anthropology of the region declined.

In contrast, the anthropology of the highlands of South America has always had to contend with Christianity in the legacy of Spanish conquest, albeit with the persistence of indigenous religious forms. By the 1970's studies of Christian communities in the Mediterranean and Catholic South America were becoming commonplace. For both areas there was a tendency to distinguish 'Christian' from 'non Christian' practice, a distinction articulated either in terms of 'syncretism'<sup>2</sup> or with reference to the debate, following Redfield (1956), about the 'great' and 'little' traditions.

The last decade has seen an explosion of interest in Christianity as popular religion in both history and anthropology. Significant works include those by Moore (1987) and Ginzburg (1983) on the relationship between local religious practice and the prevailing orthodoxy of the Christian church in medieval Europe; Iletto's (1979) study on Filipino Christian revolutionary consciousness, and, most recently, Stirrat's (1992) account of Catholic religiosity in Sri Lanka.

## **The Anthropology of Christianity in Africa**

The treatment of Christianity in parts of the world where it has a more recent history has been much more uneven in anthropology than outside it. While there are few strictly anthropological accounts of Christianity in Africa, there are numerous studies by theologians, sociologists and philosophers, many commissioned by religious orders and interests. Some of these works are partly anthropological, although, because they were written with a specific objective by people with a specific religious perspective, and, because

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see Terray (1972), Meillassoux (1981).

<sup>2</sup> For example, see Nash (1979), Taussig (1980) and Sallnow (1987).

their findings may justify the adaptation of liturgy and theology to perceived local concerns<sup>3</sup>, they are not to be understood as 'ethnographies' in the conventional sense, and must necessarily themselves become part of the object of study. The works of Shorter (1973; 1979) and Sundkler (1961; 1976; 1980) fall into this category. There are many others<sup>4</sup>.

Historians have also paid attention to Christianity in Africa because of its inextricable entanglement with imperialism, colonialism and, even when independent of empire, with political and social change<sup>5</sup>. This history has implications for the way in which anthropology approaches the study of Christianity in Africa. It determines the formulation of what has become the analytical problem in anthropological accounts of Christianity there, by making an assumption that we are dealing with the meeting of two distinct systems, one indigenous and authentic, the other a 'Christianity' as an ideological package containing Western modes of thought and organisation primed to shatter the 'traditional' society which it meets. The history of anthropology, on the other hand, largely continues to determine the object of study. Assumptions about the two systems underlie the notions of conversion and syncretism which have become core metaphors in the field as bridging concepts to relate them.

The writings of Horton (1971; 1975) have been influential in creating a paradigm for the explanation of the adoption of Christian<sup>6</sup> religious affiliation in Africa in essentially reductionist terms. Horton assumes that both Christianity and 'traditional African religion' are systems of thought or worldviews, and that, consequently, the adoption of Christianity entails a change in the thought or worldview of converts. Changes in religious concepts are seen to lead to changes in social structure or vice versa (van Binsbergen 1981:42), it is assumed that 'conversion' involves the abandonment of one 'system' for another, and that 'conversion' is a deliberate choice by individuals or social groups seeking a new intellectual framework in order to cope with the modern world (Horton 1971; 1975). In this view, 'conversion' to Christianity entails the adoption of an entire new pattern of thought,

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Tanner (1967:234-8) and Shorter (1979:138).

<sup>4</sup> For example see Bottignole (1984), Okorochoa (1987), Niwagila (1987), Tanner (1967), Mbiti (1969a, 1969b), Kalilombe (1978), Dickson & Ellingworth (1969).

<sup>5</sup> Some examples relevant to this study are Grey (1990), Iliffe (1979, 1987), Ranger & Kimambo (1972). Further examples are given in Chapters two and Three. For an overview of the historical literature pertinent to Christianity in Southern Africa see Comaroff & Comaroff (1991), for West Africa see Fernandez (1982), and for historical accounts of mission in East Africa see Beidelman (1982).

<sup>6</sup> The same argument is extended by Horton to encompass Islam.

implying a fundamental change that not only alters the way society is but the innermost being of its members.

This kind of understanding of 'conversion' has proved remarkably persistent in anthropology, perhaps because of its sanction by Mauss, for whom Christianity was the significant factor in the construction of the individualised self in modern Western societies (1985). Lienhardt, in an essay on representations of the self among the Dinka, describes their notion of the vitality (*weei*) which animates the body and departs it on death. This term has been appropriated by Christian missionaries, who use it to stand for the very different notion of 'soul' in Christian theology. Lienhardt suggests that, 'Missionaries...have presumably successfully reshaped the Dinka word for their converts-reshaped it into a unitary term for a moralised and spiritualised self-consciousness of each separate individual in relation to a personalised God.' He continues, 'I hope that further research, especially among converts, will tell us something about how this *translation of conscience intimately takes place*' (1985:147, my emphasis).

There are various problems with this kind of interpretation of 'conversion'. The first is that it is ahistorical<sup>7</sup>. As I shall show in this thesis, 'conversion' to Christianity in many missionary colonial situations was essentially as consequence of mission control over schooling<sup>8</sup>, and in fact adults rarely chose to become members of Christian churches. In addition, 'conversion' does not happen in the way in which the intellectualists and theologians imagine, as either a miraculous or methodical transformation of the inner state of the person. This vision of 'conversion' is itself derived from the language of evangelical Protestantism (cf Weber, 1985:143). Further, among the Pogoro at least, Christian religious affiliation as an aspect of a person's identity is explicitly concerned with the presentation of an exterior state, not an internal one<sup>9</sup>. Lienhardt assumes that conversion implies a 'translation of conscience', a fundamental and profound shift in indigenous modes of thought, ways of being and conceptions of the person. But he is right to sound tentative. Why should we presume that, because Christianity can be presented as an objectified package of practices and theology which are contrasted with indigenous notions similarly presented, it has such power? Why should we assume that this presentation of Christianity

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<sup>7</sup> For a critique of Horton on this point with reference to the adoption of Islam in Africa see Fisher (1973).

<sup>8</sup> For Kenya see Strayer (1976), for Rwanda, Linden (1977), and for Rhodesia, Murphree (1969).

<sup>9</sup> This is also the case for Islam among the Miri of the Sudan (Baumann, 1987:124).

as a thing, a system, a mode of thought, is indeed how it appears to others and how it is perceived by them?

Much of this thesis is concerned with people's perception of Christianity, which as elsewhere, is necessarily defined partly in opposition to people's perception of a 'traditional system', itself objectified by the very existence of Christianity (cf Bloch 1986; Comaroff 1985:142-5). What I shall show in this thesis is that while Christianity is perceived as a system of practices, organisation and ideology, it is perceived as being a system of a wholly different order to that which people define as 'traditional'.

The concepts of 'conversion'<sup>10</sup> and 'syncretism' continue to dominate the anthropological literature, in which 'syncretism' comes to be used as a descriptive term denoting situations in which local religious practice is comprised of both Christian and non Christian elements, combined into a unitary system of meaning<sup>11</sup>. The limited criticism to which these concepts have been subjected remains firmly within the intellectualist framework. Comaroff and Comaroff acknowledge the imprecision of 'conversion' as an 'analytical category'. They point out that it 'conflates changes in individual spiritual identity with cultural transformation' (1991:250-1), but they do not question the assumption that Christianity is concerned primarily with spiritual identity. Similarly, Grey's suggestion that we replace the notion of 'syncretism' with that of a 'theological pluralism' (1990) merely substitutes one descriptive category with another, and even then it is not exactly clear what he is describing.

Christianity can be presented as a theology, which is itself an integral part of the various orthodox Christianities, but Christianity is not reducible to theology. That theology may justify Christian ritual and inform some of the attitudes of Christians is not because Christianity is equatable with theology, but because Christian theology is part of the same symbolic and religious system as the rituals and attitudes it supports. The existence of Christian theology or Christian ritual does not explain or account for the thought or worldview or 'culture' of 'Christians' in various parts of the world. Ritual and religious practice are not equatable with thought or knowledge or consciousness, although they may inform it on occasion (Geertz 1966). They are, in fact, partially separated off from everyday practice and knowledge (Tambiah 1968; Bloch 1985). Indeed, as Sperber (1975), among others, has persuasively argued, if they were not there would be no explanation for the

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<sup>10</sup> For recent examples see Rigby (1981) and Lienhardt (1982).

<sup>11</sup> For example see Peel (1968), Fernandez (1982) and Comaroff (1985).



existence of ritual which, because it cannot just be decoded (Lewis 1980, Bloch 1974; 1986) is not the expression of a worldview nor is it a form of communication.

In any case, Christianity cannot be understood in idealist terms. It is not a philosophy. As Weber made clear with reference to Protestant sects, Christianity involves a system of organisation and material practices centred on a church (1985). The church is not merely a building in which Christians pray, but usually entails some sort of bureaucracy and hierarchical structure by which members are organised in relation to the authorities of the church, which they support financially. The material power of the church as an institution is especially evident in missionary situations, where, because of the lack of institutional differentiation which implicates mission directly in politics<sup>12</sup>, power and patronage, Christianity can never appear simply as 'religion' in quite the way the intellectualists imagine.

### **The Small Christian Community**

Anthropological studies of Christianity in post colonial and colonial contexts, not only in Africa, tend either to concentrate on mission, emphasising the confrontational nature of evangelisation<sup>13</sup> (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Beidelman 1982; Shapiro 1981; Rigby 1981). Alternatively, the focus is on situations in which Christianity has itself become transformed through local practice and interpretation to the point where there appears to be no break, except at the analytical level, between it and a 'traditional' system. This would seem to be the case for many of the 'syncretic' cults and sects which are so numerous in Africa. The literature on these cults and sects, to which a minority of people belong, is vast (Fernandez, 1978), and growing<sup>14</sup>. These sects and cults are easy targets for anthropology quite simply because their members form their own small scale communities in which the presence of Christianity is so pervasive it can be comfortably encompassed by the holistic approach of a conventional ethnography. Christianity, for members of a Tshidi Zionsit church (Comaroff 1985), for *Zambian Witnesses* (Long 1968) or for members of the *Jamaa* movement in Zaire (Fabian 1969; 1971; de Craemer 1977) affects every aspect of their lives. In a very real sense it determines how church members earn a living, whom they will marry,

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<sup>12</sup> Linden (1977) is an excellent example.

<sup>13</sup> The concentration on mission in colonial contexts is explicitly political, enabling authors to combine a critique of mission with that of the colonial endeavour.

<sup>14</sup> See also Fabian, (1969:155).

how they cope with illness and so on<sup>15</sup>, just as, in the view of Fortes, among the Tallensi kinship determined economy, residence patterns, religious practices and political and economic relationships (1969:229). Interestingly, it is this kind of situation which some of the mainstream churches are attempting to replicate with pastoral programmes advocating the creation and maintenance of the 'small Christian community'<sup>16</sup>.

## The Majority Churches

Assessing the place and importance of Christianity is much less obvious in communities where people are members of the more mundane mainstream churches, to which the majority of Christians in Africa belong. As these churches lack the separatist and exclusive characteristics of the sects, being Christian does not necessarily imply a wholesale and fundamental rejection of non Christian practices. Indeed, Christianity frequently manifests itself as an extra layer of practices on top of those practised more or less routinely by everyone else within the society, whether Christian or not, or if Christian, whatever church they belong to. This would appear to have been the case for Nyakyusa Christians in the 1930's (Wilson 1957; 1963), and for the Catholic Shona in the 1980's, whose religious affiliation did not prohibit their involvement in ancestor oriented practice or healing rituals (Lan 1985:40)<sup>17</sup>.

Precisely because Christianity so often appears to manifest itself in this way, it has been possible for anthropologists to underplay its impact as its presence does not seem to have detracted from what is easily recognisable as non Christian practice, which is assumed to be 'pre Christian' and therefore 'traditional'. Consequently, there are very few anthropological studies of mainstream Christianity in Africa, with the exception of those commissioned by and for the churches themselves. These are in the main concerned with the peculiarities of local Christian practice in relation to the current orthodoxy of the commissioning church, as for example, Tanner's (1967) account of Sukuma Catholicism, Perrin Jassy's (1973) work on Luo Christian groups and Murphree's account of Christianity of various denominations among the Shona (1969).

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<sup>15</sup> For the Legio Maria among Kenyan Luo see Perrin Jassy (1973), and Fernandez (1982:98) for the Bwiti church among the Fang of Gabon.

<sup>16</sup> For example see Bottignole (1984).

<sup>17</sup> Significantly, only the minority Evangelicals rejected any such participation, recognising that it threatened the integrity of their alternative and encompassing Christian society (Lan 1985:40).

Today<sup>18</sup>, most Christians in Africa are born of Christian parents and grandparents, rapid population growth rather than evangelisation accounts for the expansion of Christian congregations, and changes in religious affiliation are between the various denominations of world religions, not between indigenous religion and Christianity (Perrin-Jassy 1973;xii). Studies of mission and transition now belong to history, not anthropology.

## **The Catholic Church in Africa**

The Roman Catholic church is profoundly influential in much of Africa, particularly in Kenya, Zambia and Tanzania, where, despite its political impact, it has received little anthropological attention. Protestant churches and missions have been the main focus of anthropological studies, albeit indirectly, because many of the minority sects are derived from them and also because of the tendency of English speaking ethnographers to study Protestant missions.

The Catholic Church is of interest because it is structurally very different from the Protestant churches. It is a universal church, a highly centralised monolithic organisation which has a recognised body of acceptable Catholic practice, an 'official' baseline Catholicism which, in theory, applies the world over. To use the analogy of the play, they are presenting much the same show in numerous theatres. In essence, only the audience is different. The scope for lay innovations, revivalism, breakaway movements and officially sanctioned differences in interpretation is limited. Groups which do break away either collapse after expulsion from the Catholic church, as happened in the case of the Jamaa movement in Zaire (Fabian 1971; de Craemer 1977), or else, as in the case of the Legio Maria, become routinised on the model of Protestant derived Independent churches (Perrin-Jassy 1973). Finally, while we have a number of ethnographies of Catholic and Greek orthodox communities in Europe<sup>19</sup>, in South America, and the Phillipines<sup>20</sup>, there are only two that I know of for Africa, and both, commissioned by a religious order, are concerned with the 'failure' of mission (Perrin-Jassy 1973; Tanner 1967).

## **Situating this Study**

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<sup>18</sup> This has been the case since the 1950's (Swantz, M, 1978:139, Hastings, 1978:26-7).

<sup>19</sup> For example, Pina-Cabral (1981), Christian (1972), Rushton (1982).

<sup>20</sup> See above.

This study of a community in which most people have been affiliated to a single majority church for several generations was conceived in opposition to the prevailing trends in the anthropology of Christianity. As such, it is not a study of mission, but of contemporary local religious practice. My concern is not with deviations from an abstract and perhaps imaginary 'orthodoxy', but with the inevitable break between what is locally defined as orthodoxy by clergy and how laity perceive Christianity.

Given the concerns of the research, I chose to do fieldwork among the Pogoro people of the Mahenge area, in the administrative district of Ulanga<sup>21</sup>. Mahenge has the fourth highest concentration of Catholics of all Catholic dioceses in Tanzania (van Bergen 1981:29), and, unlike other parts of the country, in the Pogoro area there are no significant competing Christianities. Out of the one third of Tanzanians who define themselves as Christian, two thirds are affiliated to the Roman Catholic Church (Westerlund 1980:8). Catholicism is then the main majority Christianity in the country, but, because of the historical establishment of Catholicism in the colonial period, when parts of the country were divided between denominations and orders, and because of the perpetuation of diocesan autonomy even after the formation of the Tanzania Episcopal Conference (van Bergen 1981:32), there are great differences between dioceses. Ulanga district has a long history of isolation and conflict. Unlike other parts of the country, it remains virtually dominated by one Church. Mahenge cannot be said unequivocally to be typical of a Catholic diocese in Tanzania. Neither can the response of its people to Christianity.

Rather like anthropologists writing about Christianity, Pogoro people make a distinction between 'Christian' practice and that which they regard as authentically 'traditional'. As Christianity continues to be perceived as foreign, despite its indigenous clergy, aspects of local practice defined as 'traditional' are set up in opposition to it. Some of these practices are also defined by the Church as non-Christian and incompatible with Christianity. This results in a separation between Christianity and 'traditional' practice, a separation partly made inevitable by the existence of institutional religion. This separation is not manifested in a separation between Christians and non Christians, but in the practice of the same people living in, and negotiating between, the two systems simultaneously. Christian practice is kept separate in time and space from that thought of as 'traditional', even if elements from both occasionally form part of the same sequence, as for example in the series of events which comprise the funeral process.

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<sup>21</sup> See map in Appendix i.

However, this separation is not absolute. Certain Christian practices having been freed from the institutional Church have become almost 'traditional'. That these are mainly concerned with the dead and the divine beings is not surprising, given that what the Pogoro define as 'traditional' practice is not necessarily that which was performed in the past, but that which is oriented towards the dead and the territorial spirits. 'Traditional' practice is not unchanging, but any change must be justified and legitimated in terms of non human agency. The fact that much of Christian practice is obviously the result of human manipulation devalues its claims to an equivalence with 'tradition' which can transform itself and incorporate other practice, so long as the authority for this transformation can be presented as coming from the spirits.

## **The Thesis**

In contrast to much of the anthropological work on Christianity in Africa, I make Christianity central, rather than marginal, to the investigation. As any study of the place of Christianity in a society must be equally concerned with where Christianity appears to have no place, I do not confine the study only to Christianity. Aspects of life which appear unaffected by Christianity are just as important as aspects of life which seem heavily influenced by it. I have attempted to pay equal attention to both.

The result is evident in the structure and organisation of this thesis. The first three chapters deal with where Christianity is most evident and most influential; with the local economy and political structure, with the history of mission and Christianisation, with current Catholic practice and the relation between the Church and its congregation. The next three chapters deal with practices and events in which the place given to Christianity is marginal: kinship, girls' puberty rites and funerary practices.

If it appears to the reader that these chapters virtually ignore Christianity, this is intentional. In my placing of Christianity I have merely replicated the place accorded it by my informants in their daily lives and social practice. The essential separation of some aspects of Christian practice is precisely what I intend to convey in my narrative which, like my informants, eventually recaptures Christianity in Chapters Eight and Nine. These describe practices which deal with the spirits of the dead and with witchcraft, and in which a Christianity, partially liberated from the fetters of the institutional Church is

appropriated<sup>22</sup> by the people and made use of to address their own social concerns. In the concluding chapter I explain why this separation exists and why it manifests itself in the way that it does, and return to some of the theoretical issues raised above concerning the manifestation of Christianity.

The following chapter introduces the area and its peoples, providing an account of recent history and of the various models of social organisation imposed by the Church and the State. Chapter Three looks at the history of conversion in Ulanga and at the structure and organisation of the institutional Church. Chapter Four gives an account of Pogoro perceptions of Christianity and of local Catholic practice. Chapter Five, an analysis of Pogoro kinship, provides the necessary background for the second half of the thesis which looks at where Christianity appears to be excluded and why, at things which people define as belonging to the realm of 'tradition' or jadi.

Chapter Six gives an account of girls' puberty rites and outlines the structure which recurs in all Pogoro ritual which is, as I show in Chapter Seven on funerals, concerned with the physical containment of pollution and its removal as a way of returning the person to a state appropriate for living people to be in. Chapter Eight deals with the relationship with the dead and with the spirits associated with territory, considering possession and the giving of offerings as aspects of descent. Chapters Nine and Ten return to the social construction of 'tradition', examining the place of witchcraft suppression practices among the Pogoro as examples of practice which is not claimed to be indigenous in origin and yet which is accorded the status of tradition. Chapter Eleven is the conclusion, in which I return to some of the themes raised in this introduction about the impact of Christianity in the light of what we know about where and why the Pogoro place Christianity as they do in relation to that which they consider to be 'traditional'.

## **Methodology**

Many anthropologists writing about Christianity and religion, in Africa and elsewhere, are themselves religious. I should make my own position clear. I am not affiliated to any organised religion. Brought up in a secular family in the north of England, I attended Jewish schools until I was thirteen, after which my religious education stopped. I had no contact with organised religion, either Christian or Jewish, and, until I began to study

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<sup>22</sup> cf Grey (1990:64).

anthropology, I knew very little about Christianity and very few practising Christians. This has been an advantage in my work. I had very few preconceptions about Christianity and certainly no sense of its 'rightness' nor of its internal coherence. This enabled me to treat it as simply an aspect of social practice and to evaluate what I was told about things 'Christian' in the same way as I evaluated other information. Attending church and witnessing mass was as new to me as attending a divination session, and took just as much of an effort to comprehend.

When I first arrived in Mahenge, I stayed at the Church headquarters at Kwirow, in a small room adjoining the convent of the Diocesan Sisters. I took my meals with the parish priests, all of whom were from the area, with the exception of a visiting father from the Diocese of Iringa. This experience was interesting and gave me something of an insider's view into the lives and problems of the religious, but because of the position of the Church in the community it was not a satisfactory base from which to do the kind of fieldwork I wanted. Two months later, I found a house in a village not far from the church and within easy access on foot of the neighbouring villages. I lived there for the remainder of my stay, dividing my time between there and the neighbouring villages where I spent my days in the company of people I had got to know. I also spent some time in Ihowanja (Malinyi) and at Ilonga, places on the margins of the Pogoro area. This gave me a better perspective from which to view my own data and helped me to understand more clearly the nature of ethnic identity in Southern Tanzania.

My methodology is conventional. Much of my information comes from informal conversations, from observation, from asking persistent questions and from looking and listening. I rarely used structured interviews, and none of my interviews were taped. I did, however, use a tape recorder to record songs and dances, which my informants considered to be an appropriate use for it. Once people knew me better and understood my motives, they encouraged me to write down what they said, either at the time or to jot it down in note form as they were talking, if they felt that it was about 'customs' and 'culture'. They did not regard their everyday social life as data, although in practice it is from this that much of what this thesis contains is drawn. For this reason, where people are named in the text I give pseudonyms, unless they were speaking on a specific research issue. I have tried, where possible, to support what I say with evidence from Church records and those from local government. Some of these are presented as an appendix in the back.

## Language

The fieldwork was conducted in the two languages spoken by Pogoro people in Mahenge. These are the national language, Kiswahili, and the local language, Kipogoro. Both are Bantu languages. Kipogoro is very similar to a Kiswahili purged of its Arabic and loan words, although there are significant grammatical differences with regard to, for example, the construction of tenses. A German-Pogoro dictionary was published in 1907 (Hendle, 1907). This book does not adopt the conventional orthography of Bantu languages, making the pronunciation of words very difficult for a non German speaker, although it gives an indication of the basic grammar and a limited vocabulary, some of which would appear now to be archaic. As I am not trained as a linguist, I have doubtless misclassified certain words in the plural and I do not know enough about the meaning of class prefixes in Pogoro to be able to theorise about the derivation of words which would appear by their roots to be related, unless the connection was either obvious or was pointed out to me by speakers.

People are comfortable with both languages and often shift between them in the course of the same conversation or sentence.<sup>23</sup> In the text, for the sake of clarity, where people perceive a distinction between a Kiswahili word and its Kipogoro equivalent these are indicated. Similarly, if a word is the same in both languages this is made clear in the text: **Kiswahili** is denoted in bold, Kipogoro underlined, and the same word used in both languages by bold and underlining, as in **mwali**. A Kiswahili word is not necessarily confined to a Kiswahili sentence. Neither is a Kipogoro word confined to a Kipogoro sentence or conversation. This should be borne in mind by the reader.

## The Ethnography of Ulanga District

There is little material available in English on the Pogoro people, although there are ethnographies on neighbouring groups, such as Culwick's numerous publications on the Rivers Bena, of which the best known is his (1935) monograph<sup>24</sup>, and the work of Crosse-Upcott (1956) on the N'gindo. A comprehensive review of the ethnographic literature on what are now the districts of Ulanga and Kilombero is given in Brantschen (1953). The works dealing mainly with the Pogoro are the small number of semi-ethnographic studies

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<sup>23</sup> The linguistic situation would appear to be very similar to that described by M Swantz (1986) for the Zaramo, a coastal Bantu people who live near to Dar es Salaam.

<sup>24</sup> All Culwick's publications are listed by Brantschen (1953).



produced by Capuchin missionaries (eg Lussy 1951; 1953; Schoenacher 1965; Engelberger 1954, Engelberger & Lussy 1954). These are mostly in German. Other works in English dealing with the Pogoro are Jilek-Aal's work on epilepsy and psychiatric disorders (1976; 1979), and Larson's (1976) history of Ulanga district. Colonial records provide some ethnographic information, but it is hazy, often confused and unreliable. This lack of ethnographic data in English on the area has obviously influenced my work. No doubt there are numerous errors, which only further fieldwork will reveal.

## Two: THE SETTING

### The District and its Peoples

The Pogoro are Bantu agriculturalists who live in the south western part of central Tanzania, in what is now the administrative District of Ulanga<sup>1</sup>. With an estimated population of sixty-nine thousand<sup>2</sup>, they are the largest single ethnic group in the district, occupying a territory which encompasses the southern edge of the Kilombero plain and the Mahenge Highlands proper. Its area in total exceeds one thousand square miles, consisting of forested hills, intersected by deep and narrow river valleys in which cultivation occurs. The highlands rise to a level of five thousand feet above sea level (Jatzold & Baum 1968:17). They are well watered, traversed by numerous rivers, some of which flow throughout the year. Rainfall is plentiful. Parts of the area are subject to severe flooding. Other streams and pools fill only after the rains.

In the wet season, the area is vibrant with greenery, fluorescent against darkly thunderous skies. The grass grows higher than a person's head and the air fills with many coloured butterflies. There are great stretches of dense creeper hung forest and hillsides clothed in tall trees. Elsewhere, in the more populated areas where the trees have been cut and cleared for firewood, building and cultivation, the hills are starkly bare. As the highlands slope down towards the valleys, the trees give way to scrub and grassland<sup>3</sup>. In the dry season the landscape changes. The colour seeps out from it, the grass becomes lighter, then yellow, then grey. Dead grass and fallow are burned off. The dark earth is exposed, dug over and planted. The seasons determine the agricultural cycle and patterns of labour. The busiest times are just before first planting, at the start of the short rains in late October or November, and during the longer harvest season, which extends from the end of February to June. Agricultural work continues through the hot, relatively dry months between December and March when the rains resume with vigour, and may destroy what has already been planted. July, August and September are the coldest, driest months, and, with the harvest over, the slackest agriculturally.

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<sup>1</sup> Until 1974 what are now the present day districts of Ulanga and Kilombero formed a single district, known at various times as Ulanga District and Mahenge District.

<sup>2</sup> This figure was supplied by the Office of Development and Social Welfare, Ulanga, in March 1991. The Tanzania census does not give population by tribe or ethnic group.

<sup>3</sup> For a descriptive account of the ecology and geography of Ulanga see Jatzold & Baum (1968).

Ulanga District is one of the least densely populated<sup>4</sup> areas in Tanzania<sup>5</sup>. Vast tracts of it are uninhabited. Much of it is accessible only on foot. Transport is infrequent and unreliable, even out of the local administrative centre Mahenge town, the district capital, which encompasses several settlements too small to be villages in their own right<sup>6</sup>. It had, in 1988, a population of five thousand people<sup>7</sup>, many of whom were government workers from other parts of the country. Established by the Germans as a military station in 1899, the town proper has grown up to be a disparate collection of shacks and small buildings huddling at the foot of the German fort, itself perched on the edge of a steep escarpment, affording views over mile upon mile of treetops down into and across the Kilombero valley.

The fort houses a prison and the District Headquarters. Mahenge was a battlefield in the **majimaji** rising of 1905. The high walls of the fort are still scarred with bullets. From here hundreds of rebels were machine gunned down as they approached it from the escarpment. The rising decimated the populations of Southern Tanzania (Culwick 1938; Larson 1976:133; Iliffe 1979:165), many dying of starvation in the famine that followed.

Mahenge town is the main trading centre in the district. Its market, post office, police post and hospital serve the entire population of the highlands. The mission dispensary and the church itself draw people to the town, which, in 1991 had, the only secondary school in the district. Most villages do not have shops, even for staples such as salt and cooking oil. Mahenge market usually has maize for sale, brought in from outside the district, as well as beans, rice, onions, tomatoes and the dried fish which is brought up from the Kilombero river. There are about fifteen small shops selling clothes, **kanga**<sup>8</sup>, soap, cigarettes and other rural luxuries. All of them are owned and run by outsiders, most commonly by people from the north. The town is currently expanding as a commercial centre as a result of economic changes in the country as a whole and because of the discovery of rubies in the area.

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<sup>4</sup> The district's total population in 1988 was 138, 887 (Government of Tanzania 1988:67).

<sup>5</sup> The average population density for Tanzania was 26 per km<sup>2</sup> in 1988, while Morogoro region has an average of 17 (Government of Tanzania 1988:25). Ulanga's population density has been estimated as 5 per km<sup>2</sup> (Mbosa 1988:23).

<sup>6</sup> According to the Villages and Ujamaa Act, villages must have a minimum number of 200 households (File R20/5 Mahenge Uandikishaji wa Vijiji 3/76-88, District Office, Mahenge).

<sup>7</sup> see (Government of Tanzania 1988:67).

<sup>8</sup> A piece of patterned cloth with a motto printed along the bottom border. Worn and sold in pairs, **kanga** are the basic items of women's clothing in East Africa. **Kitenge** is also popular. This is patterned cloth, without a border, which is sold and worn in the same way.

Ulanga District is underdeveloped and marginal to the national economy. Its southern and eastern sides are bounded by the Selous Game reserve, an area first cleared of people in 1921 as part of colonial tsetse control policy (Iliffe 1979:202). Further expansion in 1940 has left an area the size of Denmark uninhabited and out of bounds to people who may neither hunt in it nor pass through it. The creation of the Selous radically affected the future development of the District. It severed the connection with the coast via Liwale and Kilwa, a foot route established during the slave trade, and reoriented the District's peoples towards the north-to Ifakara, Morogoro and Kilosa. This was in part a consequence of the construction of the 'central line' railway passing through Kilosa, making a road link between Mahenge, Ifakara and Kilosa inevitable. Ifakara has become a link town between Ulanga and the regional capital, Morogoro, and, with the completion of the Tanzania-Zambia railway in 1975 (Coulson 1982:231), the rest of the country.

There are but two significant roads in Ulanga District. One runs south, from Ifakara to Mahenge, and then onwards to Ilonga where it meets the Selous and stops. There is no through route out of Mahenge to anywhere except the villages en route to Ilonga, and Ilonga itself is just another collection of villages. The other road runs westwards, around the base of the highlands, to Malinyi and beyond. These unsurfaced roads do not connect regional centres and quickly become impassable in the wet season, when vehicles sink into the mud. Until 1987 Mahenge itself was regularly cut off for at least three months of the year as the Kilombero River flooded, expanding to submerge the road. The road level has been raised and a new ferry provided. Transport, though still a problem, has improved considerably. One company now operates a bus two or three times weekly to Dar es Salaam. For services to Ifakara, people rely on the school and post office trucks, and on the church. Many people cannot afford road transport and so walk the seventy kilometres to Ifakara, if they have a reason for going there. There are no secondary roads connecting villages not located along main roads. Walking is the primary mode of transport. Steep slopes and rocky terrain defeat bicycles, which few could, in any case, afford. Loads are carried great distances on the head, along the narrow paths that are the real highways of the district and along which a constant stream of people, walking barefoot and in single file, come and go.

Ulanga District is home to a number of ethnic groups, apart from the Pogoro, who think of themselves as belonging to distinct 'tribes'. These are the N'gindo, Ndamba, Ngoni, and Vidabaga. The dispersion of ethnic groups appears relatively unchanged since the late

nineteenth century<sup>9</sup>. Places at the edges of a group's area have mixed populations. The Kilombero Valley itself is home to Ndamba and Bena peoples. All of the main groups in the Ulanga district speak similar languages, classified by linguists as belonging to the general category of Bantu. They can understand each other easily, although members of the various groups might choose to exaggerate the difference between them in order to assert identity and difference in some contexts. Many people who today define themselves as Pogoro can in fact trace their origins to other groups in the area. This partly shared cultural background is in itself historical, and explains the area wide appeal of such phenomena as **majimaji** (Gwassa 1973:43) and various witchcraft suppression movements amongst all the peoples of the districts of Ulanga, Ruvuma and Kilombero<sup>10</sup>. It is a consequence of the solidification of ethnic identities in the early years of the twentieth century as an innovative strategy for dealing with the geopolitical demands of the various colonial administrations (Ilfie 1979:324). All of these peoples have a historical tradition of having come into the area from the west, a migration in part forced by the momentum of Southern African defikane. This tradition has been dealt with by historians elsewhere (Ilfie 1979:54-8; Larson 1976:10-28). Consequently, these peoples are more accurately regarded as belonging to the general South Eastern and Central African tradition than to an 'East African'<sup>11</sup> one, and, as shall become evident in the thesis, much of their cultural practice is similar to that described for the peoples of, for example, Zambia (See Turner 1967; 1968; Richards 1939; 1982).

Some writers have insisted on a distinction between the Pogoro of the lowlands and those occupying the highlands region, maintaining that the cultural and linguistic differences between the two groups are pronounced and that they are more accurately considered as separate cultural entities (Larson 1976:30,118). This thesis is about a small section of the Pogoro community living in the vicinity of Mahenge town, the district capital, at the heart of the highlands area. I do not know to what extent the highlands communities differ from those in the lowlands. Although highlanders themselves were at pains to point out that numerous differences existed, they were rarely interested in elaborating on what these might actually be. There is, in any event, much contact between the highlands and lowlands peoples, many of whom are related to each other, and frequent and extended visiting. All define themselves as Pogoro.

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<sup>9</sup> See Gulliver (1959) and Culwick (1935:153).

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter Nine.

<sup>11</sup> I am thinking here of such peoples as Gikuyu, Luo and Nandi for example.

## First Impressions

Travellers coming to the highlands area generally arrive by road, disembarking at Mahenge town. The road rises up from the Kilombero flood plains, gently at first as it passes through villages shaded by tall mangoes and coconut palms. As it gradually becomes steeper and steeper, the vegetation gives way to forest, bamboos and tall grasses. For the last fifteen kilometres the road climbs and winds its way painfully around the forested slopes of Ndororo mountain. Paths leave the road at right angles, vanishing into cool shadow. In some places the forest has been cut and fields cleared for maize plants to grow amid the blackened tree stumps. The road passes through a couple of villages consisting of low, rectangular houses strung out along it. They are, like the earth, a rich terracotta colour.

At the top of the mountain the landscape flattens out into a kind of mini plateau, itself a series of shallower ridges and valleys, strewn with massive obelisk like black rocks, on which candelabra trees grow. The forest thins out to nothing, replaced by irregular patches of cultivation, intersected by streams and gulleys and clumps of tall bamboos. Scattered houses line the road. After a final incline the bus lurches into the market place. The fort is on the left, past a monument, a red torch on a brick pillar, commemorating the Arusha Declaration. Clusters of houses connected by footpaths and separated by crops, grasses and trees, begin just at the edge of the town. More tall hills encircle it, some covered with Eucalyptus first planted by German missionaries and administrators. Close to the town the houses are scattered. There is an overwhelming impression of space.

The town itself is unimpressive - an extended village, consisting of three short 'streets'. The few large buildings dating from colonial times are in a state of decay. About a mile away from the town, slightly raised in the distance, is a gigantic church, painted bright white and yellow, with a tall tower, dominating the landscape. Behind the church, on a steep slope overlooking it, is a large white cross. The claim to the landscape has been staked by the missionaries. The church is, without doubt, the largest, tallest and best maintained building in the district. It dwarfs everything, even the old German fort. Its physical presence is symbolic of the position of the Church in general in the area. As I shall show in the following chapter, this presence is pervasive.

Pogoro people are visibly, ostentatiously Catholic. One notices immediately the large number of people, particularly women, wearing rosary beads and medallions of the Virgin. Schoolgirls pin little paper sacred hearts over their own. Dried and yellowed palm branches are nailed over the doorways of two out of three houses. On Sunday mornings the paths

are busy with people going to and from church. The church itself is packed for both morning masses. On Holy Days it overflows. People stand at the back and wait by the doors because there is not enough room for everybody inside. Small children know how to greet priests and sisters with the cry, 'Tumsifu Kristu!' (Let us praise Christ!). Older people still refer to Sunday by the Latin, **Dominica**. Some people cross themselves spontaneously when the cathedral bells ring out across the plateau.

Church figures for religious affiliation in Kwirow parish, which includes Mahenge town and outlying villages, indicate that out of a parish population of some 16,000 only 4000 do not regard themselves as Catholic<sup>12</sup>. Of these, approximately 2000 are Muslim. The majority of the non Catholics appear to be outsiders working and living in the town, where the two mosques are located. Throughout the course of my fieldwork I met very few Pogoro Muslims. Those I did meet came from the heavily Islamic area of Ilonga (Luhombero).

In recent years some of the evangelical churches have come into the area, mainly brought by traders and government workers from the north. They appear to have had little success in attracting Pogoro converts. Of these, the only two with any significant presence are the Assemblies of God and the Seventh Day Adventists. Both of these have congregations of around twenty, but only one or two Pogoro converts. These churches, with their food taboos and prohibitions on alcohol and dancing, are regarded, like Islam, as inappropriate and unappealing by Pogoro Catholics. The 'Independent' churches do not have a significant presence in Tanzania as a whole (Hastings, 1979:255). There are none in Ulanga.

## **Economy and Agriculture**

Pogoro people living in the Mahenge area are all subsistence farmers. A minority have salaried positions in the town or at the diocese headquarters. Wages are low, and do not keep pace with an annual inflation rate in excess of 30%, making even full time employees dependent on agriculture for subsistence needs. In 1991 a nurse earned the equivalent of 10 US\$ per month, before deductions, slightly more than the official minimum wage of 2000/-, about 8 US\$. Some people do short term wage labour when they need cash. Opportunities within the district are limited. Many young men leave for the towns of Morogoro and Dar es Salaam to look for casual or permanent employment. The unsuccessful return. Those doing well in the urban centres end up subsidising kin, though

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<sup>12</sup> See appendix 2.

not directly through remittances, by providing new migrants with a place to stay in town, with food and with the contacts necessary to find employment<sup>13</sup>.

The main crops grown in the highlands area are maize and rice. In the vicinity of Mahenge, maize is the staple, although some rice is grown. In the lower villages rice is now the main foodcrop. The staple is supplemented by cassava, sweet potatoes and many different varieties of banana. Beans of various types, groundnuts, millet, sesame, sunflowers and wheat are also grown. In the villages near to Mahenge, there is no cash crop. Although people sell food crops to raise cash when they need it, they do not produce a surplus specifically for sale. Few families produce any surplus at all. Cotton is grown in the hotter, lower villages near to Ruaha, where the failure of state marketing boards to collect and pay for the crop has meant that many people are abandoning cotton and turning instead to groundnuts and rice which, if they cannot be sold, can at least be eaten. Any produce sold is sold in small quantities because of transport problems and poor access to markets.

Farmers who concentrate on a saleable crop do so with the explicit intention of purchasing food, maize or rice, for the household's subsistence. A meal consists of a large dish of maize ubaga<sup>14</sup> or rice, dipped into a side dish of beans, meat, fish or vegetable, stewed to make a sauce. What constitutes the main dish, rice in the lowlands or maize in the highlands, is considered to be 'food'. Just as 'food' is culturally defined (cf Richards 1939:46-7), so is its absence, when the people have njala, 'hunger'. This refers to the annual period of food shortage which occurs from about September. It lasts until the following February, when the first maize crop of the year is ready. These periods of hunger have a long history in the area, and have probably always been a feature of Pogoro subsistence agriculture (Lussy 1953:113). When there is no maize people eat plantains, cassava and sweet potatoes<sup>15</sup>, which they dismiss as rather unsatisfying snacks. Usually, for those living within reasonable distance of the market at Mahenge town, maize is available throughout the year. Prices fluctuate depending on demand, doubling and tripling in the shortage season, transforming the experience of 'hunger' from the absence of 'food' into the absence of the necessary cash with which to purchase it. This dependence on cash to meet

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<sup>13</sup> This pattern is common throughout the country. See Collier et al, (1986:37-9).

<sup>14</sup> ubaga can refer either to maize ugali, or where rice is the staple, to cooked rice. It also refers to flour.

<sup>15</sup> ie, foods which they have grown themselves. At shortage times, rice becomes so expensive that people with rice left over sell it in order to purchase a greater quantity of maize.



subsistence needs is bitterly resented. Millet, which was the staple up to the 1940's<sup>16</sup> is grown by only a few individuals. It is used to brew the beer for the ancestors and to make ubaga offered to them on special occasions. It has other ritual uses<sup>17</sup>.

Agriculture is chronically underproductive. Cultivation is done with the hoe and a long handled knife with which the grasses or forest are cleared before burning. The average household<sup>18</sup>, consisting of between five and twelve people, cultivates only two acres of land<sup>19</sup>. Manufactured fertilisers, which could improve maize yields, are prohibitively expensive for farmers, who rely on long fallow periods, intercropping with beans and planting on mounds (**matuta**) to increase the land's fertility in areas which have been subject to intensive use mainly as a consequence of villagisation. A minority of the more progressive farmers are experimenting with **rejea**, a fertility restoring plant, encouraged by the government's agricultural extension officers.

Storage facilities for grain are basic. People store maize on the cob in the rafters of their houses. Much of what is harvested is destroyed by insects, exacerbating the annual shortage. Pests are endemic. Monkeys threaten ripening maize and small birds descend in flocks on newly planted seeds and vulnerable seedlings. A significant proportion of agricultural labour time is deflected from production into guarding fields and bird scaring (cf Lussy 1953:112). Women gather wild foods, leafy greens, fruits and seeds. Before the market came to mediate the supply of food, people relied on wild foods in times of famine. Old people lament what they see as a loss of knowledge about what could be eaten and which they see as increasing their dependence on the market and on cash. Hunting is now not a significant contributor to the local economy and diet. Few men own guns. The hunting of larger game is controlled by government with a complicated and expensive system of permits and restrictions on the sale of arrow poison, traditionally bought from the N'gindo peoples to the south. Traps are used to catch wild pigs and small rodents.

Few people keep livestock. Most households possess some chickens. Some have ducks and guinea pigs. Cattle are not kept. The beef sold in the market is from cattle brought in from

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<sup>16</sup> See Lussy, (1953:113). In 1938, a British district official remarked that, 'Millet (sorghum) may be classed as the staple food of all the tribes in that district'(Ulanga District Book, Vol 1, MF 21, TNA).

<sup>17</sup> See Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

<sup>18</sup> The average household size for Ulanga district is 6.2 (Government of Tanzania 1988:67).

<sup>19</sup> Office of Development and Social Welfare, Mahenge.

elsewhere, sometimes walked from places as distant as Mbeya and Songea. The Church farm has cattle and sells beef and milk. Milk is very expensive and is not part of the local diet. Goats are not common. Wealthier households now keep a couple of pigs. The attitude to pig keeping is essentially subsistence. Because pigs have to be fed, there is a limit on the number of pigs which can be kept before a person has to increase his or her own production in order to sustain them. People use pigs as a store of value, slaughtering when they need cash which may be many months before a pig has realised its full market potential. Pigs are regarded as labour intensive and troublesome to keep. The meat is valued because of its high fat content, but wild meat is thought to be much better and tastier.

Land is not bought or sold. Men and women have their own plots in various places. These they get from their father's kin, their mother's kin or even from neighbours. Fruit trees and the bamboos producing the alcoholic drink aulanzi<sup>20</sup> remain the property of those who planted them. There is little inheritable wealth, and, despite protestations of poverty, little interest in property. Yet the Pogoro as a people are poor and their poverty<sup>21</sup> is palpably more than the mere absence of cash or property, which makes them poor relative to other Tanzanians.<sup>22</sup> It is manifested in their bodies and their lives. Life expectancy at birth is a mere 50 years.<sup>23</sup> Twelve percent of children die before they reach their second birthday. People are small, so small that I felt like a giant among them.<sup>24</sup> During the Second World War, the British considered abandoning the conscription of Pogoro men because of their small size, their poor state of health and their high incidence of disease.<sup>25</sup> Families cut out a meal if they lack food, and eat only once a day in the shortage season (cf Richards 1939:35). Many children are malnourished and infested with worms. Items which have become staples in other parts of the country, such as sugar and tea, are not bought routinely by the majority. Cooking oil, if it is bought at all, is bought by the spoonful. Most people do not light their houses at night. Household goods are basic, perhaps a couple of strung beds, a couple of low folding wooden chairs, some basins, cups and mats. People sit

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<sup>20</sup> This is the fermented sap of the bamboo.

<sup>21</sup> Chambers defines rural poverty as ' characterised by malnutrition, illiteracy, disease...high infant mortality and low life expectancy' (1983:1).

<sup>22</sup> Collier et al cite the absence of livestock as an index of poverty in Tanzania. Nationally, 30% of Tanzanian households own large livestock, such as sheep or goats (1986:54).

<sup>23</sup> Office of Development and Social Welfare, Mahenge, March 1991.

<sup>24</sup> I am 5'8".

<sup>25</sup> See letter dated 8/2/41 from the District Commissioner, Mahenge to Provincial Commissioner, Eastern Province in File No 61/3/xvi/G, Monthly Report Mahenge, TNA.

outside their houses under the shade of the eaves on bricks, mats and logs. One man said to me, 'Look at us. Rocks are our furniture!'. The wealthy peasants are in the minority, comprising a tiny elite, most of whom owe their position to a connection, past or present, with the mission.

Some people supplement their incomes as craftsmen, men as carpenters, making small tables, beds and chairs, and as housebuilders, specialising in bricklaying. A few know metalwork and make oil lamps from tin cans, tools, and the charcoal burning stoves which have a ready market in the town. There is no indigenous tradition of metalwork (Mbosa 1988:28), and, as far as I am aware, there are no taboos surrounding the workers of metal. Men and women practise as healers, often specialising in one type of medicine for a specific condition. Women's primary way of earning cash is by brewing beer from maize, which is 'cooked'. Men, on the other hand, profit from the sale in season of aulanzi as not only do they own the canes but, so women claim, know how to cut them so as to get a sweet tasting drink. Women make beautiful clay cooking pots, which they dust with graphite after firing to make them look like metal. They also weave mats. Tough bamboo baskets and winnowing dishes are woven by men.

### **Official Social Organisation and Settlement - Village, Household, Parish**

At the time of my fieldwork, Tanzania was a one party state, although the debate about the desirability of a return to a multi-party system was just beginning. The political party, the **Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM)**, the 'Party of the Revolution', was formed in 1977 as an amalgamation of the old Tanganyika African National Union and the Zanzibar Afro-Shirazi party. The name change was intended to convey more forcefully the party's commitment to radical policies and the official ideology which, under Nyerere, dominated Tanzania in the 1970's. This was the ideology of 'ujamaa', or 'African Socialism' (Nyerere 1962:170). For all the romantic notions about a return to a 'traditional' and kin based cooperation, **Ujamaa** policies were centralist, totalitarian and bureaucratic. Rural people responded by informally opting out of a national politics and economy and by the conscious perpetuation in practice of pre-independence local autonomy and non party authority structures in a bid to avoid integration into the state (Hyden 1980:96-130)<sup>26</sup>. **Ujamaa** policies included widespread nationalisation and the creation of a massive public sector. The marketing of crops was taken over by the state which set prices, removing peasant incentives to produce

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<sup>26</sup> See also Arhem (1985), Thiele (1984) and Abrahams (1981).

surplus or even to engage with the market at all. There was, in any case, nothing to buy. People talk of the period as a time when such basic goods as oil, soap, salt and matches were unavailable.

In some areas agricultural collectivisation was imposed. Villages, created as part of the **ujamaa** drive, were to function as economic units, producing a surplus on a communal **shamba**<sup>27</sup> which would then be sold to state marketing boards through the various party committees which controlled it. The surplus failed to materialize. Nationally, agricultural production dropped (Collier et al, 1986:63). Manufacturing went into steep decline, many sectors grinding to a halt completely<sup>28</sup>. By the early 1980's it had become obvious even to the government that the policy was a failure and the economy was in severe crisis (Thiele 1984:60). An initial programme of structural adjustment was embarked on prior to the successful negotiation of an agreement with the International Monetary Fund in 1986 (Cheru 1989:87; Biermann & Campbell 1989:82). Structural adjustment policies, now imposed by the Fund continue, together with a limited liberalisation policy, which has done much to enhance the popularity of President Mwinyi. Various crops have been freed from the constraints of national pricing. Of these the most significant is maize which is the national staple.

## Party in Mahenge

Like the rest of Tanzania, Ulanga District is divided into a number of administrative divisions and subdivisions, the **tarafa** (division) and the **kata** (ward), which group together villages in the hierarchical pyramid of the local **CCM** structure. Each division has a chairman, elected by party members, and a non elected **katibu** or clerk who is an official employed direct by the local administration. This is replicated at all levels of the local administrative structure. Each village has a chairman (**mwenyekiti**) elected by village party members and a clerk appointed by the administration. The **makatibu** are usually from the district, but not necessarily from the areas in which they work. They have received some training and stand between the village chairmen and the district headquarters, never sure from whom they are supposed to be taking orders, although it is the district which has the ultimate authority. The **makatibu**, like all local officials, are also party members. Although there is a formal separation between the district administration and the district party, in

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<sup>27</sup> Farm, plantation, agricultural plot.

<sup>28</sup> For an overview of the economic situation in the 1970's see Coulson (1982).

practice there is no break. A point of tension exists, however, between the local level of both and the district level, as the latter is dominated by outsiders, career bureaucrats charged with the implementation of national policy.

At the level of the district, the system of local administration is hardly different from that which preceded it under the British. The District Commissioner still has ultimate authority as the representative of the state, and the village chairmen and **balozi**<sup>29</sup> are recognised by local people as replacements for the pre-Independence **jumbe** or headman. As Pogoro 'chiefs'<sup>30</sup> were essentially colonial servants, lacking authority and legitimacy<sup>31</sup>, the abolition of the chiefship in 1962 appears to have had little impact in Ulanga (Mtenga 1971). Headmen were appointed by chiefs from their own families. Rather like village chairmen<sup>32</sup> today, they acted as intermediaries between the local level and the district, effecting the formal integration of settlements into the wider state administrative system.

### **Settlement Patterns and Government Policy**

Settlement patterns in Ulanga as a whole have altered considerably throughout the century as a direct consequence of the policies of successive national governments<sup>33</sup>. The impact of these has been to concentrate populations into larger, nucleated settlements, of which 'villagisation' under Nyerere was merely the most recent and the most drastic. When the German army first made inroads into the Pogoro area, the population was scattered into small settlements spread over a wide area<sup>34</sup>. The German military administration introduced hut taxation and a short lived local cash economy based on the collection of wild

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<sup>29</sup> See below.

<sup>30</sup> Mtua(sing.),watua(plural).

<sup>31</sup> On 5/7/35 the District Officer remarked on the fact that few Pogoro chiefs had much influence beyond their immediate home areas, and that they depended on the support of the district administration for the maintenance of their authority (Mahenge District Book, MF:17, TNA).

<sup>32</sup> At the time of fieldwork there were no female village chairmen in the area which I am describing.

<sup>33</sup> These were the German administration from 1890 to 1918, the British from 1920 to 1961, and the government of Tanganyika from 1961. The country adopted the name Tanzania after the union with Zanzibar in 1961. For a comprehensive history of the colonial period see Iliffe (1979).

<sup>34</sup> For the debate about precolonial settlement patterns see Larson (1976).

rubber. The difficulty of controlling a dispersed population was recognised by the Germans in the years following the **majimaji** rising, but it was the British who implemented the first policy of 'closer settlement' in Ulanga in a bid to consolidate state control. It was not particularly extensive (Larson 1976:222). The establishment of the administrative centre and market at what is now Mahenge town, the presence of the mission and the building of a road between there and Ifakara probably contributed to the tendency of people to move voluntarily into larger settlements in the vicinity of the town. A quarter of the District's population now live within 15 kilometres of its capital.

The British took 'closer settlement' further in the 1940's when the eradication of tsetse fly was used as the justification for 'population concentration' into large nucleated villages located along roads. The communities most affected were those occupying the lowland areas on the margins of the area occupied by the highlands Pogoro - Mtimbira, Ilonga and Ruaha. By 1944, all of the Pogoro with the exception of those living in the immediate vicinity of Mahenge, were living in large villages (Larson 1976:303). It looked as if the days of the scattered homestead were over<sup>35</sup>. This was not to be the case. For years following the move families drifted back to their original homesteads and reclaimed their land. The populations of the new settlements shrank progressively, despite sanctions on escapees<sup>36</sup>.

In 1976 Nyerere's government implemented its policy of villagisation in the Mahenge area, bringing people who had been unaffected by British policy forcibly into the new system of villages. New villages were not created in Ulanga. Existing settlements were added to, and smaller ones destroyed. The army was brought in to supervise the move, burning houses and demolishing classrooms to prevent people returning to their old villages. I estimate that the majority of those who were relocated moved between five and ten kilometres from their original location.

The main impact of villagisation in the Pogoro area has been on farming. Because people moved within walking distance of their original land, and because there was no formal reorganisation of land allocation, most people continued to farm at their pre-villagisation **shamba**. This has resulted in split residence, with people officially living in the village at the same time as they spend much of the agricultural year in temporary houses and shelters at

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<sup>35</sup> '5000 families which (sic) were scattered throughout 5000 square miles of **miombo** bush...have been concentrated in an area of 60 square miles' (Senior Agricultural Officer, Eastern Province, to Director of Agricultural Production, Dar es Salaam, 29/6/1943. File 10/13 Kiberege Station:Mahenge Sleeping Sickness Concentration-Correspondence relating to-, TNA).

<sup>36</sup> File T5/2 Tsetse Sleeping Sickness Concentrations General, 1949-62, TNA.

the **shamba**, which may be located in the section of land allocated to another village. Others walk the long distance between village house and **shamba**.

The destruction of schools has meant that people with younger children have to live in recognised villages for much of the time because only recognised villages have schools. By the late 1970's people had begun to abandon their new villages and to return, more or less permanently, to their pre-villagisation homesteads, despite strong government opposition<sup>37</sup>. By the mid 1980's some 15% had returned (Maghimbi 1990:258). The exodus continues. Today the figure is probably nearer 25%. Returning is no longer condemned, but tacitly acknowledged by government. Runaway families are easily accommodated into the administrative structure of villages by extending outwards the network of ten house leaders to encompass them. In some places, primary schools are being rebuilt as old settlements are given official recognition as villages. Villagisation scattered families between villages. The return to old settlements divides families further as not everybody wants to return. Those with school age children prefer to live near schools, while the elderly perceive the advantages of being near to the road, a grinding mill and the hospital. Split residence remains a viable solution for many. The main reason for returning to old settlement sites, and for the establishment of new ones, is the ready availability of good, fertile land away from the immediate vicinity of the villages.

## **The Village**

According to CCM ideology, the village is the formal unit of rural social organisation. Village chairmen have, in theory, authority over their villages and are responsible for the preservation of order. In practice, the degree of authority which a chairman has depends on his personality and on the extent to which villagers will support him. Because villages are merely clusters of dwellings rather than the cooperative ventures envisaged by Nyerere, the chairman and **katibu** have little to control apart from the collection of local taxation and party revenue. They are charged with the implementation of national government or party initiatives in the villages, such as the introduction in 1991 of the short lived **sungusungu** village based vigilante groups, and with 'voluntary' party fundraising such as the **mshikamano**, the 'unity' sponsored walk, to which even non party members are expected to contribute. While villages are formally incorporated into the hierarchy of the

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<sup>37</sup> Until 1988 police were used to recover escapees (File R20/5-Mahenge Uandikishaji wa Vijiji & File R20/7 Mahenge-Operation Vijiji Tanzania (Kihamo), District Office, Mahenge.

state administration through the local party, there is little that the state can do to ensure that its policies are permanently implemented.

Villages are supposed to have annual meetings of all adult residents to decide on issues affecting the village. Out of the seven villages with which I am most familiar, only one had a meeting during the 21 month period of my fieldwork, and this was extraordinary as a response to a dispute between villagers and the chairman. Villages are further subdivided into clusters of roughly ten houses. Each of these clusters has a chosen representative (*balozi*), who is, like all village officials, a party member.

Party membership is rather vaguely defined by villagers. Real party membership involves paying the annual subscription and 'carrying a card'. Many who have been members in the past and do not renew membership when the subscriptions are due still consider themselves to be *wanachama* (people of the party). Of these, some renew when they perceive a specific need to so do. This might be wanting to become a village official, wanting the assistance of the party bureaucracy or local officials, and for youth, wanting to be considered eligible for public sector employment. All members of the police and the armed forces are, for example, party members.

Interest in the party for its own sake is slight. People become members because it is necessary or expected. Because villages are mere administrative entities and do not constitute the actual basis of social organisation, people do not perceive a need to join the party in order to become involved in the affairs of the 'official' village. People are critical of the government and the party, condemning both as exploitative and extractive. The recent reintroduction of head tax, abolished by Nyerere, is widely opposed by rural people, as are charges for education and health. CCM is tainted by its association with *Ujamaa*, which, although abandoned, remains unpopular. "How can you redistribute wealth in a country where people have no wealth to begin with?", is the rhetorical comment on Tanzanian socialism, or, "If a man has nothing and you take it away, he is left with less than nothing".

The representatives of the ten house groups, *mabalozi* (sing: *balozi*), are usually middle aged household heads who have some kinship connection with the other households in their section. They owe their authority and ability to arbitrate disputes as much to this as to their connection with the party. A small proportion of *balozi* are women. Arbitration is popular. If the dispute does not involve matters which could be subject to the law to enforce them, or if disputants do not want to involve the state legal system, almost any elder can be asked



to arbitrate between kin or neighbours, whether or not they are **balozi**. Local settlement of disputes is preferred where possible, even for criminal actions such as theft or attempted rape, because the state legal system is slow and corrupt with a poor reputation for justice. People recognise and work within two systems, that of the state and that of the village as they define it, as a collection of kin and neighbours who live in the same place. There is, they say, 'the law of the government' and the 'law of the village'. In the view of the people, villages are not and should not be incorporated fully into the state system.

Apart from the arbitration of disputes, including witchcraft disputes<sup>38</sup>; the main responsibilities of **mabalozi** are assisting in the collection of official and unofficial taxes and the 20/- demanded from each adult in the village in the event of the funeral of somebody from the village. The collective obligation to bury is the only communal activity of people officially resident in a village.

The CCM model of social organisation, premised on the same set of values as the Church model of social organisation, provides an interesting contrast with Pogoro notions about it. Both systems are premised on the individualistic nuclear household, **kaya**, and take the individual as the primary unit. The individual, as a Christian, villager or party member, is incorporated into the bureaucratic totality of an administrative geography through the payment of fees and registration. The Church also uses a village model to organise Christians, grouping villages into parishes, each of which have an 'elected' **mwenyekiti wa dini**, a chairman of religion. The organisation of the parish council, whose tasks include the collection of contributions to the Church from individual Christians and the vetting of applications for marriage and baptisms<sup>39</sup>, is seen by villagers to be the same sort of system as that of the village chairmen and **mabalozi**.

## **Residence, Household and Cooperation**

People between whom there is some kinship connection occupy the same section of a village. Even though the land allocated to villages is extensive, running to tens of thousands of acres,<sup>40</sup> village populations on average are between 300 and 500 people. The residential

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<sup>38</sup> See Chapter Nine.

<sup>39</sup> See Chapters Three and Four.

<sup>40</sup> For example the village of Chikuti was allocated 30000 acres of land in 1979. At the time the village had a population of 308 adults (people over 15). See File R 20/5 'Mahenge Uandikishaji wa Vijiji', District Office, Mahenge.

core of a village is relatively compact. Houses are often spread out along a path or track, and it is possible to walk from one end of a village to the other within ten or fifteen minutes. Space within the village is used for the cultivation of small plots and gardens. Banana trees surround every house. The houses themselves are built from wood and earth or burned bricks, a technique encouraged by Nyerere's administration in the belief that the building of durable semi-permanent dwellings would discourage families from abandoning the new villages. The inheritance of these houses, especially if they have iron roofs, has become a point of contention among siblings.

Those who are closely related build houses in contiguous plots, some virtually next to each other, separated only by a shared clearing. Such clusters of houses belong to parents and their children of both sexes, and to groups of siblings. Each household is separate. While there may be some cooperation between them, this is by no means automatic. It is said that people of one house are people with one hearth, who eat together and share agricultural produce, but belonging to the same household does not imply agricultural cooperation. Farming is essentially a solitary activity. Each adult has his or her own fields. Husbands and wives may farm together and assist one another, but such cooperation, even between spouses, must be negotiated. There are many different strategies for securing agricultural cooperation between kin and neighbours, most of whom can trace some kind of kinship connection to each other, however vague. Etiquette demands, in any case, that people are treated as if they were kin and called either by teknonymic forms or kinship terminology. Household heads with older children are able to be more or less self reliant. Female headed households with young and school age children suffer from periodic labour shortages at busy times in the agricultural calendar. These women help each other out either by exchanging labour for produce or by the direct exchange of labour. Wealthier households can take advantage of *vibarua*, casual labourers, usually male youth, who work on a piece work basis.

In the majority of villages, communal agricultural cooperation is a thing of the past. Beer is no longer brewed routinely to secure the assistance of kin and neighbours in major endeavours such as harvesting or house building. Only a few influential older men still offer beer in return for assistance with the harvest and this seems more likely to occur in the lowland villages which have rice as their main foodcrop and which requires more labour to harvest than does maize. These gatherings attract people in their thirties and above. Youth, it appears, would rather be compensated with cash. In May, after the maize harvest in the

highlands, scores of women go visiting relatives in the lowland villages to assist with the rice harvest, for which they receive a share of the crop.<sup>41</sup>

Households are fluid, continually changing in size as sons and daughters, brothers and sisters come and go. Classificatory siblings and children often stay for extended periods. These visitors do not necessarily contribute much in the way of labour to their host households, who nevertheless cannot refuse to receive them. As among the Bemba, extended visiting is a strategy used by many to escape from food shortage at home, either at the level of the household or the village (Richards 1939:109,140). The bulk of the long term visitors are women with small children, many of whom are single. Lacking access to cash and labour, they are especially vulnerable to food shortages, which periods of ill health can intensify. Even within groups of related households, people who have no household of their own pragmatically shift affiliation. Young people are most likely to do this, choosing to stay with parents, siblings or grandparents. Often such shifts are semi-permanent. Such strategies make the household difficult to isolate and to define<sup>42</sup>. Perhaps the best definition is the group of people gathered around a household head, whose place it is and to whom members defer. Because a hearth implies the presence of a woman to cook (cf Harwood 1970:23), it follows, as I show in Chapter Five, that men need access to female labour in order to establish households of their own. Women, on the other hand, are able to establish and maintain autonomous households without recourse to husbands or brothers.

The household provides a way of organising production and consumption, but neither are strictly confined to it.<sup>43</sup> Consumption transcends the boundaries of the household because of the tendency to eat with other households. The household, as I have defined it, is the primary economic unit, but it is not the most significant social unit. What is seen to be the increasing tendency towards nucleation is condemned by many, especially by the old, for whom the time of their early youth was something of a golden age, against which modern times are continually compared. "Then", they say, "we did not need money and people would help each other out. Now even a relative will not help you without money".

To an extent, as we have seen in the discussion of agricultural cooperation, this is true. Whereas once labour would be directly exchanged for food, the exchange is now likely to

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<sup>41</sup> This is kudoka, which means to help with the harvest in return for a portion of it or food.

<sup>42</sup> See also Collier et al (1986:30).

<sup>43</sup> cf Richards (1939:122) for the Bemba.

be mediated by cash, and large scale movements of people from area to area in times of famine are no longer necessary because the food is moved to the people by the market. Yet, as we saw, the availability of food in the market has not ended food shortages at home. As a woman explained to a visiting daughter in law from Kilombero, "You say, 'What are you complaining about? The market is jammed full of maize?' Well, I tell you, what shall I do with this market without money?. There is only hunger here".

People still try to avoid the market and the cash economy and negotiate direct exchanges of labour or produce with others willing to do the same. It is not uncommon for people living in the highland villages nearer to Mahenge town, where prices are higher, to obtain in bulk winnowing trays from specialist villages which they then take to the lowland villages to barter for rice. They may then sell this rice for profit or keep it for their families. Others buy salt which they exchange for maize with people living far from the market and the shops, who prefer the salt to cash. Preferring goods to cash makes sense in the current economic climate, where goods hold their value better than cash, and where the price of food rises sharply at shortage points in the annual cycle.

I was told that when people lived in scattered homesteads, comprising a group of brothers, their wives and families, food was cooked by the women of the various households and brought to the courtyard of the male elder whose 'place' it was, where all the men ate together. Eating together, from the same two dishes, is still accorded enormous significance, particularly at funerals, which, as the only truly communal events, have become the forum for an elaborate display of cooperation<sup>44</sup>. An unpopular, selfish and antisocial person - a person who could very possibly be a witch, is said to be 'unable to eat with people'. Hospitality and food sharing are important. Guests are invited to eat and given uncooked food to take home to their houses with them. People attending weddings and celebrations are presented with gifts in the dance by the host family. Passers by should be offered what a person is eating. Feeding people is the duty of women. As we shall see, it is made much of in the puberty ceremonies for girls<sup>45</sup>.

Generosity and sharing are similarly valued. People ask each other for things constantly. Etiquette demands that they should be given, rather than refused. People are reluctant to

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<sup>44</sup> See Chapter Seven.

<sup>45</sup> See Chapter Six.

admit to what they actually have and strive to hide it<sup>46</sup>, responding to some requests for fear of being thought selfish, and selecting those which are most likely to offer the potential for reciprocity in the future. No reciprocity is expected from the maimed lepers and epileptics, many of whom live as beggars in isolation from their families, and who are denied full adult status because of their position as dependents.

This chapter has given a descriptive account of the economic and political environment with which the rural highlands people must contend. For all the rhetoric of 'development' and villagisation, rural living standards have declined since Independence, and the new units of social organisation have had little real impact on the dynamics of social organisation. This situation no doubt facilitates the perpetuation of the powerful position of the Church, and it is to this that we now turn in the following chapter.

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<sup>46</sup> For this reason, loads are always carried covered over with cloth, as a matter of politeness.

### **Three: THE CATHOLIC CHURCH: CHRISTIANITY AND 'CONVERSION'**

In order to understand why the Pogoro think of themselves as Catholic and to appreciate their perception of Christianity today, we need to understand the history of the establishment of the Church among them. In Ulanga, as in other African colonial situations, widespread 'conversion' to Christianity was not the result of the aggregate choices of individuals attracted by the 'message' of Christianity, but a direct consequence of colonial education policy<sup>1</sup>. Catholic missions gained early access to much of Southern Tanzania. Through various agreements with governments, they established an exclusive sphere of influence. This effectively excluded missions of other denominations and was to persist in practice long after the old agreements, and the administrations which made them, had ceased to exist.

#### **The First Missionaries**

The Pogoro area first came into contact with the Catholic Church with the arrival of the Benedictines of St Ottilien from Germany in 1902<sup>2</sup>. This monastic missionary order, founded in 1884, had close links with the German East Africa Company (DOAG), which administered Tanganyika until 1890 when it was formally taken over by the German government (Larson 1976:39). At the outset of German rule, only the coastal towns of Dar es Salaam and Bagomoyo were pacified and under company control. The pacification of the interior was to be a bloody and protracted process, eventually achieved by the sheer force of the military. Back in a Germany dominated by Bismark's 'realpolitik', the Catholic Centre Party approved extra funding for an expeditionary force to suppress resistance up country (Larson 1976:40). It was ultimately this close association between Catholic interests and colonial policy which gave the Benedictines the initial advantage in the south, and which, by bringing the Mahenge highlands under military control, made evangelisation possible.

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<sup>1</sup> see Murphree (1969) for Rhodesia, de Craemer (1977) for Zaire, Linden (1977) for Rwanda. For other parts of Tanzania see Thompson,(1976:36), Nolan (1977), Iliffe (1979), and Beidelman (1982).

<sup>2</sup> Much of the historical material in this chapter is drawn from Larson (1976).

The Benedictines already had an interest in the south. They had established a base in Dar es Salaam in 1888. Eight years later they were involved, together with the military, in the initial administrative occupation of Iringa (Wright 1971:69), from where they began to consolidate their position in the region. Stations were founded at Lindi in 1896, and at Peramiho in Songea in 1898 (Richter 1934:43). That same year an attempt was made to expand into the Mahenge highlands<sup>3</sup>, but the Benedictines were forced to withdraw because of local hostility (Larson 1976:63-4). The order realised that the support of the military was essential if they were to proceed in the highlands. The powerful Catholic lobby at home ensured that this was forthcoming. In 1899 the army established a centre at what is now Mahenge town, creating a military district under the direct rule of the commanding officer at the Mahenge **boma**<sup>4</sup>. Even after the territory was formally taken, German control remained partial, as the outbreak in 1905 of the **majimaji** war was to show (Iliffe 1979:168-204). Mahenge was to remain under the direct control of the German army until 1917, and was, together with Iringa, the last District in the country to remain so (Iliffe 1979:118).

In 1902 the Benedictines made a second and successful attempt to establish a base at the present day site of the cathedral at Kwirow. Backed by German military might they were allocated land on which to build and settle in the territory of a Pogoro 'sultan', Mlolere. The Benedictines set up a mission station surrounded by farmland on which they grew crops and kept cattle. As a self sufficient community of priests and brothers<sup>5</sup>, living apart from the people whom they had come to convert, theirs was a semi-monastic lifestyle. Agricultural and technical innovations introduced by the missionaries were oriented towards the establishment and maintenance of the mission and the European lifestyle of the missionaries. Technical schools to train boys in tailoring, carpentry and mechanics were started early. The mission's grandiose building and agricultural programmes demanded semi-skilled artisans and a continual supply of labour, which the mission had initial difficulty in attracting until the colonial taxation system was better established. Even then, people preferred to work only for short periods until they had earned sufficient money for taxes (Mbosa 1988:90; Larson 1976:144). Most of these early employees were Christians (Larson 1976:150).

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<sup>3</sup> They wanted to settle at the present day site of Isongo, about 5 km from Mahenge town.

<sup>4</sup> **Boma** means any fenced or fortified structure. In the modern context it still refers to administration headquarters.

<sup>5</sup> In Ulanga, missionary sisters came later, with the Swiss Capuchins (see below).

A number of temporary churches were built prior to the completion of the present day cathedral at Kwiro in 1938, under the Capuchins (Kilumanga 1988:18-34). The Benedictine programme of evangelisation had been somewhat disrupted by the outbreak of the **majimaji** war<sup>6</sup>, and was to be disrupted further by World War 1, both of which saw fighting in Mahenge itself. The initial pace of 'conversion' to Roman Catholicism was slow, not so much because of war and disruption, but because, as yet, there were not sufficient incentives to attract people to the mission and, importantly, because colonial education policy was not extensive.

## Evangelisation in Ulanga

The first surviving Christians were young men and boys, seeking work or education in the nascent network of bush schools which the Benedictines had begun. Initially they were a minority. The bulk of early baptisms were performed in *periculo mortis*<sup>7</sup>, by other Christians, rather than by the religious<sup>8</sup>. These trends in conversion were to continue throughout the missionary period<sup>9</sup>. Even up to the 1960's, hardly any normal adults were baptised in Kwiro parish. In this parish, centred on Mahenge, distinct patterns in baptisms are discernable. The baptised fell into three groups, those in fear of death, schoolchildren and infants. Up to 1920, most of those baptised were schoolchildren, among whom the number of girls baptised did not begin to equal the number of boys until the mid 1930's. This group was to remain a significant baptism category until the 1950's. Among the infant category, the sex ratio was more equal right from the start. Of the adults baptised throughout, the majority were on their deathbeds. The remainder were from among the community of lepers, epileptics and paupers who lived under the care of the mission at Tabora. Adult women do not seem to have been any more attracted to Christianity than

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<sup>6</sup> By the end of 1905 only 98 people had been baptised. Of these, the majority were teenage boys baptised en masse at the mission in 1904 and 1905. The remainder were on their deathbeds. (Baptism Book LBI 1, Kwiro Parish). Until 1912, a one month preparation period prior to baptism was deemed sufficient if the person lived at the mission (Richter 1934:39).

<sup>7</sup> All Roman Catholic missionary orders appear to have pursued similar tactics. Referring to Tanganyika in general, a commentator remarked in 1934 that, 'a great amount of baptising in *periculo mortis* goes on, so that the natives blame the mission for "killing young and old by baptism" (Richter 1934:47).

<sup>8</sup> Some orders, for example the French 'Black Fathers', ran special catechetical classes to train laity for this purpose (Richter 1934:40).

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix.



their male counterparts. Occasionally, normal adults were baptised in order to marry a Christian spouse.

Infant baptism gradually became the norm once this first generation of school age Christians became parents. As early as 1920, out of 185 baptisms, 137 were of infants born between 1918 and 1920, and, out of the total baptised, 127 had at least one Christian parent. Forty one of these new Christians died within one month of being baptised<sup>10</sup>. Until the 1950's, perhaps one third of the total number of infant baptisms were carried out because the infant was thought to be dying. A vast proportion of these children actually died. The total number of baptisms at various points in history then does not give any accurate picture of the actual number of Christians<sup>11</sup>. Actual 'converts', in the sense of adults who had chosen to accept a new religion, were few and far between.

The lack of any strong centralised political authority, combined with weak and artificial chiefships<sup>12</sup>, meant that adults were not attracted to the Church as a way of challenging the existing political system. Land was plentiful. Situations such as those described by Murphree for the Shona (1969:9), or by Wilson for the Nyakyusa, in which converts moved to mission lands and the mission came to function as a quasi chiefship did not arise (1963:42). A chief's adoption of Christianity here did not imply any large scale adoption of Christianity among his followers.

In 1912, the East African Bishops Conference introduced a three year preparation for baptism requirement, formally making the school the cornerstone of evangelisation policy (Richter 1934:39). In the years after *majimaji*, and prior to the outbreak of World War One, the mission made limited progress in attracting the young to its schools, mainly because of close cooperation between the pro-school military administration and the mission. The military had wanted to establish a secular school in Mahenge in 1901, recognising that the standards in Benedictine schools were dubious and that local resentment could be provoked by Christian control of schooling. As central government refused their request for funds (Wright 1971:112), the military had no option but to cooperate with the Benedictines, encouraging school attendance in the only available schools, those controlled by the mission. Many children were forced to attend, with the

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<sup>10</sup> Baptism Book LBiii, Kwirow Parish.

<sup>11</sup> Detailed figures for baptisms are given in the appendix.

<sup>12</sup> see Chapter Two.

result that they became Christian (Larson 1976:163). The mission provided clothing and other material incentives to attract the young and reduce the hostility of their parents.

The First World War abruptly ended Benedictine involvement in Mahenge. Once Belgian troops occupied the highlands in October 1917, the Benedictines were deported (Larson 1976:217). By 1918, Britain had effectively assumed responsibility for Tanganyika Territory, although the details of the mandate were not finalised until 1922 (Iliffe 1979:247). The Benedictine mission was virtually abandoned. During the war, a small number of Dutch White Fathers had acted as caretakers to the mission, but there was no expansion. By 1921, when the Swiss Capuchins, another Franciscan order, arrived the Christian community, consisting as it did of the young, the sick and the dead, was almost non-existent (Larson 1976:252-4).

### **The Swiss Capuchins**

The Swiss Capuchins were inexperienced in the field of missionary work. Tanganyika was their first overseas venture. Correspondence in the colonial files of the time suggests that the Capuchins lacked the political skills necessary for dealing with the secular officials of the British district administration. The mission was in perpetual conflict with the authorities over land for mission stations, over the payment of its labour in goods rather than cash, and, in the 1940's, over the administration's use of a witchcraft eradicator in 'Christian' villages<sup>13</sup>.

The colonial government's 1925 report on the state of education in the territory was highly critical of the poor standards of education in the Capuchin's schools, which concentrated on religious education (Larson 1976:35-6). The introduction of government grants in aid to approved mission schools over the next three years (Thompson 1976:35-6) meant that the Capuchins had to improve their schools or lose influence. They chose to upgrade. By 1945 there were 44 church run primary schools in the old Ulanga District, as opposed to only seven run by native authorities which took mainly the relatives of 'chiefs'. A further 4000 pupils were enrolled in 'bush schools' and catechetical centres (Larson 1976:314), which, under the 1927 Education Ordinance, were exempt from government regulation (Thompson 1976:47). In the area with which we are concerned, there was only one native authority

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<sup>13</sup> see for example, file 461/10/29 Land Leases to Missions, 1927-42, TNA for conflict over land and trading. On witchcraft eradicators see below, Chapter Nine.

school. All the rest, bush, grant aided and the Central School at the mission centre itself were in the hands of the mission.

No other mission gained access to the Pogoro area until Lutherans from Denmark established their small church at Mahenge in 1947<sup>14</sup>. By this time the whole of Ulanga District was, in any case, officially designated as a Capuchin 'sphere of influence' under the order of the Apostolic Delegate of 1932<sup>15</sup>. Initially, Catholic missions had been hostile to spheres of influence, advocating freedom of religious movement in opposition to the demands of the Protestant missions for discrete mission territories (Wright 1971:120). Increasing conflict with Protestant missions and the attitude of the British administration resulted in a change of attitude. Even without the sphere of influence, the Lutherans would have found it difficult to attract converts in Ulanga where, because of the crucial role of the school, the Capuchins had effectively made competing evangelisation impossible. The Lutheran church was, as it is today, a parish church intended to serve a congregation of already Lutheran outsiders. According to the Lutheran Pastor in Mahenge, out of his current congregation of about sixty people, 'less than five' are Pogoro.

The hegemony of the Catholic missions in the present day Ulanga district, and especially in the highlands area, has yet to be broken. Although the Capuchins were the second wave of Catholic evangelisation in and around Mahenge, their strategy was no different from that of the Benedictines who preceded them. Trade schools, bush schools, hospitals and mission stations were progressively expanded, the boundaries of Kwirowo parish shrinking as new parish centres were begun on its margins.

### **Mission Control Over Marriage**

The custom of secluding girls between puberty and marriage was appropriated by the mission, which, under the authority of missionary sisters<sup>16</sup>, assumed responsibility for the daughters of Christians from throughout the area and kept them 'inside' on behalf of their parents. An old Capuchin missionary explained that this was necessary to allow the girls to attend church, as had they remained at home they would not have been permitted to leave

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<sup>14</sup> This information comes from the Pastor of the Lutheran Church, Mahenge.

<sup>15</sup> Ulanga Mahenge District Book, Vol 1, (no page numbers), microfilm 21, TNA.

<sup>16</sup> Baldeg Sisters from Switzerland.

the house. This is not the only or even the main reason why the church attempted to appropriate the seclusion of the wali<sup>17</sup>.

There had been debate in educational and colonial circles during the 1930's about the widespread practice of secluding girls in southern Tanzania and elsewhere, and the need to replace this with what was then considered to be a modern domestic education in a boarding context<sup>18</sup>. Girls, under the care of the sisters, were taught the skills which their contemporaries in Europe would have learned at home, knitting, sewing and cooking<sup>19</sup>. In Mahenge, older women recall being taught how to knit socks, while being forbidden by the Sisters to wear shoes lest they become big headed. These girls became known locally as the **wakubwa**, the 'big ones', to differentiate them from younger female primary school boarders. The mission, acting in loco parentis, received bridewealth for the **wakubwa** and arranged Christian marriages with men whom they considered suitable. The mission appropriated the seclusion of the girls because it gave the mission an element of control over marriage, or at least over the marriage of the girls under its control<sup>20</sup>. In some instances, the mission paid over bridewealth to the father of the girl before a suitor had been found<sup>21</sup>. The groom would then reimburse the amount to the mission, or to the girl's father directly, and he in turn would reimburse the mission. Some young men appear to have ended up doing what was in effect brideservice to the mission, in order to pay off

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<sup>17</sup> See Chapters Five and Six.

<sup>18</sup> See for example Culwick, G M (1939).

<sup>19</sup> This practice occurred elsewhere and under missions of other denominations, for example, among the Zaramo the Lutherans secluded girls, with similar justifications (Swantz, L 1956:78).

<sup>20</sup> This aspect of the seclusion of girls was opposed by the District Administration. 'It sometimes happens that the mission, when anxious to convert a Pagan wife who is already married, actually advance money to her father so that he can pay back the brideprice to the Pagan husband, and the girl is then taken into the mission and after a probation period married to a Christian. I think that this matrimonial agency business is not within the strict sphere of missionary operations, and is really the result of overzealousness...I have warned (them) ..that divorces are...the affair of the local native courts.' (DO's handing over report, 1934, in File No 61/141/G/Vol 1, 'Handing and Taking Over Mahenge District', TNA.

<sup>21</sup> A typical agreement between a father and the mission is quoted here in full. 'I, Liambandowe, have received from the Kwirow mission 50/- for returning, over the (bride)wealth for Afra, my child. I have received this money under the following conditions: 1. Afra will stay secluded until she has a Christian marriage (**Afra akae utawani mpaka atafunga ndoa ya kikristu**). 2. When she has a Christian marriage, I shall return to the mission this wealth, 50/-. (**Atakapofunga ndoa ya kikristu, nitarudisha misieni Kwirow mali hiyo, shs.50**) Kwirow, 18.4.37. I agree, Daudi' (Mapatano File, Parish Office, Kwirow).

their bridewealth debt which was transacted through the mission and not paid over directly to the relatives of the girl<sup>22</sup>.

Of course, not all the **wakubwa** had Christian marriages and only a minority of Christian girls were ever secluded at the mission. That a minority was, however, is significant, for they comprise today much of the core group of devout Catholic women, women who are virtual specialists in the recitation of prayer and song and Christian procedure. National Independence in 1961, heralding at least officially the end of the missionary era, brought with it an end to the seclusion of the **wakubwa**, although it continues in modified form as a fee paying domestic science school for girls, run by the indigenous sisters of the Diocese.

Capuchin expansion continued in the district until the 1950's. The last mission stations to be built were those at Malinyi and Ngoheranga in 1954 (Kilumanga 1990: 50-1), in the plains to the west of the Mahenge highlands, on the very margins of the area associated with the Pogoro. The Pogoro heartlands had been effectively incorporated into the network of mission centres and outstations twenty years previously. The British policy of 'closer settlement'<sup>23</sup> had advantages for the mission, bringing together schoolable communities near to which a mission station could be established. In 1938 the missionaries moved their mission station from Ketaketa, in the N'gindo area, some ten miles east to Luhombero, because this was where the new settlement was to be located. They never succeeded in attracting the already Muslem N'gindo. Today, most of the small Catholic community<sup>24</sup> at Luhombero is Pogoro.

## **The Economics of Mission**

The economic importance of the mission was considerable. As the then Bishop pointed out to a District Officer in 1936, 'An average of more than one thousand men are daily

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<sup>22</sup> This is the text of an agreement made in 1936 between the mission and Thomas Sauli. 'I Thomas son of Sauli agree that I have a debt of 28/- and 25 cents to the Kwirow mission that is bridewealth which is outstanding over my fiancée Lucia daughter of Limpeta. I shall pay this debt while doing work at the mission. Kwirow 1.6.36. Thomas Sauli. I agree' (Mapatano File, Parish Office, Kwirow).

<sup>23</sup> see Chapter Two.

<sup>24</sup> In 1990 there were 2758 Catholics in the parish out of a population of 13000 (Parish Office, Luhombero). However, as this figure is got by simply subtracting deaths from baptisms, it is probably an exaggeration. The parish priest reckoned that twenty people attend church on Sundays.

employed in our missions in the Ulanga District...A high percentage of tax money collected in this district is from mission sources<sup>25</sup>. By the mid 1930's the mission stations were, in the absence of any similar institutions in the area outside the administrative centre of Mahenge town, 'important socioeconomic centres (functioning) as bank, post office, medical dispensary, market and employer' (Larson 1976:313). This is still the situation today. Outside Mahenge town, with its government offices and police station, there is no postal service, nor any regular transport to the villages to the south. The Church has more vehicles than all the public sector offices in Mahenge combined. It provides an unofficial transport service, selling rides and renting out vehicles and tractors<sup>26</sup> to the rural population. It continues to provide permanent and casual employment<sup>27</sup>, and distributes relief in times of flood and famine.

## Education

The Capuchins control over the education of the district's children meant that in the beginning the young became Christian while their parents remained as they were. No doubt this has contributed to the perpetuation of what people think of as 'traditional' practice, which was, and is, under the elder's control<sup>28</sup>. Baptism, followed by first communion and confirmation, if the child remained in the system long enough, was an integral part of the educational process, associated with the individual's progression through primary school. During the missionary period, the children of non Christians were baptised when they reached the third standard. Those who stayed on at school often became catechists, on whom the main burden of teaching fell. The education in the 'bush schools' was basic; reading, writing, arithmetic, song and prayer.

The mission Central School at Kwirow, established in 1928, provided a higher level of education for those who were to become trained teachers or priests. In 1950 the junior seminary at Kasita was begun, to accelerate the production of an indigenous clergy. Today this seminary takes students from all over the country and functions in effect as a private

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<sup>25</sup> Letter from Bishop Maranta to DO, Kiberege, 12/10/1936, in File 46/10/29 -1927-42-Land Leases To Missions, TNA.

<sup>26</sup> For transport, rather than ploughing.

<sup>27</sup> In 1991, 56 lay people were permanently employed by Church organisations in Kwirow parish. Unlike government employees, Church employees are predominantly local. Many more people are employed on a daily or casual basis.

<sup>28</sup> see below, Chapters Six to Ten.

secondary school for boys. Of these, only a minority, between two and six percent, will ever proceed to ordination. Perhaps surprisingly, the nationalisation of schools in 1969 (Westerlund 1980:221) has had remarkably little impact on the access of the Church to primary schools, even though it no longer controls them. Catechists have virtually unrestricted access to the classroom, where they teach two periods of religion a week. Parents who object may request that their children be excused. The figures for Kwiro parish of the religious affiliation of children in the parish's 12 primary schools show that, in any case, almost all the children are Catholic with the exception of perhaps five Muslim children to a school<sup>29</sup>.

Becoming a 'full' Catholic is still associated with schooling. Catechists, who now have no involvement in secular education, are still referred to as *walimu*-teachers. Those who miss out on baptism as infants are likely to be baptised before taking communion for the first time, as part of their primary education. The priests are well aware that continued access to the classroom is vital. In the words of a parish priest, "If we don't confirm them by standard seven, we have lost them completely".

It is this continuation of the Church's association with institutionalised schooling that reinforces the notion that *dini*, 'religion', is something external to domestic life and ordinary existence. This aspect of religion, essentially organised religion which is distinct from peoples' relation with the Christian divines, is associated with regulations, rules, deadlines and the payment of contributions on which full membership depends. A person who breaks the rules or who fails to contribute can be excluded from it. Thus the church is compared to the political party, and Christianity, as 'religion' is regarded as '*chama*', a group or organisation, like the political party<sup>30</sup>. The attitude to party pluralism is extended to encompass other kinds of Christianities, and on occasion, all organised religion. Confronted with the possibility of joining another church, people ask the rhetorical question, "We have one church already, what would we do with another?".

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<sup>29</sup> Parish Office, Kwiro.

<sup>30</sup> Shorter describes a similar perception of the church in Mbeya where it, the secular school and the CCM all competed as 'voluntary associations' (cf Peel 1968:244) which local people likened to 'new dance societies', the voluntary associations of the past (1979:156-63). Among the Sukuma, the various Christian churches were also recognised as 'dance societies' (Tanner 1967:73).

The other Christianities and Islam are all considered generally equivalent as 'religions' which worship the same God<sup>31</sup>. A Catholic woman with a Muslim daughter explained that she didn't mind bringing the child up as a Muslim, because "Islam is religion just the same"<sup>32</sup>. One 'religion' is not thought intrinsically more 'true' than any of the others. Islam's obvious difference sets it apart from the various known Christianities, but these, because they all centre on standard Christian notions and structures, are all 'Christianity'. Some of the smaller Protestant sects are, together with Islam, unappealing since they involve rigid prohibitions on alcohol, pork, wild meat, tobacco and dancing. Just as education is something which children in the modern world of the nation state do, so is being affiliated to a world religion like Islam or Christianity. The use of the national language, Kiswahili, in both the Church and in education since German times in Ulanga<sup>33</sup> (Wright 1971:108) underlines this perceived separation between 'religion' and everyday life, and, further, confirms the perceived equivalence between 'religion' and institutions associated with the state.

## **The Persistence of Mission**

The 1960's saw the official end of the missionary era in much of Africa, including Tanzania. The missionaries had begun to train local men to be priests relatively early. The first priest from within the diocese was ordained in 1948, but it was not until the 1970's that over 75% were Tanzanian. Prior to 1960, a mere five indigenous clergy had been ordained. Ordinations increased in the 60's and 70's, with a further twentyeight ordinations. In 1988 the staff of the diocese comprised fortyone indigenous priests and nine missionary fathers<sup>34</sup>, not all of whom were in residence. In 1990, there were 28 indigenous clergy working within the diocese, as opposed to only eight missionary fathers<sup>35</sup>.

The missionaries who remain, fathers, brothers and sisters are now elderly. They have become marginal to the organisation and administration of the Church which is in the hands of the new generation of clergy. On the face of it, then, it would appear that the

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<sup>31</sup> cf Peel (1968:233) for the Yoruba.

<sup>32</sup> The child's father was Moslem. See Below.

<sup>33</sup> Some Catholic orders never used Kiswahili as the language of the church, relying instead on the vernacular.

<sup>34</sup> see Catholic Directory of Tanzania, 1988.

<sup>35</sup> This includes ordained brothers, but excludes those who are not ordained.



church in Mahenge is no longer a missionary church. This is not in fact the case. The present day Roman Catholic diocese of Mahenge<sup>36</sup>, coterminous with the administrative boundaries of the districts of Ulanga and Kilombero, remains heavily dependent on funds from outside, and receives most of this money from the missionary orders which were the agents of evangelisation in the diocese. Of church funds, less than 20% of the total is raised locally, the remainder coming from Rome and from the Swiss Capuchins<sup>37</sup>. This estimate does not include donations of machinery and vehicles, nor does it include gifts to individual clergy from 'benefactors' in Europe, some of which are substantial<sup>38</sup>.

This continuing dependence on Europe gives the missionaries an element of control over the Church, and perpetuates its close connection with Switzerland. For all the ideas of the Second Vatican Council, the intention to move towards local models of Christianity and the autonomous 'small Christian community'<sup>39</sup>, the Church remains organised on the mission outpost model and has changed neither its structure nor strategies for evangelisation since. The perpetuation of mission is recognised by Pogoro Catholics, who still refer to the buildings and personnel of the diocese as *missien* (mission), and use the term *kanisa* (church) to refer only to the actual church building.

There have been changes, notably in the attempts to increase lay involvement in both the running of the church and in meeting its costs. Annual fees, *zaka*, payable by Christians to the church were introduced as early as 1947 (Larson 1976:346) when the missionaries realised that the church was unsustainable if it continued to give as a way of attracting converts. Willingness to support the church was, and is, regarded an index of Christian commitment. People then (op cit,347), as now, were reluctant to pay. Only a minority, perhaps 20%, contribute *zaka*<sup>40</sup>, and sanctions (*kizuizi*) may be imposed on non payers requesting certain sacraments in order to encourage them to pay. In 1991 *zaka* was 225/- for a farmer, having increased from 80/- in 1989. According to the parish clerk, people tend to underpay, if they pay at all. People resent having to pay for the Church, much as they

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<sup>36</sup> i.e. the Diocese boundaries are those of the old pre 1974 Ulanga District (see Chapter Two). A map of the diocese is in the appendix.

<sup>37</sup> This figure was supplied by the Vicar General of the Diocese.

<sup>38</sup> The majority of benefactors to Catholic clergy in Tanzania are German. See van Bergen (1981:263).

<sup>39</sup> For example see Bottignole,(1984:87) and Kalilombe, (1978:90).

<sup>40</sup> This estimate was supplied by the parish clerk, Kwirowi. Individual records are not kept.

resent the reintroduction of head tax<sup>41</sup>, and feel exploited. Around them they see well dressed, fat bellied priests and government officials driving around in cars. At the same time these people demand money from the rural poor and every service provided by Church and State must be paid for. Almost everybody thinks that they are being cheated by the state, and when the Church asks for money, by the Church too. The price of 'self reliance' demanded by the Church and the state seems high. "Now we give to the Church, not get from it", I was told, and this appears unreasonable to many. The institutional Church still presents itself as a wealthy organisation. It is not only seen to be enmeshed in land and buildings (Tanner 1967:200), but in vehicles, in business ventures and in lucrative contacts with Europe. The Church presents a stark contrast in terms of wealth and resources with the dilapidated facilities of the state and the living conditions of the poor. Church buildings have electricity and piped water in most parishes. Mahenge town lacks both, and the district hospital uses its generator only for emergency operations.

Although the structure of the Church is largely unchanged since the missionary days, the Church no longer prioritises evangelisation at any cost. The winding down of the leper colony and the return of many who were previously in the care of the mission to the community has led to widespread criticism of the Church, even though they are not wholly responsible. The leper colony was, throughout the colonial period<sup>42</sup>, a joint venture between the local administration and the mission, assisted by grants from government, which, under the British, assumed financial responsibility for the destitute<sup>43</sup>. Tanzania's thirty years of post Independence financial crisis has led to drastic changes in social policy priorities, implemented in the drive for structural adjustment. Local government has cut its assistance to Church social services. The Church continues to provide other services which are appreciated in the relative absence of private enterprise. Of these, the trade schools<sup>44</sup>, dispensaries and grinding mills are popular.

The Church should, in the ideal, be self financing. It is striving to achieve this, but has failed to meet the initial deadline of 1991 set by the Capuchins. The expense involved in

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<sup>41</sup> This tax is presented by the government as 'development tax', but people regard it as a reimposition of an old tax, as opposed to the introduction of a new one.

<sup>42</sup> In German East Africa a law provided for the compulsory segregation of lepers. It was not abolished until 1930, but voluntary segregation was encouraged by the British at treatment centres (Iliffe 1987:218-20).

<sup>43</sup> see Mahenge District Record Book, in Morogoro (Eastern Province) Provincial Book Vol ii, Bagomoyo & Ulanga District Books, microfilm no:MF 17, TNA.

<sup>44</sup> With the exception of the Seminary, there are no private schools in Ulanga, although unofficial secondary classes were available in town.

maintaining the infrastructure of land and buildings set up by the missionaries is enormous<sup>45</sup>. The lifestyle and expectations of priests are, like their surroundings, informed by the missionary model. Demands on congregations are frequent and heavy. People especially resent the annual request for contributions of food, especially maize, after the harvest to 'feed the priests': "What do priests eat? Rice! But they ask us for maize". Rice, as a higher status food than maize, is the preferred food at feasts and celebrations. It is said that the priests then sell the given maize back to the people at shortage times for a profit. Things like this, combined with the various income generating enterprises of the Church, contribute to the perception of Christianity as 'dini ya biashara', 'the religion of business'<sup>46</sup>.

Government dispensaries in the rural areas could have provided an alternative to those run by the Church. Since Independence, however, the shortage of drugs there has thrown people back on the mission, forcing people to use Church dispensaries for which they must pay. The current situation is such that patients presenting themselves at government hospitals, at which medication is officially free, are referred on to mission dispensaries where drugs are available. Some patients prefer to do this anyway, even though it will cost them money. They feel that the state will cheat them, providing weak medicine manufactured in low status countries like China, whereas, it is said, the drugs available in mission dispensaries are better. This is because they come from 'Ulaya', usually translated as 'Europe', a category which includes the people and products of Western countries, and which has been extended to encompass such places as Thailand and Japan.

The state's failure in the provision of health services merely serves to reinforce the perception of the Church as a business venture. People believe that most of the drugs in mission dispensaries are donated as charity from abroad and the Church is, once again, seen to be making a profit. The Church denies this, saying that it buys the drugs for its dispensaries and charges only to recoup its costs. The truth is probably somewhere in the middle. Drugs and medicines are donated, and then sold on within the Catholic network, making donations of medicines a source of revenue for the church. Many of these goods have 'gift of the ..' stamped in large letters on the packaging.

Not all money transactions involving the Church are seen as commercial. The attitude towards contributions at a service is different. These are seen to be, or rather are presented

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<sup>45</sup> Diocese expenditure for the financial year 1991-2 was forecast at 35 million shillings. At the time, the official exchange rate was about 390/- to £1.

<sup>46</sup> For a very similar perception of the Church in Sri Lanka, see Stirrat (1992:53).

by the church as being, *sadaka*, that is as an offering to God. Even then, totals for contributions at masses remain low, individuals giving on average between ten and twenty shillings, less than the price of one egg or equivalent to five small bananas. The same word, *sadaka*<sup>47</sup>, is used to refer to offerings to the dead. The issue of who may give *sadaka* and to whom it should be given is, as we shall see, a point of conflict between the Church and its congregation, especially with regard to the dead.

The diocese comprises a number of formally separate institutions, such as the seminary, the friary, the congregation of sisters, the diocese headquarters, and the constituent parishes. Each of these are semi-autonomous and are responsible, as far as they are able, for their own financing. Ordinary Christians regard all these things as *missien*, and perceive no separation between them. What constitutes the mission is then anything and anyone associated with it. In a small community where the Church is powerful, and where the personnel of the Church are either local or have lived in the area for many years, what the Church does is seen to be the result of decisions by these individuals. No distinction is made between changes instituted by the diocese and changes initiated by bodies external to the diocese. Unpopular policies are blamed on the individual priests thought to be responsible for their introduction. Consequently, demands for contributions from congregations are often seen to reflect the greed of individual priests and what are in effect national decisions of the Bishops' Conference in Tanzania, with regard to such issues as *zaka*, marriage or baptism, are held to show the insensitivity or downright pigheadedness of priests.

This lack of distinction between Church and its representatives has helped to contribute to the perception of the Church of today, and thus the priests of today, as money grabbing. Although even in the missionary days, some charge was made for mission controlled services and the Church was always involved in business and trade, the financial demands of the mission were somewhat diluted by the behaviour of individual missionaries who helped many with medicine, clothing and school fees. It is difficult to find a single family in the parish of Kwirowi which has not received help of this kind in the past. Mission control of schooling meant that the missionaries could supply students with clothing and uniforms, paper, pencils and food. In so doing, they set up a large network of clients who came to expect missionary support and assistance in the provision of material goods. There is now considerable resentment among the younger priests about the attitude of missionaries who still try to subvert the work of the diocesan priests by rebuilding their old client groups, and

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<sup>47</sup> It is used to refer generically to offerings or things done for the dead or the divines. In contrast, *tambiko*, refers only to offerings thought of as 'traditional'.

by criticising them for not 'helping people', that is, not giving them money. This criticism is echoed by the people themselves, whose expectation of priests and the mission in general is based on their experience of the past.

The gift giving of the missionaries has another legacy in the way in which the divine figures of the Church are conceptualised. Of these, Jesus and Mary are the two most important. All of the human divines of the Church are imagined as Europeans, an image reinforced by the painted representations which the missionaries placed in their churches and which remain there to this day. A new sculpted 'Stations of the Cross' with African figures, recently placed in the graveyard of the cathedral, is not popularly liked, precisely because it challenges the accepted images of the divines, and in making them mere examples, directly sheds doubt on the truth of the stories in which they are involved. Mary and a few select saints are approached through prayer for assistance. This is usually material and is often for basic goods and food. Votive offerings are not made. There is no notion of debt with the divines. Rather, they are potentially capable of procuring, as did the missionaries, a semi miraculous supply of cargo.

### **The Priests: Businessmen and Ritual Specialists**

The present generation of priests are mainly from within the diocese. They have their own obligations to the kin who have contributed to their education. They also have less money than the missionary priests who had the support of Catholic communities in the home country, as well as access to the resources of the order. The priests, living apart from the community, better educated, driving cars and wearing good clothing are regarded as rich. Because the priest is the parish, income generating projects aimed at the support of the parish are seen to be supporting the priest and his personal fortune. There is much resentment at the tales, not all of them true, of priests building large houses for relatives or friends while refusing help to members of the parish. The position of the priests as patrons to a rural community, which continues to depend on them for access to transport, medicine, emergency assistance and credit, puts the priests in a very real position of power over the people. Those who see that their chances of assistance in the future depend on the maintenance of a good relationship with the priests try to be seen to be good Christians. These people put themselves forward for such things as the Lay Committee, and make sure that they contribute cash to Church celebrations, such as ordinations or the visit of the Pope in 1990.

Catholicism depends on priests, whose ordination conveys on them the ability to bestow the sacraments on which the theological structure of the religion is premised. The only sacrament which a non priest can bestow is that of baptism. The core Catholic sacrament is communion, when priests feed their congregations a wafer and wine which are thought to have, through a process of Divine substantiation, become transformed into the body and blood of Christ. For the priests, this is the miracle of mass. A person wanting to 'receive the Host' should be in a state of grace. This is achieved through the confession of sin, the doing of penance and absolution. Only priests may take confession, and convey God's absolution to the person. They can not only transform the offerings of the congregation into the Host, but transform the congregation into a state of fitness to receive it.

In Mahenge, as elsewhere in Africa, there is a relative shortage of priests and high priest to congregation ratios (Hastings 1978:35). This constrains the organisation of the Church, which cannot abandon the missionary framework of parish centres, where one or two priests reside, and outstations which are usually visited by a priest once a month for mass. For the rest of the time, catechists give Sunday services in villages designated as outstations. They may also take burial services, if the person who has died was not in a state of temporary excommunication. Although women can become catechists, the majority are male. As primary leavers can receive training as catechists, they are more numerous than priests. They do much of the day to day work of the Church in the parishes, for which they receive a small salary<sup>48</sup>, but are not regarded as being of a special status by the people, beyond that of teachers. They 'are able to bury people', and to pray and sing. These skills are no different from those of some ordinary people who have reputations for being good at prayer or knowing Christian procedure at funeral events.

Priests are seen somewhat differently. They have more status in the community than catechists because they can 'read mass' and give communion. In general, priests have status as ritual specialists. They can drive out spirits and are able to 'see', thus potentially destroy, witches<sup>49</sup>. The Diocese discourages the involvement of its priests in healing and exorcism. In this it is consistent with the post Vatican Two attitude of the Bishops' Conference in Tanzania and in the wider East African context<sup>50</sup>. Another consequence of Vatican

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<sup>48</sup> Untrained catechists receive the minimum wage. Trained catechists get a slightly higher salary. Unlike other Church employees they do not receive loans for housing or accommodation. Salary costs are met jointly by Rome and the parish.

<sup>49</sup> See Chapter Nine.

<sup>50</sup> This attitude is evidenced in the recall to Rome in 1982 of Archbishop Milingo, best known for his healing ministry in Zambia (Gray 1990:109).

Two is the prevailing consensus of a liberal, individualistic and rationalistic approach to religious practice among the clergy and hierarchy, not only in Tanzania (cf Christian 1989:182-5), which demands that Catholics 'understand' Catholicism as an intellectual system as opposed to a system of practices through which the person can experience God. This attitude informs many of the post Vatican Two innovations which, in general, have served to undermine the supernatural authority of Catholicism, which by being changed, is exposed as something manufactured, an artefact of humanity. Mahenge priests do not involve themselves in healing or in driving out spirits, although people want them to, and their refusal is interpreted as selfishness.

The younger priests are not widely respected in a society which prioritises the status of elder. While this status is to an extent negotiable, very few priests under forty have the authority to be taken seriously as elders. Older people dislike addressing them as 'father', preferring instead to use 'padre' which is not loaded with reference to kinship and authority. The fact that they live apart from the community and have little experience or understanding of its problems and priorities, combined with years of seminary education, distances the priests further from their congregations.

In the seminary, priests have been taught to regard much of traditional practice with contempt. There is no doubt that this is how the missionary priests perceived it<sup>51</sup>. The following quote is taken from an announcement (*tangazo*) written by a missionary and posted outside the cathedral in 1958<sup>52</sup>: 'We are losing the blessing of God here in our country for three things. 1. Our faith is being lost by following the bad things of Paganism, witchcraft and divination. 2. We are missing to make the day of God holy by dancing in the night on Saturday. 3. And those who are ... refusing to marry are they who are refusing the blessing of God' (and are by implication responsible for the bad state of things in the country). Although the priests of today are local, the *tangazo* are virtually unchanged. The attitude of condemnation prevails. It comes across most forcefully in the Sunday sermons which are inevitably about people's failure to lead a 'Christian life'. As a parish priest told the congregation on Easter, "Christ is the light of the world, but we are still looking to the darkness".

Priests insist that their role is to say mass and, as the only people able to do this, they deserve the financial support of their congregations. The association of the Church and its

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<sup>51</sup> See Lussy (1953) for a good example of the attitude of Capuchin Missionary priests to the Pogoro peoples and to traditional practice.

<sup>52</sup> 6/7/58, , Tangazo File, Parish Office Kwirowi (my translation).

representatives with self interested business has contributed to the loss of the authority of priests. There is a strong degree of ambivalence in the perception of the Church as a bureaucratic organisation, which is reinforced by the Church's attempt to recoup more costs from its congregations in the drive to become self financing. Priests seem to have lost, or to be losing fast, what supernatural power they were once credited with. They are still asked to guard newly dug graves in churchyards to prevent the entry of witches. Everybody believes that priests still keep watch over graves as a matter of course in this way, but they are no longer thought able to curse entire villages or to know a person's doings or whereabouts from a distance<sup>53</sup>. These kinds of powers were associated with the early missionary priests. Old people tell stories about the miraculous doings of these priests, which often reveal competition between the priests and indigenous ritual specialists in terms of access to the power of the supernatural. Not surprisingly, in these tales, the local powers win the struggle because being foreign, the priests lacked the vitally important close association with place. These missionaries were thought to be able to make medicines and talk with the dead. The fact that they were Europeans enhanced both their mystique and the degree of ambivalence with which they were regarded.

### **'African Europeans': The Africanisation of the Clergy**

At one level **wazungu**, 'Europeans', is a general descriptive category, conveying the physical and cultural attributes of a kind of people, like 'Africans' or 'Indians' or 'Arabs'. In the popular stereotype, 'Europeans' are wealthy and have a cunning manipulative cleverness which always puts them ahead of the African peasant. Things 'European' are similarly mysteriously powerful and clever, linked inextricably to the amoral and exploitative world of market relations transacted through the medium of cash. This attitude underlies the widespread belief in **wamumiani**<sup>54</sup>, 'bloodsuckers', people so corrupted that they steal other people's blood and then sell it to 'Europeans' who export it for profit<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> This decline appears to be widespread. See for example the articles in the journal of the Pastoral Orientation Service, No 5& 6, 1980,(Tabora).

<sup>54</sup> Some people use the **ma**-prefix to denote the plural. In Ulanga they are also called **washinjashinja**-slaughterers.

<sup>55</sup> This notion has widespread currency in Tanzania. 'Bloodsuckers' were originally thought of as Arabs, see Baker (1941), no doubt because of their association with the slave trade. Bloch (1971:32) describes a very similar notion of 'heart thieves' for the Merina of Madagascar.



As a category, Europeans stand opposed to Africans, and exploit them. For some people, Africans will always lose out to Europeans. One woman told me that this was because in the beginning, the forefather of the Africans was drunk and laughed at the nakedness of his father. As punishment, the father created a division between his sons. The disrespectful one became poor and black, while the one who fled in shame became white and rich. Similar tales are told all over Africa (Leinhardt 1970:283; Fernandez 1982:69-70). Being a certain kind of person is not, however, merely an attribute of race, but depends on behaving in ways thought appropriate to the category. People who behave in 'European ways' are mockingly called 'Europeans', which in this context has strictly negative connotations. A Christian woman who buried her dead parents in a 'European' way, fully clothed and with shoes on their feet, is called a **mzungu** behind her back. Those who eat 'alone' from their own plates<sup>56</sup> are similarly dismissed. Because these people are not **wazungu**, this way of behaving is inappropriate.

The indigenous priests are equated with the negative aspects of Europeanness. They are said to be behaving like foreigners, turning their backs on traditional culture and ignoring obligations to assist kin and neighbours. They are frequently accused of greed and selfishness, attributes given a wholly negative image and strongly associated with witchcraft. The Africanisation of the clergy has, paradoxically, done little for the image of the Church. It is still regarded as foreign, and Christianity as the 'European religion'. Christianity is seen to be at moments powerful and at others inappropriate for precisely this reason. Having a 'religion', especially Christianity, can make people less what they should be, and more something else which they should not. A middle aged client at a diviner's put it this way: "We Africans we don't have religion, only tradition. Priests, even the Bishop, they are just following money. If they have problems they come here ... If they say they are Christians it is lies-they don't have belief". On another occasion, a male elder gave this account of Christianity. "Christianity and Islam have no origins in Africa. The Arabs brought Islam and business - they sold people for salt. The Europeans brought the Christian religion and Jesus and Mary. Jesus and Mary were of the Jewish tribe, that was their tribe. They are not close. We did not choose this religion. They, the missionaries, baptised the small children."

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<sup>56</sup> For the importance of eating together see Chapter Two.

The issue of celibacy has also contributed to a decline in the authority of priests<sup>57</sup>. It seems to be a common expression of hostility to priests in Catholic countries to allege that they do not keep to their vows on this point<sup>58</sup>. Tanzania is no exception. Priests are said to have lovers and children, and to roam the villages in search of casual sex. In contrast, it is said that if the wambui, the diviners of the shrines of the spirits associated with territory, broke the proscriptions surrounding sex and pollution prior to entering the sacred area of the shrine they would be punished by the spirits with death or other calamity. Adultery has similar consequences for these diviners. Both offences can result in the loss of their powers, as the spirits will withdraw their cooperation from them. That priests can break the law of the Church without anything happening to them serves only to expose priests as servants of an organisation, not servants of God. Ideas about purity in ritual contexts add to the revulsion people feel at the thought of priests going direct from bed to altar to read morning mass because, as many people expressed it, "It's not clean".

In the popular view, priests set an example which proves that there is no mystical sanction on those who break the law of the Church. The concept of sin (**dhambi**), as presented by the Church, is seen for what it is, as 'breaking the laws of the Church'<sup>59</sup>. Everybody who I asked explained to me in these terms. That there is no mystical sanction on those who break the laws of the Church suggests a fundamental weakness in Christianity, confirming the view that the Church is essentially an organisation run and manipulated by people. Changes in Church ritual, which, in the aftermath of Vatican Two, were intended to make the church truly 'local', and of which the most visible is in the language of mass, have also reduced its mystical authority. In the Pogoro conception of jadi or 'tradition'<sup>60</sup>, what gives something mystical sanction is its very unchangeability and the fact that in the ideal these things are not open to manipulation by humanity, unless, of course, authority for innovation is seen to come from elsewhere, from the spirits themselves (cf Boyer, 1990:60). This attitude probably explains why the notion of 'calling' is so popular with priests, sisters and catechists, making an individual's choice of career look as if it is the result of some higher authority than simple material self interest.

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<sup>57</sup> These types of allegations also occurred during the colonial missionary period. Interestingly, one of the priests accused of assaulting a young woman whose marriage he was arranging was Lussy, the author of several ethnographic papers. See the District Officer's 1934 report in file 61/141/G/ Vol 1, 'Handing and Taking Over Mahenge District', TNA.

<sup>58</sup> See for example, Christian(1989:152) for Spain, and Stirrat (1992:52) for Sri Lanka.

<sup>59</sup> See also Chapter Nine.

<sup>60</sup> This is the main topic of the second half of the thesis.

The current status of priests is ambiguous. On the one hand they are people who have a privileged access to both divine and material power. On the other, they are the self interested representatives of an institution which is foreign because it was brought by foreigners and because it stands, at moments, in opposition to local practice. Priests are, however, frequently equated with other ritual specialists and, as such, they are thought to have the potential to do the same kinds of things. The Christian Church and its personnel, both human and divine, are merely one avenue of access to the supernatural in a landscape which has many routes of access to the supernatural and many ritual specialists. The tradition within which a specialist is working does not render him or her unable to treat people coming from different traditions or with different ethnic and religious affiliations. All share an equivalence, and each has its moments of greater usefulness or validity. Pogoro Catholics frequently seek the assistance of an Islamic **shehe** who uses Islamic texts and writing for the making of medicines and divination <sup>61</sup>.

### **Religion as a Category**

The structure of the Church, with its hierarchy of bishop and parish priests, is used as an analogy for the relation between indigenous diviners associated with the territory, who are themselves ranked in a hierarchy of precedence associated with their various shrine spirits<sup>62</sup>. The existence of the Christian religion sets up some aspects of traditional practice as 'religion' also, and its personnel as specialists, as quasi priests. The two 'religions' stand in a relation of opposition yet perceived equivalence at this formal level. Most people, unless they are specialists in either, can move between them. For example, an ex-catechist who is now a diviner of a territorial shrine still considers himself a Christian because he was baptised, but because he is now a diviner, he no longer practises Christianity. To do so would be, he assured me, as illogical as supporting two opposing football teams. "We have two religions here", I was told, "the European religion and the religion of our place". Others use **dini**, 'religion' in its more restricted sense of world religion and articulate the two systems in terms of a distinction between 'things of religion' and 'things of our place'.

In the next chapter I look at the day to day practice of ordinary people, which reinterprets Catholicism, where something of an accommodation is reached. To an extent, this

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<sup>61</sup> For a description of their methods see Swantz, L (1990).

<sup>62</sup> See Chapter Eight.

accommodation is possible because 'things of our place' are not 'religion', and thus , in the view of the laity , do not contradict religion. There are limits on accommodation however, limits which are set by what the Church defines as anti-Christian practice<sup>63</sup>, and a point is reached where a person must temporarily choose between two distinct and incompatible systems.

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<sup>63</sup> See Chapters Ten and Eleven.



## Four: POGORO CHRISTIANITY

### Being Christian

People's self definition of themselves as Christian differs from that imposed by the Church, which requires that a person be baptised, confirmed and in a position to receive the sacraments. Being in a state to receive the sacraments is, for most, regarded as something temporary. This is partly a result of Church policy with regard to those whom it considers transgressors, and partly because people do not place the same value on the Church defined sacraments as does the Church itself. Much of this is explained by the attitude of people to priests, as givers of sacraments, and the perception of the Church as **chama** - as a club or organisation. In practice, baptism is the minimal criterion for Church recognition of a person as Catholic, and it is this which is used for the purposes of parish records and the annual statistics which are sent to Rome. Baptisms exceed confirmations by as much as half. Most people define themselves as Catholic because their parents and grandparents were Catholic. This history provides further justification for rejecting other Christianities. As Catholicism has become the 'religion of the father and grandfathers', any change in religious affiliation is disrespectful to one's elders, living or dead. These Catholics have been baptised, and either go to church or have been regularly at periods in the past.

### Baptism

For today's young adults, baptising their children is not regarded as something immediately necessary. There is no sense of urgency. It is said that small children have no sin and are intrinsically incapable of malice, hence God will accept them, baptised or not. The baptism of infants has become an occasion for a family celebration. It may be delayed until the parents of the child can afford to put on a feast with beer and dancing. There are other reasons for the delay. These are primarily a consequence of Church policy with regard to the non payment of **zaka** and people living together without marrying in church. Priests impose a prohibition<sup>1</sup> (**kizuizi**) on these people receiving the sacraments, including and especially, baptism. These prohibitions extend only to the Christian family, which is nuclear

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<sup>1</sup> See below.

and limited, in contrast to the local conception of family which is extensive and extendable<sup>2</sup>.

Parents wishing to have a child baptised may have to wait until **zaka** has been paid and they have married in church, which also means saving money for the wedding celebration. Christian family festivals are occasions for display and conspicuous consumption. Wanting to have one's children baptised was the reason cited most frequently for having a church wedding. The church wedding is the last event, and arguably the least important, in the series of events which constitute the marriage process. They are described in the following chapter.

Baptism is no longer done for individual children, but for groups of infants three or four times a year, often coinciding with annual festivals such as Christmas and Easter. The children of married people are baptised together on the most special day of the festival, while those born out of wedlock, but whose parents are not living together, are baptised as a separate group, usually on a Sunday. The group baptism policy has been in force since the early 1970's and is a direct consequence of Vatican Two. Its intention is to increase the Christian consciousness of parents and godparents (**wasimamizi**), who have to attend some hours of instruction. The **wasimamizi**, literally 'overseers', are usually higher status friends or neighbours of the parents who are regarded by the Church as 'good Christians'<sup>3</sup>. No long term relation of obligation is implied between 'overseer' and the child's parents, nor with the child itself. This would in any event be impractical. There are not many high status 'good Christians' in the community, and those who are asked to be **wasimamizi** are asked so often that some have as many as fifty or more godchildren. These same people will also act as **wasimamizi** for first communions and weddings, although not for the same children.

The group baptism policy has had the effect of devaluing baptism, as not only is baptism delayed, but people can be excluded from it. In the past, infants were baptised when their parents brought them to the mission, or, if they had been born in the mission dispensary, before they went home. Babies born at home were taken to be baptised when they 'came out' of the house in which they had been secluded with their mothers until after the tied end of the umbilical cord had dropped away. Then they had were given a medicine called shirala. This medicine creates relationship between a child and its father's side, and ensures that children grow. Older people make an explicit connection between the giving of shirala

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapters Two and Five.

<sup>3</sup> see Chapter Three.

and the baptism of babies. Both were essential and associated with the 'coming out', and, importantly, both involve the anointing of the child's body with substances thought of as having the transformative properties of 'medicine'<sup>4</sup>. Up until the 1960's, the majority of children were baptised before they were two months old<sup>5</sup>. The average age of baptism is now between 18 months and two years. Many children are not baptised until much later, and others wait until they take communion for the first time.

The change in the age of baptism and the fact that the Church no longer insists on the necessity of baptising all children confirms for people that baptism is not something essential. That it was thought so in the past is suggested by the popularity of deathbed baptisms and the fact so many of these were carried out by laity, not by the religious, perhaps in a desperate bid to save the life of the person or, failing that, to hedge bets for the life beyond<sup>6</sup>. Consensus now has it that delaying baptism or even omitting it altogether will not expose children to mystical harm.

Baptism is, however, important as the first step on the road to becoming an 'official' Christian. This is because baptism bestows on the child a new and specifically Christian name. Mahenge priests, indigenous and missionary, refuse to baptise children with African names, insisting on appropriate 'Christian' names, which are, in the main, Germanic versions of the Saints' names introduced by the missionaries. Names from the Old Testament are less popular with priests and laity. The custom of naming grandchildren after grandparents means that the same limited stock of Christian names is kept in circulation. Christian names are used only in the most official contexts, for example when registering for school, for a court case or for employment, or in dealings with institutions, such as the state. They are not used between kin or neighbours. Children are given names which relate to the circumstances of their conception and birth. Baptism names are so little used in some families that parents forget the baptism names of their own children, for in most households nicknames and 'housenames' are used, as they are between adult equals on occasion. A single individual is known to different people in different contexts by many names, for example by a nickname, by the name of their father and by the names of their children. Names can be inherited, and are in this sense, partially constituted as property<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter Nine. The Nyakyusa also equated baptism with the giving of medicines. Wilson was told by an informant that Christians 'have a medicine. You are baptised with a medicine' (1957:115)

<sup>5</sup> See appendix.

<sup>6</sup> The Baptism Books record the baptizer as well as the baptised.

<sup>7</sup> See Chapter Five.



Names represent only one aspect of a person, they do not stand for the self. Christian names are known as 'baptism names'. Because they are associated with the Church as an institution of the outside - as **chama**, they allow for the presentation of an 'official' self in official contexts.

Today, if you ask people what baptism does, or why it is necessary, they reply, "It is just giving a name". 'Having a name' is a way of talking about being Christian. A person 'without a name' has no 'religion'. This aspect of being Christian is valued, for in present day Tanzania affiliation to a world religion, such as Islam or Christianity, is important. It ties people into the world beyond and puts them in a conceptual relation of equality with other peoples in the nation state. That the Christian names are foreign and, unlike local names, have no meaning, perpetuates the association of Catholicism with its origins in Europe and the outside. For most Pogoro Catholics, baptism has become essentially secular. It has lost its association with mystical sanction and the supernatural. People say that it is necessary only to become Christian, that is a member of the Church. Although the Church tries to use the **kizuizi** as a means of making Christians conform to the demands of orthodox Catholic practice, people know that if the Church delays baptism for too long it will soon run out of Christians: "They will refuse until when? If they don't baptise them, how will the religion continue?" Unlike shirala medicine which makes children grow and ensures that girls will be fertile<sup>8</sup>, baptism is not necessary for the reproduction of society, only for the reproduction of the Catholic congregation.

## Services

People who are Christian attend services periodically, depending on how far they live from a church. Those who live in a village designated as an outstation attend services taken by a catechist or the monthly mass. Services are long, consisting of readings from the Old and New Testaments, a sermon and communion. There is singing, led by a choir. People are familiar with the structure of services and the words of the songs. Sermons are **mafundisho** - 'teachings'. Inevitably, they feature an attack on local practices with regard to such things as marriage or visiting diviners, practices which the Church regards as antithetical to Christianity. Another recurrent theme of the **mafundisho** is the need for Christians to support the Church financially. "Can a person eat from two tables at once?", asked a priest rhetorically, about people's dual allegiance to things Christian and things 'traditional'.

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<sup>8</sup> See Chapters Five and Six.

Pogoro Catholics answer in the affirmative, arguing that by virtue of being Christian anyway, they are living a Christian life. They may add that because things 'traditional' are emphatically not 'religion' they are not following two religions at once, even if that is how the Church tries to present it. Given that 'religion' refers to the institutional aspect of Christianity here, this separation and lack of contradiction is not surprising. In the second part of the thesis I consider the social construction of practice which is thought of as 'traditional'. It is this, as much as the institutional nature of Christianity, which serves to create a boundary between it and 'religion', at the same time as it permits some aspects of Christianity to escape from the constraints which the definition of 'religion' imposes. It is to these we now turn.

Going to church is an occasion for dressing up in good clothing, shirts and trousers for the men and new khanga or kitenge for the women, often over western style dresses. Older women keep their heads covered. Men and women sit on separate sides of the church, the men on the right and the women on the left. People pay little attention to the lessons or the mafundisho, unless they are especially interesting, amusing or well delivered, but enjoy the display and the singing. Going to church is talked about in terms of 'going to pray'. People also pray at home, usually with the rosary. Primarily, people go to church because as the most public Christian activity, it is what Christians do.

As in other Catholic countries, devotion is periodic and depends very much on the life cycle of the individual. In Mahenge, the core of devout Christians who attend masses regularly and meet to say rosary are older women, many of whom are widowed or divorced. They are often those without a strong network of kin who are prepared or able to assist them materially. Although they may not actually get anything substantial, they look to the Church for support and try, through the giving of small gifts of food to priests, to oblige the priests through debt to help them.

Church attendance is highest at the main Catholic festivals, and highest of all at Easter. The service on Good Friday is the most popular service because it is explicitly concerned with death. There is a genuine atmosphere of sadness in the church evoked by singing 'songs of suffering'. These songs, lamenting the death of Christ, are sung repeatedly over many hours during funerals. Good Friday, as Christ's funeral, is at the same time an occasion for remembering what one has felt at all the funerals one has attended. It is this reenactment

of the funeral which makes the service special<sup>9</sup>. Although All Souls is also concerned with the dead, it is perceived as another mass, and as such is an occasion when the Church does something for the dead on behalf of the people. The opportunity for emotional engagement is lacking. Consequently, it does not have the same importance as Good Friday for Pogoro Catholics.

The service on Good Friday is the most spectacular of all the annual services. The crucified Jesus, who has been taken down from the church, is brought inside and laid at the foot of the altar for people to see and later to file up to, barefoot, and kneel down and kiss. I was told that those who kiss Jesus then will be forgiven their sins and will be accepted by him on death. Kissing Jesus is an opportunity to achieve forgiveness without confession or penance, and is very popular. On occasions when I attended a Good Friday service, I was the only person in the church who did not do so.

## Lay Organisations

Various lay organisations exist in Kwirow parish. Fewer exist in other parishes further away from the centre. Another consequence of Vatican Two was the attempt to formally increase lay involvement through the establishment of the **baraza ya walei**, the lay committees<sup>10</sup>, to whom requests for baptism should in the first instance be addressed. People try to bypass the lay committees where possible, and approach the parish direct. Similarly, more **zaka** is collected by parish offices than the committees. Few people are involved. The most active of the lay committee members are the same people who are regarded as having a higher status than their neighbours and who are regarded by the Church as being 'good Christians'. They are, of course, the very same people who are likely to be asked to be **wasimamizi**, and tend to be either church employees or those who owe their position to a connection, past or present with the mission.

Other lay organisations are the society of St Vincent de Paul, which has about thirty members out of a parish Catholic population of 16000. Run by a missionary priest, this

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<sup>9</sup> According to Taussig, Good Friday is similarly popular among the peasant communities of Western Columbia where it is understood as a funeral and occasion of mourning. There too, Church songs focusing on Christ's death are sung for the nine day duration of the funeral(1980:105). Rushton (1982:156-7) remarks on Good Friday as an explicit enactment of funeral in Greece.

<sup>10</sup> These were established in the diocese in 1969.

group aims to help the poor but serves instead to reinforce the missionary client base. The Catholic Women's Group organises the sweeping and cleaning of churches. Its members, many of whom are also in the Legion of Mary, visit the sick and pray for them. Schoolchildren are encouraged to join the national Catholic youth organisation. Of all the lay groups, the most significant is the Legion of Mary. This has a shifting membership because of various disputes among its members, which seem frequently to involve suspicions of witchcraft. The Legion is the only devotional lay group, and although ultimate control rests with a designated priest, its members feel that it is their organisation and not a service organisation to the Church. Current membership for Kwirow parish fluctuates between sixty and eighty people. Slightly more women than men are members. The Legion of Mary 'talks to Mary' on alternate Sundays after mass. It occasionally disseminates literature, which is tucked away and treasured by devotees. The illustrations are popular, confirming for many that the stories told in the pamphlets are true. Many adults, because of their one time involvement with the Legion, know the story of Fatima.

The Legion of Mary as a Church inspired devotion in the diocese seems to date back to the 1960's, although it was introduced to East Africa as part of Catholic evangelisation strategy in 1936, when it was recognised by missionaries as 'the greatest aid we have' (Rweyemamu & Msambure, 1989:23). It is currently undergoing a small revival, encouraged by the Church, which has inserted two Marian months into the ritual calendar when special masses are said weekly and rosary groups organised. In addition, the Legion requested that masses be said at the grotto before the statue of Mary one Saturday a month, and this request has been granted. There is, however, deep disenchantment with the Legion of Mary which stems from the very fact that the Legion is an organised lay group. A one time devotee explained to me why she left the Legion, "I have realised that it is not necessary to be a member of a group (*chama*) to talk to Mary. If I want, I can talk to her with my rosary at home". This attitude, which stresses the individual's direct contact with the divines, often through material media such as the church building or rosary beads, and bypasses the institutional Church, is a significant feature of local Catholic practice. The very institutional nature of the Church itself serves to undermine its role as an avenue to the supernatural.

## **The Catholic Divines**

Being Catholic implies that a person knows and accepts some of the main Christian notions, for example the story of creation and that Mary was the mother of Jesus. Everybody is more or less familiar with some of the stories in the bible, especially those in the New

Testament as these are most often used by priests as the basis for **mafundisho**. Bible stories, largely because they are written down, are thought to be true. They are seen to bear no direct relation to some of the teachings of the church. People, especially the young, who are more critical and freer of obligation to the church than their mission indoctrinated elders, and who are more likely than they to be competently literate, say that the priests distort the teachings of Jesus in the bible. Others are of the opinion that the Church has misunderstood certain texts. What has happened is that the priests, as official interpreters of Christian texts, have, by losing their authority, become unable to present the authorised version. I was told the story of Jesus turning the water into wine on numerous occasions, as an illustration of how little the priests understand and of their hypocrisy. While priests have a reputation as heavy, if not excessive drinkers, a recurrent theme of **mafundisho** is the issue of drunkenness, especially on Sundays. The story confirms that the bible condones drinking as well as demonstrating that Jesus, as the son of Mary, listens and responds to requests made by his mother.

Everybody, whether devout or not, accepts the existence of God, a vaguely conceptualised all powerful figure, responsible ultimately for the original creation and for everything since. It is said that the Christian God, 'Mungu' and the indigenous 'Mlungu' are one and the same, thus the Pogoro knew of God long before the coming of the missionaries. This God is only invoked directly in Christian services, not in other ritual contexts, although the idea of his ultimate responsibility for life and his control of fate is a recurrent theme in conversations. If somebody is ill people shrug their shoulders and say, 'God has already decided who is going to die' or 'He has already written their names'. It is the ultimate right of God to 'take' people. In this context God is Fate.

The Church presentation of God is of 'God the Father', an anthropomorphic image of a personified being who interacts with people and the divines in a way similar to how people behave. This image of God is real for Pogoro Christians who recognise the anthropomorphic God as the controller of fate and the Supreme Being of the Church. But this representation of God is different from that evoked by the notion of mlungu, which corresponds closely to Lienhardt's interpretation of the Dinka's notion of 'Divinity', a kind of ultimate power, manifested at various places and points and through various beings (1961:28-9)<sup>11</sup>. Mlungu is responsible for the generalised fertility of the earth, and through the localised spirits, associated with specific territories, for the rains on which agricultural production and ultimately life itself depends. The first maize to be harvested, planted in the

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<sup>11</sup> The Bena's notion of Mulungu is very similar (cf Culwick, 1935:99-101).

first rains of a season, in late October, is called 'majani ga Mlungu', 'Divinity's maize'. It should not be eaten until it has first been offered to the spirits associated with territory<sup>12</sup>. Thunder, rain, lightning and sunshine are this spirit personified, thus the expression 'kawala' literally 'he<sup>13</sup> shines'.

The spirits associated with territory are aspects of Mlungu, as are a variety of other non specific spirits with similar or derived names. The Christian God is similarly understood as an aspect or manifestation of this Divinity, of which Jesus, though a person, is yet another manifestation. An older woman talking about the diviner who has the current monopoly on the suppression of witchcraft in the region<sup>14</sup>, made an explicit comparison between this diviner and Jesus, saying, "They are both people of many wonders. Is not that Mlungu?". Another man, the brother of a diviner of one of the territorial shrines, talking about the spirit at the shrine said, "Who is he? He's a spirit, not an ancestor...He's just Mlungu".

In day to day living, God is not particularly concerned with the affairs of people. If something is put down to fate, this is God's doing, and in this case there is no retribution. Many misfortunes are put down to the doings of witches or the spirits of ascendants. Good fortune can be sought with the help of medicines and prayers. These are usually addressed to Mary who is a compassionate intermediary between people and Jesus. Jesus is then thought to pass on the person's request to God. Most people believe that Jesus is the child of God, although some express doubt, saying that if God were really to send somebody to live with the people then this being would not need to be born of a human being and would surely not have been put to death as Jesus was. For many, talking about Jesus as the 'son of God' is a way of emphasising his close relationship to God, rather than a literal truth. It is this special relationship with God that gave Jesus the powers of seeing and healing so often recounted in the New Testament stories spontaneously related to me on numerous occasions.

Jesus is valued not then as the child of God, but as a kind of super diviner, able to cure and to throw out spirits. Mama Lumeta's account of what Jesus did is typical: "Jesus made people better, he healed them. He spat dirt into the eyes of the blind and they could see. He raised up the dead. One of them was Lazarus. Jesus said to him, 'Get up!', and he got

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<sup>12</sup> See Chapter Eight, below.

<sup>13</sup> ie, the 'person'. Bantu languages have no gender, but prefixes denoting classes of nouns. Two such classes denote animates in the singular and plural.

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter Nine.

up. Then he took off his grave clothes and washed himself and he was well again. His father is God and his mother is the Virgin Mary. Mary was a person completely. So was Jesus. They were not angels." It is for these things, rather than his death, that he is considered special. This kind of understanding of what Jesus represents underlies descriptions of the 'Black Christ' figures so common in Zionist churches (Sundkler 1961:284-287). These Zionist prophets are not so much basing themselves on an image of Christ as basing Christ on an image of themselves<sup>15</sup>. The Christ of the Zionist churches, is like the Pogoro Christ, a possessed and inspired diviner, who may or may not be the son of God but is, like the territorial spirits and the anti-witch specialist, an aspect of Divinity<sup>16</sup>.

For Pogoro Catholics, the resurrection only proves that Jesus was closer to the power of God than was Mohammed who, once buried, I was told with glee, rotted in his grave. There is little emphasis on Jesus's sacrifice or on the millenarian aspects of the resurrection<sup>17</sup>, perhaps because people take it as self evident that death is not the end of the person, but the point at which the person is transformed into a spirit.

Because God is Mlungu, the two notions overlap on occasion. The image of the Christian God as distant and all seeing undermines to an extent the role of the priest as mediator with the divine, especially with regard to confession. If God sees all and knows all, confessing to a priest, himself a transgressor from the rules of the Church, is pointless. People have been seen confessing to empty boxes to avoid the mediation of the priest in the relation of the person and God. The lack of emphasis on confession is connected with the conception of dhambi, 'sin', which people understand in two ways. The first was described in the previous chapter, and refers to 'breaking the law of the Church'. Real 'sins', however, are those things which anger God. These are not so much connected with the 'law of the Church' as with a more general morality. The only two 'sins' which people agreed were sufficiently serious to anger God were adultery, which was inevitably brought up by women, and 'killing a person without a reason', that is, witchcraft<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> cf Anderson (1983:29).

<sup>16</sup> One of Sundkler's informants said about one such prophet, 'He is God, ...but we call him prophet'(1961:286).

<sup>17</sup> Peel points out that in Africa, millenarianism is not characteristic of the Independent churches either (1968:3).

<sup>18</sup> See Chapter Ten.

Few people attend confession regularly. Parish priests reckon that less than 20% of Christians confess once or twice a year. Others confess pragmatically in order to get penance as part of the removal of an exclusion, so that they are again eligible to receive the sacraments. Most exclusions concern marriage and witchcraft. Some older people resent them because it means that a person will be refused an officially Christian burial, perhaps in the church graveyard. In practice, as we shall see in Chapter Six, all burials, are thought of as Christian burials, whether or not a priest or catechist is present, and although some devout Christians value Church burial, it is not considered essential.

The exclusion policy is justified by priests with reference to Canon Law, which forbids 'public sinners' from receiving any sacrament, except that of penance. 'Public sinners' are those who live together without marrying in church, and who engage in practice defined by the Church as anti-Christian. Other exclusions, for example those relating to **zaka**, are less extensive because they are not derived from Canon Law. Thus those excluded for the non payment of **zaka** can receive communion, but are denied baptism or confirmation for their children, a marriage service and burial in a Church plot. The application of these guidelines is confused and contradictory. Refusing baptism because of non payment of **zaka** contradicts Canon Law, under which anybody can be baptised. The exclusion policy with regard to **zaka** is unpopular, as is the hard line the Church is now taking towards temporary excommunications. For many, this simply confirms that the Church is now wholly self-interested. "The mission", a man of sixty complained, "no longer does anything out of love. Now if a person is dying and you ask for a priest, he doesn't come. Instead he asks the chairman of religion, what kind of Christian is this? Has he married in Church? Are his children baptised? You wait. He doesn't come".

At Sunday services, only about one third of the congregation ever takes communion. The figures collected by the Church at Easter are revealing. On average, only about 2000 people in the whole parish actually receive it<sup>19</sup>. This is due to a combination of prohibitions and a lack of interest. Older women, place more value on communion than do their juniors or male peers, perhaps because many of them spent several years in seclusion at the mission. They say that the wafer has a special taste by which they 'know' it is really the body and blood of Jesus. They did not think of it as eating Jesus, but rather as absorbing or incorporating something of him in their bodies, which made them feel good and 'clean'. It is also a blessing (**baraka**). Others were less convinced that the wafer actually becomes the body and blood of Jesus, but thought it potentially possible. Communion is not thought of

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<sup>19</sup> See Appendix 2.



as a meal, and so lacks the connotations of eating together which are prioritised by both traditional practice and formal Catholic theology. That it is taken inside the body is important. Blessing given by the diviners of the shrines of the spirits associated with territory, the wambui, involves the use of 'medicine' and this, as is all medicine, is both applied to the body and placed in the mouth. Some people spoke of communion, like baptism, as the 'medicine' of Christians and the Church.

For Pogoro Catholics, while being in a position to receive the sacraments is something that is only ever temporary, it is, because of the sacrament of penance, always potentially possible. In some ways, the theological structure of the religion, which readmits transgressors, permits the perpetuation of practice defined by the Church as un-Christian and allows for the limited deviation of its practitioners from the orthodox line. The situation is different in Protestant churches, which, unlike Catholicism, prioritise a person's interior state of grace over external sacraments (cf Weber, 1985:116-8) and consequently expel sinners in order to maintain the integrity of the community of the saved. Revival is one way back in for adherents to Protestant sects, which tend to be much more rigid in their opposition to 'traditional' or non-Christian practice<sup>20</sup>.

Communion is only one way among many of getting the blessing of the Christian divines. There are other events, which, like communion, involve the person's body or contact with an object which somehow can contain blessing and harbour it for the individual. Such occasions are valued because people cannot be excluded from them by the decisions of others. They have become elevated to the status of the sacraments, if not beyond it. The kissing of the cross on Good Friday has already been described. The service on Ash Wednesday is popular because to have one's head covered with ashes is **baraka**. Easter also offers opportunity for people to protect their houses with the palm leaves, blessed by priests with holy water on Palm Sunday. These, like rosaries, are thought to discourage the entry of witches and to protect the occupants of the house. Small children are usually sent to the service, carrying leaves, just as some people send children to get seeds blessed before planting.

The priests know that these events are popular. The recent institutionalisation of St Blaise's day blessings, said to cure ailments of the neck, are their response to what they see as local concerns. In September, there is a procession to 'respect' the cross on the hillside near the Cathedral, placed there by an earlier generation of clergy. Many people believe that the

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<sup>20</sup> For example see Beidelman (1982:109).

purpose of the journey it is to pray for the rain which falls inevitably in the following weeks. Significantly, this hillside, which some say Mary visited, is very close to a territorial shrine on the adjacent summit. The procession, mainly attended by the religious and by the core of devout Catholic women, provides opportunity for **baraka**, as those who wish to do so touch and kiss the cross before they leave. Any occasion which involves the scattering of holy water is also special<sup>21</sup>. The further the water goes the better and the more people it touches. A woman describing the events at All Souls mimed the action of the priest as he sprayed the water. She said, "You see. The blessing goes everywhere".

Water is recognised as a medium of blessing. Its use in Church contexts is equated with its use by Wambui and by ordinary people 'to cool things down'. The use of incense is similarly perceived. Incense is used by **waganga**<sup>22</sup> to drive out **mashetani**, the troublesome foreign spirits which recurrently possess people, especially women. The use of these ritual artifacts in church enhances the mystical authority of some aspects of Christian ritual and confirms that the Church is indeed concerned with the same sorts of things as some aspects of what is locally defined as 'traditional' practice. There is no doubt that the special dress of priests and catechists on occasion does too. It sets them apart from ordinary people as ritual specialists. Now, only Brothers and Sisters wear special dress all of the time. Priests dress casually, and, while several favour collars some of the time, most are indistinguishable from government officials and traders. The Capuchin missionaries wore, and wear, long grey habits and flowing beards; dress which aligns them firmly with the illustrations inside the churches and differentiates them from secular Europeans.

## Mary, the Saints and the Dead

Mary, as the mother of Jesus, is a benign passer on of messages. She can be accessed through the use of the rosary, and can plead with her son on the behalf of others. Stories about Mary's pregnancy and her influence on the previously infertile Elizabeth are well known by women, who value Mary for her fertility rather than her virginity. Mary is talked about as 'Mother' rather than 'Virgin', which is how she is addressed in Church prayer. Mary has more of a presence on earth than does Jesus. This is a consequence of devotional literature and well known stories of a visitation at Bukoba. Mary is said by some of the

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<sup>21</sup> cf Gray (1990: 103).

<sup>22</sup> **Mganga** can mean medicine person, diviner, medium, doctor. The exact meaning depends on context. In this thesis it refers to specialists in 'traditional' medicine, who are not wambui.

older people to have been seen near Mahenge itself at some time in the 1930's. A promise made by the child who had seen her was broken. She never returned and the child was punished with death. Mary is mentioned frequently in conversation: "I was helped a lot by Mary", people who have recovered from sickness say. Mary is also prayed to for material goods and for help with food or money. Saints too are asked for this kind of assistance. The expression used for this kind of contact with the divines is **kuomba**, which can be translated as 'to pray for (something<sup>23</sup>)', but in normal usage it means to beg or to request. Praying, which really refers to the recitation of Christian prayers, is '**kusali**'. Both these words are, because they are in the language of the Church, Kiswahili. If one wears rosary beads and prays with them occasionally, Mary will help and watch over one. Like Mary, the rosary 'has strength'.

Of the saints, **watakatifu**, (holy people), perhaps five are well known. They are thought to be just dead people who were especially good. Because of this, they went straight to God, Jesus and Mary. If a person or a family pays attention to a specific saint, these saints may be invited to participate in the **tambiko** offerings of food and beer for the related dead of a family. These dead are thought to be the same as the **malaika**, which is translated by the Church as 'angels' although people understand it as referring to spirits in general, especially the spirits of the dead, the **mahoka**. In some contexts people make a distinction between the two, using **mahoka** to refer to significant dead, and **malaika** to encompass other dead, who are not thought able to affect one, such as the spirits of dead children.

The dead live on the earth in a kind of parallel world contiguous to that of the living. Their lifestyle is not elaborately conceptualised, but they are believed to farm and live in houses just as people do. They wander about in the evening and at night when it is cool, and they inhabit the forests. They visit the living in dreams and can be heard talking and laughing by those who walk along forest paths in the evening. People say that the dead are in the forest. At other times they say they the dead are in heaven, '**mbinguni**'. This notion of heaven is a Catholic concept. There is in fact no contradiction, and the dead are not in two places at the same time, because 'heaven' as the place where the dead and God are, is here on earth and everywhere. Talking with an old woman about the location of 'heaven', she said, "Its not above. Its just right here, below".

Others are more specific, avoiding a potential contradiction by dividing up the universe into Christian and non Christian domains, making 'heaven' the place of the Catholic divines to

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<sup>23</sup> as opposed to 'on behalf of'.

which people might ultimately progress after the Day of Judgement: "Heaven is only for Saints. We go to the forest". A woman who considers herself a devout Catholic explained it in terms of 'religion': "In our religion, the spirits are in heaven - These are the spirits of the padres. The ancestor spirits (mahoka) are different. They are not religion, and they are in the forest".

Nobody with whom I spoke believed in hell, *motoni* which means 'in the fire'. Punishment happens here on earth and in this life, not beyond it, and anyway is likely to come from the dead themselves or other spirits who may be angry at having been forgotten, or because the person or his relatives, have, either deliberately or inadvertently, broken a taboo, for example cutting the forest in a sacred place or at its margins. The Devil did not come up in conversation, nor did the idea of him seem to be important to people, in the way that other divines are. People think of him as an example of evil, rather than a real entity: "The Devil (*shetani*) is just an example. He is not here". Similarly, purgatory (*tohorani*) is not real for Pogoro Catholics, although opinions differ as to what and where it actually is. Some say that it refers to the time when the dead are on earth with the living and before all will be taken at Judgement Day. Others think that purgatory is some intermediate place where people who are out of favour with God and Jesus will stay until they can move closer to them. Everything is vague and uncertain. What is certain is that the dead are on earth and they can intervene in the lives of the living. Because they are dead and they are spirits, they are in something of the same dimension as Jesus, Mary and the other spirits. They are in a position to become intermediaries with the divine. They are also able to harm the living if they are angered or if they are not remembered with offerings of food, beer and masses.

Masses for the dead have become increasingly popular since the 1950's. They will be discussed fully in Chapter Eight. It is thought that masses please the dead because they can see that the living have not forgotten them. Masses also help the dead to be received by, that is to become closer to Jesus, Mary and God, and once they become sufficiently close, it is thought that they can then intercede with them on behalf of the living. If the dead are satisfied, they will not harm their kin and may even help them, appearing in dreams with good advice and bringing good fortune. The logic behind the perpetuation of masses for the dead is that in the first instance one helps the dead, and later on the dead are in a position to help the living. The need to maintain a continual relationship with the dead brings together Christian practice and that which is thought of as 'traditional', although in discrete elements separated either in time or space.



## **Five: KINSHIP AND THE CREATION OF RELATIONSHIP**

In the first three chapters, we have seen how Pogoro Catholics perceive Christianity and how they construct their definition of themselves as Christian. For them, being Christian is something associated with agencies of the outside, with things which are not essentially Pogoro in origin and do not have the same kind of legitimacy as those which they define as jadi, and which are thought of as 'traditional'. Like other rural communities in Africa, they strive to retain a sense of autonomy and identity by selectively ignoring institutions of the state and the outside. They explicitly recognise the existence of two parallel systems which people negotiate between, for example the 'law of the government' as opposed to the 'law of the village', the 'things of the Church' as opposed to the 'things of our place' and so on. People, in moving pragmatically between the two systems, accord one the greater local validity.

In this chapter, I move away from Pogoro perceptions of the other system, to Pogoro perceptions of, and strategies for managing their own. I begin with a consideration of kinship and introduce the notion of descent, which will be elaborated further in the chapters that follow. Kinship is about relationships among the living, while descent really concerns the living and their relationship to the dead.

### **The Negotiability of Kinship**

Most of the Pogoro people in the area which I am describing are related to each other, through descent or marriage, usually both. There is no emphasis on descent groups as such. A person has obligations to his or her core relatives; those to whom they are related through their mother and through their father, to their own offspring, to their siblings and the offspring of siblings. Ties to affines are less important, or at least less extensive. On marriage, a woman never becomes one of her husband's people entirely. Her position at his home is frequently precarious and, unless she has adult children, her security there is dependent on his being alive.

Those to whom a person is related (walongu) are now scattered among several villages. Crises such as funerals or events such as marriage bring them together as transient groups, the constitution of which depends very much on the occasion. They also come together for offerings in response to affliction, and for periodic offerings to 'remember' related dead.

Even then, not everybody will go. Mothers, sisters and daughters can stand in for each other as representatives of branches of a family, as can brothers, fathers and sons. Funerals are special, transcending the administrative boundaries of the new villages, as all those living in a neighbourhood are under obligation to attend and be seen to 'cooperate'<sup>1</sup>. Kinship is dramatised at funerals and relationship marked out by such actions as shaving, marking the faces of the relatives of the deceased with flour, the transaction of various token payments and the inheritance of property and names. Participation here, as among the Nyakyusa, 'is taken as evidence of kinship' (Wilson 1957:200) but, because there are no absolute rules determining the categories of kin who participate, and because of the expansive and classificatory nature of kinship (cf Radcliffe Brown 1950:8), Pogoro kinship is essentially pragmatic and open to manipulation. That is, a person can choose to be more 'kin' than not by the extent of his or her participation.

Payments at funerals and those that make up the marriage process are these days in cash, as they have been for much of this century. This makes them highly divisible among those who can present a claim to receive a portion of the payment. The actual sums an individual gets are small, perhaps as little as 50/-<sup>2</sup>. What is important is not so much the actual sum of money a person receives, but the fact that by receiving it a person has a legitimate claim to the relationship which receiving a portion of the payment implies. This aspect of kinship is open to negotiation. Kinship here is seen to be essentially social, rather than given, and this is possible because of the vast array of classificatory kin and the expansive nature of kinship.

## **Marriage Strategies and the Household**

In the ideal, the people who share a dwelling are a man, his wife and young children. Marriage, again in the ideal, is virilocal, a man living near his father, his fathers' brothers and his own brothers. Women should move on marriage, and should marry. What actually happens is somewhat different. Many households are female headed, and at the core of Pogoro practical kinship are groups of brothers and sisters and their children. Increasingly, women are neither marrying nor having permanent relationships with one man<sup>3</sup>. They are

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Seven.

<sup>2</sup> In 1990 this was equivalent to about 30p.

<sup>3</sup> The District Book hints to the instability of marriage as early as 1934, when many marriages collapsed before the completion of the bridewealth and the children remained affiliated to the family of their mother (Morogoro (Eastern Province) Provincial Book Vol

forming their own households, keeping some of their children for themselves and these children are the jural responsibility of a woman's brothers and fathers<sup>4</sup>. Other children may be given over to their fathers if a payment is made.

Separations and widowhood add to the number of female headed households. Young widows often return to their natal homes, taking their younger children with them. They may return to their father's relatives later on, especially if their mother remarries and her new husband does not want to be responsible for her other children. Often, neither the dead husband's family nor the new husband want responsibility for the children and they remain with their mother's relatives, cared for by one of her sisters or her mother.

Young men are reluctant to marry early. As any child can be claimed whether a man is married to the mother or not, a man can have the status of fatherhood without the burden of a wife, and can usually get for free from a sister the kind of domestic services that a wife would be expected to provide. Young men say that they cannot afford the expense of marriage, of keeping a woman clothed and a family fed. They also complain that the bridewealth, in 1991 between 15000/- and 25000/- is too high, and that their relatives cannot amass such sums. In truth, young men have little reason to marry early while they can live off the labour of their mothers and sisters. For young women, marriage is desired, but only if the man has a job and there is the promise of a better life without the drudgery that rural marriage entails. Marrying a farmer is looked down on. Women in general have a low opinion of men, whom they see as squanderers of money and lazy drunkards. Women expect certain things from a cohabiting relationship with a man, just as a man expects reciprocal services from a woman. A woman should cook and prepare food for her husband, should wash his clothes and should sleep with him. He in turn has a duty to provide her with clothing, soap, cosmetics and cash. He should also provide for his children. If a man fails to provide a woman with clothing she has sufficient justification for leaving him and returning home<sup>5</sup>.

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11: Bagomoyo & Ulanga District Books, Microfilm MF17, TNA). What appears different about the contemporary situation is not so much the incidence of female headed households but women's perception of this as a choice or strategy.

<sup>4</sup> For an overview of the situation in East Africa with reference to marriage and childbirth payments see Parkin (1980).

<sup>5</sup> This was sufficient grounds for divorce in the native courts under the British (see District Book, op cit).



Many adult women, often divorcees, are in effect second wives to men who live at their own homes with their **mke wa ndoa** (wife of marriage). Although it continues to exist in various forms, the existence of polygyny is played down by Pogoro who see themselves as Christian because of its association with Islam. Only a minority of men admit to having second wives as opposed to lovers. Those who are openly polygynous have taken another wife because their first wife was infertile and they did not wish to abandon her. In these cases the first wife, if they have married in church, is recognised by the Church as the **mke wa ndoa**, 'the wife of marriage'. She is allowed to receive the sacraments from which the second wife and the husband are excluded. In the eyes of the community, both women are equally wives, although the seniority of the first wife is acknowledged.

First wives have higher status than second wives, and their offspring are ranked senior to the offspring of the second wife irrespective of age. Women, especially those under forty, dislike the idea of being a second wife, seeing second wife status as second best, but all of the older women I knew in polygynous unions seemed content and enjoyed the companionship and support of their co wives. Such arrangements amount to 'formal' polygyny, in which both wives live at the homestead of their husband, usually in separate houses. Practical polygyny is more common, and these days involves a man living with his first and official wife at one homestead, and having a semi-permanent relationship with another woman elsewhere at the same time. This is a private arrangement between the man and the woman. It does not entail the transaction of bridewealth, although if children are born of the union the man pays money to the woman's relatives for rights to the children, should he wish to do so.

These unions are not radically different to 'marriage'. The woman expects in these relationships the same kind of support and commitment that she would get from a husband. This expectation is reciprocal. The difference between formal and informal polygyny is in the relationship between co-wives, which, in the latter case, may be non-existent, and the fact that the man has no sanction on the behaviour of the second wife. These kinds of unions appeal to older women who want a relationship with a man without the burden of a husband. All too often marriage for women simply means having an additional adult to support, whereas for men it is the only way in which they can establish a household of their own. The vast majority of men over 35 have wives. For women, being unmarried is not considered shameful or unusual. What is shameful for women is to be 'rotten', childless and barren. Illegitimate babies are greeted with enthusiasm by single mothers, especially if the child is a boy. Many such children are named **Bahati Njiani** - 'luck on the path'. The Church refers to them, disapprovingly, as '**watoto wa barabarani**' (children of the highway).

Boys do not go away on marriage and are thought more likely to support one in old age, although in reality many single daughters with children look after elderly parents at home while the boys seek their fortunes elsewhere.

Younger women take short term lovers, often with no expectation of marriage as these men have wives of their own. They can expect a limited support from them, usually in cash. Some girls, in the absence of other opportunities to earn money, rely on these relationships as a way of getting clothing and soap. This adds considerably to the number of single mothers, many of whom are teenage. Children often start primary school several years late, when they are ten or eleven. Consequently, a proportion of girls have reached puberty long before they have reached standard seven and by getting pregnant fail to complete primary school. First pregnancies at fourteen and fifteen are common. So too are teenage deaths from illegal abortions and accidental overdoses of chloroquine.<sup>6</sup>

## The Marriage Process

In Kipogoro, there are no words referring specifically to 'husband' or 'wife'. There are only mdala, woman, and mpalu, man, which are used with a personal possessive pronoun to indicate a conjugal relationship. Kiswahili has a more specific vocabulary, with terms for man, woman, husband, wife, lover and the term **bwana** which can mean boss, master or simply man, and which women use to refer to the man with whom they are currently involved, as either lover or husband. Kiswahili also has a word referring specifically to marriage, **ndoa**, and **harusi**, from the Arabic, for wedding. These terms are used by the Church, which privileges the wedding as a significant event which transforms the status of the man and woman who undergo the ceremony into husband and wife. For Pogoro Christians, **harusi** refers only to the wedding ceremony, and in particular to the events of the Church wedding, while **ndoa** refers to 'official' marriage as a written contract between individuals recognised by the Church or the state. Marriage is not conceptualised as a single event, but as a process talked about in corporate terms of 'taking' the woman, and, unlike Church or state marriage, which it precedes, it explicitly involves the creation and recognition of a relationship between groups of people who are related to the bride and groom.

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<sup>6</sup> Most rural women are aware that chloroquine, an anti-malaria drug, if taken in sufficient quantity can induce abortion. It can be bought over the counter and obtained for free at government dispensaries.

Marriages still tend to be local. Men prefer to marry girls from villages within a day's walk from their own. Although marriages are no longer arranged, the approval of kin, and parents in particular, is necessary because of matters connected with bridewealth. Despite the 1971 Marriage Act, which made the payment of bridewealth optional and parental consent unnecessary (Westerlund 1980: 162; Coulson 1982: 205), 'customary law' takes precedence in rural areas where many people are unaware of their rights as defined by the state legal system.

Marriage between people who are related, for example as descendants of a common grandparent, seems to be a fairly frequent occurrence. This is perhaps not surprising given that local marriages are the norm, and that the majority of people in a locality can usually trace some sort of kinship connection between them but may choose not to emphasise this now that marriage between close relatives is no longer acceptable. In the past, marriage with a cross cousin, either the child of a mother's brother (**mjomba**) or father's sister, (**shangazi**), real or classificatory, was preferred because 'it stopped the children going away'. Cross cousins are **watani** or **binamu**, and have, as the term **mtani**<sup>7</sup> suggests, a joking relationship<sup>8</sup>.

As Pogoro kinship is classificatory (cf Radcliffe Brown 1950:8), siblings of the same sex are equivalents. Marriage between parallel cousins is prohibited because they, as children of one's classificatory mothers and fathers, are one's brothers and sisters. The kinship terminology itself sets this up. The mother's younger sister is, for example, the 'little mother', the father's elder brother, 'big father', and so on. The closer the relationship of the siblings to the parents of the child, the more equivalent they are seen to be. Siblings born of the same father and mother are thought to be especially close, and the 'one father, one mother' nature of their relationship is emphasised. Those related only through the same father are thought of as being somewhat less so, although this is played down in formal contexts such as the handing over or receiving of bridewealth, or on other occasions when brothers want to present to the outside a united front. Offspring of the same father have a different kind of 'closeness' than offspring of the same mother, who are 'naturally' close, having been 'born from the same belly' or 'suckled at the same breast'. We shall look further at fatherhood and motherhood below.

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<sup>7</sup> From **-tania**, to tease, joke with, in both languages.

<sup>8</sup> Grandparents and grandchildren also have a joking relationship, and can call each other **ganja** (friend).

It is now no longer acceptable to marry a close cross cousin. People say that this is because of the teachings of the Church, which they explain in convoluted fashion: "If the mother's brother was a woman he would be the mother's sister, and the child would be your brother so it is only because he is a man that we could marry his children. We did not realise that he was the same as a sister, and that the **binamu** is a brother or sister".

## **Betrothal and Bridewealth**

If a man wishes to propose to a woman, he gives her a gift called shibani<sup>9</sup>, a **kanga** or **kitenge**, soap or some money. By accepting this gift the woman consents to become his lover, but her consent alone is insufficient to become his wife. The man's male relatives, on both sides, have to secure the consent of the girls' male relatives. If the couple are thought suitable by both families, negotiations begin.

Bridewealth, maheto<sup>10</sup>, is today all in cash<sup>11</sup>. It is in fact a series of payments paid over in instalments which continue to bear reference to either the objects or the labour which were previously exchanged. This determines in part its division. Thus matemeko<sup>12</sup>, the portion of the bridewealth payment representing the brideservice component goes to the person or people who stand in the relation of parents to the bride and at whose household she was living prior to being taken by the husband. Brideservice was part of marriage exchange until perhaps thirty years ago when the groom was expected to assist the bride's parents with agricultural work. As many marriages were with people living in the same immediate locality, this did not necessarily involve the groom's going to live with his wife's people. In some instances, grooms did move to complete brideservice, and it appears not to have been uncommon for them to remain at their wife's place if there were practical advantages in their doing so.

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<sup>9</sup> From the verb to agree, hence the literal translation of shibani would be 'the (thing) of the agreeing.

<sup>10</sup> The Kiswahili **posa** and **mahari** are also commonly used.

<sup>11</sup> According to informants, up until the 1920's bridewealth items consisted of hoes (mahuka) and one or two goats.

<sup>12</sup> From -temeka, to do brideservice, to clear grasses.

Bridewealth is paid over in stages. The first payment, barua<sup>13</sup>, is between one and three thousand shillings, and is in effect, a downpayment on the bride which is made after the parties have agreed on what the total amount of maheto should be. If the relationship between the parties is good, the girl's parents might agree to her being 'taken' by the groom once the barua is paid over. A trial period for a young couple is thought prudent as, in the event of a separation, returning only barua is less of a problem than returning the full amount handed over as maheto, which may have taken several years to accumulate. The fact that bridewealth is in cash means that it is almost endlessly divisible amongst the numerous categories of kin who have a claim to a portion of it, making returning it a fraught and drawn out process (cf Parkin 1980:207). Although as a lump sum maheto may be 20000/-, many of those who have a claim will receive as little as 200/-, which could be further reduced if they are under an obligation to divide their portion further.

Maheto is calculated and divided on the basis of its component parts, barua between the bride's fathers, her mother and mother's brothers. Of the remainder, the bridewealth proper, the bulk goes to the bride's father who may then, if he so chooses or is indebted, further divide it among his brothers and sons. 500/- or so is set aside for the shangazi (FZ) of the bride, representing the chickens to which she was previously entitled. The bride's mother receives a small payment called shibebeo, after the carrying cloth in which infants are carried. This is in recognition of the care she gave to her daughter when she was a baby, for 'did she not carry her on her back?'

The brideservice component, matemeko, is usually now a couple of thousand shillings. This goes to the parents of the bride as those who would have benefitted from the groom's labour in the past. A portion of the bridewealth is set aside for the mjomba (MB) of the bride. This payment, called shilemba ('headcloth' or 'turban'), stands for the cloth which the person standing is the category of mjomba would have previously received. It is between two and four thousand shillings. Some families still ask for cloth, usually a blanket as shilemba. As with all the payments, they may be further divided between those who have a claim to them, shilemba among the mother's brothers and so on. These actual sub divisions are negotiable. Some people take it in turn to receive payments, rather than divide them every time. If a girl has no father<sup>14</sup>, or if she has been living at her mother's

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<sup>13</sup> From the Kiswahili for letter, chit, document. What it conveys in this context is a contract between the wifegivers and the wifetakers to the effect that the outstanding sum will be paid over later and that in the meantime the woman will not be 'taken' by anybody else.

<sup>14</sup> Real or classificatory.

brother's place, it is he who is entitled to the bulk of the bridewealth payment. In any event, the consent of the mother's brother is needed prior to the marriage. It is said that in the past the mother's brother had the right to sell at least one of his sister's children into slavery.

Barua is handed over formally in the same way as the maheto proper is given, often several years later. If the bride has been taken by the groom after the barua, the outstanding amount is paid over gradually in informal instalments. Some families prefer, if they can afford it, to have a 'proper' wedding. This entails the formal completion of the bridewealth, a church wedding and the moving of the bride to the groom's place after the church ceremony. For others, a church wedding, if it happens at all, happens several years after the couple's practical marriage and may well be in response to a desire to have the children baptised or to release the bride's parents from their prohibition on receiving the sacraments which was imposed for 'eating' the bridewealth prior to the couple's marriage in church.

## Church Marriage

The Church has long attempted to enforce Christian marriage on its congregation, with only a limited degree of success. In 1988, 26 church weddings were held in Kwirowi parish. Between 1975 and 1985 on average only thirteen were held annually, a significant decline since the 1950's when it was not uncommon to have in excess of one hundred weddings<sup>15</sup>. Like other Church events, such as baptism and confirmation, church weddings are an opportunity for public display and ostentation, favoured by the small number of wealthy people who are well connected with the mission. Those most likely to have church weddings are employees of the church and their relatives, the very same people who benefit from the redefinition of kinship implied by the Christian family as a retreat into household with its concomitant narrowing of kinship obligations. As elsewhere in Tanzania, Christian marriage has become a matter for the elite (Hastings 1979:243).

At the height of the Capuchin mission, not only did the Church arrange marriages, it gave Christians incentives to marry in church. Older people recall being given clothing for a church wedding, in the early years a **kanzu** for the man and a **kitenge** for the woman, and later, as conventions of dress changed, the **kanzu** becoming associated with Islam, grooms were given suits and the women dresses. Until the Marriage Act of 1971, bridewealth had

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<sup>15</sup> See appendix.

to be agreed prior to a church or state wedding, and the church issued certificates<sup>16</sup> which were called **mapatano** to this effect. These were signed by both parties to the marriage exchange. This practice may have contributed to people's placing of church marriage as the final sequence in the marriage process, a position which the Church is attempting to challenge by, for example, imposing prohibitions on parents who receive bridewealth for their daughter and let her go prior to a church wedding. With the legal abolition of bridewealth, the **mapatano** are no longer necessary. The Church is then no longer involved in marriage agreements, except at the level of the ceremony itself.

People are still entreated to marry in church as the way of achieving the 'Christian family'. There are now few material incentives to so do. This may have contributed to the sharp decline in Christian marriage which began in the 1970's, and which coincides so neatly with the loss of Capuchin control. As part of the post Vatican Two changes, those who are about to marry have to attend a **semina** (seminar) given by a priest, together with their **wasimamizi** before the wedding, aimed at instructing people in matters pertaining to the Christian family. Issues such as 'natural family planning' and faithfulness are discussed. The seminars are necessary, a parish priest told me, "because our people are ignorant. They do not know how to live". Priests still provide clothing for those about to marry in church. Nowadays, it is sold, rather than given.

## **The Constitution of Practical Marriage**

What actually constitutes practical marriage is the payment of bridewealth and the 'taking' of the bride, irrespective of whether the bridewealth is completed or whether the couple marry in church. Taking the bride constitutes marriage. 'Kamtola', 'he took her', means the person is married and there is no other way of expressing it in Pogoro, which has no verb 'to marry', only kumyuga - 'to betrothe', kumheta - 'to bridewealth' and kutola, 'to take'. If a couple live together with a quantity of the bridewealth outstanding when the woman dies, the remainder has to be paid over before the woman can be buried at her husband's place. The handing over of bridewealth, or at least a portion of it, is the most important event of the marriage process as it is this which makes practical marriage possible.

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<sup>16</sup> These were called **mapatano**, from **-patana**, to get on with (a person), to agree with a person about something.

The ceremony at which this takes place is called kuposa or kuheta, which I translate as 'bridewealth'. It is a public event involving representatives of the two sides in the exchange, and the bride herself. It does not involve the groom. Kuheta is not a wedding. It is the public declaration of an agreement between two families and the girl herself, which takes place at the house of the bride's father or mother's brother if she has no father.

Up to the 1960's girls were secluded inside the house for several years between the onset of puberty and their being taken in marriage. Girls now remain inside for about one week, and may be put inside again for a day or so in order to finish the ceremonies associated with their 'coming out'. These are described in the following chapter. Between puberty and the birth of her first child a young woman is a mwali, and while secluded she is a mwali kam numba, a 'girl of the inside of the house'. Mwali refers to any young woman, but in the context of marriage and puberty ceremonies it has the connotations of 'bride'. The Church does not use mwali to mean 'bride', using instead the Swahili **Binti Harusi**, from the Arabic 'daughter of the wedding'.

The bridewealth ceremony recalls the seclusion of the mwali inside the house and the connection in the past with her marriage and her coming out. In effect, what the ceremony does is to put the girl back inside the house and to collapse the time period between the betrothal and her coming out in order to maintain the association. For the day of the ceremony, the girl is hidden away inside the house, from where she will emerge, as a mwali, completely covered in cloths and with only her hands and lower limbs visible.

The people of the bride's side gather at the house early in order to prepare for the reception of the guests. Depending on the wealth of the bride's family, they are fed, presented with beer or with baskets of flour and with chickens. The categories of people likely to be present are the girl's mother and her mother's sisters and brothers, her father and father's brothers, grandparents and brothers and sisters. Some of these people stand in a classificatory relationship to the girl. If the groom's family is from far away only a few of his relatives come. If, on the other hand, they come from the same immediate area a larger group of people attend, although most of these people are, as are most of the girls' relatives, observers and do not become directly involved in the formal presentation.

The ceremony primarily concerns the senior core male relatives of the bride and the groom, the fathers and mothers' brothers of each. The girl herself hides inside the house while representatives of the two sides take up positions in relation to it. Houses are surrounded by a cleared area, luaga, an unenclosed yard, on which most everyday social activity occurs.



The front door of a house opens onto it. The representatives of the bride's side sit at the far edge of the luaga, directly opposite the front entrance to the house, but leaving the yard itself clear. The wifetakers sit to the side of the house, at the opposite edge of the yard, facing the wifegivers across the yard itself which, clear of people, separates them. This confrontational position characterises all marriage transactions. Women from both groups sit around the sides of the house, wherever there is space. Unlike the men, they do not align themselves with separate groups. The mother of the girl can sit together with the men from the wife giving side, but it is they who will do the negotiating.

Each group of men has a representative, often a father or mjomba of the bride or the groom. What matters more than his kinship connection to the bride or groom is his ability to make speeches and not to be talked down or forced to compromise on what the two sides have already agreed. After formal welcoming speeches, the bride's side ask the groom's side what they have come for and say that they hope that it is as was agreed. The groom's side respond in the same formal, drawn out manner. Anticipation mounts among the observers. The event is a standardised performance and it is known that the groom's side will attempt to underpay. One of the younger men of the groom's side is handed a wad of notes, wrapped in a handkerchief or cloth, by one of his elders. He youth then walks across the yard, presents it to the spokesman of the wifegiving group, and returns to his seat.

The spokesman takes the bundle, and begins to count it aloud, waving each note flamboyantly. The audience counts with him, silently mouthing the denomination of each note displayed. Those present know already the amount which was agreed upon when the barua was transacted, and they are curious to see whether the groom's side has amassed sufficient cash. Inevitably, when the total is finally announced, it is several thousand shillings short. Feigning disappointment, the spokesman for the wifegivers refers back to the agreement the two parties made: "Did we not agree the amount would be such and such, and you have brought only this amount. You know we cannot let our daughter go until you bring the remainder, but it has taken you one year since we last met to discuss this and it looks as if you will be another year in finishing it. If you will not be able to keep the agreement we had better forget the whole thing. Our daughter wants to get married. We all know that daughters now do not wait. Hurry up."

A representative of the wifetaking group responds, asking for time. His group talk amongst themselves. Some more notes are produced, and handed to the go-between who crosses the yard to give them to the counter who counts again. Again the money is short, a thousand

shillings outstanding. The spokesman for the wifegivers makes another speech. He regrets that the groom's family appear so reluctant to take the girl and are being so slow about it. She might not be here next year, he cautions. The wifetakers ask for more time. More notes are collected, and other people, including the women, from the groom's side reach into their clothing and hand over any small notes which they have with them. This is taken across the yard and counted. It is still short, but now only by a few hundred shillings. The bride's side talk amongst themselves, quietly. They decide to accept the money, but ask that the outstanding sum be paid soon. The man who will receive the money on behalf of the bride's side takes the cash ties it back into the cloth to form a neat bundle which he puts on the ground in front of him at his feet.

Everybody resumes their positions around the house and the yard. The bride remains inside the house. At this point an older female relative goes inside to bring her outside. Some women insisted that a shangazi (FZ) of the girl was the proper person to do this, but on the occasions I attended, it was the mother's older sister. What is important is that it is a female relative of the girl's parents' generation.

The girl has meanwhile resumed the identity of a mwali kam numba. She is, for the purpose of the ceremony, in a state of seclusion. A mwali should not go outside while in seclusion, and if she does she must be covered completely with cloths. She has to be lead out of the house by another woman for two reasons. The first is practical. With her head and face covered in a cloth, and her head down in the submissive posture of the mwali, she would not be able to see well enough to emerge alone. The second reason is the more important, and refers back to the events at the mwali's washing ritual which precedes her eventual 'coming out'. In this, the mwali is carried from the house on the back of an older woman. Carrying children is what mothers do, and by carrying the mwali the point is being made that she is the child and dependent of the senior generation<sup>17</sup>. This is explicit too in the 'bridewealth' ceremony where she is 'carried' out of the house by the father's sister or a 'mother' because they are negotiating the loss of their child to another group.

The two women emerge from the house, the shangazi in front with the mwali immediately behind, her hands clasped tightly around the other's waist. They are both kneeling, and must 'walk on their knees' throughout. The mwali's head and face are covered, her whole upper body is submerged in cloth. When they appear at the doorway the assembled women remove their top garments, worn wrapped around the head and shoulders like a shawl.

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<sup>17</sup> See Chapter Six.

These are strewn on the ground, creating a carpet of cloth across the yard. The brightly coloured cloths form a pathway of women's garments between the two groups of men, just as the bride herself will be the embodiment of the link between them.

The two women make their way clumsily along this pathway. Their progress is slow, because they are joined together and walking kneeling, to the amusement of the spectators. While whoever leads the girl out can make this into a performance, the mwali herself remains subdued and meek. She is expected to show soni, 'shame', intensified by her knowledge that the mjomba and father of her future husband are present. A wife is expected to show absolute deference to her husband's mother's brothers, and should avoid them if at all possible.

When the pair arrive at the feet of the men of the bride's side, the mwali is left kneeling in front of them. She is formally told that she has been asked for her on behalf of so and so, who have brought this cloth which is now on the ground in front of her. She is asked whether she consents to be 'taken', and that if she does, she should pick up the cloth with the money in it. There is a moment of anxious silence here, even though everybody knows that for things to have got this far she will have long ago made up her mind. All eyes fixed on the mwali, she bends, picks up the bundle and hands it silently to the spokesman of the wifegiving group. As a mwali kam numba she is not permitted to speak<sup>18</sup>. As she picks up the money the women break into a whoop of ecstatic ululation and get up and dance around the yard. The bride's side briefly draw aside her head covering, to let the groom's side see that she is indeed the same girl they have chosen. The veil replaced, she is led back into the house. Because she is 'in seclusion' only for the ceremony, she can come out when she wants after the groom's side have departed.

To all intents and purposes the couple are now married, whether the bride is formally and ceremonially 'taken' to the groom's place or not. Nowadays what seems to happen is that the formal 'taking' of the bride is enacted after the bride has already been living at the husband's place for some time. This is likely to occur as part of the events surrounding a church wedding. If the relationship between the families is good, the girl may go and live with her husband after the payment of barua, on the understanding that the outstanding debt is paid.

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<sup>18</sup> This various proscriptions on the mwali will be explained fully in the chapters that follow, as will the significance of silence and speech.

## **Church Weddings**

Church weddings are held on Saturdays, usually in the morning, and attract a large number of spectators. Wealthy people who have big celebrations try to limit the numbers of guests at a reception by issuing invitations only to those who have made a contribution in cash to the expense of the feast. This practice is much resented by the majority. A compromise is reached which entails a two tier celebration. A select group of 'big people' are invited to a reception, where bottled beer and prestigious 'soda' are served, perhaps to the accompaniment of taped music, while unofficial guests gather outside, where they are provided with local beer, food and dancing. The first day of celebrations are held at the place of the bride, either on the evening before the wedding or on the evening of the wedding itself. These continue at the place of the groom the following day, after the bride has been 'taken' there, escorted by a group of her female kin, singing and dancing.

## **Moving the Bride**

A new bride is given household goods and food by her relatives from both her father's and mother's sides with which to set up house. These goods accompany the bride to her new home and, as trousseau (cf Bloch 1978:26), remain her property, which she is entitled to reclaim in the event of a separation. These items are a bed, some buckets and basins, pots and mats, and cloth. The prohibitive cost of manufactured goods means that while both rich and poor families aspire to provide the same goods as trousseaux, these tend to differ qualitatively, poor families providing locally produced items and richer ones providing the more expensive, and prestigious, manufactured goods. The cost of providing a trousseau, combined with the expense of the wedding celebration, means that many parents regard marrying off daughters 'properly' as a cost, irrespective of the amount of bridewealth received, because the amount expended in the trousseau and the feast will probably exceed it. Understandably, many delay this and others, by avoiding the church marriage with which it has become associated, attempt to escape it altogether.

'Taking' the bride, and thus formally completing the marriage transaction, provides a final opportunity for the wifegivers to demand further payment for the bride. This payment is justified as compensation for the loss of the bride's labour and the bride herself from the parental household, but the desire to redress a felt imbalance in marriage payments is a factor which encourages people to demand quite unreasonable amounts for moving the bride. As the group escorting the bride approach the groom's homestead, they stop every

few yards, exclaiming that the bride has become 'stuck' (*kalemera*). They cannot move her unless they are given money. Initially small sums are demanded, 50/- to 100/- or so, and the girl is moved a few yards nearer. As they approach the house she becomes more difficult to move. The sums demanded for easing her path become progressively larger. The largest sum of all is demanded for bringing her across the threshold of the house itself and to the hearth or the bed. In 1991, these payments were in the region of between two and five thousand shillings, that is between ten and twentyfive percent of the total bridewealth already paid. It is said that if the groom's side do not pay up, the bride's side can, if they wish return, home with her until the money is forthcoming.

Although a married woman is usually buried at her husband's place, she never loses her connection with her natal family, to which she may well return in the event of his death or a separation. And, while the bridewealth payment recognises the bride's mother, compensates her parents for the loss of her labour and for her removal, and gives her husband legal rights to her offspring, these are by no means absolute. The consent of the woman's brothers is needed prior to their marriage, and a child may choose where to make his or her home, settling more or less permanently at the place of relatives from either side. As among the Lozi, an individual's choice of residence ultimately depends not on some fixed principle of kinship, but on the quality of the relationship between all the parties concerned (cf Gluckman 1950: 171).

## **Separation and Divorce**

Divorce is relatively easy. Practical divorce entails the reversal of practical marriage, the woman returning to her place and to her natal kin. If the children remain with their father they continue to have a relationship with their mother, and no father would attempt to prevent this. The separation of the parents does not alter the relationship between parents and children. Nor does it terminate obligations between spouses. Even those who have divorced officially shave at each other's funerals.

Official divorce, (*talaka*), is spoken of in terms of its being 'given' to the woman by the man, and is an artefact of the state's recognition of 'customary law', in this context derived from Islamic practice. People who separate say simply, 'We left each other', a more accurate reflection of the situation in which it is often women who take the initiative in leaving. Most separations are unofficial in that they do not involve the Church or the state. People who have married in church may divorce, but are only likely to seek an official

divorce in order to remarry in church, which the existence of unofficial marriage makes largely unnecessary<sup>19</sup>.

In the case of a separation where bridewealth has been completed and the woman has borne children, the husband has legal rights to the children, who may or may not remain living with him. If the bridewealth has been completed and no children born, it should be returned, as should all of the barua if only that was paid over. In such cases, the wifetakers demand their money back with some urgency because they want to put it down to secure another bride. These negotiations can become complicated, resulting inevitably in protracted haggling because of the sheer difficulty of reassembling the divided bridewealth. If a wife has proved completely unsatisfactory and has failed to contribute in any way to her new family, they may seek additional compensation for her support.

## **Kinship and Descent**

Pogoro people themselves are divided over the nature of kinship and descent, which older people debate continually. It is a debate framed with reference to a past when things were done properly and there was no confusion. Many maintain that then, descent was matrilineal with the mjomba (MB) having rights and authority over his sister's children which surpassed those of their father. The mother's brother could, I was told, sell at least one of his sister's children into slavery, and paid out and received bridewealth for them. "We were", they say, "like the Luguru and we congratulate them on sticking to their customs"<sup>20</sup>.

Today, the formal ideology of descent and inheritance stresses the patrilineal line. To what extent the matrilineal principle dominated in the past when, as some older people insist, names and property passed from mother's brother to sister's son (mpwa), in the absence of any brothers of the dead man still living, is impossible to say, and may reveal little about Pogoro kinship. According to informants in their sixties and above, a man could choose his heirs either from among his own sons or from those of his sisters. The actual situation

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<sup>19</sup> In fact I heard of no instances where a Christian had divorced and remarried in church.

<sup>20</sup> The Luguru are a well known matrilineal group in the region. See Beidelman (1967). For an interesting discussion on Luguru inheritance see Brain (1973:128).

certainly seems to have been unclear to the British colonial administration which made patrilineal inheritance legally binding in January 1935<sup>21</sup>.

Colonial officials, like their anthropologist contemporaries, saw kinship and descent as real systems providing the actual basis for the organisation of society rather than a way of describing it. African societies were presented in the literature as having a rigid organisational infrastructure premised on the unilineal 'descent group' or the 'lineage' as a corporate property holding body. For writers such as Radcliffe Brown (1950), Fortes (1953) and Evans-Pritchard (1940: 1950) it is this which constitutes African kinship. This view privileged a particular construction of the notion of 'property' as rights in objects, livestock or people which could be exchanged for each other (cf Goody 1962:285-7), and it was these transactions which were seen to constitute the basis of relations between groups and of kinship. This model ignores other aspects of descent and the importance of names, statuses, offices and ritual prohibitions, which are only partially constituted as 'property' in that they can be passed on, but are neither alienable<sup>22</sup> nor transactable. In such contexts, rather, the reverse is the case: the person or incumbent can be alienated from the office or status, rather than the office from the incumbent.

In Africa, unilineal descent systems are likely to be associated with societies like that of the Tallensi in which the social construction of property as a relation between certain kinds of people and certain kinds of things, which can stand for people, finds its expression in the ideology of the unilineal descent group as a corporate property holding body (Worsley 1956:69<sup>23</sup>). This kind of system is perhaps less typical of kinship in Africa than these early writers imply. Among the patrilineal Nyakyusa, for example, where ties through women are recognised and where in daily life, 'groups of cognates with a patrilineal bias ...cooperate', the main significance of the patrilineal 'lineage' (for which there is no equivalent local term) is in the contexts of inheritance and bridewealth which involve cattle and rights in them (Wilson 1950:117).

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<sup>21</sup> The General Rule set on 1st January 1935 states that the primary heir who is responsible for the distribution of a man's property and wives 'shall be a man's brother NOT his son or mpwa, and if no brother it shall be his son and not mpwa' ( see Mahenge District Record Book, in Morogoro (Eastern Province) Provincial Book, Vol ii, Bagomoyo & Ulanga District Books, microfilm MF 17,TNA.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of 'alienability' see Strathern, M (1985).

<sup>23</sup> See also Richards (1950).

For peoples like the Pogoro, without cattle and with a flexible system of land tenure premised on usufruct rights, descent has little practical relevance for social organisation. Attitudes towards property or the social construction of property relations have implications for the extent to which any one ideology of descent is realised in social practice (cf Bloch 1975). Among the Pogoro, the houses of the dead were destroyed after a funeral, as the less permanent houses still are. It was only with the introduction of new forms of wealth during the colonial period and the successive resettlement policies which had implications for the availability of land in certain areas that unilineal descent in the context of inheritance became an issue, later enshrined in law.

What is striking about the Pogoro situation today is the negotiability and the essential pragmatism of kinship. Among the Pogoro, as among the Lozi (Gluckman 1950:171), what is important is the existence of rights and obligations on both sides, that of the mother and that of the father.

The ambiguity of descent is perpetuated by the present situation in which many women do not marry and continue to live with or near to their brothers. If they have children who are not claimed by their fathers, these children are affiliated to the group of their mother's father<sup>24</sup>. Some women are happy with this situation, preferring to keep their own children as the nucleus of their own household, and in some cases refusing to disclose to the child the father's identity because they do not want the child to 'go away'. The mother's brothers of these children then take on the formal role of father on formal occasions, thus giving the impression that it is indeed the mother's brother who, in certain formal contexts, has a considerable degree of influence over the offspring of his sister. These days a person with 'no father' is likely to get the few possessions of his or her mother when she dies, and will not get anything at all from her brother who will probably pass on the little he has to his own children or to his brothers.

What property people have now passes from parent to child, rather than in the past from older brother to younger brother. If a married man dies leaving a permanent house behind him, his widow's right to remain there must be negotiated with his brothers and his children, unless he has made it known that he wants her to remain. The inheritance of names is more pragmatic, and depends on who of the same sex as the deceased is considered to be an appropriate recipient. A man related to the dead either through his father or his mother, or even through his father's mother could, in the absence of another

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<sup>24</sup> This trend appears to have been long established by the 1930's (see Mahenge District Record Book, in Morogoro (Eastern Province) Provincial Book Vol ii, Bagomoyo & Ulanga District Books, Microfilm MF: 17, TNA).



appropriate recipient, be given his name. The position of the diviners of the shrines of the spirits associated with territory, the wambui, passes in practice to those related to the previous incumbent through the father or the mother, although after the event succession is likely to be talked about in the idiom of patrilineality as if 'so and so begat so and so', distorting the actual relationship between the persons involved. These diviners have the longest genealogies, though sparse, going back between five and seven generations whereas other older people usually only trace descent back only to their own grandparents. This no doubt reflects the comparatively recent settlement of the area<sup>25</sup>. People accept that they have a relationship and if appropriate will work to maintain it, even if they have no clear idea of how the original relationship came about. Often, when I asked how a person was related to another, I got the following reply, "If your father tells you this person is your brother you don't ask why".

### **Creating Paternity**

The Pogoro place great emphasis on the relation of an individual to people on the side of the mother, washimau, and those on the side of the father, washitati. As among the Lozi, every child has latent rights of residence and inheritance with the kin of his or her father and mother. The 'difference...in a child's relations with its father's and mother's kin is one of emphasis' (Gluckman 1950; 171). In some ways the father and the mother's brother are equivalents, as the male representatives of the two sides to whom an individual is related. As such they can stand in for each other. This is dramatised in the etiquette of respect and in funeral and marriage payments which are paid over to either the father or mjomba depending on whether the person in whose respect the payments are made was living at the place of the father or mother's brother. What is important, however, is that the medicine which ensures the strength of children and the fertility of women, shirala, should come from the side of the father, actual or social, of the individual in question, in a sense proclaiming that social continuity is made possible because of patrilineal ties and the existence of a socially recognised paternity.

Both sets of a person's relatives, those from the mother's side and the father's side, are walongu, and in everyday contexts are equally important. Yet, as I indicated above, these relationships are thought of as being qualitatively different. This difference stems from the fact that paternity, as a social relationship is to an extent negotiable, unlike maternity which

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<sup>25</sup> See Chapter Two.

is conceptualised as given, at least in its residuality<sup>26</sup>. A person's relatives on the mother's side are thought to be especially close and are somehow mystically linked in a way that makes them particularly susceptible to each other. Sickness afflicting one may affect them all, if caused as the result of some transgression by another member. This is said to apply especially to the breaking of prohibitions surrounding various sacred places, pathways, rivers and streams. Certain hostile spirits, shamshupira, are passed down through the matrilineal line and prey on those matrilineally related. Significantly, these spirits, having only one of everything, one ear, one eye, one leg, and so on, are incomplete. Apparently, in the past, ordeal medicine had to be taken not only by the man accused of witchcraft, but by his sisters sons. Older people said that those related through the mother's side are more than walongu, they are walukolu, 'people of the family', adding that "the man has no root of the family". In contrast, younger people made no distinction, using walukolu to refer to those whom they considered close relatives, either from the side of the mother or the side of the father.

A person is expected to show respect to the brothers of their mother. Until perhaps thirty years ago, this entailed kneeling before them, sitting lower than them and, for women, virtual avoidance. Neither sex could enter into the house of a mother's brother. Older people kneel on greeting, and maintain distance. Younger people have all but abandoned these displays of deference and avoidance between categories of kin, although the principle of seniority is universally respected. This is expressed in what has become the everyday form of greeting between juniors and seniors, shikamoo !, from the Kiswahili which means '(I) clasp (your) feet', with all its connotations of submission. The feet are not actually clasped and people now rarely kneel to greet seniors, but children and young women bob down, bending their knees as they say it. The greeting mwika, is reserved for people, usually men, who have special status and is most commonly used to address the diviners of the spirits associated with territory.

The degree of respect shown to the mjomba (MB) is somewhat greater than that shown towards the father. It is, at any rate, more dramatic and elaborated. People say the mjomba must be respected because "He is the brother of your mother", and "They were suckled at the same breast". This, given the classificatory nature of kinship, is not meant to be taken

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<sup>26</sup> cf Astuti (1991: 220) for the Vevo of Madagascar. Among the Vevo, paternity is an insufficient condition for membership of the tomb group, and the father must make an offering called 'soro' to his wife's elders in order that his child will be a member of his descent (tomb) group.

too literally. Rather, it conveys the essentially 'natural' quality of the relationship through the mother's side.

That relationship is not given but is socially created is especially evident in the case of paternity. The genitor is, as in other African systems, not necessarily the socially recognised father of the child although it is said that it is the man's seed alone which forms the foetus. There is little emphasis on folk biological notions to account for relationship or to justify why, for example, a child is said to be 'the blood' of its father. As we shall see, this is primarily metaphorical. There is in general a lack of concern with the body as something understandable solely in terms of itself. Sickness is seen to be a manifestation of diverse causes external to the physical body of the victim, thus traditional healers never, or almost never, physically examine their patients in order to either diagnose their ailments or give medicine (cf L Swantz 1990:90).

Babies are given a medicine called shirala before they can be taken out of the house inside which they have been secluded with their mothers until the tied end of the umbilical cord drops away. This medicine should be provided by the child's father and is made from the ground roots of a tree, which, in the ideal, come from his ultimate place of origin and have been handed down for generations. If a family has no shirala medicine, it can be bought from a specialist who knows where in the forest to collect it. This medicine is applied to specific places on the child's body<sup>27</sup>. A small quantity is put into the child's mouth. Although each family has slightly different ways of applying the medicine, what is important is that the medicine is rubbed on the child's body and consumed by the child. The medicine is thus incorporated by the child, just as the child itself, through the consumption of the medicine, is incorporated into its father's side.

Without this medicine a child will not be able to 'grow' and will not develop properly. Boys receive this medicine only once in their lifetimes. Girls are given another dose when they reach puberty, as, without it, they will be unable to have children. Should one of their offspring die while they are still living, they are again given the medicine, or their fertility will be impaired for ever<sup>28</sup>. If a child has 'no father', that is nobody claiming the social position of father, the medicine comes from the side of the mother's father. The medicine for babies is ground by both the child's parents, the father and mother from two pieces of root. One of these is big and fat, and is called mdala, 'woman'. The other, small and thin,

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<sup>27</sup> See Chapter Nine..

<sup>28</sup> See Chapters Six & Seven.

is mpalu, 'man'. The symbolism here relates to sexual intercourse, with which grinding and pounding are associated (cf Beidelman 1968:370)<sup>29</sup>.

Each parent grinds his or her own root into a powder which is mixed with water to make a paste which will adhere to the child's body. A man should not see his first child of each sex of a particular union until he, together with the child's mother, has put the medicine on the child's body. He should do this with his eyes closed. 'Seeing' is a way of talking about knowledge, particularly knowledge of the relationships between things, events and people<sup>30</sup>. Seeing the normally unseeable, such as the dead and witches, happens when one is asleep. The ability to see these beings when awake is the prerogative of diviners and other specialists, who consequently have knowledge of causation. Seeing people in certain states can somehow connect them physically with you. Thus, for example, if someone merely sees the person with whom their partner is having an affair, they can succumb to a disease<sup>31</sup>, irrespective of whether or not they are consciously aware of the adultery. This contact is thought of as physical. It unites all three in a relationship of interdependence<sup>32</sup> because all three by sharing substance now share a common vulnerability. 'Seeing' is then potentially a way in which the substance of another can be incorporated into oneself (cf Boddy 1989:103).

Only after the child has been given shirala by the father can the father see his first child of each sex of that particular union, and only after the child has been given the medicine can the child 'come outside' of the house. The connection between paternity, as the child's relationship with the father's side, and the coming out of the house is explicit. Taking shirala to one's child confirms the father's relationship to the child. It assigns the child to the father's family, to his father's and brothers. It ensures that children grow and that girls will be fertile. It creates paternity as a social relationship and contributes to the creation of a fiction that without the tangible contribution of substance from the father's side the child would be weak, and that the fertility of women depends, in part, on socially recognised relationships through men.

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<sup>29</sup> These associations are discussed further in the next chapter.

<sup>30</sup> cf Comaroff (1985:97) for the Tshidi.

<sup>31</sup> This is maleko to which adults of both sexes are vulnerable. Small children are similarly vulnerable to the sexual activities of their parents, and parents of infants should not resume intercourse until the child can sit upright and has been protected with medicine.

<sup>32</sup> cf Richards (1982:34-5) for the Bemba.

It is no accident that the medicine is given to babies when the thing which attached them to their mothers has dropped off, and that only after this has happened can they come outside of the house. 'Coming out' from the inside of houses is particularly associated with excesses of fertility or mortality, with women who have begun their periods or who have given birth, and with corpses which are also kept inside the house for the period between death and burial. It is, as we shall see in the following chapters, a recurrent theme in Pogoro ritual. The child is not a social being until the medicine from the father's side has been given, and this cannot be given until the biological separation from the mother is complete.

The end of the umbilical cord is buried in the earth, planted like a banana sucker in a clump of banana trees by an old woman who is past childbearing. The association between the natural fecundity of plants and people is made explicit in the planting of the umbilical cords of girls at ndala 'female' banana trees, which produce many small fruits and reproduce quickly, while those of boys are buried at banana trees considered 'male', which produce big, heavy fruits with fewer bananas to a head<sup>33</sup>. But this natural fecundity is in itself an insufficient basis for the reproduction of people, and it must be augmented with medicine. Medicines are, for the Pogoro, crucially important substances which effect the transformation of states<sup>34</sup>. Shirala here transforms the baby into a socially recognisable being, as the child of somebody, who can come out of the house and into the wider society. It, like the 'ikipiki' medicine of the Nyakyusa, not only marks the relationship between the child and the father's side, but creates it. One of Wilson's informants put it like this, "They say of the medicine it is our kinship, it is our blood...The medicine is to create relationship" (1957:105).

This attitude towards paternity underlies the fact that religious affiliation today follows that of the father, just as in the past the taboos on the eating of certain animals or parts of animals were inherited in the patrilineal line. Today, these prohibitions are known but are not thought to be important. In any case, the decline in hunting has meant that many of the taboo animals are no longer regularly eaten. It is not uncommon for unmarried Catholic women to say that one or two of their children are actually Muslim, because their fathers are, even though the child has never had any real contact with Islam. This will only happen in instances where the father intends to take the child later on. As religion is so often seen

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<sup>33</sup> The banana symbolism of the Nyakyusa is very similar, with plantains equated with the male and sweet bananas with the female (Wilson 1957:37-38,106).

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter Nine.

in terms of its prohibitions, these Muslim children will often not be allowed to eat pork as this is tangibly Islamic.

Notions about biological paternity and maternity are vague in some contexts, more elaborate in others. Almost everybody agrees that it is the man's seed which forms the foetus. The woman is merely a belly, a vessel. It is said that the foetus is the man's 'blood'<sup>35</sup>, yet without the woman the seed can't take and men cannot reproduce without women. Some young people, in contrast, give a human biology view gleaned from primary school, talking of reproduction in terms of eggs inside the woman like a chicken. Opinions differ about to what extent the woman's blood enters into the substance of the foetus. Some men eventually concede that it must all get mixed together when the child is in the womb, while others deny this, maintaining that the foetus is formed solely from the 'blood' of the man. In some contexts 'blood' is semen<sup>36</sup>. It also refers to family, to those to whom one is related. The current ideology of descent privileges ties through men and patrilineality. Notions about blood and biological kinship run on two apparently contradictory levels. On the one hand are notions about biological blood and the mixing of it. On the other there is blood as a way of talking about relationship, which can be created through exchange but must be augmented with medicine.

Women are thought to be susceptible to a disease called mapinga should they have sex with more than one man in fairly close succession. The symptoms of this disease are described as being like epilepsy (kifafa), which is highly visible in the area (Jilek-Aaal 1979:616). A woman so afflicted has fits and 'falls'. These fits may be triggered by seeing the colour white or the dazzle of the sun reflected on water. Men are not susceptible to mapinga, which is a woman's disease. Although some young women now insist that they do not believe in mapinga, having through practical experimentation disproved its existence, the idea of mapinga is still important. It gives the older generation an edge of control over the behaviour of the young. This is because a sexually active woman who falls sick or who is known to have been sleeping around is encouraged by her relatives to seek medicine to prevent the onset of the disease. Refusal means that should she become sick in the future, it will be put down to some mapinga complication, proving the elders right. Under the British, the symptoms of mapinga were taken as evidence in native courts that a woman was committing adultery, for which her husband could claim compensation<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> mwazi

<sup>36</sup> cf Wilson (1957:104) for the Nyakyusa.

<sup>37</sup> see Mahenge District Record Book, op cit.

Mapinga is caused by the mixing up of the 'blood' of all the men with whom she has been sleeping inside the woman's body. The woman 'falls' when this blood reaches her head, clogging up her eyes. Any child which the woman is carrying has its blood mixed up too and is the product of the seed of many men. Such pregnancies, it is said, never come to term, or if they do the mother never survives the delivery. Mapinga can be treated with medicine. Certain individuals are specialists in the manufacture of just this one type of medicine, which is made, as are all indigenous medicines, from plants<sup>38</sup>. Special leaves are pounded in a mortar. The pounded pulp is thrown away several times, once for each man with whom the woman has slept. The last lot left in the mortar is taken out and squeezed into water to make a draught which the women drinks, after the medicine maker has drunk some. She will now carry the child of only one man.

The ideas underlying mapinga strongly suggest that blood should not be mixed up. It should go only one way, that is from men to women. Thus not only is it considered unclean for a man to sleep with a woman during her period (and what women stress about the instruction of girls during their seclusion on puberty is their duty to avoid men while menstruating), it can make him sick because her blood gets into his body, causing his genitals to swell. These notions suggest a certain 'biological' view of blood and relationship, and are consistent with the statement that the blood comes from the father, this makes the foetus and the woman is nothing but a vessel. However, the implications of these notions are not pushed to the limits of the kind of logic behind them in the justification of categories of marriageable kin. People say that not only did they marry cross cousins in the past, but that this was a preferred union. They insist that a man could marry either his fathers' sisters' daughter or his mothers' brothers' daughter. The marriage of parallel cousins was mwiko (taboo), since these, as children of his mothers' sister or fathers' brother are also brothers and sisters. These notions about blood would imply that the offspring of the mother's sister is of the same degree of unrelatedness as either cross cousin. Notions about blood as constituting kinship suggest that kinship is not solely about blood in any inherent 'biological' sense, even if we take into account notions of folk biology.

These two aspects of 'blood' as common substance and as a symbol of social relations are present in the idea of blood brotherhood, which was, according to the older generation, previously practised. It involved making incisions in the skin so that the blood of the new kinsmen could be mixed in their bodies. When people say "this child is his blood", pointing to a child's father, they also say "this child is his wealth". The two expressions are used

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<sup>38</sup> see Chapter Nine.

interchangeably. They are also used to refer to a pregnancy. The woman 'has' (is with) the foetus (*kana inda*<sup>39</sup>), but the *inda* itself belongs to the man who has a responsibility towards it. Mothers of teenage pregnant daughters try to make their daughters tell them who the father is, "because then if we know, we can go to him and say (pointing to the girl's belly), 'This is your *inda*. Look after it'". 'Looking after it' means also looking after the one who is carrying it, if only for the duration of the pregnancy.

Children are a person's 'wealth'. This is especially emphasised for men, with whom rights in children traditionally lie. Social relations and obligations are still regarded as wealth. People in their twenties and thirties are beginning to regard children as a cost, as rural living standards plummet and the price of education rises, but the pauper remains the person without kin rather than the person without property. In a practical sense children are wealth because they are labour and because they increase a person's network of kin, but children are a man's 'blood' and a man's 'wealth' because the man has given wealth over for the child. This is either as bridewealth (*maheto*) for the child's mother, or as a one off payment to her relatives for rights in the child. It is this payment which makes the child formally the child of that father and his fathers, but the payment is, like conception and birth itself, insufficient to create paternity without the giving of the medicine after the child is born. A man as a person has 'no root of the family', so he has to create it with medicine made from roots<sup>40</sup>.

What constitutes paternity for the Pogoro is the creation of relationship between a child and its father's side. It involves three things, firstly the biological act, second the exchange between the man's side and the woman's side for rights in the child and thirdly, the giving of medicine. The giving of the medicine precedes payments for rights in children when the parents are not husband and wife. These payments are usually not finalised until the child is about seven and considered old enough to go and live with the father. The fact that the child gets medicine from its father's side creates relationship in a practical as well as a symbolic sense, bringing the father's relatives into an orbit of obligation centred on it and which, in the case of the offspring of extramarital unions, may well transcend the limits of the father's primary family.

This is well illustrated by the following incident. One of my close neighbours, a man in his late forties married to a very religious Christian wife, was having a long standing affair with

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<sup>39</sup> *Inda* refers to a child in the womb, at whatever stage of the pregnancy.

<sup>40</sup> Among the Vezo of Madagascar paternity is also conceptualised as a relationship which must be socially created, in contrast to 'natural' maternity (Astuti 1991).



a younger woman in another village. This woman had one small child with him, as well as an older child from a previous union. She was not married, and as far as I am aware, had never been. The affair was the topic of much gossip among the older women in the village where I lived, although the woman was not known well by people in my village. Her lover has seven children with his wife of marriage. The status of the second woman was unclear to the women who talked about it, because they could not decide whether to classify her simply as a 'lover' or as something more serious: an unofficial (and secret) second wife.

Just after the end of Easter in 1990, news came to the villages that the child of this man and his lover had died during the night at the hospital in town. The body was carried back to her village and the burial hastily arranged. Small children are buried on the day of their death if at all possible, but the first child to die of a particular union must be buried on this day<sup>41</sup>. The man had not been at the hospital, but when he got the news he went to the woman's village for the funeral, together with his mother and sister. His own wife was away at the distant funeral of her mother's brother. Luckily for him, she did not return for a month, and was thus saved from having to confront her husband's adulterous relationship which he made public by his actions at the funeral.

The man's mother and sister returned from the house of the funeral in the late afternoon. Funerals for small children and first children to die last only one day. There is no extended mourning. He did not return until the following evening, looking self-conscious, with a shaven head and, by his silence, challenging people to speak. His behaviour at the funeral explicitly stated that he was a close relative of the child, as "We who share the same funeral are the same family". This relationship was acknowledged by his mother and sister who accompanied him, and who had been involved with the child's birth. His staying overnight at the funeral house was interpreted by people, including his mother and sister, as a statement about his relationship not only with the dead child but with the child's mother. It was this aspect of his behaviour which met with disapproval among his wife's friends and led to speculation as to what she would do when she found out. Had she been in the village, they suggested, she would have been forced to challenge her husband because his behaviour had been a public affront to their Christian marriage. When she eventually saw her husband, a few weeks after the child's burial, his hair had grown back sufficiently for his excuse of having had it cut to be plausible. When the child of a particular union dies while its parents are still living and it is the first of their children to die, it is said that not only must the mother be given shirala but that the couple must sleep together that same

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<sup>41</sup> See the following two chapters.

night as if nothing had happened. The man's staying away was said by people to be because he had spent the night with the child's mother, which indicated an intention to perpetuate the relationship. In the eyes of the village then, the woman was not merely a lover but was in fact an unofficial second wife.

## Descent and the Dead

All social relationships are conceptualised in the idiom of kinship. The stranger, mhenga, is the person who has not yet been incorporated into the network of people classified as kin. Kinship is classificatory, often fictional, and expansive. It concerns the living and the realm of everyday interaction. Descent is, on the other hand, non negotiable and concerns the relationship of people to those from whom they are descended and who are now dead. It presents a different vision of society, merging past with future, in which the living look perpetually in front of them to the dead who have gone before, not to their offspring who they will leave behind (cf Leach 1966:46). The elderly, as mediators between generations separated by death (Kopytoff 1971), talk of the time of 'the grandfathers and the grandfathers' at the same time as denying kinship between a person and a great grandchild. "This is not a relative. Just a person", said an old woman, pointing to the great grandchild on her knee. "It is my luck to see him, but the relationship is finished"<sup>42</sup>.

A person's significant dead are those from whom they are descended, 'the father and his fathers, the mother and her fathers'. These are the ancestors most likely to intervene in the lives of their descendants if they are not 'remembered' periodically with offerings of beer, food and cloth. Intervention takes the form of sickness which is the idiom of ancestral possession. The ancestors 'take hold' of the victim's body in this way because the victim's living body is the only thing which separates them from the ancestors. This aspect of descent will be dealt with fully in Chapter Eight. Here it is sufficient to note the emphasis on those related through both sides which is evident in practices oriented towards the dead, especially in the giving of offerings (tambiko) to 'remember' them. At all family level tambiko two sets of offering are made, one for the 'fathers side' and one for the 'mothers side'. Thus two dishes of food are set out, two pots of beer and the cloth cut into two strips, one for each side.

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<sup>42</sup> This appears to be commonplace in Africa (Radcliffe-Brown 1950:29).



## **Six: GIRLS' PUBERTY RITES**

This chapter examines girls' puberty rites and related practices associated with birth and the safeguarding of female fertility. In the last chapter we saw how relationship is created among the Pogoro through the application of medicine. The same medicine is given to girls when they reach puberty. It enables them to fulfil their potential as women by being fertile, transforming them from girls into potential mothers.

### **The Symbolic Basis of 'Jadi'**

In this chapter I introduce some of the notions which constitute the conceptual basis of things which are thought of as 'jadi', practice which is held to be traditional and ancestrally sanctioned. It is only when we understand this that the extent of the schism between 'religion' and 'tradition' becomes apparent, a point to which we return in the conclusion. These notions centre on the removal or reduction of the excess pollution incurred in the processes of living. They are made explicit in rites of purification involving washing and shaving off the hair after the 'pollution' first has been taken on and, in a sense, indulged in. The social construction of jadi is achieved through a conceptualisation of people as bearers of states which are thought of as being between the two ultimate poles of human experience, that of the mahoka, the spirits of the dead at the one end, and, at the other, those states embodied by people when they engage in the processes of reproduction and of dying.

Pogoro people imagine life as a process of transformation which begins with the formation of the foetus in the woman's belly and continues beyond death when the person becomes a spirit. Neither a foetus nor a spirit of the dead are people. Personhood is an attribute of the living, constituted through the performance of appropriate acts and the giving of medicines. It is mediated by ritual. A newborn infant is not a potential person until it can sit up by itself or has some teeth. People grow, have children, age and become barren. As they age and 'dry out' they become closer to the dead, whom they will soon join. The old are a little like the dead, in that they have left off human reproduction, but unlike the dead, they are still very much alive. They have special ritual functions.

Birth, its associated processes and death are thought of as being inimical to the state of the person, putting those who have been connected with them into a state of relative pollution

which must be taken on and dealt with before the person is cleansed. Once cleansed they return to the state which people should be in, somewhere between that of the mahoka, disembodied and beyond death, and the extreme poles of biological living.

This chapter examines the special nature of the pollution associated with reproductive processes, which is both the same as, and antithetical to, that associated with death. This notion of 'dirt' will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters which deal with death and the ancestors. An account of the special practices occurring in the event of a couple's first child to die is given, as the death of a child before that of its parents is an affront to the fertility of the parents, the burden of which is carried by women. Consequently the emphasis in these rites is on female fertility, which must be reestablished immediately after the removal of the pollution with which the death has brought the parents of the child into contact. The central feature of the chapter is, however, a description of some of the practices associated with the onset of puberty for girls.

### **Fertility Rites and Initiation**

The relative isolation of the majority of the female population of Ulanga from the influences of the outside, except for that of the Church, is pronounced. Many women have never travelled beyond the district. Although others have gone on short visits to relatives working in other parts of the country, few women over sixty have spent any time away from the area inhabited by Pogoro peoples. This situation has probably contributed to the perpetuation of some of the ceremonies associated with the puberty of girls, unyago<sup>1</sup>, which are the responsibility of older women.

The girls' puberty rites, having lost the once direct connection with marriage, remain unaffected by Christian practice which does not feature, except by its absence, in the series of ceremonies which ensure that girls will be fertile and will produce strong, healthy children. The absence of Christian practice here is explained by the fact that, in the local perception of what Christianity is about, either as **chama** or as a source of access to an alien yet appropriated supernatural, and what jadi is concerned with, Christianity quite simply has no place. The perpetuation of jadi is essential, although in condensed form, for

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<sup>1</sup> **Unyago** in Kiswahili can refer to the initiation of both sexes. Among the Pogoro, unyago refers specifically to the girls' rites.

without it the fertility of the women would be lost and the reproduction of society would end.

There are no equivalent initiation ceremonies for boys. Nowadays all boys are circumcised<sup>2</sup> in hospital when they are small. Men in their forties and fifties recalled being circumcised at camps in the bush run by visiting Islamic ritual specialists. These initiation camps did not exist during the period of my fieldwork. Male circumcision among the Pogoro is a result of the influence of Islam in the area, and in Tanzania more generally, where the vast majority of men are circumcised.

Back in 1956, Audrey Richards posited a relationship between the ideology of descent in African societies and the presence or absence of what she termed 'nubility' rites for girls. Assuming that these girls' rites are of the same order as initiation rites, because both are associated with puberty, physical or social, and the transformation of children into adults, she suggested that the presence of such rites for girls with no equivalent ceremony for boys was a concomitant feature of matriliney (1982:185). They seem to me to be something quite different. Initiation rites, whether for boys or girls, are concerned with a generalised social fertility as opposed to the fertility of individual participants, a fact Richards herself acknowledged (1982:52-3). Although the structure and symbolism of both are often similar, involving, for example, seclusion, washing and head shaving (eg Comaroff 1985:116), the intention of the rites is quite different. Girls' puberty rites are concerned with ensuring the reproductive potential of individual girls in a direct and immediate way. Without them girls will either be infertile, as among the Zaramo (M Swantz 1970:365) and Nyakyusa (Wilson 1957:101), or, as among the Bemba (Richards 1982:124) and Ndembu (Turner 1968:200), they will have difficulty in reproducing. Unlike initiation, these rites are triggered by physiological puberty. In contrast, among the Tshidi, a society which has both male and female initiation, female fertility is not dependent on girls undergoing the initiation process, which, by according them the status of adult women, merely makes marriage possible (Comaroff 1985:116).

Girls' puberty rituals are found throughout the area of South Eastern and Central Africa<sup>3</sup>. If we accept that female initiation rites are of a different order to puberty rites, then there

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<sup>2</sup> The girls' rites do not involve clitoridectomy or any other surgical alteration of the genitalia, which women consider detrimental to sexual pleasure. Both sexes consider male circumcision clean, but there does not seem to be any equation of male circumcision with manhood.

<sup>3</sup> See Richards (1982:170-186) for Central Africa, and Swantz (1966) for Tanzania.

appears to be no necessary correlation between the existence of girls' puberty rites, irrespective of whether male and female initiation exists, and the ideology of descent in a given society. Rather, their existence seems to depend on how fertility is conceptualised in these societies; whether female fertility needs to be augmented or protected, rather than on descent per se. Looked at in this light, the patrilineal Nyakyusa, who have a puberty rite for individual girls but no rituals of initiation for either boys or girls, no longer appear to be something of an aberration (Richards op cit:185,ff1).

### **Becoming a mwali**

Among the Pogoro, the practices associated with the puberty of girls are not, these days at any rate, primarily concerned with nubility as a precursor to fertility as Richards described for the Bemba's 'chisungu' and related rites among Lunda peoples in Central Africa (1982:170-186). They are concerned with fertility itself, with ensuring it through the giving of medicine and with containing the excess potency that the girl's first period entails so that it is unable to escape and be lost for ever. There is no doubt that in the past the rites and practices associated with girls' puberty were different and were intimately connected with, indeed a part of, those associated with marriage and the birth of the first child. As elsewhere in Africa, girls' puberty rites have been curtailed and collapsed into a shorter period of time (Swantz 1970:363, Richards 1982:55, Turner 1968:200). The emphasis is no longer on the process of 'instruction' through seclusion, but on the safeguarding of the girl's ability to give birth.

Older men and women perceive an equivalence between school as a place of instruction and seclusion, thus they say, it is no longer necessary to 'instruct' (kumfunda) a girl at home<sup>4</sup>. That this instruction is different is not thought to be significant and, in any event, secluding girls inside for long periods of time conflicts with the demands of primary school. The average seclusion period now seems to be about one week, whereas in the past girls were kept inside for anything up to three or four years if a suitable husband was not found.

The unyago is still held to be important. Small girls are fascinated by it and look forward to their own because it means that they are grown up. When they are not otherwise engaged in household chores for their mothers, relatives or neighbours, small girls play at

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion on the changing nature of 'instruction' among the Bemba see Richards (1982:126).

being grown up for much of the time, carrying banana stalk or maize cob babies on their backs, which they suckle and nurse. As girls get older they have increasing responsibilities for childcare and around the house. Gradually, their maize cob babies are replaced by real siblings whom they must tend and carry. By the time they are eleven or so, they are tall enough and strong enough to perform the heavy work of pounding grain with a long pestle in a full sized mortar, and to help their mothers with the agricultural tasks on the shamba.

The early years of primary school, when girls are nine or ten, are their last taste of freedom. A girl between childhood proper and puberty is a muhinga or kigoli, a transient status which comes to an abrupt end with the onset of menstruation. A girl between puberty and motherhood is a mwali. As such she is expected to behave like an adult woman and to stop playing games with other children in the evenings. It is not surprising that some girls feel ambivalent about becoming a mwali and about the public proclamation of their new status which restricts their freedom even further. Any conversation with boys is now looked upon suspiciously by adults, and, a child no longer, the mwali is expected to be sedately subservient to her elders in a way in which small children are not. Some girls are reluctant to tell their mothers that they have begun to menstruate and may try to hide it, to extend their period of grace.

The older female relatives of the girl look forward eagerly to her becoming a mwali. They comment endlessly on how her breasts have grown<sup>5</sup>, and rebuke her for not working hard enough with, "You, you're almost a mwali. Work!". Keeping a close eye on the physical development of her daughter, a mother puts aside some of the cucumber seeds (ntanga) and the millet that will be needed for the first of the ceremonies. These items are seasonal. The mwali ceremonies are initiated by physiological puberty, as evidenced by the onset of menstruation<sup>6</sup>, although the actual 'coming out' can be delayed and held when convenient.

## Men's Work, Women's Work

In day to day life, men and women do the same sorts of agricultural work, usually alone. Although people say that men should take responsibility for much of the heavy labour of clearing overgrown land which has been left fallow, for the cutting of forest to provide new

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<sup>5</sup> cf Swantz for the Zaramo(1970:363).

<sup>6</sup> Among the Ndembu the evidence of puberty is taken as the development of the breasts, not menstruation (Turner, 1968:200).



agricultural land and for housebuilding, in practice both men and women do this work. Many female headed households have restricted access to male labour, and if they cannot afford to buy it, must do the work themselves. Men and women cultivate separate plots, although they may cooperate on occasion.

Old people say that in the past millet was the 'man's crop', as it was the responsibility of male household heads to ensure that a plot of millet was planted. Both sexes were involved in the tending of millet, although some say that the crop was cut by men. Today maize and rice as the staple foodcrops have replaced millet which, as the preferred crop of the mahoka, is mainly used in ritual<sup>7</sup>. Its use is thus demanded by practices thought of as being authentically jadi. It is the responsibility of male elders, the heads of semi localised kin groups, to make offerings to the mahoka to 'remember the dead' and, in the past, to remove the taboos on the eating of the first fruits after the mbui for a territory had done so first<sup>8</sup>. It is for this reason that millet is considered the man's crop, grown on the mgunda which informants translated as 'the field of the father', as opposed to the more generic terms for field or garden where other crops are grown<sup>9</sup>.

Women can make offerings to their dead in their own right and at their own homes. They do not do so routinely, but only if no equivalent male relative is present. On these occasions women are standing in for absent or dead male siblings or fathers. In the ideal, tambiko should be given by men as heads of families and because men are intrinsically more suited to dealings with the mahoka than are women. Why this is so will become clear in the course the next two chapters.

Women can never become wambui, diviners of the territorial shrines, because they can never enter the ultimate sacred space of the ludewa, a pool of still water deep in a section of unviolated forest where the spirits are. Neither can they take part in the brewing of the beer for the mahoka which is offered twice a year by the wambui, although everyday brewing is the activity of women.<sup>10</sup> In fact, ordinary people of either sex cannot enter this part of the ludewa which is only for those men chosen by the mahoka. Men and women

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<sup>7</sup> Why they should prefer millet is discussed fully in Chapters Seven and Eight which deal with the ancestors.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter Eight.

<sup>9</sup> These are shamba, from the Kiswahili, and lirambo.

<sup>10</sup> Older people disagreed as to whether it was proper for women to brew beer for the ancestors offered at family level tambiko, although in practice this is brewed by women, not men.

can, however, on certain occasions go into the part of the sacred forest in which the ludewa is located, but only if they are in an appropriate state and not 'dirty'. This means, for men and women, abstaining from sex from the night before. A woman who has just given birth or is bleeding is not in a suitable state. Neither is a woman who is in a state of mourning signified by the wearing of mourning 'strings'.<sup>11</sup>

Sex makes people 'dirty' and 'hot'. This is not a problem in everyday contexts, but, as we shall see in Chapters Seven and Eight, it is inappropriate in those contexts which demand that a person be in a state of semi purity appropriate for approaching the mahoka. The 'dirt' of sex is not dangerous in itself. There are no complicated rituals of purification between husband and wife, such as Richards described for the Bemba (1982:30-32). The various diseases which can be caused by sex are not the result of 'dirt' but, as we saw in Chapter Five, of wrongly incorporated substance. Sex brings both sexes into a state of 'dirt', which is also the state in which a woman is in when she is menstruating or involved in the processes of birth. The Pogoro notion of 'dirt' is similar to that described by Goody for the West African LoDagaa (1962:59). It is explicitly associated with sex, reproduction and death - things which are antithetical to the mahoka. In relation to birth and female fertility, this pollution is a source of potency which must be contained and safeguarded lest it escape and the woman become infertile. Girls' puberty rites are the same as those associated with birth and the 'coming out' of children because the onset of menstruation is a mere precursor to giving birth, which the rites and the shirala, more than the sexual act itself, make possible.

This association of sex and reproductive processes with both pollution and potency is explicit in other African societies. The underlying idea that pollution must be absorbed bodily and contained physically before it can be got rid of is implicit in the structure of much African ritual. Thus there are the same sequences of the taking on of pollution, its containment, washing and purification and finally the reintegration of the person into the community in LoDagaa funerals (Goody 1962:59-203), in the Ndembu's 'nkang'a' ritual for girls (Turner 1968:201-257), and in Zulu healing rites (Ngubane 1977:77-85,113-127). There are numerous other examples<sup>12</sup>. These too are the main preoccupations of Pogoro ritual practice, and are discussed at length in this and the following three chapters.

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<sup>11</sup> This is discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>12</sup> For examples of this ritual structure see also Wilson, (1957),for the Nyakyusa; Rigby(1968) for the Gogo; Beidelman for the Ngulu (1964) and Comaroff(1985) for the Tshidi.

Women are responsible for childcare and feeding people. Their domestic burden is far heavier than men's. Cooking involves the collection of firewood and water. While men may collect firewood for sale or to assist at a funeral, they never fetch water. Women carry a triple burden; " A baby in the belly, a child on the back and a load on the head". They, together with children, collect wild vegetables for the afternoon meal on their way to and from their **shamba**. Men and women sit and eat separately. Men are served first. Social activity happens outside the house (numba<sup>13</sup>) in the yard, where men spend much of their free time sitting with friends. Houses are really places for storing things and for sleeping. The 'house' is a euphemism for marriage and the legal sexual relations which are assumed to take place inside it<sup>14</sup>, hence 'going outside' is a frequently used expression for adultery. Houses, or rather the insides of houses, are intimate places associated with sex, birth and death. **Mwalis** are secluded inside them, as are nursing mothers with their new born babies until the tied end of the umbilical cord drops away. Corpses too stay inside the house until they are taken out for burial.

Women assume responsibility for the processing of maize and other grain, by hand or machine. Men go to the milling machine only at funerals, when the women are otherwise occupied with their business of cooking and mourning. The expression of sorrow is women's 'work', as women are able to 'suffer'. Women are not only mourners; they are responsible for the emotional labour demanded on public occasions, and so take on the vocalisation of celebration with ululations at weddings and other festivals. Women are thought to be more susceptible to possession by **mashetani**, wandering foreign spirits, than are men. This is because of the way in which possession is conceptualised as a 'taking hold' of the body of a person<sup>15</sup>. When **mashetani** 'take hold' of women's bodies, if the **mashetani** in question are male, this is interpreted as a sexual conquest (cf Boddy 1989:142). Some types of **mashetani** are attracted to highly charged emotional events, particularly to funerals, where their main victims are women.

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<sup>13</sup> numba refers to the physical structure of the house. It is distinct from ukaya, which refers to 'home' or 'homestead'.

<sup>14</sup> cf Beidelman,(1964:379) for the Ngulu.

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter Eight.

## Female Fertility

Although in the folk theory of reproduction, the woman is only the vessel for a man's seed or blood which forms the foetus<sup>16</sup>, the fertility of the woman is paramount. Making an analogy with planting, men explained that the quality of the earth, not the seed, determines the harvest. Fertility is highly valued, but needs to be carefully controlled. Births are spaced by at least two years in order to enhance the survival chances of the mother and children. Women who have another child too soon after the first are criticised for their lack of common sense. Women blame men for this. Men, they say, have no self control and no intelligence.

Human fertility and reproduction are not confined to pregnancy and birth, but encompass the growth and development of children. Consequently, as we can see from the ceremonies described below, the death of a child is interpreted as a failure of the fertility of the parents, and in particular the mother, just as a child's achievement of adulthood is a victory for the fertility of the parents.

If a woman has not had a child by the time she is about twenty five, whether or not she is in a stable union, people begin to say that she is 'rotten' and infertile. Such women are unlikely to find a husband. If they are already married, this is sufficient justification for a man, even if he is a rule abiding Christian, to take a second wife. Female infertility is highly visible and much feared by women for whom it is between disgrace and tragedy. It does not tend to result in childless households because of the widespread practice of the long or short term adoption of the children of kin. While male impotence is the subject of joking and laughter, among both men and women, male infertility is unthinkable.

Today, many women have their first children in the hospital. Those living far away go and stay with relatives who live near while they can still make the journey on foot. Infant mortality is high<sup>17</sup>. People of all ages are susceptible to endemic diseases, of which the most serious are malaria, tuberculosis and leprosy. Much of the population is infected with hookworm and filaria. Medical treatment is poor and exacerbated by people's attitudes towards disease and medicine which mean that often they either begin medical treatment

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<sup>16</sup> see Chapter Five.

<sup>17</sup> District officials from the Office of Development and Social Welfare put the Infant Mortality Rate at 120 per 1000 live births for Ulanga.

too late or fail to complete the course of treatment<sup>18</sup>. Death is a reality for everybody, irrespective of age. That this contradicts the proper order of generations in which parents 'go before' their children is addressed by the special collapsed funeral practices for the mjindu, the first child of particular parents to die while those parents are still living.

## What Happens to the Mwali

What follows is based on being present at the mwali ceremonies for two girls, although most of the description is taken from the one which lasted longer and was made into a big occasion with many people present and dancing afterwards. This was the 'coming out' and the washing of a girl whom I shall call Maria. Maria's mother is not married to her father and her parents have always lived separately. Even though the father of the girl had declined to 'take her', the relationship was acknowledged publicly by the involvement of Maria's father's relatives, his mother and sisters, real and classificatory, in the proceedings. Maria lives with her mother in a small house next to the house of her mother's elder brother. It was in his large brick house and surrounding yard that the unyago took place.

Families in which several people are in paid employment often choose to hold mwali ceremonies on a Sunday, when these people are free<sup>19</sup>. Sundays are also convenient for people living in the vicinity of the cathedral, as many people from more distant villages climb the mountain up to Mahenge to attend one of the morning masses. Sunday has become a kind of general rest day on which heavy work is not undertaken.

Not all families can afford to make mwali events into big public occasions. Some do only the bare essentials of the rites. These are the giving of the medicine, the eating of the first lot of ntanga (cucumber seeds), the seclusion, the washing and coming out. Only two parts of the mwali rituals are public. The public they involve are women, although older male relatives and small children may attend. The first of these is the 'shaving of the mwali' (kummoga mwali) when the first lot of ntanga is eaten. This involves a core group of older women who are said to have 'dried out' and are 'unable to cooperate with men again'. Men, on the other hand, are thought to remain sexually active well into old age. Old men denied this, saying that they too 'dried up' just like the old women did, but the old women do not believe them. These older women, the wamakolu, have special ritual functions as

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<sup>18</sup> See Chapter Nine.

<sup>19</sup> Until June 1991 government employees worked on Saturday mornings.

they can contain the excess pollution of others, whether the negative pollution of death which they will not pass on through sexual contact or the more ambiguous potency of reproductivity which, similarly channelled, could be drawn away from the person who was its source. The celibacy of the wamakolu, or at least their non involvement in reproduction, means that only they can eat of the first lot of ntanga.

The other public event of the unyago is the washing of the mwali (kumogesha mwali) when the second lot of ntanga is eaten. Anybody may eat this, although in practice more women than men attend. Men say that the 'things of the unyago are 'women's work' or 'their secret', but older men have some idea of the rites, especially if they have daughters of their own. Younger men are discouraged from attending. They present a danger to the fertility of the mwali and could try to seduce her before she has 'come out'. Both public events are referred to as 'kulia ntanga za mwali', 'eating the cucumber seeds of the mwali'. Almost all major cultural events can be talked about in terms of eating or cooking.

### **The First Lot of ntanga, Medicine and Shaving**

When a girl realises that her first period has started she tells her mother who gives her a rag and explains about 'cleanliness'. Old women place great emphasis on this aspect of 'instructing' a mwali, which any older female relative or even non relative may do, if it is thought that the girl would be ashamed to discuss such things with her mother. They stress that the girl must wash herself well, and must never sleep with men while she is menstruating. After the first, and sometimes the second period, apart from the taboo on intercourse, there are no other domestic taboos applying to menstruating women<sup>20</sup>.

As soon as the family of the girl realise that her periods have started, special restrictions on the household apply. Those living in it, especially her parents, must refrain from sex, and it is now mwiko<sup>21</sup> (taboo) for anybody to take fire or water from them. They must not take fire from other houses, and the mwali herself must not eat food which has been cooked on other people's fires. Food from her fire should not be given out to outsiders, unless they are wamakolu. Even they, however, should not be given fire from the house of the mwali, because they could pass it on to others who are sexually active. The fertility of

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<sup>20</sup> According to the Mahenge District Record Book (op cit), during the 1930's menstruating women were not permitted to cook with salt. However, none of the old women with whom I discussed the matter could confirm whether or not this was the case.

<sup>21</sup> mziru is also heard, but mwiko is more common.

the mwali could then be taken away. This is talked about in terms of 'depriving her of giving birth'. Not only could people use the fire, water and food to pass bad medicine to the mwali, the restriction on fire is crucial in that it prevents the mwali from 'drying out'. Fire is a potential vector of the girl's fertility, which could be dissipated further if those who receive it indulge in sex. The mwali's food should be cooked for her by her mother and she should eat separately to reduce the risk of this happening. The restrictions on food, fire and water apply only while the girl is actually bleeding. Only cooked food is involved, because its preparation involves fire.

The onset of physiological puberty has made the girl into a mwali kam numba, a mwali of the inside of the house. She should not go outside unless she is completely covered, and only then if there is special reason. She should not see any men, not even her own father. Only women and children may sit in the room with her. She should sit in silence. She may do inside work, but no cooking. If she has to say something she should gesture and 'talk with her hands'. Women in their sixties, recalling their own seclusion, said this was then strictly adhered to, but that parents today allow their daughters to whisper. The notion of jiiri, silence, is significant, for it is equated with unsociability, absence and death.

In the past, when the seclusion period was long, girls, dressed only in a barkcloth apron and a string of white beads, were expected to scrub their bodies daily, so that, after their long period inside, when they finally came out, in the ideal to be 'taken' by their husband<sup>22</sup>, their skin was 'white'<sup>23</sup>. White is a colour signifying cleanliness and coolness. It is, for this reason, also the colour associated with the mahoka. I think it would be wrong, however, to attach too much significance to the colour of the mwali's skin in these terms. The pale skin seems to have been considered attractive and desirable, rather than symbolic. From what older people said, neither in the past nor today does whitewashing feature in the mwali rites. Exposure to the sun was thought to be taboo and dangerous, probably because of ideas about heat and drying out. This is not a concern today, although it is important that girls stay inside until they are formally 'taken out'. Some parents try to reach a compromise between the demands of school and a longer period of seclusion, allowing their daughters out to attend school with their heads covered, and putting them back inside when lessons are over.

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<sup>22</sup> See Chapter Five.

<sup>23</sup> cf Swantz (1970:367) for the Zaramo.

Word is passed on to neighbours and female kin living in other villages that the girl has begun to menstruate, 'kalama'. Within the next few days arrangements are made to shave the mwali and eat the first lot of ntanga. There is no definite sequence to some of these events, beyond general agreements that such things as the shaving should precede the final washing by at least a couple of weeks, and that the giving of the shirala should take place after the girl has been shaved. Different people have different conceptions of what is entailed by adherence to things which they define as 'tradition', and there is debate among people about how to do things and in which order they should be done.

How things are actually done at a particular event depends in actuality on who is present. Practice is continually changing. Things to do with the mwali are very much left to the women under the authority of the current generation of wamakolu, some of whom are regarded as specialists in matters to do with the puberty rites of girls. These wanyagu, who in the past were also midwives<sup>24</sup>, are really wamakolu who know the rites and the songs exceptionally well, and are thus able to lead the ceremonies. They have no special status outside of the unyago. They receive token cash payments for their services, handed over by the relatives of the girl's father and of her mother as each stage of the process is completed. These tend to be between twenty and fifty shillings.

At some point during the girl's first period, preferably at the beginning, she is taken outside by the wamakolu, who are a mixture of female kin and neighbours. The woman who assumes responsibility for the event is referred to as the mnyagu, whether or not she defines herself as a specialist. Covered completely in two pieces of kanga or kitenge the girl is made to stand with her arms over the shoulders of one of the women, as if she is being carried on her back like a baby. She is taken to the front of the house and made to reach up to the central pole supporting the ridgepole of the house, and which in turn supports the roof. While holding the pole, she is made to 'step on' a hen, which becomes her responsibility. She must let it lay and not kill it, because, "This hen is her child".

She may also be given responsibility for a younger sibling, a toddler, and told the same thing: "This is your child. Don't deprive him of anything!". According to the older women, when they were young, this child would have been the mwali's main companion inside, fetching the water with which she washed and helping her to scrub her back. Girls are also

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<sup>24</sup> This is explained by the fact that the puberty rites continued until after the birth of the first child, which the woman would return to her parent's place to have.



'taught' not to refuse their husbands anything<sup>25</sup>. Feeding others is the duty of women. Women who are inhospitable with food have upati, a trait which men cannot have.

Either on this day or the next, the girl's head is shaved by one of the wamakolu with a razor blade and water. The mwali remains passive and silent, seated in the lap of the woman who 'carried' her from the house. For the first child of a particular union to become a mwali the parents may also be shaved because, having produced fertile progeny, they are 'whole people now'. If representatives of the girl's father's side are present, a small circle of hair is left unshaven at the crown of the girl's head until they have given the girl's mother's side a token payment. Most commonly the head hair of the mwali is shaved, although some also shave the eyebrows, armpits and pubic area. Shaving recurs in all pollution contexts, and will be discussed further in the next chapter.

The hair is collected by one of the wamakolu and put aside until the girl has had her second period, or until after she has been washed when it is taken in the morning or evening to be 'buried by water', in the muddy banks of one of the many all year rivers in the area. If this is not done, some women explained, the girl will stop 'growing' and will not develop into a mother as she should. Others just said that to do so was jadi, which is how most women explained the various components of the unyago. This comment, from a woman of fortyfive, is typical: "Even we do not know for what reason we do these things. It is just tradition. Even if I ask my mother she doesn't know ". Her mother, who was sitting beside her, shrugged her shoulders in assent, adding, "When I was younger I asked my mother and the grandmothers and they could not give me a reason!".

If the girl is to be shaved again before coming out, which is now unlikely because the two events are so close together, this second lot of hair is just thrown out, at the 'rubbish heap' (palifunkusi or palifulu) or in the 'bush' (pantundu). It does not have to be buried by water. The ashes from the fire on which the mwali's food has been cooked are thrown here also when the prohibitions cease and a new fire lit. After being shaved, the mwali is taken back inside the house. Before going in, she is fed a piece of millet ubaga dipped in a sauce made from the finely ground cucumber seeds, ntanga. Throughout she sits passively in the lap of the woman who holds her. Her eyes are shut, her head down.

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<sup>25</sup> Similar sequences are found in the Ndembu 'nkang'a' (Turner 1968:198-259), the Ngulu 'guluwe' (Beidelman 1964), the Zaramo's girls rites (M Swantz 1970:363-393), and in the Bemba's 'chisungu' and related rituals among the peoples of East Central Africa (Richards 1982).

The ntanga are prepared, ground and cooked into a paste by one of the wamakolu. This woman may be referred to as the nyagalikolu, which seems to mean the woman who is acting as the leader and who performs the significant acts in situations where a group of wamakolu are involved. It is used, for example, to refer to the old woman who puts grain for the ancestors beer to soak prior to a homestead level offering. This term is not then restricted to the contexts of women's rites, as is mnyagu. However it is restricted to ritual contexts, as is the general role of the wamakolu as wamakolu who, outside of ritual, are just older women<sup>26</sup>.

Only a small quantity of seeds is prepared, for only a restricted circle of people can eat them. Apart from the mwali herself, who is fed the ntanga like a baby, the eaters of the first lot of ntanga are the wamakolu themselves. For others to eat them would be, "Completely taboo. Younger women are unable because some of them wander about"<sup>27</sup>. If they were to eat the ntanga this mwali would get problems, that is to say she can't give birth...They would deprive her of giving birth".

### Containing Female Fertility

After this is finished the women disperse. Nobody with whom I spoke could give any explanation of why the ntanga has to be eaten by anybody other than the mwali herself, although people were adamant about who should not eat them. These cucumbers are a common feature of girls' puberty rites in the area<sup>28</sup>. People say they reproduce quickly. More than their phallic shape, it is the numerous seeds inside the fruit which make them particularly suited to an equation with fertility in general, and female fertility in particular. This is commented on by the people themselves.

In the context of the unyago, the ntanga are the same as the girl's fertility during the first period, when it is like an essence which, because it is excessive, is liable to be carried away by media thought appropriate because they are intrinsically similar. These things are sex, fire and the cucumber seeds themselves. The prohibitions relating to fire are the same as those relating to the eating of the ntanga, suggesting that the various prohibitions on the menstruating mwali here are not concerned with preventing the contamination of others,

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<sup>26</sup> See Chapter Eight.

<sup>27</sup> ie, are sexually promiscuous.

<sup>28</sup> For example see Swantz, M (1970:236) & Turner (1968:241).

as Wilson suggests for the menstrual taboos of the Nyakyusa (1957:131) nor with protecting the woman herself from her own pollution (Buckley and Gottlieb 1988:11).

Among the Pogoro, menstruation is not regarded as dangerous and the excess potency of birth and reproduction is neither harmful to others, nor to the woman herself<sup>29</sup>. The prohibitions safeguard the fertility of the mwali. Those on water mark out the separation of the mwali and protect her from the medicine of others. Although nobody explicitly made a connection between taking water and the girl's 'drying out', it is possibly present and was perhaps just too obvious for informants to mention. When women talk about their reproductive physiology they equate 'water' (clear discharge) with the potential for pregnancy. Because the ntanga can be eaten by anybody after the mwali has been washed on coming out of seclusion, it would appear that what the wamakolu are doing when they eat the first lot of ntanga is to contain the excess potency of the mwali until her state is sufficiently normal for there to be no risk to her if others eat it. The wamakolu are able to physically contain it because they are beyond reproduction themselves. They therefore do not channel away the mwali's fertility, and, as women, they have already absorbed in their bodies this kind of excess potency, when their own periods started and when they themselves gave birth.

## Medicine

The giving of the shirala medicine is a less public affair, involving only one or two old female relatives of the girl and the girl herself. In the last chapter we saw how babies of both sexes receive shirala before they can 'come out' of the house where they are secluded with their mothers. Boys never get another dose. Girls must get shirala again on the occasion of their first period. For babies, the roots are ground and mixed together by both parents of the child. Shirala for the mwali is provided by her father's side, but is ground and administered by her mother or another female relative. It is applied to the body, starting with the head, and given to the girl to eat.

## The Washing of the Mwali and the Second Lot of ntanga

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<sup>29</sup> For the contrary view, see Gottlieb (1988).

The girl goes back inside after being shaved and remains there for about one week. For Maria the washing was to be held two weeks after the shaving, but was delayed by another week because some relatives were sick. Like the shaving, it took place on a Sunday afternoon. About forty adult women attended, many of whom were relatives of the girl who lived locally. Six older men were present and kept themselves very much to one side. They did not involve themselves in the events until the girl had been taken back inside, when everybody moved to the yard in front of the girls' mother's house to dance the libantha, a dance held at weddings and festivals. It is associated with mwali events, as is another dance called the shinyago, which was not danced for Maria. According to informants, formerly this was a key element in the ceremonies, which were also known as the 'dancing of the girls'.<sup>30</sup>

When I arrived, all the women were in the kitchen where the ntanga was being roasted before being pounded in another room. This was done inside because it was raining. It was put into a mortar which the girl's mother gripped between her knees while squatting on the floor. The woman who was acting as the mnyagu did the pounding, while the girl's mother made faces of enjoyment and squirmed around as if she were having sex. Pounding, like grinding, is symbolic of sex.<sup>31</sup> This performance was greeted with raucous laughter from the women, who egged her on. A song was sung, the mnyagu leading and the rest responding. Songs accompanied each stage of the ceremony. The women, having already attended numerous ceremonies of this sort, were very familiar with the songs, which described each stage of the ceremony as it happened. When the ntanga had been ground into a coarse powder, handfuls of it were given out to the women in the room, and, as it had stopped raining, we went outside into the yard to eat them.

The women, led by the mnyagu, crossed the yard and approached the main part of the house in which the mwali had been secluded for the ceremony. The men, who had been sitting by the door, moved away. The women went inside the house, cramming themselves into the narrow corridor, some spilling out of the back entrance. Assembled outside the door of the room in which the mwali was secluded, they began a song demanding entry to the room. After some minutes they, led by the mnyagu, forced their way into the girl's room and crowded around the bed on which the mwali, wrapped from head to toe in cloth was lying motionless on her back. The mnyagu approached the bed, running her hands up and down the girl's body and shaking her, while they sang a song which went something like

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<sup>30</sup> cf Richards (1982:54) for the Bemba.

<sup>31</sup> This association seems to be a recurrent feature of the region, see for example Beidelman (1964:370) for the Ngulu and M Swantz (1970:376) for the Zaramo.

this: "You're all put to sleep, you're all put to sleep, child of theirs. I am used to waking up". Somebody said, "They are waking her up!".

'Waking her up' went on for ten minutes or more, until somebody else decided it was enough. The girl is not supposed to actually wake up. She must remain passive and silent, and not look at the women. Then she was lifted off the bed and put on somebody's back, as she was when she was shaved. She was 'carried' in this way by the same woman who had held her then, on this occasion it was a classificatory grandmother on the girl's father's side, but any woman of the right age group would do.

With the mwali shuffling behind her, they made for the front entrance of the house. Some of the women went out ahead, among them the father's sister (actual) of the girl, and the girl's mother who knelt before the entrance with their heads together, foreheads touching. The girl was lifted up, lying on her back, and passed over their heads to be received by the women in the yard. She was passed back and forth several times, turned over and shaken. Then she was passed out head first, lying on her stomach, and caught by the assembled women who turned her over again, onto her back, before passing her back to the women in the house, this time feet first. Then the girl was lifted, feet first, out of the house and over the heads of the two women on the threshold, and set upright in the yard. Women said this was because in the morning when you leave to go to the **shamba** your head leaves the house first, but when you come back in the evening your feet enter it first. Others were less explicit, "Its just the tradition of we Pogoro".

### **Washing the Mwali**

The girl was then 'carried' to where a mat had been laid out in the middle of the yard, and was seated, as at the shaving between the legs of the woman who had carried her. This woman placed her hands over the ears and eyes of the mwali, who sat as she had sat before, passively with her head down. The mwali and the woman holding her were joined by another 'grandmother' of the girl, who sat across her feet. Her head and her shoulders were uncovered. Some of the children present were sent to fetch water. When they came back with small pots balanced on their heads, they were instructed by the mnyagu to begin dancing in a circle around the group on the mat, with the pots of water still on their heads. The old men came over and stood at the edge of the circle of women, who now joined the children, grabbing the pots of water from them and dancing around the mat. As they danced, with the pots of water on their heads, they deliberately spilled water onto the group

seated on the mat. The children were sent back about five times to get more water. The women danced until the people on the mat were completely soaked. They threw water at each other and at the men who had come over to join them. They danced with each other, making lewd gestures, imitating lecherous men. Everybody got wet and slipped in the mud. When the mnyagu decided it was enough, the men moved back to where they had been sitting, and the women began to wash the mwali.

The mnyagu had placed some leaves called lufumbeza in a shiseru, a small shallow dish made from woven bamboo. These dishes are owned and used by most people, but metal and plastic dishes are also used. The decision to use one or the other in everyday activity is a purely practical one. However, 'traditional' practice demands that 'traditional' utensils are used, not those of foreign or manufactured origin. The leaves are special and are used in various purification rituals. They smell sweet and, as they can stop people 'dreaming'<sup>32</sup>, they are used to wash the core bereaved at funerals. Lufumbeza, as leaves with special properties, are 'medicine'.<sup>33</sup> The leaves are left attached to the stem in bunches to make a loose bundle. Some water was poured over the leaves which were squeezed out into the dish. The mnyagu then poured some of this water over the girl's head and began, rubbing her head and body, to wash her. As she did this, she hit the girl's body with the bunch of wet leaves. This is 'kupunga<sup>34</sup>'. It means to slap the body with medicine to cool it down and to prevent dreaming.

Female relatives also of the mwali came forward to have their heads washed. A small child was made to sit between the legs of the mwali just as she sat between the legs of the old woman. She was made to wash this child, rubbing his body, just as the woman holding her rubbed her's. They sang a song about 'she is washing with the child'. The mnyagu said many times to the mwali, "This is your child. Don't deprive him of anything!". The child was taken away and a kanga held over the group on the mat to form a sort of tent, under which the mnyagu, assisted by another of the wamakolu, could wash the girl's 'secret places'.

## Fetching the Salt

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<sup>32</sup> 'Dreaming' is discussed more fully in Chapters Seven and Nine.

<sup>33</sup> All trees and plants are potentially medicine. This is dealt with fully in Chapter Nine.

<sup>34</sup> -punga (Kisw) denotes exorcism.

While the girl was being washed, an in-law of the girl's father<sup>35</sup> prepared some finely ground salt, which she wrapped carefully in a maize leaf and tied into a package. This she gave to the father's sister of the girl, who tied it to a small stick and set off with it jauntily, going behind and around the house. Half dancing, half shuffling she vanished from sight. When she next came into view she was crouched and limping, resting on the stick as if she were an old man. Making for the group on the mat, she slipped and fell flat on her face in the mud right at the mwali's feet. Still on her knees, she greeted the group of women in quavering tones, handing the package of salt to the mnyagu who carefully untied it and handed it back. The father's sister then began to apply the salt in spots to the girl's body as if it were medicine, starting with the forehead and working down the body, chest, back and joints. While she did this she pulled a lecherous face. She then, crouched at the girl's feet, began to lick the salt off the girl's body until all of it was gone. The women made loud comments of approval while this was being done, such as "food without salt is not sweet" and "food without salt doesn't taste". The girl's mother came forward to lick the girl. She was joined by several other women, who nibbled and sucked the girl's body, beginning at her feet. The women said they were 'sucking off the water' off her, (she was still wet) because they 'loved her'.

The next event everybody said was just a 'custom' they could not explain. This involved the girl's mother dipping her breasts in the dish of water and running them up the girl's body, using one breast for each side, beginning with the feet. There was disagreement about whether this should have been done before the salt mime, but consensus had it that what mattered more than the order it was done in was that it was done because it was 'jadi'. As we saw in the last chapter, the breast is a way of talking about one's relationship with the mother's side. This part of the sequence would seem to be an encatment of this relationship, an emphasising of connectedness.

The salt mime was explained to me in terms of fetching salt, which is a duty of husbands. This too seems to recur in similar rites throughout the area (cf Richards 1939:56). In the Pogoro fetching of the salt, the woman sets out as a young husband and returns as a medicine giving elder. She represents both the girl's future husband and her father. The salt is applied like medicine. Like medicine, it transforms the girl, making her 'good to eat'. The father's sister performs the salt mime because the girls' fertility comes via the shirala medicine from her father's side and, as one woman explained, it was the father's sister's brother who got the girl's mother pregnant. These mimes, and indeed the whole event, are

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<sup>35</sup> It was the wife of Maria's father's elder brother.

also fun, an occasion for the women to act in a crude manner that would normally be considered outrageous.

### Snatching the Ntanga

The final part of the ceremony involving the mwali was the eating of the ntanga, which had been cooked with some water to make coarse paste. It was brought out in a dish, together with an enormous lump of millet ubaga. The mnyagu broke off a large piece of this, dipped it in the ntanga and placed it between the hands of the mwali, who was still sitting still and silent on the mat. From this she then took a smaller piece of ubaga, coated it in the sauce and held it up, while the father's sister of the girl resumed her lecherous expression and followed the food with her eyes as it was waved before her. She began to dance, moving her head from side to side as she followed the food which the mnyagu held in front of her but out of reach. Eventually it was brought close enough for her to snatch with her mouth, licking her lips. The mnyagu rubbed the food on her face as she pushed it into her mouth. Another woman danced forward and the same thing happened, until everybody present, including the men and myself, had snatched with their mouths some of the food proffered by the mnyagu. What was left in the dish was rubbed on the mwali's body. She was again covered up and, carried once more on somebody's back, was led back into the house where she was to stay until evening, when she could come out and wash. The ceremony was over and she could go to school in the morning.

The women said that, when they snatched the ubaga and the ntanga, they were pretending to be dogs. Although this is mainly for fun, it also makes explicit the fact that, now the mwali has been washed, there is no taboo on who may eat the ntanga nor on who can sleep with the mwali, who is, as in the salt ceremony, explicitly compared with food. Turner describes a similar sequence for the Ndembu in which people pretend to be hyenas, snatching the food as scavengers, which he interprets, perhaps wrongly, as stealing the some of the girl's mother's fertility (1968:226). Rather, it emphasises the desirability of the fertility that she who has gone through the ritual now has and its vulnerability to predation<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> Among the Cewa, girls were supposed to have first intercourse with someone other than their husband at the end of their first period. This man was called the 'fisi', 'jackal' (Richards 1982:179).



Everybody was fed a proper meal of maize ubaga and beans, together with what ntanga was leftover. The group dispersed, some going over to the house of the girl's mother to dance. Although people refer to the day's events as 'taking the mwali out', they actually put the mwali back inside. This is not as contradictory as it seems. The mwali has been 'taken out', as having been washed, her period of seclusion is finished. Because the mwali ceremonies have become disconnected with marriage, the actual formal 'coming out' now occurs later, at the handing over of the marriage payments when, as we saw in the previous chapter, the bride enacts her 'coming out' of the house as a mwali, silent, covered and 'walking on her knees'.

### **Summary Analysis of the Unyago**

The unyago is comprised of several related themes, which perhaps need stating more explicitly than I have done so far. The girl is secluded inside the house, which, as will become more clear in the next chapter, is symbolically associated with processes of living and of dying, with corpses and newborns, with sex and marriage and with women. The purpose of the rites is ultimately to release her to the outside, to the courtyard and back into social life. Inside, like both corpse and newborn, she sits in passive silence, protected from the outside world lest it draw away her fertility, which must be contained inside the bodies of the older women who later waken her and take her outside to wash her, 'cooling' her down so that she can return to the world of living people.

She is given a laying hen, representing herself and her offspring. In addition, the continuity of generations generated by women is acted out in the ritual. It is vividly evoked by the image of the older woman washing the mwali sat between her open legs while the mwali simultaneously washed a smaller child between her own. This explicitly symbolises birth. Women never normally sit with their legs open; to do so is indecent. The running of the breast up and down the girl's body similarly evokes the image of continuity through the female line, albeit a fertility mediated and made possible by men, hence the salt bearing husband who is, at the same time, a medicine providing elder. Finally, she is 'taught' her duties as an adult woman, to have children, to feed people and especially to feed her husband.

### **Birth**

I now look at the mwali rites in the light of related practices concerned with female fertility. Of these, the most important, in that they are most routine, are those associated with birth. Each time a woman has a baby, her fertility is in danger because the excess potency of birth not only disrupts her 'state', but can be lost if precautions are not taken. These are the same restrictions on food, fire and sex that apply to the house of a mwali. If the baby was born at home and a mnyagu assisted, this woman must also refrain from sex until the taboos are finished.

Like the mwali, the mother is secluded inside the house with her newborn baby until the umbilical cord of the baby comes off. This is later taken by the wamakolu and buried in a clump of 'male' or 'female' banana trees, depending as we saw in the previous chapter, on the sex of the baby. If a mwali is shaved a second time her hair should be thrown out at 'female' banana trees. Banana trees surround the yards of homesteads and are thought of as 'lifulu', places where domestic rubbish is thrown. The umbilical cords must be buried with the end that was from the mother pointing downwards, and the tip sticking up, just above the soil, like a banana sucker, or the mother of the child will become infertile. It is said that if the tip were to be smothered in soil or be eaten by a dog, the mother would be deprived of her fertility. Only after this has been done can the mother come out of the house and the child be given the shirala medicine which ensures its 'growth' and proper development. Women who have recently given birth are unable to go into sacred sections associated with the mahoka, nor may they brew their beer. Birth does not seem to entail any elaborate rituals of purification for the mother.

### **Re-establishing Female Fertility**

The first death of a child while its parents are still living also concerns female fertility, which must be re-established as the death is an affront to it. The first child, of whatever age, to die before its parents is called the mjindu and its mother, mama mjindu. The usual funeral practices are collapsed and finished in one day. After the body, which the parents are not allowed to see, has been buried, the parents of the mjindu are shaved and washed as is usual by those of the same sex who have already been 'died on'. The mama mjindu is then taken into the house and given some of the shirala medicine by one of the wamakolu. As usual, this medicine comes from her father's side. She then has oil rubbed on her body, is dressed in new clothes and the funeral is over. Not only are the parents forbidden to mourn, they are instructed by the elders to sleep together the very night of the funeral. One of my neighbours, who lost a teenage son several years ago, said that she had

felt too upset at the time to do so. "Who would be able?", she asked, "But that's my secret". It is the expectation more than the act which matters. It is thought that if the parents of the mjindu do not have sex after the burial that they will not be able to have more children, and without the shirala the woman would not get pregnant again. The parents cannot mourn, nor can they 'remember' this death at the repeat funerals which make up the normal funeral process.

Before being shaved, the mother is made to shuffle out of the house on her buttocks while women pour dirt from the floor and ashes from the fireplace over her head. One of the three hearthstones is rolled out behind her until they reach the rubbish heap at the edge of the yard, where she is washed, with lufumbeza, and shaved. The old hearthstone is left behind, representing the dead child. People said "She is following her child". She returns alone to the house where a new stone has been put in the fireplace. The rolling out and replacement of the hearthstone recalls the marriage ceremony of 'moving the bride', when the bride's relatives take her to the place of the husband, demanding payment at each stage of the journey to stop the bride from getting 'stuck'. The final payment is demanded for taking the bride right inside the house of the husband and up to the hearthstones, which the bride's relatives have set up. The events at the funeral of a mjindu seek to deny the death and to re-establish the fertility of the mother, through a collapsed reenactment of elements of puberty and marriage rituals. We return to the mjindu in the next chapter.

The mama mjindu is washed and shaved to rid her of the excess pollution of death. This is both the same as, and antithetical to, that associated with fertility and birth. Why this should be so will become clear in the following chapter which examines practices associated with death.

## Seven: FUNERAL

This chapter examines practices associated with death. It looks at the first part of the funeral process which is oriented towards the burial of the body and the taking on of death by those who defined themselves as bereaved. The extended funeral process lasts up to two years and consists in essence of repeat funerals, until, finally, the dead has become one of the mahoka and will not be mourned again. This is marked by the final sadaka, at which offerings to the dead are made.

Funerals for the living entail a taking on of death and its limitation. This is achieved through a series of tambiko aimed at keeping the mahoka distant, and by the containment of death by the core bereaved, in particular women. Women are here set up as bearers of the symbolism of death and 'dirt', emotion and mourning. In the previous chapter I suggested that the 'dirt' of death is essentially the same as that associated with reproduction. At certain moments these two kinds of dirt stand antithetically opposed, just as life and death contradict each other. Pogoro ritual deals with the necessity of living people to achieve a middle position between the disembodied state of the dead and that embodied by people at extreme poles of biological living, which are represented in Pogoro symbolism by birth and death. Both are potent and, as we saw with the fertility of the mwali, potentially contagious. They can cancel each other out.

In this chapter I pursue these themes further. The role of women as mourners is explored through an examination of the symbolism of the house. It is this, as much as anything, which serves to identify female mourners with the corpse itself, and what happens to both the core bereaved and to the corpse closely parallels what happens to the mwali. The funeral rites conform to the pattern suggested in the previous chapter, with regard to the taking on of 'dirt' in order to contain it, its subsequent removal and the reintegration of the person into the community. This taking on is focused on the body of the person and things associated with it, such as clothing and hair, which can be removed and thrown away.

### Christian Practice

In what follows we shall see that the place given to Christian practice is marginal. Christian practice is more concerned with the dead as disembodied spirits, and, for this reason, has little part to play in the first stage of the funeral process. Since people define themselves

as Christian, all burials are defined by them as 'Christian burials', even though they may not be attended by a priest or catechist and the corpse may be refused burial in the graveyard of the Church, the 'shamba la Mungu' (the field of God). This is a frequent occurrence, due to the pervasiveness of prohibitions on the sacraments and the distance of many homesteads from a priest. Burials held by Christians all feature the same church songs and prayer, whether or not a priest is present. There is then no valid distinction to be made between what goes on at a burial at which a priest or catechist is present and one at which they are not. What is interesting about the funeral process is the way in which Christian practice has become associated with it, even an integral part of it, at the same time as remaining separated either in time or space from that which is thought to be authentically jadi. This aspect will become evident in the context of sadaka for the dead and other tambiko oriented towards the remembrance of the related dead of a family. It will be discussed fully in the next chapter.

## **The Bitterness of Mourning**

All the events which constitute the funeral process, from the formal opening of mourning to the final meal at sadaka ya mwisho are part of the msiba or shiwembo. The two terms mean the same thing and are used interchangeably. They refer to the entire funeral process and carry with them an expectation of certain patterns of behaviour and the organisation of space at homesteads so afflicted. Funeral events are set apart from the everyday and, importantly, from feasts and celebrations, by restrictions on such things as food and dress, which must be appropriate to mourning.

Funeral events are explicitly concerned with 'cooperation'. If a man says that he has been 'working together with people at such and such a place', what he is saying is that he has been attending a funeral. Burying is spoken of collectively. It is the duty of neighbours and the obligation of kin to bury one another. Everything that happens at a funeral, because it happens at a funeral, is 'cooperation'. Simply by participating in the meal after the burial, one is cooperating. The contribution of small sums of cash towards the funeral expenses is an integral part of this cooperation. Cash is collected by the village party representatives and ten house leaders, the mabalozi, as presumably in the past it was collected by headmen. This is handed over to the 'mweni msiba', he with the msiba, or the 'owner' of it, usually a 'brother' of the bereaved, who assumes responsibility for the organisation of the event. This involves amassing sufficient food to feed everybody present, supervising its distribution after the burial and goading the women to cook and fetch water. It is to this man, as

representative of the main bereaved, that people arriving give condolences. Condolences are expressed in Kiswahili, in the idiom of cooling. The mourner says, as he would to a sick person, 'pole', literally 'be cool'. This idiom of cooling signifies both emotional calm and good health. It is extended to encompass states which are thought to be close to that of the mahoka, and it is the idiom in which blessing from the ancestors is expressed, with shimba izizimiri - 'let the body be cool'.

Unlike celebrations, from which people are increasingly excluded as invitation cards become, for the elite at least, the norm, nobody may be excluded from the public events which constitute a msiba. The msiba is the locus of cooperation par excellence. People who do not attend the funerals of their relatives and neighbours without good excuse are said to have 'no love for people' and, as among the Lodagaa, may even be implicated in the death itself (Goody 1962:86). Such people may well be accused of witchcraft. Being seen to attend funerals is to be seen to be good. The expectation to attend and to cooperate falls on all adults. Children do not attend, unless they are the children of the deceased. Young men who are not close kin are less likely to be present than are their female counterparts. This is because girls assume adult responsibilities far earlier and mourning is part of women's 'work'.

Those most likely to be frequent and ostentatious attenders are the older women, who consider themselves to be devout Christians and who are well versed in the songs of mateso (suffering) sung at the funerals. These are the same songs which are sung on Good Friday in the Church<sup>1</sup>. They describe graphically and at length the suffering and death of Jesus. These songs of suffering have become a legitimate expression of mourning. The singing of them is now held to be the equivalent of actual wailing or crying. These women also know the rosary fluently and the other songs sung routinely as part of Christian burials. They lead the prayer and song at a msiba, whether or not a priest or catechist is present. If a priest attends, he only leads prayer at the burial service itself.

Some of these women spend as many as thirty days a year involved in funeral activities. In a bad year, they spend much longer. One woman, whom I knew well, reckoned that between July and the end of August 1990 she had attended sixteen funeral events, of which ten were burials and three were tatu<sup>2</sup>. The remaining three were sadaka for people who had died the previous year. Involvement in funeral events is time consuming because these

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>2</sup> See below.

women stay at the house of the msiba for the fortnight period between the burial and toa tatu in the event of the death of a relative. They also attend the burials and sadaka for more distant kin and those unrelated to them but who lived in the vicinity. Many of these women are widows. They believe that, as one can be taken at any time God wants, one must be continually in a state of readiness for death. They regard attending other people's funerals as part of this preparation.

It is an honour and a mark of respect to have a large crowd at one's funeral. It also confers the stamp of moral approval on the life of the person who died. It is, however, unusual for people not to attend the funeral of a person simply because they were thought to be unpleasant or unpopular. Involvement in a msiba concerns the relation between families, as much as it concerns the personal relationships and friendships of the dead person with others in the community.

Those who have already been bereaved themselves are able to assist in the preparation of the body with impunity. Men's bodies are washed and prepared by men, and those of women by women. Older men also make a point of attending funerals. These older people actually seem to enjoy attending funerals and the activity that funerals entail. They deny this vigorously. Indeed, the very purpose of funerals is **not** to enjoy them, but to suffer. They are occasions of great bitterness and sorrow. This is most intense during the first part of the funeral process from the beginning of mourning until the body has been buried.

Burial marks the end of the dead as a person, whereas while the corpse remains in the house it is still regarded as a person who has died. After the burial people wash and neighbours can return to their houses because the dead "is not a person again". The sadness remains at the other funeral events, but is articulated with decreasing intensity. The dead is mourned for the last time at the sadaka ya mwisho. This, with special dancing overnight, marks the end of the funeral and the restrictions on the core bereaved imposed by mourning. As such, it is an occasion of both sorrow and celebration.

The bitterness felt by mourners is expressed in the old and ragged clothing worn at funeral events. People wear everyday farming clothes and go barefoot. Funeral food is similarly thought of as coarse, although it does not differ much, if at all, from the everyday food which people eat in their homes. Coarse ground maize flour must be used in the preparation of the funeral meal, as opposed to that which has been dehusked and then ground. Onions are not be used in the preparation of the likolu, the side dishes with which the maize ubaga is eaten, usually green vegetables or beans. Cooked dried fish is sometimes

served as a funeral meal, usually because of cost only for special people, and, partly because of the cost and partly because it is so associated with celebrations, meat is rarely served on the day of the burial, although it may be served, if the family can afford it, on the day of the toa tatu.

Whatever the old people say about funerals, they do enjoy some aspects of them. They enjoy the slow atmosphere of self indulgent grief, the singing and the chance to sit in a large group of same sex contemporaries and gossip. Funeral events are the only events which collectively involve a neighbourhood. In a sense they define it as an active network of relationships which transcends the artificial boundaries imposed by villagisation. As I shall show, they also provide an opportunity for the dramatisation of kinship in the marking out of related mourners from the general mass. And, crucially, funeral events provide a locus for the self conscious perpetuation of 'traditional' practice, as what is regarded as jadi is that which is thought to have been practised by one's ancestors and their ancestors in turn when they were alive (cf Middleton 1982:135). To deviate from it is to anger the long dead by not 'remembering' them, unless, of course, such deviations can be justified by the wishes of the new dead themselves.

A person may tell their relatives before they die that they want the funeral to last only one day or to finish after toa tatu, usually about two weeks after the burial. Some devout Christians ask that sadaka ya mwisho be dispensed with, and replaced by a mass. Others may request that they want only masses, not tambiko after the funeral process is over. In general, it is the old who make these requests in preparation for their own deaths. Youth, on the other hand, do not plan for their deaths and changes in funeral routine for young people are imposed by elders acting in the interests of the remaining living relatives.

## **Children's Funerals**

The funerals of children are short, collapsed into one day, with the body being buried, usually in the morning, on the same day as the death. There is little ceremony. Elaborate mourning is curtailed and does not extend beyond the burial. In the case of small children, the elder in charge of the funeral can request that women do not wail. Once a boy is about 19 and a girl has become a mwali, they are treated as adults for the purpose of funerals. To mourn them is not thought of as bad, whereas to mourn a child will involve too much 'bitterness', which can, in some vague way, have ill effects on the siblings or the parents of



the child who has died. The funerals of younger people tend to be short, with toa tatu, if it is held at all, held very soon after the burial.

The first child to die, of whatever age, while the parents are still living is called the mjindu. Such funerals last only one day and, as we saw in the previous chapter, involve special practices aimed at reinforcing the fertility of the mother and a symbolic denial of the birth itself and that the death ever happened, made explicit in the prohibition on the parents seeing the body of their child<sup>3</sup>. The parents of a mjindu may not attend the burial. The one day nature of the funeral is emphasised in the taboo on offering them condolences after the funeral is over. The special collapsed funeral practices associated with a mjindu are dealt with as they offer a contrast to the everyday funerals of other adults, but what follows concerns mainly the funerals of older adults of both sexes, people who are wakulu, 'big ones', or elders.

### **Lugutu as a Second Death to Begin the Funeral**

Funerals are not only about burying. The disposal of the body is merely a part of the funeral, which is about kuguta, 'wailing' or 'crying'<sup>4</sup>. In this context it implies mourning. The word shiwembo, as well as denoting the funeral in its entirety, also refers to the stylized mourning dirges of the women. Wailing and crying is the 'work' of women because women have the capacity to feel lusungu, 'pity' or 'bitterness', and are 'able to suffer'. The main burden of mourning falls on women. For the core bereaved, it entails not only crying, but the acceptance of certain proscriptions which are associated with being in a state of mourning. The msiba is formally opened and the mourning begun, implying a reorganisation of domestic space and labour appropriate to funeral events.

The event which opens the msiba is called lugutu<sup>5</sup>. It involves the killing of a chicken of the same sex as the deceased on the threshold of the house, while a male elder implores the mahoka to allow the events to proceed without discord. He scatters some maize grains or pumpkin seeds from the dead person's store across the yard to encourage them to keep away. A female relative of the dead smashes a pot or a gourd signifying that wailing can

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Five.

<sup>4</sup> It can also mean 'complaining', usually about somebody, which can imply an accusation of witchcraft.

<sup>5</sup> From -guta, to cry, wail.

begin. The essential act is the killing of the chicken, which is the 'work' of a woman, usually a 'sister' of the dead. The chicken is killed by smashing its head against the doorframe of the house so that it dies without shedding blood, in contrast to the usual way of killing chickens by cutting their throats with a knife, which anybody may do. Until this chicken has been killed it is taboo to kill anything else at the homestead of the deceased, as it would encourage death.

The chicken is left where it lies for a time, before being taken away, plucked and cooked. Its meat is eaten by the old people who have already been 'died on' and who, because of their age, think of themselves as being close to death and to the dead. "Us!", said one, "We could die tomorrow". If the young and the not yet bereaved were to eat the meat of this chicken they could bring death to their houses and families. Old women are particularly suited to eating this meat. Not only have they already been 'died on', but, having 'dried out', proximity with death will not harm their fertility. Also, as women, they should involve themselves fully in mourning, of which eating this chicken is part.

The killing of the lugutu chicken is not an offering to the dead and is of a different order from sacrifice. It is directed at death at the same time as being the very death which can begin the msiba. People say that the taboos on the lugutu chicken apply because it is 'another death'. It is not, however, an ordinary death; it is a bloodless death which makes possible the spilling of blood. Blood is equated with life. Blood running around the body is a sign of youth and health. To be short of blood is associated with sickness, age and fever, ideas reinforced by hospital blood testing for anaemia and blood pressure. Killing and death involve the spilling of blood. As we have seen, chickens can stand for people in certain contexts and on certain occasions<sup>6</sup>. That the chicken at lugutu stands for the dead person, much as in Nuer sacrifice the cattle are identified with people (Evans Pritchard 1956: 263), is made explicit in the fact that the chicken must be of the same sex as the deceased. At lugutu the person whom the chicken represents has already died. The death must be contained or it will become pervasive. The mahoka want people to die so that they will join them. Dead people return in dreams and may try to entice the living to follow them, or grab their limbs and try to drag them away. Much of the symbolism of the funeral events is concerned with preventing the dead 'from coming back' randomly to take the living and about the setting up of the necessary distance between the living and the dead. Because the mahoka want death, they can be encouraged by death to bring more death. The mahoka want blood because blood is the stuff of life. Spilled blood is death. The

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapter Six.

bloodless killing of the chicken is a way of containing death by having a death without blood, which is further contained physically by the already bereaved who consume its meat, just as the mwali's potent fertility is contained by the wamakolu when they eat the first lot of cucumber seeds. It is also the death of the person who has died, controlled and without blood.

### **At the House Awaiting the Burial**

When the people already gathered at the house hear the pot smashing, a chorus of wails erupts from the women. Neighbours and others hear this and come rushing over. Some people are more pragmatic and meander over to the house of the msiba later in the day, for custom has it that the body of an adult will not be buried until about 4pm, at the start of evening. If relatives are expected from a distance the burial is deferred. It is important that mourners arrive before the burial because it is this which is thought of as being done collectively. The wailing continues periodically throughout the day, and indeed after the body has been buried.

Women mourners arriving at the house of the dead pause and collect themselves at the edge of the compound, to prepare for their entrance at a slow pace and with arms raised in a striking gesture of loss. As they approach the yard and go right into the house, they wail in rhythm the name of the deceased or the kinship term by which they used to call them.

Men and women arrive separately. They will spend the whole day in separate groups in separate places. The organisation of space at a msiba is not, in fact, radically different from the everyday, but is, rather, a dramatisation of it. The men sit outside, leaning their backs against the walls of the house in the shade of the eaves, squatting on rocks, low stools or bricks. Women sit flat on the ground with their legs straight out in front of them. The men gather around the mwani msiba and the male bereaved who sit outside the house, which is packed full with women.

There are no hard and fast rules about the internal organisation of domestic space, even though the actual design of the houses is so standardised. Pogoro houses are usually divided into four or two rooms, coming off a central corridor which cuts the house in two. There are doors at either end of this passageway. There may be a couple of small windows which, in the modern burned brick style houses, are closed with wooden shutters. The central

space is frequently used for cooking and is where the three hearthstones, the mafiga are set out. Cooking inside is preferred in the months after the harvest as it helps to preserve the grain, stored on bamboo slats making a kind of ceiling. Some women prefer to build a lean to shelter in the yard and to cook there. Others cook in one of the rooms in the house.

Nowadays, it is most unusual for a husband and wife to have separate houses, unless the union is polygamous. In that case, each person has his or her own dwelling. The important contrast in Pogoro symbolism is not between the domestic space and the world beyond it, but between the inside of the house and the outside, which encompasses the yard, the community beyond it and the fields and forests. The homestead, ukaya, is distinguished from the physical structure of the house, numba. The physical structure of the house is simply a part of the homestead, albeit a central one.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the house itself is really a place for sleeping and for private activity. Social activity take place outside the house, on the luaga (yard) and in those of kin and neighbours. This is where people sit and talk, eat, prepare food, weave mats and so on. These yards are not enclosed by hedges or fences. The yard is an extension of the domestic space of the house. Callers ask permission to enter. Guests are received in the yard and seated in the shade of the roof away from the sun.

Irrespective of where an individual woman actually chooses to cook, what is important is that conceptually the hearthstones are thought of as being inside the house. In the ceremony for the moving of the bride, when the bride is escorted by her kin to the house of her husband and her path has to be eased with payments from the groom's family, the final payment is demanded for moving the bride right into the house of the groom, either to the bed or to the hearthstones<sup>7</sup>. Bed and hearth are, of course, the whole purpose of marriage. One hearth defines household, centred on the woman who feeds its members (cf Harwood 1970:23). On the death of a spouse, a payment called vyamnumba is demanded by the female kin of the dead from the female kin of the survivor, in recognition of the 'things of the inside of the house' which the widow or widower had received from their relative. These are food, sex and domestic labour. That this payment passes between women is significant. Women are more closely associated with these matters, and with the very house itself, than are men. The inside of the house is the place of legitimate sex and reproduction. It is where mothers and mwallis are secluded in order to safeguard their

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<sup>7</sup> See Chapter Five.

future fertility and when they are not thought to be in a sufficiently 'good state' to 'come outside.' Men and boys are on no occasion secluded inside, unless they are corpses or newborns.

At a **msiba**, the men sit around the side of the house which is not being sat around by women. The two groups do not mix with each other socially on this occasion, as they would at a drinking club for example or even at home so long as, for the older generation at least, the conventions of avoidance between certain categories of kin are not flouted<sup>8</sup>. The women sit inside the house, cramming themselves into all the available space. The inside of the house is the place of women at all the events associated with a **msiba** because the inside of house, where the dead person is, is the obvious locus of mourning.

During funeral events, men sleep outside the house, not inside it. The women, if there is space, sleep inside. Other women sleep outside, away from the men. It is taboo to sleep on mats or beds. Sex is also taboo. Both sexes sleep on the ground, on the dry banana leaves which have been spread throughout the house and yard for this purpose. They are a sure sign of a **msiba** and are used for sleeping at all funeral events. The sweeping away of these banana leaves signifies the end of a stage of the funeral. It is most elaborate at the very end of the funeral process, when the yard is swept clean and the banana leaf shelter in which the funeral beer was placed is destroyed.

There is never enough room inside the house for all the women present. The close relatives of the dead sit in the room with the corpse. Outside, women prepare food huddled around large cooking fires. As well as wailing, the other work of women at a **msiba** is cooking. Up to two hundred people may attend, all of whom have to be fed. Men and young boys are sent out by the mwani msiba to 'look for' food, flour and things to go with it. On this occasion, because all the women are occupied, 'looking for' likolu and going to the grinding mill are the work of men, who may even fetch the firewood needed at the house. Other men are sent out to purchase a shroud and, if there is money, a coffin.

The corpse is washed and dressed in good clothing before being laid out on a bed in one of the rooms. Men go inside the house to look at the body, but, unless they are the husband or the father of the dead, they do not remain long. A husband who has lost a wife is expected to stay with her body until the burial, as is a woman who has lost her husband. A widower wears rags and goes barechested until after the body has been buried. Spouses

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<sup>8</sup> See Chapter Five.

are not allowed to leave the house until the burial. Should they need to urinate they are escorted by a group of mourners, lest, distraught with grief, they attempt to injure themselves. They are permitted neither food nor drink until after the burial.

## **Defining the Bereaved**

Those to whom I refer as the 'core bereaved' are those who define themselves as the immediate family of the dead. This group can be extensive. Its composition depends very much on personal choice rather than proscription. It can include sisters in law or father's sisters of the dead, brothers in law and mother's brothers. Affines define themselves as core bereaved if there was a good relationship between the two families. The core bereaved mark themselves out from the mass of mourners by smearing a mixture of flour and water across their foreheads. They remain at the house of the *msiba* after the burial, when neighbours and distant kin disperse. Women are more likely to define themselves as core bereaved than are men, and they are more likely to wear flour on their faces in a dramatic slash of white. These women spend much of the day of the burial in the same room as the corpse. They may actually throw themselves to the ground with grief, the expression of which is highly stylized. Those particularly close to the dead wear only one piece of cloth, tied under the armpits and with their breasts hanging down over the top. It is these women, if they are older, who will mourn for an extended period of time. A widow should remain in a state of mourning, signified by the wearing of a strip of cloth, *lijemba*, representing the shroud, until the funeral process is finished.

## **Preparing for Burial**

The burial will take place either in the churchyard or at the family's burial plot, which is usually at some distance from the house although well within the area of land with which they are associated. Throughout the day until the procession departs for the burial, the people gathered at the house continue to mourn and cry. The women wail intermittently in waves when the rosary or songs of suffering are not being sung. Each time a newcomer enters the house a new chorus of wailing erupts inside it. The singing is subdued. The atmosphere is eerie and intense, but calm. At funerals I sat with the women, either inside or outside the house. I do not know whether the men involve themselves as fully in the prayer and song, although it seems they spend more time talking.

The women prepare pieces of plantain and cassava for the mourners, to take the edge off their hunger while they wait. Grain is pounded for the large meal served after the burial. Beans are boiled in giant pots. The relatives of the dead negotiate with affines over the various payments which should be made before the body is buried. These payments, of which vyamnumba is one, are known in totality as shirandira mashi, 'for the drinking of the water', because they should be made, or at the very least agreed, before the burial. Only when the body has been buried can the main bereaved drink water. If a woman dies before her husband has completed paying bridewealth, this should be paid, ideally in full, before the body can be buried.<sup>9</sup>

The body is washed shortly after death by same sex people who have already been bereaved themselves. For anybody else to do so would be to invite death. Only the already died-on may take with them the soap and dishes which were used to wash the corpse. Similar restrictions apply to the clothing of the dead, in particular to that in which the dead person has been laid out. The bed on which the body has been lying out is put outside the house after a burial. This too may be given away, so that the family of the dead do not think about them and become sad.

Just before the burial, the body is undressed and washed again. All clothing is removed. It is dressed again in a white cloth, wrapped around tightly. The face is left uncovered so that mourners may look for the last time and, as they bid farewell to the corpse, kneel and touch the cold forehead with the right hand. The corpse is barefoot. If there is no shroud cloth, a piece of another kind of cloth, called shitambi, can be used instead. This kind of cloth is white with some thin strands of colour running through it. It is the kind of cloth which is frequently demanded by the mahoka and offered in two pieces, one for each side, at problem oriented tambiko<sup>10</sup>. The cloth belonging to the ancestors is kept for them in a box by their eldest descendant. It cannot be used by the living, but, in the event of a death, it may be 'borrowed', by the corpse as long as it is replaced soon after the burial. When mahoka appear to living people in dreams, they are wearing white cloth or shitambi. The corpse has to be dressed in the clothing of the ancestors. If a person is incorrectly dressed before burial, they will not be recognised by the other mahoka and, rejected, will wander around, troubling the living. This is what happened to the parents of the 'European' woman mentioned in Chapter Three. She had buried her parents dressed in European

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<sup>9</sup> This is called 'bridewealth the corpse' (kuheta mauti) and was discussed in Chapter Five.

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter Eight.

clothing with shoes on their feet. Nobody was surprised when, of all the houses in her village, only her's lost a child to the cholera which swept across the district in 1991.

Some thin, bandage like strips are torn from the shroud<sup>11</sup> and set aside when the body is being dressed. These ngoi (strings) or majemba are worn tied around the heads of the female core bereaved. Apart from the widow and, perhaps, sisters of the dead, whoever else decides to wear these does so as a matter of choice rather than proscription. An older adult daughter may wear them but, in general, it is considered inappropriate for any but the old to do so, at least for an extended period of time. This is because a woman wearing lijemba is under the restrictions of mourning. She should not dress well nor use cosmetics on her body. Neither can she have sex. Old women say that, when they were young, only very old women or widows wore lijemba because "men are not able to suffer". A married woman wearing lijemba, perhaps to 'accompany' a bereaved sister, can pass the lijemba on to another sister if her husband demands, who then assumes the obligations of mourning. Loose threads are pulled from the frayed edge of the shroud and tied around the wrists of the dead person's small children. This is to prevent them from 'dreaming' (cf Goody 1962:147) and so protect them from the dead<sup>12</sup>. Children wear the threads until they drop off naturally.

As the assembled mourners file inside the house to see the body for the last time, a final chorus of wailing, lasting anything up to an hour, begins before the departure for the burial ground. If a catechist or priest has come to do the service at the house, this is read outside, when the body has been brought out and, either in a closed coffin or wrapped in a mat, placed in the centre of the yard. As small children may not see the corpse, they are lifted over the coffin as a gesture of farewell. This is called 'jumping the corpse'. The body is taken out of the house, where it has been associated with women, by men (cf Bloch & Parry 1982:25) who carry it to the grave. Once buried, a corpse ceases to be a 'person' and begins the process of transformation into a spirit, a process mediated by men, who are also responsible for the digging and preparation of the grave.

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<sup>11</sup> The usual word for shroud is sanda, but I was told that lujemba was the authentic Pogoro equivalent, now archaic.

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter Eight.



## The Burial

The women inside the house, and the widower if a woman has died, follow the body out of it. The procession assembles, the core bereaved leading with the widow or widower in front of the body. The rest follow, first the main bereaved, then the men and, finally, the remaining women. The actual burial is short and is based, as are the style of the graves, on Christian practice. Christian songs are sung by the people gathered around the open grave. Mourners drop a handful of earth into the grave as they leave. People return to the homestead of the dead, in single file without looking back towards the grave. As they draw near, they pause to wash their hands, faces and feet in a nearby stream. Those who have flour on their faces wash it off and women wearing majemba pull them down from their foreheads and wear the string around their necks, with the ends falling across the chest. Mourners must wash before reentering the funeral homestead and certainly before returning home, so as not to bring the death with them.

A meal is served in the yard. The distribution of the food is supervised by men, the mweni msiba and other 'brothers' of the bereaved. Men and elders are served first, people eating in small single sex groups gathered around one dish, as is the custom. The men who have dug the grave and helped to carry the corpse are given special food, in recognition of their labour. The meal is an essential part of the burial. Eating together, as the idiom of sociability<sup>13</sup>, is integral to th'cooperation' that burying entails. Only after they have finished eating can people depart, leaving the core bereaved at the house of the dead where they will stay until at least after shasangira. This, the 'things of the throwing away' happens one or two days after the burial, and marks the end of the burial for the close relatives of the dead.

## The Gradual Removal of Death

Death as an event encourages death, which the killing of the chicken at lugutu is an attempt to contain. Death is also directly contagious. The corpse, as the dead thing itself, is the most contagious of all. The contagiousness of death permeates everything connected with the corpse, material items and the people who attended the burial and were present at the house of the bereaved. For this reason, only those who have already been 'died on' may involve themselves in the preparation and washing of the corpse, or take with them the

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<sup>13</sup> See Chapter Two.

vessels which were used in its preparation. All those who have attended a funeral must wash as they leave, even if they have had no close contact with the body. Death is so contagious that pregnant women and those with small babies should not attend funerals, but if they do they should remain distant from the house of the death and stand far back on the margins of the burial ground at the actual burial.

The contagiousness of death affects particularly acutely those who are closely related to the dead and who are obliged to have close contact with them. The core bereaved do not only make themselves physically close to the corpse, but become identified with it (cf Goody 1962:188; Wilson 1957:49). This identification is most apparent in the case of the main female mourners, who wear a piece of the shroud in which the body has been wrapped. Main mourners are shut inside the house with the body and come outside with it, because they are being made to physically take on the death and carry it around with them as dirt. This is systematically removed in stages following the burial, at the various repeat funerals which make up the funeral process.

### **Shaving the Bereaved**

The first of these stages is the washing and shaving of the core bereaved after the burial. Everybody washes as they return to the homestead, but the main bereaved must be washed with medicine to make them clean and to prevent them from 'dreaming'. In this context, the main bereaved are spouses and parents. A wider group of kin are shaved. Who agrees to be shaved depends on personal choice and the individual's feelings about the dead person. To shave at a funeral is a sign of bitterness and makes a statement of one's love for the dead person. Small children are also shaved. Close affines shave if the relation between families was good. To shave for an affine is a mark of respect for one's spouse.

While the meal is served to the mourners, or shortly after, the already died-on shave the heads of the core bereaved with a blade and water at the edge of the yard, which is thought of as an appropriate place for throwing rubbish. Because it is a funeral, the very purpose of which is suffering, soap is not used. The core bereaved do not wash with soap until after the shasangira. Those who choose to extend their mourning continue this prohibition until toa tatu. Only the head is shaved. The hair is left to lie where it falls. The main bereaved are later taken, by same sex people who have already been died on, to be washed with lufumbeza leaves in a stream of running water. This is the same kind of medicine which was used to wash the mwali and which, because of its pungent smell, is thought cleansing, as

well as preventing dreaming. Only after this can they be given food. To break the fast of death, which serves to reinforce the identification of the bereaved with the corpse, they are fed gruel, the food of the sick and small children. They are thus partially reintegrated into the community of the living.

Shaving the bereaved is a recurrent feature of post burial practice in the funeral rituals of other African societies. It is practised by groups as diverse as the Nyakyusa (Wilson 1957:42), Lugbara<sup>14</sup> (Middleton 1982:148) and the Nuer (Evans Pritchard 1956:152). It is not merely a ritual of separation, as Goody suggests for the funeral shaving of the LoDagaa (1962:61), serving to separate the living from the dead, and, since the LoDagaa shave the corpse also, the dead from their previous life. It is a ritual of cleansing. Among the Pogoro, shaving is associated with washing in the special contexts involving purification by water, as we have seen in the washing of the mwali and will become evident when we look at the suppression of witchcraft<sup>15</sup>. At the same time, like the whitewashing of the faces, it serves to mark out the bereaved from other people.

All these groups express concern over the contagion of death and all share a similar preoccupation with 'dirt'. For the Nyakyusa, both sex and death make the person 'dirty' (Wilson 1957:130), and much of their ritual practice is oriented towards its reduction or removal. In the context of funerals, this is the 'filth' of the corpse which adheres to the bodies of all those who have come into contact with it. Goody, writing about the LoDagaa, examines their concept of 'dirt', observing that LoDagaa funeral rituals are oriented towards the purification of participants through such actions as washing with water, the breaking of a new laid egg, whitewashing and sweeping (1962:57). While Goody perceives that a relationship exists between the two kinds of dirt, he systematically misunderstands its basis, maintaining that the LoDagaa concept of dirt is particularly concerned with the 'exuviae of the human body', which in the form of sweat, body fluids and so on, adhere to the clothes of a person and to the things and people with whom they are in close contact. Consequently, those with whom the dead has been in close physical contact during his life are the 'subject of particular attention during funeral ceremonies' (1962:59).

The shaving of the head of the surviving spouse is interpreted in similar vein. In this view, it is not the dirt of death which the shaving is intended to remove but the dirt which the spouse contracted from the other when they were alive (1962:61). Although Goody

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<sup>14</sup> Among the Lugbara, only women shave after funerals.

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter Nine.

acknowledges the close identification of mourner and corpse, he insists that 'the widows are treated as dead because of their close association with the deceased', and, moreover, 'the defilement of the surviving partner arises not only from a general association with the deceased, but from the most intimate form of human intercourse, the sexual act' (op cit, 193). The dirt which the LoDagaa funeral rites are intended to remove is seen by Goody to be not the dirt of death, but the dirt of a physical intimacy which the death has brought to an end.

In these societies, including that of the Pogoro, 'dirt' is something associated with physical intimacy and physical process in general. The same 'dirt' is a consequence of sex and death, of birth and mourning, although on occasion, these two aspects of 'dirt' stand antithetically opposed. Mary Douglas has exposed the logic underlying this representation of the processes of reproduction and death, which are often treated in the same way symbolically because of the 'paradox of the ultimate unity of life and death' (1966:176). For the LoDagaa, the widow is 'dirty' and needs to be cleansed, not because of the physical intimacy which she had with the deceased in the form of a sexual relationship while he was alive, but because of her identification with the corpse. This is not because of the physical intimacy between them, as such, but because her social relationship as a wife puts her in the social category of bereaved. Goody himself points to the parallel treatment by the LoDagaa of the core bereaved and the corpse. At one point, the widow is even approached as if she were actually dead, when an offering is made to her as if she were an ancestor (1962:188). As a Nyakyusa informant said to Monica Wilson, "What they do to the participants they do to the deceased...If they are not cleansed, he is still muddy" (1957:49).

The core bereaved are shaved and washed with medicine. This is the first stage of the removal of the dirt of death, which they have taken on by their identification with the corpse. Shaving is appropriate because it takes away something from the body of the person, in this case the hair. The same logic demands that the bereaved change their clothes at the end of mourning.

Pogoro people refer to body fluids in some contexts as 'dirt' or 'rubbish' simply because they are, like banana peel or dust, superfluous. When talking about sex in terms of experience, rather than the ideology of descent and reproduction, women call semen 'men's rubbish' which drips out of them or, if the couple continue to have intercourse too late on

in a pregnancy<sup>16</sup>, can make the newborn appear dirty and spattered with white. This notion of 'dirt' is a way of talking about states. It has no moral weighting.

The 'dirt' of reproduction and of death are the same and are dealt with in the same manner. Removal involves containment. Before it can be removed, however, it must be indulged in, taken on, which involves the whole body of the person. Adult people indulge in sexual activity and are thus, by the very fact of living as people should, implicated in dirt, although this is not felt to be excessive. It is only in contexts which involve contact with the mahoka that a person should be in a state approaching some sort of purity. This is achieved by abstaining from sex and the avoidance of hot things. This sort of purity is the way in which the distance between the living and the dead is temporarily broken down as the living get into states more like those which the disembodied dead are thought to be in. These states are necessarily temporary. Indeed, they are not desired as permanent because, if they were, a person would be almost dead himself. This is explicit in the case of the wambui, the diviners of the local shrines who are thought able to communicate with the mahoka via the medium of their localised spirit. Before entering the sacred section of the forest, these mediums follow certain prohibitions which are designed to make them more like the mahoka than other living people. They abstain from sex, from smoking and from food. They observe permanently various other restrictions on such things as dress and style of housing, in order to conform to the demands of jadi. Not only are their clothes held to be 'traditional', a piece of single coloured cloth wrapped around the body, they wear next to their skin a piece of white cloth, such as is used as a shroud or demanded by the mahoka. Just as it is taboo to dress a body in red, it is taboo for wambui to wear this colour. Red is associated with blood and with hot things. They avoid contact with death. They must not see corpses and, like pregnant women, they stand aside at the first stage of a funeral when the presence of the body makes death contagious. As I show in the following chapter, the wambui can act as intermediaries between the dead and the living because they themselves are like the dead.

Physical processes associated with birth and death implicate the living person in more excessive dirt, locating them at the other extreme of the continuum away from the state of the mahoka. Taking on the dirt that these situations entail is a way of harnessing and containing the potency inherent in them, at the same time as seeking, through various rites of purification, to reestablish the ideal middle position appropriate for living people. The person is transformed by involvement in such processes and moves further along the

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<sup>16</sup> There was a general consensus among older women that 'too late' is after the seventh month.

continuum of life towards death and becoming a lihoka. Consequently, bereavement is a status, as is becoming a mwali or a mother. This drama is played out between two conceptually opposite places, the inside of the house and the cool shade of the forest, the place of the mahoka. The ideal middle space for living people is the social space of the yards and fields.

## The First Child to Die

In the previous chapter, we looked briefly at the special funeral practices for the mjindu, the first child of particular parents to die while those parents are still living. The funeral for a mjindu lasts only one day and is particularly intense. The parents of the dead child are not allowed to see the body and the mother must remain inside the house until after the burial. Not attending the burial is a denial of the fact of the death, as is not seeing the corpse. The death has, however, happened, and the mother in particular is made to take on the dirt that this entails. When the others return from the burial, some female relatives of the woman go into the house and roll out a hearthstone after her. The mother herself is made to shuffle out of the house on her buttocks as far as the rubbish heap, where she is washed and shaved. As she shuffles across the yard, these women sweep up dirt from the yard and the house and throw it on her head.

Sweeping the yard clear of the dried banana leaves happens at the end of each stage of the funeral process, but the only occasion on which women are covered with rubbish is at the funeral of the mjindu. It is done here to demonstrate the intensity of the collapsed funeral and the utter abjection of the mother. It also provides an explicit contrast between the state of the mother before shaving and being washed and after. After she has been shaved and washed with lufumbeza, the mother changes her clothes and her body is rubbed with oil. She is given some of the shirala medicine by the women of her father's side. A new hearthstone is put inside the house to replace the one which the women have abandoned at the rubbish heap, with the mother's hair. The mama mjindu is expected to sleep with her husband that evening. The mourning is over.

Here the funeral ritual is collapsed into the coming out of the mwali and, with the replacement of the hearthstone, marriage. The mourning mother becomes, after being washed and shaved, a mwali again. Like the mwali, she is given medicine to guarantee her fertility and she is taken by her husband. Death here is presented as being so antithetical to birth that the mother is not permitted to attend the burial. There is then no direct

identification of the mother with the child's corpse, but the woman herself is treated like one. She is swept out of the house shuffling, by the other women, who treat her as rubbish. Like the hearthstone and her child she is discarded, but only temporarily.

The mama mjindu is followed by her child, the hearthstone, to the rubbish heap in a reversal of the normal funeral sequence in which the main mourners follow the corpse out of the house. She leaves the stone at the rubbish heap, and, in so doing, can return to the house as a new woman. The death of a mjindu contradicts the proper order of generations, in which the dead are those who have 'gone before', 'walongulera'. As such, it is an affront both to female fertility and the natural order of things. The correct order is restated symbolically in the ritual as the mama mjindu goes before her child to the rubbish heap. The trick is that it is he, not her, who is left there while she, transformed, can return to the house. In the funeral of a mjindu the identity of the mother is collapsed; she remains inside the house as both female bereaved and mwali. In the end, because the funeral of the mjindu is partly a symbolic denial of the fact of the death, her identity as mwali, as fertile bride bearing the potentiality of progeny, triumphs.

The husband is simply washed and shaved. Unlike his wife, he does not have to remain inside the house. As we saw in the previous chapter, in the funeral rites for a mjindu what made the birth possible has to be restated, which is why the mwali rites are repeated in condensed form for the mama mjindu. There is, however, more to it than this. The mwali rites are very similar to what happens at funerals. This is partly because both are oriented towards the taking on of 'dirt' and also because of the parallels between the symbolic construction of death, birth and initiation. All three borrow each other's imagery in order to effect some kind of transformation. In the funeral process, obviously, this is the transition from person to corpse to ancestor. It is only when this is finally thought to have happened that the female mourners can dissociate themselves from the death and stop carrying it around with them. What is thought to happen to the corpse is paralleled by what happens to the main mourner throughout. A widow cannot dissociate herself completely from the corpse until the very end of the funeral process, sadaka ya mwisho. This is described in the next chapter.

## **The Burial of the Shroud Strips**

The death is removed in stages from the main mourners and the core bereaved. This removal corresponds to the degree of closeness in their relationship with the dead. We have

already looked at the very first stage right after the burial, when everybody washes and the core bereaved are shaved. The removal of the shroud strips, the majemba, is carried out progressively at the various repeat funerals which make the identification between these pieces of shroud and the corpse explicit.

Close relatives of the dead remain at the house of the msiba for one or two days. On the morning of the second day after the burial, while it is still dark, the shasangira meal is prepared at the house. The men sleep outside, because it is still a msiba. The women are inside. One of the older women, the wamakolu, takes some of the food in her hand and scatters it into the corners of the house. She does this silently. The food is left to lie where it falls. This is a tambiko, although an informal one, to the generalised and unnamed dead who are thought to be hovering around the homestead, indeed inside the very house itself, attracted by the death. It also parallels what happens to the corpse who has, like the food, been discarded. Shasangira means literally 'things thrown away'. Night is the time of the spirits. Ordinary tambiko are made at morning or evening, when it is cool. They are usually made by men. Women here are set up as the arbiters of uncontrolled polluting death, while men negotiate formally with the ancestors. Morning and evening are appropriate times for approaching the mahoka, because they are liminal periods, neither wholly the time of the living nor of the dead. The shasangira meal is eaten by those present at the house before daylight.

After the shasangira, the women who have been wearing majemba go, before the sun has risen, to bury them by water. The shroud strips are buried in a shallow trench, made oblong like a grave, in the muddy soil at the edges of a permanent river. They are laid lengthwise on top of each other. Bereaved women close to the dead remove the strips which were been torn from the shroud and replace them with a piece of cloth, which they wear around the neck as lijemba. Some spit water onto the strip as they lay it in the earth.

To spit water, kupeta mashi, is a kind of tambiko to the mahoka when they trouble the living. It is way of spitting out the trouble and the heat from the physical body of the group, while, at the same time, calming the mahoka. It is discussed in the next chapter. The women speak to the dead person as they bury the majemba, saying, "You have gone and left us. Don't come back". They ask that 'nshimba zizizimiri' - 'the bodies be cool'. This is directed both at the person who has died and at those left behind. They cover the trench with earth, wash themselves in the stream looking only downstream as they do so as not to encourage the dead to return, and make their way to the house without looking back. Some return to their houses, but those close to the dead remain until toa tatu.



Some of those who continue to wear lijemba remove them at toa tatu, which is described in the next chapter. For here, what is important is that the removal of the majemba is always the same. They are buried 'like a corpse', by water. Beer or the flour water mixture which was used to daub the faces of the bereaved can be spat onto them instead of water. It is the responsibility of women to bury them. It does not concern men, although older men know what happens and why. One told me the women do it because, "It is like putting fire in water". A woman who has worn them many times explained that burying the strips by water calms the dead and they become still. This is possible because the shroud strips are the dead person and death in general, which the female mourners have been physically carrying around with them. Burying them 'like a corpse' makes them into the symbolic corpse of the second, third and fourth funerals, shasangira, tatu and sadaka ya mwisho. They are buried by water to assist in the transformation of the corpse into lihoka.

The women, the corpse and the shroud strips are all identified with each other. Just as the dead person must be cleansed and cooled down in order to become a lihoka, so the women must be cleansed and cooled down in order for them to resume their normal positions, away from the 'dirt' of mourning. At the very end of the funeral sequence, a widow may even be shaved again. Indeed, the whole Pogoro notion of ancestral blessing is about purification through cooling and is, in effect, a transformation or a movement between states of heat associated with the extreme poles of biological living and the cold states associated with calm, with wellbeing as opposed to sickness and disruption, and with the mahoka.

The medium of cooling and cleansing, which gets people back into good 'states' is water. Its equivalent is the process of decay. This is what happens to the body of the corpse and, by implication, to the hair and other stuff discarded at the place where domestic rubbish is thrown. This may be anywhere at the edge of the yard, away from the house. Places so designated are often clumps of banana trees, plants which are, as we saw in the previous chapter, associated with a prolific and natural fertility and which surround every yard. It is in clumps of banana trees that umbilical cords are planted, like banana suckers, and also in these trees that the corpses of babies and afterbirths are disposed of. If a mwali is shaved a second time, her hair is thrown there or is buried at a forest tree called mfulu, a prolific bearer of dark coloured fruits, the name of which suggests another name for rubbish heap, lifulu. Dirt must be taken on physically in order to be contained. It can then be discarded, and its potency fed back into the cycle of natural growth, leaving the person clean. The mahoka are thought to be attracted to places where rubbish is thrown, and it is here where peta mashi is often done at a problem oriented tambiko.

There are explicit parallels between what happens to the mwali and what happens to the female mourners and to the corpse with whom they are identified. These centre on the house and the distinction drawn between the inside of the house itself, and the world beyond it. This world is further conceptually divided, first into the domestic yet public space of the yard, the margins of the homestead where the family cultivates bananas and perhaps other vegetables, and finally the fields and forests. Agriculture still involves clearing and burning forest. The only forest which never becomes fields is that associated with localised spirits. The forest in general is the place of medicinal plants, wild foods and the mahoka. Forest or bush really refers not so much to the presence or absence of trees, as to an absence of human habitation. The margins of the homestead, the place where the rubbish is thrown and where the mahoka are invoked at problem oriented tambiko, is equivalent to the forest and the burial ground. It is perhaps important to note here that there are no ancestor shrines (cf Richards 1939:357).

The inside of the house is the place of the hearth and of the intimacies of marriage. It is the place where, at certain times, certain categories of people are confined, and this confinement is followed by cleansing. For women, these occasions are; after the birth of a baby, on becoming a mwali, as a main mourner and as a corpse. Men are secluded inside the house as newborns, when their separation from the mother is not socially recognised, and as corpses. Widowers remain inside the house with the body for a time, but they do not bear the symbolic burden of the corpse, as women do. A mwali is made to stay inside, passive and silent, 'talking only with her hands'. Silence, jiii, is equated with absence, unsociability and death. She is carried out of the house eventually, by women, as if she were a corpse. Like the baby, she is given medicine. She is shaved and washed with the lufumbeza medicine, the leaves of which are used in all rituals of cooling and purification. The head hair, which was shaved off when she began to menstruate, is kept until her second period, and then, just as the strips of shroud are buried, it is buried by water in the muddy banks of a permanent river. Women mourners (and a male spouse) are shut inside the house with the body, and they follow the body out. Their identification with the body is reinforced by their wearing of the shroud. As long as the dead is still untransformed into a lihoka at least one of them must carry him around.

The same proscriptions with regard to the sacred spaces of the local shrines apply to women who are wearing majemba as to women who are menstruating or who have recently given birth. These and the significance of water are described in the next chapter, when the offerings to the localised spirits, on which the fertility of the land depends, are discussed.



## **Eight: TAMBIKO AND POSSESSION**

This chapter examines the giving of tambiko as a means of maintaining a relationship with the dead. It looks at the way in which the distance between the living and the dead, established in the first part of the funeral, is broken down formally at the sadaka ya mwisho. This marks the end of the funeral and the first offering to honour the dead, rather than keep them away. It is in the relationship with the related dead that Christianity meets jadi on something of the same terms. Masses for the dead have become an integral part of the funeral sequence and are regarded as sadaka, as something for the dead.

Other routine offerings (tambiko) are considered; those at the level of the local family and those performed biannually, on behalf of the inhabitants of a place, by the mediums of the spirits associated with territory. The selection of these mediums is discussed in the context of possession by ancestors, which manifests itself as sickness and is expressed in the idiom of 'being taken hold of'. In contrast to possession by mashetani, which are thought able to climb into the head of the victim and can thus be driven out, ancestral possession involves only the body.

Possession by ancestor spirits is the way in which the ancestors themselves are thought to broach the distance between themselves and their living descendants, which it is the purpose of the funeral to establish. Tambiko are offered to discourage possession and to encourage the dead to leave off a person of whom they have taken hold. Possession and tambiko are two aspects of the relationship between living people and the mahoka. Both constitute descent, possession as its ultimate experience (cf Lienhardt 1985:154-5) and the giving of tambiko as defining the group of descendants who, by making the offering, are stating that they share substance in common. Possession and tambiko, as a collapsing of the distance between the dead and the living, are essentially the same. They involve ideas about the body. Possession centres on the body of a person as a living representative of the mahoka and the people to whom the afflicted is related by descent. The giving of tambiko entails the living getting bodily into temporary states of semi purity. This is achieved by avoiding sex and hot things, thereby dissociating oneself from the processes of reproduction and death and becoming, temporarily, a little more like the dead. As we have seen, this association with death and reproduction is carried on and in the body of the person, because the body is what the living have which separates them from the spirits of the dead. Consequently, states of semi purity, which move the person along the continuum towards the state of the spirits, must also be embodied.

## The Spirits of the Dead

The first part of the funeral sequence, centred on the burial, is concerned with the taking on of death and its containment. The person who has died is in an ambiguous position. Once buried, they are 'no longer a person'. Neither is the break with the human being, who lived and died, and the new state of existence, appropriate to the dead complete. This ambiguity is expressed throughout the funeral, when the dead body is treated as though it were still, in part, a person, and the purpose of the funeral is to mourn them. The food cooked as part of the **msiba** for the mourners is not offered to the dead. The spirits of the dead are encouraged to keep away from the living and from the funeral house. The series of **tambiko** during the first stage of the funeral are intended to distract them and encourage distance, to close the door between the dead and the living which the death has left ajar. Thus, for example, grain is scattered away from the threshold of the house at the formal opening of the **msiba** and scraps of food are 'thrown out' at **shasangira**. These small **tambiko** are not for the person who has died but for those, the already dead, who will receive them.

People talk about dying and what happens after death in language influenced by the concepts of the Church. Many people told me that a person consists of body and spirit, for which they used the Kiswahili '**roho**', the same word used in Christian prayer for 'Holy Spirit'. In everyday talk, it refers to spirit in the very abstract sense, as a part of the person separated off from the body. Emotion is talked about in terms of the heart. **Roho** is best translated as 'soul' in the Christian sense, for this is how it is understood by Pogoro Catholics. When somebody dies, the **roho** goes away from the body to God, and if it is accepted by him, to 'heaven'. This happens at the moment of death. The body rots in the grave and becomes dust.

People also talk about the dead becoming a spirit (**pepo**) in the more substantial sense of ghost. There is no absolute time frame for this, but, because these spirits are thought of as being somehow corporeal, it cannot happen until the body has been buried as even a person who has died cannot be in two places at once. Spirits of the dead are potentially visible and can speak. Some older people said that a person did not properly become a **lihoka**<sup>1</sup> until the flesh had rotted from their body, leaving only the bones. Most people had no clear

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<sup>1</sup> **lihoka** is the singular of **mahoka**. It can refer to any kind of spirit, but is most frequently used to refer to those of related dead.

opinion on the matter. Funeral practices do not make an explicit connection between the becoming of a lihoka and the decomposition of the corpse. What is important, however, is that a period of time elapses between the death and the end of the funeral sequence, after which the dead have assumed their place among the mahoka. Once the ambiguity regarding the status of the dead is ended, the living can abandon the restrictions of mourning, because, as the dead is no longer a person, mourning itself is no longer necessary.

Everybody who dies becomes a spirit. Spirits of the dead are the mahoka, although this can encompass other kinds of spirits as well. The significant ones for an individual are those from whom a person is descended, from both the side of the mother and the side of the father. For this reason I have translated mahoka in some contexts as 'ancestors'. The Church uses the word **marehemu**, literally 'deceased', to talk about the dead, perhaps because this word carries with it no immediate association with spirits. The practice of ordering **misa za marehemu**, masses for the dead, and why, is discussed below.

The spirits of the dead live in the forest or bush, (kuntundu), a domain beginning at the margins of houses and fields. The 'forest' really refers to those places which are not currently inhabited by people. Abandoned settlements and fields return to it, just as the 'bush' itself is potentially transformable by settlement. Just as settled areas and forest are contiguous, so the space occupied by the spirits and that occupied by the living merge into each other (cf Boddy 1989:3). There is no fixed boundary, merely a consensual distance, dependent on the goodwill of the dead.

The lifestyle of the dead is not elaborately conceptualised. What concerns the living is the interaction between themselves and the dead. What is known about the dead is based on people's experience of this interaction. The reality of the existence of the dead is experienced by the living, who may hear their voices as they walk along forest paths at dusk or meet with them in dreams. It is taken as self evident that the dead are here together with the living, that the Christian concept of 'heaven' is the place of the dead here on earth<sup>2</sup>, and that the community comprises, not only those currently alive, but those who have lived and died before and who, by influencing the lives of their descendants, make their presence known. Things which are slightly out of the ordinary or unexpected are construed as signs and messages from this parallel domain with which interaction is normal. Pure chance is negated by the equation of God with fate<sup>3</sup>. The most intense personal

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapters Three and Four.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Four.

experiences of the spirits are, however, in possession and dreams, when the separation between person and spirit is collapsed in the body of the person, and the domains merge.

Correct performance of the funeral sequence is crucial in order to satisfy the other mahoka who will receive the dead person. The dead person must not be angered by incorrect performance of the funeral or he may exact revenge later on. A spirit that is not received by its kin will trouble the living. Similarly, a dead person with no relatives alive will be equally lost and without a 'place'. This notion of place, of belonging somewhere is central, for, as I shall show below, place can be said to constitute the person. Some of these wandering spirits become mashetani, possessing people at random as they search for a place of their own.

The sense of the presence of spirits in the world is reinforced by the sacred geography of the land which people inhabit. The area inhabited by the Pogoro is divided into a number of 'spirit provinces' (cf Lan 1985:34, after Garbett), belonging to the spirits associated with territory, the centres of which are various ndewa shrines, sacred forests and pools. These forests must not be cut or burned, nor used as places for human habitation. The pathways used by these spirits crisscross the district. The vegetation alongside spirit paths is similarly protected. Such places are known to those resident in a locality and are respected. All forest is the place of the spirits, but some forests are special because they have a high spirit presence. Such places are thus particularly favoured for the collection of medicines<sup>4</sup>. Old men know of shrines and sacred places well beyond the area inhabited by the Pogoro peoples. The landscape is alive with spirits and the unseen. The story of Mary's visit to the hillside near to a ludewa shrine, described in the Chapter Four, is an attempt to associate Mary with place and, by making her part of this landscape, to incorporate her into this sacred geography.

## **Toa Tatu**

We left the funeral at the end of the first stage, after all but the immediate relatives of the dead had dispersed. The next event, toa tatu, is a repeat funeral which centres on a communal meal at the house of the dead. Usually held about two weeks after the death, it is a regrouping of those who were present at the burial. As such, it is a denial of the fact that the mourners dispersed. Core bereaved remain at the house of the dead until tatu. The

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter Nine.

longer the interval between the death and toa tatu the greater the respect for the dead. With the eating of tatu, the first part of the funeral is over.

As with other msiba events, tatu is an occasion for 'kulira na kulia', crying and eating. It is talked about in terms of 'cooking' or 'eating tatu'. The actual words toa tatu could be translated literally to mean 'to give out three', but this translation does not make any sense as far as I and my informants were able to gather. It is possible that it comes from Muslim coastal peoples, and that, among the Pogoro, the term has lost what immediate reference it may once have had or perhaps still has in other places. Some people refer to toa tatu as 'siku ya tatu', which taken literally could mean 'the third day', but its contextual meaning is 'the day of tatu'. Others talk about tatu as if it was the 'siku arbaini' (fortieth day) of Islamic practice, when Muslims gather to end their period of mourning with an elaborate meal forty days after the burial. People describe toa tatu as 'sadaka', as something for the dead, although no tambiko are made.

People gather at the house of the dead the night before the meal, which is served at around midday. The event replicates the organisation of space at the first part of the funeral and which applies to all public msiba events. Dry banana leaves are strewn around the yard for sleepers. Men stay outside. Women pack themselves into the house. The night is taken up with the 'songs of suffering' and with prayer, that is with the recitation of the appropriate sections of the rosary which a kwaia (choir) may be hired to lead.

The members of the kwaia are local Christians of both sexes. They are often young, and women outnumber the men. The leader is usually a catechist. The choir members are given food and cash for their services, just as a dance group are rewarded. The dress of the kwaia contrasts with that of the other mourners who are wearing ragged everyday clothes because it is part of the funeral. The kwaia members, as representatives of things Christian, dress smartly as they would to attend a Church occasion. During the night the choir remain inside the house. If funeral dances are to be danced and funeral songs sung, these are led by members of a troupe outside on the luaga (yard). The core of people gather outside to dance, while the Christian songs continue, unheard, inside the house. Both go on until morning. The dancing of funeral dances is not obligatory at tatu. It is, however, customarily performed at the sadaka ya mwisho. The song and dance are, like the meal, a part of mourning: "It is not to make people happy". In the view of many, these dances are also an offering because they please the dead.



Some devout Christians request that the mourning ends at tatu, and that they are not remembered with dancing. For most people, the central event of toa tatu is the meal. The majority of those attending, if they live near, arrive mid morning. Mourners bring with them contributions of food - rice, flour or beans, as the money collected at the burial is likely to have been all used up in the preparation of the burial meal and the purchase of things for the corpse. Some of the core female bereaved remove their strips of shroud in the early morning. Only the widow continues to wear lijemba beyond this. After the meal, people disperse. The house and yard are swept and return to normal. Between six months to one year later, the msiba continues at the final sadaka.

### Masses for the Dead

Meanwhile, Christian practice offers another way of 'remembering' the dead. People begin to be 'remembered' with masses, ordered by family members, very soon after they die. With masses for the dead, what is important is that they are 'read' by a priest, rather than that relatives of the dead are present at the time of the reading. Masses for the dead have only become really popular since the 1960's, with the numbers of masses ordered annually progressively increasing since then<sup>5</sup>. Masses ordered by lay people are most commonly dedicated to groups of related dead, partly because this replicates the orbit of those 'remembered' with traditional tambiko and partly because people perceive this to be better value for money than ordering a series of masses for individuals. In 1991 a mass cost 150/-<sup>6</sup>, a sum equivalent to a day's wage for a male labourer. Masses for all the dead of a place or for the Souls in Purgatory are ordered by either the religious or by representatives of organised lay groups such as the Legion of Mary.

Masses for individual dead are read as part of the funeral process. A mass for the dead is ordered routinely as part of toa tatu to be read in church on the actual morning of the meal. House masses have become more of a feature of sadaka ya mwisho than tatu. Unlike routine masses, they are only available to families thought by the Church to be 'good Christians'. Priests refuse to read masses at the houses of people whom they hold to be 'public sinners'.

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix.

<sup>6</sup> Apparently this amount was decided by the baraza ya walei, the lay committee or parish council, and not by the church hierarchy. The members of the parish council tend to be wealthy, more educated people who are subject to the influence of the clergy. They justify the high price of masses as a means of generating parish revenue.

The family of the dead person continues to have masses read for them long after tatu. Masses for one named dead are requested most frequently in the years immediately following their death. After a while, all one's important related dead, usually fathers, mothers, mother's brothers and father's sisters, and spouses, will be 'remembered', at least annually, with the same mass. Devout Christians think that the more masses read for the dead, the better for both the dead and the living. Even those who resort to Christianity only occasionally believe in the power of masses to help the dead move closer to the Christian divines and to intercede on behalf of the living. People like the idea of masses for the dead because they allow for the remembrance of individuals and the perpetuation of a very personal mourning, which other funeral practices do not. Moreover, unlike other tambiko, they allow for the remembrance of spouses. The mahoka when invoked at tambiko are, although named, invoked as a collectivity of spirits. Their demise as persons is not mourned, neither is it sad, since it is the self evident precondition for their existence as mahoka.

Some devout Christians have frequent house masses for their related dead which have replaced the annual homestead level tambiko. An annual mass is often combined with the sweeping and weeding of graves, built in the European style whether in Church graveyards or at a family's plot. A simple grave is an oblong demarcated in bricks or stones, marked by a wooden or metal cross on which the name and dates of birth and death are inscribed. More elaborate graves are raised in concrete. The crosses marking graves are hung with rosaries. I attended one such house mass when the conflict in interpretation between Church and laity became a point of open disagreement between the priest and his congregation. Looking at the forty or so people assembled for the sacrament, the priest asked who could tell him why they were there, only to be met by silence. He asked again. Finally, the household head, a man of about sixty, replied: "We are all here because this is the place of my late father, and his brothers' place, and when we buried him it is from here that we set off". This association with place is precisely the appeal of a mass read at home<sup>7</sup>. The priest then asked whether the gathering was to remember the dead and was dismayed to find only a resounding chorus of assent. This angered the priest because, he said, the people had misunderstood the whole purpose of mass which was to remember Jesus, not the dead. "You can't follow two religions", he said, threatening not to proceed with the mass and relenting only when he saw that a minority of the crowd, four people in fact, were able to receive the sacrament anyway<sup>8</sup>. Beer and some food were served afterwards.

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<sup>7</sup> Masses read at home seem to be an innovation of the 1970's, another consequence of Vatican Two's attempt to resituate Christianity in the community.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapters Three and Four.

For Pogoro Catholics, the perpetuation of an ongoing relationship with the dead through the media of jadi and masses is not a matter of 'following two 'religions' at once', as the priest tried to present it. The important point is that the 'things of the ancestors', the mahoka, are not dini, 'religion', and, by definition, cannot be, because 'dini', as we saw in Chapter Three, refers to the modern introduced religions, Islam and Christianity. Traditional practice with regard to the dead is not seen as being 'religion', and thus is not thought of as being in opposition to Christianity. People see practices with regard to the dead, whether Christian or indigenous in origin, as essentially similar and even complimentary. This is in part because of the way in which the Catholic Church has presented the cult of the dead and over the years attempted to encourage a devotion to the dead centred on masses. What is striking about funeral practices in general among the Pogoro is the incorporation of Christian elements into the sequence of events and the separation of Christian practice, in time and space, from that which is held to be 'traditional'.

Much of what is constituted as 'tradition' is concerned with not angering the dead and thus with safeguarding the welfare of the living. Doing things which are thought to be 'tradition' is the way in which the dead are remembered. As we shall see, because the dead are those who 'have gone before', they are representatives of an imaginary past. This past is reenacted in the present in contexts which have become self consciously 'traditional', particularly , since these concern the dead, at events which comprise the funeral process. 'Tradition', by virtue of its association with the past, or rather with the people of the past on whom the present depends, is inevitably brought into a relation of opposition with the 'things of the Church', with institutional religion standing, as it does, for the things of the outside, the present, the market and the state.

## **The End of the Funeral**

The final part of the funeral consists, like toa tatu, of a large communal meal served between midmorning and early afternoon in the yard of the house of the dead. After this, it is said that "We won't cook again" and "We won't cry again". Property of the dead is finally reallocated. In the past, when names and wives were constituted as property, the shaving and inheritance of widows and the passing on of names was formally concluded. Widows now can decide for themselves where they go and the inheritance of names, still valued by the older generation, is not prioritised by the young. There is now not much to distribute, beyond some clothing and a blanket and possibly some cash. Before the durable

burned brick houses became widespread, the house which the dead inhabited was also destroyed. This is still done by some families.

Sadaka za mwisho (final/last sadaka) are held in the cold, dry season, after the harvest, between the months of July and October. Then people have the most food and do not spend so much time on the shamba. The first crop of maize is ready from March. Millet and rice are harvested in June. Availability of grain is a consideration in the preparation of sadaka, because grain in quantity is needed to prepare the maize beer which will sustain the living during a night of dancing and the beer made of millet for the ancestors. The schedule of brewing means that sadaka are planned carefully in advance. The beer for the ancestors, ujimbi wa mahoka, is left out for them on the night before the night of the funeral dances. Special restrictions applying to those who brew it come into force from the moment the grain is put to soak, in order to make it germinate, by one of the wamakolu, the old women who are no longer involved in reproduction. None of those involved in the preparation of this beer should be menstruating and nobody at the house of the dead should have sex until the tambiko has been made.

A mass is usually ordered to coincide with the day of the ancestors' beer. If it is to be read in the church, it is read in the morning. House masses are usually read in the afternoon, when the priests are free of duties centred on the church or parish offices. Priests try to ignore the connection people make between sadaka and masses for the dead, and refuse to read a mass at a house if the connection is too explicit, for example, if it is on the same day as the tambiko. A person requesting a mass will not inform the priests that they are to offer beer to the mahoka that same evening.

Priests insist that only they, as representatives of the Church, have the right to give sadaka, and that legitimate sadaka are the sadaka of the Church. These are the sacraments, collections and masses which are directed at the divine beings of the Church, not at the spirits of the unsanctified dead. The Church forbids offerings to the dead, but does not oppose the living drinking to 'remember' them. Its position is viewed as ambiguous. As we have already seen, 'remembering' the dead is inseparable from making offerings to them. Even if 'remembering' them does not involve an actual offering, as in the dancing of funeral dances for example, because it is done for the dead, it is thought of as making an offering to them.

The parish priest explained, "We forbid beer for the ancestors and making offerings, but beer for the people is not forbidden since the Church understands it. Only the Church can

give **sadaka**". The Church's position on **sadaka** is open to further misinterpretation because, as I shall show, the beer for the ancestors is inseparable from the beer which the living drink to celebrate the end of the funeral. There is also a more fundamental problem concerning the ambiguity of the word **sadaka**, which is understood in a different way by the Church and ordinary Catholics. For laity, the word encompasses all kinds of offerings, from 'traditional' **tambiko** to masses and to collections at services. Consequently, because people reject the narrow interpretation implied by the Church definition of **sadaka**, the stated position of the Church with regard to it is interpreted in a different way from that which the Church intended. The best example of this is found in the interpretation people give to the words of one of the 'songs of suffering' sung by Christian choirs at funeral events: "**Jesu ametoa sadaka ya damu kutulipia dhambi zetu, Nasi tunatoa sadaka ya leru kuwakumbuka wafu wetu**". The song means, 'Jesus gave an offering of blood to pay for our sins, And we are giving our offering of today to remember our dead people.' People associate this song with the giving of an offering to the dead in order to remember them, rather than an offering to the Church in order to remember the dead. The point about masses as **sadaka** is that they are thought of as offerings to the dead, not as offerings to the Church, which simply mediates the offering on behalf of the people making it.

## **Beer to End the Funeral**

The beer for the ancestors is set out for them on the night before the people drink theirs. The beer for the people is made from maize. If there is no maize it is made from rice, or any other grain. It is just 'ordinary beer', although, because it is to be drunk in the context of a funeral, it must not be placed inside the house. This restriction applies from the very moment the grain is put in water to soak. A special shelter, **likuta**, a rectangular construction of dry banana leaves, is made for it. It stands at the edge of the yard, opposite the house of the dead. The beer for the people is put inside it as part of mourning because, "The beer is not to make people happy". The placing of the beer emphasises the special nature of the event of which it is part. "The dead person is outside, the beer is outside", I was told (cf Goody 1962:233).

The beer for the people is called **ujimbi wa matapatapa**. Many people could not say what **matapatapa** actually meant. "It's just a name", they said with characteristic lack of curiosity, and every adult knows that **matapatapa** is the beer drunk at **sadaka ya mwisho**. On another day the word came up in a different context, that of having problems and of struggling to survive. The old woman with whom I was talking said that this is what was meant by the

verb, kutapatapa<sup>9</sup> and that the point of the beer of matapatapa was that it consoled the living who were left behind to struggle.

The beer for the ancestors, on the other hand, must be made from millet, which is thought of as the 'traditional' crop of the area.<sup>10</sup> It is to this beer that the prohibitions on sex and the state of the brewers apply. Social change and adoption of agricultural and technological innovations means that much of what is held to belong authentically to the ancestors and to 'tradition' is now no longer part of routine daily life. A consequence of such changes in clothing, exchange, patterns of labour, utensils, medicines and diet is to encourage a contextual separation of things which are thought to be authentically 'traditional' from the everyday. Because this beer is an offering to the ancestors as representatives and upholders of jadi, it is prepared and served in 'traditional' vessels. It is cooked in clay pots, not in the oil drums or aluminium suferia<sup>11</sup> of everyday use. It is served in either long handled cups made from gourds or poured into cups and dishes woven from split bamboo. Only a small quantity of millet beer is made. The beer for the ancestors is consumed by the family of the dead, who define themselves as such by this consumption, not by everybody who attends the matapatapa the following evening.

The beer for the ancestors is offered to them in the hour after darkness falls. As the place of the dead is defined in opposition to the place of the living, for example in the 'forest', defined by its absence of human habitation, as opposed to the homestead, so night is the time of the dead<sup>12</sup>, just as day is the time of the living. All offerings to the mahoka are made in the evening or early morning, at the margins of day, for spirits dislike heat, sunshine and daylight. Their beer is placed in two clay vessels, one for each side, the side of the mother and the side of the father of the dead. Some of these are called by name. The dead person is not called. The purpose of this tambiko is to ensure finally that the dead is received by the others, and this they are entreated to do. No food is offered. The beer is either put inside the house or just outside it.

The ancestors' beer is left overnight, then drunk by the family in the morning. If a widow is still wearing lijemba, some beer is set aside to be spat onto the cloth as she buries it, and

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<sup>9</sup> -tapatapa, would, she said, be the equivalent of the Kiswahili -hangaika which means to struggle, with little success in life.

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>11</sup> A kind of standard aluminium cooking pot which comes in various sizes.

<sup>12</sup> Night is also the time of the witches. See Chapter Nine.

with it her obligations to her dead husband. The whole purpose of tambiko is that they are shared with the dead. They are given first to the dead to partake of. What is left over is divided among the living. What has been touched by the ancestors thus becomes special and transmits blessing which, through being consumed or rubbed on the body, enters the person and confirms the substance which they share with the ancestors, physically constituting descent.

## The Vigil

The main public part of the sadaka begins on the evening of the next day, well after dark. People assemble at the house of the dead for a night of dancing and drinking which will continue, if the beer lasts, until well into the following morning. A Christian kwaia has become a routine part of the night's events for many families, as at tatu. As a concession to the church, "because 'spies' (from the parish council) are everywhere", the kwaia is permitted to sing, uninterrupted by dancing and funeral songs, for half an hour or so at the start of the evening. By performing what is Christian first, which, as with the timing of masses, is at the behest of the Church, people go along with the fiction of the priority of Christian practice. The kwaia remain inside the house. They sing until their throats are sore and their voices hoarse, and do not stop, even though nobody can hear them over the noise of the dancers.

Certain dances are particularly associated with funeral events. The best known of these, the lindenda and the makumbo<sup>13</sup>, use rattles and a bamboo pole with a carved surface to create a rasping sound when a stick is drawn across it. The bamboo flutes which, together with drums, are a routine part of celebration dances, especially the ever popular sangula, are not used in creating the music of funeral dances. The beat is provided by pounding the pole on the ground. Dance groups specialise in certain kinds of dances. Some perform only funeral dances. These dance groups are small and informal, comprising a core of perhaps seven committed players with a more or less ad hoc collection of supporters and people who join in when they have an opportunity. Men monopolise the pole playing and the lead singing, but women are active as criers of the chorus and shakers of rattles. The dancers are compensated for their labour with money, beer and uncooked food, the greater proportion of which is in the form of flour. People who specialise in dancing do so because they enjoy it and see themselves as performing a service to the community.

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<sup>13</sup> from -kumbuka -to remember, recall.

Performing funeral dances is regarded as 'work', just as members of the choir see their singing and recitation of the rosary as necessary work done for others. The dancing is not only for the specialists. They merely lead, the others following them across the yard or around it and repeating the chorus. The atmosphere is quite different from that of other funeral events. It is not subdued. There is no wailing. Women ululate as they dance. Beer is handed out by the ladleful. People become progressively drunk. The dancers do not rest. Although it is night and the cold season, sweat runs off the dancers bodies. Those who are not dancing huddle round fires at the edge of the yard. Old men congregate around the banana leaf shelter which contains the beer on the pretext of protecting it. Women who are not dancing either join the choir inside or else sit against the walls of the house, near to the fires.

The songs sung by the dancers are well known. New songs are introduced, invented and adopted, soon becoming established as an authentic part of the repertoire of the genre. Not all the songs are about death. Some of the makumbo songs are about hunting. It is said that the makumbo was a hunting dance adopted from the N'gindo peoples, appropriate for funerals because both are ultimately about death. Some songs are sad and are addressed directly to the dead, bidding them farewell. The makumbo involves a stamping of the feet on the ground as the dancers move in a circle behind the pole player. This stamping is apt for, "Are the dead not buried in the earth?"

Other songs concern people and events in the locality. These lindenda songs are sung, not so much for the dead, as to keep the people present at the vigil awake. Because night is the time of the dead, the living are, through staying awake, entering the realm which the dead are known to inhabit and sharing it with them. There is a more practical aspect to nighttime dancing, which is also a feature of weddings and celebrations. Dancing during the day is too hot and exhausting to sustain for long periods of time.

People get drunk if the beer is good and plentiful. Others sneak away and sleep. The women, swathed in cloths, curl up together on the dry banana leaves which have been spread under the eaves of the house and elsewhere for sleepers. Those with the energy to sustain them continue to sing and dance until morning. Once it is light, some people go home to check on their children. They return later when the meal is ready. Others assist with its preparation. It is on this morning that a widow removes her strip of cloth, representing the shroud in which her dead husband's body was wrapped. She no longer carries death around with her. The marriage is over.



The meal is a large, communal event, just as at the burial or at toa tatu. After people have eaten, they drift away to gossip about what they ate and who had the largest portions. The mwani msiba, who is in charge of the distribution of funeral food, should not be seen to have favourites or he will be accused of pride and selfishness. The beer shelter is demolished and some beer spat on the poles which supported it. This is for the mahoka. Old men say that if the house of the dead is demolished also, then some beer is spat on the main down pole at the front of the house on which the whole structure rests. The house in which the beer is placed is the house of the dead. That which is used and dead returns to the ancestors. The yard is swept clear of the litter of banana leaves which signify the msiba. The funeral is finally over.

### **Offerings to the Dead and the Spirits Associated With Territory**

The dead are also 'remembered' with other tambiko offerings of beer, food and cloth. Increasingly, as homesteads become detached from the ritual cycle centred on territory, these routine 'rememberings' of the dead are ad hoc and performed only in response to crises. Although the point of 'traditional' practice, as the Pogoro would have it, is that it is thought of as unchanging, in actuality 'traditional' practice is undergoing a continual process of change. The important point about change or innovations in traditional practice is that they are thought of as coming from the authority of the spirits or of the dead. Any deviation from what is regarded as 'traditional', as for example in the funeral sequence, must be justified in terms of the wishes of the person whom the funeral is for.

In many respects, the Pogoro notion of 'tradition' corresponds closely to that put forward by Boyer in a recent book, where he argues for 'tradition' as referring to a kind of interaction in which a specific form of communication can occur, rather than to kinds of cultures or societies (1990:110). 'Traditional communication' is, he suggests, certain types of ritual practice, such as divination techniques, or rather situations, which are stacked to reveal certain kinds of other worldly truths. That traditional communication reveals truths, he argues, stems not from the method in which these truths are revealed, but depends on the very person who is able to reveal them; the diviner reading the oracle, the initiated man instructing the novice and so on. These people are 'customised' to speak the truth in certain 'traditional' contexts. Importantly, this truth is seen to come, not from the person who is speaking or interpreting the oracle or whatever, but from other beings, such as spirits or ancestors (1990:60). This is the crucial point about what the Pogoro consider to be jadi. It is not that 'traditional' practice is unchanging, but that it derives its moral

force from change being seen to come from beyond living people, at the instigation of the spirits. Not surprisingly, because the source of truth is so often the spirits, 'traditional' practice is oriented towards the ancestors and, in much of Africa, the territorial spirits who are super-ancestors. 'Tradition' in such societies is then inevitably bound up with 'descent' in the sense understood by Leach (1966:46), as linking people with the transcendental through a merging of past and future to create an image of the otherworldly, while living people remain in the present.

The area inhabited by the Pogoro is divided into eleven or so spirit provinces. Each of these has a centre where the spirit associated with that particular territory is thought to reside. These centres are pools of still water surrounded by dense forest. The sacred areas are called ndewa (ludewa sing.), which also refers more specifically to the pool itself. These pools are taboo for anybody other than wambui, the diviners of the territorial shrines. Ordinary people may not see or go near them. Stories are told of hapless hunters disappearing and being found dead in the pools, or else vanishing altogether. People who wander into the place of the spirits can be taken by them and they never return. People can only enter the sacred forest section in the company of a diviner.

Formerly, homestead level tambiko were linked in to an annual ritual cycle, centred on the diviners of the shrines of the spirits associated with territory and the agricultural calendar. Certain crops first had to be offered to the spirit of the territory and eaten by the mbui before anybody living in the spirit province could eat. This gradual removal of taboos on first fruits is called kutekera<sup>14</sup>. It is still performed by the wambui, who offer crops which were planted with the first rains in October to their spirits. These are maize, pumpkin leaves, cowpea leaves and the seeds of one wild fruit which is the first to ripen. The seeds of this melon like fruit are called zaya, the tree maya. Zaya are not seriously considered to be 'food'<sup>15</sup> today, although they were previously a fallback in times of famine. In addition, millet must be offered as it is the crop of the ancestors, although it is now not usually planted until December, well after the maize which has replaced it.

People living in areas associated with spirits take these prohibitions seriously and refuse to eat these foods, even when they are away from the spirit's area, until the taboo has been ended. At first, I took the fact that nobody in my village seemed concerned with these prohibitions as an indication of the lack of seriousness with which people regarded them.

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<sup>14</sup> This refers also to the offering of some of the meat of animals killed in hunting before the hunter can eat it.

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter Two.

This is not in fact the case. The point is that nowadays there are some areas which are known to have no mbui and the tracts of the spirit provinces are no longer contiguous. People thus did not feel obliged to follow the restrictions because the place in which they lived was not subject to them. They insisted that if they moved to an area associated with a spirit and with a resident mbui as its representative, they would take them very seriously indeed. Those living in an area without a spirit follow the prohibitions of first fruits if they plan to travel to a spirit province. On one occasion, the dish of pumpkin leaves which I was eating at a friend's house was snatched away from me and replaced with okra because I inadvertently mentioned my journey to visit a mbui the following day.

It is thought that eating before the food has been offered to the spirit associated with territory leads to sickness, death or natural disasters such as fierce winds, rain or lightning, which could put the rest of the crop in jeopardy. Heads of local families would, in the past, have offered a quantity of these foods to their own mahoka after the mbui had done so. The elder was the first person to eat the food, after which his juniors were free to do so. Now, in the immediate vicinity of Mahenge at any rate, hardly anybody bothers to make these domestic level first fruits offerings and the only people who adhere to the prohibitions on the foods associated with the first rains are those residing very close to a local shrine.

The wambui are responsible for a biannual offering of beer and grain to the spirits. The smaller of these is called lumetola, which means 'taken from the granary'. This occurs in December and is 'to close the year', that is, the yearly cycle of millet. It is an offering of what is left over from the previous millet crop, which can then be planted for next year's crop. Millet beer is also offered and then drunk by the participants. The offering of zaya is done at around this time.

The larger event, in terms of its importance and the numbers of people attending, is called lumezi<sup>16</sup>. Lumezi takes place during the months of July or August, after the millet harvest. Millet beer and flour are offered to the spirit at the shrine. By this the flour is transformed into uhembe, the medium of blessing from the territorial spirits, which is given routinely to clients by the wambui. Uhembe is said to be 'medicine'. More will be said about uhembe and other medicines in the next chapter. The beer is drunk by the people who have come to the lumezi, together with water taken from the ludewa itself which is both drunk and slapped onto the body with leaves. As with the 'washing' of the mwali with

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<sup>16</sup> lumezi means germinated grain. It also refers to annual homestead level offerings.

the lufumbeza leaves, described in Chapter Six, the purpose of this is that 'the body be cool'.

## The Territorial Shrines

The wambui of the area rank themselves in a hierarchy of ritual priority which they base on the spirits' order of appearance in the area. The shrine which they regard as being the most important and powerful is that associated with the name of Linkono. Linkono was the first mbui in the area, they say, and his place was the first to have a spirit. Ordinary people who live in the area agree that Linkono's shrine is the most important, although they are little concerned with why this should be so. The shrine itself is on a hilltop less than 10 kilometres from Mahenge town, making it accessible. Its mediums, who have a high profile in the community, say that the spirit with whom they work, Mbagahera, first came to the forest as a fire which took hold of a tree yet did not burn it. The people were all at their fields, and only the children were there. The spirit talked to them, instructing them in the various rituals and taboos with regard to it, and then went to live in the pool of water. This spirit was never a person. The spirits of other shrines have this in common with Mbagahera. If they were thought to have been human once they were taken bodily by the spirits, and thus, even if they were thought to have lived, they are thought never to have died. There is then no kinship relationship between the various spirits.

People outside of the immediate families of wambui do not concern themselves with the identities or life histories of the spirits with whom the wambui work. For the purposes of divination, what matters is that the spirits associated with territory have a privileged access to the realm of the spirits, to the truth and to the dead. The spirits associated with territory are essentially the same as the mahoka, but, unlike the mere spirits of the dead, who depend on descendants to provide them with a 'place' by 'remembering' them, the territorial spirits have a place independent of people. Because they belong not to one group of people, but to a place, everybody in that place belongs to them. The very fertility of the place depends on them, as does the generalised welfare of its inhabitants. These spirits themselves are referred to as wambui. Mbui also means 'grandfather', which carries with it the implication of family head and male elder. People resident in a spirit province were incorporated into a ritual hierarchy which put the wambui as super-elders at the top, and the spirits of territory as super-ancestors above the ordinary spirits of the dead. The wambui are super elders because of all the old men, they are, by virtue of having been 'taken hold of' by the spirits, closest to the ancestors, irrespective of their actual age. This

is why the removal of first fruits taboos is first done by the wambui on behalf of the people in the territory, an action then replicated by the elders of local families. Here too, as among the Bemba and other African peoples, first fruits ceremonies emphasise the prerogatives of those who, by virtue of being the first in a place, are thought of as being the original 'owners' of the land (Richards 1939:376).

Living in the same spirit province implies more than mere co residence. It implies, too, a sharing of substance, because people in one place depend on the same land and the same rain; that is on the same local spirit. They eat the same food and they bury their dead collectively. They share a collective vulnerability to epidemics and disasters, which offerings on their behalf are thought to prevent and which wambui must attempt to control. In the March of 1991 the wambui of the three shrines surrounding Mahenge performed a joint ritual to rid their part of Ulanga of a cholera epidemic. People who participate in the collective rituals drink the beer which has been offered to the local spirit and they swallow the uhembe of which he has also partaken. This is rubbed on their bodies. It is incorporated by them.

It is because living in one place and participating in its rituals implies a sharing of substance that co-residence is such an effective mode of incorporation (cf Lan 1985:25), involving more than the adoption of clan names or the extension of classificatory kinship terms. Its efficacy is reinforced by an attitude which allows one to 'become' the same as those whom one is currently among. As I was told often, "If you are in the place of other people you dance their dances". In fact, many of those who today define themselves as Pogoro actually trace their origins to neighbouring peoples, but say "Now, we have become Pogoro". Ethnic identity is not absolute. It changes over generations and is seen to depend on residence, language<sup>17</sup> and on the adoption of appropriate customs. Traditions and customs are what are seen to differentiate between ethnic groups, and being Pogoro, or anything else for that matter, consists pretty much of doing 'Pogoro things', just as, as we have seen, 'Europeanness' depends as much on the things which are done as on the person doing them<sup>18</sup>. This attitude to place<sup>19</sup> is evident with regard to the medicine which makes relationship, shirala. What is important about shirala is that, in the ideal, it comes from tree roots which were dug in the father's place of origin. The shirala is rubbed on the body and

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<sup>17</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>18</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>19</sup> cf A Strathern (1973).

consumed, thereby incorporating the substance of the father's ultimate place of origin, and of the father's people, into the child's body.

Participation in territorial rituals need not be in person. For the kutekera of millet, for example, a couple of heads of millet are collected from all the shamba in the vicinity of the shrine and, some maintain, throughout the entire spirit province. The same is done with maize. The crop of everybody is then offered, even if the owners of the crop do not themselves attend. In practice, few people attend these events routinely. At a lumetola in the December of 1990, there were fewer than five adults, excluding myself, who were not direct relatives of the officiating wambui. At lumezi the following year, between thirty and forty attended. As with much of what constitutes jadi, what is important is that it is done and known to be done by the appropriate person. The event itself demands no witness.

The annual lumezi is still carried out by all the remaining wambui in the Pogoro area. There are now more ndewa than there are wambui to represent them. At least two of the better known shrines have nobody. This is partly because wambui are chosen only from the men of certain clans and lineages<sup>20</sup>. Some shrines have three or four resident mediums. All work independently, although they cooperate with the same spirit and perform annual tambiko collectively under the authority of the senior diviner. These positions of seniority, like mediumship itself, exist independently of their respective incumbents.

Those selected by the spirits to become wambui have to follow certain proscriptions with regard to dress and lifestyle. These vary from shrine to shrine, but are essentially concerned with making the person, as a representative of the ancestors, like an ancestor. Not only do the wambui dress as the dead are dressed, in a piece of white cloth next to their bodies, they live out their lives as if they were living in the past, when the ancestors were alive. They strive to do what is thought of as belonging authentically to 'jadi' and 'tradition'.

The wambui at Linkono live in houses with walls made from millet stalks woven into bamboos. To live in a burned brick house, or one with a metal roof, is taboo. Wambui do not wear shirts, shoes or trousers. Travel in motor vehicles is forbidden them. Some will not cross the Kilombero river, which is not only an effective boundary of the area inhabited by the Pogoro but is, because of the present system of communications, a symbolic point

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<sup>20</sup> See Chapter Five.

of engagement with modern day Tanzania<sup>21</sup>. They adhere to what is held to be a 'traditional' morality. Sexual relations 'outside' marriage are believed to invoke the wrath of the spirits. Of all the various proscriptions which the wambui follow this is the only one about which they were more than willing to complain. Significantly, because of the inevitable opposition between Christianity and the institutional aspects of 'traditional' practice which the wambui represent<sup>22</sup>, they can neither enter churches nor attend services. To do so would be, one told me, as ridiculous as "supporting two teams at the same time". Many continue to use their Christian names when dealing with the Party or the state, although for their work as diviners they use the name associated with each position of mediumship and shrine. These names are adopted together with the various proscriptions of lifestyle when a person's selection as an mbui is confirmed by the other diviners at the shrine.

The notion of a 'traditional' and ancestrally sanctioned morality extends to the sphere of economic transactions. Wambui support themselves with subsistence farming. Grain for offerings at the shrine should be grown, not purchased, and wambui should not involve themselves too deeply in the market. This attitude extends to their work as diviners and healers. They do not charge set prices and are obliged to accept what their clients can afford to give them, without demanding more in cash, although a demand for further recompense may well be presented as an offering to the spirit, who is the one really working on behalf of the client. The spirits demand cloth or chickens, items which do not lead to the visible self enrichment of diviners.

Ordinary waganga<sup>23</sup> charge what they like and what the market will stand. They can also expect to be paid cash as compensation for their services. Wambui, on the other hand, working in the realm of 'tradition', must accept, and on occasion demand, payment in chickens, food or cloth. This is because the offerings are not for the diviner himself but for the spirit with whom he works, and on whose cooperation he depends. Wambui can receive cash, but cash itself cannot be taken into the sacred area of the forest. If they demand market payment for their services they reduce their own claims to authenticity and, in so doing, reduce their authority as those with whom the spirits talk. This is a powerful reason why many men appear reluctant to agree to being selected as wambui and so many of the positions are vacant. This shortage is reinforced by the attitude of the current incumbents,

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<sup>21</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>22</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>23</sup> Medicine person, healer, diviner, doctor.

who must confirm the selection of a man by the spirits. This they appear reluctant to do. There is much competition for clients, and the battle is fought on the grounds of authenticity.

Issues of 'traditional' morality and authenticity form the basis of witchcraft accusations between competing wambui. Wambui insist that they cannot practise witchcraft<sup>24</sup>, which is not claimed to be indigenous in origin. However, accusations between rival diviners were commonplace, the logic behind them being that a mbui who practises witchcraft is no longer a mbui because he will have lost the cooperation of the territorial spirit who empowers him.

In the area where I lived, of the four spirit provinces in the immediate vicinity, two had no resident mediums. The diviners at Linkono, the most important shrine in the area, claimed that the spirits from these unattended ndewa had moved to their place. During my stay, the diviner of the third shrine in the hierarchy, that of Mlimba, was accused of sexual impropriety with a female client and the wambui of Linkono all claimed that his spirit had also come to join them, leaving its place in disgust. This diviner eventually accepted that he lacked the authority to continue because the story very quickly became common knowledge. His position is currently vacant.

For several months before I left, the Linkono diviners were claiming to have the spirit of another little known province in their area. They said that the spirit's diviner had sold a ritual object, a kind of bone ornament worn by the chief mbui at a shrine, and the spirit had moved away. This spirit had been seen by them at a river on the margins of their territory and had told them what had happened. They summoned the diviner to come and entreat the spirit back with offerings of cloth and chickens. He never came. Perhaps he never knew of the claims the others were making. This kind of competition between wambui is made possible by the break in the hierarchy of shrines, allowing the diviners of the senior shrine to exploit their position by challenging the incumbents of the lesser shrines and claiming their spirits, making the area into one big spirit territory under a centralised shrine. As the territorial rituals become less important, so the diviners of shrines associated with territory become more concerned with healing and divination for individual clients. Their role becomes more like that of the waganga, with whom they are in direct competition. Consequently, their claims to authenticity and 'tradition' become more strident in a bid to differentiate themselves from run of the mill waganga.

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<sup>24</sup> See Chapter Nine.



The three remaining wambui at Linkono are themselves divided over the selection of a replacement for the senior position of Linkono himself, the previous medium dying in July 1990. It was hoped that a younger 'brother', a man in his fifties, would be 'chosen', but the man himself has consistently refused to allow this to happen. He makes much of his widowed state and sexual infidelity which he is hoping will make him unfit for ancestral selection. He takes great trouble to avoid attending events such as lumezi or lumetola when his selection could be publicly confirmed. The other wambui have now accepted that this man defies selection, or to put it another way, by his behaviour and his refusal to follow the proscriptions that are part and parcel of becoming a mbui, thereby makes himself inappropriate for selection, he defies 'customisation' as a mbui (cf Boyer 1990:60). They say that they are now waiting for the spirit to decide just who the next incumbent should be. Meanwhile, they are accusing each other of witchcraft and saying that one of them, the acting chief diviner, has lost the favour of the spirit because the spirit has told them so.

### **Family Level Tambiko**

The lumezi remains a point of potential incorporation of households into the local ritual cycle. Certainly in the past, and to a lesser extent today, local families did not hold their annual offerings to the dead until after the mbui of the territory had performed his. Those of the wambui themselves adhere, in theory at least, to the hierarchy of precedence. The first lumezi is performed by the mediums of Linkono and the wambui of the other shrines follow. Annual family level offerings to the dead are also called lumezi. They also centre on the offering of millet, in the form of beer and flour, to the mahoka. As with any kinship focused tambiko, the flour, beer and possibly food, is placed in two vessels, one for each side, and is consumed collectively the next day by those on whose behalf it is given.

For many Christian families living away from a spirit territory, the ordering of masses for the dead has largely replaced the annual lumezi, partly because the stated purpose of each, 'to remember the dead' is the same. The fact that a mass costs money is significant, making it an offering of something more substantial than prayer. The trend towards the increasing nucleation of households and families, many of whom are now divided between villages, also make the ordering of a mass a simpler, more attractive option than regrouping scattered kin.

Today, most homestead level offerings which are not explicitly connected with a funeral are in response to affliction of one sort or another. Affliction may be attributed to ancestral

displeasure by diviners and **waganga**, or even by people themselves. This is not to suggest that the popularity of problem oriented **tambiko** is a direct consequence of the changing ways in which the dead are 'remembered'; it only appears that way because routine offerings have so largely been replaced with masses. In any case, the way in which the ancestors are conceptualised means that they are always likely to be dissatisfied. There is no rigid system of ritual offerings to the dead. Something can always be forgotten. The ancestors, or a particular ancestor, may demand cloth rather than just beer. Ancestors are likely to be distressed at discord among living kin, at what could be viewed as a failure to meet obligations to siblings or sons. Since there is nobody to whom these situations do not apply, retrospectively at least, the results of divination are always plausible<sup>25</sup>.

## Affliction

Apart from responsibility for the generalised welfare of the inhabitants of their spirit provinces, the day to day work of the **wambui** is divination and healing through the making of various medicines. These will be discussed in the next chapter. Here it is sufficient to note that those men selected as **wambui** do not possess specialist medical knowledge prior to their selection. Their ability to make medicine is dependent on their position as diviners, and healing is an integral part of divination. Their knowledge of medicines depends on their access to the spirit with whom they cooperate and to the **ludewa**. It is here, in the sacred forest section, that the plants from which the **wambui** make their medicine are gathered.

Not everybody goes to a **mbui** for divination and medicine. There are a variety of other specialists in the area<sup>26</sup>. The appeal of the **mbui** is that he is local and has a good knowledge of the people with whom he deals. Because of the hostility of **jadi** to the cash economy, clients think they are less likely to be 'cheated' by a **mbui** than by a **mganga**. **Wambui** are able to know the cause of misfortune because of their relationship with all the spirits via the spirit associated with territory: "The **ludewa** is a door to their town", one told me.

**Wambui** have different methods of contacting these spirits, depending on the shrine with which they are associated. Some talk with the spirits at night during their dreams, reporting what they have learned to their clients in the morning. Others go into a trance and speak

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<sup>25</sup> cf Boyer (1991) for a discussion of divination in general.

<sup>26</sup> See Chapter Nine.

with the words of the spirits which are interpreted for them by an assistant, rather like the Shona *mutapi*, who interprets for the *mhondoro* medium (Lan 1985:60). Of the wambui whom I knew well, only one relied on dreaming as a method of divination. His authenticity was challenged by the others who said that he had to dream because he did not have a ludewa. The others all claimed to 'talk' with the spirit directly at the pool. They also said that, unlike ordinary people, they could 'see' the spirits when they were awake.

People going to one of these mbui for divination arrive at his house, at the margins of the sacred forest, in the very early morning or the night before the divination session. The mbui only goes into the ludewa to talk with the spirit in the early morning, when it is still cold and before it is properly light. Before entering the section of the ludewa, he has to follow certain proscriptions which come into force on the previous evening. These apply to anybody entering the sacred forest section. They they are routinely followed by the wambui because they go into the ludewa frequently. These concern the bodily state of the person as well as, through dress and the use of appropriate utensils, relocating the person in the time of the ancestors. People entering the ludewa, which they may do only in the company of an mbui, and would only normally do at lumezi or lumetola, must wear 'traditional' dress. The men wear a piece of cloth tied over the shoulder, and the women kanga or kitenge, without any 'foreign' ornamentation. They must be barefoot. The mbui himself, who wears 'traditional' dress all of the time<sup>27</sup>, wears only white cloth to go into the ludewa.

Prior to going into the sacred forest, neither men nor women should have sex nor smoke tobacco. Snuff is acceptable, since the objection is not to the substance but to the heat generated by smoking it. Women who are not yet healed from pregnancy and giving birth, who are menstruating or who are wearing lijemba may not enter. They must wait at the house of the mbui, outside the forest section, as "Their state is not good. The mahoka don't like dirt". These same restrictions regarding reproductive processes apply to those who are brewing the beer for the ancestors offered at lumezi and lumetola, and, less rigidly, to those brewing the beer for the ancestors at home. Women may brew this beer<sup>28</sup>, but that for annual offerings to the spirits associated with territory is prepared by men alone. The women only fetch the water. People going into the ludewa and the mbui routinely, align themselves with the ancestors and the realm of the spirits by embodying a state which is closer to that which the ancestors are thought to be in. They partially collapse the distance

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<sup>27</sup> cf Lan (1985:68-70).

<sup>28</sup> Although there was some debate about this, See Chapter Five.

between them, only, for the ordinary people, to set it up again as soon as the tambiko is done.

Wambui live, for most of the time, as if they were actually in the realm of the dead. They embody the paradox of being alive at the same time as living on the threshold of the world of the dead. This they do by virtue of their having been 'taken hold of' by the spirits. Wambui are selected by non human agency. They are 'chosen' by the spirits. This choosing manifests itself as sickness<sup>29</sup>. Sickness is an appropriate idiom for being chosen as it takes over the body of the person and the person himself. One so afflicted has indeed been 'taken hold of'. For those whose selection is confirmed by other diviners, this being taken hold of lasts for the person's lifetime. Breaking any of the taboos surrounding the position of mbui can result in the incumbent's being 'taken' completely, that is, in his death. The wambui are, by being 'taken hold of', in a semi permanent state of possession by the spirits with whom they work, hence they are able to 'talk' to them directly. A person chosen by the spirits usually undergoes a lengthy and serious illness which does not abate until, possibly several years later, their selection is confirmed by the other diviners at a shrine.

## **Women and the Ancestors**

Women cannot be selected, by the spirits associated with territory, to become diviners of the territorial shrines. I was told that this was because they could never enter the sacred pool area of the ludewa itself, which only a mbui may do. This explanation is partial. Women cannot enter the ludewa, not because they are female per se, but because of the incompatibility of certain ritual statuses which makes their selection as wambui inappropriate.

Among the Pogoro, the symbolic burdens placed on women are highly context related. The status of the older, post menopausal women, the wamakolu, is a ritual status which is only meaningful in a ritual context. Outside it, older women are either part of the 'washina mau' category of 'all the women', 'womenfolk' or women in general. This is a social status, not a ritual one, just as being a mother, grandmother, father's sister or whatever is a social category, not a ritual one. In everyday, non ritual contexts, women have a high status and a high degree of personal autonomy. They can become ordinary healers and diviners, they

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<sup>29</sup> Shona spirit mediums initial selection is similar and is similarly conceptualised. The medium is 'grabbed' (Lan 1985:49).

can be household heads and they are respected as persons within a relatively egalitarian setting. In order to understand why they cannot be selected as wambui, we must look again at the symbolic construction of gender in the context of ritual, not outside it, because the symbolic association of women with heat, dirt, the inside of the house, physical process and reproduction is created by the structure of the ritual itself.

The rituals we have been looking at are all concerned with negotiating the place of living people in relation to, on the one hand, physical process and, on the other, the state of the dead. Physical process is necessary, but powerful and dangerous precisely because it is what separates the living from the dead. The living, more than anything, desire life. They must safeguard fertility and control death. In order to safeguard life, the living must move themselves away from excessive physicality, yet not so far away that they become like the dead, disembodied and beyond life. This process is expressed through notions of cooling and played out spatially between a series of contrasting locations; the inside of the house, the social space of the yard and the fields, and the uninhabited, uncultivated forest.

Sex and reproductive processes in general are, like death, associated with 'dirt'. But, this association only matters in the context of ritual when it has to be dramatised because the structure of the ritual demands its existence. Both men and women can embody this kind of 'dirt', which is not a devalued entity, but, rather, something which, once controlled, is essential to life. Women are thought to embody it more often than men, because of the way in which female physiological process is conceptualised, placing on them the burden of human fertility. The association of women with death stems from their symbolic association with birth and with physical process in general in the context of rituals, which utilise the series of contrasts between the inside of the house and the domain of the ancestors. Women carry these associations because of their position as symbolic actors in the ritual schema, (cf Smith 1982:108). Consequently, their status outside of ritual, and indeed everyday notions about gender, are radically different to those dramatised in ritual.

Among the Korekore Shona, described by Lan (1985), *mhondoro* mediums are selected in a very similar manner to the Pogoro mbui and follow similar ritual proscriptions with regard to dress and behaviour. There are many other similarities in the way in which the ancestors are conceptualised. They are associated with the past, with 'tradition', with the fertility of the land. According to Lan, they stand opposed to 'biological life and biological death' (1985:95), which is represented by women. Lan suggests that, 'The... life of the ancestors achieved after death ... (is) controlled by men. And everything about this sort of life demonstrates that it is better than the life created by women out of blood' (1985:97).

According to Lan, this ritual denigration of women legitimates male domination which rests on 'the containment of women within the private, domestic sphere' (1985:213).

From what Lan is saying, it would seem that among the Shona there is no break between the representation of women in ritual and the role of women in everyday life. However, women can become diviners of the *mhondoro* spirits (1985:26). Although not many of them do so in actuality, their association with what Lan suggests are negatively valued states does not make their selection wholly out of the question, as perhaps we would expect from Lan's interpretation. This suggests to me that we are not simply dealing with a gender opposition but with a situation in which the symbolism of gender is used, as among the Pogoro, to represent aspects of human existence in contrast to aspects of the ancestors' existence. The Korekore Shona, unlike the Pogoro, do not place the entire burden of fertility on women. Women are a vessel for the man's seed, but their fertility is natural and does not require augmenting. As women age and become barren, they become like old men. When they reach this point they can participate in possession rituals (1985:94). Among the Korekore then, female fertility naturally ebbs away with the process of ageing until, finally, the woman loses it altogether. Having become like a man, she is an appropriate vessel for the ancestor spirits.

In contrast, among the Pogoro, the entire burden of human fertility is placed on women who are made fertile with medicines. As women age and dry out, they become infertile, but this only means that they have a responsibility, as wamakolu, for absorbing the excess fertility of others. They thus never lose their association with human reproduction entirely. Nor do they cease to be physically involved in its processes. Consequently, they can never be selected by the territorial spirits. The status of the mbui is a ritual status. The mbui, by virtue of his selection by the spirit associated with territory, permanently occupies the kind of position which other people occupy only transiently in ritual. Women's ritual status, as wamakolu, contradicts the status of the mbui. The two are thus deemed incompatible. And, for women to be selected by the spirits as wambui would destroy the fiction of the wambui as male elders and as 'owners' of the territory and the implication that the people living in it were descendants.

### **Affliction, Divination and Possession**

People with problems they consider out of the ordinary seek the assistance of diviners and traditional healers. Infertility and madness are considered out of the ordinary; that is, they

have extraordinary causes. Death is frequently attributable to witchcraft, as is lingering sickness or a run of bad luck. Divination can clarify the source of the trouble and recommend ways in which the situation can be rectified and further problems averted. People visit several healers in succession for a persistent problem, but are unlikely to concede that the previous ones were wrong in their diagnoses or their recommendations. Clients usually have an idea of the kind of problems they have and the kind of solutions they want before they seek help. This influences their choice of initial specialist. Thus, for example, the standardised way in which affliction by **mashetani** is often experienced means that people with **mashetani** seek out a **mganga** who has a reputation for driving them out with the inhalation of steam, smoke and spices, in a fashion no doubt influenced by Arabic possession cults such as *zar*<sup>30</sup>. Indeed, troublesome short term **mashetani** are said to be Arabs and, when addressed, speak 'Arabic'. That **mashetani** can very often be driven out is significant, for the type of possession associated with them is quite different from that associated with the mahoka.

Wambui specialise in ancestor related problems. They can also treat various maladies, offer advice about the outcome of court cases and know whether a death was due to witchcraft or some other cause. They impose fines of cloth or chickens on people known to have violated any of the sacred forests, pools or pathways by cutting or burning the vegetation. Sickness is frequently put down to ancestral displeasure, especially if it persists after other treatments have been tried and **mashetani** driven away. In such instances it is said that 'so and so has been taken hold of' by the mahoka'. In order to cure the person, the mahoka must be persuaded to let go. This is a form of possession in that the sickness is experienced as possession. Although only one person, frequently a child, is affected, the affliction is spoken about as if all the family were afflicted. The afflicted person is then a representative of a wider group of persons, who must take collective responsibility for the affliction. The afflicted person is possessed by the ancestors because they embody the substance of the ancestors. Possession is a way in which the ancestors make this explicit by taking over the body of their descendant. This they have a right to do. The ancestors must be implored to 'leave off', rather than be driven out or 'chased away'. This 'leaving off' is only ever temporary since, on death, the person goes to the ancestors anyway. Ancestral possession involves only the body of the victim. Because the possessed is, as it were, a part of them, according to the logic of this kind of possession, the possessing ancestor does not need to assert its identity or personality through the person of whom it has 'taken hold'. As this possession is legitimate, the mahoka are not driven out from the body of their victim.

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<sup>30</sup> For a description of Zar cults see Boddy (1989).

Various problem oriented tambiko are recommended to encourage the ancestors to loosen their grip on a person. The most frequent of this kind of tambiko is kupeta mashi, the spitting out of water, which is essentially an offering of water from the living to the dead that 'the body be cool'. It is, as we saw in the previous Chapter, also done to 'cool' down the dead person when the women bury their shroud strips. Its purpose, on both occasions, is the same; to spit out the heat from the bodies of the victims and to calm the ancestor spirits. As kupeta mashi is a tambiko, it is performed at morning or evening by a male elder. The water is drawn from a 'traditional' vessel, not from a plastic beaker or glass. The phrasing of this blessing is significant. As we have already seen, sickness and health are talked about in terms of heat and cold. Cooling implies recovery from ill health and poor states. It conveys too a sense of emotional calm. The point of this blessing is to ask that those sharing substance with the afflicted are well. This sharing of substance and the common vulnerability which is entailed by it is the real meaning of 'descent' among the Pogoro<sup>31</sup>.

Kupeta mashi is performed at the margins of the yard, where the spirits congregate, between house and forest. If kupeta mashi fails, the mbui may recommend a larger offering involving beer, a fowl, flour and possibly cloth. If cloth is given, it is offered in two pieces, one for the side of the father and one for the side of the mother. The usual restrictions apply to the preparation of the beer for the mahoka and, as usual, the tambiko is made in the evening. What is left over is consumed jointly by those on whose behalf it is given.

Possession by mashetani is quite different from possession by ancestor spirits. Mashetani are wandering, alien spirits without a 'place' of their own<sup>32</sup>. Possession is usually short term. Some shetani stay with a victim for as little as half an hour. These sporadic visitors depart reluctant hosts if offered a piece of coal, a coin or a cigarette. Others remain with their hosts for several months, causing sicknesses by invading the person and inhabiting a particular part of their body. Long term mashetani are enticed with incense to 'climb up into the head' of the victim, from where they can be implored to leave. The more frequent short term possession by mashetani always immediately centres on the head of the victim. The possessing mashetani can thus speak through the victim and make their desires known. There is no elaborate cult built around possession by mashetani<sup>33</sup>. The very foreignness

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<sup>31</sup> cf A Strathern (1973).

<sup>32</sup> They particularly afflict women at funerals. See Chapter Five & Six.

<sup>33</sup> Apparently, elsewhere in Ulanga there is more of a cult of affliction for those possessed by mashetani. Its main activity is dancing.



of these kinds of spirits makes their eventual departure both right and inevitable. Ancestors never occupy the head of the person in this manner and never speak through people. On rare occasions, wambui may be subject to spirits speaking through them, but this involves a more complete annihilation of the person of the mbui and his total merging with the identity of the spirit whom he serves. For this reason, this kind of violent possession is referred to as 'kukoma mahoka', the literal translation of which is to be 'hit by the spirits'.

### **'Tradition' and Descent**

I have argued that practice which is thought of as 'traditional' is essentially concerned with 'descent', in the sense of a relationship between the living and the dead. Seen in this light, the popularity of masses for the dead represents an attempt to 'traditionalise' Christian practice by incorporating it into a ritual sequence aimed at placating the dead. 'Traditional' practice is not concerned with the past directly, but with the relation between people and the spirits. Its social construction depends on a conceptualisation of people as bearers of states which are thought of as being between the two ultimate poles of human experience, that of the mahoka, at one end, and at the other those embodied by people when they engage in the processes of reproduction and dying. Because 'traditional' ritual practice is oriented towards the spirits of the dead and of territory, it deals with renegotiating the place of living people in relation to them. This is done through various rituals oriented at ridding the excess pollution which a person has incurred through involvement in processes of living and of dying, or, if the spirits are to be approached directly, people must strive to dissociate themselves from life as much as possible, by getting temporarily into states closer to those which the dead are thought to be in, so collapsing the distance between themselves and the dead and making contact possible. This is achieved through the avoidance of 'dirt', things associated with sex, reproduction and death, which are antithetical to the mahoka.

In the next chapter I look at the social construction of witchcraft, something which is not claimed to be indigenous in origin and yet, because it is conceptualised in 'traditional' terms can only be dealt with by practice thought of as 'traditional.'

## Nine: WITCHCRAFT

Although Pogoro people see themselves as the collective victims of witchcraft, a social blight which is blamed for the lack of development of Ulanga and for the failure of individuals to succeed in life, they vigorously insist that witchcraft is an intrinsically alien practice, brought in by the N'gindo people to the south. Despite the foreign origins of witchcraft, however, it is something which is conceptualised in essentially 'traditional' terms. Moreover, practices for its suppression conform to the structure and sequence of 'traditional' ritual. In this, Pogoro anti-witchcraft practice is similar to that of the many movements for the suppression of witchcraft which have swept across South Eastern and Central Africa at least since the early years of this century. Perhaps the best documented of these kinds of movements is 'kamcape', observed at different places and points in its history by Richards (1935), Marwick (1950) and Willis (1968).

Anthropologists like these have tended to regard such movements as essentially 'modern' phenomena<sup>1</sup> because, if studied in isolation, they appear to have origins external to the societies affected by them and their ritual sequence frequently incorporates elements of Christian and bureaucratic practice. I shall suggest that, on the contrary, the practice of these movements only appears modern and innovative when the movements are considered solely in terms of themselves, divorced from the social contexts in which they operate. In fact, as I show in this chapter, the ritual sequence of these movements conforms to the structure of indigenous purification practices routinely enacted in the context of, for example, funerals and girls' puberty rites. Such purification practice is thought appropriate for dealing with witchcraft because of the way in which witchcraft is conceptualised in much of Southern Tanzania as a premeditated act which, through the use of medicines, transforms the person into something dirty and antisocial. By conforming to the logic of what is locally perceived to be 'traditional' practice, the anti-witch practice of the movements not only appears valid, but can constitute an effective critique of modernity. This probably explains why anti-witch practices become more popular at times when state intervention or other external forces disrupt rural areas, as was the case during villagisation in Tanzania in the 1970's, and why these kinds of movements have so often been interpreted as a response to problems generated by change. I shall argue that, among the Pogoro at least, witchcraft eradication practices are self consciously anti modern, and are

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<sup>1</sup> For a contrary interpretation of African 'religious' movements in general see de Craemer et al (1976).

an attempt to renegotiate what is indigenously regarded as traditional practice in opposition to that which is sanctioned by Christianity and the state.

Among the Pogoro these cults, like witchcraft itself, are not claimed to be indigenous in origin and yet are accorded the status and truth value of 'tradition'. This is in explicit contrast to some aspects of Christianity which are set up as being in opposition to it, because of the Church's foreign origins, its association with 'Europe' and the voluntary aspect of 'religion' which makes it so equivalent to a club or political party. This brings us to another aspect of 'tradition', associated with things thought of as being local in the wider African sense, and which are defined by their opposition to Christianity and the state. This chapter describes current anti-witchcraft practice and ideas about witches. The following chapter examines past practice and the transformation of tradition.

## Witchcraft and Medicines

**Uchawi** is the Swahili word for witchcraft or sorcery. It is in general use throughout Tanzania, although what is specifically implied by the term varies with the locally defined constituents of witchcraft. Pogoro witchcraft is technically 'sorcery', according to Evans Pritchard's classic distinction (1976:227<sup>2</sup>): witches, who may be adults of any age, male or female, derive their powers from the use of medicines, and use their medicines to harm others. There is no notion of witches having an involuntary power to harm, such as Evans-Pritchard described for the Azande (1976:1). Witches are not thought to have some kind of physiological substance inside their bodies, such as Wilson described for the Nyakyusa in the 1930's, when witches were believed to have 'pythons', identifiable at autopsy in their bellies (1963:90). Among the Pogoro, as among the Kaguru (Beidelman 1963:64), witches are unable to affect others by the mere power of thoughts or spells, and the practice of **uchawi** is held to be deliberate and premeditated.

The Pogoro word for witchcraft is **uganga**, and for witch, **mganga**, words which have largely fallen out of use because of the possibility of confusion with the Kiswahili meaning of the words, which refer to 'medicine' in the abstract sense of the noun, and generically to medical practitioner. The Pogoro term does suggest the use of medicines. These are of many different kinds and are classified according to their method of administration, rather than intended effect. Thus **ntumba** is any medicine in liquid form, whether used for good

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<sup>2</sup> See also Turner (1966:119).

or bad purposes, by either witches or **waganga**, which is placed in a gourd from where it somehow seeps out to affect people or things in its vicinity. **Hirisi** is, similarly, any medicine wrapped in cloth and worn on the body.

All medicines are made from plants and trees. Any plant is potentially medicine. The manufacture of medicine depends more on the power of the person making it than on the innate properties of the plants which are used. Some medicines are classified according to the illnesses they are intended to treat or the states which they are intended to alter, but never by the plants which comprise them. These are often kept secret by practitioners. The word for medicine from plants, **mtera**, as in other Bantu languages, also means 'tree' (cf Comaroff 1985:66; Richards 1982:27, Ngubane 1977:22). The 'forest' is then both the place of the ancestors and the place of medicines. The Kiswahili **dawa** is often heard. Like its equivalent local term **mgota**, it may refer to both local and hospital medicine as well as to poisons, insecticides and chemicals (cf Harwood 1970:62).

**Waganga** use plant medicines to heal and have various individual specialisms. Unlike **wambui**, not all **waganga** rely for medicinal inspiration on the advice of spirits, and they are not associated with specific clans and lineages. Some **waganga** come from outside the area and work within their own or adopted medical traditions. These are accorded a general validity and equivalence as 'local' medicine, in contrast to **dawa ya kizungu**, 'European medicine'. People are eclectic in their choice of healer and diviner, basing decisions of convenience, proximity, cost and reputation. In Mahenge town, an Islamic **shehe** is very popular with Pogoro Catholics, who readily accept the potency of Islamic 'book medicine', irrespective of the fact that they themselves are not affiliated to Islam. Medicines of various kinds are known by many people, not all of whom are **waganga**. Individuals often have a specialist knowledge of only one kind of medicine, which has been handed down within the family over generations. Possession by benevolent **mashetani** can similarly endow a person with the ability to make certain kinds of medicine.

Medicine is not only used to treat what are regarded as illnesses. It is, as we have seen, given to correct potentially dangerous bodily states, such as those incurred by men and women who indulge in sexual relations outside marriage. It is also given on such occasions as the 'coming out' from the house of a new born baby, at the onset of a girl's first period and as, **uhembe**, the millet flour which has been offered to the spirits associated with territory, is the stuff of blessing given by the **wambui**. Medicine is an appropriate medium for blessing, which as a 'cooling down' is explicitly associated with health and the good state of the person. Substances thought of as 'medicines' create relationship and effect, through

their incorporation into the body of the person, the physical incorporation of the person into the territory and lineage of the father's side. These substances are thought of as medicines precisely because they are thought of as having transformative power. Any substance with this kind of power is 'medicine'. This power depends, not on the intrinsic nature of the substance, but on the person who has the ability to make the medicine, that is to endow the substance with power.

Medicines to treat people are rubbed into incisions in the skin or smeared on to the body as a paste. They are symmetrically applied to specific body sites; usually the top of the forehead, the crown, the mouth, the breastbone, the base of the neck between the shoulder blades, and the limb joints. They are also eaten; placed directly in the mouth or cooked and mixed with food, which is eaten by the patient and their family. Like food, medicine may be 'cooked' and eaten, and, like meals, it should be consumed by a wider range of people than the individual patient. As eating is the idiom in which cooperation is both talked about and enacted, family members must cooperate in a person's cure by also eating the medicine which has been made for the sick person themselves.

Medicines change the state of the person, either curing, protecting and empowering or, for victims of witchcraft, weakening, draining and poisoning. Just as witches get their powers from the use of medicines, other medicines can be used by anti-witch specialists to suppress the powers of witches, making it impossible for them to continue to practice their witchcraft, whatever their intention. Anti-witch specialists treat witches with medicines after shaving off the alleged witch's hair. Nowadays all the person's body hair is shaved. Consequently, the process for the suppression of witchcraft in Ulanga is known as **kunyolewa**, meaning 'to be shaved'. For at least the past ten years, one specialist in particular has assumed responsibility for this work throughout the district.

### **Witchcraft Attacks and Attacks on Witches**

In the popular imagination, witches join together in groups to commit evil and torment innocent others. They operate at night when they are invisible to ordinary people, unless they too are empowered with medicine. They fly naked through the sky on worn out winnowing trays, discarded as rubbish and enter the houses of victims, wrestling with them in their sleep. They are frequently recognised in dreams. As their lust for human flesh is said to result in the digging up of corpses, new graves are carefully swept over so that the

footprints of witches will show in the soft earth in the morning.<sup>3</sup> It is widely believed that priests guard the graveyards of Catholic churches at night, especially that of the cathedral in Mahenge, with heightened vigilance after a burial, to prevent witches gaining access to corpses. This practice is denied by the priests themselves, although several admit to having been offered money by bereaved families for performing this imaginary service. Priests, as ritual specialists, are thought particularly suited to guarding graves from marauding witches because they have the ability to 'see'<sup>4</sup> witches in the night and to recognise them in their human form during the day. This ability is shared by the wambui and by certain specialist waganga.

People who can 'see' witches are potentially able to destroy them, either by making them eat salt in vast quantities, or by driving nails or thorns from a certain kind of tree into their chests. These weapons leave no marks on the body of the witch and do not cause bleeding. Witches succumb to these attacks in silence as, in their witch state, they are unable to speak nor cry out for help. Witches caught in this manner, I was assured, die in great agony within two or three days. People empowered with the appropriate kinga<sup>5</sup>, protective medicine (against witchcraft in this case), may also be able to 'see', and so kill, witches in this way.

Such witch deaths are a topic of gossip in the villages and are claimed as fairly frequent occurrences. That people suspected of witchcraft are killed is denied by the authorities. Deaths supposedly due to thorns, salt or nails are rarely investigated by police and tend not to be brought to their attention. It is highly unlikely that actual murder is involved. If it is, it is not a regular occurrence. According to my informants, only one suspected witch had been beaten to death since 1980. This was in a lowland village outside the immediate area of my fieldwork.

Witches use their medicine to harm crops and people, causing sickness, failure and death. The deaths of young or previously healthy people are often put down to witchcraft, which is regarded as the actual instrument of killing. For this reason, as elsewhere in Africa, people who suspect that they are the victims of witchcraft do not seek hospital treatment for what are otherwise treatable conditions in the belief that only 'local medicine' can cure them (cf Ngubane 1977:24). Bad luck also plagues victims of witchcraft and is another

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<sup>3</sup> This practice occurs elsewhere, for example among the Shona (Lan 1985:42).

<sup>4</sup> 'Seeing' was discussed in Chapter Five.

<sup>5</sup> Kinga refers to any protective medicine, including vaccination.

symptom of witchcraft attack. Everything associated with the victim becomes vulnerable (cf Favret-Saada 1980:196), but the victim's body is the most vulnerable because it is the victim himself. Witchcraft is thought to alter the whole state of the victim, and can, in some instances, make the person vanish altogether. The curing of the victim is a separate matter from the deactivation of the witch, which is nevertheless desirable in order to prevent the possibility of further attack. Not every death or bout of illness is attributable to witchcraft. Deaths may be caused by malevolent spirits or simply be put down to the will of God, who takes people without any special reason. Malnutrition, malaria, tuberculosis and other diseases are recognised killers.

Witchcraft attack is often spoken about in terms of 'poisoning', when the witchcraft medicine is thought to have been ingested after being placed in the victim's food. That witchcraft should be thought of as poisoning is not surprising given the importance attached to eating together, which is held to be in direct contrast to a fundamental characteristic of people thought likely to practice witchcraft: "They are unable to eat with people".

Incidents of alleged poisoning by witches and others are common. These are rarely investigated by the authorities because of the problem of evidence. Between 1930 and 1950 the district authorities did send samples of assorted 'witchcraft medicine' and 'poison' for forensic investigation in Dar es Salaam. The results revealed only that the substances involved were either present in quantities too minute to analyse, given the limited technology of the time, or were found to be harmless<sup>6</sup>. There is no doubt that some people make and acquire medicines for the purpose of adversely affecting others. I myself was involved in a lengthy dispute with a brother of the woman who had rented her house to me. He tried to give me medicine, sprinkled on a letter, which was supposed to make me hand over the house to him, even though it was many months before I was due to leave<sup>7</sup>. It is less clear as to what extent some of these medicines are actually harmful and how common 'poisoning' actually is. I am sceptical of tales about witches digging up graves and making charms from human flesh. In a witchcraft context, as Favret-Saada has pointed out, what matters is that these things are thought to be done and the empirical existence of witches or witchcraft is not in the least necessary for the system to function (1980:24).

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<sup>6</sup> see TNA File 29/3 'Mahenge Station: Witchcraft 1938-49' for correspondence dealing with the examination of witchcraft medicines and the investigation of witchcraft cases.

<sup>7</sup> Having learned of his intentions, I did not touch the letter. Nevertheless, when I contracted hepatitis two months later my illness was interpreted by my neighbours as being directly caused by his malevolence.

Witches are motivated by jealousy and hate. They resent neighbours bettering their position and are thought to attack those whose only mistake is to have got ahead of their fellow villagers. It is said that, in the past, people were reluctant to build the more durable burned brick houses for fear of exciting the envy of witches. Although these houses have become the norm in some villages, it is still believed that any ostentatious display of wealth will attract their attention. In the popular stereotype, witches are those who are poorer than their neighbours or who have fallen behind. But, as getting ahead is felt to be at the expense of social obligations to both kin and neighbours, it is the better off who are often accused of witchcraft (cf Wilson 1963:34; Beidelman 1963:74,93; Richards 1935:460). There is a general attitude which stresses the fundamental equivalence of persons and a profound reluctance to evaluate people according to qualities which they might have. A person who surpasses others does not do so because he is competent or skilled, but because he uses something which others do not use - medicines, charms, witchcraft (cf Richards 1935:460). Doing well is in itself sufficient to arouse suspicions of witchcraft. Jealousy is at the heart of the system, but in reality it provokes accusations of witchcraft rather than witchcraft attack.

Refusing to 'help' somebody with food or with contributions for a wedding or funeral can quickly lead to gossip that a person is 'proud' and selfish. A person with pride, or who does not feed and help other people, is thought likely practice witchcraft. Absence from a funeral also rouses suspicion because, as we saw in Chapter Seven, funerals are the very essence of cooperation. Significant absences are noted and stored in memories. Funerals themselves can become occasions for accusation, often at the gathering and meal immediately after the burial, where the details of the death are endlessly discussed. There may be a long history of conflict between accuser and accused, but this is not always the case. Many accusations seem almost random, based on nothing more than a general dislike of the person in question (cf Redmayne 1970:118). Accusations inevitably involve people resident in the same immediate locality, rather than outsiders. Someone who bewitches another must know them and perhaps even know where their umbilical cord is buried. A person who feels themselves bewitched looks to kin and neighbours in the first instance, making it known through strong hints and gossip that one of them is probably a witch. Later, an accusation may follow.

Close relatives of the dead may be held responsible for the death as witches, especially those new to witchcraft, are thought to kill close kin in order to prove their integrity as witches to their companions. First born children and siblings are particularly vulnerable. This and the alleged necrophagy of witches has been interpreted somewhat literally by



anthropologists as a means of reinforcing the 'badness' of witches which mystically reinforces the efficacy of their medicines (Beidelman 1963:62; Redmayne 1970:114). Although this interpretation appears to be supported by evidence in the form of bizarre confessions, possibly forced from terrified suspects, it is mistaken. Such beliefs about witches are, rather, the way in which the social construction of the witch as a person with specific negative attributes is achieved. Thus, in the circular logic of this kind of witchcraft, a person with certain anti-social attributes is a witch, just as a witch is a person with certain attributes. It is this same logic which classified opponents of the Shona guerillas in the struggle for Zimbabwe as 'witches' and demanded that they be dealt with accordingly, irrespective of whether they actually practised witchcraft in the narrowly defined sense of the term (Lan 1985: 170).<sup>8</sup>

Witches are thought of as behaving in ways which moral people should not. They insult people and are proud and selfish. At the same time there is a recognition that all people are potentially witches because it is an aspect of human nature to be bad, selfish and jealous. 'Bad' people may transform themselves into witches through the use of medicines. Witches are then a certain kind of person, a witch person who uses the night, who is mean and antisocial during the day, and who, significantly, is reduced to asocial silence when in his or her witch state. There is a great reluctance to comment on whether people are bad or in some way unpleasant, because to say that a person is 'bad' is tantamount to suggesting that they are a witch. If you ask, as I did in the early days of fieldwork, "What sort of person is so and so?", people shrug their shoulders before answering, "Just a person".

### **Catching a Witch**

The Kiswahili phrase **kwenda kunyolewa**, or, in Kipogoro, **kugenda kumoga**, means literally 'going to be shaved' but is, in effect, shorthand for a process involving the disputants, the secular authorities and witch specialists, a process taking, on average, between one and three weeks to complete. Although witchcraft is often a matter for joking and the word 'witch' is frequently used as a term of insult or abuse, the decision to accuse somebody of witchcraft is not taken lightly. It may be based on suspicion alone or on 'evidence', strange behaviour of the person who may have, for example, called out the name of a dead person or have been seen by the victim in a dream before they died.

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<sup>8</sup> No doubt this could also explain the anti-witchcraft properties of the **maji** in the 1905 rising (see Chapter Ten).

The dream is equivalent to divination<sup>9</sup> for the Pogoro, who make a distinction between ordinary dreams, in which one is doing familiar things with familiar people, and significant dreams in which the dreamer meets with the extraordinary. The people one meets with in such dreams are the dead and witches. A recurrent dream of the same living person is a sure sign that they are out to harm one. These kinds of dreams are discussed and related so their content becomes public. Because the dreamer is not held to be personally responsible for the dream in the way that a speaker is for his speech, these dreams are a way in which the normally unsayable can be said. These kinds of dreams come from outside the person; the dreamer merely sees what is already there. To say, "Last night she came into my house and hit my daughter, and the night before she sat on my bed...in my dream I saw her", enables the dreamer to later say, directly, "She is a witch" (because I saw her), giving the allegation an authority which it would otherwise lack, so ensuring that at least some people will take it seriously.

Divination can also reveal the cause of a person's death or ailment and the identity of witches. **Waganga** who specialise in this let their clients name names first, which they can then confirm on the authority of the spirits with whom they work. The wambui are also able to divine death by witchcraft and to reveal the identity of witches, but leave the suppression of a person's witchcraft to specialists. As in witchcraft contexts the world over, the whole purpose of divination is 'not that the magician should guess who the witch is, but that the patient should take on the task of guessing himself, and name him' (Favret-Saada 1980:51). Both dreams and divination convey, for the accuser, the authority of unchallengeable truth on an accusation (cf Boyer 1990:60). The accuser becomes a victim from whom personal responsibility for the accusation is removed, making it possible to deny that an accusation is politically motivated.

People talk of 'catching' a witch, who can then be taken for shaving. This 'catching' need not be physical, but refers to the form of accusation. Suspected witches are not always 'caught'. Many accusations lie dormant and are allowed to lapse. The pattern of suspicion ebbs and flows in whirling eddies around a village. It is always flowing. Occasionally the current is dammed and a witch is caught, if not physically at least in the 'discourse of witchcraft' (Favret-Saada 1980:24).

Suspected witches are often publicly confronted with the accusation, at a funeral, at a beer drinking session, or at a gathering to discuss a dispute at somebody's house. The actual

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<sup>9</sup> 'Public' dreams are held to be the same as visions.

'catching' now takes a particular form and involves the accuser touching the accused on the head with two one shilling coins. The two shillings represents the two shillings that is the spirits' portion of the total fee paid to the current **mganga** for **kunyolewa**. This portion of the fee never changes, although the balance increases annually in line with inflation. The two shillings carries with it the implication that should a person refuse to go to be 'shaved', they may be taken against their will, if the means to do so are available. Those accused of witchcraft usually cooperate in the conviction of their own innocence, which ready consent is seen to support. Only those with the means to resist do so. Such people may even find it advantageous to be thought of as a witch, for example the village chairman who relied on his reputation as a witch to enhance his authority in the village. Residents were keen to avoid conflict with him because they did not want to become victims of witchcraft (cf Geschiere 1988:46). He called in the police to arrest his accusers.

After a witch has been 'caught', the matter is taken to a **balozi**, village chairman or other local party official who may arrange for impartial outsiders to escort those going to be 'shaved' and who provides them with a letter for the village officials in the village of the **mganga**. Accusations usually involve more than one person as those associating with the suspected witch are assumed to be jointly implicated, unless considered innocent by virtue of having been bewitched themselves. In the ideal accusers and accused go together, but this is not always the case. If those who feel themselves to have been the victims of witchcraft go by themselves, they take with them the two shillings with which they have touched the head of the witch in the belief that the **mganga** can somehow deactivate the witch from a distance.

If accusers and accused go together, the accusers pay the costs of the journey to the **mganga's** village, although each individual meets their own costs for the return journey.<sup>10</sup> The current **mganga**, an elderly woman called Kalemwana, but known throughout the area as the **Bibi** (grandmother), lives in the village of Ihowanja, in Malinyi Division. Ihowanja is between three and five days walk from Mahenge town, or two days by a combination of vehicle and walking. The prohibitive costs of road travel means that many people from the Mahenge area walk both ways, carrying with them food for the journey together with the maize flour and the chicken that are essential for the shaving. Some of Kalemwana's clients come, on foot, from the villages of Songea.

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<sup>10</sup> People taking suspected witches to Chikanga for 'cleansing' also paid their fare, although according to Redmayne, Chikanga did not charge a fee for the 'cleansing' (1970:178)

## The Elite's Attitude to Witchcraft

Witchcraft is perceived as a problem by the secular authorities of State and Party, whose official policy, supported by the national elite, condemns witchcraft as 'the enemy of progress' and illegal<sup>11</sup>. The Party strongly opposes witchcraft at its higher levels, but is unable to alter the views of its rank and file members whose involvement in the village administration inevitably implicates the Party as mediator in witchcraft disputes. Such a divergence of views is to be expected, given that the party officials who constitute the village administration are members of a local population for whom *uchawi* is a reality, daily evidenced by suspicious deaths and confirmed by the findings of diviners.

The current law on witchcraft is essentially unchanged since the colonial period. The 'Witchcraft Ordinance' of 1928 was revised in 1958 to take into account changes in local government structure, leaving the substance of the ordinance intact<sup>12</sup>. This declares both the practice of witchcraft and the accusation of another as a witch, unless before a local authority or a court of law, to be illegal. Under the Ordinance, penalties are fines, imprisonment and restricted residence under the supervision of district officials. The impossibility of proving witchcraft cases and the existence of a socially recognised way of dealing with accusations means that witchcraft is rarely a matter for the courts. Current district policy is to treat alleged incidences of witchcraft as civil disputes, referring those involved back to the village authorities and, ultimately, back to the villagers themselves. Although it is technically illegal to take a suspected witch by force to be 'shaved', victims of abduction tend to be reluctant to pursue the matter in the courts, and the police, most of whom come from outside the district, do not take the matter very seriously.

The Roman Catholic Church rejects witchcraft as a belief antithetical to the Christian religion and way of life. Current Church policy is to impose a *kizuizi* on those who have been to 'be shaved'. This includes both suspected witches and their accusers. The length of the exclusion is usually six months. The final decision regarding reincorporation into the Church defined Christian community rests with the Bishop himself. For most Catholics, the

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<sup>11</sup> See for example letter to **Makatibu Kata** of Ulanga from the **Mkuu wa Wilaya (Utamaduni na Vijana)**, ie to Ward Secretaries from the Chief District Officer for Culture and Youth, dated 21/1/76, in File N10/10, 'Mahenge Witch-Crafts(cap 18)', Mahenge Boma. In the same file see also letter of 30/3/84 to **Mkuu wa Mkoa** (Regional Commissioner) from DC, **Mkuu wa Wilaya**.

<sup>12</sup> Laws of Tanganyika, Vol 1, Chapter 18.

exclusions are regarded as neither permanent nor fundamental, and are cited by many as an inevitable part of the witchcraft cleansing procedure.

Accusation has to some extent become a way of publicly humiliating 'big people' and of mocking what are seen to be their pretensions to modernism and to the Church. For ordinary villagers, among whom there are not great differences in material wealth and who regard witchcraft as 'anti-progress' simply because witches stop people getting ahead, an accusation of witchcraft is not felt to be particularly embarrassing since it can, and should, be denied. Readily consenting to *kunyolewa* implies innocence as the person is afraid neither of taking the medicine which can prove fatal to witches nor of being recognised as a witch. The practice of shaving both the accusers and the accused and, in the past, entire villages, does not allow a particular group to be singled out for abuse and is generally believed to make their continued practice of witchcraft impossible. In any event, going to 'be shaved' has become routine in parts of Ulanga District, so routine that many people choose to go independently as a precaution against a future accusation of witchcraft. Going to be 'shaved' is seen to be beneficial for those who are not witches and the experience is, for many, something rather special and to be enjoyed.

### **Current Witchcraft Suppression Practice: At the 'Grandmother's Place**

Kalembwana has become the main anti-witchcraft specialist in Ulanga District and, indeed, in neighbouring Kilombero, in the period following villagisation. 1980 is cited by most people as the year from which she became the only recognised 'shaver' of witchcraft. By 1985 the sheer numbers of those going to her had begun to cause concern in government and party circles at the district level, both in Ulanga and Kilombero.<sup>13</sup> The location of Ihowanja, combined with the poor road facilities in the district, means that those going for 'shaving' often stay away from home for up to two weeks. This, together with the practice of working on the *shamba* of the *mganga*, has led to criticism, from representatives of the Catholic church and the CCM elites, that Kalembwana exploits the rural masses and, by deflecting valuable time from agriculture and other 'pro-development' activities, her practice is contrary to the interests of the State and 'development'. In fact, the great majority of

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<sup>13</sup> see above file correspondence between 1983 and 1986, including a letter of complaint from the current Bishop and various expressions of concern from members of the public, including one entitled '**Chama Kiingilie Kati Suala la Uchawi**' - 'The Party Should Interrupt in the Matter of Witchcraft'.

people go to Ihowanja during the dry season, which is slack agriculturally, when the journey is relatively easy. At other times of the year, the low plain between Malinyi and Ihowanja is liable to severe flooding.

A considerable mystique has built up around Kalembwana who has a formidable reputation for healing and divination. She is said to be a wholly good person, working in the interests of furthering peace among people, and is thus, in the eyes of the ordinary person, 'pro development'. Her reputation is guarded and embellished by the circle of close kin who, under her authority, assume responsibility for the day to day work of shaving witchcraft and giving routine medicines. Some of these relatives are holders of considerable authority in the local party and village administration. Supposedly aged 120, although probably nearer 80, the Bibi has become a figurehead for the group of her kin who, empowered by her ancestors and her reputation, 'shave witchcraft' in Ihowanja.

Kalembwana herself is a Mdamba, although her powers are said to come from the ancestral spirits of the Wandwewe. Ihowanja itself has a mixed population of Ndwewe, Ngoni, Ndamba and Bena. Kalembwana's powers derive from a nameless spirit which had previously empowered other **waganga** to do this work of shaving, healing and divination. Although they lived in the same locality, these forerunners were all from different tribal backgrounds. Possession by this spirit does not follow any particular line of descent, although those who have worked with the previous incumbent seem likely to be selected by the spirit on their deaths. Kalembwana herself was an assistant to the previous **mganga**. She began her work at Ihowanja shortly after being widowed, at some time during the 1950's. These **waganga** are said to have a privileged relationship with all spirits. In this way they are able to deal with people of many different backgrounds. Two of the three previous incumbents were women. It seems likely that Kalembwana's brother will inherit her powers after her death, although those who work with her stress that the final decision rests with the spirits themselves. For the majority of those going to see her, the details of her origin are not known and are not considered important. It is enough that she has been selected by the spirits, and that, as is the case with diviners of the territorial shrines among others<sup>14</sup>, the ultimate source of her power is God.<sup>15</sup>

People usually travel to Ihowanja in groups, either from their place of origin or from those gathered at Malinyi market place, which has become the unofficial camping point for those

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<sup>14</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>15</sup> Chikanga, a witchcraft shaver active in the 1960's on the Tanzania/Zambia borders claimed to have been sent by God (Redmayne 1970:106).

en route to the **Bibi**. At the edge of Ihowanja proper is a small patch of forest, where travellers rest in the shade and discuss what they should do before entering the village. All of them have heard tales about Ihowanja, usually exaggerated, and they know that there is a camp for the reception of witches, and that within the camp, or even within the village itself, certain rules and taboos about clothing, shoes, sex and smoking apply in Kalembwana's section. The debate at this point is about where this section actually begins. People are reluctant to break the taboos unintentionally and invoke the wrath of the spirits.

Some five minutes from the forest are the first houses of Ihowanja, a neat and compact settlement much added to during villagisation. Ihowanja's inhabitants are used to a constant flow of visitors. As many as seventy people a day arrive during the dry season. The economy of the village reflects this influx. Neighbouring villages such as Mabanda and Tanga, which are more accessible and closer to Malinyi, have only one shop and no market place. Ihowanja has three shops, several stalls which serve tea and cooked food, and a small market place located next to the camp at the margins of the village. Even though the **Bibi**'s clients will work on her **shamba**, they must provide their own food.

The camp consists of two long thatched shelters arranged at right angles to each other across a large open space. One shelter is for the women, children, and cooking. The other is for the men. When I visited the camp, in September 1990, there were at least two hundred people, mostly adults staying there. The camp is only for those going for 'shaving'. Those seeking other medicines stay elsewhere. Seriously sick people stay at the homestead of the **Bibi** herself or at the houses of her relatives. Other long term patients, some of whom stay for two or three years of treatment, build their own houses.

Camp residents reckoned that about forty people were Pogoro from Mahenge and Mwaya. The remainder were not Pogoro and came from villages in Kilombero and Songea. About twenty came from well outside the area—from places as distant as Tanga and Tabora. People from many different ethnic groups and parts of Tanzania go to Kalembwana for 'shaving' and other medicines, not all of whom share the cultural similarity of the peoples of Ulanga District.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the elements of Kalembwana's practice are familiar to almost anybody from an African background.<sup>17</sup> The emphasis on medicines, the shaving and purification, the involvement of the spirits, the elements of oath and ordeal are recurrent

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<sup>16</sup> This was discussed in Chapter Two. See also Gwassa (1973:43).

<sup>17</sup> Or perhaps more accurately a 'Central African' background. See de Craemer, et al (1976:468-9)

features of both the ethnographic area and of the witchcraft eradication movements which have swept across it. These are discussed in the following chapter.

Most of the people in the camp were between the ages of twentyfive and sixty. Women outnumbered men by about one third. I was told that this was usually the case, although the proportions varied and that on some days the ratio was more equal. Perhaps a reason for this is that women are more likely to remain at home in the villages while their men go away to work, and are thus more likely to get into witchcraft disputes. From what Pogoro people say, women are not thought to be somehow more innately prone to practice witchcraft than are men. There were very few people over sixty in the camp. This is probably explained by the difficulty the old or unfit would have in getting to Ihowanja, especially if they lacked money for road transport at least part of the way. If, as many people maintain, in the past witchcraft was predominantly the preserve of the elderly this is not the case today. The proportion of younger people in the camp was striking. Approximately half were people in their thirties, although many of these were accompanying an older relative. Some younger men claimed that they had been accused of witchcraft by older people, envious of their money and success.

The newcomers to the camp are received either by the other residents or by some of the **Bibi's** relatives, who fulfil the dual function of **CCM** village officials and servants to the **mganga**. They show the newcomers where to sleep and give them instructions regarding their behaviour. Men and women sleep separately. Sex is not allowed within the boundaries of the camp. Neither is the drinking of alcohol nor the wearing of shoes. Smoking is permitted, but smokers may only take a light from a certain fire inside the camp, from which the cooking fires are also lit. This fire should not be passed on to anybody from outside the camp. Those staying at the camp must always leave and enter it by the same path which they used to go into the camp the very first time. These restrictions are taken very seriously .

Theft is said to be an impossibility in the camp, some say in the whole of Ihowanja, because a person guilty of theft would be mystically prevented from leaving, or would die on the journey back. The people in the camp are in state of partial separation from the modern and mundane world of theft, money and corruption. They have been temporarily resituated in an enclave of a morality that is held to be both ancestrally sanctioned and 'traditional'. This enclave extends throughout Kalemwana's section.



Kalembwana herself lives about 500 metres from the camp, away from the village. On approaching her homestead people divest themselves of such 'foreign' items as shoes, watches, spectacles and 'western' ornamentation. Tobacco cannot be smoked in her presence. The sick people living at her homestead observe these restrictions for the duration of their stay. These prohibitions mark out Kalembwana's homestead as a mid point between the camp where the witches stay and the ancestors' section proper, where they will be taken for 'shaving'.

Special days are set aside weekly for the business of **kunyolewa**. Groups of people are shaved together. Kalembwana's assistants reckon they can shave up to 150 heads a day, but this is "hard work". As people arrive throughout the week, some have to wait longer for shaving than others and, consequently, spend more time working for the **mganga**. Some of this work, such as the fetching of firewood, directly benefits the people staying in the camp. The other work is mainly agricultural, and is, in effect compulsory. People are keen to appear cooperative, some because they fear that if they refuse to work they will not be shaved. Others want to help the **mganga** who, they say, is helping them and "bringing peace among people". Kalembwana's entourage justify the labour contribution in terms of a tradition of helping out one's hosts. They point out that even though people provide their own food, they are given shelter and protection at the camp.

People are assigned a day for shaving. The **balozi's** letters are read and official matters dealt with by the **CCM** people and the assistants of the **mganga**, in the camp. Names of all those coming are recorded and documentation is arranged. Each person will be provided with a **cheti** (chit), a slip, to the effect that he or she has been 'shaved' in Ihowanja. Those who have come without their accused, but with the two shillings, are dealt with. They are told that nothing can be done, but a letter may be provided for the **balozi** in the home village saying that these people have shown an intention of resolving the dispute by coming to be shaved, and suggesting that he advise the accused to come also. The atmosphere at the camp is calm and relaxed as it is believed that the only danger is for actual witches, and everybody else is convinced that they have been wrongly accused.

From dusk the night before the shaving, more restrictions are imposed on those who will be going to be shaved the next day. They are forbidden to have sex, to smoke tobacco, to wash and to use cosmetics on their bodies. In the morning, at first light, they are summoned and divided into two groups, one of men and the other of women. Each person carries a stick of firewood and a small bundle of clothes. The women carry small dishes containing a portion of maize flour and a small quantity of salt. Some carry chickens. It is

not necessary to have a chicken per person, but one for each group of people coming together. People wear their own old clothes, 'stained with their own sweat'. Nobody else's clothing can be borrowed for the occasion. Women wear their usual garments, patterned pieces of cloth, tied under the armpit but with their breasts hanging out over the top. The men wear shorts without shirts, or, alternatively, a cloth tied around the waist or over the shoulder. The wearing of other types of clothing is forbidden. The 'witches', no distinction being made between accusers and accused, are taken in their two groups to what amounts to an intermediate section, away from both the camp and Kalembwana's homestead. This place, although not far away from either, is regarded as 'bush' because it is not used for habitation or cultivation. It is in this area that the hut stands, where offerings to Kalembwana's mahoka are made.

The people are taken to two shelters, one for men and the other for the women. There they sit on the floor and wait to be shaved. The men are shaved first. The floor of the shelters has been sprinkled with medicine, the same medicine, a white powder made from ground roots, that will be painted on their heads and mixed with their food. Outside the shelters all the head and body hair is shaved with a 'traditional' knife, in deliberate contrast to the razor blades of everyday use. Even the eyebrows are shaved. Women are handed the knife with which to shave their own pubic hair. The finger and toenails are pared. The clothes which people have been wearing up to the shaving are discarded and left in piles with the hair, at a short distance from the shelters where the actual shaving takes place. People put on 'new' clothes which they have brought with them, and return to the shelters. These 'new' clothes are also 'traditional', not dresses, shirts and trousers which most people, especially men, wear normally. Although not in actuality new, these clothes are clean, unlike the deliberately soiled, old and worn ones of the morning.

Back at the shelters the **waganga** apply medicine, mixed with water to form a paste, to the peoples' heads, in a cross - from forehead to the back of the head, and from ear to ear. As they do this, they curse their clients in Kindwewe, the language of the Kalembwana's empowering spirit. The people are instructed not to wash until the following day or they will make the medicine ineffective. Meanwhile, the chickens and the maize flour have been cooked by assistants of the **Bibi**. More of the medicine has been mixed into the flour so that the **ugali** from which it is made contains it. The people eat, as they would at home, in single sex groups of those who have come together. After the meal they are again cursed by the **waganga** and made to shake hands with each other before returning to the camp, without looking back.

Money for the shaving is paid over at the shelters. At the time of my visit it was 152/-, having increased from 42/- in 1985. The two shillings component of the total fee is handed over as coins. Change, for the ancestors' portion of the payment, cannot be given, since it would taint the money with the aura of commerce, which seems to be what is avoided, symbolically at least, by keeping the two parts of the payment separate. I was told by Kalembwana's relatives that the two shillings are put towards the costs of brewing beer for the large scale annual tambiko for the spirits associated with the territory on behalf of the people resident in it, and for which she has assumed responsibility and, with this, responsibility for rain.

At no point is any distinction made between suspected witches and those who brought them there. Everybody receives exactly the same treatment. **Kunyolewa** is not explicitly a witchcraft ordeal, although there are elements of ordeal in it (cf Douglas 1963:123-4). Witches who 'remember' their medicines are said to die on their way home, or even years later if they return to witchcraft. **Kunyolewa** does not however, pick out and identify witches. People say that even though nothing is said to point out who the real witches actually are, they cannot help revealing themselves by their behaviour. It is said that the knife will not shave witches smoothly, leaving nicks and cuts. They squirm with discomfort when made to sit on the medicine which has been sprinkled on the floor and, as we might expect, they have difficulties with the food and the process of eating. They may be unable to see the dishes of chicken placed right in front of them or else they shake so much that they cannot direct the food into their mouths and so smear their faces with it. They eat greedily, crunching the bones of the chicken which the people have been forbidden to eat. Witches are then literally 'unable to eat with people'. Furthermore, if Kalembwana herself was present and watching them, they would not be able to see her. People watch each other very carefully at this point and try not to do anything that gleeful neighbours could interpret as a sign of witchcraft. It is believed that Kalembwana's people also observe closely, recording the names of the real witches in a book which they keep for this purpose. Many people do not understand the words of *Kindwewe* spoken as a curse. People say that it is to the effect of invoking death to witches, and seems to run something like this: "Let he who returns to witchcraft be killed by a snake! Let him be split by lightning so that he dies! God will see him and take his life!" and so on. Dealings in the camp, because of the diverse origins of clients, are conducted in Kiswahili.

By mid afternoon it is all over. Presented with their slips confirming that they have been shaved, people are free to go. Many stay on in the camp until the next morning, continuing to follow its rules which apply to all those staying there, even after they have been shaved.

Others stay because they wish to get other sorts of medicine, which they are not permitted to do if they have come to be 'shaved' until after this has been done. Those leaving Ihowanja, completely hairless and looking a little self conscious about it, genuinely believe that witches who return to their witchcraft will die. Many such stories are told.

## The Logic of Shaving

Going to 'shaved' is considered to be both cleansing and, for non witches, something that helps one and carries with it the slight promise of prosperity. That people are shaved at the edge of the ancestor shrine is significant. It explicitly associates what goes on there with the mahoka and other spirits who can curse, bless and punish. Although there is something of an intrinsic logic in the use of a medicine for the suppression of witchcraft, which itself comes from the power of medicine, Kalembwana's authority as a shaver of witchcraft comes in part from her association with a territorial spirit and the way in which she has made this a central aspect of her practice. Consequently, she is said to be something more than a mere mganga, such as those who previously conducted mass shavings in the villages. These people had no real 'power', they had 'only medicine'.

Those going to be 'shaved' are first taken to the camp which stands between the area of the shrine and the ordinary world. They are not shaved at the sacred place proper, indeed they must not approach the hut there, but at a point on its margins in a place that is classified as 'forest', the place of the spirits and the dead and the source of medicines. The restrictions imposed at the camp place those waiting to be shaved in an extraordinary position, partially separated from the ordinary transactions of social life. They are not free to move as they wish, always using the same path by which they first entered the camp, and they cannot give or take fire from outside the camp just as they cannot receive it. Similar restrictions apply to houses where a girl has begun her periods or a woman just given birth, the notion being that something, in this case her fertility, could be transmitted and potentially removed with the transfer of fire. At the same time the mwali or mother is isolated from society. The restriction on the transfer of fire outside the camp serves to mark out the separation of those within it, and presumably protects others from the possible actions of witches. This separation is echoed by the physical siting of the camp at the margins of Ihowanja. The camp is not provided for the convenience of those tainted with witchcraft, but is, rather, an integral part of the witchcraft suppression procedure. Not wearing shoes, the restrictions on sex and drink and the supposed impossibility of theft all hark back to an idealised 'traditional' morality, sanctioned by the spirits.

Within the camp, and on the day of the ritual itself, the separation of men and women simply replicates the everyday separation of the sexes, which is especially marked at public events. The dress and other restrictions before going to be 'shaved' are those associated with going to a ludewa shrine, again suggesting ancestrally sanctioned practice. Menstruating women must wait in the camp until their period is finished before they can go for shaving. The restriction on sex and on smoking tobacco means that people are in a 'good state' and 'clean', although those who are going to kunyolewa, because of their association with witchcraft, have to be made cleaner still.

Those going to be shaved wear their own clothes, dirtied by their own sweat. They are forbidden to wash before going, or to sweeten their bodies by applying oil. Why the women wear their breasts outside their garment is not clear. It is, however, resonant of the way the main female relatives of the dead dress at the first part of a funeral, before the body is buried and when the mourning and the pollution associated with the death is most intense. This connection with funeral dress is made by those who have been to be shaved at Ihowanja. Not surprisingly, it was most frequently commented on by women.

The witches and those accompanying them are made to sit in their old clothes on a floor that has been sprinkled with medicine. They must, however, be shaved before the medicine can be given to them properly, applied to their heads and eaten with food. The shaving here is said by both those going to kunyolewa and the waganga who do the shaving to be cleansing. Unless the people are shaved clean, the medicine will not 'hold', and will not be effective. We have already seen how shaving is intimately associated with cleansing and purification. It is always done together with washing with water. As well as being performed routinely after the burial of a close relative, peoples' heads are shaved on being released from prison and on recovery from a severe illness. Girls' heads are shaved as the first part of the purification sequence when they become a mwali. Shaving the head, by changing the appearance, conveys, obviously, a change of state - from girl into mwali, from person into bereaved and from witch into one who has been made unable to practice witchcraft. Certain medicines are thought not to 'hold' unless a person is 'clean'. This applies to Kalembwana's anti-witchcraft medicine, to shirala and to the uhembe given by the wambui. Uhembe is similar to anti-witch medicine. It is said to have the protective properties of kinga, and it too, if eaten by a witch, would kill them on their way home or whenever they 'remembered' their medicines. The shaving off of all a person's body hair at kunyolewa emphasises the intensity of their uncleanness and the badness of their state. It also emphasises their humanity. Only living people can practise witchcraft, hence the things

which are most associated with being alive are removed and discarded, the hair and the nails.

In an earlier chapter I suggested that 'dirt' is that which is contextually superfluous. The contexts in which it is superfluous are those of 'traditional' ritual, when what is set up as 'dirt' has to be got rid of because the main concern of such ritual is the renegotiation of the place of the living in relation to the dead. In cleansing witches what is superfluous is their witch aspect, which is what is symbolically discarded with their 'old clothes', their hair and nails. The clothing is left with the hair in the bush section between the shrine section and the village. Only after having been there, closer to the shrine, can the witches return fully to the village.

The eating of the meal after being shaved is not just a way of giving the medicine nor, as many people think, an opportunity to actually see who the witches are, but is the focal point of the whole process. Eating together is an integral part of most rituals and a valued aspect of everyday life. It indicates good relations between people as there is no fear of poison or harmful medicine in food which is eaten by both guest and host. It is considered polite to drink first from the cup oneself before offering its contents to another. **Waganga** always taste some of their medicine before passing the vessel to their client. For suspected witches to eat together with those who suspect them of witchcraft is normally unthinkable. That it is possible after **kunyolewa** is commented on by many in tones of wonder. Finally, the two shilling coins make **kunyolewa** into a tambiko, as the money is used to make the beer for the spirits at the annual offering which is the responsibility of Kalemwana. Although Kalemwana is not a mbui, her work and relationship with the area and the mahoka are regarded as being, by her Pogoro clients, intrinsically the same.

So far then, we have seen how current anti-witchcraft practice conforms to the structure of 'traditional' ritual. This in itself does not explain why such practice should be thought appropriate for dealing with witches, which is the issue addressed in the next chapter.



## Ten: KUNYOLEWA IN ULANGA AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF TRADITION

Kalembwana's anti-witchcraft practice is not a new phenomenon in Ulanga; neither is it merely a repetition of past practice. A consideration of anti-witchcraft practices in Ulanga and elsewhere suggests that they are a transformation of practice which is thought of as 'traditional', in the sense discussed in Chapter Eight; that is, as practice concerned with negotiating the place of living people in relation to the spirits. An important question to be answered, then, is why witchcraft should be conceptualised in essentially 'traditional' terms.

### Past Practice

The problem of *uchawi* has a long history in the district, although for how long *kunyolewa* has been the primary means of dealing with it is impossible to say with any certainty. Older people insist that, in the period before the German invasion, witches were shut in their houses and burned alive. However, they may be saying this to present a contrast with 'shaving', which, in the context of random accusations, has widespread support. The existence of a relatively benign way of dealing with witches possibly encourages what are essentially 'political' accusations which have no serious long term consequences for the accused.

Just as witchcraft itself is claimed to be foreign in origin, specialists able to 'shave' *uchawi* are frequently outsiders. Some of these appear to have been influenced by, or been part of, the so called witchcraft 'eradication'<sup>1</sup> movements such as 'kamcape' which have swept through East Central Africa since the 1930's, and very possibly before (Ranger 1966; ms; Larson ms; Richards 1935; Marwick 1950; Willis 1968; Redmayne 1970). Current practice in Ulanga is similar to that of these eradication movements, which all used 'medicine' to suppress the powers of witches and which were all spoken about in terms of 'cleansing' or 'shaving'. There are major differences however, notably the absence of 'confessions', cited by Willis (1970:130) as an integral part of eradication practice, and in the way in which

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<sup>1</sup> These writers all refer to witchcraft *eradication*. I prefer to use the term suppression, which is less ambiguous, as these practices are more accurately concerned with suppressing the powers of individual witches, rather than the eradication of witchcraft.



witchcraft suppression in Ulanga has, for the second time, (Larson ms) become associated with a territorial cult.

Some historians have pointed to a connection between the **majimaji** rebellion and witchcraft eradication movements in Southern Tanzania (Iliffe 1969:508-9; Ranger 1966; ms). It has even been suggested that the involvement of the Mahenge people, mainly the Pogoro, in the **majimaji** rising was motivated by the anti-witchcraft properties of the **maji**, the water that provided not only the symbolic basis for unity among the different groups participating in the rising, but also mystical protection from the impact of German bullets (Larson 1976:103-5). Little reliable evidence is available to either prove or disprove this theory. It would seem that the sheer existence of the German stronghold at the Mahenge **Boma** would, during the brutal suppression of the rebellion, have made limited Pogoro involvement inevitable. The anti witchcraft properties of the **maji** were probably not the explanation for its popularity<sup>2</sup>. These would seem to have been the inevitable side effect of a 'medicine' associated with a major territorial shrine, a medicine which seems from the historical accounts to have been concerned with putting the people back into an ancestral past and in touch with ancestral power (Gwassa 1973:148-68). The **Hongo** who carried the medicine from place to place, spreading the message of the **maji** wore only cloth wrapped around their bodies, the same kind of cloth which, even then, featured in offerings to ancestor spirits (Gwassa 1973:163). The **maji** gave protection from German bullets because, by drinking it, a person was aligning himself with the ancestors, the already dead. By placing himself partly in the state of the dead, the person who had drunk the medicine put himself beyond death. Indeed, according to a Matumbi elder quoted by Gwassa, people were keen to take the **maji** because, "They wanted to see their relatives who had died many years past"(1973:195).

From colonial records, it appears that witches have been 'shaved' in Ulanga for at least the last sixty years<sup>3</sup>. Witchcraft accusations and **kunyolewa** have long been a way of attempting to get rid of unpopular village leaders who were imposed from above, or at present, even if elected by the CCM members, lack legitimacy in the eyes of the wider community. Correspondence from a case involving a village headman at SanguSangu, about 7km from Mahenge town, in 1949 includes letters from elders demanding that the headman 'be shaved like a baby that he may be clean'. This headman was duly shaved and given the medicine,

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<sup>2</sup> The similarities with the Pogoro **ludewa** shrine, described in Chapter Eight, are obvious.

<sup>3</sup> see TNA File 2/7 'District Office Mahenge-Ngoja, Cult of 1932, and for correspondence relating to the case at SanguSangu see File 29/13 'District Office Mahenge-Misc/Witchcraft Case Kamsani Magungu and Five Others' 1949.

together with an assurance that if he should 'remember his medicine he would get sickness'<sup>4</sup>. He was presented with a thumb printed letter from the **mganga** who had shaved him as proof in case he should be accused of witchcraft in future. It is not clear from these documents whether only the head hair of the witch was shaved, although this seems likely. Older informants state that the all over shaving is an innovation of Kalembwana, and that, before this, either the head hair, or only a small section of it, was shaved.

## Government Policy and Anti-Witchcraft Practice

In the early years of the British administration, witchcraft suppressors were regarded with distrust by the authorities, who assumed that these cults and medicines had the disruptive potential of the **maji**. In Ulanga, the turning point in the government's attitude came in the 1940's as the administration struggled to implement its policy of closer settlement<sup>5</sup>. An increase in witchcraft accusations and demands for a witch specialist prompted the local authorities, under the direction of the District Commissioner, A T Culwick, to authorise the sending in of a **mganga** called Ngope to conduct mass shavings in the villages, much to the disgust of the Bishop of the time <sup>6</sup>.

Between 1942 and 1976 it was common practice for anti-witch specialists to go to villages afflicted with witches, usually by invitation, and to shave everybody, including children, for which they received a fee per head shaved. Part of the logic of mass shaving is that **kunyolewa** not only suppresses the powers of witches but protects possible victims against bewitchment. That such requests coming from village authorities often went for approval to the local administration has contributed to the perception of some of these anti-witchcraft specialists as being actually appointed by the government for the purpose of

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<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, he was taken by his accusers to a **mganga** who lived some six day's walk from Mahenge, via Malinyi, for shaving (TNA File 29/13 'District office Mahenge-Misc/Witchcraft Case Kamsani Magungu and Five Others,1949').

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>6</sup> see TNA File 10/13-T5/2 'Kiberege Station:Mahenge Sleeping Sickness Concentration-Correspondence Relating TO, 1941-', especially letter dated 9/3/43 from Bishop Edgar Maranta to the Provincial Commissioner complaining about Government approved **kunyolewa**. Further correspondence suggests, in particular a letter to the PC from Culwick, dated 22/3/43 that the success of the resettlement depended on it. Interestingly, Culwick, points out that, 'The Christian community, which is a large one, too large ever to be *compelled* to submit to pagan practices, welcomed Ngope. I am told that they considered this anti-witchcraft medicine far more efficacious than...anything supplied by the Mission'(emphasis in the original).

furthering **maendeleo** ('development') by controlling the number of witches. The current **mganga** is widely recognised by the rural population as the **mganga wa serikali** (the government doctor) because of the inevitable involvement of the local government administration in the witchcraft procedure. This official recognition is exploited and enhanced by anti-witchcraft specialists throughout the region. The use of rubber stamps, certificates of shaving and 'official' letters summoning suspected witches for cleansing is a recurrent feature of their practice (Redmayne 1970:110,124; Willis 1968:6). There is no doubt that such practices enhance the authority of anti-witchcraft specialists at the same time as undermining that of the opponents of 'shaving', such as the Church. As a woman who had been shaved five years previously said to me, "If Kalembwana were really evil, as the Church says, then the government would not have her do this work".

The Villagisation programme in the mid 1970's resulted in a change of District Policy with regard to anti-witch specialists<sup>7</sup>. **Waganga** were to be discouraged from visiting villages, especially **Ujamaa**<sup>8</sup> villages where collective cultivation had been imposed. They found permission to travel the district withdrawn, on the grounds that their presence in the villages would disrupt agricultural production. In the years immediately following the move, some specialists were permitted to 'shave' villages, if a sufficient number of village officials requested it, or if it seemed to be the only way of preventing the break up of the new settlements. In May 1976 a **mganga** was sent to the village of Kituti, near Ruaha mission, after a request from the Chairman and others, in which some nineteen cases of alleged witchcraft were cited, nearly all of which involved deaths. At least sixty people were implicated. The entire village was shaved in July.

As the new settlements were consolidated, the district administration put an end to the mass shavings by passively encouraging people to go to Ihowanja. Only the existence of this locally acceptable alternative made such a course of action possible. The district administration then no longer deals officially with the problem of witchcraft, which it has handed back to the villages and the local party. This policy has contributed to the creation of Kalembwana's monopoly on the suppression of witchcraft. It is not possible to predict how long the **Bibi's** popularity will last, nor how satisfactory her successor will prove to be

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<sup>7</sup> See File N10/10-'Mahenge Witchcrafts (Cap 18)', especially letters from **Katibu ya Wilaya (TANU)**, **Katibu Tarafa Malinyi** and the **Mkuu wa Wilaya** about a certain **mganga** who was to be refused permission to shave **uchawi** in the villages because of the agricultural season and the demands of **Ujamaa**, letters between late 1975 and January 1976. Ulanga District Office, Mahenge.

<sup>8</sup> **Ujamaa** villages were not established in the highlands area.

in her stead. Once a multi party system is implemented, perhaps state control of both medicine people and agricultural policy will weaken, and itinerant shavers of witchcraft will once again tour the villages in search of clients.

That requests for mass shavings have tailed off since the late 1970's is due largely to the disintegration of villagisation policies. Witchcraft accusations peaked during both moves into closer settlements, in the 1940's and again in the 1970's, in the main because witchcraft was an appropriate idiom for the articulation of opposition to state policies, which were justified in terms of 'modernisation'. The result was to implicate the pro-development state directly in dealing with witchcraft, and in dealing with it using mystical means, effectively undermining the administration's credibility as a progressive opponent of witchcraft and 'traditional' practices. It is not surprising that people do not take the state's opposition to the idea of witchcraft seriously, and that they understand the state to be in opposition instead to the practice of witchcraft.

### **Witchcraft as 'Tradition'**

Witchcraft and practices for its suppression are, rather like Christianity, ambivalently regarded. Witchcraft is claimed not to be indigenous in origin, yet it is claimed as part of an authentic African heritage, albeit a heritage of poverty and hardship, in opposition to the official Christianity of the Church. At the same time, local anti-witchcraft practice is defined as pro-Christian. Christian amulets and substances, and even the ritual specialists of the Church, are appropriated by it, as we shall see below. Witchcraft occupies a similarly ambiguous relation to the state. It is used as an explanation for the region's lack of 'development', at the same time as a discourse about witchcraft is used in self conscious opposition to centrally imposed development plans. It is an idiom in which local political relations can be conducted, deliberately bypassing the officially created political sphere of state and party. The local level party addresses this, by accepting the incorporation of witchcraft into the local political process.

Witchcraft is also brought into a relationship with what is considered to belong authentically to the realm of 'traditional' practice. While witchcraft is not claimed as being a part of this tradition, only 'traditional' practice can deal with it because only it can deactivate witches. This is because witchcraft is conceptualised in essentially 'traditional' terms. The deactivation of witches is played out along a series of contrasts and oppositions in physical space and on the bodies of people. The first basic contrast is the general one, between the

state of the spirits and the state of living people. Witchcraft is a habit of living people. The ancestors and the territorial spirits, as the non living, are, by definition, anti-witchcraft. They are against conflict. If they cause sickness and death this is interpreted as a legitimate reclamation of what is already theirs, thus, as we saw in the previous chapter, ancestral possession manifests itself as sickness. The possessing spirits are not expelled from the body of the victim, but are asked instead to let go. Ancestor spirits are what people become after they have lived and died. The state embodied by them is the state which all people will ultimately embody. Like living people, the spirits of the dead talk, eat, wear cloth and are, on occasion, visible. Unlike people, they are beyond death and reproduction. As their attributes are defined in relation to those of living people, they occupy space in which living people are not, the forest and the night.

Just as the spirits are defined in relation to aspects of living people, witches are defined in relation to both living people and the spirits of the dead and of territory. The amorality of witches makes them not only anti-ancestor, but anti-people. They behave in ways which proper people should not. They are impolite, greedy and antisocial. Witches kill without a reason and they do not speak. Speech is what characterises social relationships. Once a dead person has become a spirit he or she can speak and be spoken to. Silence is associated with unsociability, with pollution and with corpses. Witches go naked and fly. Their antisocial nature is manifested in their inability, both literal and metaphorical, to eat with people. When they do eat, their chosen food is the flesh of corpses, plundered from graves. They actively seek out the pollution of death and they carry death to homesteads. Witches make use of the night, when other people sleep, to hang around graves and homesteads in their search for victims. They occupy the domain of living people but at an inappropriate time.

The attributes of witches are defined as being in direct contrast to those of ancestor spirits and of people. In an earlier chapter, I suggested that Pogoro ritual dealt with the process of negotiating life's progress between two poles, at one end the extremes of physical process represented by the processes of living and of dying, the other the state embodied by the ancestors. Each pole involves death. Living people strive to maintain a distance from it by struggling to keep themselves to the middle ground, taking on and shedding excesses of pollution in order to negotiate their place on the continuum. Witchcraft has its place on the extreme physicality side of this continuum;<sup>9</sup> the attributes of witches implicate them in a

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<sup>9</sup> cf Huntingdon (1973:72) for the very similar way in which witches are conceptualised among the Bara of Madagascar.

wholly negative construction of physicality, associated only with death, unlike human physicality which is also associated with life.

We are now in a position to see where witchcraft and practices for dealing with it fit within the logic of jadi. Kalembwana's witchcraft suppression ritual conforms to the structure and sequence of the Pogoro rituals we have considered so far, and to the structure of much similarly oriented African ritual. This gives it an instant validity and efficacy in the eyes of clients who recognise the sequence as appropriate. That many of the witchcraft suppression cults in the area have relied on similar sequences, albeit augmented by elements of Christian or Islamic practice, explains their popularity and their rapid spread and acceptance beyond their areas of origin.

Kalembwana's anti-witchcraft practices appear to be somewhat more complicated and elaborate than those of these earlier cults, although much of the information we have on these is scant and second hand. Kalembwana takes the structure of rituals involving purification and makes it explicit, relying not only on shaving, but on the seclusion of the witches in the camp and their dramatic reemergence in new clothes after the shaving in the forest. The camp of the witches is the equivalent to the house as a place of seclusion and pollution in the funeral sequence and girls' puberty rites. The place where the witches are taken for shaving, where the discarded hair, nails and clothing lie, is the equivalent of the rubbish heap, between the house and the forest.

## **Witchcraft and the Church**

The Catholic Church is thought to involve itself mystically in the battle against witchcraft, although this is denied by the Church itself and contravenes the current policy of orthodoxy which removes from priests the official role of 'unwitcher' (cf Favret-Saada 1980:88). Most indigenous priests themselves believe in the existence and powers of witchcraft. "Its in our blood", one told me, pointing out that witchcraft is acknowledged in the New Testament and condemned by Christ himself. For priests, being against witchcraft means trying to get people to stop practising it and to turn instead to Christianity. Church appeals to the Christian community not to involve itself in *uchawi*, nor go to be 'shaved', are phrased simply in terms of this being against the 'Christian life'. Witchcraft is not only evil, it brings hate and discord among people. Christians interpret this as meaning that the Church is not opposed to the idea of witchcraft, but to actual witches. It is thought that having a house blessed can deter witches from entering in the night and that the palm branches, blessed

with Holy water and handed out to anybody who wants them at Easter, have similar properties when placed over the doorway. It is even said that the rosary is 'the kinga (protective medicine) of Christians' (cf Favret-Saada 1980:8). These things in themselves are not enough to defeat witchcraft. The value placed on them by local people meets with clerical disapproval.

As we saw in Chapter Three, the institutional Church is still perceived as something from the European tradition. This tradition is held to be unable to understand witchcraft or the necessity of dealing with it. Although witchcraft, that is the practice of it, is condemned by Christians it is paradoxically valued as being something authentically 'African' in opposition to the public position of the Church. What amounts to a 'folk theology' of witchcraft has been constructed concerning the place of *uchawi* in Mahenge Catholicism. The two sins mentioned by Christians if asked to explain what sin is, are taking somebody else's partner and 'killing people without a reason'. This latter sin will not be forgiven by God because the only people who kill without reason are witches. Thus witchcraft is the most serious sin, hence the mystical killing of witches is not only acceptable but applauded. Witches are against both God and people. Priests then have a moral obligation to 'kill' witches and, in this case, no contradiction is felt between priestly behaviour and killing. God alone cannot deal with *uchawi* simply because it concerns the relations between living people. In such matters God does not involve himself, while Mary and the saints keep their distance. Thus witchcraft must be dealt with by people themselves, using whatever media are available - medicines, rosaries, rituals and so on. Kalemwana's power is thought to come ultimately from God, which is taken as further justification for her working in the interests of the Church and Christians, not against them<sup>10</sup>.

Just as the peasants of medieval Italy could not accept that involvement in the night battles against witches should be interpreted by the Church as implicating the person in the work of the Devil (Ginzberg, 1983:89), Pogoro Catholics refuse to accept the Church's condemnation of Kalemwana. In both cases the popular argument is that any practice which is anti-witchcraft should be recognised by the Church as good, because witchcraft is bad and is condemned by the Church. Furthermore, as the Church is good and opposes witchcraft, practices directed against witches are essentially Christian in intention, if not in form.<sup>11</sup> The argument of the Church follows a similar logic, yet the premise is different.

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<sup>10</sup> Kalemwana herself, unlike Chikanga (Redmayne 1970:112), is not affiliated to any world religion.

<sup>11</sup> This conflation of form and intention by the catholic Church was pointed out to me by Jock Stirrat.

Non Christian form indicates a non Christian intention, hence any practice not sanctioned by the Church is anti-Christian. Anti-Christian practice is, by definition, the work of the Devil and therefore bad. Anything connected with witchcraft on its own terms, not those of the Church, is similarly the work of the Devil.

That those who have been 'shaved' in Ihowanja face a minimum ban on receiving the sacraments has not affected the resolution of Christians to be 'shaved' should circumstances demand it. The exclusion is not regarded as permanent and is accepted by Pogoro Catholics as an inevitable part of the witchcraft cleansing procedure. It is an affirmation of the inevitable break between the official Catholicism of the institutional Church and local Catholic practice and of people's perception of themselves as caught between two sometimes contradictory systems, which they move between as circumstances demand, thereby escaping the contradiction. The constitution of these two systems, and their essential separation, is the subject of the concluding chapter.





## Eleven: CONCLUSION

In Chapter One I suggested that, in situations where the presence of Christianity is the product of comparatively recent colonial mission, it often remains quite separate from other practice which is performed more or less routinely by both Christians and non Christians. Moreover, the adoption of large scale Christian religious affiliation does not lead to the abandonment of non-Christian practice. I have described just such a situation for Pogoro Catholics in Ulanga.

The previous five chapters explored the social construction of practices which are accorded the status of 'tradition'. We now have a clear understanding of the ritual structure of traditional practice and of how 'tradition' is conceptualised as having a specific relation to the past which sets it up as being directly opposed to certain aspects of Christianity. It is historically and ethnographically misleading to present what the Pogoro think of as 'traditional' practice as if it represents some kind of baseline religious or symbolic system which can be either displaced by Christianity, as the writers on 'conversion' imply, or combined with it, as the writers on the syncretic cults and sects seem to be suggesting.<sup>1</sup> 'Tradition' does not refer to practice which is performed today as it was in the past, but to practice thought of as deriving its authority from the people of the past, the ancestors and the spirits of the shrines associated with territory. The way in which these beings are conceptualised in opposition to living people explains the logic underlying the structure of 'traditional' ritual practice. The Pogoro notion of 'tradition' corresponds to that put forward by Boyer (1990), who suggests that what it really refers to is, not to kinds of societies or to kinds of practices, but to a specific form of communication which is seen to derive its authority from beyond living people. This was discussed in relation to the dead and the spirits associated with territory in Chapters Seven and Eight.

'Tradition' is not a static body of practices which are 'pre-Christian' and unchanged despite the introduction of Christianity. Practice thought of as 'traditional' is not unchanging. It can transform itself and incorporate other practice, so long as the authority for this transformation can be represented as coming from the spirits. The most obvious example of this kind of transformation is the effective institutionalisation of various witchcraft suppression practices in Ulanga District throughout the twentieth century.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter One.

Because 'tradition' refers to practice deriving its authority from beyond living people, some Christian derived practices have the potential to become 'traditional' in this sense, while what the Pogoro conceive of as being 'Christianity' as an institutional religion does not. The separation between 'tradition' and Christianity is not then absolute. Certain Christian practices have been 'freed' from the institutional Church and are performed spontaneously, without recourse to clergy, because they have a perceived equivalence with 'tradition'. Even where, as in the final part of the funeral process described in Chapter Eight, Christian practice in the form of masses for the dead has become an integral part of the funeral sequence, it remains separate in time and space from the homestead offerings and dancing. The equivalence of Christian practice is, however, limited. While elements of Christian practice are regarded to some extent as an equivalent to discrete elements of 'traditional' practice, here the actual offering of something to the dead, because Christian practice cannot deal with the relocation of the person in relation to the dead, it cannot stand in for the whole process.

In this final chapter my main concern is to explain where and why Pogoro Catholics place what they define as 'Christianity' as they do in relation to that which both they and the Church define, in different ways, as not Christian. Their separation of what they define as Christianity from that which they define as 'tradition' is not simply a consequence of the Church's own demarcation of an arena of officially sanctioned Christianity. Rather, such a separation is made inevitable by the manner in which 'tradition' is socially constructed, as deriving its authority from beyond living people, *and* experienced as an implicit system of substances and practices.

### **'Religion' and 'Tradition': The Implications of the Two Systems**

The historical establishment of Christianity in Africa has been inextricably entangled with imperialism and colonialism. As these have undergone transformation, Christianity has been subject to a parallel process of change and development along with institutions such as the school, the nation state and forms of production and exchange. Christianity in these contexts is inevitably implicated in power and politics, an entanglement that carries over into the post colonial period. In Ulanga, as in other post colonial situations, the very existence of a category of practices which are thought of as belonging to an indigenous and authentic 'tradition' depends historically on the presence of Christianity and the Christian mission, and on the inevitable association of this Christianity with what is foreign and alien. And, as in other mission/colonial situations, Christianity as an objectified body of beliefs and

practices is contrasted with non Christian practice, by both the Church and the people, both of whom have to negotiate between them. Such situations are well documented in anthropology<sup>2</sup>. What is less clearly understood are the implications of the existence of these two systems. The first mistake is to assume, like the writers on 'conversion', discussed in the Introduction, that we are dealing with two systems of the same kind. As I have shown, 'Christianity' is many things - a 'religion', a business, a voluntary association, a political power, and, on occasion, a source of access to the extraordinary power of the Christian divines. These Christian divines, precisely because they are divines, are not wholly controlled by the institutional church. It appears that it is at this point only that Christianity is the same kind of system.

When the Benedictine missionaries first arrived in Ulanga, they confronted a society in which 'religion' as a category did not exist. As in other non industrial societies, religion, kinship, economics and politics were only analytically separable. Institutional differentiation was minimal. In order to present Christianity as a competing system of religious truth, the missionaries had to construct an indigenous 'religion' which they could attack as if it were the same kind of system as their own. This strategy is commonplace in missionary situations. What is also commonplace is the imprecision and misdirected nature of the attack. Thus, for example, in Madagascar, Protestant missionaries focused their attack on the *sampy* medicine cults which appeared to them to be the nearest thing to 'religion', leaving the more fundamental notions and practices dealing with the ancestors and the land intact (Bloch 1986:26).

In Ulanga, the strategy was similar. Missionaries selected what appeared to them to be the obvious elements of a religious system which they could compare with their own and condemn as the work of the Devil. They targeted possession dances, divination, offerings to the dead, anti-witchcraft practices and the territorial shrines. In addition, as we saw in Chapter Three, the mission attempted to appropriate control over marriage. Other less obviously 'religious' practices were ignored by the missionaries who did not recognise that these were integrated into a wider but inexplicit ritual system. The most glaring example of this is the case of the girls' puberty rites, which the mission, like the Church today, classifies as 'cultural' and therefore as having no connection with 'religion'. In fact, as we have seen, the girl's puberty rites are an integral part of the same implicit system as anti-witchcraft practices and the relationship with the dead.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example, Bloch (1986), Comaroff (1985), Comaroff & Comaroff (1991), Nash (1979), Beidelman (1982), Fernandez (1982).

The missionaries failed to describe Pogoro 'religion' accurately because they misunderstood the nature of the system they were trying to describe. In societies in which religion is only analytically, not institutionally separable, locating 'religion' as a domain is especially problematic. For this reason, anthropologists since Robertson Smith and Durkheim (1976) have emphasised the primacy of ritual and practices over belief or theology in the study of religion. The implications of the importance of ritual are that we are dealing with the implicit logic of a system of practices. The coherence of the underlying principles of such systems is only ever realised in the practices which embody them (cf Bourdieu 1979:88). This has been evident in the thesis. In order to present an image of what the Pogoro define as belonging to 'tradition', I have had to describe in detail a sequence of practices, rather than present a series of informant's statements about what 'tradition' is. Such statements in general, as Boyer (1990) and Sperber (1975), among others, have pointed out are far from explanatory ; if asked about the 'meaning' or significance of a particular practice, informants tend to say what appears to them to be the obvious, " We do this because it is tradition".

While informants may be unable to articulate the underlying system in words, they can nevertheless recognise instinctively practice which is inappropriate because it goes against the underlying principles of the system. Actions, rather than words or explanations, are the way in which the implicit knowledge of such systems is transmitted. The inexplicitness of ritual systems in particular has received much theoretical attention in anthropology. It is now taken for granted that ritual is not a symbolic system which can be decoded to reveal a submerged but explicit message which somehow makes sense to participants and accounts for their participation.<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, ritual, half way 'between an action and a statement' (Bloch 1986:10), is powerful because it is vague, and, as Durkheim made clear, because it is subjectively experienced by the individual through action (1976:205-39).<sup>4</sup>

This subjective experience inevitably involves the physical body of the person, either centrally as in healing and possession rites, or through participation in eating, singing and dancing. Not surprisingly, substances applied to the body or incorporated by it become the media through which ritual is experienced. Thus substances thought of as medicines among the Pogoro are not merely instrumental in effecting a transformation in the states of the people being given them, but are in a very real sense the means through which the ritual is experienced. This is most obvious in the case of the uhembe given as blessing by the

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<sup>3</sup> For example see Lewis (1980), Sperber (1975), Tambiah (1979), Bloch (1986).

<sup>4</sup> Durkheim asserts 'religion is action'(1976:430).

wambui and in the various medicines and the cucumber seeds given to a girl on puberty, and ultimately incorporated by a wider circle of women. It also underlies the importance of the communal meals which, as an enactment of mourning, are the focal point of funeral gatherings. That religion in such contexts is an essentially inexplicit and experienced system of practices and substances has implications for the way in which people perceive and experience Christianity.

While the missionaries created a distorted and partial image of traditional religion which could be condemned, they were not successful in discouraging or discrediting the perpetuation of traditional practice. The image of traditional religion which they created does not make sense to Pogoro Catholics. Neither does the Church's presentation of Christianity, as a system of ideas, premised belief, rather than experience. Both representations are incomplete and contradictory. Although Catholic religious education concentrated on the catechism and on song and prayer, it culminated in the sacraments through which the person's experience of having become a Christian was constructed with a mystical efficacy, still held to be analogous to the transformative effect of medicines. As one woman explained, with actions such as baptism and confirmation, irrespective of the belief of the individual, " They are completely Christian now. The religion has hold of them." The Church itself relies on the use of rituals, substances and artifacts.

The mission's systematic failure to attract adult converts to Christianity was also a factor in accounting for the persistence of traditional practice. As we have seen, the correct performance of 'tradition' is the responsibility of the senior generation of men and women. These people did not adopt Christianity, although their children became Christian as a routine part of their primary education. In Mahenge, Christianity was to remain tainted by its association with paupers and children up to the 1940's. It never posed a serious ideological challenge to indigenous structures of authority or eldership. Unlike Protestant missions, the Catholics did not insist on the individual's inner conversion as the conscious and deliberate acceptance of the imported system. Salvation could be achieved through the application of sacraments to the external body of the individual, hence the initial emphasis on deathbed baptisms and on the instruction of lay people to perform them. The significance of such physical sacraments is now underplayed by the Church, in line with current post Vatican Two theology. Instead, as we saw in Chapter Four, the emphasis is on encouraging Christians to commit themselves intellectually to Christianity as a theological system premised on individual faith and realised, not solely through participation in Christian ritual, but through 'living the Christian life'. The current policy of the Church with regard to the sacraments and the emphasis on the internalising of Christianity meets with

opposition from Catholics, who value Catholic practice precisely because, like 'tradition', it can be experienced as a system of substances and practices.

In order to establish what the 'Christian life' is, the Church has to continue to define it in opposition to that which is not Christian. It takes the distinction further by distinguishing that which it defines as anti-Christian from that which it defines as merely cultural or pertaining to custom. The Church only opposes that which is regarded as anti-Christian, which is that which seems to the Church to be 'religious' in the same manner as its own practice is 'religious'. Thus, as we saw in Chapter Four, diviners of territorial shrines, anti-witchcraft specialists and any form of divination are defined as anti-Christian, because they depend on explicit contact with the spirits, as are the giving of tambiko offerings to the spirits of the dead. On the other hand, the use of plant derived medicines without divination is now acceptable as 'folk medicine'. Similarly, the girls' puberty rites are not condemned because, as they do not involve direct contact with the spirits, they are, in the view of the Church, only 'culture'.

This attitude permits the perpetuation of certain practices within the framework of 'official' Christianity, while anti-Christian practice has to be performed outside it. This separation here is marked out by the temporary excommunications which permit people to move between official Christianity and what the Church defines as anti-Christian practice, and to be reintegrated, if they desire, into the officially defined Christian congregation. It is most explicit in the case of polygamous marriage when the Church classifies second wives as non-wives, while first wives, if they have married in Church, continue to be recognised as Christian. Even this exclusion is not drastic in practice as, in the event of a fatal illness, a 'sinning' husband can renounce his other wives, and so receive the last rites and an official Christian burial. These strategies of the Church allow for the perpetuation of what the Church itself has declared to be two opposing systems and avoid the possibility of contradiction, because, as was clear in the case of anti-witchcraft practice described in the previous chapter, people can, and do, move between them.

In the view of ordinary Catholics, 'religion' is not confined to practices dealing with spirits and divinities, just as culture or custom is not distinct from what the Church would classify as 'religion'. The following exchange between two women discussing a Sunday sermon reveals the extent of differences in interpretation between Church and laity, and the extent to which lay people interpret the Church's position with regard to what it defines as anti-Christian practice as contradictory. The attitudes expressed by the women, both of whom are in their forties, are typical. Mama Patia, who spent a good part of her childhood under

the care of the mission, began, "The parish priest said in the sermon that traditional medicine is sin and hasn't any significance because there is only one God", to which her cousin, Mama Asanteni replied, "What! To say this is to say that our custom is sin, as our custom is our medicine". Mama Patia then said, "Yes. It is not possible. Only witchcraft is sin". "And", added Mama Asanteni, "He is talking nonsense. The Church has its own medicine<sup>5</sup>". The fact that Catholicism can, like 'tradition, be experienced as an implicit system of substances and practices further undermines Church attacks on 'traditional' practice.

Ordinary Catholics do not think that the Church's position on these matters makes sense. As we saw in the previous chapter with regard to anti-witchcraft practice, the Church's definition of things which are, by general consensus, 'good' for the community as 'evil' appears so unreasonable that it is ignored or dismissed as an error in the Church's interpretation of both 'tradition' and Christianity. This is exactly what Mama Asanteni means when she says that the priest must be talking nonsense. This attitude is clearly evident in people's refusal to accept the Church's condemnation of anti-witchcraft practice, and, indeed, in their interpretation of such practice as essentially Christian in intention.

I made a distinction above between Christianity as 'dini' (religion) and Christian practice, which has the potential to become 'traditional'. Such practice is performed routinely by Christians and is not initiated by the Church. Furthermore, it is seen to derive its authority from the dead and the Christian divines. Christian practice is derived from the Church, but is detached by people, as far as they are able, from the institutional aspects of Church. It centres on accessing the powers of the Christian divines directly, without the mediation of the institutional Church., as for example, in the use of rosaries and medals. The desire to free Christianity from the institutional Church is evident in the story of Mary's visit, described in Chapter Four, in which Mary escapes from the Church and is resituated, albeit transiently, in the local landscape. Because these aspects of Christian practice do not derive their authority directly from the institutional Church, but from the Christian divines, they can exist independently of it. It is the very institutional nature of the Church and 'religion' which undermines its claims to be the sole and legitimate arbiter of the transcendental.

This problem of the transcendental authority of the Church as an institution is not to be confined to Africa. It is perhaps an inevitable feature of institutional Christianities which, by imposing change on what people regard as unchangeable, serves only to enforce a

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<sup>5</sup> She is referring to holy water, consecrated oils and communion wafers.



separation between Church as institution and the relationship of people and the Christian divines. This was certainly the case, historically, in medieval Europe where, as Moore (1987) has argued, religious movements which were condemned by the Church as anti-orthodox continuities of pagan practices were in fact rooted in past Church sanctioned practices, and were perpetuated in opposition to the innovations of the institutional Church. More recently, Catholics in rural Spain were reluctant to abandon their belief in purgatory and the importance of devotions in order to conform to the new constraints of practice and interpretation imposed by Vatican Two (Christian 1972:94). The lack of credible authority faced by majority Christian churches depends not on their institutional nature as such, but on where the authority for the institutional structure of the church is perceived by followers as lying. Thus Zionist churches in Africa are able to adopt the institutional forms of majority churches because, as we saw in Chapter Four, their leaders are thought not to be selected by people, nor as a result of personal choice, but are chosen by God. The basis of this kind of authority limits the extent to which these kinds of churches can expand along the lines of majority churches.<sup>6</sup>

Other aspects of Christian practice are harder to free from the Church entirely. Holy water, blessed objects, such as palm branches and seeds, and masses for the dead all have to be obtained via priests. But, because such practices can be interpreted locally in terms of a perceived equivalence between them and 'traditional' practice, they can be freed from the constraints of an interpretation imposed by Catholic theology. The equivalence between Christian practice and 'tradition' is granted because people recognise they are concerned with the same sorts of things, with the relation of living people to the dead and to the divine. It is fostered by the recurrence of identical symbols either in Christian ritual or in the bible stories read out in the services which occur in similar contexts in traditional practice. The ones most frequently pointed out to me were the use of water, of fire, of special clothing, the notion of offering and, the anointment of the body in specific places with special substances in the case of the last rites and of baptism. This recognition makes Jesus into a healer and diviner and Moses into a ritual specialist who removes his shoes before talking to God as the bush burns before his very eyes. Removing the shoes is a feature of the Good Friday church service, visiting territorial shrines and of funerals. All three contexts are collapsed into each other in this interpretation. As we saw in Chapter Four, Good Friday is experienced as a funeral, albeit a non ancestral one. Removing the shoes at ordinary funerals and territorial shrines conveys not only respect for the dead, but a temporary reenactment of the past which the dead represent.

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<sup>6</sup> For a good description see Sundkler (1961).

The place of the dead shows us the limits of the 'traditionalisation' of Christian practice. While the dead can be 'remembered' with masses, they cannot be buried in 'Christian' clothing. In order to become an ancestor, a corpse must be dissociated from Christianity. And, while Christian practice can be experienced physically through ritual and substances applied to the body, it cannot resituate the person in relation to the spirits of the dead through sequences of seclusion and purification. Consequently, Christian practice has no place in dealing with the pollution of death, with the parallel transformation of corpse and mourners and in rites dealing with female fertility.

In Ulanga, as elsewhere in Africa, the association of Christianity with things foreign and alien and the fact that its organisation exposes what it does as the product of human manipulation devalues its claims to a transcendental authenticity. Consequently, practice which is thought to be authentically 'traditional' is always given priority, as, for example, in the place given to witchcraft suppression cults in the area, and in much of South Eastern and Central Africa (Douglas,1963, Willis,1968, Marwick,1950, Redmayne,1970, Richards, 1935). Significantly, these institutionalisation of these cults would seem to be as much a feature of the twentieth century as the large scale adoption of Christian religious affiliation. For the Pogoro, who do not regard these cults as indigenous in origin, they are nevertheless accorded the status and truth value of 'tradition' simply because they are, in opposition to Christianity, rooted in the cultural geography of the region and derive their mystical efficacy from the ancestors and medicines. For the Pogoro these are then 'things of our place' as opposed to the 'things of religion'.

## **The Position of the Church**

When ordinary Catholics talk about what 'religion' is about, dealing with the spirits and divinities is hardly relevant. Although people may on occasion use 'religion' to describe an analogous local institutional structure dealing with the spirits associated with territory and divinations and shrines, the point of comparison here is not that all these things concern the spirits, but their incorporation into an institutional structure. Thus in Chapters Four and Eight we saw how the hierarchy of wambui mediums is compared as an equivalent institutional structure to the Church. 'Dini' (religion) refers to the world religions, here Islam and Christianity, as essentially voluntary associations, concerned with God certainly, but concerned with a many other things besides; with modes of organisation, power, identity, names, literacy and status. For Catholic Pogoro, membership of the institutional

Church constitutes 'religion', which depends on various official procedures, the taking of a specific name and, for 'full' Christians the payment of the annual fees.

The identification and close association with the Catholic church in Ulanga continues to have material advantages for many, within and beyond the district. The Church provides, formally and informally, a wide range of services unavailable elsewhere. Its material wealth is overwhelming - the fleets of vehicles, its land and property, its supplies of grain, fuel, and clothing. It continues to enjoy a good relationship with Catholic donor agencies in Europe. Services provision tends to be determined by the interests of donors, often via ex missionary priests. Its projects are designed to serve the interests of the Church and conceived within the framework of the expectation of continued donor support. For the Church to continue to support its mission derived infrastructure and the lifestyle of its personnel, it has no option but to function as a business. The alternative is to rely on local support and to change the whole nature of the organisation<sup>7</sup>. The current mood of Catholic donor agencies, influenced by 'liberation theology' and 'development' ideology supports the latter approach. The diocese is trying to sustain itself as it is by presenting its future plans in terms of 'development' and 'local sustainability'. What this obscures, however, is that the 'development' refers in practice solely to the development of the infrastructure of the diocese and that the local sustainability will come, not from local support, but from profits made locally.

People's relationship with priests remains founded on patronage and 'help'. As recently as 1986 a parish priest was reported to the local administration by village chairmen for denying the excommunicated access to the mission dispensary. Personal ties between priests and congregation are immensely important. The states' virtual collapse in the rural sector has thrown people back on the Church. While there is hostility from party elites to Church power, and mutual accusations of corruption and misappropriation of funds, the district administration has to maintain a good relationship with the Church to make use of its resources. The Church is perceived as an institution which combines aspects of the bureaucracy of party and state with the material power of business. At present, for sound historical reasons, it surpasses all the alternatives in terms of influence and resources. The Church is Christianity, and Christianity is 'the religion of business'. The Church justifies this position with reference to the organisation of the Catholic Church in Europe and the

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<sup>7</sup> This is a particular problem for dioceses which were founded and missionised by European monastic orders, like the Benedictines and Capuchins. The Maryknoll, White Fathers and Holy Ghost Fathers created less elaborate mission infrastructures, perhaps because they were not monastic orders.

example set by the Swiss missionary orders with their large farms and substantial properties. "You can't draw a line between the Church and business anywhere in the world", the man responsible for diocesan funding told me. While this reflects the reality of the organisation of the Church internationally, it contradicts the image of itself which the Church tries to present as a 'religion' concerned with the spirit. This merging of 'religion' and 'business' is noticed by people other than Catholics. The pastor of the Mahenge branch of the Assemblies of God, who comes from Kilombero, stated emphatically that, in contrast to Catholicism, "The Assemblies of God is *not* religion", he said. "The person is not given the Holy Spirit, it chooses him. Unlike religion we have no projects (like grinding mills etc). Our project is the spirit".

The separation of Christianity from both 'traditional' practice and everyday life is reiterated in the physical separation of the Church from its congregations. Churches are built within the bounded enclaves of a mission station, where religious personnel reside. Like that of other mission buildings, their architecture and scale is alien. The religious are isolated from the community and do not mix with it, except formally, in their capacity as religious personnel. The physical siting of the Church is important. People must make an effort to go there, and, when they do, they adopt certain conventions of dress and behaviour which have become associated with Christianity. In addition, the Christian calendar of Sundays and festivals creates special days set aside for Christian things. Importantly, for Pogoro Catholics, as I have shown in the thesis, Christianity as 'religion' is not concerned with the same sorts of things as 'traditional practice'. Not only then do we have two systems, but two different kinds of systems with different areas of validity.

In situations such as I have described, Christianity continues to remain separate from the small scale society which its followers inhabit. The presence of institutional religion does not result in institutional differentiation; religion, economy, kinship and so on remain only analytically separable. I would suggest that in these situations then we are likely to find a situation similar to the one which I have described for the Pogoro. That is one in which the existence of institutional religion sets up 'religion' as a category referring to specific practices and features of the institutional church, and from which things thought of as belonging to 'tradition' are kept separate. In the case of the so called 'syncretic' cults and sects to which reference was made in the Introduction the same situation applies. These sects are particularly associated with the marginal - people who are dislocated from the small scale society, migrant workers, outsiders, those without kin or place. These cults tend to replicate in their organisation the institutional unity of the small scale society (Perrin Jassy, 1973) with cult members living and working together, and frequently refusing

to cooperate with people who are not cult members. Because Christianity is no longer on the margins of these systems, it is dragged right into the centre and there is then no perceived break between tradition and religion. Collapsing the boundary between religion and tradition, allows for the manipulation and merging of the two systems, and 'syncretism' becomes a possibility.

## **Future Trends**

In the Mahenge area, there is no doubt that despite local criticism of the Catholic church, it will continue to remain dominant for the foreseeable future. The alternative Christian churches, like the Assemblies of God, are unpopular for various reasons which we considered earlier. For example they forbid alcohol and dancing, the Seventh day Adventists forbid the consumption of pork, while the Lutherans oppose 'remembering' the dead and ancestral practice. They are also unlikely to take hold for a more fundamental reason, the very one which the Assemblies of God pastor pointed out; such churches are 'not religion'. These churches demand that the separation between Christianity and 'tradition' is obliterated: converts have to choose one over the other. There is no negotiation between systems. The question then becomes why are people reluctant to choose and to abandon practice which they define as 'traditional'. I hope that the previous chapters have suggested some reasons why 'tradition' matters so much, as a relationship with the land, the place and the people from whom one is descended, the relationship on which fertility and identity, at the ethnic and personal level, depend. The issue of ethnicity in Tanzania is paramount. In a country with numerous groups defining themselves as distinct tribes and claiming distinct languages, cultures and customs, identity is marked out by the adherence to distinct 'traditions' which produce what are conceived as different kinds of people. This situation no doubt underlies the importance attached to what is defined as 'tradition'.

There is one final question, the extent to which I have presented a vision of society which privileges the perspective of the old, and whether this accounts for the situation I have presented. My informants were from all age ranges: I tended to work with families rather than individuals, because people are so rarely alone, and every person with whom I became friends introduced me to their extended families. Young people, under thirty, of both sexes, were all convinced of the importance of adhering to 'tradition', and, although some of them went through periods of devout Catholic religiosity, this did not undermine their commitment to 'traditional' medicines nor to the importance of offerings for the dead. The young are participants in such rituals, rather than instigators, and as such they have little

choice, as yet, in opting out of them. The only youth likely to so do are those attending the seminary or, in the case of girls, aspiring to the novitiate. 'Tradition' will inevitably continue to change, but while Christian practice may stand in for more people more of the time, it will never replace it completely.



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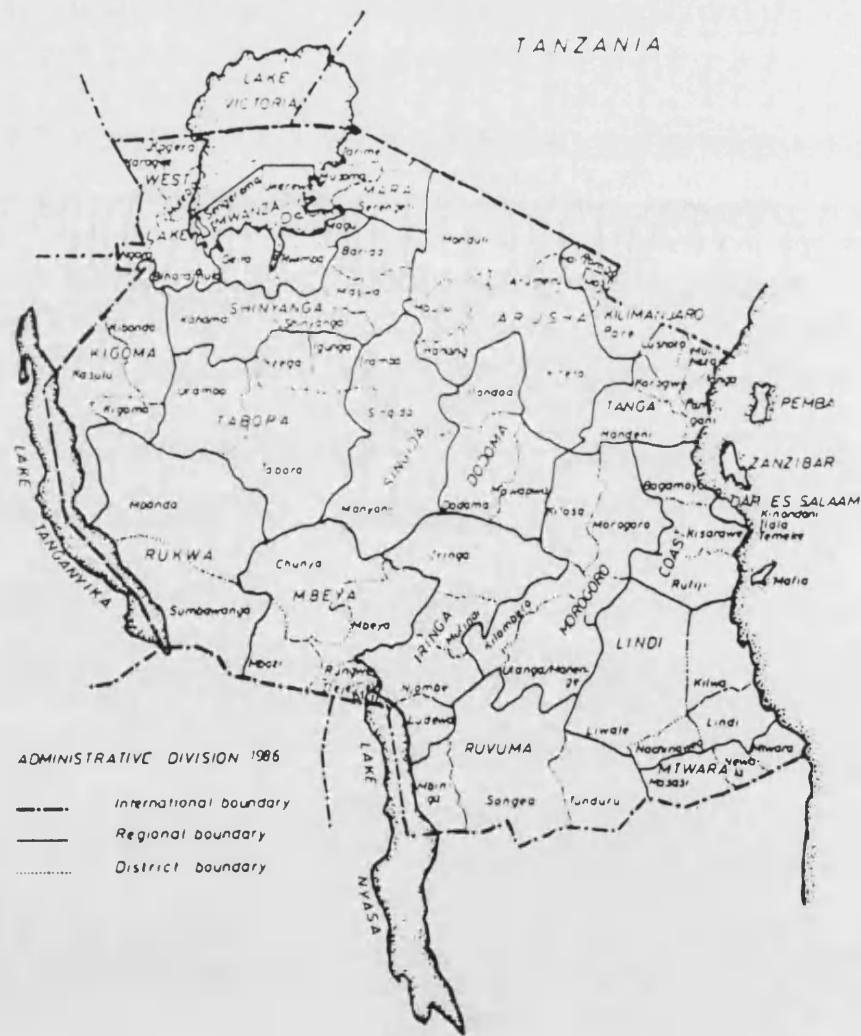
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## **APPENDIX 1 - MAPS**



# Map 1: Tanzania-Administrative Districts<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> From Bosen et al (1986).





## APPENDIX 2 - TABLES

**Table 1: Religious Affiliation by Year, Kwiros Parish<sup>1</sup>**

YEAR:	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980
Catholics	4115	6544	7046	12890	11939	15832
Protestants	20	7	30	?	120	234
Moslems	4000	1200	600	650	851	1702
Pagans	15000	10000	6000	?	38	1778

**Table 2: Personnel of the Church by Year, Kwiros Parish<sup>2</sup>**

YEAR:	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980
Expatriate priests	5	7	8	16	6	4
Expatriate brothers	4	6	10	8	6	1
Expatriate sisters	9	13	12	11	3 <sup>3</sup>	4 <sup>4</sup>
Indigenous priests	none	none	1	2	8	10
Indigenous sisters	none	none	26	8	7	?
Catechists	4	51	19	16	5	17

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<sup>1</sup> These figures are from the annual statistics which are sent to Rome. The total number of Catholics is worked out by subtracting catholic deaths from the total number of baptisms. The figures for the other categories are obviously estimates. The boundaries of the parish have been constant since about 1955.

<sup>2</sup> From Prospectus Missionis, Kwiros Parish.

<sup>3</sup> This dramatic decline reflects the move of the Baldegg Sisters to Ifakara, a major missionary centre within the Diocese.

<sup>4</sup> The number of sisters is no longer recorded on the parish statistics because the Sisters belong to the Diocese.

**Table 3: Catholic Sacraments by Year, Kwirow Parish**

<b>YEAR:</b>	<b>1931<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>1940</b>	<b>1950</b>	<b>1960</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>1980</b>
<b>Baptisms under 7 years</b>	113	234	273	545	387	631
<b>Baptisms over 7 years</b>	119	43	128	69	41	8
<b>Easter Communion<sup>6</sup></b>	1475	2950	2666	6894	2000	2074
<b>Marriages</b>	33	61	71	90	36	1

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<sup>5</sup> The figures for 1930 were not recorded.

<sup>6</sup> This refers to all those given communion slips, which is not necessarily an accurate representation of the numbers of people actually taking communion at Easter, although it provides an indication of the small numbers who do.

**Table 4: Comparative Data for some Parishes, 1990<sup>7</sup>**

PARISH:	Biro	Ifakara	Igota	Iragua	Luhom-bero	Itete
Catholics	5680	21723	7488	2772	2758	4950
Protestants	260	2350	11	15	912	97
Muslims	30	13260	11280	964	6873	2021
Pagans	2	440	1110	170	2235	1711
Priests	3	5	2	1	1	2
Sisters	4	33	none	none	none	24
Untrained Catechists	1	3	5	1	2	4
Trained Catechists	3	10	1	2	1	4
Baptised under 7	1048	889	179	46	77	193
Baptised over 7	52	240	8	20	64	80
Marriages	12	50	10	6	2	10
Easter Communion	?	?	?	?	?	3500

PARISH:	Malinyi	Sali	Sofi	Ruaha <sup>8</sup>	Kwiro <sup>9</sup>
Catholics	5958	5250	3276	11356	15667
Protestants	3316	7	11	55	561
Muslims	4061	98	537	3576	3677
Pagans	101	1060	217	1326	2260
Priests	1	1	2	2	13
Sisters	4	4	0	4	20
Trained catechists	3	2	3	10	7
Untrained catechists	6	1	1	1	1
Baptisms under 7	193	114	113	202	449 <sup>10</sup>
Baptisms over 7	80	40	38	73	122
Marriage	13	19	5	23	43
Easter Communion	?	300	?	?	973

<sup>7</sup> These figures are taken from the annual reports on the state of the parish which are sent to Rome. They are compiled by parish offices, and should be taken as indicators of general trends rather than as completely accurate.

<sup>8</sup> The figures for Ruaha are for 1989 as the 1990 figures were unavailable.

<sup>9</sup> The figures for Kwiro are for the year ending december 1989 as those for 1990 were unavailable.

<sup>10</sup> This figure should not be taken as representative. The group baptism policy means that some years there is a glut of baptisms. in 1988 for example there were 349 baptisms, and 26 marriages. In 1987 there were 462 baptisms and 20 marriages.

**Table 5: Masses Ordered at Kwiro, 1958-90<sup>11</sup>**

MASS ORDERED FOR:	1958 <sup>12</sup>	1969	1976	1990
one named dead <sup>13</sup>	84	23	165	147 <sup>14</sup>
related dead	?	15	231	718
non related dead	?	7	-	3
religious dead	7	62 <sup>15</sup>	21	20
all souls	1	10	1	5
souls in purgatory	-	4	1	3
dead of a place	-	5	3	6
Mary	-	4	-	42
God	-	13	25	38
Saints	1	1	-	11
Sacred Heart of Jesus	1	-	-	-
marriage	?	?	5	3
other	-	2	-	3
<b>Total</b>	94	133	452	999

<sup>11</sup> The years for which some records were available at Kwiro Parish Office.

<sup>12</sup> The mass figures for this year are taken from the *tangazo*, the announcements of the parish, because the book in which masses were recorded was unavailable.

<sup>13</sup> The figures for 19xx and 19xx exclude masses ordered at burials because until 19xx no charge was payable.

<sup>14</sup> Of these 34 were burials, 6 were at *toa tatu*, and 5 house masses.

<sup>15</sup> The high figure for religious dead reflects the death of a bishop in 1969. 57 of the masses here were for him.



**Table 6: Baptisms and Survival Beyond Two Months of Baptism  
1910-1960, Kwirow Parish**

AGE AT BAPTISM:	0-2	3-10	10-20	20+	Total
<b>1910</b>					
Male Survivors	27	4	92	6	129
Male Non Survivors	7	6	0	21	34
Female Survivors	23	27	20	8	78
Female Non Survivors	8	4	5	20	37
<b>1920</b>					
Male Survivors	71	?	6	0	77
Male Non Survivors	4	?	4	14	22
Female Survivors	53	?	8	2	63
Female Non Survivors	5	?	1	13	19
<b>1930</b>					
Male Survivors	55	4	36	3	98
Male Non Survivors	14	4	4	29	51
Female Survivors	52	3	14	4	73
Female Non Survivors	23	3	5	25	56
<b>1940</b>					
Male Survivors	78	7	15	2	102
Male Non Survivors	39	10	2	25	75
Female Survivors	103	2	25	0	130
Female Non Survivors	49	5	6	46	106
<b>1950</b>					
Male Survivors	165	12	65	3	245
Male Non Survivors	15	6	3	20	44
Female Survivors	149	10	44	9	212
Female Non Survivors	22	1	5	61	89
<b>1960</b>					
Male Survivors	290	10	27	5	332
Male Non Survivors	16	2	0	23	41
Female Survivors	297	6	23	14	340
Female Non Survivors	10	1	1	14	26

**Table 7: Population of Ulanga District by Sex, Age and Division<sup>16</sup>**

DIVISION:	Households	Men	Women	Boys under 15	Girls under 15
Malinyi	3470	16789	17606	4187	3863
Mwaya	6378	17800	19210	3260	2840
Lupiro	3489	13252	15414	2862	3504
Mtimbira	2699	11203	12764	1885	2016
Vigoi (Mahenge)	4203	13204	14302	1992	2306
<b>Total</b>	16777	55459	61690	9999	10666

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<sup>16</sup> This information was supplied by the Office of Development and Social Welfare in March 1991.

Total Population of the District: 137,814, of which 50% are Pogoro, 10% N'gindo, 35% Ndamba, 2% Ngoni and 3% Vidabaga.