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One of the finest memories of my life was to see my father and my parents-in-law attending the initiation of their grandson in Dang'eida village. At that point of time my father was 76 years old and he had spent at least fifty of them as a travelling evangelist for one of the most conservative, some would say fundamentalist, church denominations in Norway. The *gidahalaghweanga* of our son, Håvard, who was born during our second fieldwork, involved the engagement of several hundred Iraqw and Datoga, the brewing of numerous calabashes of honey mead and several drums of sorghum beer, the highly unbiblical slaughter of an ox and a goat, and lengthy prayers to a god that was not my father's. The central part of the ritual was the strangulation of the *gidahalaghweanga* goat in front of the baby, and the sprinkling of urine from the dying animal on Håvard's forehead. My father was not, however, abhorred by the "pagan" ritual procedures in which he was one of the main protagonists by virtue of being the senior elder of Håvard's clan. On the contrary, he was highly impressed by both the scale and the content of the event, and he shared our own strong emotional experience of seeing Håvard being introduced to the world. My father later referred to the event as the "baptism" of his grandson, and I believe that he had captured one of the main messages that anthropology has to bring to the world.

Finally, I would like to dedicate the fourth of these articles, which focuses on the tendency to attribute healing and ritual powers to the culturally distant, to Fremskrittspartiet. Just days after I submitted this particular article to *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, the leadership of this right-wing Norwegian political party launched a party platform in which they introduced a new concept for what they perceive to be a major threat to Norwegian society: *Fremmedkulturelle*. This may be translated as "culturally alien/distant", and happened to be one of the key concepts in

the article I had just completed. The party, which soared to 25 per cent support in the polls at the time, thus provided further evidence of the human inclination to attribute supernatural power to the culturally distant, and illustrated yet again that a potential source for expanding knowledge and wisdom may easily be interpreted as a threat, to be feared and fought by those who need to construct such an enemy.



## Introduction: The invention by tradition

### ***The image of static Africa***

For 500 years the African continent has been haunted by powerful outsiders who have denied its inhabitants potential for creativity and ability to change. Some of the early European comments on the “primitivity” of Africans expressed doubts as to whether they deserved to be called fully human, a debate that was still lingering at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. When Carolus Linneaus published his *Systema Naturae* in 1735, he classified the African a “subspecies” of *homo sapiens*<sup>1</sup>, characterised as “indolent, negligent. Anoints himself with grease. Governed by caprice” (cited in Maybury-Lewis, 1992:19). Almost two decades later, in 1753, David Hume (1903:213) wrote:

“I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the Whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion, nor even any individual, eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences. ... Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction between these breeds of men. Not to mention our colonies, there are Negro slaves dispersed all over Europe, of whom none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity; though low people, without education, will start up amongst us, and distinguish themselves in every profession. In Jamaica, indeed, they talk of one Negro as a man of parts and learning; but it is likely he is admired for slender accomplishments, like a parrot who speaks a few words plainly.”

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<sup>1</sup> With the exception of the “hottentot” who, according to Linneaus, belonged to the species *homo monstrosus*.

A century after David Hume's comparison between the African and a parrot, in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, another prominent European philosopher argued that "the character of the Negroes ... is capable of no development or culture" (Hegel, 1956:98). Such "facts" about Africans were successfully employed in the debates surrounding the slave trade, to the extent that some came to portray and legitimise the trade as a heroic attempt to rescue Africans from the stone age primitivity and misery of their lives.

When the image of a static and non-creative Africa was threatened by the discovery of the accomplishments of pharaonian Egypt, its location at the periphery facilitated the construction of Egypt as a "non-African" achievement. Later, when the evidence of pre-European cultural sophistication in sub-Saharan Africa became too massive and too obvious to be ignored, the European image of the African continent as devoid of possibilities for development, creativity, and innovation was sustained by the Hamitic hypothesis and similar theories, which ascribed any impressive achievements found in Africa to Caucasoid or European peoples who had allegedly wandered southward some time in the past. The Hamitic hypothesis was able to maintain its disguise as a scientific theory until the 1960s, and, as is exemplified in article II in this thesis, its impact on the image and self-image of Africans is still a powerful one. The idea that Africa has always been dependent on outsiders for creativity, guidance, and development is perpetuated in various forms, ranging from popular literature, cartoons, and movies such as *Tarzan* and *the Phantom*, to the more diffuse and ambiguous rhetorics of well-meaning politicians and development agencies. Expatriate employees of the latter, when encountered at cocktail-parties in fashionable suburbs of African capitals, may be willing to generalise and theorise, providing numerous examples of

Africa's continued total dependence on external initiative, creativity, and administration in order to achieve anything at all. Some might even agree with one of the former District Commissioners in Mbulu, the area in focus in this thesis, who not long ago wrote in his memoirs that if the African were left alone he would "proceed along his time-honoured course of *laissez-faire* and stagnate in his unproductive village life, producing just enough for his daily needs and living perilously close to famine and starvation" (Lumley, 1976:18).

Anthropology is hardly innocent in this remarkable construction of a continent peopled by human beings devoid of creativity. In 1863 the first president of the Anthropological Society of London, James Hunt, "challenged those who argued for African equality with whites to name one "Negro" who had distinguished himself in any field" (Adas, 1989:154). The author of the most influential work on the Hamitic hypothesis, C. G. Seligman, was one of the founding fathers of British anthropology. In *Races of Africa* he states that the invading culture-bearing "Europeans" were "quicker witted than the dark agricultural Negroes" (Seligman, 1959 {1930}:96), an opinion which, as we shall see, is still echoed, not only in popular literature and travel and missionary accounts, but also in various forms in the curriculum of schools and universities and in academic publications. The degree to which European anthropologists embraced, or at least failed to discredit, the theories presented in *Races of Africa* is evident in the impressive list of leading Africanist anthropologists who contributed to the revision that led to the 1957 edition, in which the section on "Europeans" outwitting "dark Negroes" and bringing civilisation to Africa was left intact (see "Publisher's note to the third edition" in Seligman, 1959 {1930}).

Paul Bohannan (1964:65-77) was one of the first anthropologists to point out the racist bias of Seligman's theories. He claimed that some of these were built on "no evidence at all" and that the classifications of African peoples were based on a "mishmash". Bohannan had been trained in Britain and was strongly influenced by the dominating paradigm of British anthropology of the day. Structural-functional anthropology focused on the functions of the internal structures of the tribe, and customs and institutions were primarily described and analysed in terms of their contribution to the maintenance of an internal balance or homeostasis. Innovation, creativity, and various types of inter-tribal social and cultural exchange were often considered rare enough to warrant description as irregularities that might upset the equilibrium and stasis that played such prominent roles in structural-functional models of culture and society. Bohannan's work on economic spheres among the Tiv became one of the classical anthropological works of its time. The title of what was probably his most influential article on the subject, *The impact of money on an African subsistence economy* (1959), illustrates the way Bohannan interpreted the events he had been observing. The introduction of money caused a deterioration of norms, upset the balance of traditional institutions, and caused conceptual confusion. Bohannan's focus was on processes of destruction set in motion by a powerful external agent, and local constructive efforts intended to cope with the problems raised by the new medium of exchange were either absent or futile.

A major reason for including Bohannan's article in present-day first year anthropology curricula is that it excellently illustrates the necessity and importance of the anthropological ideal of holism. What Bohannan showed was that certain market transactions among the Tiv cannot be understood without extensive knowledge about the way these transactions

relate to the cultural and social environment in which they occur. As is the case with another curriculum classic, Lauriston Sharp's (1974 {1952}) *Steel axes for stone age Australians*, the point of close interconnections between various aspects of culture and society is highlighted by considering the effects of the arrival of a single external agent. In both cases — the introduction of money among the Tiv and of steel axes among the Yir Yoront — the impact is described as massive and far-reaching, illustrating in a powerful way how economics and technology in these societies were inextricably intertwined with gender and kinship relations, politics, and religion.

The exam papers of first-year social anthropology students at Norwegian universities reveal that students often learn another lesson from these two articles. The Tiv and Yir Yoront societies were both virtually defenceless in the encounter with the external agent whose impact on the societies in question may be likened to a collapsing house of cards or a line of dominoes pushing each others down. A major implication drawn from this by a number of students, is that it is essential to employ anthropologists both in the planning phase and during implementation of development projects. Somewhat flattering for their examiners, students conclude that anthropologists can, and even that *only* anthropologists can, predict the consequences and prevent disasters when pristine and defenceless traditional societies are touched by external forces.

In the eyes of outsiders, African societies have often been so inextricably bound up to static qualities that this stasis has become a defining characteristic. If they change, according to this view, they simply cease to exist. A major contributor to Iraqw ethnography has recently been recorded to lament that “Iraqw culture” does not exist any more, blaming the nationalist policies of Julius Nyerere for this sad outcome. If we turn to

one of the more well-known neighbouring groups, the Maasai, we encounter “a culture” which appears to have been on the verge of extinction throughout the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first book carrying the title *The Last of the Masai* was published in 1901 (Hinde, 1901), the last one in 1987 (Amin, 1987). Almost 100 years after the first of these books was published, there is considerable proof that both authors were wrong. The Maasai are still present in East Africa, indeed they are present to the extent that they have become a metonym for the whole region, if not the entire continent. Even a superficial look at popular films, cartoons and literature depicting Africa reveals an extraordinary density of Maasai symbols. A recent and widely circulated example is the official introductory video for the 1998 Soccer World Cup TV transmissions which featured a Maasai woman in traditional dress in the midst of a soccer match crowd. The continued existence of Maasai culture is also implicit in a statement by a colleague of mine, claiming that there are few anthropology departments in the world that have not recently sent students or staff to East Africa to conduct fieldwork among the Maasai.

One of the Maasai I know runs a thriving tourist business in Arusha and one of his specialities is to send truckloads of tourists to his relatives in Maasai-land where they are offered accommodation in mud huts and are served fresh milk from zebu cows in the morning. The last time I saw him he was expecting a large group of German anthropology students and their professor; they were all going to conduct fieldwork for several weeks in his home village. The Maasai are certainly still there, but Maasai culture is not the same as it was. Some of them wear western style clothes and are taking PhDs, and some travel by helicopter from Nairobi to visit relatives and to attend traditional rituals in Maasai-land.

There is, of course, little remarkable in the fact that cultures change. The extraordinary in all this is that some societies continue to be perceived and to be portrayed as unchanging, stuck at a stage of evolution that the others have left behind, or in a garden of Eden that is lost as soon as the natives take the first bite of the fruit of modernity. Thus, there seems to be little in-between the traditional and the modern. The African, according to this image, is either fully submerged in the blessings and curses of modernity, or he is still dancing to the beat of ancient drums. What lies between is portrayed as a hybrid, neither tribal nor decently detribalised, “matter out of place” that is liable to be despised or ridiculed by those who equate cultural change in these societies with cultural decay.

Thus, European discourse on Africa, to which early anthropology made major contributions, constructed an image of Africans and African culture as primitive, static and non-creative, thereby helping to legitimise external intervention and expatriate presence intended to elevate Africa; the goals were civilisation, education, efficiency, rationality, development, Christianity, and other virtues considered to be of universal value by more or less well-meaning outsiders. Furthermore, anthropologists continue to contribute to the construction of stereotypes depicting African societies as fragile structures on which the effects of contact with modernity are more likely to be destructive than constructive — especially if such contact is not carefully administered, monitored, or nurtured by people who are aware of the vulnerability of African traditional societies.

Commodisation, westernisation and modernisation have often been depicted as inevitable and universal processes that will eventually lead to the cultural homogenisation of the peoples of the world. The role of the anthropologist in such a scenario would be merely, though somewhat heroically, to try to reduce the pain of acculturation, and to record and

preserve as much as possible of the world's cultural diversity in books and videotapes before it is lost forever. The foreword of *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, the book that gave birth to modern anthropology, opens with a passage that prophesises a rather bleak future for both the new discipline and its object of study:

“Ethnology is in the sadly ludicrous, not to say tragic, position, that at the very moment when it begins to put its workshop in order, to forge its proper tools, to start ready for work on its appointed task, the material of its study melts away with hopeless rapidity. Just now, when the methods and aims of scientific field ethnology have taken shape, when men fully trained for the work have begun to travel into savage countries and study their inhabitants – these die away under our very eyes. ... The hope of gaining a new vision of savage humanity through the labours of scientific specialists opens out like a mirage, vanishing almost as soon as perceived. For though at present, there is still a large number of native communities available for scientific study, within a generation or two, they or their cultures will have practically disappeared. The need for energetic work is urgent, and the time is short.” (Malinowski, 1922:xv-xvi)

Some seventy years later, however, Jean and John Comaroff (1993:xi) write that:

“*pace* the predictions of modernization theory and historical materialism, not to mention the efforts of CNN and Sony, the world has not been reduced to sameness. Nor does it promise to be, at least not imminently.”

A major reason why the world did not follow its predestined course towards cultural homogeneity and uniformity was the fact that the active and creative voices of non-western societies had once again been left out of the model. The peoples who were expected to be conquered by Western cultural imperialism did not, in fact, behave like David Hume's parrot.

### ***The invention of tradition***

No term has been more closely associated with the static qualities attributed to African societies than “tradition”. The word, as it is used in ordinary speech, corresponds well with the original Latin meaning of the term, implying something that has been “handed down” largely unchanged from earlier generations. It is precisely these static properties attributed to tradition that are conceived as the defining criteria or the measure of the extent to which a tradition is *genuine* or *authentic*. Seen from this perspective, the title of Hobsbawm and Ranger’s influential book *The Invention of Tradition* (1983) plays on an explicit contradiction in terms, a startling juxtaposition of two mutually exclusive concepts that both catches the attention and reflects the writers’ central argument. It is not possible to invent something that has been there all along, and Hobsbawm and Ranger’s point was precisely that the traditions focussed upon in the book have certainly not been there since ancient times. What people identify as tradition is not what has in fact been handed down, but what is perceived as having been handed down. By manipulating these perceptions, it becomes possible to invent traditions which are genuine and authentic in the sense that they are perceived as such, and which may be powerful enough to change the course of world history.

Thus, *The Invention of Tradition* introduced a dynamic element into a concept that by definition had been associated with rigidity and stasis. The primary concern of Terence Ranger in his contribution to the volume, *The invention of tradition in Colonial Africa* (1983), is not, however, to re-ascribe the potential for creativity and initiative to African culture. In fact, Ranger’s article may be (mis)read as yet another example of African dependence on external creativity and initiative. The inventors of the traditions he is focussing on are Europeans or the colonised minds of their

African collaborators. Just as agricultural and pastoral adaptations, iron tools, and sophisticated forms of political organisation were allegedly introduced to Africa by the Hamites or other outsiders, Ranger describes how another set of powerful cultural inventions were brought to Africa by a new wave of “incoming Europeans” in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The roles of ordinary African men and women are yet again those of passive spectators, receptors, and acceptors of cultural inventions emerging from the creative and non-African north. And yet again we see the weakness and vulnerability of African culture, which so easily made room for, and was replaced by, the new European inventions. Ranger’s article, like the many recent descriptions of how European administrators and their African collaborators invented tribes, focuses on the more or less conscious innovative strategies of colonial officials and ideologists, leaving one with the impression that Africans were willing to passively accept that even their own ethnic identity could be discarded, moulded, divided, and synthesised into new categories that fit the new order envisaged by European administrators. The ethnographic contributions on the colonial invention of African ethnic groups, some of which are referred to in article IV (page 157-159), have flourished to the extent that commentators have found it necessary to warn that:

“the formative influence of the colonial (and post-colonial) state has been overemphasised, at the expense of the *continuity with pre-colonial processes of group formation*. The blanket statement that ethnic groups are *ipso facto* colonial creations is wrong: many ethnic groups in Africa have formed before the colonial state.” (Schilder & van Binsbergen, 1993:8; cited in Bank, 1995:565, italics in original)

To lump Ranger’s *The invention of tradition in Colonial Africa* together with Seligman’s *Races of Africa* is, of course, a rather unfair equation. Moreover, it should be noted that if the above can be read as a critique of

Ranger's 1983 article, this is hardly very original; in fact, much of the argument is his own. In *The invention of tradition revisited: The case of Colonial Africa* (1993), Ranger sums up and reflects on the reactions provoked by the original article, discusses more recent major contributions to the debate, and suggests a number of amendments to his own argument. Few scholars have, in fact, made a greater contribution than Terence Ranger to the restoration of the African creativity that has been ignored and denied by Europeans who for centuries have sought to legitimise their uses and abuses of the African continent. Ranger has emphasised that *The Invention of Tradition* "was about a specific historical period in which, it asserted, traditions were peculiarly frequently invented rather than customs continuing to evolve" (1993:6). The distinction between the conscious and rigid properties of "invented traditions" on the one hand, and the unconscious flexibility of "custom" on the other, is important in Ranger's analysis. I shall in the following section explore the extent to which this distinction may shed further light on Iraqw ethnography and on the arguments I have pursued in the five articles that constitute this thesis.

### ***The invention of Iraqw tradition***

"The Iraqw" and "the Iraqw chiefdom" may be seen as yet another colonial invention. The people who later came to be recognised as *the* Iraqw did not have any kind of centralised political authority at the time of the arrival of the first Europeans. The earliest German descriptions of the distribution of the various groups and the ethnic labels that were applied to them in the Mbulu area are highly confusing (Baumann, 1968 {1894}; Werther, 1898; Kannenberg, 1900; Jaeger, 1911). Several decades later, the oral traditions collected by Paul Berger reveal a similar complexity (Berger & Kiessling,

n.d.), indicating that the Mbulu area was characterised by the fluidity and flexibility that Richard Waller (1985) claims was a general feature of the pre-colonial East African ethnic scenario. What was to be simplified to the “Iraqw Chiefdom” actually consisted of a number of groups which interacted and intermingled in various ways; the ethnic boundaries were certainly not as clear-cut as the implementers of indirect rule might have wished them to be. In fact, the newly invented Iraqw Chiefdom included within its borders groups of people who spoke Cushitic, Nilotic, Bantu, and Khoisan languages, i.e. all four of the major branches of African languages were represented in the area. This does not mean that the borders drawn up by the British were artificial or wrong in the sense that they did not fit with the “real” pre-colonial distribution of ethnic groups in the area. Regardless of where the borders had been drawn, they would have been artificial because the very concepts of border and boundary did not fit the pre-colonial East African realities. The European idea of the nation state presupposed clear-cut divisions and the existence of complementary and mutually exclusive categories of land, of political systems, and of identities. This model was much too simple to be able to grasp the complex pre-colonial East African ethnic scenario where “there were few barriers to the flow of population from one small-scale unit to another and [where] definitions of identity tended to be inclusive rather than exclusive” (Waller, 1985:349).

The memoirs of an early District Commissioner in Mbulu indicate the strength of the preconceived European attitudes regarding how African tribes were organised both internally and externally. When the map turned out not to fit the terrain, he lays the blame not on the map but rather on the impact of two decades of German rule on the East African social landscape:

“When we took over, scarcely any trace of traditional tribal rule through chiefs and councils remained. ... [t]here was an initial difficulty in some tribal lands of finding the rightful hereditary chief. So effectively had the Germans suppressed the ruling families of the tribes that it was often difficult to decide who should occupy the “royal” chair.” (Lumley, 1976:14,18)

That some ethnic groups, such as the Iraqw under his own administration, were acephalous and lacked a “royal chair” altogether was apparently not even considered a possibility by Lumley.

Another pervasive aspect of the colonial image of Africa was the idea that inter-“tribal” relations were by nature problematic and needed to be regulated in order to avoid the eruption of conflicts. As Lumley put it: “Africans are not by nature co-operative outside their own tribes” (*ibid*, 15). As a result, Iraqw and neighbouring Datoga groups in Mbulu who tried to migrate out of “their” chiefdom were constrained and chased back by colonial administrators who saw such movements as a dangerous threat to the stability of the region (Winter & Molyneaux, 1963:498-499; Bagshawe, 1926:64; Fukui, 1970b:111; Lumley, 1976:87).

With the implementation of indirect rule, the problem of the map not fitting the terrain was in a sense solved. The solution was not to dismiss or modify the model, but to take the remarkable step of transforming the ethnic and political landscape itself, including the ethnic identities of people living there, to make it fit with the basic idea of the European nation state. Examples of the successes of the colonial invention of Iraqw “traditional” organisation are evident in these articles, and one of the most powerful statements indicating the extent to which the new political and social order was accepted and internalised by the Iraqw after less than 30 years of indirect rule is provided by the first anthropologist who conducted fieldwork among the Iraqw:

“The Native authority is fully accepted, and is an organic part of their own social structure. Very few Iraqw are capable of envisaging modern tribal life without the system of chieftainships. What has occurred has been that as the Native Authority has established its authority, in the sense that as it has reached the position where the Iraqw not only think that they have to obey its dictates but they *should* obey them, the old system and the new have delimited their own spheres of activity. Thus both are seen as having legitimate places in the total social structure, but each has a different part to play in the over-all scheme.” (Winter, 1968:16-17, italics in original)

Iraqw chiefs are currently spoken of as great and legitimate Iraqw leaders rather than as the puppets of an oppressive external regime, despite their central role in implementing policies that varied greatly with regard to their general popularity, such as tax collection, culling programs, restriction of movement, outlawing of Iraqw customs, and extensive conscription of forced labour. It is no coincidence that the first democratically elected member of parliament from Mbulu was the son of the last Iraqw chief to serve under British rule (see page 108).

Thus, the physical borders that the British drew up on the map were transformed into a number of social and ethnic boundaries that did not exist in pre-colonial East Africa. The new order synthesised culturally heterogeneous populations into tribes, and often disrupted a complex pattern of inter-ethnic relationships of co-operation and interaction. As we shall see in article III, the Iraqw whose houses were burnt and who were chased back to the “Iraqw chieftdom” early in the colonial period might very well have been close affines and kin of the people whose land they were accused of “invading”.

In this collection of articles, the most prominent and detailed account of an externally invented tradition that came to be accepted and internalised by many Iraqw is the new myth of an Iraqw origin in Iraq (article II). The external origin of the myth, the central role played by

administrators, missionaries, teachers and scholars, and by their written texts in transmitting it to the Iraqw, are typical features of accounts of invented traditions in East Africa and elsewhere. Although the Iraq myth may be traced back to Seligman and to the European invention of the Hamites, this does not, as we shall see in article II, tell the whole story of how the Iraqw came to regard Iraq as their place of origin. The new myth did not replace previous myths of origin but was synthesised with them, and when the new myth was accepted and added to the existing repertoire of Iraqw myths, it continued to change and to develop as oral tradition despite the fact that the fixation and the power of the written word had been one of the major sources of its legitimacy. Iraqw “custom” appears to have interfered with the European invention of the Hamites.

### ***Iraqw “custom” and invented traditions***

During my first fieldwork in southern Mbulu I interviewed a male elder about Neetlangw and the role of this figure in Iraqw religion. Among other things, he told me that the *neetlaame* (pl.) live in water sources, and that a very powerful one resides in a well at the very top of the Hanang mountain. Mount Hanang lies 3644 meters above sea level and is a very conspicuous feature of the landscape in southern Mbulu and Hanang Districts. I happened to have climbed the mountain a few weeks prior to this talk and I told the old man, not without apprehension, what I had observed at the top: there was no water source at the summit. Its peak is a single relatively sharp ridge, and there is no crater there despite the fact that the mountain has the typical conical shape of a volcano when seen from the surrounding savannah. The old man answered something in the vein of: “Oh, then it’s not like I told you”, and continued the conversation

as if nothing had happened. I wondered for the next few years whether he had been ridiculing me, but finally arrived at the conclusion that he was not. At about the time I realised this, I told other informants, with the same and this time more justified apprehension, that their theory of an Iraqw origin in Iraq was highly improbable according to recent authoritative research on the distribution of African languages, a statement that was perceived by some as a dis-authentication of Iraqw history (see page 110).

These two incidences and their contrasting responses may serve as an illustration of Ranger's distinction between the flexibility of "custom" and the rigidity of "invented tradition". One of the obvious differences between the two is the fact that the theory of an Iraqw origin in Iraq was presented and fixed in writing, while the story of the great Neetlangw at the top of Mount Hanang was an account that had been orally transmitted between people and possibly between generations. There is an inherent flexibility in the oral mode owing to the interaction between human creativity and the limitations of human memory. "Inconvenient" parts of orally transmitted accounts may be unconsciously transformed and adapted by the people through whom they pass, or they can simply be forgotten (Henige, 1980). Direct contradictions, as in the case of the Neetlangw at Mount Hanang, could be attributed to the failure of someone's memory of the past, or to misunderstandings in one of the links through which the account of the Hanang Neetlangw has been transmitted. Thus, my information on the missing well never came close to refuting the existence of Neetlangw, and this was at least one of the reasons why the elder was not particularly concerned about my findings.

When traditions, whether invented or not, are written down and institutionalised in clearly defined structures such as "customary law", "chiefship", a line on the map, or a chapter in a book, there is a risk that

they will lose whatever flexible characteristics they might have had. The Iraq myth drew upon the authority of missionaries, teachers, scholars, and at least one important literate Iraqw ritual leader, and upon the power of the written word, hence, the pervasiveness of its influence. The power basis of the Iraq myth thus depended on fixation, an indisputable fact which was transmitted in writing from leading scientists via missionaries, educated Iraqw, and a widely distributed book in Swahili. Any questions raised, as in parts of the argument of article II in this thesis, would therefore threaten to falsify the whole story, whether it is called myth or hypothesis.

What people have come to regard as their own authentic tradition is sometimes exposed by anthropologists and historians as “merely” an invention by someone who moreover was completely wrong about the issue that the invention was dealing with. The controversies that have arisen from such constellations are many, and not surprisingly, heavily charged with emotion (e.g. Keesing, 1989; Jackson, 1995; 1989; Briggs, 1996; Hanson, 1989; 1991; Linnekin, 1991; Levine, 1991; Desai, 1993; Friedman, 1992). Although the reactions of some of my Iraqw informants appear reminiscent of the arguments and sentiments that have been expressed in these controversies, I do not expect article II and its doubts about an Iraqw historical connection with Iraq to be perceived as a threat to any essential aspects of Iraqw culture. My confidence in this matter derives from the fact that the invention of the Iraq myth did not imply a revolution of Iraqw conceptions of the past. Just as the Iraq myth was incorporated into an existent set of Iraqw accounts of the past, rather than replacing this, it is to be expected that the same flexibility will allow the incorporation of other and newer versions. The account of the Iraq myth is not only about the Iraqw adoption of an invented tradition, but also about how Iraqw

“custom” submerged and developed a new myth in ways that might turn the original into something entirely different before the anthropologist comes searching for invented traditions and “fakelore”. The point is that while the Iraqw appear to have accepted an externally invented tradition, they did not entirely adopt that other European invention; the notion that tradition is timeless and static.

Edward Winter (1966) published an article on the Iraqw in the influential volume *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (Banton ed. 1966). In a recent Internet review of this book, Danny Yee (1993) comments as follows on Winter’s article: “It would be interesting to see if the Iraqw have coped with modernisation better than other ethnic groups as a result of their organisational differences”. The answer to Yee’s question must, of course, depend on which variables and standards are to be used to define what is good and bad, and in relation to whom such coping strategies should be judged “better”. Although it might be hard to interpret parts of article III and its comparison between the Iraqw and the Datoga as anything but a “yes” to the question above, the primary concern of this thesis is how, rather than how well, the Iraqw have coped with change and modernisation. All the articles in this thesis deal with Iraqw responses to the introduction of new things, practices and ideas, including invented traditions, and the processes of change and continuity that are described and analysed are varied and complex, and cannot be reduced to singular explanations.

The inherent flexibility of “custom” does not consist merely of the ability and freedom to forget and to discharge “inconvenient” parts of the past and of culture. I have argued elsewhere (1994) that the simple fact that the Iraqw were agro-pastoral implied that they were well equipped to meet the challenges of the new environments into which they expanded during

the colonial period. While those in arid environments took up a purely pastoral adaptation, others became large scale cultivators in the areas that were best suited for agriculture. It seems possible to identify similar adaptive features at an ideological level. Article III in this thesis argues that certain particularities of Iraqw religion have provided the Iraqw with a comparatively free hand to deal with the new challenges and opportunities provided by the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Robert Thornton (1980) has drawn attention to the prominent role of space in Iraqw ideology, a feature which has served to integrate local communities consisting of heterogeneous populations and to ease the Iraqw incorporation of foreign peoples and new lands. The introduction of biomedicine (article IV), of exogenous ritual (V), and of new ideas about the origin of the Iraqw (II), were all facilitated, I argue, by the emphasis in Iraqw ideology on the potential power of the culturally distant, a feature which has contributed significantly to the ascription of attractiveness to the exogenous and new.

Thus, as will be revealed in the articles below, it is possible to isolate a number of Iraqw cultural characteristics which can be viewed as constituting adaptive features in the encounter with the changing environment of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, these arguments are phrased in structural and general terms, and the creative voices of the Iraqw themselves are still missing from the scene.

### ***The invention by tradition***

Jan Vansina's contribution on Central African history, *Paths in the Rainforest: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa*, extends far beyond his consideration of the arrival and impact of the Europeans. He portrays precolonial Central Africa as being characterised

by highly flexible and adaptive features, a “great tradition” of creativity and process rather than structure and stasis (1990:257-260). In his review of Vansina’s book, Terence Ranger summarises the author’s description of precolonial Central Africa and suggests that these processes may be described as “invention *by* tradition”, a notion which inspired the title of this thesis. The most obvious implication of the change of preposition is that it draws attention to internally generated creativity and change, and away from the external initiatives which were the primary concern of *The invention of tradition in Colonial Africa*, and which have dominated modernisation and globalisation theory until quite recently. As I have illustrated, some Iraqw traditions were certainly invented by powerful outsiders and subsequently adopted and accepted by the Iraqw; however, these were accompanied and transformed by processes that were guided by adaptive features and creative and innovative forces *within* Iraqw society.

All of these articles deal with Iraqw creativity in meeting the external and new; the adjustments, innovations, and inventions that were decisive for the ensuing processes and their results. To describe indirect rule in Mbulu as the successful colonial invention of an entirely new political structure which was then filled with African collaborators whose subjects stood passively watching and accepting the changes, would be to tell less than half the story. The British did not invent and establish any of the new East African ethnic groups of the 20<sup>th</sup> century single-handedly. John Iliffe has pointed out that “Tanganyikans *created* tribes to function within the colonial framework” (1979:318, italics added); hence, the British invention of Iraqw chiefship would probably have been as short-lived as it was among the neighbouring Gisamjanga, if the people who were defined as belonging to the new social and political entity had not seen any advantage in participating in creating such an entity and in

legitimising the position and rule of the chief and his sub-chiefs and headmen. Indeed, colonialism did imply conditions that were perceived as favourable by the Iraqw in a number of ways, as illustrated in articles II and III; the most important of these was probably the fact that the need for more land was satisfied with the opening up of former Datoga and Maasai areas, and of previously tse-tse infested land, for cultivation and pasturage.

Doubts may be expressed about the extent to which the following account reflects a real historical event, and certainly about whether such an incident was decisive for the Iraqw acquisition and expansion into the fertile northern areas of Mbulu (currently Karatu District). Nevertheless, it serves to indicate that the invention and manipulation of tradition as a tool in a power play was not necessarily the prerogative of the colonial representatives. The protagonist in this story is one of the earliest and longest serving Iraqw chiefs, Mikhael Ahho:

“Thus, it is said, Michael Ahho loaded a truck with grindstones one night and partially buried them in a number of places all over the newly gazetted areas. Some days later, after the first settlement scheme had failed, he was asked to provide the government agricultural officer with justification for the Iraqw settlement of the land. He said nothing, so the story goes, but took the agricultural officer on a jaunt through the northern areas. He took him past every grindstone he had buried there and pointed it out, commenting that everyone knew the Masai never ground corn. At the end of the trip, Ahho ingenuously remarked with surprise that the Iraqw, who did grind corn, had obviously settled these areas long before the Masai had stolen it from them—witness the partially buried grindstones! The Iraqw elders today recite this story with obvious glee. They hold that it was this ruse that successfully manipulated the British settlement policy in their favor.” (Thornton, 1980:124)

The irony in this story is that the Iraqw chief, whose position was invented by the British just a few years earlier, starts inventing his own Iraqw traditions in order to manipulate the perceptions of his own inventors.

Although we may not place much credibility on this particular account as historical evidence, it serves to indicate that Iraqw elders were aware of the power and possibilities of invented traditions. We shall see a number of examples in the articles below that are reminiscent of the inventiveness that is attributed to the Iraqw chief in this case, examples which show that there are very active forces of creativity and invention underlying Iraqw social and cultural change. The ritual cleansing of the cursed mountain of the Iraqw (article V), the partial exemption of a hospital compound from ordinary rules of pollution beliefs and practices (article I), and the invention of a new kind of ritual impurity (article V) are perhaps the most spectacular examples of creative efforts directed at solving particular dilemmas. A number of other examples of cultural inventions are provided in which it is not as easy to follow the details of the decision-making process, such as the rise of the *geetla/angw* ritual as a means for preparing and redefining sorghum for sale on the market, and the establishment of a sharp distinction between the symbolic qualities of milk from “traditional cows” and those of milk from “modern cows” (article I). In article V, I claim that Iraqw ritual is an important forum in which discourses take place on how to act on and perceive the world take place. Rather than a means for the reproduction and replication of an ideal past, ritual among the Iraqw is frequently a flexible tool for handling new and old phenomena in ways that make sense in a changing world. Ritual is a, if not *the*, prime site for making, creating and inventing Iraqw culture.

To return to Vansina’s depiction of Central African history, a sharp disjuncture is described, a point of time when colonialism and its invented traditions, such as “customary law”, brutally wiped out and replaced the creativity and flexibility of the Equatorial tradition, which, according to

Vansina, “finally died in the 1920s” (1990:247; see also Ranger, 1993:19-20,23).

One of the things I hope to have achieved with this thesis is to confirm that Iraqw culture and Iraqw tradition have not suffered such a sad destiny. There is no doubt that colonialism has had a deep impact on people’s lives in Mbulu. There are few signs, however, that the creativity and initiative of Iraqw tradition has perished in the process.

The idea of a static and passive culture which reacts to external influences by falling apart or disappearing, or by becoming corrupt, malformed or homogenised, does not fit well with the ethnography of the Iraqw. Nor do I think that other cultures in Africa fall in this pattern. Not only do external forces have impact on these societies; they also provoke responses, whose characteristics may help to explain why the homogenisation prophecies of modernisation theory have not yet materialised. In Marshall D. Sahlins’s words, “[t]he very ways societies change have their own authenticity, so that global modernity is often reproduced as local diversity” (Sahlins, 1994:377). The flexibility of Iraqw “custom” and the inventions by Iraqw tradition represent such authentic processes, producing what I have focussed on in this thesis; a continually changing *authentic* Iraqw culture.

There will always be an element of uncertainty and unpredictability in the study of human conduct. No anthropologist could have predicted the series of events which followed the introduction of money to the Tiv and of steel axes to the Yir Yoront, no matter how carefully (s)he might have studied the culture and society before the event took place. The point is that Tiv and Yir Yoront societies do not, in fact, consist of elements that passively collapse like dominoes or cards in response to the slightest touch

of an external finger, but of human beings, each of whom shares the universal human potential for creativity, innovation and invention.

### ***“The invention of invention”***

The fall of the Hamitic hypothesis coincided with the demise of structural-functional anthropology. The latter was replaced or supplemented by models focusing on agents of change and potential for creativity within the social system; the former was replaced by a historical portrait of Africa based on linguistic and archaeological evidence. These new perspectives and insights have made major contributions to the re-ascription of the potential for internally generated creativity and innovation to African societies, but there is still a long way to go. The influence of 500 years of misrepresentation are not easily erased from the image and self-image of Africa. Furthermore, the power of the old myths of African stasis and passivity has increased with the introduction of new and powerful tools of communication. *The Discovery Channel*, third world tourist agencies, and quite a few anthropologists continue to convey an image of African societies as a site where authenticity varies inversely with change. The idea of unchanging tradition was, according to Keesing (1994:301), “our anthropological invention. We continue to evoke it; and some of us journey ever deeper into darkest New Guinea to find it, existing still.”

Movies and cartoons are still conveying the message that Africa is dependent on the creativity and initiative of the white man. The popularity of one of the examples referred to which is most explicit on the issue, *the Phantom*, is not restricted to non-African countries. The cartoon version is currently being published in Kenya’s biggest Sunday newspaper, *The Sunday Nation*. *The Phantom*, a European sailor who is washed up on the

shores of East Africa and who comes to be regarded as a deity by the natives, is an incarnation of the “invention of tradition” in Hobsbawm and Ranger’s restricted meaning. *The Phantom* deserves to become target of the critique that is currently being directed against “the invention of tradition” school. In an article titled *The invention of invention*, Gaurav Desai sums up:

“the voice of the other is continually being muted, the activities of the other continually being controlled, and the history of this other insistently denied” (Desai, 1993:137)

Although the invention of tradition perspective served well to illustrate certain aspects of Iraqw history under colonial rule, I have argued that the approach implies disregarding the powerful creative forces emerging from within Iraqw culture. The seriousness of the shortcomings and dangers in using “the invention of tradition” is contained in a statement from Terence Ranger himself. Ten years after the publication of *The Invention of Tradition*, he states that “I have been changing my mind, away from the notion of “invention” and towards the notion of “imagination””.

A number of authors have commented upon the rather sudden and extensive popularity of the concept of “invention” during the last two decades (e.g. Sollors, 1989; Ranger, 1993; Desai, 1993). Terence Ranger has been told that at one time *The Invention of Tradition*,

“was cited in almost every social anthropological application to funding agencies in the United States. ... many of the anthropological applicants were drawing upon it to argue that all traditions, at all times and places, are ‘invented’”. (Ranger, 1993:6)

This use of *The Invention of Tradition* stretched Hobsbawm and Ranger’s argument considerably further than the authors themselves had intended, and the concept of invention thus takes on entirely different properties. The claim that all traditions are invented and that all cultures are constructed, implied a radical redefinition of concepts that have been used as a tool for

ascribing stasis and lack of initiative to the other. The other side of shield, however, is that the depiction of all traditions as invented draws the attention away from, and even denies the existence of, processes of cultural continuity. The durability of tradition and the rigidity of culture had certainly been over-emphasised in anthropological discourse, but this does not justify the portrayal cultural continuity as merely an illusion. “Traditional” societies and indigenous groups are in danger of becoming “dis-authenticated” in such a process, and the political consequences may be disastrous for the people involved. Land claims by indigenous populations may, for example, be dismissed on the grounds that the traditions are not *really* traditional, but “inventions”, according to “authoritative research” by historians and anthropologists (Briggs, 1996:460, 462-463).

The thesis that all traditions are invented implies an over-dramatising of the constructedness of culture, and must be seen a reaction to the phenomenon I started out with in this introduction; the European ascription of stasis and lack of creativity to non-western peoples. The sudden and great popularity of the concept of invention may in fact be seen as symptomatic of one of the main fallacies of anthropology: the convenient and simplifying illusion of the static characteristics of the traditions and cultures of the anthropological other:

“Anthropologists, I am saying, have misperceived *our* invention of cultural stasis as *others’* invention of process. (Their traditions have not followed our ahistorical conception of tradition and so we label them “invented.”)” (Borofsky, 1994:479, italics and parenthesis in original)

The submittal of this thesis implies that a new item has been added to the long list of anthropological works dealing with “inventions”. By the use of an unconventional preposition to connect tradition and invention I hope to have avoided some of the fallacies of the various branches of the invention

literature reviewed above. My primary concern has been to focus on the flexibility of Iraqw culture and the creativity of Iraqw individuals in a way that does not throw the baby out with the bath water. The processes of change explored in this thesis, whether called adaptivity, flexibility, creativity, or inventiveness, are inextricably linked up to the simultaneous reproduction of cultural continuity.



## **Introducing the Iraqw**

The five articles that make up this thesis all draw upon ethnographic material collected during fieldwork among the Iraqw of northern Tanzania. Since the articles are written for readers who are not necessarily acquainted with the Iraqw or the particular area in which most of them live, the papers contain some general introductory comments on Iraqw ethnography. I have chosen to let the articles stand in virtually the same form in which they were or will be published,<sup>1</sup> which implies that some sentences, paragraphs and sections may appear superfluous and repetitive for those who read this collection as a whole. Though in danger of repeating myself yet another time on certain issues, I still feel that a few introductory remarks on the position of the Iraqw in the East African ethnographic and historical landscape are needed in order to give the reader a frame of reference for the coming pages. I wish to emphasise that the following outline of ethnographic context is extremely selective, and brings up solely features that are most directly relevant for the arguments in the articles below.

### ***People, land and language***

The Iraqw, who according to recent estimates number some 500,000 (Mous, 1992:1) are commonly described as agro-pastoralists, live mainly within the Karatu, Mbulu, Babati, and Hanang Districts of northern Tanzania. Up until the end of the previous century they were confined to a

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<sup>1</sup> The only changes are technical, such as format standardisation, insertion of cross-references between the various articles, compilation of a common bibliography, and restoration of footnotes to the bottom of the page. The ethnic labels “Datooga” and

small mountainous area called Irqwa Da/aw in Mbulu District. During the present century the Iraqw have experienced a rate of population growth that has been estimated to be one of the highest in Tanzania, and a territorial expansion that has increased the Iraqw-dominated area by several thousand percent (see e.g. Schultz, 1971).

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the first German explorers arrived in the area, the population density in Irqwa Da/aw was high, and the Iraqw living there practised intensive cultivation, with terraces, manuring, and crop rotation, in some places producing two or more harvests a year (Baumann, 1968 {1894}; Jaeger, 1911). As they expanded into the surrounding highlands, which were sparsely populated and arid, they adopted more extensive cultivation methods and less closely regulated grazing, “forgetting”, according to an early British report from the area, “the excellent agricultural practices” that had been practised in Irqwa Da/aw (Sturdy, 1936:53).

The main subsistence crops in the Mbulu and Hanang areas are maize, beans, sorghum, and millet. Maize and beans are often also cultivated for sale, in addition to cash crops such as sun-flowers and wheat. Cultivation technology ranges from hand hoes, to ox ploughs and tractors; the numbers of the latter have increased significantly in recent years. Cattle represent an important source of capital, and there are monthly cattle auctions in all the major villages, where domestic animals are sold to traders and then transported to urban areas, such as Arusha, for slaughter.

Together with a few smaller neighbouring groups (the Alagwa, the Gorowa, and the Burunge), the Iraqw belong to an enclave of Cushitic-speaking peoples in a linguistically complex region dominated by Bantu

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“Barbayaig”, which appear in the published version of some of the articles, have been replaced by the conventional terms “Datoga” and “Barabaig”.

and Nilotic populations. The Iraqw and their linguistic relatives are generally regarded as remnants of Southern Cushitic peoples who lived in the highlands of Kenya and Tanzania some 3-5,000 years ago (Fleming, 1969:31; Ambrose, 1982:105), and they are the southernmost Cushitic-speaking groups identified on the African continent. The remote linguistic ancestry shared with Cushitic peoples in northern Kenya and Ethiopia appears to be paralleled by physical similarities, features which visibly set the Iraqw apart from most of the neighbouring groups in the area where they live.

The linguistic particularities of the Iraqw language have probably been a contributing factor behind the development of the term *Wambulu*, which is commonly used by Swahili-speakers when referring to the Iraqw. The singular form, *Mbulu*, is homophonous with a Swahili word meaning “a person who says meaningless things because of madness or weak intellect” according to the *Standard Swahili-English Dictionary* (1987 {1939}). The term appears to be a dysphemism developed during the swahilisation of “Imboru”, the location where the Germans established their first permanent administrative unit among the Iraqw. *Mbulu* became the official name for the administrative centre and later of the district that was formerly called the Iraqw Chiefdom. After independence the original *Mbulu* District has been divided into Babati, Hanang, Karatu, and *Mbulu* Districts.

### ***Space and kinship***

The Iraqw are organised into some 150 patrilineal clans that are strictly exogamous. Some localities in the Irqwa Da/aw area, which is generally considered by the Iraqw to have been their core territory during the 19<sup>th</sup>

century, have names that are identical to the terms for certain Iraqw clans. Although Iraqw clans may have been localised in the past, such areas are today characterised by a highly complex composition with regard to clan affiliation. In the 1950s, Edward Winter (1968:2) noted that religious and spatial categories played a prominent ideological role in Iraqw social structure, and that kinship as an organising principle was of relatively less importance (see also Thomas, 1969:22; Kamera, 1978:vi). Robert Thornton, who conducted fieldwork in Irqwa Da/aw in the mid 70s, investigated the ideological role of space in Iraqw society and in 1980 he published *Space, Time, and Culture among the Iraqw of Northern Tanzania*, the first comprehensive anthropological monograph on the Iraqw. Thornton describes a society in which an ideology based on spatial categories is almost all-pervasive:

“For the Iraqw, however, categories and relations of space, not kin or chiefship, underlie all social organization above that of the domestic group. It is the principles of a spatial order—not principles of hierarchy, “shared substance,” or economy—that integrate independent single-family homesteads, the smallest productive and reproductive units, into larger social and political units.” (Thornton, 1980:1)

According to Thornton (1980:117,131-132,228), territoriality is the decisive criteria for ascription of Iraqw ethnic identity, and the values that the Iraqw regard as inherent attributes of the various cardinal directions determine the relationships the Iraqw have with neighbouring peoples. Though I have expressed a number of objections to several of Thornton’s specific claims in my Cand. Polit. thesis (Rekdal, 1991), I agree that spatial categories appear to be *relatively* important when the organising principles of Iraqw society are compared with those of other peoples in the area, such as the neighbouring pastoral and Nilotic-speaking Datoga. The Iraqw proverb which states that “rather than the death of a neighbour, let a far

away relative die”<sup>2</sup> appears to fit neatly with Thornton’s general argument of the paramouncy of spatial ideology, and I do believe that many a Datoga would be somewhat reluctant to accept the wisdom of this proverb. My main reservation concerning Thornton’s emphasis on the ideological role of spatial categories is that he argues his case partly by denying and de-emphasising the importance of kinship. The assumption that there is an inverse relationship of importance between the ideological role of space and that of kinship is not self-evident.<sup>3</sup> The above proverb is clearly a statement about the importance and strength of neighbour relations, but it is not a straightforward claim that kinship ties become insignificant when geographical distance intervenes. The fact that kinship is used as a standard for illustrating and measuring the importance of neighbour relations could, on the contrary, be interpreted as an indication that kinship ties are important enough in Iraqw society to act as powerful metaphors.

In Maghang, the site of my first fieldwork among the Iraqw in 1989-90, I found that kinship ties and kinship ideology played important roles in people’s daily and ritual lives.<sup>4</sup> Kinship relations were mobilised for work parties (*slaqwe*) in connection with cultivation, for harvest rituals (*geetla/angw*), for the institution involved in carrying sick people to a healer, as well as for food in times of shortage and for bridewealth in connection with a marriage. I found patterns of, and an ideology of, virilocal residence (not neolocal, as Thornton states was the case in Irqwa

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<sup>2</sup> *Ta gwa'arár inslaawmoowo, mar'afmó saáw ngir gwaai.*

<sup>3</sup> This point has also been made by one of Thornton’s reviewers (Whisson, 1983:93) who apparently had no first-hand knowledge of the Iraqw.

<sup>4</sup> The mobilisation in connection with the *masay* ritual, which is given a place of prominence in Thornton’s ethnographic portrait of the Iraqw (1980; 1982), appears to be determined exclusively on a spatial basis in Maghang as elsewhere in the Iraqw-dominated areas. The pattern of mobilisation of this particular ritual is hardly unexpected, as the focus of the *masay* is the protection and cleansing of a specific and clearly defined territorial unit.

Da/aw), and both patrilineal and matrilineal kinship relations played significant roles in core Iraqw beliefs and practices such as the curse (*lo'o*) and ritual pollution and related precaution measures (*meeta*). Contrary to Thornton's findings, kinship terms were applied to influential individuals, such as the *kahamusmo* (land dealer and ritual leader) and the leaders of traditional youth groups, indicating yet again that kinship terms do indeed carry enough weight and strength to be used as powerful metaphors in other contexts.

The importance of kinship is further indicated by the emphasis placed on the need to classify all Iraqw as affiliated with one of the some 150 patrilineal clans, each of which has its own cattle mark, and many of which have clan-specific taboos. A large number of these clans are associated with certain characteristics or abilities, such as ritual expertise, healing powers, and witchcraft. Preparations for marriage involve extensive investigation into the ancestry of the two parties; there are intricate and very strict rules governing which clans a particular individual can marry into, eliminating a large number of potential partners who belong to clans and matrilineages that are found in the ancestral charts of the parties.

After this brief argument for the restoration of kinship in Iraqw ethnography, I should hasten to note that there is no doubt that Thornton is right in claiming that there is a strong ideological emphasis on spatial categories in Iraqw culture and society. Numerous examples of this feature are mentioned in the articles that follow. The point I wish to make here is simply that the emphasis on space has sometimes wiped out the consideration of kinship as an organising principle of great emotional and practical value among the Iraqw.

***Politics and power***

The traditional political system is dominated by the *kwasleema*, a term that can be translated as “meeting”. The character of the mobilisation for the *kwasleema* is decided by the nature of the issue to be discussed. A serious quarrel or fight requires the attendance of male elders from the neighbourhoods or kin of the two parties, while boy-girl-friend issues and rape is commonly discussed and dealt with at a meeting attended exclusively by youth. Incidents that are perceived as infringements on fertility, in the broad sense of the word, often prompt exclusive and large scale female mobilisation. In Maghang, such mobilisation of women has occurred in connection with a wide spectre of cases, such as an incident in which a teacher had sexually molested three primary school pupils, the protest against the female head tax in 1990, the drought in 1991, and in 1997, the refusal of one of the deceased *kahamusmo*'s sons to take up the ritual duties of his father, as well as a case instigated by the imposition of a local tax intended to finance the building of secondary schools in the area.

The decision-making process of the *kwasleema* puts strong emphasis on debate and efforts to reach consensus. Although certain individuals have more or less fixed positions of influence, such as the *baabú daaqaay* (“the father of the boys”) and the *aaír dasu* (“the mother of the girls”) in areas where the youth are formally organised in traditional youth groups, the only inheritable and fixed position of political influence is that of the *kahamusmo* (literally “speaker”). The *kahamusmo* has the double function of distributing land and leading ritual activity directed at securing the well-being of the local community. The first of these tasks has now been taken over by the official political apparatus. The influence and authority of the *kahamusmo* in the *kwasleema* is limited; he is, to paraphrase Thornton

(1980:253), a *primus inter pares*. Though the authority of the various participants in a *kwasleema* is influenced by factors such as age and sex, the most important determinant is, according to informants, their ability to speak well. The saying “oral incompetence in the meeting has taken away the first born child”<sup>5</sup> is often used to illustrate the point that the one who does not know how to present his case well in the *kwasleema* will always lose. The sanctions at the hand of the *kwasleema* ranges from small fines, often a certain amount of beer or a domestic animal, to the much feared and severe punishments of social ostracism (*bayni*) and the formal curse (*lo’o*).

Pre-colonial Iraqw society has been described as acephalous, and the early European efforts to single out individuals of traditional authority that could be incorporated into the colonial administration concentrated on individuals from the ritually powerful *Maanda do Bayo* clan. These efforts appeared to be unsuccessful since these ritual experts, when turned into secular rulers, generally failed to gain the support and obedience of the ordinary Iraqw. The British, who took over German East Africa after World War I, appointed educated chiefs from clans that were of little or no ritual significance, and were thus able to install the system of indirect rule within a few years. Indirect rule among the Iraqw was, from the point of view of the British, highly successful despite the fact that it implied the creation and imposition of an entirely new political order on Iraqw society. Chiefship and a hierarchy of sub-chiefs and head-men was a prominent feature of Iraqw political organisation throughout the period of British rule. The new institutions of indirect rule, however, did not manage to incorporate existing political structures, nor to supplant them. According to Winter (1968), the two political systems came to co-exist in a

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<sup>5</sup> *Kwasleema wasle na/ó baris gwaa hayót.*

complementary and relatively harmonious way throughout the colonial period.

With independence in 1961 and the implementation of the national *ujamaa* policies, a new political order was introduced, organising individual households into a hierarchy of units, including the “ten-house cell” (Swahili: *ubalozi*), sub-village (*kitongoji*), village (*kijiji*), ward (*kata*), division (*tarafa*), district (*wilaya*), region (*mkoa*), and finally, the nation (*taifa*). The political power at each level has been, until quite recently, shared between elected leaders and government appointed officials under the umbrella of a one-party system. Though the government opened up for multiparty elections in 1995, Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM, “the Revolution Party”), still plays a dominant role in the area of study. In fact, the ten-cell political unit continues to be based on CCM membership. In addition to these official political structures, other important sources of political influence and authority are education or wealth, empowering men and women such as church leaders, missionaries, teachers, and individuals who have successfully managed to profit from extensive cash crop cultivation or other opportunities of the various markets that have opened up during the last decades.

### ***Religion***

Iraqw religion is dominated by the supreme female deity, *Looaa*, who is addressed in prayers and rituals of various kinds, and *Neetlangw*, a spirit that resides in water sources and who is central in Iraqw pollution beliefs. A number of events, such as miscarriage and still-birth, the death of a suckling child, premarital birth, bleeding, and a strike of lightning, are thought to generate pollution that needs to be contained by elaborate

precautionary procedures (*meeta*), often involving the long-term physical and social isolation of the individuals involved. The spirits of the dead (*gi'i*) play, as we shall see, a relatively peripheral role in Iraqw society. While the formal curse (*lo'o*) is a much feared sanction that is generally used for legitimate purposes, for example as punishment for the violation of social norms, witchcraft (*da/ari*) is exclusively evil in intent. The roles of the *qwaslare*, which I translate as “ritual experts” or “healers” depending on the kind of *qwaslare* referred to, are more ambiguous, especially those of the most powerful of them all, of the *Maanda do Bayo* clan. Since they have the power to provide medicines that can heal, protect, purify and provide rain, they can also withhold these medicines. Furthermore, some of the *qwaslare* are feared as providers of harmful medicines (*kaharmo*), and others, if angered, are believed to be able to command leopards to attack people and domestic animals.

Compared to other regions of Tanzania, the Iraqw-dominated areas appear to have been relatively late and slow to convert to Christianity, and elements of Iraqw religion continue to play an important role in the lives of most Iraqw. Islam in this particular area is almost entirely restricted to immigrants from other ethnic groups. The extent of the spread of Christianity in Mbulu and Hanang is difficult to estimate for several reasons. The last official census which included religious affiliation is from 1957, at which time 88% of all Iraqw men declared themselves to be “pagans”, a number that was considerably higher than in most areas of Tanganyika (Iliffe, 1979:547). Johnson (1966b:51) and Hauge (1981:22) assumed that 90% and 80% respectively of the Iraqw population were primarily attached to traditional religion, and Ng'aida (1975:22) notes that there are few Christians among the Iraqw, compared to other groups in Tanzania. Our 1994 survey of the village of Dang'eida (the site of the

second fieldwork, 1993-94) revealed that 74 (60%) out of 123 Iraqw male household heads described themselves as “pagans”. Such numbers are of little value for generalisation, however, as there are great variations within Mbulu and Hanang Districts. The main difficulty in making quantified estimates of christianisation, however, is a definitional problem; ascription and self-ascription of religious affiliation is to a large extent situational, and all shades of religious syncretism are present in the area. In fact, parts of the present thesis may be read as arguing that syncretism and openness to the exogenous is an inherent element of Iraqw culture, and that the adaptive and flexible character of Iraqw ideology and practice has been a determining force underlying a number of major social and cultural developments in the area.

### ***Ethnicity***

One of the most problematic terms in this thesis is also one of the most frequently used. “Iraqw” and “*the* Iraqw” are concepts that are not, I have to admit, as straightforward as the reader may be led to believe by reading some of these articles. Who then, are the Iraqw, and what distinguishes the Iraqw from the non-Iraqw?

Ethnic identity is frequently manipulated; for example, Datoga visitors to urban areas sometimes present themselves as Iraqw in order to escape the stigma of savagery that is attached to the Datoga (and especially the Barabaig, the largest Datoga sub-section) in post-independent Tanzania. Other Datoga may present themselves as Iraqw in dress and language in order to get work, to be admitted to a guesthouse, or simply to be allowed to board a local bus. In other situations Iraqw individuals may claim to be Datoga so that their children may be admitted to schools that

have quotas to be filled with Datoga pupils and students, or perhaps in order to benefit from the not uncommon Western admiration for East African Nilotic pastoralists. Such strategies may be outright faking of ethnic identity, in the sense that the acts and statements may be disclosed as false by anyone who knows the particular background of the individuals involved. The picture is, however, considerably more complex than this.

A number of people in southern Mbulu and northern Hanang can claim affiliation with two or more ethnic groups, and may legitimately shift ethnic identity in various contexts. The 1994 survey of 246 households in Dang'eida, a village with approximately equal numbers of Iraqw and Datoga male household heads, was based on a questionnaire containing a number of questions on variables commonly used as criteria for the ethnic categorisation of the peoples in this area of Tanzania. For example, we asked about the self-ascription of ethnic identity and the clan affiliation of all adult members of the household, about the degree to which the various household members mastered Iraqw, Datoga and Swahili languages, about the emphasis on cultivation and pastoralism for the livelihood of the household, and about whether or not the women of the household wore the *hanang'weanda*, the leather skirt of Datoga women. During the five months it took to complete the survey, my wife and I conducted fieldwork in the same area, continuously comparing our experiences from participant observation with the findings of the questionnaire. The comparison revealed the extent to which ethnic classification of the people in the area was problematic. Despite the fact that there are marked cultural contrasts between the Iraqw and their neighbours, there is no single and explicit defining feature for definition of Iraqw ethnic identity.

Although the clan system is all-encompassing in the sense that all Iraqw are members of one of the approximately 150 clans that are

commonly acknowledged as Iraqw, this does not provide an unambiguous criteria for the classification of ethnic identity. The reasons for this are many. Most Iraqw clans have an apical ancestor from another ethnic group, and the classification of members of these clans as Iraqw has taken place through a gradual definition of these clans as Iraqw over successive generations. The status of some of them is still ambiguous, and their members may legitimately use two, and sometimes three, self-ascribed ethnic labels for themselves. In addition there is at least one clan which has two branches, one Iraqw and one Datoga. Members of the *Hilba Giroy* clan among the Barabaig Datoga cannot marry into the Iraqw *Hhay Wala/a* because they are related through a remote and mythical common ancestor. Another consequence of this is that members of the Barabaig *Hilba Giroy* can, and often do, present themselves as Iraqw. One of the prominent members of this particular clan in Dang'eida asked us to look after an ox plough for him, explaining that "these Barabaig steal so much". The same individual, as well as most of the other *Hilba Giroy* in Dang'eida, presented themselves as Iraqw to both Iraqw and Datoga interviewers during the village survey. At the same time, most informants would state that the *Hilba Giroy* (*hilba* is Datoga and means "group", while *Giroy* is a personal name) are unmistakably Datoga. In fact, this particular clan is one of the most prestigious Datoga clans, and the father of the man mentioned above was one of the most prominent figures in a huge Datoga circumcision ceremony a few weeks later.

Furthermore, in the southern Mbulu and northern Hanang areas, there are a large number of people who have a clan affiliation that is unequivocally Iraqw, but whose first and sometimes only language is Datoga. These individuals are in most cases descended from Iraqw families who have moved into areas dominated by the Datoga, and many of them

are in all respects indistinguishable from the Datoga, except for the fact that their clan affiliation is Iraqw. They may participate in the secret ritual hunts and youth meetings of the Datoga, they may have the characteristic Datoga facial scarification, and, if female and married, they may wear the *hanang'weanda*, a most central symbol in Datoga religion. According to Blystad's informants (personal communication, December 1998), there have even been cases in which an Iraqw has been given a *bung'eed*, the elaborate and large scale Datoga funeral which is reserved for individuals with exceptional moral qualities, who have kin wealthy enough to provide the necessary honey and animals for the offerings during the nine-month long ritual proceedings.

At the same time, there are a large number of people who have a clear Datoga clan affiliation, but are indistinguishable from their Iraqw neighbours in virtually all other respects. They cultivate and speak Iraqw as their first language, they participate in all the Iraqw ritual and secular activities, and they have the same social rights and obligations as the Iraqw they live among. The entire Gisamjanga subsection of the Datoga has been described by commentators as "iraqwised", "absorbed", "incorporated", or "assimilated" by the Iraqw (Fukui, 1970b:116; Ehret, 1971:6; Thornton, 1980:198; Wilson, 1952:43; Tomikawa, 1970:13; 1979:12; Raikes, 1975b:86; Kjærby, 1979:10). Nevertheless, most Gisamjanga will claim to be Datoga and may be mobilised as such, for example when one of their clan members is to be given a *bung'eed*.

There are, therefore, no definite criteria by which to decide who is an Iraqw and who is a Datoga in the southern Mbulu and northern Hanang areas. Nevertheless, in everyday discourse the distinction between Iraqw and Datoga culture is a very important one. Expressions like "Oh, he's an Iraqw", "He is moving like an Iraqw", "Do not speak like an Iraqw!" or

“He is completely Barabaig” are frequently heard, and such statements refer to contrasting sets of behaviour and communication that are associated with the two terms. The Iraqw way, according to the ascriptive and self-ascriptive stereotype, is peaceful and even cowardly, secretive, hideous and sometimes associated with witchcraft. One of the early Districts Officers in Mbulu characterised the Iraqw as “not truthful, often lying without cause, to be on the safe side” (Bagshawe, 1926:64). Another colonial administrator writes that the main Datoga subsection, the Barabaig, “were frank and extrovert, and gave their views to me and others without hesitation” (Lumley, 1976:79). Other stereotypes of the Datoga centre on characteristics that are the exact opposite of those attributed to the Iraqw, i.e. the Datoga are depicted as aggressive, violent, brave, open and honest.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of people in southern Mbulu and Hanang are unambiguously categorised by themselves and by others as being either Iraqw or Datoga. Although the term “Iraqw” as it is used in this thesis is imprecise, I still believe that it reflects well the way people living in this particular area use the term to classify themselves and their way of life. The fact that “Iraqwness” is an elusive term does not necessarily reflect disintegration, dilution or erosion of ethnic identity. The idea that such a thing as the tightly knit African tribe with clear and sharp social boundaries ever existed was a colonial fiction, and the elusiveness of ethnic categories in Mbulu and Hanang is but one example of the European historical propensity to simplify the minds and social organisation of Africans.



## Article abstracts

The first article in this collection, *Money, milk and sorghum beer: Change and continuity among the Iraqw of Tanzania*, focuses on the symbolic qualities of sorghum beer and milk among the Iraqw. It illustrates how the villagers in a southern Mbulu village handle and make use of these two products, and seeks to illuminate the manner in which they both become associated with qualities that are perceived as positive and desirable. With the spread of the market economy, and of money as a medium of exchange, the symbolic content of sorghum beer and milk has come under considerable pressure. As products in demand, they may today circulate in impersonal relations which lack the social and religious qualities that they traditionally communicated. The monetisation of sorghum beer and milk has not, however, caused a breakdown in established practices surrounding the handling of these two products, or in the structures of meaning in which such practices are embedded. The article illuminates some of the processes which seem to be of importance in explaining this notable cultural continuity in the face of fairly radical social change. The examples of sorghum beer and milk seem to reflect and highlight more general dynamics of change and continuity among the Iraqw, and it is suggested that the processes related to the two products may help to shed light on certain seemingly paradoxical ways in which the Iraqw have been conceived by outsiders and by members of neighbouring ethnic groups. The Iraqw are, in various contexts, stereotyped as both culturally conservative and progressive, and they appear to be able to combine the two in ways that ensure both cultural continuity and successful adaptation to a rapidly changing environment.

The second article, *When hypothesis becomes myth: The Iraqi origin of the Iraqw*, traces the history of a new myth of origin among the Iraqw. The now-rejected Hamitic hypothesis, accrediting to Caucasoid peoples from the north a number of pre-colonial cultural and technological achievements in Africa, served to legitimise European intervention and colonisation on the continent. The article discusses how the Hamitic hypothesis was modified and revived, with the help of missionaries, literacy and the printed word, as an Iraqw origin myth, and how the oralisation of written sources has significantly promoted and transformed the current widespread recognition among the Iraqw that they originated in Iraq or Mesopotamia in the Middle East.

*“We are as sheep and goats”*: *Iraqw and Datoga discourses on fortune, failure and the future*, the third article, is co-authored by Astrid Blystad, who has conducted extensive research on the Datoga for the last ten years. The article is a comparison of the Iraqw and the neighbouring Datoga with regards to the dramatic changes both have experienced during the course of this century. Among the Datoga remaining in northern Tanzania, processes of marginalisation, impoverishment, and disintegration are today highly visible, and the Datoga increasingly perceive their future prospects as bleak. This development has reached levels which the Datoga, in particular contexts, read as signs of an unavoidable end to their lineages, and thus to the continuation of Datoga life. In contrast, the Iraqw, as a rapidly expanding population both geographically and demographically, commonly talk of themselves as relatively successful and prosperous, and as a people who manage to manoeuvre victoriously among the challenges the modern world poses. A prominent feature in the contrasting development of the two groups is the fact that the Iraqw are taking over Datoga pastures, and the manner in

which this is happening can only be explained as the interplay of a number of factors. The article focuses on the dynamics of interaction between the two groups as a crucial feature for the development of a scenario in which the apparent success of the Iraqw corresponds with the failure of the Datoga. Furthermore, it draws attention to certain contrasting notions which continuously influence and are influenced by the way people act, and which are decisive in determining the degree to which the two groups respond, or fail to respond, to the rapidly changing environment in which they both live. The new circumstances represent both threats and opportunities, and there are significant differences between the ways the two groups manage to protect themselves from, and take advantage of, these forces.

In the fourth article, *Cross-cultural healing in East African ethnography*, I argue that examples of cross-cultural therapeutic relations have frequently been mentioned in ethnographic accounts from East Africa, but that this feature has rarely been made the object of in-depth description and analysis. Colonial ideology, structural-functionalist anthropology, and a number of more recent medical anthropological contributions have often been biased in ways which have drawn attention away from a prominent feature of African healing: the search for healing in the culturally distant. I argue that a focus on the dynamics and ideology of cross-cultural healing may be crucial if we are to understand the processes generated by the encounter between biomedicine and African traditional medical systems. As exemplified by the case of the Iraqw, widespread acceptance and extensive use of biomedical health services may not necessarily mean that people abandon traditional beliefs and practices. On the contrary, the attribution of power to the culturally distant implies an openness to the unfamiliar, the alien and unknown, which has facilitated

the introduction and acceptance of exogenous medical practices, one of which is biomedical health services.

The fifth and final article in the collection, *Creativity and invention in Iraqw ritual*, maintains that there is an inherent element of flexibility and room for creativity in Iraqw ritual practices. The decentralised leadership and frequency of Iraqw ritual prayers make them a powerful forum for the exchange of feelings and ideas on a wide range of problematic issues, often involving the relationship between social change and what is perceived as traditional values. Furthermore, certain Iraqw ritual practices are to a large extent dependent on the ritual experts of the *Maanda do Bayo* clan, whose position in Iraqw religion allows for a considerable degree of individual flexibility. The creativity, innovation and invention that is displayed by ritual experts and the performers of Iraqw ritual prayers are frequently presented, and envisaged by their audiences, as continuities with the past, but this does not appear to be a necessity for the legitimisation and attribution of power to Iraqw ritual innovation and invention. The article touches upon ritual practises that are talked about and commonly recognised by the Iraqw as relatively recent inventions by named individuals who do not draw upon the ritual power of their clan affiliation or a mythical Iraqw past. Furthermore, Iraqw ritual and Iraqw culture in general feed on the ritual powers of neighbouring groups, especially the Datoga, establishing new practices whose non-Iraqw origin is both acknowledged and emphasised. A number of Iraqw ritual practices are not, I argue, simply repetitive, non-discursive, and standardised procedures for reproducing a traditional and rigid order, but rather flexible instruments that are used, and sometimes invented or borrowed, in order to discuss, classify, make sense of, and act upon the changing environment in which the Iraqw live their lives.

## Some reflections on the fieldwork experience

This thesis is based upon three periods of fieldwork. The first was conducted mainly within one particular village, Maghang in southern Mbulu, between September 1989 and May 1990. The village is located some 10 km from Haydom, the site of a mission hospital that will be frequently mentioned in this thesis. I was living in the centre of the village together with three young men who were working for the proprietor of a business which was a combination of shop, cafe, and *kilabu*, a place for serving and selling sorghum/maize beer. Owing to its central location, it was an ideal place for meeting people. It was never a problem to find people to talk to, but the social life of the place was hardly typical for the rest of the village. During my stay in Maghang, I established particularly close contact with the members of two different and more peripherally located households and became familiar with the neighbourhoods of which they were a part. One of them was the family of Alphonsi Erro, the first family to welcome me to their home, and who invited me to participate in various social activities, ranging from their yearly *geetla/angw* ritual, to everyday events such as work and beer parties. The other neighbourhood where I spent a considerable amount of time centred around the household of the late Tua Masay, the legendary *kahamusmo* who was old enough to recall the Germans. The fact that Tua Masay and his sons welcomed me to the village and to their neighbourhood and home was, I felt, decisive for the entire fieldwork. Although Tua Masay continuously expressed his disappointment over my limited command of Iraqw, he was well satisfied with the fact I joined the youth in the fields, hoeing, ploughing, weeding, and attended the beer parties and ritual prayers that ensued.

Toward the end of my fieldwork I learned that my presence in the village had initially caused considerable confusion. People in the area were used to seeing Europeans, and even Norwegians (missionaries employed at the Lutheran hospital at Haydom), but they found it difficult to classify me since I was taking on roles that were quite different from the Europeans they were used to encountering in nearby areas. During the first weeks a number of people were suspicious, and I later learned that various theories were circulating to explain my presence: that I was a witch, a spy for the government or for South Africa, or I was there to steal and profit from the cure for AIDS that had allegedly been found by one of the Ihanzu healers in the village. These problems, the social effects of which I could sense during the first difficult weeks of the fieldwork, gradually lessened, and the sceptical and reserved attitudes were supplanted by friendliness, warmth, and openness from virtually all the inhabitants of Maghang.

The language question has represented a dilemma at several points in time during the process that has led to this thesis. Before starting my first fieldwork I took Swahili courses in Norway and I arrived in Tanzania as a student linked up with a NORAD sponsored AIDS project. Due to initial uncertainties regarding the role of students in the project, the site of the fieldwork remained unclear for almost half a year. This made it difficult to engage in language training in Iraqw, and the time was spent in Arusha and Zanzibar on intensive Swahili studies. When finally starting my first fieldwork in Maghang, I had to make a decision about how much emphasis I would put on learning the two languages that were commonly spoken in the village: Iraqw and Swahili. I chose to put most of my efforts into improving my command of Swahili as I knew that the nine months remaining of my stay in Tanzania would hardly suffice to learn yet another language while at the same time conducting my research. Virtually all of

the men and many women under 40-50 years of age spoke Swahili well, and the occasions when I needed to use an interpreter were very few. All interviews were therefore conducted in Swahili, which, as the fieldwork proceeded, became increasingly interspersed with Iraqw concepts that were central for the understanding of the topics under discussion. Although I acquired a limited Iraqw vocabulary, I did not learn the basics of Iraqw grammar, and my command of Iraqw was restricted to greetings, simple questions of courtesy, and a few jokes. I could eventually get a fair idea of what people were talking about in an Iraqw conversation, but when personally involved in a discussion I would use Swahili supplemented by Iraqw words.

The village of Dang'eida, the site of my second fieldwork (October 1993 to October 1994), had approximately equal numbers of Iraqw and Datoga, a feature that was not unrelated to the fact that I was living together with my wife, Astrid, whose main research focus was the Datoga. The heterogeneous ethnic composition of Dang'eida implied that there were a large number of people in the village who did not speak Iraqw, so Swahili proved to be an even more useful working language than it had been in Maghang. So it was that the Swahili language dominated during my second fieldwork as well, although I continued to expand my vocabulary of Iraqw, and established a corresponding, but far less extensive, repertoire of central Datoga concepts.

The contrasts between the first two fieldworks were great in a number of respects. During the first, in Maghang, I had been alone, arriving with a bicycle and a backpack containing little more than an extra set of clothes, a camera, and a tape-recorder. I spent most of the days participating in the daily activities of village life, and the only opportunity I had to speak a European language was when I met Astrid, who was living

in Wandela among the Barabaig some 30 km away, or when I visited the missionaries at Haydom. My first period in Mbulu may be described as the “old-fashioned” type of anthropological fieldwork in which the anthropologist was thrown into a society that he knew very little about on forehand (cf. page 183), to learn first hand from the often quite intense personal experience of participating actively in the phenomena to be studied.

Although the differences between the first fieldwork in Maghang and the second one in Dang’aida were many, the most important ones were the fact that during the second fieldwork there were two of us initially and in due course, three, and the fact that we were generously funded by the Norwegian Research Council and the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies. We lived in the middle of Dang’aida village in one of the very few houses with a corrugated iron roof, which soon became a kind of meeting place for people in the sparsely populated area, a place where people popped in for a chat or to inquire about the next opportunity to get a ride to Basotu or Haydom. The hectic social life of our home was difficult to handle at times, but our central location and peoples’ willingness to visit us provided us with ample opportunity for getting to know large numbers of people whom we talked to, chatted with, discussed with, interviewed, and sang with at any time of the day. We had a car that carried us all over the Mbulu and Hanang Districts to collect data, and we had the financial resources to employ research assistants who conducted interviews, who made recordings at gatherings we were unable to attend ourselves, and who helped us translate and transcribe the material that was collected.

Our car was the only motorised vehicle in an area with a population of several thousand people. During the period when malaria was most prevalent we often made the two-hour trip to the hospital several times a

day, usually arriving in time, but sometimes not. At such times, the conditions for conducting efficient research were hardly ideal, but we were glad to have the opportunity to give a little back to some of the people who spent so much time and effort helping us.

The second fieldwork, although still dominated by participant observation as the main methodological approach, was distinguished by the large amount of data we were able to collect using the technological and financial resources we had at hand. It is difficult to see how we could have collected data through research assistants and questionnaires in a meaningful way without our previous knowledge of Iraqw and Datoga culture and society, or without the social relationships we had established during the initial fieldwork.

During our third short fieldwork (six weeks in June-August 1995) we lived in the home of a Gisamjanga family in Getanyamba, a location that was conveniently located to facilitate follow-up studies in the various villages where we had earlier conducted long-term fieldwork. Finally, some minor ethnographic updates were undertaken following Astrid's brief revisit in November/December 1998.



## **Money, milk and sorghum beer: Change and continuity among the Iraqw of Tanzania**

In this article I shall focus on two central products that derive from the two spheres of the production regime of the Cushitic-speaking Iraqw,<sup>1</sup> an agro-pastoral people living in northern Tanzania. Both sorghum beer and milk have high significance in the lives of the Iraqw, not only owing to their nutritional value, but also on account of their potential as symbols in continuous discourses on relations between individuals, between groups of people, as well as between human beings and spirits and deity.

Both products have deep historic roots among the Iraqw. Cushitic peoples, who entered the area 3,000 to 5,000 years ago, were probably the first food-producing inhabitants of East Africa, and sorghum is presumed to have been one of the earliest crops to be cultivated in this region. Linguistic and archaeological evidence seems to confirm that Cushites were also the first East Africans to keep cattle and exploit their milk yield (Ambrose, 1982:113; Ehret, 1967; Sutton, 1981:576-579).

Through a presentation of how the Iraqw handle and make use of these two products I shall try to illuminate the manner in which both become associated with qualities that are perceived as positive and desirable.<sup>2</sup> With the spread of the market economy and of money as a

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<sup>1</sup> In Swahili, the Iraqw are frequently referred to as the “Wambulu”, a term that is derived from Imboru, the locality of the administrative centre for Mbulu District where most of the Iraqw reside. According to Mous (1992), the Iraqw number about 500,000.

<sup>2</sup> The topic of this article does not allow adequate emphasis on the less desirable aspects of beer and other alcoholic drinks used by the Iraqw. Excessive drinking is a major source of human suffering world-wide (e.g. Desjarlais et al., 1995:91-97), and the Iraqw are certainly no exception. Homicide, suicide, violence, and particularly domestic violence, neglect of children, and criminal offences like theft and corruption, are all phenomena which frequently are connected with excessive drinking.

medium of exchange, the symbolic contents of sorghum beer and milk seem to have come under considerable pressure. As products in demand, they may today circulate in impersonal relations which lack the social and religious qualities that they traditionally communicated. The monetisation of sorghum beer and milk has not, however, caused a breakdown in established practices, nor in the structures of meaning in which such practices are embedded. This article will try to illuminate some of the processes which seem to be of importance in explaining this remarkable cultural continuity in the face of fairly radical social change. These examples seem to highlight more general dynamics of change and continuity among the Iraqw, which I will return to and discuss further at the end of the article.

I wish to emphasise that the data on which the article is based were mainly collected within one village, Maghang, in the southern part of the area currently dominated by the Iraqw. The Iraqw must in no way be regarded as a culturally homogenous group, and the findings and conclusions presented here may not be applicable to other Iraqw-speaking populations differently located in time or space. The Iraqw of today are characterised by social and cultural diversity, some of which may be attributed to the impact of Catholic and Lutheran missions, compulsory education, national administration, market forces, and intensified contact with other ethnic groups. Such cultural variation should be kept in mind when I use concepts such as “the Iraqw” and “Iraqw culture”.

### **Sorghum beer (*buura*)<sup>3</sup>**

During the first weeks of my fieldwork in Maghang I was struck by the number of people who introduced themselves by the name Buura (“Beer”). A child frequently gets a name according to the circumstances, often relating to what the father was doing, that characterise the time and place of birth. That Buura is by far the most common name in Maghang may therefore reflect that a sizeable number of fathers were brewing, drinking, or were otherwise involved with sorghum beer when their children were born. A brief glance at the social activity of any Iraqw village will confirm that many of the inhabitants do indeed spend a considerable amount of time handling beer. Another striking feature of my first weeks in the village was that numerous individuals showed considerable interest in whether or not I drank, or enjoyed drinking, beer. Later I came to understand that the question was a way of classifying me as a person. Whether one drinks or not reflects important social and religious boundaries in Iraqw society.<sup>4</sup>

During the different phases of the agricultural cycle, a considerable part of the cultivation is done by work parties (*slaqwe*). A group of neighbours join forces and work each other’s fields in rotation. The one who owns or has usufruct rights over a field which is to be cultivated on a particular day will brew *buura*. Then, after the work is completed, the participants will gather at the household of the host, where they will be served food and sorghum beer. During the rainy season, when agricultural

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<sup>3</sup> *Buura* may in fact designate a whole range of alcoholic drinks. In everyday usage, however, it refers to beer brewed either from sorghum (*maangwaré*), or from sorghum mixed with maize flour (*buusa*). In this article I use the word in its restricted meaning.

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer who made me aware of Ivan Karp’s work (1980) on beer drinking among the Iteso, an argument about the social significance of millet beer which resembles the one presented here. There are also striking similarities in ethnographic detail between the two peoples.

activity is at its peak, everyday life for Iraqw men becomes a series of such work parties. For the households that take part, this system ensures that the necessary tasks which provide the basis for the coming harvest are carried out. The worker/consumer ratio of different households may vary considerably, owing to fluctuations of a more or less temporary kind. Newly established family units with small children will commonly have little manpower but many mouths to feed. Had they to perform the chores without assistance such units would, owing to labour shortage, necessarily experience difficulties during the most labour-intensive stages of the agricultural cycle. Similarly, for all participating households the system provides insurance against the effects of any temporary reduction of labour capacity, for example owing to disease. Other labour-intensive tasks, such as digging wells and building houses, may also be accomplished through the institution of *slaqwe*.

If a household suffers some kind of misfortune that threatens its viability (if, for instance, the herd is decimated by an epidemic or a fire destroys the homestead), various institutionalised practices ensure that the household will receive the necessary assistance from neighbours and relatives. An essential feature of these institutions is that the household head arranges a beer gathering for the individuals he has asked for help. These guests will arrive with gifts, or promises of gifts, such as domestic animals or building materials, which will contribute to the restoration of the unfortunate household's viability.<sup>5</sup>

Sorghum beer is characteristically served on occasions where reciprocity or solidarity is realised in action. According to traditional religious beliefs the manifest unity and harmony of the local group are a

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<sup>5</sup> Bagshawe (1926:65), who in general had little positive to say about Iraqw customs, mentions that "[the Erok] are extremely good to each other in cases of distress."

prerequisite for establishing an amicable relationship with the supernatural, and especially with the Iraqw female deity, *Looaa*. This is expressed directly in proverbs and sayings which tend to be variations of the core message: “If we all agree with each other, then *Looaa* must agree with us”. Through the co-operation that takes place in the fields and through the joint consumption of food and sorghum beer, the Iraqw thus fulfil the fundamental demand of mutual accord and solidarity which is the presupposition for contact with *Looaa*. The time of drinking is therefore also the occasion for ritual prayers (*fiiro*). *Looaa*, the supreme being, is thanked, and any harmful or evil influence from Neetlangw (a “water spirit”) and *daa/aluuse* (sorcerers) is cursed. The atmosphere characterised by solidarity and unity is further emphasised by the formal structure of the *fiiro*. Messages presented by the leader of the prayers are continuously supplemented and supported by confirming statements from one or more respondents. The speaker will gradually build up his argument and will, with increasing intensity, reach an emotionally charged conclusion to which all the participants will respond by enthusiastically repeating the key message, or by proclaiming in unison that they all agree with what has been said. Each new finale is accompanied by vigorous and approving gestures.

Conflict between individuals or between groups of people threatens this unity and solidarity, and consequently also the relationship between the local community, the spirits, and the deity. People present are commonly quick to initiate measures to prevent any disagreement from erupting into a serious stick fight. Fights do occur from time to time, however, and often result in court cases where the differing views are presented before a group of elders. A central element of such court cases is the reconciliation, usually through a ritual meal, of the parties in conflict.

After particularly violent outbursts, this may involve the slaughter and consumption of a domestic animal. In most cases, however, a certain amount of sorghum beer will be brewed by one or more of the parties, and they will both be required to drink from the same gourd. The court case is concluded with ritual prayers (*fiiro*), where the restoration of peace and solidarity among all men is communicated, thereby re-establishing the essential prerequisites for maintaining a good relationship between the local community and *Looaa*.

The use of sorghum beer as protection against, or remedy for, conflict is conveyed even more concretely in other contexts. For example, sticks<sup>6</sup> may be smeared with *buura* if there is reason to believe that there are latent conflicts between individuals at a social gathering. Sorghum beer, together with honey or honey mead, is also a central element in rituals seeking to withdraw and neutralise curses.

The handling of sorghum beer is in itself a highly ritualised procedure. The beer is always poured from the pot into the drinking vessels in two or four stages, never in one or three. Sorghum beer may not be drunk while standing, nor should anybody seat himself while holding a gourd of beer in his hands. Drinking vessels of various kinds may be utilised, but need to be sufficiently big to contain enough beer for several people. The gourd must also be continually passed back and forth between individuals who belong to the same social category, age and sex being the most important criteria. The spatial separation between male elders and youth becomes less rigid as the drinking proceeds, allowing participants to form cross-generation drinking groups. At this stage the Iraqw beer party becomes like what Karp (1980:104) noted about Iteso beer drinking: “a form of social communion, a commensal sharing in which persons who

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<sup>6</sup> These sticks are made from hard wood and may be lethal weapons.

participate are stripped of the capacities in terms of which they interact in non-beer drinking contexts”. The drinking of sorghum beer is in these ways performed in a manner which reflects generally desired social qualities, such as reciprocity and the sharing of goods.

The use of *buura* as a mediator of positive social qualities is also extended to relations between the living and “the spirits of the dead” (*gi'i*).<sup>7</sup> In order to keep or restore a good relationship with the *gi'i*, offerings of sorghum beer, milk, and, in serious cases, meat, are presented, usually at the threshold of the house of the deceased or at his or her grave. Sorghum beer is also a central element in various other ritual occasions. During the important *geetla/angw* ritual, which marks the end of one agricultural cycle and the beginning of a new one, a huge beer pot is, in two senses, the centre of the arena.

*Buura* seems both to reflect and to generate qualities that are perceived as desirable and good in social relationships. These qualities are highlighted in situations where circumstances call for precautions to protect oneself, i.e. in situations which demand distance, not closeness and sharing. Certain events, such as death, abortion, strikes by lightning, premarital births, or the shedding of blood (especially if it is caused by an object made of iron) on the ground, all cause ritual pollution. The individuals affected by such events will be required to keep a certain physical and social distance from the rest of the community, i.e. they will be in a state of *meeta*, a term Snyder (1993:177) has translated as “the quarantine created to contain pollution”.<sup>8</sup> Direct contact with a person in

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<sup>7</sup> In the existing literature about the Iraqw the *gi'i* are usually translated as “ancestral spirits”. This seems to be somewhat misleading, as the *gi'i* are in some cases the spirits of deceased young and unmarried members of a household.

<sup>8</sup> The practices and institutions covered by this term are commonly referred to as *metimani* in the literature. This is probably a Swahili-influenced version of the original Iraqw word (adding the Swahili prepositional suffix *-ni* to the conjugated Iraqw form

*meeta* is considered dangerous, and, when meeting individuals whose background is unknown, people will take measures to avoid a close relationship. On occasions where sorghum beer is served, such preventive measures seem to be accentuated. Individuals affected by ritual pollution may sometimes work in the fields together with their neighbours, but at the end-of-the-day beer gathering they must consume their food and beer at some distance from the compound of the host. This would indicate that the intimacy communicated through the joint consumption of sorghum beer renders a beer gathering more vulnerable to the transfer of ritual pollution. This is therefore compensated for by keeping a wider physical distance than is common on other occasions.

Funerals are among the few social occasions where sorghum beer is rarely or never served. The reason must be found in the unclean condition of the family and the household of the deceased, i.e. they will be in a state of *meeta*. The fact that the traditional wedding is another important social event usually characterised by the absence of beer may be related to structural tensions between the two patrilineal descent groups involved which would render the symbolism of beer inappropriate. When the marriage results in children, however, the relationship seems to become more relaxed, and in-laws may now be invited to a beer gathering.

The socially integrative aspect of *buura* is given another expression by the way many immigrants from other ethnic groups perceive it. The Iraqw seem to have been highly inclusive in their relations with representatives of differing ethnic groups.<sup>9</sup> It is frequently stated that

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*metimaan*). The alteration is a reflection of the fact that this distinctively Iraqw set of beliefs is frequently commented upon, and to a certain extent stigmatised, by Swahili-speaking peoples. See Snyder (1993) for a more elaborate presentation of the most important *meeta* practices.

<sup>9</sup> This general attitude towards foreigners seems to have provided the basis for extensive immigration over the last century. It may have contributed significantly to an

anyone who wishes to settle among them may do so, provided there is enough land and the immigrants are willing to adjust to certain Iraqw norms of behaviour. Individuals of foreign origin who live in Iraqw-dominated areas may be heard saying that they fear drinking sorghum beer with the Iraqw, as the latter allegedly possess certain herbs that are frequently mixed with the beer that is served to strangers. Such medicines are said to have the effect of making the drinker forget his homeland, and of implanting in him a strong desire to remain with the Iraqw and their beer gatherings. When immigrants who have no wish to settle permanently among the Iraqw are suspicious of sorghum beer as a medium for assimilatory, Iraqw'ising or alcoholising processes, this is hardly surprising if we consider what *buura* stands for within Iraqw society. The inclusiveness that sorghum beer communicates in most diverse contexts is a quality that this particular group of immigrants for different reasons, at least to a certain extent, want to avoid.

### ***Beer as payment?***

In the existing literature about the Iraqw, beer is portrayed as a “payment” for the services that the participants in a work party are providing for the host (cf. Fukui, 1970a:134; Winter, 1968:4; Raikes, 1975a:271). A closer look at the apparently straightforward exchange between work and beer, however, reveals features that may not be adequately explained by such concepts.<sup>10</sup>

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extremely high rate of population increase (cf. Southall, 1961:161; Winter & Molyneaux, 1963) and a correspondingly extensive territorial expansion. In fact most of the approximately 150 Iraqw clans trace their origin back to a male from a neighbouring ethnic group.

<sup>10</sup> In a general discussion of similar institutions Sahlins (1972:219) concludes that “wages” in the usual sense are not at issue. He proposes rather another principle behind

Arranging a beer gathering as a way of mobilising labour is done solely in connection with activities which are not directly associated with “modernity”. Digging wells, building and repairing traditional houses, and cultivation for subsistence, for example, may all be regarded as activities that reproduce the welfare and viability of the local community. In this respect such projects may be labelled “traditional”, in contrast to other more individually oriented or “modern” tasks such as the production of cash crops or the construction of houses from burnt clay or concrete blocks. In Maghang beer gatherings are frequently arranged for the former purpose, but rarely or never for the latter.

The pastor of the local Lutheran church has argued that many traditional Iraqw customs are in accordance with Christian ideals and are therefore worth preserving. He sees the solidarity and co-operation represented by the work party as a good example. The pastor sought at one point to modify the institution in accordance with the Church’s restrictive views on the consumption of alcohol. Meat and other highly valued foodstuffs were substituted for sorghum beer, and Christian prayers for the traditional litanies. The experiment failed, however, to mobilise even members of the local congregation. This example does not provide a basis for general conclusions, but it does indicate that the notion of beer being used as a “payment for labour” does not provide us with an adequate explanation of the transactions that take place in connection with the beer gathering. The fact that sorghum beer is an indispensable element of the work party is related more to its symbolic content than to its material exchange value.<sup>11</sup>

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such transactional patterns, i.e. “that those who participate in a productive effort have some claim on its outcome.”

<sup>11</sup> This is consistent with the fact that honey mead may be used as a substitute for sorghum beer in areas characterised by extensive culture contact with Datoga-speaking

The transactions of the work party are not complete when the final sip of beer is taken. The host is further obliged to take over the roles of his guests on later occasions; failure to do so will be regarded as a breach of proper conduct. The exchange of labour within the institutional frames of the work party may perhaps best be understood as the realisation of what Sahlins (1972) has termed “generalized reciprocity”, or in other words, that each person gives according to what he has (in this case agricultural manpower), and each person receives according to his needs. With this understanding, the difference between the beer gathering of the cultivator and that of the unlucky man who has lost his herd becomes a matter of degree and not kind. In the latter case, it becomes meaningless to represent the transactions of such institutions as a balanced exchange of objects—for example, cattle for beer. It is no more meaningful, I argue, to regard the beer pot as containing the salary for a day’s work. The transactions of the work party may be more fruitfully understood as a continuous exchange of manpower between the various participating households. Such reciprocal relations may last for several generations, compensating for fluctuations in available manpower of single households.<sup>12</sup>

The function of sorghum beer at the work party is thus not primarily as a medium of exchange; beer is rather a symbol of, or the nucleus of, the long-term reciprocal relations between members of participating households. Several participants at a work party responded emphatically to my hint about a possible exchange value of beer: “This is not payment. We are just *helping* each other!” When an unfortunate household, by arranging a beer gathering, is able to re-establish a herd or rebuild a house within a

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groups. Honey mead among the Datoga shares many important symbolic features with sorghum beer among the Iraqw.

<sup>12</sup> In the hinterland of Maghang it is possible to find several examples of neighbouring households that have upheld such relations despite long-distance migration.

short period of time, this act of solidarity from relatives and friends is best understood as an extreme variant of the daily activity taking place within the institution of the work party.

### **Monetised beer**

Up to this point I have described what may be labelled as the “traditional” context of *buura*. However, much of the beer that is consumed in Maghang today clearly lacks the symbolic and religious qualities I have elaborated upon above. In all Iraqw localities with a certain population density there will be at least one *kilabu* (Swahili, pl. *vilabu*), a popular and often crowded market place for the selling and buying of *buura*. Even a brief look at the setting and activity of the *kilabu* will reveal some differences to the beer gatherings I have described above. Non-monetised sorghum beer is served and consumed indoors (except by individuals in *meeta*), while commercialised beer is usually sold from rudimentary stands and consumed outside in the shade of buildings or trees. A second immediate impression is that the consumption of beer seems to be considerably heavier at the *kilabu* than in other settings. A closer look at the social activity of the *kilabu* will reveal further differences. No ritual prayers are performed, and the atmosphere is generally more casual, relaxed or humorous; laughter and loud verbal arguments, sometimes erupting into fighting, may frequently be heard, and the handling of beer is free from many of the restrictions and norms of the traditional beer gathering. Cross-generational and cross-sex drinking groups are formed, the beer may be consumed in a standing position, and the size of the vessels seems to be decided solely by practical considerations.

Although the drinking which takes place at the *kilabu* is clearly less formal and more individualised than in the traditional setting, it is nevertheless common to see groups of customers sharing the same gourd. One may even find persons in *meeta* drinking together with others they are required to keep a good distance from in other settings. Informants would claim that ritual pollution is less dangerous in the *kilabu*, a fact that is consistent with other “modern” situations or locations, such as a nearby hospital, the Mbulu bus, or the local market-place, which, to a certain extent, are exempt from the normal rules of *meeta*. Despite the differences from the traditional settings, the drinking of beer in the *kilabu* retains a strong element of sociability and reciprocity. People do not primarily go there to drink a certain liquid with a certain consistency; they go there to be together with others in a special way. In some cases one may even say that the ability to communicate sociability is heightened in the new context. Lutherans, who in general are supposed to be restrictive in their consumption of alcohol, in some cases have an apparently more relaxed relationship to beer when it is served in the *kilabu*. This may be linked with the close associations between sorghum beer and “pagan” religion when it is served in the traditional setting.

Many of the traditional qualities of sorghum beer are, however, apparently absent in the *kilabu*. The Iraqw readily confirm that they perceive important differences between beer consumption in the two different situations: “This is not beer of *slaqwe*!” may be heard as the negative answer to a person who asks for a sip of beer from his fellow Iraqw’s gourd in the *kilabu*. The sociability of the *kilabu* and the kind of beer which is consumed there is probably as new as the very word for the place where it is served: *kilabu* has got both its meaning and its orthography from the English word “club”.

Elders in Maghang claim that sorghum beer has been sold for as long as the Iraqw have had access to money. This means that it has most likely been possible to exchange money for beer throughout most of this century. Enquiries about the circumstances surrounding the early history of sorghum beer becoming a market commodity revealed few signs of resistance stemming from traditional attitudes. On the contrary, a good commercial beer brewer is, and allegedly always has been, highly valued and respected for his or her expertise. This contrasts with what Håland (1990) and Barth (1981:171) found among the Fur of Sudan. There the selling of beer was associated with shame and to a certain extent equated with prostitution, i.e. traditional values and norms inhibited market transactions involving beer. When the importance of such norms was reduced in certain villages in Darfur, it was a result of social change which strongly influenced traditional transactional patterns between man and wife, a relationship in which beer was deeply embedded symbolically.

There are, however, certain features which seem to indicate that the introduction of sorghum beer into new contexts has not been entirely straightforward. The shame associated with the selling of beer in Darfur was expressed spatially by the peripheral location of the beer market in relation to other commercial activities in the village. This was also the case in Maghang until 1974, when the implementation of the policy of *ujamaa* led to radical changes in the composition of the village. Since then various *vilabu* have been established at, or moved to, more central locations in the village. Another example is that efforts to levy taxes on domestic production of beer have met especially strong resistance, causing massive boycotts not only among ordinary Iraqw but also among their elected leaders (Quorro, 1971:55; Malley, 1970:23). In addition to its function as a remedy for strained social relations, beer has also been used as a fine in

traditional court cases, i.e. if found guilty a defendant may be obliged to brew a certain amount of sorghum beer. An effort to integrate beer as a fine for failing to participate in public development projects is reported to have failed completely, owing to generally strong resistance in the community (Malley, 1970:41). Despite such examples, however, the general impression is still that the commercialisation of sorghum beer, or its transfer to an entirely new context, has met with relatively few signs of resistance.

Other features reveal, however, that the relocation of beer from a domestic or traditional framework to the market has not been, and is still not, free from complication. At the end of the agricultural cycle, usually in September or October, most households will arrange the *geetla/angw* ritual. This ritual has several more or less explicit functions, the most important of which, in this context, is that it determines whether or not beer may be sold, i.e. the previous year's harvest of sorghum may not be sold until the ritual is held. Breach of this rule is associated with shame, and *Looaa* is expected to punish the offender. Through the ritual, sorghum beer is enabled to cross the barrier between the traditional and the modern contexts. Put in another way, the *geetla/angw* ritual is required in order to redefine the symbolic and religious qualities of sorghum beer and thus make it compatible with market transactions.

From this there seems to be good reason to claim that there are two kinds of beer among the Iraqw: commercialised beer and traditional beer. Before I elaborate on this point I shall present another product that, among the Iraqw, is associated with an even higher degree of intimacy.

**Milk**

Milk is the most highly valued ingredient in the traditional Iraqw diet, a cultural feature which, in this case, is in perfect accordance with the nutritional value of milk. According to health personnel working in the area, the malnutrition syndrome of kwashiorkor is practically non-existent among the Iraqw. This contrasts with its prevalence among the Iramba, a neighbouring group subsisting on much the same diet as the Iraqw but with the important exception that the Iramba do not have the same access to protein-rich pastoral products, particularly milk.

In Maghang there is a café which serves tea and coffee, and on some days the proprietor is able to provide milk to mix with the warm drinks. Invariably this milk is imported from Kenya via Arusha, either in powder form or in cartons. The long-distance transport of milk from Nairobi to a remote locality in Tanzania may appear puzzling, considering the fact that this area is one of the richest in cattle in the entire country. Cattle and cattle products in general flow *out of* this district in large amounts. The European employees of a nearby Lutheran hospital will readily comment on the “peculiar” ways the Iraqw handle their milk products. Despite continuous requests from the missionaries, many of whom have raised children in the area, the Iraqw have proved unwilling to sell the milk from their many cows. The milk that has been consumed by the missionaries and their children has therefore largely been imported all the way from Kenya. Indeed, such imports have taken place during the rainy season at times when nearby Iraqw households were unable to consume the entire milk yield of their cows. Some of the missionaries have, however, on some occasions been *given* milk as a gift.

In order to seek an understanding of these puzzling features, a fruitful starting point may be to explore the circulation of milk within

Iraqw society. Milk produced by the cows that belong to a certain household is very rarely brought outside the limits of the compound; in other words, it is milked, refined and consumed primarily by the members of the household. When milk is served to visitors the common denominator of the guests is that they have a close relationship with their host. Young girls may moreover hide some milk away in order to present it as a gift to boy-friends. The relations in which milk circulates are thus usually confined by the boundaries of the household and, when crossing that boundary, are characterised by love or trust.

It seems reasonable, following Håland (1990:11), to regard milk as a metonym for a relationship that is universally characterised by an extreme degree of intimacy, love and trust, i.e. the relationship between mother and child. Indeed, in some respects the Iraqw conceptualise the mother-milk-child relationship as a unity, comparable to that of the relationship between a pregnant woman and her foetus. An abortion and the death of a child that is still being breast-fed are both categorised as tragic events causing the same serious type of *meeta*. This in stark contrast to the categorisation of deaths among children that are weaned, which, if classified as requiring *meeta* at all, are of a much more benign kind. The weaning of a child is perceived as the initiation into a new phase of life, a transition that is marked ritually.

As a metonym for the mother-child relationship, milk may be used metaphorically only in relationships that share some of the same intimate qualities. To allow milk to circulate in relationships lacking such qualities is considered shameful. When outsiders receive milk as a gift, it is an unmistakable sign of devotion or love, or at the least it is a strong invitation to establish or reproduce a close relationship. Europeans and other educated immigrants are usually aware of the fact that milk may

transfer bacteria which cause serious diseases such as brucellosis and tuberculosis. When offered milk in an Iraqw household, they will in many cases politely reject it, out of fear that the milk has not been boiled. The double tragedy of such situations is that the guests seem to be completely unaware of what their Iraqw hosts are communicating by offering them milk, just as the hosts may be unaware of the health scruples of their guests.

The rationality behind Iraqw unwillingness to sell or dispose of milk is apparently twofold. Children and calves are regarded as particularly vulnerable to sorcery or polluting influences on the milk of their mothers. At the nearby hospital, which has approximately 2,000 deliveries per year, death in childbirth is not uncommon. The motherless child in such cases will be in a state of ritual impurity. At the same time it will be needing milk in one form or another. Lactating Iraqw mothers have not proved willing to breast-feed such children, since their own children would be severely threatened by contact with the pollution of the other child. The solution at the hospital is usually to have mothers from other ethnic groups provide the necessary milk, or to give the children commercially produced substitutes.

The same rationale applies to cow's milk, i.e. the calf will suffer or die if the milk of its mother comes into contact with sorcery or with pollution. Women in general are regarded as less polluted than men, not as an inherent quality decided by sex, but rather owing to the fact that, since men lead a broader social life, they are exposed to more of the invisible influences of sorcery and ritual pollution. Although boys "who do not travel around much" may in some instances do the milking, it is usually, purportedly for the reasons mentioned above, a female task. When milk is given away, the owner of the calf must be certain that the receiver has no

evil intentions and must trust that he or she will not, out of carelessness, expose the milk to sorcery or ritual pollution in any form. Trust and confidence, as dimensions of the relationships in which milk circulates, are therefore not only metaphorically related to the mother-child relationship but are also connected with ideas about the calf's vulnerability to what happens to the milk which, by natural law, it was supposed to have. To bring milk to the market implies that the owner loses control over who comes into contact with it, thereby exposing his calf to serious dangers.

The fact that sorcery applied to milk is perceived as a threat to the calf has implications for another characteristic of milk. When offering beer to a visitor, one may frequently see that the host takes a sip of the gourd before it is served the guest. The intention is to assure the visitor that no harmful substances have been mixed with the beer. I have never seen this procedure followed in cases involving milk, the reason purportedly being that a sorcerer would only experience harm to his own calves if he mixed his milk with malign substances, thereby making such practices self-defeating.<sup>13</sup> One might therefore add purity as another characteristic of milk; the milk from a cow whose calf is alive is never dangerous to the person who drinks it.

During my first discussions about milk I was frequently made aware that it is not considered proper to articulate the Iraqw word for milk, *ilwa*. Instead I was advised to use the term *xwaante*, literally meaning maize soup.<sup>14</sup> Many informants would simply state that "it is not good" to

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<sup>13</sup> Sorcerers are believed to get their powers from Neetlangw, or "water spirits", which are also regarded as the ultimate origin of the various forms of ritual pollution. Harmful substances that do not have their origin in Neetlangw are not considered to have any effect on the calf. On the contrary, milk may actually be applied as a purifier, for example on stones that have been used to heal snake bites.

<sup>14</sup> Maize soup is frequently supplemented with some milk, especially when it is to be consumed by small children.

pronounce the word. Some would say that *ilwa* is associated with affluence, and that the use of the word would imply boasting, i.e. an expression of bad social qualities. Others would explain that the Iraqw ceased to use the term “when milk became scarce”. The story is that in the beginning, when the Iraqw spoke of their *ilwa*, *Looaa* heard and concluded that they had too much of it. The result was that she, as the source of fertility for all things in the world, reduced the amount that she gave to the Iraqw. The substitute word *xwaante* is therefore allegedly used in order to induce *Looaa* to increase the amount of milk again.

Qualities of the mother-milk-child constellation are not only transferred metaphorically to other human relationships, but also occur in relations between the Iraqw and their deity. *Looaa* is female because “she is like the mother of the Iraqw”. Hence the milk that is manipulated from the cows is regarded as *Looaa*’s gift to her children. This is seldom as clearly stated as in ritual prayers for fertility. Rain clouds are referred to as “breasts”, and worries about the state of people, cattle and land are expressed in phrases such as “The breast we are sucking is drying up” (e.g. page 198). Milk thereby becomes a metonym for the ultimate relation, i.e. the relationship between the Iraqw and their god. Thus the reason for not articulating *ilwa* seems to be connected with its sacred aspects.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> In this connection it is interesting to note that the neighbouring Maasai are recorded as using the word for milk (“kule”) to denote what really is maize soup (“enkurma”) (Århem, 1987:7), exactly the opposite of what the Iraqw do. The rationality behind this is, of course, entirely different. By using milk as an euphemism for maize soup the Maasai classify the ingredients of their diet in accordance with how it ideally ought to be.

***Monetisation of milk***

While making enquiries about the circulation of milk I was invariably told that milk might not be sold, and my informants claimed to know of no cases in the village where milk had been exchanged for money. These statements seemed to be consistent with my observations during fieldwork. One day, however, I was invited to a meal at the household of one of the many immigrants to Maghang. Knowing that this person was one of the few in the village who did not keep cattle, I was surprised to find that he was able to offer me several glasses of milk. When I asked about the origin of the milk, he somewhat reluctantly explained that he had established an agreement with a nearby Christian Iraqw family regarding the daily delivery of two bottles of milk. For this service he paid a certain amount of money, which turned out to be less than 5 per cent of the purchase price of the imported milk that was served in the village café. The agreement was established on the conditions that he was not to serve the milk to anyone outside his household, and that he was to keep the transaction secret. Further enquiries revealed that there was at least one other case in the village, and the situation was the same: a non-Iraqw immigrant bought milk from a Christian Iraqw, on the same conditions. The manner in which the norms and values constituting the sphere barrier were violated, and the specific social categories involved in the transaction thus seem to confirm the general existence and strength of the barrier.

***“Modern milk”***

Up to this point I have focused solely on milk that is produced by indigenous zebu cows. In adjacent areas, development projects and a few individual Iraqw households have bought cows of European origin. These

animals, called “modern cows” both in Iraqw and Swahili, yield significantly more milk than “traditional cows”, and are usually kept in order to produce a surplus that can be marketed. The sale of this milk, i.e. its circulation in impersonal relations, is not concealed in any way, and the elaborate regulations that surround the circulation of “traditional milk” are absent. “Modern milk” and “traditional milk”, objectively very similar or identical in colour, form and taste, are apparently conceptualised as radically different from each other.<sup>16</sup>

Creating the category “modern milk”, and leaving it unaffected by the religious and symbolic constraints of “traditional milk” keeps the new product neutral in a manner that facilitates its sale as a market commodity. In this way the Iraqw have been able to integrate a new and valued element, milk as a commodity, into their conceptual framework. But establishing a distinction or a barrier between “modern” and “traditional milk” has yet another implication, if not intention; it assures the protection of the symbolic and religious aspects of “traditional milk”. What has taken place may thus fruitfully be regarded as a process or a procedure of adjusting to change in a manner that serves to maintain social and cultural continuity.

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<sup>16</sup> Knowledge about such cultural distinctions may be essential in studies of economic activity. In Philip Raikes’ impressive study of wheat-cultivating Iraqw in the Karatu area, he states:

“Once again, it is hard to impute a value since very little milk is sold locally. The only guide available is that the Karatu Catholic Mission sold fresh milk at 50 cents per pint, and was entirely unable to cope with demand at this price. One may thus assume that the price would have been at least 60 cents.” (Raikes, 1975a:191)

These “assumed” 60 cents are then used to estimate the total income of “small farmers” in shillings per year. According to the table, milk (from traditional cows) constitutes

### **Money and change**

The introduction of money into many African societies that previously had no such medium of exchange has been recorded as having been accompanied by massive change. The impersonality or “the shatteringly simplifying” idea of money is accused of having destroyed established social relations and of having broken down cultural distinctions in a rather mechanical manner (Bohannan, 1959).

Another perspective is presented by Bloch and Parry (1989) who insist upon the need to look at how a particular culture comes to view money rather than at what kind of world view money in itself gives rise to (*ibid*, 19). In their review of how money is symbolically represented in various societies, Bloch and Parry find not only considerable cross-cultural variation, but also that the meaning of money may vary within one culture. Furthermore, in the instances when it has been possible to identify cross-cultural similarities in the way money is represented, according to Bloch and Parry, the similarities are not due to the innate qualities that have often been attributed to money, such as the alleged tendency for money to do away with cultural distinctions and to depersonalise social relations. Instead they would suggest that such superficial similarities represent:

“a kind of epiphenomenon of regularities which exist at a deeper level. That is, they are a consequence of regularities in the way in which the transactional world as a whole is symbolically constructed in terms of what we have called long and short-term cycles.” (*ibid*, 28-29)

Earlier in their introductory chapter they clarify these concepts in the following manner:

“Each of our case studies, we argue, reveals a strikingly similar concern with the relationship between a cycle of short-term

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approximately 20 per cent of this amount (*ibid*, 191,193). In other parts of the thesis the reader is informed that the cows at the mission were of European origin (*ibid*, 336).

exchange which is the legitimate domain of the individual, often acquisitive, activity, and a cycle of long-term exchanges concerned with the reproduction of the social and cosmic order; and in each case the way in which the two are articulated turns out to be very similar.” (*ibid*, 2)

The distinction “at a deeper level” is thus analytically more significant than the more conventional monetary/non-monetary dichotomy. Money is not necessarily present in the “short-term” sphere, nor is money confined to it. Impersonal or “short-term” transactions are of course possible without money as a medium of exchange and, as Bloch and Parry have pointed out, money may be involved in “long-term” transactional patterns. When traditional cultural and social structures are destroyed, as in the classic Tiv case (Bohannon, 1959), money in itself is not to blame. What really happens, according to Bloch and Parry, is that the short-term cycles infringe on the domain of the long-term transactional patterns:

“When the short-term cycle threatens to replace the long-term cycle then the world is rotten. It is in such circumstances that a morally indeterminate instrument becomes something morally opprobrious.” (1989:28)

In the Iraqw case, sorghum beer and milk can be seen as metonyms for agriculture and pastoralism, i.e. the vital relationships between the Iraqw and the environment on which they subsist. As metaphors they occur in relationships of immense importance for those involved, i.e. relations between close relatives, friends and neighbours, but also between human beings, spirits, and the deity. To use the terms of Bloch and Parry, sorghum beer and milk appear to be central vehicles for the Iraqw reproduction of “long-term social and cosmic order”.

On the other hand, sorghum beer and milk may both be found as market commodities, circulating in impersonal or “short-term” transactions, without having any immediately evident destructive effects

on the “long-term cycles”, i.e. on the traditional circulation patterns and cultural content of the two products. The selling of beer and “modern milk” apparently do not cause “the world to become rotten”.<sup>17</sup>

As the commercialisation of sorghum beer and milk does not seem to threaten the traditional symbolic and religious qualities attributed to those products in other contexts, this achievement must be related to the construction and maintenance of a conceptual boundary between different kinds of beer or milk. The existence and relevance of such dichotomies are, as I have sought to illustrate above, evident in the daily life of Maghang.

My informants stated that they did not know the ultimate reason why the cows of European origin produce something so entirely different from what the cows of the more familiar types do. They were well aware of the fact that the role of the *geetla/angw* ritual in preparing sorghum for market transactions was a rather new one, but no one was able to explain how and when this new function was added to the more traditional ones. I did not expect a clear answer to these questions, but, with some knowledge of Iraqw culture and history, I would not have been surprised if I had got one.

Robert J. Thornton, who has published a comprehensive ethnographic study of the Iraqw, writes that he was struck by “the apparently ad hoc nature of many of their rites and rituals”. One of his examples is the following:

“when the Tanzanian government insisted that the Iraqw and the Masai make up and be friends, a group of ritual experts got together and invented a ritual that involved a Masai and an Iraqw woman exchanging infants and suckling them at each other’s breast.” (Thornton, 1980:147)

Another example of such “ritual inventiveness” may perhaps help to shed further light on the processes in question. In the 1950s a Lutheran hospital

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<sup>17</sup> See Baxter (1984) for an interesting account of similar attempts to control

was established about 10 km from Maghang, and the health services provided by the European missionaries soon became popular among many Iraqw in the surrounding areas. Shortly after the opening, however, the hospital ran into difficulties because of the pollution beliefs of the Iraqw. Inside the building patients died, unmarried women gave birth, and iron caused bleeding during operations and blood tests, events all strongly associated with ritual pollution and the *meeta* precautions. Patients insisted that the dying must be brought outside the building, and healthy individuals refused to donate blood for their anaemic or newly operated on close relatives. According to informants in Maghang, the main problems were solved practically overnight. During a meeting of influential ritual leaders and Iraqw elders it was decided that the hospital compound should be exempt from certain types of *meeta* regulations, and that what took place in this particular location should be regarded as the work of *Looaa*. The result of this decision, which allegedly was reached after lengthy prayers to *Looaa*, was that the Iraqw in adjacent areas could benefit from the evidently efficacious treatment the hospital was able to provide without exposing themselves to the dangers of the extremely strong concentration of ritual pollution that, according to traditional definitions, should be linked up with the location and the health personnel working there.

It is worth noticing that the redefinition of the hospital compound did not alter the fundamental idea that certain events lead to ritual pollution, requiring a state of *meeta*. On the contrary, such beliefs seem to have become strengthened by such processes. By defining the hospital as a place where ritual pollution may not be transmitted, contradictions between practice and religion are avoided, i.e. practice is no longer a threat to the rationality of pollution and *meeta*. The integration of new ideas and new

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“sacrilegious” market transactions in butter and barley among the Arssi.

practices is thus achieved in a manner which ensures the continuity of certain fundamental beliefs.

The creation of the dichotomy between the hospital compound and its surroundings therefore has the same consequences as the distinctions drawn between different kinds of beer and milk. Monetised sorghum beer and milk represent valued “new” products and involve desired new practices that are integrated into the daily life of the Iraqw, and this is taking place in a manner which ensures continuity in existing transactional patterns and symbolic structures. In Bloch and Parry’s words, these processes are directed at controlling the articulation between “short” and “long-term cycles” in order to prevent the former from replacing the latter. The inventiveness or creativity required to achieve this is highlighted by the story about the dramatic redefinition of the hospital compound. Although we may not be able to trace the origin of the beer and milk dichotomies in the same way, the general dynamic seems to be the same. These newly created distinctions must obviously be accepted and internalised and such cultural integration is the result of a continual creative discourse rather than an overnight procedure. The story of the redefinition of the hospital compound, whether reflecting historical realities or not, may be seen as a contribution to such a discourse. It serves as a myth which legitimises new ways of looking upon, and acting upon, the world.

The processes I have pointed to may perhaps help to resolve an apparent paradox in the way the Iraqw are perceived and evaluated by outsiders. Neighbouring peoples tend to classify the Iraqw, together with other “conservative” peoples like the Maasai or the Datoga, as *watu wa kabila*, literally “tribal people” if translated from Swahili (cf. Wazaki, 1966:247; Ishige, 1969:99; Arens, 1979:60,69). At the same time, Iraqw

society has been characterised by profound changes throughout the last century, and the study of those changes seems to reveal a remarkable degree of adaptability and flexibility (Rekdal, 1994). Philip Raikes, who has conducted a comprehensive economic study of Iraqw cultivators in Karatu, states that “in North Iraqw, it would be hard to discern any resistance to change stemming from traditional attitudes” (1975a:333). The study of thought and practice surrounding sorgum beer and milk among the Iraqw illustrates a simple point that seems to shed light on the apparent paradox, i.e. that there is not necessarily a contradiction between profound social change and a high degree of cultural continuity.

The processes that I have explored in this article, with Iraqw culture and society as my vantage point, may, I suggest, indicate that a certain not uncommon way of representing so-called “traditional” or “tribal” societies ought to be adjusted. These societies are not, and have never been, simply the passive victims of external modern forces “having impact” on them in more or less predictable ways. We are talking about living societies that consist of living and creative human beings, and which, like all societies, have mechanisms and procedures for coping with change in a manner which ensures cultural continuity.

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# **When hypothesis becomes myth: The Iraqi origin of the Iraqw**

## ***Introduction***

A great many Iraqw in northern Tanzania claim that they have a historical connection with Iraq in the Middle East, and they are frequently able to provide detailed accounts and arguments reaching far beyond the phonological similarity between the two words in order to substantiate this linkage. The theory of the Middle East connection is a rather new phenomenon in Iraqw discourse about the past, and this article reports on how it came into being. This is an example of how the written word, and the oralization of the written word, under certain historical circumstances can become a powerful means for attributing authority and authenticity to an invented tradition. At the same time, the fixation inherent in the process of transcription does not mean that oral traditions lose their ability to respond to changing historical circumstances. On the contrary, “orality and literacy, far from being mutually contradictory poles, can interact and support each other” (Finnegan, 1988:110). This implies the necessity of scrutinizing the historical, social and political circumstances in which a particular tradition occurs before one proceeds to evaluate the content of oral traditions as historical evidence.

The story of how the Iraqw came to regard Iraq as a place of origin is also the story of how a well-refuted scientific hypothesis, heavily infested by European ethnocentrism and racism, has been modified and has taken on new life as the origin myth of an African people. In order to understand the Iraqw adoption of the new myth, it is necessary to explore

how its parent, the Hamitic hypothesis, has constituted an integral part of European attitudes to Africa from the start of the slave trade to the present. The historical context and development of the Hamitic hypothesis reveals that it has always primarily been an ideological statement, a myth motivating actions and responding readily to changes in the relationship between Europe and Africa.

There is little extraordinary in the fact that Malinowski's functionalist approach to "savage myth" may be applied convincingly to statements which were presented as science during a specific historical epoch. There is a certain degree of irony, however, in the fact that C. G. Seligman, the author of the work that contains what is probably the most influential formulation of the Hamitic hypothesis, was also the one who probably more than anyone else contributed to bringing Malinowski, and with him modern anthropology, into prominence.

### ***The setting***

The linguistic map of Tanzania shows the area where the Iraqw live as a pocket of Cushites in a land almost entirely dominated by Bantu- and Nilotic-speaking peoples. The linguistic contrast to the surrounding groups corresponds with other cultural differences, and to a certain extent with variations in physical attributes. Until a few decades ago the classification of the Iraqw language was problematic, as it contained elements "differing from any other known language", making it "impossible to regard it as anything but a member of an Isolated Language Group" (Tucker & Bryan, 1956:157). The question of where the Iraqw came from when they entered the area in which they currently reside has until recently been equally

problematic, and the various theories that have been suggested include all four cardinal directions.

The earliest sources of Iraqw oral traditions, however, provide quite a clear answer to the latter question in the story of Ma/angwatay. Ma/angwatay, as the story goes, was a fertile land where the Iraqw were healthy and strong. But the increasingly self-confident youth, disobeying the elders and the ritual expert, led their people to disaster by declaring war on an opponent that proved to be superior. The Iraqw had to flee northwards and finally came to a mountainous area (Irqwa Da/aw) which is still regarded as the Iraqw core area. The different versions of this story that have been recorded are strikingly similar, and they all agree that Ma/angwatay was a land to the south of where the great majority of the Iraqw currently live (Snyder, 1993:319; Thornton, 1980:205-206; Nordbustad & Naman, 1978:7-15; Berger & Kiessling, n.d.:110-113; Ramadhani, 1955:1-4; Harri, 1989:2-4; Huntingford, 1953:127; Burra, 1985:32; Fosbrooke, 1954:55).

The rise of a new myth which names a place of origin in the opposite cardinal direction (in Iraq) does not, however, seem to have threatened the southward orientation of the story of Ma/angwatay, nor does it seem to have modified any other aspects of the previously existing myth. The two locations of origin are simply synthesised and combined in temporal sequence; i.e., the Iraqw originally came from Iraq, migrated southward to Ma/angwatay, and then had to flee northwards to where they currently live. It is the question of how the first part of this journey was invented and how Iraq has come to be accepted by the Iraqw as their initial point of origin that is discussed here.

**Written sources and oralization**

Informants' statements from all corners of the area dominated by the Iraqw showed a high degree of consistency in detail regarding the exodus from Asia to East Africa. As the myth is a rather new phenomenon and the population in question numbers about 500,000 people, these similarities are indicative of a rapid and seemingly very widespread acceptance of the theory of the Middle East connection, and strongly suggest a written source as a key factor in the dissemination process.

The first written source referring to an Iraqw origin in Iraq or Mesopotamia is an unpublished ethnographic account in Swahili by Hemedi Ramadhani, a schoolteacher in Mbulu from 1930 onwards. The following is an excerpt from the introduction to the paper, which is dated 1955:

“Their origin is not particularly well known, but they are Hamitic nomads who have now mixed with Bantus. There are many stories telling that they came from Iraq (Mesopotamia) in Asia, that they passed Egypt and some crossed a great sea in canoes. They came into a mountainous area and some went to Habesh and all the way to Somalia. Others continued to travel until they came to Lake Victoria, and some crossed the Blue Nile and finally came to the land Maangwatay which is in Kondo-irangi District, Central Region, Tanganyika.”  
(Ramadhani, 1955:1, my translation)

Ramadhani substantiates the connection to Iraq by listing eight Arab words which have similarities to Iraqw terms with the same or closely related meanings. He also points out that the Iraqw language has several rare phonemes in common with Arabic, and that young Iraqw who fought in World War II in Ethiopia had seen people there who dressed like themselves.

Twenty-three years after Ramadhani wrote his version of early Iraqw history, a collection of Iraqw folktales was published by W. D. Kamera

(1978) in Swahili. In the book's introduction the author presents some general ethnographic information about the Iraqw and some of their clans. Here the connection with Iraq reappears. A detailed account is given of how the Iraqw crossed the Red Sea, and how they then spread southward in Africa in a manner that corresponds well with the current distribution of Cushitic languages (Kamera, 1978:vii). No reference is made to Ramadhani's paper in Kamera's book, either as source or as corroborative evidence. A factor which must be considered concerning the remarkable similarities between the works of the two authors is the fact that Ramadhani's paper had already become oralized by the time Kamera collected his material. It is impossible to estimate how many copies have been made of Ramadhani's paper, but there are definitely several copies of two slightly different originals circulating in the Mbulu area. The three anthropologists who have written theses about the Iraqw have all managed to get hold of a copy independently of each other. The man who lent me Ramadhani's paper said I could borrow it on the condition that I "renew it". It was just a heap of pages badly torn and completely worn out after decades of use, yet it appeared to be one of his most precious possessions. The owner of the manuscript, who was heir to the position of ritual leader (*kahamusmo*) in the area of my first fieldwork, had learned much of Ramadhani's text by heart and frequently cited its content or referred to its authority in various contexts. How profound an effect such an oralization of this written text has had is hard to estimate, but the authority and the extensive travels of this particular man alone may account for considerable dispersion of Ramadhani's theories. Thus the appearance of Ramadhani's paper may have had substantial influence on Iraqw discourse on the past through such processes, despite the fact that the manuscript was never published.

Much of the power of both Ramadhani's and Kamera's versions lay in the fact that they were printed, and were written by learned individuals whose authority may have been enhanced by the fact that both authors were outsiders. It should also be emphasized that a typed ethnographic account written in Swahili was itself a remarkable phenomenon several years prior to independence. The inherent power attributed to the written word in a society characterized by restricted literacy may, as comparative evidence suggests (Ong, 1982:93-94; Goody, 1968), be considerable. While the importance of this factor may have decreased between 1955 and 1978, the influence of Kamera's text was obviously enhanced by the fact that this was a real book, printed, published, and made readily available, apparently strongly subsidized, to the literate Iraqw public. Moreover, it was written by a scholar with a PhD from abroad.

There is, however, good reason to believe that another and more modern type of oralization has played a key role in the distribution of Kamera's version. Most of the Iraqw I met who were in possession of and had read Kamera's book were people with a relatively high level of education, such as schoolteachers and pastors. Many of them had used the book (or Ramadhani's paper) in writing their papers and theses (e.g. Naman, 1980; Mathiya, 1981; Burra, 1985) and continue to use it actively in their teaching and preaching. The effect of this dissemination is reflected in papers secondary-school students in the Mbulu area have written about Iraqw history (Mosses et al., 1987), and in interviews with students, particularly secondary-school students. The Middle East connection has in this way become part of the body of knowledge that Iraqw pupils and students bring back from school to illiterate relatives and neighbours.

Despite the fact that there is a remote relationship between Semitic and Cushitic languages (classified as distinct subgroups under Greenberg's

(1963) Afro-Asiatic language family), the Cushites are rooted “firmly in African soil” and “the unity of the Afro-Asiatic language family does not support any theory of Asian influence on Africa in historic times” (Curtin et al., 1978:121). There appears to be good reason to claim that the Iraqw connection with Iraq is, in a literal sense, rather far-fetched. If anyone is to blame for the spreading of the theory, however, the culprits are not Ramadhani and Kamera, nor the teachers and other literates who present the theory as authoritative knowledge. The works of these two authors have certainly served as catalysts for the dissemination of the theory, but they were by no means the originators of the idea. The short introduction to each work provides a clear indication as to whence the theory came. The clue to the phenomenon I am discussing here is contained in one of the terms by which the two authors classify the Iraqw. Both consider the Iraqw to be “Hamites”.

### ***The Hamitic hypothesis***

The origin of the term “Hamite” is the biblical figure Ham, who was cursed by his father, Noah. More precisely, Ham’s son Canaan was cursed because of the wrongs of his father, and doomed, together with all his descendants, to serve as slaves for the descendants of Noah’s other two sons.

“The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was peopled. Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard; and he drank of the wine, and became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it upon both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of

their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, "Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers." He also said, "Blessed be the LORD my God be Shem; and let Canaan be his slave. God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his slave." (Gen. 9:18-27)<sup>1</sup>

When Ham later came to be associated with black skin,<sup>2</sup> which was first explicitly formulated in the Babylonian Talmud of around 600 AD, the foundation was laid for a most fitting legitimization myth for the slave trade (Sanders, 1969:523). By defining the African as the descendant of Ham or Canaan, his status as "slave of slaves" in relation to the rest of the world was endorsed by God.

The nineteenth century Hegelian view of Africa postulated that the continent was "the land of childhood, ... enveloped in the dark mantle of Night" and that in Africa there would not be found any signs of civilization, of culture, or of "political constitution". Even "moral sentiments" were non-existent, and "the character of the Negroes ... is capable of no development or culture" (Hegel, 1956:91, 96, 98). In 1912, Kitching (1912:276) wrote that the savage African "has no conception at all of love. In many dialects there is no word for love." Africa was characterized entirely by what it lacked, all of which was defined in European terms (cf. George, 1958:64). Some of the more or less bizarre arguments in this same vein were phrased in biological terms. The claim that Africans did not have hair but wool, that their children matured more rapidly than whites, that women gave birth quickly and practically without

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<sup>1</sup> Oxford Annotated Bible, Revised Standard Version.

<sup>2</sup> Isaac (1985:81) provides an interesting example which appears to reveal changes in the connotations of this black skin. The passage "I am black and beautiful" in the early Hebrew and Greek versions of Song of Solomon (1:5) became "I am black but beautiful" when translated to Latin and English by Europeans.

pain, and that mulattos were infertile hybrids, were efforts clearly directed at associating Africans with animals (Curtin, 1965:43-44). The European image of “darkest Africa”, which may have had its origin in geographical ignorance, soon came to be an expression of cultural and racial arrogance. Africa had become the antithesis of Western civilization.

Evidence gradually appeared, however, that seemed to contradict the hypothesis of the biologically or divinely determined inferiority of the African. Archaeologists found remnants of African empires and sophisticated cultural artefacts, and anthropologists described highly complex political structures. Increased knowledge indicated that at least some Africans had religion, albeit not the right one, and cannibalism turned out to be not as universal in Africa as the first European accounts had claimed. These new, positive attributes of Africa and Africans demanded explanation, and the racist view was salvaged by a remarkable redefinition of the Hamites. The Hamites were now turned into Europeans, to whom at least some of the European virtues of the time were attributed. Meinhof’s (1912) *Die Sprachen der Hamiten* is, according to Knappert (1976) “the one great work on the Hamitic languages”. Meinhof writes in his introduction that “the Hamitic tribes acted invariably as the *Herrenvolk* in the midst of the dark-skinned peoples” (cited in Knappert, 1976:315). But it was Seligman who provided what probably became the most influential formulation of the new Hamitic hypothesis when he wrote in his *Races of Africa*, “The incoming Hamites were pastoral “Europeans” arriving wave after wave—better armed as well as quicker witted than the dark agricultural Negroes” (Seligman, 1959 {1930}:96). This version of the hypothesis assumed that the Hamites had migrated southward into a continent already inhabited by primitive bushmen and Negroid peoples, bringing with them everything that might be considered signs of

civilization.<sup>3</sup> In other words, even the cursed among the Euro-Asians were able to completely outshine the original inhabitants of Africa. The newly discovered cultural achievements of Africa were in this way explained as the work of outsiders, and in most cases of Caucasoid peoples from the north. One well-known example which is symptomatic of this attitude to Africa was the persistent denial of the possibility that Africans could have been capable of creating the great masonry of Zimbabwe (Fagan, 1981; Garlake, 1982). Hodgkin (1956:177) writes:

“[I]t was at one time the fashionable view that any remarkable work of art or architecture discovered in Africa south of the Sahara must have been produced by non-Africans ... since Africans were by definition incapable of this level of achievement”.<sup>4</sup>

Archaeologists alleged that the Hamitic material culture was superior, linguists maintained that relative sophistication characterized the Hamitic languages (Knappert, 1976:304), and descriptions of the Hamitic peoples emphasized that they were “light-skinned” and “good-looking” in comparison with their neighbours. Whatever good there was in Africa came physically with the Hamites, or by diffusion from the north. This view provided, of course, a powerful legitimisation for the next historical epoch, colonialism:

“It was thought that just as every sign of civilization in Black Africa was to be attributed to influences of ‘light-skinned’ Hamites, no development could take place without the interference of ‘superior races’.” (Farelius, 1993:109)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> As Curtin has pointed out, the Hamitic hypothesis had a predecessor in early-nineteenth century theories of the influence of the “Europeanoid” Fulbe: “By assigning the Fulbe a very long migration route, they could be given the role of cultural bearers for all of Africa” (1965:411).

<sup>4</sup> A similar sort of reasoning lies behind the refusal to believe that the American Indians had built the great earthen mounds of the Ohio Valley (Fagan, 1981:43).

<sup>5</sup> Trigger (1984:363) makes a more general statement on the same phenomenon: “Colonialist archaeology, wherever practised, served to denigrate native societies and

The remarkable redefinition of the Hamite seems to be a good example of the point that Hammond and Jablow (1977:13, 18) were pursuing in claiming that Africa was “a field for the free play of European fantasy”, and that “for each period certain historical factors determined the precise content of the images”.

### ***“The shadow of the Hamite”***

The inference of the Hamitic hypothesis that Africa is dependent on outsiders for its evolution and development is an idea which is still very much alive in European minds. It is perhaps most clearly seen in films (Dunn, 1996) and popular literature describing rather ordinary white men who travel to Africa where their innate qualities turn them into deities in the eyes of the natives (e.g. *The Phantom*), or where apes take the intermediate position between the ruling white man and the Africans (e.g. *Tarzan*, see Gruesser, 1992:12-13). It is also, in varying degrees, an element in the ideology behind the activities of missionaries and development workers. Africa is still to some extent perceived by many as the “white man’s burden”, and continues to be defined by what it lacks and not what it has, as reflected in negative prefixes such as under-, non-, or un-.

These remnants of the world view underlying the Hamitic hypothesis are not, according to Farelus (1993:111), confined to the popular sector: “It is no exaggeration to say that the shadow of the Hamite is still lingering on in lecture rooms of both European and African universities.” Murdock (1959), Greenberg (1963:50-51), Bohannan

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peoples by trying to demonstrate that they had been static in prehistoric times and lacked the initiative to develop on their own.”

(1964:65-68), and many of their contemporaries argued strongly against the Hamitic hypothesis and the prejudices it represented and reproduced. The careful reader may, however, still recognize elements reminiscent of the Hamitic hypothesis in the following quotation, in which Murdock (1959:195) provides a first-hand description of the area where the Iraqw, now classified as Cushites, live:

“This particular area, which the writer is fortunate to have visited, makes an indelible impression upon the European because of its sharp contrast to the settlement patterns of most African tribes. One sees no brush, no fallow or unoccupied land. The rolling countryside presents a vista of alternating cultivated fields, neat strips of green pasture, homesteads, and well-tended plots of woodland—the whole strongly reminiscent of prosperous peasant sections in certain parts of Europe.”

If the message of Caucasoid superiority implicit in the Hamitic hypothesis has been able to survive in more or less disguised forms, there may be reason to raise the question of whether this has had any influence on the characteristics attributed to the Cushites. It would be speculative to suggest that such a factor has played any role in linking the introduction of both agriculture and pastoralism in this particular part of Africa to Cushitic peoples (Ambrose, 1982:113; Ehret, 1967; Sutton, 1981:576-579). It is tempting, however, to ask whether there might not be a parallel between the efforts to attribute the ruins of Zimbabwe to Phoenicians, Hittites, Sabeans, or Hamites, and more recent proposals that the impressive structures of Engaruka in Tanzania are remnants of a Cushitic or Nilotic society, and not, as is increasingly accepted today, the work of the ancestors of the nearby Bantu-speaking Sonjo (Ambrose, 1982:135, 143-144; Nurse & Rottland, 1993). The suggestion that Cushites or Nilotes

were the engineers of Engaruka is based on very slim evidence,<sup>6</sup> and the most plausible connection between Engaruka and the peoples that were earlier called Hamites or Nilo-Hamites is the fact that one of these groups, the Maasai, was probably responsible for the destruction of Engaruka (Davidson, 1968:129).

The final dismissal of the Hamitic hypothesis by leading scholars occurred within a few years of the publication of the last edition of Seligman's *Races of Africa* in 1957. However, by then the hypothesis had been treated as authoritative knowledge for so long that its impact and influence could not easily be wiped out by the new theories that emerged. The continuous authority of *Races of Africa* and the Hamitic hypothesis is indicated by the impressive list of leading Africa scholars who contributed to the revision that led to the 1957 edition (see "Publisher's note to the third edition" in Seligman, 1959 {1930}). MacGaffey (1966:13) writes that "since World War II [the Hamitic hypothesis] has taken on the sanctity of established doctrine." He cites a 1960 article which traces the origin of a Nigerian stone axe to western Europe, and comments that "At this stage our hypothesis has become a virus" (see also Lewis, 1963). Kamera's 1978 contribution is but one example of the fact that aspects of the Hamitic hypothesis survived even outside the popular sector. Just one year previously, Kesby had published *The Cultural Regions of East Africa*, and though the term Hamite had been eradicated from the vocabulary, its shadow lingered on. The admiration for the Maasai that seems to be

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<sup>6</sup> The various versions of the story of Ma/angwatay are, as stated earlier, quite consistent in claiming that the Iraqw came from the south when they entered the Mbulu area. Furthermore, a large number of Iraqw clans are claimed to have been founded by members of ethnic groups (the Alagwa, the Burunge, and the Rangi) currently living considerably further south than the Iraqw. No Iraqw clans trace their origin in sedentary groups (such as the Sonjo) to the north of Mbulu; i. e., in the direction in which Engaruka is located.

projected onto neighbouring peoples in this quote is strongly reminiscent of preindependence thinking regarding cultural influence and prestige in East Africa:<sup>7</sup>

“They have impressed European visitors and residents in East Africa almost as much as they have their African neighbours. ... Whatever Europeans’ opinions, there is no doubt, as has been stressed already, that they are the key people of the whole region. Prior to European administration, the Maasai represented the centre of fashion for the peoples around them. ... All that can be said with certainty is that the Maasai represented, in a high degree, the desirable way of life, and the appropriate culture, which was the ideal of all the peoples of the region, except for the Swahili.” (Kesby, 1977:79)

The loss in charm of the Hamitic hypothesis and its replacement by new terms in the 1960s seem to have had virtually no effect on the Iraqw myth that had developed. The terminology of the following quote from a thesis written by an Iraqw student is quite up to date, but the migrations of Seligman’s Hamites have been kept intact:

“The ancestors of the Iraqw tribe are said to have lived in ancient Mesopotamia, the country today known as Iraqw [*sic*]. At some time in the remote past they migrated to the highlands of Ethiopia between the Blue and the White Nile where their descendants are known as Cushites today.” (Naman, 1980:1)

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<sup>7</sup> The British affection for the Maasai has been interpreted as a reaction to lost British values and institutions during the industrial revolution. The Maasai was quite appropriately termed “the noble warrior” because he represented the antithesis of the decay of the European nobility and its values. The affection, which sometimes amounted to a diagnosis called “masaitis” and prompted the transfer of government officials to other posts (Hammond & Jablow, 1977:164-165), has continued in the popular Western view of Africa, as is perhaps most clearly seen in the way the Maasai dominate the numerous coffee-table books presenting visual images of Africa.

### ***Self-fulfilling prophecies***

Ramadhani and Kamera do not state explicitly that the Iraqw come from Iraq, but refer to the “numerous stories” and “interesting legends” of their informants. Both authors, however, seem to take for granted that the myth is pre-European, and their readers are certainly led to perceive the historical connection with Iraq as probable. Hauge (1981:8), a folklorist who collected his material between 1968 and 1972, also refers to Iraqw “legends” about an origin in the Middle East, apparently, like Ramadhani and Kamera, treating these more as a hypothesis of history than as myth. His contribution is published in English, and has therefore not had the feedback effect on Iraqw culture as has been the case with Ramadhani’s and Kamera’s contributions in Swahili. The fact that scholars such as Kamera and Hauge indicate that the stories of a Middle East connection are interesting as historical evidence must be appreciated in the context of the “euphoria” in the nascent discipline of African history in the 1960s, and the publication of Vansina’s *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology* as “a fundamental justification of the value of oral tradition as historical source” (Miller, 1980:ix-x).

There is little reason to believe that the Iraqw, prior to contact with the Europeans, had any knowledge of the specific locations referred to in the legends that were collected by Ramadhani and Kamera. The Mbulu highlands were located far from the caravan routes of the Arabs, and the Iraqw had “only passing contact with the Germans until 1902” (Iliffe, 1969:162). As late as 1913, the area was described by German officials as a “remote and inaccessible region” (Koponen, 1994:559). Moreover, the very first descriptions of the Iraqw (Baumann, 1968 {1894}; Jaeger, 1911; Kannenberg, 1900; Werther, 1898; Bagshawe, 1925; 1926), and the substantive material collected by Kohl-Larsen (1958; 1963; 1964) and

Berger (1947; 1938; n.d.) between 1934 and 1939, provide no evidence of oral traditions mentioning an Iraqw origin in the north. As almost all of this material is either unpublished or published in German, it was probably not accessible to Ramadhani and Kamera at the time they wrote their contributions.

The Iraqw legends presented by Kamera, Ramadhani, and Hauge are, I argue, derived from stories heard from Europeans obsessed with the idea of the Hamites; an idea which, as we have seen, was central in legitimizing the very presence of Europeans in Africa. The way in which the European image of Africa, substantiated by biblical myths, was projected into the folklore of the peoples who were colonized, is highlighted by another set of “legends that have been passed on from generation to generation”, collected by the missionary H. Faust among the Barabaig, another Hamitic or Nilo-Hamitic group in the area. The three stories told by Langai, “chief of the Arajek medicine clan”, are all remarkably similar to sections of Genesis, and the following text is virtually identical to the story of Noah’s curse. Even more impressive is the fact that it also contains the interpretations of the Babylonian Talmud; i.e., that the curse was the origin of the black skin:

“Shortly after the man who had escaped the flood returned to the valley, he made himself a gourd of ghamunga, honey wine. He became drunk and sought the comforts of his bed.

His sons found their father lying there naked, since his covering had fallen from him. The sons laughed at the nakedness of their father.

He roused himself and cursed them. “You shall be as black as your hearts.”

From that day on, these sons and their sons in turn have become the dark races of the world.

But sons who were born to the old man after this incident remained light and have peopled the light races of the world.”  
(Faust, 1966:22)

The many similarities with Genesis (9:18-27) cannot be coincidence, and Faust concludes that the Barabaig must have some kind of ancient connection with Semites or early Christians.

At about the same time that this Barabaig story was recorded by Faust, C. B. Johnson interviewed Tsea, an Iraqw informant estimated to be more than 90 years old:

“Another man had two sons. One day the father forgot to cover himself when he went to bed. One of the sons came, saw his father, laughed, and went away. The other son also passed by. He found something to cover his father with. When the father woke up, he said to the first son: “Because you laughed, you shall be black, and be the slave of your brother”. To the other son he said: “Because you covered me, you shall be white, and your brother shall work for you”. This is the reason why you as a white man are superior to us blacks”.

“But this is the story of Noah!”, I exclaimed. Where could Tsea have got it from? Not from the Christians, and not from the Mohammedans. Later I heard the story in an entirely different part of the tribe, so it is authentic enough.” (Johnson, 1966a:96, my translation)

As we have seen earlier in this article, however, the fact that a story is told by a person of considerable traditional authority does not necessary mean that he is repeating the words of his remote ancestors. His inspiration may in fact have come from a book he or his son had just read, or, as is more likely in these cases, from a church sermon or Christian meeting that had been attended by someone sometime during the 70 years of European contact prior to the interviews that Faust and Johnson conducted. Faust is analyzing the myth as a statement about “real” origin and “real” past, and not as a very real comment on the present. I would suggest that the fact that an influential Barabaig elder presents Noah’s curse as the origin of his people may say more about effects of the collective punishment and marginalization of the Barabaig (Blystad, 1992; Ndagala, 1991), and even

about future Barabaig conceptualization of HIV (Blystad, 1995:104), than about their historic relation to the Middle East.

The Hamitic hypothesis was fundamental to European perception of Africa in general and the Iraqw in particular, and these images were projected into the self-images of their new subjects through powerful new channels of communication. The Hamitic hypothesis was taught as history in the schools and churches that provided the educational basis for the new emerging African elite. In his introduction, Ramadhani (1955) expresses his gratitude to those who had helped and given advice in connection with writing his ethnography of the Iraqw, among whom was Jon Jøssang, who has described his experiences as missionary in a book published in Norwegian. The theory Jøssang subscribed to regarding the origin of the Iraqw and other Hamites in the area is formulated explicitly as follows: “[A]ll agree that they are of white origin and have come to Africa across South Arabia, the Red Sea and into Somali-Land” (Jøssang, 1959:26, my translation). There is good reason to assume that Jøssang is one of the informants who, directly or indirectly, perpetuated Ramadhani’s Middle East origin of the Iraqw.

These examples show that Seligman’s authoritative statements in *Races of Africa* are combined with tales and locations taken from Genesis, which synthesis is then communicated to the peoples in question by missionaries and other Europeans. Later, the message is recalled as genuine tradition (with local attributes such as *ghamunga*, the honey mead of the Barabaig) and, in the sense that it is taken as evidence of the reliability of the initial point of departure, it reinforces and verifies not only the message of the Hamitic hypothesis, but indeed the authority and universality of the Holy Writ itself. When this evidence is communicated back to the Iraqw in written form and then oralized by authority figures in

both modern and traditional institutions, the ultimate effect is a self-fulfilling prophecy: a new Iraqw origin myth.<sup>8</sup>

### ***The Iraqw and the Hamitic hypothesis***

The simple argument of the Hamitic hypothesis of African inferiority to Europe depended heavily on the claim that the “Caucasoid” or “European” Hamites were indeed superior to other Africans. We have already seen how the Hamites in general were associated with rather positive attributes, and correspondingly how “Negroes”, Bantu-speakers, or “real Africans” were stripped of what were perceived as desirable qualities by the Europeans. Let us now consider how the Iraqw, who were classified as Hamites by the end of the previous century following the first contact with Europeans (Kannenberg, 1900:144; Jaeger, 1911:96), were conceptualized and described prior to independence in 1963.

The official national census of 1931 contains several notes describing the categories of people listed. Here, the Iraqw are described as “intelligent” while certain Bantu-speaking groups are labelled as “extremely primitive and ignorant people” (Mitchell, 1932:7). Raikes (1986:139) cites the notes of a Mbulu District Officer in the 1920s who described a Bantu group as “exceptionally backward, unprogressive”, and characterized by “natural stupidity and laziness”, while the Iraqw were “steady, hard-working and people of their word”, qualities which were

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<sup>8</sup> Henige (1980) illustrates the dangers of treating oral traditions as history when, after earlier arguing that the Ganda kinglist is reliable, he realized that the consistency in detail between seemingly independently collected versions was not proof of authenticity, as he had assumed, but the result of manipulations of powerful individuals who were literate before the coming of the Europeans. Access to the written word had fundamentally shaped the depth and content of the kinglists, which came to be regarded as authentic by both the Ganda people and the scholars who studied them.

associated with their “nilo-hamitic origin”. Margery Perham (1976:113), who travelled from Iraqw country to that of the Bantu-speaking Mbugwe in the late 1920s, reveals her preconceived attitudes to the peoples she met in the area, “from bush to semidesert, from handsome Hamitic to squat-faced Bantu. Their tribal mark, a deep gash under the eye, makes them ghastly and they are sickly enough without this extra infliction.” Earlier she had described the Iramba (Bantu-speakers to the west of the Iraqw) as “ugly” and “magic-ridden”, and the contrast to the Iraqw becomes marked:<sup>9</sup>

“They, and especially the children, have a very spiritual look: the expression in their great eyes is of people who see more than plains and crops and herds. It was most exciting, after so many months of Bantu, with only a sprinkling of alien dynasties, to be among Hamites.” (Perham, 1976:94)

It should be noted that Perham travelled extensively in the British colonies and wrote several books on African administrative issues. Moreover, she was lecturer in Government and Administration at Oxford at a time when “the Colonial Office began to recruit administrators chiefly from Oxford and Cambridge” (Iliffe, 1979:325). The equation of “Hamitic” with certain racially determined positive qualities is perhaps never as clearly stated as in the way Perham describes the chief of the mainly Bantu-speaking Singida, who was “popular and efficient. He has a strain of Hamitic, I fancy” (1976:89).<sup>10</sup> “The strain of Hamitic” which accounts for the

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<sup>9</sup> Ernest Hemingway (1976 {1935}:57) met a group of “M’bulus” whom he describes as “good-looking savages”. Another adventurer classifies them as “a rather nice-looking lot” (Dugmore, 1925:53).

<sup>10</sup> See Ranger (1979:519) for a bizarre and more recent example where a prominent representative of the antiquarian tradition in Rhodesia argues that his cook is not African at all, but a Hamite. The conclusive evidence in this 1958 incident is the cook’s ability to repair a broken fridge door.

surprisingly positive qualities<sup>11</sup> identified in this particular man is illustrative of the way the new Hamitic hypothesis saved the thesis of the predestined inferiority and misery of Africa from being directly falsified. Just as every new sign of civilization and cultural achievement tended to be attributed to Hamitic peoples from the north, whatever were perceived as desirable qualities in African individuals could, as in this case, be attributed to partial or purely Hamitic racial origin. The glorification of the Iraqw and the other Hamites, or the blood of the Hamites, at the expense of Negroid or Bantu-speaking neighboring groups was, of course, an act of European self-glorification.

There is good reason to believe that Iraqw acceptance of the Middle East connection was facilitated by the fact that being classified as Hamites implied a promotion to the very top of the new prestige ladder that was imported from Europe. Furthermore, judging from the terminology of colonial administrators, it is fair to assume that this attitude may have influenced colonial policies toward the Iraqw to some extent. Although the extraordinary territorial expansion and the correspondingly rapid population growth in the twentieth century is undoubtedly a result of many factors, including being favored as a both peaceful and sedentary population (Rekdal, 1994:60-72), it would be hard to believe that the superlatives of the Europeans were not converted into actions beneficial for the Iraqw. It is also an open question whether, or to what extent, the

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<sup>11</sup> Less attractive features could similarly be attributed to Bantu blood. Barns (1923:73, 77) described the Iraqw as “an interesting industrious and intelligent people”, while the neighbouring Gorowa, who are linguistically and culturally closely related to the Iraqw, were “of a low order of intelligence and morality”. The author, whose ethnographic descriptions from Mbulu were heavily influenced by the Political Officer in charge, J. B. Bagshawe, explains the contrast by mentioning that the Gorowa are more “Bantu in physique.”

peacefulness and sedentariness of the Iraqw were related to the fact that they were treated as “intelligent” and “hard-working” Hamites.

### ***The Hamitic hypothesis in independent Tanzania***

The Hamitic hypothesis went through a radical transformation in order to account for the changes in European political relations with Africa. The early version depicted Africans as the descendants of Ham, cursed by Noah to serve as slaves for the rest of humankind. Its successor turned the Hamites into “Europeans” or quasi-Europeans, conveniently accounting for new discoveries of impressive achievements that should not have occurred on the African continent according to the prevalent European image of Africa. Although the Hamite had appeared remarkably adaptive during the preceding centuries, his function as an instrument of oppression and domination of Africa remained constant. It was therefore to be expected that there would be little place for the idea of the Hamite in the new independent African states.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Another reaction to the Hamitic hypothesis and what it represents is the Afrocentric movement. Just as the Hamitic hypothesis attributed all good things in Africa to Caucasians or Europeans, Afrocentrists are arguing that what Europe can be proud of in fact originated in Africa. The status of Pharaonian Egypt as a black civilization is a central focus of debate as it implies a reversal of the argument of the Hamitic hypothesis. Black Egypt brought civilization to Europe through the Greeks who studied there (Bernal, 1989), just as the Hamites allegedly brought “European” achievements to Africa. On the fringes of the debate there are several other interesting mirror images, such as the claim that white people may be descendants of African albinos. While the early Hamitic hypothesis stated that the Africans lost their color because of Noah’s curse, some Afrocentrists say that it is the whites who lost their color as a result of hereditary genetic deficiency (which we may regard as a modern equivalent to the multigenerational curse). Certain Afrocentrist arguments take on an equally racist dimension by claiming that the lack of skin melanin, which is virtually identical to a neurotransmitter found in the brain, can account for a number of biologically determined mental and emotional capacities that black people have and whites lack (see e.g. Kittles, 1995; Ortiz de Montellano, 1993, *Time*, 1991:19-20 and 1994:74-75).

The Maasai warrior who had been featured in all his regalia on Tanzanian 100s. banknotes was removed and replaced by entirely different national symbols in the late 1960s. At about the same time a law was passed that made the wearing of Maasai and Barabaig traditional dress illegal. Hundreds of Maasai men were in fact arrested because they were wearing the very clothes that still appeared on their Tanzanian banknotes, and the district commissioner of Maasai-land told journalists in 1967 that “police are prepared to herd the Masai into mass baths, burn their ceremonial garb in public and shave off their ochered hair” (Time, 1967:31, see also Newsweek, 1968:24 and 1972:10-11, Daily News, 1977:1, Arens, 1976:69).

The degree to which this change of attitude affected the Iraqw and their response to the new government is hard to judge, but a comparison of politically oriented studies prior to and following independence seems to indicate a certain degree of change in the relationship between the Iraqw and government. Officials and researchers employed by the colonial administration had written reports which described the political and economic integration of the Iraqw into the greater society as harmonious and successful, and a stark contrast to the development among other groups in Tanganyika was often pointed out (Meek, 1953; Hatch, 1972:17; Iliffe, 1979:473). Studies conducted after independence frequently focused on problems of Iraqw integration into the nation state and described widespread scepticism and lack of participation on the part of the local population (Malley, 1970; Quorro, 1971; see also Raikes, 1975b:86). This scenario corresponds well with stereotypes, currently prevailing in urban and administrative centers such as Arusha and Dar es Salaam, of the Iraqw as reserved and sceptical.

This point is clearly illustrated by contrasting the findings of the two major anthropologists working among the Iraqw prior to 1980. Thornton, who conducted his fieldwork in the mid-1970s writes that “many Iraqw, especially those of Irqwar Da’aw, express suspicion and hostility toward all governmental institutions” (Thornton, 1980:6). Just prior to national independence, Winter declared the implementation of an extensive government-initiated culling programme “a spectacular success”, and stated that “it marked the first occasion on which any cattle-owning people in all of East Africa was successfully induced to participate in such a scheme” (1968:18, 22; Winter & Molyneaux, 1963:500). He found that the Iraqw had moved territorial boundaries of important ritual significance in order to bring them in accordance with the ones drawn up by the colonial administration, and moreover,

“[t]he Native authority is fully accepted, and is an organic part of their own social structure. Very few Iraqw are capable of envisaging modern tribal life without the system of chieftainships. What has occurred has been that as the Native Authority has established its authority, in the sense that as it has reached the position where the Iraqw not only think that they have to obey its dictates but they *should* obey them, the old system and the new have delimited their own spheres of activity. Thus both are seen as having legitimate places in the total social structure, but each has a different part to play in the over-all scheme.” (Winter, 1968:16-17, italics in original)

One particular event seems to highlight the changes indicated here. During the national election in 1960, the official candidates of the Tanganyika African National Union won all the contests, except in the area dominated by the Iraqw. This caused great consternation as it was perceived by many as a reactionary move on the threshold of independence. The winner of the election in Mbulu was Herman Elias Sarwatt, a top administrator of Mbulu District during the last decade of colonial rule who was also the son of the last Iraqw chief to be installed by the British. Sarwatt was subsequently

expelled from Parliament, but was later readmitted under “a general amnesty for party renegades” and elected deputy speaker of the National Assembly in 1964 (Tordoff, 1967:59n; see also Listowel, 1965:380-381).

Ethnographic material from multiethnic rural communities such as Mto wa Mbu and Mangola in Arusha Region provides additional evidence of how independence affected the image of those peoples who had earlier been labelled Hamites. In both of these communities a new and valued super-ethnic or national identity, *mshwili*, had developed, which implies a remarkable redefinition of a term that to a certain extent had been stigmatized during the colonial period (Arens, 1975). The contrasting category was the more or less pejorative term *watu wa kabila* (literally, tribal people) which was applied to the Iraqw, the Datoga and the Maasai (Ishige, 1969:99; Arens, 1979:60,69; 1976:70), i.e., the peoples in the area who had been classified as Hamites or Nilo-Hamites by the Europeans. The quasi-European Hamite was suddenly no better than the rest. The removal of the Hamite from the banknote reflects changes that extend far beyond the symbolic domain. In the southern Mbulu and Hanang area it is not uncommon to see Barabaig women hiding their traditional leather skirts under layers of modern clothing in order to be admitted to local guest houses, or to be allowed to board a bus. Those who are pursuing a career in the modern Tanzanian society sometimes use special earrings, or even surgery, to hide the fact that their earlobes have been pierced in the manner characteristic of the Nilotes and Cushites in the area.

Europeans have fallen from grace and taken the Hamite with them. Independence in Tanzania was marked by a radical re-evaluation of the influence of Europe in Africa, turning the former rulers into the prime villain. Colonialism, which had earlier been described as an altruistic intervention, was redefined as imperialism, economic exploitation, or even

genocide.<sup>13</sup> As a central element in the ideology behind colonialism, the Hamitic hypothesis was dismissed for both scholarly and political reasons.

The fall of the Hamitic hypothesis as an explanation for the cultural achievements of Africa seems, however, to have had little influence on the popularity of the Iraqw myth of origin in Iraq. Furthermore, there are no indications that the new nationalist ideology or post-colonial academia had any political objections to the existence of the myth, as is illustrated by the fact that Kamera's book was published as late as 1978 by the state-controlled East African Literature Bureau. The continued and virtually unopposed existence of the Iraqw myth, both as it is presented by the authors reviewed in this article and as it is currently circulating and flourishing among the Iraqw as oralized literature, may be explained in part by the fact that it has been stripped of the clearly racist message of the Hamitic hypothesis. The Iraqw myth contains no explicit formulation of Iraqw racial or cultural superiority and does not, therefore, represent a contradiction to the post-independence nationalist ideology which stresses the unity and equality of all Tanzanians. The connection northwards, however, is hardly value-neutral at another level, and there is a certain amount of pride implicit in being directly linked to the cradle of civilization and two major world religions. This, however, is in perfect accord with other aspects of nationalist ideology, embracing, for example, modern development theory, Islam, and Christianity.

During interviews with Iraqw informants I was often forced to state my opinion regarding the question of the origin and migrations of the Iraqw. In all honesty I replied that I thought that the linguistic evidence

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<sup>13</sup> One of the colonial officials who worked in the Mbulu area sums up his feelings in connection with this re-evaluation in the title to his book; *Donkey's gratitude: Twenty two years in the growth of a new African nation, Tanzania* (Harris, 1992). The gratitude of a donkey, according to a well-known Swahili proverb, is a fart.

links the Iraqw to Cushitic-speaking peoples currently living in northern Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia. When I added that this common linguistic ancestry lay several thousand years back in time, and that the connection with Iraq or Mesopotamia seemed highly unlikely, the response was in some cases very negative. My scepticism about the Iraq connection was an obvious attack on the authenticity of a tradition that was meaningful for my informants. The paradox in the situation lies in the fact that their reactions indicated the degree to which the modified Hamitic hypothesis really *had* become an authentic tradition. These reactions are reminiscent of the distress provoked by Hanson's article on "inventions" of Maori culture (Hanson, 1989; 1991; Linnekin, 1991; Levine, 1991). Anthropologists should keep in mind that the invention of tradition is a contradiction in terms for most people, especially for those whose traditions are involved.

### ***Orality and writing***

In order to map the extent to which the Iraq myth has pervaded Iraqw society, I sought the collaboration of a group of students at Dongobesh Secondary School. As part of a project in history, they were to interview elders in their respective home areas about the origin of the Iraqw. The result confirmed my own experiences regarding the pervasiveness of the new myth, but one of the interviews with elders in Karatu provided some unexpected findings. A new prelude had been added to the Iraq(w) origin myth, describing the origin of three important Iraqw clans. According to this version, the Masay clan are descendants of Romans from Messina, the Tipe clan are descendants of Jews originally living around Tigris, and the Naman clan are descendants of Normans. These additions may be seen as

serving to reinforce the Iraqw ties to centers of civilization in the north, but there may be reason to question whether the choice of Normans is as phonetically determined or coincidental as it appears.

Norwegian missionaries in this area have built up a network of dispensaries and established one of the best hospitals in Tanzania, Haydom Lutheran Hospital. The doctors, most of them Norwegians, working in these institutions are frequently referred to as *qwaslare*, which is the Iraqw term for ritual experts from certain clans, including the Naman clan. It is probably stretching the analysis too far to draw attention to the fact that the only Iraqw doctor at Haydom Lutheran Hospital is from the Naman clan, and that his father, recently made Bishop, has been the most prominent Iraqw in the development of the powerful (and still Norwegian-sponsored) Mbulu Lutheran Church in this area. It should, however, be noted that a strikingly similar prelude to the Iraq myth has been recorded independently elsewhere by the historian Yusufu Q. Lawi (personal communication, January 1997). This example indicates that the raw material for making myths is virtually unlimited and, more importantly in this context, that writing does not necessarily freeze the process.

Ramadhani's and Kamera's contributions to Iraqw discourses on the past have had a significant influence because of characteristics attributed to the written word. The technical side is obvious; i.e., numerous (at least in the case of Kamera's book) and inexpensive copies of the written story were distributed and could thereby reach a large number of literate Iraqw differently located in time and space. These Swahili texts became particularly influential and authoritative because they were the very first descriptions of Iraqw culture presented in an intelligible language to the Iraqw public. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, comparative evidence suggests that the written word tends to have considerable authority,

sometimes even magical and healing power, in a population that is moving toward literacy. Thus, several contributing factors made the Iraq connection appear authentic and authoritative, thereby creating tradition. The other side of the coin appears to be that these processes imply fossilization or fixation of the myth, imprisoning it in the very letters that provided the power for its creation. The question then is whether, having lost its adaptability, the myth will survive in a world that is changing ever more rapidly.

Henige (1980:255-256) writes that “orality can free the present from imprisonment by the past because it permits the remembrance of aspects of that past .. to accord with ever-changing self-images” and that “one of the more attractive features of the oral mode is that it allows inconvenient parts of the past to be forgotten.” Parts of books, however, can also be forgotten, and this article has illustrated some adaptive features of the written version of the Iraq myth. First it was synthesized elegantly with the pre-existing myth of Ma/angwatay without causing internal contradictions or discontinuities. More recently, at least one interesting prelude has been added to the myth, and its vocabulary has even been updated in accordance with recent developments in African linguistics.

The best example of the potential adaptability of the written myth, however, is provided by the predecessors of the Iraq myth. Seligman’s version of the Hamitic hypothesis was oralized by European administrators, teachers, and missionaries, and underwent further transformation in the process that led to the new origin myth of the Iraqw. Reaching further back in time, the account of Noah and his sons is today, in a sense, identical to the original as it was written several thousand years ago. At the same time it has been interpreted, oralized, and popularized in preparation for reception by diverse peoples who have all produced their

own unique reinterpretations of the story. One of the results of this proliferation and of the continuous interaction between written and oral forms of this particular biblical story is the fact that we find it reappearing in myths and genealogies from all over the world. Even the Maori are recorded to have myths and genealogies linking themselves to Noah and the Middle East, and Fijians are able to provide detailed accounts of how they migrated along the same course as the Iraqw (in the Iraqw myth), before they set out in canoes from the shores of Tanganyika (France, 1966 and Kelly, 1940:241, both cited by Finnegan, 1988:113-115,119).

### ***Concluding remarks***

The story of the Iraqi origin of the Iraqw, I believe, emphasizes the point that myths must be analyzed in the light of their present and their own history before one proceeds to draw any conclusions about what the myth can reveal about history itself. This may lead to conclusions, such as those drawn here, that may falsify theories of grand migrations and long-distance culture contact, or may shatter the credibility of impressively consistent royal genealogies of 35 generations (Henige, 1980). This does not, however, mean that myth is a less important object of study for the historian, especially if we consider the myths that purport to be the product of science. Malinowski (1948 {1926}:145) has argued that myths are of limited value as historical evidence and should instead be analyzed as “social charters” or rationalizations for the social organization of a particular group. In the conclusion to his argument, he presents the following suggestion:

“Let me state once more that I have dealt in this book with savage myth, and not with the myth of culture. I believe that the study of mythology as it functions and works in primitive

societies should anticipate the conclusions drawn from the material of higher civilizations.” (Malinowski, 1948 {1926}:145)

Some 70 years after the publication of *Races of Africa*, the Hamitic hypothesis has all the characteristics that Malinowski attributed to myth. It is clear that the description of the migrations and the cultural influence of the Hamites were actually an ideological statement about the present and the future that had considerable political importance on the development (some would say underdevelopment) of an entire continent. Furthermore, it has become clear that the Hamitic myth has been rewritten dramatically in response to changing historical circumstances, such as the rise and demise of the slave trade, the beginnings of colonialism, and national independence in the 1960s. The Hamitic myth exemplifies well Malinowski’s (1948 {1926}:146) point that myth is “constantly regenerated; every historical change creates its mythology.”

The distinction between hypothesis and myth has been dissolved in the course of this discussion. The Iraqw have, in fact, simply borrowed a myth from another tribe who provide authenticity and authority to some of their own myths by calling them hypotheses or theories. The binary oppositions of human/subhuman, civilized/savage, and Christian/pagan that provided legitimacy for European intervention in Africa have changed in accordance with historical circumstances. There remains, however, an uncomfortable resemblance between the old colonial contrasts and the dichotomies that are currently applied in the encounter between the West and the rest. When science has become the dominant mode that orders lives and legitimizes actions, the science/nonsense dichotomy is perhaps no less powerful and potentially dangerous than the previous ones.

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## **“We are as sheep and goats”: Iraqw and Datoga discourses on fortune, failure and the future**

Like so many other pastoral and agro-pastoral peoples in Africa, the Datoga<sup>1</sup> and the Iraqw of northern Tanzania<sup>2</sup> have experienced dramatic changes during the course of this century. In this paper we would like to discuss the highly divergent manners in which these two neighbouring peoples, who have had close inter-ethnic bonds for centuries, perceive, talk about, and act upon the dramatic transformations connected to the distribution of land and livestock in the area where they reside. We will try to show how the encounter between two sets of beliefs and practices embedded in a particular historical-political context have had, and continue to have, considerable effects on the development and future prospects of the Datoga and the Iraqw.

Among the Datoga who still remain in northern Tanzania, processes of marginalization, impoverishment, and disintegration are today highly visible, and the Datoga increasingly perceive their future prospects as

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<sup>1</sup> Other variations in spelling include “Dadog”, “Datooga”, “Tatog”, and “Tatoga”. The Datoga category consists of some thirteen sub-sections which today are highly intermingled, and of which the Barabaig is numerically the largest.

We are following conventions of not conjugating ethnic terms according to sex and numbers.

<sup>2</sup> The majority of the two populations lives in the Mbulu, Karatu, Hanang and Babati Districts of northern Tanzania, although large numbers of Datoga have, in recent years, moved out of these districts. As a result of these migrations the Datoga may today be encountered in numerous other regions of the Tanzanian territory.

We carried out fieldwork in four separate locations in the western part of Hanang and the southern part of Mbulu districts of Arusha Region between 1989 and 1995. We would like to emphasize that we are in this paper primarily writing about the Iraqw and Datoga in the area where we have carried out fieldwork. There is good reason to expect that some of the ethnography we are presenting here may not be pertinent to Iraqw populations further north in Mbulu District, and even less so to the Datoga who have dispersed over vast areas of Tanzania.

bleak. This development has reached levels which the Datoga, in particular contexts, read as signs of an unavoidable end to their lineages, and thus to the continuation of Datoga life. In contrast to this, the Iraqw, as a quickly expanding population both geographically and demographically commonly talk of themselves as relatively successful and prosperous, and as a people who manage to manoeuvre victoriously through the challenges the modern world poses. We shall attempt to make sense of these diverging discourses on success and failure in a rapidly changing environment. The commentaries on such a substantial topic are obviously innumerable, complex and conflicting. We will try to do justice to some of this complexity while at the same time focusing on certain dominant notions which continuously influence and are influenced by the way people act.

Deviating ideas related to what “property” is, how wealth is measured, and what it is to be wealthy or poor in these two communities seem to be significant in this context. Iraqw notions of wealth in particular reverberate around cultivated fields and livestock. A poor or a pauper (*narkutmo*) will in Iraqw thought have neither cattle nor substantive fields for cultivation. The Iraqw have been described as having a “practical way of regarding stock”, and the fact that there is “little of the mystical about their attitude [to livestock]”, was listed by Meek (1953:161) as an important reason for the “outstanding” or “spectacular success” of the Mbulu de-stocking scheme in the 1950s (Ilfie, 1979:473; Winter, 1968:22).

Among the Datoga, the cattle herd is talked of as the only measure of true wealth. The Datoga expression *siida bar bar*, “a person without anything” refers to a man without cattle. A farmer who has no cattle, no matter the size of his fields, is referred to as a “person without anything”. In Datoga thought a major distinction is as such made between “people

with cattle” (*fuga dugwa*), and “people without fat to smear” (*fuga murjeewi*), i.e. people without cattle. Diverging perceptions on land, as “personal property” and as the “property of God” respectively, will also be shown to be of significance.

Our material points to the necessity of taking a fresh look at some central religious notions and ritual practices in which discourses on fortune, failure and the future are embedded. A focus on diverging perceptions surrounding sources of fertility and the essence of ritual power appears to be particularly revealing if we are to understand the dynamics of poverty and prosperity in this area.

### ***Situating the discourse***

The Datoga and the Iraqw have been classified as Southern Nilotic pastoralists and Southern Cushitic agro-pastoralists, and their numbers have been roughly estimated to some 50-100,000 and 500,000 individuals respectively.<sup>3</sup> The Iraqw subsist primarily on the cultivation of maize, beans, and sorghum. Most families also keep cattle, and some sheep, goats and chickens. In the area of study, this is increasingly a fitting description of Datoga subsistence as well.

The Datoga, or *Tara*, as they are called by the Iraqw, figure prominently in the latter’s songs and tales. Let us start out with the presentation of the story which comes closest to an Iraqw origin myth, since it pinpoints some central Iraqw moral norms, political strategies, and

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<sup>3</sup> The Iraqw figure is based on Mous (1992:1). The Datoga estimate is derived from Lane (1990:6) who indicates that there are between 30-50,000 Barabaig in Hanang District alone. Even a rough estimate of numbers is difficult to obtain due to lack of data on ethnic affiliation in Tanzanian censa.

their relationship with the neighbouring Datoga. The following is a condensed version of the story:<sup>4</sup>

Many years ago the Iraqw lived further to the south than what they do today, in the fertile land of Ma/angwatay. The people prospered and became rich and strong in the favourable environment. Iraqw youth gained courage as their health and wealth improved, and at a confident moment they demanded that their leading ritual expert (*qwaslarmo*) go to the Datoga and arrange a battle between the young men of the two peoples. The *qwaslarmo* refused, but the youth forced him to comply by kidnapping and threatening to kill his child. He went to talk to the Datoga, and large numbers of Datoga youth were eventually sent off to meet their Iraqw counterparts. The battle that ensued was disastrous for the Iraqw, and the survivors fled Ma/angwatay following the *qwaslarmo*. He led them to an area he by ritual means turned into a fertile and habitable land, today called Irqwa Da/aw.

A key issue in the story is the emphasis on the power and wisdom of the *qwaslarmo* and the elders in opposition to the rebellious youth. In defiance of the *qwaslarmo*'s words the youth forced violent conflict upon their community with catastrophic consequences. By their action they not only violated norms of legitimate political and religious authority, but they defied the strong ideological emphasis on non-confrontation and non-violence in Iraqw culture. The Datoga youth enter the stage not primarily as an enemy, but rather as a force that legitimately punishes those who have broken internal Iraqw norms. It is, however, hardly incidental that it is the Datoga who engage in battle with the Iraqw in the myth. We shall see below that the lesson of Ma/angwatay is strongly manifest in the way the Iraqw of this century are approaching the Datoga in an entirely different kind of battle, and, with an entirely different outcome.

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<sup>4</sup> The story about the land of Ma/angwatay has been recorded in slightly different versions by a number of researchers (Snyder, 1993:319; Thornton, 1980:205-206; Kamera, 1978:1-3; Fouquer, 1955:55; Nordbustad & Naman, 1978; Berger & Kiessling, n.d.:110-113; Ramadhani, 1955:1-4; Harri, 1989:2-4).

Where the story of Ma/angwatay ends, in Ireqwa Da/aw, the documented history of the Iraqw begins. The Iraqw were confined to this mountainous area until the beginning of this century when they started to move into the surrounding highlands. The subsequent population growth and the territorial expansion of the Iraqw has been a most spectacular feature of the general development of this region (see e.g. Mitchell, 1932:7; Winter & Molyneaux, 1963; Southall, 1961:161; Snyder, 1996:318; and Schultz, 1971). A great majority of the Iraqw today live in areas that were dominated by the Datoga and to some degree by the Maasai at the end of the 19th century, and the Iraqw expansion has been the single most important factor in the dramatic shrinkage of Datoga territory during this century.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the most striking feature of this expansion is that it has occurred at the expense of neighbouring peoples stereotyped as both aggressive and militarily strong, without having prompted any large scale retaliation or conflict.

Iraqw movements out of Ireqwa Da/aw coincided with the arrival of the European colonialists. Since the colonial times national policies have worked in favour of settled agriculture. Cultivating populations were perceived as easier to govern, to levy, and to draft as labourers. Nomadic pastoralism has moreover been discerned as non-compatible with mandatory primary education, advances of national health programmes, and development of the national economy. The creation of arbitrary borders, settlement schemes, cattle confiscation, and state subsidies to farmers, are policies that have worked against a pastoral adaptation. Agriculturalists have taken advantage of the favourable policies, and

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<sup>5</sup> The extent to which this has occurred is exemplified by the fact that even what originally was Barabaig Chiefdom, becoming Hanang District in 1985, is now dominated numerically by the Iraqw. See also Schultz (1971) for a graphical illustration of the Iraqw expansion into areas previously dominated by the Datoga.

Datoga land has not only shrunk due to Iraqw migration from the north, but to Nyaturu movements from the south, Iramba from the west, and a number of ethnic groups coming in from Babati in the east (Wada, 1975:67).

The rapid expansion of state-subsidized cash crop cultivation in the region after World War II continued unabated after independence. These policies were particularly successful among the Iraqw (Raikes, 1975b:96; Coulson, 1982:58,164) and implied an increasing rate of cultivator encroachment on Datoga land. Datoga land was again dramatically reduced when the Tanzania Canada Wheat Project took some 100,000 acres for large scale mechanized wheat farming at the Basotu plains in the 70s and 80s. The area seized by the wheat project amounts to “as much as 50% of the area that was once available to Barabaig herds for grazing” (Lane, 1991:278).

In their encounters with the colonial power crucial differences arose between the Iraqw and the Datoga mode of interaction with “the outside” world. While Iraqw leaders engaged in dialogue with the colonialists, the Datoga sought to keep the new rulers at a distance. Though there had been a certain degree of fascination for both peoples on the part of the European administrators,<sup>6</sup> their characterizations of the Iraqw and the Datoga were soon fixed in images of docile and peaceful agro-pastoralists and hostile and aggressive pastoralists. These stereotypes became increasingly powerful and consequential in the following century. Agriculture officer J. Hartley wrote in the Mbulu District book in 1942 (cited by Snyder, 1993:24) that the Iraqw “seem a tractable people”, whereas the Datoga were described as “practically unadministered” (Perham, 1976:103). The

policies against them reflected this stand. Public executions, recurring incidences of arbitrary imprisonment, forced enrolment in the army, collective cattle fines, and discrimination in resource allocation have characterized Datoga modern history, and indeed make up central parts of the Datoga calendar of this century.

The representations of the two peoples’ responses to the Maasai offensive at the end of the 19th century exemplify the stereotypes of the Iraqw as peaceful and defensive<sup>7</sup> and the Datoga as offensive and violent. While the Iraqw in Irqwa Da/aw, the core area of the Iraqw, built defensive subterranean caves in order to hide people and cattle from the Maasai scouts (Fosbrooke, 1954), the Datoga developed an institution which ensured rewards for the men who proved the most daring and effective in killing the enemy and capturing or recapturing cattle. This so-called “ritual killing” custom (*lilicht*) has up to this day been closely associated with the Datoga (Klima, 1970).

Aggression, warfare, raiding, and killing have been recurring themes in the pastoral literature (Bollig, 1990; Galaty, 1991; 1993; Sutton, 1993). Among the pastoral Datoga it is the Barabaig subsection in particular that has gained the dubious image as raiders and killers. Margery Perham, an influential lecturer in Government and Administration who travelled in the area in the 1920s, wrote that the Barabaig:

“cannot graduate as men and claim a wife until they have performed some valiant deed. The result is that no traveller in their country is safe, and the Barabaig are famous for the numbers of senseless and cruel murders they commit.” (Perham, 1976:103)

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<sup>6</sup> See Rekdal (1998) for a review of how the “Hamitic hypothesis” shaped the Europeans’ attitude towards the Iraqw and other “Hamites”, and in fact became a determining factor for the rise of a new Iraqw origin myth.

<sup>7</sup> Bagshawe (1926:64), one of the District Officers in Mbulu, describes the Iraqw as “experts in semi-passive resistance”.

The quote is quite representative for writings on the Barabaig, and reveals lack of knowledge (killing is not related to marriage among the Datoga) and lack of analytical distinction between ideology and practice. There is no question about the fact that throughout the years a number of killings have been carried out by the Datoga against individuals of neighbouring ethnic groups. But, highly erroneous accounts about what has taken place, as well as a lack of analysis about the particularities and socio-political contexts of each violent event have characterized both the older and many of the newer writings on the subject (e.g. Fouquer, 1955; Faust, 1969; Loiske, 1990:97; Wilson, 1952:44; Umesao, 1969:87). The scale of the killings has moreover been blown quite out of proportion.<sup>8</sup>

Waller and Sobania (1994:47) write:

“it is often asserted that pastoralism is by its nature aggressively warlike and expansionist, as communities seek more lands to accommodate their herds, which increase through breeding and raiding (Galaty, 1991) ... Though warfare and expansion are certainly an integral part of pastoral history, they are by no means the whole story ... peaceful interaction with the neighbours has generally been the norm except during short periods of extreme stress.”

The account below will provide substance to this statement. Datoga modern history has indeed been a history of recurring incidences of violence, but the violence is characterized not by *lilicht* killings but by confrontations with armed government forces, confiscation and killing of cattle, and by collective and random punishment and imprisonment of thousands of Datoga men (see e.g. Ndagala, 1991:82). During the course of the following analysis the images of the “peaceful” Iraqw and the “aggressive” Datoga will become more nuanced and ambiguous, and we believe, more true to real life.

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<sup>8</sup> See Blystad (n.d.; 1992) for reviews of the *lilicht* tradition.

The Iraqw have developed close ties with the Datoga.<sup>9</sup> The Iraqw notion *hoomo* is indicative in this context. *Hoomo* refers to a member of another ethnic group, and has clearly negative connotations. The Datoga are frequently said to be outside of this category (Rekdal, 1994:73-75). On their part, the Datoga never regarded the Iraqw targets and legitimate prey for their ritual killings. The relationship between the two, as we shall see below, is hardly unambiguous, but the two peoples do regard each other as associates and allies. Neither their mutual interest in the exchange of crops for cattle, nor the raids by the common enemy (the Maasai) during the second half of the 19th century, can sufficiently account for the intimacy of the Iraqw-Datoga relationship. More significant, but not unrelated to the above factors, is the fact that the two groups have intermarried extensively for as long as genealogies can take us back in time.<sup>10</sup> The complexity of the interaction is reflected by the numerous individuals who claim Datoga descent, but who live in Iraqw dominated areas, and who are in many cases virtually indistinguishable from the Iraqw themselves. Simultaneously, one will find large numbers of individuals of Iraqw clan affiliation who use Datoga language, dress and decoration in the Datoga dominated areas. These processes of incorporation of people from the one ethnic group to the other have been accompanied by a considerable diffusion of core cultural traits in both directions.

The intermingling of the two peoples has taken place to such a degree that the ethnic categories Iraqw and Datoga are becoming increasingly blurred. A consequence of these processes is that one single individual can legitimately introduce himself or herself as belonging to

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<sup>9</sup> These representations seem to be somewhat at odds with the more general thesis that conflict between pastoralists and agro-pastoralists has been more common than between pastoralists and agriculturalists who have often established relationships of mutual interdependence.

more than one ethnic group or category. We recorded numerous examples of people who, in various contexts, made use of a range of seemingly mutually exclusive “ethnic” labels. They appeared as Iraqw and Datoga, Mang’ati and Mbulu, as Barabaig, Gisamjanga and Bajuuta, or as Swahili, all according to the context. The picture is further complicated by the fact that certain clans have both Iraqw and Datoga branches, implying the ethnic ambiguity of whole clans. These ethnic labels thus increasingly appear as flexible categories, internally ambiguous and contradictory, and open to strategic manipulation.<sup>11</sup>

This complex scenario has important consequences for our discussion of “Iraqw” and “Datoga” idioms and practices, and it highlights the fact that the distinctions we attempt to explore are hardly as clear-cut and unproblematic as they may at first appear. It should be emphasized that it is the commentaries made by the people themselves about what is “Iraqw” and “Datoga” that we wish to discuss.

### ***“We are as sheep and goats”: Discourses on how to manoeuvre in a challenging world***

The Datoga was noticeably in affect when he responded to an enquiry about the consequences of graves being destroyed by the wheat project in Hanang. “How can our parents, whose houses have been levelled with the ground, ensure the growth of our lineages? The trees that were there sprouting with life are gone, and so are we.”

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<sup>10</sup> At least 25 of the approximately 150 Iraqw clans trace their origin to a male Datoga.

<sup>11</sup> A Datoga we interviewed right after he was released after 18 years of imprisonment said that the most astonishing about his meeting with his homeland was that “the land is not our any more”, and that “the Datoga and the Iraqw are almost indistinguishable now”.

A young Iraqw who was present commented on the incident at a later point by saying: "Talking about such matters is what makes the Datoga vulnerable. We, the Iraqw, know what to keep quiet about, and therefore we win. Our two tribes are as sheep and goats: the one is quietly watching the world before it is slowly moving; the other is passionately acting upon it for everyone to see and hear."

Statements like these were not out of the ordinary. The sheep/goat metaphor was frequently used by both the Iraqw and the Datoga to characterize modes of discourse. The sheep is in both Iraqw and Datoga thought a most noble animal, which due to its inherent grace and tranquillity is the animal sought for ritual sacrifice.<sup>12</sup> The docility of the sheep and the fieriness of the goat appears as quite revealing metaphors for certain aspects of the two peoples' discourse and action. Interestingly, the sheep/goat metaphor also has other denotations. Goats are known to be quicker and more intelligent than sheep. Sheep are rarely herded alone as they will roam aimlessly around if not led by goats. The metaphor is thus an ambiguous one, and is used by the Datoga to indicate their own wits and quick remarks which contrasts with the reserved demeanour and controlled commentary of the Iraqw.

It was our almost daily experience that the Datoga would share large and small events with us, talking openly about their thoughts, and frequently their longings, worries, fears, and pain.<sup>13</sup> In contrast to this, even after years of acquaintance, many Iraqw would talk to us only after thoroughly questioning us about our motives, and only after being reassured that no one, neither Iraqw nor Datoga, was listening. The Iraqw would moreover frequently present their stories in such a manner that the

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<sup>12</sup> The use of the docile sheep as a metaphor for the Iraqw is also reported from the Irqwa Da/aw area (Snyder, 1993:264-265).

information could not be taken at face value, i.e. it would often not reflect how the matters were actually experienced by the speaker. The secrecy, scepticism, and reserved demeanour of the Iraqw has been found quite noteworthy, and the phenomenon has repeatedly been referred to in introductions to ethnographic contributions from the area. These generalizations are based on more than the stereotypes made by outsiders, whether they were neighbouring ethnic groups or foreign researchers. The Iraqw themselves comment on this cultural feature, and its value is expressed in numerous Iraqw sayings and proverbs, as well as in folk tales (cf. e. g. Hauge, 1981; Kamera, 1978). Youth's alleged loss of ability to keep secrets is indeed referred to by present day Iraqw elders as a sign of the degeneration of Iraqw culture.<sup>14</sup>

The emphasis among the Iraqw on the virtue of secrecy does not, however, imply that they are generally without interest in telling stories or in getting their opinions across. Pride about their achievements and successes was a common topic of discussion. Stories about how the Iraqw were outwitting the Datoga, about Iraqw imaginative strategies, their ability to maintain a mute and unpretentious image, and last, but not least, stories about their wisdom of keeping outsiders outside when deemed appropriate, were brought up on innumerable occasions. Extensive knowledge of medicines, spells and rituals to be utilized when facing problems or new challenges, was said to be crucial. According to Iraqw informants, this knowledge was continuously manipulated in their quest for land and for women who would enlarge Iraqw families and clans. As

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<sup>13</sup> E. K. Lumley, a District Commissioner in the 1930s, makes the following comment about the Barabaig: “In manner they were frank and extrovert, and gave their views to me and others without hesitation” (1976:79).

<sup>14</sup> See Salzman (1983) and Edgerton (1971) for discussions on the contrasting patterns of behaviour of pastoralists and cultivators. Their conclusions are very much in line with the data we are presenting here.

proof of their success, the Iraqw would often refer to the land they had recently seized, and to the growth of their clans.

***“We are as hyenas and the lion”*: The story of acquiring land**

A typical account of how the Iraqw manage to enter and take over Datoga land was presented by a central informant who told us about how he managed to get his family settled in a Datoga dominated area:

We had for several years been ready to move from Endagulda. My father had left my mother with thirteen children and many sons, and the land in Endagulda was becoming scarce and overcrowded. We had a relative south in Endabalangda, so we decided to pay him a visit and ask about the conditions in the area. Rumours told that the land was fertile and plenty there, but we were reluctant to enter the area since it was Datoga land. But, we went and talked to our cousin, and he confirmed what we had heard: “There is land here, good soil, and water is not far away. From here it all depends upon our wits.”

We decided to give it a try, and started the procedure which eventually facilitated the movement of our whole family. Our cousin went to visit the Datoga neighbour he was on best terms with, a man who had married his mother’s sister. He told him he had some brothers who were in great trouble because of the drought, and who had nowhere to herd their cattle. He asked him to accept us on the land one dry season. Nothing troubles the Datoga more than to hear that cattle suffer, so he accepted the request, but stressed that we should be expected to move when the rains started.

A few of us moved onto the new land, and later more came, all of us living crowdedly in a tiny grass hut. We tried to hide the fact that we were so many, since our only task supposedly was to herd a few cows. During the nights we put up a thorn fence enclosing about an acre where we planned to cultivate the following season. We hooked our enclosure onto the fenced-in area where our cousin kept his cattle grazing at the end of the dry season, so the Datoga would not notice what was going on.

It all went well at first, but one day our neighbouring Datoga discovered that something beyond the agreement was taking place. There were meetings, frightening meetings, where it seemed like we would have to get out of the area immediately. But we told about the hardships at home, and that it was indeed a temporary solution in order to save the lives of cattle, women and children. Our cousin and his Datoga in-law supported our pleas and confirmed our good intentions. We managed to stay on, but at this point we contacted a ritual expert who supplied us with medicines that diminish Datoga vigilance, which we applied to the surrounding land.

Keeping a low profile, we continued to struggle, constructing the fence and applying medicine. The complaints ceased for a time, only to return later with greater force. At this point we realized that we needed more help. Several of the village leaders were Iraqw and could read and write, and it was not the first time they had assisted immigrants in matters like these. We gave them some shillings, and the complaints soon ceased. We don't know exactly what happened, but the main Datoga complainants have moved to Manyoni, so we are fine now. These days our children can even play freely outside.

Similar stories were numerous, and many of them implied that this type of movement was not a new trend. Iraqw informants readily recognized that the Iraqw needed the Datoga to prosper, but emphasized that secrecy, inventiveness and manipulation in their relation with the Datoga ensured their continued growth and well-being. The conquest of Datoga land is a common theme in Iraqw ritual prayers:

Those people from the south,  
from another tribe.  
Those who are Barabaig.  
Their island there,  
let us take it from them.  
The bracelet which their elders wear,  
let it be lost and let our elder pick it up.  
(Snyder, 1993:299)

The Datoga hold that they are well aware of the manner in which the Iraqw enter their land. Informants would tell us that they know about the first careful Iraqw “intruders” who are later accompanied by their numerous relatives, about the efficacy of the medicines they apply to their fields, and about the “clever words” and contacts of the Iraqw. However, although the Datoga may talk with aversion about the strategies of their Iraqw neighbours, the Datoga frequently choose not to directly confront what they regard as “invading” people. Instead they will often move away and commonly leave nothing behind that can help them to reclaim the land they lived on at a later date. The following verse from a Datoga cattle song talks about Iraqw farmers, their witchcraft, and Datoga reaction to it:

I start out the song of the bull Gillagen  
 who has white fore feet  
 The fore feet are not like those of the Iraqw<sup>15</sup>  
 who only cultivate  
 If he [the bull] says let us move in the middle of the night,  
 I start to sharpen the axe if it is dull  
 I call on the women to milk the cows  
 so that we can get off to Gideweer  
 If the cows bellow  
 the Iraqw will hear it,  
 and they will use their witchcraft if you are near them  
 I do not want to be bothered by their witches  
 so I got away early,  
 and moved to the place where Gillagen said:  
 “here we are agreed upon” [by the spirits]

Datoga informants told us that they looked upon the Iraqw as annoying weeds. The expression *neyekcheanda siginiida* refers to the Iraqw

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<sup>15</sup> “White forefeet” refers to the reluctance of many Datoga to engage their oxen in the work in front of the ploughs. They dislike the hardships the bulls suffer when they are used to farm the land, and prefer to keep their “forefeet white”. Despite the fact that they have suitable oxen to pull a plough, many Datoga use hand hoes or donkeys to cultivate.

(*neyekcheanda*) being like the *siginiida*, a type of weed it is almost impossible to get rid of. The *siginiida*'s roots grow laterally underground, suddenly penetrating the surface of the earth, sprouting and exhibiting excessive growth within a short period of time. Informants would tell us that when the Iraqw first moved onto their land they knew they had come to stay, and ultimately force people to move, just like the *siginiida* does.

Ideologically the Datoga disdain living for long periods of time in one spot, and moving is praised in song and myth, despite the fact that the Datoga themselves are increasingly adapting fairly permanent settlement patterns. Ensuring the livelihood of the herds through the search for satisfactory grazing and watering conditions is the primary incentive for the Datoga to move away from the land on which they reside. Such moves are moreover linked with the concept that land is “growing old” (*wosindang'yeanyiida*, lit. “old land”) and needs renewal. The complex traditional Datoga rotational grazing system which implies moving between a number of different forage regimes is based upon a comprehensive knowledge of local species of grasses, herbs, shrubs, and trees, on seasonal changes and geographical variability, and on disease threats to human beings, livestock and vegetation.<sup>16</sup> The Iraqw also recognize that land needs rest and renewal, but to a large extent solve the problem by extensive use of cow dung as fertiliser, inter-cropping and fallowing.

The diverging manner in which the Iraqw and the Datoga perceive their supreme deities to acknowledge possession of land is most noteworthy in this context. For the Datoga, land is the property of *Aseeta*, and can only be used temporarily by human beings and livestock. The Datoga do, however, have complex norms of rights to “protect land” (*weta*

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<sup>16</sup> See Lane (1991) for a detailed description of the traditional grazing rotation among the Datoga of Lagaujeanda in Southern Hanang District.

*ng'yeanyiida*) and “usufruct rights to land” (*ghang'wanyi ng'yeanyiida*). These imply rights for either the entire ethnic category, for clans, or for individuals, and involve rights over homesteads, certain trees, water sources, sacred locations, enclosures of grass reserves for grazing, and farming land (Lane, 1991:233-235). But the rights do not involve individual ownership, and there are powerful notions of what is morally acceptable and what is not. Claims to large areas of land reserves (*radaneda*) or permanent possession of land is perceived as “a sin against God” (*ring'eed Aseeta*). Such impetuous acts are said to awaken the wrath of the spirits and the deity, and cause misfortune and death.<sup>17</sup> Political leaders' continuous attempts to encourage Datoga to legalize land titles have met deaf ears.

The Iraqw acknowledge rights to possession of land which go beyond those of the Datoga: farming land is regarded as a particular individual's property as long as he cultivates it. Datoga informants told us that the Iraqw acted as if they “owned” the land they lived on, and made claims on land which for a Datoga were immoral both in scope and content.<sup>18</sup> The inclination of the Datoga to move is also connected to their conceptualizations of land and spirits. Hardships of people or cattle are read as signs or warnings from the spirits that time has come to change habitat. Disease, drought, or deaths perceived as exceeding the normal are in this way partially linked up with the relationship between human beings and the moral authority of the spirits. We shall return to this below.

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<sup>17</sup> See Lane (1991) for a discussion on Barabaig concepts of property.

<sup>18</sup> As Yusufu Q. Lawi (personal communication) has pointed out for us, the contrast between the two ways of conceptualizing rights to land may be a recent development related to a more general “shift towards a market-oriented economy” among the Iraqw, and “a rather quick transformation of the values, attitudes and beliefs which in the past has held human society in organic unity with nature” (Lawi, 1992:51).

Datoga informants held that living crowdedly also cause spread of pollution and illness among human as well as livestock populations. Witchcraft, rare among the Datoga, was said to proliferate with the arrival of the Iraqw. The few Datoga witches who were pointed out to us were all said to have “Iraqw blood”. As was expressed in the song presented above, living close to the Iraqw is therefore also associated with dangers of becoming a target of these evil forces.<sup>19</sup> With this understanding it is not difficult to grasp that it makes many Datoga uneasy to stay on in one location for a long period of time, particularly when they are surrounded by Iraqw farmers. Many will nonetheless today choose to remain in one location due to lack of livestock, or in some few instances, as part of a strategy of dividing up wealthy polygamous households into several units.

The “Iraqw problem” is, however, a continuous one since, as the Datoga see it, the Iraqw are bound to follow in the footsteps of the Datoga. The Datoga will frequently substitute the sheep/goat metaphor with another dichotomous animal metaphor when they describe the manner in which new land is secured. They refer to themselves as the lion who is daringly going in front, being the “killer” and the true conqueror. The Iraqw are the hyenas who follow behind, and who consume the rewards earned by Datoga courage, strength and hardships.<sup>20</sup> An Iraqw informant referred to the same phenomenon by citing an Iraqw proverb, “The first harvest is eaten by birds”, and explained that the Iraqw will always be able to follow the Datoga “because they are marrying our daughters”.

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<sup>19</sup> This observation is in accord with Baxter’s assertion that witchcraft accusations are relatively rare among pastoral peoples in East Africa, and that when they occur, they are frequently directed at strangers or outsiders (Baxter, 1972).

<sup>20</sup> The metaphor is highly ambiguous as both “the spirits of the dead” (*gi’i*) and witches (*da/aluuse*) are associated with hyenas. When the hyenas cry at night, a common comment among the Datoga is that “the Iraqw have come with their hyenas”.

### ***The story of acquiring wives***

A brief look at the dynamics at work in connection with the exchange of women, and indirectly of children, is of significance in this context, since the logic involved in the acquisition of wives seems to be similar to the one we have encountered when talking about Iraqw acquisition of land.

Let us grow fat  
 Let us press to the north  
 And also press to the south  
 And let us increase our power  
 Let us trod the mountains under our feet  
 let us take the young women of other tribes as brides  
 Young women, come from afar, and give birth in our land  
 Women, come from afar, and increase the offspring in our land  
 Cows, come from afar, and increase the offspring in our land  
 Sheep, come from afar, and increase the offspring in our land  
 (Wada, 1978:48)

There is a place in the south  
 Where is that place?  
 There among the Barabaig.  
 The cattle thoroughfares remaining between the fields  
 Now even these are finished (by us)  
 Like this we shall finish it all  
 The Barabaig women  
 Oh yes  
 Shall stoop  
 To take our hoes in their hands  
 (Thornton, 1980:122)<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> It is revealing that these texts are recorded in areas with populations far more homogeneously Iraqw than what is the case in border areas where we conducted our research. We have made recordings from numerous Iraqw ritual occasions in the southern Mbulu and Hanang districts, comprising several thousand pages of transcripts, but did not encounter statements about the Iraqw incorporating, taking over, or alienating Datoga land or women which were as explicit as those presented in the texts above (and those below from Snyder, 1993; and Wada, 1969). The reason for this should be connected to the fact that both Datoga and Iraqw are commonly present at the larger ritual occasions in the area of our study, and it would obviously not be

As we see in these Iraqw prayers, the theme of acquisition, as well as that of incorporation and conquest, do appear both in discourses on seizing new land and on acquiring wives.

Datoga intermarriage with Iraqw women often seems to be perceived and talked about in a different manner than what is the case when Iraqw men are marrying Datoga women. Intermarriage with Iraqw women has been, and to some degree still is, thought of as a Datoga strategy for getting out of a cycle of poverty (see e.g. Talle & Holmqvist, 1979). Today, however, it is not only poor Datoga who marry Iraqw women. It is quite common for educated Datoga men to marry Iraqw women with school education. The typical way of talking about intermarriage between Datoga men and Iraqw women nonetheless appears to be Datoga men unpopular on the marriage market going to the Iraqw to search for a wife, e.g. men with handicaps, men who have got into mischief, or men who are struck by misfortune or poverty. The last category is not an insignificant group. One poor Datoga man whom we first encountered while he was cutting grass on the hospital grounds in order to pay off the bills for his Datoga wife who had just died, later married an Iraqw woman. The woman, according to the man, had “exceptional farming skills” and would most certainly get their life back on track.

The Iraqw women who were initially given in marriage to the Datoga were also said to have had certain hardships which affected their marriageability status in their own society. They were often women who had become pregnant before marriage, or who had lost an illegitimate child while still nursing it. These incidents are perceived as threatening to the

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appropriate to voice such sentiments in the presence of the people who are to be “conquered”.

surroundings, causing pollution (*doroway* or *xawi*) and requiring extensive quarantining (*meeta*). The Datoga man, in the example above, married an Iraqw woman who had had several pregnancies out of wedlock. As a factor promoting inter-ethnic marriage between Datoga men and Iraqw women, however, the pollution beliefs are becoming less significant because these unfortunate girls are becoming less feared among educated and christianised Iraqw.

The vantage point for marriage pattern between Iraqw men and Datoga women is to a certain degree a consequence of the factors we have mentioned above; Iraqw women marrying Datoga men implies the creation of an affinal relation which can later be exploited by male Iraqw relatives in search for land (e.g. Rekdal, 1994:95-96). The sparsely populated Datoga areas have been particularly attractive for Iraqw men who were rich in cattle and who would, for this reason, be popular on any marriage market in the region. When Datoga give their daughters in marriage to economically powerful Iraqw individuals they seek to ensure the well-being of their daughters and simultaneously create affinal alliances of substantial political and economic potential. These immigrating largely pastoral Iraqw moreover often secure their position on the land by marrying additional Datoga wives, thus establishing further and stronger ties to various sections of the dominant population in the area.<sup>22</sup> The individual who undoubtedly was the richest in cattle in the area where we conducted our second fieldwork appears to have followed precisely such a strategy. As a wealthy Iraqw cattle owner with affinal ties to the Datoga, he moved into a Datoga dominated area and in the coming years married

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<sup>22</sup> Yusufu Q. Lawi suggests (personal communication, June 1998) that an additional motive among these Iraqw for marrying Datoga women would be that the latter are generally regarded as having greater skills related to the tending and caring for cattle than do their Iraqw female counterparts.

three Datoga women. Several of the man’s sons are today engaged in mechanized agriculture, and cultivate vast areas of land which only a generation ago was Datoga pasture. Evidence from Hanang and Mangola indicates that similar processes have taken place throughout the region. Tomikawa (1970) and Fukui (1970b) mention largely pastoral Iraqw who live among the Datoga and marry their women. Tomikawa describes the phenomenon as “assimilation”, and Fukui claims that “their lives are not different from those of the Datoga”. To what extent these processes may be talked of as “assimilation” or “incorporation” can possibly be questioned, but the fact that Iraqw male immigrants retain their clan affiliation implies that ties and obligations are maintained which may be activated by other Iraqw on the search not only for pasture, but as is increasingly the case, for areas to cultivate.

We can broadly sum up this scenario in the following manner: Both Iraqw and Datoga men marry women from the other ethnic category for strategic reasons, but the primary motivating factors behind these interethnic marriages seem to differ between the two. While Datoga men who for some reason are undesirable as marriage partners amongst their own seek Iraqw wives in order to reproduce their lineages and to gain the cultivating skills that can ensure the well-being of their families, Iraqw men who marry Datoga women are often successful individuals who seek Datoga wives in order to get access to new land for grazing. Both cases, we argue, establish kinship relations which may later be mobilised by Iraqw who need access to new land, both for grazing and cultivation.

Tension which arise in households with both Iraqw and Datoga wives is a common theme in Datoga song and tale:

My husband married an Iraqw woman  
She is like an Iramba

who cannot wear the leather skirt of the Datoga  
 I will not talk to her and I will not compete with her  
 We are not equal  
 I don't want to be compared with a woman  
 who is more burden than help  
 This women can't cross a river  
 she doesn't know how to walk  
 She is like the watchmen of Mbulu  
 who deprive people of their rights.

...

When I was still in confinement  
 I went to milk the cows in the evening  
 The Iraqw woman came up behind me  
 She made noise like a vulture  
 because of her greed for milk  
 When my children cried  
 I told them to keep quiet  
 A woman has entered this home  
 who has no shame  
 She acts like a poisonous scorpion  
 and prevents Datoga children from getting their milk

Both the Iraqw and the Datoga continuously denounce various aspects of one another's culture. The quiet comments about the others' dubious or evil traits and mischiefs in one context, however, are substituted by open demonstrations of friendship and brotherhood in other contexts. While conflict and controversy continue to go hand in hand with comradeship and co-operation, the crux of the problem is visibly apparent to everyone: The Iraqw are taking over Datoga land.

The "docile sheep" appears throughout the last several pages to have gained qualities beyond those of quietude, gentleness, and nobility. The docility seems rather to have been substituted by assertiveness, initiative and conquest, while the fieriness and passion of the goat have been replaced by avoidance and withdrawal. The following verses from Iraqw and Datoga ritual prayers highlight this point:

We [the Iraqw] will be alive forever  
Oh! our mother land!  
They were born on this land  
from where we have come  
We have accepted alien tribes.  
The authority falls on us.  
They have accepted the rule and the order of our community.  
(Wada, 1969:120)

And when their spears have been stuck into the ground,  
Let them use the hoes which have been used by us ...  
And the Barabaig who decides to live amongst us,  
let him merge with our tribe and become Iraqw  
(Snyder, 1993:303)

Spirits, whose hands are of mastery  
the Datoga are calling you  
We, the daughters of the houses  
who are neither going west nor east  
If we go east to the Mbugwe we are speared  
If we go to the Iraqw we are called names  
The Iraqw have never made us fertile  
they did not cause our lineages to thrive  
And to heaven we cannot go  
There is no path

### ***On space and spirits***

In the next section we would like to move from the discourses on land and livestock, fortune and failure, to an encounter between differing religious concepts and ritual practices. We would like to focus on certain central concepts of faith among these two peoples, as we believe this is essential for reaching a better understanding of the diverging discourses we have outlined above. Important aspects of the relationship between the Iraqw and the Datoga are pinpointed by the activities of their ritual experts and by certain characteristics of the respective clusters of beliefs they derive

their legitimacy and power from. We shall argue that these beliefs and practices influence the two peoples’ potential access to resources.

Both the Iraqw and the Datoga traditional religions have high gods, called *Looaa* and *Aseeta* respectively. These supreme beings appear to be relatively distanced from the everyday life of people, but are regarded as the ultimate sources of fertility and blessings for people, cattle and land.

The land is both in Datoga and Iraqw thought inhabited by the spirits of the dead. The contrasting significance placed on these spirits is, however, most noteworthy. The transformation of a human being to a spirit at death by means of the *bung’eed* ceremony is a prominent feature in Datoga ritual life. Certain distinguished men and women are buried “officially”, i.e. a decision is reached to honour a particular person with an elaborate funeral ceremony in which large numbers of people, men and women, young and old, are involved. The corpse is placed in a foetus-like position in a burial mound which is enlarged in height and width for nine months, after which time the deceased is said to be reborn into the spirit world. This takes place in front of the “entire” Datoga community in grandiose displays of fertility and growth.<sup>23</sup> The large burial mound will gradually deteriorate and through the years be transformed into a sacred grove of trees which is sought for blessings and redemption, both by individuals and by groups of people, for many generations after “the spirit was born”. The reborn spirits (*meanga* or *fuguuta ng’yeanyiida*, literally, “ancestors of the land”) become the guardians of Datoga fecundity and well-being, but may also act punitively towards individuals, or towards the community as a whole, as a response to immoral behaviour. The spirits appear visibly in the form of certain small black snakes which often enter

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<sup>23</sup> In connection with large funerals (*bung’eed*) several thousand Datoga from all over Tanzania and quite a few Iraqw may be present the last day of the ceremony.

Datoga homesteads. Their voices are heard through female mediums, they frequently express both anger and advice via the dreams of the diviners, and they are continuously called upon in prayer. In Datoga thought the spirits, both male and female, are the mediators between *Aseeta* and the people, and thus facilitate the communication between them.

The significance of the spirits "of the dead" is rather restricted among the Iraqw. The funerals are far more limited in scale and scope, and are commonly only attended by the immediate family and neighbours. The dead are transformed into spirits (*gi'i*), but *gi'i* are rarely referred to or called upon in prayer, and graves are not returned to for sacrifice or prayer by anyone but the immediate relatives (cf. Winter, 1964; 1968:7). Unlike the Datoga *meanga*, the influence of the Iraqw *gi'i* is said to have mainly negative impact upon the living. Any sacrifice made to them is explicitly motivated by a wish to keep them content and at a distance. While the *meanga* are invariably spirits of elders with numerous descendants, and may adequately be translated as "ancestor spirits", the *gi'i* may well be the spirits of young members of society who did not have offspring at the time of their death.

The *daremgajeega*, certain members of six clans who have both healing and prophetic powers, are perceived as the mundane extension of the Datoga *meanga*. They may even be referred to by the same term, and are regarded as earthly guardians of the Datoga moral order. Their faithful and authentic replication of ritual activity is perceived as being a vital part of ensuring that their community is blessed with fertile women and herds by satisfied spirit protectors. The distress which follows incidents of immoral behaviour or a deviation in the notions and practices which constitute the "Datoga", particularly on part of the *daremgajeega*, is

substantial. The disputes and anxiety which arose in response to the death of Gidashiid are indicative of this phenomenon:

Gidashiid, a prominent member of one of the most prestigious *daremgajeega* clans, died in the fall of 1994. He was not very old, and had appeared healthy until just days before he died. He died at Haydom Lutheran Hospital, his body covered in blisters, and the doctors concluded that the cause of death was a rare infection. The Datoga community immediately initiated a search for the ultimate reason behind this peculiar and morbid death. It was of great importance to reveal what had taken the life of Gidashiid. In their opinion, it was not only the life of one man which was at stake, but the fertility and health of an entire community. Despite the disturbing circumstances of his death, he was now being honoured with an elaborate funeral ceremony which was to bring blessings and fecundity upon the Datoga community.

A number of explanations were brought forward during the nine months of preparation for the final phase of his funeral. Some centred around the ritual powers of other *daremgajeega* who were accused of fighting with Gidashiid to the point that he died. Others argued that some Iraqw were envious of this man's ritual competence and killed him with their remedies or sorcery. That some Iraqw were envious of Gidashiid's son's agricultural success was well known, and this was also brought up to account for his death.

It then became apparent that Gidashiid's inclination to incorporate foreign elements into Datoga rituals was of great concern to many Datoga. Gidashiid had always been fond of inviting strangers to his home. This was thought of as a curious but permissible and amicable aspect of Gidashiid's personality. What was less tolerable, however, was that he had accepted missionary activity in his homestead, had welcomed spectators during important ritual sessions, and had allowed picture taking and sound recording at such occasions. He had lately involved the male author of this paper in the ritual *ginealda ghamunga*, in which he initiated two of his sons and the anthropologist into the elders' world of handling and consuming honey mead, the most significant medium used in communication between human beings and spirits. Through this act, it was said, Gidashiid might have brought the wrath of the spirits upon himself to the point that he was removed from earthly life.

The controversy over the cause of Gidashiid’s death once again exemplifies the hidden struggle between the Iraqw and the Datoga. More importantly in this context however, is that the discourse highlights the ideal role of the *daremgajeega* as guardians of an eternal Datoga moral order. Irregularity in a *daremnyand*’s (singular) thought and practice is perceived as a serious threat to Datoga life and prosperity.

The Iraqw *qwaslarmo* may act as ritual expert, healer, diviner, or prophet, not unlike the Datoga *daremgajeega*. Their roles and the manner in which power is attributed to them, however, are rather different. The ultimate role of the *qwaslare* (plural) is not to guard an eternal moral ordinance, and their authority is derived not from unique links with the spirits. Rather, the *qwaslarmo*’s ritual power is, to a large extent, drawn from sources entirely external to Iraqw culture and the spirits. Their legitimacy as healers, diviners and ritual experts seems in fact to partially derive from the foreign ethnic origin of the *qwaslarmo* clans (see article IV).

Another category of central ritual importance in the Iraqw community is the *kahamuse*. One of their roles is to obtain from the *qwaslare* the “medicine” (*maso aya*) required for the communal rituals of purification and protection of the land, rituals which they lead and supervise. The *kahamuse* earlier also had the responsibility of distributing land to Iraqw immigrants and others who wished to establish a household in their locality. The *kahamusmo* (singular) and the *qwaslarmo* represent the two most central positions of ritual and political authority within traditional Iraqw society. A focus on their roles may further our understanding of the connection between Iraqw religion and Iraqw expansion into areas dominated by other ethnic groups.

The now deceased *kahamusmo* Tua Masay told us that he had originally lived in Irqwa Da/aw. In the beginning of the 1950s he was sent into the Iraqw expansion areas by Nade Bea, the most powerful *qwaslarmo* this century. Tua Masay was given medicines in order to protect himself and the Iraqw emigrants who followed him. The land he moved into had, up to that point, been infested with the tse-tse fly and was only sparsely populated by Datoga. He settled in Maghang approximately 12 kilometres from the Harar mountain. This mountain, whose characteristically conical shape may be seen in the distance from the outskirts of Irqwa Da/aw, is central in Iraqw cosmology. It was feared as a place of the cursed, and the expanding Iraqw now found themselves living in close proximity to it. In a ritual held at the foot of Harar, Tua Masay “undid the curse” of the mountain, opening the surrounding area for Iraqw expansion. The great significance of this event is reflected in the way it is spoken about in ritual prayers today, forty years after it took place. The following text was recorded at a harvest celebration held in an Iraqw dominated village close to Harar in 1994:

Hey! Listen all of you  
 Let us continue to live in peace (x 3)  
 We live in this place  
 There is a place  
 That place is Harar  
 That place used to be cursed  
 We have removed the evil  
 Red *tsangwali* (plant used as medicine)  
 Barren *hhamandu* (plant used as medicine)  
 That curse, let it be turned around and made good  
 Like a gourd adorned  
 Our brothers have moved there  
 Let the calves be branded there  
 Let that curse be turned around and made good  
 Like a gourd adorned

The pragmatism and inventiveness that characterize the lifting of the curse of Harar, can also be discerned in a number of other events referred to in the Iraqw ethnography. Thornton (1980:124,147,244), who was struck by the “ad hoc” nature of Iraqw rituals, provides examples of how Iraqw leaders used similarly innovative means in order to achieve their goals, such as the opening of the northern expansion areas and the establishing of peaceful relations with the Maasai. The stories of the victories of Iraqw political or religious leaders in fact often focus as much on the wits and clever strategies of particular men as on the strength of their ritual powers.<sup>24</sup>

The contrasting properties of the ritual experts of the Iraqw and the Datoga may be illustrated by the kind of relationship they established with the colonial administration. Gidamowsa, who was the most influential among the Datoga ritual experts at the beginning of this century, was captured and hanged by the Germans in 1908 (Jellicoe, 1969:5). In contrast, the most powerful among the Iraqw ritual experts during the colonial period, Nade Bea, “came down four-square on the side of government” (Meek, 1953:161) and became “a great ally to have going for one”, according to the District Commissioner (Allen & Fry, 1979:85). According to Ramadhani (1955:12), Nade Bea was even awarded “King George Certificate of Badge and Honour” by the British.

We will argue that we are witnessing the encounter between two contrasting sets of religious concepts and practices. Datoga religion is centred around the *meanga*, who either reside on the earth, as *daremgajeega*, or under the earth, as spirits, and who guide and protect

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<sup>24</sup> See e.g. Berger and Kiessling (n.d.:97-101) for a story about a man without “magical powers” who manages to outwit a powerful ritual expert.

Datoga fertility with reference to eternal moral norms. The Iraqw, on the other hand, are guided by ritual leaders whose lack of strong ties to the ancestral spirit world give them a different base of power, and what appears to be altogether freer arms in their dealings with religious notions and ritual practices. The characteristically manipulative and innovative activity of the Iraqw ritual leaders should, however, not lead us to think that they are not acting as guardians of Iraqw culture. On the contrary, what is important to note is the manner in which they contribute to incorporate new elements (like modern health services, market economy, or the Harar mountain) in ways which simultaneously preserve fundamental Iraqw beliefs and practices (Rekdal, 1994, see also article I). The ritual redefinition of Harar may as such be regarded as an event which illustrates the manner in which the flexibility of Iraqw ritual promotes social change while simultaneously ensuring cultural continuity.

We have tried to show that the encounter between the dynamic Iraqw religious concepts and practice and the powerful but less adaptable Datoga religion thus creates grounds for advantageous Iraqw moves into Datoga land. Ideas of “space” and ideas of “spirits” must thus be analyzed hand in hand if we are to reach further understanding of the manner in which wealth is shifting hands in Hanang and Mbulu. Most significant in this context is the fact that the “aggression” expressed in Iraqw daily discourse and ritual prayers under particular historic and political conditions is realized in actual practice. The Datoga “island in the south” is indeed being “finished” by the Iraqw, and the remaining Datoga in the former Barabaig Chiefdom find themselves complying with “the rule and the order of [Iraqw] community”, as was expressed in the Iraqw texts presented above. Perhaps the most powerful illustration of what is taking place is the sight of Datoga labourers on Iraqw fields. These pastoralists

who so strongly dislike "scratching the earth" under which their powerful spirits reside, may today be seen tilling the land with the Iraqw as their patrons. The new order which is ever more often transforming Datoga pastoralists into docile labourers on Iraqw farms, is, to the Iraqw, a visible manifestation of their successful strategies of peaceful conquest. The Datoga are literally "putting their spears in the ground" and "taking our hoes in their hands". To the Datoga, the sight is a reversal of the traditional inter-ethnic ranking, and one of the many disturbing signs of what lies ahead.

Again it should be emphasized that the scenario we have outlined cannot be understood outside of a larger political context. During the 70s and 80s the Tanzania Canada Wheat Project (TCWP) ploughed down more than 50 burial mounds in order to clear 100,000 acres of Datoga land for mechanized large scale wheat farming (Lane, 1991:292). For the Datoga the destruction of these graves meant the demolition of the homes of their guardian spirits, the extermination of sanctuaries for prayer, shrines for offerings, and sacred refuges where calm and solace had been sought for generations.

Statements by Datoga such as "the houses of our spirits are destroyed", "our women are ceasing to wear the leather skirt", "brothers are fighting", "there is no more respect in the world", "the Datoga marry like dogs nowadays", "our children are eating maize now", all point to the manner in which the Datoga world is changing in ways perceived as threatening. Such statements are frequently presented together with more direct references to the poor physical condition of the landscape, the herds, and the human population: "the grass is dying", "these days calves don't thrive", "our herds are wasting away", and "our children are dying". The ultimate consequence of this scenario is the frequently expressed notion of

"Datoga lineages coming to an end", and of "the death of the land" (*miyeeda ng'yeanyiida*).

### **Concluding remarks**

We have argued that differing motions and notions among the Iraqw and the Datoga need to be recognized as a significant part of the dynamics of poverty and prosperity in the area in question. We should like to emphasise that our aim has not been to turn from stereotypes of "aggressive" pastoralists to another set of simplified and outdated models presenting pastoralists as passive spectators to a dying way of life. In this paper we have rather tried to emphasise the importance of incorporating detailed analyses of the dynamics in local encounters in our accounts if we are to gain further insights into booms and blows to agricultural and pastoral adaptations respectively.

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# Cross-cultural healing in East African ethnography<sup>1</sup>

## ***Introduction***

A prominent feature of health seeking behaviour among the Iraqw of northern Tanzania is a marked tendency to seek healers from other ethnic groups. The ideology underlying this practice is the perception that the origin of the most powerful healing is external to Iraqw culture. Examples of cross-cultural therapeutic relations are frequently mentioned in ethnographic accounts of other ethnic groups in East Africa, but this feature has rarely been the object of in-depth description and analysis. The reason for this neglect may be sought in various historically embedded perspectives on Africa and African culture. Firstly, the pre-colonial and colonial European image of Africa was one of separate “tribes” which had limited contact apart from conflict and warfare. Inter-tribal exchange of healers and ritual experts was not in accordance with this image, nor with the implementation of the political ideology that was derived from this notion of inter-ethnic relations in Africa. Secondly, a related point, is that structural-functionalist anthropology was concerned with the internal structures of the tribe, which meant that the cross-cultural therapeutic relationship was considered largely irrelevant in the analysis of culture and society. The traditional healer’s activities were analysed in terms of his functions within his own “tribal” culture, and his role as an agent of inter-ethnic contact was consequently not a primary concern. More recently, a

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<sup>1</sup> As the article is not yet copy edited by *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* there will most probably be some minor differences between the present version and the one that

number of medical anthropologists have to a large extent overlooked the cross-cultural therapeutic relationship in what I would argue is an effort to rehabilitate the image of the “witch-doctor” and to employ the African traditional healer in a critique of Western society in general, and of biomedicine in particular. By emphasising the holism of African traditional medicine and its concern with the social and cultural environment of the patient, they criticise the alleged absence of such attributes in the biomedical approach to illness. Other aspects of traditional medicine that are less well suited to this critique, including the cross-cultural therapeutic relationship, are left out of the ethnography or de-emphasised.

These historical discourses exemplify both derogatory and romanticised versions of African medicine, neither of which has highlighted the cross-cultural therapeutic relation as it deserves. In this paper I shall argue that a focus on the dynamics and ideology of cross-cultural healing may be crucial for an understanding of processes generated by the encounter between biomedicine and African traditional medical systems. As is exemplified by the Iraqw, widespread acceptance and extensive use of biomedical health services may not necessarily mean that people are abandoning traditional beliefs and practices. Quite the contrary, the attribution of power to the culturally distant, a feature which lies at the very heart of the cross-cultural therapeutic relationship, implies an openness to the strange, the foreign and unknown, which may have facilitated the introduction and acceptance of biomedical health services.

### ***Point of departure***

The traditional healers of the Iraqw of northern Tanzania are frequently neither Iraqw, nor very “traditional”. This was one of the early findings during my first fieldwork in the southern Mbulu area in Tanzania, and I must admit that I was a bit surprised, if not disappointed. The individuals whom I had expected would be key informants in my quest for an understanding of Iraqw illness concepts and health-seeking behaviour, turned out not to be Iraqw, but Sukuma, Ihanzu, Coastal Swahili and Somali; they were members of ethnic groups with highly diverging cultural backgrounds from the Iraqw. Many of these healers did not speak any Iraqw, they often had a very limited knowledge of Iraqw culture, and in their divination and healing procedures most of them applied techniques and employed paraphernalia from their respective home areas. They were, in short, not at all the incarnations of core Iraqw cultural elements that I had expected the healers of the Iraqw to be.<sup>2</sup>

These attributes contrasted with the way the African traditional healer has frequently been represented as an individual who shares the locality, social network, and culture of his patients. Yet while there seemed reason to assume that the Iraqw were special in their emphasis on cross-cultural healing, this was not the full explanation as to why these practices appear an anomaly when compared to the way traditional medicine is usually depicted in East African ethnography. During later fieldwork in other locations in this area, which has been described as the most linguistically diverse in Africa (Sutton, 1969:12), my wife and I found the same kind of relationship among other ethnic groups; healing was often

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<sup>2</sup> Healers and ritual experts who are classified as Iraqw are members of clans whose apical ancestor is claimed to be an immigrant healer or ritual expert from another ethnic group. The only exception to this rule is the *Hhay Tipe*, a clan which is of little ritual importance today.

sought cross-culturally. One notable example was the pastoral Datoga who frequently used Sukuma, Nyaturu and Iramba healers and vice versa, in spite of the fact that these ethnic groups had a long history of mutual hostility, and who fought regular battles in this area less than a decade ago. One of the most respected healers in southern Mbulu came from Tanga on the Tanzanian east coast and was therefore alien to all the ethnic groups in the region. Thus, the extensive use of the skills of healers from other ethnic groups was not confined to the Iraqw, though the emphasis on cross-cultural therapeutic relations appeared to be particularly strong and was given more explicit expression among the Iraqw than was the case among neighbouring groups. An oft repeated statement on the subject stresses that “We [the Iraqw] believe the medicine of other peoples to be stronger than our own”.<sup>3</sup> This cultural feature is reflected in stories of how a number of important Iraqw clans (such as the *Maanda do Bayo*, *Hhay Naman*, and *Hhay Karama*) were founded by powerful healers and ritual experts from neighbouring groups. Similar stories, however, have been recorded among many of the other groups in the region, and cross-cultural therapeutic relationships appears historically to traverse virtually all the ethnic boundaries in the area of study.

A review of the literature on East Africa reveals that ethnographers have not overlooked the fact that it is common to seek healing and ritual

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<sup>3</sup> The first two major contributors to Iraqw ethnography both emphasise the strong ideological role of spatial categories in Iraqw culture, including the realm of the non-Iraqw (Winter, 1966; 1968; Thornton, 1980). In addition, W. D. Kamera states that “the Iraqw people believe that other people’s medicine is superior to theirs” (1976:3), and Mark W. T. Bura notes that treatment for illnesses caused by witchcraft is “carried out by medicine men from other tribes as the Wairaqw medicine men are not good at this art” (1984:16). With regard to rain-making, Bagshawe comments that the Iraqw and other “Hamitic” peoples “seem to put more faith and to send more presents to the rain-makers of neighbouring tribes” (1926:67). For more recent ethnographic contributions on the Iraqw, see Rekdal (1994; 1996; 1998), Rekdal and Blystad (in press), Snyder (1993; 1996; 1997), Hagborg (in press), and Selvik (1998).

expertise from sources outside one's own culture. Ethnographies cite numerous cases in which extensive use is made of healers and ritual experts from foreign ethnic groups.<sup>4</sup> It is, however, an arduous task to collect this material in a comparative ethnography, since the subject is rarely found in titles, headings or indexes, but rather in parentheses, appendices and footnotes. There appears to be a discrepancy between the frequency with which the cross-cultural therapeutic relationship has been mentioned, and the extent to which it has been considered a topic for in-depth description and analysis. What then, is the reason for this inattention to the information and data on cross-cultural healing in East Africa?

### ***Colonialism and the European image of tribal Africa***

The pre-colonial and colonial European image of Africa was that of a continent of "tribes", mutually exclusive groups of people which could be distinguished from each other on the basis of a number of linguistic, cultural, and racial characteristics. Early missionaries and explorers reported clear-cut inter-tribal boundaries and supplemented their tribe-oriented accounts with drawings and photographs illustrating the racial particularities of each tribe. Since it was assumed that language, culture and race systematically co-varied, a difference in one of these features was taken as evidence of a contrast in the others. Thus, the physical attributes of a certain tribe could be used as a criterion for its linguistic and cultural classification. The distinctiveness and isolation thought to be characteristic of African tribes led prominent British scholars in the early 20th century to

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<sup>4</sup> For examples from groups neighbouring the Iraqw, see e. g. Werther (1898:32), Gray (1955:44), Newman (1970:53-54), Jellicoe (1969:8), Waller (1985:352-353), Rekdal (1994:101-103), Gulliver (1965:252-253), Jacobs (1965:55, 86, 321-322), Fosbrooke (1948:14), Pender-Cudlip (1974:67), Berger (1947:994).

approach a colonial administrator in Africa in order “to obtain typical tribal specimens, male and female, for examination”, and German scientists sent requests for research material, before it was too late:

“They wanted to do this before mixing up of peoples made it impossible “to study their osteological qualities”, and they asked for “a series of skulls and skeletons of the different native tribes of Rhodesia.... Great care should be taken in noting the tribe of every skull and skeleton”.” (Letter (1905) from Professor Luschan, cited in Ranger, 1985:7)

To the extent that inter-tribal relations were described at all, they were frequently phrased in terms of antagonism. In the 19th century travel literature reviewed by Koivikko (1996:5), the author found that “Without exception, African men were depicted as armed warriors”. This image of Africa as a continent of tribes which were fighting, raiding, or eating each other,<sup>5</sup> became a significant element of the legitimisation of European intervention on the continent. The slave trade, it was argued by some, was a way of rescuing Africans from the misery produced by the prevalent barbarism and inter-tribal warfare that were supposed to dominate African culture and society. In Denmark, a country heavily involved in the slave trade in the 18th century, one of the most prominent intellectuals of the day, Erik Pontoppidan (1698-1764), argued that “the African, provided he is not separated from his wife and children, will have a much safer life in the West Indies” (Winsnes, 1996:5). Some centuries later, the claimed success of *Pax Britannica* served as a powerful device in the rhetorics that sought to legitimise colonialism. It was assumed not only that Africa had always needed outsiders for cultural development or evolution, such as the

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<sup>5</sup> In the very first Western account from an area closely located to where the Iraqw live today, there is the following passage: “I was assured that he was a cannibal; for the whole tribe of Wabembé, when they cannot get human flesh otherwise, give a goat to their neighbours for a sick or dying child, regarding such flesh as the best of all” (Speke, 1975 {1863}:92).

so-called “Hamites” (Sanders, 1969; Farelus, 1993; Rekdal, 1998), but also that Africans needed outsiders to stop them from fighting among themselves.

With the implementation of colonialism in East Africa, the European image of tribal Africa became, to a certain extent, a self-fulfilling prophecy. According to John Iliffe:

“it is clear that emphasis on tribe rather than other identities resulted from socio-economic change and government policy. The policy was indirect rule. Although conservative in origin it was radical in effect because it rested on historical misunderstanding. The British wrongly believed that Tanganyikans belonged to tribes; Tanganyikans created tribes to function within the colonial framework.” (1979:318)

The colonial government had the power and the means to materialise their imagined patchwork of tribes into a real one. The implementation of indirect rule involved identifying or creating a tribal “chief” in order to incorporate him into the administration. Limitations were placed on inter-ethnic contact between the various more or less invented tribes by confining people to certain well defined territories and by subjugating them to the authority of chiefs whose positions, as in the Iraqw case, frequently had to be invented because there were no traditions of centralised political authority. Both the Germans and the British are reported to have forced migrating Iraqw back to their “chiefdom” in order to “prevent clashes” with the Datoga and to “keep all Iraqw under the control of the Mbulu administrative center” (Winter & Molyneaux, 1963:498-499; Bagshawe, 1926:64; Fukui, 1970b:111). In many cases, existing groups were divided up and synthesised into political entities and identities that had not previously existed. Some of the changes wrought by these policies in British colonies in Africa may safely be described as dramatic: An old chief told W. J. Argyle that “he and his people had not

been Soli and had not thought of themselves as such, until the District Commissioner said they were in 1937” (1969:55, note 5). Aidan W. Southall writes that “It may be said that the Luyia people came into existence between approximately 1935 and 1945. Before that time no such group existed either in its own or anyone else’s estimation” (1970:34). Other examples of the way in which East African tribes were created by the British are numerous<sup>6</sup> and some of the terms that came to be applied to the new political entities were downright quite ridiculous. Many of the names of new chiefdoms were drawn from the vocabulary of neighbouring peoples, and were not always as value neutral as for example Nyamwezi (“people of the West”) or Bakiga (“highlanders”). The Datoga-speaking neighbours of the Iraqw are usually referred to as the “Mang’ati” by Swahili-speakers, a term which is simply the Maasai word for “enemy”. The Iraqw themselves and the District they dominate numerically are both known as “Mbulu” (pl.: Wambulu), a Swahili word which, according to the *Standard Swahili-English Dictionary* (1987 {1939}:269), means “a person who says meaningless things because of madness or weak intellect.”<sup>7</sup>

“Yet it is these terms, of dubious validity in relation to traditional cultures, which have been adopted by Europeans, enshrined in the literature and fed back to the people during the period of dominant colonial influence, to the point at which the people themselves were left with no alternative but to accept them.” (Southall, 1970:39)

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<sup>6</sup> See for example Liebenow (1961:68), Southall (1975:266), Gulliver (1969:15), Galaty (1982:1-2), Fried (1967:16-18), Iliffe (1979:9-10).

<sup>7</sup> “Mbulu” as an ethnic label for the Iraqw seems to derive from two sources. The Iraqw language, which is classified as Southern Cushitic, is radically different from all other languages in the area, except for Gorowa, and has a number of phonemes that are not present in Bantu and Nilotic languages. Furthermore, the term is most probably a dysphemism derived from swahilisation of “Imboru”, the location where the Germans established their first permanent administrative unit among the Iraqw.

However arbitrary the new political boundary locations, and however artificial the basis for the new identities, the British had the means to convert imagined tribes into real ones that could be subjected to indirect rule. There were certainly distinct “tribes” or “cultures” in East Africa before the colonial project was initiated, but the existing complex ethnic scenario was, in many cases, radically transformed and simplified by the policies of the new rulers. The main objective was to make the colonies governable by establishing, or as the British thought of it, *restoring* “order”:<sup>8</sup>

“Everyone sought to tidy up and make more comprehensible the infinitely complex situation which they held to be a result of the “untraditional” chaos of the nineteenth century. People were to be “returned” to their tribal identities; ethnicity was to be “restored” as the basis of association and organization.”  
(Ranger, 1983:249)

The implementation of indirect rule created order out of what Europeans perceived as disorder, but in the process it disregarded and disrupted inter-ethnic processes that may be described as integrative or symbiotic. The invention and reinforcement of tribal identities took place at the expense of inter-ethnic institutions and processes; it ignored, for example, ambiguous and multiple identities, trade, population exchange through migration, adoption and intermarriage, and, I would add, cross-cultural healing. The new political order placed a number of East Africans in an ambiguous position that aroused the suspicion of the European community. It was often assumed that “detransformed” migrants “would not have left home if they had not something to hide” (Arens, 1975:432). Healers crossing borders between the new chiefdoms became, along with other migrants, in

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<sup>8</sup> As P. H. Gulliver has pointed out, some “missionaries and administrators became fervent admirers and protagonists of particular tribes.... There was very often a genuine desire to preserve and encourage African tribal cultures” (1969:14).

a sense “matter out of place” and were liable to be stigmatised as such by representatives of the colonial administration.

The rather low esteem in which traditional healers were held by the British was connected to a number of other factors as well. “Medicine men” had played a leading role in the multi-ethnic Maji-Maji rebellion of 1905-1906 against the Germans, in which an estimated 250-300,000 Africans and 15 Europeans were killed (Iliffe, 1979:200), and were feared as potential instigators of anti-government feelings and activities. Furthermore, from the time of the earliest reports of European explorers and missionaries, the witch-doctor (or “devil doctor” as he was called by some observers) had been depicted as the prime representative of the pagan and primitive Africa, sometimes even as “the greatest evil in Africa” (cf. Beck, 1979:3), and he was singled out as one of the main adversaries of the Christianising and civilising elements of the colonial project. “Medicine men” and “sorcerers” were, in the words of one of the most prominent and longest serving colonial administrators in East Africa, in the forefront of “the recurring, instinctive struggles of the old powers of wickedness and darkness to put out the lights which have been lit in Africa” (Mitchell, 1954:267).

It is difficult to judge the extent to which the colonial attitudes and policies influenced the prevalence of cross-cultural healing in East Africa. Steven Feierman (1986:212) mentions “prominent travelling healers” who were persecuted and prosecuted under the Witchcraft Ordinance by the colonial authorities in Tanganyika. A similar law was passed in Botswana (Ingstad, 1989:255), and in Kenya:

“The law was used to criminalize traditional medicine and to discredit its practitioners, by equating such healing with witchcraft, and then outlawing it. Throughout colonialism, therefore, traditional medicine was unlawful, and this contributed to its marginalization as a system of health delivery

in Kenya.... But traditional medicine did not disappear. It merely went underground.” (Okoth-Owiro & Juma, 1996:299)

In Zambia in the 1950s “large numbers of healers were arrested as witches”, and this move was popularly believed to have been instigated by “an anthropologist who asked questions about African therapeutics in the 1940s and then gave lists of names to the colonial authorities, on which they subsequently acted” (Prins, 1992:358).

To summarise, the cross-cultural therapeutic relationship does not figure prominently in early descriptions by explorers, missionaries, and colonial administrators for several reasons. First of all, it was overlooked since it was not in accordance with the expectations that isolationism and antagonism characterised African inter-tribal relations. Secondly, colonisation implied the creation of a new political order of entities and boundaries which restricted the mobility of both patients and healers. Furthermore, legislation was enforced that had the effect of limiting or forcing underground the activities of traditional healers, and particularly those of “travelling healers” and healers who had a multiethnic clientele. It is in this context that the role of anthropology must be understood.

### ***Structural-functional anthropology***

British anthropology developed in symbiosis with the colonial enterprise, and East African ethnography from this period is no exception. Many of the contributors to the ethnography of East Africa were in fact employed by the colonial administration with explicit orders to provide information and suggestions related to administrative issues. Since the ideology of indirect rule was founded on preserving and strengthening traditional political structures, whether invented or not, the “tribe” was what the anthropologists were paid to study.

The structural-functional approach of British anthropology, and particularly of the first “arm-chair” anthropologists, had inherited the tribe-oriented descriptions of early explorers and missionaries, and with them, the image of Africa as a patchwork of isolated and mutually hostile tribes. Furthermore, by the time post-Malinowskian British anthropologists entered the field, the self-fulfilling image of a tribal mosaic had already begun to materialise. The notion of “tribes” as bounded entities, to which external factors were of minor interest, was consequently perpetuated in the new and more sophisticated models of culture and social structure that emerged. The very foundation of the structural-functional perspective lay in the notion that each “tribe” could be understood as an organism consisting of parts, each of which had its own function in the overall social structure of that particular tribe. The role of the traditional healer or ritual expert was therefore analysed in terms of his/her functions *within* the society or tribe. Cross-cultural healing appeared to constitute an irregularity or simply to be irrelevant in the structural-functional model of society, and consequently tended to be omitted or marginalised in ethnography. This also applied to a number of other inter-ethnic institutions that we now know were essential features of pre-colonial Africa.

In 1961, Thomas O. Beidelman commented on East African inter-tribal relations as follows: “it seems naive and misleading to picture such relations as wholly warlike. Such relations were and still are far more complex and ambivalent than has been commonly represented” (1961:534). Beidelman’s emphasis on the mutual interdependence of “enemies” such as the Baraguyu and the Kaguru is representative of the large number of studies that began to question the validity of earlier contributions on the subject of inter-tribal relations, or rather, the distorted

picture generated by the *omission* of inter-tribal relations in the accounts. From the 1960s onwards it was “discovered” that many of the tribes described by anthropologists were in fact invented by European administrators, and within a few years prominent historians conclude that: “Almost all recent studies of nineteenth-century pre-colonial Africa have emphasized that far from there being a single “tribal” identity, most Africans moved in and out of multiple identities” (Ranger, 1983:248), and that “there were few barriers to the flow of population from one small-scale unit to another and definitions of identity tended to be inclusive rather than exclusive” (Waller, 1985:349). The pre-colonial “chaos” perceived by colonial administrators, is now described as a system of “symbiosis and social interaction”, and East African history is portrayed as having been dominated by inter-ethnic processes such as intermarriage, trade, co-operation and assimilation (Waller, 1985).

The sudden break with earlier representations of “tribes” and depictions of hostile inter-tribal relations in the 1960s must be seen in connection with the end of colonialism, and, perhaps more importantly, with the demise of the structural-functional approach to the study of culture and society. The latter was replaced, or rather expanded, by new models that were more concerned with socio-cultural complexity and transformation, and that shifted the focus from intra-cultural phenomena to inter-ethnic institutions and dynamics. At this point the time would seem ripe to highlight the cross-cultural therapeutic relationship as it deserved. However, African traditional healing was becoming the domain of another group of anthropologists whose studies and descriptions were influenced by other concerns that once more left the cross-cultural therapeutic relationship on the margins.

***Medical anthropology and the noble witch-doctor***

In the pre-colonial era the concept of the “Noble Savage” emerged partly in reaction to European prejudices and misrepresentations of the “beastly savages”, the peoples that were taken as slaves and made subjects of colonialism. More importantly, the rise of the concept as a rhetorical device during the 18th and 19th century was an inwardly directed critique which sought to “remove or reform certain specific abuses—certain social inequalities and political tyrannies in particular—which, it was thought, had intruded into civilized society and were interfering with its continued growth” (George, 1958:72). This process of de-stigmatising the savage and using him to criticise European society, which arose “from a combination of disillusion about the here and now and illusion about the there and then” (Fairchild, 1928:127, cited in Curtin, 1965:51), seems to parallel the remarkable transformation the African witch-doctor has undergone during the last three decades.

“For four hundred years, European peoples have misrepresented, insulted, and abused African traditional medicine. They have called it “black magic”, “witchcraft”, and “tribal fanaticism”. They have referred to African traditional doctors and psychiatrists as “witch doctors”, “witches”, “wizards”, “men possessed by the devil”, and “medicine men”. This was partly due to ignorance and partly due to the white people’s chronic cultural superciliousness which notoriously leads them to treat other peoples’ cultures as inferior.” (Kiteme, 1976:413)

The African traditional healer has long been depicted as the primitive, irrational and evil witch-doctor, and consequently as the antagonist of what Europeans saw as the best in the West: development, science, and Christianity. From the earliest European travel documents and missionary reports onwards, the witch-doctor frequently appeared as a metonym for

Africa, a figure portrayed as incarnating a number of negative attributes that Europeans had ascribed to Africa.<sup>9</sup> The restoration of the image of the witch-doctor was therefore a significant aspect of a larger project intended to repair the image of a continent which had suffered so greatly in the face of European racism and cultural arrogance (Rekdal, n.d.-b).

A number of studies published during the last three decades seem to have come a long way in redefining the characteristics of the African traditional healer. Wider recognition has ensued and WHO has not only declared African traditional healers an important resource in health promotion, but has also encouraged research on their healing techniques and remedies (WHO, 1978; Akerele, 1987). National governments have followed up, establishing research institutes for traditional medicine, and initiating programmes to integrate traditional healers into the public health sector, in some cases with apparent success (cf. Green et al., 1995; Hoff & Maseko, 1986; but see also Feierman, 1985:126). Edwin Fuller Torrey, in his evaluation of “witchdoctors” in relation to the modern psychiatrist in general terms, claims that:

“the evidence regarding the efficacy of therapists in other cultures is instructive. It is almost unanimous in suggesting that witchdoctors get about the same therapeutic results as psychiatrists do” (1983:102).

The *World Mental Health Report* is more cautious about traditional or folk medicine, but nonetheless states clearly that “The few empirically grounded studies are consistent in their findings that folk and shamanic healers are generally effective in alleviating malaise spawned by psychological and social distress” (Desjarlais et al., 1995:53). The

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<sup>9</sup> The literary convention of the evil and/or irrational witch-doctor is still very much alive in the popular literature and movies of the late 20th century. A prominent example of this is the *Phantom* cartoons which enjoys great popularity in a number of countries, and on which a recently launched multimillion movie is based.

increased demand for information on traditional healers and their practices has raised the question of ethics in connection with the commercial potential of unique anthropological knowledge on these issues (Glass-Coffin, 1994:A48). Businesses have been established in order to systematically tap the expertise of traditional healers to identify herbs which can be used to produce modern drugs. *Shaman Pharmaceuticals*, which announced “its first big ‘hit’” in 1990, states that working with traditional healers represents a short-cut which can speed up the process of new discoveries (*The New York Times*, Jan. 28, 1992:C1, C9). It has become common, as the above quote from Kiteme illustrates, to describe traditional healers in terms normally reserved for respected scientific disciplines. The witch-doctor is now described as “psychologist”, “psychiatrist” or “doctor”, i.e. with metaphors drawn from the nobility of modern society, the scientists.<sup>10</sup>

Just as the “Noble Savage” was a rhetorical device whose function extended far beyond a revaluation of the savage, the “noble witch-doctor”, as he appears in many medical anthropological contributions from Africa, has another equally important mission. The way he is represented seems to contribute to a critique of aspects of biomedicine which are perceived as “tyrannical”, “inhumane”, or simply ineffective. On a more general level, the rise of the noble witch-doctor may be seen as an element in a post-modern revolt against the truths and paradigms of modernity.

An important feature emphasised in the new and more sympathetic portraits of the African traditional healer is his *holistic* approach to illness and suffering. There seems to be considerable consensus concerning the holism of African traditional healing practices, and it is claimed that this is

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<sup>10</sup> An important ritual expert and apical ancestor of an Iraqw clan has been described as “a good agriculturalist and veterinary technician. His knowledge of plant pathology and

a significant feature which enables the traditional healer to compete with, if not surpass, his biomedical counterpart. The African traditional healer is typically portrayed as a person who shares the same social and cultural environment as his patient, and the patient is treated not primarily as an individual, but as an integral part of a social and cultural whole. The activities of the traditional healer are frequently described as “family therapy”, “group therapy”, “community healing”, and Steven Feierman mentions “collective therapeutic rites” as one of the “distinctive characteristics common to African therapeutic traditions” (1992:171). At the same time it is often argued that biomedical practitioners are *not* holistic in their approach to the patient (e.g. Douglas, 1994:24-25; Hepburn, 1988). Erwin H. Ackerknecht provided an early formulation of this point: “Primitive medicine plays a social role and has a holistic or unitarian character which medicine has lost in our society” (1946:467-468; see also Sigerist, 1951:161,201). Much of the blame for this is placed on the mind-body dualism of Descartes, which “caused the mind (or soul) to recede to the background of clinical theory and practice for the next three hundred years” (Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987:9).<sup>11</sup> These general conclusions regarding the characteristics of African traditional medicine, often with explicitly or implicitly favourable comparisons with biomedicine, are found in a number of studies and commentaries on the subject.<sup>12</sup> In their more extreme formulations, African traditional medicine

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veterinary medicine made him highly respected” (Kamera, 1976:3).

<sup>11</sup> The tendency within the critique of this aspect of Western culture in general and of biomedicine in particular is contained in an expression used by one of Badone’s informants, describing her life before the conversion to a New Age healing cult: “We were completely Cartesian” (Badone, 1991:521).

<sup>12</sup> See for example Rappaport (1979), Tindikahwa (1992:14), Mphande (1993), Mbiti (1969:169), Mullings (1984:166-170), Finch (1983:148), Swantz (1990:147-148), WHO (1978:9, 13), Bishaw (1991:199), MacCormack (1981:427), Kimani (1981:339),

is not represented as a primitive and immature stage of evolution, but rather as the Garden of Eden before it was lost to Descartes.

This scenario may well be described as a “disillusionment” with biomedicine, but to what extent is it possible to claim that this disillusionment is expressed through an “illusion”, the noble witch-doctor? The Noble Savage was created in the 18th century by philosophers, poets and writers who in most cases had never seen the people they elevated from savagery to nobility. They were literary men who had “no intention of speaking as ethnographic popularizers” (Curtin, 1965:51), and their commitment to realistic description of the savage was entirely secondary to their project of social critique. In contrast, medical anthropologists of the late 20th century are subject to a number of methodological constraints which are intended to ensure their status as scientists. Their findings are based on massive amounts of data, and their conclusion that in a vast number of African healing traditions healer and patient share a culture and social network, and that these features are actively used in the healing process, can hardly be questioned.

The romanticism I have implied by introducing the concept of the “noble witch-doctor” lies not in what is said about African traditional healing, but rather in the relative silence with regard to other attributes that do not function well either as arguments for the de-stigmatisation of the witch-doctor, and by extension of Africa as a whole, or as a critique of the biomedical paradigm. Peter A. G. M. De Smet writes in an article about the dangers of traditional remedies published in *The Journal of Ethnopharmacology*: “I know from experience that not everybody who is taking a scientific interest in ethnopharmacology is pleased, when the dark

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Asuni (1979:38), Harjula (1982:50), Swantz (1979:169-70), Staugard (1986:68), Reid (1982:143,145,146), Read (1966:21), Du Toit (1985:2-3).

side of traditional medicines is put to the fore” (1991:48). Cross-cultural healing, I would argue, has suffered a similar marginalisation, and the reason seems to be connected to evaluations of its efficacy: “By and large the healer can function only within his/her ethnic group, since the shared “world view” of both healer and patient are usually integral to the traditional healing process” (Westermeyer, 1977:97). The emphasis on “shared world-view” or “cognitive congruence” as a prerequisite for efficacious healing makes the quest for therapy across cultural boundaries a dubious undertaking. While several other features of traditional medicine can, with justification, be represented as evidence that even the most prestigious scientific discipline has much to learn from Africa, the cross-cultural therapeutic relationship does not seem to have characteristics that can carry much weight in such a debate. The ethnography of cross-cultural healing does not appear to be well suited to the critique of the reductionism and the run-away technology that biomedicine is accused of by many medical anthropologists. Indeed, this very critique seems to backfire on the cross-cultural therapeutic relationship: what kind of holism is possible when patient and healer do not share the same language, cultural foundation, or social network? The fact that East Africans seek healing and ritual expertise across cultural boundaries may appear to leave the traditional healer, as well as his patients, open to re-stigmatisation as irrational. This, I believe, may explain some of the continued silence of ethnographers on the subject of cross-cultural healing in Africa.

### ***The logic of cross-cultural healing***

In the Mbulu area, successful healing commonly creates long-lasting bonds of gratitude and loyalty between healer and client. Where problems are

related to marriage or fertility, such as the acquisition of a wife or the treatment of a barren woman, these relationships may be so close that the client assumes the role of an adopted child, and even becomes subject to the same incest prohibitions as the children of the healer. We recorded several such relationships which crossed the most conflict-ridden ethnic boundaries in the area, those between the Barabaig and neighbouring Bantu groups. Thus, in functional terms, cross-cultural healing may be seen as an institutional means of fostering loyalties which can prevent or limit inter-ethnic conflict. Similarly, such ties may provide the basis for inter-ethnic co-operation and mobilisation against a common external aggressor. During the Maji-Maji<sup>13</sup> rebellion, ritual experts with a multi-ethnic clientele were able to mobilise as many as 20 different ethnic groups against the Germans. While healers and ritual experts in these cases may have served as points of contact and interaction between various ethnic groups, this does not, of course, explain the individual's motivation for seeking healing from external sources.

A popular proverb says that “rather than the death of a neighbour, let a far away relative die”, reflecting the great importance of this particular spatially determined social relationship in Iraqw society. Another Iraqw saying claims that “The one who will kill you is your neighbour”. There is nothing extraordinary about such an apparent paradox. The intimacy so highly valued between neighbours renders them vulnerable to each other. Because the neighbour is the most significant potential supporter, s/he is also the worst potential enemy. This ambiguity is frequently stressed by Iraqw informants as the rationale for not seeking the help of a healer who lives in the proximity of their own village or neighbourhood. The client

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<sup>13</sup> *Maji*, which means “water” in Swahili, refers to the medicines that were given to the rebels as protection from German weapons.

never knows when the healer may use his weaknesses against him, and the best way to ensure that this will not happen is to seek out a healer who is entirely external to his own social networks. The neutrality generated by ensuring distance from the healer is, according to Elizabeth Colson, the reason why the Tonga prefer diviners from outside:

“Any diviner visiting a new area, whether he be a Tonga or a complete alien, is likely to find local clients who say that a man from a distance, knowing nothing of local affairs, is more likely to give a true divination than a local man who knows all about the one who seeks enlightenment. Tonga will also travel considerable distances to consult diviners of reputation.”  
(1966:222)

Diagnosing the cause of illness, which in Africa is so often linked to interpersonal relations within the local community, requires the objectivity and impartiality characteristic of the “stranger”.

David Parkin describes the use of medicines from “outside” in anti-sorcery movements as a means to challenge local ritual and political authority, and he suggests that such movements “are often long-standing cultural features stemming from the pre-colonial era” (1968:424). Another motive for seeking healing from distant or alternative sources is the fact that the local healers may not be able to provide the healing one seeks. Murray Last reports on cross-cultural healing relationships which appear to derive from the ethno-ecological theory that illnesses thought to have originated in a particular alien community requires treatment that can only be provided by healers from the same source community (1981:389). Iraqw suffering from illnesses believed to be caused by witchcraft have in some cases travelled as far as Sumbawanga in southern Tanzania in order to receive treatment and protection that local healers were unable to provide. A traditional healer in Lusaka explained to Frankenberg and Leeson that “anyone selling new fish gets customers”, which, according to

the authors, is “an indication of the general applicability of the principle that a new doctor in an area soon collects the patients who are dissatisfied with his rivals and predecessors” (1976:253).

Such pragmatic concerns do not, however, fully explain why the Iraqw seek healing from other cultures. Nor do they fully explain why so many others, in Africa and elsewhere, are also attracted to the healing powers of alien and distant cultures.

### ***The power of cultural distance***

One of the most popular healers in the village where I conducted my first fieldwork was an Ihanzu who had lived for a number of years among the Hadza, a neighbouring Khoisan speaking hunting and gathering people. His legitimacy as a healer was clearly strengthened by the fact that he had been living with these “people of the bush” who are reputed to have extensive knowledge of herbs and trees that can be used as medicine. Furthermore, as an Ihanzu, this particular healer belonged to the ethnic category which the Iraqw call the *Maanda Uwa*, a term which may be translated as the “Bantu-speakers of the west”. The *Maanda Uwa* are disdained by the Iraqw because of customs which are perceived as unclean. According to Iraqw informants, the *Maanda Uwa* marry their own cross-cousins (which is incestuous among the Iraqw), they eat donkey meat, and they participate in ritual activity intended to remove the impurity of Iraqw individuals. Furthermore, they provide cheap labour for ordinary Iraqw during the labour intensive rainy season, and their women marry Iraqw men who for various reasons have difficulties finding an(other) Iraqw wife. This includes deceased or non-existent Iraqw men; the typical “ghost wife”

(*harer hante*) among the Iraqw of the southern Mbulu area has been a young girl from the *Maanda Uwa*.

At the same time, the *Maanda Uwa* have provided the apical ancestor of the *Maanda do Bayo*, the clan which possesses the greatest ritual expertise and power among the Iraqw, and more recent Ihanzu immigrants are among the most respected and widely used healers in the area of study. Contempt and respect thus seem to go hand in hand in Iraqw stereotypes of the *Maanda Uwa*.

This ambiguity associated with the culturally distant requires some elaboration. According to Katherine George:

“To be born into a culture has generally implied being supported by it, being upheld, as it were, on a pedestal, from which one might look down with varying degrees of disinterest or antagonism upon other, alien cultures. Hence, the observer of alien cultures has tended to be prejudiced, in the simple sense that he has preferred his own to all other existent cultures and has viewed the strange as a malformed deviant from the familiar.... The greater the extent of cultural difference, the greater is the amount of antagonism or scorn expressed.” (1958:62)

This statement may be valid for the particular topic focused upon in George’s article, i.e. how Europe looked upon, or rather down on, Africa during the first centuries of contact. However, the generality of the statement has been falsified by a number of studies of ethnicity and cultural difference, and, as we have seen, it tells only half the truth about how the Iraqw look upon the *Maanda Uwa*. The other side of the coin seems to be illuminated by what Mary W. Helms writes regarding cultural distance:

“More specifically, I argue that geographical distance from a given cultural heartland may correspond with supernatural distance from that center; that as one moves away from *axis mundi* one moves towards places and people that are increasingly “different” and, therefore, may be regarded as

increasingly supernatural, mythical, and powerful, the more distant they are from the heartland.” (1988:4)

The divergent perspectives represented by the quotes above are not necessarily contradictory. While cultural distance may have a potential for generating ethnic contrast, conflict and contempt, the power inherent in the ambiguity of the culturally distant may also be converted into healing and ritual expertise. Despite expressions of disdain, therefore, the perceived cultural distance to the *Maanda Uwa* means that they are associated with the “supernatural, mythical and powerful” (see also van Gennep, 1960 {1909}:26 on “sacred” and “magico-religious” attributes of the “stranger”). Other examples from this area are provided by the Iramba, who see the Sukuma as “the epitome of “foreignness”” and as possessors of “extremely powerful magic” (Pender-Cudlip, 1974:65-66), and, as already mentioned, by the Datoga and their Bantu-speaking neighbours. Richard D. Waller comments on Maasai ritual experts that “alien origin, whether real or not, is a necessary characteristic of *laibons* and an important attribute of their power” (1995:29). From West Africa, Murray Last reports on travelling healers: “The value of their remedies lies in their very strangeness, in their not being a part of a known system of medicine” (1981:389). Steven Feierman comments on a case from Tanganyika that “The more distant the *mghanga*’s home, the more esoteric his treatment, the higher were his fees” (1986:212). The case studies provided by C. Bawa Yamba (1997) and Alison Redmayne (1970) both involve extremely powerful healers or witch-finders whose place of origin was either “mysterious” or very distant from the home areas of the patients. The ambiguity of the culturally distant becomes particularly clear in Adeline Masquelier’s (1994) study from southern Niger, which demonstrates how *bori* healers and mediums appropriate and rework to their own advantage

the spiritual powers of their oppressors and adversaries, the Zarma ethnic group and Muslim healers and scholars.

In their review article on the anthropology of pharmaceuticals, van der Geest et al. (1996) note: “The belief that medicines that come from afar are stronger than native ones is present in many cultures.... This foreign aura is dexterously exploited in drug advertisements.” The demand for healing that draws on the power of the culturally distant is of course not a phenomenon that is restricted to Africa or to societies that are usually referred to as “traditional”, “third world”, or “under-developed”. More and more Western people are currently substituting synthetically processed drugs and high-tech medical equipment with herbs of remote jungles and exotic rituals. It is no longer surprising to find an obituary in *The New York Times* (Feb. 10, 1996:52) like the one for Eligio Panti, a Mayan traditional herbalist who died in the jungles of Belize, 103 years old. Several authors have commented, somewhat puzzled, that those who increasingly seek “alternative” or exotic healing are intelligent, well educated and affluent people (e.g. Eisenberg et al., 1993; Wilson, 1988).<sup>14</sup>

### ***The introduction of biomedicine***

In a 1965 article in *Man* Edward L. Margetts claims that African traditional healers:

“can have no rational place in the modern technological world, and as the educational level of African natives improves and as

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<sup>14</sup> The analysis of the power attributed to the culturally distant may be extended, of course, far beyond the domain of healing and ritual expertise. The commercial potential of cultural distance is illustrated by William Safire’s (1996:16) dissection of the well known “Chinese proverb” that “One picture is worth ten thousand words”. The “proverb” turns out to be a rather recent invention by an American advertising manager who “later confessed that he made that attribution to an ancient Asian “so that people would take it seriously””.

time affords them cultural wisdom, it is expected that the people themselves will drift away from the primitive attractions of magic and seek help in science.... However, native healers exist in all countries of Africa, and they are appropriate and very interesting subjects for study.” (1965:115)

During the colonial period, Western medicine was seen “as the greatest force for conceptual change, compelling Africans to abandon their unscientific worldview” (Ranger, 1992:256), and the biomedical doctor has always been regarded as a powerful door-opener for the Christianising project in Africa (cf. Prins, 1989:162; Oliver, 1952:211). The presumed inverse relationship between the popularity of traditional medicine and that of biomedicine, however, turned out to be only a qualified truth. Education and extensive use of biomedical services appears in many cases to have had limited impact, if any at all, on the popularity of traditional medicine. Quite the contrary, as mentioned already, instead of people drifting away from traditional medicine, the WHO, profit-oriented companies, and a vast number of well educated men and women in Africa and elsewhere are drifting *towards* aspects it. The prophesied revolution failed to materialise in the sense that the acceptance of biomedicine did not cause the rejection of traditional medicine. The latter has proved fully capable of coexisting with the impressive achievements of biomedicine.

Susan Reynolds Whyte, one of the few who has focused on the role of the culturally exogenous in African traditional medicine, has written that:

“lay medical culture is often surprisingly inclusive, readily integrating new elements...there is reason to believe that the exotic has always played a part in Nyole and other East African medical systems....“going into the bush” to gather medicines involves contacts with dispensary personnel or others with access to penicillin.” (1982:2056, 2060)

A readiness to accept and integrate exotic and/or modern objects and techniques into divinatory and therapeutic procedures seems to

characterise the activities of a large number of traditional healers. In addition to modern drugs, exogenous elements such as mirrors, magnets, various forms of the written word, white coats, stethoscopes, thermometers, syringes and urine tests, and even telephones, TV-sets, and mail-order medicines have been noted to be central in the practices and rituals of traditional healers. Furthermore, a number of studies have concluded that traditional healers are generally very positive in their attitudes to co-operation with biomedical practitioners (for example Semali, 1986:89; Chavunduka, 1978:95; Green & Makhubu, 1984:1077; George, 1983:15).

Peter Geschiere's (1997) recent study from Cameroon reminds us that the adaptivity and flexibility of traditional healers may make them well equipped not just to alleviate, but also to exploit general feelings of frustration and anxiety in a rapidly changing society. Geschiere found that the Maka healers (almost all of whom had received training from "professors" from other ethnic groups) "are generally great *bricoleurs*". He describes "the emergence of a new kind of *nganga* (healers), heavily armoured with novel attributes". These healers were able to use the official courts in order to accuse witches who, "on the basis of very shadowy evidence", were condemned to heavy prison sentences and to pay substantial amounts of money in damages to the accusing healer (Geschiere, 1997:169-198).

The willingness to integrate new elements and practices contradicts notions of traditional healers as culturally conservative, basing their practices on indigenous knowledge that has been handed down through the generations from ancient times.<sup>15</sup> In many cases it would seem more

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<sup>15</sup> According to a Regional Expert Committee of the WHO, African traditional medicine is "relying exclusively on practical experience and observation handed down

accurate to employ the self-contradictory yet highly illuminating notion of “invented tradition” if the concept of “traditional healer”, as it is used in many medical anthropological contributions from Africa, is to have any meaning. A common characteristic of many of the practices of African traditional healers is that they are not “traditional” at all. African traditional healers may well be transmitters of ancient and powerful knowledge, but they are also, and sometimes solely, *inventors* of medical tradition, agents facilitating the incorporation of new ways of thinking and acting. The point should not, however, be overstated. As Benedicte Ingstad (1989:268) has pointed out, the flexibility exhibited by a healer who treats his patients in an electric vibrating chair may well be interpreted as a way of adjusting to change in a manner that ensures continuity in culturally based perceptions of cause and effect (see also Obbo, 1996:200; Landy, 1977:477). The adaptive features shown by African healers, whether serving to maintain cultural continuity or implying the invention of entirely new ways of understanding and approaching illness, can, I believe, account for much of the continued popularity of African traditional medicine.

Descriptions of the spread of biomedical ways of treating and thinking about disease commonly stress that this was something entirely new which, in dark corners of the world with the altruistic missionary doctor as the vanguard, fought against incompatible belief systems which emphasised witchcraft and other forms of what was perceived as irrationality. Biomedicine as a way of understanding and approaching illness was certainly new to the Iraqw; what was *not* new was the incorporation of an alien way of looking at and acting on illness. The European doctors who introduced biomedicine in this area fit neatly into an

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from generation to generation” (cited in WHO, 1978:8), and Mark Plotkin of the World Wildlife Fund states that “Each time a medicine man dies it is like an irreplaceable

already existing category of healers who were already present among the Iraqw: They were non-Iraqw, and were using powerful exotic techniques and knowledge not available to the Iraqw. European doctors were in this sense “traditional healers” already upon their arrival. It is not surprising, therefore, that Scandinavian missionary doctors in the area today are referred to as *qwaslare*, the Iraqw term for ritual expert or healer.<sup>16</sup> Biomedicine and the biomedical doctor constituted simply an addition to an already existing repertoire of exotic medical alternatives.

In *A History of the British Medical Administration of East Africa*, Ann Beck considers the situation in the 1930s, when many of the newly established dispensaries deteriorated, allegedly because traditional religion or “witchcraft” still had a strong hold on people’s minds:

“The senior commissioner for Arusha did not share this view. He found that the dispensaries of Mbulu and Kibaya did good work among the natives who were beginning to disbelieve some of their native medicine, trusting their medical officers and their trained staff.” (1970:133n)

The relative success of the dispensaries in Mbulu District may seem surprising in the light of the general stereotype of the Iraqw as a people who cling to their traditions, a stereotype which earned them a place in the today dubious category of *watu wa kabila* (Swahili, literally “tribal people”), together with other allegedly “conservative” groups such as the Maasai and the Datoga (Ishige, 1969:99; Arens, 1979:60,69). However, if Iraqw tradition attributes powerful healing properties to the culturally exogenous, there is good reason to question the conclusion drawn by the senior commissioner, that the acceptance of biomedical services by the Iraqw implied that they “were beginning to disbelieve some of their native

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library burning down” (*The Economist*, April 2, 1988:76).

<sup>16</sup> This feature has also been noted by Edward Winter (1968:13; 1966:166) from another part of Mbulu District.

medicine". The Iraqw, and other groups in Africa and elsewhere, may have accepted biomedicine precisely because they *continued* to believe in, and "cling to", their "native medicine", with its emphasis on the healing power of the culturally distant.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Thabo T. Fako reports from Botswana that "acceptance of European medicine by the Tswana, was not based on scientifically demonstrable overall superiority, but on a subjective fondness for medicines from distant lands" (1985:226).

## **Creativity and invention in Iraqw ritual**

*“ritual is a kind of tunnel into which one plunges, and where, since there is no possibility of turning either right or left, the only thing to do is to follow” (Bloch, 1989 {1974}:41)*

### ***Introduction***

By coincidence, the very first day of my first fieldwork among the Iraqw in northern Tanzania a prominent elder was to arrange an important yearly harvest ritual. I could sense that something out of the ordinary was about to take place as some young men escorted me to the old man's compound outside which a number of youth and some women were gathered. I started to greet them, but was soon led into a dark room where I was seated on a log together with my host. As my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness I could see the room was packed with some 30 old men, most of whom, I felt, were silently watching me with serious expressions on their faces. The silence was broken by a man who stood in the circle and started speaking in Iraqw. Another man, seated in the audience, responded to each statement, apparently translating into an entirely different language. At certain points the leader suddenly raised his voice and gesticulated vigorously with a tuft of grass he held, as if he were angry, and the audience responded by lifting their hands and shouting emphatically. I had no idea what was going on and sat passively observing the performance. The ritual came to an abrupt halt, apparently due to my lack of

participation, and my host instructed me politely in Swahili to speak and respond like the others. I was taught some Iraqw words, but my attempts to pronounce them were lost in the shouting of the others as the ritual proceeded. Later I was given a gourd of sorghum beer to share with the three or four others who sat next to me and they took great care to see that I got my share. To approving nods from the other participants, I drank substantial amounts from the gourd that was passed back and forth between us. Then there was a change in atmosphere and the speaker started to chant short verses, while the audience hummed rhythmically with half-open mouths, producing a strongly suggestive effect. I felt that the whole room was vibrating, and that the participants appeared to merge into a pulsating chorus that was continuously responding to the beautiful chanting of the man in front of us. After a while the singer stepped down and another performer took his place, repeating the procedure, ending his session with the same captivating chanting to the continuous humming of the other participants. Some three hours into my first fieldwork among the Iraqw I staggered slightly intoxicated out into the bright daylight and was told by one of the elders that I was now to be called *Geetla/angw*, the name of the ritual I had just participated in.

Whether or not this may sound like a parody of the anthropologist's first encounter with African village life, my initial experience with Iraqw ritual had indeed been like "plunging into a tunnel". What I had witnessed was the *fiiro* and the *sluufay* of the Iraqw, formalised prayers to *Looaa*, the Iraqw goddess to whom is attributed power over the fertility of land, domestic animals and people. An important feature of these prayers is the expression of mutual consent of the entire audience, which is regarded as a prerequisite for gaining the attention and blessings of *Looaa*; hence my

failure to respond approvingly to the statements of the leader aroused enough concern to halt the proceedings. The audience knew very well that I had virtually no command of the Iraqw language, and that I was not able to comprehend any of the issues raised in the prayer. Participating in the ritual, however, implied an obligation to express my consent to and support of the messages that were communicated; whether I understood their meaning appeared to be of secondary importance. The possibility to express objections or reservations was denied until I, or any of the other participants, had made our exit from the “ritual tunnel”.

Definitions of ritual abound in anthropological literature, and the following example, provided by Stanley J. Tambiah, would be one of the less controversial and may serve to represent mainstream anthropological approaches to the topic:

“Ritual is a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterized in varying degree by formality (conventionality), stereotypy (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition).” (Tambiah, 1981:119)

These characteristics have long served as key concepts in anthropological definitions of ritual. Whether ritual has been regarded as a reflection of social life, a model for society, or a powerful device of domination, it has been associated with repetition, rigidity, standardisation, and as a consequence of these features, with limited or lacking creativity and innovation. Within anthropology there is, in the words of Jean and John Comaroff, a

“long, persistent tradition that sees ritual as conservative and conservationist, as a (indeed, *the*) prime mechanism of social reproduction, cultural continuity, and political authority” (1993:xxix, italics in original).

Anthropological descriptions have showed that the “conservative bias” or rigidity of ritual is not necessarily incompatible with social change. Maurice Bloch’s study (1986) of the Merina circumcision ceremony provides an impressive description of the durability of a ritual complex whose basic components have remained virtually intact for almost 200 years, despite its deep involvement in great social and political upheavals. Another contribution that forcefully illustrates that ritual rigidity and socio-political change can go hand in hand is provided by David Lan, who examines the role of Dande ancestral rites during Zimbabwe’s war of liberation. He states that:

“It would seem that, in a changing world, ideology and ritual must constantly seek out new raw material to feed upon, to ingest and absorb in order to grow to meet the challenges change brings, and in order to remain essentially unchanged.”  
(Lan, 1985:225)

The encounter between rigid ritual and socio-political change is not, however, always as unproblematic and smooth as in the Merina and Dande cases. Generalising to the whole of Africa, Victor Turner came close to portraying the two as mutually exclusive in one of his early writings:

“Wherever our kind of Western individualism crops up in Central Africa, the tribal religions wilt and perish in a surprisingly short time, and with them vanish the tribal symbols. ... In order to thrive, however, it [ritual custom] seems to need a matrix made up of many long-standing customary ways of behaving, thinking, and feeling. ... If the present rapid tempo of change in Africa, and the social mobility it is promoting, are ever slowed down and stabilized into a social order that will continue in much the same form over many years, then we may have a widespread revival of participation in ritual” (Turner, 1968:22-23)

Clifford Geertz has illustrated the problematic relationship between social change and ritual rigidity in his classic case of the double tragedy of a child’s funeral on Java. The *slametan* ritual, an essential part of social life

in rural areas, caused friction and great distress when it was arranged in an urban setting characterised by new types of social and political organisation. The ritual had not adapted to the more complex political environment in town, and “it seemed as if the ritual were tearing the society apart rather than integrating it, were disorganizing personalities rather than healing them” (Geertz, 1957:48).

Iraqw ethnography provides a parallel example to this. The *masay* ritual, which is intended to purify, protect, and bring fertility to people and the land in which they live, requires that nobody cross the physical boundaries of the local community for three days following the ritual. Furthermore, it is regarded as crucial that the inhabitants of the ritual area comply with a number of other restrictions for the same period of time, such as not fighting and not using a hoe or other tools made of iron. Ditches were dug to impede government personnel and their vehicles from entering the ritually cleansed area, for example (Thornton, 1980:94). Such strategies may have been efficacious during colonial times, but are futile today. The movements of people coming from the outside are impossible to control, and this is also the case for people residing within the boundaries of the ritual community. Many Christians will not feel obliged to follow the prescriptions of the *masay* ritual, and this causes social conflicts and distress (Snyder, 1997; see also Lawi, 1992:51; Ng’aida, 1975:25).<sup>1</sup> The ritual presupposes religious homogeneity of the local community, or at least that all members of the community respect the most

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<sup>1</sup> Traditional Iraqw and Datoga ritual practices are often explicitly demonised by members of the many but small Pentecostal congregations in the area. In a rather extreme expression of this attitude, one of our neighbours tried to cut down a sacred tree that was the location for ritual gatherings of the women in Dang’aida, an act that caused great consternation in the village. The violator became the target of a formal curse and was socially isolated from the rest of the community, except for the some dozen members of his own congregation.

essential ritual prescriptions. The realities of Iraqw rural life diverge increasingly from this ideal as more and more villagers become Christians or participate actively in the larger society which rewards education and development, and disdains a number of “tribal” customs. The *masay* does not seem to fit into the modern social realities of the day, and its future seems bleak if it is not adapted to the new types of social organisation. In an effort to accommodate, the ritual is now usually held on weekends, capitalising on the fact that most Christians will not do any work in the fields on Sundays, to reduce the likelihood of acts which will break the ritual prescriptions and destroy the efficacy of the *masay* ritual itself. However, this modification, as well as a more general relaxation of other prescriptions, has not managed to solve the problem.

The most recent description from Irqwa Da/aw, generally regarded as the core Iraqw area, reveals the strained relationship between the *masay* and the social organisation of a present-day community that is almost entirely dominated by people who would classify themselves as Iraqw. During the *masay* rituals that were observed by Katherine Snyder in the early 1990s, the elders had great difficulty mobilising enough participants, and “violations of the restrictions surrounding *masay* were more the rule than the exception”. The young boys who were chosen to distribute purifying and protective medicine along the boundaries of and within the ritual area “expressed great reluctance to participate” and demanded what amounted to a bribe to follow the orders of the elders (1997:568,570). Snyder’s interpretation of this development is that the ritual merely represents one of the few remaining means by which the elders are able to show their resistance to developments which have reduced, and continue to threaten, their own prestige and influence in Iraqw society (1997:573). Some twenty years earlier, another anthropologist had described the *masay*

as “the central ritual observance of the Iraqw” and “the key feature of the political ecology of the region” (Thornton, 1980:86,88). Against this background, the future of the *masay* among the Iraqw may appear bleak, and it seems like yet another ritual is about to be added to the long list of practices that have succumbed due to their rigidity in the face of social change. The question is then to what extent the fate of the *masay*, as it is described above, is representative for Iraqw ritual in general.

This article takes us on a journey that will show that Iraqw ritual has another aspect, in which flexibility, creativity, innovation and invention play prominent roles in various types of ritual practices. Starting with the ritual prayers already briefly visited in the opening vignette of this article, it concludes that performers of and participants in Iraqw ritual prayers are taking part in a lively debate, a “ritual discourse”, on how to perceive and act on the world. The *sluufay* and the *fiiro* are, I argue, mediums not just for the reproduction, but also for the *making* of Iraqw culture. The article moves on to consider the powerful Iraqw ritual experts, the *qwaslare*, and their role in staging and inventing, sometimes with staggeringly pragmatic motives, rituals intended to solve major dilemmas experienced by the Iraqw in a rapidly changing world. Additional examples serve to illustrate how Iraqw ritual inventiveness and creativity are not confined to the domain of the *qwaslare* and their clan. Finally, it will be demonstrated that Iraqw ritual draws heavily on the power of the culturally distant, either by borrowing elements of exogenous ritual, or by replicating or adopting entire ceremonies of foreign origin.

Creativity, invention and borrowings in ritual may be redefined and imagined as continuities with the past, thereby forging links to one of the most important power sources of ritual: the authority of the ancient, timeless and classic. However, the distant past, whether real or imagined,

is but one of the sources from which Iraqw ritual draws its power. The idea that there is power inherent in cultural distance seems to play a similar role in Iraqw ritual. The recently adopted ritual practices of neighbouring groups, therefore, need not be redefined as “Iraqw” or “ancient” in order to be attributed power. On the contrary, *not* redefining and *not* “iraqwising” an adopted ritual, including its foreign name, may, in fact, be essential for the preservation of the power inherent in the culturally distant.

Rituals, whether invented or borrowed, do tend to be indigenously represented as “unchanging and even unchangeable in order to introduce a measure of control and predictability into social life” (Gilbert, 1989:214). In some of the following examples of ritual creativity and invention, this is certainly not the case, and the Iraqw do not need an anthropologist or historian to tell them that an invention has taken place. Some ritual practices are described by the Iraqw themselves as recent innovations and inventions, and they can sometimes specify the identity of the inventors and the time, place, and circumstances of their introduction. This acknowledgement of discontinuity with tradition and the past does not appear to have any immediate effect on the power and legitimacy that are attributed to these practices. The way these practices are indigenously represented, being portrayed virtually as the right kind of creativity at the right point of time, points to an inherently flexible aspect of Iraqw ritual, which is, I believe, one of the driving forces behind Iraqw social and cultural change in general.

Iraqw ritual is thus not a relic from the past that is bound to collide with modernity, causing conflict and distress. It is rather a flexible tool for handling new and old phenomena in ways that make sense in a changing world. Ritual is a, if not *the*, prime site for making, creating and inventing

Iraqw culture, and, as we shall see, the Iraqw appear to have been aware of this fact long before anthropologists discovered that:

“ritual may be creative, constitutive proactive,- and hence, an instrument in all human societies at all times. Rather than being reduced to a species of ceremonial action that insulates enchanted, self-reproducing systems from the “real” world, then, ritual may be seen for what it often is: a vital element in the processes that make and remake social facts and collective identities. Everywhere.” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1993)

Before I try to substantiate these claims, let me consider how far Bloch’s tunnel analogy can carry us along the road to an understanding of Iraqw ritual. The two forms of prayer that appeared in the *geetla/angw* ritual I opened with may, in fact, serve to illustrate well several of the points that Bloch pursued in his influential 1974 essay on ritual language, the work in which he introduced the famous passage on ritual as a tunnel in which “there is no possibility of turning either right or left” and where “the only thing to do is to follow” (1989 {1974}:41).

### ***The sluufay***

In southern Mbulu the *sluufay* is performed only on special and rare occasions, such as the annual *geetla/angw* ritual or the inauguration of a new house. It demonstrates a number of the characteristics that Bloch lists as typical features of highly formalised language. As the entire audience is participating by humming rhythmically and approvingly throughout the prayer, there is no room for interruptions other than the leader’s complaints about the lack of rhythm, harmony, or volume in the response he is getting from the audience. It is difficult, as Bloch points out, to argue with a song, and it is not less so with a *sluufay*.

<i>Aten ta sla'asla'aán</i>	We love each other
<i>ma'aay ne damú</i>	(like) water and honey
<i>nu/ú ne nu/ú</i>	sexual organ and sexual organ
<i>ma'aay ne neqwa</i>	water and trough
<i>tlawu ne danda</i>	cloth and the back
<i>dawa ne afa</i>	hand and mouth
<i>yae ne ya/ati</i>	foot and sandal
<i>suuma ne hbara</i>	shoulder and stick
<i>ya/ati ne kolo (x2)</i>	sandal and heel (x2)
<i>saga ne deeqwa</i>	head and razor
<i>laqwa ne taami (x2)</i>	needle and thread (x2)
<i>ila ne kasami (x2)</i>	eye and arrow (x2)
<i>aten ta dinkwari sluufaán.</i>	may we prosper together

These are the final verses of a *sluufay* that was recorded in Maghang in 1990. A comparison between this text and other *sluufay* which have been recorded elsewhere in Mbulu and Hanang Districts during the last 30 years exhibit a number of similarities and a degree of standardisation over time and space that is remarkable considering that a population of some 500,000 is involved and that writing and literacy play an insignificant role in the sphere in which the *sluufay* occur.<sup>2</sup> The first time I tried to translate a *sluufay* I had recorded, I found that the various (mostly young) individuals whom I asked to help me considered this a difficult task. The *sluufay* contained, they said, words that were hard to understand because they were from “the old days”. The occurrence of archaic words (such as *nu/ú* and *neqwa* above) in ritual language is explained by Bloch as a consequence of formalisation. The formalisation of words and expressions implies that they are protected against the effects of more general linguistic and logical processes that occur outside the sphere of formalisation and ritual. Thus, words get stuck in ritual and become archaic forms, losing their

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<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Wada (1978:50), Thornton (1980:44,63), Kamera (1988:222), Mous (1990:4), Snyder (1993), Selvik (1998), Johnson (1966b), Hagborg (1996), Berger (n.d.), Sanka (1993).

propositional force in the process, as everyday language and vocabulary is transformed by the course of history. The fruitfulness of semantic analysis of highly formalised texts such as the *sluufay* is therefore limited, for as Bloch states, “what is being said is beyond logic” (1989 {1974}:32).

The young informants who were unable to translate the archaic forms had all been participants on occasions when *sluufay* was performed, but they had made little or no effort to understand the words they were hearing and actively responding to. The propositional force of these words was thus practically non-existent for a number of the participants. The ambiguity and even incomprehensibility of the archaic language employed in ritual prayers such as the *sluufay* may be seen as contributing to the establishment of the condition that is an explicit primary concern in Iraqw ritual prayers: social harmony and consensus among the participants. Words and images that carry little or no propositional force are less likely to produce foci of conflict, and they draw attention to a remote and mythical past that is shared and valued by the participants. The statements of the *sluufay* are thus “sanctified”, which serves to situate them “beyond criticism and to define recalcitrance as sacrilege” (Rappaport, 1971:35).

There are several parallels to the durability of archaic language to be found in the material culture of the *geetla/angw*. For example, the beer that is served must be brewed solely from sorghum (*maangwaré*), and not from the mixture of sorghum and maize (a relatively recent introduction in brewing beer) that is the most common in non-ritual occasions. The drinking vessels are calabashes that are split in two, not the cans or plastic cups that are used on other occasions. The beer itself is brewed in, and served from, a huge clay pot, and not the more practical one or two hundred litre steel drums that are such a common sight in Iraqw villages. The sorghum beer, the gourds, and the clay pot have, to a large extent,

been replaced by modern and more practical or inexpensive equivalents in the non-ritual sphere of life, just as, it seems, the now archaic language has been replaced by modern forms that are commonly used and understood in daily life. Such features are common and, some would say, essential elements of ritual that give people a sense of continuity and reassurance in a complex and changing world by connecting them with a mythical stable, safe and powerful past.

The close association between the *sluufay* and the Iraqw past makes it a powerful instrument for legitimising the event of which it is a part. Occurring during the *geetla/angw* or the inauguration of a new house, the *sluufay* has obvious functionalist aspects that serve to reinforce relationships between people. Houses are built with the help of neighbours and relatives and the participants at the *geetla/angw* are mainly recruited from the neighbourhood of the household by which it is arranged. Not to turn up at a neighbour's *geetla/angw* is considered a very serious anti-social act that even threatens the relationship between the Iraqw and *Looaa*, the deity. Furthermore, the unity of this community is strongly emphasised by the formal structure of the *sluufay*, which is forcefully experienced through the continuous harmonious and approving humming of all the participants throughout the prayer.

It seems that the *sluufay*, like the Merina circumcision ceremony and the Dande ancestral rites, may be employed in new contexts in which its inherent legitimising power may be applied to new phenomena. When the new Catholic church was opened in Maghang in the early 1960s, the event was marked by the performance of *sluufay*, and from Irqwa Da/aw there are references to the staging of *sluufay* to mark the investiture of priests, the opening of schools, and national holidays (Thornton, 1980:152). Furthermore, despite the occurrence of archaic terms and a remarkable

degree of standardisation over space and time, the *sluufay* does contain elements that are undoubtedly of recent origin. Examples of this range from references to locations such as “Kenya”, “Moshi”, and even “Norway”, to the depiction of a change in Iraqw cosmology that took place in the 1950s, which I will return to below.

Bloch has been criticised for defining ritual language “near the extreme, right next to meaninglessness, on a continuum of communication practices”, and for employing an approach that “reproduces and relicences structural-functionalism for the study of others” (Kelly & Kaplan, 1990:125-126).<sup>3</sup> Morris (1995:576) depicts his study of male initiation rites in Madagascar (Bloch, 1986) as representing “one of the more extreme returns to the Durkheimian position in which ritual is understood as the antithesis of creativity.” In his 1974 essay, however, Bloch did not claim that ritual language is by nature virtually devoid of individual creativity. His thesis was that, with varying degrees of formalisation, there is an inverse relationship between the propositional and the performative (or illocutionary) force of the language employed. A highly formalised text such as the *sluufay* (or the Holy Prayer) will therefore contain messages that are repetitive, standardised and predictable, leaving little or no room for propositions and individual creativity. A smaller degree of formalisation implies less potential performative force, but leaves greater room for creativity and propositional force in the language employed.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For further contributions criticising Bloch’s 1974 essay, see e.g. Tambiah (1981:151-153), Csordas (1987:463), Valeri (1985:193), and Boyer (1990:82-90).

<sup>4</sup> Prior to 1975, the standard Norwegian Bible translation contained a large number of archaic words, expressions and grammatical forms. When the new translation to modern Norwegian was published in 1975 this implied a drastic revision of the liturgical Holy Prayer, which earlier had been virtually unintelligible to many Norwegians and especially to young people like myself at the time. I can vividly remember the startling experience of suddenly understanding the exact meaning of the sentences that constituted the prayer, while at the same time feeling that the new words

This is what distinguishes the *fiiro* from the *sluufay*; not only the language, but also the entire procedure of the former is considerably less formalised than of the latter.

### **The *fiiro***

This kind of prayer, which always precedes a *sluufay*, but is also performed on a number of other occasions, is led by a performer whose statements are made in a rhythmical manner while a member of the audience either translates the message into another language, or provides a short confirming statement in Iraqw in response to each message. As I have illustrated above, the leader of the *fiiro* concludes each section by calling upon the whole audience to agree with what he has said or what he has prayed for, whether it is a curse or a blessing, and it is essential that everyone joins the approving statements and gestures at these points. Compared to the *sluufay*, the formal framework of the *fiiro* allows for much longer sentences and archaic forms are absent, and the language used by the performer is usually very close to everyday language, although characterised by frequent metaphorical expressions. During an in-door *fiiro*, as during *sluufay*, the sexes are segregated in different rooms, and the seating of the male audience usually reflects differences in age and social status. A number of rules regulate the conduct of the audience; for example, smoking is not allowed during the *fiiro*, nor are the participants allowed to sit on stones, or to tie their toga around their knees, which is the common way of sitting during less formal meetings and social occasions.

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were just not right for the occasion. The 1975 translation provoked a number of strongly negative reactions, amounting to accusations of sacrilege, in the congregation of which I was a part as a teenager. These sentiments can in part be explained, using

There is a certain degree of standardisation regarding the general topics that are addressed in a *fiiro*. Worries about the health and fertility of people, land, and livestock are expressed, and the state of affairs is described in terms of feelings of poverty, misery and pessimism. Evilness, misconduct and disease are cursed, and it is emphasised that harmonious social relations are a prerequisite for receiving the blessings of *Looaa*. There is, however, also room for comments on a wide spectre of issues in the *fiiro*, ranging from a lost needle to the local effects of Nyerere's vision of African socialism and Structural Adjustment Programs recently imposed by the International Monetary Fund.

Unless otherwise stated, the *fiiro* texts that follow have been transcribed from recordings made on various occasions and locations in southern Mbulu between 1989 and 1995. In all but the first of these text, I have omitted the responses to each of the statements of the performer. Between each of the lines below there should be an “*ee*”, “*eif*”, “*mm*”, or some other expression of agreement or support, except after the concluding call for the approval of the entire audience. A shouted response by the audience is marked in bold type of letters. The comments in brackets are to clarify the meaning of statements that are not easily translated into English.

### ***Fiiro texts***

In the southern Mbulu area, the well-being of people, land, and livestock is wholly dependent on sufficient rainfall. The rainy season is short and unreliable, in contrast to Irqwa Da/aw, the mountainous areas from which

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Bloch's model, as a result of loss of illocutionary or performative force due to the increased propositional force of the language employed.

the Iraqw started migrating at the end of the previous century. The preoccupation with rainfall and signs of rain is therefore great:

**1. Performer:** *Aáng laweeír doomi daadeer*

In old days there was torrential rain during the month of *doomu* (March/April)

**Respondent:** *-Eít*

-Yes

**2. Laweeír doomu hamá araanaaká, anaáxuaaká yee**

We do not get that rain now, I do not know why

*-Eít*

-Yes

**3. Tam isangwdá' ta duaaimaan in tsatiít a xuaanaaká**

Whether it is because the breast we use to suck has dried up, we do not know

*-Eít*

-Yes

**4. Too án hám nin firiím yeé**

Tell them, I will now pray that

*-Eít*

-Yes

**5. Ooryó xaasá doorá ga/aawaán, siiwirír kilá' hamí ti diriiaan**

Now, we are looking up at the sky

*-Eít*

-Yes

**6. Ooryó huunkír tsatsaa'aar xaa haniisare' raaqaay!**

Would you please bring the cool cloud, folks!<sup>5</sup>

**7. Audience: Xaasé ya/aamaré' haniisare' oryó!!**

**Do agree, bring it to us!!**

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<sup>5</sup> The fact that the performer is addressing his request to the audience, and not directly to *Looaa*, will be discussed below (see page 207-213).

The metaphor in line 3, “the breast we use to suck”, illustrates the experience of fundamental dependence on the female goddess *Looaa* for the provision of rain. The Iraqw are like infants who can only cry for more, which the participants do in a literal sense in line 7.

Another important issue addressed in the *fiiro* is the prevalence of illness, and once again a rather depressing picture of the situation is presented:

*Too asé há m sum’i tlaraara/ír sleémero gagaara umú baalár iwa kahh i káhh*

Our shoulders hurt because of the stretchers we carry every day

*Too yaá, án há m ni firiím yeé*

Tell them, I pray

*Anán oo’ geewór gwa slaqwá muu yaa nee hikwaawo an firiimaán*

I will say, we pray about the illness in the bodies of people and cattle

*Too yaá, oryó xaa geewó baá yaamuwo tsauúr ími*

Tell them, please let these illnesses on earth cool down

*Xaa fali tsauye’ raaqaay!*

Please let the skin (of the earth) cool down, folks!

*Too yaá, too án bindi kii/ yaa*

Tell them, if I return

*Geewoóri ta xuaanaaká án umuwoó sleeme oaro qiitlaaká*

An illness we do not know, even I do not dare to mention its name

*Geewoóri daáwa iwa kahh yaa*

This illness which has no cure

*Án dingi axmaamiis a bará makayká ta bay dofu*

In the old days I heard about it among the animals who are called rhinos

*Too yaá, gár muu há m gwaa fak a tí*

Tell them, the thing that has finished people is this

*Geewoóri ta kaaha baariya*

This illness is called *baariya* (a wound that does not heal)

Another standard section of the *fiiro* concerns evil forces and misconduct, and the following text mentions various kinds of evil that threaten the health and well-being of people. These sections typically do not contain direct accusations of named individuals, and the conclusions are phrased in vague and indirect terms, such as “Whoever it is, let him be punished!”:

1. *Too yaá, mukdú gwaá Háydoom heé hhoó’ i deer oo tlaákw i deer*  
Tell them, among the people at Haydom (Lutheran Hospital) there are good ones and bad ones
2. *Too aáng gaará gaa firiimaán, ana ooaán yaá*  
Tell them, in the past we prayed for this thing, we said
3. *Hamí mwi daáwár /aay gawaaqá waá ale*  
Right now, people are taking medicine there
4. *Too yaá, ilmoodá wák ta hanmiisi, an ooaan kudá hhoó’*  
Tell them, the tablet that is given, we say, the good one
5. *Xaa hariihhoó’ ilmoodá ngi qaasi*  
Let it bring good
6. *Too yaá, kudá múk waá tlaákw yaá, kudá dirós atá gaa paraatlaán*  
Tell them, for that bad one to people we have put aside a special place
7. *Aga slahhaa’aán asma, too yaá, bara slahhaa’aán yaá*  
Because we have suffered a lot, tell them, and if we have suffered a lot
8. *Akaahaan kár gará milá, gaa geewoóde laqá gár diimbe?*  
We say, what is this, is it a disease or another thing?

9. *Asma barakaákae múk qwasleeri i deer*  
Because in here there are healers
10. *Too yaá, kudaáda tlaákw atoóna bawaán poloótirók daqni bihhaá doó Hhaándo, an didí éér*  
Tell them, we told that bad one that you will find your plot near Hhando's house, you will get it there
11. *Too yaá, xaa kudá tlaákw mindiwa áykwí kii/ ooryó!*  
Tell them, the bad one should never come back home to this land!
12. ***Mindiwa kii/ raaqaay!!***  
**Folks, do not let him come back home!!**
13. *Too yaá, ala dirós gaa axaás aga aándiíke?*  
Tell them, he has heard where his place is, you see?
14. *Too yaá, Hamán ooaan yaá*  
Tell them, we will now say
15. *Daqni heé do'wí waá tlaákw, nee kudá xoorór waá tlaákw*  
That bad one, to this house and to society
16. *Too án hamán oo' yaá*  
I will say
17. *Qwaarú: qwaarú heé gu koóm, ooryó qwaarú takaahi, Karaáti kaahi kafyí dir'eé' nee laqwa. Heé hatlá', Aáli i kaahi buuraár laar faanqw a aaimaán. Heé hatlá', tam dahaymo tam milá, heé qwaarú koóm ngu ooi*  
Things that are lost, who has any? Karato has (lost) a hat, and a needle, Ali says he has a hat, this is seventh brew that it has been announced. Other people, even a stranger can announce a lost belonging
18. *Too yaá Salaahó, Salaahó qwaareemaakí yaahamaamisaán umú siiwaro*  
Tell them Salaho, Salaho, we always ask each other for the lost things
19. *Too qwaarú slawaanaaká, too yaá gaarí anaáxuaaká yeé*  
We do not get them, tell them, I do not know this thing

20. *Qwareemaaká tam in kwasasahhamiisaán anaáxuaaká*  
I do not know if we fry the lost things
21. *Qwaareemaaká dooqi bará qataa'á ooryó*  
Perhaps the lost things are in the pots
22. *Too yaá, qwaareemaaká dooqa bará qataa'áy*  
Tell them, perhaps they are in the pots
23. *Deégerká hám gwaá Háydoomuusinge iwiiwít i múk lehhiit gawaasí*  
*alé*  
There is a plane which lands and picks up people from Haydom
24. *Ala slér ira tleér iqo deéro?*  
Has it ever taken a cow?
25. *Too yaá, ooryó xaa qwaareemaaká dooqi bará qataa'áy gán*  
Tell them, the lost things could be in the cooking pots
26. *Too yaá, ala qwaaruúwí atoó yaahamaamisaán*  
Tell them, the truth is that we always ask for lost things
27. *Bál takaahi adoorók naa hamád bál tu didáwaá ádbáy, bálduú oó'*  
*algee ale*  
When your day comes, on that day they will treat you, on that day you will confess it a bit
28. *Too yaá, gám qwaareemo kaka, ooryó qwaareemá muu*  
Tell them, these lost things, people's lost things
29. *Ooryó xaa qwaareemaa ki/isare' raaqaay!*  
Please bring back the lost things, folks!
30. ***Xaasé ki/ir raaqaay!!***  
**Let them come back, folks!!**
31. *Mukdá' qwaareemaá /aáy xaa ti afe si'i!*  
Those who eat the lost things let them quarrel among themselves!
32. ***Ti afe si'ir oryó!!***  
**Let them quarrel among themselves!!**

33. *Too yaá, too yaá, too muu garká ga kah*  
Tell them, there is a thing people say
34. *Ankah heeko tlaákw, kudá múk waá tlaákw nee oo do'wí waá tlaákw*  
I say that bad person, bad to people and bad to this household
35. *Too yaá, kooko xweerawi guiiká, doó hee harwediit*  
Tell them, someone does not sleep at night, (s)he is circling around someone else's house
36. *Too yaá, kuqí bará dó'waá guu'*  
Tell them, another sleeps inside
37. *Anaáka yaá, heekwi kaaharmó kón, too yaá, i doó heé gaamiis*  
Another one has bad medicine, he wants to destroy another person's home
38. *Na/ó doó hee hayaahaymí baló faakiiká*  
Another person's child never ceases to cough
39. *Too yaá, kooko, kooko gár i huwahuwa hatlá'*  
Tell them, another one sends harmful things
40. *Too yaá, kooki slumtá duxún, ar hikwá doó hee*  
Tell them, another one opens someone else's cattle fence (i.e. stealing domestic animals)
41. *Hikwa qaeemo i naa/iiká, na/a'á doó hee alúwá /aa/aminá'*  
He does not even fear taking cows with calves, leaving crying children behind in that house
42. *Too anaákah yaá, too ooryó heewú adoorí, heewú adoorí gár ku bawaan?*  
Tell them, I say, what shall we tell this man?
43. *Aqo poloótirós aqo bihhaá doó Hhaándo*  
His plot be near Hhando's house
44. *Kudá tlaákw ilmoodá sleeme miwa gaa bú' dirse kudú daáwa*  
That bad one, let that tablet fail to help him

45. *Too yaá, heewú adoorí atán ooaan yaá*  
Tell them, the man of this kind, we say
46. *Heewú adoorí ooryó buhaareeká tii diriiaan yaá*  
This kind of a man, let this rainy season we have
47. *Ooryó xaasé na'ase' ooryó miwa al/ayaán raaqaay!*  
Please let us not finish this season together with him, folks!
48. *Miwa al /ayaán raaqaay!!*  
**Do not let us finish the rainy season with him, folks!!**

This *firo* was recorded in a village some five kilometres from the 300-bed Haydom Lutheran Hospital, and the first line (1) refers to people who have been sent there to get help. It is prayed that the good among the patients get healed by the “tablets” (line 4-5, the original meaning of *ilmoo* is “grain”) they receive there, and that the evil one will never return home from the hospital (line 11-12). The latter should end up, according to the performer, next to Hhando’s place (line 10, 13 and 43), and Hhando is a real person who is living close to the hospital graveyard at Haydom. The performer then moves to specify various kinds of evil and misconduct that cause suffering in the community. He lists a number of items that have been lost by people present (line 17), and states his suspicion that these things have been taken by people. They have ended up in “someone’s pots”, i.e. they have been “eaten”, in a broad sense of the word. Things and livestock do not disappear without a trace like the people who leave with the occasional aeroplane that takes off from Haydom (line 23-24). The performer prays that the lost things will be returned to their proper owners (line 29-30), and that those who have taken them will quarrel or fight among themselves (line 31-32). He then proceeds to witches (line 35), those who use bad medicines (*kaharmo*) to harm people (line 37-39), and

thieves (line 40-41), all of whom deserve to end up “next to Hhando’s place” before the rainy season is over.

We have seen that the *fiiro* allows highly specific and problematic local issues to be addressed, such as the fact that one of the participants has lost a hat or a needle (line 17). The leader is free, however, to comment on and ask questions about much more general issues. The following *fiiro*, recorded by W. D. Kamera, refers to the dramatic local implementation, commonly called “operation”, of the national policy of *ujamaa* in the first half of the 1970s:

1. If this disease has been inflicted on us by Loa then we ask for purification.
  2. Tell them this: I beg you all who have gathered here now
  3. Tell them this: If this disease is from Loa, then may its fire cool off!!!
  4. **Yes, may it cool off!!**
  5. Tell them this: I repeat. I say if this disease is man-made
  6. Tell them this: If it is man-made then let us return it to him.
  7. Tell them this: We have returned it to its owners but it never agrees.
  8. Tell them this: We shall never tire to return diseases to their owners.
  9. Tell them this: Now all of you: If this sickness is a spear by a man. Please brethern let us return this spear to its owners!!
  10. **Yes! Return it to him!!**
  11. Tell them this: There exists a third thing which disturbs us.
  12. Tell them this: A third thing disturbing us is called “Operation”.
  13. Tell them this: The Operation we know is the one done in Hospitals
  14. Tell them this: We have never heard of the land being “skinned” or “operates”
  15. Tell them this: We do not know yet how to react to this new thing.
  16. Tell them this: There is not any living elder who can give the best advice to us about these strangers.
  17. Tell them this: Shall we pray that these people go back to their own lands or what shall we say?
  18. Tell them this: Please brethern let that spear get cool!!
  19. **Yes, let it cool!!**
- (Kamera, 1988:218-221, bold letters and exclamation marks are added)

The two examples below concern the deterioration of social norms and traditional values. In both cases the critique of the current situation is expressed by referring to an idealised past:

*Takaahi masoomba aáng tin daandeemo hamtlaatlít*  
They say, the young men used to wash each other's backs

*Too yaá, asma ti slá'*  
Tell them, because they loved each other

*Masoomo hám de'emaaká' kuqá gu slaiiká*  
Nowadays, the youth does not love him (his mate)

*Too yaá, bungu slaiikáyaá, gadá ngus slaiiká?*  
Tell them, if he does not love his mate, what makes him not love him?

\* \* \*

1. *Too yaá, gárma kuú sleeme qeeríim*  
Tell them, you boy, you must be clever
2. *Too yaá, dasi axweesanto muwaar bá/ gán*  
Tell them, do not let the girl overcome you with words
3. *Too yaá, ma'á doóhe mi hheekaar*  
Tell them, do not go to fetch water for other people
4. *Too yaá, Gamán waatleér gawaasí, ád karyaakoósú Háydoom*  
Tell them, you go there, like those huts at Haydom
5. *Dasír doóhon al/ák*  
The girl cheats you
6. *In o' ánkú buú' qwál tláw ma'ay'eé kuqá hheekang*  
She tells you, I will pay you, go fetch water for me
7. *Too yaá, gám ala kwaá baló si'iká*  
Tell them, you will never refuse

8. *Ma'aydín hhék, tsindo uri male ya/áb*  
You will go to fetch water for her, and in the evening, she will send you again
9. *Ma'aygaa hhék, ala matlo kwán sangw tleéra gán?*  
You have brought her water, will you go away tomorrow?
10. *Too yaá, alo matlon didí geexeé in tleér Aruúsha*  
Tell them, tomorrow she will leave you at home, while she goes to Arusha
11. *Too yaá, dasú bará hoomaárí tlaatláw xaa ki/isare' íími!*  
Tell them, please bring back the girls who went to foreign lands!
12. *Ya/aamaré' xaa ni ki/i!!*  
**Do agree, let them come back home!!**
13. *Xaa nee daaqó ayaarén ti duxuutir!*  
Let them get married to our boys!
14. *Ti duxuuti raaqaay!!*  
**Let them marry each other, folks!!**

This is a warning to the boys who are attracted to the ways of urban life, where traditional institutions have been replaced by new patterns of social interaction. When a boy fetches water for a girl, this means a reversal of the traditional pattern that this is the task of young unmarried girls. In fact, the customary way of communicating the sex of a new-born female child is to say that a *hhekusmo* has arrived, i.e. “a person who fetches water”. The primary concern of the speaker is that the way young people organise their lives implies a threat to marriage, the essential institution for the reproduction of Iraqw clans. The clan affiliation of children born out of wedlock is highly problematic, and the birth of such children is associated with ritual pollution necessitating a prolonged period of seclusion from the rest of society (*meeta doroway*). Many of the girls in the “huts of

Haydom”, or the market area of Haydom, have in fact arrived there precisely for this reason: they have become pregnant out of wedlock, and have been sent to urban Christians (or others who are not afraid of the ritual pollution) who are paid to take care of them for some months after they give birth. These girls are in a sense both expelled and liberated from the social life of their home villages, and are free to get involved in various kinds of enterprises in booming markets, such as the village of Haydom, or distant big towns like Arusha and Dar es Salaam. Not only are they lost to the reproduction of rural Iraqw society, but they also threaten to draw young men after them. A return to their home and to marriage for both girls and boys is the only solution which can restore the lost potential for the reproduction of Iraqw clans and rural life (line 11-14).

The following text comments on another contrast between traditional ways and a practise whose impact on people’s lives in recent years has been strongly influenced by decisions made in the Washington premises of the International Monetary Fund:

*Hám siptaárisíng bara keér gár ta sla’ a slee*  
If you go to a hospital, what they demand is cattle

*Too yaá, takaahi aáko qwál ti qeer!*  
Tell them, they say, you elder, bring it!

*Too yaá, tam heewók i gwaá’ bu’tuwa meeraaká*  
Tell them, even if your person dies, you can still not leave without paying

*Too yaá, to, ala geera adoodí qoónda?*  
Tell them, is this really right?

*To’ geera heewók hám bira gwaá’ alók tun watlísíke, gídaabá toó waátl gán?*  
If your person dies, should you not then be told to leave without paying?

*Too yaá, ala adoorihe atá gawá gurhaami*  
Tell them, for this reason we are in sadness

*Too yaá, Até gár ta gawdeesa taamír hikwa*  
Tell them, what has made us strong is cattle

*Too yaá, hikwaaré kuqá ooryó xaa dabaaré ngi kone' íimi!*  
Tell them, let those cows remain in our hands!

***Ngí kone' oryó!!***  
**Let them remain!!**

The hospital charges for the treatment of the patient whether this is successful or not, while the traditional healers commonly demand payment for accomplished healing. The text reflects a widespread concern about the cost of hospital treatment, which has risen drastically in recent years as a result of the removal of government subsidies on medical treatment. Extensive treatment or a prolonged stay in the hospital is increasingly responsible for the economic ruin of vulnerable households.

### ***The power of mutual consent***

As has been pointed at, the performer is often directing his request to the audience rather than to *Looaa* (e.g. line 6 on page 199, line 2 and 18 on page 205). This reflects a key feature of Iraqw ritual life which is epitomised in the statement that “if we all agree with each others, then *Looaa* will agree with us”. The power of agreement is formulated explicitly in a *fiiro* recorded by Robert Thornton (1980:67-68; see also Kamera, 1988:219):

As I return to say again  
If you all are of one accord

Even heaven must agree  
 Even the earth agrees  
 Since even the ground is ill  
 The ground is ill  
 People are ill  
 Cattle are ill  
 I say, if you all are of one accord  
 This ground we must husband carefully  
 Because by your agreement it is as if you all were carrying a burden  
 Then heaven must agree, and the earth  
 Now all agree the ground be cooled!!  
**It is cooled, it is cooled!!**

An expression from one of the *fiiros* I have referred to earlier conveys the same point by using a powerful metaphor: “All of you here are *qwaslare*”<sup>6</sup>, a term that can be translated as “healers” or “ritual experts”. This does not mean that every single member of the audience is a healer or ritual expert, but that together, by expressing their agreement with the requests that are put forward, they acquire powers that are comparable to, and may even surpass those of the *qwaslare*, including the biomedical practitioners:

1. *Too yaá, diínii suruuk i deer*  
Tell them, I will move to a certain topic
2. *Daqná dír faltá yaamu*  
That is the skin of the earth
3. *Faltá yaamu hamá tiqaán*  
The whole land is sick
4. *Iími geewoodá xuaawaslen nina dahiyé’*  
Strange diseases have suddenly appeared
5. *Geewuduuká’ atén hám sleeme i xuaanaaká*  
We do not know these strange diseases

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<sup>6</sup> *Kuungaáká’ dinkwaári diriia’ sleémero takaaha qwasleeri.*

6. *Qwaslaare sleeme ng'ina harslaqatiye'ie*  
Even the *qwaslare* have failed to cure the disease
7. *Bará siptaáli bira keér takaahi, takaahi kú waátl gán*  
If you go to the hospital, you are told to go back home
8. *Gár dáw i káhh, ala amooqae kwá gwagwa'aán*  
They tell you there is no remedy, even when you are dying
9. *Too yaá, geewuduuká' sleeme kingin slaslayká nee qwaslaarér gwaaqá'*  
Tell them, even the *qwaslare* over there (at the hospital) have failed to discover what these diseases are
10. *Atén dír doorene aáng qwaslaare aga tsár tleehhaán*  
We have divided our *qwaslare* into two groups
11. *Kuqú aya, kuqú gwaaqá'*  
The ones at home, and the ones over there (at the hospital)
12. *Hamán ooaan yaá, geewuduuká, naa áykwí dahiyé'*  
We say, these diseases have come to our land
13. *Geewuduuká' in tse'eesaán*  
We shall cool down these diseases
14. *An ooaan yaá, geewuduuká', xaasé' geewór faltá yaamu i tsauur daaqaay!*  
We say, these diseases, let the illness of the skin of the land cool down, folks!
15. *Ya/aamaré' i tsauur!!*  
**Do agree, let it cool down!!**

### ***Mutual consent and ethnic and religious affiliation***

My experience with *fiiro* is that if there is a Datoga present in the audience, then the entire message of the speaker will be translated into Datoga by an interpreter. The importance and power of mutual accord thus transcends

this particular ethnic boundary and, as we shall see, divisions between Christianity and traditional Iraqw religion:

1. *Too yaá, nina baá do'wí dahaán*  
Tell them, we have entered this house
2. *Gár tasa diirí dahaán i deer saalingrén kudá naa hamaár*  
What made us enter is that the time of our prayers has arrived
3. *Daxa a saalimaán, /iisi tam baá kaniísaro hee bira dáh in xasliit*  
Now we pray, even in church, the person who enters keeps quiet
4. *Too yaá, too umú heewo iia ngi qaasi yeé*  
Tell them, tell everybody to listen
5. *Too até /iisi a múk slahhaahhaá' dinkwaaro*  
We are all people who are in trouble
6. *Too hám muu bir dinkwaári dirii' /iisi Looi naa ó' kungá tam tsár sleeme firirimé'*  
If people are together, *Looaa* has said that you should pray, even if you are only two or three.

These are the opening lines of a *fiiro* that was performed during a *geetla/angw* in Endaharghadatk in 1994. Though the prayer is explicitly addressed to *Looaa*, in this case Iraqwised Swahili terms from Christian religion are employed, such as *sala* (Swahili for “prayer”, in line 2 and 3, and 7 below) and *kanisa* (Swahili for “church”, in line 3, and 9 below). Furthermore, line 6 is strongly reminiscent of Matthew, 18:20: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”<sup>7</sup> The explicit equations between Iraqw religion and Christianity must in this case be seen in connection with the special circumstances of

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<sup>7</sup> Note that in this particular line, even though it is probably partly inspired by a biblical verse, the performer reverts to the Iraqw term for praying, *firirimé'*, when he is directly referring to *Looaa*.

this particular *geetla/angw*. A Toyota Landcruiser was parked right outside the mud hut where the ritual was being held, and the two sons of the deceased household head present were both well educated Lutherans who held high ranking government positions, one of them locally, and the other one in Arusha. A *geetla/angw* had not been arranged for a number of years in this particular household, a fact which is illustrative of mainstream Lutheran ideology in southern Mbulu. In comparison to the Catholic church, Lutherans have generally kept a greater distance to traditional Iraqw culture, and in particular to ritual practices such as the *geetla/angw* ritual. Thus, the two brothers broke with common Lutheran practice by formally hosting the event, and these circumstances seem to be reflected in the statements made by the first performer of the *fiiro*. Towards the closing section of the prayer, he relayed the following message:

7. *Do'wí laá a doó tawa saalimaan*  
Today, this house is a house of prayer
8. *Múk taa baá kaniísár wá ay i kaahh /iisi kungú xuá'*  
You know the saying that there is nobody who quarrels in church
9. *Gaarí laá hamá kaniísár bariise*  
Today, this place is the church of the elders

When people in the southern Mbulu area are asked in Swahili about their religious affiliation (*Una dini gani?*, literally “What religion do you have?”), they classify themselves as *Mlutheri* (“Lutheran”), *Mkatoliki* (“Catholic”), or *Mpentekosti* (“Pentecostal”) if they belong to any of these denominations. The answer is more complicated, however, if the person being addressed is oriented towards traditional Iraqw religion, and common answers would be “*Sina dini*” (“I do not have a religion”), “*Mimi ni mpagani*” (“I am a pagan”), or sometimes “*Mimi ni mshetani*”, which

may be translated as “I am a Satanist”. The latter statement derives from the fact that Neetlangw, a “water spirit” which is central in Iraqw pollution beliefs, has been interpreted by missionaries and Christians as the Iraqw counterpart of Satan. This rather awkward equation between Neetlangw and Satan is used in the current Iraqw translation of the New Testament.<sup>8</sup> The same translators did not consider it appropriate to use *Looaa* for God, and chose to use the Swahili *Mungu* instead. Most independent observers with some knowledge of the characteristics attributed to the main deities and spirits of the two religions would probably agree that *Looaa* has more in common with the Christian God than Neetlangw has with Satan. Pushed to its logical conclusion, the message is that while the Iraqw have no equivalent to God, they do have a devil; in fact there are many of them and they are all over the place, dominating the lives of Iraqw people in numerous ways. These ways of speaking about traditional religion represent a classical pattern that communicates inferiority. By defining traditional religion by qualities it does not have (non-religion, non-Christian, no God), or as an adversary to various aspects of the defining principle (anti-Christian, pro-devil), the implicit message is that traditional religion is inferior to, or the opposite of, Christian ideology.<sup>9</sup>

By arranging the *geetla/angw* ritual, the two brothers made a clear statement protesting this view of the inferiority or “paganness” of Iraqw traditional religion and ritual practices, and they demonstrated that they did not perceive the hosting of such an event to be incompatible with the

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<sup>8</sup> Early Catholic translations, however, used “*sitani*” or “*shitanmo*”, and not “Neetlangw”, for Satan (Maarten Mous, personal communication, October 1998).

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that the on-going Lutheran Bible translation project is currently considering using the term “*Looaa*” for the biblical “God”. An interesting feature in this context is revealed by a *fiiro* which was performed during a *masay* ritual in Dongobesh in December 1998. In this particular case, both the performer and his

Lutheran ideology they adhered to. The “pagan” performer of this particular *fiiro* made the same point from his perspective by equating the mud hut in which the ritual took place with a church (line 9), and by stating quite explicitly that the participants in the *geetla/angw* can learn proper conduct from what is preached and practised in church (line 3, 6, and 8). In this way, the two brothers and the performer of the *fiiro* argued for the bridging of gaps generated by rhetorical ascription of inferiority or dangerousness to the other. What remains, then, are complementary religious beliefs and complementary rituals, and a merging of *Looaa* and the Christian *Mungu*. The conceptual merging of deities of contrasting religions is seen more directly in the way Iraqw texts are translated when there are Datoga present: *Looaa* is invariably translated as *Aseeta*, the Datoga supreme deity, and the equation between the two deities appears not to be hampered by the contrasting qualities ascribed to them by their respective adherents. This kind of cultural relativism, then, is an aspect of the production of the preconditions required for obtaining the blessings of the deity, whatever name she or he carries: the social harmony and mutual accord of everyone in the gathering irrespective of ethnic and religious affiliation.

### ***The fiiro as discourse***

The examples above illustrate that the formalised features of the *fiiro* leave room for creativity and propositional force, and that a wide spectre of issues can be addressed. Some of these issues and statements are standardised, such as the announcement that “the skin of the land is sick”

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translator used “*Mungu*” instead of “*Aseeta*” and “*Looaa*” in their Datoga and Iraqw statements (Nils Gunnar Songstad, personal communication, February 1999).

or the prayer for the healing of the blisters if the *fiiro* is connected with a work party. Other statements, although being indirectly and carefully formulated, must be seen as highly political and potentially controversial, and contain interpretations or expressions of opinion on current problems caused by social change.

These ritual prayers are monologues, however, and the audience is left with no other option but to express their agreement with the propositions presented by the performer. Within the “ritual tunnel” represented by the individual *fiiro* there is little or no room for debate, objection, or interruption by the audience. If such a breach of conduct were to occur, it would be sanctioned by the performer, as evident from a statement made during one of the *fiiros* referred to above: “Who is this laughing, let him stand, if you insult mine (statements), say it, I’ll go to my seat, you stand up!”<sup>10</sup> Such a threat is unlikely to be effectuated, and I have never witnessed a performer step down because of objections or interruptions from the audience. The performer has absolute power as long as he is leading the *fiiro*, but his autocracy does not last for long.

There is an inherent element of dialogue in the performance of *fiiro*. Whenever a *fiiro* occurs there are always two or more performers. In fact, according to informants in southern Mbulu, there must always be an even number of performers. The young performer of one of the texts above was succeeded by an elder who referred to the previous speaker as follows:

*Axweesani i kumít, too yaá, axweesani bir kumít yaá*

There are more things to be said, and if there are more things to be said

*Garmaawí há m niwa tláy yaá*

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<sup>10</sup> *Heewá heemá, heé qaseeseém tós ngir sihhiiti gáwtí alé, bar ana tsáhh ta’á naa waaqá’ to’ ki/áng yaamí ale án ta’ár sihhiit!*

When this boy (the preceding performer) stood up to speak

*Diirihe murú naa laqán i deer*

He showed us several things

*Too yaá, muruusíng daqta unsa tsatsahhaamaán*

Tell them, we are just now beginning to realise these things

*To' múk baakí dirít' sleémero gaa ka tsaahhiiká*

Tell them that people in here will not understand a thing at once

*Aqo heé wák gan tsaahh gay dír múkí oo'*

It takes one person to understand a thing, and then he explains it to people

In this case, the second performer explicitly supports the messages that have been presented by the first. Such statements are not uncommon, and overt expressions of conflict or disagreement between the messages of various performers at the same ritual occasion are rarely seen. Diverging opinions or contrasting interests between the performers of a particular ritual occasion must be kept from surfacing in order to preserve the ideal of social harmony. This may be achieved, for example, by choosing topics which are not controversial in relation to the other performer(s), or by clouding dissent through the use of ambiguous symbols:

“Conflict expressed in a symbolic idiom allows greater ambiguity and manoeuvrability; it is less definitive and much safer than if such ideas were to be expressed overtly and “prosaically” in a secular every day context ... ritual context actually facilitates political discourse.” (Gilbert, 1989:226-227)

It would be reasonable to assume that submerged and symbolically represented tensions may be perceived by the other participants, especially those who know the performers and their idioms well. Clearly, although the facade of the *firo* is apparently devoid of controversy and conflict, the

fact remains that we are dealing with the messages of at least two individuals whose outlooks on the world can never be completely identical.

A visitor travelling through the Mbulu District can hardly avoid observing some kind of ritual activity taking place along the road or in the villages (s)he is passing. The *fiiro* is not only an integral part of occasional major rituals like the *masay* and *geetla/angw*, but it is also performed as part of everyday social events such as meetings of various kinds, court cases, and when sick people are carried to the hospital. During the agricultural season, the *fiiro* may be a daily occurrence as a part of the institution of *slaqwe*, beer parties held in connection with communal work in the fields of relatives or neighbours. The *fiiro* is, in short, a frequent occurrence, although the actual members of the audience and the occasion to be marked vary.

The leadership of the *fiiro* is highly decentralised. The main criteria in selecting who is to perform the prayer is whether the performer is “good” at it, and this is ultimately decided by the participants who are present on the particular occasion. We therefore have a scenario where at least two individuals are allowed to express their concerns about the state of people, land and cattle in a ritual framework, and where others may be allowed to present their own, and possibly diverging, views on the same issues, to the very same or an entirely different audience the next day.

The point is that the decentralised leadership of the *fiiro*, the frequency of occurrence, and the lack of complete formalisation which leaves room for considerable creativity and propositional force, combine to make it meaningful to speak of the cumulative effect of *fiiro* as a ritual discourse in which many and divergent voices can draw on the performative power of ritual. The *fiiro* then becomes an important forum in which to exchange thoughts and feelings about the rapidly changing

environment in which the Iraqw live, and ultimately, a powerful means for handling problematic issues, both old and new, in meaningful and constructive ways. The individual *fiiro* may well be analysed as an instrument of power, or a “tunnel” from which there is no escape other than the one pointed out by the performer in charge. The *fiiro* acquires entirely different properties, however, when it is seen as an institution that is spread over time and space, and that is open to practically anyone who may wish to take the leadership and draw upon the power of ritual in expressing their thoughts and feelings.

Thus, the *fiiro* is not monopolised by elders who use it to control and criticise the young, as evident in an earlier example. The balance of power may well be reversed, as I witnessed during a *fiiro* at a work party where a young man expressed his worries about “elders who go straight to the beer pot”, without first paying a visit to the youth working in the fields (as they should do according to the norms of the communal beer party, *slaqwe*). Whether the topic is the misconduct of the elders or the young, whether it is lack of rain, new diseases, increased hospital charges, or the implementation of radical government policies, it is possible to discern a common feature in these prayers: the discontent with the present is highlighted by juxtaposing it with an ideal past. In many of the texts above this rhetorical device is explicitly formulated. More important in this context, however, is the fact that the very act of making a statement within the formal framework of the *fiiro* automatically establishes a relationship between the message of the speaker and an ideal and powerful past. Ritual has “a tradition-like effect”, according to Moore and Myerhoff (1977:8) “whether performed for the first time or the thousandth”. The statements on the implementation of *ujamaa* policies (page 205-206) are therefore more than the expression of one individual’s personal opinion on the

matter. By placing his scepticism in a *fiiro*, the performer is claiming that he is speaking on behalf of Tradition. He is not merely describing, but actually *creating* a tension between Iraqw culture and government ideology by drawing on the performative power of ritual and the mobilisation of Tradition. In another example (page 212-216) the *fiiro* was used to “un-invent” conflicts and contrasts between Iraqw religion and Christianity. Thus, the *fiiro* cannot be reduced to a means for reproducing and reinforcing “a” structure or “an” ideology. By lending the power of ritual to creative voices, invention and discourse, the *fiiro* sanctifies and authorises process rather than structure, and thus represents a powerful vehicle for change.

The following *fiiro*, recorded at beer party in connection with *slaqwe*, is interesting and revealing in several respects, as the performer in this case is reflecting on the *fiiro* itself:

1. *Boó/aay, iimír doorén, ín aayí nee bariise nee daaqaay to' iia qaasaak*  
Bo/ay, tell our people, mothers and elders and boys, to listen all
2. *Too yaá, hamá diirí doó Sluqó i diriiaán*  
Tell them, we are now here in Slugho's house
3. *Too yaá, taa diirí haraagwaa'aán sleémero*  
Tell them, we have all gathered here
4. *Too yaá, do'wú doó Slúqo /isikó uqo i daraarahanaaká*  
Tell them, usually we do not come here to Slugho's house for no particular reason
5. *Too yaá, án te'eé' ngiqo ureesaaká*  
Tell them, I will not lengthen mine (talk)
6. *Too yaá, Irqwár Iraqw aáng taqo aain muu diíti doog aná xuaaká*  
Tell them, the original Iraqw say, when people met, I don't know

7. *Aná kabilár hatlá' tamar milá*  
If I were of another tribe (literally: I am of another tribe)
8. *Tam didá ti doók ta firaarín aná xuaaká*  
Whether they do pray when they meet, I don't know
9. *Ar ni oo' tidár doorén, layaadár doorén*  
What I will say is that, of our house, the mark of our house
10. *Too yaá, atén iimír baabú baabeemo*  
Tell them, we, since the time of the father of our grandfathers
11. *Muu birta dírwákí doók laqá tam kooán ngaa ayé' taqo firiirín*  
If people meet, even if they are (only) five, they pray

*Layaadár doorén* (line 9) refers to the marks on cattle which identify the animals as belonging to a particular clan. Each clan has its own mark, some of which cover most of the animal's body in order to signify which "house" it belongs to.<sup>11</sup> What we see in this *fiiro* is that the performer is talking about the ritual prayer of the Iraqw as an ethnic emblem, an ancestral tradition that sets the Iraqw apart from other peoples in the area. Although the performer is most probably using the term in this restricted meaning, it is revealing to note for illustrative purposes that *layaadár doorén* not only refers to the permanent marks that are burnt onto the bodies of the entire cattle population of the Iraqw, but also to the iron stick that is used for this purpose. While the *fiiro* may be used as a metonym for an ancient and distinctive Iraqw culture, it is also an instrument for the continuous constructing of Iraqw culture. Just as *layaadár doorén* is both the marker and the mark, the *fiiro* is both the constructor and the construction of Iraqw culture.

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<sup>11</sup> Individual households have in recent years begun to add Latin letters, usually the initials of the household head, to these clan marks, illustrating the move towards a stronger emphasis on individual ownership of domestic animals.

The following case, which is taken from the first article in this collection, was written down at a time when I was less aware of the role and significance of Iraqw ritual prayers as a site for construction of culture. The key point in this dramatic account of cultural change and continuity, processes which have had immense influence on the health and well-being of people in southern Mbulu, is, I believe, that the “decision” was reached “after presenting lengthy prayers to *Looaa*”:

“In the 1950s a Lutheran hospital was established about 10 km from Maghang, and the health services provided by the European missionaries soon became popular among many Iraqw in the surrounding areas. Shortly after the opening, however, the hospital ran into difficulties because of the pollution beliefs of the Iraqw. Inside the building patients died, unmarried women gave birth, and iron caused bleeding during operations and blood tests, events all strongly associated with ritual pollution and the *meeta* precautions. Patients insisted that the dying must be brought outside the building, and healthy individuals refused to donate blood for their anaemic or newly operated on close relatives. According to informants in Maghang, the main problems were solved practically overnight. During a meeting of influential ritual leaders and Iraqw elders it was decided that the hospital compound should be exempt from certain types of *meeta* regulations, and that what took place in this particular location should be regarded as the work of *Looaa*. The result of this decision, which allegedly was reached after lengthy prayers to *Looaa*, was that the Iraqw in adjacent areas could benefit from the evidently efficacious treatment the hospital was able to provide without exposing themselves to the dangers of the extremely strong concentration of ritual pollution that, according to traditional definitions, should be linked up with the location and the health personnel working there.

It is worth noticing that the redefinition of the hospital compound did not alter the fundamental idea that certain events lead to ritual pollution, requiring a state of *meeta*. On the contrary, such beliefs seem to have become strengthened by such processes. By defining the hospital as a place where ritual pollution may not be transmitted, contradictions between practice and religion are avoided, i.e. practice is no longer a

threat to the rationality of pollution and *meeta*. The integration of new ideas and new practices is thus achieved in a manner which ensures the continuity of certain fundamental beliefs. ... These newly created distinctions must obviously be accepted and internalised and such cultural integration is the result of a continual creative discourse rather than an overnight procedure. The story of the redefinition of the hospital compound, whether reflecting historical realities or not, may be seen as a contribution to such a discourse. It serves as a myth which legitimises new ways of looking upon, and acting upon, the world.” (page 80-82)

In the following section I will explore similar examples in which the decision-making process seems to be clearer. In fact, the structure of the *fiiro* appears to be replicated on another level, with powerful ritual experts (*qwaslare*) as the creative performers, and the entire Iraqw population as the audience whose mutual consent is ultimately the driving force in processes of social and cultural change that have profoundly altered the lives of the Iraqw.

### ***Ritual experts (qwaslare)***

The focus here is upon the *qwaslare* of the *Maanda do Bayo* clan, who have been regarded as the most powerful ritual experts throughout this century. Though the *qwaslare* seldom participate in communal rituals such as the *masay*, they play a key role in the preparations for the event. They provide information regarding the timing of the ritual and the characteristics the sacrificial animals should have, and they supply the medicine that is to remove ritual impurity, restore health and fertility, and make the rain fall. As a result, they also have the power to withhold their medicine, thereby bringing disaster upon land, livestock, and people.

The importance of the medicines of the *qwaslare* is explicitly referred to in the stories of the first migratory movements to the north and

south-west of Irqwa Da/aw, the limited area to which the Iraqw were confined until the end of the previous century. According to Massimo Tommasoli, the first Iraqw to try to colonise areas north of Irqwa Da/aw in the 1920s were led by Bura Ma'ala. The attempt was unsuccessful, allegedly because he initiated the project without having the support of the *qwaslare*. The *Maanda do Bayo*, "which enjoyed the support of the English, ... moved against Bura Ma'ala because the latter was eluding their control". He was punished by having to carry on his back a 40 kg bag of beans from Buger to Mbulu (some 40 km) in addition to subsequent imprisonment (1986:8). Bura Ma'ala was, however, restored to favour a few years later and was sent towards Karatu with the blessings and medicines of the most powerful *qwaslarmo* among the *Maanda do Bayo*; Nade Bea (Thornton, 1980:245).

Those who made the first attempt to move westwards and to settle in the Maghang area in the 1940s also had to give up. Once again, according to one of the members of this group speaking in retrospect almost half a century later, the reason for the failure was the fact that they had not obtained the right kinds of medicine from the *qwaslare*. A few years later Nade Bea ordered another individual, Tua Masay, to lead a new migratory movement westwards towards Maghang. When I interviewed Tua Masay a few months before he died in 1990, he said that he had been highly reluctant to leave Irqwa Da/aw, but was ordered to go by Nade Bea. He left no doubt as to the reason for his success: "Nade Bea gave me medicines to protect us from lions and the Barabaig".

Bura Ma'ala's and Tua Masay's missions opened up vast areas of land for future Iraqw expansion from the over-populated Irqwa Da/aw area. Both of them became *kahamuse* (ritual leaders and land dealers) in

the areas in which they settled, and their descendants retain these positions today.<sup>12</sup>

### ***The redefinition of Harar***

As the Iraqw proceeded to expand westwards, however, they soon faced a special problem that needed to be addressed. The characteristic conical shape of the Harar mountain may on clear days be seen in the distance from the outskirts of Irqwa Da/aw. This particular mountain has had a special place in Iraqw cosmology, as the place to which the cursed and evil that have been thrown out of Irqwa Da/aw are banished. In the 1950s, the expanding Iraqw groups found themselves living in the proximity of this cursed place, or rather this place of the cursed. Tua Masay was, according to his own account, ordered by Nade Bea to “clean” the Harar mountain of its curse. A group of elders joined him at the foot of the mountain. Prayers were reiterated, an ox was slaughtered, and four huge calabashes of honey mead were consumed during a ceremony that culminated with Tua Masay climbing alone to the top of the mountain. The following night, according to a number of other informants, drumming was heard, as if something or someone came out of the Harar mountain and disappeared in the distance.

The significance of the event is evident from the way it is talked about and emphasised by young and old alike in the southern Mbulu area, not only in ordinary speech, but also in ritual language. The following are the opening words of a *sluufay* that was recorded during a *geetla/angw* held in an Iraqw dominated village close to Harar in 1994:

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<sup>12</sup> At least three of Bura Ma’ala’s sons became *kahamuse* for various sections of the northern expansion areas (Tommasoli, 1986:42).

<i>Háay! Iia qaasaag</i>	Hey! Listen all of you
<i>Hhoó ngi koomaán (x3)</i>	Let us continue to live in peace (x 3)
<i>Diirá hootaán</i>	We live in this place
<i>Oryó dirka hanooq</i>	There is a place
<i>Dirqár Haraár</i>	That place is Harar
<i>Dirqá bál geerár lo'o</i>	That place used to be cursed
<i>Tlafī ga pa/asán</i>	We have removed the evil
<i>Tsangwalár da/aten</i>	Red <i>tsangwali</i> (plant used as medicine) <sup>13</sup>
<i>Hhamandú /abkwa</i>	Barren <i>hhamandu</i> (plant used as medicine) <sup>14</sup>
<i>Lo'oodá amór hhoo'</i>	That curse, let it be turned around and made good
<i>Dambo qaaláy</i>	Like a gourd adorned
<i>Hhaeré nga i loohír</i>	Our brothers have moved there
<i>Ka tsirisi'imú wá layin</i>	Let the calves be branded there
<i>Lo'o amór hhoo'</i>	Let that curse be turned around and made good
<i>Dambó qaaláy</i>	Like a gourd adorned

The cleansing of Harar was not only the redefinition of a topographic feature, however, conveniently opening up new land for further expansion. It also implied a major change in Iraqw cosmology that was relevant to a large number of people besides those who came to live in the immediate vicinity of the mountain itself. The importance of the event is reflected in the way it is talked about in ritual prayers elsewhere. The following texts are all *shuufays* that have been recorded independently in locations far away from Mount Harar:

*Tloma-r ka a luumamisan ang*  
There is a mountain we used to curse in the past  
*Tloma da a Harar*  
That mountain is Mount Harar  
*Ham deemuka aga iloohan*

<sup>13</sup> *Vitus cyphostemma nierense/nodiglandulosan*, according to Mous and Qorro (1997).

<sup>14</sup> *Cucurbitaceae*, according to Mous and Qorro (1997).

Now we have settled there  
*Masomba ga i laqwal*  
 The young people have produced children  
*Barise ga i laqwal*  
 The elders have begotten children there  
*Ne loo da amor hhoo*  
 Let that curse be turned around and made good  
 (Wada, 1978:50, recorded in Giting, mid 1960s)<sup>15</sup>

\* \* \*

*Loorka hanos*  
 There is this curse  
*Losir u'wa*  
 The curse of the west  
*Loosir Harar*  
 The curse of Harar  
*Looda amorhho*  
 Let that curse be turned around and made good  
*Dambo qalay*<sup>16</sup>  
 Like a gourd adorned  
*Dearmo tiita*  
 Like the roots of the fig tree  
*Qwarea'mo goi (x2)*  
 Like a decorated gourdplate (x2)  
*Ayaren wahhar*  
 Our land grow fat  
 (Kamera, 1988:224, recorded in Sabilo, mid 1970s)<sup>17</sup>

\* \* \*

For life is ruined  
 By those of bad birth (i.e. the youths)  
 They shall go to the bush  
 In the past it was Harar

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<sup>15</sup> The Iraqw text and orthography is identical to how it appears in Wada (1978:50), while the English version is a re-translation by Yusufu Q. Lawi, September 1998.

<sup>16</sup> Archaic terms.

<sup>17</sup> Re-translation by Yusufu Q. Lawi, September 1998

Our fathers cast their curse on it  
 That curse is now forgiven  
 And that's how it is  
 And they gave birth there at Harar  
 They have children  
 Now the young men  
 Rub shoulders with one another  
 (Thornton, 1980:153, recorded in Irqwa Da/aw, end of 1970s)

\* \* \*

For us, Harar is a cursed place  
 This has been so since long ago  
 Now, we cleanse this curse with words of blessing, and we say,  
 'this curse of the past, turn round and be at rest.  
 Although in the past we Iraqw called upon you,  
 today we want you to turn round and bless us.'  
 Black bull and ram  
 they have been slaughtered there  
 The exceptional calf who is not suitable to be given away to anyone,  
 they have been born there  
 Our young men and their young women dance together there (Harar)  
 And also, it is the special dance which young people dance outdoors  
 Evil, pass far from us  
 (Snyder, 1993:300, recorded in Irqwa Da/aw, early 1990s)

\* \* \*

There is a place in the south  
 That (place) is Harar  
 It is a hill with *lo'o* (curse)  
 It is a hill with *lo'o*  
 We put *lo'o* on it  
 We put *lo'o* on it  
 Let it (the *lo'o*) now be cleared  
 (Hagborg, 1996, recorded in Karatu, 1996)

The remarkable similarities between these texts,<sup>18</sup> and the way they are performed as the most formalised and “sacred” Iraqw ritual prayers signify that these are more than descriptions of how the curse was lifted decades earlier. These texts, collected in all corners of the area dominated by the Iraqw, are also expressions of the consent of the entire Iraqw community to what took place, and by extension, essential parts of the accomplishing process itself. The *sluufay*, with all its formalised and archaic features, is in fact a part of a discourse dealing with a problem which has relatively recently made itself felt in the lives of the Iraqw, and which apparently necessitated a modification of Iraqw cosmology in order to make its core features compatible with needs experienced in real life.

What we see in this case, then, is reminiscent of the formal structure of the *fiiro*. The performer whose creative voice is heard is Nade Bea, and Tua Masay has the role of the respondent who is confirming and effectuating the message of the performer. The agreement to what took place is expressed in *sluufay* prayers that are reiterated throughout several decades and throughout the entire area inhabited by the Iraqw. The analogy between the redefinition of Harar and a macro-level *fiiro* lasting several decades appears to stop at the point I have claimed to be the crucial factors that turn the monological *fiiro* into a ritualised discourse; i.e. its decentralised leadership and its frequent occurrence. The creative use of ritual power behind the successful expansion missions of Bura Ma’ala and Tua Masay and the redefinition of Harar was vested in one particular individual among the *qwaslare* of the *Maanda do Bayo*: Nade Bea. As we shall see, however, the paramount position of Nade Bea during the last

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<sup>18</sup> There is good reason to expect that further similarities between the texts would have emerged if all the authors had provided the original Iraqw text, or if they had all been translated by the same individual.

decades before independence is atypical for the general history of the distribution of ritual power among the Iraqw.

### ***Nade Bea***

As Blystad and I have pointed out elsewhere (see article III, page 142) the power of the *qwaslare* is not closely tied to ancestor worship or to their roles as perpetuators of the ways of the ancestors, as is the case among the neighbouring Datoga. In a comparative perspective, this leaves the *qwaslare* freer to deal with the challenges of a rapidly changing environment. Rather than guardians of the ways of the ancestors, the *qwaslare* may in fact be the inventors of new ways for their descendants to follow. This combination of ritual power and flexibility was, of course, at great interest for the British who often had the contradictory tasks of preserving traditions to achieve their political ends (indirect rule) and of changing cultures to achieve their economic ends (e.g. culling programs, introduction of cash crops). Charles Meek, the District Commissioner of Mbulu between 1950 and 1956, reported that he had found a “witch-doctor” who turned out to be:

“a much more important chap than any of the four chiefs that we had, important though they were. If one was wanting to get some big improvement in coffee cultivation, for example, the great thing was to get Nade Bea on your side. He was a remarkable old man; he was very, very old by the time that I’m talking about, white-bearded and I’m not exaggerating when I say that when he was born no European had been seen in the area and he’d never seen a wheel turn—yet he lived to be a wise advisor to a whole succession of administrative officers like myself and we rewarded him with some sights which must have been pretty astounding to him, flying him by aeroplane down to Dar es Salaam, having him shown over a big ocean-going liner and so on. He was a great ally to have going for one.” (Allen & Fry, 1979:85)

This statement, which is taken from a series of BBC interviews with former colonial administrators, indicates the magnitude of the political importance of Nade Bea. Nade Bea never held any official position in the colonial administration, but he appears to have been treated as an “important chap” even by earlier administrators,<sup>19</sup> and his influence was used for political purposes extending beyond his own ethnic group. In 1939 the Provincial Commissioner of Northern Province, Captain Hallier, wrote a memorandum on his talks with the District Officer of Mbulu and the Chief of the Iraqw on the problem of administering the Gisamjanga, a subgroup of the Datoga: “It is quite possible owing to intermarriage and the influence of Nade Bea that the Gismajeng may be agreeable to recognise the Wawutmo [Chief] of Iraqw as their head.”<sup>20</sup> Three years later the Gisamjanga, whether they agreed or not, were formally put directly under the administration of the Chief of the Iraqw as the last stage in an “amalgamation” strategy that was initiated in 1927.<sup>21</sup> Ramadhani (1955) claims that Nade Bea was even awarded “King George Certificate of Badge and Honor”, and though I have been unable to verify this, such a token of gratitude would not be unlikely given the number of British projects whose “spectacular success” in Mbulu could be directly or indirectly attributed to the influence of Nade Bea (Meek, 1953:161; Iliffe, 1979:473; Winter, 1968:22).

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<sup>19</sup> The British strategy of educating the sons of chiefs in order to modernise native society (Pels, 1996:742) appears to have been extended to Nade Bea as well. One of his sons, Akonay Nade, who is currently regarded as one of the most powerful among Iraqw *qwaslare*, was sent to secondary school together with sons of Tanganyikan chiefs and notables, among them Julius Nyerere.

<sup>20</sup> Provincial Commissioner, Northern Province, “Memorandum: Gitagano, Kisamjeng and Administration of Dongobesh”, in Tanzania National Archives: Mbulu District Book, March 17th, 1944.

<sup>21</sup> W. F. Page, Acting Provincial Commissioner, Northern Province: “Notes of Baraza at Dongobesh on 30.9.40”, in Tanzania National Archives: Mbulu District Book, Sept. 30th, 1940.

When Nade Bea provided medicines for Bura Ma'ala and sent him to the northern areas in the late 1920s, and when Tua Masay was sent westwards in the 1950s, this happened, unlike the earlier unsuccessful attempts, with the approval and even the encouragement of the colonial administration. Bura Ma'ala and Tua Masay were protected by not only Nade Bea's medicines, but also by the British who by the late 1920s began to see Iraqw expansion as a means for achieving control over Datoga groups in the area, in particular the Gisamjanga and the Barabaig.<sup>22</sup> Iraqw expansion was also associated with a number of development projects which were initiated in the areas that were originally inhabited by "ungovernable" pastoralists, such as clearing of tse-tse infested bush and the Northern Province Wheat Scheme (Tommasoli, 1986:9,15). The Iraqw were held in high esteem as "intelligent Hamites" by the British (see page 103-106), and as a sedentary, agro-pastoral, and peaceful population, they were the most likely candidates and beneficiaries of these projects.

The support and protection of the British was certainly a powerful "medicine" as the expanding Iraqw moved into areas that had been the territory of Datoga and Maasai groups, both of which were well known for their strong military organisation. For Nade Bea, the British must also have been "a great ally to have going for one" as he orchestrated moves that were to turn vast Datoga and Maasai-dominated areas into Iraqw land:

Let us continue northward  
May our place have abundance  
Other countries shall know us  
We are in that place

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<sup>22</sup> L. S. Greening, Acting District Commissioner, Mbulu, 8/20: Letter to Provincial Commissioner, Northern Province, dated May 18th, 1931, in Tanzania National Archives: Mbulu District Book.

That place is Dulen<sup>23</sup>  
 Shall we capture it?  
 We have already captured it  
 The girls of Dulen  
 Are ours  
 They shall become ghost-wives  
 In the homestead of Dulen. . . .  
 May we finish it  
 We have already captured it  
 The land of our enemies  
 We capture them  
 (Thornton, 1980:155)

The foreign lands of enemies  
 And it is captured  
 That of the Mbugwe is ruled over (by us)  
 The lake Walaydamo (in Mbugwe) is reached  
 There is a certain man in the north  
 That man is a Maasai warrior  
 With a nasty red knife  
 The knife is dropped  
 It falls in the wild greens  
 The women of our house  
 Find it among the greens  
 And use it to cut pumpkins  
 And that's how it is.  
 (Thornton, 1980:81)

Similar imperialist texts mentioning the land and the daughters of virtually all groups neighbouring the Iraqw are many in the ethnography of the Iraqw. The enormous power attributed to Nade Bea in Iraqw oral traditions is closely associated with the successful realisation of the values expressed in these *sluufay*, and his unique position as paramount ritual expert during the colonial period may to a large extent be explained by his symbiotic relationship with the British.

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<sup>23</sup> A location north of Lake Eyasi which is associated with the Maasai.

### ***The decentralised distribution of ritual power***

Whether the *qwaslare* act as cultural conservators or as innovators, their power is, in the last instance, entirely dependent on the way they are viewed by the general public. The *Maanda do Bayo* is one of the larger Iraqw clans and though not all of its members are ascribed ritual power, a considerable number of them are classified as *qwaslare*, particularly within Nade Bea's lineage. The following case illustrates that the position as "great *qwaslarmo*" is to a large extent an achieved status:

The lack of rain in the village of Maghang in 1991 was generally attributed to Gemua Nade, one of Nade Bea's numerous sons. It was alleged that a relative of Gemua Nade had been offended by unfavourable market fluctuations when he was trying to sell a goat in Maretandu, and Gemua responded by using his powers to hold back the rain. The people in Maghang acted on several different strategies in order to bring the rain back during the drought that ensued. The women marched to Gemua Nade to beg him to bring back the rain he was withholding. At the same time the elders collected cattle and sent them to Akonay Nade, a younger son of Nade Bea who was living in Basodesh, and asked him to use his power to make the rain fall. Akonay Nade allegedly refused and told the elders to take the gifts to his older brother Gemua. The elders then started collecting money in order to send Tua Masay, the *kahamusmo*, to Gemua Nade. At that point they also consulted Sanka Nawe, a local *qwaslarmo* of the *Maanda do Bayo* who was not directly descended from Nade Bea. Sanka Nawe called the elders back and said that it would rain within three days. The second day heavy rains started.

Though a number of the sons of Nade Bea are currently regarded as powerful *qwaslare*, none of them, as we saw in this case, has achieved a status comparable to the paramount position of their father. Each *qwaslarmo* represents only one among several alternative sources of ritual power, and their power is dependent on the extent to which they are able to

provide people with what they want or need, whether it is rain or cultural inventions such as the redefinition of Harar. In a historical perspective, the most powerful ritual expertise has not been confined to the *Maanda do Bayo* clan. According to oral traditions, the Tipe, Karama, and Naman clans (Kamera, 1978:ix-xi), as well as individuals from other ethnic groups (such as the Datoga Saigilo and Gidamowsa), have all held similar positions to that of the *Maanda do Bayo* today.

We can now stretch the analogy with the *fiiro* further. As is the case with the leadership of the *fiiro*, the paramount position in Iraqw ritual expertise is also to a certain extent decentralised and continuously changing, and the decision as to who is the best performer is made by an audience which is striving to cope with the changing environment in which they live.

### ***Ritual creativity without the qwaslare***

Though ritual power and creativity is to a large extent concentrated in the hands of *qwaslare*, currently the *Maanda do Bayo*, it is not confined to this category of people. Thornton (1980:147) was struck by “the apparently ad hoc nature of many of their [the Iraqw] rites and rituals”, and he mentions a ritual that was invented in connection with establishing peaceful relations with the Maasai. According to Thornton’s informants, the ritual involved two mothers, one Iraqw and one Maasai, who temporarily exchanged their infants and suckled them at their breasts, a very powerful symbolic way of communicating intimacy (see page 70-75), in this case crossing a conflict-ridden ethnic boundary. Thornton also mentions that Bura Ma’ala, in his first and unsuccessful attempt to colonise the Karatu area, “invented a ritual in order to get people to follow him” (1980:244).

Ng'aida (1975:11) provides a detailed account of how a named individual, Do/ak Hhahhaya, invented the ritual impurity of a widow and the elaborate rules of seclusion and purification associated with this state (*meetar dirangw*). The explicit intention with this invention was to ensure that the reproductive potential of the widow of his deceased son stayed within his own lineage. Ng'aida then proceeds to describe how Do/ak Hhahhaya's invention was institutionalised as a result of a later incident, a quarrel between two clans over the right to a boy. The boy's clan affiliation was ambiguous as he was born to a widow who had remarried into another clan at an early stage of her pregnancy; i.e. there was uncertainty as to who should be defined as the legitimate father of the boy. The problem was discussed in a meeting held in Lohir-hhado, at which Do/ak Hhahhaya was a central figure:

“It was at this meeting that the “meta”, taboo upon the death of a husband was introduced and it was soon widespread among the Iraqw. It then became something common and psychological, to which the whole Iraqw society is subjected to up to this day.” (Ng'aida, 1975:11)

Thus, the invention of *meetar dirangw*, as described by Ng'aida's informants, consists of two stages. The idea of attributing ritual impurity to Do/ak Hhahhaya's widowed daughter-in-law is portrayed as an act motivated purely by the pragmatic self-interest of the former, and the strategy was successful as the widow, with the help of “an arrangement” with a genitor, gave birth to a boy who was classified as Do/ak Hhahhaya's grandchild. The boy was named Duwe, which means “childish”, because Do/ak's wife had thought her husband's idea of this new type of ritual impurity quite ridiculous. The second stage of the process, in which the idea was allegedly institutionalised, appears to be equally clearly motivated by a more collective concern. The arrangement of secluding widows implied the perpetuation of the marriage with the deceased, thus

eliminating the possibility of ambiguity regarding the kinship and clan affiliation of any new children born to the woman.<sup>24</sup>

Similar functionalist explanations of various aspects of Iraqw pollution beliefs are frequently to be heard in the southern Mbulu area. For example, various types of *meeta* are explained as the Iraqw prophylaxis for infectious diseases,<sup>25</sup> the ritual impurity connected with premarital births is claimed by some to be a way of “punishing” immoral sexual behaviour, and the impurity of women who have had an abortion or lost a suckling child is sometimes portrayed as a way of stabilising marriages threatened by the stress of misfortune (e.g. Ng’aida, 1975:7, 9). Such explanations are often closely related to factors such as the level of education and the religious affiliation of the speaker; in many cases they represent situationally motivated attempts to rationalise aspects of Iraqw culture.<sup>26</sup> However, Ng’aida’s story of the invention of *meetar dirangw* is more than a single statement that may be heavily influenced by the immediate circumstances of the interview situation. Both Yusufu Q. Lawi (personal communication, October 1998) and I have collected the story independently, though not in such detail as Ng’aida’s version. In fact, the invention of *meetar dirangw* may be estimated to have occurred in the mid

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<sup>24</sup> The identity of the genitor is thus irrelevant for the clan affiliation of the child. Though the widow will structurally be married to, and provide descendants for, a dead man, she will not be *harer hante* (literally “shadow wife”, a “ghost wife” in anthropological terms), the term for a woman whose “husband” is already dead or non-existent at the time of marriage.

<sup>25</sup> Kilonzo and Mtoi (1983:91), in an article on the 1977 plague outbreak in Mbulu District, claim that the pollution practices among the Iraqw “was developed during epidemics of anthrax, smallpox and/or plague which occurred in pre-colonial days.”

<sup>26</sup> *Meetar doroway* explained as punishment for immoral sex is one of the more obvious examples in this respect. The ritual impurity is related to birth out of wedlock and not to premarital sex. The “offence” according to Iraqw norms is thus not premarital sex, as some Christians will claim, but rather premarital conception.

19<sup>th</sup> century if Ng'aida's and Lawi's genealogical information on Do/ak Hhahhaya and Duwe is correct.

The main issue here is not whether such inventions really are made or whether they can be invented even by people who do not hold positions as *qwaslare*. The important point is that the Iraqw are aware, and will state this explicitly, that some of their rituals and traditions are relatively recent inventions or, as I will show below, borrowings from other ethnic groups, and that this fact does not seem to reduce the power they attribute to these practices.

### ***The power of cultural distance***

Distant past or tradition is only one of the sources from which Iraqw ritual draws its power. If the *qwaslare* are not primarily “guardians of tradition”, from where does their power derive? Like the *Maanda do Bayo* clan who claim to be descendants of Yandu, an immigrant from the Bantu-speaking Ihanzu, virtually all the other clans which are attributed ritual or medical powers claim, and more importantly, emphasise, descent from one of the groups neighbouring the Iraqw. Nade Bea himself is associated with a double foreign origin as he was not only a member of the *Maanda do Bayo*, literally “the Bantu of Bayo's house”, but also the daughter's son of a prominent Datoga ritual expert. I have argued elsewhere that much of the power of the Iraqw *qwaslare*, and the fact that the Iraqw (and others) so frequently seek help from ritual experts and healers from other ethnic groups, can be explained as an effect of the general tendency to ascribe supernatural power to the culturally distant (see article IV). This argument can, I believe, be extended to the study of ritual among the Iraqw.

Shohei Wada (1971; 1980) has provided detailed descriptions of two types of Iraqw marriage ceremonies, and concludes that both are probably borrowings from the Datoga. During the last few decades, the Iraqw in the southern Mbulu area have taken up a number of Datoga ritual practices, such as the *ghadweed* (literally “people seeking blessing”), “women’s marches” to a Datoga ritual expert in order to pray and to request medicines for people, land and cattle (see also Wada, 1975:64; Tomikawa, 1979:25). The following *fiiro*, which was performed in an Iraqw household before an audience which was almost entirely dominated by Iraqw may serve as an illustration of the point I am pursuing:

1. *Anán oo’ /ameenár yaariir a hootaawe*  
I say, many women have “stuck pregnancies”,<sup>27</sup>
2. *Too yaá, aamár doorén werweérg i káhh*  
Tell them, our mothers have no *werwerg*
3. *Tlawú halaghweéng gur watlká*  
She cannot come back home with *halaghwenga*’s skin
4. *Too yaá, halaghweéngu doorén a Haydom*  
Tell them, our *halaghwenga* is at Haydom
5. *Too yaá, /ameenaadá’ gawá Haydoomí dirii’ yaá*  
Tell them, women who are at Haydom
6. *Mukdaáadá’ bará Haydoomí dirii’*  
Those people at Haydom
7. *Ta hara gogoowaan*  
The people we run to for help
8. *Kálaqo halghweéng gun /áyiíhhe ooryó*

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<sup>27</sup> This refers to the common conception that the foetus can stop growing and get stuck in the womb for several years. The condition is covered by the term *hotay* and it is frequently referred to in ritual prayers addressing current prevalent problems.

It is they who eat the *halaghwenga*

9. *Too yaá, aamár doorén halaghwénguúwós aamár gu /aay i káhh*  
Tell them, none of our women eat their *halaghwenga*
10. *Tsataay sleeme gan /aay, barke gawaaqí huúw*  
When taken up there the knife eats her (i.e. she is operated on)
11. *Too yaá, xaa ooryó tsataydá' xaa tse'eesare' yeé!*  
Tell them, please cool down that knife!
12. ***Xaa i tsauy!!***  
**Let it coolen!!**
13. *Too yaá, bira tsaúy yaá, /ameenár doorén yaá*  
Tell them, if it cooled down, our women
14. *Xaa xwaylár doorén tla/afíri ki!*  
Please let our birth be returned inside the women's room!
15. ***I tla/afíri ki!!***  
**Let it return back inside the women's room!!**
16. *Too yaá, binga tla/afíri ki/isé' yaá*  
Tell them, if you return it inside the women's room
17. *Kár daqni /ameenár doorén werweerg gwaa tsáq*  
Then our women will taste *werweg*
18. *To' anaákah yaá, xaa xwaylar doorén i tla/afíri ki/ ooryó*  
Tell them, I say, our birth be inside the women's room

The performer is praying that childbirth should be normalised, and brought back to its proper place, i.e. to the *tlafi*, the women's room (line 14-16, 18), and he expresses his concerns by mentioning ritual practices in connection with birth that are neglected when the women give birth at the hospital. The two ritual practices referred to (*gidahalaghwenga* and *werweg*) are Datoga. The *halaghwenga* (line 3, 4, 8, and 9) is a goat that is ceremonially slaughtered and offered to the Datoga female fertility spirit, Udameselgwa,

during the *gidahalaghweanga* ritual after the birth of a child, and whose meat and skin are reserved for neighbouring women and the midwife. *Werwerg* (line 2 and 17) is the Datoga ceremony in which women, usually neighbours and relatives, come to present gifts to the mother and her newborn child some time after birth.

There are often found a number of Datoga words in Iraqw ritual prayers from the southern Mbulu area. In addition to terms covering ritual practices that have been or are being adopted by the Iraqw, there are Datoga words for precious objects such as milk (*anoga*), ghee (*naqeed*) and beads (*gileng*), and ritually powerful and feared items such as spear (*ng'uta*), rope (*qalod*), hyena (*habiye*), lion (*ng'adi*) and leopard (*mariray*). These words are not loan words in a general sense, as they are rarely or never used in ordinary speech; i.e. they are ritual loan words.<sup>28</sup> This scenario is in accordance with the common African power constellation in which an expanding group attributes considerable ritual power to the previous inhabitants, the autochthons, even though they have been conquered, assimilated, or subsumed by the invaders (Turner, 1987 {1977}:99; Lan, 1985; Waller, 1985:352; Iliffe, 1979: 28-29; Douglas, 1993:626). A comparison between ritual texts from the southern Mbulu

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<sup>28</sup> It should at this point be noted that Datoga words play a prominent role in Iraqw name and word avoidances. A woman is, for example, not supposed to pronounce the name of her father-in-law (such as Buura, “beer”), nor to use the word in other senses (referring to the beverage “beer”). She must therefore avoid the term *buura* altogether and will have to use synonyms instead (in this case e.g. *xufta*, Iraqw for “beer drinking” or “drunkenness”, or *margwe*, Datoga for “beer”). In addition, she must avoid words that are phonetically similar to the names that are not to be mentioned, and the matter becomes even more complicated since there may be a large number of names (e.g. of all her father-in-law’s brothers) and words that she will have to avoid and find synonyms for in this way. The practice itself may have been adopted from the Datoga, among whom the practice (referred to as *gingawekshoda*) is even more highly elaborated. Entire sentences may be built up by *gingawekshoda* words, making them completely unintelligible for outsiders who are not familiar with the kinship relationships and the particular avoidance words commonly used by the speaker (Blystad, personal communication December 1998).

area and Irqwa Da/aw reveals that the introduction of these words into Iraqw ritual texts must be a recent phenomena. The texts recorded by Thornton, Snyder, and Selvik from the Irqwa Da/aw area contain few or no Datoga terms, and informants confirm that the *werweg* and the *gidahalaghweanga* are both new phenomena among the Iraqw, both as ritual practices and as terms in ritual language.<sup>29</sup> Despite this acknowledgement, the Datoga rituals mentioned in the text above do in fact serve as metonyms for Iraqw “traditional” ways that are threatened by forces of change.

I would support Shohei Wada’s (1978:51) claim that some expressions occurring in *shuufay* must have been there “since ancient times”, and also Katherine Snyder’s (1997:562) assertion that the content of the *masay* ritual and the way it is performed has remained “largely unchanged from the pre-colonial past”. However, the speed with which expanding Iraqw in the southern Mbulu and Hanang area are adopting Datoga ritual practices indicates that it is risky to make statements about the ancient character of specific Iraqw ritual elements. The *fiiro*, the elaborate ritual pollution practices (*meeta*), and the *masay* ritual have all been classified or treated by ethnographers (including myself, in Rekdal, 1991) and other observers as ancient or “original” Iraqw practices. They all have, however, clear parallels among the Datoga who call these ritual practices *moshta ghawood*, *meetiid*, and *lughmajeeeg* respectively. Who borrowed what from whom and when may appear to be less self-evident as the ethnographic material from the various groups in this area increases.

If we accept Bloch’s explanation of the occurrence of archaic forms, it is reasonable to assume that the *shuufay* must have a long-standing

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<sup>29</sup> As one informant phrased it, the extensive use of Datoga words, particularly in ritual contexts, represents a recently introduced “fashion”.

history among the Iraqw. However, I would suggest that the presence of archaic words in highly formalised texts such as the *sluufay* should not automatically be accepted as evidence of deep and ancient historical roots. The possibility should at least be considered that the occurrence of archaic words may in some cases be a result of recent innovation and creative metaphorisation, a poetical device that empowers the language of the present with the authority of the distant past, just as the innovative use of Datoga (and Swahili) words in *fiiro* appears to be empowering the message with the power of the culturally distant.

Bloch concludes his description of the Merina circumcision ritual, whose basic structure has remained unchanged throughout almost 200 years of social and political change, by stating that:

“the persistence of such rituals may explain the long-term cultural continuities on which anthropologists are continually commenting. They may, for example, explain why it is possible to say that there are “typically Austronesian” cultures in spite of the extraordinary varied history of the people who are bearers of such cultures.” (Bloch, 1986:194)

The close correspondence between the sub-Saharan distribution of Bantu languages and the occurrence of *ngoma* healing cults (Janzen, 1992) appears to be one of the examples that support this thesis. The *ngoma* ritual complex, or the core ideas upon which it is founded, appears to have survived through millennia in a way that is reminiscent of Lan’s image of Dande ritual: “Like a cork afloat on the sea, it has risen above and overcome each wave of history as, one by one, they have rushed up and broken on the shore” (Lan, 1985:225).

Continuities in the distribution of ritual are not, however, necessarily the result of ritual persistence through time or of the durability of certain core back-stage cultural features. The extremely complex linguistic and cultural scenario of the area in which the Iraqw live should be well suited

for shedding light on the question of the extent to which cultural continuities across ethnic boundaries are a result of persistence through time, or to what extent can they be explained by diffusion and people's tendency to attribute power to the culturally distant. This question is beyond the scope of the present study. I do believe, however, that Iraqw ethnography illustrates the need to look elsewhere than only back in time, and emphasises the importance of not restricting comparative studies to groups that are close linguistic and cultural relatives, when studying the history and distribution of ritual. The most revealing findings may in some cases emerge in places where they are least expected to be found according to traditional approaches to the study of the distribution of ritual. The *masay* ritual of the Cushitic Iraqw, which I have used as an illustration of ritual rigidity and persistence among the Iraqw, has a parallel not only among the Nilotic Datoga, but also among the Bantu Gogo and the Khoisan-speaking Sandawe (cf. Thornton, 1980:235-238). When John Iliffe (1979:28) comments that "over large areas of the western plateau a single rainmaking tradition appears to have existed", he is referring to the area where the Iraqw live. The most remarkable feature of these spatial continuities in the distribution of ritual practices is that they are present in what is the most linguistically diverse rural area in the whole of Africa.

### ***Concluding remarks***

To summarise, the creativity of Iraqw ritual is made possible by several factors. The decentralised leadership and frequent occurrence of the *fiiro* make ritual prayers a powerful forum for the expression of feelings and ideas on a wide range of problematic issues, among them the relationship between traditional values and social change. Iraqw ritual is to a large

extent dependent on the *qwaslare* of the *Maanda do Bayo*, whose creativity and relatively decentralised organisation then becomes a significant factor for the direction of Iraqw ritual. Nevertheless, certain ritual practices have been invented by apparently ordinary people who do not draw on the power of their clan affiliation. Finally, there is considerable evidence that Iraqw culture feeds on the ritual powers of neighbouring groups, especially the Datoga, constructing new and syncretic ritual means which enable the Iraqw to handle the rapidly changing environment in which they live their lives. In this analysis the traditional anthropological definitions of ritual as inherently non-discursive and rigid have been discarded, including Bloch's tunnel analogy, in favour of Kelly and Kaplan's claim that "the rituals in ongoing practice are a principal site of new history being made" (1990:141).

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## Epilogue

It seems appropriate to end this thesis with what I had expected would be the highlight of my fieldwork among the Iraqw. Some five years after my first rather abrupt encounter with Iraqw ritual (page 183), I finally gathered courage to visit Akonay Nade, the person who was most frequently mentioned when I asked informants for the most powerful among the *qwaslare*. I was very apprehensive about the encounter, and tried to prepare myself as best as I could. I had asked a number of friends and informants, especially those of the *Maanda do Bayo* clan, for advice in connection with the visit: when to arrive, how to behave, how to speak, what to talk about and what not to talk about, what gifts to take, and so on.

My first encounter with Akonay Nade was somewhat disheartening. I arrived at his homestead and was directed by a young man to wait in the men's room until the *qwaslarmo* arrived. When he finally appeared he listened to my greetings and my explanation of who I was and what I was doing in the area. Then he simply told me to come back another day. I left with a strong feeling of failure; my attempt to catch a glimpse of his knowledge on the core of Iraqw ritual had ended in rejection.

When I returned at the appointed time, however, I found that he had brewed a big calabash of honey mead. I was greatly surprised by this token of honour and hospitality. My gift, the result of extensive inquiry into what would be appropriate to bring, was a plastic bag full of cans of Stella beer, brewed and canned in Belgium.

We sat in the men's room, talking for a whole day. Other people came in, sat a while, and left; at some points the room was packed with people listening to our conversation. Both of us were dressed in traditional

Iraqw clothes, the traditional in this case being machine-made cotton cloth and sandals made from car tyres. I had prepared a long list of questions but did not even get to look at it during the visit. Akonay Nade was by no means unwilling to talk about Iraqw culture, but he was much more interested in telling about his days at secondary school with Julius Nyerere and in hearing about Norway and the ways people do things there.

The anthropologist was being served honey mead in the correct ritual manner from a horn, while the great *qwaslarmo* was opening his cans of beer in a way that made it clear to everyone that he was well accustomed with both the beverage and the drinking vessel. Occasionally he gave a can to one of the elders in the audience, and I realised that most of the time I was the only one drinking honey mead in the room. I was reminded of a story I had heard from a European friend of mine about the neighbouring Hadza, some of whom live as hunters and gatherers in the vicinity of Lake Eyasi in Mbulu District: The Hadza, when they hear the sound of a small aeroplane, quickly gather some bones and invent a ritual for the in-coming anthropologists. “They are so happy when they see these things” a Hadza hunter allegedly told my friend. Whether the story is true or not, and most likely it is not, I could sense that there were some interesting similarities between the story and the scene in Akonay Nade’s men’s room.

Later, when Akonay Nade discovered that I had brought along a camera, he went to change his dress and the ultimate image emerged: Behind the camera was the anthropologist in traditional Iraqw dress; in front of it was the great *qwaslarmo* and the incarnation of Iraqw tradition dressed in a suit, an outfit that fit him perfectly. The great expectations I had prior to my encounter with Akonay Nade had indeed been fulfilled, but in an entirely different way from what I had anticipated.

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