In the spirit of Uganga - inspired healing and healership in Tanzania

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Chapter 3

The Self, the Social and the Spiritual

Since this anthropological study finds itself at the junction of sociology, theology, history, philosophy and psychology, I wish to examine in this chapter the main factors that contribute to notions of the self and the social in relationship to the spiritual world. Two major factors that have had profound influence on the concept of the self and the social to the inhabitants of Tanzania are religion and colonialism. There is hardly an area of life that has not been affected by these two aspects, the most pervasive being Western/Roman law and social values. Current notions and dealings with the self, the social, and the spiritual world have their roots in historical events and the presence of institutionalized religions. The ‘self’ of Tanzanian people can be divided into two interrelated categories: the inner or individual, and the outer or collective. The individual self develops under culturally comprehensible and integrated elements that are, to a certain degree, understandable to the indigenous self. Deeper knowledge of a particular element of the self may lie with a religious specialist.

According to Topan (1992: 56-57), the collective self functions at the highest all-embracing level of a given unit - be that of society, nation or culture – with its own set of values, customs, practices and sanctions. Differences of the collective self are of degree, not of kind. In other words, the collective self provides an individual with an umbrella of familiar interactions covering a spectrum of human emotions and responses, both positive and negative. Topan (ibid.) speaks in this respect about the collective self that constitutes a super structure within which the coastal people of Tanzania express their ‘Swahiliness’. It seems to me that the super structure of the Swahili has a lot in common with the various Bantu populations throughout East- and Central Africa.

What are the main components of the social structure of Tanzanians and in what manner do these connect to East- and Central African epistemologies and philosophies about the spiritual world? And, what are the religious expressions as mani-

46 About experiences of ‘the self’ and ‘the other’ in African cultures I refer to Jackson and Karp (1990).
fested by the Bantu and Swahili peoples in Tanzania over the past two centuries when to restore or improve the balance between the inner and outer self? By introducing some of the (gender) elements encompassed in popular traditional, Christian and Islamic healing (guilds), I familiarize the reader with the various aspects involved in spirit healing. Personal inquiries from a number of scholars and students familiar with traditional or mental health care in Central- and East Africa, have aided me in complementing some of my own insights.  

3.1 Social structure and ancestral ties

Among the Southern patrilineal Bantu tribes, the spiritual tie with forefathers is of great importance; reflected in the characteristic organization of social relations. On one hand, there are interactions among individuals and groups that are carried out in an idiom of patrilineal descent, with an ethic of sharing and unity (cf. Harwood 1990). On the other hand, interactions are based on exchange and reciprocity between kinsman and non-kinsman. The first kind of social relations are conceived in terms of the mystical protection and assistance of named patrilineal ancestors (see Willoughby 1928). This spiritual unity is demonstrated in ancestor rites, constitutes the expression of incorporation in Bantu society. Various economic rights and obligations may be encompassed in this spiritual tie with the ancestors, and can become endangered when social disharmony exists in the kinship group (ukoo). The word ukoo may refer to four categories of kinship. Firstly there is the clan, the largest kinship group composed by persons of both sexes, membership of which is determined by unilineal descent, putative or actual, with ipso facto obligations (see Seligman 1951, Seymour-Smith 1987). To put it otherwise, the clan is a descent group that traces ancestry to a common ancestor or ancestress from a long time back, but the precise link to this ancestry is not known. A descent group counted through the female line is also termed as a ‘matrilineal’; when counted through the male line, it is termed a ‘patriclan’. Membership in a Bantu clan can be acquired by birth, by fusion, by marriage but also by adoption, as happened with slaves (v. Pelt 1977). Secondly, there is the lineage. The lineage consists of all the descendants in one line of a particular person through a determinate number of generations (between three to ten). The difference with the clan is that these generations can still trace their common ancestor. Thirdly, there is the extended family that traces descent from a known common ancestor up to three generations beyond the confines of the elementary family. In the extended families exogamy is practiced on account of the

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47 Since the mid 1990s, I have been in contact with several scholars, who have studied healing aspects in Tanzania. Among others I mention: John Janzen, Roy Willis, Maria-Lisa Swantz, Linda Giles, Thomas Moore, Pat Caplan and Barbara Thompson. The last one I met in 1996 in Lushoto, Tanga region.

48 Next to kinship, van Pelt (1971) distinguishes in Bantu society, associations of non-kinship groups with a common aim, interest, or age, and residence or locality.
members’ blood relationships. Lastly is the elementary family that comprises a man with one or more wives and their respective children.

In Tanzania, the wider groups (lineage or clan) are composed of several elementary families who may form a ‘unity’ or *ujamaa* (pl. *Jamaa*) that falls under the supervision of one head. These larger kinship groups are the basic structure of Bantu social life and, therefore, the most important group in the social environment (ibid.). Traditionally, members of a clan live together in the same place in a *kijiji* (a small village) or *mji* (a village) and compose a basic social and economic unit. In practice, however, one sees families of different clans living together in one village. When various families of different clans live together in a village forming a basic social and economic unit one may speak of a ‘clan-village community’ (Haule 1969). The four mentioned categories should be considered with regard to the role of the tribe (*kabila* plural *makabila*). According to Father van Pelt (1971: 176-177) in his book on Bantu customs, a tribe is a group of people with a common name who all speak a single language. Each tribe is made up of several clans and would be headed by a paramount chief. Actually, this is rather a simplified meaning of a tribe. According to Seymour-Smith (1987: 281), ‘tribe’ has been largely a colonial creation attributed to the pre-existing characteristics of African populations. The concept has been the subject of considerable debate and disagreement and it even has stood in the way of independence and self-government. Tribal divisions and tribal consciousness have been largely created to impose order and unity upon previously autonomous local communities where there was once a loose sense of ethnic identity. Anthropological studies of African peoples have shown, however, that the colonial concept of the tribe as an ethnically, linguistically, culturally and politically autonomous and self-conscious unit has been a gross oversimplification of the complex panorama of inter-ethnic and regional social relations of pre-colonial Africa. In view of this study, I consider therefore the role of ethnicity - a concept preferred in anthropology over the concept of tribalism - of far greater meaning within the social structures in Tanzania. This ethnicity is strongly intertwined with the social ties and structure which in turn shape religious beliefs and practices of the people.

3.2 African philosophy and reasoning

Concepts of spirits address basic beliefs concerning life, good and evil, and the etiology of illness. The concepts are means of gaining a better understanding of the spiritual world. The way Africans think and reason has been the subject of many studies. In the field of religious and historical studies, African scholars and students responded with vigorous condemnation and rejection of the claims of Western scholarship that presented their peoples as ‘primitive pagans’ (P’Bitek 1970: 54-58). As nationalist forces began to challenge the assumptions by the West, Christian churches
and missionaries had to review and change their philosophy. Not only were magical beliefs and practices condemned outright by Christian faith as heathen expressions, they were also viewed as attributing to man’s immense powers over things beyond what was generally accepted to be the limits of reason by Western scholars. Theologically, attribution of such powers to humans meant, for Christian faith, that man had access to Godly powers – a presupposition opposed to the foundations of Christian theology, which can be argued to be based on human culpability and powerlessness. According to P'Bitek’s (ibid.: 49) *African religion and western scholarship*, the important contributions of anthropological scholars like Evans-Pritchard (1940, 1956, 1976), Parrinder (1963, 1969) and Lienhardt (1961) were to brush away earlier speculative writings of African religions. These scholars carried out systematic research using the languages of the peoples they studied. However, they still had done research in terms of the Christian God they believed in.

In East-Africa Christian beliefs and practices, God, *Mungu*, or *Mulungu* in old Bantu, are referred to by the concept of religion or *dimi*. The interpretation of the Christian God or religion does, however, not help to understand the nature or ideas about African deities or spirits as conceived of by the people. In order to extricate Christianity from its past historical association with Western political, economic and cultural aggression, a profound conversation was envisaged between the Christian and the ‘native’ mind, known as the ‘Dialogue with Animism’. The definition of ‘animism’ was derived from a Belgian father by the name of Placide Tempels (1959) who maintained in his book *Bantu Philosophy*, that Bantu beliefs were based on a High God.\(^49\) According to Tempels, everything in Bantu life was infested with a life force.\(^50\) In fact, Tempels distinguished two levels in the concept of life force among the Bantu. First, he defined force as that which signifies being, in the sense of thing or matter. Second, he distinguished only that which was perceived by the senses of an individual being. This spirit or power, *ntu* (meaning person or being in Bantu), was seen to be the essence of every living creature, deceased ancestors, inanimate objects and natural events, such as whirlwinds and lightning. The theological interpretation of *ntu* implied that illness or misfortune could be caused by unseen forces, like ancestors and nature spirits, but also by seen forces, like relatives and neighbors. Yet other forces of nature too could play a role. Tempels characterized the system of life forces as a peculiarity in the thought of the Bantu and of Africans in general. In other words, Bantu ontology was a product of the imagination of the Bantu, a subjective idea which did not at all correspond to reality. Subsequently Tempels said it was un-

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\(^49\) The original French version is *La Philosophie bantoue* (1946).

acceptable from the point of view of reason, objectivity, and scientific notions of what is real (cf. Masolo 1995: 56). The Bantu ontology implied to Tempels that the Western mind was scientific and the African intuitive and magical.

African philosophers and theologists took Tempels’ speculations about Bantu concepts of life forces as an example of African religious thought and practice. According to social anthropologist P’Bitek (1970: 46), African students reacted by claiming that African peoples knew the Christian God long before the missionaries told them about it. Yet none of these scholars attempted to carry out systematic research about traditional beliefs and practices that could oppose Tempels findings. It did not occur to them to represent their own peoples and give examples of how religious beliefs and practices were practiced. Today this situation is changing, but still a majority of scholars who take an interest in the study of African beliefs and practices are Western scholars. Some of these scholars study African religion with the aim to understand the Christian God in Africa, whereas others look beyond that. P’Bitek (ibid.: 57) further states that the belief in a High or Christian God, but also animism and fetishism, are all products of the Western mind. Can the same be said about the beliefs in spirits? The scholars I spoke with in Tanzania appeared to be little concerned with these beliefs and its practices until they were personally confronted with their impact. Being well educated may increase people’s rationality, thereby reducing the belief and the fear for spiritual entities. On a subconscious level, however, this may not be totally the case. A striking example comes from an academic who published a booklet called *Satanic Tortures* (1998). The author named Samia Mmasi, writes how at some stage in life, he suddenly began to suffer from the influences of an angry spirit. The upheaval caused the author’s life serious quarrels within the family, loss of property, job and wealth and, worse still, it brought illness and death. Having conquered this devastating misfortune after several years, Samia Mmasi wanted a large public to know about it so as to warn them that there is little point to deny the existence of spiritual entities. By facing such spiritual agents with the help of a discrete specialist, these forces can be averted.

I suppose it is less urgent to examine whether traditional thought is philosophical or to what extent people are intuitive, rational or emotional. The function of philosophy everywhere is to examine the intellectual foundations of our life, using the best available modes of knowledge and reflection for human wellbeing (Wiredu 1980: 62). What counts is that people are creative and spiritual beings; they may apply, and also encounter, their beliefs, for good or bad. To African people, the total environment in which they live and their intellectual and spiritual education, urge them never to stop at appearances, but to see in everything a sign or a symbol which should be examined thoroughly in order to discover its meaning, its hidden reality, or its surreality (see
Erny 1981: 158). I agree therefore with Masolo (1995: 130) in his book *African philosophy in search of identity*, that traditional thought in Africa remains fairly intact despite new experiences. The simple reason is that in comparison with (Western) scientific thought, traditional thought is not formulated along theoretical lines, nor is it founded on accepted theoretical frameworks.

### 3.3 Notions of ritual and time

The *waganga* may function as herbalists, but also as protectors against evil forces, as diviners, judges, arbitrators or peacemakers. Some are considered as makers of success (Swantz 1990: 144-145), whereas others are makers of peace and harmony with the help of traditional rituals. Up until today the Bantu and Swahili of Tanzania may request the help of the ancestors because they feel that moral obligations need to be fulfilled. A few specialist healers may help with these requests that may involve personal, clan or community problems. Among these specialists, some function primarily for their own lineage(s) or clan(s), whereas others extend their services to those who are not part of them. Without the specialist *waganga* people may have a hard time sorting out their conflicts. This factor is linked to the norm that clan members or community members should live in peace and harmony and fulfill duties and obligations to each other. Traditionally, the Bantu have been confident that prosperity would be controlled directly by their ancestors. Prayers as well as offerings would be directed to them to prevent or avert any offence by their descendants (see 3.2).

Traditional rituals or other religious activities in Tanzania are generally referred to as *milaya ya desturi*. The word *milaya* is interwoven with *mwiko* or taboo and each tribe or lineage has a set of rules to be respected. Rules, however, have the habit of being broken. Broken traditional taboos (*kuvunja mwiko ya milaya ya desturi*) need religious acts to be mended. This is literally referred to as ‘to heal a taboo’ or *kukanga mwiko*. When persons are afraid of having broken a taboo, but do not speak about it, this may give rise to accusations of witchcraft or sorcery and the manifestation of spirits. A key in explaining beliefs, attitudes and practices in coping with the complexities of life in a changing society, are notions of time and ritual in African religion. Among African scholars who made a pioneering attempt to discuss the issue of time was the Kenyan theologian John Mbiti (1969). In doing so, he hoped that further research and discussion would evolve around the topic (see 1.2). In so far as I know, the topic has not received much attention by African scholars. This is regrettable because time factors are very important in religious thought, influencing and effecting also the various actions in traditional health care. According to Mbiti (ibid.: 15-28), Africans consider

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51 Some of these rules are shared only by Bantu tribes, whereas others are commonly known in traditional religious practices all over the African continent.
existence as a religious phenomenon. This ontological orientation, says Mbiti, is constituted around five modes of existence. One mode of existence presupposes all others, and a balance must be maintained so that these modes neither drift too far apart nor get too close to one another. These five modes are:

- God, the ultimate explanation of the genesis and sustenance of both man and all things.
- Spirits made up of superhuman beings and the spirits of men who died a long time ago.
- Human beings alive as well as those about to be born.
- Animals and plants, or the remainder of biological life.
- Phenomena and objects without biological life.

In addition to the five modes, there seems to be a force, power or energy permeating the whole universe. God (Mungu) is the Source and ultimate controller of this force; but the spirits have access to some of it. A few human beings have the knowledge and ability to tap, manipulate and use it, like spirit healers, diviners, witches, witch-doctors and rainmakers. To avoid the associations with the English words past, present and future, Mbiti (ibid.) proposes to use two Kiswahili words, sasa or that with a sense of nearness, and zamani or unlimited past. In African thought sasa swallows up the linear or western concept of future. People traditionally set their eyes on zamani, since for them there is no world to come, such as is found in Judaism and Christianity. With history moving backwards, Mbiti (ibid.: 24-25) reasons that human life too moves from the present (sasa) to the past (zamani). Birth is a slow process that finalizes long after the person has been physically born. In many societies, a person is not considered a full human until he or she has gone through the whole process of physical birth, naming ceremonies, puberty and initiation rites, and finally marriage. Only then is one fully born; e.g. a complete person. Similarly, death removes a person gradually from the living. Important is that as long as one is remembered, one may appear to people. Mostly these appearances happen to older members of the surviving family, rarely to children. Recognition happens by name. The appearance of the departed, and his/her being recognized by name, may continue for up to four or five generations. When, however, the last person who knew the departed also dies, then the former passes out of the horizon of the sasa period. Only then is s/he completely dead as far as family ties are concerned. S/he has sunk into the zamani period.

The departed who is still remembered by name is not really dead. Rather, s/he is alive or better, in a state of personal immortality and therefore a ‘living-dead’. S/he is physically dead but alive in the memory of those who knew him/her in life as well as alive in the world of the spirits. This immortality is manifested in the physical continuation of the individual through procreation, so that the children bear the traits of their parents or progenitors. From the point of view of the survivors, personal immortality is expressed or externalized in acts like respecting the departed, giving bits of food to them, pouring out libation and carrying out instructions given by them either
while they lived or when they appear. The acts of pouring out libation (of beer or water), or giving portions of food, are symbols of communion, fellowship and remembrance. The acts, performed within the family, are the mystical ties that bind the living-dead to their surviving relatives. It is therefore a duty, religious and ontological, for everyone to get married. Procreation is the absolute way of ensuring that a person is not cut off from personal immortality.

When looking into the concept of time as stipulated by Mbiti (ibid.), the living dead fall into the category of ‘actual’ time, whereas their impact as spirits falls in the category of inevitable or ‘potential’ time. This time orientation, Mbiti says, is governed by the two main dimensions of the present and the past dominating the African understanding of the individual, the community, and the universe. Essentially, time has to be experienced to make sense or to become real. A person experiences time partly in his own individual life, and partly through the society which goes back many generations before his own birth (see 3.1). In other words, if the future cannot be experienced it makes no sense and thus it cannot constitute time. There are people who feel forced into rapid changes as both experiences of time increasingly meet with the future dimension of time. This is the reason why I mentioned that for some people a great amount of assimilative skills is needed to become familiar with the new time frame (see 1.2). How this feature interacts with illness, healing and vocation will be discussed in the remainders of this chapter and it will amply be represented in the ethnographies of the Southern healers.

3.4 Witchcraft, sorcery and magic

Having brought up the dimension of ritual and time in traditional religion, it is useful to look further into the role of witchcraft, sorcery and magic within the realm of traditional healing. Generally, the waganga (healers) perform their services in the spirit of helpfulness i.e. they do not force themselves onto anyone. The same applies for the specialist witchdoctors whose main skill is to counter-act, oppose and clear all forms of witchcraft (uchawi) and sorcery (ulowa). Both practices may commonly be referred to as uchawi (see 2.3). Sorcery concerns the practice of black magic, practiced by sorcerers and witches alike with the intention to harm members of the (immediate) society. To ward off, to protect, or to remedy those inflictions caused by sorcerers or witches, people seek the help of a specialist healer, like the witchdoctor (1.6). The witchdoctor can neutralize black magic and reveal if immorality has led to punishment by the spirits. I refer in this respect to the Kihami healers who are presented in chapter eleven of this thesis.

Mesaki (1998) mentions that a common aphorism in Africa is “how can s/he cure witchcraft is s/he if not an expert in witchcraft?” Actually, there is a general tendency
nowadays to place the power of healers in the same continuum with witches; and so the rationale behind the belief in the powers of healers is the same as behind the fear of witchcraft (see Feierman & Janzen 1992; Marwick 1990; Mullings 1984). The similarities that exist on the conceptual and practical level have made it so that the waganga in Tanzania are treated with a mixture of respect, caution and fear (see Beck 1970). Mesaki (1998) believes that the positive view of the waganga, as representatives of traditional medicine and healing in community health care, has eroded through contact with European languages and cultures (see 2.4 and 2.5). The 17th century English words ‘witchdoctor’ entered the popular idiom in the West and was later applied indiscriminately to all types of traditional healers in Africa and other continents. Swantz (1990: 7) puts it in this way:

Over the past one hundred years the medicine-men and their work have been grossly misrepresented and misunderstood. Western sensationalism has attached to him the name witchdoctor, which calls up visions of bizarre stereotypes of Africans that are both inaccurate and offensive.

The concept of witchdoctor, however, is firmly rooted in the hearts of the Tanzanian people today. Any person who has the power to protect and to harm is suspicious. Why is this notion about the witchdoctor persisting? To answer this I bring forward some of the theories on the meaning and purpose of witchcraft, magic and sorcery in East-Africa.

According to Okello Ayot (1976) witches are considered as members of the community who act secretly to hurt other people by means of superhuman powers. The immediate source of this power is not regarded as an important issue by most East-Africans. When trouble is identified as the work of a witch, it is important to expose that person, and this is the task of the inspired healer. Commonly, Tanzanians refer to witches whenever a person deviates from common standards. This may be considered anti-social, but sometimes it is to refer to someone who has a puzzling nature. It can refer to a person who shows more creativeness or inventiveness than others. I know of a man in a small village, for instance, who had great success in growing vegetables. He had spent years installing an irrigation system on his land that held a water source. Many villagers disliked him and suspected him of witchcraft, merely because of his intelligence and vigor. In the same way, white people are considered to have a lot of witchcraft (due to their technological skills). In other words, the risk of being accused of witchcraft is always there when people express their individuality in too ostensive a manner.

This raises the question why some societies maintain the belief in witchcraft, sorcery and magic? From his study among the Safwa in southwestern Tanzania, Harwood (1982: 129) draws the preliminary conclusion that witchcraft and sorcery beliefs may
be utilized in a single society to express conflicts between kinsmen and non-kinsmen. Farther Haule (1969: 11), a theologian from the southwest of Tanzania who studied Bantu witchcraft and its relation to Christian morality, states that the cause of prevalent witchcraft beliefs are due to the absence of the clan-leader who functioned as a supervisor among elders to take measures of reconciliation among conflicting parties. Apparently, there is a lively awareness of the fragility of social ties between individuals within the kinship-group (ukoo) and constant efforts are made to hold people together. This is in line with the observations of Zahan (1979: 32) who mentions that the religious powers of chiefs were numerous and complex. Theoretically and schematically, he alone was responsible for addressing prayers, offerings and sacrifices to the spirits or divinities. In reality, however, various waganga could be entrusted to hold the religious and ritual performances. These waganga fulfilled an active (religious) role to maintain peace in the community, who ensured prosperity and dealt with problems emanating from resentment, malice or evil spirits (see 2.3). With regard to the magical role of the waganga, I mention four specific tasks. Firstly, there can be the practice of natural magic, dealing with the weather, plagues, crops, and so forth, carried out by rainmakers and certain healers. Secondly, there might be the practice of ceremonial magic, where the infraction of some ancient observance or prohibitions has entailed the incidence of a curse which can only be removed by a suitable intermediary. Thirdly, there can be a kind of magic related to the spiritual competences of the healer so as to give answers to questions or unravel the reason for hardship or pain of people. The subsequent advice for a solution may also be magically derived. Fourthly, there are those practices involving the making of numerous charms, which confer immunity from disease, accident or calamity. All these tasks form part of white magic.

In 1963, Middleton and Winter published a large volume on witchcraft and sorcery in East-Africa, in which they wrote that beliefs in witchcraft and sorcery not only functioned as an explanation of misfortune, but also as an aid to action in the face of uncertainty (1963: 8). These observations are in agreement with a more recent 1996 publication on witchcraft in contemporary Tanzania edited by Abrahams. The articles offer several explanations on the dynamics in society that refer to various uncertain situations, like the controversies that have arisen between Christian and traditional beliefs and the constraints resorting from modernity and economic problems (see chapter 2). Within this context, the absence of local regulative parties and the incapacity of the state to control witchcraft and sorcery (uchawi) play an important role. One contributor to Abrahams’ book is M. Green (see 1.6). She mentions (1994: 23-45) how the governments and the Church of Tanzania have taken a similar position concerning uchawi as being anti-witch, rather than anti-witchcraft. This position is interpreted by Tanzanians to be a moral condemnation of those practicing witchcraft, but does not cast doubt on the validity of witchcraft. M. Green further states, that the Church and the State both
perpetuate the belief in uchawi by refusing to involve themselves in witchcraft disputes, either through the use of the law, or through the use of the mystical resources of the church. In sum, the logic of uchawi thus goes unchallenged, and therefore, the practices of so-called witchdoctors thrive in Tanzania.

Even when the specialist roles have often have been unjust interpreted by Europeans, the fact remains that witchdoctors make part and parcel of African folk theology and medicine. Despite its indigenous clergy, the Church, as a European tradition, is unable to understand the cultural elements in African uchawi and has no way of dealing with it (cf. M. Green 1994). This is understandable because the witchdoctor and the practices aimed to suppress uchawi have a long history in African society. To M. Green’s opinion, the tendency of anthropologists to explain witchcraft eradication practices in East Central Africa to modernity and social change is therefore not fully justified. Presently, the situation is quite different. Very few witches are being executed by the state because there is often no proof. People in local communities normally refrain from witch-killings because of the widespread fear of official prosecutions for murder against the instigators of a witch-killing (Okello Ayot 1976: 203). The witch-killings that are becoming recurrent in some Northwestern regions of Tanzania (see 2.8) seem to break with this general tendency.

3.5 The rise of spirit healing guilds

As I mentioned in chapter two, the main consequences of the social and cultural changes in the 19th and 20th century were: 1) tribal and colonial wars; 2) the increase of foreign presence; 3) the abolition of traditional leadership in 1963. During the time of European presence, traditional religion was generally scorned as a form of idolatry. The value of religious traditions also began to lessen among aspiring new African elites (see Waite 1992). Long before the Europeans began to introduce their Christian values to the Tanzanian people, the Arabs had exerted their culture and religion for many centuries. Christianity and Islam, as institutionalized religions, affected indigenous cultures in many ways, including traditional religious healing (see Ranger and Kimambo 1972). Critical features of Christianity and Islam need to be considered so as to place the present role of inland and coastal spirit healing in Tanzania in a proper perspective. With the help of records I found about spirit healing guilds in East- and Central Africa, I look into several critical aspects, beginning with the origin and primary function of spirit healing guilds. In line with the social and cultural changes in the later 19th and earlier 20th century, religious possession guilds appear to have emerged; a time many historians associate with disruptions in African societies (see chapter 2). Yet, according to Berger and Buchanan (1976: 43-78) the famous kubandwa guilds of the Cwezi date back as far as the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century.
In the Spirit of Uganga

3.5.1 *Inland spirit guilds and the role of Christianity*

A widely-distributed cluster of religious patterns and terminology suggests that all spirit guilds originally developed in the context of a religious life centered on the belief in a creator God, family spirits, and other non-related spirits. According to Berger and Buchanan (1976), who wrote about the Cwezi guilds of Western Uganda, possession or spirit mediumship guilds formed a central element of religious life throughout a large part of East Africa. The worship of Cwezi spirits - especially spirits of deceased rulers - first served close relatives and followers of the rulers and later spread throughout the Cwezi guilds. The guilds revolved around formally trained mediums qualified as intermediaries between non-initiates and the spirits. The mediums were consulted regularly as a precautionary measure, and in time of difficulty for which spirits were deemed to be responsible. When properly conciliated, Cwezi spirits (*mbandwa*), as spirit guardians of particular clans, would insure health, fertility, prosperity, and success in war. The Cwezi guilds, called the *kubandwa*, gradually changed from an elitist religious system directed to the family of rulers and priests, into a 'guild of affliction'.

In the *kubandwa*, priests and permanent shrines have largely disappeared, though some tribes still have shrines as testimonies to the existence of former priests and mediums (ibid.: 64-65). Since priests and temples formed closely linked institutions, the disappearance of one could likely parallel the demise of the other. In other words, spirit mediums or diviners became substitute powerful spiritual figures to anyone who would agree to undergo initiation (ibid.: 67). The initiation ceremony originally emphasized the bond between members through the use of kinship terms and through symbolic gestures of the parent/child relationship, such as feeding each other food or sitting on one's lap. Up until today such symbolic features can still be found in customary ritual practices and some examples will be given later in chapter ten.

Once functioning as a popular or democratic healing guild, large numbers of men and women would be initiated into relatively independent groups, unaffiliated with kinship ties. Eventually, the *kubandwa* became an integral part of indigenous healing and religion in vast areas in East- and Central Africa. In the new guilds, the development of group sentiment among initiates corresponded with a decline in ancestral spirits (*mizimu* or *bazimu*) and of family elders, who formerly controlled their kinship guilds. Along with the widened access to the *bandwa* spirits, went the development of a new division of religious functions. First of all, a hierarchy of initiates developed, followed by the categorical verbal distinctions between believers- and non-believers, with a corresponding division between different sorts of spirits. Lineage spirits, who formerly were represented by the male family elder, were now represented by a lineage medium, often a kinswoman. This offered new prestige and responsibilities to women. Spirits were divided into 'black' and 'white' spirits, the first associated with ancestors and the latter associated with spirits of great purity (ibid.: 68).
With the arrival of the Europeans, the wind of change began to blow even stronger. European and American missionaries introduced an alternative to ancestral spirit veneration in the form of Christianity, a religion that transcended the spirits of families, lineages, villages or kingdoms (Waite 1992: 105). The new spirit houses were now the churches introducing Christian spirits. People who turned to the churches for their saviour, were no longer supposed to consider propitiation of ancestral spirits a significant activity. Those who were possessed by spirits or had visions claimed a direct authority from God, including the Holy Ghost or Pentecostal prophet. In other words, elders or ancestors were not referred to anymore (see Dillon-Malone 1988 and Van Dijk et al. 2000). Following the demise of traditional religion, 20th century healing churches emerged in some Central and East-African countries. Among them were the Zion Vamuzimu churches in eastern Zambia. Unorthodox Christian Zionists introduced the old Bantu term for ancestors, mizimu, to acknowledge their existence (see 2.2). The mizimu churches possessed a healing component in them that was absent in the mission and orthodox churches, for the African Christian faith healers added Christian saints to their repertoire of traditional and local spirits. Some of these healers dreamt about departed family members and felt to receive direction to passages in the Bible. When they read these passages, they became possessed by biblical spirits who indicated to them what treatments to administer (Waite 1992: 106). Mizimu churches and Christian healers became alternatives to traditional shrines and healing methods that relied solely upon ancestral spirits for inspiration (Schoffeelers 1991: 1-25). Nevertheless, ancestral spirits remained part of traditional religion, and in addition, came alien spirits from Arab, Swahili or European origin (see 3.6). Actually, people began to feel increasingly troubled by ancestral, but also by ‘foreign’ and ‘modern’ spirits (see Lewis 1966, 1971, Beattie and Middleton 1969, Blakely, van Beek and Thomson 1994). As the ethnographic information of this thesis emphasizes the role of Christian spirit healers and their dealings with spirits, I will not comment on this issue here.

The developments of spirit possession guilds and Christian healing churches in East and Central Africa is seen to be due to a general ‘enlargement of scale’ during the 19th and 20th centuries. In this respect, Schoffeelers (1966) mentions that the realm of the spiritual actually got out of hand in modern times. Still, a number of other factors, I believe, should be taken into account. Actually, certain parallels exist between the rise of spirit healing practices in early days of written history and the rise of guilds in East- and Central Africa. Let me attempt to give an explanation as to why a rise in spirit guilds of affliction took place. In Africa, a major turnover started when family elders began to lose control over kinship guilds as a consequence of tribal and colonist wars. Represented by kinswomen as ritual specialists and spirit mediums, lineage spirits of rulers and priests were increasingly invoked to bring back stability and harmony in the family and/or the community. The kinswomen were held in high esteem for their ca-
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Capacities and ritual purity, and became powerful substitutes for former kinship guilds and ancestral shrines. The mediums received guidance primarily from male spirits, once healers, chiefs or lineage elders. Many of these tutelary spirits functioned on behalf of other ancestral spirits to preserve a cultural and religious heritage among tribal members. In part, this situation arose in answer to foreign presence and cultures, but also to the deportation of males as slaves during the slave trade period. As women were increasingly on their own to work the fields and sort out family obligations, they took over various religious roles. Foreign presence, however, largely disregarded women as religious or cultural representatives, just as women were disregarded as traders or laborers (see 2.4). These drastic changes for both men and women also laid the foundations for changes in the religious sphere, as this had once happened in Europe.

According to Karen Armstrong (1994), women in early Christianity were said to be forceful, and saw themselves as equals to men. In traditional religion, the status of women, as well as their female and ritual roles represented in deities and spirit guilds, was strongly emphasized (see 1.3). With the rise of cities, more masculine qualities of martial, physical strength were exalted over female characteristics. As a consequence, female guilds were suppressed. This cultural change did not happen peacefully, and the male war deity Yahweh was created to fight and to subjugate expressions of female gender. Armstrong (ibid.: 50) refers to the Axial Age when the majority of peoples stood up against the conception and creation of Yahweh until women were marginalized and became second-class citizens in the new civilizations, something that was first demonstrated by the patriarchal attitudes of the Orient. Cultural changes in Africa have happened to a great extent, under the influence of Islam and later, Christianity. Though most Africans took from Islam and Christianity only those aspects that met their needs, women were increasingly marginalized by the patriarchal attitudes of Arabs and Europeans. Furthermore, (orthodox) Christian and Islamic religion did not acknowledge ancestral spirits, and therefore, adaptation was needed. In the process of adaptation, various aspects of indigenous, Christian and Islamic features became interwoven in traditional healing practices. This syncretism formed the premise for the formation of popular or democratic possession guilds. The guilds addressed among other things, the need of suppressed feelings in women and the woes of (male) ancestral spirits that were left in oblivion. Formerly, the regular, communal worship of chiefs, elders and people would be sufficient to maintain harmony between spirit, man and nature (see Mbiti 1969).

3.5.2 Islam and the diffusion of Swahili healing guilds

Long before the 19th century, medical practitioners in Muslim societies had by and large performed their profession in the spirit of religion. Disease would largely be interpreted, diagnosed and cured spiritually. It was this type of magic-scientific
medical thought and practice that crossed the desert of Africa and eventually flourished among African Muslim communities. According to du Toit (1985) clinical scientific Islamic medicine failed to take root in most West-African countries, because of a lack of developed urban centers. Until the 19th century, official representatives of Islamic medicine in West-Africa, who esteemed the regulations set by Islamic law, were set out to deliberately destroy the power of all pre-Islamic practitioners. Similar forces will no doubt have affected traditional and spiritual health care in East-Africa, but I have no information on this. What I do know is that Christian spirit healers, both males and females, may convert to Islam upon the wishes of specific spirit guides. Islam, however, does not allow conversion to Christianity.

In Tanzania, Swahili Muslims consider the treatment of spirit affliction either as permitted or lawful (halali), or forbidden or unlawful (haramu), under Islamic law (see Caplan 1997: 163). Much in line with Caplan’s (ibid.) observations in Zanzibar, I became familiar with the four ‘lawful’ Islamic interventions in coastal healing. Two of these interventions – the act of cautery and cupping – are also part of Galenic-Islamic medicine that attributes disease solely to natural causes. In cauterization (kuchoma), rings of hot iron are lightly placed on the painful spot which taking away the immediate pain. Mainly elderly people who abstain from ‘unlawful’ practices make use of this old intervention that is performed by certain men in the community. Cupping (kutia chuku) is an ancient intervention among the Bantu performed at home or by female or male spirit healers. The intervention implies the use of a glass, a cup, or a horn that is heated and placed on one or more parts of the body to stimulate the blood flow. The two other interventions that are lawful are ‘to be encircled by the Koran’, also kusunga kwa Korani, realized with the help of Islamic books, hymns, prayers or songs; and the preparation of amulets or the writing of charms, called hirizi. The interventions are performed either by a Koranic healer, also called healer of the book (mganga wa kitabu), or by the coastal spirit healer (mganga wa pepo). The charms or amulets are used to protect people from evil spirits. Nearly all children, and also many adults, wear an amulet tied around the neck. The amulet contains a passage from the Koran written on a piece of paper and sewed up in a little leather pouch. The other principal method of using the Koran is to write a verse on a plate with saffron ink and then wash the ink off into a cup. This fluid is thought to contain the essence of the written passage which communicates with the spirit world. The fluid may be drunk as a medicine or sprinkled on a person who is endangered or possessed by an evil or malevolent spirit (see 3.6).

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52 The practice of cautery is mentioned also by Gallagher who wrote Medicine and Power in Tunisia: 1780-1900 (1983: 10). She refers to various Islamic writings, also hadiths, that mention how fire draws out the poison of the nerves. Infections are treated well with this method. Other bodily impurities are also treated in this way.
‘Unlawful’ interventions under Islamic law are mainly those that are part of prophetic medicines in which disease is ascribed to divine powers or the actions of spirits, usually referred to by the Arab term majini (sing. jini), but also to natural causes such as cold and wind. Those who know of prophetic medicines in Arab culture are blessed with luck or baraka which can be inherited by certain descendants of the Prophet, or possessed by marabouts (in North Africa, holy men or women, also saints).\(^{53}\) There are five unlawful Islamic practices. The first concerns the use plants, be it roots, leaves or bark, dawa ya miti shambaa. The second concerns a visit to a spirit shrine, kuenda pangani. The third concerns the slaughtering of cows, kutambikwa n’gombe. The fourth concerns the use of lighted coals for fumigation, kutia buhuri, and the fifth concerns the performance of divination inspired by spirit forces, kupiga ramli. This is particularly condemned because it can reveal information about the cause of spirits that are behind death. In this sense, the divine work of God (kazi ya Mungu) is not given credit.

In 1972, Ranger and Kimambo wrote that historians had only recently become interested in guilds (cults) of affliction in which very large numbers of men and women were held to be possessed by the spirits of ‘alien’ men, or of divinities or animals; in which the idea of possessions and the reality of the trance state was used to ‘cure’ diseases and neuroses by means of initiation into a spirit guild. These popular or so-called ‘democratic’ spirit possession guilds were thought of as a peripheral phenomenon, neither requiring nor lending themselves to historical investigation (ibid.:11). Lewis (1971), who wrote about the phenomena of mass possession in various parts of the world, said that all is about census with specific groups of spiritual forces. He cited the Swahili sheitani guild as an example of peripheral possession, but did not give it much scholarly attention. In 3.9 I will come back to the discourse that has evolved around the rise of popular spirit possession guilds in Africa. The first author to have reported on the Tanzanian sheitani guild form was Koritschoner, better known in English by the name Cory. In 1936, Cory published an article about a healing guild among the Sukuma in Northwest Tanzania (see 1.3).\(^{54}\) He wrote that the guild sessions functioned much like the Islamic guild with similar spirits and also reported a high number of spirit affictions, even epidemics, in Islamic regions of Tanzania (1936: 209-219). Ever since Cory (1936) wrote about spirit healing guilds in Tanzania, a standard notion began to circulate in anthropological literature about sheitani or pepo guilds. Both spirit concepts, sheitani and pepo, became a stereotype for spirit guilds in which various cultural influences come together (see Lewis 1971 and Giles 1987, 1989). Till today the sheitani or pepo spirits are seen as an elaboration of malevolent spirits found in the Koran and the Bible causing a variety of illnesses and misfortunes, in particular, psy-

\(^{53}\) See also Gallagher (1983) and Bakker (1993).

\(^{54}\) The Nyakyusa and the Nyiha in the Southwest of Tanzania are closely related to the Sukuma.
chical and sexual abnormality (see 3.6). It is found throughout the Islamic world but in particular Islamic Sub-Sahara. Other well-known examples include the zar guilds in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and the Sudan. In West-Africa there is the Hausa bori guild, the Songhay hokey guild and the Mossi kinkirsi guild (ibid). The pepo or sheitani guild has received some scholarly attention. Because of its connotation with Swahili culture, the information about spirit healing covers mainly the coastal regions of East-Africa.

Till today, in Kenya and Tanzania, the religious pepo or sheitani guilds are popular movements among the Islamic Swahili peoples living in the interior and the coastal regions of East Africa. The healing guilds have spread far into Central, Western and Southern Tanzania. In coastal and other Islamic areas, they are mainly known as sheitani guilds whereas in Christian areas inland, the guilds are foremost known as pepo guilds. The changes in types of spirits as well as the terminologies for spirits have also come to affect the various individual spirit healing practices in the country. As a result ‘foreign’ spirits may be ‘treated’ together with territorial or family spirits. As I will bring up in part four of this thesis, Islam does not give recognition to ancestors (mizimu), yet some Islamic spirit healers and guilds do include them in their practices. Popular sheitani or pepo healing guilds exists of one or more healers who give support to members with a specific kind of spirit affliction. The spirits may entail deceased, nature or foreign spirits with various cultural backgrounds. People join the guild on the recommendation of a spirit healer. The members of a guild return services to the healer, by participating in group-sessions to invoke spirit forces for other members or new patients of the guild. The pepo or sheitani diviner of a guild employs various techniques for inducing a state of trance in a patient who suffers the consequences of a spirit affliction. Foremost among them is the use of songs, inhalants, vapors and incense. During a trance, the patient’s gestures as well as his or her words, are interpreted as messages from the spirit. In Islamic areas, initiates who become members of spirit healing guilds in coastal regions and the islands are called wateja (sing. mteja), whereas the healing compound is called kilinge. The guild members receive support from the healer who is called teacher (mwalimu). Some Islamic waganga wa pepo organize weekly gatherings for their regular clients and may combine a number of cultural, spiritual, magical and medicinal interventions as part of their practice. To identify with each spirit guide, the healers may use ethnic songs, artifacts, outfits and remedies, resulting in a very colorful range of assets to decorate a healing practice. Of course the pepo or sheitani guild has also been strongly influenced by local traditions of spirit possession, as far as techniques are concerned, and where cultural influences come together. What kind of spirits today reign in spirit healing activities among the coastal

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55 See also Barbara Thompson (1999) in Kiiza mphebo. The arts of healing among the Shambas peoples of Tanzania.
In the Spirit of Uganda

Swahili and how are traditional and Islamic aspects reflected in the healer, the clients and the spirits? I pose this question, because insights of this will facilitate the discussion of the ethnographic findings of this study.

3.6 Spirits in Swahili society

Generally, there is a great deal of variation in the East African Bantu use of terms that refer to spirit. Little is known, however, about the characteristics and nature of the various spirit sources as written records are practically lacking (see chapter 1). In Tanzania, spirit categories are classified by tribal names and distinguished as groups by their traits, like status, gender, behavior and needs. Some spirits are said to bring specific complaints. Distinction in the characteristics of the various spirits demands special knowledge from spirit healers. In 2.7 I have shown that terms for spirit healers denote the skills and the kind of spirits that guide them, subsequently I have grouped them under healers of coastal (Swahili) and inland (Bantu) origin. But there is more. Spirit groups can also be distinguished in higher and lower spirits, male and female spirits, and healing and non-healing spirits. Below I describe the most essential concepts of spirits in Swahili society and define what the basic differences are between them.

Among the Swahili a spirit of a non-human invisible being is jini (pl. majini). The word is derived from the Arab djinn or genie. A jini is believed to cover large distances in an instant and, though usually invisible, it is able to assume human or animal form, and frequent people’s homes. Gazes and bad odors are seen as manifestations of a jini. The jini is thought to be especially active during the cool evening hours. A differentiation is made between a Swahili spirit (jini Mswahili) and an Arab spirit (jini Mwarabu). A malevolent or possessive spirit is jini mbaya (a bad spirit), but also jini ya sheitani (the spirit of a demon). The Kiswahili word sheitani (plural mshetani) is derived from the Arab shaytan (demon spirit) or al—Shaytan (Devil). Notions about the devil or Satan in the Koran appear to be strongly influenced by conceptualizations from Arab paganism, but also from Hebrew notions (cf. Sengers 2000: 32). The mshetani are an elaboration of malevolent spirits found in the Koran that bring temporary nuisance by frightening people with sudden appearances or acts, sometimes with clowning characteristics. Usually it suffices to chase them away by wearing an amulet containing a charm and/or certain medicine. Arab booklets on sheitani, or possessive jini’s, are available to anyone who wants to know about their characteristics.

56 Similar to the English ‘genii’ which literally means a tutelary spirit or deity that presides over the destiny of an individual or a place. Figuratively meaning ‘one who exercises a powerful influence over another for good or bad’.

57 See also M. Swartz (1986:205) who mentions that the Arab word Shaytan corresponds with Ibilsisi. Among coastal Swahili both words are used interchangeably. To emphasize the ‘clowning’ ways in the ngoma ya sheitani, the Swahili may refer to ngoma ya ibilsisi.
indicating how to prevent them, to avert them, but also how to appeal to them for the use of bad magic. Never will a sheitani function as guiding spirit. Instead, the sheitani may be used for the purpose of bad magic (see Caplan 1975 and Giles 1989). To reflect the low rank of evil spirits, the Swahili also say wadudu (sing. mdudu), literally meaning insect or crawling creature.

To refer to spirits of the mainland, the Swahili may employ mapepo (sing. pepo). The word pepo is derived from kupepea, meaning to wave or to fan and, from upepo meaning wind or unseen felt force, also called ‘spiritwind’. The term is specifically used in Christian-oriented areas where it may be said that a person has a spirit (ana pepo), is possessed by a spirit (amerekwa or amepata pepo), suffers from spirit illness (ugonjwa ya pepo) or has a spirit exorcized (kupunga pepo). A positive inland spirit is pepo nzuri (a good spirit) or pepo malaika (the spirit of an angel) from the Arab mala’ika. Pepo can also be associated with a nature spirit, like a bush, tree, rock, lake and sea spirit. In coastal areas and Arab influenced areas on the mainland, the term pepo is freely mixed with the term jini and sheitani. The widespread use of pepo and jini seems to overtake the indigenous term for ancestor (mzimu pl. mzimu) (see 2.2 and 3.3). In prayers the mzimu are still addressed, especially the mzimu za kale (ancient ancestors) are pivotal; the divine nature and connectedness to God makes them the highest in rank among all spirits. Mzimu can be manifested indirectly through illness, confusion, bad luck, impotence and barrenness. They rarely, however, manifest themselves directly by possessing a person so that the patient’s body becomes their vehicle, or speak through him or her. According to M. Swantz (1986: 203), the Swahili consider the mzimu to be the essence of a person, roho, which joins God upon death. The shadow of a person, kivuli, remains nearby for forty days after death before it is ready to separate itself from the world of the living.

Typical for coastal regions is that spirit forces are easily inherited, or may simply like a person and want them as their associate or as a partner. Often, Arab and Swahili spirits tend to be of male gender and have a special appeal to women. Some of the reasons for this preference are discussed in the course of this chapter. In the last decennia a number of inland spirits (mapepo ya bara) and coastal spirits (mapepo ya pwani) mark the setting of spirit possession and healing in Swahili society. Not surprisingly, the first group is more recurrent in Christians, whereas the second group is in Muslims. A famous coastal spirit group is Subiani and a famous inland spirit group is Kinyamkera. These nature spirits reside in natural settings. The coastal spirit ‘lives’ in the sea or in seashore bushes or trees. The inland Subiani spirit lives in trees, rivers, pools or lakes of the mainland. Subiana is a male spirit group that mainly possesses women. A woman who is possessed by Subiani can be dangerous to children; upon looking into the eyes of a possessed woman or upon touching her
they can experience an electric shock. *Kinyamkera* concerns a female spirit group that needs appropriation at crossways. The *Kinyamkera* can manifest as a whirlwind and afflict those who it meets on its way, which reminds again of the abstract meaning of *pepo* as spiritwind (see 2.2). Another popular spirit group is *Kibwengo* residing in seashore as well as mainland settings. I do not know what its gender is.

Some old spirits too are still popular, like the male and female spirit groups *Kinyamwezi*. Although the Nyamwezi homeland is far in the interior, these inland (bara) spirits are found throughout the Tanzania coast. The *Kinyamwezi* spirits are historically associated with the involvement of the Nyamwezi in the slave trade, with their powerful chiefdoms, which controlled the interior, and with fear due to their wild bands of warriors at the close of the eighteenth century (cf. Giles 1989: 162). Nowadays, the Nyamwezi have settlements on the mainland coast and the islands. People may encounter the *Kinyamwezi* spirits in all areas where the Nyamwezi have settled. Generally, the *Kinyamwezi* are portrayed as uncivilized and uncooperative spirits, yet they are not as difficult to control as *Maasai* spirits. The pagan and uncivilized nature of *Kinyamwezi* spirits is apparent in many coastal and Islamic guild practices (ibid.).

What all these strong spirits have in common is that, as with malevolent spirits, they throw down the persons as they take possession of them. I have often seen this happening in coastal or Islamic spirit healing practices, mostly with the clients, but sometimes also with the healers. More commonly, however, symptoms of sickness or mental deviance appear together with emergencies or misfortunes.

In a majority of all cases, coastal spirits are Muslim spirit groups of male gender. Yet, in Tanga region, a number of alien coastal spirits are associated with male German colonists (*majini ya Ujermani*). Such spirits behave in the way white people tended to do during colonization. They use to request large cigars, green outfits, alcoholic drinks and rifles as offerings. In her dissertation about artistic traits and objects of spirit healers in Tanga region, Thompson (1999) mentions that alien spirit groups may be trans-ethnic (like the Maasai spirit) or transnational (the German spirit). These spirit groups possess members of the community to warn them about cultural conflicts and differences. By possessing a community member, says Thompson (ibid.), the foreign spirits cause affliction and insist on the adoption and redefinition of alien notions, objects, images, and technologies as a pivotal part of returning Shamba society to a desired state of health, harmony, and wellbeing. The unfamiliar and alien spirits are allowed entry or incorporation into Shamba group identity, an attempt to resolve the cultural differences that can cause affliction. Alien spirits make more often part of urban (coastal) healing settings, than of rural (coastal) ones.
In contrast to most Swahili, some pastoralists like the Maasai, the Samburu, the Rendille and the Turkana, do not have any defined ancestral or nature spirits (Giles 1989: 193) According to Fratkin (1996: 67), the pastoralists believe in the protective powers of a distant female creator, also *en'gai*. The Maasai and the Samburu have strong beliefs in the power of curses from living elders, and they have a tradition of divination, prophesy, beliefs in sorcery and the healing powers of herbal medicines (see Lagerwerf 1985). The Luo of Kenya hold the belief in *jok* which is a reference to spirits (ancestors) and objects, as well as to occurrences of spirit phenomena (P'Bitek 1970, 1971). Just like the Nuer in the Sudan, the Luo only pay attention to the ancestors when they are directly concerned with what is happening and their relationship with the living has to be emphasized, as in case of a funeral or settlements of blood feuds on account of violent deaths (ibid. 1970: 78). Because the ancestors are not considered to have powers to grant requests, they are not commonly addressed in prayers. Fratkin (1996) and Janzen (1992) further mention that pastoralists generally do not use Bantu healing techniques or *ngoma* therapeutics, characterized by rites of passage and/or musical therapy (see 1.4). In short, some concepts of spirits are shared among the Eastern Bantu speakers due to a fusion in several healing traditions, but in other ways differences also exist. East African religions have been, and are in constant change and adaptation and so is the organization and manifestation of spirit possession and healing in Tanzania.

3.7 Interaction of spirits in a Swahili healing practice

How do inland (*bara*) and coastal (*pwani*) spirits intercede in the life and practice of a Swahili spirit healer? Here I would like to use information from the practice of my good friend Nuru N’hangachallo (see preface and 2.5) to serve as an example. Nuru is a Nyamwezi by origin and born in Tabora region (Northwest of Tanzania). The last ten years she is running a popular practice in Dar es Salaam. The various guiding spirits of Nuru have come in a particular order in her life. First came the inland spirits and much later came the coastal spirits. I give a short outline about the way that inland and coastal spirits have come to be part of Nuru’s life and work. Some characteristic differences in terms of origin, function and ritual procedure are also mentioned.

As a child, ancestral spirits exerted their influence on Nuru as they wanted her to restore breaches in conduct in the extended family. Much later, when Nuru was able to perform the necessary rites and vows, she was initiated as a healer. Besides the ancestral spirits, Nuru felt to be inspired by the inland *Kinyamkera* and *Kinyamwezi* spirits (see above). Then came the spirits *Kibisa* and *Kimanyema* to which special guilds are dedicated in Tabora in the Northwest and the Kilwa area of Southeast Tanzania (Giles 1989: 168). According to Nuru, the *Kibisa* spirits are aligned with the Wabisa people of Eastern Zaire and northern Zimbabwe, whereas the *Kimanyema* are aligned to the Wamanyema of...
eastern Zaire. The Wamanyema area has been one of the last and most intensive areas of exploitation by Arab/Swahili ivory and slave traders (cf. Giles 1989). Whenever Nuru appropriates inland Kinyamkera spirits to help her patients, she uses millet, corn meal porridge, greens, roast chicken, and fermented corn meal beer. A ritual offering, also called kafara, may include certain objects to be blessed by the popular inland Kinyamkera spirits. The Kibisa and the Kimanyema spirits are colorfully displayed with their faces of white chalk and traditional outfit. Where the Kibisa spirits are fairly introvert in their expression wearing simple black loin cloths, the Kimanyema are very extraverter and dress in a beautiful red outfit with a large feathered garment on the head while dancing passionately carrying an old hatchet around. In other words, these inland spirits contribute to a very entertaining healing session, which actually adds to the popularity of coastal ngoma (see 1.4 and 2.5).

After several years of practicing with inland spirits, Nuru felt guidance coming from coastal spirits. Among them was the spirit Ruhani (jini Ruhani), the most esteemed healing spirit of Arab origin. According to Giles (ibid: 276) not much is said about the Ruhani spirits in the available literature on Swahili spirit beliefs, apart that Ruhani (Rowhan in Arabic) is the name of a spirit group that is derived from buruhani meaning divine force. The word “ru” means ‘heart’, ‘mind’, ‘soul’ in Arabic, whereas rih is ‘spirit’ or ‘wind’. The connotations are often cited in Arabic books or booklets about spells, astrology and magic. These magical books are widely used by Koranic waganga along the Swahili coast. The Ruhani spirits are positive and pure spirits, which is symbolized by wearing a white dress and a turban. Another Arab spirit group that may guide Nuru is Sharifu. Its ancient wisdom is much respected and so is its knowhow of the Koran. Sharifu is said to be a divine force that originated millions of years ago, before humanity existed. Once I was able to register a sound of the Sharifu during a healing rite in Dar es Salaam which was indeed like a force that came from eternity (see 4.5). The Ruhani spirits appear to live in rocky areas in the sea, which is characteristic for most coastal Arab spirits (see Gray 1979, Swantz 1986). As many coastal spirits originate from and around the sea (majini ya bahari), they know mainly about the powers of plants growing in the sea and along the ashore, thereby limiting their capacities to the usage of sea ingredients and coastal vegetation. These ingredients - together with Koranic magic that makes use of the power of written and verbal text from the Koran - are used as a means to deal appropriately with symptoms caused by Arab and Swahili spirits (see 3.7). In case lower or bad spirit forces are intentionally used by sorcerers by means of a spell, Nuru will have to know the ethnic backgrounds of the sorcerer, for sorcery varies among ethnic groups. Recognition of the type of sorcery helps her to decide how to oppose or counter-act the spell. For instance, in Arab magic, specific charms are invoked that appeal to specific spirits.
As in many Bantu practices, a tri-color scheme of white, red and black is used in coastal practices with similar meanings attached to them reflecting the type or character of a spirit group (see Jacobson-Widdington 1979). I have seen that other colors, namely yellow and pink, have also become popular in coastal practices. If the Ruhani and other Arab spirits seek the attention of a Muslim spirit healer they impose conversion to Islam, as in the case of Nuru. In case of Arab spirits, incense of rosewater and Arabic gum (ubani) or aromatic aloe wood (udi) may be used for fumigation. The purpose can be to call the spirits or to offer them the smoke. Typical offerings to a Ruhani spirit and other good Arab spirits are food, oranges or the juice of an unripe coconut that the healer or the afflicted will have to distribute to all participants. In case of a novice healer, the Ruhani spirits expect gifts or items that can be blessed so as to give power for healing, as is also the case with mzimu spirits of the interior. The food may consist of a loaf of bread or porridge made of cereals. Whenever attention needs to be given to the inferior spirits of coastal or inland origin, Nuru calls them by songs and drumming (ngoma). A cloth to cover the afflicted patients helps to invoke these spirits. Not only does the use of a cloth hasten the sense of oneness of the spirit with the afflicted, it also prevents the spirit from looking through the eyes of the afflicted. If it does the afflicted may loose total control of the body.

Nuru may organize a special musical gathering or ngoma once a week. Every now and then, she also holds a ritual celebration known as maulidi in which songs are marked by Koranic recitations to praise the prophet Mohammed. These celebrations are usually organized by Koranic healers (waganga wa Korani), also referred to as healers of the book ((waganga wa kitabu). Because of the many responsibilities Nuru has, she does not entertain an active healing guild. Those coastal spirit healers who do, perform ngoma gatherings more frequently and are known as ‘healers of the drum’ (waganga wa dundo). Patients (wagonja) and members (wateja) who make part a healing guild receive support from the healer but they also have certain obligations. First in line is to attend the guild rituals. Secondly, they have to make an initial offering or celebration for one or more spirits and bear the expense of an occasional ritual. If the afflicted (patient) wants to travel, s/he has to request the healer to inform the spirits. If these regulations are disregarded the member may fall ill or become distressed. Generally, men are not so willing to join a guild because of the association with women, who are known to facilitate spirits more willingly than men. This gives the impression that women dominate, as clients, in coastal healing practices and guilds being an accepted arena to express anxiety of spirits and afflicted patients.

58 This art of singing involves rhythmic recitations of the various names of Allah or of Koran verses and is derived from the mystical Sufi brotherhood (see Body 1989, Bakker 1993 and Sengers 2000).
But there is more to what meets the eye. From personal experiences I know that men tend to consult the healers secretly to seek relief from spirit symptoms.

What has further drawn my attention in Nuru’s practice and that of other Swahili healers is, that spirits from the coast have a preference to seek wateja of the opposite gender (see Cory 1936 and Giles 1989). In as far as I know, only in Swahili society are women requested to appropriate male spirits by ‘marrying’ them. To do so consent is needed of the woman’s husband. Males who are afflicted by female spirits may also ‘marry’ them. Yet, these ‘marriages’ do not happen frequently. As with female spirits inlands, those from the coast are less demanding then male spirits. Subsequently they give less problems and complaints (see preface). As with female patients, men too suffer mostly from male Muslim spirits. How I place the various features of spirit healing in Swahili society within the framework of this study is discussed below.

3.8 Discussion and conclusions

In this chapter I have sought to outline some of the main features about the self, the social and the spiritual in Tanzanian society. First I wrote of the various elements that need to be considered in traditional religion in Bantu society. Secondly, I wrote of the rise and role of spirit guilds and spirits in Swahili society. Some personal observations on Swahili spirit notions and healing practice have been added to accentuate the interrelationship between both. In the literature dealing with African Muslim possession guilds, emphasis is often on the positive attraction for all those who are excluded from full participation in the public realms and rituals of orthodox Islam (Lewis 1966, Giles 1987, 1989 and Boddy 1989). The attraction to those who seek relief from afflictions, which the orthodox rituals and prophylactics of Islam fail to remedy, has led to the assumption that people with conditions of anxiety often turn to these guilds. The guilds are said to be especially popular to women. The official viewpoint – endorsed by men – is that such cults are a means to cure women from amoral or evil spirits. Since they are subject to regular discrimination, the guilds offer some sort of compensation. This forms a picture of possessed individuals who are not ‘really’ sick, but use ‘mystical pressure’ against their relatives who employ possession to ‘gain attention’ from people (Lewis 1971 and Crapanzano & Garrison 1977). In other words, the central argument that dominates explanatory theories of possession guilds in Africa is that spirit affliction guilds function as therapeutic outlets for psychological frustrations and socio-religious exclusion suffered by so-called marginal people in a society (Lewis 1971). Though there is much truth in the central argument, I do not believe that possession guilds function mainly for marginal people of a society. Nor do women dominate in all types of possession guilds. If they do, these women are members in Muslim guilds using religious ecstasy as much as a
positive assertion of female value than as a protest against male domination. I will come back to this in the last part of this thesis.

Closely tied to the discussion about the function and the appeal of people to possession guilds is the official view in anthropology of African personhood are being socio-centric. Consequently African disease etiologies are defined mainly in terms of ‘social conflict’ or ‘disturbed relationships’. Warranted as this view may be, I believe that a more refined analysis is needed of personhood in possession. Jacobson-Widding and Westerlund (1989) state that the behavioral rules connected to personal integrity reveal that people cherish an egocentric view of personhood too. This is demonstrated foremost on the level of self-expression in face-to-face relationships. The occasions for self-expression are, however, fewer and more circumscribed in a rural African village than in western society. In this perspective, the phenomena of spirit possession and spirit illness may be seen as one of the few accepted outlets for frustrations connected with this double definition of personhood. In spirit possession and spirit illness, psychological, sociological and physical factors are strongly entangled and deserve equal scientific attention. This involves also an examination into the process of possession illness- and healing as well as the reality and expression of the various spirits (see 1.3). Giles (1987, 1989) who did a study on the Swahili pepo or sheitanisheitani guilds along the coast of Kenya and Tanzania asserts in her study that the guilds are not peripheral but rather central to Swahili coastal society. In fact, she states that the guilds are one of the most illuminating expressions of spirit possession. The study of Giles (1989), and also Thompson (1999), show that various categories and groups of spirits (mapepo) may be interdependent, and have various identities. Each of these spirit groups may be the focus of a particular healing practice. When these categories coincide with human ethnic groups, like the Maasai or groups of Arab origin, they are considered as spirits of deceased people. Ethnic designations, however, do not imply that the peoples affected by these spirits borrowed them from the spiritual cosmology of the group. As Giles (1989:68) also states, a Maasai spirit possessing a Swahili woman of the coast is said to act like a Maasai, though the Maasai themselves have no tradition of possessive spirits (see 3.2). The ethnicity of the spirits is thus a conceptualization of the host group providing a commentary on cultural expressions of ‘the other’. Though inland and coastal types of spirit forces can possess people anywhere in the country, they primarily possess persons who share their historical and ethnic backgrounds.

In my opinion, the whole complex of spirit healing concerns emotional experience as well as cultural stereotypes thus deserving more than being regarded merely as a socio-structural problem. Though personal and emotional aspects are part and parcel of being a member of a specific society with its particular cultural values and means to (re-) es-
tablish harmonious social relationships, this does not necessarily happen without clashes felt by individuals, who are in need of self-expression. Self-expression is particularly favored within the setting of the traditional healer (see Jackson and Karp 1990) and needs to be viewed from the side of informants or actors, rather than only focusing on the outer features, like symptoms, treatment and effectiveness. Another aspect I wish to clarify with my study of Southern healers is the differences that exist between inland (Christian) and coastal (Muslim) practices. For one thing, inland healers deal foremost with their ethnic spirits. In other respects too, inland practices may differ from coastal ones. Apart from holding different interventions, the inland practitioners may not be organized in healing guilds and their musical rites may not be called ngoma (see 1.4). Important in this context is the remark of Cory (1936, 1960) that inland tribes, like the native Sukuma of northwest Tanzania, do not perform the type of coastal or Islamic ngoma except when imported by coastal people. Cory explicitly mentioned that inland tribes have different ideas and approaches towards spirits in which the mizimu (ancestral spirits) play an intrinsic role. He also said that certain coastal spirits afflict a person in order to become a medium, but he did not identify these spirits. Overall, Cory showed little insights into the role of ancestral spirits in spiritual afflictions. One important aspect namely is, that mizimu (ancestors) do not possess people directly but need intermediate forces for communication. While searching for more literature on pepepo, I found an elaborated Kiswahili-French dictionary by Sacleux (1939: 655), in which is mentioned that in Swahili society mizimu are easily confounded with possessive pepepo spirits.

According to M. Swantz (1986: 201), who wrote about the role of ritual and healing of the Zaramo in Tanzania, it is difficult to adequately study the more traditional spirit concepts in studies of coastal peoples. The reason is that they have incorporated features from the spirit world of Islamic teaching and adapted it to their own spirit world. The Zaramo, for instance, use the foreign (Islamic) expression of sheitani for almost all types of spirits, even when the original word for spirit is beho (Kizaramo for pepepo). Similar observations have come from Parkin (1991), who studied the Girama people of Kenya and Farouk Topan (1992), who studied the role of spirit songs along the coast of Kenya.59 Gray (1969: 171-187), who wrote about the role of the pepepo or sheitani guilds among the Segeju of Tanga region, mentions that spirits without Islamic traits are quite distinct from ancestral spirits who are not presented in these guilds. Gray assumes that the healing guilds existed before the Segeju converted to Islam. In former times, the guilds mainly served wealthier families who could afford the more elaborated rituals in which special dances were performed. Gray explicitly mentions that the guild was marked by the use of exorcist rites.

59 Unfortunately I have been unable to get hold of Topan’s dissertation to incorporate his findings.
Overall, the scholars who studied coastal forms of spirit healing tend to associate the healing guilds with exorcist rites. The reason is that they have translated the frequently used terminology *kupunga pepo* by ‘to exorcize a spirit’ (see 3.6). Yet, a more appropriate translation is ‘to reduce a spirit’ to describe when a spirit temporarily becomes one with the initiate or patient. This ‘oneness’ allows for a satisfactory condition so that the afflicted can resume everyday life (see Allen 1981: 283). It seems to me that spirit concepts and practices are not always served well by using generalizations. In Tanzania, as elsewhere in Central- or East Africa, different worldviews and practices co-exist in the realm of spirit healing and guild forms. Met with new spirits and spirit phenomena, each practice tries to cope with the change of tides requiring from people to constantly question their own world. Where in the old days illness arose on account of the punishing powers of ancestors in reaction to offences or violations of taboos, nowadays there is an increasing tendency in Tanzanian society to connect illbeing with suspicions or accusations of witchcraft and sorcery. The persistence of spiritual afflictions and the development of spirit healing (guilds) should be seen in the light of the tendency of people who feel squeezed between traditional and modern life, creating a sense of discord in the self and the society. It would be wrong, however, to attribute the appeal to these indigenous practices to mere social changes. The manipulation and skills of appropriate healing and ritual arts and/or cultural artifacts merit just as much attention.
After drying, cutting and grinding the plants, collected in Tabora region, are placed in bags for transportation to Dar es Salaam by Nuru N'hangachallo.

Musicians play the drums and sing for the initiates and the patients during a healing *ngoma* in Dar es Salaam.

Female healer in Mtawa region is dressed as an Arab sheikh whose spirit inspires her during a divination session.
Initiates of coastal healing guild are joined in a healing *ngoma*. They sing special songs to invoke the presence of several sea-spirits that possess the women one by one.

Female initiate of a coastal healing guild is covered with a white cloth to favor temporary possession from the Ruhani spirit.
In the Spirit of Uganda