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

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Chapter 6

Divination, Revelation and Remedy

On March 10, 1991 a man arrives in Nambela’s compound around forty years of age. His name is Joni Komba and he is Nyamwanga by tribe. His worries concern the condition of his daughter, called Riana, who herself is not present at this occasion. As it turns out, the problems are tied to the extended family.

Nambela: This child has been taken to other healers (waganga)?
Joni: Yes, she has.
Nambela: What illness they told you it was?
Joni: That witchcraft is concerned.
Nambela: What is your name?
Joni: My name is Joni Komba.
Nambela: Who is the one among your relatives considered as a sorcerer (mchawi) of whom your family often speaks?
Joni: That is my father.
Nambela: Do you know of any black magic (uchawi) among your relatives? What I see here are things around you that have been carried out in secret. Do you know of anyone among your relatives who is a healer? Why did you not take the child with you, so I can see her too? Yes, this child shows mental problems (matazizo ya kichaa) and a fast beating heart (moyo inapiga haraka). Her whole mind has ‘stopped’ functioning (kichwa ndani imesimama) and her belly is troubling her (tumbo inamsumba). Sometimes she says her head hurts... she also feels cold all over her body...her blood is obstructed from running normally through her veins (mhisipa zimefunga damu). They say that your father is a sorcerer... this child, bring her to me. There is no witchcraft involved at all! The reason for her illness is a case of an accidental death (kifo cha ghafula) in your extended family (ukoo). Also there are some matters concerning mental disturbances (ugonjwa ya kichas). Where in fact did a house go up in flames? I see, they blame you for being a thief, but this is it not true. [Nambela turns back to what she has been saying before, sensing that Joni is not willing to tell everything] Is there witchcraft among your relatives? There is a case of an accidental death in the family as well as a robbery case. If you want to know more, you will have to bring the child with you.

Nambela already knows Joni, yet she specifically asks for his name as if to make the public aware of his identity. After exposing the doings of certain relatives of Joni, Nambela focuses on his daughter and states that Riana has pepo illness. Nambela
clearly stresses that the practice of black magic (*uchawi*) is not the cause of Riana’s complaints; rather it concerns the accidental or sudden death of a relative. Witchcraft practices within the family do, however, exist. Nambela furthermore indicates that simultaneously with Riana’s complaints, there is a relative suffering from mental illness, while also a robbery and a fire have taken place in the family. I will continue Riana’s case in 6.1 (case four).

The above example exposes some of the characteristic features that may be involved in the onset of *pepo* illness. In this chapter, I will focus on the ideas and actions regarding diagnostics and revelations that Nambela exposes in divination and in religious prayers and the way this interrelates with daily practice. About ten to twenty people come for divination or walk-in treatment every day. A few times a week, people arrive in the company of one or more relatives to remain for in-treatment, taking along essential household items and food. Whatever the motive, clients often need to travel for one or more days to reach Nambela’s compound. When people arrive at the compound, they are usually welcomed by one of the patients (appointed as an assistant of Nambela). Those who come from far are allocated a hut to rest in, or to cook a meal. As a rule, Nambela does not charge clients for divination, treatment or other interventions. She does, however, accept gifts in kind after patients are cured. Some clients stay for one or more days, while others come to stay for a prolonged treatment (see 4.1). Patients who stay for a long period contribute by participating in the daily duties, either by cultivating, harvesting or fetching water or medicinal plants for Nambela.

Nambela’s reputation as a diviner and a healer has a lot to do with her skills to draw upon knowledge of six interrelated aspects concerning illbeing: 1) cultural and social beliefs; 2) powers that affect the state of *pepo*; 3) the consequences of an ill state of *pepo*; 4) the psychotherapeutic aspects of *pepo*; 5) the interaction of body and mind and 6) the importance of plants as herbal remedies. These six aspects are essential ingredients in the healing process, discerned by the psychological, social and behavioural processes at work. Since a broad range of symptoms may occur when *pepo* afflictions are concerned, this chapter will demonstrate that Nambela is concerned with various complaints, be it of a mental, social or physical nature. A majority of these complaints are presented in the second part of this chapter to reflect what Nambela’s knowledge entails, construed after many years of visionary insights. Next to the etiologies that Nambela has on diseases and misfortune, I hope to reveal the way Nambela experiences spirit forces and the way these affect her.

6.1 The divination sessions

In general Nambela’s divination sessions are held daily. Usually this begins in the morning, between 08.00 a.m. and 11.00 a.m. If necessary, Nambela also makes
herself available late in the afternoon or in the evening, depending on the number of clients present, and time pressure due to seasonal cultivating activities and personal family duties. Many clients, who seek advice or treatment with Nambela, do not speak her vernacular language. Assistants are needed to intermediate and translate Kinyiha, the vernacular of Nambela, into Kiswahili.

6.1.1 Procedures of the sessions
Once Nambela is ready for a diagnostic session she informs her assistants, who are experienced in-patients. Being familiar with the daily concerns of Nambela's work, they gather the clients who have recently arrived and make them sit down one at a time for consultation. This is done in the middle of the compound in between Nambela's house and the patient's huts. Nambela takes her seat at a fixed spot on the ground near her house, often with legs crossed. The client is seated a few yards in front of her and has to face Nambela with the legs pointing straight forward. She told me that this is the best way to receive 'information' about the person. Since the diagnostic session is a public affair, other clients, patients or visitors, may be watching. In divination, Nambela's knowledge of the human body is based on what she perceives clairvoyantly (kuagua). Simultaneously, Nambela may prophesize (kutabiri). Nambela often confines sensory perceptions in her utterances like 'to feel' (kusikia) or 'to see' (kuona). This can also occur when she describes the (internal) condition of the client or expresses her perceptions in connection with the cause and the solution. Much is depending on what the 'heart' or emotional state of a client exposes to Nambela, whose strong pepo enables her to receive clues about the matter while she sits quietly at some distance of the patients. Whatever impressions or sensations she has, are transformed into a meaningful explanation of illness, distress or misfortune. Nambela uses no singing or dancing in divination, though she uses Christian hymns in the Sunday ceremonial session (see 6.2).

Before entering a trance by the typical shivering of pepo, Nambela will ask a client where s/he is coming from and from which tribe s/he is. Then Nambela concentrates on the client (and his/her family) to discover the various aspects of the problem involved. As she experiences (feels, hears, sees) the information that comes to her and expresses this instantly, she may mention things that are directly but also indirectly related to the client's present situation or state. If Nambela notices that the client is not aware of certain facts or not willing to admit them, she may repeat what she said more emotionally or ask related questions. For as long as the client refuses to see the point, Nambela may feel obstructed to continue. Normally, however, Nambela reports the physical complaints or pain of the client(s). Also, when a client comes to consult Nambela for a material or social problem, she will report physical or spiritual problems if these are prevalent. As details or negative features that
concern the client are gradually unfolded, like a death due to a family feud, a murder or witchcraft, Nambela may react very dramatically to the pain or problems of clients. The kind of strong vibrations Nambela perceives induces this reaction. Fortunately, my field assistant Patterson was well used to Nambela's speech under influence of *pepo*. In such instances, Nambela uttered words and sentences in a slightly dissociated state. Patterson, who had his own *pepo* experiences to rely on, became a crucial means for me to come to properly understand the meaning of the sessions. In many instances I recorded the divination sessions so that we could make a fair transcription and translation afterwards (see chapter 4).

6.1.2 Case studies of divinations

What follows are ten case studies of divinations. I analyse each case to illuminate the various factors Nambela exposes by means of her clairvoyant perceptions. As Nambela reveals the etiology of *pepo* in relation to various symptoms and misfortunes, she may also suggest treatment to her clients. I present the ethnographic texts with explanations ‘in real time’ using the present tense. (see 4.6). The comments I have added to each dialogue are based on discussions I had with Nambela, the client(s), or in-patients after the sessions. Additional information about the various concepts of disease and the subsequent treatment can be found in 6.3. The ten examples concern people who either lived as (subsistence) farmers in Mbeya region, or had a job in a district or regional town. Most were Christians and had been to primary school.

Case 1 - A dirty wound (*kidonda kichafu*)

On the evening of December 16, 1990 Nambela divines a family by the name of Mwasenga living around Mbozi area. A man, a woman and a child, Nyih a by tribe, are seated together in the middle of the compound, waiting patiently for Nambela to take the initiative. Darkness does not pose a problem for Nambela, since she does not need to see somebody physically in order to find out what is wrong.

Nambela: You three people, who is the one making the bad beer? Your beer, mama, they have spoiled it by witchcraft up to the times that you prepared it for selling. No matter what you cook, they will spoil it all. There is a woman who is responsible for doing this. Mama, I feel your body has no strength when you wake up! I feel there are things creeping in your body (vitu vinatemba ndani ya mwilini). For quite some time now, your feet and legs are very painful. I heard that you have been running around with divine powers of *pepo* (kuchima).

Wife: Yes, I have, while remaining with another healer.

Nambela: Your legs hurt just as your belly and head does.

[Suddenly seized by *pepo*, Nambela loses control and starts to ‘travel’ and ‘visit’ chiefs in surrounding regions in order to ‘look’ into the matter more closely. The divination intensifies by this sudden interference and Nambela utters:] I refuse, I refuse, I do not want to see this! [Nambela’s divine *pepo* is hurt to see the destiny of the child] Have mercy on me... I refuse to hear more of this! [Nambela reacts
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with loud cries and shakes her head in a rejecting manner. Then she hits herself a couple of times on the head as if she wants to get the impressions or feelings out of there. For a short while she comes back to her ‘normal’ senses after which she involves us in her ‘travel’ [We were at the chiefdom of... [three names are mentioned] You Jehovah! We were at... [three more chiefs are mentioned, all of them deceased spirits who were once active in the area and now give guidance to Nambela] We have returned, after we have jumped to all chiefdoms and all chiefs. Enough, we have listened! It [pepo] has gone to chief... Father, Jesus Christ, we have become tired, I have become tired, have pity on me, Jesus Christ, I am suffering in this land. We [she and her pepo] absolutely refuse anymore! Only by opening the boy’s body after his death, the parents may find out that he died from an ulcer (kidonda kichafu). [She turns back in full consciousness to the parents and proceeds:] Someone has been suffering from mental illness; who is this among your relatives?

Wife: That is my aunt.

Nambela: Something burns badly around the armpit of the boy.

In this session Nambela spots more than one aspect. First, she reports the witchcraft that is practiced on the mother. A woman is responsible for doing so and Nambela leaves it up to the client to figure out who this is (most likely jealousy is involved; the brewing and selling of beer is a source of income for many women). Whether or not Nambela knows, she will never expose the identity of a guilty person if the clients’ aim is to take revenge. If she can, however, Nambela will indicate the reason why and the way it is done, only to make the client aware of the cause of the complaints. Nambela also mentions that the mother suffers from an ill pepo, but does not explain why. Perhaps the woman was emotionally troubled by her son’s condition or unconsciously, she felt troubled by the witchcraft practiced on her. From the text it also becomes clear that running is a typical behaviour for those who are inspired by divine forces in pepo. Also in the bordering regions it is a familiar phenomenon in the practice of prophet healers (see 5.4).

At one point Nambela is tuned into the destiny of the child and this takes her pepo on tour to former chiefdoms in the area. Somehow this contributes to her insight into the boy’s destiny. It hurts her to ‘see’ that he will die, which is why she repeats that she refuses (nakataa) to obtain this information (as she always does when a painful matter presents itself). Nambela’s reactions momentarily reveal her emotional involvement, as if she is suffering from the pain and the sorrow of the people involved. However, this stops immediately after the temporary seizure. When I asked if the pain and sorrow of others affected her own condition, she answered me rather humorously ‘the pain stops as quickly as when turning to another frequency on the radio, not to return again.’ The way she laughed while telling this indicated that to her the switching was part of a routine.
At the end of the divination, after exposing the natural cause of the boy’s disease, Nambela stresses that they will find the ulcer upon opening the boy’s body after his death. The parents who feared witchcraft are told that no humans are trying to harm them. This is followed by a sudden report of a mental illness within the family. Nambela gives no further comment on this so no connections can be made here. Finally she picks up the burning pain in the armpit of the boy, which seems to be the spot where the ulcer is located. After this dialogue, medicine is provided to relieve the pain of the child, to ease the complaints of pepo for the mother and to protect the family against witchcraft. Because of the seriousness of the boy’s ulcer Nambela advises the mother to consult the hospital. I have no news of the outcome of this.

**Case 2 – The first wife (mke mkubwa)**

On February 9, 1991 at eight o’clock in the morning an educated businessman consults Nambela. He has arrived by car the evening before and comes from Mbeya town where he lives with relatives. He is a Bena by tribe, aged around forty, single and called Julias Mboko. In contrast to most people present, he is neatly dressed. Nambela is sitting on the pavement beneath the roof of a hut, as she often does, instructing women about beans that have just been collected from the fields. At the same time, she instructs an assistant about the preparation of a certain medicine for one of the clients. Then she focuses on Julias.

**Nambela:** *She is spoiling her husband’s business... she is bringing spittle to him. She is no good... we refuse this woman’s witchcraft. She is fighting over you! [She speaks in a jerking fashion while the verbal speed is increasing and continuously she repeats the words or the sentences. At a certain moment she says] I refuse to hear more about it! But it was your first wife (mke mkubwa lit. big wife). This mama of yours fought about Nambela in vain. What does she want? She does not want the children back... she has given birth to many already. She has taken your footprint...to enable her to do black magic (uchawi). We [she and her pepo] refuse this mama... she is no good. She is a lot of witchcraft! Fighting over medicine from God and me... this pepo of hers is sick, all over her body. This man has two houses and one wife...*

Nambela slaps her hands from emotional involvement and ends the session with a loud cry. She goes off to mingle with other activities, while somebody else takes their place on the ground, patiently waiting until she returns. The divination reveals that Julias had consulted Nambela before. Apparently his first wife, who consulted a witchdoctor without his knowledge, had taken action against him to prevent Nambela from helping him successfully. I draw this conclusion from Nambela’s words that ‘this mama has fought about Nambela in vain’, meaning that by means of black magic, the first wife is making improper use of medicine from God which is there to serve the good cause. Nambela also mentions that Julias has ‘two houses’
referring to his involvement with two women, the former and the present one with whom he has a relationship.

The example shows Nambela's fairly strong involvement in the case and demonstrates her social support for the client's hardship. More than once, I noticed that she showed her authority by the approval or disapproval to certain acts on the part of people, mostly reflecting Nambela's traditional morals and values. While strongly condemning the action by Julias' wife, Nambela explains how she used contagious magic on Julias by taking his footprint from the earth. The earth that contains the footprint of her husband is used under the assumption that the earth still contains the energy of the man regardless of the time lapse. This kind of magic can be done by practically anyone who bears a grudge against someone else, though to guarantee success, a specialist should be consulted. This may be a witchdoctor who, with the promise of being rewarded, makes his or her magical know-how available. In other words, clients who seek revenge or a settlement can consult special intermediaries. Some of them will make sure, by means of divination, that the client has a real case against the person involved. Other means of contagious magic are the use of bodily elements such as fingernails, blood, skin or hair. Whatever contains a blueprint or energy of the victim may be used. Further, a spell or a curse can be placed on the victim, for example through the help of magical objects or medicines hidden in a house. Usually this is placed under the doorstep. Jealousy, disappointment, or hatred may form the roots of these magical attacks (see 3.4). To remedy the case of Julias, Nambela gives him protective medicines, called dawa za kinga, consisting of certain plant ingredients to be worn around the waist or the arm. An extract of plants is sprinkled over his body or rubbed into incisions made by a razor blade. Many of these plants are selected on sympathetic magical concepts, following the idea that like influences like. Spirit healers like Nambela discover during divination what kind of uchawi has been practiced in order to know what counter-medicine is needed. For this purpose, plants are not always the only ingredients in use. I will come back to Nambela's views and dealings with uchawi in 6.3.

Case 3 – Witchcraft medicine (dawa za uchawi)
This case of March 10, 1991 concerns a young woman of 16 years old, called Huruma, who is accompanied by her aunt Hawonga. They are Nyamwanga by tribe and have come in the company of a novice healer whose name is Nankala. Together with a few other patients, they arrived on foot from Itaka, a town north of Mbozi, about one day's walk from Nambela (10 hours). Nankala is a novice of Nambela who recently began practicing as a pepo healer. Still depending on Nambela's help, Nankala consults Nambela in difficult matters, taking along those patients she cannot properly diagnose or treat. Several other novice healers do this too, when their pepo
forces are not sufficiently strong or stable to throw light on certain cases. Nankala, who attends the sessions of her own patients, discusses at length with Nambela about each person in question. In this case, Nambela already knows the elderly woman as she addresses her instantly by her name.

Nambela: Hawonga, are you the one who has taken along this girl? Does she have a husband? You child, I feel your belly is hurting. Your husband has carried away your clothes, in order to use them some day to practice magic on you with the help of witchcraft medicine (dawa za uchawi). Your husband does not want you to leave him and to have an intimate affair with another man. He wants to interfere with your monthly period by placing a spell on you, so your bleedings will not stop. Also I foresee that you will suffer from mental illness in the future. You will have an obstructed belly (tumbo imefunga or a closed belly) that will prevent you from defecating (haendi choo). A moment will come when your face will look darker... also I hear your heart will beat very fast by then. I see that there is a man who wants to marry you. Bring the girl to my house so we can speak in private!

In contrast to case 2, this is an example of witchcraft practised by an elderly husband out of fear of loosing his young wife Huruma who was given to him in marriage by her parents. By making Huruma have irregular and strong menses, he hopes to prevent her from having an intimate affair with a younger man. Traditionally, it is forbidden for a man and a woman to have sexual contact during menses (see 6.3). Likely a close relative, probably a woman, has facilitated the husband with the blood coming from a piece of cloth that women use during their menses. Eventually Nambela mentions the symptoms Huruma will develop due to the witchcraft. I think that Nambela would not have stated all this unless it was to make Huruma aware that she should not (yet) leave her husband. Huruma appeared sensitive and afraid as Nambela's words confronted her with her own doubts and she did not dare to say anything in the company of so many people. Therefore Nambela takes Huruma aside to speak with her in private. Besides this, Nambela is opposed to discuss female matters so openly. Afterwards, Nambela said to me that witchcraft existed in every family and nobody could ever trust one’s closest relatives! With this, she indicated that maybe the mother or a sister had been involved. People, she added, are the ones to manipulate divine forces for their own benefits, thereby emphasizing that all witchcraft comes initially from God. God is the greatest magician as well as the greatest healer (see 6.2).

Case 4 – A bad death (kiparazi kibaya)

In the beginning of this chapter, I introduced Joni Komba. He had also come along with the young female healer Nankala who requested Nambela to give a second opinion. After the divination, Joni is advised to bring his daughter Riana to find out more about her problems. Two months later on May 26, 1991 not Joni, but his
brother Samson arrives in the company of Riana and her sister Ruth. They had made a long journey on foot. Together they sit down in front of Nambela. Riana appears to be totally indifferent to the situation, absent-minded in fact. Unable to comprehend anything, Riana's sister Ruth answers.

Nambela: This child's head is wasted! She has an illness that is spoiling her hearing. If you shout to her she does not even hear it. Her brains are not working and her heart is asleep. This child needs to be locked up all the time! Her father needs to lock her up, because she wants to sleep elsewhere. She does so in the woods, where she wanders around empty headed. She will die like this, without seeing her grave... she will die in the bushes. Has she been to school?

Ruth: Yes.

Nambela: She leaves school because she resents going there. Even if you hit her it would not make her change her mind. She makes a mess of everything! This illness of hers has been initiated by her grandfather who died a long time ago... he did not have a normal state of mind when he died. The cause of this girl's state is an accidental death.

Riana appears to be troubled by the spirit of her grandfather who himself died in a deranged mental state. If nothing is done to stop his influence, Riana will likely die the same way as he did. Nambela describes the far-developed features of *pepo* illness in Riana this has resulted in serious mental confusion (*kichaa*), which has also affected Riana's sense of hearing. To clear all bad elements, Riana is instructed to take a ritual bath in the river. Also she is given protective and curative medicine. The latter is to calm down her mental state. Nambela said nothing, however, about a sacrifice or graveyard-medicines. This was discussed in private at a later stage of the day. Since Riana left the next day with her sister and her uncle, I have no information about the outcome of the treatment. According to Nambela, the grandfather of Riana had died in much the same condition as Riana is now. Sudden deaths, including murder and suicide, may re-occur in forthcoming generations if not 'closed' properly. Especially 'sensitive' relatives prone to *pepo* illness are victims. Traditionally, local people 'close' the spirit of those who have died suddenly (*kifo cha ghafula*) to prevent the consequences of a bad death (*kifo* or *kiparazi kibaya*). The 'closure' is done by means of a ritual sacrifice and by placing special herbs in and around the house for protection while graveyard medicines are placed on the grave of the deceased (see 5.4).

Case 5 – Suicide in the family (*Kujua katika familia*)

The last case of March 10, 1991 concerns a housewife holding a small child. Her name is Sofia and she is around 30 years old. Sofia also has come along with the novice healer Nankala from Itaka. As soon as she sits down, Nambela reveals the involvement of *pepo* due to a bad death:
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Nambela: Among your relatives someone has been running with pepo (kuchima) and at your home ground there is a case of sudden death (kifo cha ghafula)?

Sofia: Yes, my father hanged himself.

Nambela: You will also die by accident, if you do not ‘close’ the spirit of your father. I see two women and a man will die! Child [addressing the woman], take your place on the ground [to wake up the spirit]. You will need to experience pepo at least three times, in order to reduce the trouble of the blood that surrounds her mind ever since the death of her father. God will help you! Did you close his spirit?

Sofia: No, we did not.

Nankala: This woman reacted with a very strong pepo at my place in the way people do when they suffer severely from mental illness (ugonjwa ya kichaa).

Nambela: Here too it will work for her, for if she does not run here with pepo, she may wander off in the woods and get lost. When you close your father’s spirit, you will close it for all the elders and all children. If she runs off with divine forces in pepo (kuchima) it will be fortunate, as it will help her to get strength again.

No description is given this time about the symptoms of Sofia. Nambela mentions instead someone who is ‘running’ with pepo. What seems important is the fact that Sofia ‘sees’ blood in her mind ever since her father hanged himself. The connection is made that there is a need to ‘close’ his spirit to prevent her death, and that of two other women and a man. In this case, it appears, that by ‘closing’ her father’s spirit Sofia contributes to the protection of the whole family. For this purpose, Sofia is instructed to bring a sheep for sacrifice upon her next visit. The decision of making a sacrificial offering is related to the severity of the matter and not always necessary. The location for offering the sheep is linked to whether the deceased spirit comes from the maternal or paternal side, respectively a place in the woods or at the river. Sofia is further given protective medicine and is invited to stay in the compound in order to fully activate her pepo. As I spoke with Nambela later on, she said that Sofia would have to experience a pepo release at least three times to reduce the trouble in her mind. Nankala, the novice healer, added to this that Sofia had a very ‘strong’ pepo at her place and ran off into the woods.

Case 6 – Pepo regulations (sheria za pepo)

In the following case of March 24, 1991 a young businesswoman of 35 years old from the district town of Vwawa comes for consultation. Her name is Elizabeth and she is Ngoni. Since Nambela knows her from former treatment, she immediately focuses on Elizabeth and senses what is wrong.

Nambela: Is there another person in your extended family (ukoo) who died an accidental death (kifo cha ghafula)? I ‘feel’ that the belly is painful and the heart is beating fast. Which healer have you consulted? Did he say that you are bewitched?

Elizabeth: I have not seen another healer.
Nambela: I see your mother quarrel with your father, here around the navel (indicating with her hand at her own belly). I see there is a lot of water... I feel your arms and hands are very painful... how many wives does your father have?

Elizabeth: He has two wives, but one has left him.

Nambela: Has your father problems with coughing (kukohoa)?

Elizabeth: Yes, he has.

Nambela: Your father is also ill. He suspects your mother of using witchcraft on him.

Elizabeth: Yes, that is true.

Nambela: Every day he says to her that she is bewitching him, but this is an illness that comes from your extended family (ukoo). At your homestead, someone has actually died from coughing. Another person died from the illness of the river (kwashiorkor) and became very skinny... you can stand up now. Have your hair shaved off and then we will take you to roll on the ground (kugaragara) with pepo.

Nambela starts the session by saying that there is a renewed case of an accidental death in the family. Earlier this year, Elizabeth had been in treatment with pepo symptoms due to the accidental death of a close relative. To remedy this, she had been advised to ‘liberate’ pepo by joining the singing sessions and to sacrifice a sheep for the kiparazi ritual (case 4 and 5). In this divination, Nambela relates Elizabeth’s complaints of pepo to the sudden death of a relative and to tensions between her parents. Nambela mentions further that Elizabeth has consulted another healer, but she denies that she has. Clearly, Nambela interrogates her client for she strongly disapproves of healers who unjustly divine problems of her clients by relating them to witchcraft, thereby causing unnecessary fears and worries. Finally, Nambela recommends Elizabeth to have her hair shaved off and to manifest pepo that will calm down her state of being. In addition, she is given protective medicines to prevent further strains due to the second sudden death in the family, while a special liquid is given to drink from a seashell to calm her nerves. The haircut is to neutralize a possible influence on the woman after the second sudden death in the family.

Case 7 – Stealing habits (kuzoea kuiba)

The next case, also of March 24, 1991 introduces us to yet another aspect of Nambela’s knowledge and role as a diviner. It concerns Amos, who is a hard working farmer aged around 50. He is Mdali (Tukuya area) and lives in a neighbouring village together with his four wives. Nambela exposes his problems in relation to various matters.

Nambela: I see a child who is a thief. This is not a child from your family, but from your uncle’s. He is a big thief, very hard to deal with. Really this boy, they will kill him one day (out of revenge). He will come during the night and break into people’s houses. Sometimes he takes away a chicken. His father could never pay back what his son has stolen. The boy is a big thief! Look for a chameleon, which you will cut in pieces. Bring it here, so we can mix it with medicine. He is capable of
killing his own father unless preventive measures are taken. We will see to it, that he gets some of this mixture... the medicine will calm down his heart. Your wife is fine, she has been seeing a healer, but there is nothing wrong with her. You will look for an illness in vain. What troubles her is the condition of your own child who is bewitched by people in your village. They have set a trap (tego) and this is what made him ill. Now if you think that his illness has come to an end, then you are wrong. He will wake up once more feeling very sick and troubled. One day he will faint a couple of times... You tell me, now that you have come out here, what is troubling you?

Amos: I am worried about my son's illness.
Nambela: Do not worry, everything will turn out all right. Now you, yourself, you suffer from pepo illness and an illness that you have inherited from your parents. The last illness has not been caused by witchcraft (uchawi). I refer to the coughing that cannot be stopped by closing somebody's spirit (kufung a kiparazi), for it has nothing to do with that. No medicine can take proper care of your illness. At some stage all your children may be bothered by the same coughing symptoms that is characterized by throwing up blood. This illness has its origin in your family and it is passed on from one generation to another. If you visit other healers about this, they will say that it is caused by witchcraft, but really this is not the reason...

Amos is confronted with the reason for his troubles. He seems to know about the thief in the family otherwise Nambela would not have mentioned it so explicitly. She confirms for him what he consciously or unconsciously knows and will provide him with a medicine to stop the young thief from stealing. To proceed, Nambela mentions that one of the man's children is bewitched, which gives emotional strains to his wife. Nambela indicates that the child suffers the consequences of witchcraft caused by a trap. Whether the nephew, who is a thief, has given rise to the witchcraft trap in an act of revenge, remains uncertain. At the end of the session, Nambela mentions that the client himself suffers from pepo illness and asthma, which is hereditary. Amos is told that not much can be done about the asthma complaints. He is further told that an accidental death or witchcraft has nothing to do with his asthmatic condition.

Amos, who provided his nephew with shelter, started to suffer from pepo complaints after a number of people had accused the boy of robbery. As Nambela confronted Amos with the implications of his nephew's social deviant behaviour, she urged him to bring the boy to her so as to apply counteractive medicine to stop the stealing. Together with his uncle Amos, the boy came to see Nambela a few weeks later. Nambela treated him with a remedy made of pieces from a chameleon mixed with certain herbs. The mixture was rubbed into small incisions in the skin all over the body, particularly the arms. The chameleon is seen to be a 'messenger' to the spirit world to help discourage the boy from further stealing. The rubbing of the medicine into incisions in the skin springs from the assumption that the bad habit of stealing is in the blood. Through the medicine, the blood will be purified and cleansed from the bad
or negative elements that influence the behaviour of the thief. There are other situations, like in cases of bad luck, when Nambela uses similar symbolic ingredients.

Some time later, I learned from Amos that his nephew had admitted his bad behaviour to all parties and promised to repay the victims. Apparently, the comforting words of Nambela had made him regain trust in himself. For a while, he worked hard to keep his promises, but upon my return in 1996, his uncle Amos told me that the boy was in prison on account of various major thefts. Amos said that the boy had gone back to his old habits on account of using soft drugs, also called bangi. The use of soft drugs is widely seen to have become a problem. Many young men are in national prisons or in psychiatry wards of major hospitals on account of the use of drugs. It is one of the ways by which the constraints of modern life have become apparent in Tanzania.

Case 8 – Multiple illnesses (magonjwa mengi)

On Sunday May 26, 1991 many people come to seek Nambela’s advice in divination; among them are several men from Mbye town who arrived by car the day before. Some are working at the state prison as guards. As they wait for Nambela to start the diagnostic session, I get the impression that they are desperately looking for help. The first consultation is for Justin, who is about 35 years old and married with children.

Nambela: This illness has started a long time ago?
Justin: Yes, it did.
Nambela: Did you go to the hospital?
Justin: Yes, I did.
Nambela: What has been done?
Justin: Nothing, they failed to help me.
Nambela: Have you been making mistakes (makosa) with other people?
Justin: I am not aware of that.
Nambela: But I see people who have taken your urine and hair. They want to practice black magic on you. Your pain is seated in your belly that is where it hurts. At times your belly is boiling and you feel the need to go to toilet or you feel like vomiting. I see you have much pain in your ribs, while your heart is beating fast. This makes your back very painful... this man ...his pain is from long ago... You will waste all your money in vain, if you go and see other healers...this would be an unwise thing to do... it will only bring more trouble to your illness. The first illness, the pain, is seated in your belly. The second one that you are suffering from is pepo. The third illness is called malila. The fourth illness is already known to you and related to you being a driver (meaning venereal disease). You will not be able to function as a man for another six years. This can now be

74. These may concern the leaves from the quat plant which are dried and smoked, but more often it is marihuana.
75. Source of information is a psychiatrist at Muhimbili Hospital, Dar es Salaam.
The complaints Nambela exposes to Justin are twofold. First, there is *malila* that refers to poisoning of the vital organism caused by the intrusion of bad magic. Secondly, there are the particular anxiety symptoms inherent to *pepo* illness. During the divination, Nambela sees images of people who have taken Justin’s urine and hair to practice black magic on him. Nambela makes this remark as if saying this is a justified means to make him pay for his mistakes (*makosa*). She wants Justin to speak about these mistakes, but he appears to be reluctant to say anything. Further Nambela mentions that he has multiple illnesses and that he suffers from a sexually transmitted disease. After the session, Nambela provides Julias with pieces of the strongest roots that are placed in several bottles by her assistants so as to help Justin to clear his body from internal infections. By taking the bottles home, he can add water to the pieces of roots to serve as an oral medicine. Justin is advised, however, to return for more fresh medicine if he wants to have any lasting benefit. Also, he is recommended to take a poison treatment for *malila*. The role and treatment of *malila* will be further explained in 6.3. The next month, Justin returns back for further treatment. At this occasion he visits a colleague who remains with Nambela for treatment of HIV-virus. During his stay, Justin participates in the musical sessions to awaken his *pepo*.

I should add that in-patients and myself knew of Nambela’s descriptive manner to refer to symptoms of STD’s. She never diagnosed STD’s or AIDS (*Ukimwi*) in public because of the emotional impact to the client. Nambela would describe the symptoms by saying it was “an illness that brings along many other illnesses” or “you are a driver, so you know why you are ill”. The people in this area of Tanzania were well aware that drivers are an important source of spreading AIDS, in particular, those who crossed the highway with trucks going up and down to Zambia. Within Tanzania, the Mbeya region reported the highest rates of AIDS cases (see 6.3).

Case 9 - Unsettled accounts (*kuwa na madai*)
The last case is also of May 26, 1991 and deals with a man who came together with the prison guards from Mbeya. He is Edwin Mwakanjamale, a Nyakyusa from Chunya. He is a businessman, married and around 40 years of age. Nambela reveals the serious nature of Edwin’s problems in her own special manner:

**Nambela:** What tribe are you from?
**Edwin:** I am a Munyakyusa.
**Nambela:** I see three deaths in your family?
**Edwin:** Yes, this is correct. It is my father’s younger brother, my wife and my sister.
[All three seem to have died recently and Nambela reacts strongly to what she perceives by shivering and uttering intensive cries a couple of times, moved by what she feels].

**Nambela:** Soon others will follow... they will all die! There are mistakes involved, concerning the death of the three that have died. They all had a case against them due to unsettled matters. Do you know what your case is?

**Edwin:** Yes, I have chased away my wife.

**Nambela:** I see that you have killed your wife. Her sister is trying to find out what caused her death. She has seen several witchdoctors and healers about this. In the meantime she knows that you are the one responsible for her death and she has medicine to return her sister's death. She will kill you too, if you do not show repentance in time. You have done wrong and you will have to repent your mistake! The illness will start in one arm... that is how it will manifest itself. Until you settle this matter, nothing can be done. The same goes for the medicine... it will be in vain as long as you have not paid back your mistake.

Edwin has lost three relatives and one is his wife. According to Nambela, he has killed her. He does not deny it when Nambela says so. His sister-in-law has consulted witchdoctors and healers to find out about his wife's death and is presently seeking ways to avenge her sister (see case 2). Nambela already knows that harm will come to Edwin. No medicine will be effective, however, as long as he does not show repentance through a payment (*malipio*), be it a sacrificial offering or otherwise. Nambela cannot do anything for Edwin. Therefore, she later advises him to consult a traditional specialist (*fundi wa jadi*) at home. Such a specialist can advise about payments that are needed to compensate for unsettled accounts existing in the family (see 5.4).

**Case 10 – News from Europe**

Below, I give an example of a divination Nambela once held for me in April 1999. The purpose was to see if she could give me insights about the wellbeing of my family of whom I had received no news in the past four months:

**Nambela:** Ready it is coming! Jesus Christ has arrived... wire with God... yes we have returned! We have arrived at Europe... tell us the news from Holland (Uholanzu)... look for illness in her family... Your mom's belly is very painful... also her legs are painful... Your husband is anxious to come... money troubles him... a woman will come... In your country many people suffer from mental illness... This month you will receive news from home...

**Me:** Can you be more precise about my mother's condition?

**Nambela:** Here we say it is pepo illness... her soul is very hot... Her legs, belly and chest are affected... to us this is a small matter...

**Me:** Is there reason for me to be worried?

**Nambela:** No, you will meet her upon your return...

Clearly, Nambela senses my disappointment about my partner who cannot come to visit me. He has no means to pay for the trip. Nambela knows, however, from earlier
conversations with me that the chances for him to come are slim. Interestingly, Nambela links the state of my mother to an ill pepo, which makes sense to me. Ever since the death of my father in 1971, my mother has developed various symptoms, one of which is asthma. Another symptom that repeatedly occurs is bladder-infection. Nambela does not speak of either of these two specific symptoms. She further reports to me the visit of a woman whom I was in fact awaiting.

Later I requested Nambela to gain further insights into my mother and she told me that she would be fine. At another occasion, Nambela held a divination to verify how my pepo was doing. She said its power tended ‘to get stuck’ in my lower abdomen. This sounded familiar to me because a couple of years ago my yoga teacher had told me that my nervous energy was blocked around the waist. Many years of digestive problems were the physical proof of this blockage. Intensive yoga exercises had reduced these problems drastically, yet it remained a sensitive area of my body. I will come back to this in chapter seven.

6.1.3 Comments on pepo and divination

Generally, Nambela identifies pepo (impepo in Kinyiha) as the principle cause of a problem, be it organic, mental or material. Pepo complaints typically appear as anxiety symptoms in reaction to social conflicts, witchcraft, theft and murder in the family. The cases point to two principal agencies causing disturbances of pepo; first is witchcraft and sorcery and second is the sudden death of close relatives. If illness results from offensive behaviour within the extended family, negative forces bring about more ‘evil’. This is especially true when negligence of customary rituals is at the basis of pepo illness (case 4, 5 and 9). All sources of evil have to be faced be it by means of confession, repentance and/or ‘payment’. Besides the cases that have been presented, matters of work, sexual problems, marriage conflicts, disappearances or bad luck are brought to Nambela. People even consult Nambela about where to build their house or start a shop. This demonstrates how divination sessions mirror the social space and character of relationships by clients. In fact, whatever the burden for the client might be, it is taken for divination.

Shared morals, beliefs and convictions are expressed in the words of the healer Nambela; working much as a shock therapy. To consult Nambela and be confronted in public with various aspects of one’s problem is not always easy. Out in the middle of the compound, where everybody can see and hear everything, the clients all face a kind of personal trial. The majority of clients are rather embarrassed or afraid to speak up. Nambela confronts them so suddenly with emotional and social matters otherwise not easily spoken of in public, that it seems to cut off their tongue. In some cases, assistants or relatives have to break the ice or answer the questions instead.
During my observations, this was most common among women and younger men who traditionally do not oppose the words of a senior or important person. Women and youngsters from large villages or cities were often more self-confident in the way they reacted to Nambela’s revelations. Men would either be frank with her or totally deny the facts that compromised them. No matter their origin, sex, age or education, all people showed respect to the diagnoses as Nambela unravelled personal, social, spiritual or biological facts.

From my own observations, the divinations work extraordinarily well, functioning first at a personal level, relieving doubt and anxiety. Characterized by verbal therapy, the divination sessions allow for clients to communicate either actively or passively with the healer. This too serves a psychotherapeutic aim. For is it not most convincing to be mirrored by someone who was at the same time considered a judge? In contrast to the Western medical approach, where the client informs the doctor about his or her complaints, here the diviner explains to the client what is wrong. If the diviner is not able to assess the emotional and social implications of what s/he is saying, considerable damage could be caused. These crucial moments in divination are what Turner calls part of the divinatory drama, marked by moments of liminal reflexivity (1980: 17). Here, the visionary capacities are constantly in exchange with reflections to reveal the cause and context of the problem(s) that subsequently call for a decision that cannot easily be taken by the client alone. I agree with Devisch (1985) and Peek (1991) who state that divination serves a specific therapeutic goal, demonstrating a therapeutic reality constructed from the interaction between patients and the healer producing a plausible (meaningful) view of the causes of disorder and determination of appropriate action.

Within the context of the divination sessions I should mention that at times clients knew more than they were willing to admit. Also, Nambela could know or perceive more details, which she did not expose for some reason. Patterson told me over and over again that this makes up part of her personal strategy in divination. I assumed his admiration for her was somewhat exaggerated, but at other times I figured that this rightly remains a secret domain of Nambela. One way or another, the various constraints during divination sessions limits outsiders, like myself, of making refined judgements.

6.2 Revelations, prayers and prophecies

6.2.1 The religious ceremonies
Nambela’s intermediary role with the spirit world prevails in her role as priestess and prophetess in Sunday ceremonial sessions. In the middle of the compound - serving as a sacred and ritual space for the healer and her patients - Nambela requests support
from God to sustain her work and to empower the healing process of the patients 
(kusali na kuomba nguvu kwa Mungu). Text of some prayers will reveal, that pepo 
clients cannot expect positive changes from any intervention, as long as grudges re-
main. Therefore, clients are to ‘clear their hearts’ and rid themselves of worries or ill 
feelings (kutoa mawazo kwa mayo) before the sessions begin. Everyone in the com-
pound accepts this as part of Nambela’s intervention strategies. These strategies 
strongly reflect the ancient religious authority of Nyiha chiefs who once served as 
intermediaries between the community, God and the ancestral forces (see 5.1).

In my eagerness to understand Nambela’s revelations and prophecies, I had origi-
nally in mind to record each ceremonial session. Soon, however, I realized that I 
would never be able to capture nor translate most of this information. I had to accept 
that these events were part of Nambela’s daily life and practice. Some of the texts of 
Nambela’s speeches or utterances that were recorded during ceremonial gatherings 
were transcribed and translated with the help of Patterson, my field assistant. A small 
part of these texts serves to set an example of the kind of insights Nambela obtains in 
pepo trance. These insights, as in divinations, clairvoyance or dreams, do not contain 
cognitive thoughts, but rather impressions, feelings or sensations of inner percep-
tions. Therefore, it is difficult to be completely certain of their meaning. Nambela 
does not recollect what she utters during these pepo trances and strongly depends on 
what others convey to her afterwards. Whenever I asked Nambela to listen to these 
recordings, she would laugh upon hearing herself and make fun about it to others. 
What follows, are some descriptions of the way Nambela reveals her pepo forces, 
and the messages she conveys in a series of texts. Patterson, who was often an impor-
tant witness of Nambela’s subsequent spontaneous pepo trances, would also convey 
to me what these insights were. This enabled me to verify the consistancy of some of 
her messages.

6.2.2 Performance and speech

On Sunday’s, but also during festivities, some patients sweep the compound clean. 
Between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. everybody gathers and drinks a purifying herbal conco-
tion that is sprinkled afterwards over the ground to enhance communication with the 
spiritual world. As everybody sits together in half a circle, the ceremony is initiated 
by one or more assistants who begin by singing specific songs while waiting for 
Nambela to join. When Nambela arrives, she sits down on her knees with her back to 
the patients who are seated at some distance from her. Nambela reacts with strong 
sensations by giving an intense shiver or uttering of a loud cry, after which she bends 
down. Soon she begins to speak under the influence of her pepo. Nambela then opens 
the religious ceremony with call-and-response singing followed by one or more
prayers. The songs show to be related to the speech event in which Nambela utters her concern about her intermediary role as a healer.

Nambela calls:

_Ukulililila chane wee tata_
What do you cry about Father?

_Ukulililila chane wee Nambela_
What do you cry about Nambela?

_Uzenzüe chane wee_
What have you brought to Nambela?

Patients respond:

_Kulitila Jesu, zenzüle matezo_
Crying about Jesus, I have brought my trouble

Nambela calls:

_Wejiyula umwezo wako_
I open my heart for you

_Jesu aliyirna akulolo_
Jesus, come and see us

_Sowela Jesu ndaga yeye_
Jesus we are grateful for your help

_Molopiya musinachimwi_
No money can help us

Patients respond:

_Natonta, tonta nimilimo nenga kasunga_
You have become tired, tired to do the work on your own

By now, Nambela has sensory perceptions about the doings, but also dreams of certain patients. Sometimes she accuses a person of being lazy or ignorant, causing illness and bad luck. When a woman fails to be a good mother and partner, Nambela will react furiously. Also, patients who exhibit immoral behaviour in the compound, like extra marital sexual relationships, are not excluded from exposure. Discussions may arise as a consequence. Nambela can also convey the dream(s) of a patient and explain its meaning. Or, she can react to dreams that she considers as warnings to herself, her family or the community. All this helps to clear the compound of possible negative vibrations. Once the air is clear, the prayers are directed to Jesus Christ and God to evoke a cure for all. The texts I present below are from a recording on the 17th of March 1991.

_You Father of power, your children bend down for Jesus Christ as we kneel down at his feet... you respect the earth below and the heaven above and so I beg for your strength, dear God... yes you have power for you take away the burdens of all your creatures, all by yourself... God Almighty, as ever we out here are all part of you, creator of each and everything... you father! Your illnesses are here at our home-ground and they need your healing power... you are the..._
only healer and no other healer excels your power... They may use witchcraft-medicine or boast about their work, but all this is fake... it is you who is the big healer and nobody else besides you... you are the one who sees everything, below and above...

**Interrupted by another song called:**

*Kuliteseya* *kumwanya, kuliteseya* (In heaven there is peace, peace)

You also see it, that you lead the people at the hospital [district mission hospital]... You Jesus Christ and the healer Almighty God who watches over those who are operated there... But you are concerned with all people and you shall point out the way to me as well... Indicate the way to me for I am your motherless child and together we will do the work... Look once more for your cup of medicine [symbolically], Almighty God, and do your work... For with your strength you look after all medicine, yes you father! Only in your hands can it be used as medicine, yes, only a cup of your medicine is powerful... I beg you to come to our homestead, for if illness is taken away it is by your doing so only! You wipe out all the rubbish from the earth... you and me... Yehova is you God so show me the way to Jesus Christ [who has the power to heal through God]... I beg you to go to Muvasankanje who also does work of God [being a healer]... Also go to Namumba and Muvasi Muetu [both also healers]... Please go near them also... go near all our pools and do your work... Muvasi Muetu together with Vannomone and Kanchule are all doing the work of God...

Let all of us sent by God to do this work, enter through the help of Jesus Christ! Do not die with a bad feeling for this is not to the benefit of the world... You father, I beg thee we are here below your feet... Do not doubt about what happens in the world, for each one will be left with his garbage...

I do not know how I will die God, but I beg for one person to meet me when I die... Perhaps some people will carry me to the hospital or take me to healers when I am about to die... From this place I beg you, Almighty God and Jesus Christ, to have me send back to your creation God. Carry out your job by protecting those who are travelling on foot or by car... shed your power on the roads in order to protect the people from having accidents... Those who do the work of God watch over them and give them strength in head, hands and feet... Father, you test us day after day... Let them (the healers) remember you day and night... As the snake has been given marks on his head, so do I receive marks in my dreams... you say not to forget these marks even for one day for they contain a message... but I am just an orphan in this country while you are always everywhere Father... I leave all the burdens to you and ask for your power, oh Father... if we ask you to come close to where we are now, this is also meant for the girls of Nakavala... Last night you have asked me about your sheep [two girls that are ill]... what am I to do about this, Almighty God...

You know what to do about these problems father and Jesus Christ... I am sorry, I will not return to you again today just think of all of us. Amen. Thank you.

The messages of Nambela’s prayer clearly reflect her respect for God (*Mulungu*), Father (*Utata*) and Jesus Christ (*Jesu Cristu*). God ‘the only healer’ is asked to give Nambela and the patients a strong *pepo* to help them in their healing process. Nambela strongly judges healers who think they can outwit or manipulate divine powers for their own benefits. The gift and competence to heal is only to be used for helping others with good intent. She mentions, among others, Namumba, who helped and trained her (see 5.2). Next to the work of the novice healers, Nambela shows her concern for other people, in the community and beyond. In reaction to Nambela’s speech, patients react with a sudden fit or faint, while others manifest sudden spirit
seizures as they give loud cries and shivers. Subsequently, these patients may roll over the ground or feel the urge to sway or hover around while Nambela runs around the compound in *pepo* trance, prophesying local and national events. Often, she utters the same information for weeks or months afterwards, adding recent developments. Once back in her ‘normal’ consciousness these messages are usually forgotten.

While running and prophesying, Nambela comes to the stage of taking her hatchet and basket and run off into the woods in search of plants. At that moment, everybody moves away to the other side of the compound to sit and start singing. One to two hours later, Nambela will return breathing heavily and carrying the basket filled with roots or other parts of plants. Upon Nambela’s return in the compound, she may find that a ‘charged’ atmosphere has evolved as a result of the group singing session (see chapter 7). This again can trigger a reaction in her *pepo* and make her run, while uttering her concern for certain matters. In the text below I present some of the utterances Nambela makes as she returns to the compound while the singing is going on. She is perspiring profusely as she has run for nearly two hours in the vicinity in a *pepo* trance. It is Sunday March 24, 1991.

Tonight I have dreamt that Majenda [representative of the party CCM and village-chairman] went to look for medicine [plants] around the area (in *pepo-trance*)...after finding the medicine he dreamt that he prepared them after which he gave it to others to drink... it seemed to be bad [dangerous] medicine for it made the people ill...he had committed witchcraft without knowing it and was afraid that people would die because of it... Today my *pepo* has taken a lot of medicine for the many ill here...God sees to it together with my *pepo* that I will take the correct medicines... God gives me power to have a strong spirit... with this strong spirit I can heal the bad spirits (*mapepe mahaya*) of the various people here so they become well again...also the people from Kilimanjaro region [Chagga tribe] will receive help from God...God has given his help to me for a long time which is why I can do this work and continue to do so for many years more to come...I beg to God to show those who fear to come here that they make a big mistake...my knowledge of medicine ought not to be feared by anyone for I am protected and assisted by God... why should ill people have fear for me, when I am doing work of God? There are many people who suffer from belly-infections but those who went to hospitals have died...the hospitals do not dispose of the appropriate medicine to treat the disease [epidemic] that is being spread by people from the coast who are travelling to the interior of the country...the people who have come here are all cured and this pleases me very much... Why is it that men and women argue so much? Why do parents fight so often at home? It is bad to quarrel in a family, for it can make both parents and children ill...but there are no medicines against anger and hatred...for those who are ill and return to their homes amidst problems or fights medicines have no use...it is for this reason that I ask you upon return here to clear all that has occurred at home before giving you new medicines...only on these terms can they be of help to you...so first clear your heart with me, in order to prevent worsening of your *pepo* [at this point Nambela hits herself on the head with both hands]...those who do not want to listen will first have to wake up and come to understand what is the meaning of their illness... only then God can help them! Patterson [my field-assistant] is inflicted by witchcraft...he is in the midst of a feud with his relatives...for some time witchcraft has been practised on him...if he stays there he runs the risk to die... it is therefore necessary that he remains here under my protection and recovers from his symptoms.
Nambela first mentions something about the village chairman of the national party CCM (Chama cha Mapinduzi). He was once a patient and a novice of Nambela, and for two years he had his own small healing practice until he began to devote himself to politics. Up until today, Majenda shows attention to his pepo by regularly joining the Sunday gatherings at Nambela’s compound on which occasion he runs around as a nchimi (a person ‘sent by God’ - exposing witchcraft in pepo trance). Regularly, he also brings clients to Nambela, either for divination or treatment. He is not known to do evil in any way and it seems that somebody in the community is using black magic to upset his dreams.

Furthermore, Nambela reports about a virus that has spread in the country causing the death of many people. She utters that divine powers will help her to find good medicines for each and everyone, no matter where they come from. She stresses that her knowledge and success with medicinal plants is very effective, unless people continue to argue so much at home. Clients have to clear their minds and hearts first if pepo is to react positively to the treatment. In the end, Nambela deplots that some people fear her work, even when this is without reason for she never abuses her magical powers [black magic]. Her last utterance is about witchcraft that is practised on Patterson. I will come back to this in the next chapter (7.2). When Nambela has come back to her normal senses again she goes to her home, changes her clothes [as everybody does on Sunday] and watches the activities on the compound. Friends and members of the family come by to greet her or to join the musical sessions that have started afterwards. The Sunday gathering results in an explosive afternoon, in which most of the people manifest the liberation of pepo. With a short interval around 5 p.m., the singing continues until late at night.

That same evening of March 24, 1991, I am seated in front of Nambela’s house when she suddenly runs off from the house in pepo trance. I quickly fetch my recorder and capture a part of the text she utters. It is a very strong manifestation of her spirit forces, which as yet I have not been able to witness. It is impossible for me to follow her as she hovers far around the compound. I also know that she does not appreciate being followed in this state of mind. Though part of the speech is lost as Nambela runs away in her trance-state, I have captured the following sentences:

He, he, he, heya... that man is bewitched maybe it is a deceased spirit ... there are people who seek other things... there are people who try to disturb my work ... I direct myself to God... there are people who want to destroy my work the coming years... I pray to God to let the seeds grow into flowers... now you will hear about the diseases, these have two eyes (magonfwa wa mucho mucho)... you know, God is helping us, but we do not care... God helps his seeds to grow... Let the healers not think that they do their work on their own... God is helping us but we do not listen to his messages... leave him alone who does not want to listen... He will find out by himself... we do not agree... we will only listen to God... he, he, heya, we have heard it ...he, he, heya (3x), now we [spirits] have come from Europe, from Holland,
from the areas of chiefs Kalengo, Chiwila and Mwatuka... he, he, heya (2x) we have heard it... there are bad things... they will come out... ye, ye, yeha (2x) death will be seen... there will be many deaths... ye, ye, yeha... it hurts me Nambela... we hear, we hear... we do not agree [to hear more]... we are far away... what is it? Nothing here... there are diseases... we do not want them... thank you... we do not want the words of liars... we do not want those bad things... that child [the destiny of a child]... we do not want it... this is not what we need... we do not want those bad things to happen around here... about this child... we do not want bad things of his father... you, young boy, do not complain... what shall I do...I, Nambela... about this boy... he does not have good examples... this young boy needs to learn about the ways of God (2x)... I am sad about him... bad things (2x)... let him [father] stop these bad things... that make his son vomit... Look for a sheep... let us close it... the witchcraft... the way he gets these problems... it has something to do with his father... he does not have anything... we do not agree (2x)... sometimes he [the father] thinks of killing him [the boy]... with an axe [out of despair?].... Let us be quiet... let us be silent... What is needed is that we close it... We do not agree... my heart feels pain for this child... He is in big trouble... I feel sorry... I feel sorry for they [?] want to throw away a human life... This child gets into trouble because of his mother... she is dangerous for him... There is much quarrelling... there are big fights... this mother has bad things... Let us look for a sheep... let us close it...

Though the text is incomplete, the speech turns out to be quite revealing, showing Nambela’s immense sensitivity to conceive what may go wrong. After having said something about a man who is bewitched, Nambela utters how her work will be disturbed in the coming two years. Nambela goes on about the spread of the virus that already has been her concern earlier in this afternoon. For some reason Nambela utters also something about spirits from ‘Holland’ which no doubt is related to my presence. These and other spirits, like tribal chiefs (*mwene* in Kinyiha), are apparently communicating with Nambela on this matter. Eventually, Nambela refers to the trouble around a boy that has to do with bewitchment. Unknowingly, the father poses a threat to the boy as he is under the influence of a restless family spirit (see 6.3). The man does not know that a sacrificial offering with a sheep can ‘close’ the spirit thereby also ending the bewitchment on the boy. Apart from that, Nambela mentions that the mother has a bad influence on the boy.

With regard to Nambela’s remark about the disturbance in her work I can confirm that this actually happened shortly after I left the compound in September 1991. The reason was that a younger son of hers sought to benefit from her achievements. Another factor was that a nephew of hers began to practice as a healer right beside her healing compound. I will come back to this specific development in a discussion of the findings in chapter twelve. The utterance of Nambela about ‘blood in the air’ has to do with the many people that have unexpectedly died from the virus that spread from the coast to the interior. Nambela refers to this virus as ‘a disease that has two eyes’. With this she means that the virus has two implications. Apart from those who immediately die from it, the virus brings about repercussions to the living. The many wandering dead create a spiritual disharmony and affect the whole environment, giving rise to extreme droughts that would lead to crop failure over a vast area of Tan-
zania. As a consequence, Nambela expects that hunger will be among many people. For a while I reckoned that she referred to the spread of the AIDS virus, but this was not the case. Had it concerned AIDS, she would not have stated that cure could easily be found. What Nambela refers to here is a virus that causes a severe belly-infection which she has been able to cure in a number of persons. In the afternoon prophecies, she has uttered that hospitals failed to succeed in this. In cases of AIDS, Nambela would never make such proclamations, even though some patients responded well to her treatment with medicinal plants.

6.3 The realm of plants and the fight against illbeing

Kwela miti mama, yeyeye (2x),
Climb the trees mama
Ozomelani nchimi wee
You who can see fetch us medicines

This song is popular in Nambela’s practice and sung whenever Nambela runs off in trance in search of special plants that are not known to anyone. The song not only refers to her skill in finding proper medicines, it also reflects the expectations that patients have.

6.3.1 Collection of plants

Once in June 1991, I had a proper chance to join Nambela on a tour collecting plants. With great enthusiasm, Nambela showed me plants and told me about their beneficial properties. At this occasion, Nambela plucked the leaves, dug out the roots, or scraped the bark of about fifty plants [shrubs and trees]. Later on, Nambela took me up a hill. As we arrived at the top made up of large rocks, she started singing and dancing a favourite pepo song: Aliyee mama wee meaning ‘Be silent mama’. It was on this spot that she had once come to realize the reason for her pepo symptoms and the task she had to accomplish as a healer (see 5.2). Here she had received the ‘messages from God’ (maagizo wa Mungu). Apart from this one occasion, Nambela preferred to collect the various plants alone. During the wet season, when Nambela cultivated the fields for hours, she returned with parts of plants by the end of the day. Upon instruction by Nambela, assistants (trained in-patients) could fetch commonly used plants and prepare these for distribution and/or application to various patients.

Nambela’s ethno-botanical repertoire is very extensive and largely surpasses the 115 plants that I have documented. My primary research focus was, however, not ethno-botanical. All I wanted was to understand the context in which plants play a role in her daily practice (see 4.6). As they played such an important role, I decided to document the main plants in use. Nambela’s capricious moods with pepo and the many responsibilities she had, made it difficult for me to document her knowledge.
and dealings with important plants. The information came when I was least expecting it (see 4.1 and 5.2). At times, Nambela would suddenly drop by with some plants or hand them to my field assistant Patterson who would pass on the information to me. Nambela had appointed Patterson to assist me in the documentation and collection of plants specimens. Patterson also checked the names of the plants that I had often written phonetically in Kinyiha. Nambela checked and commented on this data afterwards. The dried specimens I had collected, mainly leaves and pieces of roots, supported with photographs or slides, were taken along for further identification. For more general findings regarding the intake and usage of plants, I refer to chapter twelve and the appendix containing a list of commonly used plants by all the healers in this study.

6.3.2 Dysfunctions and respective treatments

During the time of my stay with Nambela, I have kept records of 64 patients - 34 women and 30 men - of whom a majority were in prolonged treatment. Among them 56 were diagnosed to have serious complaints due to pepo illness. Fifteen of these patients were said to have pepo illness due to a sudden death in the family (kiparazi); 18 to a spell of witchcraft (uchawi); and 20 to a state of coldness (lupalala). Besides a broad range of pepo symptoms (see later), 3 patients suffered from partial paralysis, while 8 others had various infections: chest infections (4), infection of the reproductive organs (2) and eye-and skin disease (2). All patients were said to suffer from homa, which literally means fever. They would use this term to refer to pain or bad feeling, without any sign of fever. The subjective feeling of pain would be related to the sensation of heat in the body, whenever pain or tension was involved. About half of the pepo patients also received treatment for problems of infertility or impotence. Some pepo patients, who were less troubled by their pepo symptoms, were treated as ambulatory patients. Sometimes this concerned women with complaints of menses and pregnancy.

The major dysfunctions that Nambela would deal with in her daily practice, together with respective treatments, are discussed here in accordance with underlying etiology. The information will not only reveal the ideas that are behind pepo illness, it will also explain the various remedies, be it phyto-therapeutic, psycho-therapeutic or ritualistic. With practically all dysfunctions, Nambela would recommend patients to participate in the daily musical sessions to bring relief of emotional and spiritual strains, and to speed the natural healing process. I will deal with the role of musical sessions extensively in the next chapter. Below, I present three groups of dysfunctions. Firstly, these are the dysfunctions and problems interrelated with pepo illness, including fits or convulsions, paralysis, sudden deaths and breaches in conduct, bad luck and witchcraft and sorcery. Secondly, there are the dysfunctions of
the reproductive organs, which include impotence and infertility, difficulties regarding childbirth, menses and lactation and venereal disease. Thirdly, there are the dysfunctions of the internal organs. This includes digestive complaints, HIV-virus, and chest complaints. Whenever relevant, I will refer to the cases in 6.1.

**PEPO DYSFUNCTIONS**

A spirit in harmony is a healthy or ‘good’ spirit (*pepo nzuri*) that has an appeal to positive forces of a protective or healing nature. When a disharmony occurs, these positive forces are strongly reduced or even withdrawn. In that case, a person has an ill or ‘bad’ spirit (*pepo mbaya*). This *pepo mbaya* has an appeal to negative energies, which facilitates the success of witchcraft and sorcery. A *pepo mbaya* leads to *pepo* illness (*empongo impepo* in Kinyiha). The various forces in *pepo* can fluctuate and are distinguished by Nambela in the following manner. The inner spirit of a person, called *pepo wa mtu*, has a component that can separate itself from the body and permanently does so upon death. This is the component that intercedes with other spirit forces of dead, non-human or divine origin. A lower force is *pepo ya sheitani*, a devilish or teasing spirit. An intermediate force is *pepo ya bara*, an inland nature spirit or *pepo ya mzimu*, a spirit of a departed person. A high spirit force is close to God, like the *pepo ya mzimu cha kale*, spirits of ancient ancestors or *pepo ya Mungu*, divine spirits of God.

According to Nambela, the characteristic dysfunctions of *pepo* illness are heartburn, heart palpitations, restlessness, weakness, weight loss and also, depression, confusion, aggression and withdrawal. Often *pepo* illness starts with physical complaints felt as oppression in various parts of the body. The oppression can result in specific pains referred to as fever (*homa*). Many clients experience severe strains in the legs making walking difficult as the joints are stuck. Other clients experience food getting trapped in the stomach, causing a burning sensation in the throat, resulting in belching or vomiting. The nervous tension in the stomach and heart area expands to the head, the chest and the neck. With the loss of appetite and consequent loss of weight the defence system is reduced, thereby developing more complaints. By now, a person will feel ‘sick all over the body’. Gradually, people experience chronic complaints, like headaches, whooping cough, bronchitis, digestive or reproductive problems. Also, problems of the heart (*mataizo wa moyo*) are an indication that something is wrong with *pepo*. Heartburn, palpitations, restlessness, weight loss and weakness, are more immediate physiological reactions coming from the heart. A sensitive person can faint in some cases, without knowing what kind of influence has disturbed his or her *pepo*. Other persons can have an epileptic fit after feeling a burning sensation in the belly. If nothing is done about *pepo* complaints, depression or confusion can occur (see 6.1 case 4 and 5). Signs of madness (*ugonjwa ya kichaa*) in
pepo patients are: 1) not being aware who they are, what they do or what they say; 2) having moments of sudden aggression towards relatives; 3) feeling an urge to withdraw or to live in isolation; 4) refusal of food, help, or any kind of medical intervention; and 5) running away into the woods, disoriented with ‘negative’ influences in pepo. Out in the woods, patients either fall asleep from fatigue or hide out of fear of their hallucinations. Sometimes they tie themselves to a tree and hurt themselves. From the histories of patients it appears that the symptoms of insanity become manifest in what are believed to be a completely sane and ‘normal’ persons. Such patients receive special attention from the assistants in the compound. Otherwise, nobody is ever worried when those ‘running’ with pepo disappear from the premises. Even after being away for one or two hours, they always return safely (see 7.3).

Remedy

Next to intensive participation in the musical sessions, Nambela gives patients a small pouch filled with certain plant ingredients or madawa, to wear around the neck. The pouches are used for prevention and protection of negative influences on the patients. Pouches calm down the heart that beats fast (moyo imepiga haraka) when pepo is sensitive to all kinds of danger. If children are staying with the patient, they too are to wear these pouches. Other preventive medicine is a mixture of plant ingredients (unknown), some sheep's hair, and powdered elephant tusk (obtained from a national reserve). Water is added to this mixture and Nambela keeps it in a special, large seashell. Whenever somebody is having heartburn or heart palpitations, Nambela gives some of the liquid to drink or to rub into various parts of the body to protect a person from evil. To calm down the physical reaction, a drink is made from the leaves of the Urvumbe and Ikuwanmatete (both not identified). In cases of severe mental confusion, medicine is given to calm down the mind. The roots of the Imbandu (Ficus sp./Moraceae) and Unantandale (Rubiaceae, species unknown) are effective as a sedative.

In general, pepo patients have a poor appetite, because of the tensions in their body, mostly in the belly and chest. In such cases, Nambela tells them ‘to listen’ well to the needs of their pepo. Some patients follow a very strict diet, abstaining from food in general for two or more days. Nambela does not force food restrictions on them, except in severe cases of pepo involving fits and convulsions. In those cases, she advises people to abstain from catfish (kambale), pork (nyama ya ngurwe), and goat's meat (nyama ya mbuzi). According to Nambela, these foods contain fat that increases blood pressure which in turn gives a strain on the heart. Nambela too respects food restrictions. For instance, she does not eat any meat other than pigeon or chicken, which she rears herself. It occurs that she hardly eats for a month, living mainly on tea with sugar. Nambela remains incredibly strong under these
circumstances, without losing her normal vitality, enabling her to work as usual. To restore the physical condition and encourage a normal appetite, the roots of nutritious plants are in use: Umunyaazia (Euphorbia sp./Euphorbiaceae), Umunkoyo (Crotalaria sp./Papilionaceae), Unameketeka (not identified) and Ahela-avahoi (Biophytum sensitivum/Oxalidaceae).

**Convulsions or epileptic fits (degedege or kifafa)**

Convulsions in children are called *degedege ya mtoto*, literally 'when a bird has frightened a child'. The convulsions of *degedege*, which occur in children, are weaker than convulsions or (epileptic) fits in adults, *kifafa*, which are to be placed in the range of more severe *pepo* symptoms (see 5.4). The convulsions involve heart palpitations and uncontrolled body movements. Often, convulsions happen at night during a restless sleep, after which the person suddenly awakes from a frightening dream hearing sounds or voices. Another indication of convulsions in children, especially younger ones, is the palpitation in the child's soft fontanel. *Pepo* patients frequently experience nightly fits before manifesting other *pepo* symptoms. According to Nambela, the attacks are a signal of *pepo* in distress. Left untreated, a person can have sudden seizures at any time of day while other strange feelings and symptoms may be experienced: a strange sensation in the belly or head or a loss of control and contracting muscles. This is usually followed by falling down unconsciously or by shaking violently. Such a seizure takes away all the subject's energy. A seizure can also be experienced in reaction to therapeutic treatment, in particular the musical sessions. In that case it concerns the expression of suppressed feelings in mind and body (see chapter 7). Without the guidance of the musical sessions, people usually faint. Regular attacks, without the use of the singing, can result in madness.

**Remedy**

Convulsions and fits are first and foremost treated during the therapeutic singing sessions (apart from the attacks in small children). The symptoms are to some extent evoked during the singing, as a means of therapy to reduce further attacks. The plants in use to treat convulsions and fits are *Ipangala* (*Tamarindus indica/Caesalpiniaaceae*) for children and *Umwalanite* (*Entada sp./Mimosaceae*) for adults. The roots are boiled in water and the drink is taken daily, usually three times a day. This helps to calm down the state of nerves.

**Paralysis (kipooza)**

Paralysis is placed here in the context of emotional disturbance, but it can also be a result of poisoning. In both cases, the central nervous system is affected. Paralysis can be partial or total. Paralysis both in children and adults can be a symptom of
pepo illness caused by an emotional shock. Witchcraft too may be involved. In such cases, a person may have been given a certain poison unknowingly. Nambela stresses the fact that she does not refer to paralysis caused by an accident or a fall.

**Remedy**

In case of paralysis, nine different plants can treat the state of nerves, the joints, and the blood. Mostly the roots are mixed and boiled with water and two cups a day are taken orally. Small pieces of the roots of Chiboko (not identified) and Ushilembo (Uapaca kirkiana/ Euphorbiaceae) are first boiled in water. When still hot, they are pressed on the paralysed parts of the body. This is also repeated daily. Boiled roots of the Ufita (Mimosops denseflora/Mimosaceae) are mixed with the saliva by chewing and spat carefully over the body and into the nostrils, mouth, and ears.

**Sudden and bad deaths (kiparazi and lupapala)**

By divination, Nambela will discover whether a sudden death like a stroke, a car accident, or death by a lightning flash has a natural or a spiritual cause. When pepo illness is related to sudden deaths among relatives, Nambela refers generally to an accidental death (kifo cha ghafula in Kiswahili and kiparazi in Kinyiha). Accidental or bad deaths occur mainly when serious breaches are made in social norms or conduct in the family, including negligence of burial rites. In these cases, Nambela also speaks of 'a state of coldness' (lupalala) in the family (see 6.1 case 3, 4, 5 and 9). The concepts kiparazi and lupalala are common among many regional tribes. People, especially those who fail to honour their closest relatives, are very afraid that spiritual problems will occur in the family. Kiparazi and lupalala are often intertwined with each other. For a person who has suddenly died, a proper traditional burial needs to be held. Specific medicines and rites during burials favor the passage to the spirit world; so as to prevent the spirit of the departed to wander around the living. Wandering family spirits may exert influence on their closest relatives, but also distant relatives may feel their presence. In the worst scenario, the person affected will die under similar circumstances as long as the wandering spirit has not been facilitated to make the passage to the spirit world. Those spirits that have died a sudden or bad death can be the cause of severe mental disturbances in their offspring accompanied by violent behavior or suicide attempts.

**Remedy**

In the first place, ritual bathing, with the use of certain plants, is performed by Nambela to end the negative influences of a deceased on the living offspring. Traditionally, ritual bathing is a cleansing ritual, be it for the living or the recently deceased, and makes part of the traditional burial rites. For the ritual bathing, parts of plants (unknown) are mixed with water and poured over the head and body of the person,
dead or alive, serving as a protective shield. This ‘shield’ (*kigao*) prevents negative influences to come to one or more offspring. In the second place, a sacrifice of a sheep may be needed. In accordance with Nyiha tradition, female clients make the offering in the woods, whereas male clients perform the offering at the river. The restless spirit for whom the offering is made can be male or female; usually a deceased next of kin, like a parent or a brother or sister. Whenever the ritual entails *kufunga kiparazi* (to close a bad or sudden death) entails a sacrificial offering, not Nambela, but male assistants help perform the ritual acts. The reason seems to be that the Nyiha traditionally do not allow women to perform offerings (see 5.1). If a sheep is offered, the blood is collected in an earthenware pot to which small pieces of the heart, the kidney and the liver are added. This mixture is boiled on a fire together with some leaves of the *Ipangala* (*Tamarindus indica/Ceasalpiniaceae*), some water and maize flower. The person for whose benefit the ritual is performed has to kill the sheep him or herself, though assistance is given to prevent the animal from suffering. The patient, man or woman, has to light a fire and stir the mixture. When all the ingredients have been boiled, s/he has to drink (eat) some of the mixture, looking towards the place where the deceased spirit has been buried. What is left of the mixture has to be taken home and given to other members of the extended family. This too contributes to the effectiveness of the ritual. No one is allowed to look back after leaving the sacrificial spot. If one does, the power of the ritual will fade, requiring a new sacrifice.

Thirdly, Nambela recommends a ceremonial offering (*tambioko*) at the ancestral graveyard to appease the ancestors. In this case sudden death are interwoven with *lupalala* entailing serious breaches in conduct (failure to perform traditional burial rites, violent behaviour or sexual abuse). As in the past (see 5.1), flour is used or homemade beer, or a chicken, while requesting family ancestors to intermediate with the (wandering) spirits that are offended. In addition, Nambela sometimes advises a special offering serving as a ‘payment’ (*malipio*) to the wandering spirit(s). Fourthly, Nambela provides her clients with graveyard medicines. This exists of a mixture of sheep blood and plants that is buried at the feet and the head of the grave of the wandering spirit(s). This brings the departed to rest and protects the living from further spiritual intrusion by the departed (see 5.4). The plants in use are considered magical in that the plants carry a message to the spirit world. If none of these interventions bring the desired solution, Nambela advises clients to consult a traditional specialist (*fundi za jadi*) at home who can arrange more specific rituals that align with the customs of the lineage- or clan spirits.

**Bad luck (*mkosi* or *nuksi*)**

Material, social, emotional and physical problems occur when bad luck is involved. In most cases, money is an important item within this context, either as a cause or a
result of bad luck. Nambela recognizes six different types of bad luck, each causing different problems. The names (in Kinyiha) are exclusively in use by Nambela. The first one, *Ipangazia*, is always related to the fact that money is finished sooner than expected; the second one is *Inoro* and concerns money lost or disappeared by the time one wants to use it; the third one, *Urovolela*, means all types of bad luck, be it in money, love, business or health; the fourth, *Mfita*, relates to people blinded by money, which changes their personality in a negative way; and fifth, *Mkanda*, is about a person attracted to all types of bad luck. Nothing s/he does, says or touches has the desired outcome. Social relations are bad and people avoid him or her. Sixth is *Burwe* or *Iyalawe*, meaning that a person is born with bad luck, resulting either in failures or illnesses.

**Remedy**

For the treatment of all the bad luck cases, the roots of *Ivoli* (*Scleria sp./Cyperaceae*), *Umleve* (*Protea sp./Proteaceae*) and *Ufita* (*Mimosops denseflora/Mimosaceae*) were pounded together. The resulting powder is given via incisions in the skin, in order to clear the blood of the bad luck. Various other ingredients (mixtures) are available to improve luck in business or in making money, but I did not find out what they were composed of. There is no doubt that the symbolic meaning of such mixtures worked as a placebo and satisfied the needs of the desperate customer. Whenever I asked Nambela to explain more about these remedies, she would answer with a big smile or a shrug as if saying that I would not be able to understand.

**Witchcraft and sorcery (uchawi and uloga or uvolozi)**

Witchcraft and sorcery (*uchawi* and *uloga*) in Nambela’s vernacular are both called *uvolozi*. Both practices can easily harm persons with a sensitive or disturbed *pepo* (see 6.1 case 2, 3, 8 and 9). If *uvolozi* is inherent to a person and s/he is born with a substance or force in the belly for doing malice (see 3.4) this substance is called *imbungulu*. However, not all those who possess *imbungulu* will become practicing witches. In fact, some are not even aware of having inherited the substance from either parent. The implication is that such a person cannot be blamed or held responsible for the latent capacity. S/he can be blamed for activation of the latent force.76 Another type of *uvolozi* is the bewitchment of a person by placing a spell or charm: referring to sorcery by manipulation of natural and spiritual forces. The power to understand and perform ‘hidden things’ is known to Nambela as *itonga*. When Nambela speaks of *imbombo itonga* she means that certain tasks are performed in secret so as to influence others. Persons who do *itonga* are called

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76 In other areas of Tanzania (Southeast and Northwest) this kind of *uchawi* is more common than in the area where Nambela lives.
abitonga (sing. omwitonga). Those persons who do good secret things are itonga linza, and those who do bad secret things are itonga libibi. In the first case, the act is to the benefit of the social unit, whereas in the last case it is against it. If the reason is jealousy or greed, it is an anti-social act. When traditional customs have been seriously violated within the family or the lineage, or a social disharmony exists, itonga serves a social purpose. In this case, ancestral powers of the lineage in disharmony may be invoked. In other instances too, consent of the ancestors may play a crucial role in the success of itonga. Nambela will distinguish what type of uvulozi affects a person, for each kind causes a different range of pepo symptoms, typified by predominantly mental or physical distortions. In some cases, both forms of uvulozi are practiced on one person. In case of sorcery, a major question is whether contagious or sympathetic magic has been used and, if a curse has been created. A spell or a curse may imply the use of magical objects, like horns (vipembe) filled with magical medicine (dawa za uchawi) that are hidden or placed on the doorstep, affecting the cursed person passing it. Also, a ‘bad’ spirit may be invoked, sent in disguise of a bird or an animal to bewitch the person. While sorcery involves the manipulation of medicines or other substances placed in close proximity to the victim, there is one form, called umunago that deals with very powerful medicines. Umunago can transform inanimate things and people into animals and back again. Nowadays, according to Nambela and her relatives, it is rare to find people who have these skills. Stories still circulate about powerful persons who had this power in former generations. Nambela stresses that she never takes part in the practice of revenge nor does she expose persons intentionally to help a patient who seeks revenge. Nambela’s task is to restore pepo and not to disturb it. Those waganga wa pepo who are specialized witchdoctors assist victims after making sure, by means of divination, that the client has a real case against the person. Some of these waganga feel that in so doing, they contribute to a just society (see chapter 11), whereas others mainly counteract witchcraft for money (see 3.4). Nambela’s role in witchcraft and sorcery is to discover and expose what type of practice has been used and how to neutralize it.

People who suffer from the intrusion of uvulozi often feel creeping sensations in the blood to indicate that something alien is inside them. Also, poisoning (malila) may affect the vital organs. Malila is achieved by secretly mixing poisonous ingredients (often plants) with foods or drinks (6.1 case 8). Certain (grounded) animal, human or mineral ingredients may be used, like tiny fragments of bone, tissue or stone. Once the mixture dissolves in the body, it becomes poisonous or harmful causing a
creeping sensation or stabbing pains. The symptoms of malila can also produce lack of strength, nightmares and confusion. More serious signs are paralysis or dysfunction of the kidney and the liver. People suffering from malila suffer from swollen bodily parts. At first this appears in one foot, leg or arm, but eventually the liver will be contaminated. Whooping cough and loss of hair are manifestations of the body’s failing defence system. The internal infection can lead also to infertility or miscarriages. Once too far progressed, Nambela is unable to save people’s life. Besides this type of poisoning of the body and/or the mind, Nambela states that certain foodstuffs can contain poisonous or toxic ingredients.

Remedy

What is important is to detect what has set witchcraft or sorcery in motion. If appropriate, Nambela will receive instructions during her dreams or divinations about the location of a hidden magical object. An assistant may collect it upon instruction of Nambela and give it to her for safekeeping and neutralization. There is a yearly ceremony near to Nambela’s compound to neutralize those material objects that she or patients have exposed. During the first days of my stay, Nambela proudly showed me the storage place of the various magical objects. The storage lay just behind the compound and consisted of an open shack with large bags hanging from the rooftop. With the help of her pepo, Nambela finds plants that enable neutralization of the danger attached to these objects. Around Christmas time, the various objects are taken out to an open spot in the woods near the compound, where they are burnt following the instructions of her pepo. During the event, a number of people, including Nambela, react very strongly with pepo. Many fetch medicine (leaves) and throw these into the fire so as to neutralize the negative components. Some patients or novices fall down close to the fire as if to clear the spot with their presence, while others look for magical objects that are still hidden. The whole event triggers people one by one, as their pepo is liberated in an atmosphere that fills the air with a kind of charged energy.

Symptoms of witchcraft involving poisonous or magical substances are treated as in malila. In both cases, Nambela will perform a poison proof. This is done with the help of a steam bath that helps extract poisonous elements via the skin. The liquid contains the fine roots of the fragile flower Isyansa (Hippocrateaceae/ Hippocratea buchananii). The roots are boiled for twenty minutes in a large quantity of water. The patient has to steam the head and the chest for ten minutes above the cooking pot covering him/herself with a cloth. The perspired drops that fall into the water become compact when containing poisonous elements. This is seen in the water about half an hour afterwards as wax-like ingredients coloured red, green, yellow or blue. In this way, the patient has visible proof of the physical complaints that are extracted from
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the body. This treatment is repeated several times until no more signs of toxic or dangerous elements are found in the water. After detoxifying the body of a patient, Nambela applies a medicine to purify the blood. For this purpose, she makes an oral drink based of water and pounded leaves and/or fruits of the Aloe Vera or Ivata. The plant is known for its antiseptic activity, purifying the blood. The same function is derived from the roots of Uluveva (Cononaceae/Byrocarpus), Uvutupa (not identified) and Umohogo (Ampelidaceae/Rhocissus sp. family of the cassava plant).

All plants are cut in small pieces and water is added. Curative as well as protective medicines are made from a mixture of the bark from Ilosio (Hypericaceae/Psorospermum bebrifugum) and Itanji (Euphorbiaceae/ Bridelia micranyha) either for oral use or to wear in a small pouch together with other (unknown) substances, or to be used for bathing. Other protective medicines (madawa za kinga), mainly consisting of herbs, are placed in the house for protection and are called ‘medicines to protect the house’ (madawa za kuzindika nyumba). This remedy is in use whenever Nambela suspects sorcery, as in case two of 6.1. Nambela never goes to people’s homes herself to place it there, as many other pepo healers do. The same applies to ‘cleansing a house’ (kusafisha nyumba) from hidden magical objects. The reason for Nambela’s remote involvement in both cases is her enormous workload.

**DYSFUNCTIONS OF THE REPRODUCTIVE ORGANS**

**Impotence and infertility (udhaifu and hazai)**

Dysfunction of the reproductive system can be subdivided into three ailments:

1. impotence or infertility (mwanaume au mwanamke hazai);
2. painful or irregular menstruation (kukosa kizazi); and
3. infected ovaria or scrotum (kidonga kichefu cha mwanaume au mwanaume).

Many people consult Nambela about sexual problems. She may identify whether the cause is spiritual or purely biological. Nambela always stresses the great impact of these problems on a marriage. For the local men and women, this topic is very sensitive as it arouses fears and concerns. This is especially true in cases of male impotence. According to Nambela, impotence is a sexual disturbance that she describes with the words of ‘having lack of power’ (hana nguvu). Nangu is attached to the condition of pepo and expresses the subjective experience of a weak physical condition caused by biological (hormonal) disturbances. Fatigue and pains in different parts of the body can result from it. Often, the complaints are intertwined with ancestral wrath invoked by misconduct in the family. With females, Nambela emphasizes moreover the biological impact of either a temporary or a persistent barrenness. A woman who cannot conceive children may be told “her eggs do not move” (mayai hayatembei). When a woman has failed to conceive for a very long period, Nambela says that “the womb is closed” or “the eggs cannot get out of the
womb” (*mayai yamefungwa*). The presumed cause for both types of barrenness is that the percentage of fluid in the body has been reduced. This reduction obstructs the normal functioning of the body and hinders the transport of the blood to the internal organs. Therefore, medicine is needed to increase the bodily fluid. Once the woman can conceive, Nambela refers to “the opening the womb” (*kufungua uzazi*).

**Remedy**

The complaints are all treated with the same range of plants, which indicates their common aim. Purification of the womb and activation of blood circulation is the major goal. In women, this can regulate conception and ovulation (thus also stabilizing irregular periods). With impotence and infection of the scrotum, the plants serve to vitalise (stimulate) and purify the internal organs so as to regain (increase) strength (*kuongeza nguvu*). Some of the plants *Ishihololo* (*Canthium sp./Rubiaceae*) and *Unasagara* (*Aster sp./Compositae*) have very symbolic features of the sexual organs. They resemble the shape of the womb or the scrotum. In practically all cases, the roots are pounded and boiled in water.

**Difficulties of menses, childbirth and lactation (matatizo ya mwezi, ya uzazi na kunyonyesha maziwa)**

Frequently, clients come with problems concerning irregular menses, a miscarriage (*kuhariba mimba*), a bad position of the fetus (*mimba amegeuka*), an unstable condition of the womb and fetus (*mimba na uzazi hawakaa vizuri*), infection of the womb (*kindonda ya uzazi*), a delayed birth (*kuchelewa kuzaa*) or insufficient milk for breastfeeding (*hayatoshi maziwa*). Whenever women consult Nambela because of troubles or fears about pregnancy, delivery, or menstruation problems, Nambela will describe the condition of the female organs. Nambela can explain very vividly that she can ‘see’ the condition of a woman’s womb to the extent that it can tell also about past or future events. Nambela also claims that she can ‘see’ the number of eggs that will lead to pregnancy or if the condition of the eggs will lead to a delivery or a miscarriage (sometimes it could mean an unhealthy child who could die in the womb or soon after delivery). In order to have a smooth pregnancy, Nambela considers that a good general condition, especially of the womb (*ujamzito or uzazi*), is vital. This prevents complications or pain, as well as abortion. The cause of miscarriages is often the presence of germs in the woman’s body. The germs influence the condition of the food to the fetus and infect it. The body rejects the fetus because of its unhealthy condition. If the woman does not first purify her body of the germs, she will never succeed in delivering a healthy child.
Remedy

Nambela is reputed as a midwife and this explains her impressive knowledge of the use of effective plants. For pregnant women with problems in the womb or the fetus, plants are used either to relax the belly organs (muscles) or to strengthen the womb. The roots of several plants are mixed with water and taken orally during the pregnancy. If pain is felt in the womb, the roots of Unamimvwa (not identified) are crushed and rubbed into the skin of the belly, as an ointment. This relieves the tensions inside. Women, who loose the fetus easily because the womb is not strong enough to hold it, are advised to take Nambela's medicines from the second month onwards to sustain the condition of the womb. Normally, Nambela recommends the intake of medicines from the sixth month onwards to ensure that no complications will arise. To clean the body of germs that infected the fetus, Nambela gives a mixture of roots to clear the blood circulation of all bad elements, also ‘to clean the womb’ kusafisha mimba. The roots of Ihando (Strychnos sp./Loganiaceae) and Isovoyo (Allophyllus sp./Sapindaceae) that are used for menstruation problems, also favor a healthy or good womb (mimba mzuri).

Nambela knows of one particular plant that can encourage delivery most effectively and prevent women from having a caesarian section. To encourage abortion or delivery, the wires of weed, leaves and flowers of Isova-ihonti (hemi-epiphytic plant not identified) are pounded and boiled in water. This results in a slimy substance that has to be taken orally two or three times a day until the fetus reacts. Usually it does not take long since the plant is very active in softening the condition of the womb. This plant curls itself high up around other plants and is very difficult to obtain. Nambela has to go to great pains to get it. If the fetus is in the wrong position, the same medicines are used. To activate milk production, Nambela uses the leaves, stem and roots of Intavu (not identified) and Ikunyu (Euphorbiaceae, species unknown). The plants are crushed until a milky substance is achieved. Mixed with water, this is taken orally. Even if another woman suddenly takes charge of a child (mother absent or dead), these plants will help to activate the production of milk. For reasons of hygiene, usually the mother or a sister of the woman are placed in charge of this. Also, in case of malnourishment, it happens that the mother seeks another woman to nourish the baby. Several women have confirmed to me the efficiency of the medicines to support both the pregnancy and the delivery. During my stay, the pregnancies and deliveries of women in the compound always passed without complications. When a child is born, Nambela will give him or her the second name with a small ritual to prevent any harm coming to the child. Both husband and wife will be present as a token of respect.
Venereal diseases (ugonjwa ya uzinzi)
The venereal diseases dealt with here are Syphilis (kaswende) and Gonorrhea (kisonono). Nambela always uses two terms to indicate venereal disease. The first one is ugonjwa ya siri, meaning secret illness, and the second one is ugonjwa malaya, meaning an illness of prostitutes. With these words, Nambela clearly indicates the venereal nature of these diseases. The features involved in venereal disease are difficulties and pain in urinating, with pus and small quantities of blood in the urine. The disease can spread through the body and affect the head. Wounds gradually develop on the sexual organ of the patient. The cause for venereal disease is seen to be germs that are spread during sexual intercourse. Clients, especially women, find it too shameful to talk about during a public divination session. Nambela takes these clients aside after divination to deal with the matter. At times, during divination, Nambela seems eager to disclose the disease relating it to the ‘bad’ conduct of the client, mostly men. In such instances, she would say it was an illness that comes from sexual affairs with prostitutes. This might be the reason why she also calls it a ‘secret’ disease (see 6.1 case 8).

Remedy
Nambela never examines patients physically. A wide range of plants can deal with the symptoms of venereal disease. Mainly the roots of antiseptic plants are used and boiled with water to serve as an oral mixture. The antiseptic plants combat an infection by cleaning the kidney and bladder. Roots of Umkalia (Securidaga sp./Polygalaceae) may be chewed in addition, after which they are spat at the genitals to reduce the wounds. The remedies are almost identical for men and women.

DYSFUNCTIONS OF THE INTERNAL ORGANS
The digestive system (uwezo wa kubadili chakula kifae mwilini)
Stomach and belly complaints (kidonda na tumbo) are indications of dysfunction of the digestive system. During my stay, it happened a couple of times that a child quite suddenly died from a severe attack of dysentery. I wish to mention that these complaints are often connected to witchcraft or sorcery. For instance, a father who failed to pay his debts to somebody was liable to risk an attack of dysentery among his children. It was considered obvious that ultimately, revenge was taken and therefore this type of wrongdoing was not condemned. Often, this wrongdoing was exercised through a form of contagious magic that affected the weakest of the family. Without prompt action, like seeing Nambela to obtain counter-magical medicine to reinforce protection, nothing or nobody could end the complaints. Otherwise, purely biological factors are at the bases of digestive malfunction. Dirt and waste-substances entering the stomach through food are seen as the common causes for the complaints. Parasitic worms (inchororo) are known to be easily transmittable through water as
well as food. In case of an infection of the digestive system, there could be abdominal pains accompanied by hard or soft stool. When constipation (ivalala) and flatulence are involved, the stools can contain blood when the patient tries to evacuate the bowels by force. Another reaction is the opposite, diarrhoea (ukudolola) or dysentery with blood (kuharisha damu) that is often accompanied by a general feeling of weakness. There may also be an overproduction of bile that causes stomach-acid felt in the mouth and the throat. When the pancreas (bandama) is infected, this can be due to stress or fear, too much (greasy) food, or too much cigarette smoking.

Remedy
The remedies for stomach and belly complaints or pains are extensive (35), as various plants are known for their efficiency in cleansing internal infections. The aim of all remedies is to cleanse the digestive system of all toxic elements. Some plants cause vomiting, while most plants act as a purgative. Apart from boiling the roots with water, the leaves are sometimes used. In the case of malfunction of the pancreas, Nambela uses the roots of the Unyongwe (Dolichos sp./Papilionaceae). After pounding them, cold water is added for the oral remedy.

AIDS virus (Ukimwi)
HIV infection is discussed here under this category of dysfunctions of internal organs, because it affects the whole organism. Whenever Nambela divines a person with AIDS symptoms, she refers to the illness as ugonjwa wenu: our illness (in Africa), or ugonjwa nyangi: it is a multiple illness (see 6.1. case 8). She may also tell the patient that it concerns a severe belly infection. Or, Nambela emphasizes the lasting effects of an infectious illness or ugonjwa sugu. On no account did Nambela want to shock or frighten a patient by using the word Ukimwi. Quite a number of people are said to take poison (sumu) to commit suicide once they are told they have AIDS. Clients arriving at the compound in an advanced stage of AIDS mostly come to Nambela after they have been turned down at the hospital for treatment. The symptoms are manifold, for all the vital organs can be affected by the virus. Nambela believes that AIDS is passed on primarily by sexual contact with pains and complaints concentrated in the belly.

Interestingly, some pepo patients in treatment with Nambela had been diagnosed as HIV positive at the hospital after a blood test was made. Yet, once they come for consultation with Nambela they are told that they are suffering from pepo illness. A number of such patients did indeed regain strength after a relatively long treatment. Since I did not make a specific study of AIDS patients, I cannot tell if they totally recovered. From a medical assistant at the nearby mission hospital, I learned that
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each hospital was supposed to have a team of specially trained counselors, concerned with the social and psychological impact of the illness on HIV-positive patients. The mission hospital team would only work with these patients after an extra blood test was taken at the laboratory of the major regional hospital, since there were so many misleading indications for HIV infection (diarrhoea, dysentery, weight loss, poor general condition). The counselors had to inform the sero-positive patient and the family that nothing could be done and that they had to prepare for a difficult period back home. Only in exception cases was a patient admitted to the hospital. Therefore, it was not surprising, that many people turned to traditional healers as a last resort.

Remedy

Nambela claims that herbal treatment can only succeed when a person comes at an early stage of the illness. To treat AIDS, Nambela makes use of a wide range of ‘big’ medicine known to be effective in cleansing the whole body of toxic elements. Many of these plants are also used in cases of belly infections, infertility and venereal disease. Small pieces of a variety of plants are put together in a large bottle to which cold water is added. After one day, the drink serves as an oral medicine. The roots can be used for ten days, each time adding clean boiled water. After these ten days, a fresh mixture needs to be used and the treatment is to be repeated for as long as the symptoms occur. There is also a ‘magical’ composition in use by Nambela. The preparation entails a mixture of a tiny piece of a dog’s tail, a bit of cow dung and earth boiled together with the roots of the Impumungu (Hound’s tongue or Gynno glossum officinale/Boraginaceae), Ukangala and Icholo (both not identified). This concoction is administered occasionally next to the other treatment.

Chest infections (kifua kikuu)

Chest infections concern asthma/bronchitis/tuberculosis (pumu/kikohozí kikuu/kifua kikuu); cold/coughing/flu (kifua/kikohozí/kifua na homa); and hiccups (kwikwi). The cures that Nambela prescribes for various colds and coughs are used frequently. During the rainy and the dry season, it is either the humidity or the cold that brings about the complaints. This is not surprising since most people walk barefoot and have little warm clothing. Concerning asthma, bronchitis or tuberculosis, Nambela recognizes saliva in chest, throat, nose or head, sometimes accompanied by fever. The cause is mainly cold weather, rains or a neglected cold or flu. With colds, coughing, and flu, the symptoms were less severe, with no fever. Dust could also cause the coughing. Chest infections are also typical symptoms of stress with pepo patients when pepo is stuck or obstructed in the chest, giving symptoms of whooping cough. Quite often I saw pepo patients suffering from complaints of the lungs that could indicate tuberculosis, but this was said not to be the case. Rather, a weak condition had brought forth chronic pepo symptoms; as was the case with Nambela.
as a child when she threw up blood (see 5.2). In cases of severe coughing, Nambela could also divine a genetic cause, like asthma.

**Remedy**

An important function of most plants is to reduce or resolve the saliva, in order to clear the chest, throat and/or head. Other plants are used to relieve the respiratory problems or the tight feeling in the chest and the stomach. The roots of the *Umkalia* (*Securidaga* sp./*Polygalaceae*) smelled like menthol eucalyptus and are either crushed or pounded and rubbed into the skin of the chest or inhaled. *Ufita* (*Mimosops deseflora*/*Mimosaceae*) is also considered a very strong medicine to relieve the lungs from infectious elements. Like most of the plants, the roots are boiled in water and administered as a drink. *Itumbuya* (*Flacourtia indica*/*Flacourtiaiceae*) is mainly used to treat throat infections. After being dried, the roots are pounded and ground. The paste is then applied on the back of the mouth with the help of a stem, to make it active in the throat. For hiccups, Nambela uses the roots of the *Ituvu* (*Ficus sp./*Moraceae*) that are boiled with water and serve an oral extract. If someone has regular attacks of hiccups, he or she receives a medicine to relieve the tension in the chest.

6.4 Conclusive remarks

During divination, prayers, or revelations, Nambela often stresses that medicine can only be effective if people have cleared their problems or faults in line with traditional Nyiha preconceptions on community healing (see 5.1). Only then can God help (*Mungu atasaidia*). Often, however, the concept of *pepo* illness serves as an indicator of disrupted social relationships. In this respect, Nambela’s emphasis differs from those spirit healers who consider *pepo* illness to be primarily caused by witchcraft, curses, demons or ancestors. Since everybody is in Gods’ hands, Nambela never refuses to help anyone, even when the physical symptoms are serious. Normally, however, Nambela advises clients with severe contagious or life-threatening diseases to obtain medical treatment at the nearby mission hospital. In such instances, her son Nelson writes a note for the patient that states Nambela’s diagnosis.

In general I found that patients responded well to phyto-therapeutic treatment. Not only did I learn this from the patients, I was also able to observe positive changes in people. Nambela had made them believe that herbal medicines or *dawa ya miti shamba* (lit. plant medicines from the field) have a divine quality and mediate between God and the people. The fact that Nambela would regularly diagnose patients during their stay, to ‘see’ whether the plants were bringing the required positive change, was much appreciated. Either the comforting words that things were going better, or that better results would be achieved by using a different plant, contributed to this. Rarely however, did I see Nambela visiting the patients on the compound. Mostly this was a responsibility of
male assistants who were long-term patients themselves, sometimes in training to be novice healers. They were accepted as intermediaries. Nobody complained about this, for it was obvious that Nambela had a lot of work.

With regard to Nambela’s visionary role in divination and revelation, I have found the following aspect to be of major importance: that Nambela exposes what she ‘sees’, ‘feels’, ‘hears’ or simply ‘knows’ instantly. At times Nambela may, however, make judgements as she takes certain morals into account. Generally, patients would be very impressed by Nambela’s exact descriptions of the internal body. Nambela may perceive the interior body in either light (healthy) or dark (ill) substances. In the latter case, she may experience a short but intense feeling of pain. These clues also provide Nambela with an indication to know what herbal remedies are needed. As Nambela is able to determine the nature of the complaint without prompting or access to any visual cues, she does not make use of techniques that involve mechanical procedures such as throwing bones, shells, or sticks (see Peek 1991). Nambela has the gift to ‘see things’ consciously or semi-consciously, which I have referred to as pepo trance. During such a trance, Nambela does not experience a loss of the self, as often happens in divination trance, but, an expansion of self. So Nambela speaks to clients as herself. This is a self that has been transformed through contact with the realm of spirits. The involvement of psychical incorporation of spirit into the body entails a doubling of spirit type. Friedson (1996: 30) calls this ‘consciousness doubling’ in which the healer is in communication with the spirit forces, rather than being possessed. This communication can also take place in dreams and visions.

The foregoing implies that Nambela, a mganga wa jadi nchimi, is not a medium in the sense of being merely a vehicle for the spirits who use her as a mouthpiece, a characteristic that is typical for many spirit healers who are guided primarily by nature spirits (see 3.5 and 3.6). I refer back to chapter five, in which I stated that Nambela developed her experiential training and learning over the years to form a cultural-historical lens on illness and health. Local people and patients of Nambela told me that the inspiration by superior (divine) forces was a very typical phenomenon among spirit healers in the Mbeya region. I was able to observe this myself as I attended a district meeting of traditional healers in Tunduma (on the border with Zambia) in the final stage of my fieldwork period. Indeed, I noticed how many healers in the meeting resembled Nambela demonstrating the typical behaviour of a prophet healer. Among them were many ex-patients of Nambela, a majority of whom were women. I will come back to the healing career of (female) novices in the next chapter that deals with the experiences of clients in musical and ritual therapy.
Patient in a state of *pepo*-trance on Nambela’s compound during a musical healing session.