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

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Chapter 8

The Healer Jeremana

Jeremana Livifile, born in 1935 in Ilembula, Njombe district (Iringa region) is the first wife of Edward Chove, and together they have ten children. Their home is situated one mile from the village of Igwachany (Mdandu division), which has a population of about 2000 people. A dirt road takes one from the village over the top of a hillside into a quiet area where Jeremana lives and runs her practice. From there, you look over the hills at the Rift Mountains of Mbeya region. The healer Jeremana is also known by her working name, Mtlahenja, which is the name of her paternal grandfather (babu). Mtlahenja renders his services to Jeremana as a medium for the family ancestors (mizimu or mababu ya ukoo). In only a few years time, Jeremana has become a very popular healer, mostly attracting people of Bena origin. As a mganga wa mizimu ya ukoo, an ancestral lineage healer, she combines healing with customary rituals to settle wrongdoings among Bena (interrelated) patrilineages.

When I reported to the cultural office at Njombe town in November 1998, I was told that two women were well-known spirit or pepo healers. One was Atuwoneyeje Wilangali (see 7.3) and the other was Jeremana Livifile. Though I intended to visit both of them, I went to see Jeremana Livifile first. At the time of my arrival, Jeremana was away visiting her daughter awaiting the birth of twins at the Lutheran Mission Hospital at Ilembula, about 20 miles from Igwachanya. Her husband Edward Chove welcomed us kindly. One of the first things Edward Chove told me was that Jeremana had been in treatment with Atuwoneyeje Wilangali for more than two years and had developed her spiritual skills under her tutorship. Nowadays, he said, his wife Jeremana receives patients who cannot be cured by Atuwoneyeje. These concern, in particular, patients of Bena origin. I told Edward Chove that I had remained with the healer Nambela in Mbozi district some years ago. To my surprise his wife, Jeremana, had once visited Nambela in the company of her tutor Atuwoneyeje Wilangali. The meeting had lead to a serious dispute between Nambela, Atuwoneyeje and Jeremana concerning ancestral spirits and ways to intervene in cases of a ‘bad death’ (kiparazi kibaya in Kinyiha and Kibena). This information aroused my interest right away. If I could remain with Jeremana, a Bena healer, I could complement my findings from Nambela, a Ny-
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Iha healer and, verify the relationship between the healers Jeremana, Atuwoneyeje, and Nambela. Furthermore, I could learn what major differences exist regarding views and ways of practising. Especially I was interested to know if the cultural meaning of bad or sudden deaths in *pepo* illness differed among them and to what extent this was interwoven with types of spirit forces and ritual interventions.

Immediately after my visit to Jeremana’s compound, I went to look for Jeremana in Ilembula. After some searching, I succeeded in finding Jeremana who was just carrying food to her daughter at the hospital. I was immediately impressed by her kind appearance. She looked puzzled by me when I told her about the goal of my search for her. Once I had briefly explained about my experiences with other healers and showed her the official papers from the government that allowed me to study traditional healers, Jeremana willingly invited me to stay with her. A house next to her, built by her first son, would provide us with accommodation. Pleased with this opportunity, my partner and I came to settle in the house overlooking Jeremana’s compound by the end of November 1998. We would remain four months in Igwachanya.

The village and, with it M’dandu division, are foremost inhabited by Bena. Through cross-ethnic marriages and the arrival of new settlers, Hehe, Pangwa, Sovi, Kinga, Sangu and Ngoni people now live among them (see chapter two). The bedrock of economic activity for the Bena and assimilated tribes is agriculture, though the Sangu were initially pastoralists. Their staple food is maize, rice, potatoes and beans. Over the last twenty years or so, significant migration has taken place in Iringa between rural and (semi) urban areas, as people search for better agricultural land. On top of that, people from neighbouring regions are in search of new land due to constraints caused by droughts. As a consequence, Njombe district, including M’dandu division, have become densely populated. This, in turn has repercussions on the environment, as the land is intensely used, thus diminishing rains. The Hehe are the largest ethnic group in Iringa region, constituting almost 90% of the population.

Since Jeremana’s role as an ancestral lineage healer – a specialist who combines traditional healing and ceremonial rites - is rare among the Bena, she has become one of the five most reputed healers in Njombe district. Overall, the district counts approximately 180 registered traditional healers (1994 census) who hold an annual permit (*kibali*) from the cultural office. In 1998, at the time of my stay, the price for such a

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82 Okello Ayot in *Topics in East-African History*, East African Lit. Buro, 1976, p. 5 states that between 1000 and 1300 the Bena, together with the Hehe and the Ngindo, made up part of the agricultural southwestern Bantu group.
permit was 18,000 TSH (about 28 US$). In Njombe district there are 3 hospitals, 3 primary health centers, and 45 dispensaries.

8.1 Tribal religion of the Bena

The Bena clan system used to be an exogamous, unilateral group of people who traced their descent from a common ancestor. Descent and inheritance among them were patrilineal and members of small lineages of three or four generations collaborated in ritual activities marked by ancestor-worship. Traditionally, the chief (mutwa) was the living descendant of the most powerful spirits. As with many Bantu tribes, he was the temporal religious head of the tribe, binding religion and law into a firmly united whole. The chief lived in close contact with the spirits; the wisdom of the greatest of his ancestors (masoka or mizimu) was his if he would listen to the thoughts they put into his waking mind or the dreams they brought while sleeping.

Around 1935, when Jeremana was born, the Bena were governed by a paramount chief, called Towegale, assisted by an aristocracy (see Culwick 1935 and Berry 1944). Towegale thought and dreamt particularly of his father, Kiwang I, to whom he attributed the watchful care and personal guidance of his ancestral spirits. The ancestral spirits occupied the most important position in the lives of the Bena who have strong ancestral ties with the Kinga, Pangwa and Sovi. They were considered to be the source of all law, the givers of all prosperity, and the senders of all misfortune. Following tribal customs out of fear of the spirits’ anger was, however, not enough to keep people from Ubena (the land of the Bena) going astray. For this purpose, the Bena had a kind of tribal code tying the belief in sanctions from the supernatural to sanctions that governed Bena existence. Out of economic necessity, fundamental principles had to be followed and these were reflected in their traditional support system. At the time, people were part of a network of rights and duties, help and counter-help, and services. They would be paid in some concrete medium like food or in exchange for privileges. In this way, they could meet with the complicated system of mutual obligations with corresponding rights, binding each member of the tribe to his fellows. This implied that dislocation of the system in one part could upset the other, even though there was no immediate connection to it.

The characteristics of Bena society were altered by three major influences. One was that the patrilineal Bena clans had migrated around seventy years earlier to highlands further west of Ulanga Valley (area south of Morogoro bordering Iringa) and absorbed various lowland clans, which were at the time, matrilineal. Second, is that the

83 The currency in Tanzania is the Tanzanian Shilling. In 1998 the approximate rate was 1 US$ = 650 TSH.
84 In line with the Health Statistics Abstract 1996 by the Ministry of Health, Dar es Salaam.
Bena educational system tended to weaken clan-loyalty. In each generation, hundreds of children of both sexes were taken away from their homes at about four or five years of age, and brought up by the chief. This included children from all classes of society and clans, as well as slaves. The boys were first and foremost servants of the chief and members of a warrior brotherhood, which cut right across the clan system. The girls were being trained to become fitted wives for the warriors. The tribal history they were taught dealt with the noble people of clans bearing great names. This implies that they did not learn to respect clan ties of their pedigrees beyond the two generations who were kept in mind by the sacrifices at family graves. A third aspect is that the clan system tended to be upset by the absorption into the tribe of small bands of Ngoni and others immigrants, like slaves, during tribal wars (see 2.1). These people, though often adapting Bena customs, remained strangers in Ubena land. In later generations, these people tended to forget their own tribal name and customs (Culwick 1935).

Along with economic decay, the slave trade and tribal wars brought decay in the social and religious ties that existed among the Bena. In part, this was due to the fact that many of the Bena tribes assimilated with the larger Hehe tribe, evolving into cultural and economic affinities among them. The Bena tribes were driven by strong traditional customs. Deprived of male elders, however, the wives and children of the Bena tribes had been left without the means of performing the necessary religious acts that were needed to maintain a peaceful balance between the living and the deceased offspring of the lineage. Gradually, the religious customs were lost and forgotten, and so were the social bonds that existed among the Bena tribes and their ancestors of Kinga, Pangwa, Sangu or Sovi descent. Next to the fusion into Hehe tribe and custom, the Bena experienced powerful integration into Christianity. The various dynamics not only alienated the Bena from their ancestral traditions, they also altered their belief in the supernatural. The different ideas that were formed took their effect on individuals who had been submerged into new groups and felt clashes as a response. Most Bena were living at subsistence level and depended on others for help and support. For them, the economic and social bonds that once existed still had some meaning and purpose. Other Bena, who wanted economic independence, moved away to live in larger towns, thereby separating themselves physically from the group they had once been a part of.

8.2 The healing compound and the patients

The land around Jeremana’s house is owned by her family and covers about five hectares. Nearly half of the land serves the purpose of agriculture, while the other half is meant for ritual activities and the collection of plants. As one walks into Jeremana’s healing compound, one sees several white and black cloths hanging to the left from a large tree as tokens of recognition to ancestors, given by earlier patients. Various items
stand around the tree, such as spears, hatchets, tissues and sticks. These are all power objects of ancestral spirits, which identify themselves with these objects during trance states by their host (afflicted patient). When patients return home, they leave the objects behind as a token of appreciation to the spirits. To the right of the compound, with a small passage of twenty meters in between, fifteen small mud- and brick houses appear, providing shelter for patients. Each family is accommodated in a separate part of a house. Here, they sleep and cook provided that they bring a stove along. Otherwise, a simple fire of collected wood is made outside the house. Four latrines are available for the whole compound. There are several small offering sights for patients. Here they make requests to the ancestors (*maombi kwa mababu*), with cassava or maize flour, or they may make an offering of a chicken. In the midst of this sheltering space, there are two huts made of straw. They are built in the fashion of the ancestors, very basic, and serve their purpose for a brief period of time. Whenever a patient is in the phase of making a settlement with the ancestors, this is often the place to live for a while.

The number of village or district people who consult Jeremana for ambulatory treatment is limited due to the presence of a public health center at the Roman Catholic Mission in Igwachanya. This is fine with Jeremana, who has enough to do for her own clientele. In other words, Jeremana has the skills to treat regular physical complaints as well. Plants are used for a variety of symptoms albeit of spiritual or natural origin. In fact, in-patients use plant medicine daily in order to improve their condition, and also specific complaints are treated with plants. In the area, Jeremana is widely known for her treatment of *kipapi*. This concerns an itching growth around the genitals, under the tongue or under the armpit.\(^{85}\) She treats this by cutting away the growth, after which she applies plant medicine. In general, Jeremana refers clients to the hospital when serious physical afflictions or contagious diseases are suspected. Jeremana and her relatives also go to the hospital when they suspect having a contagious disease. Whenever *pepo* symptoms are concerned, Jeremana recommends clients to remain for treatment. All interventions, mainly divination, herbal treatment, musical therapy and lineage rituals are free of charge. Only small expenses for rituals need to be returned. Rituals offerings always have to be bought by the clients themselves (see chapter 10). Normally, after successful treatment, gifts are given to Jeremana.

At the time of my research, nearly thirty patients were present, most of them being in a particular stage of ritual intervention. These patients were accompanied by someone to assist them be it a spouse or a blood relative. In some cases the patients received treatment together with their children. Therefore, the total number of people on the compound could amount to fifty. During my presence, it was the short rainy season. Some

\(^{85}\) In the standard Swahili dictionary *ana kinakumi* means s/he has a growth on the clitoris or the penis.
patients asked permission to return home for a while to cultivate their fields, as also happened in March and April when heavier rains occurred. Among the clients who remained in the compound, some were very sick or confused, unable to function at home. They would be following treatment while other clients were awaiting participation in the lineage rituals. Those patients who remained for a long time were allotted small plots of land by Jeremana to grow maize or beans. The number of in-patients increased during the month of July, after harvest time, which marks the end of the ritual year. In that month, more than two hundred people can be around sleeping all over the place, including Jeremana’s private house. I will come back to this in chapter ten.

Being with Jeremana during the short rainy season meant that quite a number of patients returned to their homes. As a consequence, Jeremana had more time to spend with me than she would have had otherwise. In the beginning, however, she was often away visiting her daughter at the hospital and then later at her home. The daughter suffered from complications due to delivering twins. Both eventually died, one after the other. Jeremana would send assistants over to me, who informed me whenever activities took place for patients. The assistants were initiates or novice healers. Important decisions were not made in her absence and certain performances too were postponed. In fact, all were anxiously waiting for Jeremana’s return. Once she did, she made it her concern to personally explain to me the most important features of her life and work. As the fieldwork progressed, we started to have more intimate discussions and exchanges, which eventually resulted in a close friendship. At all times, Jeremana was very collaborative and the information she provided to me allowed regular verification of the data.

8.3 Jeremana’s story

Ever since my arrival, Jeremana had told me about the major events that lead to her healing career but the story still lacked specific details. I had asked her to try and recollect all the events that were of significance to a proper understanding of her illness history. On December 26, 1998 nearly one month after my arrival, Jeremana was ready to tell me her story. We were seated outside the pavement of my house in order not to be disturbed by her patients, assistants, or visitors. From this resulted a recording of nearly ninety minutes. As always, we were communicating in Kiswahili. Jeremana’s account was a flow of words and expressions, which clearly showed that the story had great meaning to her. Afterwards, I had posed her a few more questions. Once I had transcribed the text, I checked the information with her and some of her relatives, while remaining questions were discussed in the course of my stay. For the sake of continuation, I have interwoven the information that was derived from successive gatherings into the original narrative.
Jeremana explains what happened to her before she became a specialist healer of *baridi* (a state of coldness) and how her life was affected by *baridi*. In the account, she sketches how the various events in her extended family and the lineage group are intertwined with the dynamic changes that occurred in a relatively short period (1850-1950), marked by tribal wars, colonialism and Christianity. In her story, Jeremana quotes several texts from occasions that she had spoken in a state of trance, occurring mainly in crisis periods. Persons who had been present at such occasions told her afterwards, what she had said and, took this to come from her spirits.

**Hit by the ancestors (Wahenga walyonipiga)**

I was born in 1935 in a small village called Lugalo (Chalowe district in Iringa region). My father was born a Livifile (Mutandalike) and my mother is a Nyamtiko (Hilawa). Both had Upangwa, Ukinga and Usovi origins, which nowadays all make up part of the Ubena tribe from Njombe. Until I was ten years old, I lived a normal life spending my time helping my mother or watching the herd together with my brothers. At some stage, in the year 1945, I started to suffer from stabbing pains (*vichomi*) around the neck and the head. As a result, I was not able to turn or bend down my head. Shortly after that I felt similar pains in my chest. Gradually more symptoms appeared and along with it a strange event happened to me. One day I accompanied my brothers to attend the herd (cows and goats) when I found myself under the attack of a wild goat (*nyama ya porini: nyarusi*). I ran as fast as I could but to no avail. With his horns, he swept me off my feet and started to trample me. He butted his horns at my neck while I screamed for help. My brothers came and chased the animal away with our dogs. I was badly hurt and covered with bruises. Various parts of my body started to swell. At that time, no hospitals were nearby. My father attended me by using the old ways, treating me with traditional medicines (*akaama na mambo ya zamara*). The whole family went to look for the leaves of the castor oil plant (*dawa ya kuchomelea – majani ya nyonyo*), which were dried and burnt. The black powdered leaves were mixed with some boiled water and rubbed onto the painful parts of my body to reduce the swellings.

At sixteen, I had fallen in love with Edward Chove, my present husband. My parents were much opposed to our marriage plans and so we had to wait until I reached the age of eighteen. Then we could marry without my father's consent. Before we did, in 1952, a strange event occurred to me once more. I was helping my grandmother (father's side) to plant cassava and noticed how a swarm of bees was passing high above me. It appeared that they were looking for a place to settle down. Unfortunately they chose me. Within no time I was covered with hundreds of bees. I fell down filled with fear. I thought I would die! My grandmother who kept her distance yelled at me to run back to the house immediately. The bees kept following and stinging me but when I reached the house I had lost them. My body was covered with darts and it turned white from the stings. The next thing I knew my body was swollen all over. People helped to bring me to my parents. They tried to calm the swellings and the pain by applying cooled boiled water. This did not work. Instead the pain increased and I got a strong fever. My father decided I
shoul dd  b e  carrie d  to  th e  hospita l i n  Kidogal a  district . Severa l peopl e  helpe d  t o
carr yy  m e  o n  a  kin d  o f  stretche r  mad e  o f  tre e  material . I t  wa s  a  lon g  wal k  befor e  w e
arrive dd  a t  th e  hospita l Ther e  I  wa s  give n  injection s  an d  slowl y  recovered .
mm 1953, 1  marrie d  Edward . M y  parent s  resente d  mi  s  bu t  kne w  tha t  w e  were
determin ed .. Th e  dowr y  wa s  settle d  a t  five  cow s  an d  tw o  goat s  plu s  a  n  extr a  smal l
su mm  o f  money , 10 0  TSH . W e  settle d  i n  Lugalo , clos e  t o  m y  parents . Tw o  year s
later ,, i n  1954 , I  wa s  pregnan t  wit h  m y  firs t  child . Th e  regula r  stabbin g  pains ,
whic hh  ha d  continue d  al l thes e  years , starte d  t o  worse n  durin g  th e  eigh t  mont h  o f
th ee  pregnancy . M y  lef t  shoulde r  fel t  terribl y  oppressed . A s  a  resul t  I  coul d  barel y
mov ee  m y  ar m  t o  drink , t o  fetc h  water , o r  t o  prepar e  foo d  Fearin g  a  miscarriag e
du ee  t o  a  lac k  o f  fluids
( mimba  imeJambia  imekaukana) , I  wen t  t o  consul t  tradi -
tiona ll  healers . I  wen t  t o  a  mal e  heale r  wh o  told  m e  I  wa s  bewitched . H e  prepare d
medicin ee  fo r  m e  an d  mad e  m e  drin k  i t  I  ha d  t o  pu t  m y  mour n  to a  calabas h  an d
thro ww  up . A  piec e  o f  needl e  cam e  ou t  simultaneousl y  an d  this  h e  sai d  ha d  cause d
th ee  stabbin g  pains . I t  ha d  penetrate d  m y  bod y  throug h  a  n  ac t  o f  witchcraft . A t  tha t
tim ee  I  accepte d  th e  possibilit y  ( iditupiwa  na  mchawi)  an d  experience d  som e  relie f
Yet ,, upo n  retur n  home , th e  stabbin g  pain s  wer e  bac k  again . I  wen t  t o  see  anothe r
(male ))  heale r  wh o  diagnose d  exactl y  th e  sam e  thing . A  magica l  objec t  ha d  bee n
sent  t o  m e  b y  mean s  o f  witchcraf t  Apparentl y  somebod y  wante d  to  har m  m e  bu t
he  coul d  no t  sa y  wh o  i t  was . H e  helpe d  m e  b y  applyin g  medicin e  o n  th e  painfu l
area .. H e  rubbe d  i t  int o  cut s  aroun d  m y  shoulder . Nex t  h e  use d  th e  forc e  o f  hi s
mout hh  t o  suc k  th e  objec t  out , whic h  looke d  lik e  a  piec e  o f  a  needle . Agai n  I  fel t
som ee  relie f  Whe n  yo u  se e  a  n  obviou s  caus e  for  you r  pains , wouldn' t  you !  Bu t  th e
pain ss  returned . Whe n  I  wen t  t o  consul t  a  thir d  heale r  I  wa s  mor e  successful . N o
magica ll  intervention s  thi s  time , jus t  som e  plan t  medicine s  t o  us e  orally . H e  sai d
nothin gg  abou t  witchcraf t  intrusions . A t  leas t  hi s  medicin e  worke d  an d  fo r  som e
tim ee  i t  relieve d  m e  fro m  m y  pains . Soo n  afte r  that , i n  Apri l 1955, 1  delivere d
Olica ,, a  girl . I n  1957 , whe n  I  wa s  pregnan t  fo r  m e  secon d  time , th e  stabbin g  pain s
returne d .. Agai n  I  wen t  t o  consul t  severa l traditiona l healer s (makahangaika  sana
kwakwa  waganga,  vichomi  tena). Accordin g  to  on e  healer , m y  pain s  wer e  du e  to  th e
presenc ee  o f  ancestra l spirits , wh o  ha d  bi t  m e  fo r  som e  reason !  H e  told  m e  ma t  it  ha d
toto  d o  wit h  m y  father . Apparentl y  h e  ha d  no t  bee n  instructe d  properl y  abou t  tradt -
uona ll  famil y  custom s  a s  a  chü d  (baba  amekosea  kufanya  müa  huko,  usikutakiwa). Al s oo  h e  mentione d  ma t  invisibl e  peopl e  wer e  aroun d  m e  dresse d  i n  white , whic h
coul dd  indicat e  a  futur e  a s  a  healer . I  wa s  recommende d  to  mak e  temporar y  offer -
ings ss  a s  to  appeas e  th e  ancestra l spirits . Afte r  I  di d  this , m y  pain s  wer e  totally  gon e
(kwa  mora  hfyo  mtipona)  an d  I  ha d  n o  mor e  troubl e  fo r  severa l years . A s  a  result ,
II  forgo t  abou t  th e  observation s  o f  mi  s  healer . I n  Jun e  1958 , ou r  secon d  daughte r
Margaret hh  wa s  bom . Thi s  wa s  followe d  i n  196 0  with  Rehem a  an d , i n  1963 , Ve -
nanc ee  wa s  bom , ou r  firs t  son . Al l thes e  pregnancie s  wen t  well . Problem s  returne d
inn  196 7  whe n  I  wa s  pregnan t  wit h  ou r  secon d  son , Patrick . Mostl y  I  suffere d  fro m
sever ee  stabbin g  pain s  i n  m y  head . I t  wa s  s o  painfu l tha t  m y  parent s  took  m e  hom e  an d  nurse d  me . I  wa s
inn  ba d  shape , sleepin g  mos t  o f  th e  tim e  o r  otherwis e  coughin g  an d  complainin g  o f
a nn  oppresse d  ches t  M y  parent s  di d  no t  understan d  wha t  wa s  happenin g  to  me .
Neve rr  ha d  th e y  sough t  th e  advic e  o f  traditiona l healers . I f  th e y  woul d  have , th e y
coul dd  hav e  learne d  tha t  ancestra l force s  wer e  a t  wor k (haelewi  habari ya  aina  fni  wa  mizimu), whic h  coul d  indica te  a  futur e  a s  a  healer . I  wa s  recommende d  to  mak e  temporary offer -
ings as  to  appeas e  the ancestra l spirits . After I did this, my pains were totally gone
(kwa mara hioo nilipona) and I had no more trouble for several years. As a result, I
forgot about the observations of this healer. In June 1958, our second daughter
Margareth was born. This was followed in 1960 with Rehema and, in 1963, Ve-
nance was born, our first son. All these pregnancies went well. Problems returned
in 1967 when I was pregnant with our second son, Patrick. Mostly I suffered from
severe stabbing pains in my head. It was as if a spear went right through one side
of my face. It was so painful that my parents took me home and nursed me. I was
in bad shape, sleeping most of the time or otherwise coughing and complaining of
an oppressed chest. My parents did not understand what was happening to me.
Never had they sought the advice of traditional healers. If they would have, they
could have learned that ancestral forces were at work (haelewi habari ya miximu
ni homa ya aina hii wa miximu), which do not respond to herbal or modern treat-
ment. Finally, my father decided that the matter needed to be settled once and for all. Upon recommendation he went to see a respected healer in Ibumila, who is the father of a novice of mine today. The healer said the following to my father:

A state of coldness in the family (Baridi ya ukoo)

Soon afterward the visit to the healer, Jeremana’s parents went to see aunt Magdelena. None of them had ever heard of a state of coldness or baridi ya ukoo to exist in the family, which is set in motion by offended ancestors. The reason for them being offended is complex. One is that many of Jeremana’s ancestral relatives died during the tribal wars between 1850 and 1890. Additionally, her grandparents suffered the consequences of the Maji-Maji revolt (1905-1907). For a long period of time, people died far from home and men disappeared from the lineages (see 2.3). On top of that, other tribal customs integrated into Bena lineage customs. Together, these factors caused a rather rapid degradation of Bena traditions and, as a consequence, traditional practices were abandoned or misinterpreted, like the lineage fertility rites and burial rites. Further constraints in practicing traditional religious customs originated from the introduction of Christianity by the colonists. These processes were at the bases of baridi and nobody in
the family seemed conscious of this. Jeremana’s father and aunt had not thought much of the specific family objects since they had never witnessed any of the rituals in which they were used.

The fertility rituals were traditionally only held for the males of the lineage as a means to keep the family productive and thus procuring the existence of the lineage. The fact that the lineage rites were not executed anymore implied that the families were under stress, or worse, that they were in a state of degradation. Fathers who died during the wars failed to instruct their sons, and from that moment on, next generations of boys did not receive the instructions either. Female relatives who stayed behind could not continue them alone. As a rule, girls were not allowed to participate in fertility rituals of their own lineage. As soon as they married, they were to be initiated in the fertility rites of their husbands’ lineage. The stool and the n’gao or n’gambilo (Kibena), which consisted of a chain with a metal clip, were important symbolic objects serving the lineage fertility ceremonies to prevent baridi from penetrating a person (see 10.2). The consequence of baridi is that the lineage slowly exterminates. Men become infertile and children die unexpectedly or suffer from symptoms that cannot be treated easily, thus leaving relatives unaware of the initial cause. A solution is to follow the advice and treatment of lineage diviners or specialists. Yet, due to the alienation process and Christianity, this is not a regular practice anymore. Here Jeremana takes over the story again.

After learning about all this, my aunt handed over the stool at once. As a devout Christian, she resented making an offering to the lineage ancestors. This being the case, my parents took the stool and n’gao along with them. They decided that the best they could do was to implore the ancestors to accept a chicken from them instead of the two large hens from aunt Magdalena. Since both objects had returned to the family, they expected things to ease down. Surprisingly, I recovered soon and all went well until I delivered our son Patrick late in 1967. That year we moved to the other side of the valley to live at Igwachanya, which is Mlandu district. At the time, we were the first ones to go and live there. It was a fertile area with a lot of different trees. All this changed rapidly when more people settled around. Nowadays, the rains are so short that we can barely survive on our crops. In 1969 my husband took a second wife, who settled next to our house. The oppressed feelings returned without the stabbing pains. This was followed by some weird events at home with snakes, which were unusual to us. For instance, one day while I was cooking a snake crawled into the house. Just as we went to eat a large bowl filled with maize porridge, the snake crawled on top of my bowl! We did not know what to do and ran off. By the time we came back the snake was gone. More snakes came and this went on for some time. I am telling you this to indicate that we were still not startled enough to consult a traditional healer about the reason for the snakes. This has a lot to do with the fact that I was a member of the church committee and had become a representative of the Roman Parish of the village (Igwachanya). I thought that by doing this I would clear myself from
whatever bad influences were affecting me. Yet, the church had no answers to all that happened to me so far, and eventually nothing changed.

As good Christians I, like other relatives, wanted to deny the existence of witchcraft and spirit intrusions. Yet it was common for all of us to be superstitious and to blame all serious problems on witchcraft in the family. Take the case of my husband’s son from his second wife, who suddenly took ill. The boy had just found himself a livelihood in Dar es Salaam. Within a short time he became skinny and weak. My husband was already much upset about my condition and this news made him even more suspicious. He wondered why relatives had bad intentions with us. Much against his belief, he consulted a known witchcraft specialist in the country, Kalembwana. She ran a large practice in Morogoro region and was reputed in handling serious cases of witchcraft. During a divination she told Edward that our problems were not due to witchcraft, instead they were linked to the rupture of the lineage customs by our extended family (uwo na milia ya desturi). She could not help us herself since she followed different customs. The matter was to be settled at our own homes with our own specialists. Again we did not take this advice seriously given our Christian beliefs. As a result, things became worse for me, and on top of that, Edward’s son died. His second wife blamed me for this, saying I was the witch! It was only when I became a healer myself, that I understood why the boy died. Both in the lineage of my husband and that of his second wife, baridi existed. Edwards’ relatives had abandoned the lineage customs and several of them died of strange symptoms, like swollen bodily parts or paralysis that cannot be diagnosed or treated at the hospital. Once our daughter Sofia became temporarily confused and was lost a few days. When we found her, she began to talk as if possessed by spirits, saying there was a message from Edward’s paternal ancestors. She explained to us what was wrong in the family and what had to be done to restore the ties with the ancestors. At the time we did not take Sofia seriously. It is only after my husband saw the outcome of my own affliction that he began to accept the old customary rites again. Nowadays he follows them as do all our sons and for them the troubles have been much reduced. Other relatives who still refuse to abide by the old beliefs continue to suffer from Baridi.

Madness of the ancestors (Kichaa ya mababu)

In 1972 Jeremana’s father suddenly died. It was believed that her father died from witchcraft. He had been drinking beer at a reunion when a quarrel with someone broke out. On his way home, he became very sick and went straight to the mission hospital in Ilembula. He learned that he was badly poisoned and after a few hours he died. Here Jeremana takes over again:

My faith in God All mighty prevented me from a visit to traditional healers, which was otherwise a normal thing to do after a sudden death in the family. Actually I was afraid to face the truth about the meaning and implications of these events (sitaki kajiudaika). So I held onto my beliefs (imani yangu nimeendelea mae) while life went on without any serious personal complaints. This changed totally when Emmanuel was born in 1981. He was our tenth and last child. During the last stage of lactation (the boy was two and a half years) my mind became troubled and confused. I even refused to feed Emmanuel at night and became reluctant to take care of him. I realized I was doing wrong and that I placed his life in jeopardy. The confusion was accompanied by an increased tension in my whole body. Clearly the presence of the ancestors had taken hold of me again (imebunia hii mitimu). I had sudden pains, especially a squeezed feeling around my neck. I finally went to see a healer. He was of the type that I had encountered before using the trick with the needle. I know now that it is a popular interven-

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86 In chapter eleven I further elaborate on her role as a reputed Kikami healer.
In the Spirit of Uganga

tion. Instead of admitting that they cannot deal with certain problems, they prefer to use such tricks to make easy money! I went to see other healers and found that only very few were able to detect the relationship with ancestral influences. It was not surprising that most did not bring any solution to my condition. The forces had come with more intensity then ever before and gradually this resulted in a terrible fever (ikajaka sasa kwa ngumu kunipa homa kali sana). My body felt very cold most of the time and a feeling of bitterness came over me. It was the onset of my madness to evolve later that year. In the beginning I went to the hospital for treatment of my complaints. This happened during Easter 1984. They gave me an injection for malaria fever after which I returned home. The next morning, Easter Sunday, I insisted on going to the Parish church to test my faith during prayers. As the prayers began I lost consciousness and needed help to get me home. From that moment onwards I would fail asleep all the time only to wake up and vomit a lot (nikuuzwa kutapika sana, sana)! After a couple of days, my relatives advised me to go to the mission hospital next to the church. Seeing what a restless state I was in, the medical assistant gave me a sleeping drug (dawa ya asiogieze). When I woke up late the next morning, all was dark in front of my eyes while the sun was shining brightly (wakati juu inawaka sana)! As my daughter Sofia accompanied me back to the hospital I was puzzled to see the sun being dark as the moon! I also saw a long shade next to me while the sun was still high above us! The color of the sand had turned red and the grass was yellow. Did I lose my mind (chunjio sasa cha kuchunganyika)? My daughter looked into my eyes and said to me that all she saw was the white of the clouds. I was drifting away and felt as if my life was coming to an end (kweli nitiona ni kali ya kufa kubisa). What would happen to my children? As I drifted away (niko mbali sasa) at the hospital, the acting doctor told me that all this was surely due to another pregnancy. For what reason otherwise would I have been vomiting so much? I told him that I could not be pregnant since I had my periods, at the moment. He gave me another drug to prevent me from vomiting. No sooner had I swallowed it than I started to throw up again! Then he instructed me to eat something to make me feel stronger. As I tried to eat my arm suddenly twisted, preventing me from bringing my hand to my mouth. With these two days at the hospital a long period of darkness lay ahead of me. My vision was so blurred that I saw everything and everyone in a deformed state.

Later that year, in 1984, my condition worsened and the first signs of madness appeared. Desperately, my husband Edward went to consult several healers again. In particular, I remember his visit to the healer Mkamilie in Mbeya region. This was around November that same year. The healer told Edward that our house was "dirty" from witchcraft (wamechafa wa wachawi). He came to our house three times to clean it from bad spirit forces that to his opinion were sent by black magic. Upon his last visit, he buried some bottles in the ground around the house for protection, which we call kachindika nyumba. I remember him using a medicine from roots making the water bubbly without boiling it. This magical mixture he poured into three bottles. For his intervention he demanded a payment of 60.000 TSH (about 90 US$)! Since we did not have so much money my husband paid him with a cow, which at the time, was a fortune to us. The medicines this man used are mainly derived from a plant that contains soap and there is nothing magic about it! Today I know this is a way to frame people just as they cheated me with those needles before (walliwenda kunitibu kudanganya)! Of course the intervention did not change anything for me. Then came the day that I announced to my husband to visit a competent healer in Sotiwaya. Because of my state of confusion, he did not take me seriously. The next day, however, I ran out to the healer’s place under the influence of a power that directed me. It was a couple of hours away from home and I had never been there before. I remained several days until my husband found me there. Out of fear to face the truth, my husband brought me home without consulting the healer. This happened in February 1985. Soon after this event I became totally mad and began to harm myself. Whenever I got the chance I would hit whoever tried to come near me or I would walk around naked refusing to wear clothes. To prevent me from doing this, my husband and children tied me to a tree. It is the same behavior I now encounter with several of my patients. Like them, I was singing or talking the whole day seeking solitude and refusing to eat. How well do I recognize these symptoms now!
This is what I call ancestral madness (kichoa ya mababu). Because my family did not know what to do with me anymore, they took me to Rufa Psychiatric Hospital in Mbeya.

Grandfather’s voice giving directions (Sauti ya babu kwa kutoa maagizo)
The sleeping drugs at the hospital helped Jeremana to calm down somewhat. After three weeks, Jeremana returned home continuing the intake of the drugs.\textsuperscript{87} Subsequently she slept most of the time.

During a year of so I kept calm on account of the sleeping drugs. This was highly unfavorable for the spirits who wanted to communicate something through me on behalf of my ancestors. Finally came a day when I was more awake than usual giving the spirits a chance to protest against my condition. I remember I was at home after a control visit at Rufa Hospital on September the 3\textsuperscript{rd} 1986 where I was prescribed to continue the same drugs. It was 10 p.m. when I woke up after three days of continuous sleeping. Just as I was about to take the drugs from the hospital again, a voice took over and started to speak to my husband saying if I would continue taking the tablets, I would die. I had to seek help with the healer Atuwoneye Wilangali in Soliwaya if I was to find a solution. This warning scared Edward so much that he threw all my pills in the latrine. This was the first day the forces spoke through me. As this happened I had an internal struggle of which others were not aware. I insisted to combat these forces for I did not want them to be part of my life! My husband took it that as usual, I was not accountable for what I was saying and ignored the instruction to bring me to Soliwaya. A few days later, my voice was taken over again. This time it made me speak in the language of the Kinga (Kikinga), which I hardly know. The voices appeared to be coming from my ancestors of whom one was grandfather Mhiahenjia (wakati huo sasa hivi ninjichurra mimi kuongea hii sauti ya babu yangu). Stunned, I uttered the following words in the presence of my family:

\textsuperscript{87} I have seen the registration card with the dismissal on 25/2/85. She was given anti-depressiva (50 mgm of amitriphyline and 50 mgm. of chapumazine). On 3/9/86 she came for a check up and was given the same drugs to continue at home.
The six uncles died after the stool had been given to my aunt Magdalena. After the death of these elder brothers, only my father and his (older) brother Rema remained. My grandfather Mtulahenja told my husband that uncle Rema should be brought to me. When he arrived he was told the following:
The Healer Jeremana

The ancestors that Jeremana mentions here all mark her paternal offspring (chanja cha kunonya ziba ya ukoo, kizazi cha kwanza). Her great grandfather (mtengula) was Meudusi, her grandfather (mhenga) was Mtulahenja and her own father (baba) was Mutandalike. All died from baridi and so did most of Jeremana’s paternal uncles. Her great grandfather Meudusi lived during the time that the customary rituals began to disrupt. To deal with the matter at hand, Jeremana was instructed to offer some millet flour (sembe) as a token of agreement to the ancestral spirits. While making the offering, she addressed her grandfather about her worries and doubts. She told him that she did not oppose setting things straight for the whole family (ukoo) as long as she would get cured. From that moment onwards she became more confident about her situation. To continue her story:

When Rema, the only uncle (baba mkubwa) alive learned about the news, he conveyed the message to a daughter of Elia. She was born before he disappeared. The girl came right away to see me. She did not believe what I had said about her father being still alive and made a scene. To prove to her that I did not make it all up, my grandfather spoke to her saying:

The village of Malangawino is one day’s walk away from here. Throughout his journey my brother Thomas experienced a sense of lightness in his legs until he found our uncle Elia. Elia listened carefully to what Thomas had to say and without hesitation he and two of his children returned with Thomas to see me. Upon their arrival, however, I had already left for the healer in Soliwaya in the company of my husband, my mother and brother Caspar. This was by the end of September 1986. We began to realize that the healer, Atuwoneyeje Wilangali, is a leading pepo healer (mganga mkuu wa pepo). That is why she runs a very large practice in Wa’gtn’gombé district, close to Makumbako. Because the healer herself was not present that day a trainee (mganga msalidizi) took the initiative to divine me (kuniagua). As soon as we sat down my grandfather took control over me again and told the trainee about himself. The trainee was confused and interrupted the session abruptly. He told us this was a serious matter that needed to be addressed by the healer Atuwoneyeje. He further said that it would involve a long treatment. He recommended that I join the singing session later that day, hoping to find out if the voice was really from my grandfather or that of a troublesome spirit (pepo mbaya). With the help of specific songs, he and some patients tried to invoke the spirit in me. This failed to happen. The next day, the healer Atuwoneyeje examined my situation by means of divination. As we all sat opposite of her, I became afraid of what she would say and went into hiding. Without having obtained any details from the trainee or my family, Atuwoneyeje concisely outlined to the others what had happened to me so far. For one thing, she knew that my family had tied me with ropes several times, to prevent me from harming myself in the beginning of my mental illness. Also, Atuwoneyeje knew that I had been in treatment at Rufa Hospital for mental treatment. She confirmed that my mental illness was primarily a sign from my grandfather Mtulahenja, who wanted me to restore the peace in our family and become a healer under his guidance. I would treat many people and dig out lots of medicinal plants (kinyu ni mganga; mzimu yake ni za uganga na ualib bi wenu wengi na dawa niyengi atachimba). My mother said that I had already gathered plants at several occasions taking roots and leaves home with me. Atuwoneyeje told us that I did not suffer from normal madness rather I was under the influence of ancestral spirits. In the first place, these spirits struggled for recognition (ana mitimu inangombana) and secondly, there was a healing tradition in my father’s lineage (kuna mila ya desturi jadi yenu upande wa baba, itakuya kufieleza). Atuwoneyeje further mentioned that an old
score had to be settled with my mother. She instructed her to bring a white chicken for sacrificial offering that would show the ancestors of her honest intend to settle the affair. Later that afternoon, I participated in the daily singing session once more. I sat down in the middle of the group of patients and trainees. Soon my head was stirred and my grandfather spoke through me and after that my grandmother:

Let me briefly reconsider the situation at this stage. Her grandfather Mtulahenja died during the Maji Maji war (1904-1908). His wife died later in this same period. Their son Mutandalike, who is Jeremana’s father, was not yet initiated into the lineage fertility rituals and as such, he had not made the proper offerings. Jeremana told me later that her father had been very confused after the death of grandfather Mtulahenja. During this time, his elder brothers died one after the other, except for Rema. His sister started to take care of him when his mother died. In his live, grandfather Mtulahenja was a healer and a lineage chief for the Kinga tribe. His healing gift and, with it, his inspiration came from ancestral Kinga spirits. He was, however, of a mixed origin with Kinga and Pangwa ancestry. The prime power object to Mtulahenja was a drum (ndunda) and he always carried it with him. Mtulahenja, who had an extensive knowledge of plants, stored his medicines in a medicine bag (mkoba). Everybody in the lineage depended on his help and he was much admired for his divination skills. After Mtulahenja’s had died suddenly, his wife Paulina was left with his drum and medicine bag. There was no telling yet if one of his children would inherit the two items as this would be left to the spirits to decide. Due to his sudden death, Mtulahenja did not leave any instructions for his wife on what to do with the two healing objects (mali ya babu yangu ya uganga). His wife and some relatives decided to place the objects in a broken earthenware pot (chungu) and a flat basket (ungo). They tied these to the Mtowe tree (well-known fruit tree) next to a white ant-hill (kisugua) that were thought to be messengers of the spirits. In this way they figured the objects to be safe. Yet, this was the wrong thing to do and subsequently another stage of baridi emerged.

In the past four generations, five major mechanisms triggered the onset of baridi in the extended family of Jeremana. First was that Meudusi, her great grandfather,
failed to give his son Mtulahenja the proper lineage teachings. Second, Mtulahenja was unaware of the mistake by his father and failed to give the instructions to his own son Mutandalike. Third, due to the sudden death of Mtulahenja, his son Mutandalike was taught customs from another tribe. Fourth, there was the mistake with the medicine bag by Mtulahenja’s wife Paulina and fifth aunt Magdalena kept the sacred objects in her husband’s possession and refused to compensate for her mistake. Jeremana as the fourth offspring of Meudusi (mhenguzi wa mne) was chosen to make things right for the whole family once and for all, starting with failures that occurred four generations ago.

**Becoming a healer (Kuanda kuwa mganga)**

In September 1986, Jeremana went to stay for two years with the healer Atuwoneyeje Wilangali. During this time she regained her strength and prepared for the task to be a healer in becoming a novice. When I asked her how she experienced this preparatory period, she told me the following:

Yes, once I got there I was soon much more at ease (nimetula). The bad forces (mapepo ma- baya) that had driven me mad were soon gone. It took time however before I fully manifested the ancestral spirit forces. At that point Elia showed up with his children. I told him about my trials and the message of my grandfather to reinstall the fertility rites that needed special offerings (kutetwesa matambiko). The healer Wilangali could not assist us because she is not familiar with my lineage customs. Her tribal background is Hehe and Nyilha. Therefore, my grandfather suggested that we consult another specialist, called (Mzee) Daudi Kiswaga. He is a Kinga customary specialist (fundhi wa jadi za mile ya desturi) who lives in our community. Later in 1986 I returned home for some time. Soon after my arrival, Mtulahenja spoke again and said to have instructions for my aunt Magdalena who is his daughter. When she arrived my grandfather spoke these words to her:

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88 Prefix Si- lifville refers to her paternal descent. Prefix Wa- refers to the people part of the tribe. The Kinamihanje tribe is interrelated with the Poseni tribe. As the Poseni fused into the Angoni or Ngoni tribe from Songea during tribal wars, they share a different cultural background.
The instructions to my aunt for the customary rituals were the following. She had to carry along a coin of two Tanzanian shilling as a gift (saadaka) to the ancestors. Whenever it concerns a gift of money, we speak of bebeo which involves offerings of children to the ancestors (matambiko ya waaiota). In this case I was the ‘child’. My aunt was also instructed to bring along her nice, who began to suffer from the influence of baridi. My aunt knew that the girl had already been taken to several healers. This had been in vain and now the girls’ life seemed in danger. Also my aunt’s eldest brother-in-law started to have complaints on account of baridi. He too had consulted various healers. One healer had stated that baridi happened in reaction to the possession of a ‘n’gao’ (ritual dip) that belonged to another tribe. Mtahenja told my aunt to take this ‘n’gao’ away from the family and bring it to Kiswaga, together with a he-goat (mbuci beberu), a hen (kukua) and, a piece of black cloth (kaniki).

Kiswaga was appointed to substitute the deceased elder of Jeremana’s family to help Elia familiarize with the lineage rituals (mnamumua kwa kuomba ukoo kama kufanya kuwa mkubwa wako). He could do so because he was a Kinga traditional specialist and a stranger to Jeremana’s lineage (mgeni ya ukoo). In fact, his competence was bought for the occasion. As a male, he could perform the rituals for his own lineage as well as for others (of Kinga, Sovi or Pangwa descent). Jeremana’s mother, Haliwa, was a traditional specialist too. Yet, as a woman, she was not allowed to perform rituals for her paternal lineage, or to keep sacred objects belonging to this family. Subsequently, the ritual power objects from her grandfather, among which were the stool and the n’gao, were kept by male elders for safekeeping. Jeremana was told that an elder, Elia, had to assist her during the performance of the rituals in which these objects were essential. It was a taboo (mwilko) to use these lineage objects for any other lineage then her own.

In 1987, Jeremana began to experience the presence and guidance of the ancestral spirits on a regular basis. She would often take the lead with the singing sessions and act on the ancestral powers. On such occasions, she would run under their guidance to col-

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99 Only the lineage elder or ritual specialist is allowed to keep one for the purpose of initiating others in the customary ceremonies (mufurura za mili).

90 The purpose of these items is further explained in chapter ten.
lect plants or express matters that related to her own situation or that of others. This she refers to as being the period of a **nchimi**. At this stage, she had the ancestral powers sufficiently integrated in her body and mind to conduct **ndeko** rituals for fellow patients at the compound of the healer Atuwoneyeje Wilangali. It happened that Jeremana would spontaneously divine people and give them helpful instructions. During this period, in 1988, the ancestors indicated that she could start to divine people who came for consultation. How Jeremana experienced this skill is described below:

While I was a trainee with Atuwoneyeje Wilangali I gradually learned to integrate these forces until I could apply them to divine patients. The manifestations I had under the influence of ancestral spirit forces needed guidance in order to ripen properly (**kukomaa mzimu**). After one year, I could sufficiently follow the instructions of my spirits and treat persons with medicines (**madawa**). I usually fetched medicines around my home area. I would cut pieces of the plants to show them first to Atuwoneyeje. At several occasions I had to arrange a car to transport the large bags that were filled with plants. Atuwoneyeje would check these and usually confirmed their usage and application. Some plants I brought along were for the treatment of regular complaints, like diarrhea and wound infections, while others were specifically to be used in rituals (**vintendo**). One day upon a visit home, I learned that my aunt still refused to settle the matter with the ancestors. Subsequently, she had not made the offerings. This delay kept the lineage fertility objects, the stool and the ritual clip, from being officially returned to the lineage. The ancestral forces hit back (**mzimu thuridi kwagurupiga na nguvu**) as aunt Magdalena suddenly started to suffer from severe fits. At one point, the fits were so strong that she did not wake up anymore. For nearly a year she was most of the time unconscious. Since she could hardly eat under this condition, she became very skinny! The spirits refused that I visit her and eventually she died. The spirit forces then moved (**mzimu walihama**) to another member of the family. It was my nephew Rafael Mwalukenda, who had kept the ritual clip (**n’gao**) since his mother died. He was 'hit' so badly that he became paralyzed from his middle to his feet. Family members had to see to it that he did not lie around in his own dirt (**wao wanzoa mavivokote**). In a last attempt to find a solution, his parents took him to the Lutheran Ilembula mission hospital. Nothing could be done. Upon return from Ilembula, they came to see me and asked if I could help.

My grandfather spoke to them:

This time the instructions were dealt with immediately and the stool and the **n’gao** were finally returned to our lineage. At Kiswaga’s place, the offering of a bull, a he-goat, and a black cloth (**karuki**) took place that showed our goodwill to the ancestors. This was in anticipation of other rites to be held for those who had died in the family due to **baridi**. Either they had not compensated serious mistakes or they had not received a proper burial. In the meantime, my nephew Rafael recovered and started to walk again, for which he came to thank me. At this occasion, he admitted that he had not believed in the active involvement of the ancestors. He became convinced that my madness eventually saved the lineage from extinction.

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**nchimi** is a person 'sent by God' as in 5.4.
After having shown Atuwoneyeje Wilangali sufficient competence, Jeremana’s trial period had come to an end. In 1989, she was ready to return back home definitively. Jeremana remembers how this moment was marked with feelings of strength and immense peace. In her own words:

Even when I walked through heavy sand I felt as light as a feather (isakwawana kama nsembe mwenye mfomo). It was as if I was lifted from the ground and swayed in the air (napapeeza tu). It seemed that all parts of my body fell back in place. It was also a great relief to see things in a normal perspective again. Before, when a person was in front of me, I saw several faces at the same time. That was a weird experience! So the madness of the ancestors (kicaa ya mababu) had come to an end by performing and reiterating the customary rituals (kutekrezza jadi) in our lineage! Shortly after my recovery, Mutaheja stated once more his wish to heal through me according the traditional ways (kuganga na jadi kwa mila ya desturi). I did not have to fear for he would explain clients how traditional customs interceded with their lives. In this way I could make things clear (mitapombo wote) to many people. He emphasized that he would be concerned with our lineage as well as with people of other Bena lineages. This is how I became a healer in 1989. Fortunately some assistants from the healer Atuwoneyeje came over to help me in the beginning. At that time my young son Patrick was suffering from spirit intrusion. Severe pains in the head made him unable to prepare for his exams at primary school [standard six]. Every afternoon we would sing for him until the ancestors spoke through him. They wanted me to make a sacrifice of a chicken so as to officially announce their commitment to me. From that day onwards, I would say a brief prayer whenever I needed guidance. In the prayer I address first all of my grandfather, just as I do today. After the prayer under the large [epiphyte] tree Mlungushungu (in Kibena) next to my house, I sit down and feel sulky (nikizimbani pale). Soon after that I experience his spirit from within me (maaraa m'imwe mweneyeye kindani kunitekeza). He uses my voice to speak to the one(s) in front of me. The first time I did this at my own place, I trembled all over from nervousness. I just could not believe doing this on my own without saying nonsense (nikasema likisasa ni wongo)! At Atuwoneyeje’s compound I was always in the company of other (novice) healers and related my visionary capacity to Atuwoneyeje’s healing powers. Whenever this happened to me, I had strange sensations. [To make a point Jeremana says to me:] Imagine your head gets stirred and you hear your voice speaking unfamiliar things that apparently make sense to others! In the beginning I verified afterwards if I really made sense to those who were listening. Apparently all what I said was true. This made me convinced that my healing powers came from the ancestors (nguva inatatoka na m'imwe ya uganga).

To be more explicit, Jeremana repeats to me [in bold to stress the importance]:

This power had to develop and flourish at my own compound (itsukomesa kapa kapa) and not with another healer! This means to me that each healer has to follow instructions and guidance from his or her personal spirit guides. In 1989, the healer Atuwoneyeje had given me a letter to state that I was cured and had developed skills to heal. This is necessary to obtain an official permit to practice. We went together to see the responsible person at the government office in Njombe [district level]. I paid 5000 TSH. [8 US$] and obtained an annual permit. People started to come and see me even though I had done nothing to advertise myself. I found this quite astonishing. Many of them had been instructed in dreams to seek help with me. The first people came all the way from Upangwa and Usango area in Iringa district. In 1990 people also came from Rujewa and Imallilo, in Njombe district. Among them was Mukonzenza, who became my first novice healer. In the beginning, I had no special space to shelter them, so they all stayed in my house. Women slept in the kitchen and men in my living room. All that was left to my husband and me was the bedroom. It surprised me that the confrontation with the problems of others had no impact on my emotions (ukhuu unamizama mnu, mimi ninakuta roho yangu haina wasiwasi). I was able to
react calmly and intuitively without giving it a second thought, whatever happened. Take for instance the case of a client from Usangwa, who came for a divination. Suddenly he fell into a fit (ancangakala palepale uwanjam). In the middle of the compound he started to shout and to roll over the ground, while making a lot of noise. I spontaneously started to sing all alone and to beg to his spirits to wake up and relieve the man from his attack. At the time my husband was working in the field next to the house. He heard me making serious efforts to sing and saw me lying down next to the man. My husband did not understand what I was doing there and thought that I was loosing my mind again (akasema mke wangu sasa umerudi mgorywa). In reality I was doing much like what I do in divinations (nilikuwana na kazi ya ramiti), I merely followed the instructions of my spirit. I placed my head against the patient’s head and lay with my face downwards on the ground. By uniting our heads at the crown, I took away the bad spirit force that had risen suddenly into his head (nimeshikana vichwa, ninamtoa mdudu au jini dimponda). Fortunately my husband realized the seriousness of the matter and took over the singing, while I encouraged family members of the client to join in (niliwaita kusema jemani sogea tuimbe). Soon after this, the man calmed down and stayed for a few days until he was feeling well again. Actually, the singing sessions are part of a larger healing process, in which the lineage rites play an important role to appease the ancestors. This patient had learned the rites incorrectly as a young boy, as do most of the clients sharing my origins. As soon as this man had executed the rites, he fully recovered. Gradually people came to me from all corners (pembe zote) of the country and from then onwards the compound became crowded (nikakata baadaye watu wangoja). Today I am the only healer who is allowed to organize the performance of customary lineage rituals for the Bena, Kinga, Pangwa and Sovi. Because I combine the work of a ritual lineage specialist (fundu za vitendo ya ukoo) with that of an ancestral healer, I call myself an ancestral lineage healer (inganga wa mezimu ya ukoo).

Ever since Jeremana started her practice in 1989, her grandfather Mtulahenja instructed her to take a number of measures. First, Jeremana had to move to another part of the village with enough space to perform her practice. Once settled there with her family, she had to restore the natural flora nearby so she could use it as a reservoir of medicinal and magical ingredients. A part of the land had to be made available to function as symbolic burial site for patients and as space to perform sacrificial killings and offerings to the ancestors. Further, a ritual space had to be created to settle ‘payments’ and agreements with the ancestors, known as ndeko rites. Two more spaces had to serve for instructive rites dealing with fertility. All these rites would contribute to remove blemishes and sufferings in the extended family (see chapter 10). Next to Jeremana’s house, an open space was created to perform diagnostic and singing sessions. Besides this house, Jeremana had to construct two mud houses. One would serve as a storage space for medicinal and magical plants, where mixtures would be prepared and protective rituals would be held. The other hut would serve for informal gatherings with patients.

8.4 Implications of Jeremana’s calling

What were the consequences of Jeremana’s calling in terms of the effect on her family, in particular her children or her close relatives? According to Jeremana, her younger sister and brother had been troubled by the influence of the spirits before her. As the spirits did not find them suited to ‘work’ through, literally ‘a bad seat’ (kiti kibaya), they ‘moved’ to Jeremana. The major complaints – stabbing pains and
confusion - remained until Jeremana started to set matters right in the family. Before and, also during the illness process some of her children were affected by spirit forces. This is what she told me about it:

There are four children who had spirit manifestations, two of them with more serious complaints. One is our girl Margareth. She had a weak condition and as result she had difficulty to bear children. In a period of fourteen years, Margaret became pregnant three times. One child died inside her, which was discovered one month later at the hospital when Margaret nearly died of an internal infection. The other child was born premature and was deformed; it had no bones in head and neck. It died soon afterwards. Finally a healthy child was born, in 1983. Spirit problems, however, continued to trouble her. Soon after I began to practice as a healer in 1989, Margaret experienced a miraculous improvement of her condition. From then onwards she had no more problems. Is this not proof that the negative influence of the spirits ceased? Margaret can still feel the presence of spirits, yet now the experience is positive. She may suddenly run away in trance to fetch medicinal plants or to help someone in the family who falls sick or has an accident. Two other children, Sophia and Emmanuel, occasionally do so too without ever suffering from complaints. Our younger son Patrick experienced some spirit problems at the very beginning of my healing career. At the time, he was preparing his school exams and complained to me about feelings of confusion and depression. He was unable to study and wanted to quit school. I made him participate in the musical sessions to which he reacted much in the way Margaret does; he ran away in trance to come back with medicinal plants. Eventually, the ancestors spoke through him and explained, that Patrick would replace me if I would denounce my healing career. They justified me that I was not fully prepared to commit myself to the task of a healer. I took Patrick along to consult the traditional specialist (fundi wa jadi) Kiswaga, who had already assisted us. With Kiswaga as a witness, we brought a sacrificial offer to the ancestors and I made a solemn promise to accept my task as ancestral lineage healer. The next day Patrick's crisis came to an end. He had missed two months of school and exams had begun. Patrick was scared to fail and refused to do his exams. The spirits spoke through me and instructed Patrick to go back to school and not to worry about his exams. He went and had excellent results.

When I asked Jeremana if any of her children would be likely to inherit her healing vocation, she was affirmative. Less certain, however, was if the same ancestral spirits would guide them. Another matter I asked about was Jeremana's relationship with tutor Atuwoneyeje Wilangali. How did Atuwoneyeje look upon Jeremana's role of an ancestral lineage healer? And what about their tie with the prophet healer Nambela (see 7.3)? This is what Jeremana told me:

After Atuwoneyeje returned from Nambela in 1983, she began to expand her practice under the spiritual guidance of Nyiha paternal ancestors, who had been healers. These ancestors were also the ones who gave her the instructions to consult Nambela for they wanted Atuwoneyeje to follow the example of Nambela's practice. During the three years I stayed with Atuwoneyeje [from 1986-1988], she encouraged me to embrace my own ancestor forces from Bena descent. Once, in 1986, Atuwoneyeje advised me and other novices to join the annual celebration for Nambela in Mbeya region, to show our goodwill towards her [7.1]. During the musical sessions we sought to communicate with ancestral forces and this greatly upset Nambela, who considered this as a denial to the powers of God and Jesus Christ. Nambela insulted us by saying that we were witches. We tried to reason with her but she would not hear of it and this disrupted the relation between us. Now that I am experienced as a healer, I see that Nambela has not reached full access to her healing powers because she lives in denial of her own lineage ancestors (mitimutu ya ukoo). Because she does not place sufficient faith in them, she cannot always control herself and so her pepo remains restless. I have never met
Nambela again after our encounter in 1986. In 1987, Atuwoneyeje received instructions from Hehe maternal spirits to incorporate Hehe burial rituals in her healing practice. Even when she received a good number of Hehe clients and managed to become a reputed spirit healer, Atuwoneyeje was troubled by the fact that her healing compound was situated in Bena territory, which means that she had many Bena clients. In the course of time, quite a number of Atuwoneyeje's clients of Bena descent, came to me for help. Also, I received clients who failed to find a solution at Nambela's practice. I refer to Bena clients with baridi problems, who would be suggested to perform lineage rituals at home. This has little purpose for those who do not know how. In 1996, Atuwoneyeje requested me to teach the Bena rites to her. I could not do so without the consent of her grandfather Mulahenja (see 8.4). My grandfather Mulahenja said she was only permitted to perform the Bena burial rites. The Bena lineage rites were to remain my exclusive responsibility. This situation brought tensions between us. In 1998, Atuwoneyeje sought my help for her husband, who is Pangwa, because his family suffered from baridi. At that occasion, she also formally requested permission from Mulahenja to perform burial rites for her Bena clients, which was granted after a ceremony. From then onwards our relationship was restored.

In January 1999, I have met with Atuwoneyeje Wilangali while I was in the company of Jeremana Livifile. Atuwoneyeje is about the same age as Jeremana and started to practice in 1978. After she remained with Nambela in 1983, she began to expand her healing compound. Atuwoneyeje's compound is most impressive with over 50 mud-brick houses with gardens and pathways like that of a small village. In the center it has a large compound for divination and singing sessions. A large hut to store herbal medicines stands in the midst of the compound. It is an impressive compound, the largest I have ever seen in Southern Tanzania.

8.5 Discussion and conclusions
Jeremana's story points out a number of specific characteristics as part of her spiritual calling. At first, Jeremana was suffering from stabbing pains in various parts of the body during childhood, followed by a number of strange events. Some time after Jeremana got married, she became a devout Christian. In 1985, when she was an active member of the Catholic Church in Igwachanya she began to suffer from mental complaints. Jeremana found help from the healer Atuwoneyeje Wilangali and soon developed visionary skills whilst in treatment. Upon instruction of her grandfather Mulahenja, Jeremana had to perform tribal ancestral rituals with an elder, called Elia, after which the peace in her family was gradually restored. In 1989, when Jeremana started her own practice, she appealed to many people from her ethnic descent, respectively the Kinga, Sovi, Pangwa and Sangu who are interrelated with the Bena. According to Jeremana, her sufferings came forth from paternal ancestors. They wanted her to help restore the peace in the lineage and end the suffering from physical, mental and social problems on account of 'a state of coldness' (baridi). More precisely this state refers to a disharmony among next of kin, therefore a kinship disease.
In the Spirit of Uganga

A few crucial elements from Jeremana’s story have to be discussed before I can proceed with a presentation of her practice. According to Jeremana, the transformations resulting from tribal wars, colonial rule, modernity and Christianity are principle agencies in causing disharmony in the lives of the Bena peoples. Ever since four to five generations, traditional ceremonial practices have been abandoned or misinterpreted. The church considered the traditional religious rites of initiation, purification, fertility and settlement as magical rites and condemned them. Prayers for pardon or protection that were generally directed to the ancestors were now addressed to God. In this fashion, magic, including witchcraft, became detached from the protective frame of traditional religion. As people started to question their spiritual and cultural values, they not only changed their attitudes towards religion, they also alienated themselves from their identity.

Traditionally the Bena assimilated peoples executed appropriate rituals to prevent the occurrence of a state of coldness or baridi. With these rites largely abandoned or ignored, the Bena have lost the means of communication with the ancestors who used them as a way to show remorse of mistakes or to show consideration to ancestral spirits. Subsequently, an increasing sphere of negative influences came from restless wandering souls after they died a sudden or a bad death. These souls would seek communication with their offspring. As a consequence of the tribal and colonial wars, many people came under the influence of baridi. The word baridi in Kibena is luleko which is synonym to lupa papala in Kinyiha (see 6.3 and 7.6). Baridi used to be averted with the help of customary burial rites and by means of special rituals for relatives and pedigrees. Without these rituals, the ancestral forces could exert their superhuman powers through negative forces. Negative or positive forces would be felt by the living offspring who passed these forces on at birth via the bloodline, spoken of by Jeremana as ‘the ancestors walk along in the blood’ (mizimu wanatembea katika damu). The offspring would experience magical afflictions or events, or die a ‘bad death’, anticipated by a series of dramatic experiences. As long as the generational curse was not lifted by means of repair or repayment, negative spirit forces would have an appeal to all kinds of bad spirits or mapepo mabaya. Under the circumstances, families and even lineages could be at the brink of extinction. The various lineage rites were originally part of the Bena traditional education system (8.1). Its disruption was seen as a major offence to the ancestors. Next to the long periods of war, there was also the influence of modern and Christian values. Families or lineages that continued the rites began to make mistakes in the way of execution, which was apparently even worse than not performing the rites at all. The most essential were the lineage fertility rites. Before the wars broke out, fathers and elders would instruct their sons in an official gathering. If fathers or elders were absent, a traditional clan specialist could instruct them (see 8.1). Until today, it is the belief that males are responsible for healthy reproduction of the lineage.
According to Jeremana, baridi is therefore passed onto next generations via the semen of the men. This also explains the incorporation of the stool as the seat of fertility and strength of the paternal lineage. By undergoing the rites, men feel ensured that ancestors give them protection and baridi is prevented. In other words, women cannot transmit baridi to their offspring. Yet, they can trigger baridi by a breach in conduct, or by breaking a taboo and they can similarly suffer its consequences.

Another important traditional custom that was largely abandoned by the Bena, including Jeremana’s family, was the lineage burial rite. Many people in the past had suddenly died away from home and lacked a proper customary burial to have them remembered. The abandonment of this religious custom offended the ancestors also a great deal. Jeremana mentioned that a number of her relatives suddenly died as a consequence. Next to these more formal offences, there were also personal mistakes and wrongdoings that triggered offensive reactions by the ancestors. According to Jeremana’s story, aunt Magdalena and her own mother reinforced ‘an ancestral trap’, also a trap of coldness (tego ya baridi). Aunt Magdalena had two ritual power objects in her possession without knowing what their role was. As a good Christian, she did not want to have anything to do with traditional customary beliefs. Her husband, a Poseni who followed Ngoni customs, respected the customary rites of his lineage and passed them on to Magdalena’s young brother Mutandalike, Jeremana’s father. The alien lineage rites he was taught set another ‘trap’ in Jeremana’s extended family. Had Jeremana’s father received the teachings from an elderly male member of his own lineage, no direct harm would have been caused. Later, Jeremana’s father and mother disgraced Binti Fundi Nyamtiko, Jeremana’s maternal grandmother. This too was considered as a serious mistake. Overall, the various ‘mistakes’ in the family contributed to a number of (sudden) deaths in the lineage over the past five generations and eventually lead to Jeremana’s spirit affliction. To relief her from this state, a long series of rites were needed to compensate for all the mistakes that facilitated the return of harmony in the extended family. Since Jeremana was chosen to restore all damage from the past in the paternal lineage, she was instructed by the spirits to perform several redressive rites for her paternal family members. The performance of these rites needed the presence of Elia, the second born son of grandfather Mtulahenja and the only child still alive of the paternal family. His specific task was to instruct the male relatives. Jeremana further received instructions from the spirits how to perform the burial and sacrificial offering rites. The burial rites included a short purifying ceremony that had to be carried out for deceased relatives from the last five generations. Sacrificial offerings, held at symbolic graves, were made to remember each relative. Jeremana had to finance whatever was needed for the offerings. This costly enterprise took her several years and continued after she started to practice in 1989.
A special feature worth clarifying here is that Jeremana distinguishes herself from other spirit healers in the region, including her tutor Atuwoneyeje Wilangali. Apparently, it used to be a regular feature for women to be ancestral lineage specialists, but rarely would they be healers. The role of the women was that of traditional guardians (walinzi wa jadi) of the customary rites of the patrilineages. The ritual roles of women used to be the key to the survival of the fertility rites. With a strong decline of such female specialists, Jeremana feels that she has a huge task to perform. She is the only one among Bena tribes, who combines the work of a healer with that of a traditional lineage specialist (fundí wa jadi ya ukoo). Normally women would be chosen as traditional specialists through inheritance, like Jeremana’s mother Hilawa Nyamtiko and her grandmother Binti Fundi Nyamtiko (see 8.3). Hilawa Nyamtiko, a Kinga, is now nearly eighty years old and still assists Jeremana in the offerings and ceremonies for the Kinga lineages (mobabu wolemeliska tambiko – mila ya Wakinga). Jeremana’s maternal family has never suffered from baridi, simply because her mother Hilawa and her grandmother Binti Fundi have been traditional specialists. The female ritual specialists return each other favors by assisting in the rites they perform (see chapter 10). In her work as a ritual specialist for the Kinga, Hilawa tried to incorporate the teachings of her husbands’ tribe, the Pangwa, several years ago. She was warned by her ancestors in a dream to refrain from this since it was strictly taboo (mwiko). All female specialists are forbidden to perform the rites of their husband’s lineage. If they partake, they ought to do so in a submissive way.

In brief, Jeremana’s healing process forced her back in an order with the cultural and spiritual world in which personal, social, and communal events of the past and the present became interrelated. The ancestral forces that spoke through her were in fact her departed relatives. They were the ‘living dead’ who were remembered by their offspring back up to five generations (see 3.3). Jeremana not only recovered completely, she became an intermediary between two spheres – of life and death – which gained her a new identity that brought her respect and authority. In the role of spirit medium or spirit healer (mganga wa pe-po), Jeremana mainly treats Bena people who suffer from baridi. She does so by using a series of traditional and ritual interventions that help to form a bridge between the living and the departed relatives. In so doing, her practice contributes to a revival of old ethnic customs, making use of constructive powers to restore harmony in the individual, the family and to some extent the lineage. As part of the ritual interventions, Jeremana incorporates musical therapy so as to liberate patients from negative spirit energies after which a more immediate communication between the living and the departed can be established. I will return to this treatment in the next chapter.