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

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Chapter 10

The Bena Redressive Rites

Bad repercussions in the life of a client take place when *baridi* is among members of the family (see 9.1). In that case, according to Jeremana, a state of *masikitiko* (grief or regret) exists giving emotional repercussions in the living offspring, who die a ‘bad death’ (*kiparazi kibaya*). A bad death creates a wandering soul who lingers in the world of the living. Each soul must be given a chance for settlement so as to end the influence of *baridi* on the next offspring (see 3.3). Whether or not *baridi* is the result of actions or problems in the past, present ritual actions can give redirection to the future. With the help of symbolic rites, blemishes are removed (literally ‘to take away mistakes’ or *kutoa makosa*). With the restoration of the blemishes, spirits gain back the reputation of their former positions in the family, while the initiate and his relatives receive the prospects of health, peace and wellbeing. Overall, the rituals rehabilitate the spirits through redefinition of cultural identity.

When Jeremana addresses redressive rituals, she speaks of acts or performances (*vitendo*). These acts as rituals, do not involve only the mindscape, but also the landscape. Under the influence of *baridi*, persons are said to likely harm the natural environment. In other words, traditional rituals incorporate psychological, sociological, as well as environmental components, bringing into focus the role of indigenous religion to the preservation of nature. I refer in this respect to Turner (1969: 6) who stated that the study of rituals hold the key to an understanding of the essential constitution of human societies. The meaning of the acts as rituals, correspond to three classes of symbols; those behind which we can see, those behind which we think we can see, and those behind which we cannot see. Certain aspects may be manifest because the subject is fully conscious of the explicit aims of the ritual, whereas other aspects of ritual may be hidden. In that case, the subject is unconscious of the sense or the purpose of the acts involved (ibid.). The circumstances that give rise to dramatic healing rites as proposed by Jeremana, are largely determined by the divinatory sessions functioning as a switchpoint between social crisis and performances of redressive rituals. As Turner (1968: 25) also stated, divination and redressive ritual are stages in a single process that is peculiarly sensitive to changes, especially breakages, in the
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network of existing social relations. Divination has certain affinities with the judicial process, being concerned with the customs and interests of persons in complex social situations. In the divinatory drama, moments of liminal reflexivity take place in which experiential knowledge is communicated. Yet, a more formal stage of liminal reflexivity is realized by means of redressive actions so as to change the prospects of a crisis that exists in the social group. Redressive rites are part of a more rigidly standardized process as a means to cope with the model of social drama (Turner 1957, 1975), marked by four stages: 1) a fraction between social relations; 2) an outbreak of a social crisis; 3) intervention based on redressive action; and 4) the final solution to the conflict.

Turner, who looked mainly at the aspect of symbolism and performance, showed that the third and fourth stage mark a crucial moment in social drama. The ritual actions symbolically reproduce and re-arrange the traditional social system for the sake of preventing further dramas from occurring. Turner was interested in giving an explanation of the meaning of ritual symbols and distinguished symbolism in divination from symbolism in rituals of life-crisis and affliction. Where symbolism in divination functions as an exploratory creative activity to objectify and externalize the problem according to collective values and norms, symbolism in redressive rituals help internalize feelings of solidarity so as to repair a social rupture.

In Jeremana’s practice, the redressive rites incorporate the ancestors as historical personalities with whom communication is established through symbolic acts. The performances or acts (vitendo sing. tendo) help to settle blemishes or mistakes in the family by an agreement between the living and the dead. The rituals contain symbols with a structure or a set of classifications that serve as a model for thinking and talking about nature and social life (see Levi-Strauss 1966: 1-33). The redressive rites are more responsive to social pressures than are life-crisis rituals that focus entirely on the individual client, like the musical sessions. The reason is, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, that complex cases of social pressure need reconciliation in the face of the lineage ancestors. The way this is done and how notions of conflict, illness and disruption interact with the individual patient and his/her family is what I am most concerned with. Particularly the manner by which words and symbolic gestures address emotions comes to light.

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94 See also a discussion about interpretation of symbolism in an article of de Boeck (1993: 208-226).
95 I also refer to Mullings who mentioned that the social order in the lineage is being rationalized by the existence of gods and ancestors (1994: p.127).
First in line of the *vitendo* are the *ndeko* acts to face the ‘trap of coldness’ that exists in the lineage and to reach an agreement between the living and the dead. Together with the musical sessions, the *ndeko* rites greatly contribute to a favorable development in the course of the treatment. The *ndeko* rites also form a bridge between the instructive fertility rites and the burial and purification rites that are the other main *vitendo*. The fertility rites take place between mid-September through the end of October. The rites are mainly directed to the paternal males, yet their mother and wives are requested to join so as to receive instructions to further avoid and/or counter-act *baridi* in the paternal family. The burial and purification rites can take place at any given moment of the year. To provide a lively description of the circumstances in which the various rituals are performed, this chapter incorporates four extended case studies of patients and their families.

### 10.1 The ndeko rituals

#### 10.1.1 The role and the performance

The *ndeko* rites, traditionally performed by Jeremana’s grandfather Mtulahenja, used to be a means to prevent broken taboos among the living in the Bena lineages. The *ndeko* rituals were a means to settle ill feelings within the family before any offences would happen among the ancestors. The rites would address various types of broken taboos. There were those dealing with harsh words (*matusi*), with expulsion from one’s homestead (*ufukuza*), with a clash or a fight (*pigano* or *ugombano*), with a separation (*utengano*) or with a murder (*uwu*). Subsequently, the rituals were called *ndeko za matusi, za ufukuza, za pigano or ugombano, za utengano and za kunwa*. With the old tradition largely abandoned, settlements began to occur under much more pressure, felt by the offensive reactions of the ancestors through *baridi*.

Today, Jeremana applies the same *ndeko* rituals as a means to repair mistakes (*kutoa makosa*) or broken taboos (*wiko zimevunja*) in the paternal or maternal family. The agreement that is sought with the ancestors is referred to as *luleko ya mpatano* in Kibena. The Kibena word *luleko* (plural *maleko*) is a synonym to the Kinyiha *lupa-pala* (see 6.3), meaning the condition of coldness that arises in a lineage after a serious misconduct or breaking of a taboo (*mwiko*), whether originating from the past or the present. A person suffering from its consequences is said to have *homa ya madai*, or pain deriving from a ‘claim’ by the ancestors. By exposing the mistakes or offenses, the disharmony can be remedied and the complaints of spirit affliction (*ugonjwa ya pepo*) can be healed. Literally, the ritual chases away a state of coldness coming from grievances (*ndeko ni dawa za kufukuza baridi na masikitiko*) and heals wrongdoings (*kuganga makosa*). The offenses are settled by means of repentance (*masikitiko*) and/or payment (*malipio*).
Many old repairs are involved in ndeko rites and can count back up to four generations within an extended family. The agreement is symbolized in a certain plant boiled in water, consequently called dawa ya mapatano. The use of a rooster and a chicken are a means for the ancestors to indicate to the healer what is needed as a ‘payment’. The sex and age of the birds correspond with the age period of the client who they represent. Upon consent, the chicken or rooster drinks the dawa ya mapatano. If the deal is refused they do not drink from the mixture. In that case, a new agreement must be found, instigating a follow-up session. This session will preferably be held with other relatives so as to obtain more details about historical events, after which more precise rites can be held, like in cases of killing or chasing away a close relative. Another purpose of the ritual is to verify the reason for discontent from one or more ancestors in case this failed to be communicated during the musical sessions. Eventually, the ritual is used as a means to discover which grandparent received a traditional burial and offering.

Records are being kept by assistants on each ndeko performance stating the findings of the rituals for each family. The record-books I checked dated back as far as 1991. The records allow remembering for which ancestor reconciliation has been sought, what claims (madai) have been traced, and what settlements have been agreed upon. Once agreement is found, the clients purchase what is needed with personal means so as to show honest concern to the spirits. The payment (malipio) may vary from the sacrifice of a chicken to, more exceptionally, a cow. The sex and age of the sacrificial animal is linked to the status and sex of the departed relative. In the following account on ndeko rites, some characteristic features in the onset of baridi are exposed. Also the physical and emotional implications and the way that Jeremena reacts to these implications are brought to the attention.

10.1.2 The case of Elia and his parents
This case is based on two sessions dealing with a young man called Elia of 20 years old, and his parents, Rose and Joshua, respectively 35 and 45 years old. Elia has been working at times as a driver in Njombe area. Most of the time, however, he would be helping his mother cultivating and maintaining the fields in Mdandu division, Njombe district. Elia’s problems started after his mother Rose suddenly left in 1997 after various struggles with her husband, Joshua, who often spent the little money they had on women and drinking. As Rose left, she was in the company of another man and her newborn baby. Rose remained for nearly a year in Tanga without conveying any news to her children and husband Joshua. Soon afterwards, Joshua placed

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96 The medicine is diluted with water for the chickens since the plants are dangerous to them. It can damage their intestines and cause them to die.
Elia and his sister Mary in the care of his two brothers who lived in a village some distance away. In April 1998, Rose returned from Tanga. Upon seeing her children she found both of them in poor condition. Mary and Elia were absentminded and skinny. Furthermore Elia suffered from three large sores on his leg that did not heal. He was unable to walk and in great pain. Rose consulted Jeremana, who came over to treat him with plant remedies. After six weeks, he recovered from his sores. Afterwards, Jeremana advised Rose to come with her husband and children for a divination.

When they came, they learned that various claims had been set in motion by Elia’s emotional suffering that started during his mother’s absence. Jeremana then said that the conflict situation needed to be addressed by means of ndeko. At first Elia’s parents were reluctant to partake in this ritual. They did not support the idea of admitting their mistakes or promising better conduct. Elia took their refusal as a demonstration of their disinterest in him and was much disappointed. Elia had always shown love for his mother by helping her when his father failed to do so. Around June, Elia left Jeremana’s compound to try and work again but soon he developed new symptoms. In October 1998, his mother came to see Jeremana telling her that Elia was terribly emaciated, unable to retain food or liquids. Also he appeared to be very depressed. Jeremana gave Rose some plant remedies to purify Elia’s blood so his condition would strengthen. Jeremana urged Rose to bring Elia for treatment and participate with her husband in the ndeko rituals to help Elia. It was by the end of November 1998 that Elia arrived with his parents.

On December 3, 1998 Jeremana proposed to perform the first rite with the aim to settle the damage caused by the separation of Elia’s parents, called ndeko za utengano (lit. a rite of separation). At 11.00 a.m. the family gathered at the ndeko hut where Jeremana installed herself together with two chickens and a rooster, representing the mother, the son and the father. She briefly explained to the family the procedures and the function of the ritual. First the father, Joshua, would have a chance to speak, giving his version of the situation, followed by the version of his wife Rose, and their son Elia. The actual speech event of this ndeko ritual took over three hours. Much of the actual text was repeated a number of times, each time in a slightly different way. The texts below are a curtained version of the actual speech event and are accompanied by my comments.

The first session
As Jeremana starts to pluck some feathers from the rooster, she asks the attention of the paternal and maternal ancestors of Joshua and Rose, while softly blowing at each feather. Jeremana then places the feathers in a metal cooking pan in which some water with roots of plants are heated on a fire. Next Jeremana uses a piece of bamboo
serving as a whistle to invite extra attention from the ancestors followed by the use of a small metal bar to tap on the cooking pan. Both sounds are made repeatedly during the session as the three family members utter their grievances. As Jereman initiates the ritual she loudly speaks the following:

   Bad deaths (kiparazi kibaya) have brought a state of coldness (baridi), let the ancestors come forward and speak through the chickens, really they [the parents] have left your [the ancestors] child behind, they [the parents] made him leave his home. We ask each of them today to explain themselves!

Jereman then gives a short version of the general situation so as to announce the essence of the problem. Simultaneously she implores the paternal and maternal ancestors of the husband to forgive the parents for the mistakes they have made. She says:

   With this ndeko we ask that the bad spirit get chased away
   It came in response to the existing state of coldness
   They penetrated the boy via his blood giving him pain (via the sores)
   The bad spirits came in through his wounds
   He went to various hospitals for treatment but all failed to help him
   At one time they gave him an injection to stop the infection but again to no avail
   The wounds got worse and so he went to see traditional healers
   They tried plant medicine to which he did not respond
   Hospital-staff nor healers understood why he did not respond
   The reason is that he was very sad about his mother leaving him behind
   Know now that it is due to the presence of a bad spirit
   The spirit came in from the husband’s side where they lived in denial of each other
   Who got separated as a consequence and died with a bad conscience
   All this hardship and pain was present in the blood of the father
   I implore to reconcile through the blood for this spoils lives
   Since blood continues to be dispersed through each life
   Return life back to them by clearing the condition of the blood
   If the mistakes are the reason for being upset today we will hear them
   Leave the child [Eia] in peace with the medicine I have here
   And baridi will be moved to the small ponds and the great river
   It will penetrate the dry shrubs and trees which we need to make fire with
   It will fall into the sprouts of plants below and chase away the bad spirit
   Today they will drink the medicine to close the trap, being a large trap
   It is a trap in which children fall easily and even their offspring can experience its hardship
   We ask to reunite today with all the grandparents
   We give thanks to the recovery of the sores
   They were treated with plants that my grandfather used to dig out when he was a healer
   Those were strong remedies in which I have learned to put my faith
   Let us end all the troubles, be reunited and give each other a hand.

After this introduction Jereman invites the father, Joshua, to express his grief and accusations. Jereman reproduces the account in her own words to inform the ancestors while tapping on the cooking pot.

   At night she would return home after sleeping with the other man
   This is how baridi started to affect the children
   They were contaminated with the dirt that she carried
   She mixed his blood with the blood of her husband
She prepared food for the children who were contaminated
The things she touched at home contracted her state of being dirty
The kids started to become ill
First they had fits of coughing followed by digestive problems
They vomited and suffered from diarrhoea
This mother caused them a lot of hardship
Baridi spoiled their healthy state
Then she left her husband and fled to Tanga with a man
Leaving her children behind without saying anything
She will have to pay this mistake with a he-goat
Her husband will offer the he-goat as a settlement to his ancestors
To reunite the ancestors of the husband and the mother
All spit on the ground to show that you agree.

Joshua explains how his wife had offended him. Several times, upon coming home (drunk) late at night, Rose had refused to let him in the house. At other occasions, she had lied to him. Once she had told him that she was pregnant and needed a check at the hospital. Rose left without coming back. Several days later, Joshua went to look for her and found that Rose had not registered at the hospital. As he returned home he learned from villagers that Rose was staying with another man, whom she had already been seeing for some time. When Joshua went to fetch Rose she refused to come with him. On top of this, Rose had taken all their possessions with her, being five cows and two goats. All this had greatly evoked his anger. Having transmitted the version of Joshua, Jeremana addresses his wife, Rose, to speak out her grievances and accusations. These too are conveyed to the ancestors while tapping:

When she gave birth to her children the relation with her husband was bad
Her husband did not want to work the fields instead he went out drinking
He spent money from home on beer and women
His wife refused to let him in one day and made him sleep in the stable
As a wife she ought to have kept the door open for him
Men like to impress on other women, this is the way they are
We have not the right to send a man away
All this has brought sorrow on your children and spoiled them
The daughter started to see boys and became pregnant
She contracted syphilis and had to go to the hospital for treatment
The mother had given them a bad example
Bad talk (matusi) went on as a consequence
Today we want to end ndeko 'and make it go far away'
Today we close the trap and we will break baridi
They will all drink the medicine to obtain the strength
To end ndeko today with the help of this medicine
They will stand at the intersection (njia panda)
The water of the rains will take away all the bad influence
We will bathe the boy with the medicine and the water will take it along
Nature will work as a shield against doing further harm to him
All [the family] spit on the ground to show that you agree.

Rose explains among other things that she made up the story of the hospital as an excuse to get away from Joshua. She was fed up with his drinking behaviour and had
refused to let him in one night. Besides, Rose had met another man who wanted to marry her. When Rose told Joshua about this he became outraged and tried to kill her, but did not succeed. Rose reported the assault to a government official. After this event, she was afraid to return home. Her husband started to talk badly about her in the community and so she decided to leave for Tanga in the company of her male friend. Throughout her stay in Tanga she felt guilty about her children and finally she decided to return and face the problems at home. At this point, Jeremana reacts by saying that Rose has done wrong not to tell her children where she went. The least she could have done was to leave them with her mother. This was a big mistake that created rage in her husband and bitterness in her two grown up children. Being the strongest of the couple, she should have judged the situation better. If a woman is smarter than her husband, Jeremana said, this makes him feel a failure and discouraged to take up his responsibilities. That is why relatives of Joshua spoke badly about Rose saying that she had stolen her husbands’ wits away. These ill feelings alarmed the ancestral spirits (*kusongo mawazo inaita mizimu*) and consequently had set in motion *baridi*. Eventually Elia is enabled to speak about his grievances and accusations. With a weak voice, Elia explains about his sufferings ever since his mother left in 1997. Jeremana transmits the following:

- This boy has suffered a lot and cried for his mother
- His parents did not take good care of him and raised him with a lot of trouble
- Then his mother left for Tanga and he did not know where she was
- His father was unable to tell him and placed him in charge of a brother
- He ran away from his uncle who made him sleep in the latrine
- Who beat him several times with a stick
- Who did not feed him or show any compassion
- So he went into hiding and slept among the trees
- He scratched his legs on the thorny trees
- He could not eat anymore for his feelings were too confused
- He was so depressed that he wanted to commit suicide
- If God had not taken pity on him he would have died
- The ancestors decided to save him but gave him the sores
- So that the parents would reunite again by taking care of him
- Today his sufferings will come to an end and his health will come back
- His worries will be taken away and all bad will be lifted
- We ask God to be together with us and pardon our children for their mistakes
- We spit on the ground again to show our support to the ancestors.

Elia mentions that his stay with his uncles was terrible. He had run away repeatedly to sleep alone in the bush. At several occasions he had hurt his legs on thorny bushes and eventually he contracted an infection. Nobody bothered about this or cared for him. Untreated the wounds became more severe. Finally, he was taken to the hospital, but to no avail. Herbal treatment from a herbalist did not help either. In 1998, Elia’s problems worsened. He started to feel sick on account of the ongoing infection, but also he was more and more confused, withdrawing from food and unable to
sleep. Elia, who had marriage plans, had to renounce these given his condition and the absence of a dowry. As Jeremanana ends the tapping, she asks if anything has been left unspoken. This is not the case and so she prepares the next stage of the ritual to determine the agreement with the ancestors. She gives Joshua, Rose and Elia some of the cooled medicine to drink, which they receive in their hands while saying:

This medicine will help to make your worries disappear and not to see it again
Spit it to the right and to the left on the ground to show your desire to end all bad
Next you drink the medicine yourself and you proceed to go outside.

Jeremanana, who feels the presence of her grandfather, suddenly gives a loud shriek as the family walks out of the hut. In an open space in front of the hut at the crossing of a pathway, she instructs them to sit on their knees facing each other. She places some medicine on a plate on the ground diluting it with extra water for the chickens and the rooster. Then, she puts the birds in front of the plate on the ground. She instructs the family to listen well while she walks around them stating the kinds of offers that may be needed for the settlement. For this purpose, Jeremanana repeatedly whistles on the bamboo flute and requests the ancestors to show their preference through the chickens and the rooster. As soon as Jeremanana mentions the right offer, the birds are expected to drink from the medicine concoction on the plate. She proceeds:

This is medicine for agreement (dawa ya mapatemo) and I place it here
If you agree the chicken will drink from it three times
Show us that the child will be healed
[She turned to me saying: Jessica we will test if they agree with the mother paying a he-goat (mbuzi beberu) to the ancestors of her husband, if so the boy will recover. We also try to get the attention of the wife’s ancestors for they too can help in the settlement].

I see Jeremanana bartering with unseen forces until she says that a cow has to be paid by the wife as a settlement to her husband. She has to buy this cow from her own money and so Jeremanana asks if she can afford that with two small children to nourish. Rose answers that she has 200,000 TSH (around 300 US$) in her saving-account and a cow cost half of that. Jeremanana reacts by saying that the old traditions are very strong and that it will pay off to regain the health of her child. Then she whistles her flute again and proceeds by stating that compensation is also needed for the damage Rose has caused to her son Elia. She proposes the payment of a he-goat to be offered by Joshua to his ancestors. Jeremanana raises her voice stating that Rose has agreed and wants to show repentance to her husband and her son. The ancestors are now requested to show their agreement.

Today we reconcile so you become part of one family again
We ask the chicken to agree if each has spoken honestly
If their words have come straight from their heart (rohoni) 97
If this is so chicken drink the medicine (3x).

97 The Kiswahili word rohoni also means ‘soul’.
The chickens of Rose and Elia drink immediately from the plate, but the rooster representing Joshua, does not. Jeremana double-checks the situation by having another rooster be brought to her by an assistant. This rooster also refuses to drink from the plate. Jeremana now barter with Joshua’s ancestors, saying that they should agree to Roses’ payment of a cow. Seeing no sign of the rooster drinking, she raises the payment with two extra goats. At that point the rooster starts to drink which concludes the settlement for Rose. Had none of the birds drunk at all, the ritual would have to be repeated. Later, the remark of a novice healer placed a shadow of doubt over the whole event as he said to me, that chickens do not drink on an empty stomach. I wondered how he or Jeremana knew whether or not the birds had eaten, for they had walked freely on the compound beforehand. The next moment, Jeremana implores Joshua to change his behaviour and work the fields for his family. Now that an agreement is reached with the ancestors of Joshua, the family has to drink from the medicine and spit this in the faces of each other while saying out loud:

Herewith we chase the state of coldness away (lulo ko ya mfukuzano)!

Elia is instructed to drink the medicine during three consecutive days and after the session he is bathed with the remaining of the medicine concoction. Jeremana then places three bamboo sticks on the ground in front of the hut and hangs a cloth (kitambaa) at the entrance. The hut is to resemble their home with the cloth functioning as the door. The parents are told to walk over the sticks and go into the hut ‘closing the door’. The boy has to break the last bamboo stick so as to symbolically break the influence of baridi. Before going into the hut he has to ask if they are home (kupiga hodi) which is a common thing to do, followed by awaiting an answer of his parents saying please come in (karibu). This act of theatre is to show the ancestors that the parents have honest intentions to reconcile. In fact, hope is created that the ancestors will be at peace again thereby returning their protection over their offspring, which concludes the ritual.

The second session
A few days later, on the fifth of December, a ritual of agreement (ndeke za mapatano) is performed in the presence of Joshua and Elia. The mother’s presence is not needed for this occasion as it deals with mistakes in Joshua’s family. At 2.00 p.m. the performance starts under the direction of a novice healer, called Mkonanza [the name of his ancestral guide]. The same procedure is followed as before. The messages being tapped are directed to the paternal as well as the maternal ancestors of Joshua. In part, it is a repetition of what Jeremana has already conveyed in the first session. In view of the reconciliation that is needed to compensate for the behaviour
of the father, the emphasis is a little different. Here follows a summary of the text of Mkonanza after he has consulted with Elia and Joshua:

Parents and grandparents you are called upon to approach us so as to explain about your offspring
Be concerned about this child (the father) who suffers from mistakes made by his own parents
His father and mother chased him away when he was still young
So he went to look for a wife and found one with whom he married
Life was fine for them until his parents died whom he had tried hard to forget
He buried them in the bush instead of following the burial rites of his lineage
He should have bought them a piece of family land to give them the last respect
This mistake made his hands dirty for he violated a traditional custom
From that moment onwards he became a different man
One day came that he threw a spear at his wife to kill her in vain
We ask that all problems come to an end at this customary gathering
Let us know what other causes of ‘baridi’ are among you
If traditional procedures have to be followed then make it known
As the medicine for reconciliation will be drunk at the crossway
For this purpose we request you to give us your signals through the birds
So as to hear what we are to do to achieve a definite reconciliation
This child needs compensation for having been chased away by his parents
Each parent will have to pay a goat to be offered with the help of this child
We implore his parents to show their responsibility for him and to reunite with him
To reconcile and liberate the son, the father and all ancestors of ill feelings
We ask you to make it known who among you died first as to attend to your burial ceremony
In order to chase away the bad spirits and have only the good ones to remain
And bring harmony again in the whole lineage of this child

From the ritual gathering it becomes clear that Elia’s father has suffered as a child on account of tensions between him and his parents. As Joshua left his parents and his homestead, he felt compelled to look for a wife who would take care of him. He met with Rose and soon married her. Years later, when his father and mother died, his brothers and sisters had notified him to arrange and assist in the burials. As the eldest son of the family, Joshua was expected to abide by the lineage traditions and buy a piece of land to bury his parents properly (he did not own land himself). However, Joshua and his brothers had buried both parents away from home in the bushes without any ceremony, which comprises a ritual bathing and wrapping the deceased in a burial-cloth. The fact that both parents had been denied a formal burial was bad enough, but having buried the father in the bushes had ‘made his hands dirty’. This is what triggered baridi. From that time onwards, Joshua’s life became troubled as he came under a bad influence that affected him with repercussions felt in his own family. Joshua not only became more and more aggressive, he also became reluctant to take up responsibilities in his family. Eventually came the day that Rose announced her affair with another man. At that point, Joshua took a spear and tried to kill her.

As a result of this second ndeko ritual, it was decided that compensation had to be made for the bad conduct of Joshua’s parents towards him. Since they had died,
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Joshua himself needed to provide two goats (one male and one female) and offer them in the name of his father and mother at their newly made burial site. At the end of this ceremony, it was concluded that the lineage fertility rites had been performed for all generations, which limited the chance of other ancestral grievances. All this information was written down in the ndeko record-book. Later a new series of ndeko rites would be held to establish what the claims were of the paternal and maternal ancestors of Joshua, especially those who had been deprived of a traditional burial. Since such matters are traced back to the fourth generation, there is need for (elderly) members in the extended family to participate, both male and female. Since baridi had been established in Joshua’s lineage only, there was no need to address the paternal or maternal ancestors of Rose. If that had been the case, Rose would have had to come with members of her extended family.

10.1.3 Reconsiderations

Elia’s sorrow and sufferings had initially offended the ancestral spirits of his father. The ndeko rites served to define the mistake in the conduct of the father and the mother. This information is loudly ‘transmitted’ to the ancestral spirits by the healer, thus strongly emphasizing the individual involvement of the father, and to some extent, also the mother. Certain visual stimuli, like the spitting on the ground and the drinking of the medicine by the clients, are meant to convince the spirit world of the personal commitments to correct the mistakes made. This is followed by a pact of agreement, symbolically construed through consent via the chickens that drink from the medicine. Besides the ‘repair’ that is facilitated among the paternal and maternal ancestors of Joshua, has any ‘repair’ been done to the state of feelings in Elia, Rose and Joshua?

With the help of the ritual, Elia’s parents were made aware of the damage they had caused, culminating in a symbolic reconciliation, even if they were not to stay together anymore. By acting to receive their son home together, they showed willingness to care for him as one family. Elia who broke the bamboo before entering the house, metaphorically broke his resentments and those of the ancestors. By doing so, he was given new hope and the prospect that ancestral guidance would turn to his benefit. In that case his father would have to settle his mistakes, or any other mistakes, within the paternal family. Elia’s mother had to ‘pay’ with a he-goat for having abandoned her son. The he-goat had to be offered by her husband to his paternal ancestors. Next, Rose had to ‘pay’ a cow and two goats, offered to his paternal ancestors to settle their broken marriage.

Elia’s father, who had drifted apart from his family and lost his self-respect, was also given new hope. In the last ndeko gathering, a situation was sought to increase con-
sciousness about the role of Elia’s father in recent family history. By placing his own conduct in the framework of baridi he was given a tool to solve the problems for himself and his children. Hearing about the emotional impact that Joshua had experienced as a child, Elia was shown how all things are interrelated. His father eventually agreed to settle the mistakes, and this implied to Elia and the ancestors a prospect of change in conduct. Provided Joshua accepted his family responsibilities and obtained some money by working to pay for the settlements, he would be able to win back the protection of the ancestors. As such, the ritual helped Joshua to be aware of his identity within his own lineage. By paying two goats, earned with his own sweat, Joshua could overcome the mistake of his parents in the face of the ancestors. Being the eldest son, he was also to settle proper burial honors for his parents. If he did not, he would be held responsible for the consequences. If he did, he could bring salvation to the extended family by becoming a medium or chair (kiti) of the ancestors.

On December 18, 1998 Joshua returned home in a state of depression. He said to Jeremana that he could not possibly obtain money to buy the sacrificial animals. He found that a big burden was placed on him. The little hope that kept Elia on his feet seemed to be swept away. His condition soon worsened and Jeremana did not know what to do anymore. She had told Elia’s parents repeatedly to bring Elia to the hospital for an infusion of liquids, but they had no money at all. Finally, Jeremana gave Rose the equivalent of 5 US$ to extend Elia’s chances momentarily. Rose immediately left with Elia to the nearest hospital. By January 15, 1999 she came to visit Jeremana telling that Elia had responded well to the treatment in the hospital. He was regaining some strength. His father had come to Jeremana and promised his ancestors to do all he could to purchase the two goats to give in sacrifice. Maybe there was a happy end after all. If not so, according to the principles of baridi, more relatives would be victimized until the matter was attended to.

The case of Elia and his parents is a comparatively simple one. Often, however, the ndeko rites are more complex, as quite a number of grievances need to be addressed with reference to departed relatives. Usually, certain aspects remain misunderstood, due to absence of specific relatives. In that case, other rites are delayed and so is the opportunity to avert baridi. The reason for the absence of relatives could be: 1) living too far apart; 2) no means to travel; 3) broken family ties; 4) refusal to participate; or 5) crucial relatives had died. This became apparent once during the divination of a young man. He had gradually lost his whole family and hardly knew other relatives. He had to remain with friends and was at a loss what had come over the family. One after the other his father, mother, brothers and sisters had died. Without close relatives, the ndeko rituals had little purpose. All he could do was to pray to the ancestors for their guidance while searching for other members of his extended family.
A specific feature in the case of Elia is that Jeremana made her judgements according to traditional principles. Personally, however, she could disagree with these principles. This seemingly contradictory attitude became apparent when Jeremana spoke with strong disapproval about the mother for having offended her husband and having abandoned her responsibility as a mother. The mother’s suffering was hardly brought up in this ritual. In so doing, I reckoned that Jeremana’s words favored the authority of males according to traditional conservative views. Yet this was not in line with the sorrowful tone I noticed in Jeremana’s voice as she spoke about the situation of the woman. It appeared that this was a common reaction in Jeremana and her novices. Eventually, I asked Jeremana about this. She explained to me that during the rituals she and her novices should abide by traditional ideology. Only in this way would consent and cooperation by the ancestral spirits be achieved. As a matter of fact, Jeremana often had disputes with her husband or her family about the role and responsibilities of women. As a young girl, Jeremana had taken hold of her own affairs. This was reflected in her illness history where she explained about her marriage to Edward against the will of her parents. In her position as a healer, her authority increased together with her responsibilities, allowing her privileges that other women were not likely to have.

The following example of Jeremana illustrates the difficulty to break with certain traditions. One day Jeremana told me about a rather intimate concern. Much to her regret sexual life had come to an end for her. Among Bena peoples there is a belief that sexual intercourse is dangerous for a woman once she has entered her menopause. The sperm would pile up in the belly of the woman, having no way to be excreted. This causes swelling of the belly and severe pains due to an internal infection. Both husbands and wives refrain from intercourse out of fear of this happening. As a consequence, men are allowed to take another wife.98 I told Jeremana what I knew of hormonal changes in women in western countries, and that we see no danger for women to continue intercourse after menopause. I suggested her to consult with a medical doctor to ask advice. First Jeremana took this into consideration, but by the time I departed, she told me that she, nor her husband, were able to break with this custom. To them, it would always be a taboo and part of the cultural codes they shared with other relatives. Jeremana and her husband accepted, however, that their educated children had broken with this taboo and also with polygamy.

98 One year after my departure, Jeremana’s husband Edward Chove took a young girl as his third wife. This was told to me by their eldest son upon a visit to his house in Dar es Salaam in 2000.
10.2 The annual instructive fertility rites

On December 12, 1998 I accompanied Jeremana for an informal visit to Chalowe, the area where she was born. Chalowe is situated in the countryside two miles from Jeremana’s compound serving as a location to perform the annual instructive fertility rites. The area is dry and rivers are distant. No people are settled there. During the one and a half hour walk out there, Jeremana explained to me about the plants that grow around and are used in her practice. Upon arrival, Jeremana dressed in a special black outfit as a sign of her traditional role as a ritual specialist. She showed me around the ritual compound that covers about one hectare and is filled with huts made of straw. Jeremana and her family installed the huts in 1990. The straw for maintenance would be bought far away as it was hard to come by around Chalowe nowadays. The huts provide shelter for the clients during the instructive fertility rites. There are separate spaces for men and women, while cooking is done outside. A natural well provides water. While I made a picture of Jeremana in the midst of the compound, she suddenly raised her voice shouting: “here a big event takes place, it is a secret event, it are the teachings of taboos” (hapa ni kitu kikubwa, ni mambo za siri, mafundisho ya mwiko). In the next pages I describe what the event entails.

10.2.1 Function, organization and preparation

The teachings in the rites concern taboos that deal with fertility and reproduction. They are referred to as traditional instructions (mafunzo wa jadi) or ancestral teachings (mafundisho ya mizimu) that help to end the customary ‘trap’ (kufunga tego wa mila ya desturi). During the instructive rites, patients and their families are ritually and verbally made aware of the importance of the taboos. According to Jeremana, those who have violated taboos and suffer under baridi may harm the flora and fauna by touching it, making objects wither and die. For this reason, for the duration of the ritual year, the clients become apprentices who have to abide by certain regulations so as to reduce damaging their environment. Besides the teachings, the rites announce the various settlements for each family following the ndeko rituals, while future (symbolic) burials are announced. The beginning of the annual ritual year starts halfway into September, which is also the beginning of the dry season. In this period, new leaves grow on the trees following the rainy season that ends around July, showing an intrinsic relationship with fertility and reproduction. The dry period normally ends by the end of October, but sometimes extends up until December.

99 At that time Igwachanya made up part of Chalowe. Now Igwachanya falls under a separate division of Njombe district, respectively Mdandu division. Historically the area of Chalowe, and with it Igwachanya, is ground of the Bena, Sovi and Pangwa. The Kinga occupied an area west of Chalowe.
In the Spirit of Uganda

For nine days, people stay in a group of about twenty persons from one or two families, being mainly the male descendants, their wives and their parents. The men have to learn the old teachings and pass them on to the next generations as a means to avert *baridi* to happen in future. Children are not allowed to witness the rituals until they are fifteen years of age. Small kids who accompany their mothers [wives of participants] are left in a separate section in the care of a female relative. On the last day, the children may join in. Jereman'a emphasized to me that the rituals should never to take place in the rainy season. The consequences are dangerous, as droughts or other natural disasters may occur in the presence of negative spirit forces. By the end of the long rainy season, in July of the following year, the ritual year and treatment of *baridi* comes to an end during a ‘final offering ceremony’ (*tambiko za mwisho*). Only those who have participated in the first phase of the annual ritual and have started to execute the various ritual settlements, join the second phase of the annual rites. At this occasion, also female relatives of the client are invited to participate.

The annual rites, which have been instructed by Jeremana’s grandfather Mtulahenja, are held in Chalowe for two reasons. One is, the secretive character of the rites. Nobody is allowed to witness the rituals other than those invited, including those who come to assist in the rites. Usually these are relatives of Jeremana and other ritual specialists from the area. The other reason is of a more practical nature. As the ritual starts with the preparation of local beer by the wives of the clients, a number of fires have to be lit. Also a big fire is made to invoke the spirits to join. This fire continues throughout the proceedings of the last three days, thus demanding a lot of wood. Jeremana showed me a special permit from the district office allowing her to cut sick trees in the area for the annual rituals. Just before my arrival in October 1998, an official representative nonetheless fined her and made her pay the amount of 80,000 TSH (around 120 US$) for cutting a large dead tree. Jeremana filed a complaint against the man stating she had a legal permit to cut wood, and demanded that the money be returned. Officials denied having received the money from the representative, for he had suddenly resigned.\(^{100}\) Seven months later, in May 1999, the representative showed up at Jeremana’s compound. He apologized to her saying he had been unfair and promised to return her the money. According to Jeremana, the man believed that she was a wealthy person having so many patients in treatment. He, as many district and regional officials, were unaware of the fact that she demands no fee for her services.

In 1998, the annual rites were held late - in the beginning of November - a few weeks before I arrived. While at first it appeared that I would not be able to witness the ritu-

\(^{100}\) I learned about this through Jeremana’s son in June 2000.
The Bern Redressive Rites

als, this changed a week after my short visit with Jeremana to Chalowe. A pressing issue had come up dealing with a family in great distress. Jeremana decided to hold a special gathering at this late date. No rain had fallen yet so there were no restraints. Because of the urgency of the matter, Jeremana reduced the number of ritual days from nine to three, leaving out the initial six days of beer preparation and family unification. Instead, the beer was bought and taken along, to serve the last stage of the ritual treatment. Jeremana announced this sudden event to me as if the spirits did me a favor. She wanted me to observe the rites because they are such an essential phase in baridi treatment. On December 23, 1998 a Wednesday, we left with an assistant who took along the sacrificial he-goat of the male client. He, his mother, and his two wives came later. They would carry with them the beer and some food. Another male client, who was in problems of baridi, was able to benefit from the opportunity and joined with his wife, brother, and nephew. Below I give an account of the family for whom this event was originally organized so as to place the performances of the annual rites in a proper context.

10.2.2 The case of Jacob and Edigala

Jacob is a married 45 year-old former Bible teacher who lives in Mbye region. Jacob’s sister Edigala is 28 years old, married with one child. She used to be a successful commercial trader who lived with her husband and son in Morogoro town. On December 17, 1998 Jacob was on his way to Jeremana with a sacrificial goat. He came directly from his mother in Makumbako, which is approximately 15 miles away from Igwachanya. As he approached Igwachanya, he lost control over himself and ran into the bushes, leaving the goat behind. Three days later he was found lying next to a pool in the bushes, hurt from the thorny branches. Jeremana was warned and assistants came to fetch him. They found Jacob confused. Jacob explained to them how he had felt the influence of spirit forces that tore him apart. He made attempts to drown himself, but in time he had regained his senses. Jeremana later explained to me that conflicting ancestors had fought over him. They were in disagreement with each other over the destiny of Jacob (magombano ya mizimu). In fact, his family had been bothered by baridi for a long time.

Back in 1969, when Jacob was a bible teacher and member of an orthodox Christian Church, he attended a religious seminar. During the seminar, Jacob suddenly displayed deviant behavior. In a state of trance, he ran away and uttered words that did not make sense to anyone. From then onwards, Jacob suffered from madness. His family brought him to a mental institution in Mbye where he remained in treatment for two years. He had calmed down from the drugs but continued feeling depressed, unable to perform at his job. Many years passed, until in 1995 his father suddenly died of poisoning. It was suspected that somebody had done this on purpose. At that time his mother suffered
from severe backache and tensed feelings in the legs, discouraging her to walk. Jacob’s parents lived in Makumbako, an important economic town in Njombe district. They were a well-to-do family prospering from transport business. They owned shops, had cars and possessed a good number of cows. Following the death of his father, Jacob began to have symptoms of madness again. As a good Christian, he strictly refused traditional treatment and was hospitalized in a psychiatric ward in Dodoma. After three months, he returned home heavily sedated by drugs.

In the beginning of 1997, Jacob’s sister Edigala began to complain of confusion. Before her father died in 1995, she sometimes experienced the influence of spiritual forces, but was never troubled by them. In her state of confusion, she regularly spoke in a state of trance that traditional religious customs needed to be re-introduced to save the family. Her relatives did not give her utterances any considerations. After some attempts of Edigala to bring the matter under the attention of the elders in the family, tensions began to occur among them. During that time, Edigala sensed that her twin sister was in danger. She warned the family that her sister’s life was at risk as long as the family continued to be negligent. Instead of showing any understanding, tensions merely increased in the family. In April 1997 her twin sister drowned in an accident. Immediately after this event Edigala’s behavior got worse. She walked around naked, refusing to dress herself. She was violent, refused the intake of food and was unable to fall asleep.

By the end of 1997, Edigala’s husband left her and placed their son in a boarding school in Kenya. Her family tried to find help for Edigala at the psychiatric ward in Dodoma Hospital. She calmed down with the help of the sedative drugs. In contrast to her brother Jacob, she insisted on treatment by a traditional healer. For some time her family opposed, but eventually they gave in. A long search began in order to find the proper healer who could help her and the family. The first healer ran a modern traditional clinic (see 9.2) not far from Makumbako, where Edigala remained for one month. She refused, however, to be treated with medicinal or herbal compounds. Apparently, Edigala’s spirit forces disapproved of this. When the healer tried to hold a ritual to counter-act witchcraft in Edigala, she strongly resisted and in trance she said that he used ritual tricks to impress her. The healer got scared and stopped the ritual, afraid that ancestral wrath would come over him. As nothing substantial could be done about the core of the matter, Edigala left the healer without any payments. Edigala and her mother went to see a female healer in the same village. Since she was not a Bena, the spirits of Edigala again refused treatment. Next they consulted a healer who was a specialist in mental illness. He used, however, a severe type of treatment. In order to break the influence of the spirits and drive them out of Edigala, he tied her with ropes and placed her in a hole in the ground for days without any
interruption. The treatment was only interrupted to eat or to go to toilet. Otherwise she remained in the hole night and day, even during the rains. Edigala was totally exhausted when her uncle came to visit her ten days later. Edigala thought she was dying and pleaded to be taken to the compound of Jeremana who was pointed out to her in dreams. Her family ignored her wish and brought her to a number of other healers in Iringa region.

Two of the healers had diagnosed baridi and treated her with specific medicines. They also instructed Edigala's family to perform a sacrificial offering. During treatment at both healers, Edigala had shown a lot of spirit power, seeking medicinal plants under their guidance, indicating that she had healing spirits. Though Edigala had reacted positively to the treatments, these did not bring a definite solution. What remained to be done, were the traditional religious Bena ceremonies to reunite the family with the ancestors. Edigala returned to her parents' home and for a while her condition was stable. In January 1998, Edigala had another fit of madness. Edigala’s uncle, who was in charge of the family, took her to Ilembula Mission Hospital situated between Makambako and Igwachanya. As there were no psychiatric facilities, Edigala was merely given sedatives. A nurse who heard of Edigala’s problems recommended that they consult with Jeremana in Igwachanya. Finally they went to see Jeremana whose location had been mentioned so often by Edigala’s spirits. There she was in good hands. In the meantime, however, her family had spent nearly 800,000 TSH (around 1,200 US$) on the treatment with other healers. Of the ten healers, eight had diagnosed witchcraft and the presence of bad spirits, while only two had diagnosed baridi.

By February 1998, Edigala was finally in treatment with Jeremana. Shortly after this, her brother Jacob joined her but was uneasy with the therapeutic sessions and left the compound around March. The mother of Edigala and Jacob was urged to return with the uncle, Jacob, and other male relatives to participate in a ndeko ritual. In June 1998 this was executed but nobody dared to speak. Being unsuccessful, the ritual was repeated in August 1998. Edigala was still in treatment and reacted strongly with her spirit forces during the singing sessions. On several occasions she spoke in trance about a compensation needed for the bad marriage of her paternal grandparents. Old grievances among ancestors had first become manifest in her grandfather who, as the first one of his generation, had abandoned the traditional lineage customs. Edigala said that a he-goat would suffice as a settlement. This time the advice from her spirits was taken seriously and the he-goat was offered to the ancestors. At that occasion male relatives promised to attend to the old customs and participate in the annual instructive rites at Chalowe in September or October 1998. They returned home until that time.
Edigala’s first improvements had taken effect as of August 1998 after the second ndeko ritual, which rendered more than the first attempt. A month later, in September, a sacrificial offering was made of the he-goat. Soon afterwards, Edigala felt totally recovered. This was not the case for Jacob, however, due to resistance to following traditional treatment. In October 1998, the uncle of the family decided that the family should denounce participation in the annual rituals at Chalowe. A few days later, five cows of the parents suddenly died. Around this time Jacob was in a state of melancholy and attempted suicide. He had experienced voices in his head and was unable to sleep or eat. His uncle took him to the hospital, again to no avail. In November, while Edigala and Jacob were at home, Edigala spoke in a state of trance saying that somebody would die because the family had delayed fulfilling their promise to the ancestors. By the end of November 1998 the uncle, who had refrained from joining the annual rites, suddenly died. By now the family realized that something had to be done quickly, fearing that Jacob would be the next victim.

Much against his own free will, Jacob left on December 17, 1998 for Igwachanyya with the sacrificial goat for the (emergency) performance of the annual rites. The last few miles he walked, he experienced a spiritual attack as mentioned in the beginning of the account. The reason was that he strongly resisted participation in the rites, but also because he had refused to take his sister Edigala along. She came a few days afterwards to stay with her family during the rites. It was in this period that Edigala spent a lot of time with me eager to speak about her illness story. Jacob on the other hand, did not speak to anyone, including me. Once the rites were performed, this soon changed. The account below will explain how the rites were performed and how this took affect on Edigala, Jacob, and the rest of the family.

10.2.3 The performance of the rites

Under the given circumstances of above, Jeremana prepared quickly to go to Chalowe. Several people were warned in a rush to come and assist Jeremana. Among them was the ritual specialist Daudi Kiswaga, who had been called upon when Jeremana herself was suffering from baridi (see 8.3). Others who assisted were female ritual specialists (including her mother), her husband, some male relatives and expatriates of Jeremana. The first participants arrived in the afternoon at Chalowe. This included the other male client in the company of a wife, brother and nephew. Jacob came in the company of a brother, his mother and his two wives.

Jeremana allowed me to make photos while assistants were around to explain the various events. The secrecy of the ritual, she said, would not be damaged if I were to expose it in a book. She did tell me not to speak about the event with locals. Jeremana was surprised to hear that stories were told in the district as a result of the se-
cretive nature of the rituals. Yet, next to saving the secretive character, Jeremana also wanted respect for her work. This was a dilemma, especially since gossip in Njombe town had spread of sexual orgies and witch gatherings held at Chalowe. She hoped that my presence would contribute to convincing representatives of the regional and national government that the rituals had quite another purpose. As the description will show, some sexual gestures are contained in the ritual but these are symbolic acts to re-unite participants and departed relatives with each other. I mainly write about what happens during the last three days of the annual rites in which clients become apprentices to learn how baridi is averted and prevented. The event is presented in the present tense and concerns two stages; one the fertility initiation teachings and second the symbolic acts of fertility and unification.

The fertility initiation teachings
Just before nightfall, around 19.00 hours, Jeremana bends down at the sight of the big tree behind the compound used for prayers and offers to her ancestors. Jeremana is in the company of her husband, her mother, her clients and two ritual assistants. Together they sing a song of welcome to the ancestors after which they request their cooperation so as to make this ritual gathering successful. Jeremana offers some local beer and pours this in a hole until it is totally filled. The clients make a small offering with a chicken and a rooster. The feathers and blood of the birds are offered with some flour of maize announcing the next stage of the rites. During the next three days, offerings are repeated to mark each new stage in the event, either with beer, flour or a chicken.

Around 20.00 hours, the ritual teachings take place in a shallow place covered with tree branches alongside the ritual compound. The unyago, as part of the traditional lineage teachings of the Bena (mafundishi ya ukoo kwa mila ya Kibena), is held for baby boys when they reach six months. In Tanzanian society the word unyago is usually referred to in the context of circumcision and rites of passage from childhood to adulthood. It is illegal nowadays to circumcise girls, and as a consequence, also the ritual teachings are abandoned. For boys, this is less the case. In this unyago, however, no circumcision or rite of passage takes place. Rather, it deals with an act to generate the infant’s future fertility. According to Jeremana, the sooner the ritual is held after the birth of a boy, the less chance there is to trigger baridi in his family. Ideally, the mothers are required to repeat this exercise until the infant reaches walking age. In that case, the boy may count on ancestral protection during his lifetime, which in turn helps to prevent a state of baridi, provided he passes the ritual on to his own sons. If the ritual is not performed before the third year, it is considered likely that the boy will experience sexual problems such as loss of libido, resulting in a failure to reproduce.
In the Spirit of Uganga

The unyago is performed at a quiet and shallow place on Jeremana's compound, much in the way it has traditionally been done at the homes of families. The wife, her husband and a close male relative of the husband take part in the event. They have to strip off their clothes remaining in their knickers and wear a short piece of cloth below the waste as this was done traditionally. The mother sits down while the baby rests on her thighs and the two men sit in front of her. She squeezes milk from each breast into the foreskin of the baby boy and rubs the milk into the urethra. The more power the mother can achieve in spraying the milk on the foreskin of the penis, the stronger will be the ancestral forces that are passed on to the baby. After the milk is squeezed for about five minutes from both nipples, a concoction is used from the soft leaves of a plant mixed in water. This is rubbed gently over the whole body of the child. The child is taken over by the father while the mother has to rub herself with the plant mixture in a very specific way so as to purify her body. This is done with the hands flat in one direction. After this the husband and the male witness do the same to their arms and lower legs. If a traditional specialist assists she too will do the same, before everyone gets dressed again. To conclude the ritual, some sand or earth is taken from the ground where the mother 'treated' the baby. This needs to be placed in an earth-ware pot or shell and kept in a safe place around the home until the next child is initiated. In case the woman has difficulties in the near future of getting pregnant or in labor, the sand can be used to invoke the ancestral spirits to help her. As the ritual is performed, specific traditional songs are sung that express the wellbeing of the boy who helps to continue life in his family with the blessings of the ancestors.

At Chalowe, the unyago ritual is first taught to the participants of the present generation. During the instruction, mothers and mother's milk are symbolically accorded their rightful importance, but emphasis still remains on male reproductiveness. All clients sit on the ground stripped of their cloths, only covered with an old cloth below the waist. They sit with their legs ahead facing the assistant, who is to instruct them about the power of this fertility ritual and the taboos involved. Various gestures and sentences are taught to the clients, who must learn to speak aloud to the ancestors. Afterwards, each of them has to perform the rite symbolically four times addressing the departed male forefathers of the past four generations who were withheld this unyago ritual. Also for those who unjustly performed the ritual during their lives, there is a need to perform it again. In contrast to the 'live' session I have witnessed in Jeremana's compound, no real baby boy is involved here, although the gestures imply there is. Sticks are laid down on the ground to represent the departed relatives, each of whom is to be addressed by the clients; the male offspring with their mother

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101 Mombeshora (1994:70-86) is the only author I have found mentioning the practice of this fertility rite.
and wife (wives). The assistant repeats the purpose of the rite and the taboos that are concerned for each generation.

Later on, I asked Jeremana why girls are not given the same treatment. She humorously responded that this would turn girls into nymphomaniacs. Women have no need for this treatment, not for a safe reproduction, not for a healthy sex life and not to prevent baridi. If a woman is infertile, it is due to an internal infection or to poor quality and quantity of the husband’s sperm. Jeremana explains to me that the sperm of the males is traditionally seen as vital for a prosperous continuation of the lineage. The sperm needs sanctification by the mother by means of the ritual. By means of the breast-milk, she can bless the boy and fortify the condition of the boy’s sperm. As a result, the boy is expected to have strong sexual desires and procure a healthy offspring.

The symbolic acts of fertility and unification

The initiation acts are finalized around 22.00 hours and the clients proceed to another part of the compound. By now huge clouds of smoke arise above us as we join others around the big fireplace in the midst of the compound. We are about fifty people, a majority of who have been requested by Jeremana to assist in the ceremony. Jeremana proceeds once more to the sacred tree to announce the next ritual stage to the ancestors, while giving small offerings. Afterwards she proceeds to the middle of the compound. Jeremana makes sixteen holes in the ground, representing the paternal parents of four generations of the two families and pours some of the beer they have taken along. When the holes are filled two male assistants embrace each other to symbolize unification between the four generations of each family. Under loud applause the two men hug each other and roll over the ground to express joy. Two female assistants then perform the same act. The hugging gesture between persons of the same sex is to express the mending of relationships between departed males and departed females. As with all acts they are repeated four times to address the four generations that have grievances. The clients are seated half naked on the ground and watch the acts. The sticks that represent the departed relatives are once more placed on the ground as if the departed are watching too.

Around midnight, assistants who contribute to the ritual ceremony shuffle around the fire and speak out the problems and worries of the departed relatives of the clients. Special songs express the situation of the departed, but also of the clients who are present. They are an essential means of meta-communication to end the customary ‘traps’ from the past (kufunga tego wa mila ya desturi). By midnight, people are walking around the fire singing about the lineage or kings’ stool or throne (kiti mkuu or kiti cha mfalme). The stool has a simple appearance, but it has played an important role in Jeremana’s illness history as grandfather Mtulahenja used it when he was in-
installed as lineage chief. Therefore the stool is an important symbol of lineage survival and strength. Subsequently, it plays a role in conjunction with the unyago rite. A small calabash that represents the baby boy, who was ‘initiated’ with the mother milk, is namely placed on the ‘throne’. Jeremana ties the stool with a rope to the earthenware pot that contains some of the sand on which the mother was seated during the unyago ritual. The sand is seen to contain the positive energy of the mother who sanctified her baby with her fertility.

The stool is decorated with two wooden spoons that are used for different purposes in cooking, representing the different roles of husband and wife. Branches and leaves of twelve different fruit bearing trees are stuck behind the rope around the stool to symbolize fertility in the family of the clients in treatment. Two millet corns are placed on top to emphasize good harvests if a state of harmony in the lineage exists. In addition to this symbolic display, the clients receive regulations they have to abide by until the end of the ritual year (e.g. June next year). The main regulations are not to hit children or cows, not to pluck any fruits from the twelve trees that are bound to the stool, or cut them for firewood. The negative energy that persons with baridi can exert by their touch can result in death by emaciation or in fruit trees withering.

The following moment women carry the decorated stool - representing the lineage throne - around the fire as they walk. No man is to touch it! They sing songs that emphasize the role of the stool representing fertility and prosperity in the lineage. In the meantime, the locally brewed beer has found its way to the mouths of the participants. The clients sit next to each other on the ground and are not allowed to drink from the beer. They are seated practically naked among the rest of the people and have to remain silent, only to receive the teachings with a gesture of approval. To consent to each act they have to unite their hands in front of them. The whole event clearly makes Jacob and his mother feel very uncomfortable.

Then two elderly women act as man and wife who have sex together. Two other women shake some maize corn in a cup next to the ears of the clients. The women clearly enjoy the game and exaggerate their gestures. The act symbolizes, however, prosperity in the reproduction of the paternal lineage. Without women this cannot be achieved. The maize corns further represent the role of women in providing for a means of living, e.g. the survival of the family by working the land. A cloth is then placed on the ground, representing a sheepskin that traditionally has been used to carry a baby for protection, referring to the times of war when mothers had to find a

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102 According to Jeremana, maize has traditionally been a means of payment in society. Yet in former times, women and men worked the fields together. Both had access and control over market mechanisms. Today women do much of the work on the fields and men control the money.
hiding place to protect themselves and the baby. A calabash in the shape of a male sexual organ is perforated symbolizing the great amount of sperm in the scrotum of the baby boy. This calabash is placed next to the cloth on the ground, after which each client (and the departed relatives represented by the sticks) walk over it, softly touching the calabash (the fallus) with a foot to give credit to its importance. Eventually, an elder of each generation has to crush the calabash (fallus). In so doing, the elder symbolically ends the state of baridi in the family.

From here the ritual proceeds with a large earthenware pot filled with water that is used for two purposes. The first one serves the purpose of a baptism as ‘sacred’ water is poured over the head of each client. Good and pure forces that dwell in the water are said to enable ancestral forces to touch their offspring. According to Jeremana, the Almighty God can only reach the living with the help of the ancestral forces. The sacred function of water, as means of purification, is part of traditional beliefs of the Bena, as is also the case with many other tribes. Furthermore, the water serves to personally ‘kill’ the influence of baridi by each participant. Using a bow and arrow, s/he points at the bottom of the earthenware pot in which two sacred objects lie that symbolize baridi. In Jeremana’s illness history I have mentioned these power objects (see 8.3). One is the n’gao or n’gambil, being a metal clip and the other a kakakuona, or the shell of a beetle. After the ‘killing’ gesture of baridi, the n’gao is brought into contact with the openings of the body (starting from the mouth, the ears, to the belly-button).

The n’gao/n’gambil is a clip that does not easily allow to be penetrated and the gesture therefore visualizes that the body is now armed against spirit forces. It is believed that baridi enters a person by means of negative spirits who come via the various body openings. Often the spirits enter via the mouth giving pain in the teeth, the head and the throat. Gradually, the spirit forces will spread throughout the body, often felt to concentrate around the belly button. From the belly button, feelings of oppression are radiated in the lower parts of the body, including the reproductive organs. I will come back to this feature in chapter twelve as I speak of the relation with ‘kundalini’ in yoga. The clients are told that the shell of the kakakuona insect symbolizes fertility. The insects are plentiful when the big rains start. In fact, they suddenly fall out of the sky. The insects are not only connected to rains implying fertility of the land, they are also symbolic for the semen of men implying fertility of the lineage. Both are a means of reproducing life, whereas baridi stops this process.

By ten the next morning, day two, the redressive performances (vitendo) have come to an end. The clients can stretch their legs, wash, eat and rest. That same evening, Jeremana makes two piles of maize flour around the sacred tree and requests the ancestors to accept the offerings of each family as a hallmark of future settlements. If
the next day the maize flower is (partly) gone, this means the ancestors have accepted. In the case of Jacob’s family, the pile is not touched at all. On day three in the evening, a new request is made and on day four the answer is positive. It appears that Jacob first has to promise the ancestors that he will continue treatment with Jeremana. After doing so, consent of the ancestors is established. This is followed by an offering of a he-goat (beberu) and by beer that is left. Before the clients can return home they are shown the trees that are a taboo to them until the last celebration rite in July next year. These are the fruit bearing trees that have also played a role in the acts concerning the lineage stool. The next year, they will all return for a joint offering at Chalowe to announce what settlements have been made and, what remains to be settled in the near future. In general, men offer a he-goat and women a female goat. The wives contribute by offering the beer. All clients participate in this ceremony and so it happens that by June two hundred people or more gather at Jeremana’s compound. Men in treatment, who have had to wear a cap from the beginning of the rituals, can now take this off. In covering the head, one is better protected against the influence of bad spirits. In case of female clients [sisters and mothers], a cloth (kitambaa) is used for the same purpose.

10.2.4 Final remarks

The annual rites can be seen as a means to unify paternal lineage members; be it those who suffer from a state of coldness or baridi, those who died in this state, or those who are part of a family that inherited baridi. In the fertility initiation teachings, the participation of the mother is essential, whereas in the symbolic acts of fertility and unification she is not. In the fertility teachings, the milk of the mother is needed to reinforce the sexual wellbeing of the son, which ultimately procures continuation of the paternal lineage. Both elements, the semen and the milk, are needed for reproduction. Without these fertility rites men are at risk in passing on or inheriting baridi through the semen. During the rites, wives receive instructions about the fertility rite together with their husbands to prevent baridi from spreading further in the paternal family. The wives who participated in the instructive rituals at Chalowe were over forty years old and maybe would not personally have to perform the ritual anymore. In case they forgot certain proceedings in the future, they could always ask a ritual specialist to help them, or anybody else who had been at Chalowe in their family. In the second part of the annual rituals, the subsequent acts or symbolic performances of fertility are a means to bond patrilineal descendants. Yet, the acts also bond males with the wives who are the carrier of their semen. The visual performances impress on the clients so as to make them remember the meaning of the rites. Simultaneously, blemishes or mistakes are dealt with while gestures and objects are used to symbolize repair. The clients remain silent as they watch the symbolic acts without any expression in their faces. This turning inwards seemed recurrent in this
ritual. Unification of the paternal family is particularly symbolized in the lineage chair. Again, the role of women is clearly stated. Paternal males own the chair, but the women protect it, and are allowed to touch it for the purpose of healing. Together with the stool, the women use other objects that symbolize fertility, like fruit trees and seeds of maize, expressing the interrelationship between the environment in which they live, and the way people relate to each other. Since women play an important role in providing food and taking care of children, they are mainly the ones to demonstrate this in the various acts.

In sum, the role of fertility, that always has been central for survival, is expressed through the teachings of moral obligations in the paternal lineage. To break with these obligations, means to risk a state of baridi, bringing eventually death to an extended family. Victims of baridi in turn, may bring death to trees and animals that are part of the food chain. The power objects, like the lineage stool, the ritual clip or n’gao and the insect shell or kakakuona, visually express the wish to end baridi. The objects belong to Jeremana’s paternal grandfather and may be used only for the purpose of the annual rituals (see 8.3). Jeremana awaits instructions from her grandfather when she is to possess her own power objects. In that case, she will have to find a specialist outside her lineage (fundi) to prepare them. Two goats will have to be offered to bless the objects by the ancestors. Jeremana exceptionally demands a payment for this ritual intervention. In this case, each family had to pay 7000 TSH (around 11 US$) and a goat. The meat and the money are distributed among the people who have assisted in the event.

Following the event I witnessed, Jacob and Edigala remained with Jeremana in the compound. A ndeko ritual still had to be held for their paternal grandmother who was rudely treated by her husband and demanded compensation for this. It was agreed that a cow settled this matter, paid and offered in the name of her husband. Jacob was more talkative now and less reluctant to join the interventions. In fact, his attitude changed shortly after the ceremony that made him experience a relief from all his worries. He was even willing to talk to me and give his version of the story. In fact, he told me that this event had made him change his mind about traditional religious customs. He would not walk away from them anymore. Anyway he, Edigala, and his family had little choice. They had lost all their possessions and were forced to start from scratch. They needed a miracle to overcome this and nothing earthly would provide that. By January 1999, Jacob and Edigala were both feeling quite well. In February, they returned home with the promise to bring a cow in March and settle the matter for the grandmother. Then they would also start the burials for those paternal relatives who had died without proper ceremony.
10.3 The burial and cleansing rites

10.3.1 The cultural and the emotional

Traditionally the Bena and interrelated tribes follow elaborate traditional funeral rites. Dead relatives are buried next to their ancestors on ancestral ground. This means that those who die away from home must be transferred out there. The financial burden to meet this obligation is not the only worry for many families. A sacrificial offer needs to be performed at the grave and, local beer and food is offered to all relatives and close friends who may stay for several days of mourning, as a token of respect to the deceased. After forty days, a celebration will be held to end the period of mourning. Commonly, money is gathered among relatives and community members to compensate for the various expenses related to the funeral. If a bad relationship exists with the deceased and only a few persons make a contribution, the funeral becomes a costly event. Though the rationale behind the gradual abandonment of traditional funeral rites seems obvious, the failure to meet traditional burial obligations is a concern of many Bantu people out of fear of ancestral wrath.

Apart from the instructive purpose and the role to redress the burial of a formerly deceased relative, the symbolic rites are a traditional way to repair or reset feelings of emotional disdain among the persons who remain behind. Death, and the sudden separation, puts the living in a state of emotional debt, loss and disorientation. Grief delivers to the dead that which they need to travel to the realm of the dead – a release of emotional energy that also provides a sense of completion or closure. This ‘closure’ is also needed for the griever who has to let go of the person who has died. For African people, it is a duty to grieve, like any other duty in life (see Malidoma 1996). Grief is needed to maintain a healthy balance and a funeral ritual gives relatives the opportunity to achieve this. Without grief, the separation between the living and the dead never actually shifts into that stage in which the living accepts that a loved one has become a spirit. The departed loved one consequently never arrives where death commands him/her to go and therefore becomes ‘angry’ with the living. In other words, without the performance of the funeral rites, the dead may despair and pose a danger to their offspring. To notify their offspring the ancestors seek spectacular ways to alert the family, hoping that this makes them realize that a departed is in trouble (see chapter 8).

About two hectares of Jeremana’s field around her house serve as a symbolic graveyard for her relatives and for her clients. Though there are no real dead bodies, the procedures of customary burial rites are acted out as if they are. Bodies are represented by small pieces of wood, thus demanding only small graves. Yet, the large number of small graves nearly covers half of Jeremana’s territory. All over the place, small piles of earth next to each other can be seen interrupted by a special burial sight.
for twin children. These are covered with a roof made of branches and leaves to give special honor. Up to four generations of deceased relatives are remembered. Each couple from the paternal and maternal side form a unit or house, thus resulting in a minimum of eight houses for each descent. To this, the children, the brothers, and the sisters may be added. As a result, most of the clients have between ten to twenty graves to attend to in accordance with the claims for compensation.

Of importance in the funeral rites is the bathing referred to as kuogesha lyogo (to bathe the dead) or kuogea mttoni (to bathe at the river). Traditionally the deceased is taken to the river by close relatives to be bathed in the water in a specific way. After this a fire is burnt at a crossway for which certain plants are used. The power of the ritual lies in the role of purification. Through the natural assets of water and smoke, the ancestors are able to remove bad invisible influences that may have affected the departed. An essential tool in the process of the funeral rites is the ndeko record book. The book is consulted upon each visit of those clients who come to perform a new series of rites (see 10.1). If in the past, cleansing rites were not held or were incorrectly executed during the burial ceremony, these too are symbolically redressed in Jeremana’s compound.

10.3.2 The case of Augustino and Mary

In this case study I present Augustino and his wife Mary. Augustino and Mary are both around 35 years of age, Christian, with five children. They live in a village close to Njombe town. During my stay with Jeremana, I ran into Augustino and Mary as they were in the midst of sorting out the family obligations. Their case reflects the four aspects I have discussed above. One is the way that ancestral forces may alarm clients, second is the role of emotional debts when these are not cleared before death, third is how symbolic burial rites relate to the clients, and fourth is the way the symbolic burials are performed.

Ever since 1997, problems started to take place in the lives of Augustino and Mary. Mary began to have sudden possession trances for the first time. Augustino began to loose appetite and feel tensions in his legs that made walking difficult. Shortly after this, they began to experience strange events at home. For some time they heard knocking on the roof during the night. At other times, the house was crowded with rats or a large army of ants, forcing them to go out. Progressively, Augustino and his wife became emaciated and rumors in the village were they suffered from AIDS. For quite some time Augustino did indeed suffer from diarrhoea and a poor physical condition so he had a thorough examination at Uwemba Mission Hospital. To make sure, he went for another examination at a major hospital in Njombe town. At both hospitals, an analysis was made of his blood but no signs were found of the AIDS virus.
In Augustino’s family, tensions had existed for a long time and more recently Augustino became the center of attention. An aunt accused him of theft. She filed a complaint with the police after which Augustino was taken into custody. Even when there was no proof of his guilt, they locked him in for several weeks and let him go afterwards without a trial. Upon return home, Augustino noticed how relatives kept their distance or showed distrust in him. Yet, he had done nothing wrong. He decided to consult local healers. All diagnosed spirit intrusion brought by black magic and for this he followed various treatments. His wife was going through the same ordeal. In March 1997, Augustino and Mary consulted Jeremana who told them that a state of *baridi* had existed for a long time in their lineages. Several generations had lived together in denial. This had brought many personal strains and a great number of bad deaths (*kifo kibaya*). Most deceased had never settled their disagreements and so a lot of mistakes were left unattended. This also had triggered the unjust accusation by the aunt of Augustino who was under the influence of bad spirits or *mapepo mabaya*. Mary experienced similar influences from her paternal grandparents, who had also lived under difficult circumstances. In both cases, burial rites were ignored or badly conducted and no settlements were ever made. Mary had to solve the problem together with her father and her brothers. They had come to see Jeremana and to receive treatment simultaneously with Augustino and his close relatives. One major problem, however, existed for Augustino. As a good Catholic, his father was opposed to traditional ways of treatment, considering them acts of Satanism.

As of May 1997, Augustino and Mary came for treatment. It took a little while until each of them demonstrated strong *pepo* forces in the musical sessions and expressed the grievances of the ancestors (see 9.3). The major grievance came from Augustino’s grandmother who had been badly treated by her husband and her son. Augustino was requested to repair the emotional disdain of his grandmother in the name of his grandfather. The payment was a goat. In November 1997, the goat was given in sacrificial offering. Augustino’s complaints reduced drastically convincing him of following the proper treatment. Besides this, he also experienced a change of attitude by most relatives at home. They regarded him with awe for he had become the driving force to solve constraints and disputes in the family. This allowed Augustino to participate with his brothers in the annual rituals of September 1997. The missing person was still their father who was opposed to Jeremana’s treatment. In 1997 and 1998 Augustino, his brothers, his sisters and several relatives joined a series of *ndeko* rites to establish what other grievances existed among the departed relatives of the paternal as well as maternal family. In November 1998, various offerings and burial rites began, still without participation of the father. Augustino hoped that his father would change his mind in the course of the settlements. Not only were settlements needed for the paternal family; the maternal family also had several claims. On De-
In the symbolic burial rite for the two female departed, Augustino had the assistance of Mdetele, an initiate of Jeremana whose father was once a famous healer. Mdetele was formally dressed in white and black cloths. For the event, a special hut on the compound was in use that momentarily replaced the home of the family. Mdetele carved sticks of wood to represent the two dead women. He made cuts in the sticks to indicate the mouth, ears, armpits and legs. The sticks were covered with an old cloth for bathing. This was done in front of the ritual hut where food was prepared during the ritual by a young female member of Augustino’s family. It is a taboo to involve a stranger for the preparation of this meal. At this occasion, Mdetele applied leaves of a certain grass plant that serve as ‘medicines of the grave’ (dawa za kaburi) and placed these in the cuts of the sticks. The leaves represent the new stage of existence for the departed, but also the leaves magically cleanse the departed from any evil that may have been encountered upon death. Normally, these medicines are placed in the wrapped cloth that covers the body. Next to drinking specific medicine, this act is seen to be highly essential in cases of bad deaths (kiparazi or kifo kibaya).

Together with another assistant, Mdetele went to the river to perform the act of bathing for the departed women. The two men took up the role of the husband and stood in the water with their legs widely spread while they passed the sticks (bodies) through their legs and pushed them under the water. When they came out of the water with the sticks (body), both men acted as if they urinated on the side of the river103. Next they took the two sticks (bodies) to a crossing of a footpath (njia panda) and made a small fire to clean or purify the sticks (bodies) by the smoke (kuogesha moto). They used some dry grasses to achieve this, but normally wood is used (kuni). Once returned to the family hut, Augustino, his wife and the female relative consumed a meal of porridge with chicken. Part of the food was offered to the two deceased. Then the sticks (bodies) were covered with a new white cloth for the burial and placed next to the symbolic grave of the husbands. Two piles of earth represented this and all sat around it on their knees. Augustino and his wife had to watch how Mdetele prepared the sticks (bodies) and dressed them in a white cloth. As Mdetele made a space on the side of each ‘grave’, he buried each stick (body) in the side opening. At that time, he spoke to the dead and implored them to take away all baridi

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103 I did not get the meaning of this gesture.
so as to end all illness and misfortune. This was repeated aloud by the clients so as to convince the ancestors of their good intentions. After the grave was closed, Augustino and his wife had to tap with their flat hands on top of the grave and repeat the same message. In the end all thanked each other in the special hut and rejoiced as the departed had now completed the passage to the spirit world.

The next day Augustino and his wife participated in the same ritual to be held for another couple in the maternal family of the third generation. In fact, the symbolic funeral rites continued for as long as Augustino was able to obtain small chickens needed for the preparation of the ‘last’ meal. On January 3, 1999 Augustino and his wife returned home for a couple of days. On January 17, 1999 they were back for a new series of burials but also to receive a protective treatment. For this purpose, Jeremanana prepared protective medicines (*dawa za kinga*) in the medicine hut. The bad atmosphere that had existed in both families initiated the practice of intra-lineage witchcraft, which was not expected to cease as long as Augustino’s father was opposed to the traditional interventions. Subsequently, this meant a delay in Augustino’s definite cure. As long as emotional disdain existed evil forces would be attracted. In such circumstances, Jeremanana speaks of *mazingara* or ‘state of bewitchment’ which surrounds the offended person. Given the situation, Jeremanana visited their home to place protective medicine in the ground (*dawa za kinga*) around the house and their land to ward off evil spirits. This procedure is called ‘to bury a shield by means of a charm’ (*kuzindika nyumba*). At other times, Jeremanana may disclose evil objects by cleansing visits to people’s homes (*kusafisha nyumba*). The objects or medicines she then discovers are kept at a secret spot in the compound. These are burnt once a year, much in the way this happens with Nambela (see 6.3 under black magic and witchcraft). Additionally, Augustino, his wife and two children were personally treated by Jeremanana to ward off any evil, which took place in the medicine hut. Jeremanana prepared the roots and barks from the strongest magical plants wrapped into several tight bundles, referred to as *dawa za kisa* (lit. medicines dealing with the alleged cause). The ingredients were cooked a long time and applied orally and externally by washing and spraying the body of the patient(s). The cooking procedure in itself is called *chungu ya baridi* or ‘a cooking-pot to avert a state of coldness’, whereas the plant ingredients for this purpose are called ‘medicines of the pot’ or *dawa za chungu*. This intervention is only deemed necessary when crucial relatives delay continuation of the treatment.

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104 *Mazingara* also refers to occult forces.

105 The use of *dawa za kinga* and *dawa za kisa* is very popular among spirit healers in Iringa region. See chapter eleven about the *Kihansi* healers.
When they left the compound around the end of January 1999, the condition of Augustino and his wife was quite well. They were both confident of finding a definite solution. Once the final celebration rite of July would be behind them, they would ‘transfer’ the graves to their home and continue the procedures there. The transfer is done in a symbolic way by taking some earth from each grave along to create a permanent graveyard on ancestral land.

10.4 The sacrificial offerings

10.4.1 The religious component

In Jeremana’s practice, sacrificial offerings take place at the (symbolic) graves of the ancestors in question. The offerings of animals are given in ceremony (tambiko) as a gift to the ancestors. Their soul is supposed to be received as a transcendent body and remains with the ancestors. As such, they ‘live on’ as do the ancestors. All share their invisible lives with the living, therefore justifying to Jeremana that ancestors are able to give protection and help in dreams, trances or prayers. The claim for sacrificial animals is related to having lived as agriculturalists, whose main possessions were goats, sheep and cows. Traditionally, settlements are made according to the wealth of a family with animals or foodstuff. The kind of (animal) sacrifice that is requested for compensation or payment may be linked to the position, sex and age of the departed. Usually a male animal will be offered for men and a female for women. Only in severe cases or in case of a male elder will a cow be demanded. A departed member of a family with many cows will sooner claim a cow for settlement than those families who had no cows in their possession. Generally, however, mostly chickens, roosters and goats are offered. More exceptionally is it a sheep or a cow.

As in many other African and indigenous tribes, animal offerings are seen to be a means of bringing stability and strength via the blood and the vital organs that are in part offered and in part cooked and eaten (see Mbiti 1969:165). Among some tribes, spirits demand a live prey or raw blood. I think this has to do with the kind of spirits that are involved. If they are animal spirits, as they often are in hunter and gathering tribes, they demand compensation by a real prey. Among the agricultural and pastoral tribes this only happens in case reference is made to animal spirits. Ancestors, who once were hunters, may ask for a spear or another item for hunting as a power object. It might also happen that living animals are requested as a gift. Occasionally an Arab or Swahili spirit, called jini, can be detected. The gifts this type of spirit demands are of another kind and do not make part up of Jeremana’s practice.

Important in the burial and sacrificial rites is the respect shown by one’s soul in following social norms and values. Prevention of breaking taboos is a fundamentally religious attitude, since an offense can upset the smooth relationships of the family and the
community with those who have departed. An essential tool in the process of all rites is the ndeko record book (10.1), which is consulted about a new series of burial e.g. cleansing rites and sacrificial offerings. In case of animal sacrifices, offering is done in a separate ritual to meet the ancestral claims warranted either in the musical sessions, or in rituals of agreement (ndeko ya mapatano). In this way, the ancestors are said to remove bad invisible influences surrounding the departed, a very common belief in Africa. The animal sacrifices have the purpose of ‘cooling down’ the offended spirits. Yet, if all claims are not compensated, the effect is only temporarily. How the claims take effect on the physical wellbeing of a client is illustrated in the following case study.

10.4.2 The case of Nelson and his family

Nelson, with whom I had a very good relationship, was in treatment together with his sister when I arrived in November. Nelson, 24 years of age, started to suffer from an oppressed chest and stabbing pains in 1994. At that time, he went to secondary school in a village near Njombe town where he lived with his mother and sister. One day at school a friend warned him that he had a wound on his back that was bleeding. He did not understand why and went home puzzled. The next day he could hardly breathe. His condition worsened, he lost appetite and started to tremble. In a short time he had become a severe asthmatic. His mother took him to Illembula Mission Hospital for examination. Nothing was found to be wrong. His condition did not allow him to go to school anymore, which made him very sad. At times his complaints reduced only to return again with a severe attack. The first time Nelson came to see Jeremana in 1995, she did not succeed to find out what was wrong. She said that his soul was ‘closed’ under the influence of ancestral spirits, not allowing access into the affair. Some force held him back and he was told to come another time. Later that year, he was thoroughly examined at two major hospitals. Again they found nothing wrong with him. In 1996 he had a check at the Benedictine Mission in Peramiho (Songea), one of the best hospitals in the country. Again nothing.

In 1997 Nelson went in treatment with the famous healer who runs a large modern practice between Njombe and Makumbako (see 9.2 and 10.2). He stayed three weeks receiving modern and medicinal plant remedies and paid 27.000 TSH (around 40 US$). This did not bring any result. Nelson told me that he knew many people who went in treatment there. He considered this healer to be a shrewd businessman, which is what my first impression was too. I will come back to this healer in chapter 12. Nelson returned to Jeremana in March 1998, after he had lost two brothers in a

107 See similar situation described in 8.3 about bad spirits holding people’s tongue to speak the truth.
The Bena Redressive Rites

drowning accident. This time the divination for Nelson revealed that he and his family were under the influence of baridi. He was in particular suffering under the grievance of his grandmother. Her husband was an aggressive man and Nelson's father had taken after him. He too suffered from asthma and died in an attack when Nelson was still small. Their bad temper had caused a number of dramatic events in the family. Nelson’s grandfather had attempted to murder his wife, which was one reason for her to die in sorrow. The other reason was that her son, Nelson’s father, caused the death of his young daughter. The girl was born before Nelson and died in 1978 when she was four years old. Nelson’s father had prevented his wife from bringing the girl to the hospital when the girl suffered from a strong fever. Shortly after this event the girl died. In reaction to her death, Nelson’s father had blamed his wife unjustly of ignorance. Out of anger he had swung the body of the girl around saying that all could benefit from her death serving as nourishment for the whole family. This act had offended Nelson’s grandmother a lot. Shortly afterwards she died. The matter was never spoken about anymore and now the grandmother claimed compensation from her son through the intermediary of Nelson.

As Nelson was born into a setting of serious grief (masikitiko makali) this made him an easy victim of baridi. As a result, Nelson began to react with asthmatic symptoms just like his father and his grandfather did. Once Nelson followed treatment with Jeremana, his elder sister and brother joined him. His brother was a successful healer by the name of Kidolama who had started to practice in 1986. Kidolama had advised Nelson to consult Jeremana when his problems became persistent. In 1994, Kidolama began to neglect his work as a healer going out drinking a lot and chasing after women. His marriage had suffered a crisis and he had left his wife and his sons. In the meantime, his ancestral spirits looked for another ‘seat’ (kiti) and moved to Nelson. He was chosen to settle matters right for the whole family. This too contributed to the initial attack in 1994 that he experienced at school.

On January 1, 1999 during my presence, Nelson suffered a major asthmatic attack. To find out what triggered this attack a divination was held. It appeared that his father demanded the use of medicines of the grave to drink (dawa za kaburi za kunywa) so as to enable him to complete the final passage to the spirit world. The same day a small offering of flour (sembe) was held with the promise that his family would drink this special medicine for him. The next day, a ritual of agreement or ndeko ya mapatano was held to settle the matter with the grandmother. From this it was established that two goats were needed to compensate the rude manner by which

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108 As a member of the family a healer is usually not consulted by relatives. In case the healer has personal or family problems, s/he seeks help from a tutor or a befriended healer. This is a common feature among spirit healers.
her husband had treated her. Two chickens were further to be compensated in the name of her son (Nelson’s father) for his aggressive behavior at the death of his young daughter. A few days later, January 5, 1999 Kidolama (Nelson’s brother) felt the presence of ancestral forces in his body. He was disoriented and suffered from stiffness. He had felt remorse for neglecting his healing role. Jeremana told him that he would not be able to work as a healer as long as baridi in the family had not come to an end. That same evening, Kidolama spoke with spirit voices during the musical session. Bystanders and myself could hear a faltering voice coming from Kidolama explaining how his ignorance over the last four years had urged the ancestral spirits to seek another medium (literally ‘seat’). The fact that he had spoiled his healing powers triggered the onset of baridi. Warnings about the strong claims (madai makali) in the family dated back ever since 1994 and had been neglected by him. Had he listened at the time, he would have been able to prevent the sufferings of his brother Nelson.

Meanwhile, Nelson stayed with his mother in the ancestral straw hut on the compound during the period that settlements continued. This place was to give them better protection from the ongoing claims. Nelson, who was much concerned with the whole affair, had started to settle the earlier deaths of his brothers, who had fallen victim to baridi. One had died in an accident and two other brothers had drowned. Next to his grandmother, nine deceased relatives were shown to have claims. Several ndeko rituals were needed to sort this out. As a settlement Nelson had to provide nine goats for sacrificial offering and execute a number of symbolic burials. At this stage Nelson had not been able to talk with spirit voices at musical sessions. In other words, he was not yet an initiate. This changed after a new attack on January 9, 1999. It seemed that his brother Kidolama had left without drinking the special burial medicine as was promised. A few days later, his brother returned and drank the medicine, after which Nelson experienced a great relief. During the musical sessions Nelson spoke with spirit voices and told bystanders that he was to buy a black cloth (kaniki) and a traditional chain of beads (ushanga) as a gift to the ancestors. On January 22, 1999 Nelson again suffered an attack. Nelson told me that he had asked his mother to sell a cow at home to obtain money to buy the nine goats to meet the failed obligations of his family. But the cow was not his property and could therefore not be used for the settlements. Once Nelson understood the reason of his sudden attack, he promised to find his own means with money he had saved. During the years 1995 to 1997, whenever he had felt up to it, he had been growing tomatoes for which the selling price was very favorable. With the money, Nelson bought the black cloth and a traditional chain of beads, and later he brought the first goat for sacrifice.
The procedure of the sacrificial offering, under the guidance of Jeremana and a novice healer, went as follows. With the help of a knife Nelson killed the animal. He received assistance by a brother and another male relative. They cut the body open and took out the vital organs that were sliced in small pieces. Blood was poured into an earthenware pot to which certain medicines were added. After the actual offering, Nelson ate part of the mixture, as did his close relatives. Small pieces of organs were placed in a calabash and mixed with some blood that was taken to the symbolic graveyard for offering. The remains were to be taken home and eaten by absent relatives. Nelson knelted at the grave in the presence of his relatives. They repeated the words of Jeremana and the novice healer, stating who made the offering and why. With each sentence, they placed some of the mixture on the grave. Jeremana's dogs were there to eat the meat if the ancestors were pleased with the offering. The dogs did not have the patience to wait for the prayer to end and so they received several blows on their noses to prevent them from eating. As the dogs tried to seize the meat, their noses bumped into each other while they growled to get hold of the meat first. In the meantime, the remainder of the goat was burnt to rid off the skin. Afterwards, the goat was cleaned and the meat was cut in pieces. A part of the meat was roasted in pieces and eaten on the spot by Nelson, his relatives, and other patients in treatment. Remainders of the meat were taken home by Jeremana, Nelson and others as supplementary food for the day. As far as I know, there is no strict rule to divide the meat among men and women.

Two days after the offering Nelson felt reborn. He had never felt so good before! All complaints had disappeared and this continued to be so until I last met Nelson late in February 1999. He began to take care of Jeremana's tomato field that is a distance away from the compound, glad that he could finally return a favor to her. Soon Nelson would make a second offering, hoping that by April 1999 he would finish all of them. He looked forward to starting afresh with his life and working hard. Never again would he forget, however, the existence of his ancestors.

10.5 Discussion and conclusions

Traditionally, the Bena regularly performed customary lineage rites to reconcile with the ancestors, thereby maintaining harmony in the lineage, which in turn protected them for magical attacks by spirits, witches or sorcerers. There is, however, a general tendency among the Bena nowadays to refuse the obligations entailed in traditional religious belief and practice. In Jeremana's practice, her Christian clients, however, gain back on awareness of the function of traditional religious rites. This is especially so after participating in the various religious redressive rites. Not only do clients be-

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109 This was also done in the ritual procedure 'to close a restless spirit' by the healer Nambela in 6.3.
come more critical about the messages conveyed by the church, more so they realize that God is too distant for offerings to have any affect.

In other words, clients began to trust the protection and law of the ancestors who ideologically place proper conduct of individuals and respect for the dead in the same order as that of wellbeing. This awareness was increased after they had performed the burial and/or cleansing rites and sacrificial offerings. The sacrificial offerings would only temporarily ‘cool down’ the spirits’ unrest if provocations interrupted the process. In Augustino’s case (10.3) this was due to his father’s resistance to join the rites. If nothing would change in the attitude of his father, Augustino’s recovery would be short lived. Still, the momentarily miraculous relief of all problems, like the strange events and sudden series of complaints following the death of his father, convinced Augustino of the doings of ancestral spirits. In the case of Nelson (10.4) it was amazing to see how his respiratory complaints, which began after the death of his father, diminished but also increased with the ups and downs of meeting with the ancestral obligations.

In an article by Mombeshora (1994: 70-86), the author writes that the Bena lineage rites and the Bena ancestors see cursing as a legitimate means of enforcing social and economic obligations. The use of a threat of being cursed may evoke compliance to ritual taboos, but it may equally result in accusations of the abuse of mystical powers. These accusations are related to the life cycles of the young and the old in the lineages. The economic situation of the senior generation, who control ritual knowledge, is commonly weakened by the system of property transmission, which obliges them to redistribute a substantial part of their resources to marrying juniors. Refusal by juniors to render services in return arouses jealousy, envy and curses, which to the young imply witchcraft. Furthermore, Mombeshora mentions how ideologies like the umyango rites marginalize women in their own patrilineages. This can also be said about the fertility rites in general as these too are only held for the males of the patrilineage. Still, the information coming from my study indicates that more is involved.

Most clients of Jeremana shared the opinion that the sacrificial offerings were indeed a material means of showing respect to the ancestors. Whether rich or poor, each individual ultimately is to be made aware that the living and the dead of the family are still one. Even when access to material means poses a problem for carrying out certain rituals, this is not considered as crucial. According to Jeremana, what really counts is that each client becomes aware of the benevolent and protective character of ancestral spirits by better ‘listening to their messages’. Showing ones own sweat and personal concern, as in providing sacrificial offerings with personal means, was not only a means of proving to the spirits of ones’ honest intentions, it was also
needed to transform prospects in life. This implied awareness about the economical interdependence with (close) relatives. Temporarily sacrificing one's own personal wellbeing or personal success was made acceptable to clients as it served the interest of the family group, implying social interdependence. As a reward, the clients experienced the benefits of ancestral protection throughout his/her life.

With regard to the burial rites and the sacrificial offerings, clients of Jeremana frequently made associations with the Old Testament (*Agano La Kale*). They described to me certain passages from Genesis in which burial rites are said to be a token of respect for the deceased who, through the bloodline, remain part of life, whereas offerings are a means of the living to seek harmony with and protection from the spirit world. Clients gave to me the example of Samuel verse 1-7 in which various offerings are explained, among them the offering of cattle to commemorate God, but also the offerings of sin in case of a violation of taboos and offerings of guilt to compensate serious errors in the face of God. Given this importance, the clients wondered why traditional burials and sacrificial offerings are condemned and abolished by church representatives.

Another aspect I would like to add concerns the role of animals in ceremonial offerings and the role of the dogs testing whether the offerings are actually accepted by the ancestors. According to Jeremana, the Bena have always considered domestic animals as the main source of payment to settle affairs between peoples. Once slaughtered and offered to the departed relatives, the animals remain spiritually 'alive' and thus functional for the spirit world. There are two reasons why chickens are predominantly used for daily rituals: 1) chickens are not costly and easily available; 2) the anatomy of the birds serves symbolic purposes for the living as well as the dead. With regard to the function of Jeremana's dogs in the sacrificial offering rites I add that I personally have never witnessed the dogs refrain from the offered meat as a sign that the ancestors do not approve of the offering. Assistants and patients have assured me, however, that this has happened on a number of occasions.

10.6 Conclusions of part three

As a rule, Jeremana treated only ancestral afflictions for members of the Bena (interrelated) tribes. The clients went through a number of sequences when they suffered from 'a state of coldness' (*baridi*) that marked five phases. The first phase came with the signs of *baridi* developing complaints of discontent, fear, and the occurrence of misfortune. Usually a series of *pepo* symptoms would occur, like heart palpitations, breathing difficulties, and stabbing pains that culminated in mental confusion. Male clients often had sexual problems or had failed to reproduce. Female clients had problems to conceive or give birth. In the second phase, the clients had taken their complaints for
biomedical treatment at one or more hospitals. Many clients also had consulted indigenous healers who mainly used interventions to counter-act witchcraft or sorcery. In both cases, clients reported an increase in their sufferings. Only few healers diagnosed baridi. The majority of these healers practiced in the region of Iringa and followed traditional healing methods in use by the Hehe. Their cultural approach to baridi did not appease the Bena ancestors and clients kept on suffering. In the third phase, clients came to consult Jeremana. Jeremana explained that their problems were tied to ancestral sufferings that brought about baradi, affecting their offspring by the loss of control over life and social unrest in the family. To gain more information about the identity of the ancestors, their grievances, and consequently the gifts or sacrifices, Jeremana made use of ndeko rites in which it was established what offerings were needed and for whom. The ritual of agreement (ndeko ya mapatano) was the most essential rite to settle ‘payments’ of the living to the ancestors. Musical sessions, prayers, or the use of herbs alone were not expected to have a lasting affect without accomplishing and fulfilling the terms of agreement. Negative or painful spirits would disappear for a while, only to return in an even stronger manner some time later on. Patients who seemed more concerned with their personal pains and problems, instead of those of the departed relative(s) would never be totally free from spiritual intrusions. Furthermore, the afflictions would spread in the family from one generation to the other until the wishes to perform the traditional burial and sacrificial rites were honored. Jeremana acknowledged that African churches today pay more attention to traditional values and beliefs, but they are unable to admit that benevolence and protection of God reaches people through the ancestral forces. Prayers directed to God only are hardly effective.

The fourth phase clients went through was accentuated by psycho- and social therapy. To remedy baridi a strong interaction was needed between all parties. Jeremana would teach clients about the role of fertility in life and death during annual rites, respectively the fertility initiation teachings and the symbolic acts of fertility and unification. Based on symbolic gestures and artifacts, these rites were an important means of bringing awareness to the clients about the impact of a disharmony in the family and the measures by which to counter-act the disharmony. In so doing, Jeremana raised new hopes and prospects in the extended family. Typically, whereas other interventions were directed to clients of both sexes addressing paternal as well as maternal ancestors, this was not the case for the annual instructive fertility rites. These were exclusively for men and their paternal ancestors. Men were seen to be carriers and guards of the paternal lineage who passed on baridi through their semen to the next generations. Male initiates could not favor emotional peace among their ancestral lineage spirits, however, without the re-incorporation of the umvago ceremony in which the wife ‘fertilizes’ the semen of a baby boy. This old custom had to be re-introduced in family life to ex-
terminate baridi in the future. All the other interventions, as part of the fourth phase, such as the musical sessions, the burial rites and the sacrificial offerings, were performed within a group setting in which all clients participated during a long time span. In this lengthy phase, Jeremana worked closely with the clients who became initiates, whereas some of them with healing ancestors became trainees. The healing forces would be skewed towards herbal or ritual knowledge and skills. In most cases, these trainees sought to work for the well-being of their extended family or their lineage. According to Jeremana, trainees were not immediately instructed to render their services to others outside their lineage. At all times, Jeremana would encourage all of her clients to be open to positive clues from the ancestors and to give them a voice in the musical sessions. Jeremana also tried to give confidence to her clients by distinguishing positive and negative energies during spirit manifestations. In this fashion, all clients finally entered the fifth and last phase as they became ‘a child of the ancestors’ (mtoto wa mizimu) functioning as an intermediary, also seat (kiti), for the ancestors. As initiates, the clients thus achieved a new status within the extended family. Once a major part of all rituals had been completed, well-being would be regained, demonstrated by fast relief of all complaints and brighter prospects of life.

In general, by accepting their role as an initiate, clients were forced to confront their personal identity as well as the history of their ancestors, giving attention to the hardship and struggles of deceased relatives. The initial resistance to face ancestral affliction and tribal healing methods appeared to be related to morals in Christian beliefs that denounce the existence and powers of ancestral spirits. To guarantee that the initiate would become well again Jeremana set four conditions. First of all, initiates had to make a solemn promise that they would respect the ancestral lineage traditions. If ‘mistakes’ were made, these had to be confessed to the ancestors to avert the renewed impact of baridi. Second, close relatives were expected to cooperate in the various rites. Third, the right compensation had to be met according to the terms of agreement (mapatano) between the living and the dead relatives. Fourth, all rituals and offerings had to be performed within a reasonable time span so as to ensure the recovery of the afflicted individual, but also to avert further affliction within the family and the lineage. Once there was total commitment, problems could be resolved very fast. Usually this began after they had performed the burial and/or cleansing rites and sacrificial offerings. If no further provocations took place, clients became vigorous and cheerful again. In fact, some clients had never been so well before. They praised Jeremana for her good work and some told me that they had found a way to combine traditional Bena religion with their church obligations. In her role as religious specialist, Jeremana’s guiding forces discouraged her from going to Church, yet Jeremana did not show the slightest tendency to deny others from doing so. On the contrary, her clients set a good example to their relatives who were still hesitant to accept traditional religious customs.
Whenever treatment with Jeremena failed it was, according to her, because relatives had doubts about the merits of traditional religious healing methods or were against recognition of traditional prohibitions. Another reason was that some clients had no means of buying the desired object or animal for offering. This too could delay the cure. Prayers could address this problem, however, requesting tolerance and guidance for as long as the promises were delayed. It was especially difficult for patients to indulge with the disinterest, the ignorance or the opposition of close relatives. Often, lack of communication and transport would play a role. Delay was reflected in returning hardships of clients who could remain uncertain about their future or even suffer madness as a result, while other relatives could become afflicted as well. Often these were complex affairs involving a good number of ancestral claims. In other words, there were circumstances in which ritual treatment asked considerable endurance of the clients, who remained uncertain about the outcome of their future.
Male patients and their wives receive the fertility initiation teachings from a novice of Jeremana at Chalowe.

Female assistants hug each other to express the mending of relations between the departed relatives.
In the Spirit of Uganda

Jeremana and her husband Edward make small offerings to the ancestral spirits at the start of an annual ceremony at Chalowe.

The kings’ throne decorated with the branches and leaves of twelve fruit bearing trees which play a crucial role in the annual ceremonial rites.