CHAPTER 4

More than a Stage: Life Position, Gender, and Lineal Power

Initiation rites are commonly examined as ceremonial processes societies use to guide people from one life stage to another. While this approach to understanding initiation rites is useful for learning about the details pertinent to successful life stage transitions, it often falls short of recovering deep-seated histories that underpinned their initial development in earlier times. Understanding the underlying histories of initiation rites is important because those histories help us to understand how far back in the past antecedent generations of people began to recognize particular life stages in their communities as well as how the strategies they used to guide people through life stages have changed or remained steadfast over time. Moreover, those histories can provide an avenue for recovering their underlying rationales, which tells us why they have been important to their communities. In this chapter, Ruvu initiation rites and life stages are discussed with emphases placed on their historical and religious contexts. 1

Pregnancy, Birth Attendants, and Infants

Mothers-to-be everywhere are often at the center of attention in their families and within health-centered milieus when they are pregnant. Furthermore, pregnancy and birthing are commonly times of both joyous celebration and watchful trepidation. In Bantu history and across Bantu-speaking societies, examples of details associated with pregnancy are widespread in the anthropological literature. Their data have been important for learning about the health-related and "ritual" practices associated with pregnancy in Bantu-speaking communities, among others. Additionally, much ethnography reveals that long-standing Bantu practices and ideas associated with pregnancy and birthing may have been carried widely about the Bantu diaspora and are deeply historically rooted practices. An examination of the history of pregnancy and birthing in Ruvu societies as far back as the middle of the first millennium CE suggests that their communities were no exception to what appear to be universal and timeless concerns. In their societies pregnancies were celebrated and guarded occasions. 2

Sociologist Ulla Vuorela's book, *The Women's Question and the Modes of Human Production: An Analysis of a Tanzanian Village,* drew attention to the promise of investigating systemic teachings associated with pregnancy in Ruvu societies. Her research centered on Msoga village, an area in which Kwere-speaking people (East Ruvu) comprised the majority. Because her analysis was concerned with the processes involved in "producing 3

new generations of productively and reproductively competent adults," it expectedly addressed pregnancy matters.[1] Through the stories Kwere women told, Vuorela learned of the way women kept watch over their matrilineage's married daughters so that they were apprised immediately of incipient pregnancy. They explained that after marriage it was customary for a menstruating woman to sleep near her female elders. When a woman stopped coming to their elders' homes to sleep, it alerted them that her menstrual cycle had ceased and it was taken as a sign of a new pregnancy. After an approximate five-month waiting period a woman's pregnancy could be acknowledged openly, and she was led subsequently through important pregnancy coaching in which she learned to care properly for herself and her fetus.[2] Kwere speakers referred to those pregnancy instructions as *kukowa*.[3]

4 Similarly, Mawinza's work among Lugulu speakers revealed that at the time a woman was believed to be carrying a fully-fledged fetus, sometime between three and eight months, she was led through *mkowa* coaching. If a woman was carrying her first child, one aspect of the instruction stipulated that her grandmother or other elderly women present her with a white cloth that alerted people to her pregnancy. As delivery time neared she received further instruction on caring for her child and herself, which included learning about pregnancy prohibitions.[4] These congruent accounts hinted that probing *kukowa*'s etymology could prove fruitful.

5 Further investigation revealed that, among descendant Lugulu, Kutu, Zaramo, and Kwere speakers, this term uniformly named instructions imparted during pregnancy, but Ruvu speakers outside of the ER subgroup did not so identify it.[5] Based on this evidence, it would appear that **kukowa* derived from a verb rooted as early as the proto-East-Ruvu period of about 600–900 CE, suggesting tentatively that PER speakers may have innovated the term to name those instructions. However, upon further investigation, attestations of the same root outside of the Ruvu subgroup of languages uncovered additional possibilities.

6 A cognate verb root in the Tsonga language of the Botatwe branch of Eastern-Savanna Bantu names the period when a girl attained marriageable status. And as a noun in that language it named the instruction initiates undergo to reach a "marriageable state." Specifically the plural noun *makhoba* referred to "girls undergoing initiation."[6] Taken together, this evidence requires the inference that the PER use of this word likely represents an instance of relict retention of an Eastern-Savanna-Bantu period instruction imparted to girls who had reached a locally recognized level of social and biological maturity.

7 **Kukowa*'s preservation in contemporary East Ruvu languages sheds light on possible historical developments regarding pregnancy-related restrictions among Ruvu speakers. In particular, those instructions frequently center on food prohibitions anchored in a view that particular foods harmed or created dangerous circumstances for unborn children and

pregnant women. Kwere speakers, for example, advised against eating eggs and the meat of small burrow-dwelling animals, arguing that, just as such creatures peak out and then turn inward back to their holes to stay, so too might a child peek out and turn back, refusing to emerge.[7] Zalamo speakers maintain that eating eggs and breast meat lead to the birth of gaunt, unhealthy children.[8] And Kagulu speakers instructed women not to eat eggs or their babies would be born without hair on their heads, which would impede important *mogo* ceremonies whose effectiveness depended on shaving a child's head shortly after birth.[9] Additionally, Kagulu speakers taught that eating honey and sugarcane resulted in dangerous birthing because they caused a woman's pelvis to narrow.[10]

8 Among Ruvu speakers, egg prohibitions were the most widely shared. But there was a parallel also between one Gogo clothing tradition and the earlier Lugulu example involving white cloth. Mnyampala reports that during the third or fourth month of pregnancy, Gogo women were "brought a white cloth called *kumutumbiciza*. This cloth is worn around the womb every day until she gives birth."[11] Such pregnancy related practices highlight evidence of shared beliefs ultimately concerned with the successful birth of descendants. Such admonitions and instruction represent just a small example of the widespread teaching practices common among pregnant Ruvu women and their matrilineages. But they do provide a sampling of matters **kukowa* instruction addressed.

9 Still, we as yet know little about the history of **kukowa* between the second millennium BCE and proto-East Ruvu emergence nearly 2,000 years later. Could it be that such meaningful institutions fell out of importance all together? While it is possible, the more likely scenario is that scholars have not yet asked pointed questions about pregnancy and the way societies managed it. There is little doubt that **kukowa* instructions were guarded knowledge held within the domain of women and that people likely continue to protect it. The unveiling of this aspect of Bantu and Ruvu history in societies serves only as a starting point for the kinds of histories that are still retrievable. If made the center of further study, commonalities and divergences in **kukowa* institutions that date to the proto-Ruvu period and beyond could well be recovered.

10 But there are still pregnancy-related themes about which we can say more. In the proto-Ruvu era and in descendant Ruvu languages, particular words identified women who played a part in instructional and birthing needs. Importantly, some of these also are terms suggestive of periods of contact with non-Ruvu speakers. The proto-Kaskazi term **mkunga* appears to have named both the role of an older person and that of "midwives/birth attendants." Its structure and meaning indicate that early Kaskazi speakers took a proto-Savanna-Bantu-period verb

meaning "to initiate" and applied it to senior women who attended or instructed in pregnancy and childbirth.[12] This word and meaning were then retained through to the proto-Ruvu period.

11 Later, two additional nouns for "birth attendants" made their way into Ruvu. Appearing in West Ruvu's Sagala and Gogo as well as Kagulu, the term *mdala* shows the uniquely Njombe outcome /d/ and can therefore be identified as an Njombe loanword referring to both birth attendants and senior women in these societies. Because it also occurs to the north among the Langi, this term can be argued to have spread via the West Ruvu group, probably from Gogo, to Langi.[13] **Mulala* is a third Ruvu term used to name birth attendants. Because of its limited distribution in Lugulu, Kwere, and Doe for "old woman" and "birth attendant," its source would have been a proto-East-Ruvu word that carried both meanings.[14] Notably, this is, in fact, the same root word as appears in **-dala*, but with regular Ruvu sound correspondences rather than Njombe sound changes. It therefore represents the proto-Ruvu term for a female elder, which in proto-East Ruvu, in parallel semantic fashion to the borrowed term **-dala* in West Ruvu and Kagulu, took on the extended meaning "birth attendant/midwife."

12 Clearly, we have here an ancient Mashariki and probably Savanna-Bantu cultural idea of birth attendants and their place in the age structure of society. Because many of these terms carry an indication that birth attendants were senior women, it suggests a shared understanding that such women were qualified for the role by their own experience in giving birth. The term **mkunga* carries an additional underlying meaning, that only people who have been initiated can bestow such lessons to younger generations.

13 Beyond skills involved in safely delivering children and instructing women during pregnancy, birth attendants likely played roles in post-birthing observances centered in part on religious beliefs that newborn infants emerged from the realm of the ethereal to the physical world. During that transition, newborn infants were susceptible to illness brought on by the malice of other people or by ancestral spirits, who sometimes attempted to keep the child in the spirit realm. In some Kaguru communities, as Beidelman describes, for the first three or four days following delivery, mothers and infants were confined to the house where birth attendants and matrilineal kin looked after their needs. During that time the infant's umbilical cord dried, fell off, and was then secretly buried. But even after the child's navel healed, the attendants remained protective of the child's navel because it marked a point of entry into the child's physical body. In their view, a child's passage from the ethereal realm of the spirits was a protracted process.[15] Similarly, Vidunda speakers maintained that newborns and mothers had to remain in the house for seven days to give the umbilical cord time to dry and fall off. After delivery, Vidunda and Lugulu infants, and sometimes their mothers, were given protective medicines prepared from *mpinga* trees to drink before children were nursed.[16]

Kwere speakers highlighted some commonalities: 14

> On the day going into labor the midwife will be called and the husband will prepare a place for delivery, a temporary shed called the *lago*.[17] After delivery they all come to the girl's mother's house or her grandmother's place where mother and child remain indoors until the child's umbilical cord drops off. After this, the midwife, the *mulala*, sweeps the young mother's bedroom clean, making sure that the cord and any other waste related to the newborn is closely guarded and collected together.[18] The midwife then buried it at the *mkole*[19] tree the following morning. [20]

Kwere and Zaramo placement of the umbilical cord at the **mkole* tree, which is associated with the matriliny and fertility in a widespread range of Ruvu languages and was also the place where religio-ritual offerings were presented to ancestors as supplication for bringing life into the community. 15

In Lugulu societies, men were expected to stay away from women as they neared delivery. The people called to watch over laboring women included the woman's grandmothers and sisters of both lineal sides. Once the child was born, her sisters would occasionally show the baby in the space of the doorway when they went to inform the father of the birth. Until the child's navel healed from the umbilical displacement, mothers and children were kept indoors. When they finally emerged celebratory religio-ritual ceremonies are held over an eight-day period.[21] 16

When one interrogates both ethnographic and linguistic evidence, similarities in pregnancy and birthing practices across Ruvu language communities are evident. From the time pregnancy was suspected, members of Ruvu women's matrilineages appear to have played important roles in insuring healthy pregnancies and deliveries. Following that, the religio-ritual importance of waiting for the proper navel healing was critical. The attention given to the new mother by her matrilineage foregrounds the importance of children to the maintenance of clan and lineage in matrilineal societies.[22] Fittingly, the women involved in this were those clanswomen who had given birth to the young women themselves and guided them through later female initiation instruction, which itself aimed above all at securing fertility, a topic we will return to later in the chapter. 17

The importance of children did not end after the birth of a woman's first child, though at least in some Ruvu languages the first birth may have carried special social meanings. Across Ruvu languages, special names were used to denote children's order of birth, and although it is no longer standard practice to use them, they are remembered. About the middle of the first millennium CE, the term likely applied to a woman's firstborn child was **chaudele*. A second child was **magati*. A third-born would be **mwanabure*, and **mzuanda* was applied to all 18

subsequent children.[23] The question begged by this practice is, what did such naming signify? Perhaps it was a way of drawing attention to women who had given birth, although in the context of these matrilineal societies it likely carried more meaning.

19 Anthropologist Marja-Liisa Swantz's research among Zaramo speakers captured an example of what recognizing birth order may have meant in earlier times. Specifically, she offered a basis for positing a hypothesis of the significance of a granddaughter's fertility. She found that in Zaramo communities the time when a woman's first female child reached puberty was a time of joyous celebration in her maternal grandmother's life because a granddaughter's fertility effectively guaranteed lineage survival, and for that reason *chaudele* celebrations were held in their honor.[24] The name of the celebration parallels precisely the way early Ruvu communities named a woman's firstborn child. Could it be that this ceremony exposes the earlier usages of the term?

20 Interrogating this question as well as developing research on the potential early meaning of the ways of naming children who came after the firstborn is not only intriguing, it is important. That is because that research could develop our understanding about just how the matrilineal line may have been viewed from both social and religious perspectives. And it intimates that in matrilineal societies, as has been suggested by other researchers, grandmothers personified power and importance in their communities.[25] Such research may begin to shed some light, for instance, on the missing pieces of our understanding about women in these societies, which have been usually only gleaned by the prominent role that grandmothers commonly have in marriage negotiations for their granddaughters. Indeed, in more recent times it remained common that male suitors had to bring messages of their desire to propose to both the maternal grandmother and a young woman's uncle.[26] The etymologies of the majority of terms for the early Ruvu practice of labeling children according to birth order is something that we cannot say much about. But its early presence and its persistence suggest that it may have been of wide significance in early Ruvu-speaking communities. Moreover, the added evidence suggests that we have only begun to understand the place and power of matrilineal grandmothers in their communities.

Children in their Formative Years

21 In early proto-Ruvu societies young children probably spent most of their time near the homestead. As in many Bantu-speaking societies, there were not heavily gendered distinctions made among young children. And they likely had relative freedom when it came to the spaces in and out of which they could move. As part of the immediate domestic sphere they were probably nearest women in their community from infancy to early youth, which would have

meant that they were witness to the sphere of domesticity, learning about all that was involved in establishing and maintaining homesteads. But once they began to reach a recognized level of biological and social maturity, their social status and treatment changed.

22 Groups of boys deemed ready were taken through at least one, and perhaps even two, initiation observances developed from earlier Bantu institutions. During those times they were taught about sociocultural responsibilities normative for their level of maturation, and they were circumcised. In contrast, upon reaching menarche, girls were singularly escorted through religio-ritual instructions that date to at least the proto-Eastern-Savanna-Bantu period of roughly the second millennium BCE. Associated lessons likely centered on insuring the girl's fertility, but she also was taught about matters expected to be among her coming experiences: marriage, motherhood, and sexuality. In Swantz's view, the observances served "to protect, support, nourish and reaffirm female power and fertility."[27] Their initiation, in contrast to what we know about boys', appears to have more heavily involved religious aspects, although at a fundamental level both observances involved the use of ethereal and physical medicine. A girl's female elders played an understood role in making sure that she, as the bearer of potential children, brought forth new members for her matrilineal line.

Girls in Northeast-Coastal Bantu Matrilineal Societies

23 In Ruvu communities it seems that among the primary factors influencing what communities expected from people depended on the inseparable processes of social and biological maturation. From the time of birth, family members attended to their daughters and sons as a way of imbuing them with myriad combinations of protection, knowledge, and responsibilities.

24 Ruvu language communities were descendants of generations of Bantu people who had organized their societies along matrilineal lines of descent and inheritance. Of the many Kaskazi descendants who arose out of the pervasive matrilineal structures of the early Mashariki period, the PNECB people were among those who persisted in employing matrilineal systems of social organization. Among the PNECB descendants, however, Ruvu language communities in central-east Tanzania most staunchly held to their matrilineal ideals over the long run of history. Even in the face of increasing focus on patrilineages in coastal communities, and contemporaneous exchanges with patrilineal Njombe-, Eastern-Sahelian-, and Cushitic-speaking populations on their northern and western borders, Ruvu societies did not relent from keeping the prominence of the matrilineage entrenched in their cultures.

While the outward sociopolitical prominence of the matrilineage were weakened in the colonial period of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, sociocultural and religious aspects supporting and empowering the matrilineage did not cease.

25 Since the proto-Bantu period, community members gave close attention to girls approaching puberty. It may be that because of a girl's anticipated contribution to her matrilineage and its associated social and religious windfalls, communities were especially concerned that she be properly prepared for motherhood. The primacy of motherhood in Bantu societies—both historical and contemporary—is exceedingly important and, like agriculture, it remains very much women's purview. While not every Bantu society gives equal attention to the details of the preparation of girls for their imminent life positions, there is good comparative evidence that is useful for understanding that preparing a girl for anticipated motherhood in all likelihood involved a set of ceremonies whose primary emphases were to insure fertility and readiness for sexual relationships.[28] A close examination of observed life positions offers insights into these aspects of Ruvu history.

26 People in proto-Ruvu societies referred to young girls as **kihinza*. This word's root dates to the proto-Kaskazi period where **-pinja* designated "a (maturing?) girl."[29] Following that period, some Kati-derived Langi and Njombe speakers applied it more specifically to a girl whose breasts began to show.[30] PNECB speakers, also of Kati origins, may have used it with an equivalent meaning when they settled in central-east Tanzania. But in the middle of the first millennium CE, proto-Ruvu-speaking descendants began to apply that term in a slightly different way, to name girls who had not yet shown evidence of breast development. Later, when a girl did begin to develop breasts, it signaled a transitional time recognized by her community. From the ethnography we glean that it likely was at that point of physical maturation that her community members metaphorically referred to her as "having milk."[31]

27 As we know, the time when young girls' breasts begin to develop is highly variable, which is probably why this transitory period was not assigned a numerical age. But when she reached that point of development she was called **kigoli*. This designation parallels the Langi and Njombe uses of *muhinja*, and thus maintains the idea associated with a level of maturity that had been acknowledged in earlier Kati Bantu speech communities. The addition of the **kigoli* phase in a girl's life raises some questions. Its structure, which adds the **ki-* prefix, is suggestive of her being called the thing having the quality of **-goli*, or more probably in Northeast-Coastal languages, in which **ki-* became a new diminutive suffix, the younger person with the quality of **-goli*. But what does that mean historically? To discern this, it helps to examine the word's root in the Kaskazi period.

28 Historian David Schoenbrun found in the Lakes region that the root's many meanings were ultimately tied to what he glossed as "maternal power, crown of motherhood." Several of *-*goli*'s reflexes, for example, were linked to such ideas as women as mistresses of their homes, women as new mothers, and more. Its meanings in wider Kaskazi descendant languages were tied in less specific terms to name a women.[32] Based on its breadth of generalized meanings in Kaskazi languages, including areas outside of the Lakes languages, it likely emerged in the first half of the last millennium BCE meaning "woman or female," and later took on more nuanced meanings such as those in the Lakes and Northeast-Coastal Bantu examples.

29 In later eras, various Kaskazi descendants let it drop out of use altogether, opting to use other available designations for women, while others retained it. But some time just before or during the proto-Ruvu language emergence, they attached a noun class prefix, *-*ki*/*vi*, connoting a "small/young *-*goli*" or, more specifically, "the girl soon to be initiated." Of course, a question we might ask is why would they do this? Why add to the life positions of girls and soon-to-be women?

30 There are some possibilities we can consider. The Ruvu **kigoli* position was somewhat transitional because it marked the impending start of a more significant event anticipated by her family, her menstruation, and subsequent marriage.[33] The most undesirable thing for a matrilineage would have been to lose their daughters to a patrilineal community where descent and inheritance passed though the male line. The **kigoli* period was likely a common time when suitors began to notice their daughters; it thus behooved them to pay close attention to just whom was interested in marrying her. But another practical reason is that at the coast, where kidnapping and enslavement is likely to have been a continuous possibility, Ruvu people may have been particularly watchful of losing their daughters. After all, they represented the longevity of their societies.

31 Other possibilities to consider may have had to do with the anticipation of and desire to plan for what followed a girl's **kigoli* life stage. If we consider the elaborate ceremonies that characterized her next life position, which we will turn to next, then the **kigoli* designation may have served a number of additional useful purposes beyond tightening their guard over their daughters. It could have been the time when potential marriage partners were alerted to a possible wife, which would have given her suitors time to gather the necessary and valuable items her matrilineage demanded for permission to marry. Concurrently, it could have also provided her lineage members with ample warning so that they could begin preparations for the expensive ceremony that ended her initiation period.

32 The regular naming of these phases in a girl's life by Ruvu people, which they appear to have done more than any other of the PNECB descendent societies, surely did not happen for the sheer sake of naming. Given the historical and geographical circumstances in which Ruvu peoples sat, couched between the Indian Ocean world and the deeper interior, where traffic

flowed both to and from the central Tanzanian coast, they were dealing with unique social environments. Though complete answers to this aspect of their social history needs further research, there are many more aspects of this history we can turn to by looking at the life position to which the **kigoli* transitioned.

33 Much more ancient than we know **kihinza* or **kigoli* to be is the life position connected to young women's designation as **mwali.* Across a wide range of Bantu societies this word is related in meaning, though with expected nuances, to its earliest proto-Bantu root, **-yàdí.*[34] Its most inclusive early meaning would appear to be "woman of child-bearing potential." This word related directly to female fertility. In recent Ruvu societies the **mwali* designation remained in use. It named the female religio-rituals associated with menarche as well as the label applied to the girl once these ceremonies were completed. In this institution, then, we are dealing with the retention of a long-recognized Bantu life position. Like its equally persistent counterpart among many East-Central-African Bantu-speaking societies, the **mwali* period was framed by formal ceremonial observances, the most prominent feature of which included a period of quiet seclusion that ended with elaborate emergence celebrations. It was likely the most momentous occasion centered on living people. We will see that its religious aspects placed primary emphasis on securing fertility through demonstration to lineal ancestors that the young woman was worthy and ready to add to her matrilineage. Convincing the ancestors of this involved extended training for girls in community beliefs, self-control, and supplication.[35]

34 It is important at the onset to note that some researchers have placed disproportionate emphasis on sexual aspects of female initiation rites.[36] While it would be inaccurate to suggest that female sexual expression was unimportant to the overall objectives of the **mwali* initiation rites, the overall linguistic evidence attached to the religio-ritual events—and the ethnography read in light of these—suggests strongly that a woman's fertility held the place of primary importance when the totality of the events are considered. Such an emphasis, or reasoning, for the **mwali* life position would make far more obvious sociocultural sense in matrilineal and matrifocal societies than imagining that marriage and male sexual pleasure were most important. This is particularly clear when one considers that in these societies marriages appear to have been easily dissolved and that a woman's value as a member of her matrilineal clan was not determined by her marital status or by her partner's sexual satisfaction, but rather by her strengthening the clan by bearing offspring that belonged to *her* matrilineal line.[37]

Mwali Instruction and Ceremonies

> The event of a girl becoming a *mwali* is a very important day. Everybody takes part in the common joy, especially the women who shout, sing and dance up and down the village saying "*chereko, chereko*." The *mkunga* (the girl's instructor) sings *"mwali wangu, mwali wangu"* (my mwali). The mother of the girl sings *"Hungo langu, hungo langu"* (the child I gave birth to).[38]

Ethnographic and linguistic evidence across the Ruvu languages is exceptionally helpful for gleaning particular features of **mwali* religio-ritual ceremonies. Through them we can point to some of the nuanced details that may have characterized the ceremonies in early times. Simultaneously, we can use ethnographic details to give texture to those items that are linguistically verifiable elements. **35**

A **mwali*'s initiation began with menstruation; her **mwali* life position began when initiation observances came to a close. What is not so certain is when the life position terminated. According to my informants and to ethnographic data, a woman might be called **mwali* until she was beyond childbearing years, while others have commented that one was a **mwali* until she gave birth to her first child.[39] One thing was common, however—senior females were not **mwali*. This was made clear during the course of fieldwork when informants were asked if nearby women, who physically appeared to be well past childbearing age, were considered **mwali*. Many of them laughed at the naiveté of the question indicating that such women had moved past such designations. If we remember that the variability in duration was most likely linked to biological maturation and the moment when women either had a first child or ceased to have children, then the vagueness of when the position ended has probably always varied from woman to woman. **36**

Because announcements, such as the example above, were likely made when a girl began menstruating, it probably was not long before many people knew.[40] That is because after the **kigoli*/soon-to-be **mwali* informed people close to her of her transition, they would have conveyed the news to her wider community. Those people, who likely comprised members of her matrilineage of her grandmother's generation, then took the news to others.[41] After coming together they may have moved through their home areas ululating or singing in a manner that the community understood to mean a young woman had, according to the Zaramo, "broken the limb"/"broken the winnowing basket," or "cut the leaf," as it was called among Gogo speakers.[42] Their broadcasts spread the news to her lineage, clan, and beyond.[43] The cause for elation was that she exhibited the most important biological indication of *potential* fertility. Those announcements, too, likely served to let prospective suitors or her **37**

soon-to-be husband know that her initiation period had begun. In all Ruvu groups it looks to have been common for some **mwali* to emerge from seclusion prepared to move directly into partnership as a wife or co-wife.[44]

Upon the onset of a girl's menstruation, women in her matrilineage may have presented her with a special cloth, proto-Ruvu **lupati*, which she was instructed to use in catching the blood from her first menstrual cycle.[45] Later, the cloth served important purposes in religio-ritual observances. Until those observances were held, the cloth was placed under the **mwali*'s grandmother's bed or in another protected place.[46] At or near the conclusion of her seclusion period, the cloths and other items were taken to a sacred site and buried.[47] In some cases it was said that the precise location was kept secret so that people could not tamper with the goods for evil purposes such as witchcraft. In other situations, the initiate herself was taken along to the site because some of her instruction occurred there.[48] **38**

A **mwali* remained in special quarters located near her family home. For the duration of her stay, careful attention was paid to fattening and strengthening her body. While in seclusion she was clothed from the waist down, so that her upper body was exposed. And she had to be mindful of keeping her exposure to the sun limited so that her skin would become pale.[49] Furthermore, she was shown how to keep her skin softened with oils and clay-based emollients. One of the identified substances Ruvu elders remembered using were white clay-like substances made of pulverized grains and water, which were regularly smoothed onto the skin.[50] Some informants referred to this process as **kuboboda*, which represents a word likely transferred into proto-Ruvu during a period of contact with Eastern Sahelian speakers in the middle of the first millennium CE.[51] **39**

The application of white clay has been an important facet of Bantu ceremonial expression since early times.[52] Such treatments were intended in part to beautify but religio-ritual medical uses were also an aspect of the treatment.[53] Turning to the ethnography, we get recent descriptions and rationales for these treatments. According to Beidelman: **40**

> During these [seclusion] days the initiate must not bathe but instead is frequently dusted with chaff from the grain she is processing. This is sometimes mixed with water to produce a white paint-like paste. The whiteness is thought to cool or regularize the girl, who is otherwise heated by her sexuality. The initiate is encouraged to eat as much as she can, especially meat and broth, which are thought to strengthen.[54]

Here anthropologist T. O. Beidelman illuminates a potential medical reason for using a white paste on her skin. It cooled the body. It was a remedy for, in his accounting, a "hyperactive libido." My own research did not dispute that such substances were used to cool the body, however, I was not told it was related to regulating a girl's sexuality. Instead, cooling was **41**

described as a preventative measure that brought her body to a state of neutrality in core temperature, which some people intimated kept spirits at bay, and which consequently maintained her health.[55]

While secluded, the **mwali* was required to follow additional customs. To insure she slept **42**
while positioned in the requisite fetal position, her instructors provided an exceptionally small bed, which early East Ruvu people called **-tego*.[56] This word's history is tied to a root whose various structures and meanings have been commonly associated with medicinal items linked to fertility throughout Ruvu languages.[57] It was believed that her bed or the way she had to position herself in it contributed to her fertility. Perhaps in some metaphorical sense we can say it was a "fertility catcher or trap." The distribution across Ruvu societies of such a bed suggests it was a proto-Ruvu period aspect of initiation, although we cannot reconstruct a proto-Ruvu word specific to it.

The initiate's family took care of the instructional aspects of her initiation. Her primary **43**
mentor was known as a **-kungwi*.[58] This term preserves a proto-Mashariki noun meaning "an initiation leader." Its earlier historical origins trace back at least to the proto-Savanna-Bantu period, when the verb from which it derives had the meaning "to initiate" in general. Here, proto-Ruvu retention of the root and its presence in Bondei and Zigua languages of the Seuta subgroup of NECB as well as in Swahili of the Sabaki subgroup confirms the retention of this noun and the social role it denotes from the PNECB period and the continuation of that role right down to recent centuries.[59] Moreover, the *namkungwi* role also exists among Nyanja-Chewa speakers in Malawi, which suggests it is a role enduring matrilineal societies of Mashariki origins have preserved until recent times.

Mwali* initiates among the proto-Ruvu also had an assistant, the **mnandi*, whose role was to **44
help in her care.[60] In early Ruvu times, this person probably was a member of the initiate's matrilineage, although in later times, there seem to have been some adaptations to the role. A description of Zalamo **-kungwi* and **mnandi* assistants states:

> Two guardians were chosen for the girl, the kungwi and the nandi. If the girl was engaged, nandi was always the sister of the bridegroom; kungwi could be the grandmother on the mother's side. If the girl was not engaged, the kungwi could be chosen from the mother's side and the nandi from the father's family or vice versa. It was important that the kungwi was capable of instructing the girl, but other women could also be called in to do the instructing.[61]

The roles played by the various women in the excerpt are seen as quite flexible, but there does **45**
seem to have been some regard for pulling a woman from the line of the patrilineage of her father or, if she had one, her husband. This participation by both lineal lines is not

inconsistent with the Ruvu recognition of bilateral descent; however, the evidence also suggests that the girl's matrilineage was most prominent in the roles associated with the spiritual aspects of her fertility.

46 The instructions **mwali* received covered the aspects of life expected to follow seclusion: marriage, sexual relations, and pregnancy. Of these, the question of her fertility predominated as a concern throughout the collected ethnography. Related to this concern, religious beliefs and observances were important because ancestral sanction was believed central to fertility and pregnancy.

47 In proto-Ruvu communities some **mwali* instructions were likely imparted at the base of an **mkole* tree, a shrub tree with small red buds that secrete a white sap when pierced. The sap turns red upon drying. The sap's change, some claim, was evocative of an imagery connected with menstruation, and is thus widely associated with fertility and matriliny.[62] Because of its connection to fertility, it is widely associated with rites conducted in connection with pregnancy and birthing.[63] In some cases a **mwali*'s instructor would tell her, "it is the tree from which you have gotten your growth." After that she might be instructed to hug the tree so that its power of fertility would be imparted to her.[64] Among Kwere and Zaramo speakers, **mkole* customs commonly involved concerns represented by beads of different colors that connoted medical and religious meanings. According to Rashid, among Kwere speakers, "the white bead symbolized her mother's breast; black, pubic hair; red, menstrual blood." The **mwali* placed these under her tongue while at the **mkole.*[65]

48 **Mkole* ceremonial songs suggest a sense of teachings once linked with the tree. Here are excerpts of songs Zalamo elders sang:

> You, mwali, you have taken hold of mkole, it is being full grown. You have held mkole, you are now big.
>
> Some do not start menstruating their breasts grow. They die if they do not menstruate. They cannot come to the ngoma of their friend unless this has been done to them.
>
> Mwali does not wash, she doesn't cut nails or plait her hair. This is for the coming out preparation. The dirt is hidden in a secret place. It is not buried, for then your child would die.[66]

Embedded in its words are many underlying beliefs centered on a girl's potential fertility that inspired the activities involved in initiation processes.

49 In another example, East Ruvu speakers believed they were required to demonstrate their readiness for motherhood through careful care of "*mwana nya nhiti*" (carved of wood and occasionally clay) or "*mwana sesele"* (made of a gourd) figurines.[67] Though commonly referenced as "dolls" in the historiography, they were more than a child's plaything. Both were linked to notions of fertility through connection to spiritual forces considered central to a girl's ability to become pregnant.[68] Not surprisingly, much of the published discussion surrounding these figurines, as seen above, has commonly stressed what outsiders understood to be symbolic, functional dimensions of the practice. Simply stated, it was often assumed that her actions with the doll amounted to a young girl practicing to be a mother or wife. But such conclusions largely assess the event without emphasizing the religious understandings undergirding such practices.

50 For example, among Zaramo speakers:

> The doll may have a string of white beads or a chain around its neck. The chain represents a snake, which plays a significant role in traditional Zaramo symbolism. The white beads, which today replace the snake vertebrae that were used before commercially made beads were easy to obtain, are symbolic of children and generations.[69]

The young woman cared for the *mwana nya nhiti* or *mwana sesele* as if each were a small child. She washed, fed, oiled, and carried it. And when she slept, the figurine was placed on her bed. The figurines were kept by her father's matrilineage, and when not used they were carefully stored.[70] Their association with the father's matrilineal line was explained as a spiritual necessity in assuring her fertility because Zalamo believed that important spiritual properties come from his line while the "organic continuity of the clan" descended from the mother's.[71]

51 A look at the etymology of the names used for the figurines shows that there was much more than apprenticeship happening in the girl's initiation. In the first place, the *mwana nya nhiti* ("child of wood") incorporates an aspect of ancient Bantu ideas of wood as having medicinal properties, which in Bantu contexts did not preclude the power or "medicine" of ancestors. And the fact that they were sometimes clay, but still given the "child of wood" designation also supports that what was being identified in the name was their medicinal properties.[72]

52 The second "doll" presents a different view. The *mwana sesele* is commonly translated as the "child of "gourd/calabash."[73] This common translation, like the former, is also problematic because it fails to capture all senses of its meaning, which then obscures its religious and medicinal purpose. On one hand it is true that these figures are constructed of a gourd, but the root meaning of the word *sesele* is not the common noun for gourds. Instead the meaning would be better represented by a translation such as "child of menstruation," and here is why.

The root at play here appears to be a proto-Mashariki verb meaning "to pour, to menstruate," *-*sesel*-.[74] The use of a gourd, like wood, is often tied to medicine. For example, gourds commonly hold medicines prescribed by religio-medical specialists. And they also are the instruments used in divining etiology of illness. All of these contexts highlight their relationships to curative or healing properties, which in turn often get their efficacy, at least in part, from the ethereal realm.

Though it is difficult to know with precise detail, **mwali* figurines show strong links to ancestors and lineages in East Ruvu languages. And as Swantz has noted, they may well represent portable altars or "spirit dolls."[75] Might all the care and attention they were given be a form of religio-ritual veneration to ancestor spirits who in exchange for supplication granted the initiate's fertility? The Zaramo evidence explicitly supports this conclusion. Whenever a **mwali* among the Zaramo failed to conceive a child, she was advised to redo the "offering" by wearing and watching over the figurine to the satisfaction of her ancestors, who had concluded that "she had not given them sufficient care" the first time around.[76]

53

Do Ruvu Peoples Circumcise Their Girls?

"There is always the question of circumcision."[77] This was the reaction one of the women with whom I worked gave when I broached the topic. Circumcision, particularly that of women, has long held the curious imaginations of spectators from outside Africa. Indeed, for many women and societies, African and others, this is an important issue with questions of health and abuse often at the forefront of research and policy. In early Ruvu societies, and in all likelihood in the wider NECB-speaking communities, no linguistic evidence has been recovered to suggest that female circumcision was practiced at the time of initial settlement in Tanzania. Such findings accord with previous research confirming that girls in early Mashariki societies took part in initiation rites, but "it seems clear that female 'circumcision' was not among them."[78]

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However, there was a later point in Ruvu history, probably after the ending of the first millennium CE, when communities of Kaguru, Vidunda, and Gogo speakers took up various forms of female circumcision, perhaps because of relationships with non-Ruvu societies who circumcised their daughters.[79] Gogo and Kaguru speakers tend to intimate that such procedures were tangential to broader initiation practices or altogether separate from them. Such perspectives may result from wariness about emphasizing its importance in their communities, particularly since informants are commonly aware of modern-day negative judgments of female circumcision. On the other hand, these responses may be indicative of those communities having placed less importance on the custom when it came to a girls' overall maturation. In the case of Gogo girls, circumcision was described as separate from

55

**mwali* ceremonies. It took place before the more prominent **mwali* initiation.[80] According to anthropologist Peter Rigby, female circumcisers and their assistants would take girls out to bush areas where they chose a sandy area, such as a dried riverbed, or other place where the fallen blood from the clitoridectomy could be easily covered.[81] Following the surgery, a girl returned to her home where she went immediately to her mother's *kugati* room to avoid being seen by men until she was fully healed.[82] The fully-recovered initiate was then called *munyacipale* or *munyacinga*.

Kagulu speakers offered a different picture. Foremost, they maintained that clitoridectomy **56**
was not an aspect of the cutting procedure, however, some of them explained that such practices were components of Parakuyu Maasai female initiation.[84] According to them, if any cutting was done it took place at the time of the **mwali*'s seclusion period and not as a separate event, as may have been done among Gogo communities. They preferred to do the surgery in the cool part of the day, either at dusk or dawn. All that was needed was a bush-laden area near the girl's initiation quarters. An old woman whom they called *muhunga* carried out the procedure.[85] The girl was then taken to rest, and as early as the next morning, provided she was healed enough, she was dressed in new clothing and strings of beads, gifts from her maternal and paternal kinswomen. Then later in the day, to the sound of much ululation and drumming, she was brought out of seclusion. She was then called **mwali*.[86]

Similar to Kaguru, the Vidunda practiced something short of clitoral removal. It was described **57**
as an incision of the labia *minora*. They maintained that the original occupants of the Vidunda Hills region had not done this, but that it was something introduced in later times. Contrasting with both Kaguru and Gogo speakers, they maintained that the procedure was performed at the onset of menses, and that following it girls began a period of seclusion that lasted one to two weeks. During that seclusion the girl was expected, among other things, to speak in a whisper, to rub red ochre on her skin, and to remain unclothed above the waist. At the end of seclusion she was reintroduced to her community through an **mlao* ceremony.[87]

These varied timings and procedures of genital cutting are suggestive of cultural practices **58**
adopted after separate periods of cultural exchanges. As we have shown, during the second millennium CE, Gogo-, Vidunda-, and Kaguru-speaking communities had ongoing exchanges with culturally distinct people from whom they could have adopted such practices. The descriptions of the procedures themselves offer a clear opportunity to see how this new cultural element was incorporated into the frameworks of communities who had long maintained methods of initiating their daughters by methods other than circumcision. In keeping with the conclusion that genital cutting of girls was a historically recent introduction,

there is no indication that circumcision procedures had any relation to the primary social concern of initiation, fertility. It seems that an initiate's fertility still rested on the far older religio-ritual practices associated with the spirit forces of her lineage.

The Mwali Is Danced

59 The duration of female seclusion in early Ruvu societies is not fully knowable. Recollections offered by the eldest women in various Ruvu villages claimed that long ago it lasted up to two to three years. They also volunteered that it was not a time they particularly enjoyed, though they had learned many necessary things. They usually followed up that point by explaining that girls who are of **mwali* age would much rather do other things than remain in seclusion. In contemporary situations there is much more flexibility with the length of seclusion. It is likely to be no more than a six-month period, but on average it is only a few weeks long, as in the Vidunda case above.[88] In recent times, many people have made accommodations for girls who attended school. One **mwali* initiate I got to know attended school in the daytime and returned to her seclusion quarters afterward.

60 Whatever the duration of her stay, a **mwali*'s coming out, in early times, called for celebration. Preparing for a **mwali*'s emergence, **mlao,* was on the whole the largest and most significant commemoration in a young woman's life. If a girl had been engaged before she menstruated, the celebration could signify the start of her marriage. At other times, a girl's emergence indicated that she was available to suitors.[89] **Mlao* ceremonies were held in honor of both female and male initiates in Northeast-Coastal Bantu descendant communities since the PNECB period. The noun **mlao* itself is not a Bantu-derived word. Instead, it appears to have been transferred into PNECB from Cushitic speakers.[90]

61 At the same time, there have been other terms applied to this ceremony in recent periods. For instance, Kami and Kwere speakers have called it **lusona*. This word, like **mlao*, derives from an exchange with Southern Cushitic speakers, though this exchange likely dates to the proto-Wami period of a couple of centuries later than the PNECB era. It appears to have applied originally as a general term for ceremonies of all sorts, and the way it attests across the Ruvu languages upholds such meanings through more recent times.[91] For instance, in Kaguru **lusona* applied to ceremonies that included marriage and circumcision. In Kami its application included marriage observances as well as one aspect of a ceremonial offering, while in Zigua it named just the marriage ceremony.

62 The days that led up to the **mlao* included the girl's final instruction, bodily preparation, and communication with her ancestors. Zalamo speakers held a symbolic "grain pounding" ceremony in which grains of three colors were used: maize, millet, and rice—red, black, white

—which symbolized blood, hair, and semen. The mortar represented a woman and the pestle a man.[92] Afterward the girl was kept awake all night. While she held red, black, and white beads under her tongue, she was given further instructions. The bead colors carried the same meanings as those in the grain ceremony. In the final preparation the **mwali* was bathed and her body was adorned with appropriate garments and jewelry. People in the surrounding communities were invited to her **mlao,* the announcement of which was carried out in a manner similar to the way her initial menstruation had been announced. Her family members would move through the area singing that the **mwali* was going to be presented. At the ceremony her family provided food and beer. We are told that in more recent times guests were also expected to contribute food and drink, and that may have been true among early Ruvu peoples as well, particularly if the girl was emerging as a newly married or betrothed woman.[93]

Upon exiting she "was danced."[94] This action is described passively because the **mwali* was carried around on the shoulders of lineage members, so that all could witness the desired difference initiation had made on her body. She was a **mwali.* 63

From Boys to Men in Ruvu Societies

64 In early Northeast-Coastal Bantu communities, male physical maturation and all that it encompassed was, like girls' initiation, of central social importance. As is the case with girls, the attention given to boys' matters is still evident among proto-Ruvu descendant societies. This point is particularly highlighted by the terms used to signify certain life positions: some are more recent while others date back to the proto-Bantu period of history or possibly earlier. In the language evidence, we can see the transformations in history that were for various reasons either innovated by Bantu-speaking descendants or transferred to them from influential neighboring or intermingling, distinct language speakers. In the overall course of history, Bantu-speaking societies in many regions were, for a long time, insistent that as male bodies matured, they required guidance. It was an important, historically deep-seated principle.

65 Among the most ancient and salient sociocultural features found among Ruvu communities was the recognition of transitional phases through which boys moved into early adulthood. To understand the precedent for such things it is useful to understand the deeper history in which it was rooted. An early Mashariki-period institution of the last millennium BCE marked a boy's passage from boyhood to manhood. This ceremonial moment was identified by the initiation of groups of boys into a shared age-set, **-kula*. According to Ehret, the distribution of this term shows that the institution goes back to a proto-Bantu period word, **-kúdà,*

meaning "age set or age group," which in turn derived from a proto-Bantu or even earlier verb meaning "to grow, grow up."[95] This means *-*kula* ceremonies and cohorts represented early practices in very early Bantu communities.

66 In the Mashariki period, age-group formation was marked by ceremonies that centered on the removal of emergent young men from their homesteads for a shared period of isolation from their communities. This contrasts with the girl's observances, which were taken individually. The boys were taken away to temporary camps where they remained in seclusion for up to three months. During that time they were circumcised and their bodies were treated most notably with white clays. All the while, male elders who had been through initiation in their youth taught them what this transitional period meant for their lives. Near the end of the seclusion they may have been ceremonially bathed and their temporary camps torched.[96] The group of boys taken together through initiation may have emerged as a lifelong social cohort. That, at least, is the case in such widely separated societies of recent times as the Gusii of western Kenya and the Nguni of South Africa.[97]

67 The persistence of *-*kula* initiation among Northeast-Coastal Bantu speakers as well as other Kaskazi language subgroups thus represents a continuity in sociocultural practice. Through the first half of the first millennium it is likely that the procedures involved were carried on as they had been in early Mashariki societies, but for reasons unknown the two-part practice of seclusion and circumcision fell out of practice among a continuous area of Mashariki communities within the regions of southern Tanzania, southward to Zimbabwe and parts of eastern Zambia, as well as areas of the western Nyanza Basin and western Rift Valley.

68 However, in central-east Tanzania, descendants of proto-Northeast-Coastal Bantu speakers continued to hold on to some related aspects associated with the boys' initiation. As late as 1999, when I conducted fieldwork in Tanzania, male elders in various villages remembered *-*kula* initiations from their childhoods. *-*Kula* rites were uniformly described as the *oldest* type of initiation boys underwent. According to them, however, in those times boys were not circumcised. Instead, a later tradition, *-*kumbi*, which they described as a more recent practice, marked the time of circumcision.[98] In fact, their recollections are in all probability what happened over the long term of Ruvu history. What likely transpired was a division of the ancient *-*kula* rites into two ceremonies *after* contact with an external group that shared its own ideas about male circumcision. This is just what happened along the central-east Tanzanian coast when Muslim traders increasingly became part of the social composition of society. The challenge is to discern just when such a split occurred.

69 Twentieth-century ethnographers have suggested that *-*kumbi* and *jando* circumcision rites came about in the nineteenth century, when Arab Omani merchants were increasingly present on the coast. But what they are noting in the central-east-Tanzanian context likely represents

a conflation of two historical developments. Based on the etymologies and distribution of the names for the rites alone it seems that in a much earlier point in their history the word *-*kumbi* named the initiation period in which boys were circumcised. In that era, young boys may have gone through an initial *-*kula* ceremony wherein they were taught about aspects of their clan culture. In the second more elaborate *-*kumbi* ceremonies, however, boys emerged as socialized young men after being circumcised. Then at a later period the *jando* term, which is a borrowing from Swahili, entered into Ruvu lexis.[99] Because Ruvu peoples already practiced *-*kumbi* circumcision, it would not have been a stretch to rename it or to have synonyms in use in their communities. Where *jando* was needed for sociocultural collateral or prestige purposes it could be invoked. In all other instances, circumcision ceremonies could be called by what informants stipulated was its original name, *-*kumbi*.

70 The gap in their recollections, however, was that they did not recall that the*-*kula* rites ever included circumcision. But that reality makes perfect historical sense when we pair it up with the linguistic divergence that transpired among Northeast-Coastal language communities. By the midpoint of the first millennium CE it is possible that circumcision and age sets had become minimally if at all important in early Northeast-Coastal communities. But whether or not that is true, by the time the proto-Ruvu communities emerged in the central-east Tanzania, they and their proto-Wami ancestors already applied the word *-*kumbi* to their initiation camps, presumably where *-*kula* rites, whatever they entailed, were held.

71 Either in that period or shortly thereafter, a schism occurred in which the *-*kula* rite became a first ceremony and the camp developed to name the rite, *-*kumbi*, in which circumcision was the principal event.[100] The timing of this transition does elude reconstruction here, but when we consider that contact with non-African "circumcising" communities via the Indian Ocean coast has a much earlier presence than the nineteenth century, then the possibility of the continuous practice of male circumcision may have waxed then waned as a result of increasing influence and intermingling with those communities. For this to happen would not have required Northeast-Coastal Bantu descendants to invent or reinvent circumcision. At most they would have reinstated it.

72 The language evidence connected with the accoutrements of circumcision adds some weight to these various points. They provide the evidence for there having never been a complete erasure of circumcision from the proto-Northeast-Coastal-period communities into the period of the nineteenth century among Ruvu language descendants in central-east Tanzania. The word for the camp itself is a longstanding and widely distributed Bantu word for a type of temporary shelter. Based on its attestations, the innovation of this shelter as one in which circumcision was done may have transpired as early as the proto-NECB period, but at least by the proto-Wami era at the midpoint of the first millennium CE.[101] An additional word for a temporary circumcision shelter, **ilago*, may represent a more widespread Bantu noun that

was variously used to describe a temporary shelter or reed mat. In Ruvu languages **ilago* did not replace the **-kumbi*; it was a material feature of it. It was the place of the surgical procedure. Among the Zaramo it was an initiate's circumcision mat, and in Kaguru- and Luguru-speaking communities it attested as a temporary shelter for circumcision. At the same time it was prevalent among Kwere speakers as a temporary birthing shelter. Its various applications among these communities are likely local innovations in use.[102]

73 Evidence for circumcision as a practice in proto-Northeast-Coastal societies is substantiated by the widespread verb **-gotola*.[103] It attests in central-east Tanzania meaning "to circumcise." While it represents the oldest term, other words are now used to signify circumcision. For instance, the Kutu and Zalamo of East Ruvu use **kuingiza*. Literally meaning, "to cause to enter," this verb preserves, it would appear, the implication of the earlier proto-Mashariki verb **-alik-* for undergoing the sequence of observances surrounding circumcision. This proto-Mashariki term, which remained in use in the PNECB and proto-Ruvu eras, derives from proto-Bantu **-yad-* "to enter" and can be argued to convey, as does the East Ruvu **kuingiza*, the idea that an initiate "enters" into the seclusion of the circumcision camp to undergo its ceremonies. Though a new term, it does not show cultural change, but rather a continuity of a far older social conceptualization.

74 The oldest word for the surgical specialist, the circumciser, in Northeast-Coastal history traces to the proto-Wami period of the early first millennium CE. It is **ibakwa*.[104] Though widely replaced among NECB descendants with *ngaliba*, **ibakwa* derives from a Savanna-Bantu-period verb meaning "to remove from a container or to castrate." Today, it is found in Kaguru and Seuta's Ngulu, and Zigua, all Wami descendants. *Ngaliba*'s presence in the Ruvu languages rings of an obvious borrowing because of its shape. The triconsonantal shape of this root and its irregular outcome /b/ in place of expected Ruvu loss of **b* entirely in that context certifies to its being a loanword in Swahili and across a large region of the interior, although it remains to future research to determine its source.[105]

75 With linguistic data supporting male initiation rites as a continuously preserved historical feature of Northeast-Coastal Bantu and Ruvu communities, the ethnographic record offers complementary evidence for the sort of undertakings initiation comprised in recent times.[106] Colonial government documents note that Vidunda male initiation often coincided with harvest months. During those months, a boy would be taken to the "bush" where all hair was plucked from his genitals and armpits. After those procedures he was given a loincloth and a string of beads, and from that point he was called "*mwali*." The emergent young man then took his first meal at his instructor's home and later proceeded to his father's home, accompanied by a group of singing and dancing people. He then slept at his father's place. The following morning he was brought to a river where he was "purified" and rubbed with oils. Then he was told about the details involved in consummating a marriage. Like young Ruvu

women, at the end of the ceremonies the young man was presented in an *mlao* ceremony. From that point forward, boys were marriageable.[107] Similarly, in Kaguru-speaking areas circumcision also coincided with the harvesting season, which they maintained made sense for both practical and medicinal reasons. In their communities, the person leading the ceremonies was usually someone prominent, though for each boy, it was commonly his father or his mother's brothers who initiated his inclusion in the initiation.[108] Similar to the Vidunda example, Swantz found that Zalamo and Lugulu speakers stated that they were shaved as part of their instruction.[109] Indeed, this was a recollection shared with me across Ruvu communities.

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As uniform as the ethnographic record appears, a caveat must be made. Outside of Wami-derived languages the **mwali* designation is not known to apply to male initiates in any Bantu-language subgroup. This finding suggests that in the middle of the first millennium CE, the proto-Ruvu, and perhaps the proto-Wami before them, extended the **mwali* term by analogy to male initiates. The analogy was only partial: for boys the term applied to them while they were involved in initiation ceremonies and not after the **mlao* ceremonies. No doubt social issues of some kind drove this addition of a new meaning to the **mwali* term, but what the particular issues may have been are unknown. As was suggested earlier, people commonly choose new words for old customs because words have power and may imbue a sense of prestige on the thing or idea being named. The analogizing of the male to the female initiatory state at that point in history suggests that female initiation in the thinking of the proto-Ruvu embodied the greater religio-ritual power.

Married to the Matrilineage

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Marriage in NECB societies, in contrast to initiation, has a history characterized by widespread variation in naming. Still, even with a somewhat motley mix of names, its customs included somewhat uniform expressions. Both **-kuel-* "to marry" and **-tol-* "to take, carry, receive, marry," verbs of very early Bantu origins, continued to name marriage unions in proto-Ruvu societies.[110] Some time in the early second millennium, speakers of descendant East-Ruvu languages innovated the meaning "to marry" from a different proto-Savanna-Bantu verb, **-sola*, that had previously meant "to choose."[111] Its presence among the Zigua, of the Seuta branch of Wami, who lived in areas adjacent to East-Ruvu speakers, likely resulted from a borrowing of the term into Zigua, probably in a long-term historical context of inter-marriage across the language divide. Meanwhile, West-Ruvu and Kagulu speakers continued to prefer **-tola*. It is possible that the distinct designations may have arisen through the development of finely nuanced differences in ways the proto-East Ruvu and their sister Kagulu and proto-West Ruvu societies viewed the institution. For example, the proto-Ruvu inherited verbs may likely have connoted the time in which the ceremonial union occurred, in

the case of *-*kuel*-, while *-*tol*- may have referred to the moment when women and men physically moved to join a family unit. In the East-Ruvu instance, the verb gives the impression that emphasis was given on selection, although we cannot discern which party, the woman or man, was undertaking such decision-making. But it does highlight an area, that is, the deeper history of marriage in Ruvu and Bantu societies more generally, that awaits further research.

78 Leaving aside the differences in naming, the customs and traditions in marriage were widely shared among the descendant societies of the proto-Ruvu and so suggest that these practices usually can be projected back to the proto-Ruvu era. When a man in early Ruvu societies was ready to form a partnership with a woman and, effectively, with her matrilineage, he invoked the help of his family and maybe of some outsiders.[112] His primary challenge likely involved persuading a woman's matrilineage, and probably most centrally her maternal grandmother, that he was worthy of their daughter. Such attempts likely depended on the giving of various payments to her family and ancestors as well as physical labor done by him for her lineage.[113] Critical among a young man's helpers were individuals called **msenga*, who might have been the young man's father or a close friend. He was sent to inquire (most probably with gifts in hand) about the availability of a woman for marriage. **Msenga* derives of a proto-Forest–Savanna-Bantu verb meaning "to ask for."[114] Later, in the Savanna-Bantu period, it took on a specialized meaning of one who sought favors from someone of greater social power by doing work of service for that person. Schoenbrun shows, for example, that in West Nyanza languages of the Great Lakes subgroup of Mashariki Bantu the "seeker" was a person who, upon requesting and obtaining rights to land, entered "into the social relations that land tenure mandated."[115] Furthermore, the relationship was one in which the person who was asking was of lesser status and would ultimately benefit from the union because of that access to land she or he would then have.

79 This description may be on the mark in generally describing the function of the **msenga* in the proto-Ruvu marriage context. He acted as the messenger who brought the request for marriage to the elders of the young woman's matrilineage, often her grandmother and maternal uncle. After all, in Ruvu matrilineal societies, a woman's clan and lineage members controlled access to land. This meant that a man who wanted access to land or women had to align himself with people who held rights to them. The most common way of doing this entailed the creation of alliances between two families whose children were interested in negotiating the terms of marriage. The reality that the matrilineal Ruvu male would have needed to "ask" fits well within the scope of meaning of the underlying verb.

80 Based on the comparative ethnographic and linguistic evidence, the entire proposal was composed of several stages of gift-giving to the girl's lineage members, who either accepted or refused the gifts. In the Vidunda case, the **msenga* was often a male relative of the potential

groom whose job it was to present what is best described as pieces of the proposal. In a 1960s publication, Brain noted that girls were married by the time they were fifteen, while for boys marriage was usual between the ages of seventeen and nineteen. Marriage was handled in stages. First, a young man approached a girl's maternal grandmother, who, in turn, asked if her granddaughter was agreeable to such a possibility. If she was willing to marry the suitor, her grandmother was presented with *viampa*, which customarily comprised beads but which by the 1960s could include giving cash to pass along to the granddaughter.[116]

81 The next step among the Vidunda as well as several other Ruvu peoples began with getting the permission of the girl's maternal uncle. If he approved, the boy then presented the *kwalo* gift to her parents. When it was accepted, the pair was considered betrothed. When she later exited seclusion, the young man gave her maternal uncle *mbera ubaka*, usually a string of white beads. Then she was considered his wife. Until they had three or four children they lived uxorilocally (with her family), so that her husband could work for her matrilineage. If he had the means after two years he might approach her uncle about holding a *kupula lutambikilo*, a ceremony in which a hen was sacrificed and after which the young man would be granted permission to move his wife to a homestead of their own.[117]

82 In many cases today this is seen as a mere custom, in that I was informed that once a family has decided to consider the proposal it was highly unlikely that the marriage would not take place. However, the entire set of undertakings necessary to carry out the process lends further insight into the way that marriage may have been negotiated in early Ruvu societies. A key component of the process was the period of **ujengele*, a proto-Ruvu term that derives from the verb "to build." This was the period during which the woman bore one or more children and the man labored for her mother's matrilineage at her home. Only after proving himself a producer of children for her lineage and as a good worker would her family could decide if he was fit to take their daughter away to begin his own homestead.[118]

"Married Women . . . Women Should Have Children"[119]

83 In the best of circumstances a woman gave birth to healthy children. She expanded her matrilineage. But as we saw in the discussion of **mwali* ceremonies, proto-Ruvu speakers did not assume one's physical ability to bear children. In their understanding, if all the proper steps were taken for securing the young woman's fertility, there should not be problems conceiving. So, if married daughters failed to conceive, people took note and they looked for causes and solutions.

84 It seems fairly certain that the early Ruvu people's first hypothesis about infertility was that religio-rituals had gone awry during initiation. In the case of a woman, her family might have had her repeat aspects of her **mwali* ceremonies, particularly those that sought the power associated with spiritual forces. Sometimes, she had to repeat them more than once. If the problem persisted, then they may have solicited the help of a community religio-ritual-medical specialist. One category of remedies prescribed was called, in general terms, **-tego*, meaning "fertility charm." As we saw with the case of the special initiation bed, the name of which was of the same root, people in many Kaskazi language groups, particularly languages spoken elsewhere in Tanzania, also used fertility instruments of the same name. The root of this word was first noted in a gender-specific context in the reconstructed languages of proto-Western-Lakes societies where **-téga* designated "raffia jewelry, female wealth."[120] Based on its attestations outside of the Western-Lakes societies there may be at play an underlying Kaskazi root, **-teg-*, linked to medicinal instruments believed to aid in acquiring wealth and ability. The Ruvu application of the word, as well as those of other Kaskazi peoples, may support the idea that these instruments were used in efforts to aid a woman's "ability" to add members to her lineage. In matrilineal societies, such as the Ruvu, new lineage members may well have been viewed as a source of wealth produced by women.

85 Furthermore, the evidence indicates that men were examined for potential fertility problems. Referring to Lugulu boys' initiation, Brain's informant commented, "if you don't bear a child a Luguru has no joy. If a Luguru doesn't bear a child his father takes him to a [doctor-diviner]."[121] Similarly, the Kutu of the East-Ruvu subgroup, in an effort to decide on a prospective husband's reproductive abilities, encouraged the potential wife to have sexual relations with him in order to be sure that he was not impotent, *kangwa*.[122]

86 In a particularly telling example, Rigby captured the importance of male virility in Gogo marriage "tests." To be sure that Gogo daughters are married to virile men, the couple went through the *kuhovuga* ceremony. As Rigby recounts it:

> The youth is taken in the inner room (*kugati*) of the girl's mother and sat on a stool next to the girl. The girl's female kin (including affines) are present. She takes off her cloth and sits naked. The man does the same and they are sprinkled with water by one of the elder women (*mudala*). The man should have an erection (referred to as the "the homestead has arisen," *kaya yema*). If he does, the elder women begin to ululate and say, "Our child is married by a man."[123]

Rigby notes, that in his view it is odd that in a patrilineal society people should be so concerned with male virility. But it is not peculiar when one understands that Gogo traditions are anchored historically in earlier matrilineal roots. Rigby does not take account of this

historical background and would not necessarily have been aware of it.[124] But it does expose that even though Gogo communities abandoned their emphasis on matrilineal inheritance, this did not erase completely the influence women held in their communities.

87 Because the terms related to infertility among Ruvu people applied equally to female and male, and because men too were treated for dysfunction and shared responsibility in determining the causes of their infertility, it seems evident that, from the proto-Ruvu period down to recent eras, the matter of fertility was not shouldered only by women.

88 In proto-Ruvu societies men and women who had reached a point of expected parenthood but had not had children were called either **-gumba* or **-tasa*. The application of these terms to both women and men differs greatly from those recorded by past ethnographers and linguists. Generally, **-gumba*, which is of proto-Bantu origin, has been translated as "barren woman."[125] The second word,**-tasa*, and its variant shape, **-sata,* "barren woman," are widespread in other Kaskazi languages. It represents a Tale Southern Cushitic word-borrowing that probably came into early Kati vocabulary in the middle part of the first millennium BCE.[126]

89 At this point it is not possible to discern whether the gender-neutral proto-Ruvu use of such terms to designate infertility in males and females was their innovation or something datable to the Kati, Kaskazi, or even earlier Bantu communities. The problem rests in the incompleteness of the available sources. The word allocations of Western observers in the past too often only translate these terms as a description of women's infertility. So we do not know if the language speakers from whom the data were gathered were asked if the words also applied to men. It would of be of importance to learn if **-tasa/*-sata* and **-gumba* were originally transgendered among Bantu speakers. For now, however, it is clear that the issue of fertility or lack thereof has been understood as a problem that afflicted both women and men in Ruvu societies since early times.

Conclusions

90 In this chapter we have shed light on the historical depth of Ruvu practices that are commonly referred to as life-cycle or life-stage "rituals" in the ethnographic literature. Evaluating the word histories and comparative ethnographic record regarding Ruvu life positions, it was shown that men and women in proto-Ruvu and descendant societies have guided their people through recognized life positions since their societies first settled in the hinter-coast regions. From both physical and spiritual vantage points they understood that each life stage needed collective intervention. Often, elder lineal members instructed youth on the expectations

associated with incipient life positions. But Ruvu people believed that successes in entering and fulfilling the roles associated with each stage of life also depended on the support of ancestral spirit forces.

91 In early Ruvu communities, birthing involved the cooperation of lineal elders and the powers wielded by ancestral spirits to safely transition an infant from pregnancy, through delivery, and to an age at which it was no longer susceptible to the desires of spirit forces that yearned to have the infant back in the realm of the ethereal. Educating new women about pregnancy and motherhood was also part of the work involved in successful childbearing. The instructions still given to pregnant East-Ruvu women, for example, were shown to be more ancient than the proto-Ruvu period. Its roots were traced to the early Eastern-Savanna-Bantu era. The attentiveness Ruvu people gave, particularly Ruvu women, to guaranteeing successful births and infant survival is an example of the importance placed on bearing children in matrilineal Ruvu societies.

92 The evidence also showed that in proto-Ruvu and later societies ceremonies tied to life position were distinct for physically maturating girls and boys, although during initiation they were all named **mwali.* The teaching and ceremonies associated with their initiations were not solely meant to engender or control male or female behaviors, although establishing gendered social norms was an aspect of them. They were also done to prepare them for full adult responsibilities. In a girl's initiation ceremonies this was emphasized explicitly in the religio-ritual events done to secure her fertility. The emphases placed on a girl's initiation and fertility represent ideas and practices that they inherited from their PNECB forebears. The data also indicate that their concern for and attention given to incipient motherhood probably dates to as far back as the proto-Bantu era. Ruvu initiation religio-ritual ceremonies have been and in some cases still do reflect powerful ethereal and physical practices that shaped and regenerated their societies.

93 The institution of marriage represents another persistent feature in matrilineal Ruvu communities. We showed how the terms used to name marriage have varied in descendent Ruvu communities, yet each of them has origins in antecedent Bantu root words that meant "to marry," "to take/receive," and "to choose." Beyond that the comparative ethnographic data indicate that the practices associated with marriage and its conceptualization in Ruvu societies are remarkably consistent. In their societies, it was understood necessary for a young man to persuade a young woman's matrilineage, usually her maternal grandmother and eldest uncle, that he was worthy of their lineal daughter. If he was granted the right to marry their daughter, he then had to earn the privilege of taking his wife to a new homestead. This entailed obtaining a girl's grandmother's approval and propitiating her lineage ancestors. Once that was established, his final test was to produce grandchildren for her matrilineal line. If he failed to do this, then the marriage agreement could be terminated.

Although there was variation in the ways religio-ritual ceremonies and sociocultural practices were carried out in Ruvu societies over time, two salient matters were common to them. In every life position Ruvu people gave emphasis to the desire for children. Linked to that, Ruvu people understood that it behooved them to call upon spirit forces to guarantee infant survival and a woman's fertility, and for blessings in marriage. The religio-ritual ceremonies important in Ruvu life stages thus reflect additional aspects of their inherited and enduring Bantu worldview that communicated what was requisite for community sustainability.

Notes

Note 1: Vuorela, *The Women's Question and the Modes of Human Reproduction*, 201.

Note 2: Somewhat parallel, Beidelman reported that in Kagulu societies people rarely speak of pregnancy or about being pregnant in public because it was considered ill-mannered to do so. Women often concealed their pregnancies as long as they could. Though viewed as a blessing, pregnancy also opened people up to ill-willed or envious people. Beidelman, *Cool Knife*, 129.

Note 3: Vuorela, *The Women's Question and the Modes of Human Reproduction*, 99–100.

Note 4: Mawinza, "The Human Soul," 9–10.

Note 5: M. Swantz, *Ritual and Symbol*, 243.

Note 6: Proto-Eastern-Savanna Bantu *-*kob*- "to become marriageable/nubile"; Proto-East Ruvu *-*kowa* "to instruct on pregnancy"; e.g., Tsonga *khoba*, *ku*- to become nubile (of a girl), *khoba*, pl. *ti*- ceremonies of feminine initiation, *khoba*, pl. *ma*- "nubile girl undergoing the initiation." Mawinza, "Human Soul," 10, 200, 202; M. Swantz, *Ritual and Symbol*, 243.

Note 7: Vuorela, *The Women's Question and the Modes of Human Reproduction*, 99–100; "Watu wetu-Kabila kuu ni Wakwere," in *Tribal Classification* (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania National Archives, no date).

Note 8: L. Swantz, "Zaramo of Tanzania," 31.

Note 9: CS 1317; Proto-Kaskazi *-*moog*- "to shave"; Proto-Ruvu *-*moga* "to shave"; e.g., Zigua *moga*, *ku*- "to shave"; Rundi *ku-mobga* "to be shaved." For Lugulu and Kwere customary shaving of infants see Mawinza, "Human Soul," 10; Brain, "The Kwere of the Eastern Province," 238; Brain, "Boys' Initiation Rites among the Luguru of Eastern Tanzania"; Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, 661.

Note 10: Beidelman, *Case Studies in Anthropology*, 99. Zigua prohibited men and women from working with clay/dirt for home building because it would lead to difficult birth or miscarriage. Dr. Reuss, "Notes on Zeguha, Pangani," in *Native Law and Custom* (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania National Archive, no date).

Note 11: Mnyampala, *The Gogo*, 103; L. Swantz, "Zaramo of Tanzania," 50–1.

Note 12: CS 1226, 1227; Proto-Savanna Bantu *-*kung*- ~ *-*kunk*- "to initiate"; Ndembe *nkunka* "seclusion house for initiation"; Proto-Mashariki *-*kung-w-i* stem plus passive plus *-*i* agent noun suffix); e.g., Zigua *kungwi*, *ma*- "one who has had a certain illness previously"; Bondei (Seuta) *kungwi*, plus same term in Swahili and Ruvu, as well as in Nyanja *namkungwi*; Proto-Kaskazi **mkunga* "midwife/birth attendant"; also in Lambya and Mabia; Gogo *munkunga* "circumciser," "sponsor of girl initiates." Mawinza, "Human Soul," 144; M. Swantz, *Ritual and Symbol*, 169, 260; M. Swantz, *Blood, Milk, and Death*, 39.

Note 13: West Ruvu and Kagulu *mdala* "midwife/birth attendant, old woman." Presence of /d/ suggestive of loanword, perhaps an Njombe/Langi transfer; e.g., Njombe *-*dala* "woman"; Langi "old, woman"; Pogolo *mdala* "woman." Mnyampala reported that the Gogo term *wadara* named "elder women." Mnyampala, *The Gogo: History, Customs, and Traditions*, 136, n.126.

Note 14: Proto-East Ruvu **mulala* "birth attendant, old woman." Semantic innovation from Kaskazi *-*lala* "old." Also, *-*lala* adj. "old" in Rufiji-Ruvuma subgroup.

Note 15: Beidelman, *Case Studies in Anthropology*, 100; Beidelman "The Kaguru," 34–35. In the Sumbwa, Sukuma, and Wangoni areas, similar birthing religio-ritual "*ituga*" rites are detailed in Koritschoner, "Puberty Rites, Secret Association Rites, Rites Observed in the Healing of the Sick," in *Native Affairs* (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania National Archives, no date).

Note 16: CS 1534; Proto-Forest-Savanna Bantu **-pinga* "medicine worn on the body"; e.g., Nyanja, *mpingu* "charm worn at throat to ward off illness"; *mpingusi* "calamity, event of ill omen, shadow of coming evil"; Zigua *mpingu* "a charm worn on body." "Kilosa Station, Vidunda Tribe"; Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, 621, 638.

Note 17: Based on comparative ethnography (including the fact that it is used as a temporary structure in male initiation among the Kagulu) and linguistic evidence, this noun is in all likelihood a relict retention of PS147; CS 470; PB **lágò,* glossed "house" in Guthrie, but probably originally referred to some kind of more ephemeral structure. Proto-Mashariki **-lago* "mat; reeds"; PR **-lago* "temporary shelter"; Swahili *rago* "camp"; Rundi *iki-rago (ibi-)* "mat for sleeping"; Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, 666.

Note 18: Proto-Mashariki **mbeleko* "cloth for carrying baby on back"; "carrying of child in pregnancy, child bearing"; Proto-Ruvu **mbeleko* "afterbirth"; e.g., Zigua *mbeleko* "cloth for carrying baby on back." Ehret, *African Classical Age*, 312. For another example, see Beidelman, *Moral Imagination*, 60.

Note 19: The **mkole* is a proto-Ruvu era term for a tree species important in birthing and female initiation religio-ritual ceremonies.

Note 20: Vuorela, *The Women's Question and the Modes of Human Reproduction*, 100–1. For additional examples, see L. Swantz, "Zaramo of Tanzania," 36; Brain, "Boys' Initiation Rites among the Lugulu of Eastern Tanzania," 373; Mawinza, "Human Soul"; G. F. M. Payowela, "Ritual Patterns in the Life-Cycle of Kutu" (Ph.D. thesis, Dar es Salaam University, 1977), 7; M. Swantz, *Blood, Milk, and Death*, 2, 47–8, 78.

Note 21: Mawinza, "Human Soul," 10–11.

Note 22: L. Swantz, "Zaramo of Tanzania," 51.

Note 23: Southern Cushitic Dahalo *-dééla* "girl not yet of child-bearing age" final position **-a* > **-e* > **-dele* is a regular Ma'a sound shift; proto-Wami **-dele* "girl/young woman." *Chaudele* can be parsed into **ki-a-u-dele*, literally "the one of young womanhood," consisting of the noun class prefix *ki-* for a "small thing," plus Bantu **-a-* associative marker ("of") plus **u-* (noun class prefix of abstract nouns), giving, when added to the root **udele,* "young personhood"; e.g., Bondei *mndele* "girl"; Zigula *mdele*, "girl"; Ehret, *The Historical Reconstruction of Southern Cushitic Phonology and Vocabulary*, 164. **Magati* for the "second child" builds on proto-Ruvu **-gati* "middle." Zigua *mwana ywa magati* "the middle child (of a family or in a line)." *Mwanabure*'s origins are yet unknown. And *mzuanda* is also found in Zigua *kiziwanda* (*vi-*) "the last born of a family." In Lugulu, Brain found *mzuanda* was the "one who perforates [perhaps sews?] the womb." In Gogo, Rigby noted that *muziwanda* was "the one who 'closed' the womb." It may derive from proto-Wami **-band-* "to knot, tie up" (to fold, to close). See Brain, "Symbolic Rebirth," 178; Rigby, *Cattle and Kinship*, 264–5, 323; Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, 641.

Note 24: M. Swantz, *Blood, Milk, and Death*, 139.

Note 25: Beidelman, *Moral Imagination in Kaguru Modes of Thought*, 63.

Note 26: "Kilosa Station, Vidunda Tribe."

Note 27: M. Swantz, *Blood, Milk, and Death*, 37.

Note 28: See, for example, chapter 5 in Saidi, *Nacimbusa*; Klieman, *"The Pygmies Were Our Compass,"* 70.

Note 29: Proto-Kaskazi **-pinja* "a (maturing?) girl"; PR **kihinza* "young girl"; e.g., Kirundi *uru-hinja, umw-ana, uru-yoya* "tiny baby"; Hehe *kihinza* "girl"; Bena *kihinza* "girl"; *muhinza* "daughter"; Sango/Lori *muhinja* "girl"; *muhinja* "daughter"; Bunga *muhinza* "girl"; Rangi *muhinza* "girl"; Gingo *muhinja* "daughter"; Ndengeleko *mwinzi* "young girl."

Note 30: Kesby, *The Rangi of Tanzania*, 79. Rigby notes that for the Gogo, *muhinza* connotes "a girl before marriage." Rigby, *Cattle and Kinship*, 271.

Note 31: Author interviews, Tanzania, 1998–1999. Informants explained that girls did not really have milk in their breasts.

Note 32: Proto-Kaskazi **-goli* "woman, female"; e.g., Rundi *ku-gora* "to do woman's work" (housekeeping); *umu-gore (aba-)* "woman, wife"; *uru-gori (in-)* "wreath, crown, heathen crown worn on head or stomach"; *in-goro* "house of king"; *uru-gori* "crown worn by dancers"; Runyakore/Rukiga *abagore* n. "bridal pair; young wives," *bagore* n. "mistress (of)"; Kondoa/Solwe *mgole (wa-)* "girl"; Nkwifiya *kigoli* "girl"; Vidunda *kigole* "girl" Swahili *kigoli/kigori vigoli/vigori* "young girl before menstruation" (evidence of /l~r/ means likely borrowed from Ruvu source). The most nuanced example among Ruvu language descendants was reported by Rigby, who found that among Gogo speakers "*mugolece* is a more respectful term, often used for a first, or senior, wife, or for the wife of an elder when a younger man is speaking." In this sense it approximates the meanings Schoenbrun recovered in Great Lakes Bantu. Rigby, *Cattle and Kinship*, 271–

Note 33: Schoenbrun, *The Historical Reconstruction of Great Lakes Bantu Cultural Vocabulary*, 83.

Note 33: Proto-Mashariki **-sesel-* "to pour out, to menstruate"; e.g., Lamba *sesa* (*-sesele*) "to menstruate for the first time"; Rundi *gu-sesera* "to pour out, at, for"; *i-sesero (ama-)* "place where water has flooded"; Nyanja *msesera*, "mark of trailing or sweeping (sesa), of worm, snail, serpent"; Swahili *mwanasesere, wa-* "doll" (this represents a loanword in Swahili).

Note 34: CS1895 and 1896; Proto-Bantu **-yàdí* "woman lately given birth" and "girl at puberty"; e.g., Lenje *kamwali*, n. "a young girl"; Zigua *mwali, wa-* "bridegroom, bride"; Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, 617; Schoenbrun, *The Historical Reconstruction of Great Lakes Bantu Cultural Vocabulary*, 105–6.

Note 35: Beidelman, *Cool Knife*, 182.

Note 36: See Beidelman, *Cool Knife*; James L. Brain, "Symbolic Rebirth: The 'Mwali' Rite among the Luguru of Eastern Tanzania," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 48, no. 2 (1978): 176–188; A. P. Caplan, "Boys' Circumcision and Girls' Puberty Rites among the Swahili of Mafia Island, Tanzania," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 46, no. 1 (1976): 21–33.

Note 37: Christine Choi Ahmed, "Before Eve Was Eve: 2200 Years of Gendered History in East-Central Africa" (Ph.D. thesis, University of California Los Angeles, 1996), 126.

Note 38: Vuorela, *The Women's Question and the Modes of Human Reproduction*, 118–9.

Note 39: Author interviews, Tanzania, 1998–1999. Saidi, *Nacimbusa*, Chapter Five.

Note 40: This term may connect to CS 760 **-gàd-* "alter" tr. and 759 **-gàd-* "turn" tr.; PER **-galigali* "recognition of first menstruation." The Zaramo also call the event *mkwego*. M. Swantz, *Blood, Milk, and Death*, 38.

Note 41: Beidelman, *Case Studies in Anthropology*, 107; M. Swantz, *Blood, Milk, and Death*, 38.

Note 42: Rigby, *Cattle and Kinship*, 209. M. Swantz, *Blood, Milk, and Death*, 38. Various other metaphors are used but they all connect up to the idea of something having been broken resulting in the flowing of menstrual blood.

Note 43: In the Gogo case Rigby says announcements were locally proclaimed. See Rigby, *Cattle and Kinship*, 209. According to Brain, menstruation onset was followed by the *mkore* dance. See Brain, "The Kwere of the Eastern Province," 235.

Note 44: Bemba girls, too, were often betrothed upon beginning their initiation tied to menstruation, though they did not need be to complete initiation. See Audrey I. Richards, *Chisungu: A Girls' Initiation Ceremony among the Bemba of Zambia*, 2nd ed. (New York: Tavistock, 1982), 58.

Note 45: CS 1453; Proto-Bantu *-*pát*- "hold"; may derive Proto-Ruvu **lupati* "menstruation cloth"; CS 267; Proto-Mashariki *-*samb*- "wash"; may derive Kaguru *sambala* "menstrual cloth," *sambo* "menstruation"; e.g., in Nyanja *samba, ku-* is (euphemistic) "to menstruate."

Note 46: Author interviews, Tanzania, 1998–1999; L. Swantz, "Zaramo of Tanzania," 43; M. Swantz, *Blood, Milk, and Death*, 38.

Note 47: M. Swantz, *Blood, Milk, and Death*, 28. The ethnography varies on the point of burial, but is consistent in it having been a sacred component of initiation.

Note 48: Ehret, *African Classical Age*, 312.

Note 49: L. Swantz, "Zaramo of Tanzania," 42.

Note 50: Author interviews, Tanzania, 1998–1999. Vuorela, *The Women's Question and the Modes of Human Reproduction*, 120. L. Swantz, "Zaramo of Tanzania," 43.

Note 51: Eastern Sahelian (Nilo-Saharan) **bóɗ* or *bōɗ* "to scratch (skin surface)"; PR *-*boboda* "to rub a substance on skin." Ehret, *A Historical-Comparative Reconstruction of Nilo-Saharan*, 269.

Note 52: Ehret, *African Classical Age*, 156; Herbert, *Iron, Gender, and Power*; Klieman, *"The Pygmies Were Our Compass"*; Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, A Good Place*, 25; Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforest*, 120, 125, 291.

Note 53: Beidelman, *Cool Knife*, 165; L. Swantz, "Zaramo of Tanzania," 43.

Note 54: Beidelman, *Cool Knife*, 165.

Note 55: Some informants reported that a *mwali*'s body is made cool with menstruation, while others say the opposite. In all instances, white was a common symbol of that which is healthy and pure and thought to create balance.

Note 56: Cory reported that the *mtego* bed was also used among male initiates in the *kumbi*. Because Cory does not clearly distinguish among language groups, it is impossible to know to which group he refers. Hans Cory, "Jando Part I: The Ceremonies and Teachings of the Jando," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 77 (1947): 166.

Note 57: CS 1698 and 1699; Proto-Kaskazi *-*teg*- "to trap; medicine"; Proto-Ruvu *-*tego* "fertility medicine; medicine trap; to trap"; PER *-*tego* "fertility medicine, trap, initiate's fertility bed." Zigua *mtego, mitego* "trap." Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, 608–9, 621; Schoenbrun, *The Historical Reconstruction of Great Lakes Bantu Cultural Vocabulary*, 164, 241–2, 257.

Note 58: CS 1227; Proto-Savanna Bantu *-*kunk*- ~ *-*kung*- "to initiate"; Proto-Mashariki *-*kung-w-i*, stem plus passive plus *-*i* agent noun suffix "initiation leader"; Ndembe *nkunka* "seclusion house for initiation"; Gogo *munkunga* "circumciser"; "sponsor of girl initiates"; Bondei (Seuta) *kungwi*; Zigua *kungwi*, (ma-) "one who has had a certain illness previously"; Nyanja *namkungwi*; Swahili *kungwi* "initiation leader, assistant to midwife, instruction leader for marriage."

Note 59: In colonial ethnographic materials the *kungwi* is fittingly described as an "old wise woman." See Pels, "Kizungu Rhythms: Luguru Christianity as Ngoma," 173; "Wasaramo, Native Laws and Customs General," (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania National Archives, no date), 101–125.

Note 60: CS 493; *-*dàndá* "to follow" plus *m*- prefix. A nasal assimilation shift in this environment of **l* to **n* accounts for why the Ruvu reflexes come out *mnanda* rather than the usual **mlanda*. Only in the case of Lugulu is the helper identified by a particular name, *kisepi*. This word occurs elsewhere in Ruvu languages with varied meanings. For example, this is one way of identifying a single man in Gogo and Kagulu. And it also can be the word for a single man's home in Kagulu. In Doe it is

someone who brings food to an initiate, while in Kwere, this person helps to bring the initiate to the initiation site. This word looks like a good case of a proto-Ruvu innovation *-*sep*- "one who had already been initiated" but who was yet young and unmarried. Brain, "Symbolic Rebirth," 376–7, 379.

Note 61: L. Swantz, "Zaramo of Tanzania," 45.

Note 62: M. Swantz, *Blood, Milk, and Death*, 47. For Kwere example, see "Watu wetu-Kabila kuu ni Wakwere."

Note 63: Author interviews, Tanzania, 1998–1999; M. Swantz, *Blood, Milk, and Death*, 70–71.

Note 64: L. Swantz, "Zaramo of Tanzania," 46.

Note 65: Rashid Wembah, J. A. R., "The Socio-Economic System of the Wakwere: An Ethnographic Study of the Matrilineal People of Central Eastern Tanzania" (Ph.D. thesis, Dar es Salaam University, 1978), 186. Such colors and various implements that are used to symbolize them occur widely in Africa, and even beyond the Bantu-speaking areas. This scheme is seen in aspects of dance, possession, art, and beyond. Here they are discussed in their use in *mkole* but this is only one area in which their colors are important among Ruvu people.

Note 66: L. Swantz, "Zaramo of Tanzania," 45–6.

Note 67: The presence of these dolls among most East Ruvu communities makes it tempting to reconstruct it to the proto-East-Ruvu period; however, there is no one way they refer to them. References were exceedingly mixed in the field and in the ethnography. My sense is this particular expression of the institution may have developed in the second half of the second millennia. Still, the widespread prevalence of such "dolls" in African societies begs further research.

Note 68: Elisabeth L. Cameron, *Isn't S/he a Doll? Play and Ritual in African Sculpture* (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1996); "Wasaramo, Native Laws and Customs General," 112.

Note 69: M. Swantz, *Blood, Milk, and Death*, 39.

Note 70: L. Swantz, "Zaramo of Tanzania," 42–3; M. Swantz, *Blood, Milk, and Death*, 33; M. Swantz, *Ritual and Symbol*, 273; author interviews, Tanzania, 1998–1999.

Note 71: M. Swantz, *Blood, Milk, and Death*, 39.

Note 72: L. Swantz, "Zaramo of Tanzania," 43. In a Zaramo context, the *mkongo* tree was particular wood used to craft the figure.

Note 73: Ibid.

Note 74: Proto-Mashariki *-*sesel*-"to pour; to menstruate"; East Ruvu *mwana sesele* "fertility medicine (doll)," lit., "child of menstruation"; e.g., Lamba *sesa* (-*sesele*) "menstruate for the first time"; Rundi *gu-sesera* "to pour out, at, for"; *i-sesero (ama-)* "place where water has flooded"; Nyanja *msesera*, "mark of trailing or sweeping (sesa), of worm, snail, serpent"; Swahili *mwanasesere/wa-* "doll" (this is a loanword in Swahili).

Note 75: Marja-Liisa Swantz provides a point about the figurines, which may shed light on their doll shape in East Ruvu language communities. She explains that in the context of increased urbanization, the figures, which were formerly kept in a shrine or cave, were now kept as portable dolls. Her information about fertility rites as having taken place in caves or shrines—or better, cave shrines—seems reasonable in Bantu expressions. We see this in the rock art believed created by Bantu people across much of the areas in which they lived. It is also not unheard of for people to make portable medicines to carry them into their new home areas when they moved far from accessible shrines and important ancestors. This may factor into why we see these figurines in some places and not others. M. Swantz, *Blood, Milk, and Death*, 33; M. Swantz, *Ritual and Symbol*, 273.

Note 76: L. Swantz, "Zaramo of Tanzania," 43.

Note 77: Remark made by a Gogo speaker. Author interviews, Tanzania, 1998–1999.

Note 78: Ehret, *African Classical Age*, 158.

Note 79: This was supported further during author interviews by assertions that their families had never taken part in such ceremonies but that others, because of marriage, had taken up such customs. Circumcision is commonly used to name any alteration to female genitalia, but it should be acknowledged that there are various types of "circumcisions" and that they vary from community to community.

Note 80: Peter Rigby, "The Structural Context of Girls' Puberty Rites," *Man* 2, no. 3 (1967): 436.

Note 81: This is different from the traditions given by Mnyampala. He claims that they are kept close to home for the procedure. Mnyampala, *The Gogo: History, Customs, and Traditions*, 106. This could constitute a regional distinction or there may be a difference in perception about relative closeness.

Note 82: The *kugati* room was an interior room that belonged to her mother. It was accessible only through passage through another room, the *ikumbo*. It was thus to some degree guarded. For a diagram illustration, see Rigby, *Cattle and Kinship*, 171.

Note 83: Rigby suggests that the term's first part derived of the prefix *ci* "quality of," *munya "*possessor of," and *-pale* "circumcised penis." Rigby, *Cattle and Kinship*, 208–209.

Note 84: Author interviews, Tanzania, 1998–1999; Beidelman, *Case Studies in Anthropology*, 107.

Note 85: Beidelman, *Cool Knife*, 168.

Note 86: "Kilosa Station, Vidunda Tribe"; Brain, "Symbolic Rebirth," 180.

Note 87: Swantz reported that Zaramo speakers remembered *mwali* girls being secluded up to five years. M. Swantz, *Blood, Milk, and Death*, 37.

Note 88: Beidelman, *Cool Knife*, 168.

Note 89: Author interviews, Tanzania, 1998–1999.

Note 90: It derives from the Southern Cushitic verb **-laab-* "to go out to do something."

Note 91: The direct evidence for this source comes from the Burunge language, where *losona* means "ceremonial occasion, in particular circumcision ceremonies." The proto-Southern Cushitic root meant something like "crowd, gathering." Ehret, *The Historical Reconstruction of Southern Cushitic Phonology and Vocabulary*, 206. The word *lusona* in the Ruvu languages parallels the case of *kitabu* in Swahili in the manner in which speakers assumed a prefix attached to the word. In each of these cases, the borrowed word looked like a noun-class structure already present in the borrowing language, so when they borrowed the word they treated it as if the donor word carried a prefix. In the Swahili case that resulted in *ki-* being seen as a normally occurring prefix. Similarly the *lu-* in *lusona* was viewed as a regularly occurring prefix in proto-Ruvu, although the reality was that the source was a noun without an attached prefix. An alternative attribution of this root, to the wide Bantu root **-cona* "shame," can be ruled out because, although it might make sense in connection with the liminality of a girl's seclusion, its semantic associations conflict with the celebratory and "coming out" occasions to which Ruvu groups usually applied the term. See, for example, Beidelman, *Case Studies in Anthropology*, 111; Pels, "Kizungu Rhythms," 169, fn. 9.

Note 92: L. Swantz, "Zaramo of Tanzania," 47.

Note 93: Ibid., 47–50.

Note 94: CS 147, 148; Proto-Ruvu **kuvinwa* "to be danced." Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, 611; L. Swantz, "Zaramo of Tanzania," 50.

Note 95: CS 1190; Proto-Bantu *-*kúdà* "age-set, age group"; e.g., Mpongwe; Fang; Tetala; SW-Bantu; Luhyia and Suguti of Great Lakes. Nkoya *kukûla* "to become mature (of male)"; Nyanja, *kula*, *ku-* v.i. "grow, grow up, mature"; Zigua *kukula* "to grow, to scrape (as when shaving)." Ehret, *African Classical Age*, 155–8. For another example, see Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforest*, 79.

Note 96: Ehret, *African Classical Age*, 156.

Note 97: Ibid., 156–57.

Note 98: Some accounts attribute the origin of circumcision to a woman, who was the first circumciser of male hunters. See, for instance, Hans Cory, "Jando Part II: The Ceremonies and Teachings of the Jando," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 77 (1948): 87–8.

Note 99: In many Ruvu languages and others of NECB descent, *jando* is used as a synonym for *kumbi*. Its display of /j/ instead of the regular corresponding /ts/ or /dz/ in Ruvu languages suggests that it was a word transfer. See Cory, "Jando Part I: The Ceremonies and Teachings of the Jando," 159–168; Cory, "Jando Part II: The Ceremonies and Teachings of the Jando," 81–95.

Note 100: The *-*kumbi* within the *-*kula* rite may well have been the shelter made from the fibrous *mkumbi* tree whose bark pulls back in sheets of **makumbi*. Author interviews, Tanzania, 1998–1999. See Rigby, *Cattle and Kinship*, 207.

Note 101: Proto-Wami *-*kumbi* "initiation camp"; e.g., Nyanja *kumbi*, "shelter from the sun (roof raised on poles, no walls)"; Swahili *ukumbi* "traditional initiation rites"; *kumbi, ma-* "circumcision hut where boys stay before and after being circumcised"; *kumbi* "circumcision"; Runyankore/Rukiga *eicumbi* n. "quarters, camp," "aluminum hut"; Zigua *kumbi* (*ma-*) "a field hut, a palm leaf, dried grass used for building"; Shambaa *kumbi, ma-* "camp, traditional school."

Note 102: Possible Proto-Mashariki(?) *-*lago* "mat; reeds." Attests as Rundi *iki-rago* (*ibi-*) "mat for sleeping"; Ngulu *lago* "initiation camp." If mats were used as the roofing and wall materials (something that we do not as yet know), it could be a PNECB innovation. Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, 666, draw attention to CS 470 and PS 147 as possible sources but leave it unresolved. These similarly constructed nouns share close structures but the wrong tone correlation. They are, respectively, "mat" and "house." For its use among Kwere, see Vuorela, *The Women's Question and the Modes of Human Reproduction*, 100–101.

Note 103: Proto-Mashariki *-gotola "to circumcise"; e.g., Nyanja kotola, ku- v.t. "strip off bark for barkcloth, burn off skin, brand"; ngotola "hooked stick used in removing baobab bark to make a rope (from kotola)." The /g/ in Ruvu languages is the regular effect of Dahl's Law, changing *k to *g before a voiceless stop (t). Attests in Gogo, Kagulu in its regular shape and in Doe in the metathesized form *kutogola.

Note 104: CS 1426 and 1427; Savanna-Bantu *-*pakud-* "to take out (from container of some kind); to castrate"; this root is seen in both Swahili *-bakua/-bakwa* "to take away by force" and *-pakua* "to take off, unload, dish up food, remove honey from hive," etc. The first of these shows the effect of Dahl's Law, i.e., *p > *b preceding an unvoiced second stem consonant, here *k. The second version does not show Dahl's Law. These may simply be two alternative pronunciations of the same root that persisted in pre-proto-Swahili after Dahl's Law ceased to be productive, although subsequently diverging in meaning. Alternatively—and the most probable scenario—the first shape is a loan in Swahili from a language in which Dahl's Law operated longer, the Wami being one such group. Wami *-*bakwa* is a straightforward version of this second root in which Dahl's law voiced *p to /b/.

Note 105: The term in Swahili, **ngariba*, is a loan, presumably from Ruvu, because it keeps /r/, although in this scenario it would have been a secondary borrowing. If it were originally Swahili, the expected shape would be **ngaiba* or **ngaiwa*. The structure of the word would make phonological sense if it was of Southern Cushitic origin, but no such term is as yet known in Southern Cushitic languages. Alternatively, it may be of Arabian (Rhapta period?) origins.

Note 106: Beidelman, "Notes on Boys' Initiation Among the Ngulu of East Africa"; Beidelman, *Cool Knife*; Brain, "Boys' Initiation Rites"; Brain, "The Kwere of the Eastern Province," 235; Cory, "Jando Part I: The Ceremonies and Teachings of the Jando," 159–168; Cory, "Jando Part II: The Ceremonies and Teachings of the Jando," 81–95.

Note 107: Cory, "Jando Part I: The Ceremonies and Teachings of the Jando," 159–168; Cory, "Jando Part II: The Ceremonies and Teachings of the Jando," 81–95; "Kilosa Station, Vidunda Tribe."

Note 108: Beidelman, *Case Studies in Anthropology*, 103.

Note 109: L. Swantz, "Zaramo of Tanzania," 39–40.

Note 110: CS 1175; Proto-Bantu **-kued-*; CS 1774; Proto-Bantu **-tóód-* "take, receive (carry)"; Proto-Kati **-tool-* "marry." Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, 663.

Note 111: CS 365.5; Proto-Savanna Bantu **-sol-* "to choose"; Proto-Ruvu **-sol-* "marry."

Note 112: Author interviews, Tanzania, 1998–1999.

Note 113: Ibid.

Note 114: CS 323; e.g., Lenje *-senga* v. "beg"; Schoenbrun, *The Historical Reconstruction of Great Lakes Bantu Cultural Vocabulary*, 155.

Note 115: Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, A Good Place*, 183–5.

Note 116: Brain, "The Kwere of the Eastern Province," 231–239.

Note 117: Beidelman, *Case Studies in Anthropology*, 112–4; Brain, "The Kwere of the Eastern Province," 235–6; Vuorela, *The Women's Question and the Modes of Human Reproduction*, 92, 98.

Note 118: CS 935; Proto-Ruvu **ujengele* "marriage negotiations, uxorilocal marriage arrangements." For Zaramo, see "Wasaramo, Native Laws and Customs General"; for Kwere, see Brain, "Symbolic Rebirth," 178; Vuorela, *The Women's Question and the Modes of Human Reproduction*, 98.

Note 119: Author interviews, Tanzania, 1998–1999.

Note 120: Schoenbrun, *The Historical Reconstruction of Great Lakes Bantu Cultural Vocabulary*, 44.

Note 121: Brain, "Boys' Initiation Rites," 377.

Note 122: Payowela, "Ritual Patterns in the Life-Cycle of Kutu," 16.

Note 123: Rigby, *Cattle and Kinship*, 221.

Note 124: In fact, there are many instances in the text when Rigby struggles to make sense of Gogo cultural practices because they are not what he expects to be customary in patrilineal societies. For example, in Gogo marriages many of the processes of their matrilineal NECB linguistic siblings are followed. Among these, a woman remained linked to her matrilineage. The remnants of these practices demonstrate that they have endured from the matrilineal practices of forebearers. Ibid., 225–45, 272.

Note 125: CS 894; e.g., Shambaa *mghumba wa-* "barren woman"; Tsonga *gumba, ku-* "to take away everything"; Zigua *mgumba* widow/widower"; Lenje *ng'umba*, n. "a barren or impotent person." Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, 616, 663.

Note 126: E.g., Zigua *ntasa* "a barren woman or animal." Ehret, *African Classical Age*, 326; Nurse and Hinnebusch, *Swahili and Sabaki*, 663.