

**CHAPTER 5**

# Healing the Body: Etiology, Caregivers, and Prevention

The first time I visited Tanzania, I was struck by the way people greeted one another. In contrast to the United States, where people typically ask only how a person is doing, expecting a cursory response (if any), in Tanzania people took introductory exchanges much more to heart. They usually began by asking if you bring news, and they anticipated an answer. But such openings were only the beginning of welcoming etiquette. I learned that all parties were expected to engage in questioning about how the others' children were doing, how parents and extended family members were, and how life was going, among other subjects. The underlying reasons for such gestures piqued my interest. I wondered if people were simply being polite or displaying good manners, but in time I came to a different understanding about what such exchanges might represent and the purposes they potentially serve. **1**

A timeless concern in Ruvu societies is the maintenance of a state of well-being among their members. Taking time to learn how people and their communities are faring is potentially helpful to all parties, because it allows people to come to an understanding of the state of health or disease within families and communities. The exchange of information conveys something of what a person entering the community can expect to encounter, but just as significantly, it can reveal pressing problems that confront people, so that they can be addressed. After all, only when people exist in a state of vitality can they fulfill their social and moral obligations to their families and society at large.<sup>1</sup> It is healthy communities that can regenerate biologically and sociologically.<sup>2</sup> Salutatory protocol can thus be viewed as a tool of communication that fosters information exchange and establishes networks that can help in maintaining or returning to a place of well-being.<sup>3</sup> **2**

This chapter explores the ways Ruvu-speaking people have understood and addressed health matters. Examining the words they inherited, innovated, and adopted relating to disease etiology, diagnosis, prevention, and intervention, it recovers aspects of their worldview and institutional practice. These understandings and customs show that religious and health matters have been long entwined.<sup>4</sup> When disease—physical, mental, spiritual, and sociocultural—manifested, Ruvu peoples sought to restore "bodies" to a state of equilibrium using biomedicine and religio-ritual reconciliation ceremonies that commonly required involvement from kin, community specialists, and ethereal forces, each of whom wielded relevant knowledge and influence inherited from prior experiences.<sup>5</sup> In their worldviews it **3**















































































