

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

RFG - 24
Segeju Tribe
III-Medicine and Devils

c/o Barclays Bank
Arusha, Tanganyika
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Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Rogers:

The only medical dispensary on the fifty-mile stretch of coast between Tanga and the Kenya border is located at Moa. Although it is meant to serve a population of 10,000 people or more, the majority of the patients who attend it come from Moa itself. The other smaller villages along the coast still rely mainly on their own native methods of dealing with sickness. Except for a high incidence of infection with hookworm, the inhabitants of these fishing villages appear to be relatively healthy. A health survey of the region was done in 1929 by Dr. Bagster Wilson (the present Director of the East African Institute of Malaria and Vector-Borne Diseases--see RFG-21) for his first assignment as a Tanganyika Medical Officer. During that survey some 20 or 25 conditions were diagnosed, including most of the common tropical diseases of East Africa, but hookworm was the most serious. Dr. Wilson noted in his report that the physique of the Segeju was excellent and their general health compared very favorably with that of the Digo people living further back from the coast. His chief recommendation at Moa concerned the improvement of faulty latrine habits to stop the transmission of hookworm. At Moa, and at other villages located on the sea, the beach itself serves as a public latrine, one end being used by men and the other by women. If the excreta were carried away by the tide each day, no harm would result from this system. But during the time of small tides the people do not go out far enough, so that their excreta remains to pollute the soil with hookworm. No change has been made in the 27 years since Dr. Wilson's survey, and the hookworm rate remains high.



Segeju Woman Wearing
Buibui

The present attendant at the dispensary, Julius Kibua, holds the rank of Rural Medical Aid. He comes from the Sambia tribe and is a Christian--the only Christian family in Moa. During the year and a half that he has been there he has reduced the average monthly attendance of patients from nearly 400 to about 200, largely through energetic treatment of yaws, hookworm, and other helminthic diseases. He states that even at Moa most of his patients have already tried native methods of treatment before they come to him, except for simple conditions such as the dressing of wounds. Western medicine is still a second choice for the Segeju. In this report I shall discuss some of the ideas underlying the native medicine.

The Segeju really have only one basic concept as to the cause of sickness. They

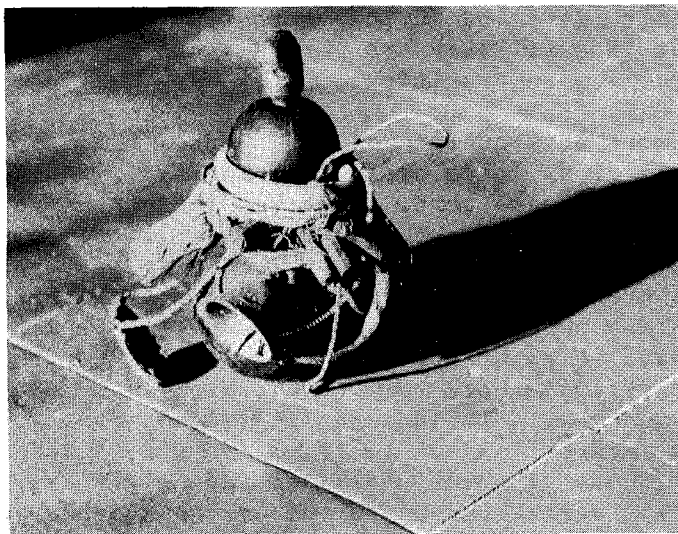
believe that demons or shetani may enter the bodies of people and cause all manner of mischief therein. I shall mention at once that this belief is common to the whole Swahili coast and is probably to be found in southern Arabia and--in one form or another--in other Arab countries. Its main features are derived from orthodox Islamic theology, according to which the Devil (Iblis) rules over a host of demons (sheitan). It is an ancient Semitic concept; the word "satan" is cognate with "sheitan," from which comes the Swahili word shetani. The Bantu word pepo ("spirit") is also used synonymously with shetani, and the belief as it exists among Africans is a blend of pagan and Islamic elements. I shall simply describe the beliefs held by the Segeju, without further comment on their derivation.

There are various tribes of shetani, each tribe with its own name. These are conceived of on the analogy of African tribes and are not believed to have radically different natures. The Segeju recognize eight different tribes of shetani which reside within striking distance, but occasionally a shetani from a more distant tribe wanders into Segeju country and seizes on one of the inhabitants. A tribe known as Nyari reside in the Boma area and are responsible for most of the sickness there. The Pemba tribe are frequent visitors to the Segeju coast. A minor tribe of shetani called the Kimasai are supposed to have been left behind by the Masai when they were raiding on the coast in the middle of the last century. One tribe with the name of Jini (from Arabic jinn) dwell in the sea and are of great importance in the lives of fishermen. The shetani of one tribe are by no means all alike in character; they differ in the same way that the members of a human tribe do.

Shetani are capricious in temperament, and their relations with humans are generally harmful, but not always. They can even be helpful on occasion, but such help is considered to be unwholesome and would not be openly solicited. They are invisible, of course, but are thought of as being somewhat human in form. The Segeju notion of the appearance of shetani is probably less concrete than the medieval Christian notion of demons. Shetani sometimes harm people by external action--by tripping them, pushing them so that they fall from coconut trees, and so forth. Usually, though, they annoy a person by entering into his body, residing in his head most of the time, but also wandering to other organs, which they may tamper with and cause to disfunction. In this way they may cause a variety of symptoms, and if the victim is not treated he may become seriously sick. According to orthodox creed, a shetani can not cause a person's death; that is in the hands of God. But popular belief holds this to be a hair-splitting point and in effect frequently attributes deaths to shetani.

For the most part shetani are conceived of as independent nature spirits, similar in many ways to the netlang of the pagan Gorowa (see RFG-13), but it is never entirely lost sight of that they are creatures of Iblisi, the Devil, who is a rebel against God. As such they dislike and fear the symbol of obedience to God, which is the Koran. This symbol avails itself for protective use against the inroads of shetani. Passages copied on paper from the Koran are frequently worn--almost universally by children--to guard the wearer against shetani and other evil influences such as the evil eye; they are usually worn on a string round the neck sewn up in a little leather pouch. Another way is to write a koranic passage on a board and then wash the ink off into a vessel; this fluid is thought to contain the essence of the written passage and may be taken by mouth as medicine or sprinkled on a patient.

The symbol of the Koran is used against shetani in the same way as holy water and the crucifix against devils when they were, or where they are, believed in by Christians. However, if a shetani has firmly possessed himself of a person, it is considered more discreet to exorcise him by enticement rather than by forcible expulsion. But before anything at all can be done it is necessary to confirm that the patient has in fact been seized by a shetani and if so to what tribe it belongs. This requires the offices of a learned man with the rank of mwalimu or sheikh, who has mastered one or more methods of divining to obtain this information. Of the half dozen diviners in the villages where we stayed, I became acquainted with two of the most prominent--Hababi Junus of Moa (who is also a native court elder) and Gunda Makame of Sibutuni. Hababi uses a comparatively advanced method, involving astrology and the prophetic interpretation of koranic passages. He also deals in protective amulets (hirizi) made from koranic scripts, and is able to exorcise shetani by mystical methods. Gunda uses a simpler form of divining based on interpreting phrases in the Koran which are chosen by lot--usually by casting pebbles on a board. Although he is about forty-five years old, he is studying astrology and hopes to advance his status as a diviner. At present he can usually inform a client whether there is a shetani and what kind it is. He then writes a prescription which includes this information and his recommendation as to what should be done. One thing that the diviner can not tell is the name of the shetani--for every shetani has a name; they also have families and genealogies, so that a full name may go back several generations: Fulani bin Fulani bin Fulani.



Mganga's Calabash

The next event in a shetani case may be a visit to the mganga or doctor, who reads the prescription and makes arrangements to exorcise the shetani. The simplest way of doing this is to talk to it (kusemea) in a secret language which the Mganga has learned. Sometimes the shetani responds to this approach, tells its

name, and agrees to leave its victim. The standard fee for this service is four shillings and it is not regarded as very effective. Even if the shetani is persuaded to leave, it is very apt to return. When this happens, and if the shetani is very troublesome, it requires the ritual known as kupunga, which consists in a dance and a ritual feast for the pleasure of the shetani. This is an expensive affair involving the slaughter of several goats, the hiring of musicians and a large fee to the mganga. There is no doubt that women are found to require a shetani dance oftener than men. The three dances that we watched all concerned women. Men are said to prefer the mystical method of the mwalimu (which I was not able to observe) but occasionally their shetani are danced away too.

A mganga, in contrast to a mwaliimu—who is traditionally a poor man—practices a profitable profession and his knowledge is strictly secret. The mganga whom I knew best, Mwaita of Bomandani, had spent a long term of study and apprenticeship under other master doctors, including a postgraduate course under a famous mganga on the island of Pemba. He was a knowledgeable herbalist and used his herbs both for their natural action, usually for simple gastric complaints, and mystically in exorcising shetani. Like every mganga he possessed a basket of horns filled with dawa or medicine, dried herbs, and odd bits of skin, claws, and unidentifiable things. His most powerful dawa was kept in a polished calabash to which was tied a variety of charms, and which for a stopper had a carved plug representing a guardian shetani or familiar. Mwaita would not let me photograph his equipment and medicine, but in the D.C.'s office at Pangani I photographed a similar calabash confiscated from a Zigua mganga who had been charged with malpracticing on young women. The mganga at the small village of Bomandani was very influential with the women, but was not exactly popular with the men. There was some skepticism as to whether the expensive shetani dances were always necessary or effective, and it was the men of the family who had to pay the doctor's bill. However, the leading mganga of Moa, Rashidi Hasani, seemed to enjoy wide esteem. In addition to exorcising shetani, Rashidi also practiced another type of Swahili medicine based on a pharmacopoeia of Arab and Indian drugs, which I will not have space to describe in this report. Shetani dances are seldom performed at Moa itself; they are generally held at some small village where the atmosphere is more propitious.

Before going on to supplement this outline of the shetani belief with case histories, a word must be said about Islam as it is practiced by the Segeju. Every village has a mosque of some sort. Moa has four: two for Africans, one for Indians, and one for Arabs. The Arab mosque is not in use at present, and visiting Arabs use the African mosque. The religious creeds of the coastal Arabs and Swahilis are almost identical, the main difference concerning the correct posture during parts of the service: the Arabs leave their arms at their sides, the Swahilis clasp them in front. Although these differences were not considered very important, they were enough to segregate the two communities in different mosques. The principle African mosque, located right on the seashore, is used only by men. A smaller one is used by both men and women. The rest house at which we camped was only twenty yards from the mosque, so that I was well situated for observing attendance.

The five daily calls to prayer are chanted faithfully from the mosque. The caller or mnadi swala may be any man of the community in good ritual standing, and he must chant in a loud clear voice. The first call, Asubuhi, came before dawn and served as an alarm clock for us. A group of fifteen or twenty pious men attended mosque for prayers almost without fail, and a hard core of five or six older men frequented the place almost constantly. When not actually at the mosque they would often be seen mumbling prayers with the help of a tashihi or rosary. Before I had investigated the interior arrangement of the mosque I thought that a number of young fishermen were dropping in frequently for a quick prayer. As it happens, the ablutions room of the mosque contains a urinal, which is the most convenient place in the village for relieving oneself during daylight. On Thursday night there is a long maulidi service for the young people and school children—a chanted liturgy under the direction of the Imamu, which is quite musical and pleasing to hear. On Friday most of the fishermen rest. The main religious service, held at noon, is well attended by men and women alike.

The people bathe and don their best clothes, the men wearing white kanzus (like long nightshirts) and kofias (white caps), the women wearing black or colored buibuis (a pair of large matched kerchiefs, one worn round the body and the other over the head and shoulders). The service consists of prayers, readings, and usually a sermon by the imamu, the religious leader of the community who, in his more secular role as mwalimu, teaches koranic school on week days. After mosque many families have a big meal at which they may invite guests. In many ways Friday is observed at Moa much like our Sunday at home.

Every Segeju child is supposed to study at koranic school, and a fair proportion actually finish the course, which lasts from two to four years, depending on how apt the pupil is. Moa has two schools attended by about forty pupils. There is a preponderance of boys, but many girls also attend. The children sit cross-legged on the ground for an hour or two each morning and afternoon. First they learn the Arabic alphabet, writing the letters over and over on a board using an ink of pot black and water which can be washed off after the lesson. Then they take elementary lessons in reading and writing words, and finally select passages of the Koran are memorized and copied out. The reading is done by reciting the passage out loud, usually repeating it over and over. As the pupils in one group are usually at different stages of advancement, they produce a babel of noise that can be heard from afar. Teaching is solely concerned with Arabic, but most of the children learn to adapt Arabic script to the writing of Swahili, so in a limited sense the people are literate.

Most of the Segeju men and quite a few women can read and write Arabic, but they do not understand the meaning of it; and yet Arabic is practically synonymous with Islam to them. The parallel here with the use of Latin in the Catholic Mass is striking. In both cases there is the advantage of universality of language. Islamic prayers and readings sound the same wherever they are recited, regardless of the language of the country. The Segeju, though, lack a systematic catechism, and their children learn the basic creed in a more casual way. This is less of a neglect than might be thought, because the fundamental tenets of Islam are extremely simple.

My impression was that piety and the observance of orthodoxy increased in proportion to the size of the villages, being greatest at Moa. Bomandani had only one mwalimu who served both as religious leader and schoolteacher for the village. This man, Salim Bakari, gave the curious double impression of being a cornerstone of the church and at the same time the iconoclastic village atheist. This was because he was an uncompromising monotheist and had no belief whatever in shetani. He was afflicted with asthma which everybody else in the village believed was caused by a shetani, but Salim laughed at the idea and steadfastly refused to go to a diviner or mganga. His skepticism about so many village beliefs made him sound like an unbeliever, but in fact he was very devout, though unostentatiously. A few of the elders at Moa shared his views, but not many. Salim firmly believed in Western medicine, and it is unfortunate that in his one visit to Tanga hospital he was treated rather cursorily and discharged without explanation or effective treatment of his ailment.

Against this sketchy background of Segeju belief and custom, I shall present two case histories from the village of Bomandani.

1. A SHETANI DANCE

Mwenshika binti Bakari is a healthy looking woman of about thirty, short and stocky in build. When she was ten years old she suffered from a severe earache. Her father took her to consult a diviner—a mwalimu at Sibutuni—and it was discovered that she was possessed by a shetani of the local Nyari tribe, who was causing her earache. She was then taken to a mganga at the village of Manza, who conducted a seance (kusemea) and established contact with the shetani. The shetani was persuaded to leave the girl and she recovered from her illness.

In due time Mwenshika was married and bore five children, two of them dying in infancy. During all that time she enjoyed good health, until two weeks before my arrival on the scene. Then suddenly one day she was thrown down by some force within her, and afterwards she was mentally abnormal. This throwing down of a person is a common way in which a shetani first makes known its presence. Betty had a good friend at Moa, a young woman named Monsiti, who was teaching her about household crafts. One night on the beach, where she had gone to visit the lavatory, Monsiti was thrown down into the sand, and only with difficulty was she able to get up again and walk home. As it was approaching the month of Ramadhan, during which no divining or exorcising is done, her diagnosis and treatment were postponed. In the meanwhile she was obliged to remain mute and could not help Betty any more.

Mwenshika took to wandering through the bush in a state of trance after her fall, and there was danger that she might get lost or injure herself.



Koranic School at Moa

So she was kept at home under the watchful eye of an attendant, and as soon as possible she was taken to a diviner. The diviner confirmed what her friends already suspected, that she had been possessed by the same shetani who had seized her in childhood. This was only to be expected, because she had originally been exorcised by the simple method of kusemea, which frequently results in repossession at a later date. A shetani dance was clearly required and Mwaita, the mganga of Bomandani, was engaged to conduct it.

Mwaita gave an estimate of 400 shillings as the total cost of the dance. This sum was raised by her family: her father paid about half of the total, her husband the next largest share, then a prosperous brother of her mother, and so on down to more distant relatives who chipped in with small sums of one or two shillings. A day was set for the dance to start, four drummers were hired, and the society of women who had been exorcised by dancing in the past was informed of the plans. Most of the actual dancing is done by these women, who also help the mganga with other parts of the ritual. The dance lasted seven days, which is the usual custom, though some minor dances are cut short at three days. The dancing schedule calls for two sessions a day—from two to four in the afternoon and from eight to ten at night. One or two sessions were omitted altogether because the principal actors were called away on more important business. When the dancing went with a proper swing and the people were enjoying themselves, the sessions might be considerably prolonged.

During the whole course of the dance and for several days afterwards, Mwenshika lived at the mganga's house attended by her mother and another kinswoman. She was enjoined to strict silence for the entire period. The society of past shetani victims also spent a good deal of time at the house. When the time came for a session to start, the dancers gathered inside the house with Mwenshika while the mganga chanted an invocation. This was the signal for the drummers to tune up their drums by warming the heads with handfuls of blazing grass. There were three drums, so that the four drummers were able to take turns resting during the dance. Two of the drums were played by being struck with the open hand—a short, squat, upright drum with a single head, and a long, narrow lap drum closed at both ends. The third drum consisted of an upright cylinder of wood covered with a loose brass plate. This was played with two pieces of heavy plaited rope bound on the ends to form knobs. It was capable of creating a terrific din and would not join in until a dance was reaching its climax. The drummers also sang songs from time to time with themes of praise for the shetani. The chanting of the mganga and some of the singing was in an esoteric tongue.

The dance took place in an open-sided thatched shelter built in front of the mganga's house and in the open space in front of that. From ten to fifteen women were always dancing at any one time. These were mostly members of the past-victims society. Occasionally a man joined in the dancing. The mganga himself, and also his assistant (an apprentice who was almost as old as his master) danced part of the time. He would lead the group in starting each new dance, and then drop out. Mwenshika danced constantly. The mganga would give her various insignia to carry—first a spear, then a club or an ebony staff. She wore bells on both ankles, as did some of the other women. A dance, lasting from ten to twenty minutes, would start with small shuffling steps, which became more energetic as the

drums quickened; it sometimes ended with frenzied stamping and posturing of the body. Mwenshika carried a stick in her mouth as a symbol of her muteness. She was completely absorbed in her dancing and seemed to enjoy every minute of it.

Everyone in the village not otherwise occupied would come to watch the dancing. There would be forty or fifty spectators at the afternoon sessions and more at night. The final day brought a larger crowd. This audience was critical of the drumming and dancing, sometimes praising it and sometimes censuring it. The dancers were serious in their demeanor throughout, even when something humorous happened as when Mwenshika's ankle bell came loose and one of the other dancers followed her around trying to tie it back on while she was still dancing. The spectators, though, talked and laughed freely, and the mganga himself was not over solemn.

The highpoint of the dance came on the sixth day with the rite of kutoa jina: the shetani was induced to reveal his name. That day, before the afternoon session started, the group of participants danced through the village in procession, led by a sacrificial goat decorated with colored ribbons. When they reached the dancing place the goat was tied to a front post of the shelter to await its fate. Mwenshika was wearing a new costume--a wide pleated skirt made of several dozen folded cloths tied round her waist and a broad, turban-like headdress. The dancing started as usual, but there was more excitement than on previous days. Midway through the session, two offering tables were placed in the open space before the shelter. These were made by placing wide brass trays on pedestals which were overturned grain-pounding mortars. A ritual feast was laid out on these tables--rice cakes, coconuts, bananas, and bottles of honey. The drumming and dancing stopped and an expectant silence settled over the gathering.

The dancers formed a circle around Mwenshika, who squatted in the middle of the shelter. They held cloths over her and around her so that she was completely tented. The mganga recited an imprecation and there was a hushed pause. Then a squeaky voice began speaking from inside the tent. This was the voice of the shetani that everyone had been waiting for. It went on speaking for about five minutes. The substance of its remarks, as they were told to me in Swahili by people who professed to understand its language, were in praise of the dance with which it had been entertained. It was completely satisfied, so it stated, and promised to evacuate Mwenshika's head at the completion of the dance and leave her mind unencumbered. Then it told its name, which was extremely long, going back many generations.

The cloths were whisked away and the drums started again. Mwenshika was hoisted up on the mganga's back, and he danced about with her pickaback for a couple of minutes. The whole company broke into a frenzied dance while the goat was led away to be slaughtered in orthodox Mohamedan style. The dancing stopped and people gathered around Mwenshika to offer her tidbits of cake from the offering table, which they popped into her open mouth. Then all the dancers sat down in the shelter and rested while portions of the food were passed around. The mganga brought a bowl of blood from the slaughtered goat, which he mixed with honey and fed to the dancers. On tasting the blood, several of the women behaved wildly and danced madly about, whirling and cavorting. These women had been temporarily possessed by their old shetani, who were unseen attendants at the dance. They ran



Shetani Dance at Bomandani
Sacrificial Goat (left) Being
Untied



Shetani Dance
Offering Table
Appears in front

up to some of the spectators, including Betty and me, and made threatening gestures. They also spoke with "tongues." When this excitement subsided the afternoon session was finished.

The seventh and final day of the dance appeared to me as an anti-climax. The events were much as on the previous day, except that the shetani did not speak. The ritual feast was laid out as before, and people offered Mwenshika tidbits and also money. This rite was called kutunza shetani, i.e. to give it presents—presumably farewell ones. A second goat was slaughtered, the blood was fed to the dancers, and some of the women again got wild. In the evening, a session of solid dancing brought the program to an end. The next day I was taken to see Mwenshika at the mganga's house, the first time I had been permitted to speak to her. She was still not allowed to talk and carried a stick in her mouth. She stood quietly while I complimented her on the fine dance. Another girl afflicted with a shetani had just moved into the mganga's house in preparation for her dance, which was to start the next day. Now she came running up to me speaking in "tongues." Mwenshika got excited and started stamping her feet in the dance rhythm. It was obvious that the shetani was still with her. I mentioned this to her father, but he was not worried. With his own ears he had heard the shetani promise to leave his daughter, and he knew that things are seldom done in a hurry in the languid climate of Segejulang.

2. A DEATH BY SORCERY

Two days before we closed our camp and left Boma Peninsula for good, a man died in the village of Bomandani. His name was Chuma Kukuma and he was about forty years old. He had been sick for some time but I had not known about it, which was surprising as he was a half brother of Arajabu Anzua, with whom I had recently spent considerable time learning about Segeju fishing. In fact Chuma was one of the few people whom I had not yet pinned down in my census of Bomandani, and in a few more days I would certainly have come to him. In the meanwhile no one had volunteered information about his sickness, which was understandable in view of what I found out later.

I was finally told about the case by Gunda Makame, a mwalimu and diviner from Sibutuni, who had visited our camp that morning to tell me something about shetani and his way of divining their presence. After hearing that there was a sick man at Bomandani, for whom all hope had been abandoned, I walked over to the village with Gunda to see him. Chuma was lying in a darkened room of his house, attended by his wife and mother, obviously in a state of extremity. Coming in out of the bright sun, I could not see well enough to inspect him, but his breathing was stenuous and his reflexes unresponsive. I was told that he had been in coma for three days. An hour and a half later he died. In the meanwhile I talked with his brother and his neighbors to get the history of his sickness.

Chuma was a fisherman, competent at his occupation, and generally liked in the village. His main weakness was a tendency to philander. About three years previously he had had an episode of mental disturbance. He became irrational and violent and would throw men around with the strength of an ox. Finally he was subdued and kept tied up in his house for a whole week. His brothers went to a diviner at Tawalani who diagnosed his trouble. It seemed that a shetani had been sent to annoy him by the



Funeral of Chuma Kukuma
Carrying the Body from the Mosque

outraged husband of a woman to whom he had been paying attention. It was decided to exorcise him by the mystical method, which is usually preferred by men. The seance was conducted by a mwalimu instead of a mganga. Seven loaves of bread and seven coconuts were arranged on a table which was held over Chuma's head by his brothers, their hands joining to form a circle around him. Then a cock was slaughtered and the mwalimu read parts of the Koran which had special mystical meaning.

The rite accomplished its purpose and Chuma recovered completely and went back to fishing. He remained well till the onset of his present illness two months before his death. Then he started complaining of pain in his eyes, chest, and abdomen, and was no longer fit for work. His brothers went to the same diviner at Tawalani, but this time he was not able to fathom the cause of the sickness. They then went to other diviners--four in all--and the nature of the trouble gradually transpired. Some man who held a grudge against Chuma was trying to do him in by nefarious means. First he had managed to put poison in his food (this was conceived of as magical rather than as physical poison), then he had made a pact with an evil shetani to destroy Chuma. In short, he was practicing sorcery. The diviners could not tell the name of the sorcerer--that seems to be against their code of professional ethics--but many of the people in the village knew who it was. Some months earlier Chuma had had a bitter quarrel over the rent of some coconuts belonging to him. (Coconuts are the commonest cause for lawsuits and quarrels all along the coast.) The man with whom he had quarreled was Salim Tita, a bad character who was known to possess

the evil eye. Salim lived next door to the mganga Mwaita, which was also a suspicious circumstance.

The situation seemed to be virtually hopeless. The only possible way of saving Chuma would have been to persuade Salim to try to call off the shetani, and that was very unlikely. Chuma's brothers actually went to Sheikh Mwaita of Sibutuni, the highest ranking Muslem on the Boma Peninsula, and requested him to try Salim Tita for guilt by a mystical ordeal. Sheikh Mwaita refused and explained piously that Chuma would recover if God so willed in spite of shetani and sorcery; and as for Salim, if he were really responsible for Chuma's death, his just punishment would come when he met God. It is thought that Salim proceeded in this way: he went to a tree in the forest which he knew to be frequented by shetani, made an offering, and established contact with one. He promised to bring a goat to the spot and sacrifice it if the shetani succeeded in killing Chuma.

During all this time Chuma had been getting worse and worse, until finally he could not get up from his bed and went into coma. Three days later he died. From the meager findings and sketchy history I was not certain of the physical cause of death. The diagnoses that first presented themselves--sleeping sickness, cerebral malaria, syphilis of the brain, poliomyelitis, and so on--all had points against them. The possibility of a helminthic infestation of the brain could not be definitely ruled out, considering the frequency of these parasites among the Segeju. The Africans themselves showed no curiosity about the mechanism of the death.

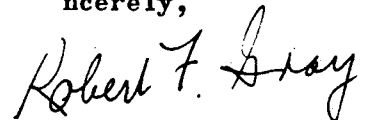
The body was buried the next morning and we went to the funeral, having already contributed to the funeral expenses. A crowd of 200 men and fewer women had gathered, including friends and relatives from neighboring villages, all dressed in their Friday best. Betty went immediately to join the crowd of women squatting on the veranda of the dead man's house. She reports that they were not lamenting but were indulging in a gossip fest. She sat next to the sharp-tongued wife of our friend Mohamed Abdallah and picked up some choice bits. The men were comporting themselves more decorously--all except Mzee Bakari, the father-in-law of the deceased, who was loudly upbraiding a group of walimu for a minor mistake which they had made in washing the body. A large share of the funeral expense fell on Bakari, and as he had just recently paid for an expensive shetani dance for his daughter Mwenshika he was in a truculent mood. Other men were rolling the winding sheet and preparing the bier--an ordinary African bed with a low canopy covered with soberly colored cloths. Salim Tita was present in the group, looking as sympathetic as anyone.

At ten o'clock the bier was taken into the house for the body. Its emergence from the house was a signal for the women to start wailing, which they did in a dignified, subdued manner. The body was first carried to the mosque for a short service, and was then taken to the grave which had been dug in a coconut grove about 100 yards from the village. The grave was about four feet deep. A narrow trench had been dug in the bottom, just wide enough to hold the body laid on its right side with head facing the east. A large cloth was held over the grave while the body was slipped in and placed in the trench, which was then covered with a board. During the burial there was constant reading from the Koran, first by Chuma's brother, then

by different visiting walimu. The grave was filled in to ground level and two dippers of water were poured over the head by a mwalimu. The whole group stood around the grave reciting prayers in unison, some of them with hand gestures. The remaining earth was piled over the grave in a neat bevelled mound. This ended the funeral and the group broke up and strolled back to the village, except for three men who stayed on sitting by the grave with small books to read selected passages from the Koran.

Normally there would have been a funeral feast going on for two days, which is considered a major item of expense for the family. But as this funeral took place during the month of Ramadhan, the feast was curtailed and limited to the evening hours. The women stopped their formal wailing, and those from other villages started to leave. Mzee Bakari was busy interviewing visiting relatives of the dead man, taxing them with their small shares of the funeral expenses before they left for home.

Sincerely,



Robert F. Gray

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