Umleavyo
The Dilemma of Parenting

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Preface

The word “Umleavyo” in the title of our book refers to the well-known Kiswahili proverb: “Umleavyo ndivyo akuavjo”, meaning “the way you raise a child is the way she will grow up”: that is, the means you use will have an impact on the kind of person she will be. The saying is so familiar that it is enough to use the first word for people to recognise it.

*Umleavyo, The Dilemma of Parenting*, is the third book written by the Teenage Reproductive Health Study Group based at the University of Dar es Salaam. The first was *Chelewa, Chelewa, The Dilemma of Teenage Girls*, published in 1994. It consisted of eight small studies from different parts of Tanzania focusing on the reasons for and consequences of teenage girls’ out-of-wedlock pregnancies, especially the schoolgirl pregnancies that upset elders, parents and teachers. In that book we introduced a Kiswahili saying into the title by using the first words of “Chelewa, Chelewa utamkuta mtoto si wako,” which means, “if you do not take proper and timely action, you will end up a loser.” Although many unmarried teenage mothers are at risk, the proverb was addressed at parents who did not guide and talk with their daughters about the transition from childhood to womanhood and the effects of sexual maturing on relations between girls and boys, not to mention with men who are attracted to young girls. Our studies showed how unprepared the girls were – they had been told “too little too late”.

The studies made it clear that explanations for the problem of unmarried teenage mothers cannot be primarily researched by studying the girls themselves, but by better understanding the profound changes that have taken place and continue to take place in society. Thus, the next set of studies investigated youth at the crossroad of custom and modernity. The book was titled, *Haraka, Haraka, Look Before You Leap*. “Haraka, haraka, baina haraka” means “Rushed actions have no blessing”. The studies focused on the “crossroad” by looking into the erosion of customary institutions that regulated sexuality, marriage and parenthood, and the loss of community involvement in the social control of children and youth.

*Umleavyo* reverses the perspective of *Chelewa, Chelewa* by focusing on the parents who are expected to guide their children into an unknown future.
Three generations of parents and community members are the focus of various chapters dealing with ways of bringing up children and advising youths about gender and sexuality. By presenting case studies on how families and communities in the past promoted obedience and good manners, and comparing these practices with current conditions, the book aims to illuminate the gap between the elderly and the youths, and discusses how to bridge that gap. The first step might consist of a better understanding of the forces that divide the generations, an understanding that could enable parents and children to better hear each other.

As the name Teenage Reproductive Health Study Group suggests, the team was set up to advance work on reproductive and sexual health. The concept of health is strongly associated with medicine, but the group’s interdisciplinary composition and studies transcend medicine. Since the causes of maternal and infant mortality as well as sexual diseases are to a large extent economic, social and cultural, they require approaches that trace connections between illnesses and social conditions in a broad sense. However, while medical studies are directed towards direct intervention and measurable results, social studies, if successful, depend on having an impact on public opinion and/or policy makers to bring about reform. Since people act according to their definition of a given situation, our studies are a humble attempt to define local situations and thus to animate action.

The composition of the research team is heterogeneous, ranging from professors to a self-employed farmer, but the majority of members have completed the Masters exam. The disciplines are diverse – sociology, statistics, linguistics, education, law, cultural geography and biology. Not all the team members contributed to Umleavyo, since we wanted to establish a thematic cohesion for the book, and two members dropped out of the project but are already busy on our next one. Of the ten original members (since 1989), seven are still working together. Over all these years we have supported each other and built up the competence of the group by sharing knowledge, skills and experience. This support has extended into our social lives.

All the team members work part-time on their studies. All have demanding full-time work and families. We do not receive any salary for the studies we have done, only direct costs like travel, per diems and workshop participation. Intellectual curiosity, social engagement and the good spirit within the team motivate us. We all face the struggle of finding the right words, since we are not writing in our mother tongue. Rita Liljeström, professor of sociology at the University of Göteborg, continues to work with us in her retirement. She shares our conditions of work and supports us through criticism, encouragement, editing and friendship.
The group has always enjoyed the support of many people and is indebted to the following resource persons for their constructive contributions throughout the process of writing research proposals and reports to the writing of the books themselves. These include Dr. Patrick Masanja, senior lecturer in sociology at the University of Dar es Salaam; Mrs. Mary Machuve of the Ministry of Education and Culture; Mrs. Tuli Kasimoto from the Ministry of Community Development, Women’s Affairs and Children; Dr. Cletus Mkai, statistician at the Planning Commission; and Rose Mwaipopo Ako, sociologist at the University of Dar es Salaam. Tribute is paid to the late Professor Ernest Urassa, gynaecologist at Muhimbili University of Health, who passed away while we were writing the manuscripts for Umleavyo, for his relentless efforts and his contributions to the volumes up to his untimely death. May God rest his soul in eternal life.

We also acknowledge the Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries (SAREC) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) for providing the financial support that has made it possible for us to undertake these studies. Our sincere gratitude is expressed to the universities of Göteborg and Dar es Salaam for fostering a good environment for multidisciplinary studies and cooperation.

The group is also indebted to the Nordic Africa Institute for publishing our three volumes. The opportunity to be published has motivated us to continue and improve our studies. We warmly thank our employers and families for their kind support and for letting us devote some of the time that would otherwise have been used to perform our official obligations and family duties to working on these books.

Dar es Salaam, 21 October 2003

Mary Ntukula
The Dilemma of Parenting

Virginia Bamurange

In the early 1990s, when I was attending an international conference on adolescent issues, I suddenly, in the middle of the discussion, heard a clear and loud voice proclaim. “There is no adolescence in Africa.” I burst into laughter, but with awe, not with joy. The friend sitting beside me could not hide her disappointment. I raised my hand and protested, noting that I was working on a project in Tanzania that was dealing with adolescent issues and that it had been initiated more than a decade ago. We wanted an explanation from the participant. Since he was not from Africa, we wanted to know from where he got this notion! “Oh, I got it from your learned people. In my country, I met well-educated Africans who told me that there is no such thing as adolescence in Africa. Children pass smoothly to adulthood without any turmoil!”

Adolescents appeared in Africa long after formal schooling had invented them in Europe. There were no adolescents as long as the transition from childhood to adulthood went smoothly and did not require years of preparation between those two stages. By and large, customs provided models for life and the older generations guided the younger ones. Of course, changes took place and conflicts had to be dealt with. Yet on the whole, the older generations were able to uphold social control, discipline the young, assign them tasks and involve them in common aims.

In the past, a pubescent girl was guided and protected by customary institutions and was prepared for marriage immediately after she had matured (attained menarche) by chosen people of the clan. A girl did not have much to choose from, since she was not exposed to many temptations. Hence, she usually started her reproductive life and life-nurturing role in her teens. This corresponded to her expectations and when they were fulfilled she was contended and accepted by others. In marriage, the wide family and kin group supported the couple materially and psychologically. Any lack of wisdom, direction and emotional maturity was cushioned by the invaluable support received from
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the bigger family. Families were guided by social norms and values, but these are no longer there.

The few transitional rites that still exist are inappropriate. The protected nature of the pubescent period, with all the attendant guidance, belongs to the past. The present vacuum in relevant ideals and exploratory dialogues leaves young people and parents bewildered. Despite their intentions to do the best, they often fail.

I often remember the statement “There is no adolescence in Africa” in my daily work with youths and their parents. I still meet people who have not grasped the meaning of a preparatory period after childhood that postpones adulthood. Adolescence as a concept was introduced into Africa by missionaries and through formal education. The coming of adolescence was preceded by a series of interventions from abroad as well as by internal conflicts, which both undermined the previous tribal order and the transmission of social mores.

Counselling between generations

I am a counsellor by profession and I have been in youth work for sixteen years. In that period, I have been involved in training youth leaders and youth workers, in developing materials targeting youth and in counselling youth, parents and other adults on adolescence-related issues. I have participated in outreach work to try to get in touch with the youth in communities as well as the support institutions in the community. In this chapter, I will share some of my experiences. Most of the examples are about adolescent problems and parents who are at a loss to deal with them. Adolescent parenting in our country is a long and tiresome road for most parents. Be it in towns or in villages, be it educated or uneducated parents, nobody understands Vijana wa leo (the youth of today). In my daily work, I feel overwhelmed by the naiveté, the ignorance and the failures of parents of today. I am also one of them. How can we help the young if we do not even admit that they are at risk and that the rules from the past need to be adapted to current conditions, reinterpreted and sometimes reinstated?

The adolescent stage I am addressing is the period after the onset of puberty and before adulthood. This is the phase in life when one is no longer a child and not yet an adult. The World Health Organisation has acknowledged the phase and defined it as from twelve to nineteen years. This phase overlaps with the definition of youth, which runs from fifteen to twenty-four years, also according to World Health Organisation. Here, I use adolescence and youth alternately, since I meet the whole range in my work. Adolescence came into
being as the period of preparation for the future. This preparation, however, is lopsided. While the education system has opened avenues to the labour market for those who manage to reach its higher levels, the same educational system leaves adolescents unprepared when it comes to human reproduction and gender relations (Rwebangira and Liljeström, 1998).

Today, the successful young men and women are those who remain unmarried during adolescence and spend time to learn skills to be deployed during adulthood. At the same time, they remain exposed to risk. With their changing bodies and lack of appropriate guidance they have sometimes ended up in dire circumstances. Those who, due to poverty, are excluded from further education and hence from employment, and who, due to lack of means, cannot consider marrying are doubly at risk.

Without the facts of life about sexual relationships and parental bonds, too many adolescents end up in the morass of unwanted pregnancies, illegal abortions, abandoned children or sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, not to mention unemployment and all the problems attendant on a lack of direction, such as drug abuse.

Who will prepare the girls?

What puts girls at risk is that they usually take male dominance for granted in gender relations. They want to be seen as good girls. As part of the game, they are flattered into feeling that by accepting men’s advances they will be more coveted and seen as more beautiful, especially when those men are in authority or are better off. To be a good girl is to obey, to follow instructions faithfully, never to manifest a deviant point of view. A young girl encodes these messages early in life and few mothers are knowledgeable enough to guide their daughters to live in the modern world. Nobody can blame mothers, as most of them were not subjected to the influences their daughters now face. During counselling, we often meet girls who were caught up in messy situations because they were not forewarned but were ill equipped to venture into modern life. I will give a few examples to illustrate the issues at hand.

We had set aside a week especially for girls. My fellow counsellors and I had endless discussions about urgent cases. Young girls came with their desperate mothers and half the counselling time was used for tears. Mothers did not comprehend what their daughters were up to. According to these mothers, they themselves were working hard to make ends meet and to provide for their daughters’ education, but the daughters did not give a damn. One abandoned
A mother consoling her daughter, who was allegedly defiled after being given 200 Tanzanian Shillings. (Photo: The Guardian, Dar es Salaam)
Virginia Bamurange

school for three days and the teachers did not know her whereabouts. When she reappeared she was expelled, in accordance with school regulations. Her mother had saved for two years to send her to a good boarding school and was now totally distraught. When they reached the town where they lived, the daughter chose to move out from home and live with a friend’s family. “What is wrong? What have I done to deserve this punishment?” the mother asked me. “Why can’t she see my struggle and reward me just by living well. I am not demanding too much, am I?”

I had to establish a good rapport with the girl. She opened up and confided in me:

You know, when I went to boarding school I made three friends. We were always together. One day the school authorities gave us a day out to town for shopping. I went with my friends and we were dressed in school uniform. In the city centre we met four men whom my friends knew. The men looked handsome and had nice manners when they invited us to their hotel. We ended up spending three days with them. They bought us tracksuits to dress in, so we did not wear the school uniforms. We had a pleasant time having a picnic where we chatted, ate and drank. The third night it was all tears as we departed. They had to go back to their workplaces. The men had only come to the city to attend a workshop. I was expelled from school after spending three days out without permission. Since the town is small, gossip reached our headmistress on the third day, when all the staff were searching the whole town for us.

The girl ended up with a loud laugh and commented: “I was very stupid!”

Reflecting on this story, whom can you blame? The grown men who were actually abusing schoolgirls? The girls themselves for not being wise enough to make a choice between school and short-term enjoyment with men. The girl could not even remember the name of the man who courted her, nor does she have any contact with him. Do you blame the mother who worked hard to pay for her daughter, bought everything according to school instructions but never talked to her daughter about the risks she might encounter? Was she aware of these risks herself? What about the teachers? Could they have prepared the girls for a life away from home, for the kind of temptations they might face?

I never met the teachers but the mother was very annoyed during the counselling session when I asked how she had prepared her daughter to live away from home and to choose her friends, etc. Her angry voice still rings in my ears: “What? I work sixteen hours a day to get enough money to feed and educate her, what other preparations does she need from me? Does she not have a brain? Je ni taahirâ? [Is she mentally retarded]? What I do know is that she was proclaimed normal when she was born. So I do not want her to play with my life – if this goes on, I will end up as a mad woman!”
Once, another desperate mother in a counselling session told me:

My friend, my sister, you have listened to me, you have shown me all the respect a sister and a friend shows another. I appreciate everything, but today I have come to tell you that I have escorted many mothers to bury their sons and daughters. I have consoled them. I am not an exception, I have washed my hands of this daughter of mine. If she dies, inform me! I will be consoled by those I have consoled!

She left her daughter in the counselling room with me. I am sure there are many other mothers who feel similarly overwhelmed by their adolescents’ problems and let go.

**Fathers who wash their hands**

When I was still a young counsellor, we wrote several polite letters to invite parents to our counselling centre to discuss their teenagers. Some of the letters were ignored, some were responded to, but usually only the mothers turned up. The few fathers who came gave us the same explanation. For example, one explained: “In my house we have different ministries. The ministry of parenting belongs to my wife and I do not interfere!”

A father once confided to us: “I know that my son sleeps with girlfriends and sometimes he does not attend school. I have remained quiet all along because I feel strongly that it is better for him to be promiscuous than to commit suicide. You see, nowadays these children punish us parents by committing suicide.” The poor father had overlooked the fact that today being promiscuous is also suicidal in light of the HIV/AIDS pandemic!

There was the daughter whom we had to give priority to finding a stable home. She had messed up her life and her relationship with her mother had deteriorated so much that she stubbornly refused to live with her. The person we wanted to talk to most of all was the other parent, the father! We got his telephone number after a long search, because according to the daughter he had just cut all communication. After listening to us and assuring us that he understood our plea, he went underground. It appeared that he had several lines that were connected to several secretaries. These kept us waiting on the phone for several minutes before they cut us off. It was not possible to talk to the father after our initial conversation. After a long time we got hold of his mobile telephone number, which he decided to turn off when he heard from us again. We gave up. One day our client’s mother confided that “the father has washed his hands of her. He has told me that he will not have anything to do with his daughter.”
One day a fifteen-year-old chubby girl tearfully narrated the following to me:

It was in the evening at about 7.00 when my dad sent me to the shops. Before I reached the shops a boy, who always claims that he loves me so much, pulled me aside. We began to romance. I forgot about the time. – My father was so angry when I returned home after two hours that I was taken to the police station. The police were calling each other to listen to my story. They were all giggling the whole night.

The father was then told by the police to let the girl get married if she wished. This case raises a lot of questions in my mind: Where are the fathers? Who is supposed to prepare girls for the right passage into adulthood? What service does our society and community offer when there is a wounded relationship between parents and children? The way the police handled the girl leaves a lot to be desired.

All these experiences and many others remind me of a friend’s comments: “You know, even the Bible says a good child is the pride of the father and a badly behaved child is the shame of the mother.” Who ever interpreted the Bible verses, experience has shown me that people live to it. When the mother informed me that “the father has washed his hands of his daughter”, this was not the first time that I heard that refrain. However, things are changing and we now get fathers in our counselling room, but the change is very gradual! Parenting should be the responsibility of both parents, especially in crucial stages such as adolescence.

What about girls who are far away from grandmothers and aunties who were supposed to guide them and show them the way? The case of Lulu who was living in an urban area with her divorced father might typify many other cases of children who are deprived of their childhood because of parental problems.

“Can I talk to you?”

A girl’s voice came to the attention of all my colleagues who were sharing a joke in my office during lunch hour. She had opened the door to allow just her head in. I invited her in and inquired if she needed counselling.

“No!” She smiled, “I want to talk to you like one would talk to a friend!”

All my colleagues left. They had learnt by this time that my office was more for young people than for anybody else.

Lulu, the girl, was very familiar to me. She was an active participant in our programme. She came nearer and asked in a very serious and pressing tone, “Could you assist me with 200 shillings [equivalent to US$ 0.25]?” I took some time to look at her closely, a young girl who had just begun her pubescent changes. She looked young and very attractive in her torn uniform and
worn-out shoes. Her white blouse was unwashed. I wondered what she would do with such a small amount of money. When I inquired she gave me the details: “You know, I want to go and buy half a kilogram of maize flour and okra. I will then get spinach and cook a meal for my siblings and porridge for my sick dad.”

“Two-hundred shillings? Will it suffice?” I asked her.

She took my pen and put every detail on a piece of paper for me! I was astonished! She told me that her dad brings money for the family everyday he is healthy and can search for jobs, but now he has been sick and in bed for the last three days.

“And your mum?” I inquired.

She responded calmly with a sad voice: “My mum and dad divorced four years ago and my mum immediately remarried. Since then, we, my two younger siblings and I, have been living with my dad! My dad brings money, I budget and cook meals for all of us.”

I added “You attend school at the same time?”

“Yes, I am now in Class Five.”

She left me totally disturbed. I questioned myself about how many Lulus there were in this community? I could not stop myself from imagining the answer. How Lulu would spend several days without proper food and one day would approach any man for assistance. She might be assisted, grandly, but on condition of giving sex in return. She would fulfil the condition, of course. The man might be infected with HIV/AIDS. Lulu is well informed. She is a peer educator, but would one blame her if she fell into the trap! I wondered why the grandparents or the aunts and uncles, any kin, or any neighbours, were not in a position to help this girl who has been robbed of her childhood by her unstable family conditions. I kept on answering myself that this is urban life. Yes, urban life, meaning that everybody minds his or her own business and that probably aunties and grandparents are far away.

Informing young girls and providing them with services does not suffice. There are many forces bearing on girls that can lead their lives astray. My sense of disturbance was aggravated when I shared my feelings with a friend, a teacher from a school nearby. Even before I finished, she interrupted me by saying, “Oh, there are many young ones in this community who are bringing themselves up.”

The large family network, the clan, that once provided mutual assistance and relatives who shared in looking after and disciplining youth are dispersed and old obligations are dissolved. The parents are left to cope on their own in conditions where old rules no longer apply.
Who am I?

When do you tell a child the truth about its origin? How do you tell a child of its painful history without harming the child? These are questions that haunt many an adult guardian. Often they remain silent about important issues concerning the child’s identity. When a child eventually reaches the point where he wants to know his identify, he starts to inquire and the adults become anxious! They do not know how to break the news. It becomes a problem, the family members meet and argue, never finding a solution. Did they not know that while they remained silent there could be others who talked? Distant relatives, people in the neighbourhood and friends could break the sad news to the child in a crude way! Or the child learns the truth in awkward circumstances that leave him injured for the whole of his life.

Twelve years ago, in one of the busy towns in Tanzania, I met a young man of twenty who had been on the streets since he was nine years old. This is how he came to be a street boy in his own words:

One day I heard my mother and father arguing in their bedroom. It was locked but I could hear my mother sobbing bitterly and my father said in a strong harsh voice “Goody, (as I was known to members of the family) I will never send him to school. Look for his father, he will be responsible for his education. Not me! I will educate my own children.”

My mother continued to plead: “Please. I never hid the pregnancy from you. You accepted me in marriage and promised me that we’d take care of all the children without ... “She was silenced by a good slap, which I am sure sent her to the ground. The beating continued, with heavy blows and insults.

“Stupid woman! You think I can take care of and educate another man’s child!”

Goody told me that afterwards he sat on his own and tried to analyse what he had heard. The only solution was to run away and relieve his mother of her burden. Village boys talk a lot about town life. He would go to the town and make a life like a man. In the evening he boarded a train towards the town where we met.

Imagine what happened after he left. Probably the mother believed that her husband was responsible for this mysterious disappearance of Goody. The agony the mother must have gone through! What would Goody have done if he had been told the truth? What he heard through the door would have affected him less and he could have made a different decision. What I learnt from Goody is that he saw his mum again after seven years.

Zebedeayo was a son seeking his father. The professional who had brought the young people for group counselling informed us that it was Zebedeayo
who had requested and motivated the others to come. He was very lively throughout the discussion. Five minutes after the group left the counselling centre, Zebedeayo returned and requested individual counselling. So he had an agenda!

He let out all his emotions as if he had never before talked about his feelings:

I have been travelling and living in all the towns where my granny told me my father might have lived. I have explored all the towns, all the corners, all the offices of his profession, all in vain! This is now my fourth year since I started my search. Nobody knows about this name I have. He might have lied to my mother's family. Did he use a different name so that he could not be traced? I wish he knew how lonely he has made me feel.

The boy tearfully narrated:

I wish I could set my eyes on him and see what he looks like. If I die today, nobody is going to prepare to mourn me. Imagine, my mother who was left alone to nurse me from pregnancy until I was fourteen years old, has died and my granny is dead too. But where is my father? I have never known him. He might be alive. This is what motivates me to continue the search.

In counselling rooms we meet many adolescents who are troubled by their sense of blurred identity. The above cases illustrate an adolescent who is hurt by realising that he had a false identity and one who is searching for his identity.

"I am is based on feeling" (Noonan, 1983). The question of identity is crucial for young people. An adolescent is not yet someone with an identity that has been tested and recognised in the society around him. Hence, the sense of self is at the centre of his questions and made into a preoccupation. The adolescent is readily pestered by strange doubts about where he belongs and about being accepted by others. This questioning of one’s identity can be seen as an attempt to adapt to the environment and to become viable within it (Rayner, 1993).

In counselling, we meet those who are trying to find themselves for the first time and those who are merely reshaping themselves. The first category is more difficult to deal with, especially in our society. They have never felt firmly grounded in their own experience and cannot say “I am” with any conviction. It is very important for a child to be told the mere truth about his self, his base.

Identity can be equated with a solid and well-entrenched foundation upon which the house is built. Such foundations can be seen as the equivalent of the self who is organised, continuous and worthwhile, i.e., a purposeful and indispensable self (Noonan, 1983). The person accepts responsibility for himself
and for others. So let us help our children find their identity with us and please, let us provide support to those who have been hurt in their effort to develop their identities.

The cases above tell us about the importance of the parents. They also warn parents against hiding secrets about relationships and thus undermining the trust of their children when the truth is revealed.

One of the difficult tasks for parents is to prepare adolescents for sexual responsibility and provide them with knowledge and means to avoid the traps and risks that take a heavy toll among the youth of today. Parents are not well prepared for this task. Traditionally, it was not the duty of parents to talk about sexuality with their children. Quite the reverse, since strict taboos silenced parents and prevented children from entering those places and touching those things that reminded them of parental sexuality (see Ntukula’s chapter in this volume). Many tribes had elaborate initiation-rites, and within the families it was often the duty and privilege of the paternal grandparents to joke and talk about the meaning of gender, and the paternal aunt was the person entitled to give instruction to her brothers’ daughters. However, the variations among the sub-Saharan people are so great that customs cannot be summarised.

While Westerners take it as given that parents guide their children in sexual matters, this has not been so in Africa. The clan and the collective played an active role in bringing up and disciplining children. Norms underlined respect for the elders, obedience and good behaviour (see Mziray’s chapter in this volume).

The social scenery in Africa, as in the West, has changed dramatically. Old rules have lost their validity and it is argued that parents of today are unable to foster their children because the societies are no longer what they were when the parental generations grew up. Some parents stick to the past, some look for new options by asking what can be done.

Let’s look into what some adolescents are asking for.

**At what age is the time ripe?**

In the youth centre complex where I worked we had several youth sub-groups based more on age categories than on friendship. Early adolescents play together and share similar interests and this is also true of mid-adolescents and the youth above nineteen years.
One day I was approached by boys of between ten and thirteen years who flocked into my office and politely requested, “Mama counsellor, could we have a lesson on puberty?”

“Of course! Yes,” I assured them!

Shame on us! How come we neglected to arrange such lessons? The habit of delaying education about the meaning of puberty that prevails in our society had spread to us professionals. I felt humiliated. Yet when you work in a youth centre with outreach programmes you tend to be overwhelmed by several activities.

When I raised my head the boys were still standing in front of me. Abdulkarim, who is a born leader, said shyly. “Mama Mshauri, we have a reason for our request.”

I nodded to show that I agreed.

Faraja, who is a bully but very nice and open when his emotions have not taken their toll, pointed a finger at his comrade Robi. “We are requesting these lessons because this one is already seducing girls.”
“NO! It is him,” Robi said.

They all laughed but Albert came forward and told me almost in a whisper: “We all feel the same about being near girls.” An other round of laughter.

I immediately sat on my desk and started to prepare a lesson plan for the boys. They were a mixed group of those in school and out of school. Those in school ranged from Class Two to Class Six. Some of those out of school had dropped out, while others had never been in a classroom. I knew that actually getting the message across would demand skill. Writing would not be possible. I needed to use diagrams and talk more and concentrate especially on answering their questions accurately.

We planned together with the young boys. The lessons on puberty would take us five sessions in order to explain biological changes, psychosocial changes, new ways of relating to the other gender which accompany these changes and how to cope with all of the changes. The boys were surprised – five sessions just on puberty!

“My father took only five minutes.” At this point all the attention shifted to Felix, who went on: “One day my dad called me into his room and in a very scornful way pointed at my nose and told me: ‘Now you are of age, I do not want STDs in this house! Understand?’”

Then I asked them, “How many of you have been taught by your parents?” The boys all laughed. Then Peter confided:

One day my father was having a siesta and I was talking loudly in the living room, not knowing that my dad was having a rest. I heard him call my mother to the room. I got palpitations for I knew I was to be reprimanded. So I followed to eavesdrop. My father asked calmly: “Do we have a visitor in the house?”

“No”, my mother answered.

“But I hear a man's voice!”

My mother said: “It is our son. I have told you to talk to him. He is now growing into a man. Please, talk to him!”

My father replied angrily: “Talk to him about what?”

“About life,” my mother pleaded, “about good behaviour.”

Then to my surprise my father questioned her about who taught me all that?

“Nobody! He will learn through his mistakes.”

The discussion went on and on and then my father was convinced. He called me: “Peter!”

I went in and in a very serious tone he cautioned me: “Do not sleep around with girls. We are not ready to bring up out-of-wedlock babies!”

I nodded politely. That was the end of the lesson and my mother was very happy and satisfied. She always reminds me whenever I go out: “Remember your father’s words!”
No wonder adolescents continue to get into difficulty and parents wonder why, for, according to them, they have done their best.

Ideally, at what age should the preparation for this critical stage start?

The Ministry of Education and Culture is convinced that this education should start in Class Five, but teachers in primary schools in Kinondoni where the African Medical Research Foundation (AMREF) has had an Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health (ASRH) programme since 1996 insist that this education is needed even earlier. In reality, a child should be informed just before puberty to avoid things going wrong. Most adults in our society think this is too early, which has resulted in adverse consequences. A study of unmarried teenage mothers clearly shows that they had received “too little preparation, too late” (Tumbo-Masabo, 1994).

An appeal

There are days when I feel low. I can hardly bear it that some adults in the society make matters worse by exploiting adolescents, take advantage of their naivety, lack of wisdom and guidance. Remember those adult men who tempted the teenage girls to abscond from school for three days?

Mothers who give up, fathers who hide and the father who left his daughter to the police to be humiliated, make me wonder: Are we aware that we lack knowledge and skills for the positive parenting of our adolescents? Do we want to overcome this deficiency and seek help in our dilemma or otherwise?

What about parents who keep secrets that are bound to be revealed, fathers who wash their hands and are not aware that they deprive their children and themselves of a sense of belonging and a base for identity. Fathers and mothers, who do not say or do not know who they are, risk having children who do not know where they belong.

How is it that we deny adolescents the knowledge of their maturing bodies, sexual relations and the recreation of life, issues that in the past were the focus of initiation into adulthood!

Friends, let us all roll up our sleeves and work to alleviate this problem. Adolescents are our future, our hope and pride!
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At the moment there is an outcry from our society that children do not behave as expected. Adolescents are blamed for disrespecting elders, premarital sex, unwanted pregnancies, drug abuse, theft and many other forms of misbehaviour (Chambua, 1991). Why do the elderly blame the modern generation? What were the aims and means used when the elders themselves grew up? What are the current aims for and methods of upbringing?

I have interviewed people about their ideas and images of how to bring up children and youths as responsible adults. I am interested in highlighting how preparation for adulthood has taken place in three consecutive generations; i.e., an old generation of great-grandfathers and grandfathers, a parental generation, and the young generation of their grandchildren and children. I am concerned about agents and institutions that have an impact on children and youth: family and community, religion, custom, modern education and the mass media. How efficient are they? I will discuss how each of the three generations looks at current ways of upbringing. The last (but not the least) part of the chapter contains my reflections.

In order to explore these issues, I have studied six families in Same and Mwanga Districts, northern Tanzania. Two families are from Ugweno village: Kinanja Wedi’s family and the Mmbaga family. The Tehena Kivandiko family lives in Usangi. Three families are from Gonja location, namely, the family of Noah Luhwa, Furaha Mungara and Kabwe Kinywa. The residents of these places belong to the Pare tribe. However, they adhere to different religions: people in Gonja village are mainly Christians while those in Usangi are mainly Moslems. Ugweno residents are almost equally divided between these two religions. I used a local informant to identify families with very old members. I also considered the educational background and local reputations. In each family, I interviewed a woman and a man from each of the three generations.
I established that the way the six families had brought up their children over three generations was almost the same, even though the families had different religious backgrounds. Instead of repeating comparable stories in detail, I will give a full account of the first family I met and comment on the other five families on issues that did not come up in my encounters with the first family. The consensus in opinions indicates an isolated, homogeneous local culture.

Targets of a “civilising mission”

Information from Ugweno area confirmed that the break up of traditional society began with the arrival of German missionaries around 1900. However, it is believed that Islam was already there, although its spread had been rather slow. By 1901 the missionaries had established church centres and built hospitals. There was a primary school with three pupils who were taught to read and write in their local language. Those were the beginnings of what became known as “a civilised way of life.” The youths that attended Christian schools were encouraged through gifts to abandon their local beliefs and convert to Christianity. The more the young people joined missionary schools, the more local beliefs disappeared among families.

Cross-border business between Tanzania and Kenya increased rapidly around the 1920s and Mwanga District grew into a famous business centre. The traders were mostly Arabs who brought with them the Moslem religion and culture. Their white khanzu dress, their Arabic prayers and their fluent Swahili led local habitants to regard Islam as civilised and they slowly adopted it. This area was regarded as more civilised than all the other parts of the Pare area, and Usangi village still has many Moslem believers.

During my fieldwork, I observed that almost all school-age children were in school. Mwanga District was among the leading areas for primary and secondary schools and technical and vocational training centres. The area is very advanced compared to other villages in the country. The road is passable throughout the year. There is a reliable water system, a post office and several bank branches. Ugweno and Usangi are mountainous and enjoy a cool climate throughout the year. The rich soil and good weather conditions make the area suitable for agricultural production. The main cash crop, which yields a good income for residents, is coffee. Maize, beans, bananas and potatoes are the staple crops. Good income levels enable most people to own modern domestic electrical appliances, including videos, and to have telephone lines to their
Gonja, like Ugweno, experienced changes after 1900, when missionaries settled in the area. The Christian faith expanded quickly thanks to incentives or “motivations.” The missionaries built churches, schools and hospitals and taught people better farming methods. By the 1940s, several primary schools were in existence, mainly owned by religious institutions. Some boarding schools were built to accommodate students from remote areas. The teachers were mostly local graduates from Christian institutions. Their lifestyle had already changed into what was called modern. Thus, they ignored customary ways of life and rejected local beliefs. The teachers transmitted a foreign culture to the pupils. By that time, almost all Pare cultural practices had disappeared, especially among Christians. African Christians joined the missionaries to undermine tribal beliefs. Educated Africans now had scientific explanations to counter most of the local beliefs, thus weakening them and confirming the assertion that “belief system, knowledge and practice go together. If one changes, the rest weaken” (Raum, 1940).

Gonja village is quite advanced economically, socially and educationally. There is a referral hospital, several government and privately owned health centres, a number of primary and secondary schools, police stations and a bank branch. There is a reliable electricity supply and the residents have access to modern communication technology.

In other words, my study took place in an advanced region that has undergone modernisation and been exposed to Westernisation for more than a century.

THE GENERATION OF RESISTANCE

The family of Mzee Kinanja Wedi in Ugweno

In the past in Africa, sons and daughters were brought up to master different skills and to perform different duties. Of course, there were basic values that both genders shared, but by and large male and female were expected to live different lives. Consequently, I provide a separate account of the preparations for manhood and womanhood.

Mzee Kinanja Wedi (ninety-five) and Bibi Nasemba Kinanja (eighty-two) are better off than most of the villagers. They have a modern house where they lived with three grandchildren, two of whom were in secondary school while
the third was still in primary school. Mzee Kinanja and Bibi Nasemba have no school education at all, since this was not available when they were young. Neither were they influenced by the mass media, which had not yet been invented. So what did they have? How were they brought up?

Mzee Kinanja was a short, dark skinned and very talkative old man. He had lost none of his teeth and his eyesight was still good. He sat on a chair of local wood, covering himself with a blanket against the cold. Mzee Kinanja placed his walking stick beside him and laughed at me: “I am ready now. I have a vivid memory of my childhood – the good days I always dream of. The upbringing of my generation followed traditional norms and values. At an early age children were taken to a specialist who removed two front teeth and pricked the ear lobes for identification.”

For as long as he could remember he spent most of his time with his parents who taught him good manners and the norms and values of his tribe: respect for elders, gender roles, taboos and the day-to-day acts of a boy. At the age of eight, he was circumcised along with several other boys. He has a vivid memory of what happened:

I went into the forest with boys of my age, several senior boys and some grown-up men, who brought a cow, several goats and some food. When we arrived at the ceremonial site, we camped. A goat was slaughtered and the older boys prepared food. We ate and the male elders drank local brew and sang songs and danced throughout the night. The next day at sunrise we were seated naked. Two men carried us one by one for a distance of about one and a half metres. An old man who was the specialist in circumcision (ngariha) was seated on a stone ready to remove the foreskin. I never saw the act: it took about a minute, but I felt severe pain and I could see blood oozing. The ngariha spat a charm on the wound and the bleeding stopped, but not the pain. I wanted to cry out but they would not allow it.

The men who were carrying me started shouting encouraging words. One of them shouted “I have never seen a hero like this one.” Another said, “His face did not even show pain.” A man by my side started singing this war song: “A man like this boy can face a Maasai warrior with empty hands and would win within seconds. He can fight a lion. I have heard of heroes but this one is above them all.” I was so taken with their praises that I forgot the pain. The songs made me feel I was a hero and a hero in this tribe never cries.

I remember when one of the boys tried to cry, an old man imitated him and cried out even louder that the boy was bearing the pain so courageously that he was reminded of his own days. The old men expressed how they would like to undergo the pain again to prove their heroism. As a result, no boy shed tears. Undergoing circumcision without crying was a sign that the boy would be able to face the realities of life, of becoming an
adult man and of being self-reliant. The severe pains were likened to the problems one would face in life.

After circumcision we were sent back to a shelter belonging to an old man. We stayed there until we were healed. Our mothers would bring food and call from afar but they were not allowed to come into contact with us. Circumcision marked the end of childhood. When we returned from the forest our families celebrated our circumcision with a festival and gave us presents.

As a youth, Kinanja Wedi was expected to work on the family farms with his parents and brothers. Laziness was strictly discouraged. Each boy was given a piece of land to cultivate. The one who failed to do so was laughed at and dishonoured. The young men looked after cattle and goats. They took them to the pastures during the day and returned home in the evening. Among the pastures, they enacted plays reflecting what was happening in the society around them, like festivals, weddings, sacrifices and many other rites. They sang songs for the different occasions and each song conveyed a lesson. The men ate food together and before going to bed the older members of the family recited stories about their experiences and each story conveyed a lesson. They were taught the best methods for trapping birds and animals and how to act if faced by any danger at the pastures or when staying alone on the farms. They were given plenty of information about their own village; but had no ideas about the world beyond.

Good manners and cultural practices

The children were taught to greet whoever they encountered. Each age group and each gender had its own greetings. The children were told not to beg, fight or take another person’s property without permission. They were encouraged to help others, especially old people. These teachings were implanted in them through warnings and proverbs.

Great emphasis was placed on keeping secrets. No one was supposed to talk about anything he had seen in secret unless he thought that it would destroy the society. Mzee Kinanja explained how he obeyed the elders. Whenever he was sent on an errand, he used run to and from home. He was not allowed to talk to strangers and was warned against making friends with naughty boys. If a youth fell ill or anything abnormal appeared on his body, the matter would be reported to the family elders of the same sex. Elders would look for local herbs to heal the disease and no other person would know about the matter.
If a youth got married and was unable to father a child, he would tell his “escort” or an elderly member of his family who would arrange for someone else to visit his wife so that she could bear children. No one would know of this secret except the elders involved. The chosen man would never claim those children.

People were guided by a host of taboos and beliefs, which aimed at teaching diligence, hospitality, courage and worldly wisdom. Although Mzee Kinanja admitted that some beliefs caused fear and suspicion, by that he meant that they helped to strengthen parental control and preserve tribal values and beliefs. Pare society was ruled through a hierarchical order. A youth was not allowed to talk or discuss any matter in front of the elders unless asked. Elders were always right in everything they did or said. A youth was not allowed to ask questions. Questions were considered bad manners because they revealed doubts. If a youth erred or failed to abide by one of the many tribal rituals, he was punished in accordance with the type and seriousness of his misconduct. The punishment might involve payment of a pot of local brew, a hen, a goat or a cow. Sometimes, if the elders believed that the youth had made a mistake because his father had failed to discipline him properly, his parents would be punished too.

Failure to pay the fine would result in the whole family being isolated from the rest of the society. If the family prepared a feast, people would not attend to eat or drink, and neighbours would not even turn up for the burial of a family member.

The whole community took part in bringing up children. Every elder was expected to punish any child who misbehaved in his presence. If he failed to do so, and another elder saw it, he would be fined. It was a serious offence for an elder to see a youth misbehave and not take disciplinary action against him. The youth would never tell any other person of the disciplining, not even his own parents. If he did, his parents would further punish him.

Mzee Kinanja told us about the moving forest. Outside Ugwena village there was a dense forest where the initiations were conducted. The forest was sacred because the gods were believed to inhabit it. Moreover, the forest was held to have supernatural powers that could harm anyone who went against tribal laws. Children were taught that if they disobeyed the elders, the forest would pursue them and surround them. They would be lost forever.

When Mzee Kinanja Wedi grew up, there were tribal laws that were said to protect an individual and sustain peace in the community. Among them was the law stating that if a youth annoyed a person, the man was allowed to beat him, although not enough to hurt him or draw blood. If the boy did
bleed, the man who beat him had to give him soup to drink so that he made up for the lost blood. Normally the offender would also be fined a cow.

If someone was proved to have stolen property, he would be required to pay back double the amount. If a man were caught committing adultery, he would be forced to pay a cow to the wronged husband. Such sanctions helped ensure that people respected each other and lived in peace. However, in serious cases of conflict, when all efforts at arbitration had failed, the wronged individual was allowed to invoke dangerous demons. He could perform the traditional rite of kubaja nyungu (breaking a pot). This was a serious curse, which involved breaking a real clay cooking pot while uttering an oath. It was believed the curse would kill the offender and, sometimes, all the members of his family or clan.

If the offence were even more serious, such as killing someone through witchcraft, then another type of rite would be performed. This one was called MMA (spirit’s curse). MMA involved calling a local healer to make a “sacrifice” to the ancestors. During this ceremony, the healer would slaughter a goat or a sheep and offer it to the ancestors while asking them for justice for the deceased. It was believed that the ancestors would react by killing not only the man responsible for the death but several other members of his family. Finally they would kill even the one who performed the MMA unless the curse was stopped by another sacrifice. The community passed on all these practices from the past to the youth to warn them against evil deeds. These, along with many other beliefs, allowed the society to live in harmony. Some of the beliefs were not really believed, but as long as the society kept the secret, the beliefs worked to deter misconduct by the children.

At the age of fifteen, Mzee Kinanja and ten other teenage boys were sent into the forest for initiation. Each candidate was accompanied by his escort (supervisor), recommended by his family. There were about ten men who had already passed through initiation to train them. Among them was an expert (ngariba) who was in charge of the training. According to Mzee Kinanja:

We took an oath not to reveal what we learnt there. We stayed in the forest for almost six months. The teachings included warrior training, good manners, respect towards elders, how to deal with women during marriage, peer relations, how to support helpless members of the family, take care of sick people, etc. We also learnt about the necessity to attend tribal rituals and to make sacrificial offerings. Sex out of wedlock was strictly forbidden.

After graduating from ngasu ya mshitu (forest initiation) the teenage boy was regarded as a grown-up youth. As such, he was expected to be very close to his father, the family and society at large. He was expected to help his parents with
food production and to fight during tribal wars. Mzee Kinanja recalled several tribal wars with the Chagga, who lived in the mountainous areas around Mount Kilimanjaro in the north: “Whenever we lost a war, the Chagga would take all our cattle and goats.”

Bibi Nasemba Kinanja

Bibi Nasemba Kinanja, the wife of Mzee Kinanja, was short, plump and dark skinned. She had a smiling face. At the age of eighty-two she looked strong and could still dig, cook, pound maize and do all the domestic chores. The secret of her good health was natural foods and not taking any modern medicines. She said that they were poisonous and destroyed the body.

Bibi Nasemba narrated her childhood story:

I was born into a family of nine. I am the third born and have three sisters and five brothers. My older sister or my grandmother always accompanied me. We worked on the farm together and we collected firewood in the forest. I helped with the cooking for the family, washing plates, washing clothes, cleaning the house, cutting hay for the animals and many other household chores.

On very rare occasions, I went with girls of my age group to fetch water. We had very limited time to play. Then, one day, I dropped a pot while coming back from the well. I cried loudly and when my mother learned what had happened she comforted me by saying that a pot is made of clay and breaks easily. It is not as strong as a stone. The life of a girl is also as delicate as a pot – it can be spoiled easily, unlike that of boys. She told me that I had to be careful while carrying a pot and move carefully through my life.

During my childhood, girls of the same age group played together. We had imitation games like carrying stones on our backs and saying they were children. We imitated cooking by using tins and broken pots. We performed tribal dances and songs without knowing their meaning.

At the age of nine, Bibi Nasemba was circumcised together with seven other girls. The circumcision plans were made secretly. The girls did not know they were to be circumcised. Bibi Nasemba remembered the morning when their mothers and several older women relatives led them into the wilderness near to where the circumcision was to take place. They were taken one after the other. A small but very sharp knife was used to remove part of their private parts. An old woman performed the operation, which was very painful, and she remembered losing a lot of blood. A charm was applied to the wound and the bleeding stopped, but the pains persisted for a long time. After the operation they were well fed. They stayed with the old women for ten days while
the wounds healed. Then each girl went back to her parents without any ceremony.

Gendered cultural norms

Bibi Nasemba explained in detail what was expected of girls:

I was taught to greet my relatives by mentioning my relationship to them, for example, by adding the word aunt, uncle, sister, brother, mother, father, etc. This was the way of showing respect to the elders. We were told not to insult people, not to say bad words to others or to ask for any favours. If a person insulted another person in public he/she was supposed to “wash the face” of that person, meaning to restore society's respect for him or her. Usually, this was done by buying a pot of beer as a sign of regret or by giving a goat or a hen, depending on the gravity of the offence. All members of the village participated in punishing the person who breached cultural norms. The fine was shared among the village members. Neighbours and the community members participated in monitoring the manners of children. As a child I was not allowed to talk in public or give an opinion on anything concerning the society, as children were considered unknowledgeable. Even if a child knew what was being talked about, she was not allowed to comment or show signs that she understood. Our comments were reserved until we were alone.

When we were around twelve, we were sent on our own to fetch firewood, dig or fetch water. Parents still closely supervised us and at times an older girl was sent to spy on our discussions and actions when we were alone. We were not allowed to discuss sexual matters with boys, nor were we allowed to talk about growing up or bodily changes. Such talk was regarded as bad manners. We were told that if we saw people having sexual intercourse (kujamiaza), we would go blind. We were forbidden to listen when elder people discussed sex. If we did, we would go deaf.

In those days, there were many beliefs that threatened and warned people. If a thief took an oath denying his bad deeds, the oath would kill him and all other members of his family. If a daughter insulted her mother, the girl would die. If she talked with boys, wild animals would eat her. We were told that people from other tribes were man-eaters. The treatment of boys and girls was different. Young boys could go anywhere or behave anyhow – they could run naked, but girls were not allowed to. We were told that if a girl or woman was naked it was a curse on the society. It could prevent the rain or thunder would plaque the tribe or it brought evil on the people or domestic animals. I remember my grandmother saying that if I walked naked near a milking cow it would cease giving milk. Female parents had special ways of checking a girl’s cleanliness, especially around her private parts and armpits. They watched the girls when they bathed, and if one of them was dirty, i.e., did not shave properly, she was given a warning.
through a proverb or a song. I remember a common saying in such a situation: “One day a woman was saying to another that a long time ago a certain woman bred animals in her body. The animals turned against her and ate her.” All the older women laughed loudly.

Among the lessons the older women taught Bibi Nasemba was that it was the woman who made the household. She is the one who took care of children, husband, parents and parents-in-law after marriage, and kept good relations with neighbours. A girl was expected to be healthy, a good farmer, well behaved according to the cultural norms and to get married while still a virgin. Women were not allowed to own fixed assets like a house, a farm, a cow or a goat or sheep. The only cow a woman was allowed to posses was the “virginity cow” she received from her son-in-law when her daughter was found to be a virgin at marriage. Girls were expected to marry men of their own tribe. Marriage to a man from another tribe was regarded as shunning a husband from one’s own tribe and one was disgraced. Women were expected to feed their husbands well so that they became strong. The stronger the man, the more the respect the woman enjoyed.

Initiation and preparation for motherhood

Bibi Nasemba underwent the initiation rite at the age of fourteen. A year before, she had attained her menarche. She regarded the initiation rite as the basic cultural institution concerning female maturity, sexuality and family relationships. During these preparations she learned about fertility, marriage, sexual skills, spacing her children and the significance of good social relationships.

Bibi Nasemba talked about the ways women used to assist one another. If a woman had a problem with her husband, other women would advise her on coping strategies. For example, if a woman had regular confrontations with her husband, her friends would advise her to seek his permission to visit a relative for at least a week, so that she would be separated from him for awhile, which was likely to improve the atmosphere between them.

If the relationship between the couple became more strained, a brother of the husband or a close relative was approached to help with reconciliation. It paid for a woman to be on good terms with her in-laws because the reconciliation would favour her. Girls were told that there was no marriage without togetherness. Once you have him in the house he is not always good, but your own bad spouse is worth more than another woman’s good spouse.
A pregnant woman was not allowed to eat liver, kidneys, eggs or fatty meat, because such food would affect the child. Eggs would result in a child without hair on its head. Liver, kidney or eggs would make the child grow so big that it would burst the uterus, killing both child and mother. A pregnant woman was not allowed to go where they sacrificed to or worshipped the ancestors. It was believed that the child would be born dead: the ancestors would take the child in the womb.

We were also taught that the love between mother and child was very strong and that breastfeeding strengthened the bond of love. As a result, women were told to breastfeed whenever the baby wanted. They were warned that if the mother did not breastfeed, the love between her and the child would break. Weaning was undertaken cautiously so as not to hurt the baby or break the love. The baby was increasingly given its grandmother’s dry breast whenever it wanted to breastfeed until the child ceased asking for the breast.

A barren woman was never dishonoured in the Pare tribe. The family made arrangements to give her a child of one of her relatives. The baby was taken to the barren woman who would breastfeed it with her dry breasts in the same way the grandmothers did. It was believed that in some cases the breasts would produce milk. If this happened, the grandmother or the barren woman continued to breastfeed. This practice nurtured the love between the child and the barren woman. From then on the child would grow up in the hands of that woman as if she had borne it. The society would never tell the child who its real parents were.

Options for widows

In cases where a husband died, his brother would inherit his wife/wives. Some sort of ceremony followed the inheritance of a brother’s wife. Relatives and neighbours would come to the head of the deceased man’s compound and sit in an open space to witness which type of inheritance the man intended to adopt. The brother stood in front of the elders and announced whether he would inherit the wife through an “open door” or “closed door” agreement. “Open door” inheritance meant that the man would enter his late brother’s house and bear children by the woman in order to expand his brother’s family. “Closed door” inheritance meant that the man would be responsible for the welfare of his brother’s family but that other men were free to visit the widow. However, if she had a child, it would belong to the man who inherited the woman. If the woman accepted the man, the onlookers would applaud with cheers. The woman would remain in her late husband’s home and nothing
would be taken away from her. From that time on she and her late husband’s brother would live as husband and wife. This ensured that the widow and her children had security and close ties with her husband’s family. If the woman refused the brother, she would be returned to her parents without her children or any of her property.

THE KEEPERS OF PARE CUSTOM

It emerged clearly that in the old generation the family, near relatives and the community were responsible for preserving societal values and norms. Parents were always close to their children and taught them good manners, tribal norms and values, social roles, taboos and day-to-day conduct. This ensured that children grew up with a clear set of standards.

The old interviewees agreed that discipline, commitment and the preservation of the societal and cultural heritage were to be honoured and respected by every member of the society and overseen by its older members. Both family and society have a responsibility to ensure that societal values and norms are preserved. Chichiri Mmbaga, sixty-five, from Ugweno, explained how his grandfather taught him personal skills and cultural roles. His grandfather showed him how to use a bow and arrow to shoot animals. He explained that young boys were taught to become farmers and given a hoe and a piece of land to cultivate and plant with maize and beans. He recalled how he, as a young boy, caught a grasshopper and tied a string around its neck and pulled it as if it were a cow. The boy with the biggest grasshopper was praised as the best animal keeper.

Other elderly men shared their vivid memories. “We were also taught to be warriors. We tried to beat each other with sticks. The one who got tired or ran away was taken to have lost the battle.” Mzee Kabwe Kinywa, seventy-six, from Gonja village argued that strong family ties discipline children. If a child stole something the whole clan disciplines him or her. If that child continued stealing, the community would name the clan as a clan of thieves and other families would fear to marry into that clan.

Transition from childhood to adulthood

Even in their old age the men remembered circumcision as painful and the encouragement they received to endure the procedure without tears in order to
symbolise their heroism and their ability to face life’s realities with courage. Initiation was a famous traditional institution that was aimed at teaching military skills, good manners, family-life skills, peer relationships and how to care for sick and helpless family members. Other teachings included the need to attend tribal rituals and sacrifices and, in particular, to avoid sex out of wedlock, which was strictly forbidden.

Bibi Nasemba also talked about girls undergoing two main traditional rites, i.e. circumcision and initiation. She regarded initiation as the basic cultural institution that offered training on female maturity changes, fertility, marriage, sexual skills, family planning and social relationships. From the above it is clear that both male and female adolescents were prepared to take specific roles in their society.

Navone Luhwa from Gonja talked about the initiation rites:

The women in Gonja were circumcised and initiated in exactly the same way as those in Ugweno area. After initiation the girl stayed hidden for a long time in the attic under the roof of her parent’s house. She did this without bathing or plaiting her hair. She was smeared with kwene oil till the day she was brought down. A large ceremony was held on the day the girl was taken outside the house. She was kept away from men to ensure that she still had her virginity at the time she got married and her mother would be given a cow. When a girl gave birth, two ceremonies were performed. The first occurred a week after birth and the second after one month. The second one was the bigger feast.

During the ceremony, the mother and about twenty other women from her village would carry presents in big sisal baskets to her daughter’s house. The presents would consist of food, chicken, kwene, flour, etc. They would ululate twice, and the women on the husband’s side of the family would answer, indicating that they were ready to welcome the visitors. If they were not ready, they would not respond to the ululation. They would only answer once they had prepared themselves for their guests. The visitors would then enter ceremoniously, singing and dancing. The esteem in which the girl’s mother is held can be judged from the number of women who escort her and the presents she brings. The girl feels proud that by keeping her virginity she has honoured her mother, and the society in return honours her. It is on this day that a mother shows her respect for her daughter.

One of the songs sung on this occasion is called “Lukungu Tandama” meaning “Cola fruit plant should prosper.” It goes as follows:

*Lukungu Tandama: Nandame*
*Lukungu Tandama: Na-Lutandame.*
*Wekimogha ndumbu yakhe Lumoghe*
(Fruit plant prosper: Prosper abundantly
Fruit plant prosper: Prosper abundantly.
When you give birth to “he fruits” give birth to “she fruits” also.)

This meant that baby girls were also valuable.

A girl was socialised by her mother. The manners and morals of the mother determined the manners and morals of the girl. If a man wanted to marry, he examined the mother. This made women behave well so that their daughters would find partners. Maternal grandchildren were more valuable than paternal ones because a girl brought wealth to her mother in the form of the virginity cow. Her children are seen by their maternal grandmother as the fruits of a profitable plant.

Gender bias

Mama Nambua Mbaga from Ugweno maintained that there was a gender bias from birth. When a pregnant woman was ready to deliver, four women were called to assist her. The husband would wait outside for the news. He would be called in after his wife had given birth. He would ask the sex of the child. The women would tell him “she has brought us” if the baby was a girl, or “she has brought you” if the infant was a boy. Different treatment would start immediately. A large rooster would be slaughtered to provide soup for a wife who gave birth to a boy and later a big bull would follow. On the other hand, a wife who gave birth to a girl was given hen soup followed by goat soup. Sometimes a small cow was offered instead of a goat. A boy was an heir for the family while a girl was not.

Mama Nambua lamented that girls should be treated the same as boys because they participated in bringing up the family. Girls took care of their young brothers and sisters while boys spent their time playing. The cow given as bride wealth when a man married was used by the bride’s parents as bride wealth when their son, a brother of the girl, was ready to marry. A man of any age was seen as more confident, courageous and stronger than any woman. For example, if six women wanted to travel, they would not be allowed to go unless a man escorted them. In some cases a boy of seven was considered stronger than six adult women. He would walk behind the women with a stick to keep them safe and was called “the guider”. If a woman did anything outstanding she would be called a tomboy (he woman). The society believed that only men were courageous. If a man loved a woman he was allowed to take her by force against her will. It was a women’s duty to satisfy men’s urges at all costs: a man had all the rights over his wife.
Male youths from Gonja went for initiation like those from Ugweno and Usangi. Noah Luhwa talked of his experience:

During initiation in the forest, it happened that those boys who were handicapped or very inquisitive or came from hated families were killed in the forest. The killings took the form of a well-planned accident. The boy would be told to go to a cliff where he would fall and never come back, or he would be chased to a place full of dangerous snakes, there to be bitten and die. Then the elders would declare that the boy had been eaten by the forest.

After staying in the forest for six weeks, the youths would be carried out of the forest by their escorts. The initiated boys donned a white cloth and beads around their waists as a sign that they were ready to marry. The escorts of those candidates who were eaten by the forest carried banana trunks, which they gave to the parents. The parents of the deceased were not allowed to ask questions or mourn in public.

Old Mama Kalele Kinywa, seventy-two, from Gonja held that although some beliefs frightened children, they played a role in forcing them to have good manners. Kalele spoke of some extraordinary powers like the bweteta (speaking stone) that were used to frighten children. There was a stone in her village that was believed to have inordinate powers. This big stone lay along a narrow path to the market. It had an echoing sound. Children were told that the stone was alive, had five senses like a human being and was able to reveal secrets. If a youth misbehaved and passed nearby, the stone would announce the youth's evil deeds very loudly so that everyone could hear about them. The echoing sound was believed to be the voices of badly behaved girls who had been swallowed by the stone. It was also believed that bweteta could give a barren woman a baby if she begged for one. The stone was said to have the power of solving conflicts between people.

Another belief concerns ndiva ya mahuhu (Swamp of Hurls). Stories were told to children that along a narrow path in the thick forest between Gonja and Chome there was a swamp of hurls, which could not be seen by naked eyes. The swamp was said to swallow guilty people but innocent people passed through without harm.

There were other cultural norms that were frightening and not acceptable by modern standards. Noah Luhwa from Gonja explained:

For instance, if a person was proved to be a witch he was burnt to death in his house. If someone bore twins, one of the twins was killed. If a child started to teeth on the upper jaw, he or she was left on a big stone to die. Mzee Luhwa was nearly a victim of this practice, but since he was a handsome boy, his parents hid him until teething began on his lower jaw. Later, two of his family members died on the same day. The parents believed it was a curse for hiding the kid and they regretted having done so. Such children are no longer killed and no curse befalls the family.
Views on modern child rearing

Mzee Kinanja blames modern parents for raising their children in a foreign culture. According to him, one strong culture cannot emerge by mixing several cultures: “Usually you come up with something bogus. I hate Western culture for its openness on everything, especially on sexual matters, regardless of age.”

Bibi Nasemba said that modern upbringing is not good. Breastfeeding mothers leave their babies unattended the whole day because they are employed, and so they destroy the first love of their children. Others do not breastfeed because they are modern women – a woman who does not breastfeed is not fit to be a mother. She condemned the use of family planning techniques, especially by unmarried women or girls. She said this encouraged promiscuity.

Mzee Kinanja Wedi commented that when he was growing up their society was guided by many taboos and beliefs that taught diligence, hospitality, courage and worldly wisdom. Some of them, he said, related to the hierarchical system, the moving forest and some serious demons. Mzee Kinanja admitted that such things caused fear and suspicion, but helped to a large extent to discipline the children. These methods show how serious the old generation was about making sure that Pare values and norms were preserved. The social ties between members of the same family and within the community at large made for strong relationships between people and made the disciplining of children easy.

The old generation was exclusively a generation of traditional values and beliefs. No formal religious beliefs featured in the socialisation of children. Christianity and Islam, which reached Mwanga and Same Districts earlier in the twentieth century, were strongly opposed by elders for killing cultural and traditional beliefs.

A few respondents from the old generation had received some formal education. Nambua Mmbaga (sixty-two) from Ugweno and Kabwe Kinywa (seventy-six) from Gonja had some primary education while Furaha Mungara (fifty) from Gonja had some secondary education. The families and the community did not value their education. It did not have much impact on their community standing.

For the old generation, socialisation of adolescents into responsible adults was in no way affected by foreign influences. The mass media did not exist and external influences were strongly eschewed. As Kinanja Wedi remarked, “We were not allowed to talk to strangers, we had no information on what was happening outside our village.”
Informal education, through such traditional practices such as circumcision and initiation, was therefore the dominant method or institutional mechanism used by the old generation to socialise adolescents. The society required that every male or female undergo circumcision and initiation before they qualified for adulthood status.

My study demonstrates how both family and community were responsible for making sure that societal values and norms were preserved. The old persons interviewed admitted that discipline, commitment and preservation of societal and cultural heritage were matters to be honoured and respected by every member of the society, and overseen by its elder members.

The overall assessment of comments by interviewees from the old generation indicates that they are dissatisfied with modern methods or institutions for socialising children and adolescents. The interviewees opposed the use of television, videos, family planning methods and house girls, etc. These are accused of “distorting African culture,” which in the old days was something to be proud of and respected.

THE PARENTS’ GENERATION – A SPLIT GENERATION

Mr. Kikwena Kinanja (fifty-two) is a son of Mzee Kinanja and Bibi Nasemba. He is married to Mama Naira Kikwena (fifty). They belong to the “generation of parents”. Although in their childhood the family and community still were the earliest rearing institutions, they were not as strong as in the past. This was largely due to the fact that children were subjected to teachings from two competing sources – Pare custom and values and the missionaries’ salvation and civilising project. According to Kikwena, the parents could no longer inform their children of cultural practices because religious teachers forbade such transmission. Another factor weakening parental influence was the introduction of formal education.

Unlike his parents, Kikwena Kinanja attended school up to Standard Ten:

I was taught by my parents how to cultivate the fields, keep cattle, hunt wild animals and all the other work that a man was supposed to do. I started school at the age of nine. It was a very strict mission school. We had to be punctual. No one was let into the school late or allowed to be absent from school without the permission of the teacher. We learnt how to read and write; we studied mathematics, English, science and history under the British administration.
Kikwena spent his last two school years in Uganda, where he met youths from different countries and tribes. This mixing prevented him from practising his traditional beliefs, because the other students would not understand them.

The Christians did not allow traditional education so I did not go through the traditional initiation rites. They were terminated. Those who attended Koran-based schools were also discouraged from practising initiation rites and making sacrifices. We learnt about sexual issues through secret peer group discussions. A boy’s bravery was measured by his academic performance at school, fluency in reciting the Koran in the Madrasha or his good sportsmanship at school, and no longer by the cultural norms and values of our parents.

Kikwena studied English, mathematics, science and history.

Some other adolescents also managed to attend school, e.g., Shangwe Luhwa (forty-nine) from Gonja ward and Kiranja Mmbaga (forty) from Ugweno village. According to Kiranja Mmbaga, he had a hard time with his parents who saw no value in formal education. He, however, managed to undergo formal schooling despite his parents’ strong opposition to foreign institutions and their forcing their children to undergo tribal tuition. Some adolescents underwent traditional rites as well as passing through the foreign institutions that were introduced into the area. Furaha Mngara (fifty) from Usangi village took part in tribal ceremonies and teachings. These experiences instructed him on how to become a responsible adult. He also went through formal schooling up to Standard Ten. According to Furaha Mngara, he was left to choose what to follow from the two cultures. In the face of this “cultural confrontation”, individuals were left to follow the demands of the family and community or to follow what seemed to them more realistic and important.

Kikwena explained how a missionary called Hans Fuchs acquired knowledge about the traditional culture of the Pare people. He heard that people believed in a talking forest. He disapproved of the local people wasting time in the forest during initiations, time which would have been better spent on farming. He discouraged people from making sacrifices to the forest, but the elders resisted and told him that the forest would call for the initiation ceremony and sacrifice and if the villagers did not respond to the call, this would be disastrous. Disbelievingly, Hans Fuchs sought for the truth. Actually, it was the elders who sent a youth into the forest early in the morning to blow a special horn. The elders would then spread the word that the forest was calling. Fuchs caught one youth red-handed and imprisoned him. Traditional practices continued to slowly wane as Fuchs went on to prove more beliefs to be fake. As a result, the community began to doubt the beliefs that they had inherited from their ancestors.
The religious leaders forbade cultural practices, while traditional elders and leaders insisted on them. This created a strong tug of war and conflict among the two groups. Parents could not pass on traditional knowledge to their children as expected. Boarding schools were in operation in almost all missionary institutions. Traditional norms were considered primitive. Community involvement in bringing up children broke down, and individual parents taught their children how to behave according to their own views and values.

Mama Naira, Mr. Kikwena’s wife, completed her primary school education. She confirmed that sexual education was not offered at school. On the contrary, the teachers made sure that such information was never passed on to students. Science subjects taught very little about human reproduction. Schools did little or nothing to replace tribal instruction on growing up and maturing that parents had formerly given their children.

In the parents’ generation, foreign influences had entered the community. Naira Kikwena recalled that newspapers and magazines were available in towns. Some found their way into her village. She said that the writings information were careful censored to ensure that they contained no information on sexual matters or misbehaviour of any sort. This prevented youths from learning about the risks. In this situation, foreign influence had little effect on children’s socialisation.

For the parents’ generation, initiation was the component of traditional education that was most strongly opposed. Therefore, many children growing up during this time did not undergo initiation. Kikwena Kinanja and his wife Naira Kikwena were among them. Kikwena said he learned about sexual matters from his peers, especially those who secretly underwent tribal education. His parents gave him no specific teaching on the subject but taught him about general sexual misbehaviour.

Naira Kikwena had a hard road to travel. No one prepared her for maturity changes until she had her first menarche. This shocked her. Ignorant about her maturing body, she was, nonetheless, expected to be a virgin until she married so that her mother would receive the virginity cow. Naira and Kikvena both confirmed that neither school nor religion provided them with anything like family life education.

According to Kikwena, there was no specific preparation or advice on sexual conduct except that:

We were told not to indulge in sexual relations before marriage. Once married, we should not become involved with other people’s wives. If you were caught doing this you would be dishonoured and have to pay a cow. We were forbidden to walk with girls in public and were told not to impregnate girls. If you did that the girl’s mother would ask to be given a virginity cow and you would be forced to marry the girl.
Mama Naira Kikwena (fifty) had the following story to tell:

My parents taught me good manners and the household chores I was supposed to perform as a girl. I attended pre-school and later primary school. I spent most of the day at school. After school I helped my mother by fetching water and preparing food for the family. I had very little time to play with other girls. I was not circumcised and I did not attend an initiation ceremony in the forest because school regulations did not allow such practices. I was not taught about maturity and sexuality because missionaries did not allow people to talk about such topics. I was not prepared before menarche that a girl is expected to menstruate. When I had my menarche I was afraid. I cried. I did not know what it was. My grandmother and my aunt explained to me what it was all about and taught me how to handle such situations. We knew about the big forest. We were told that it was the place where initiation ceremonies took place, but we were not taken there and nor were we told what happened during the initiation ceremony.

A value that still prevailed was virginity. Before marriage the bride would be examined. If she was still a virgin her mother was awarded a cow. The only initiation I underwent was the marriage instructions that were offered the night before my wedding day. Women elders from my family taught me how I was supposed to behave towards my in-laws and neighbours. My grandmother separately conducted a course on sexual skills and how to behave towards my husband. It was the first time I ever heard someone talking to me openly about sex. Teachers and school inspectors made sure that such information was never passed on to students. However, some girls, especially from the remote areas, were secretly circumcised and initiated. There were no open ceremonies though.

The parents’ religious commitments and how they were brought up

The parents’ religious commitments caused conflict within families, according to Herini Kinywa, (forty-two) from Gonja:

When I was growing up, society was divided into two groups – Christian followers and followers of traditional religions. I was a Christian follower. When I visited my grandfather I was met with a lot of reservations. For example, I was told not to touch a gourd used to offer sacrifices, not to enter the house through the back door and many other taboos. As a Christian I did not believe in such things, so I was caught between the world of tradition and Christianity, which was frightening.

The conflict between the old people who followed tribal ways and those who had a formal education was bitter. When there was no rain or there was an epidemic, the old generation believed that the solution was to offer sacrifices to the ancestors. The young generation would say that the situation was the re-
sult of climate changes, and modern religious believers would advocate prayer meetings to seek forgiveness, believing that the issue was God’s wrath. When tragedies persisted, the old blamed the young for not following traditional norms and making sacrifices to the ancestors, and the religious claimed that those people who made sacrifices to ancestors annoyed God, thus bringing evil on the tribe. The learned people in the society blamed the changes in the rainy season and urged people to grow plants that could withstand drought. All these beliefs could be present in the same family but within different generations. Each generation was strongly convinced of its own beliefs and values, a situation that led to conflict among them.

Mr. Kiranja Mmbaga also talked about the confused situation regarding the children’s upbringing. Children from families whose parents did not go to school were taught customary norms and beliefs. Those with educated parents were brought up according to the modern way of life. Children who were brought up following either Christian or Moslem religious teachings were also opposed to each other, the adherents of one believing that their faith was superior to the other. As a result, the upbringing of children depended solely on their parents’ teaching.

Attention was still given to good manners, Mr. Kiranja Mmbaga remembered:

Using a foreign language in front of elders was seen as an insult. Speaking English or Swahili in front of an old man would be interpreted as teasing him. We were told not to sit near women or chat with them and we were told not to drink beer or smoke in public. At this time, each child was taught about maturing, sexuality and good manners by one member of the extended family, such as a grandfather, uncle, etc. Social services like dispensaries had been built but people resisted using medicine from white men’s hospitals. They continued to use local herbs.

Some people, especially those who maintained their traditional religions and beliefs, still practised some cultural norms secretly. They still inherited their brother’s wives. Some elders still made sacrifices and they still requested their gods for rain. Breach-born children were still believed to be a bad omen but were not killed, as in the past. Among the parents, Mama Nasama Kinanja Mmbaga from Ugweno was lucky to have learned customs and cultural norms from her older sister’s mother and other members of the extended family. Her father was working away from home and she was with him only when he was on his annual holiday. However, she was not close to him. She could not discuss sexual matters with him because Pare culture did not allow her to do so. Among the things she learned from her elders was how to behave properly in
front of elders, work hard, maintain good relations with her friends and not to have boyfriends.

The parents’ generation on current upbringing

Many parents held that the current practices and modern institutions for bringing up children are weaker than the methods of the recent past. The explanation for this encompassed such manifold and diverse influences as religion (traditional, Moslem, Christian; customary and modern concepts, explanations, worldviews, interpretations, symbols and facts; and foreign mass media (television, video, newspapers). All of these are held to have challenged good manners and engendered different standards, material as well as moral.

Tanzanians have increasingly been overtaken by something collectively called modernisation. Furaha Mngara (fifty) who openly underwent both traditional rites and a modern education admits that modernisation has killed traditional culture, and he was for that reason opposed to it.

Most members of the parents’ generation criticise modern television, video and newspapers. The major criticism is that they are unrestrained in what they deliver to adolescents. This lack of moderation means that children and youths are indiscriminately exposed to sexual pleasures and infringements, violence as entertainment and brutal reality, and other sensational matters. Customary society, with its moving forest, talking stones, dangerous demons and witchcraft would have regulated access to such modern matters by children and youths. The fears and threats in tribal society aimed at disciplining and warning, not at meaningless entertainment, fun or thrills.

Another common comment related to the parents’ socialisation of their young and adolescent children through their day-to-day interactions. Parents admitted that, in contrast with their own childhoods, “modern” parents do not spend much time in the company of their children. As a result, the parental role in teaching children and youths good manners and responsible adulthood is now performed by other people and institutions, such as schools, religious institutions, house-girls and -boys, etc. The likely result is a rather fragile and pragmatic nurturing process that lacks the flavour of traditional heritage. Expecting house-girls and -boys to transmit vital aspects of customary culture is like boiling an empty pot and expecting delicious soup. Traditional culture should not be lightly thrown into the slop-bucket: it has a part to play in providing roots and a common history and has the potential to support responsible adulthood.
Kikwena Kinanja blames parents who have no time to teach good manners but concentrate instead on what they call a modern upbringing for fear of a negative reaction from their children: “I know a youth who committed suicide because of being disciplined by his parents. Since then, parents hesitate to warn their children”. Many parents criticise modern methods of upbringing. The main point is that parents are not close to their children and do not take strong measures to see to it that their children behave as the society expects them to. Moreover, the parents say that children’s upbringing is weakened by not being a community issue any longer and they feel that at present there are no strong institutions to lead the children into responsible adulthood.

Naira’s observation on modern upbringing was that community solidarity was the most effective tool to socialise children. Since the tool is no longer practicable, there are now clear problems. Each person cares for his or her own children, and even if an adult observes another’s child misbehaving, she or he does not consider it to be a community issue.

A GENERATION WITHOUT ROOTS AND DIRECTION

The role of the family as the basic institution for moulding children’s moral qualities has weakened. The youth that have not undergone circumcision and initiation have never received any explanation of the deeper meaning and the practices that were associated with these rites. Modern youth has never been under the spell of old cultural beliefs such as the walking forest, talking stone or the various taboos.

In modern society the school is at the centre of children’s upbringing, and nearly all school-age children attend school. The modern school system is based on the Western education system that teaches particular subjects at a particular level. As noted by the parents’ generation, the school does not socialise students as responsible adults. Such socialisation as occurs at school is mainly between students.

Although in contemporary society schools have become the centre of children’s upbringing, some respondents criticised schools for being ineffective in shaping children’s behaviour. Chonge Luhwa, forty-five, a teacher from Gonja, had a lot to say.

Having been in the teaching profession for years and years, she stated that school was ineffective in disciplining students. Her explanation for this is irresponsible teachers who lack commitment. Many teachers are undisciplined,
lazy, drunk and sex abusers, and are not able to perform their role as models of discipline for students.

Some teachers cannot grasp the curriculum and have not mastered teaching methods. Particularly those who came to the teaching profession through the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme are failing. Chonge Luhwa also said that some teachers dress indecently. Inadequate inspectorate services also contributed to the lack of student discipline. The relationship between teachers and parents is also poor. Parents are not called to school to discuss their children’s difficulties, and teachers make no effort to communicate children’s problems to parents. Some parents do not respond to teachers’ calls, while others object loudly when a teacher takes measures to establish good order among the students. The parents in turn blame teachers who sent students home on disciplinary grounds. Chonge Luhwa agreed that this practice showed the weakness of the teachers. She also blamed the school system for allowing too many students into a single class under the control of only one teacher. A class could have up to eighty students, and no teacher could control such a large group.

The opinions of two students

Mwanga Kikwena (a grandson of old Mzee Kinanja Wedi) noted that his generation was not brought up as part of any specific culture. The fifteen-year-old boy, the third in a family of seven children, was attending primary school. Of his early experiences, he said, “I was taught good manners by my father and my older sisters and brothers. I was told that I should greet everyone I came across and not insult anyone, not steal, not accept food from any person or eat in strange houses and to say my prayers according to the Moslem faith. Members of the extended family and the community played a very small role in teaching me.”

Cash and wealth has led to the disintegration of families. This young boy’s father lived in the town where he worked. His wife and children lived in the rural area and they were only together during his one-month annual leave. There was not much time for Mwanga to be close to his parents. He said he was afraid of his father.

If I have any problem related to school fees or school uniforms, I tell my mother even if my father is around – I fear talking to him. My mother is always busy on the farm or feeding the cattle. She has no time to check my exercise books or teach me. She becomes furious when my teacher or a neighbour reports my misbehaviour, though she does not have time to follow up on what actually happened. I only have time with my mother on Saturday afternoons or Sundays.
Mwanga added that after school he did some household chores. Yes, he had plenty of time to play with other boys. The discussions he had with peers were basically about video shows, football, girls and events in the community. Very little information about bodily changes was provided in school and none at all about religious teachings. “What I know is purely from peers.”

Mwanga thought that the community expected him to do well at school but he himself did not expect to do so, because of the fierce competition. He confessed that mathematics and the sciences caused him difficulties. He agreed that elders expected good behaviour, but he did not fully understand what constituted good behaviour. Elders in his society disapproved of fashionable styles, video shows and discos. He wondered whether youth in other countries faced the same problems. Unlike the previous generations, Mwanga’s generation is strongly influenced by foreign culture. The mass media encourage youths to consume as much as they can.

To Mwanga, a hero is a person with an advanced education, a good job, a good house and a car. He confided that he planned to spend his life away from Ugweno. He would go far away and take up a business or seek a good job and lead a different life from his elders. He did not want to behave like them. However, the conduct of a few elders in front of children was a concern to him. “Who is behaving well?” he asked. “I have seen some grown-ups sexually harassing each other in public. I have seen others insulting one another, fighting or dead drunk. Is that good manners?”

Young Mwanga has not undergone any traditional teachings and he was opposed to some old beliefs. He did not believe that there were gods for rain, birth, protection and misfortune. He argued that there was no scientific explanation for such beliefs. He said he had no idea of initiation and would not like to take part in the forest initiation ceremonies. In regard to present methods of bringing up children, he said he preferred everyone to live a life of his own choice and not of another person’s choice.

Nia Kinanja is Mr. Kinanja’s granddaughter by his fourth son. The sixteen-year-old girl was in her first year in a nearby secondary school. She was living with her parents. Her father was a teacher and her mother a nurse. She said that she was very close to her parents. The whole family ate their meals together. After dinner, her parents told her stories and parables about past events. She could remember the story of a girl who fell pregnant out of wedlock and was killed. She was told that a leopard ate up a liar, and a misbehaving girl was thrown into a fast-flowing river. Such teachings made her behave well, as expected by her parents, for fear of being killed.

Nia said she was not afraid of her parents and that she told them about her problems. Her father went through her exercise books daily and gave her
homework. Her mother had told her beforehand that she would experience menarche. When that happened, her mother instructed her on how to take care of herself and told her that menarche signified that she had matured and risked pregnancy if she had sexual relations. She was taught not to shout in public, wear short dresses or visit secluded places with boys.

Nia is not circumcised. She had heard that girls were initiated in the past, but did not know what this entailed. She believed that a good girl should be hard working and diligent and should not be promiscuous. Although her parents have openly taught her many things, they have never taught her about sexuality, but she has been told not to accept presents from boys, because they will demand sex in return. The sexual knowledge she had was from peers, books, newspapers and radio programmes. She said she did not believe most traditional beliefs and felt that scientific explanations should be adopted. She did not believe in curses, but advised people to base their beliefs on religious teachings. In her view, parents should spend time with their children and teach them good manners in order to effectively socialise them. This would ensure that children have a clear direction to follow.

These two youths appear to have differing views. While one prefers personal choice, the other looks to religious teachings.

FROM THE MOVING FOREST TO VIDEO MOVIES

The old generation grew up in a local community largely isolated from external influences. The community was hierarchically organised and was ruled by the elderly. Consensus was maintained through emphasis on good manners and respect, community involvement in social control and discipline, instruction during initiation rites and through cautionary taboos. When needed, the elders used tougher methods like threats, fear, punishment and deprivation of life.

The old generation was little affected by foreign influences, such as Western religious beliefs and formal education. They were adolescents when the foreigners – missionaries, traders, colonialists and others – came. By then, the elders were prepared for defending their traditional way of life. In short, they viewed everything foreign as “poisonous” to Pare culture. Although one may praise this generation’s methods and institutions as being well structured for bringing up adolescents as responsible adults, those methods and institutions can also be criticised for being too conservative and rigid.

However, it can be argued that the explicit socialisation methods and institutions of this old generation helped to transmit the values of the society to
the youth and to future generations. And to actualise what the society stood for. There was strong social involvement in traditional communities in the upbringing of children. Any elder in the community could punish a misbehaving child. Such interventions are rare these days. Initiation oaths also helped to enforce acceptable conduct. Once a girl had fully undergone initiation, she was supposed to take an oath to respect and preserve societal values and norms. In reflecting on oath taking and the resultant allegiances, Nasama Kinanja Mmbaga from Ugweno village said: “My mother did not teach me anything about sexuality. This was because she and the others swore not to reveal issues of sexuality except as part of the initiation rites.”

Apart from being too conservative, the means and institutions of socialisation also oppressed women, infringed the right to life and used fear to ensure adherence to norms and values, including the threat of the wrathful reaction of the supernatural powers that children were taught to believe and respect. Although one may partly agree with the use of threat and punishment as means to ensure compliance, such means leave psychological marks on the growing child. The child may later be afraid to question unscientific beliefs. When the child later learns that a stone is a non-living thing, he or she may find it hard to discard earlier belief in a “speaking stone”. Who, then, can the child trust?

So, traditional means of bringing up adolescents were largely effective in preserving societal and traditional norms. However, these methods risked creating a future “yes generation”, oppressing women and undermining human rights, to name but a few issues.

Old institutions superseded by new ones

In the parents’ generation, foreign influences became part of their instruction through the introduction of formal education and the Christian and Moslem religions. The parents’ generation faced pressures on two sides: the older generation defended the tribal heritage while foreigners pressed their beliefs and challenged old practices in the schools and congregations. Under such circumstances, the youth were left to follow one of two cultures or to try to follow both of them.

Some members of the parents’ generation joined these new religions, but were restricted in practising their new beliefs through the opposition of others. Local people who converted created a tug of war and conflicts within families. Most parents kept their traditional beliefs but could not pass them on to their children. Religion proved not especially effective in educating children on growing up. Adolescents grew up with little instruction about how to behave.
Teaching did not provide the sort of preparation that initiation ceremonies had provided, leaving the youth unprepared for their gender roles as responsible spouses and parents. The means and institutions that the parents’ generation passed through ranged from the traditional, the foreign/modern and the quasi-traditional/modern.

What I learned was that the upbringing of adolescents in the parents’ generation was less effective than during the grandparents’ generation. These adolescents were subjected to teachings, beliefs and practices drawn from two essentially competing cultures. The internalisation and solidity of the teachings was largely dependent on the adolescent’s capacity to acquire and distil out those aspects of the teachings of the two cultures that she or he regarded as important.

However, the interviews reveal that sometimes the confrontation of cultures and lack of consensus resulted in confusion about which methods were right and which were wrong for achieving the ends propounded by the spokes persons of the two cultures. This in turn has promoted a certain pragmatism regarding methods and made them less effective than the more solid, intact and well institutionalised methods of the old generation.

"Sheep without a shepherd"

Young people appear to be aware that they are being essentially brought up and nurtured by means and agents that are not rooted in tradition. Procreation basically lacks a cultural heritage. Pendo Mngara (fifteen) from Gonja ward is a student in Form Two. She argued that “parents have let girls go astray like sheep without a shepherd”. Pendo was trying to indicate that parents should not withdraw from the responsibility of bringing up the youth.

Likewise, Huruma Mngara (14) aired his discontent:

One is supposed to choose good friends, because nowadays some youths are badly behaved … Some smoke bhang or keep on fussing around girls … Several boys have impregnated girls in my village … I blame the youth for wanting an easy life. Life means hard work … I blame parents for being loose with their children. Parents do not care what their children do.

Pendo Mngara admitted that what little knowledge she had about responsible adulthood was obtained largely at school and from peers. She noted that there is an indispensable need for parents to closely monitor and follow-up on the conduct of their children and the youth. Huruma shares the sentiments expressed by Pendo in likening the lack of parental control and monitoring to sheep without a shepherd. It should be stressed that many youths pay a high
price for the lack of parental control and monitoring, for instance, unwanted early pregnancies. For the old generation virginity was something to be proud of and honoured and was, above all, rewardable.

The young are, as already noted, subjected to a multiplicity of influences, whose diversity and contradictions are confusing. In the early stages of learning, the youth need to be taught and instructed through regulated and explicitly clear messages. The lesser effectiveness of the socialisation process for youth stems in part from the increasing withdrawal of community and family from that process. The ambient society should not be completely divorced from the nurturing process. After all, children and adolescents are more closely and intimately related to their families and communities than to the mass media, religious institutions, schools, etc.

The comments of the young generation on modern upbringing fall into two categories. There is a group that, despite being largely exposed to modern ways of socialisation, still finds something appealing in the traditional ways. The other group appreciates modern education and guidance. This group “adores” everything that modern foreign culture offers them without burdening them with responsibility. It is, therefore, imperative that the two groups’ points of view are discussed and articulated in future agendas for responsible adulthood.

Last but not least, the young generation seems set to be a generation without a specific culture to uphold. It is a generation for whom the methods and agents of education are essentially foreign-rooted. The youths are prone to consume culture without restraint. As a result, this generation takes risks uncommon in prior generations.

References


Ngoni and Yao are two ethnic groups in Songea. We visited among them and talked with people about social mores. What were we looking for? We intended to highlight norms and values that regulated sexuality and mating. We wanted to know how these had changed over recent generations. In the past, how did initiation rites (jando and unyago) relate to arranged marriages, virginity and parenthood? At present, how are young girls and boys respectively initiated into womanhood and manhood? By what means do communities and families try to bridge the widening gap between sexual maturity and marriage?

We start by introducing the Ngoni. The name Ngoni is derived from Abanguni, a name for the Zulu-speaking tribes (Ebner, 1991). In the early 1800s, the Ngoni emigrated from Zululand in South Africa to Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and southern Tanzania. The Ngoni were hierarchically organised. On top was the Nkosi (Master), the master of his tribe, or Bwana in Kiswahili. Immediately below him was a Chief (Nduna), a civil official who was the head of a small area, today called a district. He was also a military leader. Under him was Madoda, who took part in discussions about important matters in the council of the Nduna. Next in rank was the Mnunzana, the head of the village, followed by the head of the clan. If the whole clan lived in the same village, the head of the clan was the Mnunzana.

When administering justice, the Nkosi had one Nduna or Madoda at his side, who acted as his right hand during the council. The Nduna would also take over during the Nkosi’s absence. Offences that could be taken to the council included adultery, assault, seduction and offences against tribal authorities (Ebner, 1991). Tribal authorities were greatly respected and they were responsible for maintaining social order, norms and customs, including those concerning sexual conduct. The tribal authorities, i.e., the ruling hierarchy,
Custodians of Custom

consisted of elderly men and women and the somas (instructors on puberty, sexuality, marriage and pregnancy rites).

This kind of organisation was efficient in preserving Ngoni customs. To date, the Ngoni have undergone many changes in political and economic organisation, in the school system and other institutions. Not the least of the serious issues facing Ngoni society is the task of guiding new generations in sexual and gender matters. I am myself a Ngoni. Although I have lived most of my life in Dar es Salaam, I have maintained my roots in Songea. In recent years I have had an opportunity to learn more about people in my region. I immersed myself in studying Ngoni and Yao customs. Rita, the Swedish sociologist in our team, followed me to Songea. My sister, a teacher at a local school, acted as an interpreter for her. With them, I felt at ease and was able to make observations and record what we were told. The local people we met were pleased by the foreigner’s interest, volunteered information and gave us ample demonstrations.

However, we were told that individual women would not feel comfortable in the presence of Rita (a foreigner) or me (the main researcher). Consequently, we decided to interview them in small groups: two groups of experienced Ngoni women and a male Ngoni leader of traditional dances (ngoma) and ceremonies. We held a session with four women from Mataware area, namely Mamas Sia, Neri, Agatha and Idia. They were between fifty-five and sixty-four years old. Mama Sia was not sure about her age but remembered that she was a young unmarried girl at independence in 1961. Mama Agatha is a custodian of original Ngoni customs. Whenever there is a Ngoni ceremony of any significance, she is likely to be involved. All four women take part in the initiation of pubescent girls and rites for marriage, pregnancy and childbirth. Likewise, all of them perform ligihu, a traditional dance, for marriage ceremonies and for the inauguration of a new chief or other leaders. During our study, the president of Tanzania, Benjamin Mkapa, was honoured as a Ngoni leader by Ngoni elders and ligihu was performed.

Later we met Mamas Nagama, Ana, Angela, Scholastica, Bertha, Kerubiana, Martina, Nachihaule and Susana from Mfaranyaki area. Some of them estimated that they were between seventy and eighty years old.

BECOMING A NGONI WOMAN

The social moulding of girls into Ngoni women is carried out from stage to stage and it is directed towards their relationships with their in-laws, the hus-
band-to-be and to giving birth to children. The passage rites at each stage convey the meaning of this transition and the taboos and duties of women in their different relationships. The confirmation achieved through these rites is for the individual as well as for the society as a whole. The rites sustain custom and pass norms and values related to sexuality and fertility from one generation to another. They define marital and parental rights and obligations and provide advice in practical matters.

When a Ngoni girl attains her menarche, she enters the threshold of womanhood. Mama Angela explained how a girl was supposed to act from early age to her puberty (kigori) and the onset of menarche:

When I was very young, about four years, I learned from our mother that vigori [girls who are about to attain their menarche] are not allowed to enter their parents' bedroom. Now, their fathers were obliged to build a house or a sort of dormitory [bwalo], separately for girls and boys in a distant place. The girls would continue to live in the bwalo until they married. At the time of maturity a girl had to select a woman to instruct her. In some cases the girl would cry around her parent's house so as to attract the attention of a person willing to guide her. The girl would cry until an older woman or an aunt came to ask her why she was crying. Then the woman would let the girl's mother know that her daughter had matured. The woman would trill the kigelegele (ululation) as a sign of this. The next step is the preparation of a seclusion room for the girl who will be given adulthood instructions. At this point the aunts, sisters and somos are involved.

At the time of initiation, the candidates are instructed on how to distinguish the menstrual flow (the bleeding) from a mixed discharge (blood and mucus) and a white discharge (mucus) and other discharges. The candidate has to point to white flour, red soil and red soil mixed with white flour, which represent bleeding, white discharge and blood with mucus. The girl is then asked to relate which colours she saw first and which next, etc. The different colours convey different meanings. This knowledge will be useful especially when the girl is married. She is advised that when she is married she must never have sexual intercourse when she sees some blood or blood mixed with a white discharge, otherwise her partner will be hurt.

The significance of using symbols for instruction is to make sure that the girl has attained her menarche. By comparing actual occurrences with everyday objects, the girl can easily understand and internalise the whole process and the meaning attached to it. Throughout this training, the candidates themselves take part in each step, hence making the lessons easy to grasp. Use of figurines is common. For example, two clay figurines representing a fat and a thin man are shown to candidates, who are cautioned to provide their husbands enough food if they are not to resemble the thin figurine.
Girls are taught many things, including, for example, the prohibition on putting salt in food during her period, whether she is married or not, because the salt will harm the health of the male person in the household. This practice discourages men from touching food during the girl’s menstrual bleeding, because this is thought to be a time when the girl finds it difficult to maintain good food hygiene. Another explanation is that this lesson is a way of teaching the girl not to have sexual intercourse during her period.

Mama Agatha continued by demonstrating how to wear a menstrual cloth and how to wash and dry it: “If you are at home, the cloth is dried under your mattress. But if you are travelling, you tie it around your waist. A girl should have two pieces of cloth. One is worn to protect against the menstrual flow. Another is washed and dried, ready for changing.”

The girl is instructed on how to keep herself clean and avoid smelling badly. Special songs are sung: *Mwali winunga ngati chilonda*, meaning “You smell like a wound if you do not take proper care.” During initiation, the girls are also advised on how to sleep without soiling the bed. A girl is told not to lie on her back or on her stomach. Instead, she has to lie on either side. Another song tells about the right position to sleep in when menstruating: *Mwali pa kwenda ulale ndundule, ulale ndundule*.

The girl is cautioned that she must never play *madangi* again (the mother and father game). She has to stay within the compound and assist with household chores. She is warned, “It is dangerous to play around with boys, you will fall pregnant.” If a boy calls her, she must reply *mbwitu* (no). It was emphasized that the girls had to remain virgins until the day of marriage.

Girls may be secluded from one day to some months, or until she marries, depending on the wealth of the family. On the day of coming out from seclusion, a girl risks being punished for bad manners before the seclusion. Bad manners include being rude, lazy or having boyfriends. If the girl had hidden her menarche, she was considered rude or loose. In this case, a rope was looped around her and bound to another girl or woman, who would pull the rope.

Ngoni girls married shortly after their menarche and after passing through initiation. In those days, they matured from fifteen onwards and married at seventeen to eighteen. This was true for Mamas Sia, Neri, Agatha and Idia.

**Ngoni precautions before marriage**

A Ngoni girl would meet her future husband either at the market place or on the way to church or during traditional dances. From the time she attained menarche, she would be ready for marriage.
In those days there was not a long risky period between sexual maturity and marriage. Mama Angela narrated how she came to know her husband: “We used to observe the boys at the church or the market place. We girls usually went to church in a group. When we went back home, sometimes a group of men followed and talked to us. But we said nothing. If a boy identifies a girl whom he loves, he tells her sister or aunt. They will talk to the girl’s father. However, the girl will not give in immediately.”

It took about four months before a girl could agree to a proposal. This was done purposely: first to prove that the boy was serious and really loved her, second, to show that she is not a loose girl. Eventually, when the girl accepted the boy, he gave her a bangle (an arm-ring) to signify her acceptance. He would then inform his parents, who would look for a messenger or mediator (mshenga). The mshenga would collect a goat, a piece of cloth, beads, a hoe and a blanket and was sent to the girl’s home to give the presents to her parents.

The girl’s parents would call an mshenga from their side and the girl would be asked in front of her grandparents, paternal aunts and uncles, whether she knew where the gifts came from and whether she knew and liked the boy. If she agreed, the women would trill vigelegele and the gifts would be received from the boy’s mshenga and handed over to the girl’s mshenga, who would hand the gifts to the girl’s aunt. The aunt in turn handed them over to the father. The gifts are distributed according to custom: a piece of cloth is given to the aunt; a hoe is for the father; the beads are for the aunt. The aunt keeps the beads until the wedding, when she makes a special type of bead ornament (nuchi) to be worn by the bride when she goes to her husband. A blanket is for the grandparents and a piece of cloth or money is meant for the mother as kifunga mkaja, (meaning, comfort to the mother for all the difficult years she has gone through since she delivered the daughter). A goat may be slaughtered during the marriage rites. Each family member receives a piece of meat.

The gifts signify that the marriage is not a private affair but a family matter. Every member of the family has to be happy with the choice of girl. If one of them does not share the happiness, it is a bad omen. The girl will not live a good life with her husband.

The next thing is to negotiate the bride wealth. When this topic arose, the old mamas discussed the amounts their parents had received in the old days. Ana (70) mentioned two cows and six goats, Scholastica’s (80) family received one cow, seven goats and 300 shillings, while Kerubina’s (80) family got 40 shillings. According to the women, forty shillings was a lot of money at the time. The same amount was given to Angela’s family. Bride wealth for Martina (50) and Bertha (39) was three goats and 300 and 400 shillings respectively. We did not ask why there were such variations in bride wealth, but I was later
informed that a wealthy family tended to demand more for their daughter. Correspondingly, if the future husband came from a rich family, they demonstrated their prestige through large bride wealth payments.

The families are now permitted to prepare for the wedding. The time to prepare the local brew begins now. Before the wedding, a process of paying visits, *kuchicha*, is followed, the girl visiting the boy’s home and vice versa. The purpose of these visits is to establish whether the place the girl will go to live in is pleasant or not. She is accompanied by her girlfriends. He invites his boyfriends. A special room is arranged for them, usually a *bwalo*. The visitors will be served *ugali* (a stiff porridge made from sorghum flour cooked with chicken). They will all sleep in the same *bwalo*, but no sexual intercourse takes place. After some time it is the boy’s turn to reciprocate the *kuchicha*. The boy visits his fiancée accompanied by six boys who are his friends. *Ugali* cooked with chicken is served to them by the parents of the girl. Again, after having spent the night together with the girls, the boys go home. One aim of *kuchicha* is to check the manners of the two lovers before marriage and make sure that the partners can control their sexual desires.

Up to two months before the wedding *kulola luvanja* takes place: both sets of parents visit each other to inspect the compound of the girl’s and the boy’s house. The elders inspect to see if the ground is clean, food is available, the people behave well and are hardworking. They also check for any signs of inherited diseases like epilepsy, etc. Where problems or anomalies are noted, the parents warn their child that the partner is not suitable. If the child proceeds with the marriage plans despite the warning, it is at his or her own risk.

**The wedding ceremony**

Before the wedding takes place, the girl’s virginity will be checked. The girl kneels down while her aunt inserts a finger lightly into her vagina. If the girl shows signs of pain by raising her buttocks, or if the finger does not penetrate, she is declared to be a virgin. Alternatively, the examiner will see *utando mweupe* (an intact membrane) and the girl will be declared to be a virgin. Then the women will trill the *vigelegele*. The aunt baths the girl and she is ready to undergo the pre-wedding ceremony, which is usually performed on the eve of the wedding at her parents’ home. Here the bride is taught how to satisfy her husband, to be good at twisting her waist, to care for her husband’s family and to be kind to them. She is shaved under her armpits and around the pubic area, using white ashes. She was taught this practice during the menarche rite, but now it is again stressed. This is because the pubic hair can bruise her husband
Mary Ntukula

during sexual intercourse while armpit hair can smell badly (kikwapa), thus causing her husband to run away from her. She must not sleep with her husband when she is dirty. Shaving with a razor blade is discouraged because the razor can leave scars. The bride is given a special set of beads to tie around her waist (ngucha/ nuchi). The beads are meant to make her more beautiful and to help in arousing her husband’s desire. She is told about the male fluid. If it is white and heavy the man is fertile, but if it is thin and of a different colour the man is either infertile or sick. If this is the case, she must immediately report to her husband’s aunt.

On the day of the wedding, the gall bladder of a cow, goat or cock, depending on the wealth of the family, is tied to the bride. She is covered with a black cloth, especially her lower part, and escorted to her father-in-law’s house. Just before arriving at her in-laws, she walks on her knees holding a panga to meet her father-in-law, while her escorts sing:

Zalawanda ee [x 2], Zili mu kubwela zalawanda, zili mu kubwela zalawanda.
Za matumwa ee zili mu kubwela zawatumwa, zili mu kubwela za watumwa.

The song symbolises her total submission to male power and authority. From that day on the girl is seen as a part of her husband’s family. She cannot go back home without permission from her husband. The father-in-law covers her with a black cloth called nakondwa. Afterwards, she returns to her normal position and the feasting and dancing continue. Wedding songs are sung: Myakaya wavula zinjonjo myakaya. Ayee ... Ozi nyanyada ozi nya. The song tells of how someone has broken his foot through joy. It is meant as a congratulation of the girl.

On the wedding night the bride sleeps with her husband for the first time. In preparing for the night, the bride hands over to her husband the gifts that her aunt had given her during the pre-wedding ceremony (kumwaga mwali). They consist of a piece of white cloth, approximately one metre square; mkambo (a big pot for washing her husband); a calabash for drawing water while bathing; castor oil for rubbing the male organ to minimise friction during first intercourse; and a razor blade. The girl has been taught to twist her waist and to walk naked into the room while playing with the beads on her waist. According to the mamas, there is a special song for “twisting your waist for your husband” and a way of challenging him by saying “he is sleeping as if he sleeps with his mother”.

During intercourse, the wife must always spread the piece of cloth to prevent the male fluid from soiling the bed. During first intercourse, the blood spot on the white cloth attests to the girl’s virginity. In the morning, the aunts inspect the cloth for signs of the groom’s fertility (heavy white semen) and of
the virginity of the bride. If a blood spot is detected, the husband puts a coin without a hole into the *mkambo* and the aunts *vigelegele* as they take the coin, which is a gift for taking care of the girl. If she is not a virgin, then a coin with a hole is dropped into the *mkambo*. This is an insult and a sign that the girl already had a hole in her vagina. There is no *vigelegele* and everybody is quiet.

One week or so after the wedding, there is *arusi ya kuchidala* when the bride and groom are invited to the bride’s home and a big post-wedding party is hold in their honour. The relatives of the groom are also invited.

The pregnancy rite

When a woman misses her period for three consecutive months, she reports to her husband’s aunt. The aunt will not confirm the pregnancy before the sixth month. There are two ways of proving pregnancy. The first is checking the upward black line on the abdomen: when it reaches the navel it provides evidence of six months of pregnancy. The second is by pouring flour on the abdomen as the woman lies on her back. This will make the child choke, so she or he kicks the flour dust away. From the eighth month the woman will be trained how to live with her husband for the balance of her pregnancy. Mama Agatha again demonstrates the proceedings and explains further:

She should not have sexual intercourse with her husband, otherwise the male organ will make a hole in the head of the child in the womb. The male fluid will harm the child and make it dirty. Women should not be allowed to drink while standing, otherwise the child will pour forth a lot of water and blood during delivery. When the woman encounters people pounding or working in the field, she should just pound, dig and sow once, and then go on her way.

Mama Sia demonstrates the woman’s position when she delivers. She should lie down on the floor with her legs apart and her knees drawn up. A pregnant woman is taught different positions for delivery. “If the baby is a girl, her vagina is examined. If thick mucus is seen, or sometimes blood, then she really is a woman and she will bear children.”

Soon after the child is born the mother should go straight to her mother-in-law. She has to remain there until the child has stopped suckling, i.e., about two to three years, depending on the parents-in-law. This implies a long post-partum abstinence for the good of the child. A woman who stayed with her husband during the breastfeeding period, slept in a separate bed. Her husband did not disturb her. They practiced abstinence for about three years. The husband is told not to run with other women while his wife is pregnant and there-
after. We asked the group if in those days the husbands did abide by this. “We were not watching our men. Their whereabouts is their own secret, not the business of the wives.” In the past, the fine for adultery was a cow, although it also happened that both parties were killed. Adultery was rare in those days when men had several wives.

Polygamous marriages

One of the mamas described the Ngoni as “a family of brothers”. For instance, if a husband dies, a brother will marry the widow. The Ngoni practise polygamy. We inquired of the women about their experience of the practice: four lived in polygamous marriages.

Mama Ana confessed that she is one of her husband’s five wives. The official marriage applied only to the senior wife and no prescribed rites were followed for the four additional wives. Mama Ana was forced to marry by her father, who was a chief. As a chief he himself had eleven wives. He was a friend of the family of Mama Ana’s husband. Of course, being the chief and a family friend he received bride wealth for his daughter. Mama Ana was the second wife. She noted that her “husband just took another wife whenever he wanted.”

Mama Susana was the senior wife and thus the only one formally married. She did not give birth to any children thus her husband took two more wives. Today, they are all widows and her co-wives have returned to their native villages.

Mama Martina would have had a co-wife if she had not chosen to divorce her husband. Being a first wife and a Catholic she felt frustrated when her husband decided to marry another woman. When he even converted to Islam in order to marry a Moslem woman, Martina took her decision to divorce him. Today the husband is dead and each of the wives lives in separate places. Kerubina and her co-wife are also widows and both of them now live on their own.

In discussing their husbands’ motives, the women maintained that additional wives increased a man’s prestige. If a man is rich or a local leader he can take any woman. Moreover, the man is the head and he has the say in household matters, so he can choose whatever he wants to do. A wife’s barrenness is a salient motive in a man’s choice of another wife. Also, if the husband needed additional hands to work in the fields and to share household chores in the compound, a new wife was a solution. According to the women, in the past the husband would respect all his wives equally, although it was not possible
to distribute affection equally. That is why polygamy is not popular among women, Mama Martina explained.

The women did not mention that in the past polygamy also was used as a means for social integration. By having more wives than ordinary men, a chief or leader was attempting to integrate different clans and promote peace between them by creating marriage alliances.

Cooperation between co-wives could benefit all of them. Polygamy also meant that no women were doomed to childlessness due to lack of men, and that widows were protected by being remarried to a brother of the deceased. In those days, polygamy implied protection of women and children and the prevailing rules made strict demands on the husband. In those days, the interest of an individual was subordinated to the interest of the clan. An individual who promoted his or her interests against those of the group was unheard of.

Three of the women, the mamas Scholastica, Bertha and Angela, all had church weddings. Today, Scholastica is a widow, while Bertha and Angela still live with their husbands. Angela has recently married off her first-born daughter. They received bride wealth of 8,000 shillings and six goats. Angela and her husband used the money to pay the bride wealth for their son’s wife. This is the way it works: the wealth you get for your daughter is spent on the bride of your son. In this way, the marriages of the sister and the brother are interconnected.

Bride wealth is seen as a compensation for the bride’s reproductive capacity, and it implies that the children the wife gives birth to belong to the clan or the family of the husband. In the case of a divorce, they stay with the father. As already mentioned, if the wife is barren, the husband often takes an additional wife. He can also demand that the bride wealth be returned if the wife has not fulfilled the marriage conditions.

“God gives, God takes”

Most women in the older generation (50–80 years) had given birth to many children but lost more than half of them, as can be seen in the table on p. 62.

With these statistics in mind, what was these women’s attitude to contraceptives? “We are not interested in contraceptives at all”, they declared unanimously.

Indeed, they did not need them anymore, but even when they were still fertile, they timed the births of their children by following the postpartum taboos. Now they spoke for their daughters and granddaughters. Yet, they approved traditional methods, i.e. local medicine to prevent pregnancy. They
rejected abortion. It should not be permitted and no medicine should be provided for such purposes. They repeatedly declared that they were strongly against modern methods, both contraceptives and abortion.

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“The value of women has decreased compared to the old times. Our daughters go against tradition and they are not respected.”

In what way?” we asked.

The elderly women felt hurt by their daughter’s behaviour and by seeing them run around with men without getting married. Many women do not want marry.

We asked: Why? They suggested several explanations: “The girls are just easygoing”; “They do not want to be controlled by men”; “The new culture has damaged our traditions”; “The girls use sexual intercourse as a means to keep the man’s interest”; “They do not listen to us but keep saying ‘we already know everything, you are just old fashioned’.”

The old mothers painted a dark picture:

In our time there still was the clan and the norms were potent. In the institutional setting, the initiation rites taught girls how to take care of themselves and be proper and
useful. Now, we are mixed up with different people from other parts of the country. It is no longer possible to conduct an authentic initiation ceremony to prepare the girls to be responsible and useful in their society. The girls lack taboos and they are just interested in watching videos. The distance between us mothers and our children is growing.

The women see alarming signs. Divorces have increased due to urbanisation and poor economic conditions. Young women make themselves beautiful in order to steal other women’s husbands. Many women are no longer able to bear children in the normal way but rely on caesarean section. The daughter of Idia and many others fail to have children. The men claim back the bride wealth because our daughters do not bear children, the women lamented.

THE ROAD TO NGONI MANHOOD

We were told about a well-known Ngoni man, a ceremonial leader who was knowledgeable about Ngoni customs as well as the changes they had undergone. It took us some effort to trace Mzee Romanus Duwe (seventy-two), also known by his African name Binizamkwere. He had recently moved out of Mlielayoyo village, where we sought him, to another village. Having heard that we wanted to learn about Ngoni manhood rituals, he had this to say.

A Ngoni boy is trained in many things after he is about four years old. While still young he is taken care of by his mother, sister or another woman. The children received good care. In order to be a man, a Ngoni boy has to be strong and able to have a wife. The boys are inspected by their grandmothers and aunts. In the mornings, a grandmother would call boys of from two to five to sniff ground tobacco (kuvuta ugor/kubema libona). The grandmother touches the boy’s penis and puts her hand to her nose as if she was sniffing the tobacco. The boy’s penis would become erect and the boy is then said to function (and not be a eunuch). If his penis does not swell, it is a sign that he might not function well sexually as an adult.

When the boys are about six they begin to identify themselves with other boys and play in groups. At this time, older brothers and uncles take much interest in what they do. The boys follow their older brothers, uncles and fathers to the field or on any other duty. From this time on they are trained to become responsible men who one day will become the heads of households.

The most important stage for a Ngoni boy is when he gets wet dreams. This means that he can have a wife. The boys were initiated at the ages of fifteen to seventeen. Boys of the same age would gather at the fireplace in the
evenings. The number of boys participating would depend on the actual number of boys in this age group within the clan. In Mzee Duwe’s case, there were just three or four. The trainers were their grandfathers and uncles. No circumcision took place in his time. This early training helped them to know what they had to do to be ready for marriage. They were told to build their own huts, cultivate fields and prepare a ngoko (a grain barn). In short, a boy was expected to be self-sufficient if he intended to marry. It was assumed that after marriage he would cease to depend on his parents for food and accommodation. At maturity the boy would ask his father to look for a wife for him. Sometimes the father would choose his son’s wife, sometimes the boy looked for a wife himself.

Mzee Duwe indeed had the gift of the gab. He is tall and thin. He looked impressive as he expressed himself in a rich body language and underlined his words with gestures and by waving his arms and hands. This appears to be consistent with his being a dancer and a leader of traditional dances (ngomo). After he had told us about the bride wealth we wanted to know how much Mzee Duwe gave for his wife.

First I gave a bangle (arm-ring) to the girl as an indication that I wanted her to be my wife (luhongelu). As a courtship gift (fwika), my father gave her family two hoes, two blankets and a piece of cloth (kitenge). After giving these courtship gifts, the next step was to agree on the bride wealth. I gave three goats and 150 shillings. On the wedding day, one of the goats from the courtship gifts, a cow and beer were brought to my family. This was the contribution of the wife's family to the wedding feast. The ceremony was held in my father's house and in the evening the bride was taken to my hut. The same day I was instructed on how to perform sexual intercourse and how to recognise the virginity of my wife. I was told that if I could penetrate the girl easily, she is not a virgin. I thus tested the virginity of my bride.

Sometimes, when a coin with a hole in it was thrown to the girl’s parents, they went back home ashamed and crying. Even the boys were forbidden to have sexual intercourse before marriage. However, sexual intercourse happened. Some truant boys had it secretly, but this was, however, regarded as shameful and was not expected.

In those days polygamous marriages were common. According to Mzee Duwe, cases of adultery were rare and they were promptly dealt with. The clan council would make the responsible man pay a fine, for example, a cow. Moreover, the adulterer could be forced to marry the woman if she was unmarried. If the woman was married, part of the fine would go to the woman’s husband and part to her parents. The singing of songs about the episode would serve to punish the culprit, who would be ostracised and caused severe psychological suffering.
Photos of Pare people in the north and the Ngoni and Yao in the south

The Gonja village market.

The Killing Stone where boys were killed.
Although in their childhood the family and community were still the earliest rearing institutions, they were not as strong as in the past. This was largely due to the fact that children of the parents’ generation were subjected to teachings from two competing sources: Pare custom and values and the missionaries’ salvation and visualising project. Their parents could no longer inform them of cultural practices because religious teachers forbade such transmission. This created a strong tug of war and conflict between the two groups.

Another factor weakening parental influence was the introduction of formal education. Boarding schools were in operation in almost all missionary institutions. Traditional norms were considered primitive.
In societies without public welfare, families provide a security network to each individual who has shown willingness to support others. The economic crisis forces people to turn to their families and communities, which continue to act as lifelines. However, one is obliged to take part in the mutual gift-giving cycle to be included among those who are eligible for the lifeline. Those who are too poor to contribute and thus cannot expect returns from others are doomed to be involuntarily individualised, because, ultimately, interdependence is based on reciprocity.

Many people perceive bonds to family and relatives as an expression of African identity. They do not accept European ways without reservations. They call distant relatives and friends sisters and brothers. They identify with the clan. People stick to their traditions of supporting one another, for example in bringing up children, and by doing so specifically want to safeguard African patterns of life (Svanemyr, 2003). Three generations: Grandmother Philipina with some of her daughters and granddaughters.
The visiting daughters show their gift to their mother.

Adults and children enjoying a Sunday afternoon visit.
Ngoni ritual leaders, Mamas Sia, Idia, Neri and Agatha, explain and demonstrate the stages of Ngoni girl’s social moulding into womanhood.

Yao women: Rootless descendants of a matrilineal clan.
Mama Neri demonstrates a woman’s position when she delivers.
"No man has ever abandoned a Yao woman, because there are no other women who treat their men so well!"
Mzee Romanus Duwe, a well-known ceremonial leader knowledgeable in Ngoni customs and the changes they have undergone.

Mzee Amla Hasani Saibu guided us on the Yao road to manhood.
Mzee Duwe’s age at marriage was seventeen. Commonly, men married when they were twenty to thirty years old while girls married between eleven and twenty. Mzee Duwe’s wife was eleven when they married. In the past, pre-marital sexuality had less scope because men and women married young. Mzee Duwe’s wife gave birth to five children, two of them sons. All five are married. Mzee Duwe gave 30,000 shillings in bride wealth when his first son married. His first wife is dead long since. His present wife gave birth to three children, but two of them died. She cared for Mzee Duwe’s children by his previous marriage as if they were her own.

In those days, the fathering of several children did not prevent some men from wanting to have more wives. Mzee Duwe maintained, however, that compared with how men behave today, only a few men took many wives. Nowadays, women are after money and men lack traditional norms. In the past, adultery destroyed the health of men. Men who did not commit adultery were healthy and strong and could even go on foot from Songea to Dar es Salaam.

The men used to be told by their parents to have as many children as they could during their marriage. However, nobody was forced to have a certain number of children. If a husband and wife agreed that they had had enough children, they went to a traditional healer who prescribed a local medicine to prevent the woman from becoming fertile. If a mother died leaving a suckling child, a local medicine was applied to activate the grandmother’s milk so she could breastfeed the child.

Timely instruction and multiple precautions

It is striking how Ngoni rites promoted sexual and reproductive health long before these concepts were taken up by international organizations working on population and family planning and on infant and maternal mortality. In the past, human reproduction was embedded in a social and cultural context and not isolated and transformed into a health issue. What would have happened if the medical and demographic aid bodies had been aware of the efforts by tribal institutions to secure successful human reproduction?

There were rites and instructions at the time of menarche, marriage, weddings and childbirth. The somos and nagribas provided guidance throughout the course of life. Know-how was proffered timeously, in light of what was considered salient at each stage. Likewise, the rites emphasised the relevant norms and taboos that supported the moral order. Ngoma (traditional dances)
expressed the emotions associated with the transition to new roles and relationships.

It is noteworthy that the duty to prepare the young for sexually gratifying relationships and childbearing was allocated to chosen people in the family. Because of Ngoni patrilineal descent, paternal aunts and uncles and paternal grandparents were chosen. By contrast, there were strict taboos that sustained a distance between parents and children in sexual matters. Taboos prohibited any metaphorical hint at sexual intercourse, such as making a hole in the ngali (porridge) or touching objects associated with sexuality, such as the parents’ bed, or removing the lid of the mother’s pots and boxes. Indeed, tradition did not approve of parents talking to their children about sexuality.

The salience of marriage is demonstrated by all the precautions taken during the extended courtship and bride wealth negotiations, the exchanges of gifts, mutual visits and the investigation of the parties’ sexual self-control and the virginity of the bride. Whole families were involved and viewed the marriage as a matter of common interest.

The contrast with the current absence of viable practices is drastic. Timely instructions and precautions rarely exist. The people whose duty it was to provide continuous advice are usually no longer available and those who are expected to take over, the parents and the schools, do not know what to say. And if they knew, who would listen to them among the chorus of competing voices?

YAO MIGRANTS IN URBAN SONGEA

The Yao derive their name from Yao mountain in Unangwa country. Yao means a treeless mountain, covered only by grass. Unangwa lies in the former Portuguese East Africa, between Lake Nyasa and Lujenda River in Mozambique. Because of the frequent Ngoni wars, the Yao were dispersed from Unangwa into east Malawi and as far as the shores of Ruvuma River in southern Tanganyika. Later, they crossed Ruvuma River under Chief Matola I and settled along Mohezi River. It was not long before the Ngoni expelled them and they moved to Newala in Masasi and later to Tunduru District and Songea in Ruvuma Region.

The Yao are associated with Arab slave traders and that is how most of them adopted Islam.

In spite of being forced to migrate several times they still maintain much of their culture, although their matrilineal family system is now withering.
We visited the Yao who reside in the southern part of Songea town, a place called Makambi (meaning settlement). During the German colonial era, the place was used to house prisoners of war, including the leaders of the Maji Maji Uprising in 1905–06, who were held there prior to being hanged. Today Makambi is a large settlement and is one of the places where the Yao from Tunduru and Masasi settled.

The town authorities have allocated plots of land within the area and affluent people have bought plots for constructing houses for themselves and for rent. The dusty part of the settlement where we met two Yao groups was simply called Makambi kwa Wayao (the place of Yao people). The Yao were poor and lived in small red-brown clay houses (abode) with thatched roofs, in contrast to the surrounding well-built houses owned by rich non-Yao.

The Yao road to manhood

We were received by several old Yao men; the Mzees Amla Hasani Saibu (seventy-nine), Said Musa (sixty-nine), Islamu Banda (seventy-four) and Rashidi Dilly (fifty-five). Mzee Saibu was the leader of the group as well as the Makambi kwa Yao (the place of Yao) village. No information could be obtained from the villagers without his consent. We paid him our respects and listened to him attentively as we assembled in a shoddy basement to hear what the old men had to tell us about boyhood in Yao society.

Mzee Saibu took the floor and stated solemnly: “All humans originated with Eve and Adam. Twins were created from the ribs of Adam. From them came 125,000 tribes. There have been only two languages: male and female. I was born into the male language.”

He went on to explain the initiation rites, which are more elaborate than those for the Ngoni boys. Yao boys are initiated (jando) in age groups. At the time they are circumcised, they are about eight to ten years old. Circumcision is performed while the boys are in the forest. During the rite, ceremonial dances are performed.

When the boys come back from the forest, there is food for them prepared by their mothers. If it rains or the sun is hot, the fathers protect their sons with umbrellas. When the boys reach home, they sit down and are celebrated and receive gifts from their parents and relatives.

The mothers paint themselves with ash and carry flowers. Now the time is ripe to tell the sons about taboos to be observed:
– Never crawl under the bed of your parents. (If they do, the boys will see their parent's underwear or the mother's menstrual cloth that is put under the mattress, or even the piece of white cloth for blood and semen the parents used during sexual intercourse.)
– Do not uncover the pot that mother puts on the fire.
– Do not sit opposite your mother at the fireplace. (Occasionally he might see something that he was not allowed to see.)
– You are not allowed to make a hole in a ball of ugali (stiff porridge) prepared by your mother and fill it with sauce. It would insult the mother. You are only allowed to make a ball of ugali and dip it in sauce. (Only a married man is allowed to make a hole in a ball of ugali, if it is cooked by his wife.)
– You are not allowed to pass through the house from the front door to the back door or vice versa.

In regard to their fathers, the boys are not allowed to sleep on his bed or to wash his underwear. A father and a son are not permitted to use the same washroom or latrine. Boys are not allowed to open their father's suitcase. It is a sign of bad manners if a son takes a piece of meat before his father does. Mzee Saibu showed us a scar on his back from the beating he received from his father for taking a piece of meat before him. Mzee Saibu blamed the children of today for misbehaving. They roam everywhere in the house. The Yao boys are taught many other things about respect towards adults and decent conduct:
“It is a sign of lack of respect if a group of boys whisper when an older person passes by.”
“Are there any sanctions?” we ask.
“They were immediately beaten”, Mzee Saibu continued, giving examples of expected conduct:
When you pass over a river, you have to ask for permission by saying bodi [a warning] three times. If you don't get a reply after the third bodi, you can pass. Yet, if someone says “I am taking a bath”, please wait until the person covers her or himself. But three warnings do not always give free passage. In front of a closed door you knock three times. You are not allowed to enter after three knocks. If there is no answer, you just leave.

Mzee Saibu summarises the Yao values through the parable of the five pillars that make a human being: utu (humanity), ukarimu (hospitality), utendaji (responsibility), heshima (respect) and kujibeshimu (self-respect and control of sexual desire), because only animals mate with anybody at any time.
Whereas parents have no part in explaining sexuality to their children, there are other people who will be their instructors throughout their lives.
Hence, someone was always available to them when it was time. Mzee Saibu explained:

Every boy has his kamusi. The kamusi advises the boy during his initiation into sexual maturity and on how he can know whether he has matured. For instance, when he discovers the white fluid from his male organ for the first time, this means that he has matured. Also his voice may change, as well as his muscles. The boy’s maturity begins from fifteen onwards. White fluid from the penis is a sign of fertility, black fluid is a mark of infertility. The kamusi will be the special guide and instructor on matters related to sexuality from the time of the boy’s first rites to his marriage and beyond.

The boy’s wife is chosen by his parents, although some boys choose their wives themselves.

Mzee Saibu gave a short account of what followed:

At the time of marriage, the boys are taught what is expected of the husband in the house. During the wedding period the bridegroom will be accompanied by a friend who explains to him everything he needs to know about marriage. For example, what will happen after the wedding. The wife will escort him to the washroom and after having bathed her husband, she escorts him back to the sleeping room. While there, the wife will walk around naked to attract her husband. She has brought a piece of white cloth and castor oil seeds. She will rub oil on his male organ to facilitate their first intercourse.

At this point a messenger arrived to inform Mzee Saibu of the death of his younger brother. Mzee Saibu left immediately to visit his brother’s family. The other mzees take over:

Virginity was highly prized. In Mzee Banda’s time, bride wealth was halved if the woman was not a virgin. Originally, however, the Yao did not use bride wealth, but “bride-labour”, meaning that the man moved to her clan and worked for them. Probably, Yao have been influenced by migrations and by living among patrilineal people with other customs. According to Mzee Musa, Yao men were taught about childbearing and rearing. They knew what to do when their wives became pregnant and if she died while still breastfeeding:

After the wife was eight months pregnant, the husband was not permitted to have sexual intercourse. After delivery, the parents are not allowed to meet [to have intercourse] for one and a half years. After that they will ask for a local medicine, which is used to stop the child from sucking the mother’s milk. The medicine is given to the child at night. After the child had drunk the drug it was no longer breastfed. The spouses would have intercourse again. The men abstained in order to not damage the baby in the womb and to avoid causing it suffering. It was strictly forbidden to stray outside the marriage. From the eighth month of pregnancy up to one and a half years after the birth the men lived in abstinence.
Keeping men by caring for them

To begin with, a group of ten Yao women came to see us. They were Mamas Zaina, Zainabu, Mwajuma, Fatma, Rozi, Mwanakati, Asha, Bimwana, Mainamula and Mariam. With one exception, the women could not tell how old they were: Asha said: “I have forgotten.” Some tried to work back from the age of their first-born, but failed. They explained themselves by saying: “Years and days are not counted”, “the numbers do not matter”, and “we do not have the time to dig deeper into our ages.”

They looked younger than the Ngoni women we had met. We estimated most of them to be about forty, but three or four were much older, perhaps seventy, and some women’s ages were difficult to tell. However, all of them were grandmothers. We stayed behind the house wall and found a place to sit and talk. When young girls and children discovered us, they became curious and came peeping. They were told that we did not want them to disturb our discussions. Efforts were made to chase the girls away, but they refused to go. Fatma lamented: “Now you see for yourself. These are today’s children. They do not listen to anybody!” In the old days children were not allowed to take part in the adult gatherings, but today they dare to come. Mama Mariam then ordered the girls to join us. The girls, forward as they were, came. After they had joined us, Mama Mariam said: “Now we elders, we will watch you as you give us instructions and demonstrate how to execute them.”

The girls felt embarrassed and insulted. They rose and walked away. As soon as they had gone we withdrew to a secluded place and built a wall of bales of thatching straw to shield ourselves from view. Naturally, our secretiveness made people curious and a dozen more women slipped in and joined us.

Mama Mariam and Mama Bimwana led the session on initiation rites. What they had to say was partly familiar, partly new to us.

From four years of age the Yao girl is taught good manners: how to greet and show respect for elders and visitors. At seven she takes part in the first initiation ceremony (msondo) where the emphasis is on good manners and the observance of taboos. Good manners are highly valued in local societies where the manners of family members affect the reputation of the whole family and clan. During the msondo the girl also learns other skills. She is made to lie on the floor and an older woman sits on her twisting her waist. The girl practises
this twisting. She is told that if a woman twists her waist expertly, her husband will not leave her.

Before the girl attains menarche, she is instructed to tell her grandmother or aunt if she sees a red spot. In a timely fashion, she is shown how to wear the menstrual cloth, be hygienic and observe good manners. Like the Ngoni girls, she is warned against putting salt into the food or sugar into the tea while she is menstruating. During her initiation into maturity (unyago wa likula), when she is ten to fifteen, she and the other girls are taught to sleep on the floor during menstruation in order to avoid spoiling the bed. When she is married, she is cautioned against stepping over her husband while menstruating. This is to avoid dropping blood or some other fluid on to her husband, which is an insult. Everything associated with menstrual blood has to be hidden from anybody else.

The girls also learned how to communicate with their husbands in a discreet way. Whenever a married woman has her period, she puts red beads or a red handkerchief on the bed to let her husband know, “Don’t disturb me, I am menstruating.” After her period is over, white beads or a white handkerchief are left on the bed as an invitation to her husband, “Now you can proceed, everything is alright.”

Being no longer children, the pubescent girls are cautioned against boys and men. They should not run or have intercourse with boys. We also learned that in the past Yao children belonged to their mother, but due to the penetration of modern culture they no longer stick to the mother’s line. Most of the girls are very stubborn and prefer the modern ways.

The marriage rite of the Yao

Two to three years may elapse after the maturity ceremony before the girls get fiancés. The couple often come to know each other at the houses of their sisters or aunts. When the boy proposes to the girl, she can agree or disagree. If she agrees, the boy gives her a kibanio (hair tie) and some money, from fifty cents to five shillings.

After the girl has received the kibanio, the boy’s parents send a message to the girl’s parents. This letter should be accompanied by two shillings, although nowadays this sum has reached 2,000 shillings. When the girl’s parents have accepted the letter, the negotiations about bride wealth take place. Before the wedding, the girl is allocated to a soma and she undergoes unyago wa ndod (pre-wedding initiation). She is told how to take care of her husband by relaxing his body. The bride must wash her husband carefully. She is advised to twist
her waist to stimulate and satisfy her husband. If she fails to be satisfied, she gives a sign by touching her husband’s male organ. He then repeats the act until his wife is satisfied.

A middle-aged woman with a blue blouse demonstrated how Yao women treat their men. She kneeled in front of a woman who pretended to be her husband. The woman dressed in blue lifted the foot of her “husband” and massaged it carefully, toe by toe. She proceeded to slowly massage up “his” legs to the abdomen and the “male” organ. Assuming that “he” had an erection, she entered “him” by sitting on “his” abdomen. She was sensual and wild as she pretended to be having a ride with her husband, and ended with triumphant shout: “No man has ever abandoned a Yao woman, because there are no other women who treat their men as well as we do.”

The female audience seemed to enjoy her performance and agree on the message. These were old women, tired young mothers, poor and worn-out women and sexually exciting women able to generate money from sexual encounters. All of them were rootless descendants of a matrilineal clan. What has happened to the matrilineage?

Mzee Saibu gave a hint when he noted how brothers had lost out to husbands as power holders.

He started by glancing down at his lap at the *Maulidi*, part of the Koran. He noted:

Descendants of Adam and Eve were twin cousins, a male and a female, which made it possible for the cousins to marry each other. It therefore also became possible to trace the lineage from the mother’s line. Yao people did not provide any bride wealth when they wanted to marry. Instead, the man worked as “wife-labour” for his wife’s family. If a boy fell in love with a girl, he just went to live with her family and his children were born in the home of his wife. If he wanted to divorce his wife, he just moved out and left his children to his wife’s house. They belonged to the blood of her clan and carried her surname.

After some more probing, we understood that Yao men in Songea no longer bear their mother’s family names. The mothers have less to say today. The husband and father have taken over the place and influence of the brother and uncle. When Mzee Saibu was still a boy, the maternal uncle was consulted in all the matters concerning the children of Saibu’s mother. Nowadays, uncles mainly look after their own children.
CONTINUITIES, REVISIONS AND DEVIATIONS

We ran the risk of overestimating the extent to which rites of passage are still conducted, because most of our Ngoni informants were “custodians of custom” and were therefore well informed about, and actively involved in, conducting initiations. Nevertheless, they testified to the loss of tradition and to the resistance of the Catholic Church, which regarded the preparations for sexual conduct as especially sinful.

The Yao combined a matrilineal background with being Moslem. They took initiations seriously and seemed to stress virginity and self-control of male desire more than one would expect among a matrilineal people, who generally have a reputation of being more relaxed in matters of sexuality. However, both groups were worried about the decline of their rites and the children’s and youths’ neglected need for advice and direction. Many parents tried to pass on mores and explain their meaning to the next generation.

Zaina (twenty-eight) held that women who went through initiation ceremonies were better off than those who did not:

At least you have a chance of being told not to run off with different men or other people’s women, otherwise you might get somebody with dami chaifu (disease) and end up being barren, or you might be reported to a cell leader or even to the court … However, there are some women who have undergone initiation but who have bad manners. This is because of the impact of foreign culture: the videos and the school. But they are still better off, because they have made their own choice to be what they are, since they have had a chance to get proper instruction.

Amina (thirty) practised the use of the red and white beans to communicate to her husband when she had her period and when it came to an end, as she had been told during the marriage rite.

In the past, kuchicha was important. It gave young boys and girls the chance to get to know each other before marriage. By sleeping in the same room, they learned how to control their sexual desire, as intercourse was primarily meant for procreation and, thus, for those who were married. The changed attitudes towards kuchicha are illuminated by what happened to Agnes’ grandmother when she put two beds in the same room when Agnes’ fiancé, who is not Ngoni, came to visit her parents during courtship. The grandmother assumed that he had come to kuchicha, but the father intervened and asked her to move one bed into another room because the children of today cannot kuchicha. Being a Christian, the father also thought it was against religious norms to allow his daughter to sleep in the same room with a man before they were married. This could lead to temptation. “Kuchicha is rarely
practised nowadays because boys and men are not interested in marrying. All they want is to play with girls,” says Matelda (thirty-nine).

Although arranged marriages still occur, they are not common. Nowadays, people meet their partners in school, at work and in similar circumstances where they are beyond parental control. Individuals prefer to make their own choices. The major purpose of choosing a son’s marriage partner, according to Mzee Saibu, was to secure a wife who is accepted by the whole family and thus able to cope with all its members. As they will share the same compound, she must be accepted by all of them.

Virginity tests are rarely applied: “In the past, virginity tests were performed to encourage the girls to take care of themselves before marriage. In those days, many girls were still virgins when they married. Nowadays this is very rare, because the fiancés press for sexual intercourse before marriage. Today, few brides are virgins,” said Matelda.

Initiation practices that have lost their relevance are more or less abandoned, while valuable practices are still in use. The lives of three daughters, Heto, Matelda and Mwanahamisi, illustrate the existing varieties of the “social heritage” that their parents pass on to them.

Heto (forty) is the daughter of a Ngoni *somo*. Heto underwent initiation when she attained her menarche and went through the pregnancy rite when the time was ripe. She was not married when she gave birth to her first-born. When the *somo* inquired of the name of the father of her child, she told her. The man was approached and asked to marry her, but he already had a wife. After the child was born, Heto did not have any sexual life until she got hold of a special medicine to protect the child for harm. Her aunt gave her a string to tie around her waist to prevent another pregnancy. She used the string for three years without becoming pregnant. Later, she met a Moslem man. They married and Heto went through the wedding rite. They still live together. When I inquired about how the string worked, she explained that some of the strings were obtained from herbs that contain hormones that prevent ovulation (*kuvia*). Only very few traditional healers have access to the right herb: most of them prescribe fake herbs.

Ngoni values and practices are mediated through Heto to her children. Except her first-born, who grew up with its paternal grandparents, her children are initiated.

I have five sons by my husband. The eldest is fifteen and the next thirteen. Last year, I arranged for an old man to initiate them. However, the actual circumcision was done at the hospital. It is safer in hospital. I arranged for them to be trained at home by an *ngariba* [a male *somo*]. I hope that Ngoni tradition will persist because if you compare those who are not initiated with those who are, they differ a lot.
Custodians of Custom

Heto is proud of the training her children received: “At least they are aware of what they are supposed to do and not to do.”

The father of Matelda (thirty-nine) is a custodian of Ngoni custom. She herself does not care about this custom but adheres to the religious norms of her family and the Catholic convent. Matelda is a Standard Seven leaver. She was raised by the missionaries and did not undergo initiation. She was simply instructed by her aunt, and mainly on hygiene. Matelda is an unmarried mother of an eleven-year-old son.

For eight years, she lived in a convent aspiring to be a nun. She was dismissed from the convent in 1985, because an uncle suffered a mental disturbance. Since the disease is hereditary she had to be dismissed, according to the convent’s rules. She returned home in a sad mood. In 1986, a year after she left convent, Matelda became pregnant. She told her mother about the pregnancy, because at the time her aunt and grandmother had died. Her mother told her father about it. Although they were upset, they kept quiet. Her elder brother was angry and let her know that she was an added burden on him. He was the one responsible for taking care of the family. The other brother did not make any comments, since he was younger than Matelda.

The man responsible for the pregnancy was approached by the mshenga and asked about his intentions, but he could not marry Matelda as he already had a wife. He paid 1,500 shillings of the required 6,000 shillings compensation. He still has not paid the balance. Nevertheless, the man continued to have sexual relationship with Matelda for eight more years. Three years ago, he deserted her. According to Matelda, he used to provide for their son, but since his desertion, she is the only provider.

Matelda does not use contraceptives, but is abstaining. She is happy about having a child, otherwise she would not be respected. She is against extramarital relationships:

The practice is very dangerous because it can lead to many problems, e.g., diseases and deaths. One can even be beaten and killed. Many people here engage in extramarital relationship, although they are Christians. The church, however, bars them from church activities until they repent and leave behind their bad deeds. I have decided to abstain partly through religious influence, partly because of AIDS. A lot of people suffer from the disease. Also, I do not want to have a partner who will make me unhappy.

Matelda approves the role that initiation ceremonies played in the past: “In those days the initiated girls were very respectful. Nowadays, there is a mixture of cultures. On one hand, a girl undergoes initiation, on the other, she gets all kinds of advice from people from other cultures, from her peers, not to mention all the false messages on TV.”
If she had a daughter, Matelda would not send her for initiation. “Instead, I would teach her to wear decent clothes, not to go to discos and I’d like her to come back home early. I would teach her to work hard and earn her own money and not to depend on men ... I would not like her to watch obscene videos.”

Matelda has chosen to follow one of her parents two cultural commitments: instead of Ngoni culture she has adapted to Christian religion, a choice that her parents as converted Catholics fully approve, in spite of their own strong commitment to Ngoni custom as well.

Mwanahamisi (twenty-four) fell pregnant after her first intercourse when she was still very young. She was playing madangi (the mother and father game), but the game ended in pregnancy. She lives with the father of her second son. Both the boys stay with her. Mwanahamisi does not use contraception because she wants more children. She hopes that the man will marry her, otherwise she is at risk.

Mwanahamisi took part in the msondo and unyaga wa likuld rites, but was a truant girl. She did not observe the taboos, neither did she listen to the instructions. She played madangi after mando although she had just been warned against doing so. People say that she might end up running with a lot of men if she is not careful.

The three women have in common the fact that they had their first-born children before marriage. At present, two of them live with men who are not the fathers of their first-born, but who have fathered other children by them. Nowadays, secure mating relationships are rare. In spite of having five children by her husband, Heto fears that he may take a second wife. Matelda’s partner was already married when they met. In keeping with the saying that “burned children avoid fire,” Matelda is not going to risk being burnt again. All she wants is to be respected for having a child, being a Catholic and practicing abstinence.

There are three main sources of spiritual inspiration available in urban Songea: traditional cosmologies (theories of the origin and nature of the universe, deriving from the worldviews and values of Ngoni and Yao people) and two religions, Christianity and Islam, which manifest themselves as churches and mosques. All three contain ideas and ethics on gender, sexuality and mating. While Heto and Matelda have respectively committed themselves to Ngoni or Catholic values, Mwanahamisi has not, as far as we can see, anchored herself to any explicit system, but strives to root herself in being a mother, whatever that implies. May she succeed.
Mbena and Ali, sons of the cultural leaders

Mbena (forty) is a son of Mzee Duwe, the Ngoni custodian of custom. Mbena lives in Litowa, fifteen kilometres outside Songea town. Mbena was instructed about puberty by his grandfather and uncles while sitting around the fireplace in the evenings. Like other Ngoni boys of his age, he was not circumcised. When he matured, he knew what it meant. He prepared himself for marriage. He obtained land from his father’s farm and cultivated his own field. He built his hut, ngoko. Mbena underwent the whole marriage process from lubongelu, fuzika, kuchicha, kulola luvanja to the final wedding ceremony. However, he secretly had sexual intercourse with his fiancée before they were married. Consequently, he put a coin without a hole in the mkambo to cover his bride. After all, he was the one who seduced her and knew that she was a virgin when they first met.

Their first-born, Filo, was a boy. When he had grown up he went to Dar es Salaam to work as a houseboy. Mbena took some appropriate measures:

Before my son went away, I arranged for him to get a fiancée. I did not want him to marry a woman from the city. They are lazy and cannot cultivate. I am very happy because Filo, being very intelligent, listened to me. He came once a year with the money he had saved. He built his own small brick house. He even managed to put on an iron sheet roof. He brought a mattress too. Then, he married the girl I had chosen for him. They are happily married and have a lot to eat.

We witness here a line of continuity, in spite of minor deviations, in the life route from the Ngoni grandfather to his son and grandson.

Ali (forty) is the son of Mzee Saibu, the Yao leader. When he married, Ali was in his early twenties and his fiancée was seventeen. She was still a virgin and Ali also lacked sexual experience. Ali identified the girl himself and sent a courtship letter to her parents. When the parents agreed to his request, arrangement for the marriage started. The bride wealth was determined at 15,000 shillings and a female goat. He paid all of it himself. The marriage ceremony took place in a mosque.

How was he prepared? Ali went through jando when he was eight. He received the appropriate training and was circumcised together with a group of age mates. He still remembers the following instruction: “You shall never seduce another person’s wife, or run with other women out of wedlock.” During the pre-marriage rite he was again cautioned against running with different women and told to be careful. Yet, he was also guided about what to do: “I was instructed how to perform sexual intercourse at marriage. I had never had sexual intercourse before. And since I married I have never gone outside the
marriage. "This is against our religion and custom. In addition, it is risky—you might catch an infectious disease."

Ali is not currently keen to have a second wife: "At this time, I have no thought about having another wife. But you never know. If I should marry another woman, I would have to get the consent of my first wife."

Ali ensured that his daughter and son went through all the rites.

My first-born Zaina took part in mondo when she was eight, then she went through unyago wa likula when she was thirteen. Up to now, she has not let me down. Her conduct is good. My thirteen-year-old son went for jando when he was ten. Jando is very good. As an example, my son is well behaved. It is a good thing that the Yao still maintain the custom, which is at the same time in keeping with God's instruction.

Ali decided to allow his wife to use contraceptives. After their last child was born, she contracted tuberculosis and became very weak. Ali wanted his wife to regain her health. However, he would not encourage his son to use condoms but expects him to be able to control himself.

There are two interesting comments to be made about the fact that Mbena and Ali do not correspond to the stereotype of sub-Saharan males, who are often portrayed as being promiscuous, suspicious, violent, irresponsible, unreliable and constantly in need of proving their masculinity at the cost of women. How did this particular situation come about? We can only speculate.

First, it is worth observing that Mbena and Ali had fathers who were present in their lives. They acted as leaders and they interpreted and publicly expressed the Ngoni and Yao ethos. They possessed a certain authority, with features of authoritarianism. They provided a model of social involvement that their sons in turn passed on to their children. The sons showed consideration towards and cared for their families. Mbena took measures to facilitate his son's return to Songea. Ali took part in the initiation rites of his daughter and son. Although Ali is against contraceptives, he recognised when his wife (and he) needed them. Here again, we want to draw attention to the significance of social heritage.

Secondly, the Ngoni in Songea are mostly Catholics and the Yao are Muslims. However, it is difficult to put any demarcation line between Ngonism and Catholicism, or between the matrilineal roots of Yao and Islam. Different beliefs may exist side by side or they may merge. We met people who stood metaphorically on two legs, one leg firmly based on tribal mores and the other on the Bible or Koran. Where the Westerner is inclined to see incompatible forces competing and opposing each other, many Africans find it less difficult to combine, harmonise and make use of both sets of traditions.
“We are not interested at all”

Inevitably, we also registered a gap between the generations, many of the elderly disapproving of the loss of stable bonds and the lack of direction in the lives of their children and grandchildren. Nowhere is this gap wider and the attitudes sterner than in relation to premarital sexual relationships and the avoidance of marrying. The elders took exception to contraceptives as promoting the loosening of mores. Probably the high valuation of fertility in the past also colours their judgment. Almost all of them had lost children and were aware of high infant mortality rates: “You find women saying, I want to have only two children. This is madness. God, witches and other forces, all fix their eyes on the same two children.”

As soon as we mentioned contraceptives, the standard answer was an uncompromising and implacable: “I am not ...” or “We are not interested at all.” The elderly upheld the values they once were initiated into and these values were confirmed by the Catholic mission in Songea and by the Moslems in their rejection of premarital and, indeed, all extramarital sexual relations. Thus, they were united in regarding abstinence as the main safeguard against the AIDS catastrophe and the births of unwanted children to teenage girls.

Mzee Saibu and other Yao did not trust the government that had introduced family planning programmes (nyota ya kijani). They would have preferred the government to help them renovate traditional ways of preventing pregnancy, for example, the long postpartum periods. Mzee Saibu also explained how the Ujamaa policies had destroyed clan organisation. During Ujamaa people lived collectively, eating and working together. However, the enforced shift from their land to new places impaired clan cohesion. The introduction of the self-reliance policies had negative social effects, because people were encouraged to care for themselves individually and to care less about the well-being of the clan.

Not only was there the gap between national modernisation policies and the local interest in sustaining the social order, but there was also the gap between the views of foreigners and of natives. The contraceptive technology that broke down prohibitions and inhibitions in the West is feared because it could open the gates to youthful sexuality in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in conjunction with the growing gap between biological maturity and marriage as a consequence of modern education. The interest in controlling population growth and reducing maternal and infant mortality by modern health facilities has led to the mobilisation of international organizations that distribute contraceptives. These were both widely withheld from as well as rejected by the youths that needed them. The indifference of the young and the resistance
among the parental generation have largely limited the avoidance of unwanted children. Refusal to use condoms has exposed people to sexually transmitted diseases and contributed to the AIDS death toll. For rational Western professionals, it is as incomprehensible that local people should defend “superstitious” customs as it is for those people to abandon the old social order on which their dignity and mutual respect is founded.

Rational professionals with new medical technologies have rarely considered the different structures of Euro-Asian and African families. While Euro-Asian families have much in common with one another, sub-Saharan families are different from them and are less well understood, to put it mildly. Being indifferent to the variety of ways gender and generational relations are organised and to the treasure house of ideas about the human predicament in Africa, Westerners and their fellow Africans who are deprived of an education about their own past tend to project Western history, Western family relationships and Western ideas on to the Ngoni and Yao people, and to establish themselves as models. In short, there is a gap in mutual understanding and reverse learning.

References

The Lack of Consensus about Gender among Nyakyusa Adults and Youths

R.S. Katapa

In the past, young Nyakyusa boys left their parents’ homes and went to live with age mates in what were called “boys’ age villages”. This was to prepare them for their future roles as men and heads of households. They adopted their own norms and were able to reprimand a companion who acted against them. Young girls lived with their parents till they got married. They were taught domestic work and farm work and they assisted their mothers in taking care of their younger siblings. In this way, they were prepared for their future roles as responsible wives.

“The Nyakyusa of southern Tanzania are among the best known of African peoples in the literature of social anthropology” (Charsley, 1969). Indeed, socialisation of the Nyakyusa with regard to gender identity was very clear in the past, as was pointed out by Wilson (1936, 1950, 1951, 1952, 1957, 1959, 1970) and Wilson and Wilson (1945). This research showed how socialisation of the Nyakyusa changed over the years. Today, many girls and boys attend primary school, and the older ones are more involved in business than in agriculture. My study (Katapa, 1998) showed that the sexual mores, too, have changed, as have marriage customs. Girls marry at a much older age than in the past and cohabitation is becoming a common form of entry into marriage.

In April 1998, I conducted a study on the socialisation of Nyakyusa youths with particular emphasis on gender identity. I inquired about the attitudes of adults and youths in order to establish if, and in what respects, there was a generation gap. Here, I report my findings and reflections on the gender and youth problem among the Nyakyusa.

My methods were focus-group discussions (FGDs) and interviews. I held focus group discussions with four groups of people in Tukuyu town, namely women, men, female youths and male youths. In July 1998, thirty-six people were interviewed using semi-structured questionnaires. Eighteen of them were from Mbeya town and the other eighteen from Tukuyu. Twenty of the thirty-
six interviewees were youths, five females and five males from each of the two towns. Due to illness, one female interview was not completed. It was assumed that the women and men selected for the FGDs and interviews were knowledgeable about Nyakyusa culture and traditions. On the other hand, the youths were quite randomly selected, although no statistical selection procedure was applied. The interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis, i.e., the only two persons present during an interview were the researcher and the interviewee.

Nyakyusa culture and traditions

In the focus group discussions, we learnt that there is no institution that teaches youths about Nyakyusa culture and tradition. Most of what can be called “socialisation of youths” takes place in households, schools and, to a certain extent, among the youths themselves when they intermingle.

All the interviewed Tukuyu women and men felt that Nyakyusa culture and tradition should be taught in schools. They suggested that an elderly Nyakyusa man or woman thoroughly conversant with the subject should do the teaching. In addition, four of them suggested that some Nyakyusa teachers be selected to undergo training in Nyakyusa culture and tradition so that they could be responsible for teaching the subject in their respective schools. There was also a suggestion that any youth who is ready and committed to undergo training in Nyakyusa culture and tradition be given that opportunity and later teach the subject. It was further suggested that only the good things inherent in the culture and traditions be taught and the bad ones, such as wife and property inheritance, be left out.

In Mbeya, all the interviewees, except a female and a male youth, were in favour of teaching Nyakyusa culture and traditions to youths in and out of school. The female youth who opposed the proposal said “There are many ethnic groups in schools. If we introduce lessons on Nyakyusa culture and traditions for Nyakyusa children, other pupils will demand that they be taught theirs too.” She felt this would place an extra burden on the school and children. The male youth said we should be thinking of the twenty-first century as the century of science and technology and we should not retreat into past cultures.
Gender-bound duties

From the two FGDs I had with women and men, it emerged that the activities of a woman are: farm work, i.e. planting, weeding and harvesting of sweet potatoes, beans, maize, etc.; household chores such as cleaning the house, cooking, washing dishes, washing clothes; collecting firewood, drawing water, plastering houses and disposing of cow dung; being child minder; conducting such businesses as selling and transporting bananas and avocado pears to Mbeya, Tunduma and Mafinga towns; preparing and selling buns and “cakes” and brewing and selling local beer.

In the past, Nyakyusa women brewed local beer but almost always for celebrations or gatherings such as weddings and funerals. Similarly, bananas used to be for household consumption and not for sale. The involvement of women in business is not a traditional activity.

The activities of men mentioned in the two FGDs with women and men were: farm work, i.e., ploughing maize fields, working on tea and coffee cum banana farms and, to a certain extent, maize and banana farms. The women’s FGD added “that some men are involved in politics, especially during this era of multi-partyism”. The traditional Nyakyusa sexual division of labour persists in farm work, cattle rearing and household chores. When it comes to the sale of goods, men sell the traditional cash crops that are more profitable than the crops sold by women. The activities of girls as mentioned in the FGDs with women, men and female youths are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Activities of Nyakyusa girls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>FGD that mentioned the activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assist their mothers (refers to activities of women)</td>
<td>women men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some travel to and from Mbeya, Tunduma and Malawi to sell bananas,</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>second-hand clothes and sugar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some are in business such as brewing and selling local beer, tomatoes,</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>onions, flour and rice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some work in hair saloons</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some do embroidery and make mats</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some are engaged in prostitution</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Of all the activities mentioned, only those falling under “assisting their mothers” are traditional duties of Nyakyusa girls. It is interesting to note that focus group discussions with female youths did not come up with this traditional role. Whereas mothers expect assistance in farm and domestic work from their daughters, the daughters are more concerned with activities that will earn them money. It was shocking to realise that the girls know about those who have made prostitution their profession!

Boys’ activities as mentioned in the FGDs with women, men and male youths are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Activities of Nyakyusa boys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>FGD that mentioned the activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>women and men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist their fathers in farm work and cattle rearing</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A small number of boys are engaged in farming food and cash crops</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some work as labourers on farms</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some are involved in petty business, e.g. sale of peanuts, roasted or cooked bananas</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The majority are in business, e.g., sale of second-hand clothes, peanuts, maize beans, bananas (bunches, cooked, roasted), sugar</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some sell local brew: they buy it on credit from brewers and sell it at a profit</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some are loiterers, involved in bhang smoking, drug abuse, hooliganism, banditry and rape</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Women and men believe that one of the duties of male youths is to assist their fathers in farm work. On the other hand, male youths complain they do not have land to cultivate because their fathers have sold most of it to the Chagga and Kinga. The implication is that youths would like to farm, provided they own the farms and, hence, the produce. Fathers expect “free labour” from their sons. In a similar manner, male youths consider business to be their main activity while the elders consider this to be petty business.

The FGDs involving female and male youths mentioned that a significant number of boys are loiterers. Loitering is a big problem not only among Nyakyusa youths, but also among other ethnic groups. It was shocking to re-
alise that male youths know that there are boys who are “professional loit-
erers”!

In the semi-structured interview, the following scenario was presented to interviewees. The initial assertion was that there are gender roles in the Nyakyusa society. Only when a family does not have girls is it acceptable for boys to perform those activities deemed to be the responsibility of girls. Similarly, when there are no boys in the family it is acceptable for girls to perform boys’ activities. I sought out the views of the Nyakyusa community of a boy with sisters who performs activities deemed to be for girls and a girl with brothers who performs activities deemed to be for boys. The views are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: How the Nyakyusa community views a boy who performs activities deemed to be for girls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Frequency by Age:</th>
<th>Sex:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Old</td>
<td>Young</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Praise him</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. He has been well trained by his parents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Encourage him</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The boy is helpful</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. In the past they would think he is a fool, nowadays it is acceptable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Disrespect him</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Laugh at him</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. He is stupid</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. He is crazy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. He is lousy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. He is abnormal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. He is disgracing all men</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. He will not find a girl to marry</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. He is showing off</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. He is being mistreated</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 3, the first four reasons can be summed up as “praise,” and the frequency is eighteen. On the other hand, reasons 6 to 14 despise the boy in some way and the frequency is twenty-four. We can say the feelings of the Nyakyusa community are divided between praising and despising the boy. Those who despise him outnumber those who praise him.
Table 4: How the Nyakyusa community views a girl who performs activities deemed to be for boys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Frequency by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Praise her</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. She is courageous</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. She is talented</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. She is hard working</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. She was well trained by her parents</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. She is masculine, had she been a boy she would have been very</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intelligent and would take care of her siblings</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. She is masculine, she has the heart of a man</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. She is strange</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. She is being mistreated</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. It is all right</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Disrespect her</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reasons 1 to 7 in Table 4 can be summed up as “praise,” and the frequency is thirty-nine. On the other hand, only the last reason on the table implies disrespect, and the frequency is four.

Tables 3 and 4 clearly show that people have double standards. A girl doing boys’ work would be praised, but the case would be different for a boy, who would be more despised than praised. We summarise the responses of four people who believe that a girl would be praised and the boy despised.

A sixty-four-year-old Tukuyu woman said, “People would praise her for being intelligent and energetic and she will easily find a man to marry.” As for a boy doing girl’s work, she said, “They will disrespect him for disgracing men by doing woman’s work.” Many interviewees, including youths, echoed the view that the girl would “easily find a man to marry her”.

A forty-one-year-old Tukuyu man said, “They will praise her and consider her courageous because men’s jobs are strenuous.” As for the boy doing girl’s work, he said, “They will think he is abnormal.” A middle-aged man in Mbeya said, “They will consider him to be lousy”, and of the girl he said, “They will say she is masculine, she has the heart of a man.” An Mbeya female youth of twenty-four said, “They will think he is stupid,” and of the girl, she said, “They will say she is hard working.”
If a majority of the elderly despise a boy for doing work deemed to be for girls, boys and men will shy away from performing “women’s work” for fear of being ridiculed.

(Photo: The Guardian, Dar es Salaam)
Negative effects of business

When we think of business, most of the focus is on profit. Business can have negative effects on the lives of business girls and boys. Such negative effects are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Negative effects of business on business girls and boys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative effects on girls</th>
<th>Negative effects on boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are at risk of accidents, due to frequent travel</td>
<td>(same)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquire cultures of places they take their goods to</td>
<td>(same)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In addition to business, some practice prostitution</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some end up getting STDs or AIDS</td>
<td>(same)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To save on lodging costs or failure to get a room to lodge, some sleep in men’s rooms</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May become bankrupt and end up loitering</td>
<td>(same)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May fall sick in a foreign land, no relatives to attend her</td>
<td>(same)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May not get marriage proposals because of frequent travel</td>
<td>May postpone ideas of marrying because of business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>May be involved in banditry or illegal business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>May spend business money on alcohol and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>May not have time to visit his relatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>Some pupils go into business during vacation in order to earn fees and end up abandoning school in favour of business. (Many interviewees mentioned this.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In talking about AIDS, a Tukuyu old woman said, “Diseases such as AIDS have befallen many boys who engage in cross-border business.” A Tukuyu youth said, “So many girls return from Tunduma and Malawi after contracting AIDS.” Another Tukuyu male youth said, “Many learn prostitution there because they mix with other tribes such as the Haya, Nyiramba, etc. who are said to teach Nyakyusa girls those behaviours.” Four Mbeya interviewees felt that business affects girls negatively, but not business boys.

It was claimed that a business girl is at disadvantage because men woo her. She may initially resist their advances, but eventually give in. Boys woo girls, but a business boy may decide not to woo any girl and concentrate on business.
Government’s contribution and the impact of education

Tukuyu women and men interviewees felt that government was contributing to the upbringing of youth by providing schools, but felt strongly that it was not doing much to raise the youths’ economic status. An old man said, “Economically, it has forgotten youths.” An old woman said, “It does not help them in any way except for promises of loans!” Female youth felt that providing education was not enough and should be accompanied by economic empowerment. They said that the government’s promises of loans to groups of women are not fulfilled and the lack of an economic base contributes to prostitution among girls as a means of survival. Male youth were also concerned at the lack of economic empowerment. One of them said, “The government is not involved in the upbringing of a boy, except to tax him.” Another said, “It does not contribute in any way except by making empty promises of loans.” All the interviewees in Mbeya took the view that government should contribute to the economic empowerment of youth, e.g., by providing them with loans.

In the past, while boys were being sent to school, girls were being prepared for marriage, which fetched cows for their fathers. Currently, there is no discrimination in primary school enrolment. It is possible that parents are becoming more and more aware of the need to educate all their children. However, this change could also be due to the 1978 Declaration on Universal Primary Education. An old woman in Mbeya said, “Once employed, girls have a tendency to provide more financial support to their parents than boys. Consequently, some parents are more in favour of sending girls to school than boys.”

The advantages of education were identified as the ability to read, write and count, becoming knowledgeable and getting employment. In Mbeya, not a single youth mentioned employment or being knowledgeable as an advantage of education.

The disadvantages of education mentioned by the interviewees are: fading of indigenous traditions; some girls fall pregnant while in school; some pupils acquire unbecoming behaviours such as hooliganism, drunkenness, rudeness and pride; pupils not being able to assist their parents in farm and domestic work while in school (not a single youth mentioned this); family income diminishes because parents are at times forced to sell their produce or livestock in order to meet school obligations (once again, not a single youth mentioned this); and the creation of a class of the educated and a class of the uneducated (this was echoed by many interviewees, young and old).

A Tukuyu male youth said, “Education has brought conflicts between the educated and uneducated, with the educated seeing themselves as being better
than the uneducated.” A Tukuyu female youth said, “It has created a division between the educated and the uneducated, who are ignored by the educated people.” In Mbeya, a male youth said Kinyakyusa is fading because Kiswahili and English are the formal languages of communication in schools. This was echoed by a female youth who said, “Speaking Kinyakyusa in schools is not allowed and if a pupil is found talking it, she or he is punished.” Another male youth said education has spoiled Nyakyusa culture, and gave as an example the wearing of trousers by girls.

Nyakyusa culture and traditions have been affected by education in various ways; people dress differently from the past and now dress up; many Nyakyusa people can read and write in Kinyakyusa or Kiswahili; some Nyakyusa people are employed, which would be impossible without education; education has
brought development in the form of schools, hospitals, better farming methods and better houses, which were not available in the past; and women are demanding their rights, e.g., abolition of wife inheritance, not being battered by their husbands and the right to inherit a husband’s or father’s property. A female youth summarised these changes thus: “Today’s girl has been given an opportunity to affirm her position and indispensability in society.” These changes have wiped out some traditions. For example, educated women no longer obey men, brides are no longer examined for their virginity, and women no longer take part in local dances and rituals. On the down side, people
are neglecting their culture by changing their Nyakyusa names and adopting “British” accents.

**Virginity, bride wealth and attitudes towards cohabitation**

Female youths expressed their views on the past Nyakyusa tradition of examining brides to establish their virginity. All five Tukuyu female youths and two of their four Mbeya counterparts felt that this was a good practice, which should be allowed to continue. They felt the practice was beneficial in that the bride developed a good relationship with her husband’s family, is respected and can command more bride wealth for her family. Moreover, the practice is a source of pride for the bridegroom, in that he is seen by the community to have an “untouched” wife. Finally, the practice is held to discourage girls from indulging in premarital sexual acts with men and to protect them against STDs and AIDS (I find the last statement to be questionable because a bridegroom can also transmit STDs to his bride). The two Mbeya female youths who opposed such examinations claimed that the pronouncement of the bride’s lack of virginity would make her feel ashamed and might affect her psychologically.

In the past, Nyakyusa youth went as far as South Africa in search of money to buy cows for bride wealth. The male youths said that nowadays most of the bride wealth comes from the proceeds of their small businesses. These include selling second-hand clothes, sugar from Malawi and goods from Zanzibar. Some boys farm crops for sale and a small number of them still go to the mines in Tanzania. With the proceeds from all these activities they buy the cows for bride wealth.

A reasonable number of Tanzanian youths cohabit, a practice unknown in the past. According to the interviewees, the disadvantages for a girl are that cohabitation strains her relationship with her parents and clan; does not provide her with a wife’s ability to report to her husband’s parents and clan if she is beaten by him; leads to excommunication by the church; does not earn the respect of society; prevents her from inheriting from her partner when he dies; leads to confusion about where to bury her when she dies; and exposes her to the risk of out-of-wedlock pregnancy and of being chased away at any time. In this event, if her parents refuse to take her back, she may end up as a loiterer or prostitute.

It was stated that parents become very sad and ashamed upon learning that their daughter is cohabiting with a man. Some parents disown their daughters and some sue the boy. The sadness they experience has two faces: for some it
is losing the respect of society and for others it is concern over the foregone bride wealth.

Some interviewees said there are advantages to a girl in cohabitation although they are far outweighed by the disadvantages. The advantages are that by sticking to one man, she minimises the risk STDs, including AIDS; men will consider her to be married and will not bother her; she has more freedom to leave the man if she is mistreated, to make decisions and not to obey him than if she were formally married to him; and to certain extent society will view her as married and her children as "legitimate." A female youth in Mbeya who was a mother of two children said it was better to cohabit with a man and have children by him than to bear children while still at your parents' home. She said, "Look at me, I have two children and I am still living with my parents. They take care of my children and if my children or I fall sick they pay the medical fees. It is a burden on them!"

Correspondingly, the disadvantages of cohabitation for a boy are his poor relationship with the girl's parents, who may even sue him; his inability to command the girl for fear that she will leave him; excommunication by the church; his loss of the children if the woman dies, since they belong to her clan; and the problems he faces in burying the girl. In this case, he will have to beg and plead with her parents to take care of her body and this may involve paying a fine that is more than the bride wealth he would have had to pay for her. There are those who said there is no disadvantage to a boy in cohabiting with a girl, although they saw disadvantages to the girl in the same relationship. An Mbeya woman said, "A boy may cohabit with as many as twenty women without any disadvantages."

The interviewees noted that some parents become happy and others sad upon learning that their son is cohabiting with a girl. A Tukuyu middle-aged man said, "They feel proud because bride wealth has not been demanded by her parents." A Tukuyu male youth said "They will feel happy ... Moreover, it is difficult to get money for bride wealth." An old Tukuyu man commented, "Many feel happy because he has reduced the burden of providing bride wealth and making wedding preparations. Only a few, i.e., those who are re-
ligious, become sad.” This last point was also made by a Tukuyu male youth of twenty-one.

On the other hand, another Tukuyu male youth argued that, “They receive the news with real sadness because he has disgraced the society and brought conflict with the girl’s clan.” According to an old Mbeya man, “Wise parents advise their sons to face the girl’s parents and make arrangements for payment of bride wealth.” A middle-aged Mbeya man said that the pain of learning that their child is cohabiting is not as deep for the boy’s parents as it is for the girl’s parents.

**Non-formal entry into marriage**

Questions were asked regarding three forms of entry into marriage to establish whether they existed or not and how they are viewed relative to the accepted practice of *ukwakumbika*, that is, marriage that involves a formal wedding.

*Ukunyaka* is a form whereby a boy engages a girl by paying part of the bride wealth. After some time, he and his comrades ambush the girl and drag her to his parents’ home. His parents send a message to her parents informing them that she has been “snatched” by their son. Later, the boy collects his wife from his parents’ home.

Eighteen interviewees said this the form of entry into marriage still exists and the other seventeen said it does not. One Mbeya female youth said: “It happened this year. A girl had gone to assist her mother to sell beer at a local bar where she was ‘grabbed’ by her fiancé and his friends.” The interviewees who said it existed admitted that it occurred rarely and is less respected than a formal wedding.

According to twenty-six interviewees, *ukujonga* (elopement) still exists, while the other nine said it does not. This practice was also said to be rare and not respected as much as formal entry in to marriage.

*Ukwitwala* (bringing-herself) takes place when a girl leaves her residence and moves in to live with her boyfriend at his residence. This type of marriage is a new phenomenon in Nyakyusa society and did not exist when I was a teenager in the 1960s. All the thirty-five interviewees agreed that *ukwitwala* exists and does not enjoy the same respect as formal weddings. According to one middle-aged Mbeya woman, “*Ukwitwala* is not respected and a parent cannot claim that the daughter is married.”

The responses on the existence or non-existence of these types of entry into marriage are presented in Table 6.
Judging from the responses in Table 6, *ukwitwala* is more prevalent than each of the other two forms.

### Mixed marriages

All eight adult interviewees in Tukuyu and two in Mbeya said Nyakyusa elders feel bad about a boy marrying a non-Nyakyusa girl. His parents miss the friendship that normally develops between the bride’s and the bridegroom’s parents. The other six adult interviewees in Mbeya said it is acceptable for a Nyakyusa boy to marry a non-Nyakyusa girl although in the past the elders did not recognise such a marriage.

The youths said that a boy married to a non-Nyakyusa feels comfortable among his fellows. However, he does not feel very comfortable if he is among a group of boys all of whom are married to Nyakyusa girls, and neither does he feel comfortable when his friends speak Nyakyusa in the presence of his wife. As to how his Nyakyusa colleagues feel about him, two answers emerged: those married to an Nyakyusa woman laugh at and despise him while those married to a non-Nyakyusa woman congratulate him for joining their club.

What does it mean for a girl to marry a non-Nyakyusa boy? Seven adult interviewees in Tukuyu and two others in Mbeya said Nyakyusa elders feel bad when a girl marries a non-Nyakyusa boy. Again, this is because her parents will miss out on the friendship that normally develops between the bride’s and bridegroom’s parents. The eighth Tukuyu adult said her parents would be happy because non-Nyakyusa sons-in-law care very much about their in-laws. The other six Mbeya adult interviewees said elders feel it is acceptable for a boy to marry a non-Nyakyusa girl.

Most of the youths said a girl married to a non-Nyakyusa boy feels comfortable among her friends. Two Tukuyu female youths said that girls prefer marrying non-Nyakyusa men because they are less oppressive than Nyakyusa men. One of them said, “Educated girls do not want to marry Nyakyusa boys

### Table 6: Existence of some forms of entry into marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of entry into marriage</th>
<th>Does the form of entry into marriage exist?</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukunyaka (grabbing/snatching)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UkJonga (elopement)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukwitwala (bringing-herself)</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
because they, their parents and their relatives are really oppressive.” Another said, “Girls of today prefer marrying non-Nyakyusa boys because they are less troublesome and oppressive than Nyakyusa boys.”

On the other hand, a Tukuyu male youth said, “The girl feels bad but has no alternative, since she cannot propose marriage, only men can. If no Nyakyusa boy proposes to her then she must accept marriage offers from others”. Two Mbeya male youths said the girl would feel uncomfortable because her friends would despise her. Her companions married to Nyakyusa men would despise her and consider her to be lost, while the unmarried ones would envy her.

Boys’ talk, girls’ talk

Boys talk about girls at kijiweni (the jobless corner). During the focus group discussions with male youths, we learnt that girls are one of the topics boys talk about at kijiweni. We requested the male youths to tell us about the nature of these discussions about girls. In Tukuyu we were informed that there are vijiwe (jobless corners) for those who have never gone to school, those with primary education and those who are highly educated (secondary school and above). Consequently, discussions at vijiwe vary according to educational level. Some discussions are about the manners of girls fit for marriage and girls unfit for marriage, e.g. prostitutes, dirty and lazy girls, shapely girls; falling in love with girls and which girl a particular boy is wooing and whether she had accepted him; what her reasons were for rejecting him; the repercussions of rape (at some vijiwe); the ways girls beat them academically, gender issues including equal opportunity for girls and boys (at better educated vijiwe); the desertion by some boys of the girls they had impregnated; finding a boy to seduce and impregnate a girl who is more intelligent than they are so that she is eventually expelled from school; the economic hardships faced by young couples and the unwise spending habits of young wives; the attractions and shortcomings of girls they have gone to bed with, and what life will be like if they manage to marry a girl. When a girl passes by, discussions turns to whether she is beautiful or not and whether she should be wooed.

Girls are never seen at vijiwe. Do girls meet in the same way boys do? This question was posed to female youths during the semi-structured interviews and their responses indicated that girls do meet. In Tukuyu, girls meet at local beer bars while selling their goods, or when they are travelling together to sell or buy goods (they travel in groups) and at hair saloons while waiting for their hair to be curled or plaited. Hence, unlike the boys who sit at the kijiweni and
do nothing practical, girls in Tukuyu meet while conducting business or engaging in recreational activities.

In Mbeya, girls visit each other at their parents’ homes, in church, at gatherings such as weddings or funerals, and while obtaining groceries. They might drink beer and soft drinks when they meet. One youth mentioned business premises as another meeting place. We can see that Mbeya girls meet in more leisurely or recreational settings than Tukuyu girls.

In the meeting places, girls’ discussions are mainly about men and business. Regarding the latter, they inform each other on techniques for improving or starting new businesses as well as the most highly profitable types of businesses. For some groups of girls a major topic of discussion is how and where to get men for friendship. They also talk about the disadvantages of getting married, such as being oppressed, insulted, beaten and not being involved in decision making. They exchange news on how their boyfriends mistreat them.

**Problems youths face**

From the focus group discussions it became apparent that Nyakyusa youths face many problems. Male youths face economic hardships and lack of capital to start or improve small businesses and a lack of land to cultivate (due to poverty, their fathers have sold most of the family land to Chagga and Kinga, who are newcomers to Nyakyusaland). The youth may not be brought up according to Nyakyusa tradition and norms, which were supposed to prepare them for their future roles as adults: as a result some youths have lost direction. Youths are interested in luxurious lives that they cannot afford, and as a result some of them end up committing crimes. They may also have indulged in sexual acts while they were still young. Some fail to marry because they cannot afford bride wealth, and end up impregnating girls and disowning the pregnancies. Others are expelled from schools and colleges because they cannot afford school fees and express their frustration in anti-social activities.

The problems can be overcome or reduced by forming into groups of male youths so that the government will provide assistance or loans to them. Poor families could also form groups so that they get assisted, as above. The youth should be taught Nyakyusa customs and traditions so as to avoid falling into bad ways. Those in school should be provided this knowledge too. Health education should be emphasised so that youths avoid casual sexual relationships, drug abuse, bhang smoking, alcohol and rape. In the allocation of business premises, local government should give priority to Nyakyusa youths. Parents should discourage youths from running to towns and encourage them to participate in agriculture.
The female youths’ problems are out-of-wedlock pregnancies; preoccupation with luxurious lives they cannot afford, with the result that some of them, including school girls, end up indulging in sexual relations with men for financial and material gain; school girls who become pregnant are eventually expelled from school; being disowned by their families because of prostitution, laziness or indiscipline; being despised by their parents and family members for marrying a non-Nyakyusa; rape; being beaten in local beer bars, sometimes while fighting over men; being beaten or insulted by men or boys with whom they cohabit and who justify their conduct on the grounds that they did not pay bride wealth; being chased away at any time by the men with whom they cohabit; not being sent to school because their parents are too poor to afford school expenses; lack of planning for the future due to their poor upbringing; and lack of capital to start or improve their business.

These problems can be overcome by giving out-of-school girls loans to start informal economic activities; those in petty business should be given loans to expand their business and increase their income; forming groups in order to get assistance or loans from the government or local authorities (this will alleviate problems of prostitution, fighting over men etc); provide education on Nyakyusa culture and traditions, e.g., in schools; government to enact strict laws to curb men’s acts that humiliate and marginalise women, e.g., rape, beating and abandonment (a strict law on rape has been introduced); parents should be given assistance or loans to send their daughters to school; girls should be educated on the importance of working rather than being idle or lazy; and discouraging school girls from “loving money” in the interests of their future welfare.

According to the FGDs with men, male youths often do not like farm work and, as a result, they run away from villages to town and the end result is hunger in the villages, since old people cannot do much farming. Young men are also seen as undisciplined and engaging in activities harmful to their health, such as drunkenness, banditry, sexual relationships, smoking bhang and drug abuse. Many are held not to plan for the future, but live from day to day. For example, a boy who was assisting a bus conductor (impiga debe) yesterday is selling peanuts today and tomorrow you may find him selling roasted bananas.

The views of the corresponding group of women on the conduct and actions of female youths indicate that the girls do not abide by Nyakyusa norms, often show no respect and indulge in sexual relationships while they are still young, so that they are no longer virgins when they marry. Many girls fall pregnant out of wedlock while some get married without consulting their parents. Others drop out of school for no specific reason. The older women were not happy with the manners and deportment of Nyakyusa girls.
The youths grow up in a society marked by unfulfilled aspirations, cultural discontinuity and mass unemployment. (Photo: The Guardian, Dar es Salaam)
Reflections on the current predicament of youth

Adolescence is of cardinal importance for gender identity: for a child to be adequately socialised, there are some necessary preconditions, one of them being societal continuity (Elkin and Handel 1972). By this we refer to cultural continuity and some kind of prospect for ordered improvement. Clearly, many societies today do not meet such conditions. Tanzania is one among many societies marked by unfulfilled aspirations, cultural discontinuity, upheavals in customary institutions, mass unemployment and severe poverty. It would be truly remarkable if there were no signs of a generation gap. The training and direction given to current Nyakyusa youths differs from that of their fathers and mothers. In this study, elders felt that one of the duties of the youths is to help their parents. When the elders were growing up, they were socialised to help their parents, and now that they are old they expect the same from their children. On the other hand, youths have no idea that they have a duty to assist their parents in farm and domestic work. That is why during focus group discussions, assisting a father in farm work or a mother in farm and domestic work was not mentioned as being among the duties of male and female youths. Youths complained that one reason for their economic hardships is that their fathers have sold land to members of other ethnic groups. Youths felt they should be given land for farming and be able to make decisions on what to do with the farm produce.

The youth have a more positive attitude towards boys and men performing activities that are culturally categorised as girls’ or women’s work. When it comes to a girl performing work deemed to be for boys, there is no generation-al difference: youths and elders both held that the girl would be praised. Since a majority of the elderly despise a boy for doing work deemed to be for girls and praise a girl for doing the work of boys, the end result is a heavier workload for girls and women. Boys and men will shy away from performing “women’s work” for fear of being ridiculed. On the other hand, girls and women will continue to perform their traditional roles and add to those the activities deemed to be for men.

In the past, the Nyakyusa were considered to be among the most highly educated ethnic groups in mainland Tanzania. That proud claim is no longer true! Many children are never enrolled and some drop out mainly because of economic hardship – they cannot afford the school fees, frequent school contributions, school uniforms, stationery and books. The fact that parents are forced to sell their farm produce and livestock in order to meet their children’s school obligations was seen by elders as a disadvantage of formal education. They agreed that it is good to contribute to one’s children’s education but
when this entails sacrificing almost all you have, they started having negative feelings about education.

During the FGDs, the male youths mentioned impregnating girls and disowning pregnancies as one of the problems they face. I had always been of the opinion that boys felt triumphant in disowning their pregnancies and that this is a social problem. My research has now shown that some boys feel guilt about this situation and that it is an economic problem for them. The male youths assured me that many boys are interested in marriage but fail to follow through because they cannot afford bride wealth. The result is that they seek the friendship with girls to whom they make love: in other words, if they had been married, they would not indulge in these love affairs. They disavow the pregnancies because the girl’s parents could demand fines and/or bride wealth and the boys would be liable for the upkeep of the unborn child.

Many people claim that women fear debts and, for that reason, do not apply for loans. My research reveals that this is not the case. Female youths, just like their male counterparts, argued that government should supply them with loans. Women and men alike held that government should provide youths with loans instead of just making empty promises about loans. This finding mirrors that in my survey of the informal sector: the majority of informal sector operators (women and men) indicated that, above all, they needed loans to expand or start new businesses (Katapa 1998; URT 1991 and URT 1995).

It appears that girls have become more assertive. The socialisation of a boy and/or the social conditions that enable a boy to propose to a girl for friendship or marriage are changing. It can be recalled that one of advantages of cohabitation mentioned by boys is that girls will not disturb the boy because he is considered to be married. This implies that girls woo boys (possibly indirectly).

Another issue that shows change in socialisation with respect to sexuality is ukwitiwala (when the girl brings herself). It is the girl who takes the initiative to go and live with her boyfriend. Initially, the boy may have proposed the friendship, but there comes a time when the girl feels that friendship alone is not enough and tactically moves to her boyfriend’s residence. This type of “marriage” is gaining momentum, and every interviewee in Tukuyu and Mbeya recognises its existence.

My study made us aware about the way boys talk about girls at kijiweni (the jobless corner). In another district, Mziray (1998) came up with the same finding. While it is understandable that boys will talk about girls, some of the issues they discuss seem to marginalise women. An example is when they plan to find a boy to impregnate a girl who is academically better than they. They also talk about wives spending money unwisely during periods of economic
hardship; this can be interpreted to mean that boys are socialised into believing that a woman is to blame when things go wrong. In telling their stories of how they managed to run away from girls they had impregnated, the boys are indirectly informing others at the kijiweni about what to do if they face the same dilemma.

At present, the socialisation of girls is not very distinct from that of boys. For example, girls and boys are enrolled in schools, engage in business and do not feel obliged to assist their parents in farm and domestic work. Boys and girls are more involved in business than in agriculture. In addition to selling goods within the country, they take goods to Malawi and Zambia, and they bring goods back from those countries and sell them within Tanzania, especially in the Mbeya region. In the past, the girls did not have the freedom to travel that far.

The indigenous form of entry into marriage (ukwakumbika) that involves a wedding is fading. Instead, ukwitwala (bringing herself) is gaining momentum. Ukwakumbika is quite costly, partly because of bride wealth, usually in the form of cows and a bull, which have to be paid before the wedding day. The wedding is also costly because the bride and bridegroom have to be nicely dressed and food and local beer must be served to well wishers. On the other hand, ukwitwala does not involve any costs.

My research shows the need to sensitize the whole of Nyakyusa society on the benefits of boys and girls performing activities without discrimination and of praising them for so doing. Once boys perform, and are praised for performing, activities deemed to be for girls, they will continue the practice into their adult lives. The outcome will be a reduction in a woman’s workload.

My findings make it clear that youths need economic empowerment and that governments should provide loans to girls’ and boys’ groups. It is recommended that loans to start or expand businesses be provided to Nyakyusa youths. Economic empowerment will reduce the adverse consequences of socialisation and poverty for the youths. For boys, loans will help them to start businesses that will keep them busy so that they have no time to spend at kijiweni. This will be a blessing for the whole society: the socialisation role of the kijiweni is not constructive. With economic empowerment, girls will not have to fight over men in local bars or rely on prostitution, since they will have other sources of income. And economic empowerment of boys will drastically reduce the problem they face of not being able to afford marriage and the problem of their abandonment of the girls they have made pregnant for fear of being fined.

Blaming the youths will not solve problems. Providing the youth with the means for overcoming poverty will help to do so.
The Lack of Consensus about Gender...
Some definitions

*Kijiweni* (plural *vijiwe*): Place where youths idly pass their time. Almost every day, many youths, especially boys, gather at certain locations and idle their time away. It is literally translated as “jobless corner”, since this phenomenon emerged with youth unemployment.

*Kilumyama*: Village for boys of the same age, i.e., boys’ age village

*Kinyakyusa*: The Nyakyusa language

*Kunyaka*: A form of entry into marriage whereby a boy and his friends seize his fiancée and carry or drag her to his home.

*Ukwakumbika*: Escort a bride to her husband.

*Ukwittwala*: A form of entry into marriage whereby a girl leaves her residence and starts to live with her boyfriend (bringing herself).
The Topic Nobody Wants to Talk About

Zubeida Tumbo-Masabo

There has been a rapid spread of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa despite programmes to raise awareness and knowledge about the transmission of the disease. Unlike North America and Europe, where HIV/AIDS has mainly hit homosexuals and intravenous drug users, in sub-Saharan Africa the transmission has been predominantly heterosexual. While peer-based interventions have worked among homosexuals and intravenous drug users (Kelly et al. 1992; Kegeles et al. 1992), such interventions have had little effect on heterosexual transmission because the latter calls for familial involvement in any preventive endeavour.

Moreover, it has been shown in earlier studies that in heterosexual relations some of the measures advocated for reducing infection, e.g., condom use, are not widely adopted even by people who show profound understanding of the consequences of non-compliance. In other words, the oft-stressed Knowledge, Practice and Attitude (KAP) studies have not been effective in resolving the issue of HIV/AIDS transmission (Kalumba 1992, Foreman 1999), especially not in Africa.

New cases of HIV/AIDS occur mainly among very young people and the age is even lower for young women than for men. From 1987 to 1990, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS among youths aged between fifteen and nineteen years rose to 4 and 7.5 per cent for males and females respectively (NACP, 1994); i.e., nearly twice as many women get infected as men of the same age group. Such figures underline the need for communication between generations as well as between women and men. But HIV/AIDS is more or less an unspeakable issue, loaded with secrecy, shame and taboos. How do we break the prevailing silence and initiate open dialogues? How do we overcome the common avoidance and unwillingness to face the risks?

I have been involved in a large research project by playing a local part within it. The major aims of the study were twofold:
The first aim was to devise and put into practice different methodological approaches, i.e., prove different means that facilitate data collection and also allow for the initiation of frank communication with women, men and youth in the struggle against HIV/AIDS.

The second aim was to investigate gender relations as an aspect of the campaign against HIV/AIDS, taking account of the fact that in Africa the disease has always spread primarily through heterosexual relations.

We have used an array of different methods for both information gathering and review of research methods:

I conducted house-to-house interviews in my geographically designated area using a standardised questionnaire. The same questions were put to all the people we interviewed. As each person had to select an answer from among a few given alternatives, the answers were simple to count and lump together.

I conducted focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with people as a vital part of the study. The groups were usually small, three to six participants of either similar occupations or similar interests: e.g., four women beer brewers aged forty to forty-five; three young women aged eighteen to twenty-one who work as kilabu (local brew club) girls with the same brewer; a group of six men aged thirty-five to forty-five who meet regularly to play draughts; or five women members of an upatu (money saving arrangement which allows members to take turns to get credit) group. The discussions were conducted in people’s houses or on the verandas where people normally meet, rather than at an arranged venue. Many participants were unwilling to move to unfamiliar venues and preferred to have a well-known setting, where they felt more at ease, for the discussions. I also utilised a mixed group discussion at one focus group’s suggestion, so as to simulate dialogue in a family situation. Moreover, the field notes I compiled from my observations complemented the information from the questionnaire and group discussions.

The study benefited from a one-day workshop organised at Ukombozi Primary School. Thirty-seven participants of different ages attended the workshop: ten young men aged from eighteen to twenty-five years and twenty-seven women ranging from eighteen to fifty years. The absence of men over twenty-five years of age was conspicuous. I was told by the participants that men usually consider such workshops as a waste of time, as in their view HIV/AIDS is almost inevitable considering that “real people” have got to be sexually potent and that AIDS is ajali kazini (an accident of work).

The workshop discussions were open ended and guided by themes that focused on various communications means to put the message across, such as setting up a role-play followed by open discussion. The conveners of the work-
shop introduced pictorial analysis by using a book by Bernard Joinet and Theodore Magolola. The book shows a picture of Safina (Noah's Ark) to illustrate different methods that can be practised to prevent HIV/AIDS, i.e., through abstinence or safe sex.

On the other hand, the in-depth interviews and group discussions were guided by a set of themes pertaining to HIV/AIDS: the history of the participants; how they learned about HIV/AIDS; their beliefs about it; protective methods, with additional questions on condom use, abstinence and limiting the number of partners. These issues had all come up during the first two focus group discussions and three in-depth interviews, during which I had tried to be as open as possible to allow the participants to make comments and take up the issues that bothered them.

The profile of Manzese

The geographic area assigned to me was Manzese, a ward in Kinondoni District along Morogoro Road, a major road leading to most of the rest of Tanzania and an outlet to Zambia, Burundi, Rwanda, Kenya, etc. It is one of the oldest squatter areas of Dar es Salaam. With a total population of almost 60,000 in approximately 13,000 households (Census 1988), Manzese is one of the most densely populated squatter wards of Dar es Salaam. The ward also has numerous guesthouses, beer and pombe (local brew) bars and vilabu (local brew clubs) (pombe joints where people sit on benches or logs). Houses in Manzese along Morogoro Road are of the squatter type, with no access roads and the houses arranged in a zigzag pattern, while those which border the surveyed areas of Sinza and Manzese Uzuri, which is a relatively new area, are inhabited by middle-range traders, bar owners, middle-cadre industrial employees and retired civil servants. This area is considered by the residents of Manzese to be for the “rich.” Most Manzese Ward inhabitants are petty traders, low-income factory workers and unemployed persons who rent rooms in houses in the squatter zone.

Another interesting area of Manzese is Uwanja wa Fisi (Hyena’s Field). Uwanja wa Fisi is a squatter area off Morogoro Road bordering Tandale. It is also known as Uwanja wa Maraha (the enjoyment field). In this area, almost every other house is a pombe joint with a number of guesthouses. Some of the houses are part residential and part kilabu (pombe joint). Children, who usually sleep in the same room with their parents, are subjected to drunkenness and related behaviour when they come out of their rooms. Uwanja wa Fisi proper is a square of about five to six houses long, hence fifty to sixty meter
long and about twelve meters wide, surrounded by vilabu and about three “groceries” (not places where one goes to get provisions but rather beer and other industrial alcoholic beverages). On the square, people sell lumps of meat (approximately three-quarter to one kilogram) for 300–500 shillings, while a kilogram of meat sells at between 1,000 and 1,200 shillings at a butchery. They also sell mishikaki (skewered meat) and supu ya makongoro na utumbo (soup made from entrails and beef leg bones). The place looks untidy, with bones and entrails-waste scattered everywhere. But it is here that one can find both men and women drinking, some of the women with their babies on their backs having “fun”. Having a healthy baby is taken as a sign that the mother is free of AIDS. Many people believe that giving birth exposes a woman with AIDS to dangers from which she will not recover, such as excessive bleeding and sepsis, which lead to her death within a short time after the birth. However, the women usually look better kept than the men who go to drink at Uwanja wa Fisi.

Lying along one of the major roads into Dar es Salaam, Manzese has more than its share of migrants from upcountry and the resident population is very mobile. Most migrants, some of them seeking employment and others self-employed as petty traders, come from areas that can be reached via Morogoro Road, such as Morogoro, Iringa, Dodoma, Tabora, Chalinze and Moshi. There are also some Zaramo and Ndengereko who were born in other parts of Dar es Salaam. There are also a number of migrants, especially traders, who keep homes/rooms at Manzese but have other homes, usually with families, somewhere else, such as Moshi, Iringa or Mbeya.

Feeling risk and bargaining power

The answers to the questionnaire showed that people had different perceptions as to their risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. Gender and marital status determined to a large extent the feeling of risk. Men felt less at risk than women in all age groups (Fig. 1), with older women (forty-six years and above) feeling more at risk than men of the same age group. In terms of marital status, divorced/widowed men felt less at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS in almost inverse proportion to divorced/widowed women (Fig. 2). Moreover, more women who did not want to report on their marital status (after an in-depth interview, I found out that most of them were cohabiting or had semi-permanent sexual relations with married men who had wives upcountry) felt more at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. This finding is important, especially if we
want to open up discussion on HIV/AIDS at the family/household level where people of different sexes and marital status need to communicate.

The perceived risk of contracting HIV/AIDS influences a person’s willingness to pay attention to protection against and the transmission of HIV/AIDS. More women and young men (aged fifteen to twenty) attended the discussions, while older men, especially those 45 years and above, who felt least at risk, did not bother to attend, though they were ready to participate in the research as a means to give their opinions on young people and the HIV/AIDS situation in the area.

Also, the feeling of being at risk depends very much on the person’s ability to bargain for safer sex. Fewer women aged twenty-one to forty-five (40 per cent) perceived themselves to be at risk than any other age group of women, while more of the older divorced or widowed women felt at risk (75 per cent). Young single women with few or no dependants felt more at ease about bargaining with their sexual partners on condom use, and many of them said that it is necessary to be persistent from the beginning that there can be no coitus
without a condom. On the other hand, most divorced and widowed women did not feel at ease about bargaining for safer sex for fear of losing their sexual partners. This could be because, with fewer dependants to care for and hence less need for the economic support that is usually available through sexual relationships, young women are able to bargain for condom use without fear of breaking up a relationship that supports them economically. The situation is less favourable for those divorced and widowed women who bear a bigger burden of dependants and are in dire need of the financial support that a sexual relation can bring.

Moreover, while men in the over-forty-six age category felt least vulnerable about contracting HIV/AIDS (25 per cent), more women of the same age category felt at risk (50 per cent). It is not surprising, therefore, that during the workshop at Ukombozi Primary School this group of men was not present at all, since they see the issues of HIV/AIDS as affecting other people, especially youths and women. As one male respondent who was seventy-four put it: “Mimi nimekwishakuwa mzee” (“I am already [too] old”). That was the feeling of many of the men over forty-six. But as we know, some men in that age category are still sexually active. However, they may be in a better position to bargain with their sexual partners for safe sex than women in the same age category.

Barriers to communication

Though some parents suggested that it would be good if children, especially girls, were told about HIV/AIDS and sex from as early as eight years of age, the parents’ biggest stumbling block is their hesitancy to engage in a dialogue with their children on a subject so apparently vulgar, and they cannot find the right words. There is an urgent need to develop terms that are transparent enough but at the same time not too vulgar in the discussion of sexual matters. So far, most people rely on the mass media for information on HIV/AIDS and young men and women rely on peers and seem to be at ease in discussing issues with their friends rather than their parents or grown-ups. Parents also felt uncomfortable about initiating a discussion that presupposes that their children are sexually active. Information on such matters is usually given when the person is assumed to have some knowledge about sex or already has proven sexual experience (see Tumbo-Masabo 1994). Therefore, communication on HIV/AIDS is only viable between parents and children where parents assume or know that their children are already sexually active and at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. Consequently, the children might not welcome the intervention.
Moreover, most parents were more willing to talk about having one lover as a protective measure, rather than discussing condom use.

Among spouses, initiating a discussion on condom use is more difficult. Permanent condom use can be detrimental to a relationship whose main aim is procreation and intimacy. The majority of married people were of the opinion that condom use creates a barrier in a relationship (see also Day 1990). A discussion on condom use in a marriage can occur where there is undisputed evidence of infidelity. This happens in circumstances of wrath and anger. Condom use is thus temporary, when the two parties are in conflict, and ceases as soon as the couple are reconciled. However, condoms are sometimes used as a family-planning device.

Nevertheless, many married women feel at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS because of their husbands’ sexual habits, infidelity and belief that condoms are for prostitutes and not in a marriage or a steady/“respectable” relationship. Hence, most men will not use condoms in steady extramarital relationships even when there is no proof of the faithfulness of the partner. As one forty-year-old married woman puts it:


_Aye sister! We are already dead. What we are waiting for is God’s wish. With men like we have, today you catch him red-handed at a guesthouse, tomorrow you find him with Mariam at a bar. There is nothing that we can do. You do not know whether he uses a condom there or not. When he comes to you he does not even want to listen. He would argue with you and want to hurt you (by beating you) for nothing._

Generally, there is evidence of a strong double standard. While premarital and extramarital relations among women are abhorred, they are condoned or considered natural among men (see also McGrath 1993). Women confront patriarchal traditions that curtail their ability to refuse what a husband regards as his conjugal rights, which are consolidated by divorce laws that rarely favour women in the division of marital property and the custody of children. This position, coupled with a lack of economic and decision-making power and without alternatives to an unhappy marriage, forces women to comply with their husbands’ demands so as to avert desertion. Hence, wives are unable to refuse coitus with their husbands, insist on safer sex or force them to discontinue their extramarital relations, with the result that cross-gender discussion and negotiation is curtailed.
Young men (aged fifteen to twenty) were the most vocal group in discussions. For example, at the Ukombozi Primary School workshop, they were of the opinion that coitus barriers should be developed that would not rely on men, since, as they acknowledge, some men refuse to use condoms. This observation is also made by Laga et al. (1994) who state: “The main obstacle for reaching 100 per cent condom use was male clients’ refusal”, thereby pointing to the urgent need for chemical or physical barrier methods that are not male dependent. The young men proposed speeding up production of “femdoms.” On the other hand, young women (aged fifteen to twenty) needed a lot of encouragement and prompting to talk about the issue, especially at the workshop where there were young men and older women present. Even then they only lamented their inability to negotiate with men for safer sex. They were more vocal in small peer groups where some of them even showed that they were in control of the situation and had power to negotiate and enforce the use of condoms. One of them challenged a male research assistant in the following terms: “Hata wewe, ingawa unaonekana smati lakini hamna kitu mpaka...”

Parents are constrained by the terms they can use in discussing sexuality, especially when there is a generation gap. They would like to use words that are clear but not vulgar. (Photo: The Guardian, Dar es Salaam)
“Even with you, though you look smart, we will not have anything [i.e., sex] until you wear a gumboot.” “Gumboot” or “socks” are popular local euphemisms for condoms.)

Some respondents seem to favour school-based HIV/AIDS education but not school-based prevention programmes, such as condom-distribution, which they tend to feel should be tackled at the family level, especially for minors (i.e., youths below eighteen years, especially those still attending school). Previous studies have shown that school-based sex education may succeed in increasing students’ knowledge about AIDS, changing attitudes towards risk behaviours, especially by delaying sexual intercourse, and increasing tolerance for people with AIDS (Brook-Gunn and Paikoff 1992). School-based prevention programmes and especially distribution of condoms in schools or to schoolchildren is a highly debated issue and many respondents do not agree with them. However, some parents, especially those who are forty-six years and above, would rather allow youths over eighteen who are still in school and having sexual relations to be provided with condoms than leave them at risk.
Initiating improved communication

It is obvious from the study that people are ready to openly discuss sexuality, sexual relations and the prevention of HIV/AIDS. However, they are constrained by the terms that they can use in the discussion, especially when there is a generational gap. They would like to use words that are transparent enough, without sounding vulgar. Most respondents preferred words like *ku-jamiana* (to socialise) and *ngono* (sexual act between husband and wife) to *ku-lalana* (sleep with one another), which sounds vulgar, or to *kitendo cha ndoa* (act of marriage) which is too opaque and misleading. They challenged language institutions to come up with words that would help them to communicate. They commended the mass media and especially Radio Tanzania for educating people on HIV/AIDS through various programmes.

Also, it has been shown that knowledge and fear of the disease are not the main factors contributing to engagement in safer sex, especially the use of condoms. Intimacy and trust building before engaging in the conversation about safer sex are very important conditions in initiating such conversations between spouses and sexual partners. Moreover, such discussions should take place early in a relationship so as to prevent ill feeling when the subject arises when the relationship has already advanced.

There is also a need for all institutions engaged in the fight against HIV/AIDS to open up more discussion in community-based groups in order to reach more people and find out the constraints on preventive practices rather than relying on people to change their behaviour because they have knowledge on HIV prevention. Some of the respondents felt that current programmes that rely on seminars and workshops are not effective as they do not reach the target groups, especially out-of-school youths and young women who engage in risky sexual behaviours “*kwani wao wamemaliza*” (“as they are through with such types of education”). Therefore, there is a need for programmes to target these groups and the rural areas, most of whose inhabitants migrate to urban areas, where, away from the scrutiny of family and kin, they engage in very risky behaviours. As one man of about fifty whom I met at a draughts game put it:


These children when they come to Dar es Salaam can no longer be controlled. They think being young means to have a lot of sexual partners. How can an urban woman
have only one sexual partner? Of what use will he be? You should have one to pay your rent, another to buy you clothes or just a foolish man who will spend his money on you.

Most of the blame here is directed at young women. Some of the respondents called for programmes to begin in rural areas, where they think little has been done to address the issue of HIV/AIDS. They said that most of the programmes have been urban-based or along major roads and targeted at truck drivers. This is not bad, but it is insufficient. With the influx of rural migrants into the city, they felt that there is need to catch the youths before they migrate to urban areas, where, if they are not informed, they can be easy prey.

Conclusion

Evidence shows that people are ready to increase communication on HIV/AIDS despite the barriers posed by different cultural structures and norms, such as the lack of inter-generational and inter-gender communication on sexuality and sexual relations, which precludes free talk and exchange of information between the sexes and generations. However, there is more exchange of information among peers and people of the same sex. There is a need, therefore, to have education programmes on HIV/AIDS that target people of all ages and sexes, and place more emphasis on out-of-school-youth and the rural population and the use of a community based approach.

There is also a need for language institutions to work with the mass media to develop appropriate terms as well as booklets that would suit the different age groups, starting with early adolescents. The dissemination of such booklets should be through the family, and parents should be equipped with communications skills so that they can take an active role in discussing the issues with their children and in providing advice, rather than leaving the process to peers and schools alone.
References


In the Past, in the Present and Henceforth?

Rita Liljeström

Societies, and thus families, are changing all over the world. It appears that less of what the older generations transmit of their experiences and endeavours can be replicated by the younger generations in their own lives. Some sociologists have gone so far as to claim that there is hardly anything that today’s children can take from their parents for modelling their own lives. What we witness is a kind of cultural delinking from the past generations. In her work as youth counsellor, Virginia Bamurange confronts the despair of parents whose good intentions fail and who are overwhelmed by circumstances they cannot control.

Notwithstanding this situation, there remain basic ethics, moral commitments and mutually supportive human bonds to be mediated to new generations. The human life course from infancy to old age alternates between phases of self-sufficiency and phases of dependency on others. Dependants have to be cared for and attached to other people, which presupposes there are people around who are motivated to take care and assume this responsibility. Everyday life still dictates the old work routines of providing meals and shelter. The virtues of companionship, dependability and fair exchange are still worth passing on. Thus the denial of the importance of the parents’ contribution seems rash, and it is urgent for us to identify and discuss what matters should be transmitted and further evolved. Indeed, changing circumstances force us to establish the worth of our aims and to ensure that they are supportive in the current fluid and unpredictable situation. In fact, even without fully understanding what is happening and whom to trust, we want to equip our children to be able to make an impact for the good, don’t we?

In reading the contributions in this book, one is struck by the frequent references to the past and the comparisons with the present. To a large extent, parent and child relationships appear to have functioned satisfactorily in the past, at least from the parents’ point of view. Also, one should remember that
the parents did not stand alone in bringing up and training their children. The local community took an active part. All adults participated in disciplining the children, one's own as well as those of others: this was seen as a collective duty and a common interest. In such a communal society, where people knew each other and where the good name of the family was important and the family's reputation depended on each member's conduct, great emphasis was placed on inculcating good manners and instructing children to show respect towards the elderly. I get the impression that such respect was an iron law and a golden rule. Old people tell how inattention and lack of respect when they were young immediately earned them punishment they still remember. They learned their lesson. In communities and within large family networks where people depended on each other, the upbringing of children had to facilitate smooth relations within and between households. Moreover, sociability and hospitality were significant cultural values.

Families across cultures

Psychologists studying links between culture, family and the individual across cultures (Kagitcibasi 1996, Fisek 2003) have identified two main family prototypes worldwide, and these serve as the point of departure for my discussion. The rural African family corresponds to a hierarchical, authoritarian family model with an ethic of relatedness. Within this traditional family, segregation of roles and spheres of activity separates the man from his wife and children. While his social life largely takes place in the company of other men, the wife spends her days in her female domestic context with the children. The sources of emotional intimacy are found to a large extent in the respective networks of same-sex friendships. Consequently, the spousal relationship tends to be more task-oriented (Fisek 2003).

These family relationships build upon a strong generational and gender hierarchy in which every member has a differentiated role and the father is the head. At the same time, the closeness between the family members ("high interpersonal proximity") adds affective depth to role-based relations and ways of being. "The individual is not self contained but exists in a familial and social context within which relational embeddedness is emphasised, where each individual has a niche understood by everybody" (Fisek 2003).

The individual develops his or her sense of identity in conformity with a particular position in the family hierarchy, with the rights and duties associated with his or her position. Thus clarity about roles is the precondition for sep-
Fiske notes that to Western eyes a strong hierarchy may seem stultifying. Other societies evaluate hierarchy differently. I have a vivid memory of a large family meeting in a community in the Red River Delta in Vietnam in the mid-1990s. I had been invited together with a few sociologists from Hanoi to join an annual celebration of the ancestors. We got involved in a long exchange about the family and I was given the opportunity to put questions to the kinsmen. These dignified men wanted to bear witness to the great ancestors and the beauty and harmony of family relations, while I am accustomed to identify problems. My questions tended to focus on discord and deviant behaviour. When I sensed that they annoyed the hosts, I excused myself as being a foreigner and asked them to tell me what they regarded as the most important to know about the Vietnamese family. After a while, man after man rose and gave a short speech. All agreed that most important of all is the family hierarchy. The hierarchy is the foundation of moral order, assigns everybody their due position, prevents conflict and chaos and offers protection and guidance. They talked with passion and warmth. I thought it must have been with similar passion that the French revolutionaires once declared *égalité, fraternité et liberté*. I began to understand the ways in which we in my society deny and disguise hierarchies while, at the same time, basing many of our institutions on hierarchies of age, gender, merit, social background and acquaintance.

Hierarchy and proximity are characteristics of the interdependent family model Kagitcibasi (1996) described as collectivistic, i.e., having a culture of relatedness. It is common in traditional rural agrarian societies, and is often patrilineral. The interdependent family model is pervasive in many parts of the Majority World (Kagitcibasi uses the expression to indicate the majority of people in the world), notwithstanding its great structural diversity. Typically, it entails extended families, and even though households may be nuclear, they function as if they were extended. Thanks to the close proximity of several generations of immediate kin, people are able to cooperate and support each other. The dependencies between generations shift direction over time. First, the child is dependent on the parent. Later, this dependence is reversed and the elderly parent is cared for by the adult child.

The contrasting type is the family model of independence. It is an urban and industrial family, largely associated with the Western middle class, and has a culture of separateness (individualism). This independence and separateness keep both the family apart from other families and its members from each other (this being probably more of an abstraction and ideal than a reality, Kagitcibasi assumes).
How do the relations of collectivism and relatedness on the one hand, and individualism and autonomy on the other, affect the individual and the very definition of selfhood across cultures? On one pole is the “familial self” that allows the individual to find a niche for selfhood within the hierarchical relations of intimacy in the family, while the other pole consists of the “individualised self” that permits autonomy and development within a network of egalitarian contractual relations.

The researchers who study families across cultures argue that neither the traditional collectivist family model nor the Western individualistic model represents complete models for human development, and each of them has serious limitations. The interaction in the former is weighted towards obedience and control. Such parent–child interaction is adaptive for family survival and corresponds to a conception of family as an intergenerational system moving through time. This is because socialisation accentuates family loyalties, control, dependence/obedience of the child in order to ensure the child’s full integration into the family. Children grew up to serve the needs of the family and to invest in the elderly, while “independent” children are more likely to be encouraged to look after their own interests.

The interaction in the latter model promotes the development of the independent, separate self with clearly defined boundaries. The parent–child interaction takes place between separate members of the family. There is less control in childrearing. Parenting is more permissive compared with the authoritarian parenting of the interdependent family. Autonomy is stressed. Independence and self-reliance are valued in a socio-cultural context in which intergenerational material dependencies are minimal. This type of socialisation is conducive to both independence between generations and individual family members.

Each of the two family models build on vital human needs, namely the need for relatedness and the need for autonomy, and so do the constructs of familial and individual selves, although they are mistakenly believed to be incompatible. Actually, they can be combined in a family model of emotional interdependence, which recognises the need for both relatedness and autonomy (Kagitcibasi 1996, 2002). This family model is prevalent among affluent families in many Asian societies as well as among middle class minority families in America. These are families that no longer depend materially on family support but who see emotional relatedness as one of the qualities of life worth preserving.

In the absence of a cross-cultural theory of family, there is an assumption of unidirectional change towards the Western model of the independent and individualistic family. Underlying this assumption is the further implicit as-
sumption that whatever is different from the Western model is deficient, and therefore bound to change with economic development. This assumption, however, is being challenged by the striking economic growth in East Asian countries with affluent interdependent families.

A second assumption is that Western family patterns have evolved towards nucleation and individualism as an outcome of industrialisation, which will cause the same transformation of families in other parts of the world. This assumption is refuted by historical evidence that documents how the nuclear family and individualism predated industrialisation in Western Europe (particularly England) by several centuries (Kagitcibasi 1996).

A third observation is that the families in the West have undergone changes and are currently in a serious crisis, which manifests itself in high rates of divorce and separation; in single parents, i.e., predominantly matrifocal families; in an increasing diversity of family forms that have displaced the husband and wife as the mainstay of the nuclear family; in issues of reproduction and in delinking sexuality from marriage, family and gender (Castells 1997). Far from being a model for the Majority World, the present state of Western families seems to be cause for alarm.

Some characteristics of rural African families

African family systems have demonstrated great ingenuity and diversity in the ways they adapted descent, marriage, power and inheritance to ecological and economic conditions. To be brief, I will select a few characteristics that illuminate relations between adults and children. First, however, what is a family? A seemingly easy question until one realises the worldwide diversity of family forms, and the ever-changing life course of families. A common international attempt to define family as those who live in the same household (or eat from the same pot) generally distorts the meaning of family, especially in Africa, according to Peil (1977):

Definitions based on the use made of kinship links explain more than those based exclusively on residence. Increased migration and urbanisation interfere with common residence, but if the links continue to be relevant it is meaningful to talk about extended families. Many couples live in a nuclear family in town, or in a horizontally extended family (with the addition of one or two kinsmen), but think of themselves as part of extended families and maintain regular relations (through messages and visits) with the extended families. Members of compound families often live separately in town because the husband finds rooms in different houses for each of his wives. In the case of the sep-
arated or stem family, the village spouse will visit the town from time to time. Meaningful ties are more important than permanently shared residence.

Nevertheless, the nature of these ties is affected by the residential pattern. Children growing up in an extended household get to know their kinsmen much better than would be possible if they lived some distance away, but they usually know their parents less well because attention is shared among several adults. A child in such a household may have closer ties to an aunt or grandmother than his own mother, especially if he has many siblings and/or his mother is busy trading. The father may be a distant figure for the young child. Not only is it important for the father to maintain his dignity and demand the respect due to him; a polygynous father also avoids conflict by treating his children equally and, as he usually has many, he cannot devote much time to each one.

Peil notes that kinship roles become less specific, since the relative who is needed in a specific situation may not be available. In those circumstances, another relative must be called upon: the fact of being a kinsman is more important than the precise relationship. Traditionally, there were many sources of help when a crisis occurred:

Although a child has a mother and father, it may be reared by one, both or neither of these parents. Although rearing by both parents is the most usual, this pattern is often broken by death, marital breakdown, customs of separate residence of spouses, or fostering ... Divorce is also prevalent in many societies, with the children usually going to their father in patrilineal societies and their mothers in matrilineal societies ... When a marriage breaks down through death or divorce, it may be considered better to foster the children with kinsmen rather than allowing them to live with a step-parent who might not treat them kindly. This is known as crisis fostering (Peil 1977:157).

Kinship systems that have formed the core of small-scale societies were hierarchically organised according to gender and age. Labour was divided according to gender. Women were, for example, responsible for producing and preparing food daily and taking care of children: they were midwives, healers, initiation leaders and/or traders. Men cleared the bush, built and tended the huts, tended cattle and provided the means for rituals: they could be healers, hunters, traders, ritual leaders, warriors, and engaged in local community affairs.

Power relations between genders in sub-Saharan Africa have often been rendered in the West in polarised terms, thereby expressing putative sympathy for the women who are seen as subordinated to or directly oppressed by men. In his review of research and in studying gender relations in Africa, the Norwegian sociologist Joar Svanemyr (2003) became aware of the complexity and elusiveness of gender. In societies represented as male dominated and androcentric, women possess more power and autonomy than previously assumed. Such was the case in patriarchal societies where women’s informal power has
been ignored. In matrilineal societies, women occupy pivotal economic and political roles. While women and men may agree on an ideological level that men are superior to women and command more power, it has been shown that in practice men and women are equal or that women have more power than men when one looks closer at concrete relations within specific domains. Both men and women men have multiple and sometimes reverse positions and ranks, depending on the context and ideology. Both matri- and patrilineal families are marked by ambiguity and contradictions. Gender segregation restricts men’s exercise of power, as each gender has its own domain in which it exercises command. Segregation brings in its train a set of tools, resources, responsibilities, rules, values, symbols and social relationships that are respectively assigned to each gender. Gender differences do not have fixed borders, but are on the contrary the subject of disagreement and negotiation.

The African mother carries her infant on her back or hip most of the day. The child feels her movements when she works in the fields and when she pounds maize. The child has the gratification of being close to its mother and seeing what goes on around. This also used to be the postpartum period, when husband and wife did not sleep together and the mother devoted her attention to her child/children. Not until the child was one-and-a half to two years old did the parents’ abstinence end. According to custom, the father returned when the child came to his hut with a pot of soup (it could then already walk) or when the child could talk. The walking or talking child was a sign that the wife was ready to be with her husband and to have another child.

The mother was the primary parent, training the children to take part in work according to their age and capacity. It was her duty, together with the other members of the family and community, to direct, instruct and console the children. The fathers’ functions were more distant and less concrete. Anthropologists distinguish four forms of fatherhood: the social father defines the child’s basic identity; father as social authority rules over the life of the child; the recognised biological father sets the limits for the choice of a sexual partner; an unrecognised biological father has no paternal rights. In Africa, all these forms of father may be separated, the main distinction being between the recognised biological father and the social father (for example, the child’s uncle/mother’s brother). The distinction between the recognised and unrecognised biological father matters less, it is the access to the child that counts (Svanemyr 2003).

African fathers are almost absent in studies of upbringing. Svanemyr has tried to trace reasons for this lack of paternal visibility by collecting studies that tell something about what is expected of fathers. I present extracts from these studies that provide some clues and small fragments of explanations. The
absences of the father from studies of upbringing are not only due to lack of interest, but also to the fact that fathers are rarely in touch with small children:

In many societies in the region, taboos prevent fathers from frequent contacts with infants and very young children. Men hardly ever come in close contact with infants and very young children except in occasional ritual events and unusual circumstances, such as when the mother has to perform a pressing domestic chore with only the father around to help. Rare is a West African father who shows tenderness and nurturance toward children. Such a father is regarded as effeminate or otherwise behaving inappropriately (Nsamenang 1987:27).

Some populations/ethnic groups in Africa practise duo-focality, a custom according to which parents live apart after having children. The children mostly, but not always, live with the mother and her parents. Living separate from their fathers diminishes the children's contacts with him. In many African societies men have stronger economic and emotional bonds to their parents, while the children are the most important bonds for women. Although even men receive economic support from their children in old age, a man's most important emotional bonds and economic obligations are to his mother (Potash 1989:198).

Tradition emphasises the father's importance and his responsibility and yet at the same time undermines his position. There can be no doubt, however, that in spite of some paternal role rhetoric, the cultural tradition tends to marginalise fathers with respect to their conjugal families (Bleek 1987a:144).

According to Svanemyr, a father is mainly expected to serve as a model for his children but he rarely interferes by disciplining them. The father's economic contributions are important in order to strengthen the bonds between him and his children. A man who shows affection and concern for his children by supporting them financially more than is common may be called a "nursing mother". The label has no negative connotations.

Adult–children interaction in Africa

“Community is first and foremost a matter of shared meaning.” (Lash 1994:162)

“All societies are factories of meaning. They are more than that: nothing less than the nurseries of meaningful life. Their service is indispensable.” (Bauman 2001:2)

A marked trait of close-knit rural communities was conformity and emphasis on consensus. When Juliana Mziray interviewed Pare elders she soon recognised that the same stories and opinions were repeated by her informants in the region. They all shared a homogeneous culture of a kind that is becoming
rare today. Indeed, socialisation of children was facilitated by the fact that the messages were clear and adhered to by all.

Children and youths were expected to obey. There were different methods to ensure compliance. The old people interviewed by Juliana Mziray told of how the adults used threats and frightened children with horror stories: the moving forest that enveloped disobedient children so that they were lost forever; the talking stone revealing secrets about naughty children who passed by and then swallowed them; likewise the swamp engulfing those who were guilty of bad deeds. The environment was populated by malignant forces. Grown-ups themselves feared evil spirits and witchcraft. Accidents and illnesses were often explained by supernatural causes.

However, similar fostering methods existed in northern Europe during my childhood and were (and regrettably still are) widespread in the world. Their absence seems to be more an exception than a rule. I remember how the housemaid scared me by saying that God could at any time let a burning stone fall and hit me. Every now and then I glanced at the sky. When I misbehaved, the maid threatened me with the judgment day. I was at risk of being condemned to hell forever and ever. I never grasped how something could go on forever: even forever must come to an end, I consoled myself. In old churches in Sweden, one sees paintings of judgment day and cruel scenes from hell. Even adults were frightened into abiding by the mores. My mother warned me that God could read my most secret thoughts and God was well aware of the deeds that adults around did not know about. The day would come when my true nature would be revealed. As I had already learned to hide rebellious thoughts behind an innocent face, my mother’s words disturbed me. Such terrifying methods of upbringing still prevailed in the 1930s.

Today, the horrors are less didactic, less legitimated in the name of God and less intended to keep children on the right track. (Today’s action movies and the massive violence in mass media, cartoons and TV, often aim at entertaining.) But these reminders should prevent us from waxing indignant over the role of supernatural powers in socialising African children in the past. Children everywhere have been (and still are) exposed to real and fictive fears.

Over the years, I have talked with adults in Tanzania about how they were brought up, since the relationship between adults and children has always fascinated me. Most adults told me that they had been beaten for being disobedient, mischievous or disrespectful. Afterwards, some had felt remorseful and believed they had deserved a beating. Others felt offended and misunderstood, and their obstinacy was aroused. I have also inquired about the “significant people” in an adults’ childhood, people to whom they were attached, people who made sense, people they identified with. The persons mentioned were the
mother or father; the grandparent – usually the grandmother – who cared for
the child in her house; a sister they shared the bed with; or a teacher who
showed empathy in a critical situation. Those significant others followed them
as inner voices or sources of strength through their lives. I was surprised to find
that some of those "significant others" had beaten the child, not once but re-
peatedly. Nevertheless, a ninety-five year old man concluded his story about
frequent beatings with a tender smile: "My grandma took care of me. She used
to buy food. She bought me shoes so that I could go to school. I remember my
grandmother even now." This indicates that there are beatings and beatings.

The recollection of my childhood’s beatings still brings out a sense of in-
fringement in me. In fact, my mother stopped beating me when she realised
that it had no good effect on me. Instead, she locked me in a dark wardrobe,
so that even now I feel slight claustrophobia in cramped places. I have met par-
ents in Tanzania who cope without beating their children. A parent (mother
or father) may not like to beat a child, but leaves it to the other spouse (my
father left it to my mother). Many parents in Tanzania still believe that they
have to resort to beating, for the sake of the child. I met a village teacher in the
Kilimanjaro region who told me how he had often used the stick in school but
stopped when he realised that beatings are useless and even harmful. Some
people felt that pinching was worse than beating, because it hurt more. I got
the impression that being left without a meal was regarded as even worse.
There were persons who stressed approvingly that their parents never left them
without a meal. Withholding a meal, especially something the child likes, is
common is Sweden, but it does not have the same meaning as for a hungry
African child. Since the 1970s, all corporal punishment is forbidden by crim-
inal law and Swedish parents are deprived of the right to beat or pinch their
children.

Frightening and beating children are seemingly effective if the goal is obe-
dience. As parents, we want to promote compliance with the rules we follow.
However, those means as well as the goal of obedience itself became question-
able after the Second World War. When people who had committed war
crimes were brought to court, they defended themselves by saying, "I was only
obeying orders." They evaded personal responsibility by being obedient. Obe-
dience was revealed as irresponsible: there was a risk in following inhumane
orders without question. Our dilemma is how to bring up children and youths
who are able to resist unjust orders, who know when to be disobedient. In-
stead of showing respect for authority, authority itself has tended to be dis-
credited and brought under suspicion. Things that were taken for granted in
the past, are now disputed. In the West, during the decades after the Second
World War, the disciplinary and authoritarian style of socialisation was widely
substituted by new ideals of free upbringing, by parents who themselves were largely moulded in the old ways. The issue was complex, the task demanding. Many parents adapted new methods of listening to their children and becoming more sensitive to their children’s thoughts and feelings. Yet when the adults misinterpreted “the free upbringing” or did not take the challenge seriously, the result was slackness and inconsistency instead of real parental involvement. Again, the way in which the parents themselves were brought up made it difficult for them to adopt new ways of relating to children.

To what extent do adults in Tanzania maintain old virtues and deportment – respect for authority, obedience and belief in punishment? Juliana Mziray’s study shows an old, frustrated and critical generation, a middle-aged generation split between custom and modernity, and youths who feel neglected and abandoned to themselves. Deprived of the world of the past, the generations drift apart. Households no longer link their members in common work. In the past, children participated in farming and domestic work. Children’s duties involved them in the toil and moil for the common good. Children were seen as assets in food production and investments in the parents’ old age security. Nowadays, they go to school, giving their parents less help but incurring more costs, while the prospects for old age are uncertain.

The blow of sexuality
When children are in school, their parents not only lose labouring hands but also control over their offspring. At present, one of the main youth problems throughout sub-Saharan Africa is out-of-wedlock pregnancies involving schoolgirls. Such pregnancies are messy: the girl is expelled from school, her mother risks being blamed and the family feels dejected due to the loss of reputation. There are also other losses: the investment in the daughters’ education has been in vain, the daughter cannot fulfil the parents’ hopes of being supported by her, the bridewealth they can expect is reduced and the marriage prospects of the girl become less promising. The reception of the new out-of-wedlock family member is marked by strain. Our previous studies have highlighted what all this implies for the young woman (Tumbo-Masabo and Liljeström 1994; Rwebangira and Liljeström 1998).

Again, in order to understand the present situation, looking into the past makes sense. The regulation of sexuality, arrangement of marriages and safeguarding of the right to progeny were crucial for the survival of clans and lineages. Many tribes created elaborate institutions to serve those aims. Among them were the initiation ceremonies whereby youths were taught the secrets...
of gender, genitals and generation. They were introduced to a whole complex of symbols, taboos, meanings and mores related to human reproduction; instructed about good manners, hygiene, their maturing bodies and trained to be sexually skilled. Initiation took place in steps under the guidance of initiation specialists who prepared the youths for the next phase. Mary Ntukula’s interviews with Ngoni and Yao initiation leaders in Songea are striking in their emphasis on past sexual and marital education, topics that current education grossly neglects. Instead, we witness a gap between the generations, the elderly being faithful to the customary timing of births through long postpartum abstinence. They thus reject modern methods of family planning and abortion, thereby earning the strong approval of the Catholic Church and Moslem mosque. Their children sometimes turn to the past or to the church or mosque, sometimes they look for compromises and sometimes they take the risks inherent in an eroding sexual order.

As described by Virginia Bamurange, at present, in the midst of the AIDS catastrophe, people avoid talking about the issue, hide the “shame” and are more or less mute in front of their children. Behind Zubeida Tumbo-Masabo’s description of the “Topic Nobody Wants to Talk About” lurks a past, when talking about sexuality, in the wide sense of mores and practices, was delegated to specialists, i.e., initiation leaders. Parents were commonly excluded as being too close to their children. The sexual distance between consecutive generations was upheld by numerous symbolic and behavioural taboos, whereas grandparents and children could be outspoken about matters that were forbidden between parents and children. A paternal aunt could be assigned the role of talking with her brothers’ daughters. The present inability to talk, the communication barriers, are a paradox as they apply to people who have had the transmission of skills and the meaning of gender, sexuality, marriage and fertility at the core of their culture. Civilising and modernising efforts have to a large extent erased past practices and messages without being able to fill the vacuum and reveal the modern meaning of “private parts” to youths.

The distance from the past makes it easier to comprehend how parent–children relations used to be, while present parent–children relationships seem too varied, liquid and ambiguous to be distinguished. The changes that have happened need to be made more visible by contrasting them with an ideal model of the past. The past serves as the stable background against which we can project and clarify ongoing, fluid parent and child relationships in all their contradictoriness.
Advantages and disadvantages of education and marriage

First and foremost education has promoted emancipation and individualisation, which are perceived as progressive and advancing national development but which, nevertheless, contain contradictions and social costs. Education is highly valued and parents make sacrifices for their children’s advancement. The benefits of schooling are many and well recognised. However, Rosalia Katapa’s study brings out some side-effects of education, the so-called unintended consequences:

The school youths interviewed by Katapa generally did not consider or bother about their parents’ expectations of being assisted in daily work or
about their obligations at the time that their parents depend on their help. Possibly, the youths’ main concern thus far is achieving the ability to support themselves.

The elders charge that education is alienating youths from custom. Education largely based on imported models deprives youths of common cultural ground with elders. Moreover, children who are educated above their parents’ level risk underestimating their parents’ judgment and reach. In that case, education indeed contributes to the gap between generations.

A Tukuyu girl hit the target by pointing out that, “education has created a division between the educated and uneducated, who are ignored by the educated people”. This division is evident within families and communities and between classes in the society. The gap in life opportunities between the out-of-school youth and those receiving education is challenging. As schools are not always up to standard, elite families make sacrifices to send their youths to school overseas. The result is a gap between those with a domestic and those with a foreign education.

Education leads to postponement of marriage but not to a delay in sexual relations, which results in out-of-wedlock pregnancies, especially schoolgirl pregnancies, a form of wasted investment that hurts families. Women and men speculate about the gains and costs of cohabitation as compared to formal marriage in trying to cope with changed gender relations and the inability of men to marry because they were unable to afford bridewealth. In the case of cohabitation, no bridewealth is demanded. Without bridewealth for the bride’s parents, the marital relationship is not confirmed by the families, the “wife” is not integrated into the “husband’s” family, the couple cannot count on support from the “in-laws” and the “husband” has no right to the children if the couple parts. Moreover, the families probably suffer from poverty, otherwise the father would have provided bridewealth for his son. Thus, there might not be anything to share but poverty.

One of the findings of Rosalia Katapa’s study is that old methods to marry but evade bridewealth (seizing a wife, elopement) have not ceased and that a current form (the girl bringing herself) is gaining popularity. Due to poverty, marriage ceases to be a family matter. Men without education are unstable providers and education no longer guarantees employment as there are no jobs and there is no land to cultivate. How can an empty-handed man raise a family? In such conditions, the best the youths can achieve is to console themselves by identifying the gains and loopholes that enable them to live together. Who knows what tomorrow brings in its train?
The divide of individualisation

Casting members as individuals is the trademark of modern society ... The meaning of “individualization” keeps changing, it now means something very different from what it meant a hundred years ago and what it conveyed in the early times of modern era – the times of the exalted “emancipation” of humans from the tightly knit web of common dependency, surveillance and enforcement ... (Bauman 2001:45).

In the core of African consciousness is the feeling of reciprocity and of guilt if a gift is not returned (Svanemyr 2003). Such feelings occur in interdependent families all over the world. They are associated with undelivered returns and the habits of gift giving as a source of feelings of increased depth. Members who have been away for some time are expected to return with gifts for everyone in their household and related households, especially if the visitor is seen as a better-off member of the family. The foundation of interdependent families was explained by a Vietnamese farmer, who stated that “the greatest of all gifts is the gift of life that our parents have bestowed on us. Such a gift can never be fully reciprocated. We owe our parents gratefulness and respect.” The gifts confirm intergenerational dependency and reciprocity. The best gifts are given to the parents, but the reciprocity embraces all relatives. The farmer’s words reflect and confirm that the main flow of contributions goes from children to parents, culminating in the care of the ageing parents. In modern societies the flow has changed direction: children are seen as the greatest gift and the parents bear the burden of costs without expecting any tangible returns, for now the welfare state has taken over.

Do not assume that there is no individualism in collectivistic and communal systems. Even these systems are composed of individuals, but the individuals are not autonomous in the sense that they can consider leaving the system or questioning its solidarity through intellectual critiques. Individualisation is doomed to ambiguity for many reasons. It is only accepted insofar as it serves other people and, at least potentially, benefits the family. People are encouraged to succeed in getting jobs different from those of their parents and in establishing other ways of life, as long as they do not break the law of solidarity on which the interdependent family rests. Svanemyr substantiates his reasoning by a quote:

… the freedom to pursue individual and group goals exists within a socially predetermined frame that emphasises conviviality with collective interests at the same time as it allows for individual creativity and self-fulfilment ... Achievement is devoid of meaning if not pursued within, as part of, and on behalf of people who recognise and endorse that achievement (Nyamnjoh 2000:7–8 in Svanemyr 2003:178).
Psychologists studying families across cultures (Kagitcibasi 1996, 2003) make a distinction in similar vein between individual and social achievement, seeing social achievement motivation as an important step towards autonomy. As long as achievement is socially motivated and not merely self-assertion, it can be interpreted as a step towards synthesis between autonomy and social relatedness.

There is other evidence of a similar trend. The aspiration for education and one’s own income not only reflects a wish to become independent: for many youths it expresses a wish to support relatives, especially siblings. These youths do not wish for a complete break with family loyalty, but for a certain compromise that allows space for personal wealth and marriage according to one’s own choice. They also want to decide how many children they will have and when the time is suitable for having them. They want to evade strict social control and conformity. Economic independence provides freedom to think and act differently and transcend the lifeworlds of the old people who remain loyal to the past.

A form of compromise also takes place in the diminution of the range of people one feels obliged to support: “The tendency today is to neglect or to disregard their obligations towards their extended family in favour of their more immediate relatives, often the nuclear family” (Ampofo 1995:241 quoted in Svanemyr 2003:178). People struggle with the ambivalence: on the one hand, modernisation evokes and encourages individualistic interest, while, on the other, communal non-individualistic dispositions are imprinted on their minds.

Following Svanemyr’s arguments, one could say that there is an ongoing balancing between the familial and the individual self. There is no conversion from the one to the other: instead they both coexist and back up each other. While people move out of the village and family to live more distantly, they simultaneously do their best to maintain their connections with and positions in the family. This also applies to marginalised groups, such as prostitutes and criminals, who try to maintain the bonds by helping the family with food and ceremonial costs.

Svanemyr reveals the conditionality of family support. In societies without public welfare systems, families provide a security network to each one who has shown willingness to support others. The economic crisis forces people to turn to their families and communities, which continue to act as lifelines. However, one is obliged to take part in the mutual gift-giving cycle to be included among those eligible for the lifeline. In my opinion, this practice resembles a regular insurance system. You pay your premiums and are given the help that is available when you badly need it. In other words, people who are
not able over time to pay their premiums or to contribute money when they are requested, face the risk of being expelled and turned away. Those who are too poor to contribute and thus cannot expect returns from others are doomed to be involuntarily individualised, because, ultimately, interdependence is based on reciprocity.

Svanemyr adds a neglected motive for family cohesion: people perceive bonds to family and relatives as an expression of African identity. They do not accept European ways without reservation. Indeed, Africans look for material improvement and, to a certain extent, more equal gender relations, but they do not want to be like Europeans. In other regards, they want to preserve their particularity. They call distant relatives and friends sisters and brothers. They identify with the clan, and often also with their ethnic group. This is not because of sanctions, Svanemyr underlines: people stick to their traditions of supporting one another, for example in bringing up children, and want by doing so to safeguard specifically African patterns of life. Svanemyr’s observation are from West Africa, but my impression is that they are valid for East Africa as well.

Modernisation and individualisation accompanied each other, the one being a prerequisite for the other. Individualisation was once understood as a response to hitherto unknown and unavailable choices and opportunities that were opened up by education, science, technology and huge investments in new relations and means of production. Currently, it is understood that there are different brands of individualism: an emancipatory variant associated with those who have been able to reap some benefits of modernisation, and those who are left behind on their own, out of school, unemployed, out of money, unable to marry. For them, individualisation means that they have no one to blame for their shortcomings but themselves. This second group of modern individuals consists of people for whom modern economies have no use: surplus people individualised by force, eroding bonds and poverty.

They do not have access to new forms of self-assertion and autonomy, or chances, choices and new opportunities. Indeed, no gates are left open to them having a full adult life and contributing to society. They risk becoming “wasted lives” (Bauman 2004) in the wake of global modernisation.

Bauman (2001:206–207) notes the wide and growing gap between being individuals under the law (“individuals de jure”) and their actual chances to become individuals (“individuals de facto”), who are in control of their fate and make their own choices. “And that gap cannot be filled by individual efforts alone; not by the means and resources available … Bridging that gap is a matter of politics … where private problems are translated as public issues and public solutions are sought, negotiated and agreed for private problems.”
What obstructs such attempts is the other side of individualisation, which seems to be the corrosion and slow disintegration of citizenship, warns Bauman, quoting Tocqueville: “The individual is the citizen’s worst enemy”.

Bauman interprets the political history of modernity as a relentless search for the right balance between freedom and security, “the two aspects of the human conditions that are simultaneously contradictory and complementary” (Bauman 2001:55). The lack of equilibrium between them causes serious, but differing threats to citizenship, depending on which of the two is losing ground.

What matters?

Parents cannot be held responsible for societal changes and prevailing global conditions, but neither can children and youths be blamed. Much of the blame that has been laid upon youths should be directed elsewhere. When par-
In the Past, in the Present and Henceforth?

ents feel bewildered and powerless, the children become scapegoats for those things the parents cannot control. Youths have less say than adults. Consequently, it is the mothers and fathers who have to consider the terms of raising children under circumstances that previous generations did not confront. What matters if parents wish to have an impact on their children? Looking for an answer I will depart from a theory called *interactionism*, (whose founding fathers are G.H. Mead and C. Cooley). Interaction is the keyword; it is about getting to know each other; talking, chatting, being involved in a dialogue or familiar discourse, but interaction goes beyond words, it comprises how you relate to each other, how you show empathy and share feelings, how you handle disagreements, the impact you make on each other. It is the very quality of the relation.

Interaction takes place within society. Society, the family and the individual are interlinked and each of them influences the others. Family is influenced by what happens in society and children by what happens in the family. Family has a strategic position in the middle, between society and the individual, thus mediating knowledge and inducements from both directions:

When children become adults, the ways in which they were brought up will have an impact on society. Commonly, the family is the child’s first encounter with society and relations within the family are the basis of the child’s first and lifelong social impressions. These impressions derive their power from being very first impressions. The family contains current customs and practices, ethics and manners, norms and models, habits and values, thereby integrating the child into society. The family is a primary group characterised by personal closeness and cooperation. A child’s social disposition and ideals are founded within the family. Family intimacy and closeness results in a melding of individual particularities into a common totality that can be summarised by the expression “we.” “We” includes mutual identification. These early relations affect us from the very beginning and are assumed to have lasting effects.

Interaction within the family is longstanding and confident. This is what “the emotional function” of the family means. Principally, the members can openly express what they feel. They usually know the weaknesses and strengths of each other quite well. Thus, they are more clear-sighted, more able to see through each other and to be indiscreet than members of most other groups. That is why, among other things, the family has an impact on its members. Such traits also explain the merging of family members.

My description above is not only metaphorical but also literal. This will become clear when we understand “role taking” as the process from which our self and consciousness come into existence. The process has three phases:
In the beginning the infant cannot distinguish between itself and its surroundings. It senses chaotic and unsorted impressions. It lives in a diffuse nameless world. The early interactions involve touching, skin contact, voices, gestures and facial expressions. It is argued, however, that the infant acquires a basic trust or lack of trust through such wordless, limitless and diffuse sensations. From early age, some say from the very beginning, the infant is sociable and curious. The mother–infant interaction is nowadays the focus of attention, since its significance has been revealed and recognised. Increasingly, the presence of the father in the early childhood is emphasised.

In the second phase, the child has concrete experiences. It now sees the surrounding world through the eyes of others, and the child tests its own experiences by role-playing. When the child learns words, the experiences, acts, states, people and things get names and meaning. The only way to grasp the meaning of things is to incorporate the meaning that “the others”, the adults, give acts and things. The child learns and acquires meaning by “taking the role of others”. The social self comes into being through others, through interaction with others.

Interaction is more complex than we are used to think. It is a mutual influence where both principally take the role of the other. Interaction is a mutual exchange of perspectives whereby the parties influence each other by seeing themselves through the eyes of the other. The phase during which experiences are given meaning is simultaneously a phase of emotional transmission. Acts and things become emotionally loaded and evaluated. The child finds out the value of things and acts by assuming the role of those who evaluate their experiences.

In the third phase, the child begins to discern categories and types (age groups, gender, position and so on). Now the child starts learning general rules and norms in terms of common sense. The child is now ripe for taking the role of “generalised others”. It takes in prevailing patterns of relations (for example, within the family) and becomes able to evaluate a situation from the perspective of the totality by seeing it through the eyes of all the others.

If we perceive role taking as the key to the human self, a person is moulded and influenced by her/his relations with other people, especially with people who are important to her/him, the “significant others”. Access to roles to take, roles that promote development, seems crucial. Therefore, the ability to take the roles of others, to perceive others correctly and make oneself understood is an important precondition for good, constructive relations.

The most crucial experiences when growing up concern relations between people. People can be understood by looking at the ways they relate to other people, namely how skilled or handicapped they are in role taking. Children
learn about themselves and others through role taking. Making oneself clear and focusing on taking the role of the child is what matters in upbringing. Importantly, role taking means mutual learning. Indeed, bringing up children demands self-fostering, which is even more demanding than nurturing the child. One needs to be aware of what the child will discover by taking your role. Are you trustworthy and reliable? Do you keep promises? Role taking at its best is a dialogue involving mutual listening and respect. While authoritarian child rearing was top down, role taking is mutual. It entails avoidance of preaching, scolding, belittling and offending one’s children, for these are harmful. Listen and try to understand what troubles the child. See to it that encouragement and positive encounters always outweigh blame and condemnation.

For those of us raised in an authoritarian tradition, there is a long way to go. But the effort is worth every step, for the sake of the children. So much for
Links between family and society

The translation of private problems into public issues and the seeking of public solutions lead to the politicisation of those problems. HIV/AIDS is already a recognised political problem, but at the same time it is “a topic that nobody wants to talk about.” Zubeida Tumbo-Masabo calls for educational programmes on HIV/AIDS that target people of all ages, and place the emphasis on out-of-school youths and rural people, while using a community-based approach.

Such programmes have to be carefully devised. Language institutions have to work with the mass media to develop appropriate terms as well as booklets that suit different age groups, starting with the early adolescents. The dissemination of such booklets should be through the family. Parents should be trained in communication skills and should command the terms needed for them to dare to name the relevant organs when they discuss sexuality and sexual relations with their children. They have to overcome their anxieties and remember the openness and sound preparation youths in some ethnic groups received during initiation rituals. Why not prepare yourself by reading Mary Ntukula on what the custodians of custom, i.e., the initiation specialists, the somos and nagribas, tell of initiation into womanhood and manhood in the past?

Rosalia Katapa points to the value of sensitising the Nyakyusa society to the benefits of boys and girls performing activities without discrimination and praising them for doing so. What she writes about the lack of consensus about gender roles provides excellent material for a discussion on prevalent attitudes towards women and men who perform work supposed to be performed by the other gender. She also highlights the specific problems of female and male youths.

It has been common to discuss tradition and modernity in a polarised either/or fashion without trying to bridge the two and uncover how they have become intertwined in Africa today. An adult–child dialogue is a way for guidance and learning, since in an interactive setting both parties learn from each other and become familiar with the perspectives of the other. If you open your ears, you will find that children can tell a lot that you did not know.

To bridge the now almost fixed gap between the generations is a demanding task. Methods like role-playing, where parents assume the roles of youths...
and youths pretend to be parents might expose the perceptions that the two parties have of each other. Before the session ends there needs to be time for an open dialogue about these respective perceptions. Hopefully, the next time parents and children will be ready to listen to each other when the elders speak of their realities when they were young and the young speak of the new realities today.

A dialogue between parents and adolescents should address the contradictions and complementarities of the needs of freedom and security and deal
with the limitations of each alone. An adult and a youth should prepare introductory comments on the topic and invite participants to give examples and relate their personal experiences.

The exploration of the limits of obedience and permissiveness appears to be relevant for parents and children alike. Juliana Mziray’s “moving stones” and video movies capture the changes in Pare upbringing over three generations. Mziray’s examples of the old methods of achieving compliance are worth comparing with the experiences of the participants.

Virginia Bamurange has introduced “the parental dilemma” with her account of some parents and children she met in her work as youth counsellor. She has the final word in our search for methods to raise private issues into matters of public opinion that will affect politics: this happened in Mtakuja community when the parents met to share experiences and observations. The whole tone of the meeting was coloured by parental frustration. For most parents, youths seemed to have lost interest in everything and become a useless generation. Most parents were at loss about how to handle the situation. Nevertheless, a few of them took the side of the youths, but they were in the minority.

When the professionals arrived, the parents were eager to get solutions, while the professionals sought instead to brainstorm how to manage the situation with the options at hand. To satisfy the parents, the professionals compiled some guidelines to motivate them in better understanding the youth.

Though the community had space for social gatherings, such as clubs and bars, these did not cater to young people. Consequently, the parents and professionals decided to establish a youth-friendly place where the youth could come together, exchange views and play and sing, and they were able to convince the community to start a youth centre.

The planning at Mtakuja brought the parents together, and they took great pride in the plan they developed. Contributions from parents flowed generously, and parents and youths communicated openly as they continued to plan and brainstorm about the youth centre. “The Pride of Mtakuja” took six months to build. The youth centre was officially opened with great fanfare. Government officials were invited and local leaders too. Young people surprised their parents with their talents for poetry, song composition and the plays they wrote and performed.

The first three months were highly successful and young people dropped in at a rate of about one hundred per day. They played together and formed smaller groups according to interest, talent and age. The jobless corners started to disappear. Parents were happy as they saw their ideas take root. If the story ended here, we could leave it feeling good.
But after three more months, the youths were overwhelmed by their duties and responsibilities at the youth centre. The parents had no idea about how to handle this situation until they realised that the centre needed one or two professionals to run it full-time. The most challenging criticism came from an eighteen-year-old youth who felt that the needs of this age group were not being catered for: they wanted to acquire deployable skills and earn a living. They felt they were being conned by the games and the sports at the Pride of Mtakuja, and frustration had set in. Parents started meeting again. This time the professionals advised them to involve government officials and several NGOs with experience in the field.

Virginia Bamurange’s tale reveals how local voluntary efforts divert the frustrations of parents and youths for a time, but that these frustrations return when it becomes apparent that the road leads nowhere. Such frustrations, in turn, may fuel new efforts that involve more people.

There are politics and policies on race relations, class relations, gender relations and ethnic relations. The relationship between adults and children has the same salience, but is hardly given the weight it deserves. Parents and youths struggle with problems that are widespread across nations and the globe. Parents and youths are ready to act, but where are the popular movements, the networks, opinion leaders, professionals and political parties that can link the frustration of families to citizenship and public action, whether locally, nationally or globally?

The Polish journalist Kapuscinski (2000) reports from Africa:

Half the population in Africa is under fifteen years. There are great numbers of children in all armies, most of those in refugee camps are children, children work on the fields, children sell and buy on the markets. At home … children carry water. While others still sleep, young boys wake up in the darkness of the night and rush to the sources, the dams and rivers, for water.
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