

Changes in the Practice of Circumcision among the Iraqw of Tanzania

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Changes in the Practice of Circumcision among the Iraqw of Tanzania

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Initiation rites of the Iraqw have passed through two main historical turning points to arrive at their present state. First, "*Marmo*," the seclusion rite, was abandoned owing to the political judgment of the chief in the 1930's. Second, the male circumcision rite stopped being performed as a result of the compulsory establishment of *Ujamaa* villages in the early 1970's. As for the former, I have already written an article published in S.E.S No. 15. Accordingly, in this paper I will describe the process of the male circumcision rite as practiced in Giting by the Iraqw, and take up the question of whether or not the practice of male and female circumcision will continue.

INTRODUCTION

Initiation rites in East Africa have passed through a number of historical turning points to arrive at their present state, one which reflects the diverse changes they have undergone. Some rites have been abandoned and are already extinct, while others continue to be practiced. Even among the latter group, some rites are being simplified or reduced to their mere outer shells, moving toward obsolescence.

Among the Iraqw of northern Tanzania studied by this writer, the female initiation ceremony accompanying the "*Marmo*" seclusion rite was abandoned in the 1930's. The reason for this, as stated in a previous article of this series [WADA 1984], was the occurrence of accidents during the ceremony, resulting in the death of some novices. It must be remembered, however, that initiation was originally an important ritual of collective education, a gateway through which one passed from childhood to adulthood. Important lessons of discipline and tests of ability are naturally included in the rites, which were practiced with the acknowledgement that some danger and the possibility of accidents were inherent. The main problem is that initiation is a closed ceremony whose participants form a close, esoteric circle with an "in group" sensibility, making them particularly susceptible to such intervening influences as political pressure or Christian missionaries.

The female initiation rite of the Iraqw was abolished in the 1930's by Mikael Ahho, who had been appointed *Wawutomo*, or Chief of the Mbulu. He was a practicing Christian with a chapel near his office, and his order abolishing the

practice of female initiation was undoubtedly as much motivated by religious conviction, stemming from his missionary school education, as it was a political step taken in response to the deaths of novices. After this, "*Marmo*" was secretly continued by women unwilling to give up the practice, but, nevertheless, it eventually died out. The disappearance of this female seclusion rite was one of the major turning points in the history of the Iraqw initiation rituals. The reason for this is that, putting aside the question of the ceremony as right or wrong, its extinction eliminated the vital feminine domain of Iraqw rites. It should be noted, however, that the practice of clitoridectomy, or female circumcision, has continued in the absence of the initiation rite.

In contrast, male initiation rituals were not the object of political or religious opposition and criticism, and continued to flourish as one of the Iraqw's collective rituals. In the village of Giting at the foot of Mount Hanang, where I first began conducting research during the period 1964–1966, male initiation rites seemed to have continued basically unchanged since the 1930's. I will now discuss the process of male circumcision as practiced by the Iraqw, using ethnographic data from my observations.

1. MALE INITIATION RITES

1) Age of circumcision

Circumcision, called *Heheemis* in the Iraqw language, is ordinarily practiced in the latter part of the harvesting season, which falls in the dry season; that is, between the months of September and November.¹⁾ The collective size of the ceremony is basically determined by the number of children to be circumcised. Boys who are eligible for circumcision range in age from 4 or 5 to 12 or 13, comprising a relatively wide age group. Looking at circumcision from the viewpoint of the ease of performing the operation and the attendant pain, it is preferable to perform it on younger children; exceptionally, children who missed the opportunity due to various circumstances account for the older children. If a child's father neglects to declare to his relatives his intention to perform the rite for his son, the child's circumcision is put off.

1) In 1964, a circumcision rite was held on December 18, during this writer's stay. The date of the ceremony is determined in accordance with that year's climate, and seems to be chosen at the height of the dry season. There have also been reports of December circumcision rites in the Kondoa district, in the southeastern part of the Hanang region [FOSBROOKE 1958]. The dry season is apparently most suitable for circumcisions, in that the wound dries and heals faster and there is less chance of suppuration. M. Tomikawa has reported, however, that the Datoga perform circumcisions during the rainy season, when the savanna grass is thickest. The reason for this is that during the rainy season, the cattle do not have to be taken elsewhere to graze, leaving the young men with free time, and the large amount of milk available at this time also makes it easier to entertain guests [TOMIKAWA 1965].

While any man with a child of circumcisable age can hold a circumcision rite, the rite requires the attendance of several specific relatives, to be discussed later. The father must first make the rounds of these relatives to announce his intention to circumcise his son, and succeed in obtaining their consent to attend. This done, the man's brothers decide which of their own sons will be circumcised at the same time. This is the major reason for the wide age range among children to be circumcised.

In the event that several brothers decide to hold a joint circumcision rite for their sons, the eldest brother ordinarily conducts the ceremony; but there are instances in which a younger brother with more sons participating takes on this role. When the total number of candidates from the presiding father's sons and his brothers' sons has been determined, the next step is to call upon members of nearby villages sharing the same lineage, and close neighbors in the area. If they have any sons of circumcisable age, they are invited to participate as well, thus expanding the size of the ceremony. In the case of Giting, the Iraqw now form a majority of the population; but the area was once the territory of the pastoral Barabaig, a Datoga sub-tribe, and there are cases in which Barabaig children take part in the circumcision rite as well. The Sule clan of the Iraqw, however, restricts participation in its circumcision rites to its own members.

2) Preparing for the ceremony

Once it has been determined which families will be sending their sons to participate in the ritual, the presiding party must begin careful preparations for the rite. Once he has obtained a firm commitment of attendance from his requisite relatives, the first thing he must do is secure a traditional surgeon to perform the circumcision. The circumcisor's role will be delineated later, but I should mention that he is a specialist who must belong to a specified clan or another tribe. The next step is the preparation of sorghum beer (*bura*). The beer is made of *sorghum vulgare* (*mangware*), and while the amount prepared depends on the number of children to be circumcised, enough must be made for all the guests who will be attending as well. It is therefore necessary that the presiding party be of sufficient social standing to have a considerable amount of grain and be able to call upon neighboring homestead heads to contribute aid, both tangible and intangible, to the effort. In actual practice, it is customary for each neighbor to contribute a four-gallon kerosene tin can full of sorghum for the ceremony.

This custom has some bearing on the next stage of preparations, in that brewing a large amount of beer requires a great deal of firewood and water, and depends on the assistance of friends and neighbors. It would be no exaggeration to say that without the cooperation of neighboring homesteads, the circumcision rite would not be possible. The work of collecting the considerable amount of firewood required falls upon the women of the neighboring homesteads, with the active support of the older children. Likewise, the water needed for preparing the beer is carried by the boys and girls of neighboring homesteads. As sorghum beer takes roughly six days to ferment, preparation must commence in time for the beer

to be ready on the day of the ceremony. The large amount of beer being made necessitates the cooperation of a number of women skilled in the art. Among the Iraqw, specialists in beer brewing tend to be older women rather than men. The assistance of neighboring women is therefore essential to the male circumcision rite.

3) Relatives and gifts

On the day of the ceremony, the uncircumcised boys, called *daqay*, are sequestered before dawn in a structure on the presiding member's homestead. Groups of people begin arriving around nine o'clock, when the sun has completely risen. Among these are the boys' (*daqay*) relatives, who will play an indispensable ceremonial role in the proceedings. These relatives, who are given a particularly hearty welcome upon arrival, have the following appellations:

- I) Brothers of the boy's mother, called *kompā* (brothers-in-law) by his father, and *mamaay* (maternal uncles) by the boy
- II) Sisters of the boy's father, called *hhyo* (sisters) by the father, and *ayishiga* (paternal aunts) by the boy
- III) Sisters of the boy's father's father, called *ayishiga* (paternal aunts) by the father, and *ama* (grandmother) by the boy

These relatives always bring certain gifts (*yaata*) with them. Namely:

- I) The boy's maternal uncles must bring, if possible, a bull and a sheep; if a bull is beyond their means, a male goat may be given instead, or at the very least, a female goat.
- II) The same applies to the boy's paternal aunts, but the obligation to deliver a bull is lower than it is for maternal uncles.
- III) Gifts from the boy's grandmother conform to II) above; but in practice goats are common, while giving cash is not unusual.

The value of the gifts has a bearing on the amount of sorghum beer provided later at the feast, but I would like to reserve a detailed description of this for later.

In addition to the above gifts, the boy's maternal uncles and paternal aunts must prepare several other items to be used in the ceremony itself.

- I) The boy's maternal uncles must make him a pair of cowhide sandals, symbolizing his embarkation on a new phase of life.²⁾ On the day of the ceremony, the elders gather to work together making the sandals.
- II) The boy's paternal aunts must make, by the eve of the ceremony, woven reed mats (*xafta*) that will be used in the circumcision rite. If a paternal

2) Traditional sandals are made by cutting a piece of leather in the shape of a foot, to form the sole. Thongs are then attached to the sole in three places, one being the space between the big toe and second toe, and the other two on either side of the ankle, as with Japanese clogs (*geta*). However, when it comes to attaching the sandals to the feet, the thong between the big and second toes holds down the front part of the foot; the middle thong wraps around the instep; and the rear thong holds down the heel. Iraqw sandals, both in the way they are made and in their shape, are basically the same as Datoga sandals. This can be confirmed by Tomikawa's illustration [TOMIKAWA 1979: 33].

aunt has several nephews (*nam hiyao*) who will be participating in the rite, she must prepare one mat for each nephew. As a rule, these mats are delivered on the day before the ceremony, and often the aunts then spend the night at the presiding father's house.

4) Arrival of the guests

On the day of the ceremony, groups of guests comprising five to eight people from the candidate's family and relatives, and from neighbors who helped in the preparations, arrive singing at the homestead of the presiding member. The women of the presiding family recognize the members of the arriving party from the singing voices, and come outside to welcome them, whistling a greeting of "lu lu lu lu." They throw green grass (*barsi*) on the arriving guests, and welcome them into the house. At this time, the youths of the presiding family take the male guests' self-defense staffs (*hhara*) from them and place them in one place for safe keeping. They also take the guests' footwear, and likewise bring them into the house.

This is also the time when the gifts are given and received. While the aforementioned gifts from the specified relatives are dictated by custom, other guests bring gifts as well, particularly if they are distant relatives or in-laws, or venerated elders of the village. Such gifts are often honey, or a small amount of money. Women guests might bring some cornmeal in a ground container as a gift. By noon, most groups of guests will have arrived and congregated in the presiding family's homestead and surrounding bush, filling the entire area. At the circumcision rite held in 1964, the largest such ceremony of that time, unmarried girls formed a column, holding evergreen branches and stamping their feet, after



Photo. 1. Arrival of the Attending Women

which they sang together and danced, further animating the festivities.

5) Ceremony site

In the village of Giting, the circumcision site is invariably in the northern or northwestern part of the homestead, the precise site being fixed on the eve of the ceremony. The area is cleared and simply arranged on the morning of the ritual. Although just one site is used for the actual circumcision, another site must be prepared as a waiting area for the children, so that a total of two enclosures (*islangw*) are required. Thickets of shrubbery are used for these enclosures, and simple shelters are erected.

During this time, the final circumcision tools are being prepared inside the house. The male sheep brought by the maternal uncle is slaughtered, and a raw hide is cut into thin strips, each of which is torn into small pieces and made into string-like rings. These rings (*xamang*) are fitted onto the boy's right-hand fingers as protective charms to ward off sorcery and evil spirits during and after the operation. Charms are used by the Barabaig in their circumcision rites as well. At around this time, work on the aforementioned new cowhide sandals is finally completed, and the sandals are placed on the children's feet. Meanwhile, the boys' paternal aunts prepare liquid (*xanga*), a mixture of water and honey, and pour it into an earthen vessel (*sirwi*), a ceremonial jar prepared especially for this day. The jar is wrapped and decorated with a necklace of white beads (*kwastashi*) used on festive occasions. About half of the *xanga* is then poured into two beer gourds (*qumi*) and handed to the circumcisor as he heads toward the circumcision site.

6) Ceremonial procession

When all of the above preparations are completed, the heretofore confined children are led outside. Youths and men encircle the children, remove the rectangular cloths (*mgurori*) they are wearing and hold them up to form a screen, to prevent the women from seeing inside the circle. The presiding homestead head stands in front of the children and prays to the sky god (*Loa*) for a safe circumcision rite. The procession of children, surrounded by the *mgurori*, moves toward the waiting area, with the child at the head of the queue bearing the ceremonial jar. As the procession starts moving, the middle-aged men lead the others in song: "*Hoyae...daqay rem masomba hoye hoye*," meaning "the children have grown, and will now become circumcised youths (*masomba*)."¹ Thus, with all singing in unison and interjecting shouts and claps, they move forward in a solemn procession.

7) Circumcision

The surgeon performing the circumcision is called *alutusmo*. Among the Iraqw, *alutusmo* traditionally come exclusively from the *Hhay Masango* lineage group, although in villages such as Giting that have contact with the Nyaturu, Nyaturu circumcisors are occasionally approached to perform the operation. This, however, is a recent occurrence, and in olden times *alutusmo* were always of the

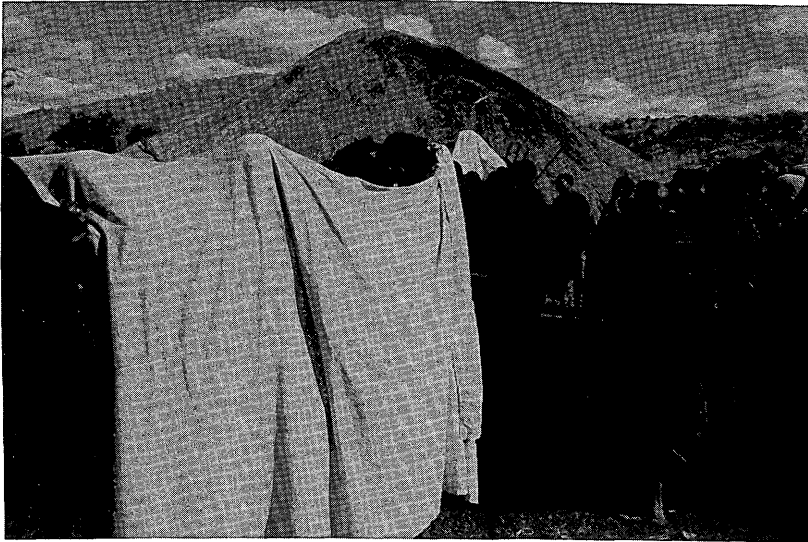


Photo. 2. Ceremonial Procession with Screens

Hhay Masango. Even in Giting, there were some elders who insisted that circumcision should under no circumstances be performed by members of other tribes.

The children are led one by one from the waiting area to the circumcision site (*hahi*) and circumcised. Each child seats himself on the mat prepared for him by his paternal aunt, and is held tightly from behind by his maternal uncle. The *alutusmo* clasps a small knife and removes the child's foreskin, following a specific procedure: first, he makes an incision several centimeters long in the foreskin, going from the tip to its base; then he cuts around it, going to the left and to the right; and finally removes the subcutaneous tissue at its base. As soon as he is finished, he immediately takes some of the *xanga* honey-water in his mouth and sprays it over the wound, and gives some to the child to drink. The operation is over in a few minutes, and the child, upon drinking the *xanga*, changes places with the next child in line.

While the next child is entering, the husband of the exiting child's paternal aunt wipes the mat clean of blood spilled during the operation, as well as of any urine or feces the child may have voided in pain. The severed foreskins are left on the ground where they lay, but are covered with green grass. When all of the children have been circumcised, they are surrounded by the *mgurori* of the older youths and, forming a procession like the one at the start of the ceremony, they head back to the house where they had been secluded earlier. A man holding a leafy branch follows at the end of the procession, brushing the ground to erase the drops of blood spilled by the children, and their footsteps as well. Two old men remain at the circumcision site and place a curse upon it: "He who takes these foreskins will

immediately die." Then they leave.

8) The feast

When the newly circumcised children have entered the house, the distribution of the sorghum beer, which had been kept at the presiding father's side, begins. As mentioned earlier, the amount of beer given out depends on the value of the gifts given by the respective guests.

I) If the maternal uncles have given a bull, they receive a sixty-liter oil drum full of beer, but if their gift was a goat, they receive half a drum.

II) The same applies to the paternal aunts.

III) As grandmothers almost never give a bull, they receive half an oil drum of beer for a goat; but their gifts are often lower in value, in which case they usually receive a kerosene can full of beer.

The sorghum beer is thus distributed to all those relatives that have brought gifts to the ceremony, and is drunk by all members of the group accompanying each relative. Additionally, beer is equitably distributed by the presiding father to other participants in the ceremony, commensurate with the role they played in the rite, their help in the preparations, and any gifts they may have brought. Even if a guest does not directly receive any beer, all persons present have accompanied someone who does, so that in fact, no one attending goes without. The feast continues in this way with the guests eating and drinking until late into the night.

As for the *alutusmo*, he is paid a fee for every child he circumcises, in accordance with the acknowledged reward for his services.³⁾ The circumcised children generally return home on the day of the ceremony, with the exception of those belonging to the presiding house and those living far away. Some children, unable to walk on their own, are carried on the backs of their parents or relatives.

After the rite, the circumcised boys rest quietly at home until their wounds (*slufa*) have healed, usually between two weeks and a month. There are cases in which the wound festers, requiring treatment. This writer has once assisted in stopping the suppuration of a friend's son, with medicine I happened to be carrying with me. After the period of rest, a small quantity of sorghum beer is made at the presiding father's homestead, and the children's heads are shaved by their fathers and maternal uncles. With the fathers and uncles at the center, all those present assist in pouring the beer into a gourd container, which they take to the circumcision site. Saying a prayer of thanks to the sky god (*Loa*) for the safe condition of their children following the ceremony, they pour the beer onto the ground, thus annulling the curse placed there after the rite. Returning to the presiding man's house, a drinking party is held with only the members that have gathered this time, thus concluding the last of the rites related to circumcision.

3) In 1964, the circumcisor was paid 12 shilling fee per child, but an elder is on record as saying this was a low remuneration for the market value of that time. For reference, one carton of "Sportsman" cigarettes cost 18 shillings and 50 cents in 1964.

Following this, the presiding man's family is free to cut down the trees of the circumcision site and plow the land.

2. FEMALE CIRCUMCISION RITE

In marked contrast to how the male circumcision rite has continued as an important, large-scale and collective ceremony, the female rite is a closed, private affair, conducted solely by women. While the male rite involves relatives and neighbors, the female circumcision ceremony has been completely individualized since the abandonment of "*Marmo*," and consists only of the clitoridectomy itself.

What the male and female rites hold in common is that the girl's paternal aunts (*ayishiga*) prepare and present a mat (*xafta*) for her to sit upon during the rite. However, the girl's father is never informed of his daughter's clitoridectomy in any way. The date of the rite is chosen in secrecy by the girl's mother and other women involved. While the male circumcision rite is usually set to fall on a full moon (*slahhang awak*), the female rite is customarily held on the day of a new moon (*ona*).

The surgeon performing the clitoridectomy is called an *alutlusoo*. There are usually two to three older women in the surrounding area who have the expertise to perform the operation, and they are approached when their services are required. In Giting, *alutlusoo* from the Nyaturu are occasionally asked to perform the clitoridectomy, as in the case of the male circumcision ceremony.

Although male circumcisions are performed with a knife, it is said that clitoridectomies are performed with razors. The Barabaig, however, are said to use a knife for female circumcision as well, and it may be inferred that the use of razors is a fairly recent practice. Following the operation, the girl is secluded inside the house until the wound heals, as in the case of male circumcision. Clitoridectomies are now performed at a younger age than during the "*Marmo*" era, usually by the time a girl is five or six years old.

3. CHANGES IN THE CIRCUMCISION RITE

After the abandonment of the "*Marmo*" seclusion rite in the 1930's, the next turning point for Iraqw initiation ceremonies came in the early 1970's. This time, the changes were brought about as a result of the agricultural reforms, based on the *Ujamaa* policy, that were enforced in the Iraqw villages of the Mbulu Highlands.

In the case of Giting, its designation as a so-called "development village" (*Kijiji cha Maendeleo*) brought orders for the destruction of traditional *tembe* houses (semi-underground "dug-in" buildings) to be replaced by rectangular houses. The land was divided into one-acre lots, and Giting was turned into a collective. Iraqw villages became communal villages where cohabitation with other tribes was encouraged. The male circumcision rite began to move naturally toward extinction in the face of these village reforms. The modernization of agricultural villages as

envisioned by the *Ujamaa* policy repudiated a social structure drawn along tribal lines, in favor of a unified national (Tanzanian) culture. In this context, preserving the traditional social customs of the Iraqw was tantamount to opposing the national cause. In such circumstances, the villagers of Giting found it extremely difficult to openly declare their will to hold circumcision rites.

Also, neighboring communities were beginning to lose their traditional base, so that it became harder to count on them for cooperation, as was done in the old days. In addition, the influx of other tribes made it difficult to confirm the family history of persons living nearby, thus greatly increasing the risk of a sorcerer finding his way into the circumcision rite. In Giting, due to the fear of sorcery, people could no longer be found who were willing to hold a circumcision rite as a collective ceremony. While the traditional rite of circumcision does seem to have been continued, albeit on a smaller scale, in some of the more remote, undeveloped villages where traditional forms of life were left more intact, even this has died out; the Iraqw circumcision rite has been completely extinct since 1974.

The practice of circumcision in the absence of ritual, however, has endured. Parents with male children began taking their sons to dispensaries or hospitals when they reached circumcisable age, to have the operation performed there. Some fathers are said to have taken individual initiative in approaching an *alutusmo* to perform the circumcision in the secrecy of their home, but this met with the resistance of the sons themselves, and eventually ceased to be done. Circumcision as practiced in the dispensaries and hospitals involves injecting a local anesthetic into the foreskin area and using surgical scissors to perform the operation, and the pain is said to be minimal. The cost of the operation, however, is by no means low.⁴⁾

In this way, male circumcision as a collective event disappeared in the late 1970's, and has continued only in a vastly changed form.⁵⁾ Female circumcision, on the other hand, has continued relatively unchanged since the abolition of the "*Marmo*" rite in the 1930's. While the male rite, as a collective ceremony, was particularly susceptible to the influences of village reform, the female rite was already individualized at that time, and thus able to survive.

The female rite too, however, has been threatened by increased attacks since the 1980's, from the Pentecostal church, long active in Giting, and the more recently established Roman Catholic and other Christian churches. Ministers started condemning clitoridectomies in their sermons, and urged their congregations to abandon the practice. As the number of female converts increased, all Christian churches united in their stand against female circumcision; but the emergence of women who threatened to leave the church if the practice were

4) While the cost of circumcision as performed at a dispensary was 350 T. shillings per person in 1988, this had risen to 600 T. shillings by 1990.

5) Although male circumcision as a collective rite has ceased to exist, it is still customary today in most homes to slaughter a goat upon a boy's return from the dispensary, to give him physical strength after his operation.

abolished, and the realization that their exhortations were bringing very few results, caused the ministers eventually to remain more or less silent on the subject.

The very fact that the subject is suppressed, however, means that it simmers below the surface, to flare up all the more intensely when accidents occur during a clitoridectomy. When this happens, the ministers immediately raise their voices in criticism and fan the fire of opposition.

Although the practice of female circumcision among the Iraqw has not yet reached the turning point of discontinuation, influences in this direction are gradually seeping into people's minds. If a clitoridectomy is performed without accident and the wound heals nicely, the subject passes without comment; but if an inflammation should develop, the girl must be brought to a dispensary or hospital (run in the past by the missions) to receive treatment. When this happens, Christian ministers are alerted to the fact that clitoridectomies are being performed secretly, and the persons responsible are pursued.

In Giting in 1989, a girl whose bleeding failed to stop after a clitoridectomy was brought to hospital for treatment. This reached the ears of a local Christian minister, who made the girl confess the name of the circumciser, and filed a report with the district office. It is said that hospitals also withhold treatment unless a patient gives the name of her circumcisor.

In this way, word of an accident concentrates criticism against the practice of female circumcision, and pressure is put on the surgeons who perform it. In this sense, it cannot be denied that political and religious influences are being brought to bear today against the performance of clitoridectomies. In view of this fact, I have attempted to examine what the future holds for the practice of circumcision among the Iraqw.

4. DISCUSSION

While changes in the various initiation rites of East Africa have occurred at different times and under differing circumstances for various peoples and regions, we can say, generally speaking, that these rites have been falling into decline since the advent of colonial rule.

Among the Chagga, for instance, who live on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro and in the surrounding area, conversion to Christianity occurred fairly early, and it is said that by the 1960's circumcision was already performed at hospitals as a general rule. Turning points in the Chagga initiation rites came early: by the mid-1900's, when the Germans had secured domination of inland areas and Maasai raiding had come to an end, the Chagga warrior order, based on the age-grade system, had been abolished, and training in forest camps, an integral part of initiation, was likewise discontinued.

On the other hand, the Meru and the Arusha, who live in close proximity to the Chagga, joined with the surrounding pastoral Maasai in efforts to preserve the age-sets and initiation rites, and succeeded in doing so until the 1960's.⁶

According to P. Purritt, however, the system of age-sets and initiation among the Meru has rapidly been breaking down since the achievement of independence in Tanzania, with the introduction of a new system of authority and social control. Among non-Christians, most girls are still circumcised at or before marriage, but very few Christian girls are circumcised at all [MOORE and PURITT 1977].

It has been reported that around the same time, the Arusha succeeded in resisting these forces and continued to emphasize the importance of the age-based system, maintaining traditional education in the form of initiation rites [GULLIVER 1969].

As this illustrates, even in a small area of northern Tanzania where tribes live in close proximity to one another, the effects of Christianization, urbanization, education, and improvement in living standards have differed, and initiation rites show a diversity of unique changes in response to the different effects.

In comparison with the peoples discussed above, the Iraqw are geographically situated further away from big cities; and while Christian missions were established in key areas during colonial times, I have not heard of any direct interference on their part in Iraqw initiation rites, with the exception of the "Marmo" seclusion rite mentioned earlier in this paper.⁷⁾

Particularly in villages like Giting, where the church made few inroads in the years after independence, initiation served an important social function in the community as a puberty rite ceremony, until its demise due to the agrarian reforms of the *Ujamaa* policy. It should be noted, however, that even in areas where the church's influence was stronger, the ways in which initiation rites were approached seem to have varied with respective denominations and the character of individual ministers.

Turning now to a Kenyan example, N. Matsuzono's studies of Gusii circumcision show that both the Roman Catholic and Seventh Day Adventist denominations have not moved to forbid traditional circumcision. They do, however, criticise elements of the rites that they consider particularly obscene, or condemn them as lewd, and have put out an order prohibiting these aspects of the rites [MATSUZONO 1982].

In the case of the Nyaturu, who live near the Iraqw at the foot of Mount Hanang, the missions have variously declared against the *Imaa* ceremony of the women's secret society, the sexually suggestive dances of circumcision, *mwandU*

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- 6) Although the Meru are thought to have adopted the age-grade system from the Arusha at a considerably early time, the two tribes' age-grade systems are not totally alike. For example, the Arusha and the Maasai have at least five age-grades, but the Meru, both men and women, pass through only three age-grades in their lifetimes. Also, the Meru do not have a special ceremony commemorating the transition from warrior to elder, as do the Arusha and Maasai [MOORE & PURITT 1977].
- 7) Although Mikael Ahho, the chief responsible for abolishing the "Marmo" seclusion rite, was a Christian, one theory states that the girl he loved died as a result of this rite, and postulates that this was a major reason for his decision to ban it.

(compensation for injury to a person) at the death of the wife, ancestral sacrifices, *njUγUda* (sanctions for affronts to authority), and burial in the homestead [SCHNEIDER 1970: 153]. As a result, Christian converts could no longer take part in the various initiation rites, but as their number was small, this did not deal a strong blow to Nyaturu practices. Nevertheless, gradual change in traditional customs can be seen, for example in the reduced period of seclusion for young girls who have started menstruation, and in the lower age range for female circumcision.

Similar examples can probably be found throughout Tanzania, but the main catalyst for change was elementary school education, which has become widespread since the implementation of the *Ujamaa* policy. The Tanzanian government directed the people to reduce the time required for their initiation rites, so that the children could stay in their proper grade levels at school. The effect of this directive was to further lower the age of circumcision, and to simplify or curtail the ceremony itself. Moreover, in areas in which the village reforms were strictly enforced, the value of preserving unique tribal customs was lost, and circumcision as a collective rite of entering adulthood was abandoned.

Consequently, tribes such as the Maasai who still practice circumcision today on the basis of their traditional initiation rites are extremely limited in number. Even among the Maasai, the ceremony is said to have been abridged and altered little by little to reach its present form. In other words, while the turning points at which rituals become extinct or abandoned vary within each tribe, the decline of initiation rites in general as integral social functions is unavoidable with the erosion and loss of the traditional base that supports them. In some areas, for example the parts of the southern province dominated by the Lukuledi sect, where the Mwera, the Yao, the Makua and other tribes live among one another, the initiation rites have endured in a Christianized form. The actual circumcision, however, is said to be performed in hospitals as a surgical operation [HOKORORO 1960: 11]. It is probable that circumcision, the climax of the initiation rites, will as a general rule be conducted in hospitals from now on.

The same cannot be said for female circumcision, however, as hospitals are not authorized to perform clitoridectomies as surgical operations. Consequently, while male circumcision will endure as a surgical procedure in the absence of traditional rites, female circumcision will not be permitted to continue even in this form, and will undoubtedly head toward total extinction. The final issue remaining in regard to circumcision, therefore, becomes whether the gender discrimination in genital surgery, where only males are circumcised, will receive social recognition. Put another way, as long as male circumcision survives, albeit in purely surgical form, an issue remains in regard to female circumcision that cannot simply be brushed away with the religious campaign about danger and cruelty, or with governmental notices. This issue centers around the fact that in the Iraqw language, "uncircumcised" carries the meaning of "unclean" or "impure." The logic behind this is that Iraqw men do not want to marry an "impure" girl with an "unfinished" body. As this illustrates, and as M. Tomikawa has pointed out,

circumcision not only serves the social function of a puberty rite, but has secondary cultural implications of physiological and hygienic dimensions [TOMIKAWA 1965].

The question of whether the practice of female circumcision is continued or not hinges upon a change in the consciousness of women in their roles as mothers. The mother's views are the sole factor determining whether a girl is made to receive a clitoridectomy. In recent years, the trend has been toward a lower age for female circumcision; among the Iraqw, it is not uncommon for clitoridectomies to be performed on girls of ages three and four. A major reason for this is that girls at such a young age are in no position to refuse the operation. While male circumcision continues as a practice, on what grounds would women refuse clitoridectomies? Circumcision, in this sense, is an important issue when considering sexual differences from an anthropological standpoint.

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