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OF THE AKAMBA, A BANTU TRIBE OF EAST
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THE CULTURE THEMES AND PUBERTY RITES OF THE AKAMBA,
A BANTU TRIBE OF EAST AFRICA

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND METHOD

The Problem

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the relationship between the thematic content of Akamba culture and Akamba puberty rites.

In order to solve this problem, it was necessary to fulfill the stated aims of the following four sub-problems:

1. To determine the culture themes of the Akamba.
2. To identify and describe the rites of puberty among the Akamba.
3. To determine the thematic content of the Akamba puberty rites.
4. To examine the relationship between the themes of Akamba culture and the thematic content of Akamba puberty rites.

Definition of Terms

Akamba

A tribe of the Bantu group inhabiting the eastern slope of the East African Highlands in Kenya between the upper source of the Tana River and the East African railroad.

Puberty Rites

The rites through which a youth must pass which mark separation from childhood and entrance into manhood or womanhood. Even though these rites are generally coincident with the attainment of puberty, the force of circumstances or some other reason may alter this pattern.¹

Enculturation

"The process of learning and being trained in a culture from infancy is . . . called enculturation, i.e., entering into a culture. . . . The process of learning a cultural tradition."²

Culture Theme

"A postulate or position, declared or implied, and usually controlling behavior or stimulating activity, which is tacitly approved or openly promoted in a society."³

Components, Nexus, and Assemblages

Following Opler, for purposes of this study, components were held to be symbols, artifacts, behavior, and ideas which appear or

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1. The first sentence of this definition is that given by James Hastings in The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, volume 10, p. 441. Van Gennep, in Les Rites de Passage, while holding also to this definition, expressed a broadened concept which I have incorporated into the second sentence of the definition.
 2. Felix Keesing, Cultural Anthropology, p. 35.
 3. Morris E. Opler, "Some Recently Developed Concepts Relating to Culture," Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, 4:120, 1948.

occur in a culture. The nexus were held to be the more closely linked and persistent aggregates of components. And assemblages were held to be clusters or associated bodies of nexus called into play by cultural events.⁴

Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that the Akamba puberty rites are a vehicle of enculturation through which Akamba culture themes are perpetuated.

Delimitations

This study was concerned with the rural Akamba. Even though some individuals in the Akamba tribe are moving into urban centers, the tribe still remains almost entirely rural.

Incidence of the Problem

While serving as a Christian missionary among several Bantu tribes in East Africa from 1954 to 1959 the researcher faced the difficulties which arose from the culture conflict which accompanies the Western Christianisation of Bantu peoples. He discovered that the Bantu have inherited a very coherent and, to them, meaningful cosmological system of their own from their fathers. In some respects Western Christian values are similar to Bantu values, in others the two seem irreconcilable. But the value system of a people

4. Morris E. Opler, "Component, Assemblage, and Theme in Cultural Integration and Differentiation," American Anthropologist, 61:955 and 962, 1959.

is not easily discovered, for many of the values which to the tribe are meaningful are concealed from the view of the newly arrived foreigner, hidden in their rites, cultic acts, and art forms. The central question which the researcher asked himself during his life among the Bantu was, "What do these people really value, and how can one discover their value system?"

It appeared urgent to the researcher that a method be found by which a person who is not familiar with a particular culture could discover quickly and confidently the main values and themes of the culture without subjecting the culture to a complete ethnographic study. With the value system of a tribe thus clearly defined, some aspects of culture conflict could be foreseen and in many cases either reduced or avoided. At least the conflict could be defined. This research examined the proposition that a rite of passage, if studied carefully and completely, reveals basic themes of a culture.

In addition to this methodological problem the researcher was faced with other problems of a more theoretical nature. The problem is contained in questions such as these. Does the missionary really expect the Bantu to accept his Western Christianity "in toto" without regard to their own cosmological beliefs? Are there no insights which the Bantu, on the basis of their own religious heritage, can bring to Christianity? The researcher soon became aware of the fact that these questions could not be answered without an intimate acquaintance with the Bantu world-view.

This study, by a careful thematic analysis of one Bantu tribe, along with a microscopic analysis of one of its most elaborate rites of passage, provides data which are helpful in answering the above questions.

The Theoretical Background

One of the basic assumptions of the present study is that in the Akzaba culture there are certain summative principles or themes which, though possibly deeply hidden and perhaps seldom overtly expressed, can be identified and defined. This assumption is made upon the basis of recently developed anthropological theory. The stages through which the theoretical concepts of cultural anthropologists have passed should be noted, in order that the present assumption may be seen in context.

The first modern anthropologists were influenced by the assumption proposed by the biological evolutionary school that evolution is linear. This theory asserts that all men are essentially the same; differences arise only as a result of a culture's relative position on the evolutionary scale. Social evolution, like biological evolution, was from simple to complex organs, from unorganised to organised institutions. Upon these assumptions the stages in cultural development were likened to the stages in personality development, from childhood, to adolescence, to adulthood. Each stage, "rested on a more comprehensive and logically arranged experience than the stage

which preceded it.⁵ Hence Frazer drew the conclusion that magic was a stage in man's search for causal relations which, at a more advanced stage of development, became empirical science.⁶ Both Frazer and Tylor wrote within this conceptual framework. The Golden Bough and Religion in Primitive Culture⁷, as examples, were very ambitious attempts at plotting a lineal scale of evolution.

In his book Totem and Taboo Freud also made the psychic evolutionary assumption. He wrote, "[The savage and semi-savage races] assume a peculiar interest for us, for we can recognize in their psychic life a well-preserved early stage of our own development."⁸ This psychic evolutionary scale had little to do with the concepts of space and time. It was as though the theorists walked through a museum and chose items taxinomically.⁹

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5. Fred W. Voget, "Man and Culture: An Essay in Changing Anthropological Interpretation," American Anthropologist, 62:945, 1960.
 6. James G. Frazer, The Golden Bough.
 7. Edward Burnett Tylor, Religion in Primitive Culture.
 8. Sigmund Freud, Totem and Taboo, p. 1.
 9. J. G. Frazer, in his work, The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion, in 1913, lifted culture elements not only out of history but out of their own culture milieu. For instance, in discussing initiation rites Frazer lifted the description of these rites out of the monographs and discussed them one at a time in the following order: Australian Aborigines, New Guinea, Fiji, Kanians of East Indies, Ndembo of the Congo, Sherbro of Sierra Leone, Sosoos of Gambia, Kikuyu of East Africa, and so on.

They collected material concerning shamans in one category, puberty rites in another, totems in yet another, et al., with little regard to either space or time factors.¹⁰

A reaction to this approach, led principally by Boas, came at the turn of the century. He did not deny that cultures evolve but he did have misgivings as to whether this evolution is universally lineal and always in the same direction. Boas was interested in a truly historical study of each culture with an emphasis upon the interconnection of many factors, of which the evolutionary aspect is but one. He held that processes of causation are not imminent in a culture but are a result of interaction between cultures. Boas, Lowie, Radin, and Goldenweiser dominated this period. They paid little attention to the ultimate philosophical questions relating to culture.

The ethnological studies of this period followed the "universal culture pattern" outline proposed by Wissler in 1923, which divides a culture up into "chapters."¹¹ Many of the excellent ethnographical studies which now line the shelves of the libraries of cultural anthropologists were produced in this era.¹² But owing to the very nature of the composition of these studies, they were so descriptive

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10. Van Gennep did, however, attain a significant insight by his comparative approach in his monumental Les Rites de Passage, Paris, 1909. However, he failed to give due emphasis to the fact that a particular rite of passage is best understood in its peculiar cosmological setting.
 11. Clark Wissler, Man and Culture.
 12. The Akamba, fortunately, was one of the few tribes of Africa to receive this thorough treatment. The main ethnography on the Akamba was written by the Swedish anthropologist, Gerhard Lindblom, in 1916, and published in English in 1920.

that they tended to be simply documentaries. It was as though the ethnographers froze the culture on paper quickly before the culture passed away. It is little wonder that Sol Tax referred to the ethnographers as working at "the level of cataloguers."¹³

Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown dominated the next period, which began about 1925. They removed the study of culture from history and concentrated their attention on culture as a structured system. They looked inside it and, by studying the reciprocating connections of its elements, tried to derive causative principles. These two men disagreed as to whether the basic cultural reality was biological need¹⁴ or maintenance of the social processes, but they did agree on one thing; cultural behavior is sustained by an emotional configuration peculiar to each culture, which, when determined, throws new light upon social behavior.

Following the lead of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, many cultural anthropologists set about to clarify just how the emotional configuration of a culture can be determined. The conceptualization took on a variety of names, viz., "Cultural Configurations,"¹⁵

13. Sol Tax, (Ed.) An Appraisal of Anthropology Today, p. 326.

14. This concept was fostered by Malinowski. Max Gluckman, in writing a critique of Malinowski's contribution, asserted that integration of institutions or functions of each element of a culture was the web of his (Malinowski's) own making which in the end bound him. He turned anti-historical, basing his concept on the biological needs of man and society's role in fulfilling these needs. He made the concept of comparing cultures very difficult. "Malinowski's Contribution to Social Anthropology," African Studies, 6: 41-50, 1947.

15. Clyde Kluckhohn, "Patterning as Exemplified in Navaho Culture," in L. Spier, A. I. Hallowell, and S. S. Newman (Eds.), Language, Culture and Personality.

"Value Attitudes,"¹⁶ "Temper,"¹⁷ "National Character,"¹⁸ and others.¹⁹

These works, along with others like them, though oriented around a core idea, present a wide range of interpretation. They move from the concept of many summative principles, such as value attitudes, right across the scale to reducing the principles to one as Ruth Benedict did.²⁰

Benedict felt that she was able to see one dominating, summative urge or drive in the culture of some of the South-Western Indian tribes with which she was familiar.²¹ She did not propose that this single "drive-configuration" was discoverable in every culture in the world but she did feel that in the tribes with which she was dealing

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16. Talcot Parson, The Structure of Social Action, and other works.
 17. Jane Balo, "The Balanese Temper," in Douglas Haring, (Ed.) Personal Character and Cultural Milieu.
 18. Geoffrey Gorer, "Modification of National Character," in Douglas Haring, (Ed.) Personal Character and Cultural Milieu.
 19. Haring himself is quite convinced that "National Character" is an anthropological reality, conditioned, however, by several considerations. He wrote, "The specific obligations of ethnology, accordingly, include description of the ideals of personal character acknowledged by each people studied; of the ways in which children and young people come to incorporate the ideals into their own habit systems--i.e., super-ego formation; and the different types of persons in the society and their problems of adjustment to prevailing standards. If description of these phenomena discloses a clear-cut predominant personality type, that society is to that extent amenable to classification in terms of 'national character'." Douglas Haring, (Ed.) Personal Character and Cultural Milieu, p. 24.
 20. Ruth Benedict, Patterns of Culture.
 21. Loc. cit.

it was a meaningful concept. Opler, in defense of a multi-thematic concept of culture, wrote, "To many it appears that the dominant drive-configuration analysis is at best applicable to selected cultures rather than to culture as such and that it is therefore not the even-handed conceptual tool for which we are seeking. And whenever a theory can cope with only a part of the evidence it is usually found to be inadequate, and is finally either rejected or becomes absorbed in some more comprehensive viewpoint."²²

"Integration," Beals and Hoijer observe, "in the sense of a whole culture dominated by a central summative principle appears to occur with relative rareness."²³

It seems very unlikely that the meaningful scheme for the classification of cultures will be possible on the basis of one single dominant characteristic for each culture.

Talcot Parson proposed that the first consideration should be given to discover the value attitudes of a culture. But the delineation of value attitudes of any particular culture produces such a long list that this scheme hardly becomes workable. Not only that but the expressed value attitudes of a culture may be so unrelated to the behavior of its people that the analysis loses its meaning.

22. Morris Opler, "Some Recently Developed Concepts Relating to Culture," Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, 4:120, 1948.

23. Ralph Beals and Harry Hoijer, An Introduction to Anthropology, p. 216..

Kroeber aptly wrote, "There is always a gap between values and behavior, between ideals and performances. Even though values always influence the behavior of cultural organisms, that is, of men, they never control it exclusively. Hence the student of culture needs to distinguish, but also to compare, ideal values and achieved behavior, as complementary to each other."²⁴

Opler, in 1945, proposed a theory in which cultural configuration was unified around several interacting themes. "To Opler integration in a culture consists of a balancing and interplay of themes, not the subordination of all the patterns in a culture to a single summative principle."²⁵ He defined a theme as, "A postulate or position, declared or implied, and usually controlling behavior or stimulating activity which is tacitly or openly promoted in a society."²⁶ The postulate or theme is operative in a person's view of the nature of the world and of his fellow man, and of what to him is desirable and what is undesirable. However the individual within the culture is regarded, not as a "mirror" of the culture, but as possessing a good deal of freedom within his culture pattern. This becomes a reasonable conclusion when themes are thought of as often

24. A. L. Kroeber, "Values as a Subject in Anthropological Research," Margaret Mead, (Ed.), Golden Age of American Anthropology, p. 620.

25. Beals and Hoijer, op. cit., p. 218.

26. Morris Opler, "Themes as Dynamic Forces in Culture," American Journal of Sociology, 51: 198, 1945.

ever-lapping and even at times countering one another. Thus Opler's conceptualization, even though it is mainly a summary of the many poly-thematic approaches to culture which preceded him, is a landmark in theory because it produced, in a logical fashion, a theoretical construct which, if employed, would encompass the cultural materials of any community.²⁷

In his 1945 paper Opler wrote:

The activities, prohibitions of activities, or references which result from the acceptance of a theme are its expressions. Such expressions may be formalized or unformalized. Limiting factors, often the existence of either opposed or circumscribing themes, and their extensions, control the number, force, and variety of a theme's expressions. The interplay of theme and countertheme is the key to the equilibrium achieved in a culture, and structure in culture is essentially their interrelation and balance.²⁸

Having aptly described what he conceived of as a theme, Opler failed to develop the concept of the "formalized or unformalized expression" of a theme. Thus those interested in employing his concept would have been at a loss to know how themes were abstracted and defined in a scientific way. He filled in much of this blank space in his 1959 paper, where he developed what he terms "the levels of cultural expression." He notes the four levels as follows:

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27. Opler's conceptualizations are set out in his papers, namely: "Themes as Dynamic Forces in Culture," American Journal of Sociology, 51: 198-206, 1945; "An Application of the Theory of Themes in Culture," Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences, 36: 137-165, 1945; "Some Recently Developed Concepts Relating to Culture," Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, 4:120, 1948; "Component, Assemblage and Theme in Cultural Integration and Differentiation," American Anthropologist, 61: 955-962, 1959.
28. Morris Opler, "Themes as Dynamic Forces in Culture," American Journal of Sociology, 51: 198, 1945.

An event calls into play an associated body of ideas, symbols, artifacts, and behavior. These items I propose to call components, and the total group of components which are activated by the event and are considered appropriate in coping with it or referring to it, I have named an assemblage. . . . (The) more closely linked and persistent aggregates of components within assemblages, I call *nexus*. The link between the culture and the assemblage is the theme.²⁹

He thus developed his conceptualization logically from the general to the specific, from the concept down to concrete elements.

Even though Opler worked from the general concept level, the theme, to the specific, concrete level, the cultural component, in order to establish the logical validity of his thematic conceptualization, the theoretical construct is sound even if reversed. In other words, Opler's starting point was the belief that cultures are poly-thematic. Having taken this position he was required to undergird it with logical procedures. So he worked down from theme, arriving finally at the stuff of culture, the cultural components. Were one to begin with the cultural components and work up to the theme the same logic would be sustained.³⁰

The present study is concerned, in part, with the abstraction and definition of the culture themes of the Akamba, a Bantu tribe of East Africa, on the basis of ethnographic materials now in print. The researcher employs Opler's theoretical rationale and nomenclature

29. Morris Opler, "Component, Assemblage and Theme in Cultural Integration and Differentiation," American Anthropologist, 61: 962-964.

30. It is to be expected that Opler will actually do this in a subsequent paper, thus giving a specific rationale for anyone who wishes to work from component to theme rather than follow the reverse order.

as defined above.

General Statement

Though the delineation of the Akanba's culture themes was an essential part of the present study, it was not the major theoretical problem. The hypothesis to be tested was that the rites of passage³¹ do contain the culture themes of a particular culture. This hypothesis was made upon the assumption that each culture has traditional themes which it attempts to transmit to each successive generation. This it attempts to do in a variety of ways, through art forms, cultic acts, and the enforcement of culture norms of behavior through various institutions. The researcher proposed that the life crisis ceremonies, the rites of passage, are admirably suited to the study of the transmission of traditional themes from one generation to another. It was anticipated that in these rites the culture expresses its themes either overtly or covertly. In other words it was proposed that the rites of passage are an effective vehicle of enculturation.

The extent to which this was true was determined by analyzing the ethnographic materials on one of the best documented tribes of the North-Eastern Bantu group, the Akanba.³² The Akanba's most elaborate rite of passage is their initiation ritual which is divided

31. The English equivalent of rites de passage is used throughout the study.

32. Throughout this study the following terminology is used: Akanba, the people of the tribe; Ukanba, the country in which tribe lives; Kanba, an adjective referring to that which pertains to the tribe; Kikanba, the language of the tribe; and Kikanba, a member of the tribe.

into three parts, through which an Mzamba passes from childhood to manhood or womanhood. The researcher examined these rites and processed them as he did the culture itself, working from the components of the rites, the acts themselves, along with the songs and art forms included in the rites, up the scale of generalization through the assemblages to the themes.³³ Having determined the themes of the initiation rites these themes were then compared to the themes of the culture as a whole in order to determine the similarity and dissimilarity between the two sets of themes.

Related Literature

The related literature falls into two categories, that which is related to the study in content and that which is related in method. It is discussed in this order.

Literature Related in Content

The ethnographic materials describing the Akamba are not voluminous but they were found to be adequate for the study. According to Schapera the Akamba are the best described tribe in Kenya.³⁴ This is probably due to their strategic geographic position. They are on the whole a peaceful tribe and thus made friends with the traders of different races who came inland from the Indian Ocean to trade with interior peoples. The Akamba refused the traders the right to pass

33. Cf. p. 11.

34. I. Schapera, Some Problems of Anthropological Research in Kenya Colony, p. 12.

through their lands but they obligingly served as intrepeneurs, for a handsome commission. The Akamba are the first large tribe encountered upon leaving the Kenya coast, therefore they were on the vanguard for many years. Early travelers like Krapf and Thompson found the Akamba peaceable but very conservative.³⁵

J. L. Krapf was the first person to write to any extent on the Akamba. His book, written in 1860 and translated into English under the title Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours, During an Eighteen Years' Residence in Eastern Africa, is valuable inasmuch as it is the earliest record of the Akamba. The work was written as missionary propoganda, however, and Krapf, though a keen observer, was not an anthropologist.

Hildebrandt, another German working among the Akamba, made the first attempt to present several aspects of Akamba culture in ethnographic terms in his 1878 article, "Ethnographische Notizen über Wakamba und ihre Nachbarn."³⁶

Several workers in the Leipziger Mission who labored among the Akamba wrote factually accurate accounts of various aspects of Akamba life even though they wrote in popular style. Especially valuable in this respect are the works of Hofmann³⁷ and Brutzer.³⁸

35. The hostile tribes which surround them, such as the very populous Masai, presented difficulties to the early explorers and ethnographers, thus they go relatively unstudied while the Akamba are renowned.

36. J. M. Hildebrandt, "Ethnographische Notizen über Wakamba und ihre Nachbarn," Zeitschrift für Ethnologie, 10:347-406, 1878.

37. J. Hofmann, Geburt, Heirat und Tod bei den Wakamba, 1901.

38. E. Brutzer, Begegnung mit Wakamba, 1902.

Though neither of these men was a trained anthropologist, their work is valuable because it was the result of prolonged association with the people of whom they were writing.³⁹

Charles Dundas, an authority on native law, lived among the Akamba as a District Commissioner for several years during which time he produced the first description of Akamba law. This appeared in 1915.⁴⁰ Dundas was the first writer to note the unique legal system among these people. He also wrote a very valuable ethnographic work entitled, "History of the Kitui District."⁴¹ His writing indicates a keen sense of social perception although an occasional "barb" comes through revealing some disillusionment in terms of his personal relationship with the Akamba.⁴² Though Dundas did make a general ethnographic contribution, his works on Akamba law are his greatest contribution.

On the basis of research which had already been done and also as a result of prolonged residence among the Akamba as a Provincial Officer, C. W. Hobley produced several monographs on the Akamba, the sum of which he produced in his book, Ethnology of A-Kamba and Other

39. Gerhard Lindblom, The Akamba, p. 15.

40. Charles Dundas, "The Organisation and Laws of Some Bantu Tribes of East Africa," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 45:234-306, 1915.

41. Charles Dundas, "History of Kitui," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 43:480-549, 1913.

42. Ibid., p. 490.

East African Tribes, 1910. He later revised this work and included large parts of it in his well known book entitled, Bantu Beliefs and Magic, 1932.⁴³ His work earned him the respect of others more thoroughly trained in anthropological method than himself.⁴⁴

Hobley was a busy Government official and therefore did not have the time to check and recheck his data, hence his work, especially that done in his early years, does have some inaccuracies and improperly deduced conclusions. His last production is by far the most useful because Hobley benefitted from the labors of other anthropologists who worked among the Akamba in the meanwhile. If Hobley's earlier work did nothing else, it provided his successors with a body of pertinent data which led to a more accurate and fuller ethnography of the Akamba.

It was left, however, to the Swedish anthropologist, Gerhard Lindblom, to prepare the outstanding work on the Akamba less than a decade later. Lindblom, trained at Uppsala University, entered the field with the foregoing works in hand. His book is not only a correction and extension of this ethnographic material but he, after learning the language, did a very thorough study of the Akamba's institutional and private life. He produced his findings in book

43. The book was revised and enlarged in 1938.

44. Fraser quoted Hobley extensively in his Totemism and Exogamy. The chapter, "Totemism among the A-Kamba" is quoted directly from Hobley. V. II, p. 420.

form under the title, The Akamba, in 1920.⁴⁵ Lindblom also had the advantage of working on the field with the backing of Hobley, Dundas, and Hofmann. They provided him with their manuscripts and proffered him every courtesy. This greatly facilitated his study. Lindblom's book has remained the standard reference work on the Akamba through the years.⁴⁶

In presenting his material Lindblom used the taxonomical method then current and acceptable. Adhering to a principle of accurate reporting he made very few attempts to go beyond the component level of description, but the data which he collected and collated in this volume is quite extensive.

There are three major areas of research into which Lindblom did not go very extensively: the Akamba social structure, the judicial processes, and land tenure. Middleton, in 1953, produced a descriptive monograph on the Akamba for the International African Institute in which he noted Lindblom's deficiency in the area of social structure and consequently directed his energies to fill this gap.⁴⁷ Middleton's work also corrects the Lindblom study at several other points.

45. Parts of this book were presented as a doctoral dissertation at Uppsala University in 1916.

46. Norman Larby, The Kaaba, in the Preface.

47. John Middleton, The Central Tribes of the North-Eastern Bantu.

In the area of law and justice Penwill, in 1951, more than made up the deficiency in his work entitled Kamba Customary Law. This is an extremely valuable work, for Penwill, though not a trained anthropologist, viewed Kamba law in the light of the Kamba social and religious systems.

It is indeed amazing that Lindblom could have overlooked the relation of land tenure to the Akamba's world view.⁴⁸ Lambert was aware of this problem, however, and wrote his very valuable study on land tenure in 1947 entitled, Land Tenure Among the Akamba.⁴⁹ In this work Lambert contributed a new insight into the Akamba's social system. He correlated migration to revised social structures in the newly-opened areas, thus making intelligible the different institutional emphases given by various geographical groupings in Ukamba.

Besides these main works on the Akamba there are a number of excellent monographs which have appeared through the years dealing with limited aspects of Akamba culture. Due to their limited scope they will not be included here, but they do appear in the Bibliography of this study.

In addition to the above sources the researcher also brought to the study materials on the Bantu which he collected himself. The

48. This is especially amazing in the light of the fact that the great Mau Mau war was fought over what was basically a land problem. Admittedly, the Akamba were less involved in this uprising than the Akikuyu, their neighbors, but the fact that the Akamba have been plagued with land problems added fuel to the intensity of feelings regarding land in Kenya.

49. H. E. Lambert, "Land Tenure Among the Akamba," African Studies, 6:131-157.

researcher lived among several Bantu tribes during a residence of five years in East Africa as a Christian educator from 1954 to 1959. His notes and materials were employed principally as addenda to the works of the authorities cited above whose researches form the basis for the present study.

The present study is not an attempt to write yet another ethnography on the Akamba. This is beyond the scope of the purpose of this study. Even though all of the materials relating to the Akamba have been studied, the researcher does not present these in a full ethnographic reconstruction. The opening chapters of the study present the Akamba's world-view in very broad strokes simply to orient the reader and to provide a simple frame of reference upon which the study can go forward intelligently. The analytical sections of the study take place within this basic framework of belief and action.

Literature Related in Method

The thematic analysis of culture has only recently been proposed. However, cultural anthropologists have been handling cultural data in terms of summative principles for some time. Especially relevant in this regard are the works of Bateson,⁵⁰ Benedict,⁵¹

50. Gregory Bateson, "Cultural and Thematic Analysis of Fictional Films," in Douglas Haring (Ed.), Personal Character and Culture Milieu, and other works.

51. Ruth Benedict, The Chrysanthemum and the Sword. Patterns of Japanese Culture, and other works.

Gorer,⁵² Haring,⁵³ Honigman,⁵⁴ Kluckhohn,⁵⁵ Mead,⁵⁶ and Opler. The researcher employed the theoretical structure for deriving themes as proposed by Morris Opler in his three works on this subject, "Themes as Dynamic Forces in Culture,"⁵⁷ "Some Recently Developed Concepts Relating to Culture,"⁵⁸ and "Components, Assemblage, and Theme in Cultural Integration and Differentiation."⁵⁹ In the last the author applied the thematic analysis technique to the burial rites of two South-West Indian tribes. He then compared the thematic content of the two rites rather than the component parts of the rites. As a result of this method of comparative analysis Opler comes quickly to

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52. Geoffrey Gorer, "National Character: Theory and Practice," in M. Mead and R. Metraux, The Study of Culture at a Distance, and other works.
53. Douglas Haring, "Japanese National Character," The Yale Review, 42:375-92, 1953, and other works.
54. John J. Honigman, "Culture Patterns and Human Stress," Psychiatry, 13:25-34, 1950, and other works.
55. Clyde Kluckhohn, "Patterning as Exemplified in Ksvaho Culture," in L. Spier, A. I. Hallowell, and S. S. Newman (Eds.), Language, Culture and Personality, and other works.
56. Margaret Mead, Male and Female, and other works.
57. Published in 1945 in the American Journal of Sociology, 51: 198-206.
58. Published in 1948 in Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, 4:120.
59. Published in 1959 in American Anthropologist, 61:955-962.

a meaningful comparison of the two tribes in question. The present study likewise made a thematic analysis of a rite of passage, not, however, in order to compare it to a similar rite in another tribe but to examine its thematic content in light of the culture themes of the tribe.

In his work entitled, The Value Approach: A Framework for the Comparative Analysis of Cultures,⁶⁰ Ram applied the Opler scheme to Indian culture materials. He found that the scheme was in practice workable and provided insights which the ethnographic materials as arranged in traditional ethnography could not.⁶¹

A study more nearly related to that of the present study is Quintana's work entitled, The Deep Song of the Andalusian Gypsies: A Study of the Transmission and Perpetuation of Traditional Culture Themes, produced as a doctoral dissertation at New York University's School of Education in April, 1960.⁶² She did not use the Opler nomenclature, but the research design which she employed is similar to the one used in the present study.

Apart from some differences in procedure used to identify culture themes, the present study differs from that of Quintana in that she explored the effectiveness of an art form, Gypsy Deep Song, as a

60. Submitted as a Ph.D. dissertation at Cornell University in 1957.

61. Ram found that the value-analysis scheme as developed by Laswell was also workable and produced results similar to those produced by the Opler method.

62. Bertha B. Quintana, The Deep Song of the Andalusian Gypsies: A Study of the Transmission and Perpetuation of Traditional Culture Themes, 1960.

vehicle of enculturation while this study concerns itself with a rite of passage as such a vehicle. In addition the present study gives attention to the theoretical possibility of identifying the themes of a tribe quickly and confidently by a careful analysis of a rite of passage. The present study serves to supplement Quintana's work inasmuch as it is a study of yet another vehicle of enculturation.

Regarding Bantu rites and values, Richards makes the statement in her fine book Chisungu that, "Little exact comparison of the rites and the values has ever been made, largely because anthropologists are still without a useful method of classifying tribal values in a way which would make systematic examination easy."⁶³ Richards did make a very worthy attempt to compare the salient features of the female circumcision rites of the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia with the prominent features of the culture and did, through this process, bring enhanced meaning to certain parts of the rite and certain aspects of the culture. This represented the first serious attempt to relate a Bantu rite of passage to its own cultural milieu. This study would have been much more valuable had there been a logically constructed theory and method for determining the salient features of both the rite and the culture. The study thus lacks the essential theoretical undergirding which the present study supplies.

63. Audrey I. Richards, Chisungu, A Girl's Initiation Ceremony among the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia, p. 117.

Fortunately, Richards had the privilege of seeing the Bemba female circumcision and initiation rites and was thus enabled to detect emotional responses evoked from both administrators and candidates. This aided her in interpreting the rites. Assuredly her description of the rites is extremely accurate and sensitively reported. It is considered by authorities to be one of the best, if not the best, description of an initiation rite in all Bantu Africa.

Richards viewed the rite as a vehicle which reinforced the matrilineal orientation of the tribe and the relation of the woman to the man. She concluded that the rite did, in fact, emphasize the sociological aspects of social position and fertility but she did not find the rites expressing ultimate beliefs. She wrote, "In the sense of dogma as to the afterworld, transmigration of souls, beliefs as to union with supernatural, e.g. aspects of mortuary ritual and ancestor worship: trances, dreams, asceticism, mysticism, *chisungu* shows no traces."⁶⁴

The present study does not propose to refute the Richards' observation. But it is expected that, having approached the study with a carefully constructed theory of culture based on thematic analysis, the results are less open to conjecture. The present study supplements the work of Richards, being the projected study which she expressed a need for, in which "a useful method of classifying tribal values" would be employed.

64. Ibid., p. 152.

The present study also brings additional data to the hypothesis made by Richards that the social structure is mirrored in the initiation rites. While Richards did her study of a female rite in a matrilineal society, the present study will deal with both male and female initiation in a patrilineal society of another Bantu tribe.

Methodology for Sub-Problem I

To determine the culture themes of the Akamba.

Kinds of Data Used

1. Ethnographic materials which pertain in whole or in part to the Akamba.
2. Ethnographic materials which pertain to other North-Eastern Bantu tribes.
3. Ethnographic materials which pertain to the Bantu generally.

Sources of the Data

1. The primary sources used met the following criteria:
 - a. They were produced as a result of field experience and observation.
 - b. They were written by competent scholars in this field.
 - c. They were published either in book form or in reputable scientific journals.
 - d. They were available in English, German or Swahili.

Examples of sources which met these criteria include:

Angustiny, J., "Erlebnisse eines Kambajungen von ihnen selbst erzählt," Zeitschrift für Eingeborenen-Sprachen, 10:161-180, 1920.

Beresford-Stooke, G., "Akamba Ceremonies Connected with Dreams," Man, 28:128, 1928.

Hobley, C. W., Ethnology of the Akamba and Other East African Tribes.

_____, Bantu Beliefs and Magic.

_____, "Kamba Protective Magic," Man, 12:4-5, 1912.

Hoffman, J., Geburt, Heirat, und Tod bei den Wakamba.

Larby, Norman, The Kamba.

Lindblom, Gerhard, The Akamba.

Penwill, D. J., Kamba Customary Law.

Prins, A. H. J., The Coastal Tribes of the North-Eastern Bantu.

Sources were consulted which deal with other North-Eastern Bantu tribes. The criteria for selection was the same as those given above for the Akamba.

Examples of the sources which met these criteria include:

Bostock, P. G., The Peoples of Kenya: The Taita.

Kenyatta, Jomo, Facing Mount Kenya.

Middleton, John, The Central Tribes of the North-Eastern Bantu.

Raum, Otto, Chaga Childhood.

2. Secondary sources were consulted which deal with Bantu culture generally. These sources met the following criteria:

- a. They had appeared in the standard bibliographies and indexes which deal with the Bantu.
- b. They were available in English, German, or Swahili.
- c. They were recognized as authoritative works by other workers in the field of Bantu culture.

Examples of the sources which met these criteria include:

Bascom, W. and Herskovits, M., Continuity and Change in African Cultures.

Forde, Daryll, African Worlds: Studies of Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples.

Hailey, William, An African Survey.

Le Roy, Alexander, The Religion of the Primitives.

Levy-Bruhl, Lucien, The 'Soul' of the Primitive.

Murdock, George, Africa, Its Peoples and their Culture History.

Smith, E. W., African Ideas of God.

Tempels, O. F. M., Bantu Philosophie: Ontologie und Ethik.

Willoughby, W. C., The Soul of the Bantu.

Treatment of the Data

The components of behavior which appeared in the sources were collected and then recorded according to the following categories.

Man - man relationships.

Intra-conjugal family relationships, such as those between:

Husband - wife
 Children - parents
 Brothers - sisters
 Brothers - brothers
 Sisters - sisters
 Older children - younger children
 Married - unmarried

Intra-consanguinal family relationships, as between:

Parents - grandparents
 Wife - in-laws
 Husband - in-laws

Intra-clan relationships, as between:

Youths - elders
 Women - men
 Peer - peer
 Initiated - uninitiated
 Shaman - layman

Intra-tribal relationships, as between:

Youths - elders of different clans
 Peer - peer of different clans
 Totem group - totem group

Exo-tribal relationships, as between:

Akamba - other Bantu tribes
 Akamba - Nilotics
 Akamba - other races

Man - nature relationships.

Man - animal relationships, as between:

Man - cow
 Man - insect
 Man - other domesticated animals
 Man - totemic animal
 Man - wild animals

Man - plant relationships, as between:

Man - herbs
 Man - trees
 Man - crops

Man - non-living objects, as between:

Man - rocks
 Man - water
 Man - earth
 Man - fire

Man - astral bodies and the heavens

Man - natural phenomena such as lightning

Man - spirits, that is, spirit as an entity, independent of the body.

Man - spirits of inanimate objects
 Man - spirits of animals and plants
 Man - spirits of laymen
 Man - spirits of shamans
 Man - spirits of ancestors
 Man - spirits of gods
 Man - spirit of Supreme Being

Components are defined⁶⁵ as symbols, artifacts, behavior, and ideas. The method by which they were abstracted and recorded involved two approaches, (1) a methodology for symbols, artifacts, and behavior, and (2), another for ideas. This distinction arose because the first three are empirically observable while the last is subjective.

1. The procedure for abstracting and recording the symbols, artifacts, and behavior was as follows.

The researcher gathered from the primary sources the references made to symbols, artifacts, and behavior and classified them according to the above categories.

Cognizance was taken of the differences on the component level which arose as a result of differences in relation to time and place. When the ethnographers disagreed with regard to specific components within the same milieu priority was given to the data of the ethnographer who:

Had had the most intimate acquaintance with the people with regard to the disputed observation.

65. See p. 2.

Had had the benefit of some previous statement which he was trying to confirm or deny by critical observation.

2. The procedure which was used for recording the ideas or reasons behind the behavioral patterns follows.

The researcher abstracted ideas and reasons from two sources.

They were:

Statements offered by tribesmen in ethnographic literature.

Inferences made by ethnographers on the basis of their observations and findings.

The data derived from the above sources were validated in terms of the following criteria:

Where the tribesmen and ethnographers agreed:

The data were accepted as valid.

Where the views of the tribesmen were not available but where the views of the ethnographers were in agreement:

The data were accepted as valid.

Where there was disagreement between tribesmen and ethnographer/s:

The views of the tribesmen were given priority but the opinion of the ethnographer/s were noted.

Where ethnographers were in disagreement:

The data were tested on the basis of the following questions.

Who evidences the widest knowledge of the particular point as the result of intimate acquaintance with the people?

Who is best trained to make the judgment?

Where the conflicting views were due to a time lapse or to differences of milieu they were recorded and notes made concerning these facts.

Where the researcher could resolve any of the problems on the basis of his personal notes and observations made while on the field he did so.

Where no reasons were given for a component of behavior:

The researcher consulted secondary sources which are not concerned with the Akzaba alone but with the Bantu as a whole for any light which they threw on the problem. Primary sources relating to other neighboring Bantu tribes were also used for additional insights.

During the course of this study the researcher used procedural methods consistent with accepted scientific practices such as those outlined by Suggs in Chapter Five of The Island Civilizations of Polynesia.⁶⁶

The researcher collected, validated, recorded and classified the symbols, artifacts, behavior, and ideas which surround cultural events in terms of the above categories in order that no pertinent cultural material be overlooked. These data are the cultural components.

While collecting the components the researcher noted the context in which each component appeared, and he also noted what other components tend to accompany a particular component. As a result of this procedure it was found that components tend to persist in clusters, and that these clusters often reappear in different cultural events. It was further noted that these clusters of components tend to appear when a particular emotional configuration is evident in an event or when some aspect of cultural life needs to be reinforced. These clusters of components, which shall be called nexus throughout the

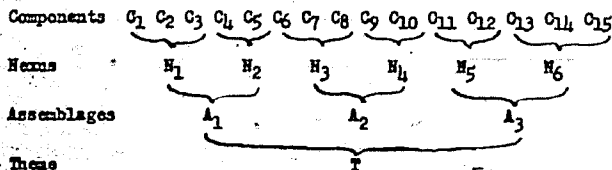
66. Robert C. Suggs, The Island Civilizations of Polynesia.

study, were studied in order to determine their intrinsic meaning and then their appearance and reappearance in various cultural events were also studied. By following this procedure the researcher was able to determine the emotional configuration of the various events in which the several nexus of components played a part.

It was further found that each cultural event calls forth a number of nexus which, taken together, form assemblages. The way in which the nexus cluster in these assemblages provides the necessary insight which is required to determine the meaning which an assemblage has in the minds of the participants. After the meaning of each assemblage was determined, the meaning of the cultural event became clear, so that its place in the world-view of the culture could be established.

After the meaning of the assemblages became clear it was then possible to determine the culture themes. A statement was made to cover the meaning of each assemblage following which these statements were brought together and examined. A number of general statements were then made to encompass all of the assemblages. These statements, being the highest level of abstraction to which this study pressed the material, are called culture themes.

The following diagram will clarify the procedure for identifying a theme.



Methodology for Sub-Problem II

To identify and describe the rites of puberty among the Akamba.

Kinds of Data Used

Ethnographic materials in which the Akamba puberty rites are described, commented upon or otherwise alluded to were used.

Sources of the Data

Primary sources which dealt in part or entirely with the Akamba and which met the criteria on page 26 were used.

Treatment of the Data

The data regarding the Akamba puberty rites were gathered from the sources and subjected to the criteria as delineated on pages 30 to 32. After the data were thus validated the researcher used them to reconstruct the rites in question in chronological sequence. While doing this he noted the emotional responses which were reported in the literature or which the researcher himself detected in discussing the puberty rites with people who had gone through these rites.

The researcher also noted some of the variations of the rites which prevail in different parts of the tribe.

Methodology for Sub-Problem III

To determine the thematic content of the Akamba puberty rites.

Kinds of Data Used

A comprehensive, valid account of the Akamba puberty rites was

needed to fulfill the stated aim of this sub-problem.

In addition to this, authoritative observations and insights regarding Bantu puberty rites in particular or puberty rites in primitive societies in a more general sense were used.

Sources of the Data

The necessary comprehensive account of the Akamba puberty rites resulted from Sub-Problem II.

1. Other primary sources.

Primary sources containing descriptions and observations concerning the puberty rites in other Bantu tribes were used which fulfilled the criteria defined on page 26.

2. Secondary sources.

Secondary sources which deal with puberty rites in primitive society were used also. These sources met the following criteria:

- a. that they had appeared in standard bibliographies on the subject.
- b. that they were available in English, German or Swahili.
- c. that they were recognised as authoritative by other investigators in the field.

Examples of the sources which met these criteria include:

Bettelheim, Bruno, Symbolic Wounds: Puberty Rites and the Envious Male.

Lowie, R. H., Primitive Religion.

Van Gennep, Arnold, Les Rites de Passage.

Treatment of the Data

The same four-step procedure which was used to determine the

thematic content of the Akamba culture in Sub-Problem I was also used in the present sub-problem.

References to symbols, artifacts, and behavior derived from the primary sources were submitted to the criteria described on page 30. The subjective components, the ideas involved, were submitted to the criteria as delineated on pages 31 and 32. These components were recorded and contextual notes made in order to aid in the regrouping into nexs.

The sources dealing with puberty rites in a general sense and those dealing with other Bantu tribes were consulted for additional insights regarding the subjective content of the rites.

The components which were closely linked in terms of meaning and those which were seen to persist as aggregates were grouped into nexs. The nexs were then arranged as they appeared in assemblages. From the assemblages themes were induced following the procedure outlined on pages 32 and 33.

Methodology for Sub-Problem IV

To examine the relationship between the themes of Akamba culture and the thematic content of Akamba puberty rites.

Kinds of Data Used

The thematic content of Akamba culture and Akamba puberty rites were required to fulfill the stated aim of this sub-problem.

Sources of the Data

The data required were those obtained in the solutions of

Sub-Problems I and III.

Treatment of the Data

The thematic content of the Akamba culture and Akamba puberty rites were compared and their relationship to one another examined in order to answer the following questions.

1. Are there areas in which the themes of the rites and the themes of the culture are in conflict?
 2. Are there any themes in the rites which do not find expression in the culture?
 3. Are there any culture themes which do not appear in the puberty rites?
 4. What themes exist in both the culture and the puberty rites?
 - a. In what areas is correlation greatest?
 - b. In what areas is correlation least?
 5. Would a study of the thematic content of the Akamba puberty rites alone give one a reliable picture of the culture of the tribe?
- All conclusions thus derived are fully reported in Chapter VII.

CHAPTER II

THE CULTURAL SETTING

In order to provide a background for the study, the following sections delineate the salient features of both the social and religious life of the Akamba tribe. In a sense this is an unreal distinction. Young observed that, "The lines of division between secular and sacred . . . have little meaning for the African."¹ However, for clarity of presentation they will be treated separately. Various aspects of the geographical and historical setting will be dealt with first.

Location and Demography

The Akamba inhabit the eastern slopes of the Kenya Highlands between the Tana River on the north and the East African Railroad on the south immediately east of Nairobi in Kenya. The area is roughly rectangular, measuring approximately 100 miles from east to west and 140 miles from north to south. Through it from northwest to southeast flows the Athi River which not only divides the area geographically but it is also the common boundary between the two main sections of the tribe. The western section, commonly called the Machakos District,

1. T. Callen Young, African Ways and Wisdom, p. 42.

was settled first² and now numbers a population of well over 350,000. Kitui District lies to the east with over 200,000 people.³ The Machakos District is higher than Kitui and is less frequently ravaged by famine.⁴ The Akamba have long since settled the productive highlands and have progressively pushed eastward and southward into regions which are very dry.⁵

The two divisions of the tribe do not form societies but the Kitui District is simply an overflow area into which members of different clans, in search of land, began to move around the early part of the eighteenth century.⁶ The division has resulted in a slight difference in dialect.⁷ Totemic groups, however, are retained no matter how mixed the population.⁸

2. Gerhard Lindblom, The Akamba, p. 10.

3. The 1948 census figures record the following distribution of Akamba peoples in East Africa: Machakos 389,777; Kitui 221,948; Meru 5,101; Nairobi 7,829; Thika 21,395; Mombasa 5,137; Kwale 2,243; Kilifi 2,189; Kajiado 1,034.

4. Norman Larby, The Kamba, p. 1.

5. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 13.

6. H. B. Johnstone, "Notes on the Tribes Occupying Mombasa Sub-district, British East Africa," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 32:263, 1902.

7. John Middleton, The Central Tribes of the North-Eastern Bantu, p. 74.

8. D. J. Penwill, Kamba Customary Law, p. 34, and H. E. Lambert, "Land Tenure Among the Akamba," African Studies, 6:133, 1947.

History

According to Murdock, when the group of Bantu, now called the Northeast Coastal Bantu, arrived in Kenya, "one branch, instead of following the coast into Somalia, moved into the eastern section of the highlands, where a substantial number of Bantu reside today."⁹

The Akamba themselves trace their history back to a country "south of Kilimanjaro,"¹⁰ which would reinforce Murdock's theory. This is supported by Lambert who finds evidence of "a considerable Kamba element in the Chaga make-up."¹¹ While in the Kilimanjaro area the Akamba, according to Lambert, lived in proximity with the Wanyamwezi, from whom they subsequently parted, the Wanyamwezi moving in the direction of Lake Victoria. One of the earliest writers on the Akamba noted that, "The Wakamba assert that they have come from Kilimanjaro, an area from which the Wanika also came, and settled first at Kilibassi, a mountain in Taita. From there they made hunting trips into the wilderness which is now Ukamba. The name Wakamba means "to travel" from ku hamba."¹²

The Akamba are one of the most northeasterly of the Bantu tribes

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9. George Peter Murdock, Africa: Its Peoples and Their Culture History, p. 342.
 10. C. W. Hobley, Ethnology of the Akamba and Other East African Tribes, p. 2.
 11. Lambert, op. cit., p. 141.
 12. J. M. Hildebrandt, "Ethnographische Notizen über Wakamba und ihre Nachbarn," Zeitschrift für Ethnologie, 10:348, 1878.

and according to Hobley, "The A-Kamba are probably the purest Bantu race in British East Africa."¹³ Grammatically, Doko puts the Kikamba (the language of the Akamba) in the "Northern Bantu" zone,¹⁴ and Guthrie puts it into his "Zone E, group 50," which includes Kikuyu, Embu and Meru.¹⁵ Evidence seems to point to the fact that even though the Akamba have been on the most advanced flank of the Bantu expansion into the northeast they have been influenced surprisingly little by their non-Bantu neighbors.

Their neighbors to the west are the Kikuyu, and to the northwest the Tharaka and Mberé; all of them are related peoples.¹⁶ With regard to the Kikuyu, a native Kikuyu anthropologist, Kenyatta, writes, "The two tribes are racially and linguistically identical. It can be said that in the beginning of things the Gikuyu and Wakamba were brothers, but how and why they came to part is a matter requiring some investigation."¹⁷ On their southern border live the Wateita to whom they are also very closely related.¹⁸

On the whole the Akamba have retained friendly relations with their Bantu neighbors¹⁹ but they have not done so with their Hamitic

13. Hobley, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

14. Clement Doko, Bantu: Modern Grammatical, Phonetical, and Lexicographical Studies, p. 15.

15. M. Guthrie, The Classification of Bantu Languages, pp. 43-45.

16. Dundas proposed that perhaps the Tharaka were in Ukamba before the Akamba arrived. C. Dundas, "History of Kitui," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 43:483, 1913.

17. J. Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, pp. 68-69.

18. Dundas thinks the Wateita are an offshoot of the Akamba. Dundas, *op. cit.*, p. 481.

19. During the Mau Mau uprising the relations between the Akamba and the Wakikuyu became strained but a friendly spirit now exists between them.

neighbors, the Masai to the west and the Boran Galla to the east, with whom they have been in almost continual conflict. This enmity toward non-Bantu peoples probably contributed to the way the Akamba retained their distinctive Bantu culture. Also, according to Lindblom, "On the whole, the Akamba have natural boundaries on all sides, since nowhere do they live side by side with a neighboring tribe, but are separated from their neighbors by stretches of uninhabited country, grass- or bush-steppes, which usually suffer more or less from the lack of water."²⁰ The Akamba, consequently, are distinctly Bantu and have probably not borrowed extensively from their non-Bantu neighbors.

The Akamba have held a rather unique position among the East African tribes in the last century for they were the middle-men through whom the ivory and slaves from the hinterland passed.²¹ They were renowned elephant hunters themselves but as elephants became more scarce, they bought ivory from the hinterland and sold it to the coastal people, mainly the Swahili. The great Kamba caravans were commonly seen hundreds of miles from home in search of ivory.²² When the famines came, as they did periodically, the Akamba had no supplies of food and therefore suffered very heavily. In the famine of 1898-99, for example, it is estimated that at least half of the

20. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 21.

21. Ibid., p. 12.

22. Johnstone, op. cit., p. 263.

tribe died of hunger.²³ Even today famine is the Akamba's worst enemy.

Social and Political System

The Akamba are divided into about 25 dispersed patrilineal totemic clans. This dispersion is a result of the Akamba's moving from their earliest home in the area, on the Mbooni range, where they had been confined by Masai raids,²⁴ into areas to the east and south into which they had gone in search of elephants.

During such an expedition an individual with a newly-acquired desire for good agricultural land might note a piece of bush-land that he thought fertile. When opportunity occurred, preferable when the rains had started, he would go back and demarcate the area and claim it as his piece of arable. . . . As the population pressure in the original settlements increased, such pioneers would move to their newly discovered farms, and group themselves into settlements strong enough to put up a reasonable defense against aggression. Such new settlements were mixed in origin. . . . The individual would retain his loyalty to his parent clan and to his totem, but the social milieu would be based on joint defense and mutual assistance rather than on kinship. . . . It was this mode of hiving-off and resettlement in smaller units socially and politically self-contained which set the pattern for the future evolution of the tribe.²⁵

Strangely enough, there is no word for "clan" in Kikamba but the distinction is made between clans by referring to "the people of . . ."

23. H. R. Tate, "Notes on the Kikuyu and Kaaba Tribes of British East Africa," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 34:135, 1904.

24. Lambert, op. cit., p. 133.

25. Ibid., pp. 133-134.

vis., "People of the Hyena," "People of the Leopard," etc.²⁶ The clan animals include the hyena, the bushbuck, the long-tailed monkey, the baboon, the jaskal, the leopard, the bat, the crow, the hawk, the vulture, the green parrot, and a small black bird with a forked tail. The wild fig tree is also a totem and the sand containing iron is the totem of the smith clan. Some clans do not have totems but are simply named "People of So-and-So (a common ancestor)."²⁷

There are certain totemic observances and duties binding upon all. It is incumbent upon the members of the clan to help one another when hardship comes, when blood-vengeance is required, and when blood-payment must be made as a result of manslaughter. The clan is exogamous and any sexual intercourse between members is considered incestuous unless the relation is so remote that the obligations regarding manslaughter are not in force. Even dancing together is forbidden to unmarried clan members, probably because these dances generally end up in general sexual license.²⁸ When being visited by a fellow clansman it is expected that the host will put one of his wives at his disposal during his stay.²⁹

The totem animal is actually considered a member of the clan, and is therefore treated as any other clansman. It is not thought of

26. Middleton, op. cit., p. 80.

27. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 117.

28. Ibid., p. 122.

29. Hopley, op. cit., p. 64.

as the founding ancestor but is simply on a par with any clansman.³⁰

It is believed that a reciprocal feeling of obligation exists between a clansman and his totemic animal. He often imitates the peculiar characteristics of his totemic animal.³¹

Some clans have certain peculiarities which have nothing to do with their totemic animals. For instance all of the members of one clan have the "evil eye" which unfortunately brings bad luck to everything they look upon unless they spit in the direction in which they are looking.³² If rain falls and a human sacrifice is required, this clan must offer up one of its children for this purpose. One clan is noted for the power it has to heal burns, and so the peculiarities are carried forward.³³

At this point it would be well to note that the Akamba have no central authority, no chief, no parliament, and no binding institution which knits the tribe together as one finds in many other Bantu tribes.³⁴ In this respect the Akamba resemble, not the Western and Southern Bantu tribes, but the Nilo-Hamites.³⁵

30. Middleton, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

32. C. W. Hobley, "Further Researches into Kikuyu and Kamba Religions, Beliefs and Customs," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 41:434, 1911.

33. Lindblom, *op. cit.*, p. 123.⁴³

34. Baganda, Zulu, and Wasukuma have very strong chiefs and legislative bodies. The Kikuyu and Meru have age-sets which unite the tribe.

35. B. Bernardi, "The Age-System of the Nilo-Hamitic Peoples," *Africa*, 22:331, 1952.

Warfare has the tendency to consolidate a people but Lambert observes, "War could unite a number of ibalo (geographical districts). There was an ad hoc binding of the units by an oath of allegiance sworn by the warriors of them all. A hole was dug in the ground and seven arrows placed round it with their heads pointed to the center. Every warrior then spat into the hole, swearing not to desert his new comrades. But when the situation ceased the alliance ceased as well."³⁶

Lambert goes on to note that,

It is evident that the Kamba are badly off for unifying forces. The mode of settlement tended to disintegrate the tribe because the discrete elements collected into units were self-contained and almost independent statelsts. The only institutional bond continuously in operation consisted of the threads of kinship running through the whole. Apart from this and the natural sense of unity arising from a similarity of speech and customs and tradition, the only binding forces were temporary and, in general, localized. They were situational and personal.³⁷

Lambert also points out that the "seeds" of central authority were inherent in the tribe and would have probably developed into a centralized system.³⁸ This may be true because during Hobley's time an individual did come to the fore and might be likened to a chief. His name was Kitui, and Hobley calls him a chief.³⁹

36. Lambert, op. cit., pp. 136-137.

37. Ibid., pp. 138-139.

38. Ibid., p. 134.

39. C. W. Hobley, Bantu Beliefs and Magic, Frontispiece.

The Territorial System

The smallest territorial unit is the musyi or homestead in which the extended family lives. Outside the entrance of the homestead is a cleared, shaded area called a thome where the menfolk spend their time. Women are barred from this place when men are present. One thome may serve several homesteads which do not necessarily all have to be of the same clan; this is especially true in the newer sections of the country.⁴⁰

The members of the thome of a particular small area join together in wider units which are called notui and ibalo. In both cases the grouping is on a territorial basis and has nothing to do with kinship associations. The notui are the smaller units, each with its own men's club (kisuka), recreation ground, elders' council (nzama), war leaders and place of worship.⁴¹

The larger units, the ibalo, seem to come into being where there is a group large enough and mixed enough for marriages to take place within the territorial group. This requires a heterogeneous group so that exogamy may be maintained.⁴² Each kibalo (singular of ibalo) has its common dancing ground (ngoma) and a common place of worship (ithembo).⁴³ Courtships take place on these dancing grounds which

40. Middleton, op. cit., p. 81.

41. Loc. cit.

42. Loc. cit.

43. Loc. cit.

lead to marriage.

As was noted earlier there is no larger unit than the kibalo. All larger units are referred to simply as nthi, which merely means "country."⁴⁴

The Age-Grade System⁴⁵

The Akamba's two nearest Bantu neighbors, the Meru and the Kikuyu, have political and social systems based on kinship and age-sets. The Meru have two institutions which bind them together, one is the organization of the internal government into lodges or men's clubs and the other is the grading into age-sets based on circumcision. Entire age-sets take over various aspects of the political machinery. The Kikuyu have an analogous system in which the most important social and political feature is the age-set based upon circumcision. These institutions have a tendency to promote tribal coherence.

The Akamba, though closely related to these neighboring tribes, have no lodges or men's clubs which have a wider jurisdiction than the kibalo and there is no government based on generation sequence. In fact, in a particular nzama many different age-sets may sit.

⁴⁴ Lambert, op. cit., p. 135.

⁴⁵ C. W. Hobley, Ethnology of the Akamba and Other East African Tribes, pp. 49-50; Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 143-148; Lambert, op. cit., p. 135; Fenwill, op. cit., pp. 96-97; Middleton, op. cit., pp. 82-83.

together.⁴⁶

Turning to the Akamba age-grade system, a male child is called a kana until he is able to herd the family goats, after which he is called a kivisi. When he begins to take an interest in the girls to the extent of participating in the community dances he is called a kamwana. This denotes him as a circumcised lad but one who has not yet reached physical puberty. Upon reaching puberty he becomes a warrior, a mwanake, when he can marry and have children but not drink beer. When he has children, or at least one child, and loses interest in the dances and turns his thoughts more to his social position he pays a fee to the elders and thus becomes an nthale.

After becoming an nthale he can begin to enter the various elders' grades (these are, strictly speaking, not age-grades because age is not the only factor in their formation) of which there are three. The lowest is the atumia ya kisuka, "the elders of kisuka," whose duty it is to participate in discussions regarding war, peace and communal action, such as communal executions. They must also bury the corpses. After payment of another fee they may advance to the atumia ya nzama which is a legal institution⁴⁷ and from there to the atumia ya ithambo which is a purely sacerdotal club concerning itself with the affairs of the ithambo, the sacred grove where

46. Lambert, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

47. C. W. Hobley, "Further Researches into Kikuyu and Kamba Religions, Beliefs and Customs," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 41/41.

sacrifices are offered. There are very few atunia ya ithambo, generally only two to a grove.⁴⁸ Advancement from one grade to the other is made possible by the presentation of gifts. In order to reinforce the hierarchies, different grades eat progressively more parts of the slaughtered animal. Each grade higher allows one to eat parts which were formerly denied him. When the final grade is reached all parts of the animal can be eaten.

It is to be remembered that these clubs or judicial councils operate only within notui. There is no higher judicial organization. The elders of the ithambo do get together in some ibalo but simply in a sacerdotal capacity.

The women also have grades but except for the iveti sia ithambo and iveti sia nzama (wives of ithambo and nzama) who take part in the sacerdotal rites at the ithambo, they are not institutionalized.

The Akamba are very rank conscious and any disrespect shown to one of a higher rank is a punishable crime.⁴⁹ When sitting in council the various members of the clubs arrange themselves in position according to rank. Rank does not always depend upon age. But a son cannot belong to the highest grade until his father dies or retires. In many instances the ithambo offices are hereditary and only certain individuals may attain to that position irrespective of age. Hence age alone is no determinant to social position. But a son

48. Ibid., p. 415.

49. Penwill, op. cit., p. 110.

may never out-rank his father or even be advanced to a position next to him in the council circle. Usually when a son attains to the seat next but one to the father the father steps out. The idea of a father and a son sitting side by side at council is an intolerable idea to the Akamba.⁵⁰

It might be observed that as one goes up in rank his circle of associates is correspondingly enlarged and ever higher rank brings with it ever increasing influence over people. It is also to be noticed that rank depends upon one's acceptability to the particular group with which he wishes to associate, and his ability to pay the price in a material way for advancement.

Government

Within the musyi the head of the family is, in theory, vested with complete control of those under him. He looks after the land-holdings of the musyi and in general tries to keep peace within his homestead. But Akamba react against authority and if the head of the family is overly authoritative, members separate themselves from the group and set up their own musyi.⁵¹ It is to the advantage of the head of the home to preserve intact his musyi for reasons which shall be shown later, therefore, though he is theoretically the master of the village, his authority is constantly tempered with the

50. Middleton, op. cit., p. 82.

51. Ibid., p. 83.

practical realization that he dare not alienate anyone living in his msayi.

The main political institution is the ngama which serves an utin (singular of motui). All atumia are theoretically qualified to sit on the nzama but there is some testing of a man's legal ability before he is allowed to pay the fee which makes him an asili, a man skilled in law, after which he may sit in the nzama.⁵² The nzama is a completely democratic institution without even so much as a chairman. Charges are brought by claimants to the nzama in order to hear the opinion of the atumia as to the amount of compensation due in the particular circumstance. If the defendant appears at the case it is tacit approval of his guilt. If a person does appear before the council and denies guilt, the disputed facts are not discussed further. The supernatural powers are expected to execute judgment. A claim never lapses and is remembered for generations. Witnesses are seldom called forward, for it is expected that they will be too bound by mutual obligations to be very objective.⁵³ A claimant has the right to take compensation due him by force. Punishment is never exacted as it is felt that this will not produce the equilibrium which prevailed before the crime was committed. The principle upon which

52. Loc. cit.

53. Loc. cit.

Kamba law rests is that of compensation, not punishment.⁵⁴ Upon occasion the members of the kisuka are given powers to execute punishment according to the will of the naama but this is very rare.⁵⁵

The Akamba practice a number of ordeals to detect the guilty one when he is not obvious to the atumia. They use licking a red-hot knife, ordeal by fire, needle, removing objects from boiling water, the bead in the eye, and poison.⁵⁶ These ordeals are administered by the medicine man, the mundu mns.⁵⁷ A far more serious type of ordeal is an oath taken on the kithitu, an object, generally an animal's horn, filled with "medicine" which, if one swears falsely, has the power to kill someone in his family in a prescribed number of days. Another oath which subjects only the swearer to the threat of death is also employed; it is called the ndundu.⁵⁸

With this brief overview of the Akamba system of government it is apparent that judicial power is in the hands of a group who act collectively. The execution of the verdicts is left to supernatural powers. Even judgment is in the hands of the supernatural powers when the kithitu or ndundu ordeals are employed. When a culprit is to be

54. Loc. cit.; Lindblom, op. cit., p. 160.

55. Ibid., p. 154.

56. Middleton, op. cit., p. 83; Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 174-176.

57. The mundu mns, of course, represents the ancestral interests, therefore, it is expected that the ancestors, who are ever interested in the affairs of the clan, will reveal the guilty one through the ordeal.

58. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 172.

murdered for the sake of public tranquility the total male community takes part in the execution, running the guilty one down and killing him.⁵⁹ There is indeed a reluctance among the Akamba to place power into the hands of any particular individual or office.⁶⁰ Or perhaps it is to be concluded that no Mkamba wishes to take upon himself the onus which would result from individual decisions and actions.

An additional point of interest is raised by the women. If the men are stalling on a court case which vitally affects the women, such as matters regarding ownership of land when the crops should be planted, the women congregate, decide the issue themselves and march as a body to demand the accession of justice before those concerned.⁶¹ No one dares oppose the women when they come in this fashion.

In summarizing the Akamba's views on law and justice several features of the system should be noted. First, only very rarely do the living execute justice. Their responsibility is to determine the guilty parties, if they are able, and to uphold the rule of law which was handed down to them through generations. Secondly, the law demands compensation, not punishment. Thirdly, no single Mkamba is ultimately responsible for any legal decisions. And fourth, the decisions of the councils, the official judiciary, can be challenged

59. Lindblom, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-182.

60. Dundas, *op. cit.*, p. 511.

61. Many Bantu peoples have myths which tell of the way in which the women were the first rulers but the men wrested the power away from them. The Akikuyu claim that their male ancestors got their women all pregnant at the same time and in this condition of vulnerability took their political power from them. Kenyatta, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

either by taking the oath or, as in the case of the women, by a group acting in concert on a common problem.

Main Events in the Life of the Akamba

The main crisis events in the life of the Akamba are birth, circumcision and initiation, marriage, death and burial. The essential features of these crisis events are germane to the study.

Birth

When a woman becomes pregnant she continues to have intercourse with her husband for three months, after which she must desist. Certain foods are denied the pregnant mother for fear harm will befall the child. She is not confined in any way and continues her usual occupation right up to time of childbearing.⁶²

According to Hobley, "every married woman is believed to be at the same time the wife of a living man and also the wife of some inn, the spirit of a departed ancestor."⁶³ Even though the biological mechanism of conception is clearly understood they believe that the spirits of the departed ancestors create and shape the baby in the woman, decide its sex, and give it its character. Indeed, they believe that the spirits, as well as the husband, play an indispensable

62. Gerhard Lindblom, The Akamba, pp. 29-30.

63. C. W. Hobley, Ethnology of the Akamba and Other East African Tribes, p. 89.

part in procreation.⁶⁴

When the woman's time has come to bear her child, all men, weapons, and iron objects are removed from the hut⁶⁵ and the woman is ministered to by a woman who has a knowledge of such matters, there being no special midwives. The child is born while the woman stands upright. There is an air of ease and joy if all goes well. The umbilical cord is cut with a knife and the placenta is buried outside the hut. If the woman has a history of deaths in childbirth all precautions are taken to keep the spirits from taking this child. This being the case, the baby will probably be hid and a new and secret door made for the mother in the side of the hut. This is designed to divert the spirits who desire the little one.⁶⁶

A new born baby is called a kiim which is quite literally, a little spirit. It is considered to belong to the spirit world, not to humanity.⁶⁷ On the third day the women gather about to name the child, looking for birth marks or any other indications that the child may be the incarnate spirit of some ancestor.⁶⁸ Many times the mother, through dreams, becomes aware of the spirit which is to be in the child

64. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 30.

65. John Middleton, The Central Tribes of the North-Eastern Bantu, p. 89.

66. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 32.

67. Ibid., p. 34.

68. Ibid., p. 46.

and tells her friends about it. The naming ceremony does not, however, as is the case of many Bantu peoples,⁶⁹ bestow humanity on the infant. Among the Akamba humanity is bestowed on the fourth day when the father hangs a black iron necklace, called an ithaa, around the neck of the baby. All metal objects, especially iron, seem to neutralize the spirits, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, chase them away.⁷⁰ On that night the mother places the baby on her breast and so encumbered has intercourse with her husband. If he is unable to perform this rite a suitable substitute is found. It may not be omitted.⁷¹ The baby takes up this position during intercourse until the woman begins to menstruate again at which time the baby is placed behind her shoulders.⁷² The Akamba always have intercourse while lying on the side.

If there is any abnormal parturition such as being born feet first the child is given a special name and through life is considered a deviant. This person may marry but the mate must have also had the identical parturition difficulty. The birth of twins is considered unfortunate and in the past one of them was killed, the mother was sent back home, and the marriage was dissolved. Today various

69. Ibid., p. 34

70. Ibid., pp. 34-35.

71. D. J. Fenwill, Kamba Customary Law, p. 9.

72. Loc. cit.

"medicines" are used to cleanse all concerned and the twins are allowed to live and the mother remain.⁷³

Circumcision

Since this rite will be dealt with in detail in Chapter IV it will not be considered here.⁷⁴

Marriage

When a girl notices that she is menstruating for the first time she leaves whatever she is doing and returns home; if she is carrying a water jar she leaves it on the spot. If she should bring the water home, and if a young man were to drink of it, it is believed that she would not be able to have children. She must be careful to walk in the grass lest menstrual blood should fall on the path where a stranger might accidentally tread on it. It is believed that the consequence of this would be that if the unwary person had intercourse with the opposite sex before the girl was ritually purified the girl would be rendered permanently sterile.⁷⁵ On the following night the father and mother of the girl must have intercourse which is called kuseuvia

73. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 38.

74. In most cases the actual circumcision of both sexes takes place some time before puberty is reached. It is rare that a person waits until pubic hair appears before circumcision. The girl's first menstruation is a very important event in her life and is surrounded with ritual. The boy's first seminal emission goes unnoticed. Among the Thonga, however, the first appearance of semen is the signal that the youth may begin to indulge in sex-play. Henri A. Junod, The Life of a South African Tribe, v. I, p. 92.

75. Hobley, op. cit., p. 65.

witu, to "purify the daughter."⁷⁶ After this she is allowed to wash herself for the first time. The water is poured near the bed where the parents have had intercourse. The girl, during this confinement, is fed like a baby by her mother.⁷⁷ Menstruation plays a very large part in the ordering of the life of the Akamba village⁷⁸ for it is thought that the menses is in some way connected with the world of the spirits. In fact, it is believed that only during menstruation can conception take place, for that is the time when the ancestral spirits are present. Consequently on the night of the first menstrual day the husband has intercourse with his wife.⁷⁹

While an unmarried girl is menstruating it is forbidden for any of her close relatives to have intercourse.⁸⁰ However, when a married woman is in this condition, sexual intercourse is the first consideration.⁸¹ In fact if there is a burial ceremony scheduled and unfortunately the wife of one of the atumia begins menstruating, all work must stop while her husband returns home and has intercourse with her, after which the work can resume.

76. Lindblom, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

77. Hopley, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

78. There is no particular connection between menstrual fluid and fire as Richards noted among the Bemba. Audrey I. Richards, Chisungu: A Girl's Initiation Ceremony Among the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia, p. 30.

79. Hopley, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

80. Lindblom, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

81. If and when these conflict the menstruating married woman will not have intercourse until the girl stops menstruating.

Boys and girls who are duly circumcised and who have attained puberty amuse themselves at their favorite dance, the mbalia. This dance is engaged in almost daily and is quite erotic in character. In this dance the girls choose their male partners and it is during these dances that the basis of marriage is formed.⁸² Pre-marital intercourse is expected, but it is regarded as shameful for an unmarried girl to become pregnant.⁸³ Abortion is sometimes practiced.⁸⁴

When a boy and a girl have come to a secret agreement that they want to marry, the young man's father, if he is agreeable, approaches the girl's father on the matter. There follows an elaborate series of gifts of goats and beer made by the suitor to the father of the girl. This is preliminary to the matter of negotiating for bride-wealth which usually includes a large number of goats and a few cattle. Payment of the bride-wealth is spread out over several years but this does not delay the marriage.⁸⁵ It is expected that the girl's father mark each of the cattle he receives as bride-wealth so that in case the marriage should need to be dissolved, the exact animals can be returned plus their offspring.⁸⁶

82. Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 407-412 f.

83. Middleton, op. cit., p. 90.

84. Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 38-39.

85. Ibid., p. 73; Middleton, op. cit., p. 90.

86. Ibid., pp. 84-85.

When the amount of the bride-wealth is finally set, it is expected that the young man will shortly come for the girl and quietly take her away to his mother's hut. When he does so he takes gifts to the girl's mother, generally bananas, in order to soothe her feelings for having lost a daughter⁸⁷ and he provides ample beer for her father. She is accompanied to the husband's home by a few relatives.⁸⁸

Since reference has been made to beer, some features regarding its manufacture should be noted. Beer is an integral part of the bride-wealth and dare not be omitted. Beer is a ceremonial drink which, though high in alcoholic content, is usually drunk in small portions as a ritual act. Every family must have the ingredients to make beer at any time that occasion for it may arise. The most ancient method of making it is with honey.⁸⁹ Therefore each family must have its own clearly marked bee hives hung in the neighborhood trees. To steal honey is one of the most serious crimes among the Akamba.⁹⁰ In some of the areas which receive more rainfall sugar-cane is grown and used for the manufacture of beer.⁹¹ Beer-making is strictly a male occupation.⁹²

87. Ibid., p. 90; Lindblom, op. cit., p. 75.

88. Penwill, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

89. Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 498-500.

90. Ibid., pp. 160, 500.

91. Ibid., p. 518.

92. Ibid., p. 519.

The only ceremony marking the entry of the girl into the new home is observed at the door of the hut. The suitor's mother rubs fat on the girl's neck⁹³ after which she is invited into the house.⁹⁴ That night the girl sleeps with the youth on his bed but intercourse is forbidden. Early in the morning she arises early and sweeps out the hut and then goes back to bed. From this time forward she lives in a relationship of nthoni or "shame" with the mother-in-law. She dare not so much as look upon her mother-in-law. This makes for some awkwardness, in view of the fact that they both live for years in the same small hut. After the birth of the first child this feeling of shame diminishes somewhat and gradually decreases through the years.⁹⁵

On the second night in the mother-in-law's hut the couple may have coition, once only.⁹⁶ The following day the unmarried girl friends of the new bride arrive at the hut and sing and dance songs of lamentation for two days over the loss of one of their number.⁹⁷ Following this the bride is considered a married woman⁹⁸; life returns to normal and the appearance of pregnancy is eagerly awaited, proving that the match is a fertile one.

Even though the couple is married, the husband continues to send

93. This is a common symbol of ritual cleansing among the Akamba.

94. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 76.

95. Ibid., p. 77.

96. Penwill, op. cit., p. 6.

97. Ibid., pp. 6-7.

98. Middleton, op. cit., p. 90.

gifts to his mother-in-law, as well as his father-in-law, and to his father-in-law's wives and their children.⁹⁹

Forced marriages are almost unknown. There is generally mutual affection between the two marital partners. If, for the sake of a large price, the father gives his daughter to a rich man for whom she has no affection he runs the risk of losing her, "since more than one girl in such a position has taken her own life, and has been found hanging by a strap round her neck to the roof of the hut, or to a tree out in the fields."¹⁰⁰

The Akamba practice polygamous marriage if they can afford to, one reason being that each wife is sexually unapproachable for six months preceding childbirth. The senior wife is the head wife and orders the distaff affairs of the village. She usually consults the husband regarding the acceptability of any new wife he anticipates getting.¹⁰¹

Divorce is said to be uncommon now.¹⁰² In Hoffman's day (c. 1900) divorce was very common. He wrote, "A large part of their legal cases have to do with this matter."¹⁰³ Grounds for divorcing a wife include

99. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 77.

100. Ibid., p. 78.

101. Ibid., p. 80.

102. Middleton, op. cit., p. 90.

103. J. Hoffman, Gebürt, Heirat und Tod bei den Wakamba, p. 18.

idleness, laziness, intractability, and habitual unfaithfulness. The husband can get a divorce if it is discovered that his wife is a witch. The wife can demand a divorce on the basis of complaints of merciless and recurrent beatings by her husband. If she is sick and the husband refuses to get her the proper "medicine" or if she does not conceive, and her husband refuses to take her to the medicine-man for the necessary treatment, she can also ask for a divorce. Since it is the wife's duty to provide food for the family from the family plot, she may ask for a divorce if the plot is too small and the husband refuses to negotiate for a larger area.¹⁰⁴ The woman is seldom left to the mercy of the man. Dundas has drawn the conclusion that, "Apart from her labours . . . the woman has not much at which to grumble, indeed, it is often a question whether she is not master in the long run, for her husband has very little control over her when she is obstreperous and finally, if exasperated, she will run away and the husband has to be content if he can recover what he has paid for her. By custom a man may not strike his wife in the field or if he does he must sacrifice a goat."¹⁰⁵

If a man proves impotent he invites in a trusted friend to perform the coitus necessary for impregnation. This is an arrangement which is thought of as proper. The biological father in this case has nothing

104. Fenwill, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-18.

105. C. Dundas, "History of Kitai," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 43:495.

to do with the child and the real husband is considered the true father.¹⁰⁶ Any children born by the wives of a particular man are considered to be his property.¹⁰⁷

If a girl does not become pregnant soon after marriage she must see a mundu mu versed in such matters. He mixes the latex from a wild fig tree, the undigested mixture from a goat's stomach, and a little of the woman's menstrual blood and saasars her navel with it. This is, of course, undertaken while she is menstruating.¹⁰⁸

It is considered highly disadvantageous for a circumcised man to die before being married because a man's wives and children are primarily responsible for keeping alive his memory in the after-life. Should this occur, the father of the dead man arranges to obtain a wife for him. The girl "is married to the name of an unmarried man who has died. She bears him children, usually by his brother as genitor."¹⁰⁹

Death and Burial

Formerly, burial in sparsely settled areas was only afforded the atnia and their first wives. Others were dragged out to be eaten by the hyenas. In densely populated areas all corpses were and still are

106. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 83.

107. Ibid., p. 84.

108. G. Beresford-Stooke, "Ceremonies Designed to Influence Fertility of Women," Man, 28:177.

109. Middleton, op. cit., p. 90.

buried.¹¹⁰ The researcher can not recall an instance in his experience in which a corpse was dragged out. When a man is about to die, four atunia take up positions around him, one at the head, another at the feet and one on each side. When death occurs they continue watching while the women wail violently. The men are expected to remain composed and are even known to laugh and joke at this time as they help themselves to a pinch of snuff from the dead man's snuffbox. It is unbecoming for a man to show his feelings.¹¹¹

Owing to the fact that no one wishes to dig the grave, arguments often ensue but it is usually the younger atunia who dig it finally. The corpse is usually placed in an embryonic attitude and laid on its side in the grave, a male on the right side with the cheek resting on the right hand and a female just the opposite of this.¹¹² Only atunia may be present at a burial and only they may touch a dead body. The corpse is buried naked and usually nothing is buried with it.¹¹³

If a childless junior wife dies her body is taken out through a specially made hole in the hut, never through the door.¹¹⁴ Children are buried by the old women. If a dead child has not as yet had its

110. Loc. cit.

111. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 103.

112. Ibid., pp. 103-104.

113. Middleton, op. cit., pp. 90-91.

114. The Akikyu used to bury only their circumcised men and the women who had borne at least five children. C. W. Hobley, "Further Researches into Kikyu and Kamba Religions, Beliefs and Customs," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 41:417.

two lower incisors removed (this is done as a matter of course in the life of the young Akamba) they are knocked out before burial. After the burial of the child the parents must have ritual coitus.¹¹⁵

The details of burial are often changed because it is believed that if there is a series of deaths in a community, it may be due to the mode of burial; so they vary the details of the burials until the deaths cease.¹¹⁶

Stones and thorns are piled on top of the graves in order to prevent the hyenas from digging up the corpses.¹¹⁷

The women mourn or rather wail for from two to five days, following a death. The entire village is considered to be unclean. No one may enter or leave it and no one within its borders may have intercourse. On a subsequent day¹¹⁸ all inhabitants are purified by being smeared with the contents of the stomach of a ritually killed goat. The hut of the dead person and the utensils within are also sprinkled with this mixture. Then follows an important part of the cleansing ceremony which must not be omitted; the parents of the deceased must perform ritual coitus, as must the widow with the successor of the deceased. If a woman dies, the husband must purify himself by having

115. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 106.

116. Ibid., p. 107.

117. During Johnstone's time, shortly after the turn of the century, the Akamba buried only the atonia, the others were cast out to be eaten by the hyenas. The Masai still practice this method. H. B. Johnstone, "Notes on the Tribes Occupying Mombasa Sub-district, British East Africa," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 32:265.

118. This takes place on the third day, according to Middleton. Middleton, op. cit., p. 91.

intercourse with one of his other wives: if he has none, he must find another woman whose husband has recently died and perform the ceremony with her.¹¹⁹ After this purification the members of the village can have intercourse as before.

Should someone in the family be away from the village during this time, upon return he is shown a stick the exact length of the corpse, which was placed in the hut of the deceased at his death. The stick is then thrown out just like a corpse being thrown out. He must then be cleansed as were the others. Following this ceremony he may then enter the village.¹²⁰

The Religious Context

As in the foregoing section where the social structure of the Akamba was presented briefly, so in the present section the religious context will be set out in broad outline so that the salient features of the religious system become apparent.

In discussing the religious system of a people several considerations must be kept in mind. The first is that it is quite unrealistic to present ethnological material in a manner in which the religious system of a culture such as that of the Akamba is separated and seen as another "chapter." It is done in this study only so that long discursive explanations of the religious system need not be made in the

119. Lindblom, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

120. *Loc. cit.*

analytical sections of the study, thus allowing for added clarity of presentation and argument.

Secondly the term "religious" is in itself misleading. The Bantu have no concept of "religion" as the Western man thinks of it, that is, as a theological system separate and distinct from other considerations. Dundas, an authority of Akamba law wrote,

It will be seen that almost every subject either directly brings us to a question of religion or hints at the influence and presence of the spirits. The tilling of the fields, the building of a house, are practically acts of religion, the law is in the hands of those who more particularly are dedicated to the service of the spirits, and its provisions frequently are ultimately religious observances; in fact, compensation seems to be as much a religious observance as a religious requirement. . . . To sum up, religion enters into the most insignificant departments and acts of the Akamba's life.¹²¹

The German expression, Weltanschauung, comes much nearer to defining the concept of the Akamba's "religion." And it is in this sense that it will be used throughout this paper.

With these considerations in mind, the Akamba's religious views are reviewed.

Creation Myths

On the basis of their rich folk lore, one would expect the Akamba to have a wealth of mythological material concerning metaphysical issues from which one could abstract some basic assumptions regarding their world-view. But the search yields little. They have no myths

121. Dundas, op. cit., p. 538.

concerning the origin of heaven and earth. But they do often relate two simple myths, one of the creation of men and the other of the coming of death.

The myth of the creation of men is extremely simple. Lindblom records it as follows:

Of the first men, one pair, a man and his wife, came out of a termite hole. Another pair, likewise a man and his wife, were thrown down by Mulungu (God) from the clouds, bringing with them a cow, a goat, and a sheep. They fell down on the rock Nsaue, south-east of Kilungu, and there built a village. Both pairs had children, who married among themselves and formed new families. From some of their descendants came the Kamba clans; others gave origin to the Masai, the Akikuyu, etc.¹²²

The myth says very little. It reveals the belief that some men came directly from God, and that some came up from the nether world, but the fact that two couples were required is possibly due to the tribe's abhorrence of incest. There is no hint in their religious views that ethical dualism was a factor in creation, nor even after it, for that matter.¹²³

The myth regarding the coming of death is not restricted to the Akamba but is known throughout Bantu Africa and among some non-Bantu peoples.¹²⁴ It is accepted that God did not want people to die and decided to send them a message to that effect.

122. Lindblom, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

123. *Loc. cit.*

124. The researcher discovered this myth among many Bantu tribes as well as among the Jaluo, a Nilotic tribe.

The chameleon was known to him as a certainly slow but very reliable being, for which reason he chose him to convey the important message to the children of men. The chameleon set off, took the matter lightly, and stopped now and then to catch flies. At length, however, he came to the human beings, and began: 'I have been commissioned to, I have been commissioned to. . . .' He could get no further. For some reason or other Mungu however had changed his mind and decided that man should die, 'like the roots of the aloe.' The swift-flying weaver bird was sent out with the new message, and he arrived just as the chameleon stood stammering. The bird conveyed his message quickly and concisely, and since that day mankind has been mortal.¹²⁵

This myth is probably more of an animal tale than a serious attempt to explain through myth the doctrine of death.

The Akamba are not given to speculation on the basic issues of life and death in an historical setting of a lineal nature in which case original myth would play a major part. Their world-view is concerned with essence more than with existence, which, in fact, almost removes their speculation from an historical context.

Therefore expressions of their world-view are not found in myths or legends of the past but in the essential everyday relationships carried on without regard to space or time. Consequently, an attempt to determine the Akamba's world-view must include the way an Akamba relates himself to four essential areas of being, namely, to the Supreme Being, to ancestors, to other spirits, and to contemporaries "in the flesh." The following introduction to the religious views of the Akamba deals with the first three relationships; the last was the

125. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 253.

subject of the preceding sections.

The Supreme Being

The Akamba have several names for the Supreme Being. The most common is Mulungu. It is found in at least forty Bantu dialects¹²⁶ and corresponds very closely to Mungu of Swahili which is at the present very widespread. Where the Akamba border the Masai they use the Hamitic equivalent of Mulungu, Ngai. Mulungu is also called the Mwumbi, the creator, from umba, to fashion. More rarely He is called the "Cleaver" or "Shaper," Mwatwanga, in the sense of carving something out as the Akamba carve stools from a piece of log.¹²⁷

The Akamba have evidently not personalized their Mulungu to any great extent. In fact Hobley states that Mulungu is, "an impersonal diety who is vaguely supposed to live in the sky."¹²⁸ Lindblom almost repeats him in concluding that, "Among the Akamba, Mulungu is a conception which, both as regards meaning and name, corresponds to what is known from so many other Bantu peoples, viz., a divinity that seems almost impersonal, since there are no conceptions--or very vague ones--of its being and characteristics."¹²⁹ It is possible, however, to see how the Akamba view Mulungu by examining the way in which they relate themselves to Him. During the initiation ceremonies

126. Ibid., p. 243.

127. Ibid., pp. 244-245.

128. C. W. Hobley, Ethnology of the Akamba and Other East African Tribes, p. 85.

129. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 243.

an offering of beer is made to Mulungu with the prayer that the initiates will mature physically.¹³⁰ When rain is withheld it is expected that Mulungu is doing it.¹³¹ The most holy of animals, the hyrax, is thought of as living in proximity with the Mulungu spirit,¹³² and a medicine is made from the little animal which is sprinkled on the fields to ensure fertility, and upon the newly circumcised penis for the same purpose.¹³³ Inexplicable natural phenomena such as lightning and earthquake are attributed to Mulungu. Prayers of thanksgiving are made to Mulungu when a normal child is born.¹³⁴

It might be concluded that Mulungu is the ultimate source of power, especially the power to reproduce. His ways are inexplicable. His acts are not punitive. Yet recourse is made to him only as a last resort, when all other agencies fail. As an Mkaaba once stated, "One does not pray when there is no reason."¹³⁵

Whether Mulungu is a personal or impersonal force has come in for some debate.¹³⁶ Both Hobley and Lindblom assert that he is an "It,"

130. Ibid., p. 46.

131. Ibid., p. 277.

132. Dundas, op. cit., p. 524.

133. Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 297-298.

134. Ibid., p. 245.

135. Loc. cit.

136. That more research needs to be made into the idea of the nature of God among the Akamba is evident from the contradictory observations put forward. Bostock, in writing on the Taita, a close blood relative of the Akamba, states, "(God) was looked upon as a great troublemaker." P. G. Bostock, The Peoples of Kenya: The Taita, p. 29. Middleton, in reference to the Akamba's God writes, "Ngai is in the sky and is held to be well-disposed towards mankind." Middleton, op. cit., p. 91.

a force. This arises partly from the grammar of the word. Mulungu, when used alone, could be personal but its plural form falls into the class of substantives "which embraces objects without independent individual life, such as trees and parts of the bodies,"¹³⁷ in which case it means "luck." This seems to confirm the fact that Mulungu can not be pluralized; the meaning of the word itself undergoes a shift of meaning when the class is changed. It does not preclude that the singular form is not personal. The fact that this same Force is called both "Creator" and "Shaper," using the personal prefix would hardly allow one to conclude that He is not personalized. It is not at all strange in Swahili, one of the Bantu dialects, for a word to move in and out of the personal class yet retain its personal meaning. For instance mtu is a man, jitu is a giant, and kijitu is a dwarf, only the first of which is in the personal class.

Father Tempels has taken as the basis for his discussion of Bantu philosophy,¹³⁸ that God is an "It," from which emanates all power, or force vitale, to use Tempels' words. He goes on to construct a rational philosophical system on the basis of this concept. God is the source from which every phenomenon in reality draws its force vitale. The administration of this power is through the hierarchy of prospective receivers. The potency of this power depends upon the receiver's position in the hierarchy. It also depends, as

137. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 243.

138. Placide Tempels, Bantu Philosophy.

far as mortal man is concerned, upon his relative position in the hierarchy. To guard his hierarchical position is one of his prime interests in life. What is morally good and juridically good is that which maintains and increases the vital gift received from God.

This theory answers many of the questions regarding ethics, and the notion of hierarchy is certainly on the right track. However Le Roy gathered materials from several east-central African tribes which led him to believe that at least the tribes he studied had a concept of God as a person.¹³⁹ Lindblom felt that Le Roy closed his eyes to the negative evidence, and considered his study untrustworthy.¹⁴⁰

More recently the Bantuologist, Edwin W. Smith, edited a collection of monographs written by some more recent students of African culture. He produced the work under the title, African Ideas of God. He writes in the Introduction, "It is pertinent to enquire as to the relation between the African's dynamism and his theology; in other words, what connection is there between his belief in this essential energy and his belief in God?"¹⁴¹ On the basis of a study made by the contributors to this work, Smith concluded that, "The unequivocal assertion that the 'High God' idea does not exist in Africa, that the supreme Power is always thought of as 'It' and not 'He,' cannot be accepted in view of the evidence set out in this book and elsewhere."¹⁴²

139. Alexander Le Roy, The Religion of the Primitives, p. 170.

140. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 249.

141. Edwin W. Smith, African Ideas of God, p. 19.

142. Ibid., p. 21.

"We have to do with a High God and not with 'an abstract power or natural potency,' Cosmic Mana."¹⁴³

It appears to the investigator that the Akamba have not been accustomed to making any sort of distinction between personal and impersonal spiritual phenomena.¹⁴⁴ This seems like a more sophisticated distinction than he is prepared to make. Yet Lindblom did find a representation of Mulungu on a medicine man's gourd in which He was drawn as having legs, an eye and genitalia.¹⁴⁵ Thus, in the mind of some Akamba, at least, Mulungu is thought of as a person or at least as possessing characteristics of a personality with the power to see, to walk, and to reproduce.

On the basis of the evidence provided by the authorities on the Akamba it is to be concluded that any reference to Mulungu as "Cosmic Mana" or "Force Vitale" does not take into account all of the facts.

Mulungu is rarely addressed specifically when sacrifices are offered. However, in a few instances which concern the "national welfare" Mulungu is supplicated directly. But, according to Kenyatta, "When a sacrifice is made to the High God . . . the ancestors must

143. Ibid., p. 22.

144. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 250.

145. Ibid., p. 251.

join in making the sacrifice."¹⁴⁶

"God," writes Parrinder, "is the resort of the desperate, when all else has failed. Then, despite his greatness and distance, he can be appealed to directly."¹⁴⁷ Kenyatta asserts that among the Akikuyu, an individual dare not make sacrifices to God because sacrifices to Him are only made through the family unit with the father as priest.¹⁴⁸

The Ancestral Spirits

The word for ancestral spirits is aimu. While the spirit is still incarnate it is called kin, soul or shadow, and ngo, meaning breath or shadow. It might be convenient to call the kin or ngo the "soul" but this is a foreign concept. The Akamba's concept of that which lives on after death is more like "personality" than an abstract "soul" for it carries into the nether world its emotional and relational patterns and the hierarchical status which it experienced in life.¹⁴⁹ Upon the death of the body the discarnate spirits join the spirits of the ancestors which have gone on before them. Both men and women have aimu, neither being superior to the other.¹⁵⁰ This is

146. Jomo Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, p. 233.

147. E. Geoffrey Parrinder, African Traditional Religion, p. 39.

148. Kenyatta, op. cit., p. 308.

149. Smith, op. cit., p. 23.

150. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 210.

evidently not the case with all Bantu peoples. Raam made the statement that among the Wachaga, "Man and woman belong to different 'soul categories'".¹⁵¹ Whence the aimu go is not always certain. In southern Ukamba where the Chyulu mountain range terminates, the last mountain, Mount Kyumbe, is considered one of the localities in which the spirits live. The Akamba simply refer to the mountain as Mulungu. However, aimu generally make their way to trees, preferably fig-trees of the species mmo or to other prominent natural features such as solitary rocks or pools.¹⁵² Though localized in these places, they are by no means bound to remain there. They take peculiar interest in the affairs of their kinsmen and at times frequent their old haunts at night to talk with their people, though they are seldom seen. They keep themselves well informed of how things are going among their people.¹⁵³ The aimu appear to the clansmen in dreams which are considered to be actual encounters.¹⁵⁴ They bring messages which often have to do with the coming fortune or misfortune of the people.¹⁵⁵ They also warn of coming raids and epidemics.¹⁵⁶ The aimu continue to concern themselves with the affairs of their kinsmen because their

151. J. Raam, "Christianity and African Puberty Rites," International Review of Missions, 16:585.

152. Ibid., p. 91.

153. Ibid., p. 211.

154. Ibid., p. 212.

155. If an Mkwaba has had a bad dream, upon waking he will extinguish the fire from a firebrand and throw it away saying, "May my bad dream go out like this fire-brand." Lindblom, op. cit., p. 211.

156. Hopley, op. cit., p. 85; Middleton, op. cit., p. 92.

existence is in some way affected by the frequency with which they receive sacrifices from the living. When sacrifices are slow in coming, the aimu punish the offenders by sending misfortune in the form of accidents and disease to men and herds.¹⁵⁷ Both the living and the dead must maintain constant vigilance lest their very existence be threatened.

Though aimu are respected with some awe it is commonly thought that they can be outwitted. If a person wishes to leave a hut which is being supervised by an aimu for some reason, he will simply crawl through a hole to the rear. Also the pseudonyms which are often employed are evidently an attempt to outwit the aimu. A woman who finds herself in desperate straits, having born a number of children who have died, throws respectability to the wind and calls the next child a derogatory name such as "Hyena," a highly despised animal, for it eats human corpses.¹⁵⁸ An Mkaaba told Hoffman, "Our little girl is called "Hippopotams" because her mother said, 'My first children, who all died as babies, had human names. By giving this child the name of an animal perhaps she will live'."¹⁵⁹ It appears as though the aimu hear better than they see.

The aimu are not immortal but pass away into oblivion. They lose potency with age.¹⁶⁰ They evidently exist as long as they get food

157. Lindblom, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

158. *Ibid.*, p. 215.

159. Hoffman, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

160. John Middleton, Lugbara Religion, p. 46.

through sacrifices but when a new generation comes along who has no memory of them, they are easily neglected.¹⁶¹

As noted earlier, aimu at times choose to be reincarnated. They usually inform the mother of their intention before the birth. The child is then named after the aimu even though it be of a different sex.¹⁶² How long these aimu inhabit the body of the youngster is not known. At the time of initiation the children are certainly thought of as containing aimu of their own.¹⁶³

It was also noted earlier that the participation of the aimu in reproduction is essential. Each woman has an imu for a husband at the same time as she has a human one. If a woman does not become pregnant within six months or so after marriage, sacrifice is offered to her spirit husband on the assumption that he holds the key to fertility.¹⁶⁴

Sacrifices

There are two types of sacrifices, the private sacrifices and the public ones.

Private Sacrifices

Sacrifice is offered to the aimu in various ways, the most common

161. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 157.

162. Ibid., p. 36.

163. John Middleton, The Central Tribes of the North-Eastern Bantu, p. 92.

164. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 211.

of which is the gift of food or drink poured out onto the ground by the head of the household before the meal. Only a pinch is given inasmuch as the Akamba believe that the aimu, being spirits, need only the essence of the food. The Abaluyia of Kavirondo, in explanation of their customs of putting offerings of beer, gruel, or meat into their ancestral shrines, say, "the ancestral spirits [have] neither grain nor meat on which to live and therefore had to be given occasional offerings, of which they only inhale the smell for being 'like shadows' they would not need substantial food."¹⁶⁵ The Akamba concept of sacrificing is much like this.¹⁶⁶ When things are proceeding normally in the community, no special sacrifices are made and the little huts which are built in the sacred groves, ithembo, are allowed to crumble. Dundas observed that "The huts are often allowed to fall very much into dilapidation and are not restored until the spirits are thought to be angry."¹⁶⁷ Brutzer recorded the words which a medicine man, who was in contact with an aimu, spoke to the community atumia. "Go to the place where the sacrifices are offered to So-and-so, build the hut of So-and-so, which has fallen into disrepair. He must sleep outside and since he must sleep outside the

165. Guenter Wagner, "The Abaluyia of Kavirondo," in Daryll Forde, African Worlds, p. 35.

166. Lindblom records that the aimu need the material of the food. If this would be the case, the quantity of food would be a factor. But the frequency of offering is more important than the quantity of the offerings. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 216.

167. Dundas, op. cit., p. 538.

rain is withheld lest he get wet. Bring him food, too, he is hungry. Bring him also seeds to plant."¹⁶⁸

Hobley observes, "The intense desire of Africans for offspring is probably due to the fact that children are expected to sacrifice to the spirits of their dead parents, and the ghost of one who has left no posterity is therefore in a piteous plight."¹⁶⁹

A word of caution is necessary in thinking of Akamba sacrifices. In many instances the sacrifice is so minute that to give it or to refuse to give it would not make any material difference to the man in the flesh. Many sacrifices are offered in which there is no "sacrifice" at all. As was noted earlier, aimu need sustenance produced by the essence of the stuff to keep alive. However this does not seem to be the complete explanation. Could not the aimu partake of the essence of food which is not offered to them? Yet no Mkanba would for one moment believe that an aimu could get nourishment from any other food than from that which is given him in the proper manner.

The researcher feels that the sacrificial system of the Akamba is closely allied with and reinforces the concept of hierarchy. As the concept of hierarchy is strengthened in Akamba life by food so in receiving sacrifices the aimu are treated in order of hierarchy as though they were present bodily at the meal. As an mtunia partakes of food before an nthele so an imu eats before an ntunia. Therefore,

168. E. Brutzer, Der Geistesglaube bei den Kamba, p. 7.

169. C. W. Hobley, Bantu Beliefs and Magic, p. 30.

when food is being served, when beer is being made, when the harvest is gathered, the aimu expect to be served first and when they are neglected or served out of turn, the sacrifice, as far as they are concerned, is inefficacious. By reinforcing their rights of proper consideration in the hierarchy of the clan and family by a system of rewards and punishments, the aimu hope to be remembered for what they are by their kinsmen in the flesh, thus being assured a long life beyond the grave.¹⁷⁰

To be sure, after death the ikamba do not face judgment and punishment for deeds done on earth but it would be indeed awkward, upon entering the "beyond," to encounter an emaciated imu who had looked to you while you were in the flesh, for nutritional sacrifices.¹⁷¹

The mode of offering domestic sacrifices also reinforces the hierarchical arrangement in the home. A son cannot offer sacrifices as long as the father is alive. And women can offer sacrifice only when permitted to do so by the medicine men, the mundu aue. Therefore the patriarch of the homestead is, in a sense, a priest. Through him alone the necessary sacrifices are made. This gives this patriarch a great deal of power and influence. Yet he himself, in his latter years, walks very circumspectly for he will soon be departing this life and will be dependent upon his earthly kin for life-giving sacrifices. So the ledger is again balanced, equilibrium is again established

¹⁷⁰. Lindblom, *op. cit.*, pp. 216-219.

¹⁷¹. Whether or not one's position in the hierarchy in the world of the spirits is determined by one's faithfulness with regards to sacrifices while on earth is not altogether clear.

and maintained.

Of lesser importance are the sacrifices offered by a person when passing a shrine or any dwelling place of an imu. Usually a passerby, no matter what age or rank, tosses a bit of grass, a pinch of snuff or some such trifle on the spot.¹⁷² These heaps can be seen along the Kamba paths even today.

Public Sacrifices

Individual or domestic sacrifices, as was noted, are offered regularly, but this is not the case in public sacrifice. It is only when famine or disease threatens that the various homesteads congregate to offer public sacrifice. These sacrifices are offered, not to departed kinsmen, but to renowned deceased medicine men or to some other highly respected person who, in life, helped not only his own family but also the general community. Mulungu is usually implicated on these occasions.

The public sacrifices are offered at the ithembo, which is, quite literally, a "place of sacrifice." The ithembo are usually located at the grave of an imu or in a copse dominated by one or more wild fig trees near to the grave. Each place of sacrifice has its own name.¹⁷³

When the need for sacrifice becomes evident, the medicine man is consulted, and if he is favorable the day for the sacrifice is set.

172. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 218.

173. Ibid., p. 219.

The sacrifice may consist of a goat, a bull or bullock, a sheep, or fowl. The medicine man determines the appropriate sacrifice but he has no part in its slaughter. The atumia ya ithembo, with their wives, take the sacrificial animal to the ithembo where, in the presence of all, they first strangle and then slaughter the animal, pouring the blood mixed with beer at the foot of the tree or on the grave, praying for rain, or whatever the need may be. The elder wives of the ithembo offer the women's sacrifice, the fruit of the fields, where the blood and beer were poured out.¹⁷⁴ Following the sacrifice the atumia gather together and eat the choice pieces of the animal, offering the remainder to the imu by placing it at the place of sacrifice.¹⁷⁵

It is very difficult to get an imu to move from one ithembo to another but with the proper amounts of good food placed in an equally habitable place, the aimu can be cajoled to make a move.¹⁷⁶ Thus the Akamba could migrate and take their beneficent aimu with them. The Akamba obviously make a careful distinction between the aimu and the spirit of a tree, a rock, or any other place in which an imu has taken up residence. The temptation to call their religion a religion of dendrolatry must be carefully avoided.

174. Ibid., pp. 219-222.

175. Ibid., p. 222.

176. Dundas, op. cit., p. 538.

In times of great peril, such as persistent devastating drought, the Akamba have been known to offer human sacrifice at the ithembo. This is now forbidden by the Government. They either kidnapped a Kikuyu child for this purpose or they took a child from the "rain clan" of their own tribe and, together with the sacrificial goat, buried it alive at the ithembo. The mother was given a gift of consolation.¹⁷⁷ Large areas would unite when a human was to be sacrificed.¹⁷⁸

Hobley contends that prayers for rain are made only to Mulungu and not to the ancestral spirits.¹⁷⁹ Lindblom did not enter into this aspect of the sacrifice. Hobley also states that there are mathembo for Mulungu as distinguished from those of the aimu. No other authority agrees with him. It is to be remembered that Mulungu ultimately controls the rain as He does all other natural phenomena such as storms and lightning. Disease, on the other hand, is sent by disgruntled aimu. However, when rain is desired, the tribesmen implore the aimu to intercede with Mulungu or intervene in any way possible to stop the drought. But it might bear repeating that the Akamba are not as limited by theological niceties as some Western peoples and when they need something desperately, they tap every possible source of help, thus the distinction between imprecations made to the aimu and those made to Mulungu are not sharply drawn.

177. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 224.

178. Middleton, op. cit., p. 93.

179. Hobley, op. cit., p. 53.

The efficacy of a sacrifice does not depend upon a formula. "There is no fixed order of ritual or prayer which can be nullified by a mistake."¹⁸⁰

The Mundu Aue

The ancestral spirits choose a certain number of Akamba each generation to act as their representatives on earth: they are called mundu aue (mundu mue is the singular form; its root meaning is "wise one"). A mundu mue is generally recognized as such at birth for he usually enters the world holding a peg in his hand, e.g. divination pebbles may be found in the afterbirth, or some other strange object may be encountered in the birth. Finding such an object, the mother carefully hides it away and gives it to the child when it grows older. He will use these objects in his profession as his credentials.¹⁸¹

As the potential mundu mue develops he is expected to show signs of the fact that he has been chosen for this calling. For instance he will play most happily when alone, and soon has strange dreams and visions. He will not, while a child, be under the influence of any mundu mue but is believed to be in contact with the aimu directly.¹⁸² Middleton makes the observation that the young mundu mue is regarded as having feminine characteristics.¹⁸³ It can happen, of course,

180. Middleton, op. cit., p. 93.

181. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 254.

182. Loc. cit.

183. Middleton, op. cit., p. 65.

that a child, born without the usual appendages, may display characteristics peculiar to a mundu mue. He is allowed to develop into a mundu mue on a par with others. Dundas characterizes a mundu mue thus; "Curiously enough, most medicine men evince a shyness and nervousness very often which may be so pronounced at times that one would think them mentally deficient. As a matter of fact, such is often the case, and the natives regard them as imbeciles in ordinary matters. They are said to be extraordinarily absent-minded and thriftless. . . . The more proficient they are in their art the less sane are they held to be."¹⁸⁴

Brutzer, who carefully described the manner in which a person becomes a mundu mue, makes several significant observations.¹⁸⁵ In a dream the young man is introduced to a certain medicinal plant by the aimu, after which he awakes and finds the plant in his hand. He gives this to his mother who puts it with the other objects relating to his peculiar calling. This can go on for some time. The mother works very closely with the son and is caretaker for the secrets revealed to the son. Finally, when the son is about twenty years old, the father, without consulting any other mundu mue, sets a day for a feaston which he kills a sacrificial goat, prays to the spirits to bless the objects which the young man now has and finally tells his

184. Dundas, op. cit., pp. 533-534.

185. Lindblom records this in German. Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 255-256.

son, "Now it is enough. Heal and prophesy."¹⁸⁶ The whole community partakes in a big feast and a new mundu mue is made. Inheritance has nothing to do with making a mundu mue, even though some families may have a higher incidence of such persons than others. It is also to be noted that each mundu mue is independent, and is not a part of a secret society.¹⁸⁷ But his reputation has yet to be made and many a medicine man has great difficulty in establishing a name for himself in the community.

As noted earlier, the mundu mue stands in a peculiar relation to the aimu. He orders sacrifices to be made to the aimu but he dare not touch the sacrifice or help in its slaughter. Both Lindblom¹⁸⁸ and Middleton¹⁸⁹ could find no reason for this practice. However, when his position as intermediary is considered it is seen that it would be unsuitable for him to engage in sacrificial activities for he has no need of them, seeing that he is already in communion with the aimu and need not offer sacrifice in order to obtain a right of entry as is necessary for his fellow mortals.

The position of the mundu mue in the hierarchy of the tribe is significant. When he walks with others on the path he must always be

186. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 256.

187. Among the Masai, Lumbwa, and Nandi, hereditary medicine men with occult powers may become recognized as chiefs. Hobley, op. cit., p. 326.

188. Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 257-258.

189. Middleton, op. cit., p. 95.

given the lead position,¹⁹⁰ even though he is travelling with his elders.¹⁹¹ Upon his death the old men dance in solitude around his corpse; this is the only instance in which old men dance.¹⁹² His corpse is buried with unusual dignity and respect befitting only people of very high station.¹⁹³ Also, when a mundu mue wishes to have a new hut, the entire community helps build it. Before commencing the work old women and youths dance on the spot. This is unknown when a layman builds a hut.¹⁹⁴

Summarily, he enjoys an exalted position among his fellows and is therefore given every respect and consideration. His peculiar relation to the aimu is the basis of this respect.

The mundu mue divines by means of a calabash which contains various bones, seeds, etc. He gets in touch with the aimu, then pours some of the objects out onto either a leopard or goat skin and divines on the basis of the way in which the objects fall. The mundu mue charges fees for these divinations as he does for all of his services

190. This is probably so that he will drive evil spirits off of the path.

191. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 257.

192. Middleton, op. cit., p. 95.

193. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 256.

194. Ibid., p. 257.

yet one looks in vain to find a mundu mue who could be called rich by his fellows.¹⁹⁵

Some medicine men do nothing but divine; others, called itima, only heal; while some may do both. Even among the itima the division of labor is very pronounced. Some can only cure one particular disease. This accounts in large part for the large number of practicing medicine men.¹⁹⁶

The fact of the matter is that even non-cult people can use certain medicines for healing but the mundu mue holds the "key" to the mode of application. Many herbs are used, however, without the aid of a medicine man.¹⁹⁷

The mundu mue's work is efficacious because he enlists the help of the beneficent spirits, the aimu, to make the medicines "work." Both the type of medicine and its application are prescribed by the aimu in dreams.

The mundu mue are instrumental in the removing of epidemics. They also give help to the women, when the women request it, regarding time for planting, predicting rain, etc. In case of drought the women go en masse to the mundu mue who, though he can not make rain, informs the community why the aimu are angry and tells them what to do to rectify matters so that the aimu can once again send rain.

195. Ibid., pp. 259-261.

196. Ibid., p. 269.

197. Ibid., p. 271.

The Maleficent Spirits

So far in this section only the potentially beneficent spirits have been reviewed; they were the aimu who left this life honorably. Those who have departed this life dishonorably, and have no one to offer them sacrifices, roam disgruntled and full of malice, ready to use what power they have as supernatural beings to disrupt the pacific life of their clansmen.¹⁹⁸ Smith calls these spirits the "revenants"; the Swahili word is mizimu, while the Akamba refer to them as aimu ya kitombo.¹⁹⁹

The mundu que work in consonance with the aimu, the spirits who are interested in the welfare of the clan.²⁰⁰ their counterpart, the mundu aci, relate themselves to the aimu ya kitombo to carry out their maleficent designs.²⁰¹ Lindblom defines woi as "witchcraft, magic," but these terms have been so thoroughly abused that this study will use them only with caution.

While a mundu mue must be, in a sense, predestined to practice his art, anyone can become a mwoi by simply apprenticing himself to a practicing mwoi.²⁰² Penwill claims that, "woi is a field in which

198. Smith, op. cit., p. 23.

199. C. W. Hobley, Ethnology of the Akamba and Other East African Tribes, p. 89.

200. Lindblom has unfortunately overlooked this most important distinction. The section of his work regarding "magic" is quite deficient in interpretation. Hobley had a more comprehensive grasp of the relation between occult forces and the aimu.

201. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 279.

202. Ibid., p. 279.

Kamba are reputed by other tribes to have high accomplishments."²⁰³

Woi takes on many forms, from a simple medicine to distract a sweetheart's mother while the youth sleeps with the daughter, to murder by poisoning.²⁰⁴ A man skilled in woi can enter wild animals to carry out his designs if he so wishes, or can kill simply by blowing some potent powder in the direction of his enemy. The use of woi is for anti-social, selfish purposes. Lindblom lists one exception to this, the aphrodisiac. But whether this woi is employed in a strictly legal fashion is not clear.²⁰⁵ The mundu aie also make a love potion which is probably used for legitimate love. The mundu mwoi can also supply, in some cases, a prophylactic to render impotent the woi produced by other practitioners. There are some areas in which there seem to be overlap in the work of these two professions. However, the mundu aue wage constant war upon the disrupting forces unleashed by the mundu aoi, and so have been called "witch doctors," which, of course, they are, but hunting witches is certainly not their only, nor their central, task, as the foregoing description of their profession makes clear.

Woi is generally effected through personal appurtenances, such as clothing and implements. That is, the practitioner pronounces woi upon the person whom the appurtenance represents. For this reason an

203. Penwill, op. cit., p. 93.

204. Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 280-281.

205. Ibid., p. 283.

Mkamba is careful to cover up his movements and carefully discards his cut finger nails and cut hair. Even a person's name is considered an appurtenance.²⁰⁶ For this reason they use pseudonyms when encountering strangers.²⁰⁷ That the name is quite identical with the person is not a strange belief among peoples of Africa today.²⁰⁸

Makwa and Thabu

Middleton defines makwa as, "a supernatural sanction enforcing rules of conduct."²⁰⁹ He also says that, "if not removed, it results in sores, wasting and eventually death."²¹⁰ Neither Middleton nor Hobley make any distinction between makwa and thabu while Lindblom does make the distinction that thabu is like a physical disease while makwa is a psychic phenomenon.²¹¹ He considers makwa to be much more serious and is more difficult to remove.

Both of these diseases occur when there is a serious infraction of tribal rules. For instance, if one kills the totemic animal or marries within his own clan he contracts thabu. Hobley lists ten ways in which thabu and makwa can be contracted.²¹² They follow here in an abbreviated fashion.

206. Lucien Levy-Bruhl, The 'Soul' of the Primitive, p. 127.

207. Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 287-288.

208. Ibid., p. 289.

209. Middleton, op. cit., p. 94.

210. Loc. cit.

211. Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 302-303.

212. C. W. Hobley, Bantu Beliefs and Magic, pp. 128-132.

1. When a death occurs in a village it must be ritually cleansed by the stumbis, and until this is done, strict continence is to be observed by all. If a man has intercourse in disobedience to this rule, both he and the woman get makwa. If a daughter of the deceased who lives in another village visits her home village within eleven days of her father's death, she too becomes afflicted.

2. When a man lies on his mother's bed or removes something from it he gets makwa.

3. Upon the death of a father the sons may succeed to his wives but only after the wives are properly purified. If a son has intercourse with one of them before purification is completed, he becomes afflicted with makwa.

4. After the death of a father the paternal uncle must first partake of some honey from the hives of the deceased. Until this is done any son who takes honey catches the disease.

5. If a woman loses a baby by death, unless her breasts are ceremonially cleansed, the succeeding child will have makwa.

6. If a man has intercourse with a married woman in the woods while the cattle are grazing, the entire herd gets the disease.

7. If a woman is forced to have intercourse by a man, all children born to the union will have the disease.

8. An entire village becomes makwa if a hyena defecates there. (This is probably because hyenas eat human corpses.)

9. If a mundu mie places makwa upon one of his wives, anyone other than himself who cohabits with her will become makwa.

10. If one goes to his mother's village and eats food there during the funeral ceremonies of a dead person, he will be stricken with makwa.

These are only some of the obvious ways of contracting the disease. Hobley listed sixty-eight causes of makwa-thabu among the Akikuyu²¹³ but the Akamba look down on the Akikuyu for this reason deriding them for the fact that they are thabu-ridden.²¹⁴

For every thabu or makwa there is a remedy. The main ingredient for all ceremonial cleansing is the undigested mixture removed from the stomach of a goat; it is called ng'ondu. There are experts who can remove these diseases. Those versed in the curing of thabu must have first been bereaved of some near relative, after which they pursued the study leading to a proficiency in preparing ng'ondu. The initial requirement for a person to enter upon the study of the removal of makwa is to have a run of deaths within his family. There are no initiation fees and these two types of practitioners are separate from the atumia clubs altogether, nor need they be mundu aue.²¹⁵

In concluding this section on the ancestral spirits, a statement by Parrinder is considered fitting: "To us the idea of ancestral priority has just no meaning, but to these African men and women . . .

213. Ibid., pp. 106-125.

214. Ibid., p. 128.

215. C. W. Hobley, Ethnology of the Akamba and Other East African Tribes, pp. 301-303.

life from day to day and, we might legitimately say, from moment to moment, has no meaning at all apart from ancestral presence and ancestral power.²¹⁶

Other Spirits

In addition to the various aimu which, in after-life, carry on activities similar to those engaged in here on earth, there are other spirits which occasionally appear to plague the Akamba, especially the women. They are spirits from the neighboring tribes and even spirits of the Europeans are not unknown.²¹⁷ All of these wandering, foreign spirits are called mbebo. They do not seem to be overly malicious. When one of these spirits enters a woman, she goes into a frenzy and falls over. After a time she tells what the spirit must have before it will leave her. It may be a handwritten letter from a European if it is a "white spirit" or, if it is a Swahili spirit it may ask for a red fez. Usually the spirits ask for more and more dancing, which is usually not difficult to provide. These seizures come in spates, passing through the land like a flood.²¹⁸

No doubt the women use these seizures to get from their husbands some desired, yet long denied, things.²¹⁹

216. Parrinder, op. cit., p. 57.

217. C. W. Heligan, "Description of Kijesu Ceremony Among the Akamba, Tiva River, East Africa," Man, 11:57.

218. Hobley, op. cit., pp. 229-230.

219. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 234.

In one section of south Ukamba there are indications of the belief that these seizures may result in rendering a woman barren. It then becomes necessary to cleanse her with the blood of a goat.²²⁰

Men never get possessed by these foreign spirits.²²¹

The Akamba do not believe in demons, or any other kind of personified nature spirits. According to Lindblom, "Irrespective of manism and the belief in mbebo, the Akamba do not seem to believe in other sorts of spirits. Conceptions of demons and nature spirits, spirits in forests and water-courses, among rocks and on mountains, etc., seem to be unknown."²²² Other authorities concur with this.

Some of the most sophisticated African tribes interpose natural and hero gods between the Supreme Being and ancestral spirits.²²³

The Akamba, however, like the greater part of pagan Bantu Africa, pass directly from the belief in Mulungu to faith in ancestral spirits.²²⁴

Summary

The central feature of the Kamba culture is the mystical union of the tribe. This binds all of the tribesmen together, whether they be

220. Ibid., p. 230.

221. Ibid., p. 234.

222. Ibid., p. 230.

223. Farrinder, op. cit., p. 43.

224. Loc. cit.

the living, the dead, or those yet unborn. An Mkamba's security, both in this life and in the life to come, depends upon how he relates himself to the mystical tribe. He is expected to offer continual sacrifices to those ancestors for whom he is responsible; he must walk circumspectly with his fellow men, accepting all of the responsibilities and privileges which his hierarchical position bestows; and he must be diligent in bringing yet unborn Akamba into this world. The Kamba spiritual, social, and political life is designed to help each Mkamba fulfill this, his destiny. If he should fail in any of these three areas it is a threat, not only to his own existence, but to the welfare of the whole tribe.

CHAPTER III

THE CULTURE THEMES

The procedure which the researcher followed in identifying the culture themes was outlined in Chapter I.¹ The culture components were collected and validated according to the criteria set out there.² These were then recorded with notations concerning other components which tend to accompany them. The study of these nexus, or clusters, of components proved to be very helpful in determining the emotional configuration which is called forth by a particular event. These components and nexus of components were examined in the context of the assemblages in which they appeared in order to determine the meaning of the assemblages. When the meaning of the assemblages became clear the assemblages were grouped together and general statements were made which covered them all. These general statements, in shortened form, are the culture themes.

They are: the maintenance of cosmological balance; the promotion of egalitarianism; the maintenance of hierarchy; the maintenance of sexual vigor; the extension of association; transparent living; and the promotion of human dignity, intelligence, and self-control.

1. Cf. pp. 28 and 33.

2. These criteria are set out under the methodology for Sub-Problem 1.

The Maintenance of Cosmological Balance

Perhaps the most salient feature of the Akamba's cosmological view is the belief that the world, both natural and supernatural, is a delicately balanced system, and that the highest duty of man and spirits is to maintain this balance.

As was noted earlier,³ the Akamba are not theological dualists. As far as they are concerned Mulungu is in an area all by himself and has no person or force to counterbalance him. Hence, the concept of balance was not derived from, nor is it perpetuated in, the realm of theology.⁴

Neither is this balance to be thought of as a delicate balance between good and evil in the strict sense of ethical dualism. Rather they believe that evil is basically the anti-social use of power.

They believe that the universe was so structured that what actually is, is the way it should be. As long as this status quo is retained, a balance results in which life can and will go on as usual. Any interference which threatens this balance is considered a threat to the entire cosmological system and is therefore looked upon as morally wrong. Furthermore if and when disruptions of the status quo do take place, steps must be taken at once to set things in order again. This abhorrence of any threat to unsettle that

3. Cf., p. 72.

4. Alexander Le Roy, The Religion of the Primitives, pp. 111-112.

which is thought of as normal is a distinct character of Akamba culture.

This is perhaps best illustrated in the realms of ceremonial uncleanness and law.⁵ The most serious source of ceremonial uncleanness is brought about by death. When death comes into a home or a family, affairs are thrown off balance because an individual has been removed. Elaborate ceremonies and lustrations are indulged in, in order to reestablish equilibrium, that is to bring things back to normal again.⁶ Death negates life and life is the normal. Following the death and burial three acts take place. The dead man's property, including his wives, is distributed so that nothing may remain without an owner.⁷ A thing without an owner is also an intolerable concept to the Akamba. Orphans are given their proper homes, beehives are distributed, and all other personal effects are given away.⁸ This brings into equilibrium ownership and the material possessions. But a more profound threat still exists. Death is a threat to life and its effects cling to the property of the deceased.

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5. Young observed this same theme in the Central-African Bantu but did not develop the theme extensively. T. Cullen Young, African Ways and Wisdom, p. 100.
 6. Gerhard Lindblom, The Akamba, pp. 104-110.
 7. D. J. Penwill, Kamba Customary Law, p. 29.
 8. Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 162-163.

Therefore the possessions must be cleansed with ng'ondu, which is used time and time again to cleanse and to foster fertility. The ng'ondu represents life which stands in opposition to death. When death as a fact enters a home, something which symbolizes life must be introduced to rid the place of the stains, and even the potency, of the principle of death. The application of ng'ondu serves this very purpose.⁹ However, as previously reported, there is another act which serves to balance the ledger more completely. The bereaved who was most closely associated with the deceased must participate in sexual intercourse with someone of social standing equal to that of the deceased.¹⁰ Only after this ceremony is properly concluded can the others in the community participate in their usual sexual activities.¹¹

There is another matter involved in death which must be considered. Death does not only disturb human relationships but it is almost always considered to be a result of imbalance in the realms of the spirit brought about either by the deceased having himself broken clan law or as a result of someone near to him having done so. This imbalance is not rectified by repentance, but there must always be restitution,¹² which begins by offering up the life of a

9. Ibid., p. 295.

10. Ibid., p. 106.

11. Ibid., pp. 108-109.

12. Levy-Bruhl elaborates upon this subject in some detail. Lucien Levy-Bruhl, The 'Soul' of the Primitive, p. 231.

goat as a sacrifice. Parts of the beast are given to the aimu, with the hope that balance can thereby be restored.¹³ But if the death was the result of a ritual disease, the offender must be found and cleansed or things will remain out of balance. In the case of someone being killed by witchcraft, the universe runs awry until the witch is found and dealt with either by cleansing or death.¹⁴

If murder or accidental manslaughter is committed, a large payment of blood-money is required as "balance" payment. Even if two murders balance out, that is, if the murderer is subsequently killed, blood-money must still be paid. It is the payment of this money which reestablishes balance, and it cannot be omitted.

When a man impregnates a girl out of wedlock, he need only sacrifice a goat to atone for his sin. This procedure is considered satisfactory because the girl gets to keep the child which is recompense in itself.¹⁵ However, and here the phenomenon of disturbed equilibrium is seen, if the mother should die in childbirth, then the full blood-money needs to be paid for it is considered that the man murdered the woman.¹⁶ Murder, being a greater offense than adultery or fornication, can only be atoned for by a greater offering.

It has already been noted that, while Western law is punitive the Kamba law is not interested in punishment but in compensation.¹⁷

13. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 108.

14. Ibid., p. 178.

15. Ibid., p. 157.

16. Loc. cit.

17. Ibid., p. 160. Young found this theme in the Central-African Bantu tribes as well. Young, op. cit., p. 100.

Of what value would it be to an Mkamba, with his view of a balanced world, to see a culprit beaten for stealing? Corporal punishment, no matter how severe, can never restore cosmic equilibrium. In fact the ultimate punishment, death itself, would do nothing but indicate guilt. When an Mkamba comes before the nzana and pleads innocence he is allowed to ask to take the oath of innocence on the kithitu, swearing, "If I am guilty of this crime may this kithitu kill me before the month is out." If it does not kill him in the prescribed time, he is considered innocent and someone else is suspected of the crime.¹⁸ But the case may not be dropped. However, if the kithitu kills him within the set time he is considered to have been guilty and his immediate family must pay the full compensation to restore the equilibrium which was disturbed by the crime.¹⁹ A careful analysis of Kamba justice reveals this theme of equilibrium throughout.²⁰ A small disturbance requires a small recompense: a large crime like manslaughter requires a much larger payment.²¹ These payments only restore the original equilibrium to earth, but it must be remembered that everything that happens on earth has an effect upon the aimu and vice versa. In fact, disturbance in the realm of the spirits is considered to be the fundamental cause of the disturbances here on earth. Therefore the mandu aue watch

18. Penwill, op. cit., p. 57, and Lindblom, op. cit., p. 169.

19. Lindblom, loc. cit.

20. This point is made often by Penwill in his work on Kamba law.

21. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 159.

the natural phenomena carefully in order to detect the mood of the ancestral spirits. When the aimu are unhappy it is either because they are not getting the proper attention from their progeny in the form of sacrifices or they are unhappy with the way justice has miscarried on earth.²² And when the aimu become disturbed, they in turn bring further disturbances to their kin in the flesh. They can send disease, cause Mulungu to withhold rain or children, or cause any number of misfortunes.²³ It is then that the nzama meets at which time the best legal brains of the tribe, the atumia, try to untangle the confused situation and, in conjunction with the mundu aue, make proposals for reestablishing normality.²⁴

Dundas, Hopley, Fenwill, Middleton, and Lindblom all stressed the fact that law is one of the prime interests, if not the prime interest, of the Akamba. This is entirely understandable in light of this theme because knowledge of the law and the system of compensation must be known because the fate of the clan depends, in a large measure, upon the proper administration of justice.

Perhaps it would be well to define what, to the Akamba, is normality. The best way to describe it would be to say that it is a state in which no incongruities would be experienced on earth or among the aimu. But this will need to be defined further. If there are no deaths, no sicknesses, no infraction of the tribal rules and

22. C. W. Hopley, Ethnology of the Akamba and Other East African Tribes, p. 169.

23. Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 214, 219.

24. Ibid., p. 153.

custom, if sacrifices are offered regularly and the aimu are at rest, and if children are born and cattle and crops increase, then a state of normality prevails. When this state is disturbed, every effort is made to restore the balance quickly by proper compensation, lest its effect spread like a shock-wave and disturb the equilibrium of the total life pattern.

It is small wonder that the ajumia find little time to do manual labor, for they have more than enough to do to keep the cosmic equilibrium extant.²⁵ Dundas noted that some cases are still going on three generations from the date of the first dispute.²⁶ This may seem like much "haggling" over small issues, or perhaps would suggest that the Akamba are so selfish that they simply cannot forget a claim if they have not been entirely satisfied. However when the phenomenon is seen in the context of the theme of equilibrium it becomes intelligible. It is not that a man carries on a case started by his now dead grandfather for his advantage alone, but his grandfather, now translated into an imu, is depending upon him to press for justice. Thus justice is demanded by ancestors as much as by the living. Therefore erudition and legal sagacity are very highly honored for it is thought that people possessing these gifts not only help themselves but they help the clan, both the living and the dead.²⁷

25. Loc. cit.

26. Charles Dundas, "History of Kitui," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 43:511.

27. H. E. Lambert, "Land Tenure Among the Akamba," African Studies, 6:138.

As has been noted, the Akamba hate incongruity for it appears to upset the balance of things. Lindblom notes that when the first flag pole was struck at the Kitui government buildings the Akamba all over the country diligently offered sacrifices in an effort to counteract the presence of this strange object that pierced the sky.²⁸ Lindblom also states that, "At the sight of or on meeting anything new and unusual, the Akamba generally offer sacrifices, so that the new things may not excite the wrath of the spirits."²⁹ Lindblom also tells an experience related to him by a missionary. "Some years ago a lame native with an unusually small, dwarfed foot passed through the country. He was stopped and not allowed to proceed until he had paid a goat as an offering to the aimu."³⁰

The appearance of twins is unwelcome because it is abnormal. In the past twins were killed. Certain ritual can now be observed to reestablish normalcy without so drastic an act as complete removal. Even today if a cow should rear up on its hind legs to eat leaves from a tree like a goat, it would be killed at once because cows normally do not do that.³¹ One could continue to demonstrate how the Akamba abhor that which is not normal in their milieu. They fear that the new phenomenon is a threat to the presently prevailing equilibrium and

28. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 224.

29. Loc. cit.

30. Loc. cit.

31. Ibid., p. 293.

therefore they either do away with the thing before it has a chance to disturb the balance or they provide a counterweight after which life can go on.

When other areas of the Akamba's culture are examined the idea of balance finds expression as well. For every poison there is an antidote. For every disease there is a medicine. For every illness there is a medicine man. For every black magic there is a white magic. For every transgression there is an atonement.

Famine also is considered a result of cosmic imbalance.³² In many Bantu tribes, when rain is withheld rainmakers go directly to the higher powers and request rain. Among the Akamba, however, it is not so simple. They believe that the rain is withheld because of some disruption of cosmic forces, and that the only thing which can release the rain is the reinstatement of cosmic symmetry.³³ Perhaps too many cases are unsettled among the people or the aimu are disturbed by a lack of devotion, respect, and sacrifices. These things must be remedied before rain can be asked for. There are no professional rainmakers among the Akamba for this reason. Any mundu mue can ask for rain if the conditions are met which assure him that equilibrium has been reestablished.³⁴

32. Ibid., p. 277.

33. Cf., p. 91.

34. Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 245, 248.

This theme also runs through the personal relationships of the Akamba. To deviate to any extent from what is considered the normal is looked upon as a threat to the status quo. This fact will be discussed more fully in the following section. An illustration or two will be sufficient here. It sometimes happens that during a dance where the youths and girls have rather unrestricted freedom, a young man appears on the scene who is displeasing to the girls. The girls decide to leave the place. The other youths, rather than be left without partners, drive the deviant away so that the girls come back. It is usually not long until he mends his ways and conforms in habit and bearing to his peers.³⁵

The following episode, while probably demonstrating feminine jealousy, also points to the fact that it is even dangerous to be unusually beautiful. The story is told of a group of girls who went to have their teeth chipped, that is to get the upper front teeth pointed, thus enhancing their looks. One of them, unfortunately, became extremely beautiful as the result of this operation. On the way home from the "chipping" one of them said, "Let us see who can spit the best and so find out which of us has got the most beautiful teeth." They all tried their best but the one with the best job spit the farthest of all. Her friends, irate with envy, proceeded to seize her and throw her into the river where she drowned.³⁶

35. Ibid., p. 411.

36. Ibid., p. 397.

There are many ways to bring pressure to bear upon a non-conformist and these means are employed without pity. Anyone who becomes too rich or too strong or too "anything," for that matter, is looked upon as someone who is different and as a threat to the stability of cosmic law and balance. This is not to say that every Mkamba is a mirror of the culture. The researcher did not find any two Akamba who were completely alike. The Akamba do allow some latitude for deviation, but this deviation is defined as normal, only up to a certain point. When that point is crossed it is abnormal and something must be done to bring things into balance.³⁷

This theme which runs through their culture probably contributes to the Akamba's restrained behavior. It is highly unbecoming for an Mkamba to be excessive in anything, and he is not given to making quick or rash decisions. For example, anyone who loses his temper is suspect because he has allowed irrationality to enter his personality and irrationality is a threat to the rational. Any excess is frowned upon.

Before concluding this discussion of the theme of maintenance of cosmic balance, one more area of Akamba life should be examined, that of witchcraft. It was noted earlier that those people who went to their graves with a grudge against the living, use the influence they have as spirits to upset or disturb the happy existence of the clan. Even prior to death these disgruntled ones disturb the peace for their

37. The Akikuyu have a nickname for an individualist. It is Muebongia and means one who works only for himself and is likely to end up as a wizard. Jomo Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, p. 118.

own selfish ends no matter how much it disrupts the universe.³⁸ The great dread that the Akamba have for the witch or witchcraft is probably not necessarily the possibility of personal harm but of the disruption of the maintenance of equilibrium. Witchcraft and the occult powers of darkness pose the greatest threat to cosmic order. For this reason the witches and any sort of witchcraft is assiduously sought out and destroyed. A practitioner of the "black art" receives no mercy. As was noted earlier, for every crime there is a set recompense which balances-out the effect of the crime. Only witchcraft is inexorable. A witch must be killed, destroyed utterly. He is denied the normal burial, thus reducing his chances for continued existence after death and no witch receives sacrifice after death.³⁹ Every effort is made to blot out the remembrance of dead witches, hoping that when all thought of the witch is gone, that he will cease to exist. Young, in referring to witchcraft among the East-Central Bantu, wrote, "His [the witch's] only conceivable punishment is death, and with him--since he has put himself beyond the pale of the clan by his proved willingness to work ill for gain on clansman and non-clansman alike--death ends all. There is no after-life for one without clan. That is why, in animist Africa, the detected 'sorcerer,' in order to be finished forever, is always burned."⁴⁰ This is a fairly accurate description of the end of

38. It is expected that witches will not persist long in the after-life.

39. Lindblom, *op. cit.*, pp. 278 ff.

40. Young, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

the witch in Ukamba but the researcher has no record of the fact that witches are burned today, nor do the Akamba believe that the witch's spirit ceases to exist immediately after death.

Thus it is seen that throughout Kamba life the theme of retention of balance and equilibrium provides the background against which many acts and attitudes, otherwise obscure, become meaningful.

The Promotion of Egalitarianism

The theme just defined, the retention of equilibrium, is very closely associated with the theme which will now be discussed. In fact, in some places these two themes overlap. They are in no way contradictory, rather they complement each other. It was noted that the equilibrium theme sets the tone, especially for relationships on a vertical plane. It accepts as self-evident the status quo and defends this condition of things against any antithetical phenomena. The concept of the egalitarian relationship, on the other hand, prompts a culture to strive after a leveling of men along a horizontal axis. This probably is never entirely accomplished in any society. There will always be differences in station and responsibility between the sociological strata. Some societies honor the deviant, some vest one man or a particular group of people with extraordinary power, and so on across the scale. The Akamba have a disinclination to invest any one or any group with extraordinary power.⁴¹ They rather emphasize

41. H. B. Johnstone, "Notes on the Tribes Occupying Mombasa Subdistrict, British East Africa," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 32:269 and Dundas, op. cit., pp. 484-486.

the worth of the individual. Levy-Bruhl stresses the fact that there is nothing like an "individual" in primitive society but that all life is part of a homogenous whole. "To his [the primitive's] mind," he wrote, "it matters nothing to arrange them [beings and objects] in a series of classes, genera, and species clearly distinct from each other and corresponding with a scale of concepts, logically defined in their extension and intension."⁴² His argument is partially built upon the theory of Willoughby who wrote, "In studying Bantu institutions, it is necessary at the outset to eliminate our idea of the individual. . . . A man's rights and duties are born with him, being conditioned by his precedence in the family and the precedence of the family in the tribe. Nothing is further from Bantu thought than the doctrine that all men are endowed by nature with fundamental equality and an inalienable right of liberty. . . . They cannot admit for a moment that any but a chief is born free, and they cannot conceive how any two men can be born equal."⁴³ Levy-Bruhl draws the conclusion that, "The individual does not exist in Bantu society."⁴⁴ The Akamba simply do not conform to these generalizations. They not only believe in the reality of the individual but they openly promote the concept.⁴⁵

42. Levy-Bruhl, op. cit., p. 19.

43. William C. Willoughby, Race Problems in New Africa, pp. 82-83.

44. Levy-Bruhl, op. cit., p. 51.

45. The greatest caution must be exercised in making any generalization regarding the Bantu people as a whole, because significant differences in both world-view and practice exists among them.

One of the first missionaries among the Akamba, Pfitzinger of the Leipziger Mission, expressed his wish in a subtle fashion that the Akamba should not just call him by his name but should preface it with a title such as bwana, which is the Swahili word for "master." He got the reply, "Among the Akamba there is no master!" In fact the Kikamba has no word for "master."⁴⁶ They value their independence very highly. Dundas noted that, "If for any reason it has become necessary for a settlement to move elsewhere, one would suppose that they would all move together to one place, but quite the contrary is the rule, as if tired of being together, and fearing that they risk becoming dependent on each other, they will disperse all over the country."⁴⁷

The myth regarding the creation of man is interesting in this light.⁴⁸ Where other Bantu peoples have the creation of one man and one woman, the Akamba believe in the simultaneous appearance of two couples. It is as though power is immediately diffused and spread among four people. The creation myth gives no hint as to where authority lies. This does not mean that all people are equally endowed with natural gifts and that no one person can get more power or influence than another, but it does mean that great caution must

46. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 151.

47. Dundas, op. cit., p. 487.

48. Cf., pp. 69-72.

be exercised in the proper distribution of power.⁴⁹

The Akamba's attitude toward nature is also based on this theme. Rather than any particular item having a great number of uses, each thing has its own particular use. Lindblom calls this "onesidedness."⁵⁰ One particular tree, for instance, is used for making knife handles, another for the tips of arrows, another for stools, and still another for tooth brushes. This is also the case with medicines. One root is good for the head, another for the feet, one for the liver and another for the eyes, and so on. Lindblom was amused when he was told that the leaves of a certain tree were used exclusively as toilet-paper for the babies.⁵¹

Carried over into the distribution of labor the same theme is evident. One man makes chains, another knife handles, while another makes chairs for sale and still another makes only a certain kind of stool for domestic use.

As one moves up the scale into the distribution of authority and power among people, this theme persists. Among the mundu aue no particular individual is competent outside of his limited proficiency area.⁵² It is almost a society of experts. One can cure eyes, another

49. Murdock wrote that, "This striking egalitarian system reflects the former prevalence of republican political institutions of the Eastern Cushitic, or Gada, type." George Peter Murdock, Africa: Its Peoples and Their Culture History, p. 345.

50. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 550.

51. Loc. cit.

52. C. W. Hobley, Bantu Beliefs and Magic, p. 36.

love-sickness; one can prophecy and another can remove makwa but not thabu.⁵³ And so the professions are divided and subdivided.

It was already noticed that councils of the land, the nzama, are made up of men of equal authority. These councils have no officers, organizers, or executors. And even if the nzama as a whole takes unto itself inordinate power it comes under censure. The women can descend upon the atumia and demand justice.⁵⁴ And if, perchance, the atumia are thought to be wrong in a decision, a defendant can always call for the kithitu or the ndundu upon which he can swear his innocence.⁵⁵ The oath is the layman's defense against the nzama. Dundas made the point that, "One of the objects of the nzama, as well as the kithitu, is to avoid laying the responsibility of a decision on anyone in particular."⁵⁶ It would seem as though, at every step, the Akamba have devised ways and means to prevent an accumulation of power at any one point. This is saying negatively what the theme expresses positively; that the Akamba make every effort to promote an egalitarian social structure.

Dundas noted that, "when the chips are down," the Akamba disintegrate into individuals. He wrote, "All this is a very common experience with the Akamba, no matter how sacred an act may be to

53. Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 269-271.

54. Ibid., pp. 180-181.

55. Penvill, op. cit., pp. 65-66.

56. Dundas, op. cit., p. 511.

them, despite all supernatural terrors which one would suppose sufficient to bind them to a common interest, the discordant spirit is yet stronger, and nothing lacks more in their composition than a unanimous spirit."⁵⁷ Dundas fails to qualify this by saying that within the conjugal family the bonds of sympathy are very strong. The young Akamba whose autobiography was recorded by Augustiny discovered that, after the death of his mother and father, he had no one to really depend on when things were difficult. When famine stalked the land his paternal uncle who took him in as guardian not only deserted him and his sister but took food from them which the young man had managed to steal. When his paternal uncle at last died he had no one to appeal to for help. His moment of truth came when he realized, "Then I had no one whom I knew."⁵⁸ The Akamba, knowing that the ties which bind an individual with those outside his own little conjugal family relationships are attenuated, strive by all means to create obligatory relationships to gain some security. Their penchant is to atomize hence they enter upon the mutually obligatory relationships to counter this tendency which they feel threatens their very existence.

This theme is also noted in the home. The eldest male in the family is indeed the patriarch. Everyone under him must respect his authority or else go unrepresented before the aimu for he alone can

57. Dundas, *op. cit.*, p. 487.

58. J. Augustiny, "Erlebnisse eines Kambajungen von ihnen selbst erzählt," Zeitschrift für Eingeborenen-Sprachen, 10:161-180.

offer the domestic sacrifices to the ancestral spirits! Therefore great deference is understandably made to him. However his power is limited in a number of ways. If a family head persists in excessive authoritarianism, those under him have the right to take what is theirs and move away and thus out of his influence. The fear of this happening tempers the old men. Furthermore, it is to the distinct disadvantage of the patriarch to alienate any under his authority for two reasons. First, he thereby comes into disapprobation among his fellows, for a man who can not keep peace, harmony, and equilibrium in his own sphere of influence is considered a threat to the equilibrium of the total tribe and a failure. Secondly, any man approaching his end realizes that he will very shortly be entirely dependent upon the sacrifices of the living for the sustenance of his imu in the after-life.⁵⁹ Therefore he must act with wisdom and prudence, striving at all times to maintain peace. A slow, deliberate, cautious personality is highly valued among the Akamba as indeed it is in many of the Bantu tribes.⁶⁰

The relations between husband and wife are highly reciprocal.

It was already noted that both male and female appeared on the creation scene together and with equal standing. It is taken for granted that

59. Cf., pp. 80-84.

60. In the writer's own experience among several Bantu tribes it was observable that to them one of the worst traits of character a man could possess was "haste." And white people generally display this unfortunate sign of what to the Akamba is inferiority.

the husband holds the dominating role in the home, probably because of his priestly functions.⁶¹ However, if a husband should at any time become overly demanding, he must be prepared to accept the consequences, the most serious of which is divorce.⁶² In the division of labor among the sexes among the Akamba the men hunt, decide court cases, and herd the cattle. The women have complete control over the agricultural interests. The researcher found that men may help to open up the ground but this is considered a concession rather than a requirement. If a woman refuses to work, no food is produced. Certainly a Mkamba man discovers that a well-fed husband is the consequence of a well-treated wife.

When the sex act is seen in light of the theme of equilibrium it becomes more understandable. Time after time the Akamba must have coitus of a ritual nature. Cleansing from ritual uncleanness does not seem to be complete, no matter how carefully the cleansing agents are administered, until the husband and wife complete the cleansing by engaging themselves in sexual intercourse. Until this coitus is accomplished uncleanness is not removed. Thus coitus becomes in the real sense of the word a religious act, just as necessary as is the killing of the sacrificial animal and the smearing of the ng'ondu. It is not that the male element alone needs cleansing nor the female. Ritual uncleanness seems to have nothing to do with a particular sex, but with

61. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 446.

62. Cf., pp. 63-64.

sex itself. This is probably to be understood in the context of fertility. It is imperative for husband and wife alike to carry on sexual relations in order to increase the clan on earth, an affair in which they both have a vital interest. And unless there is a mutual giving of one another in the sex act, especially in ritual coitus, the production of life must stop. Therefore both husband and wife need one another sexually in order to preserve and produce life which is threatened by ritual uncleanness. And the fact that coitus is engaged in while lying on the side reveals an equality of interest and participation in this most important of all ritual acts of the Akamba.

If either a wife or a husband were to withhold sex for a time the entire clan would very shortly be contaminated with inexpiable ritual sickness. It is also interesting to note that intercourse can not take place if the man's bow, the phallic symbol, and the woman's leather sling in which she carries the baby,⁶³ are not at the foot of the bed. Neither item seems to be more important than the other.⁶⁴

In intercourse in which conception takes place the Akamba believe that the man and the woman bring ingredients of an equal nature to the union, the woman the menstrual blood (for the Akamba believe that only during menstruation can conception take place) and the man the seminal fluid. However the union of these does not produce life but simply

63. This is possibly an extension of the womb. It is held to be the most sacred of the women's property.

64. Lindblom, *op. cit.*, p. 452.

provides the setting in which the ancestral spirits can contribute a third part thus creating life.⁶⁵ All three elements are necessary but the presence of the aimu seems to be the most important. Be that as it may, neither the man nor the woman can claim a preeminence over the other.⁶⁶ Stayt met a situation among the Bavenda which parallels the Akamba's belief somewhat. He found that as the result of the belief that the male builds up some parts of the foetus and the female others, there exists a system of "double controls right through the life of the Bavenda."⁶⁷

The husband is in actual control of the family wealth and can manipulate this wealth to control his wives. However wives have their own means to get their desires. They are known to go into fits when they are possessed by spirits who demand things. The seizure is not broken until the requested article is produced.⁶⁸ It is a happy coincidence, as far as the woman is concerned, that the spirit often wants soap or cloth to be given to the possessed. Thus women are again not left to the mercy of the men.

The basis of the reciprocal relationship between the sexes, actually begins on the dance floor where the young people engage

65. Ibid., pp. 30, 211.

66. Richards found that the Bemba, a matrilineal people, believe that the woman provides the body of the child, the semen just sparks its forthcoming. Audrey I. Richards, Chisungu: A Girl's Initiation Ceremony Among the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia, p. 160.

67. Hugh A. Stayt, The Bavenda, p. ix.

68. C. W. Meligan, "Description of Kijesu Ceremony Among the Akamba, Tiva River, East Africa," Man, 11:49.

in dancing which then leads to marriage. In these dances the girl chooses the boy.⁶⁹ Thus the girls set the standard of behavior among the boys. It was already noticed how an unacceptable boy is always left out.⁷⁰

Concluding this discussion of the egalitarian relationship between the sexes it should be noted that the Bantu were originally a matrilineal society but as the men accumulated cattle as wealth, the society tended to move slowly toward a patriliney.⁷¹ Among the present day Bantu the entire spectrum can be studied from matriliney on one hand, as among the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia, to a strong patriliney as is found among the Baganda of Uganda on the other. The Alamba present the picture of a tribe in midpassage. This researcher has noted an undoubted trend toward patriliney, and there are indications that this will be accelerated as the wage earning power of the males becomes more of a factor, as it is certain to become in the future. It is to be expected that any advancement toward patriliney will be faced with this theme of egalitarianism.

In some relationships between members of the same sex the theme of egalitarianism is found. For instance, a father is obviously the superior of his sons, but a son may curse his father.⁷² This curse

69. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 411.

70. Cf. pp. 110-111.

71. Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 128-129.

72. Ibid., p. 184.

may not be taken lightly. As was noted earlier, a son may also leave his father, an act which would bring great disgrace upon the father. So the father's relationship to his sons is also tempered by the very real possibility that the son can bring reproach against him.

The egalitarianism in housing is striking. If one were to walk through Ukamba he would become aware of the similarity of the houses. Every hut is built exactly the same regardless of whether the owner is a chief or a beggar.⁷³ It would seem as though the houses were built expressly to remind the inhabitants of the equality of all men.

The Maintenance of Hierarchy

The Akamba are meticulous in the maintenance of their systems of hierarchy. This theme complements the first theme which was considered, that of equilibrium. The various hierarchical systems in Akamba life were inherited and must be preserved as part of the sacred status quo. Hierarchy is to be thought of, not in the sense of inherent inferiority or superiority, but as a system which gives balance and unity to the structure. This theme does not stand in opposition to the theme of egalitarianism but rather reinforces it. It defines and establishes the limits of social roles. The hierarchical system seems to emphasize the limits beyond which one may not go in the administration of power, it delineates what various offices may not do

73. This is now changing slowly as new concepts of individuality are penetrating the society.

instead of prescribing duties of a minimum nature. If, for instance, an mtumia should have little interest in court cases he would not be required to take part in them. However upon becoming an mtumia, he may not offer sacrifices at the ithembo, for this is the right of another and higher office. Perhaps it could best be summarized by saying that the Kamba hierarchical system establishes rights but not duties.

• Every member of the Kamba tribe has the privilege of climbing on the hierarchical ladder. Only the office of the chief sacrificers of a particular clan is hereditary and that only in a limited sense.⁷⁴

For the Akamba, life is a series of stages, many of which are marked by special ceremonies denoting newly acquired privileges. And at each level of advancement symbols are given to denote the fact that a new social level has been attained.

There are four major hierarchical systems among the Akamba. The first and most elementary is that based upon sex. On the path the man always walks about three steps ahead of the woman. This is probably a custom arising out of the need for the one most able to protect the group to precede the others on the dangerous trails.⁷⁵ However, it now reflects the system of hierarchy since very little danger is met on most paths in Ukamba today. There is, however, a careful delineation of the functions of the sexes which serve to

74. See atumia ya ithembo in Chapter II.

75. Neither does the male carry anything so that his hands are free to engage an enemy.

preserve the classification. For instance, a woman may never sit in the thome if a man is present.⁷⁶ Neither may a man sit on a woman's stool, no matter where it is.⁷⁷ The woman's stool is a long legged piece of furniture. Women are denied beer and certain parts of the meat of an animal. The man, on the other hand, would appear out of place if he ate an egg, for eggs are women's food. There are many cultural components which reinforce this distinction between the sexes and certain mild taboos are connected with the breaking of these customs.

A second hierarchical system is based upon age. There are exceptions to this but generally, great consideration is given to age, especially in a limited family relationship. When sons are ready to marry they must do so according to age.⁷⁸ It would be unthinkable for a junior brother to marry before a senior one; the father would refuse him the bride-wealth. The system of inheritance is also based on age factors.⁷⁹

Nevertheless, age is certainly not the only determiner of status. It was noticed in the description of the social structure⁸⁰ that the Akamba enter the various stages of privilege as they fulfill certain

76. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 436.

77. Ibid., p. 534.

78. Ibid., p. 78.

79. Penwill, op. cit., pp. 29-30.

80. Cf., pp. 43-55.

requirements. Before a young person can be circumcised, his father must be able to present the various gifts to the circumcisers. The second initiation ceremony is open to those who have signs of puberty and whose fathers can afford the gifts necessary for their acceptance into an initiation class. The entrance into the third initiation also has economic considerations. When a person wishes to enter the lowest council he must be an acceptable individual and also have the necessary payment in hand. And this pattern continues right up to the top of the hierarchical scale, the entrance into the high council, and finally into the small group of sacrificers who may enter the sacred grove to offer sacrifice to the supernatural spirits.

It was already noted that a person's position on the path denotes his hierarchical status. Meat eating is another one of the reinforcing phenomena. Each succeeding grade provides for more freedom in the eating of the various parts of the animal. When the highest grade is reached, no part of the animal may be denied the person. Seating arrangements also follow an hierarchical pattern. The signs of status are the stool and the staff. Each mtumia carries a stool while the "priests" carry pronged staves.⁸¹ In the council circle the one with the most seniority sits at one end of the almost complete circle and at the other end sits the most recent entry. Even salutations are based on status. The system of appropriate greetings is indeed intricate and may on no account be omitted. These greetings are drilled

81. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 144.

into the young people from the moment they begin to talk.

To see the reasons behind this tenacious maintenance of hierarchy, it is necessary to view it in relationship to the theme of egalitarianism. The hierarchy is preserved in order to give everyone a fair chance. The system seems to be weighted so that on the one hand even the most mediocre individual can climb the grade-scale, while on the other hand, no matter how able an individual becomes in law and tribal politics, the hierarchical system keeps him from gaining excessive power. Thus the retention of the hierarchical system is not an end in itself but simply a means to assure that order and fairness will prevail.

There is another hierarchical system which is quite outside the social strata as outlined above. It has to do with the various people who deal with supernatural powers, like the mundu aue, the atumia ya thabu and atumia ya makwa who cleanse from ritual contamination, the atumia ya ithembo and their wives, plus other marginal people who have some peculiar relationship with the world of the spirits, one example of such persons being the women through whom the aimu choose to speak upon occasion. The hierarchy into which these people are arranged is not distinct. The mundu aue always lead when walking on a path, no matter what the age or position of the others in the party.⁸² Yet at the ithembo they are segregated from the others and must sit with the young women and children.⁸³ These people who have access to

82. Lindblom, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

83. *Ibid.*, pp. 257-258, 222.

the world of the spirits have a distinct position in the hierarchy of the tribe but no one seems to have been able to define it. At least it has not become an integral part of the hierarchical system. Perhaps this is due to the fact that contact with the spirits is a charismatic office and it would be quite out of order for men in the flesh to determine just how a person should perform his charismatic functions. With this in mind it could be deduced that if a personality cult could be built it would need to be in this area where hierarchy is undefined. And this was precisely the situation which confronted Hobley when he first went into Ukamba. He met a very influential old man from Kitui whom he mistakenly called the tribal "chief." The Akamba have no tradition which would permit them to have a chief. The person in question was simply a mundu mue who had great success in his practice as a result of his charismatic power. Since he was not bound by an hierarchical office, he was free to influence people in a great number of ways. But this man was an exception. With him died his glory for it was attached neither to an office nor a position in tribal hierarchy.⁸⁴

In conclusion, those Akamba who are believed to be in contact with the supernatural powers are not structured into an hierarchical system as is the case with those holding the reins of civil authority.

The Akamba have another interesting way of reinforcing the concept of hierarchy called the nthoni or "shame" relationship.⁸⁵ The

84. Hobley, op. cit., Frontespiece.

85. Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 89-93.

most elaborate restrictions surround the in-law nthoni. For instance, a man must not mention his mother-in-law by name. If he meets her on the path he steps far out of the way, all the while looking in another direction. The mother-in-law must cover her breasts when he comes near. He is forbidden to enter her hut while she is in the living section of the hut. This also applies to all of the father-in-law's wives and their oldest daughters. Were a son-in-law to disregard any of the restrictions he would need to pay a bull and some goats to the offended one.⁸⁶ The daughter-in-law also stands in an nthoni relationship to her father-in-law and mother-in-law. It is especially inconvenient for this relationship to exist between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law because they share the same small living quarters and must cook at the same fire yet they must at no time look upon one another. There are ways of lessening the restrictions concerning nthoni but the relationship is never completely disregarded. This relationship does not only make incest more difficult, if this is an element at all, but it strengthens the hierarchical relationships which exist between the two generations concerned. Nthoni would not exist between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law if it was simply designed to prevent incest. It can best be understood as an expression of the theme presently under consideration, that hierarchy must be maintained.

Thus it can be concluded that the ideal Mzamba respects those above him in the hierarchical system while he himself slowly accumulates

86. Penwill, op. cit., p. 112.

the wealth and other things necessary for his own advancement in the selfsame hierarchy.

The Maintenance of Sexual Vigor

The highest and greatest good for the Akamba is the power to perpetuate the clan by bringing into the world new Akamba through sexual intercourse and birth. In a very real sense the Akamba woman is saved in a soteriological sense through her childbearing and much the same can be said of the man.⁸⁷ A childless man or woman is looked upon as having contracted ritual uncleanness somewhere in the past. It is not necessary to know the Akamba long to realize with what passion they guard their sexual potency. It is indeed a theme which runs through the every day life of the tribe.

Almost all ritual uncleanness is believed to attack sexual potency.⁸⁸ The first result of contracting the ritual "diseases" makva or thabu is that the person is rendered incapable of practicing lawful sexual intercourse.⁸⁹ This is also the case with death. Death in the family brings sterility which can only be removed through the proper ritual cleansing. Sexual life must cease until the ritual cleansing has been accomplished lest it bring unfortunate consequences upon the participants. During ritual uncleanness a person may eat, sleep, and engage in other physical activities without inviting

87. Young, op. cit., p. 55.

88. Cf., pp. 58-59.

89. Cf., pp. 94-97.

trouble, but sex is denied him. This is probably because during the sex act the ancestral spirits are closest to man and if there is ritual uncleanness the spirits, of all people, will be the most aware of it and will consequently either give an abnormal foetus or cause sterility altogether. It is to be remembered that ritual uncleanness is not necessarily uncleanness in one's relation to his fellows but that it is uncleanness before the aimu who also seem to be influenced by it.

From birth a child is looked upon as a potential parent of other Akamba. He is prepared for this role in every possible way. He is circumcised, put through the initiation rites, and protected from all sexual harm and danger.

Sexual activity, save for that enjoyed by the unmarried on the dance floor, is indulged in, not for self-gratification or eroticism, but as the most important act in life, for it determines one's own security in this life and in the life to come. It would be presumptuous to say that sex for the Akamba does not have an erotic character--the ends to which they go to obtain love medicine would suggest that the erotic element is not entirely absent--but that is not their main concern. They are primarily concerned with the perpetuation of the family, the clan, and the tribe.

It is of interest to note that tribal custom and mores are reinforced by the resultant limiting of sexual activities. The greatest deterrent to unsocial action would be to say, "If you do that you will not be able to have children." This is an attack on the very reason for existence.

It is not necessary to proceed to define this theme more carefully for it is the most obvious one in Kamba culture. The fact that, save for the ithembo itself, the marriage bed is the most sacred spot in the Akamba's experience, gives further emphasis to the fact that sexual potency is the first consideration in their minds.⁹⁰

The Extension of Association

It has just been noted that the theme of maintenance of sexual vigor runs through almost every assemblage of components in the Akamba culture. It is the most obvious of all the themes. But sex cannot be isolated from the larger context to which it belongs. It does not exist as an end in itself but as part of a more inclusive theme which is actually the urge to extend one's associative group.

Colson's observation on the Bantu generally is very applicable to the Akamba. She wrote, "In general . . . the African natives have been concerned to invest their capital, land, and cattle and their personal time in building up the system of mutual obligations incorporated in their social systems; and, in times of emergency they play upon this system and prefer to invest their wealth in maintaining it."⁹¹

90. It is significant to note that a man may not have intercourse with his wife while away from home. Lindblom, *op. cit.*, p. 347. This is probably due to the fact that they believe that the ancestral spirits, the third party to sexual union, are available to promote conception only on the marriage bed.

92. Elizabeth Colson, "Native Cultural and Social Patterns in Contemporary Africa," in C. Grove Haines, (Ed.) Africa Today, p. 79.

By associative groups is meant those groups in which mutual obligation and sharing is incumbent upon all of its members. Young observed that, "prosperity in Africa involves the possession of a contented and steadily increasing group under one's leadership."⁹²

There are several reasons why an Akamba wishes to extend the boundaries of his associative groups. The simplest reason is that, due to the uncertainties of life, misfortune could befall him at any time in which case he would need help. Because famine is a constant threat to the Akamba, it is an act of wisdom to enter into a mutually obligatory association with others upon whom a person could depend for food. Many times the very physical life of a family is threatened because there are not enough people obligated to help it in time of need. Therefore the head of the family, in order to avoid such a fiasco, uses his material wealth and influence to increase the number of people in his associative group.

In addition to this very practical aspect of the theme, personal and familial prestige is enhanced by the extension of its bonds of association. The most successful Akamba is one who has claim over the greatest number of people.

Seen in its cosmological setting this theme takes on a deeper meaning. The Akamba believe in the persistence of the human personality after death simply because it is human and has, while on earth, not earned disprobation from its fellows or the ancestral spirits. However,

92. Young, op. cit., p. 13.

the human personality is not assured an extended existence after it leaves this life. Its prolonged perpetuation depends upon the extent to which its relatives and friends "in the flesh" offer sacrifice of thoughtfulness and actual food to it.⁹³ It was noticed that the departed spirits, the aimu, have their ways of reminding those in the flesh upon whom they are depending, that they are unfortunately being forgotten;⁹⁴ nevertheless in the last resort the vitality of the aimu depends upon the nutrition that they get from men. Therefore, if an Akamba has an eye to the future, he does well to try, to the best of his ability, to have as many people as possible obligated to him here on earth so that there will be less chance of his being forgotten while in the spirit state. Some Akamba aimu have persisted as long as four generations due to their influential position in the community before they died. However, few Akamba can expect to receive sacrifice from earth for more than two generations, that is, from their grandchildren, and when sacrifices are finally abandoned for any particular imu, it passes into oblivion.⁹⁵

Fully cognizant of these considerations, the Akamba strive by varied means from youth to old age to extend their associative groups. This researcher found that the privilege of living to an old age is eagerly sought after by the Akamba mainly because it provides that

93. Penwill, op. cit., p. 114.

94. Cf., pp. 84-86.

95. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 215.

much more time to consolidate one's position in his various associative groups before he passes into the next world. The means by which association can be extended are many and varied. The most important ones will be considered.

The members of each family, by virtue of the fact that they are in a family, owe mutual obligation to one another. This is a principle accepted by all and is never disputed. The closest relations exist between parents and children and among the children. In the extended family the cousins are almost as bound to help one another as are the children in the immediate family. Also a feeling of undisputable obligation among the entire clan is recognized by everyone. However, this clan relationship is not as binding as the familial one.

There is yet another far broader and less binding relationship between peers within the tribe. These age-classes, the iika, are not clearly defined and only the mildest of mutual obligation exists among them.⁹⁶ In many African tribes age-classes (as among the Masai and Akikuyu) are politically important and therefore are considerably reinforced. Among the Akamba they have no present political function for which reason they are not binding.⁹⁷

The foregoing associations are not earned but are gifts by birth.

96. Ibid., pp. 142, 147.

97. In earlier days, when warriors were organized for raids, the troops were divided up according to the iika grouping, each group having its own fire which was symbolic of the loyalty they owed to one another. Since warfare has been almost entirely eliminated, the iika have little reason for existing. Ibid., p. 148.

These, then, form the basic associative groups but they are far from sufficient to meet the needs of the Akamba. They only serve as the base from which deeper and more meaningful relations can be constructed.

In order to lay the groundwork for an effective web of relationships an Akamba must first obtain a wife. In order to do this he must obligate himself to his in-laws through a series of payments, called bride-wealth, or as Young termed it, "equilibrium guarantee."⁹⁸ The object of marriage is, of course, to produce children, and the more the better. Each child represents an additional potential link through which the parents can extend their associative group. This is especially true in the case of daughters for whom the father receives the bride-wealth which is actually an earnest of claim payment on the part of the son-in-law's family. In a way the entire family of the son-in-law is obligated to the girl's father because the family provides the payment.

Thus it is seen that the production of children is a primary consideration in the lives of the Akamba and anything which would affect their sexual vitality is viewed with alarm. A person needs children so that he might build bridges to other families and clans, thus insuring for himself a secure position in life and an extended existence in the world to come.

This throws new light upon the concept of sex and reproduction. Upon first acquaintance with the Akamba it would seem as though the

98. Young, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

tribe is sex-ridden because at almost every turn of the road there is either a prohibition against the sex act or a requirement that it be engaged in. And the horror with which an Mxamba views impotence is not because he will not then be able to enjoy sex but because an impotent man finds it extremely difficult to enlarge his associative groups. This desire to enlarge the group is so strong that if unfortunately, a man finds himself impotent, he gets a friend who is virile to impregnate his wife.⁹⁹

The safeguards which the Akamba have established to ensure fertility form the basic mold for their views of morality and social and religious well-being. This becomes entirely logical when it is seen that children are the means by which mortal and immortal security are assured.

In order to extend the bounds of his associative group, then, an Mxamba needs children. And in order to beget children he needs to have wives. And in order to get wives he must have property in the form of cattle, sheep, goats, and beehives from which to prepare beer, all of which are necessary to make up the bride-wealth. Hence property is not sufficient in itself to promote a person in the scale of influence. He must translate the property into wives and the wives must provide him with children. Property is simply a means toward attaining rights of claim on more and more people. Colson wrote, "Wealth is often still interpreted not in terms of obvious ownership of resources

99. Lindblom, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-84.

or a higher standard of living, but in terms of the number of people against whom one has a claim. . . . Over much of Africa, cattle are a form of wealth invested primarily in the building up of a varied range of social relationships which give the cattle-owners rights over persons.¹⁰⁰

A man is foolish to amass wealth on the hoof because this wealth will avail him little after death. On the other hand cattle are, in the end, the basic commodity for buying the security which is sought and therefore the fertility of cattle is almost as important as the fertility of the tribe and clan. Many precautions surround the breeding and tending of cattle. In fact it is believed that somehow human sex is involved in the reproduction of the cattle. For instance, a man and a woman may not have sexual intercourse on their bed if the cattle are out of the cattle stall. When new cattle are brought to the cattle pen the new owners have sexual intercourse so that the cows will "calve well."¹⁰¹ Also after a death, when the inhabitants of the village are purified so that they can resume their sex life, the cattle are also smeared with the cleansing agent so that they too can go on to reproduce their kind. Cattle, honey, wives, children, and all types of wealth are viewed by the Akamba in the context of the theme presently under consideration, the extension of association.

The cattle raids and wars in which the Akamba participated so

100. Colson, *op. cit.*, pp. 73, 77.

101. Lindblom, *op. cit.*, p. 488.

extensively before the coming of the British were engaged in primarily for the cattle which were gained thereby. These were then translated into wives and so the circles broadened. The passion with which the Akamba and their neighbors regard their cattle is perfectly understandable in this context. In the past an Akamba would have had to be in the most desperate of straits before he could bring himself to kill a healthy cow, and bullocks were killed but rarely, and then only for sacrificial purposes.¹⁰² Cattle breeding is a cultural assemblage, not a theme in itself. It is meaningful only in the larger thematic context of the extension of association.¹⁰³

While considering cattle as a means by which a person's influence can be enhanced, the researcher found that a man will not keep all his cattle at any one place. He farms them out to others. In an area where cattle diseases are common, perhaps this is an attempt to disperse the cattle so that if a herd is wiped out, one may still have others left in another herd. Even though the man in whose village the cattle are held has the privilege of using the milk and dung from the animal he must give up the calves to the owner. The owner may also demand the return of the cattle at any time. Hence the man who keeps cattle for another is obligated to him. Therefore one of the reasons for farming out the cattle is to enlarge the circle of people

102. This is, of course, changing today due to the introduction of cash. Now money is becoming increasingly acceptable.

103. Melville J. Herskovits, "The Cattle Complex in East Africa," American Anthropologist, 28:230-272, 361-388, 494-528, 633-664.

upon whom a person has a claim. This is confirmed by the fact that the Akamba do not usually let out their cattle to those in their own clan because they would reply "We already have a claim on them."¹⁰⁴

There is one method of extending one's associative group which is instantaneous and does not require the payment of a high price. It is through the institution called blood-brotherhood, or blood-covenant.¹⁰⁵ If two Akamba wish to enter into this relationship they present each other with a few small appropriate gifts and each supplies a goat which they then kill and eat together. They then meet at the hut of one or the other for the ceremony proper. Each of them takes a mouthful of beer from the calabash, rinses his mouth with it, and then spits it back into the calabash. Then each makes an incision on the back of his right hand, after which each drinks the other's blood as it issues from these wounds. From then on they are legally brothers and are obligated to act in terms of this new relationship. This tie cannot be broken. It is such a strong relationship that their children cannot marry each other, for this would be considered incest. If an alien wishes to become a blood-brother to an Akamba, a goat is killed and two pieces of meat are cut out for the purposes of the ceremony. The two parties make incisions on their chests until the blood comes forth. They then each take a piece of meat prepared for the purpose, smear it with the blood of

104. Colson, op. cit., p. 78.

105. The details of this ceremony are given in Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 140-142.

the other person, and eat it.¹⁰⁶

There is another rather interesting way to become covenant-brethren but with less obligations attached than that arising from blood-brotherhood. If a man is being persecuted for any reason by an enemy who is seemingly irreconcilable, he has one refuge. If he manages, by force, to suck the breasts of either the enemy's wife or his daughters, not only are the two parties henceforth at peace one with the other but they are bound to one another in a covenant relationship. Their children may not marry one another for such a relationship would be incestuous. However their children may have sexual intercourse together which would not be allowed if they were biological blood-brothers or if both of them had been Akamba.

There is another relationship which becomes more meaningful when seen in the light of the theme under consideration, that is the relationship of a person to his totemic animal. There is obviously a reciprocal relationship between the clansman and his totemic animal. This was discussed earlier.¹⁰⁷ In many ways this relationship is similar to the relationship between clansmen. It is also to be remembered that the clansmen seek to identify themselves with their totemic animal, going so far as to imitate their dispositions. Seen in the context of this theme, the totemic relationship is actually an attempt to extend the bounds of association and mutual obligation into the

106. This researcher could not discover in the ethnographic literature the reason for changing the technique of blood-brotherhood when an alien was involved.

107. Cf., pp. 43-45.

realms of nature. Le Roy saw this practical aspect of totemism very clearly. He wrote, "In a general way totemism rests on the idea that man can not only enter into relation with the invisible and supernatural world, but that he can also conclude a pact of allegiance with it, valid for himself and his prosperity."¹⁰⁸ He goes on to say, "Totemism is a means employed by primitive man to unite, distinguish, strengthen, and extend the family, through a magical pact."¹⁰⁹

The way in which the Akamba conceive of the spirits of the non-domesticated animals remains in many respects a mystery for the present writer. Perhaps the Akamba actually do have ambivalent feelings about the nature spirits and as a result of this take no chances in not being related to these spirits. Whatever the origin of the totemic system, it is probably alive and vital today because through it, man can extend his sphere of mutually obligatory relationships, even into the realm of the non-human spirits.

Returning to the Akamba's relationships with one another, there is yet another area in which spheres of influence can be enlarged; in associations in the legal clubs and in the practicing of a particular trade or the exercise of some gift. Beginning with the clubs, it has already been noticed that prestige in the community is enhanced by one's position in various clubs. Membership in the clubs is largely

108. Le Roy, op. cit., p. 86.

109. Ibid., p. 8.

obtained through good behavior and the payment of a fee. There prevails in them comradely spirit which entails some mutual obligation. Since these clubs are fairly easy to get into, the Akamba enter them as a matter of course. It is a rather inexpensive means of widening the circle of association.¹¹⁰

Those who practice wholesome arts and professions are also in a better position to claim respect than those who do not. Perhaps this is why the professions are spread so profusely among the populace, for each person is thereby given a fairly equal chance to enhance his associative position. Both manual arts and the arts which are exercised at the direction of the aimu are highly sought after. The reason for this is that it gives the individual yet another means by which he can bring a claim upon others.

Returning for a moment to the part that wives play in this theme, a man can and does enlarge his associative circle by placing his wives at the disposal of his most favored male guests. Of course, he expects reciprocal treatment in their homes as well. But this "sharing" of women goes a long way toward solidifying one's position in the community.

In concluding the consideration of this theme it is to be noted that it illuminates many areas of Akamba behavior which, if taken alone as components, remain obscure.

110. Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 146-148.

Transparency

To the Akamba, the most hated kind of person is the one who goes about with a secret. The people who, so to speak, operate in the shadows are highly suspect and avoided. The mundu aoi or practitioners in maleficent occult powers do their work while secluded and generally in the dark. Kenyatta wrote, "It is witch-doctors who live and eat alone."¹¹¹ Anyone who keeps something to himself, for that matter, is considered to be withholding something from his brethren and pressure is brought upon him to reveal his innermost thoughts. Secrecy is hated above all faults of character. For this reason a theme runs through the Akamba culture which virtually requires openness and transparency of life.

Upon meeting someone, though a stranger, along a Kamba trail it is proper that you should begin to talk to him as he comes into hearing distance, exchanging greetings and informing him of the state of your health and welfare and also telling where you have come from and where you are going and why. This is done as a matter of course. The talking continues until the parties are so far apart that they cannot hear one another. Then you are free to return to your own thoughts. To meet someone on the path who does not divulge everything like this would arouse the greatest suspicion because it would be suspected that he is no doubt on an errand of witchcraft or some other dark and evil adventure which he is unwilling to talk about. A silent Kamba is

¹¹¹. Kenyatta, op. cit., p. 179.

indeed a highly unpopular fellow and when anything happens in the community of a catastrophic nature, he will be suspect as a witch, for witches are quiet.

By this time it has become evident that the very structure of Akamba life would be disrupted if silence were to reign. One of the most remarkable features of the Akamba culture to the Western man is its lack of privacy. This is most obvious with regards to sex itself. Married Akamba do not, of course, practice petting or the arousal of sexual passions in public, for this is frowned upon. The people are expected to find some sort of seclusion somewhere for engaging in intercourse. However, intercourse itself dare not remain a secret. This is because the sex act is not a private matter but affects the lives of other people. In many cases the sex act, while not bringing any ill effects upon the participants, actually brings ritual uncleanness upon a third party and even the whole village. If, for instance, a couple is enjoying sex before the village is cleansed following a death, this brings the entire village into grave danger for through this act the whole community's sex is tainted.¹¹² If a father or husband is absent on a trip and while gone any of his wives or children have intercourse, his sex is affected and if the offenders do not confess their crime and produce the necessary goat with which to be cleansed, he will probably not be able to produce healthy babies. He depends upon their honesty for his own welfare. It is to be noted with regard

¹¹². Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 108-110.

to the morality of the Akamba that the greatest crime is not the commission of an immoral act but to remain silent concerning it. If a father stays away from the home for an extended time it is expected that the occupants of the village will not be able to refrain from sex for any period of time so, making sure they have the necessary cleansing goat, they indulge themselves. Upon the return of the head of the home they will produce the goat, go through the ritual cleansing and everything is considered to be back to normal, as though the infraction was never committed. There is no residual guilt or shame. Had the act been committed in secret and without proper public cleansing, the results would have been unbearable because the offenders would bring shame and guilt not only upon their own heads but upon all in the village.¹¹³

In order for ritual cleansing to have any meaning at all in the village, it is of the utmost importance that each person be perfectly frank and open about his sex life. This also applies to menstruation. It was noted that a menstruating woman must have intercourse on the first night of her menses. It was also noted¹¹⁴ that this act was so important that even the burial of the dead must take second place to it. Whereas these bodily functions are carefully concealed in the West, in Ukamba they are almost as public as eating itself. And indeed it must be so, not only for one's own ritual well-being, but

113. Ibid., p. 347.

114. See the section on burial in Chapter II.

for the purity of the entire population. A certain shamelessness about sex prevails among the Akamba. They take for granted the sexual development of the body such as the appearance of pubes, the enlarging of breasts and the appearance of pregnancy. As stated, even menstruation is a public phenomenon. When small children play "house" as they do in Ukamba, they imitate the sexual features of the adults, even to the extent of sleeping together.¹¹⁵ There is no secrecy about the matter nor dare there be. From infancy the children are taught that sex is not a private but a public matter and the worst of crimes is to enjoy sex in secret when, by doing so, others of the tribe are brought into sexual danger.

Not only is transparency required in sexual relations but in all areas of living. Nothing is done "in a corner." Even the smallest details of life become generally known. It is vital that the affairs of each member of the village be known by all because no one actually acts alone but in relationship to the total will and direction of the activities of the group. Everyone knows in detail the affairs of his neighbors to whom he is bound in a religious sense. Even the smallest possessions must be displayed and made known to the public. Anyone who would try to hide his wealth would be suspected of having sinister motives. The Akamba do not like surprises; they want to know explicitly the details of one's position. And they have a right to know for one man's business is everyone's business.

115. Lindblom, *op. cit.*, p. 419.

In this connection it should be noted that ownership in the minds of the Akamba is simply a trust.¹¹⁶ The clan, made up of the living, and the aimu, are the actual owners of all property. If a person is a poor steward of what he has, it can and should be taken away from him. For instance, if a man mistreats his wife, public opinion is on her side and it is considered right that the man should lose the woman because he did not take proper care of what was entrusted to him. Akamba ownership can be understood in this context. It is as though the clan has a certain amount of property at its disposal, but since the clan is a spiritual entity it cannot hold this property. Consequently the property which the clan owns is distributed to the clansmen as a trust. The property does not, in the real sense of the word, become the property of any one clansman but the clansmen are thought of only as trustees. And as trustees it is expected that they will employ their energies to see that the property is increased under their trusteeship. The nzama is, in the last analysis, the court which administers the trusteeship system. Its work is essentially concerned with the distribution of property.

The theme of transparency is a necessary constituent to the workability of the trusteeship system. Everyone is expected to be frankly honest and candid about his affairs. And if he expects this of others he must be open himself. This is understandable when it is realized that the property possessed by a fellow clansman is really

116. Dundas makes this point throughout his book on Kamba law.

almost as much yours as it is his and that he also has a like interest in what you are holding in trust. When it is further realized that the property is also owned by the aimu who also have a definite interest in its multiplication, it is seen that Secrecy is an antireligious act.

It is little wonder, then, that the Akamba place such a high social premium upon the virtue of transparency. If the Akamba were to fall into the error of individual, private living where the "home is the castle," where plans, intentions, and deeds were not divulged to the community, the entire community would shortly be under unwitting ritual impurity and could only look forward to sickness and mass death. Therefore all works of darkness, being counter thrusts to the theme of openness, are assiduously searched out and destroyed.

Human Dignity, Intelligence, and Self-Control

Lindblom observed that the Akamba, though good workers, were of very little use to the Europeans because "they consider themselves too good to be in the service of the white man as workers." He goes on to say that, "a rather prominent feature of their character (is) . . . pride. Without doing them an injustice one may assign to them the position of the aristocrats among the Bantu tribes of East Africa."¹¹⁷ And indeed the Akamba are a proud people but they are proud, not in the selfish sense in which their attitudes may be taken, but because they believe basically that all men are equal. This was clarified

117. Ibid., p. 551.

in the theme of egalitarianism. The theme now under consideration is a further definition and extension of the belief in egalitarianism.

Each Akamba feels that he has certain inalienable rights as an individual and has as much right as anyone else to press his claims. There are no "second-rate" citizens among the Akamba unless it may be the people who deal in hurtful arts such as witchcraft. While egalitarianism was defined as an equality based on the status quo, the theme of dignity covers those areas of Kamba life in which dignity is actively pursued. It is up to each individual to enhance his own dignity. Though he came into the world naked like everyone else, he has the moral imperative to assert and further his own dignity.

The assertion of dignity may not be done, however, at the expense of the social unit. Actually this would be impossible, for proper dignity is only attained within the properly constituted social means. There is, indeed, a certain pride and one might almost say arrogance, in this attitude but the assertion of dignity is not only or even primarily for the sake of self-aggrandizement, but rather is for the dignity of the family and the clan. The Akamba show a disdain for those who would cringe before any person or any people who are outside of their own hierarchical system. An alien, a foreigner, having no place in the hierarchical system, is, as a result of logic, treated as a neuter. This has given some of the European rulers an understandably poor impression of these people whom they expected to act like inferiors.¹¹⁸

118. Loc. cit.

Dundas was impressed with this theme in the life of the Akamba. He wrote, "They could never submit to a common chief, or join to oppose a common enemy. Above all the Mkamba prizes his independence, to be subject to anyone or bound by anything beyond mere family ties is hateful to him."¹¹⁹

The retention of dignity is largely due to a person's ability to practice restraint and to persevere. A person can lose his dignity in a moment by failing to restrain himself. Even the drinking of beer was formerly preserved for the old men, for they were the only ones able to practice enough restraint to avoid getting intoxicated.

Both men and women are taught to bear pain, hunger, and thirst without complaining. Even in childbirth a woman is expected to joke and smile as always.¹²⁰ If an Mkamba tramps on a thorn, he patiently stops, sits down, and removes it without flinching. Pain is a part of life, and it must be accepted as a part of one's experience. It is highly impolite to complain of either hunger or thirst unless the remark is simply a reminder for the women of the house to prepare the food. Hunger and thirst are common among the Akamba. Famines recur about every seven years, and may last for three or four years. No matter how much a person should feel like complaining, he may not do so. Perhaps this is because it is the height of folly to complain about something which is unchangeable.

119. Dundas, *op. cit.*, p. 486.

120. *Cf.*, p. 56.

A man of true dignity retains his composure no matter what happens. Even at the deathbed of a close friend, he is not allowed to weep. The women, on such an occasion, may.¹²¹ However, if a woman loses a son through the tortures suffered during the initiation rites, she must bear the loss without tears. Both sexes must, by all means, retain their composure. It is only rarely that social custom allows them to do otherwise.

In spite of the fact that an Akamba finds his fulfillment within his group as an integral part of that group, yet he is an individual and he has great latitude in which to develop his talents. It is expected that he will take an interest in law and jurisprudence; will develop his powers of erudition and logical thinking;¹²² will enlarge his experience and fund of knowledge. He is expected to take pride in his ability to influence people through the talents which he has developed. The ideal Akamba is not the priest or the medicine man, but the judge who listens to cases and pronounces his adjudications in the properly dignified manner.¹²³ The more arguments he can bring to bear on the reasons for his judgments, the more highly is he respected. Lindblom was amazed at the ability of the Akamba to express themselves in a most convincing fashion. This is because the great national sport of the Akamba, if it can be thought of so figuratively,

121. Cf., p. 66.

122. Lambert, op. cit., p. 138. "The Kamba have a deep regard for individual prowess and individual erudition."

123. Loc. cit.

is legal argument engaged in at the nzams. Though women may not take as active a part in the legal proceedings, they cannot be considered as lacking certain powers of their own in this area, a fact that can be witnessed at any public market.

One of the unique themes which runs through the folklore of the Akamba is that mental prowess and intelligence are more important than strength. One of the favorite stories concerns a great half-human monster who carries off a lad or a girl. The situation looks hopeless for the captive for the monster has in mind to eat him. A conversation then ensues in which the monster, though of gigantic proportions, is tricked into doing something foolish, for, though strong, he is witless. The clever, though physically weak, can prevail against brute strength. Many of the tales are about the rabbit who gets into one scrape after another with animals many times his size but succeeds in outwitting every one of them.¹²⁴ One would imagine that in a society as primitive as the Akamba's, where the members have been killing elephants and other large animals right up to this generation, would give greater weight to the virtue of physical-strength. However this theme of the superiority of brains to muscle which runs through their folklore is actually one of the themes of the culture.

The Akamba are taught to rely upon their own wits. If a person does not actively pursue his own rights he can be assured that no one else is going to do this for him. There are no lawyers among the Akamba; each man is his own lawyer.

124. Many of the Brer Rabbit stories of Uncle Remus are identical to those which have widespread popularity throughout Bantu Africa. This is not unexpected because the Brer Rabbit stories were probably carried to America by the West African slaves.

In warfare and cattle raids each individual is expected to use his own head and decide on the spot what he needs to do. In warfare personal decision and endurance are the two most important virtues. Of course, the ability to shoot a straight arrow is as well, but intelligence and endurance are considered to be of cardinal significance. Dundas noted that, "In respect to intelligence the Akamba are very much in advance of other tribes."¹²⁵

Summary

These, then, are the seven themes of Kamba culture which emerged when the components, nexus of components, and assemblages were studied and compared. They are, in review, the maintenance of cosmological balance, the promotion of egalitarianism, the maintenance of hierarchy, the maintenance of sexual vigor, the extension of association, transparten living, and the promotion of human dignity, intelligence, and self-control.

Each cultural component, each nexus of components and each assemblage of components and nexus of components, reinforces one or more of these themes.

125. Dundas, op. cit., p. 490.

CHAPTER IV

THE KAMBA PUBERTY RITES

The Akamba have three initiation rites¹ through which the males pass, only one of which, the second, is coincident with physical puberty.² Therefore they can hardly be called puberty rites in the strict sense of the word. Van Gennep made a distinction between physical and social puberty; he noted that while some puberty rites are actually coincident with physical puberty others are not. The latter are more properly termed rites of social puberty.³

Richards pressed this distinction further. She wrote:

One tribe (in Africa) may stress the actual attainment of physical puberty and the magic protection which the first signs of sexual maturity are believed to require. In another, a greater emphasis may be laid on parenthood, and the puberty rites may be predominantly rites of fertility. In other tribes again the ceremonies may have, rather, the character of rites of social maturation and role assumption, and the young individual who passes through them acquires forms of social privilege or becomes a member of an age group with special status and functions. Such an initiation ceremony may, in fact, become so important as a rite of role assumption that it ceases to have any connection with physical maturation, and it is difficult to decide whether the term "puberty ritual" can properly be applied to it.⁴

1. The term "initiation" will be used throughout this study to denote the initiation ceremonies which have to do with the puberty rites only.
2. Females pass only through the first two rites.
3. Arnold Van Gennep, The Rites of Passage, p. 93.
4. Audrey I. Richards, Chiungu: A Girl's Initiation Ceremony Among the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia, p. 18.

The Kamba rites contain elements of both role assumption and fertility promotion. The fact that as much as ten years may elapse between the first and the last rite places the Akamba's puberty or initiation ritual in a category all of its own among Bantu people.

For two of the Akamba's neighbors, the Kikuyu and the Masai,⁵ the initiation rites are predominantly oriented around role assumption; their political systems are organized according to age-sets which are circumcised together. On the other hand, their neighbors to the south, the Wachaga, who have centralized political authority, emphasize aspects of fertility in their puberty rites.⁶

The Akamba initiation rites, unlike their neighbors, refuse to fit into any simple classification. They are not consistently coincident with physical puberty and the rites have nothing to do with a system of political age-groups.

Turning to the rites themselves, the Akamba practice them in three stages; they are all called nzaiko,⁷ a noun derived from the verb, aika, "to circumcise." The first is the nzaiko ila nini, "the small circumcision," or the nzaiko ya kabio, "the circumcision of the knife." This is the rite celebrated in conjunction with the actual physical circumcision. The second, and most important of all, is the nzaiko ila nene, "the great circumcision," or nzaiko ya

5. C. W. Hobley, Bantu Beliefs and Magic, p. 88.

6. Otto Baum, Chaga Childhood, p. 331.

7. A Glossary of Kamba words used in this study is found in the Appendix.

mbusia, "the rhinoceros circumcision." The third, which is not practiced in all sections of the tribe, is the "circumcision of the men," the nzaiko ya aume, a rite reserved only for the sexually mature males.

Initiation must always take place in this order but at the present time not everyone is expected to complete the last.⁸ The first two take place yearly, in the dry season, and the last every other year during the same season.⁹

The Akamba have no tradition concerning the origin of these rites. Dundas thought that it came by way of the Wagiriana, a neighboring Bantu tribe.¹⁰ He also naively stated that he "can only explain the existence of such celebrations by the following. First the Akamba, it must be admitted, has a distinct inclination for that which is depraved and secondly, the natives assure us that these practices were introduced from the Wagiriana."¹¹ None of the authorities on the Akamba have gone into this matter.¹²

The Circumcision (nzaiko ila nini)

Every dry season, between the months of August and October,

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8. John Middleton, The Central Tribes of the North-Eastern Bantu, p. 88.
9. Gerhard Lindblom, The Akamba, p. 42.
10. Charles Dundas, "The History of Kitui," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 43:524.
11. Loc. cit.
12. One can speculate that if it is not an indigenous rite of the Akamba, its probable source was their Hamitic neighbors who, according to Junod, had Semitic customs. Henri P. Junod, Bantu Heritage, p. 44.

the fathers, who can afford it, bring their sons and daughters together and present them to the performer and his wife, who, for a stipulated fee, perform the actual operation. At the present time children as young as four years old are circumcised at the same time as those well on into puberty, for age has little to do with the rite; it depends mainly upon the father's ability to pay the fee. The performer is a paid professional. The mundu mue has nothing to do with this rite.¹³

In circumcising the males the entire foreskin is cut off and thrown into the sugar cane.¹⁴ The sugar cane is used by the men to produce beer. This act possibly has fertility implications, though none of the authorities state it.

The knife which is used for the operation is of the native variety and is used for nothing else.¹⁵ If it is sharp all goes well, if not, great pain is produced. A little dust, the crushed roots of a reed, or dry hyrax dung, may be applied to the wound which usually heals in two or three weeks.¹⁶

While the boys are undergoing their operation, the wife of the mwaki, helped by other women, attends to that of the girls.

13. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 43.

14. Loc. cit.

15. The Akamba can obtain good, sharp knives at the stores for this rite yet they persist in using the poorly refined native variety, even though they do use knives of foreign manufacture in their every day lives. This retention of the old instrument for ritual use is a well-known phenomenon and may, in this case, give a hint as to when the Akamba first began to circumcise.

16. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 43, and J. M. Hildebrandt, "Ethnographische Notizen über Wakamba und ihre Nachbarn," Zeitschrift für Ethnologie, 10:382.

She uses a knife like the one her husband uses. She removes the preputium clitoridis and the labia minora.¹⁷ This is a very painful operation.

These rites take place very early in the morning to avoid the "evil eye."¹⁸ It is expected that these novices, while bleeding from their sexual organs, are especially vulnerable to attacks by malevolent spirits. This somewhat parallels the condition of the girls when they experience their first menstruation at which time they must remain quiet and indoors lest harm befall either themselves or others.¹⁹

The children are ordered not to urinate while under the knife. If they do, which is interpreted as revealing a lack of self-control, they are marked throughout life and may only marry another who has been guilty of the same offense. Hopley states that after the operation they are fed children's food such as milk and gruel until they are well.²⁰

A great feast is held on the day of the operation. The young people put on their ornaments and dance while the fathers of the newly circumcised children drink beer with the men who have children who were previously circumcised. Sacrifices are offered to the aimu as part of the feast; they are implored to cause the newly circumcised

17. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 44.

18. Ibid., p. 45.

19. Ibid., pp. 39-41.

20. C. W. Hopley, Ethnology of the Akamba and other East African Tribes, p. 69.

to grow into full adulthood.²¹

On the second night after the circumcision the children's parents must have intercourse or the benefit of the entire circumcision is voided.²²

Hildebrandt reports that the droppings of the hyrax are applied to the circumcision wound.²³ The hyrax is seldom used in ritual, and when it does appear it is used to promote fertility. Crops are sprinkled, if in peril, by an ng'ondu made from the undigested mixture in the hyrax's stomach. The same mixture is used to smear barren women and is employed in some cases of thabu.²⁴

Hence every precaution is taken to ensure that the circumcised children will grow up to be sexually productive individuals. There is no instruction of any kind during this, the first of the three rites, the center of which is the actual circumcision.

The researcher could not find any other tribe in Bantu Africa in which the physical operation preceded the initiation rites by so many years. Evidence would indicate that the circumcision rites and initiation were originally performed together whenever they are practiced in Bantu Africa. The purpose for which the Akamba modified this procedure is unknown. However, a man cannot move from the position of an nthele

21. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 44.

22. Loc. cit.

23. Hildebrandt, op. cit., p. 382.

24. Ibid., pp. 297-298.

to mutumia unless he has a circumcised child, nor can he drink beer with atumia, so a man's position depends, to some extent, on the number of circumcised children he has. The importance which an Mkamba attaches to the expansion of his sphere of influence and the consequent development of prestige would thus have a tendency to reduce the age at which his children become circumcised. In 1913 Stannus wrote of the Yao tribe, "At the present time there is a tendency for the rite to be performed at an earlier and earlier age so that the youths may benefit by the instruction. . . . before they come under mission influence."²⁵ This would hardly be the case with the Akamba because mission influence there became a factor only after the trend was already established to lower the age. Mission influence previous to 1910 when Hobley wrote Ethnology of the Akamba and Other East African Tribes, was meager.

The Great Circumcision (nzaiko ila nene)

This, the second rite, is primarily initiatory in nature. Before going through it a young person is looked upon as a kiimu, the same word which is used when referring to a baby until its fourth day when, by getting an iron chain it becomes a human being. When someone misbehaves the favorite excuse is, "But he has not yet gone through the great circumcision,"²⁶ because it is believed that this rite translates one into a proper person. Before the rite, it is unthinkable to marry or to make any arrangements for getting married.

25. H. S. Stannus and J. B. Davey, "The Initiation Ceremony for Boys Among the Yao of Nyasaland," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 43:119.

26. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 45.

Hobley reported that pubes must appear as a prerequisite to this rite.²⁷ Lindblom, while not denying this, states that children go up to these rites as young as from eight to twelve years old. The age at which the child is circumcised depends more upon the ability of the father to pay the necessary fee than upon any other consideration.²⁸ There is no evidence that this rite is observed at the present time in connection with signs of physiological puberty. This may have been the case earlier and Hobley's statement that it was engaged in at the appearance of the pubic hair is probably reminiscent of a time in the past when this part of the rite was held when the candidates had become sexually mature.

It is not uncommon for a father to punish a disobedient child by withholding the fee and thus postponing his initiation. This is a terrible punishment and is dreaded by the young people.²⁹

Permission to hold the rites may not be taken for granted, although these ceremonies recur as regularly as the seasons. Each time the fathers who wish to have their children initiated must approach the nzama and beg permission to hold a nzaiko ila-nene. When the request is granted a mwaiki is engaged to organize and conduct the rite. This is likely to be the same mwaiki who performed the original circumcision.

27. Hobley, op. cit., p. 68.

28. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 46.

29. Loc. cit.

30. Loc. cit.

In preparation for the rite the elders build a great initiation hut in the thome before the performer's dwelling, strewing leaves and grass on the floor as a sleeping surface. No beds are allowed in the hut. It has two entrances, one for the girls and the other for the boys. When inside, the girls will segregate themselves on one side of the hut and the boys will segregate themselves on the other. The work goes forward in a festive mood as the elders partake of the beer prepared for the occasion. The aimu are not forgotten nor is Mulungu who also gets a part of the beer. They specifically ask Mulungu's blessing upon the children, that they may develop well.³¹

The night after the great hut is built, the mwaiki must have intercourse with his wife.³²

The next morning the candidates move in. They are called asingi. Accompanying them are several instructors, mature men and women chosen for the position by the fathers of the children; they are called abwiki from the verb bwika, "to cover," for it is the responsibility of these instructors to protect the novices throughout the rite. One mubwiki³³ may have as many as twenty candidates to look after.³⁴

Upon entering the hut the asingi render themselves completely naked, even removing rings and any other ornaments. On their heads, however, they bind a piece of cloth or a strap of leather. Particular

31. Loc. cit.

32. Ibid., p. 47.

33. Mubwiki is singular of abwiki.

34. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 47.

care is taken to avoid touching a novice's head. Were this to happen it is believed that all of his hair would fall out.³⁵ The novices' bodies are rubbed with fat and ashes³⁶ which produces a white, ghostly appearance.³⁷

The first day is taken up with the singing of a few songs which the novices are taught by the abwiki. One of them is:

You say eeh, listen:
 My father has me circumcised, eeh.
 He ? remains in the hut like a child.
 Whither have our mothers gone?
 They have gone to cook (food).
 We are very hungry.³⁸

After singing for a while they all proceed to the female leader's hut over a kind of obstacle course which can be traversed only by deciphering the meaning of each thing put in the way. The arrangement of the objects and even the objects themselves are not standardized. The idea is to give a lesson in symbolic thinking. The nzaiko which Lindblom described had objects arranged in the following order: a lump of wood, a leather strap, a pile of ashes, a large calabash vessel, and a calabash.³⁹

The group proceeds together like a troop. Upon reaching the

35. Dundas, op. cit., p. 523.

36. Whiteness is a sign of the spiritual state among Bantu peoples. The fact that the novices are called "little spirits" is consistent with this ghostly appearance.

37. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 47.

38. Loc. cit.

39. Loc. cit.

piece of wood they stop and sing:⁴⁰

You have closed the way with obstacles, aah!
The way is closed to us by something that lies across it.

Then the wood is cast away and they go on to the next object,
the strap, where they again stop and sing:

You say, eeh, listen: the animal is large,
It coils into coils. Throw the obstacle over there.

The strap is thrown aside and they proceed to the ashes, stop
and sing:

You say, eeh, listen: here, here scrape up ashes!
Go to one side obstacle.

While singing the boys jump around like hares, kicking up the
ashes with their feet. They also throw ashes at one another.

Coming to the calabash vessel they sing:

You say, eeh, listen: wombombo (a sort of refrain)
The hair on the head is burnt, isn't it?
I have seen ? aah, aah!
Ten calabash vessels may be moved away, obstacle.

When they reach the last obstacle, the calabash, they sing:

You say, eeh, listen!
Our mothers, you have closed the way, eeh.
You have closed with the vessels and calabashes all.

Having finally reached the hut of the female mubwiki they are
given a bit of beer to drink from a spoon. This is probably the first
beer they have tasted in their lives, or at least it is the first
time they have been allowed to taste it. After drinking it, they sing:

40. These songs are recorded by Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 48-50.

Father, father, beer.
 Why should we begin to dig
 With a grave stake of the mutandi tree?⁴¹

When everyone has had his portion of beer, they return to the hut and learn some more songs. These songs are of a very lewd nature, learned and sung by both sexes together. One of them is as follows:

The boys sing:

Hae, hae, listen:
 The kino (the female pudenda) is a fool,
 She dwells in the clothes,
 Hae, hae.

The girls answer:

You say, eeh, listen:
 The kea (the male pudenda) is a fool,
 It dwells among the testes,
 And is a fool to allow the kino to drink fat.

The meaning of this sort of song is obvious. The young people are required to restrain themselves and speak of such things as though they were speaking of the weather. No sexual intercourse may take place no matter how erotic the atmosphere. The males and the females sit separately.

There is probably very little taught through these songs and conversations which the candidates do not already know. It would be stretching the matter out of proportion to think of it as a lesson in sex education.

On the second day certain men enter the bush and prepare the mbusia,

41. The grave sticks are made from the mutandi tree which produces large red flowers.

literally the "rhinoceros." It is simply a structure made of sticks in the shape of a box big enough to hold a man and is covered with branches so that it cannot be seen through. At dusk the girls are taken out of the hut which is then divided by a skin partition, and the boys take up their position in one section of the now divided structure. The mbusia comes out of the forest, carried by several men. From inside it issues a noise which is very frightening. Actually it is made by a man blowing through a hollow stick, one end of which is submerged in a clay vessel partly filled with beer and water. The women and children run to save their lives lest the "beast" devour them. The "beast" moves slowly through the village threatening every one it meets. Finally it turns into the initiation hut. The boys who have been taught to dread this beast from birth, are indeed frightened. It is the responsibility of the abwiki to sustain the boys in this hour. The mbusia bellows and stamps as though he would come through the partition and devour the boys. Now the test comes. Each lad, one at a time, gathering up his courage, runs to the partition and beats the skin partition with a stick informing the "beast" of his name. This is called, "killing the rhinoceros."⁴²

After the "beast" disappears, the girls are taken into the hut to replace the boys. They go through a mild version of the "roarer." An old woman enters the hut instead of the mbusia and there rattles a calabash filled with seeds. This frightens the girls but there is no

⁴² Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 50-51.

indication that they ritually kill the "beast."⁴³

On the night of the second day the conductor must have sexual intercourse with his wife, the female conductor. During this night the asangi sleep outside the hut on the bare ground without a fire. This is indeed a torturous undertaking because of the night insects which come in hordes from the ground, trees, and grassland. The candidates are not only deprived of blankets but of all clothing. Through these rites they are considered as sub-human beings; actually they are looked upon as baboons.⁴⁴ When they find themselves stretched out naked on the cold sand which crawls with insects at night, lying without fire as the cold dew falls on their shivering, naked bodies, their plight is little better than that of the lowliest of animals.⁴⁵

On the following morning the fee must be paid. At this time the candidates seem ready to abandon the affair. The abwiki seem to be no less anxious, and so on this morning the abwiki gather their charges together and prepare to flee into the forest. Anticipating this, the parents build fires around the initiation area and take up sentry positions to prevent this. No one dares leave the area.⁴⁶

43. Ibid., p. 51.

44. Ibid., p. 121.

45. Ibid., p. 51.

46. Loc. cit.

After the fees are duly paid to the conductors and the abwiki, things return to normal. The girls are sent out to gather firewood, a female occupation and the boys are given miniature bows and small bird-arrows with which they then hunt large insects and small animals. Each youth must shoot a lizard called the telembo and bring it back impaled on an arrow to show to the elders. He then throws it onto the thatched roof of the hut, an observance which is to give him good success in the hunt as an adult.⁴⁷ Hobley asserts that only then may they be called asingi.⁴⁸ Both boys and girls must hide in the bush if they meet any passersby along the trail.⁴⁹ These diminutive animals and weapons are to represent real hunting which was no doubt the most important male occupation of the Akamba before the coming of British rule.⁵⁰

When the novices return to the hut following the hunting and wood-gathering rites, the two conductors gather them together, drink a calabash of beer, and then spit out over the group, thus giving them their blessing.⁵¹ This completes the task of the conductors, and the asingi can now return home. On their way home they sing a certain song over the first cow droppings they see, another over the first goat droppings, and so on.⁵²

47. Hobley, op. cit., p. 70.

48. Loc. cit.

49. Loc. cit.

50. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 52.

51. It is not uncommon in Bantu ethnography that the monster, before leaving the community, spits a fertility blessing over the novices.

52. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 53.

Anticipating their return home, the mothers have arranged obstacle-courses before their huts in order to test their children's newly learned ability to think in symbols. The abwiki are allowed to help them in this exercise. Often objects are displayed that reveal some abnormality which the novice must discover. For example, they must detect that some zebra or giraffe hair is omitted on one of the arrows in a quiver, or that a bow is strung up improperly. Perhaps one of the women hid an object under her groin belt or in her nose. The devices are at times obscene by Western standards. Lindblom states that the solution to one of the puzzles was for the novice to insert his penis into the genital organ of the woman who was standing in the way. When the musingi has passed all of the tests, his mother smears him with fat, after which he may enter her hut.⁵³ He is given a small gift by his father and the girls are given something by their mothers.⁵⁴

While trying to solve the riddles they sing a little song:

You say, eeh, listen:
I shall be shut out by sword and spear,
And by every possible thing, eeh!
By sword and spear.⁵⁵

During that day the asingi, with their miniature bows in hand, visit their friends and relatives who place gifts on the bows. When

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53. When a new bride is brought into the village the mother of the groom smears her in the same manner. This is an integration rite.

54. Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 55-57.

55. Ibid., p. 53.



the bows can hold no more, the gifts are taken and presented to the abwiki.⁵⁶

Toward evening of the third day each boy is provided with a stick about four inches long which is put into use that night during the dance. During the course of the dance the boys are expected to insert their sticks into the genital organs of the girls. If any boy is bashful and inhibited in this respect and thus refrains from this "pleasantry," he is told that his children will be very weak and die early. The elders are on hand to give any encouragement which a youth may need. The girls suffer silently. Whether this is a substitute for general sexual freedom which in this situation may be incestuous is not clear.⁵⁷

After the dance the novices return to their mothers' huts. While the novices are asleep on the floor of the mother's hut, the parents must have sexual intercourse. This coitus is of a ritual nature and dare not be omitted. It will help to assure fertility for the novice.⁵⁸

On the fourth day the abwiki enter the woods and cut thin branches from the musiwa tree which are in turn given to the novices in lengths of about thirty inches. In the presence of the asingi the abwiki carve figures into the bark of the sticks, teaching what the symbols mean. These sticks are called musai. One stick which Lindblom procured has

56. Loc. cit.

57. Ibid., pp. 53-54.

58. Ibid., p. 54.

on it the following figures which are done in surrealist style: an open space with paths leading to it, a tortoise, an ornamented seat of a stool, a python, a cow's tail, and a star.⁵⁹ It would seem as though no two sticks are exactly alike. Hobley collected a stick which differed in some respects from Lindblom's.⁶⁰ Hobley suggests that perhaps the sticks were to contain representations of the totemic animals of the whole tribe.⁶¹ It is true that the tortoise, python, snake, and centipede are not eaten by the tribe and so may have some totemic significance. However there are many other animals which the Akamba do not eat which do not appear on this stick.

The Wachaga also make use of a stick like this. Raum claims that four themes are interwoven in the pictorial representations, namely, the development of the embryo, the anatomy of the sex organs, the building of a hut, and the proper conduct at the king's court.⁶²

The Akamba's stick would seem to lack this sophistication. Lindblom perhaps passes them off too lightly, however, when he writes, "Although it is an embarrassing matter for anyone to betray too great ignorance in these matters, yet the figures have no deep meaning, but seem mostly to be looked upon as a joke."⁶³

59. Ibid., pp. 54-55.

60. Hobley, op. cit., pp. 71-72.

61. Ibid., p. 72.

62. Otto Raum, Chaga Childhood, pp. 328-329.

63. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 56.

In addition to using the musai stick the asingi are also taught the names of other pictographs which the abwiki draw in the sand. They include a snake, the sun, a stool with three legs, the moon and stars, a chain with short side links, a centipede, a woman's belt, and a calabash.⁶⁴ All of these pictographs, which are drawn in the sand, are associated with some aspect of the Akamba's sex life with the exception of the sun. It is possible that Lindblom took it for granted that the circle with rays coming from it was the sun. Hopley records the same picture from a Kikuyu kichandi (a musical instrument) and was told it was the moon, an object of undisputed sexual importance.⁶⁵ All of the pictographs on Hopley's musai stick are encountered in the sexual practices of the Akamba, either signifying the division of labor between the sexes or are directly related to fertility and the growth of the embryo.

There is little doubt that the musai is a phallic symbol and is associated with the fertility of the owner. Therefore one would expect that the markings on it would have something to do with fertility and generation in some way or other. This is demonstrated above, with the exception of the reference to stars, and the cow's tail. A further indication that the musai sticks are phallic symbols is the fact that after the nzaiko ceremonies come to an end, the parents of the initiated

64. Ibid., p. 55.

65. G. W. Hopley, "Further Researches into Kikuyu and Kamba Religion, Beliefs and Customs," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 41:452.

youth take the stick, place it under their bed, and have sexual intercourse over it. Following that the stick has no more use and is destroyed.⁶⁶

The girls also must learn to decipher the pictographs on the musai stick. Before they leave the nzaiko, a small piece of stick is cut off and tied around the neck of each girl. In order to make the piece feminine a small bead which is worn by the married women on their belts is placed on each end. There is a likelihood that this small piece of musai, being complementary to the youths' entire stick, is a clitoral symbol. The girls wear these for four or five days following the feast, after which they return to the nzaiko village where the old lady takes them off and throws them away.⁶⁷ It is to be noted that the Akamba do not at this time practice clitoridectomy. There are some indications that they did this in the past, and the surrendering of this clitoral symbol may represent this act. The Wachaga⁶⁸ and the Akikuyu still remove the entire clitoris during circumcision.

Before sunset of the fourth day the youths scatter over the countryside and steal sugar cane which they then use to make beer for their abwiki in order that "the milk may flow" tomorrow.⁶⁹

66. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 55.

67. C. W. Hobley, Ethnology of the Akamba and Other East African Tribes, p. 72.

68. J. Raut, "Christianity and African Puberty Rites," International Review of Missions, 16:307.

69. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 56.

Early in the morning of the fifth day one of the abwiki makes his way, by himself, to a wild fig tree in the vicinity⁷⁰ which he beats with the blunt end of a native axe. In a half-calabash he collects the milky juice which issues forth and then drives a nail into the tree, thus "closing" it so that it will yield no more sap for the other abwiki. This nail not only "closes" this tree but all other wild fig trees in the area. Some time later in the morning the other abwiki, both male and female, come to the tree to get some of the milk, failing which they would not be able to complete their work. When they get to the tree, each mubwiki spits on the tree uttering the words, "Fig tree, we have come to pray you to give us milk juice for the asingi." Both boys and girls smear the trunk with fat and then make a little offering of food and milk.⁷¹

Then each mubwiki tries, or at least should try, to get some sap but soon all discover that the flow from the trees has been stopped up. This creates confusion and it looks as though the young people must remain forever uninitiated. At this point the mubwiki who tapped the milk earlier in the day offers to sell the milk which he obtained. The others agree to this and pay him a certain fee, after which he gives them each a bit.⁷²

70. Lindblom asserts that it must lie to the east of the village. Loc. cit.

71. Loc. cit.

72. Hobley, op. cit., p. 73.

Toward sunset the abwiki lead the asingi to the fig tree from which milk was obtained. At the base of the tree each musingi is given a little of the milk, now hard, which he pretends to eat.⁷³

Another ceremony is performed at this time under the fig tree. Each male novice is again mutilated, but only slightly. He receives a small incision just at the base of the glans penis into which some beer is poured. The girls do not have a second operation.⁷⁴

By this time it is almost dark. Hobley describes another ceremony which must be performed before the novitiates can enter into their own homes. At the nzaiko hut several black goats, fertility symbols, are taken, a little cut is made in each of the ears and the blood which oozes out is rubbed on the forehead of each musingi by his or her own father.⁷⁵

Following this the novices may enter into their own homes and eat food befitting their new station.⁷⁶ During the nzaiko they lived on maize, porridge, and gruel, all children's food. Now they may eat meat, milk, sweet potatoes, and certain types of beans.⁷⁷

On the sixth day the asingi rest while the women prepare food which will be used on the following day.

73. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 56.

74. Ibid., p. 57.

75. Hobley, op. cit., p. 73.

76. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 57.

77. Ibid., p. 56.

On the seventh and last day the male novices engage in a mock cattle raid in which they prove their bravery. When the cattle are driven home in the evening, as is the custom, the asingi, dressed like warriors and carrying weapons and things for a long journey, rush out to attack the cattle and pretend to carry them off. They are pelted and beaten by the herdsmen. The asingi must not retreat. If one should shrink from the blows received he is dubbed vea, a coward.⁷⁸ While all this is going on the women are screaming "The Masai are coming!"⁷⁹

If the lads do well, a great feast and dance are held which conclude the ceremonies. Yet one act remains. As after a real cattle raid the parents of a successful warrior must have intercourse, so following this sham battle the parents must practice coitus, not on the seventh night, however, for seven is an unlucky number. They therefore postpone the act one night.⁸⁰

Lindblom has collected one song which is sung during the second nzaiko by the inhabitants of Machakos who are notorious cattle raiders.

The sun goes down in Masai-land
And leaves us its reflection, aah.
You say, eeh, listen:
We shall steal, lela !
Ae, ae, we shall steal cattle from the Masai.
We shall steal over all the steppes.⁸¹

78. The details of the mock cattle raid vary widely throughout the tribe.

79. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 57. The Masai are renowned cattle thieves.

80. Ibid., p. 58.

81. Ibid., p. 59.

The Circumcision of the Men (nzaiko ya aume)

This nzaiko is also referred to as the mbabani, a mythical river monster. Hopley learned of the basic legend of the mbabani from the Mumoni District. The elements of the legend follow. When the Tana River swells as a result of the heavy rains an aquatic animal comes out of the water. It is about the size of a cow but is white. Only certain persons know how to catch this beast. Each season the Akamba elders manage to catch one of them and lead it through the countryside for several nights. All those who wish to learn the secret of the way to catch the mbabani come to a certain place where the captured beast enters the circle bellowing loudly and pawing. But, being secured by ropes held by the men, it is restrained from devouring any of the group. In desperation the beast spits out a quantity of saliva on each novice and then is taken away.⁸²

The Akamba's mbabani rites are wrapt in utmost secrecy and it is unlikely that any white man has ever participated in or witnessed any of them. The initiated ones are sworn to secrecy. Lindblom writes, "A Kamba may not refer to these rites even in general terms, and merely to ask about them costs two bulls."⁸³ The rite takes place only every third or fourth year. If held more frequently the rains would certainly be affected and famine would result because the rite is so dangerously powerful.⁸⁴

82. Hopley, op. cit., p. 77.

83. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 60.

84. Ibid., p. 61.

It is not required that every tribesman pass through these rites but he who does is called a "man of reputation," and is rather certain to attain the dignified position of mutumia. Only sexually mature men may participate in this rite.⁸⁵

The conductor of this nzaiko is one of the respected elders of the community who, with four other men who have been through the rites, goes into the forest and chooses a site near the river for the encampment. There they construct a hut and clear an area so that only sand remains. This work is consecrated by killing a goat and sprinkling the contents of its stomach on the sand, mixing it in well.⁸⁶

While one of the men remains to guard the spot lest anyone come near it the others go to gather materials for the preparation of the mbabani.⁸⁷ Lindblom describes its construction as follows: "A musia tree is found, and from it are made two pipe-shaped staves, into which a thinner stick is inserted. By means of fibres of the mwathi tree . . . the staves are bound together at an acute angle."⁸⁸ From this description it is difficult to visualize the instrument. Another goat is killed to consecrate the mbabani. It is then placed in the river in a way that it will not float away.

85. Loc. cit.

86. Ibid., pp. 61-62. The goat is a fertility symbol.

87. Anyone coming near to the spot is fined a bull.

88. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 62.

They then return to the village and pass the word around that all is ready. That night the asingi gather at the home of the conductor and await the coming of the mbabani. All other uninitiated people are required to stay in their huts and observe strict silence. At last the mbabani comes through the village, carried by the men who made it. Two of them blow through the hollow legs making a weird, hollow sound. If anyone is found in the path of the mbabani, he is fined a bull or ten goats. No noise goes unnoticed and even a cough or a sneeze is considered a grave offense. The whole village experiences the terror of having the cruel beast in its midst. It works its way slowly to the house of the operator to devour the novices gathered there. The conductor asks it in a loud voice why it has come. The weird creature answers with a windy response. The conductor asserts that there are no more children left there. This obviously holds the mbabani off because after the novices dance a while in the conductor's hut, it disappears. The asingi do not see the mbabani.⁸⁹

Following the departure of the mbabani, the asingi are led to a secluded spot in the wilderness and are there given strict instructions regarding what is expected of them in the coming rites. Every two asingi have one protector, a mubwiki, who has already gone through the rite. This ratio of two to one is required due to the gravity of the rite. The abwiki impress their charges with the fact that on no

89. Ibid., pp. 62-63.

account may they refuse to do anything and that their obedience must be instantaneous.⁹⁰

Besides the abwiki there are several other young men who also take part in the rites. Their sole responsibility is to make things miserable for the novices. They are called ngala meaning "flea" or "spark." In social rank they are below the protectors.⁹¹

By this time the adult men of the community have taken up their positions in the initiation area according to rank. Four fires are lit, one for the asingi, one for the ngala, one for the abwiki, and one for the atumia. The asingi have already paid for their initiation in the form of domestic animals, some of which are now eaten around these fires. When an animal is killed its parts are distributed according to the rank of the recipients; the atumia receive the most desirable pieces and the asingi are left with almost nothing. Any breach of protocol is a serious offense. In addition to the segregation by fire, position, and differential dissection of meat, the atumia alone may break bones to remove the marrow. At the end of a meal all of the bones are returned to the atumia's fire for inspection. On no account may a junior break a bone. Realizing the Akamba's great love of marrow, this is a stringent restriction. None of the animals paid as fees may be taken back into the village but all must be slain

90. Ibid., p. 63.

91. Loc. cit.

and eaten in the course of the initiation.⁹²

After feasting has progressed for some time, the asingi are subjected to the first of their trials. With their eyes bound, they are led away by the abwiki to the sandy place prepared earlier where they are ordered to lie prostrate. In this position they are told to kick up sand with their hands and feet, thus attracting the attention of the mbabani, who shortly appears on the scene bellowing belligerently. The asingi are required to lie as still as corpses while their protectors kick sand over them, pretending to bury them. All the novices are ordered to cry the cry of women, "ulu, ulu, ulu!" Outwitted by the protectors the mbabani retires and the grateful asingi accompany their abwiki back to the encampment. Arriving back at the gathering of men the asingi are given a little meat but their every bite is watched to make certain that they do not break even the most cartilaginous bones. If one of them does so unwittingly, his father must pay a fine of a goat.⁹³

The asingi are allowed but a few hours sleep that night. They may take refuge at the abwiki's fire for protection from the frustrating ngala.

On the following day the ngala torment the asingi with almost no interference from the abwiki. The novices are ordered to imitate a beer party of grown men, suck sand through a straw, then get "drunk"

92. Loc. cit.

93. Ibid., pp. 63-64.

and belabor one another with clubs.⁹⁴

When the ngala break wind, the asingi are required to reply at once with a long drawn out "aah!" This is an expression of the highest respect which, in ordinary life, is used by a young person when greeting an elder. During the course of the day the ngala stuff human excrement into the asingi's mouths which they must swallow no matter how distasteful.⁹⁵

At one point the ngala order the asingi to throw themselves on the ground, roll around in the filth, and then walk by using only their feet and heads, with their hands behind their backs. This gives the face quite a drubbing. If a candidate falters in the least or does not proceed fast enough, he is beaten without mercy. Then the ngala drive a pointed stick into the ground until a part of it, just a few inches long, is left above ground. Each novice must squat, not sit, and from this position stoop over with his hands behind his back and pull out the stake with his teeth. Many of them tumble over and fall headlong on the pointed stake. For some this is an impossible task. The ngala have been known to help the novices though not without first inflicting sufficient torture.⁹⁶

Then follow the beatings proper. The ngala line up in two lines facing one another, each holding a club about six feet long. The asingi pass between the two lines and, upon emerging are thoroughly beaten.

94. Ibid., p. 64.

95. Ibid., p. 65.

96. Loc. cit.

A recalcitrant person suffers terribly at this time when old debts are paid off. Deaths resulting from these beatings are not uncommon.⁹⁷

By this time one would suspect that the life has almost gone out of the novices, especially seeing that they have had no more than a scrap of meat to eat since the previous day and have had very little sleep. Yet they must now undergo ordeals through which even their sexual powers must react in momentary obedience to their superiors. Each musingi comes before the elders and is expected to produce an erection at once after which the ngala hang a large piece of wood on the member. Thus encumbered he must walk about and the erection must be sustained for some time, lest the wood fall off. And all the while the audience is convulsed with laughter. As though this was not humiliating enough, the ngala dig out a hole in the sand and pour it full of water. This represents a vagina. Each novice must take his turn performing the act of copulation with the earth to the delight of the onlookers.⁹⁸ Pfitzinger also records that additional sexual ordeals of this nature were engaged in.⁹⁹

For three nights in succession the mbabani is brought out as it was on the first night. While the mbabani is alive there is no real peace in the encampment at night. The elders are said to make war on the mbabani each night. On the third night an ox is killed by the elders some distance from camp. Its meat is cut up into small chunks

97. Loc. cit.

98. Ibid., pp. 65-66.

99. Lindblom quotes Pfitzinger, op. cit., p. 65.

and strung on a string. In the morning the news goes throughout the camp that the beast has been slain. Then the elders come in bearing this meat, proof positive that the report is correct. Each novice is given a piece of the meat which he roasts over the fire and eats.¹⁰⁰

Following this the novices are led home amid singing. The songs are again extremely lewd. When they approach the village the ngala continue to torment the asingi. They greet them using the greeting appropriate for greeting little children. When the asingi open their mouths to answer, they get their ears boxed or get human excrement pushed into their mouths.¹⁰¹ While undergoing this humiliation the ngala will likely urinate at which time the asingi utter the reverential "aah" again. These "pleasantries"¹⁰² are continued throughout the day. Finally, toward evening, each musingi is required to call his father to come to him. Then the ngala requires him to place his penis in his father's ear. Unless this is done, and done without complaining, he is fined a bull.¹⁰³

The father then takes the novice into the family hut where he

100. This detail is reported by Hopley, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

101. Vansina reported that among the Bushong a part of the integration ritual following initiation consists of the novices eating rats, a symbol of extreme filthiness. He writes, "The village elders told me that the novices ate a thing of nyec (filth) to show that they were so pure that a filthy act could not 'spoil' them." J. Vansina, "Initiation Rites of the Bushong," *Africa*, 25:149-150. That this element enters the Kamba rite is not unlikely.

102. Lindblom, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

103. *Loc. cit.*

spends the night. During this night the father and the mother must have intercourse.¹⁰⁴

On the following morning the asingi are again led into the wilderness where they are provided with long clubs. With these in hand they roam the countryside and woe betide the person who encounters one of them. Lindblom's informant insisted that the asingi were not looked upon as human beings but as animals.¹⁰⁵ Each day their mothers would take food out to a certain place and leave it, avoiding by all means an encounter with the wild asingi. The food must be cooked without salt, befitting non-humans.¹⁰⁶

If a traveler is attacked by a musingi and kills him in self-defense, he is not guilty of manslaughter. It is just as if he had shot a baboon. But if this occurs the mubwiki is considered to be at fault and therefore receives no-payment for his services during the rites.¹⁰⁷

The asingi dare not, however, attack anyone who has been through the third nzaiko. Upon meeting such a person the musingi will ask for the password or will pose a riddle which will reveal whether the stranger has been through the rites or not. When the "umbilical relationship" has been established, the stranger passes on his way.¹⁰⁸

104. Loc. cit.

105. Loc. cit.

106. Loc. cit.

107. Ibid., pp. 66-67.

108. Ibid., p. 67.

After a few days of such lawless living the abwiki lead their charges back into the village and each goes home but communicates to no one. They go to bed in their mothers' huts and they are brought food as though they were little babies.¹⁰⁹

After a period of about a day the novices bathe themselves and put on their clothes and ornaments. A little hair is shaved from the forehead of each marking the new birth. Then the clubs which they had used to beat people are broken and burned by the abwiki.¹¹⁰ Following this the novices are presented to the community as full members of society. The proud parents and friends stage a huge feast and the dances "are indulged in with zest and abandon."¹¹¹ Only the fully initiated may take part in this dance; if an unauthorized person tries to participate, he is fined a goat.¹¹²

Hobley writes that, as a part of the reintegration ceremonies, "Each youth, shortly after his return home, goes away into the woods and collects some honey, makes beer with it and presents it to the elders who took him to the mbabani ceremony, and who he thinks helped to save him from being devoured by the monster."¹¹³

At the time Lindblom did his research this third nzaiko was not practiced extensively in the Machakos District, which is considered

109. Loc. cit.

110. Thus signifying that the novices have given up their belligerent lawlessness.

111. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 68.

112. Loc. cit.

113. Hobley, op. cit., p. 76.

the original home of the tribe. He considered that either the rite is an import or it is the extension of the second nzaiko.¹¹⁴

Hobley, as was noted earlier, considers the third nzaiko to be the oldest of the initiation rites, especially the part relating to the mbabani.¹¹⁵

The weight of the evidence supports Hobley's view. When Hobley appeared in Ukamba he found that a certain, rather ancient section of the tribe which lived around Mumoni, had just abandoned the rite. He writes, "It was performed up to a few years ago but died out with the death of an elder named Kioko, who was the last of the older generation of elders, who were skilled in the ritual, etc., connected with it."¹¹⁶

When one remembers that the Machakos District, being the oldest of the districts, had clearly defined totemic groups located in clearly delineated geographical areas, their need for extra-totemic rites to reinforce acceptable social behavior would be less acute. On the other hand, the parts of Ukamba settled from Machakos were occupied by diverse clans. These newly settled areas contained a mixture of totemic groups. In order for them to live together in peace and harmony they needed to consolidate. With its central feature, the slaying and eating of the common enemy and perhaps the common totem, the mbabani ceremonies raise the novices above petty totemic

114. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 68.

115. Hobley, op. cit., p. 77.

116. Ibid., p. 76.

groups and promote a sense of responsibility toward the entire community. For this reason it is not at all strange that the third nzaiko should have survived longer in the poly-totemic areas.

That there would be community pressure to do away with the third nzaiko is not hard to see. Lindblom wrote,

The third nzaiko is held in great dread by the uninitiated, and the women are heard to express their apprehension that their sons may return from the tests in the wastes as cripples, or even that they may be killed there. People from Ulu (Machakos District) who come eastwards during the nzaiko time, do not dare to remain in the vicinity of the place where the ceremonies are being celebrated, but prefer to wander forth into the night, braving lions and rhinoceros. It is undeniable that these customs are a plague for a large proportion of the people.¹¹⁷

With this evidence it can rather definitely be concluded that the killing of the beast was the central feature of the original Kamba initiation rites and that the second nzaiko is actually a modification of the original mbabani ceremony.

117. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 68.

CHAPTER V

AN ANALYSIS OF THE KAMBA PUBERTY RITES

Before the actual themes of the puberty rites are defined it will be helpful to consider various aspects of the rites.

Some Features of the Three Rites Compared

At the present time the three initiation rites are separated by periods of time but, as noted in the previous chapter, this is probably a rather recent development. This is due to the fact that among the Akamba the great desire of the parents to extend their spheres of influence tends to reduce the age at which children are circumcised. The parents' social and, in a sense, their spiritual positions in the community are determined, not by how many completely initiated sons and daughters they have, but by how many circumcised children they have.¹ One of the most salient themes of Akamba culture is that each individual strives to enlarge his sphere of association. The more people he has a claim against, the more security he has in this life, and in the life to come, when those in his debt will offer sacrifice to him.² Therefore no time may be lost in the extension of

1. This is true because uncircumcised children are not considered members of the clan or the tribe.

2. Cf., p. 135.

these associative borders. A person cannot take for granted that he will have an old age in which he can consolidate his position before death. The native sees his life in Ukamba as constantly threatened by famine, disease, witchcraft, and raids from the neighbors. Personal existence is, in fact, precarious and death is immanent. It is little wonder that an Mzamba wants to get his children circumcised as early as possible so that he can enter into the various clubs and councils thus broadening his area of association before he dies. Hence the first rite is now performed at a very early age.

In order to determine the relationship between the three Kamba puberty rites their salient features are set forth and compared to one another below. Also the insights gained through the study of other Bantu puberty rites are brought to bear upon the Kamba ritual, thus clarifying the meaning of some otherwise obscure parts of the rites.

Circumcision

Physical circumcision takes place in the first rite and is its central feature. In fact it is almost the only significant thing that happens to the novice at that time. But physical circumcision is an integral part of initiation among the Wachaga,³ the Amwibe,⁴

3. Otto Raun, Chaga Childhood, pp. 308-318.

4. G. St. J. Orde-Browne, "Circumcision Ceremonies Among the Amwibe," Man, 13:137-140.

the Gusii,⁵ and the Akikuyu.⁶ In fact all of the patrilineal tribes which are related to the Akamba for which ethnographical materials are available practice circumcision in the context of initiation. In light of this fact it would appear as though the Akamba originally performed physical circumcision where the mock circumcision now takes place in the second rite, under the fig tree.⁷ Added weight is given to this argument when it is recalled that the fig tree is a sexual symbol. This will be considered more fully later.⁸ Whether the girls were also operated upon under the fig tree is not clear on the basis of the available literature.

This conclusion is further strengthened by the fact that there are no sexual symbols in the first rite nor is there any emphasis upon a new life. The rebirth is a part of the second and third rites. Furthermore, the children are much too immature when circumcision is presently carried out to accept a new role in society.

The Monster

In the second rite the novices, both the boys and the girls, find themselves in the initiation hut when the monster, the mbusia appears. The boys then take turns beating it in pantomime after which it leaves.⁹ In the third rite the monster which is called mbabani comes up out of the river and threatens the lives of the novices. Their protectors

5. Philip Mayer, "Gusii Initiation Ceremonies," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 83:12-16.

6. Jomo Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, pp. 142-150.

7. Cf., p. 177.

8. Cf., reference to female symbols later in this chapter.

9. Cf., pp. 168-169.

fend off the evil beast and finally kill it after which it is eaten.¹⁰
 These two monsters are probably one and the same. In writing about the Gusii "monster" Mayer described a beast which is a combination of these two Akamba creatures. He wrote, "the initiated lads seize the novices and drag them towards it (the monster). 'Come, come now, you are to be swallowed by Enyabububu!' A halt is called. . . . After a particularly energetic roar the 'beast' falls silent. 'Oh, oh, oh! (cry the older boys) Enyabububu has returned from the river. Bring omoa (sweet gruel) so that it may vomit! Quickly, quickly!' After some roaring comes the final triumphant shout, 'Enyabububu has vomited up the novices!'"¹¹ Like the Kamba beast this one came up from the river, threatens the lives of the novices, but is finally overcome by the protectors. It is not killed, however, nor eaten.

The Bavenda have a beast which is finally killed but not eaten.¹² To them it is their spiritual grandfather! He is embodied in a pole as a phallic symbol during the rites.

The Bushong of the Congo have a myth which forms the basis of their initiation rites. It has to do with their original ancestor. He committed incest with his sister after which he disappeared upstream. The Bushong follow him to learn the secret of fertility. He comes out of the river when initiation takes place and keeps the evil forces away. The initiation hut is a symbol of this primeval

10. Cf., p. 186.

11. Mayer, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

12. Hugh A. Stagt, The Bavenda, p. 127.

ancestor. The novices get their sexual virility from him. They finally run him off the place because he had incest with his sister, an unlawful thing for the Bushong.¹³

Only Hobbey recorded the original Kamba myth.¹⁴ Taking this myth and combining it with the mbusia and mbabani the details of the myth are as follows.

The monster has come from the great water,¹⁵ the primeval source of life.¹⁶ He holds the secret of fertility. When he comes up out of the river he must be captured, though he is very powerful and is to be greatly feared. Not only must he be captured but his secret must be learned because without the fertility which he alone can disperse, life must cease. The youths cannot possibly catch the monster; he is much too dangerous for them because they are entirely uninitiated. He would kill them instantly. The elders of the tribe manage to capture the monster but even in the captured state it attempts to attack the youth who are entering their period of sexual potency. If it were not for their protectors the youths believe that they would certainly be consumed. But after giving ample signs of obeisance to the elders the youths convince them that they have accepted their position of submission. In this status of humility,

13. J. Vansina, "Initiation Rituals of the Bushong," Africa, 25:144-145.

14. Cf., pp. 179-180.

15. The mbusia, the rhinoceros, came from the water as did the mbabani.

16. Vansina, op. cit., p. 144.

they dare not even ask to be saved. They just obey. The resolution of the problem is that the monster is killed so that it will no longer endanger the lives of the novices. In eating its flesh they then partake of its fertility without which they would not be able to reproduce life. The elders have also made their point. The youths must stand in perpetual thanksgiving to them for having caught and slain the monster and for having distributed its meat through which they partook of the reservoir of tribal fertility.

Perhaps the primeval ancestor is jealous of his rights of fertility and so wants to come into the community and kill or castrate the newly virile youths so that he alone can monopolize the women. Or perhaps the monster is simply a projection of the initiated and virile generation which wants to preserve the women for itself. Roheim hypothesized that, "In the bestial prehuman castration would be the lot of those who were vanquished in the struggle and circumcision would be a mitigated survival of more radical measures. In the light of this theory, the benevolent protective attitude adopted by the older generation towards youth would be merely a cultural repression of original aggressivity, the latter still manifesting itself in the cruelties inflicted upon novices at the critical period."¹⁷ Raum, after studying the Wachaga's initiation rites came to much the same conclusion when he wrote, "Initiation is the reaction of the parental generation to the conflict situation."¹⁸

17. G. Roheim, "Dying Gods and Puberty Ceremonies," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 59:168.

18. Raum, op. cit., p. 338.

Ro'heim's hypothesis, relieved of its historical connotations, is sustained by the Kamba rites. The older generation, in face of the competition from the youths for the women of the tribe, perform a modified form of castration, circumcision, thus relieving their own repressed feelings of aggression and at the same time they permanently remind the new generation that, had it not been for their generosity, the youths could have and would have been castrated.

The physical circumcision in the first rite and the incision inflicted in the second indicates that the first two rites are very closely related and that the presence of the monster in the second and third rites indicate that these two rites are actually part of the same assemblage. Thus there is an overlapping in the elements of the rites which ties all three together as part of one great initiation ceremony.

Other Phallic Symbols

The most significant phallic symbol is, of course, the beast itself. It holds the generative principle without which potency would be impossible. It is made of musiva wood, which is probably the same tree, musia, from which the little sticks, used by the youths in deflowering the girls during the second initiation rite¹⁹ and also the musai phallic sticks upon which symbolic inscriptions are made. The fact that two sticks are used raises the question as to why one alone would not better serve the ritual and symbolic ends. The researcher

19. Cf., pp. 171-172.

was unable to find this feature in any other Bantu tribe. Possibly the sticks were actually one and the same in the past. It is also of interest that a short section of the boys' musai phallic symbols are severed and given to the girls who use them as pendants on a string of ladies' beads. It would appear as though the females, too, need to have the mystical regenerating power which comes from a phallic symbol.²⁰

Whether or not the initiation hut itself in the second rite is a male symbol is debatable. Vansina was told that the initiation hut of the Bushong was actually the monster.²¹ This concurs with what Frazer reported on the tribes of Northern New Guinea.²² Since the monster enters the hut in the second Kamba rite and there makes himself known to the novices it is probably correct to think of the hut as actually the body of the monster. It is to be remembered that the novices are not aware of the monster's entry and departure, the hut being partitioned by a wall of skin. They fear the hut itself which has taken on the character of the monster. Not seeing the monster, they strike the partition of the hut, thereby strengthening the association of the two in their minds.²³

20. Cf., pp. 175-176.

21. Vansina, op. cit., p. 147.

22. James G. Frazer, The Golden Bough, p. 804, Abridged Edition.

23. Cf., p. 168.

Female Symbols

The diminutive sticks which girls wear about their necks as fertility symbols have been discussed above.

Less important in the ritual than the male mbabani, but the most significant of the female symbols is the wild fig tree. From this tree issues the white fluid whose milky appearance possibly gave the tree its original symbolic character. The novices, both boys and girls, must partake of some of this milk before they are assured of sexual potency.²⁴ As far as the researcher could discover this tree has nothing to do with the fig trees used as ithembo, they being two different varieties. Neither does he know if the ithembo tree issues milk when cut. With regard to the fig tree in question, it was noted in the second rite that one of the abwiki managed to get a supply of the precious fluid but then "closed" the other trees.²⁵ This created the same predicament as when in the third rite the novices were absolutely helpless and had no hope of ever attaining sexual potency in their own strength. Either their elders had to get it for them or they would remain without it. They did, in the end, get to eat of the mbabani, but they could not capture and kill it themselves.²⁶ So it is in the case of the fig tree. The youths cannot draw milk from a tree and partake of it. All the trees

24. Cf., pp. 175-176.

25. Cf., pp. 175-177.

26. Cf., p. 185.

are "closed"; they stand hopeless and helpless. At last their elders produce the milk for them. The point is that without the elders they would have been unable to bear children.

There are several reasons why this tree is considered a female rather than a male symbol. The sap is actually called "milk," not semen.²⁷ Also the wood from this tree has but one use and that is for the female or passive member of the fire making apparatus.²⁸ It is actually called "female."²⁹ The Akikuyu also look upon the same wild fig tree as a fertility symbol. Beech, in writing about it, says, "Its most noticeable feature is the fact that, if an incision be made in its bark, a white, sticky, rubber-like fluid exudes. From the likeness of this fluid to milk can be traced the origin to the sanctity of the tree." He also notes that this fluid is smeared on women to ensure pregnancy and that the flocks are driven under the tree for the same purpose.³⁰

This tree plays a part in the Kikuyu initiation ceremonies but in a different manner than in the Akamba rites. The male novices hack leaves off it, these then being taken to cover the floor of the circumcision hut. Otherwise this tree is sacred and even to break one of its branches is an unlawful act.³¹ The tree is never "closed"

27. Gerhard Lindblom, The Akamba, p. 32.

28. The male part is the active member which is twirled in the hand.

29. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 440.

30. M. W. H. Beech, "A Ceremony at a 'Mugumu' or Sacred Fig-Tree of A-Kikuyu of East Africa," Man, 13:86-89.

31. C. W. Hobley, Bantu Beliefs and Magic, p. 82.

as it is for the Akamba. Each lad gets his leaves directly, without depending upon any help from his elders.

Concluding this consideration of the fig tree it appears that the tree is a symbol of fertility, that it is a female symbol, and that it is just as important in the rites of initiation as the phallic symbol, the monster.

There is yet another female symbol, and that is the earth. Upon first acquaintance with these rites it may seem strange that the novices in the third rite should be required to copulate with the earth.³² The researcher could find only one reference in the ethnographic literature on the Bantu which made reference to this phenomenon. Among the Bushong the small spring of water had a special position in the rites. Vansina wrote that, "The spring is the primeval vagina, the ocean from which the Bushong, and indeed all people came. It is also the source of life for a village. It means to return to the ultimate starting-point of everything. It emphasized, I think, the notion of 'not being created'."³³ Inside the initiation tunnel through which the novices crawl, a small depression filled with water represents this concept. "The water again is the primeval vagina of the ever fecund first woman. It is the ocean, the starting point of Bushong migrations, it is the source, the life-bringer of the village."³⁴ Then followed something akin to that practiced by the Akamba.

32. Cf., pp. 185-186.

33. Vansina, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

Corporal punishment for recalcitrants was banned, but the following sanctions were applied: a boy who had not gone through the tunnel had to "commit adultery with the earth." Stretched naked on the ground he had to ejaculate into a little pit, while the others mocked him. Should they encounter a woman they would carry her off to the camp and all the novices would copulate with her. Formerly she was then put to death. Now they keep her in the camp for some weeks.³⁵

To the Akikuyu the earth has a special significance. Kenyatta wrote,

The Gikuyu consider the earth as the "mother" of the tribe, for the reason that the mother bears her burden for about eight or nine moons while the child is in her womb, and then for a short period of suckling. But it is the soil that feeds the child through lifetime; and again after death it is the soil that nurses the spirits of the dead for eternity. Thus the earth is the most sacred thing above all that dwell in or on it. Among the Gikuyu the soil is especially honored, and an everlasting oath is to swear by the earth.³⁶

The Gusi boys sing a little song during initiation which is very revealing. It ends like this:

Uncircumcised little boys have had pain.
 Mother's clitoris, mother's clitoris;
 Mother's pubic hair, mother's pubic hair.
 Uncircumcised little boys, copulate with mother!
 Uncircumcised little boys have had pain.³⁷

Evidently the Akamba novices not only copulate with the earth as a sign of submission to their elders but by doing so it is believed that they also increase their sexual potency. And the fact that all the Akamba use the same little pit and the same water adds further

35. Ibid., p. 142.

36. Kenyatta, op. cit., p. 21.

37. Mayer, op. cit., p. 15.

mystery to the act. Whether this is actually a symbolic act which stands for incest is not unlikely. It is possibly a symbolic act protesting the incest prohibitions on the one hand yet accepting them, though begrudgingly, on the other. Vansina found the Bushong actually verbalizing this predicament. He wrote, "We shall see that one of the symbols of the initiation wall is concerned with incest, the primeval child-bearing and the sorrow which negation of incest implies. We note here that the Bushong call their mothers and sisters 'the wives God gave us,' thus recognizing the problem of incest: that the most desirable women have to be given to other men."³⁸

The Kamba act of intercourse with the primeval mother or sister, whichever it is thought to be, is, if it can be considered in the same category as the Bushong and Gusii rites, an expression of protest against the incestual restrictions. Each initiate must participate in this rite thus possibly signifying that, though the desire for incestuous relations be great, these thoughts may not henceforth be harbored. It should remove the ambivalent feelings toward mothers and sisters. Following initiation only exogamous sexual relations will be sanctioned by tribal custom and law. This act of copulating with the great, common, primeval female gives full vent to the incestuous feelings which henceforth must be strictly denied.³⁹

38. Vansina, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

39. Freud, in his book *Totem and Taboo*, outlines the role of incest feelings in the libido of the personality. There are no elements in the Kamba ritual which would discount his general theory.

The Use of Fire in Initiation

Among the Bantu, fire is closely connected with sex and fertility. Before making formal sacrifices or prayers the Bemba must make new fire with fire sticks.⁴⁰ This practice arose from the belief that sex acts, though legitimate, actually contaminated fire. By extinguishing the fire the impurity was destroyed. In the past they probably made new fire after each sex act.⁴¹

In the Akamba's huts there are places for two fires, one near the door of the parents' bedroom for the parents and another near the front door for the children.⁴² Cooking can be done at either one but the parents' fire must be sustained and should not be allowed to go out. Whether the children's fire goes out or not does not make much difference. When a new hut is built fire dare not be taken into it. It must be started inside the hut with the fire making equipment. As long as the village stands, and as long as the village is to remain fertile, the fire must be kept burning. None of the authorities on the Akamba went into the matter of fire very extensively. However it was noted that a woman may not "drill" fire.⁴³ When fire is made in a new hut all "cold" objects must be removed such as iron or other metal objects.⁴⁴ "Hotness," according to Richards, is indicative of

40. Matches are acceptable for this rite at the present time.

41. Audrey I. Richards, Chisungu: A Girl's Initiation Ceremony Among the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia, p. 31.

42. C. W. Hobley, Ethnology of the Akamba and Other East African Tribes, p. 30.

43. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 440.

44. John Middleton, The Central Tribes of the North-Eastern Bantu, p. 76.

sexual passion among the Bantu, as indeed it is in many other places.⁴⁵ The fire, then, stands for male prerogative. The fact that it is only a few feet from the marriage bed may indicate that its proximity is believed necessary for conception.

During the first rite no reference is made to fire. In the second rite the novices must sleep outside, unclothed, and without fire. There could be several reasons for this. It could just be another hardship which the novices are expected to endure. It could be to impress upon the novices that they are considered animals who do not know fire.⁴⁶ And it could mean that the novices are thereby impressed with the fact that they are not yet sexually potent and therefore have no right to have a fire of their own. Once they are properly initiated and married then they may have their own fire.

As for the fires in the third rite, they seem to have nothing to do with sex but are employed to reinforce hierarchy.⁴⁷

Obstacles

Parsons, in her article, "Holding Back in Crisis Ceremonialism" wrote, "The feature of crisis ceremonial I wish to discuss, its features of reluctance, of holding back, may be taken as an outcome of the pull of habit, actual or conventionalized, an outcome too, which is tolerated or encouraged because it increases through

45. Richards, op. cit., p. 30.

46. Cf., p. 169.

47. Cf., p. 182.

resistance, natural or simulated, the group's sense of power.⁴⁸ Actually the initiation itself is a "holding back" ceremony. However, even within the rites themselves, some of the components can be better understood in this context. The various obstacles serve as a case in point. In the second rite the parents, especially the mothers, in an integration rite, place various objects before the doors of the huts which the novices can pass over only after they have interpreted the meaning of the various objects. It would seem as though the parents would be only too glad to welcome the novices back and would remove any obstacle to their return.⁴⁹ But this is not the case, they actually make it extremely difficult for the novices to reenter the huts in which they were born. No doubt the parents want to see how well their children have been taught by their abwiki before the parents give them the fees. But this could be done in ways which would not necessarily delay their coming into the home. The songs that the novices sing are in the context of the holding back theory. Upon reaching the obstacles they sing, "You have closed the way with obstacles, aah! The way is closed to us by something that lies across it."⁵⁰ Then at the last obstacle they sing again, "Our mothers, you have closed the way, eeh. You have closed with the vessels. . . ."⁵¹

48. Elsie Parsons, "Holding Back in Crisis Ceremonialism," in Margaret Mead, (Ed.) The Golden Age of American Anthropology, p. 547.

49. Cf., pp. 165-166.

50. Lindblom, op. cit., p.48.

51. Loc. cit.

The older generation must give power, especially regenerative power, to the oncoming generation yet they hesitate to do so. By holding back they increase their own sense of power and give the new generation a view of their deep reluctance to have any new members in their group.

Sex Training During Initiation

Basic to this discussion is the fact that, due to the lack of privacy in the home, the children are thoroughly acquainted with the physiology of sex. Especially by the time they enter the second and third rites they are considered to be experienced in matters of sex. It would probably be extremely difficult for the instructors to find something new about sex to teach the novices. They also know the taboos surrounding sex and how to live morally clean in the context of tribal law and custom. Those who have been through Bantu puberty rites, like Vansina, and witnesses like Richards, Lindblom, Mayer, Tucker, Stayt, and Raun, concur on the fact that the sex instruction given is very superficial. The Wachaga, it was seen, emphasize the development of the foetus.⁵² This is probably something that Bantu generally do not know. But taken all in all the Bantu "learn" very little new concerning sex during the initiation rites.

It might be asked, why then is the content of the rites almost wholly taken up with this one subject if it is already known? There are several answers to this.

52. Raun, op. cit., pp. 328-329.

Evans-Pritchard made a study of collective expressions of obscenity in Africa and came to the following conclusion. "A common function of both the taboo and of the special acts of obscenity is to make a break in the ordinary routine of an individual's life and so give emphasis to the social value of the activity with which the taboo and the obscenity are associated."⁵³ Smith and Dale made the same observation in their study of the Baila, a Bantu tribe of the central African region. They wrote, "In normal times the abnormal is taboo, but in abnormal times the abnormal things are done to restore the normal condition of affairs."⁵⁴ This throws further light on the theme of equilibrium. There is no doubt that during the initiation rites the abnormal does so that, in this light, obscenity, being abnormal, would restore normality.⁵⁵

There is probably another reason why obscenity is used in the rites. One of the themes of the rites is obviously the fact that a person must control his sexual passions. This is brought to an extreme test in the second rite. The novices are sitting unclothed, boys and girls, in a hut in which the most lewd songs are sung far into the night. The atmosphere becomes heavily erotic yet both sexes must restrain themselves and go on singing as though they were

53. Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, "Some Collective Expressions of Obscenity in Africa," Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 59:325.

54. Edwin Smith and A. M. Dale, The Baila, v. II, p. 84.

55. A study such as the present one might leave the impression that obscenity is the Akamba's daily fare, when nothing could be further from the truth. There are very strict rules about this.

singing songs about the weather. And all the while, according to Lindblom, "others who have nothing to do with the ceremonies come and try to persuade them to disobey the instructions."⁵⁶ The night must pass without any intercourse taking place even though the novices are sorely tempted by spectators. It is probably supposed that if the young people can pass through such an experience with restraint that they can control themselves in practically any circumstances.⁵⁷

One of Lindblom's informants told him that this obscenity was engaged in to show that there was no shame under such circumstances.⁵⁸ Truly, all barriers are broken down. Even nthoni relationships which are ordinarily very binding, are disregarded at this time. Perhaps this obscenity is a cultural form that is employed now and again to remind the people that they are basically equal. This would coincide with the theme of egalitarianism.

Initiation and the Spirits

Lindblom makes the statement, "Circumcision is not to be regarded as a genuinely religious act among the Akamba."⁵⁹ Regarding the third rite he wrote, "The nzaiko has no more to do with religious practice than have the other two."⁶⁰ Actually throughout all three rites

56. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 50.

57. Cf., p. 167.

58. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 50.

59. Ibid., p. 44.

60. Ibid., p. 61.

sacrifices and prayers are offered only twice and the mundu aue have no part in the rites. Lindblom, who evidently conceived of religion as the offering of sacrifices and prayers, failed to grasp the meaning of the rites as a part of the world-view of the Akamba. On the other hand James contends that, "All initiation rites are, strictly speaking, religious because they are connected with the sacred. Therefore, if the origin of circumcision is to be found in initiation rites, it is a religious rather than a social institution."⁶¹

Both of these views are wrong in that they fail to realize that the Akamba do not draw a clear line of demarcation between the religious and the social. Almost any example taken from the component level would point to the fact that what is at first thought strictly secular fits into a world-view which is definitely spiritual in nature. For example it would be an error to view Kamba law as secular for it stands in direct relationship to the aimu.

So rather than emphasizing either the secular or the sacred character of the rites it is more appropriate to think of them as part of the Akamba's world-view. This world-view is not broken up into the secular and the sacred but is a homogeneous whole.⁶²

Results of the Akamba Puberty Rites

The origin of the initiation rites is hidden in the mists of

61. E. O. James, Primitive Ritual and Belief, p. 47.

62. This is probably true of all cultures in their non-literate, pre-industrialized stage of development.

past. If the basic origins could be positively established the rites would undoubtedly deserve reappraisal. In an earlier section some of the theories regarding the origin of the rites were discussed.⁶³ However, the primeval reasons for the rites will probably never be known. The present study is not a study of origins but of results. There is one area in which work can go on with a great degree of certainty, that is in determining the consequences of the rites in any particular cultural milieu. And this can be done with a great degree of accuracy by comparing the individual's pre-rite and post-rite status.

The Akamba do not speculate on the origin of the rites. In fact, if they clearly understood and were able to verbalize the origin of initiation rites, then the rites would probably become the master of the man. As it is, the Akamba "shrug the shoulder" at thoughts of origins and are thereby free to use the rites in a way which will accomplish what, to them, needs accomplishing in their particular cultural milieu. It is in this light that the socio-anthropological analysis of rites has value, for it is assumed that the rites do in some way reflect particularized cultural conceptualizations. A very cursory glance at the initiation rites among a group of people as homogeneous as the Bantu reveals a varied array of elements which go into the rites which are not static but are constantly changing with reference to both time and place.

63. Cf., p. 158.

When Lindblom asked why the Akamba practice the puberty ritual he was simply told, because the fathers did it.⁶⁴ At first glance this seems to be no reason at all but it is very meaningful in its broader context. If they had a definite concept of its origin the rites might have then lost their plasticity and, thus would not have been able to adapt to meet culture change. On the other hand, the rites have become sufficiently standardized to retain a position of strength. No generation would dare to manipulate consciously these rites without regard to the past. The rites as they come from a preceding generation are sufficiently sacrosanct so that the oncoming generation feels that the rites do preserve a meaningful tradition.

Therefore it is of distinct advantage to the social anthropologist that the rites have not become calcified to the extent that they do not change from generation to generation. The initiation rites should be thought of, not as the mold to which the culture must conform, but as an institution which is molded by the culture.

In light of this, the problem of origins of initiation rites, thought not unimportant, is not as fruitful in a socio-anthropological analysis as is the problem of consequences.

The Akamba's initiation rites effect three fundamental relationships, the individual's view of himself, his relationships with other humans, and his relationship to the ancestral spirits, the aimu. These relationships will be considered in this order.

64. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 42.

A Change in Self-Perception

The initiation rite is fundamentally a rite of passage from one social stratum to another. A novice comes to the rites a child and leaves an adult, to use Western terminology. The Akamba, through the initiation rites, make the assumption of this new role the most significant event in life. An Akamba has no misgivings about his social position. Either he is a child or an adult. But he thinks less of childhood and adulthood than of being uninitiated and initiated. Social role assumption is clear and precise, and it occurs at a specific time. It was already noted that this role assumption is not necessarily coincident with the attainment of physical puberty. However, the coincidence is marked enough to make it clear that initiation has to do with sexual maturity. That this is the case is obvious because one of the central acts of the rites is the operation on the reproductive organs, an act designed to promote sexual potency.

On the other hand, the Akamba do not look upon the attainment of sexual maturity as constituting in itself, a change in social status. When a girl first menstruates great precautions are taken to see that her sexual fertility is not endangered,⁶⁵ but the passing of her first menses does not make her a "woman" in the Western sense of the word. If she has already passed through the initiation rites she can now marry and if she has not, she is, though biologically

65. Cf., pp. 58-59.

mature, not a social adult. When a boy has his first seminal emission it goes completely unnoticed by the community. Both the boy and the girl fully realize that adulthood is conferred by initiation and is not simply the result of physical development.

This removes all sense of ambiguity from the maturation process. In the West a young person does not know when adulthood starts and therefore has resultant personality conflicts; in Ukamba there is no cause for frustration in this respect because initiation rites are a clear demarcation.

Following initiation, therefore, the young Mkamba looks upon himself as a responsible adult, with all the privileges and responsibilities which go with adulthood. He does not keep asking himself, "Am I acting like a man?", in order to prove to himself and to society that he is a man; he and everyone else knows that he is a man because manhood was conferred upon him through initiation.

Henceforth he cannot blame anyone else for his evil deeds. He is now held personally responsible. Before this his father was responsible for his morality. He knows now that he must take upon himself the cares and concerns of the tribe because what he does after initiation accumulates to either damn or preserve his memory in the afterlife.

Initiation is a rebirth. The Akamba's rites are less marked in this respect than those of some of their neighbors, but nevertheless, rebirth is emphasized. Upon returning to the village, for instance, the novices are fed like babies. They are also considered as sub-human

beings, living naked and wild in the wilderness. Their reintegration into society is in the context of rebirth. Initiation removes the sins of the past so that the novice can start life anew. This is typical of the new-birth concept in many of the religions of the world and its psychological therapy is well known. In this sense the initiation rites may be thought of as cleansing, and the circumcision rite, which forms the center of the rites, may be considered a symbol of cleansing. However, it is not sexual cleansing which takes place but moral cleansing of a much more general nature.⁶⁶

A New Relationship to Fellow Men

Upon attaining his new status the newly initiated person stands in a different relationship to other members of his tribe than he did formerly. He now has hierarchical status, sexual status, and legal status.

Hierarchical Status

Initiation is the first step up the hierarchical ladder. Though the initiates start in a very lowly position, by carefully consolidating their positions, they can ascend the hierarchical scale. This means that a newly initiated person will be looked upon by the other adults as a potential rival if he is outside of the family group and as a potential help if inside it. He takes on a new quality of importance as an individual in the struggle for status.⁶⁷

66. John T. Tucker, "Initiation Ceremonies for Lumbi Boys," Africa, 19:59.

67. Cf., pp. 238-239.

As a result of the initiation rites a novice finds his position in the family, clan, and tribe radically altered. Previous to this he was a member of the family constellation and related himself to his peers and elders in keeping with his station. His loyalty was to the family and the focus of his experience was the family.⁶⁸ His associates were those of his own particular geographical locality and often merely among his own family group. But this all changes through initiation because his parents turn him over to people who are not of his family, and probably not even of his own clan, and he must obey them as implicitly as he does his very own father. He is wrenched, in a sense, from the constellation of the home and is flung into a new situation in which he experiences a higher authority, the will of the tribe. His relation to his own family is not seriously affected by this change. He still owes primary obedience to his father. The difference is that now he enters a relationship in which all men become part of his experience. Also the particularistic authority which he knew in the family is superseded by an impersonal, universalistic authority.⁶⁹

In many parts of Ukamba, clans and families are intermixed geographically due to their uneven migration in the past. There is therefore no natural loyalty. And there is no central governmental authority to whom allegiance is owed. The initiation rites serve a

68. This includes both the conjugal and the consanguinal relationships.

69. S. H. Eisenstadt, "African Age Groups: A Comparative Study," Africa, 24:102.

significant purpose in this regard for through ritual they remind the novices that a spiritual unity does exist in the tribe.⁷⁰

Sexual Status

A child who is born of a union in which one or both parents are uninitiated has no place in Kamba culture. Such a child would normally be killed. It is a negation of the cosmological view of the tribe which assert that normal conception can only take place when the aimu are the third party to the union and it is inconceivable that the aimu would look with favor upon the birth of such a child.⁷¹⁻⁷²

After initiation a Mkamba can be assured that the aimu will be present when he has relations with his wife and that the offspring thus produced will be bona fide Akamba.

Thus initiation brings about the legitimacy of sex in the broad cosmological sense. Of course, social law requires that a man, in addition to initiation, must have a wife who is legally his, that is, his family must have turned over at least an earnest of the bride-wealth. Marriage brings the initiation ceremonies to their completion. It is, in itself, a rite of passage but the ceremony surrounding it is very attenuated;⁷³ it cannot even be compared to the initiation

70. Cf., p. 49.

71. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 30.

72. This point is not very applicable today because the great majority of the novices, especially among the boys, go through the second initiation ceremony just about the time that they become biologically capable of producing children. But in the past when initiation probably took place some time after sexual maturity was reached babies could be produced out of wedlock. Abortion is also practiced among the Akamba. Ibid., p. 38.

73. Ibid., pp. 72-77.

rites. This is indeed surprising in a culture where the marriage relationship is of such great importance both socially and spiritually. But when it is seen as the culmination of the legitimatization of heterosexual relations and not an independent rite, its true dimension is realized.

The initiation rites also serve to draw a clear line of separation between the sexes. As is the case with children, generally the Kamba boys and girls play together without differentiating very much between the sexes unless they are playing "house." However, after the second initiation rite both sexes are ridiculed if seen playing together. One of the consequences of the rites, therefore, is to make the boys males and the girls females. After initiation there is no reason for the persistence of sexual ambiguity.

Legal Status

After initiation a Kamba has full legal privileges and obligations. He may appear as a witness in legal transactions, he may own property, and he can claim his rights before the councils. He can legally make transactions for a wife and legally bring children into the world. He can now swear at the kithitu and be assured of justice. Obligations come with this new status as well. He must take up those cases which his family considers unresolved, even though the participants in the original dispute have been dead for years. He is liable to pay fines for transgressions of tribal rule and custom. He is liable for blood money which must be paid if either he or someone in his family kills a person. If he swears falsely he brings a curse

upon himself. He bears the full responsibility for his own acts personally and furthermore his sin can taint his successors for which they will need to suffer.⁷⁴

A New Relationship to Ancestral Spirits

There are only a few places in which the ancestral spirits are consciously brought into the initiation rites. They are given sacrifices at both the first and second rites. When a novice hits the mbusia he informs the spirits who it is that is striking. But at no other point are the novices introduced to their ancestors. But the fact that the rites effect relational changes in areas in which the ancestral spirits have peculiar interests indicates that the performers in the ceremonies and the community as a whole are aware of the fact that they are performing the will of the almu. It is easy to understand how people like Lindblom failed to detect a religious factor in the rites because so little reference is made to the ancestral spirits.⁷⁵ The fact of the matter is, as Raum puts it, "The puberty rites, indeed, stand in direct relationship to the spirit world."⁷⁶ The ancestral spirits are, above all things, interested in the extension of the tribe, the propagation of the race, and the purity of the tribe, all of which form the background for the initiation rites.

74. D. J. Penwill, Kamba Customary Law, passim.

75. Cf., p. 40.

76. J. Raum, "Christianity and African Puberty Rites," International Review of Missions, 16:584.

This aspect of the rites becomes clear by asking the simple question, "What would initiation mean if it should be considered apart from the world-view of its participants?" The answer is simply that it would lose its essential significance. This fact is probably so deeply realized by the community that it is unnecessary to remind the novices that they are doing the will of the ancestral spirits.

The initiation rites do modify the novices' relationship to the ancestral spirits. In fact without the new spiritual relationship the legal and the sexual modifications would be impossible, because these changes simply reflect the more profound change which takes place in one's relationship to the ancestral spirits.

Before initiation an Akamba has no way of communing with the ainu himself but must depend upon the intercession of his father.⁷⁷ In other words, he does not yet belong to the mystical clan or tribe. He has a soul, indeed, but it is neither strengthened nor weakened by his morality because he has nothing to do with the ancestral spirits.

The Akamba's rites of burial give emphasis to this fact. Unlike adult members of the community, uninitiated children were formerly not buried but their corpses were taken out through a hole in the back of the hut and left to be devoured by the wild animals.⁷⁸ Their souls

77. Cf., pp. 81-82.

78. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 106. At the present time the Government requires burial.

are expected to be so weak that upon death they disappear almost instantaneously. After a person is initiated, however, his burial is considered in the light of his association and morality because his deeds are then known by the simu.

Their new relationship to the ancestral spirits is most convincingly seen when the novices find, following initiation, that they can enter into legal heterosexual relations and legal transactions, the two areas in which the ancestral spirits have a vital, and, so to speak, a controlling interest.

These, then, are the broad results of the initiation rites. The rites make a novice a sexual, legal, and spiritual adult capable of all the normal tribal functions.

CHAPTER VI

THE THEMES OF THE PUBERTY RITES

Whereas in Chapter III the themes of the general culture were being derived, the following presentation is concerned with the themes of the puberty rites. In light of the detailed description of these ceremonies and a consideration of their central features, along with a review of the results of these rites, it becomes possible to identify the themes. They were identified, following the same procedure as was outlined in Chapter III. All of the components which make up the rites were carefully studied in order to determine their purpose. Attention was now focused on the way the components tend to cluster. These clusters, or nexus, were then followed throughout the rites in an effort to see what light they would throw upon the various assemblages in which they appeared. This, in turn, helped clarify the assemblages. As the meaning of the assemblages became clear the themes also emerged.

In presenting these themes, only a few features of the rites will be necessary to illustrate them. They will be presented in descending order of importance, this being determined by the frequency with which certain components and nexus of components have appeared.

The Promotion of Sexual Vigor and Potency

Sex stands at the very center of all of these rites. Almost every song has to do with sex, as do the dances and art symbols such as the mud-sticks.¹ At times the erotic atmosphere of the rites is at a very high pitch.² The use of obscene and lewd speech is considered quite normal under these abnormal circumstances and serves to further excite sexual passion.³ The sexual theme is the most striking and the most continuous theme seen throughout the initiation rites.

Sexual vigor is given special emphasis in the third rite. At a time when the novices are physically exhausted as a result of beatings, hunger, and thirst, they are required to demonstrate in a most untoward fashion that they can still engage in sex.⁴ Thus they are impressed with the fact that when all is said and done, there must always be strength left for sex.

The rites also, through ritualistic means, promote sexual potency. First of all, the novices are circumcised, a sign of the fact that in subsequent lawful sexual intercourse they will be blessed by the spirits. The fertility character of circumcision is further realized when it is recalled that, even though today only

1. Cf., p. 173.

2. Cf., p. 167.

3. Cf., pp. 185-187.

4. Cf., p. 300.

token circumcision is carried out under the wild fig tree, it was probably done there entirely in the past.⁵ The fig tree is a fertility symbol. That circumcision may have other aspects to it is not denied, but among the Akamba it is a part of the fertility rites. In addition to physical circumcision the novices must also partake of the sexual symbols of the tribe, the monster and the wild fig tree, through which sexual potency is further enhanced.

That there should be such an emphasis upon sexual vigor and potency is entirely understandable when it is realized that without legal sexual intercourse, ritual uncleanness cannot be removed nor can the aimu bless the tribe with children. In fact, were the Akamba to neglect to participate in legal sexual relations for even a short period of time, the fabric of the culture would become undone.

Physical Endurance and Self-Control

The pain inflicted on the boys by circumcision is very severe but the novices must remain silent and control their bodies during the operation. If anyone should cry out, he would be stigmatized for life. But the pain suffered by the boys is probably not as great as that of the girls at the excising of the labia minora. If the girls can persevere in the face of this excruciating pain without flinching, they can then look forward with confidence toward child bearing when a woman is expected to have her body under complete control.⁶

5. Gerhard Lindblom, The Akamba, pp. 44-45.

6. Ibid., p. 31.

Other physical pain is inflicted throughout the rites and all of it must be borne without murmuring. In the past, when the rites were probably more protracted, pain was much more severe and deaths resulting from the pain were more common.⁷ The important thing in relation to beatings, flogging, kicking, and so forth, is that the novices must suffer quietly and dare not retaliate. If a novice should become angry and strike back, his life would certainly be endangered.⁸

In order to press endurance further, the novices are deprived of clothing, fire, food, and water at times during these rites. And they are required to accept these tortures without complaint. In a land like Ukamba, where existence is precarious, the virtue of endurance appears entirely reasonable to the Akamba.

In the third rite the abwiki heap ignomy upon frustration, trying their best to tease the youths into retaliation. It requires great restraint for the novices to remain cool and calm under these circumstances. They are cursed, vile references are made to their mothers (a very serious infraction of etiquette), they are reminded of their inferiority and immaturity. In general they meet, during these rites, a bombardment of abuse simply to test their ability to control their emotions.⁹ If they succeed, they are then ready to

7. Ibid., p. 65.

8. Ibid., p. 63.

9. Ibid., pp. 65-66.

face life which is full of such vicissitudes.

Transparency

When a novice enters the initiation rites he must be thoroughly prepared to bare himself before his peers. The way in which sex is un clothed and talked about in the most base fashion in the initiation camps renders this intimate feature of life entirely transparent. In these camps the novices do not get five minutes of privacy. Even when they defecate they are accompanied by their abwiki. They are taught that privacy is a luxury which they must deny themselves if they wish to live happily with their fellows. No one dare eat any food apart from the others, nor dare he go to the river for a drink or a bath alone. Any infraction of this rule would be, indeed, a serious offense. The novices' desire to be rid of shame, in fact, almost takes on the air of abandon and a willful desire to be completely transparent.

Obedience to Superiors in the Hierarchical Scale

The novices are taught to respond to the command of their elders in the initiation instantaneously. They are denied right of private judgment in most parts of the rites. They may never ask "Why?" The novices soon learn that they are entirely at the mercy of the elders and that there is no possible alternative to humble submission and instantaneous response. The elders in the rites engage themselves in a concerted effort to break the wills of the novices so that the youths know who has power over them. The elders control the novices'

eating, their physical comfort, and even their sexual powers. Every aspect of life must be brought into subjection to the elders. Furthermore, the novices learn that obedience is actually necessary for survival. If, perchance, contrary to the command of the elders, a novice should stir while the mbabani is prancing and roaring around the initiation grounds, he could only look forward to being eaten by the beast.¹⁰ A novice thus learns that physical safety is somehow connected with realizing one's position in relation to his elders.

If it were not for their elders the novices would remain forever sexually impotent because they could never catch the mbabani nor obtain milk from the wild fig tree. The elders must do these things for them. If the elders are displeased with the response that they are getting from the novices, they need only remind them that they will not catch the mbabani nor tap the fig tree. This actually means that unless the young people submit their wills to their elders, they cannot be assured of sexual potency and will thus not be able to produce children to preserve their spirits after death. Hence, they have all to lose and nothing to gain by disobeying their seniors.

Intelligence

The obverse side of the above theme is another theme which runs

10. Cf., p. 181.

through the rites, especially the second one, that of demonstrating mental acumen. Much instruction takes place during these rites, but almost all of it has to do with memorizing verbal symbols which go with visual symbols. The songs, for instance, are learned verbatim so that they can be sung when an appropriate symbol appears. In the second rite this was seen most explicitly when a series of little songs was learned and then sung when the particular obstacles were encountered upon entering the hut of the female instructor.¹¹ It was not essential that the novices realize the meaning of the songs or the symbols in any deep sense. The point is that the community requires that a test of mental acumen be passed before a person can be considered worthy of attaining the status of a full member in society. The musai stick, too, probably has no greater interest to the Akamba than that he know what objects the little scratches represent. The drawings made on the ground also test the ability of the novices to memorize.¹² The fact that so much attention is given to memorizing is understandable when it is realized that this is one of the most important means through which enculturation is carried on in a society such as the Akamba's.

Private judgment is also stressed, though not as much as strict memorization. At one point in the rites the boys must go out and steal honey from hives in the community with which to make beer for

11. Cf., pp. 165-167.

12. Cf., pp. 173-174.

their fathers.¹³ This is a very difficult feat because these hives are closely guarded. The boys are expected not to get caught. Stealing honey is one of the most hideous of the Kamba crimes. That the Akamba are good at stealing is not news; in fact they are famous for this behavior.¹⁴ At another point in the rites each boy is expected to go out and hunt for and kill a certain kind of lizard, a feat which would tax even an adult.¹⁵ This they do, of course, with their miniature bows and arrows, the correct use of which is greatly admired.

Thus, it is seen that, even though there is an emphasis upon submission of the will to the elders, there is yet another theme which requires that a person think for himself. The two seem to be contradictory at first encounter but after examination they appear to be complementary. While finding one's place in the hierarchical organization is the first consideration, a person is expected to exercise the talents which are native to him within the hierarchical system.

Egalitarianism

All of the novices go into the rites naked and in a sense anonymous. No distinction whatever is made between clans, social position

13. C. W. Hobley, Ethnology of the Akamba and Other East-African Tribes, p. 76.

14. J. Augustiny, "Erlebnisse eines Kambajungen von ihnen selbst erzählt," Zeitschrift für Eingeborenen-Sprachen, 10:161-180, passim.

15. Cf., p. 170.

or wealth of the families to which they belong. Any spirit of superiority is summarily dealt with. If any lad has a superior attitude when he goes into the initiation rites, his tormentors take it upon themselves to relieve him of this illusion.¹⁶

Among a people such as the Akamba, rivalries between families and clans are certain to arise and the children are expected to carry on these feuds. One of the things which keeps these differences from becoming more pronounced and persistent is the fact that the initiation ceremonies, in which the mighty are brought low, tend to give emphasis to the fact that the novices are, after all, alike.¹⁷ These rites create a spiritual unity among all those in the same initiation class which, in some instances, is almost as binding as clan loyalties. This relationship is not legally binding like family obligations but is more like the fraternal relationship of college groups in the West.

In both the first and second rites the girls and the boys are treated much alike. As far as circumcision itself is concerned, both sexes are operated upon and both subjected to about the same amount of pain. They sit side by side in the same initiation hut and share the same songs and obscenities. When they are required to sleep naked on the cold earth without fire, no distinction is made between the sexes. Both sexes are required to memorize the same symbols.

16. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 65.

17. Cf., p. 215.

When it comes to the work symbol, the boys go off hunting while the girls collect fire wood. It is only in the third rite, the male rite, that the girls do not have a part. But where the girls are in the initiation along with the boys, they have activities which, if not identical with that of the boys, are complementary. As far as fertility is concerned, the girls must eat the milk of the wild fig tree like the boys, and the parents of both boys and girls must perform intercourse at the prescribed times during the rites.

It is interesting to note that the female performer is just as important in the initiation ceremonies as the man. It cannot be said that one sex dominates the rites. Also, the songs that are sung do not suggest that either sex is the one that must yield to the other in sexual matters.

The egalitarian emphasis between peers of one's own sex and between peers of the opposite sex is an outstanding feature of the Kamba puberty rites.

Summary

These six themes run throughout the rites, appearing again and again in different components and nexus of components and in the various assemblages. They are, in descending order of importance, the promotion of sexual vigor and potency, physical endurance and self-control, transparency, obedience to superiors in the hierarchical scale, intelligence, and egalitarianism.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CULTURE THEMES AND THE THEMES OF THE PUBERTY RITES

The hypothesis which the present study was designed to investigate is that the Akamba puberty rites do in fact perpetuate the Akamba's culture themes. It is now possible to give this hypothesis careful consideration because both the themes of the culture and the themes of the rites have been delineated. The question that needs to be answered is, "What is the correlation between the themes of the culture and the themes of the puberty rites?" The answer to this question was sought in two ways. First, the content of the puberty rites was examined in light of the culture themes to determine how faithfully they mirror the themes of the culture, and secondly, the themes of both the puberty rites and the culture were compared to determine the areas of least correlation and the areas in which correlation is greatest. The results of these comparisons are reported in the following sections.

The Puberty Rites and Culture Themes

The culture themes are set forth in the order in which they appeared in Chapter III.

The Maintenance of Cosmological Balance

The central features of this theme are that the status quo must not

be upset and that any deviation from that which is considered normal cannot be accepted into the world-view of the culture until it can fit in without destroying the existing equilibrium.¹

This theme finds expression in several instances in the puberty rites. All the novices must do exactly the same things; no exceptions are tolerated. There is a constant fear that some individual or group of people may gain inordinate power, realizing that if this should happen the existing equilibrium which prevails among them might be threatened. There is no place in their culture for a strong, self-willed individualist.² The initiation objectifies in many ways the utter unacceptability of anyone who is different.

In addition to the fear that individuals may get inordinate power and thus upset the cosmic balance, there is also an underlying apprehension on the part of the elders that the new generation may usurp too much power and pose a threat to the established order of things. Raam realized that this was one of the basic reasons behind the Chaga initiation. He wrote,

In the critical period of adolescence, it appears as if the organizing principle of native life, the reciprocity of rights and obligations within the family and kinship grouping, was going to break up altogether. The rising generation, anticipating its power, is ready to throw off the parental control and to stake all on pegging out its own sphere of social influence. Initiation is the reaction of

1. Cf. "The Maintenance of Cosmological Balance," in Chapter III.

2. Cf. "The Promotion of Egalitarianism," in Chapter III.

the parental generation to the conflict situation. Its effect is to impress upon the adolescent that his coveted independence must be only partial.³

This is precisely what is observed among the Akamba excepting that the novices are relieved of all of their rights throughout the ceremonies and only after they are completed are they restored and enlarged as a token of grace by the older generation. However, the basic point stands, that the new generation as a whole is a threat to the equilibrium which is established in the culture and that the initiation rites quash this independent spirit.

Any sudden change is disturbing to the Akamba because of its threat to the status quo. The initiation rites serve to strengthen the established order by bringing an ancient ritual into the experience of the people. It is obvious that the initiation ritual does change but many of its components change very slowly. As an example, only in the Akamba initiation rites are songs encountered which are almost never modified.⁴ Their antiquity is highly prized. Otherwise the Akamba are great faddists. They make up songs for their popular dances each season, knowing full well that by the next season they will be tired of the songs and dances and will demand new ones.⁵ But the songs and dances of the initiation, which do not change, give the

3. Otto Raum, Chaga Childhood, pp. 337-338. 2

4. Gerhard Lindblom, The Akamba, p. 416.

5. Ibid., p. 408.

rites a certain stability showing that rapid change can be resisted. Hence the initiation rites do serve as an ideal for which the people should strive within the culture, which is to preserve the ancient cultural components which they received from their elders and allow for change only if it would be impossible to do otherwise and if the components can be so rearranged that the equilibrium will not be unduly disturbed.

The concept of balance and the maintenance of equilibrium is not lacking in the initiation rites but it is much less pronounced than in the culture taken as a whole. On the other hand, the initiation rites do not contain any elements which run counter to the theme of equilibrium.

The Promotion of Egalitarianism

This culture theme is strikingly prominent in the initiation rites. The basic idea of the initiation rites is that it gives every member of the age-class an equal chance. It can be compared to the way that a referee lines up runners before a race so that no one has an advantage over the other. The novices in the initiation rites all start with a clean slate on the same sociological and spiritual scales.⁶

It was already noted that, save for the last rite in which the girls have no part, no distinction is made between the worth of the

6. Cf. "Egalitarianism," Chapter VI.

males and the females. They are subjected to parallel treatment throughout the earlier rites. As far as the equality of the sexes is concerned, the initiation rites leave no doubt.

In the operation of the initiation camps themselves, the Akamba are careful to avoid the predicament of allowing any one person to be ultimately responsible for what goes on in the camp. Just as the novices are treated anonymously, so the operators do their work as proxies of the total tribe. When deaths occur during the rites as a result of exposure or maltreatment, no one must pay blood-money because no one individual is ultimately held responsible.⁷ Conversely, no one person can claim the honors for a well-conducted initiation.

The whole tone of the initiation is a striving after equality. A superior attitude stands in direct contradiction to the spirit of the rites.

The Maintenance of Hierarchy

In most of the initiation rites there are only three groups or strata of people; the novices, their protectors, and the performers.⁸ The protectors, or abwiki, do not exist as a social class outside of these ceremonies. The performers, however, actually stand for the elders. In other words, the role alignment in the first and second rites is not parallel to the rôles which the novices will meet in

7. Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 66-67.

8. Cf. Chapter IV, passim.

real life. However, in spite of the fact that stratification is somewhat artificial, the rites make it exceedingly clear that the novices must respect and obey the elders without question and without hesitation. In this way they are prepared to accept their position in the hierarchical system with meekness. They learn that by humbly accepting their lowly roles, they can themselves rise in the hierarchical system.

In the final rite, however, the several grades of elders do arrange themselves according to rank and, while the novices are suffering from hunger, their superiors eat the parts of the animal befitting each rank. The lines separating the different strata are very carefully drawn during this ceremony and throughout the third rite, thus impressing the novices concerning the gravity with which hierarchy is to be viewed. At this last rite the hierarchical system is reinforced by the manner of seating, by the fires which are lit for each rank, as well as by the distribution of meat according to honor.

Also during the rites the elders must be treated with a respect that transcends that which they can expect in every day life. This exaggerated obsequiousness on the part of the novices leaves them with no doubt as to their place in the hierarchical system.

It was noted in the consideration of the "balance" theme that one of the basic reasons behind the initiation rites is that the novices must be impressed with the fact that, even though they may feel an urge to power and independence they must place these urges at the disposal of their elders. This is also true in the area of

sex, where the novices are made to realize that they can only be sexually potent if the elders are pleased to give them this potency as a free gift. Thus the basic concept of hierarchy is strengthened.

The Maintenance of Sexual Vigor

Sex, as was already noted,⁹ is the cardinal theme of the initiation rites, but the emphasis upon sex is in two areas. First, the rites arouse the sexual instincts and passions within the novices, and secondly, the rites, through symbolic acts, are thought to bring about sexual potency. But the greatest threat to the maintenance of sexual potency, ritual uncleanness, is not stressed in the initiation rites. Yet, the basis for this idea is laid in these rites, inasmuch as the novices realize that they are granted sexual potency through the agency of the elders of the tribe and that in order to retain the power to reproduce they must order their lives to the satisfaction of the elders who enforce the laws handed down to them from the ancestors. Therefore, even though sexual taboos are not given great emphasis during the rites, yet the themes of the rites create the climate and reinforce the basic concepts in which these taboos can be understood.

The Extension of Association

The initiation rites stand in direct relationship to this culture theme because initiation is the prerequisite leading to an enlargement

9. Cf., p. 223.

of the associative group. A man must be properly initiated before he can extend his influence by marriage, then by having children, and finally by having his children marry into other families and clans. The initiation is the key which opens the various doors through which association can be accomplished.

Initiation itself is the first means by which a young Akamba may extend his associative group. All of his relations outside of the family up until the time of initiation were strictly informal and nonbinding. Now, however, he enters into a class of novices who submit themselves to initiation together. He thus forms his first formal relationship with others not of his own family. Through it he obtains membership in an age-class which carries both privileges and responsibilities.

Through the initiation rites runs the emphasis upon the importance of having children, but there are no other references to the enlargement of the associative group. In fact, an observer of the rites who is not acquainted with the world-view of the Akamba would probably not realize that this is inherent in the initiation ceremony at all.

Transparency

The Akamba do indeed live in an open society in which secrecy is dreaded. The initiation rites reinforce this theme by requiring strict transparency throughout. Even the most elementary privacy is denied the novices.

Sufficient examples have already been given to show that this theme is one of the most obvious aspects of the initiation rites.

Dignity, Intelligence, and Self-Control

As far as human dignity is concerned, it would seem, at first glance, that initiation is designed to rid the novices of any illusions of self-dignity which they may have possessed. It seems to be an attempt to crush their wills and to give them excessive feelings of inferiority from which dignity could not possibly emerge. This is contrary to the result of the rites, however, for one purpose of these rites is to promote dignity and self-respect. When an Mkamba successfully passes through the initiation rites he has no further doubts regarding his worth; he knows that he has become an adult and can begin to walk as an adult. Therefore, the initiation rites enhance human dignity.¹⁰

Intelligence is honored in the initiation rites, but it must be submissive intelligence. The novices memorize songs, dances, symbols, and must have enough intelligence to steal and get away with it and they must also display enough skill to hunt down and shoot the small animals required of them without outside help. The girls are expected to be intelligent enough to gather firewood in the proper way, that is by arranging their burdens to avoid the use of "seven" in any combination. The boys are also expected to act intelligently in the

10. Cf., "Results of the Akamba Puberty Rites," Chapter V,

mock cattle raid at the conclusion of the second rite. A slow-witted novice is ridiculed by all. In fact, the researcher discovered that the parents and friends teach the novices some of the things which will be required of them in a secret way before the rites. It is most embarrassing for parents if their children display a lack of mental acumen; a dull child is an embarrassment to his parents.

As self-control is highly honored in the life of the culture, so it is honored in these rites. In fact, throughout the ceremonies the least sign of a lack of rigid self-control and self-discipline is looked upon as a grave offense which cannot be tolerated. If a novice passes passively through them he can be assured that few things in life will be able to move him. Even if death occurs in the camp as a result of the administration of discipline, the corpse must be treated with scorn, not pity. Pity is foreign to these rites. The novices are taught to suffer silently pain, thirst, cold, hunger, beatings, and other forms of physical abuse at the hands of their tormentors.

Summary

On the basis of the foregoing comparison several things can be concluded. First, the themes of the puberty rites do not conflict with any of the themes of the culture. This means that either the culture so controls the rites that the themes of the rites change because the culture changes or that the themes of the culture are normative and that culture themes which are contrary to the themes of the rites cannot be tolerated. The answer must lie in one of

these two areas or in some combination of the two...

A second observation is that some of the themes of both the rites and the culture are almost identical. And, thirdly, the correlation between the themes of the rites and the themes of the culture is not perfect.

That no negative correlation exists when the themes are compared, the first observation, can be taken as a conclusion and will not need to be developed any further. It is with the second and third observations that the study will now be concerned.

The Themes Which Are Similar

When the themes of the rites and the themes of the culture are seen side by side it becomes evident that at many points there is a striking similarity. These areas of similarity are discussed below.

Self-Control, Intelligence, and Dignity

Both the initiation rites and the culture honor these traits of character as desirable, the most important probably being the virtue of self-control. Akamba living conditions present many temptations which would challenge this virtue but they may never succumb. In order to relieve pent up feelings which produce tremendous pressures within the individuals of the group, the culture allows for the occasional time of liberty. This is probably best illustrated by the rapidity with which the Akamba adopt new dances which allow for great emotional expression. The kijesu dances of the early part of this century illustrate this point.¹¹ In these dances the women especially

11. C. W. Meligan, "Description of Kijesu Ceremony among the Akamba, Tiva River, East Africa," Man, 11:49, passim.

could vent their feelings. Other events of a marginal nature in which obscenity and free expression are employed not only provide outlets for repressed emotions but they also, due to their extreme abnormality, impress the people with the fact that normality presupposes self-control.

Intelligence is also highly honored if it is not used for anti-social purposes. In fact, the Akamba detest intellectual laziness because to them a person who does not think and plan constructively is of no use either to the living or to the dead. He must know native law and custom as well as tribal history in detail. He must know how to relieve his enemies of property without getting caught.¹² He is expected to try to outwit people who are not related to him and is given praise by his culture if he can, by his cleverness, rob and plunder an unsuspecting rival. Contrariwise, a blundering thief, who manages to get caught, loses prestige in the community. Perhaps the most highly respected members of the society are those men and women who have great sagacity and experience.¹³ Incidentally, it is expected that if a person is smart enough he can usually get out of manual labor.

This theme of cleverness and intelligence is no less marked in the initiation rites than in the culture. In fact, it is more openly promoted there than in the daily life of the tribe.

12. This is very evident in what Augustiny was able to record of the experiences of young Kamba lads. J. Augustiny, "Erllebnisse eines Kamba-jungen von ihnen selbst erzählt," Zeitschrift für Eingeborenen-Sprachen, 10:161-180.

13. Cf. "Human Dignity, Intelligence, and Self-Control," Chapter III.

The theme of dignity is very closely allied to both self-control and intelligence. Dignity is probably the result of these two virtues. Yet it goes deeper than either, or both, for it emphasizes the worth of an individual. Even though each initiated M̄kamba knows that he is a mystical member of the body of the tribe which unites the yet to be born, the living, and the dead, he must nevertheless act on his own in an independent way. He, himself, is the master of his fate. He can either obey or ignore the tribal customs and laws. This theme is given great emphasis at the initiation rites when every novice is required to bring his will under the tutelage of the tribal elders. But within the context of this hierarchical position the individual is expected to make his own decisions and formulate his own plans for action. This is training for life in which the M̄kamba is expected to order his own affairs intelligently, realizing, however, his place in the hierarchical scale.

One of the striking themes of the puberty rites is the emphasis upon the endurance of physical pain. From beginning to end the novices are beaten, harassed, and constantly tested to see how much they can endure in the way of physical suffering. One might, on the basis of this, form the impression that the Akamba are preparing their children to endure constant suffering and hardship in their daily lives. Admittedly, the Akamba do not live in a paradise; they experience severe famine about every seven years,¹⁴ and they are

14. Lindblom, op. cit., p. 339.

surrounded by enemy tribes. However, their circumstances are really not unpleasant. It would seem as though this infliction of physical pain and the consequent production of suffering in the initiation rites might be a concomitant element of the techniques of reinforcement which surrounds the basic idea of these ceremonies. Its painful aspect assures that the rites will be taken seriously and not only that but that, having passed through the ordeals, the novices will look back upon the experience with a sense of accomplishment.

It is clear that the four traits of character just reviewed are highly valued in the culture and that these same virtues are overtly promoted in the initiation rites. An analysis of either the culture or the initiation rites alone would be sufficient to identify this theme.

Transparency

There is yet another desirable trait of character which is honored in the culture and required in the initiation rites; it is the virtue of complete openness in one's relationship to his associative group. Put negatively it is the absence of privacy, even in matters of sex and bodily functions. The fabric of the Akamba society would become undone if this theme were to be cancelled, because it is the basic guard against ritual uncleanness and witchcraft.¹⁵ This is no less true in the initiation rites. Privacy is

15. Cf., pp. 94-94.

a luxury which the society cannot afford. It is equally emphatically denied in the initiation rites. The most intimate of all affairs, the sexual life of an individual, dare not be shrouded in secrecy in life, and is therefore completely exposed in these ceremonies.

This is perhaps one of the most salient features of both the culture and the initiation rites and is an obvious theme in both.

Sexual Vigor

The high premium which is placed upon the ability to produce healthy, intelligent children in abundance is a theme which pervades the culture and is actually the fundamental reason behind the puberty rites. This becomes necessary in order for the world-view of the culture to be realized, and is therefore met with very often in the Akamba's culture. Ritual uncleanness or sin ultimately attacks sexual potency in humans, animals, and crops which, of course, threatens to extinguish life altogether. The husband and wife who produce children as the result of legal, ceremonially pure sex are well on the way to both mortal and immortal security.

This theme has already received sufficient treatment both in the culture and in the puberty rites to lead to the conclusion that, taken alone, either the culture or the puberty rites unmistakably reveals this theme.

The Maintenance of Hierarchy

This culture theme, the importance of maintaining the social hierarchy, is more pronounced in the puberty rites than in the culture

as a whole. There are circumstances in the daily life of the tribe when the amenities due an elder are waived for other considerations. For instance, a son can curse his father,¹⁶ and a little girl-who is disarmingly sweet can get away with quite a lot. However, exceptions to the rules regarding respect for superiors are rare. But, in the puberty rites the least infraction of the rules regarding respect is exposed and severely punished. This is considered by the Akamba to be a good teaching technique because were exceptions to be allowed in the puberty rites, the theme would be considerably weakened in the culture itself.

It is to be noted that, even though every social grade is not represented in the puberty rites, respectful attitudes are enforced nevertheless. It is the attitude of submission that is fostered in these rituals, not only the detailed etiquette which is to be used in greeting the members of the various social grades.

This theme, also, as the previous three themes, is just as evident in the puberty rites as in the culture.

Egalitarianism

The promotion of egalitarianism is also a theme which is observed both in the puberty rites and in the culture. The puberty rites, since they are concerned with a horizontal group of the society, and not with society at each level, concentrate upon the concept that no

16. Lindblom, op. cit., pp. 184-185.

one person in a particular age-set is any better than another as a result of the accident of birth. Among the initiates there are no leaders and no followers; and initiation itself cannot be considered a contest of talents in which some excel and others fail. Every novice seems to pass the course if he is not killed in the rites.

This theme also controls the relationship between the sexes in the culture and in the puberty rites. In the rites there is no hint of superiority and inferiority within the age group. And this concept is very distinctly marked in the social life of the culture.

This theme, as the one just above, is more pronounced in the puberty rites than in the culture itself, but in both cases it is unmistakable.

Summary

At this juncture, the two themes of the puberty rites termed "Physical Endurance and Self-Control" and "Mental Acumen" may well be combined into one theme in order to parallel the culture theme, "Dignity, Intelligence, and Self-Control," thus reducing the themes of the puberty rites to five. These five are: the promotion of sexual vigor and potency; physical endurance, self-control, and intelligence; transparency; obedience to superiors in the hierarchical scale; and egalitarianism. Plotting these five themes against the seven themes of the culture it is observable that five of them are the same. In other words all of the five themes of the puberty rites are included in the seven culture themes.

Of the five themes of the puberty rites those which have to do with sex, transparency, hierarchy, and egalitarianism are more highly pronounced in the rites than they are in the culture. This is not to say that they are "weak" themes in the culture--on the contrary they are salient features there--but, since the puberty rites are actually the training ground for life, these themes are given great emphasis in them.

Culture Themes Which Have no Exact Counterpart
in the Themes of the Puberty Rites

It remains now to examine the other two themes of the culture to determine how they are reflected in the puberty rites even though they are not themes therein.

The Maintenance of Cosmological Balance

This theme, which emerges with such clarity in the Akamba's legal system and in their world-view, is not a dominant theme of the puberty rites. There are some evidences of it in the rites as outlined on pages 232-35, but so evanescent in expression that one would not have noted them there, without having first been alerted to their presence by their predominance in the culture. Whatever expression of this idea may be made in the rites, it will never be inconsistent with its major character culturally.

The Extension of Association

What was true of cosmological balance is to a lesser degree the case of this last theme yet to be considered. However, this one is

not as deeply hidden in the rites. A few questions as to the "why" of the puberty rites soon leads to it. The rites promote sexual virility and at the same time make one a full and complete adult member of the society. Both of these reasons are, upon further consideration, actually means rather than ends themselves; they are means by which the novice's associative group can be enlarged. It was noted earlier¹⁷ that the two major requirements in group extension are children and property, usually in the form of cattle. An uninitiated man cannot produce children and he cannot hold property. This also applies to the women. So he submits himself to the puberty rites in order to obtain that through which he can extend his associative group, thus assuring himself security. Seen in this light, the associative group is also only a means to the greater end of security both in this life and the life to follow.

As already stated, this theme is hidden in the puberty rites so that a cursory examination of the rites would probably not bring it to light, its obscurity being due in large measure to its being on another level of abstraction. There would be two methods of arriving at it; however. One would be, as discussed above, to ask "why" until the first level of abstraction is reached. The second method would be to work from the culture to the rite. It is easier to detect this theme in the culture because there it is expressed in a multitude of components.

17. Cf., pp. 133-144.

It is highly improbable that one would discover the other abstract theme, the maintenance of cosmological balance, solely on the basis of the puberty rites either. At least one other area of social activity such as tribal jurisprudence or religion would also need to be analyzed.

Summary

The hypothesis which the present study was designed to test was that the Akamba puberty rites are a vehicle of enculturation through which Akamba's culture themes are perpetuated. It remains to examine this hypothesis on the basis of the findings which have now been reported.

First, is the puberty ritual a vehicle of enculturation? In order to arrive at a solution to this problem it is necessary to define the terms. "Vehicle" is simply a synonym for "a means of conveyance." Enculturation, as defined by Keesing, is, "The process of learning and being trained in a culture from infancy, i.e., entering unto a culture."¹⁸ In its simplest terms it is, "The process of learning a cultural tradition."¹⁹ A vehicle of enculturation, then, is a means by which a culture tradition is learned.

The question then emerges as, "Do the puberty rites perpetuate culture tradition?" Or, to rephrase again, this time in terms of culture themes it would be, "Do the puberty rites perpetuate culture themes?" The heart of this question is, in turn, "Are the themes of the rites in fact the themes of the culture?" If this be true, then

¹⁸. Felix M. Keesing, Cultural Anthropology, p. 35.

¹⁹. Lôc. cit.

the puberty rites do serve as a vehicle of enculturation.

There were found in the culture seven major themes and in the puberty rites five major themes. When these themes were compared it was found that five of the culture themes were essentially identical to the five themes of the puberty rites. Furthermore, of the two remaining culture themes, the one concerning the extension of association does receive some emphasis in the rites but the expressions are so subtle that the theme would probably go undetected to an untrained worker. The remaining culture theme, the maintenance of cosmological balance, is even less apparent in the puberty rites, but the rites do not at any point run counter to it.

The findings of the present study therefore indicate that the hypothesis has been sustained but within the minor qualifications noted.

CHAPTER VIII

IMPLICATIONS AND COMMENTARY

Adolescence and Its Problems

One cannot but admire the psychological insight of not only the Akamba but of various other primitive groups throughout the world that has led them to combine teaching of social concepts with awarding recognition to physical maturation and sexual maturity. During pubescence a person is highly impressionable because it is a time in which he clarifies his own self-image and visualizes more clearly his future in terms of a search for specific meanings and goals. It is a time of great uncertainty, especially regarding two basic issues of life, human destiny and sex. Though he has feelings of belligerence, yet he lacks self-confidence. Accompanying puberty comes a longing for security, both of a personal and a social nature. Regarding sex the young person wants to know if he is a male or a female. He has questions about his spiritual fulfillment and whether he is really fit to belong to a society of adults.

It is precisely at this time, when frustration and ambivalent feelings are at their peak, that the Akamba provide a series of rites and ceremonies which seem ingeniously designed to meet these ends.

The researcher has observed that there is a widespread opinion held in many highly industrialized societies that the problems of

adolescence arise from the artificialities of urbanization and industrialization and that if society would be more "natural," meaning, to them, less advanced than theirs, then these frustrations of adolescents would not exist. The researcher would take exception to this concept. In working with Bantu adolescents in both classroom and counselling situations from 1954 to 1959, he encountered the same general psychological fears and frustrations which he met in similar work in American Elementary and High Schools from 1947 to 1952. An obvious difference is, however, that the Bantu have the same basic fears, but for them, they are exaggerated through being compounded with the dread of witchcraft and occult powers. The typical adolescent insecurities of the young Bantu are especially pronounced prior to circumcision. In the puberty rites his culture does not provide the complete resolution of all of his problems. He is still the principal agent in "working out his own salvation." This researcher did find, however, that following the initiation rites a change takes place in mental outlook. The initiated is more at ease and more positive, especially if he is not a Christian. Most problems following initiation are of a different quality, taking the form of solving, not the basic riddles of life, but of vocational adjustment. With regard to the influence of Christian membership this researcher encountered certain problems which arise particularly for the Christian Bantu initiate. This is discussed at length below in the section entitled "Puberty Rites and Present-Day African Christianity."

Returning to the Akamba's answers to the frustrations of

adolescence, regardless of Christian or other affiliation, an Mkamba cannot come away from the initiation ceremonies without knowing how an Mkamba should live and behave. He has learned this from the time he was a child, of course, but here it is reinforced with symbolism, instruction, and pain. And this comes at the time when he wants greater clarity of values to live by. So at this juncture the society is ready with a series of rites and ceremonies by which the tribal system is not only presented but is actually forcefully pressed upon the novice.

The Akamba permit no ambiguity about adulthood. Before initiation an Mkamba is a child, no matter if he is thirty years old. After initiation he is an adult even if he is only thirteen. Each Mkamba knows precisely the day he or she became an adult. Of course an adult should act like an adult and carry responsibility befitting his position but "putting away childish things" does not make one an adult. These ceremonies in which adulthood is conferred are therefore held in great honor, giving added impetus to the other elements of the ceremonies which may be otherwise unpalatable or unacceptable.

As a line of demarcation is made with regard to adulthood, in like manner the ceremonies remove all ambiguity regarding sex. A novice comes out of the initiation ceremonies either a male or a female. He need not go through life trying to prove to himself what sex he is or what sex he is not. Lindblom could find no homosexuality among the Akamba and this has been confirmed throughout Bantu Africa by researchers working in other Bantu tribes. Not only is homosexuality a concept which would not fit into the Akamba's world-view

of equilibrium, but since the ambiguity regarding sex is actually removed in the puberty rites, at least a clear line is drawn between males and females.

The initiation rites also mark a spiritual change in the novice's life. Before initiation he is a marginal person without any independent spiritual worth. As he advances in age he also becomes aware of the fact that he has probably transgressed tribal rules and custom in a number of instances in his childhood. Yet, owing to the fact that he is not entirely initiated, he cannot offer sacrifice to atone for his sins nor can he meet with the ancestral spirits in the sex act. In short, he has no way of contacting the spirits. The initiation rites change all this. The first thing they do is to wipe away, through circumcision and other rites, the novice's past. Through the rites a novice is symbolically cleansed and then removed from this life to a place where he is considered little more than an animal, or at least as a sub-human spirit. He is then "reborn" spiritually, emerging from the rites a new creature, having, in a sense, been killed, and then brought back to life. He can begin again with a clean slate.

The impact which the promotion of the tribal values has at this time of rejuvenation and rebirth is indeed great. When the novice is thus faced with a new life, new opportunities, and a new, promising role, he finds the tribal values imbedded in the very rites through which the new birth comes.

Thus it is seen that the Akamba have capitalized upon the fact that the period of pubescence with all of its insecurity and frustration is an admirable time not only to provide for spiritual, social, and physical renewal but also to bring the value system of the culture to bear upon the novices in a forcible manner.

The Aggressive Feelings of Adults Toward the New Generation

Throughout this study the emphasis has been placed upon the worth of the rites to the novice, giving him security, new status, and so forth. But the rites also serve a psychological need of the older generation, giving expression to its possible repressed feelings of aggression toward the younger generation which is reaching forth for power.

The researcher knows of no ritualized method in the West whereby the older generation can express such feelings. This may possibly take place in the armed forces or in initiation into secret societies; but, if so, only a small segment of the population is affected thereby. Possibly if Western society would provide a legalized method whereby the older generation could express such repressed feelings in a ritualized form, both the frustrations of the adults and the youth would not be as protracted as they undoubtedly are under certain circumstances at the present time. The expression which this may now take in the West, the withholding of goods, such as money or the family car, is generally done within the framework of the family, thus putting this institution under strain. Therefore, the adults may find themselves in the position of wanting to "take it

out" on the younger generation while at the same time wishing to retain its respect and love.

Pain and Education

The trend in modern Western education has been toward more permissiveness in the educational process and "good education" has often been seen as a happy experience all the way through. Little coercion, even though mental, is sanctioned in this context, and corporal punishment is actually frowned upon. Possibly educational method has lost a strategic teaching device thereby. Pain as a reinforcing technique has been used by the Bantu for ages and the results do not seem to be as negative as the Westerners might expect. Obviously any consideration of this matter cannot ignore the goals of the societies. To the extent that the Akamba may be striving for conformity, and certain Western educational groups in promoting individual growth may seek a degree of non-conformity, the value of this concept may be lessened.

In Ukamba, as in many parts of Bantu Africa, it takes pain and deprivation to make a man. The youths are proud of their scars received in the initiation camps. They feel that, having endured severe pain, they are worthy of their new roles as adults.

The presence of pain in the initiation rites impresses the novices with the gravity of the experience. They talk about this for months before the ceremonies. If the aspect of pain would be removed from the ceremonies the researcher believes that their educative character would be greatly reduced.

The Dramatization and Ritualization of Values

The way in which the Akamba dramatize the culture values in ritual probably adds to its educational value. There is nothing very subtle about the way this is done; on the contrary, certain values are emphasized again and again throughout the rites in varied ceremonial settings in a manner in which it would seem that the point which is being made could not possibly be missed.

The implications of this aspect of the rites are obvious for certain cultures in which it is apparently expected that the younger generation will absorb the cultural values by simple osmosis. One wonders whether, in Western societies, it would not prove advisable to ritualize and dramatize the particular value systems which they hope to transmit to the oncoming generation.

The Relation of Ritual to Culture

There is probably never a moment when the ritual of a culture exactly reflects the themes of the culture which it serves. The utility of the puberty rites, or any other rites for that matter, largely depends upon their malleability. When a rite becomes so calcified that it can no longer keep up with the changing value configuration of the culture which it is supposed to serve, that is, when its themes are no longer the themes of the culture, then it loses its enculturative value and is simply observed, if indeed it is not abandoned, as an heirloom which was handed down by preceding generations but really does not fit into the modern decor. Rites which are

so out of touch with reality that they no longer reflect the value system of the people cease to be effective vehicles of enculturation.

It would seem to the researcher, on the basis of the present study, that it is a healthy sign when the rites can and do reflect the majority of the culture themes. The reverse would also hold true, that it is unfortunate when the rites of passage no longer stand in direct relationship to prevailing themes. The culture loses immeasurably when such potentially effective vehicles of enculturation, like the rites of passage, are rendered ineffective because they reflect the themes of another culture in another time and place.

In addition to this advantage to the culture itself it is also to the advantage of the cultural anthropologist that societies which have seen relatively little technological advancement, like the Akamba, still have meaningful rites of passage. With such peoples he can gain much insight into their value systems by a thorough study of their ritual through the techniques of thematic analysis as demonstrated in this paper. This method of approaching the study of a culture presupposes that either a description of the rites is readily available in ethnographic literature or through competent informants, or if the ethnographer can view the rites himself. The researcher also believes that this technique is the most rewarding in a pre-industrialized society. The point in the development of a culture at which the rites no longer reflect the culture themes is not certain. This must

await further research. It is probably true, as Richards wrote, that, "The correspondence between the total value system of a tribe and its symbolic expression in ritual is never exact."¹ This is borne out in the present study. However, the correlation between the two sets of themes was sufficiently high (and in the Richards study as well) to warrant the observation that it is to be expected that a careful thematic analysis of the rites of passage will produce a list of themes which have a high degree of correlation to the culture themes.

Culture Themes and Culture Change

The themes of a culture are not static. There is a continual change taking place in every culture as new components are taken in. Each time a component is introduced a slight shift results. These minute shifts eventually effect the themes. However, having noted this, it is not to be taken for granted that, owing to the malleability of culture, new components can be introduced into a culture at will. Community development projects often face this problem. The introduction of any new component from outside the culture must take into account the culture's themes, its value system, and the direction of culture drift. A society will, of its own volition, probably accept something new only if it supports the value system of the culture in a positive way or if it does not militate against the major culture themes.

1. Audrey I. Richards, Chisungu: A Girl's Initiation Ceremony among the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia, p. 117.

Therefore, a thorough anthropological study should be made prior to the attempted introduction of any new component into a culture, lest the project be doomed to failure no matter how humanitarian the gesture might be. This has direct application to such plans as the Point Four Program, the International Cooperative Administration, and other programs which are concerned with community development overseas.

Cross-Culture Education in the Light of Culture Themes

At the present time there are several programs set up in American Universities to train teachers specifically for Bantu Africa. These teachers would do well to become acquainted with the extra-school educational complexes of the Bantu societies. The temptation is to think that the Bantu have not been educating their young and that now this process must begin. This, of course, is not the case. And the educator should become acquainted with the method and content of the native educational activities. A teacher working with adolescents, for example, should have a thorough knowledge of exactly what the initiation ceremonies mean to his students. Yet the researcher was surprised in his own experience to learn with what disregard Western educators in Bantu Africa generally treated such matters. This, in large part, is the reason why education in the formal sense is so distinctly "non-African" in Africa.

Certainly a cultural awareness should be the basic requirement for an overseas teacher lest his work be in vain, if not actually detrimental.

Each year more and more Bantu students attend American institutions. In order to develop better international relations and to be of the most benefit to these people personally a greater effort should be made to understand their problems. This will mean that the educators also will need to develop a cultural awareness so that they can share in a meaningful way the problems of these "new Africans."

Puberty Rites and Present-Day African Christianity

The past century of Christian mission work among the Bantu has brought many missionaries to the conclusion that these puberty rites cannot be used in Christian ritual as they are now practiced in the culture. And when attempts are made to "Christianize" them and bring them into the Church they lose their appeal to the participants. The researcher knows of no completely successful experiment in this regard.

When one seriously looks at the Christian puberty ritual he cannot but be struck with how weak and impotent they must appear to a person who has been reared in a culture such as the Akamba's. There is nothing within the Christian ritual which does what the Kamba puberty ritual does. Therefore the Christian Church finds itself in the dilemma of seeing certain psychological, educational, and social gains which the culture realizes through the puberty rites while aware of the fact that to absorb them would be in other ways unworkable and undesirable. This aspect of the research receives some further discussion in the following section.

Relation to Other Studies

The present study is complementary to Quintana's work entitled, The Deep Song of the Andalusian Gypsies: A Study of the Transmission and Perpetuation of Traditional Culture Themes. In her study she found that the Deep Song, a Gypsy art form, is actually a vehicle by which traditional themes are transmitted and perpetuated. The present study has found the same phenomenon to be applicable in a rite of passage among a Bantu tribe. Both of the studies point to the fact that these vehicles of enculturation are actually educational complexes which are concerned more with promoting culturally approved attitude than with simply imparting information.

Some distinctions arise, however, one being that whereas the Kamba puberty rites are short term, intense ceremonies, the Deep Song is less intense but operates throughout life. Hence, the effectiveness of the Kamba puberty rites is enhanced through their intensity whereas the Deep Song achieves the same ends by repetition over an entire lifetime.

Quintana also found that the basic form of the Deep Song changes very little, if at all, while there is some limited freedom to change allowed within this basic structure. The present writer discovered this in the Kamba puberty rites as well. This perhaps points to the conclusion that the cultural assemblages which obviously transmit and perpetuate culture themes are extremely conservative in nature. It is also interesting that, though manipulation of the forms is kept to a minimum, yet provision is made within the forms for change to take

place slowly. The question arises, is this typical of culture forms through which themes are transmitted and perpetuated?

Both the Deep Song and the Kamba puberty rites are almost clandestine in nature and it is rarely that an alien is admitted to either. Is this secrecy an attempt at self-identification, is it necessary so that the forms do not get polluted, or does the secrecy simply add a sense of mystery which enhances the effectiveness of the forms? The answers to these questions, of course, await further research.

The present study also throws some light upon Richards' study, Chisungu: A Girl's Initiation Ceremony among the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia. She discovered that the Bemba's belief concerning the ingredients which went into a foetus is reflected in the respective roles of the sexes. The Bemba, incidentally, are a matrilineal people. The Bemba believe that the mother provides the material for the foetus, the man only sparks its growth with semen. Therefore, only the women are circumcised, and it is through them that inheritance is passed. The Akamba, a tribe which is becoming patrilineal, believes that the woman supplies the menstrual fluid, the man semen, and the ancestral spirits yet a third ingredient, all of which have an equally important part to play. This is reflected in the egalitarianism which exists between the sexes. Therefore, among the Akamba both males and females are circumcised.

Richardson also makes the observation that the initiation rites reflect the social system.² This held true among the Bemba and it is

2. Ibid., p. 148.

equally true among the Akamba.

Richards found that it was quite impossible to find anything in the Bemba chisungu which would indicate the religious dogma of the people.³ This is corroborated by the present study if the two sacrifices are excepted. However, the Kamba puberty rites are ordered by the ancestors and therefore, though not necessarily concerned with dogma, do provide an insight into certain areas of the Kamba world-view.

If the Richards study and the present study are taken together a very good case could be made for the contention that the puberty ritual is a changing phenomenon and does reflect changing social and political trends. This assertion is made on the basis of the fact that the Bemba chisungu ceremonies indicate a strong, centralized authority; they also reflect the matrilineal social organization. On the other hand, the Kamba puberty rites indicate a dispersed political authority and a stage between matriliney and patriliney in the social organization. Further research will need to be undertaken to check this assertion but it would appear that among the Bantu tribes the puberty rites are modified to reflect the social and political institutions. If this is the case, then a study of these rites across Bantu Africa should be very enlightening.

Richards implied that the emphasis upon the fertility aspects of the puberty rites was especially prevalent in female puberty

3. Ibid., p. 152.

rites. This observation cannot be ratified on the basis of a study of the Kamba rites because the fertility theme does run throughout the rites, even in the last one where the women do not take part at all.

The present study fails to concur with some aspects of the works of Evans-Pritchard and Oechsner de Coninck.

Evans-Pritchard, in his monumental work on the Nuer,⁴ concluded that the political institutions of a tribe reflect the ecology of the culture. This observation provides an insight into the social system of the Nuer. But this thesis is not sustained among the North-East Bantu people who, though experiencing similar ecological conditions, have developed political institutions which are quite dissimilar. For instance, the Akamba have a dispersed political authority, while their neighbors, the Wachaga have a strongly centralized form of government.

Several studies have appeared in which the proposition is made that the Bantu puberty rites, in some modified form, should be incorporated into the ceremony of the Christian Church. In his thesis entitled, The Use of Bantu Puberty Rites in Christian Education, Edouard Oechsner de Coninck proposed that these rites should be stripped of all of their non-Christian elements and used in connection with Christian Confirmation. This was actually tried by the Masasi Diocese of Southern Tanganyika, a mission district of the Anglican Church,

4. Edvard Evans-Pritchard, The Nuer.

the Universities Mission to Central Africa which is "high church" in emphasis. No accurate report has yet been made of this experiment.

The researcher is not alone in challenging this thesis. He would concur with Young, who wrote, "The suggestion is that we can select, reject, adapt among African rites in order to produce something that will have at once a Christian value as education or initiation, and at the same time have genuine African roots. I have come to feel that the thing is not possible; at any rate, under existing circumstances."⁵ This is the case because the core idea of the puberty rites is not consistent with the Christian world-view. It is that the ancestral spirits, through the agency of the tribesmen on earth, take a novice, ritually kill him or her, and then bring the person back to life as a sexually potent adult. Christianity denies the efficacy of this type of intercession by ancestral spirits. And Christian rebirth is entirely divorced from sexual potency and the perpetuation of a particular tribe or family. If the concept of the ancestral spirits were removed from the initiation rites they would lack foundational meaning.

In the view of the researcher, the belief in the efficacy of the ancestral spirits is losing ground at the present time in modern Africa. This will probably result in a modification of tribal ritual. This trend may be reversed but it is highly unlikely. Herskovits

5. T. Cullen Young, African Ways and Wisdom, p. 121.

wrote, "We can see the fallacy in policies which envisage returning African peoples to a previous tribal status, when such policies are purportedly based on a presumption of greater adjustment in the earlier state than can be achieved under present conditions."⁶

Many of the values promoted in the Kamba puberty rites could almost be called Christian virtues but upon further consideration it is discovered that they arise directly out of the ancestral context.

On the other hand, the insights which the puberty ritual provide can be helpful in strengthening Christian ritual. Perhaps the Baptism or Confirmation ceremonies could be made more meaningful, providing they take place during pubescence, by incorporating some of the features of these puberty rites.

Proposed Studies

The present study raises a number of questions the answers to which must await further research. These problems have to do with the place of ritual in enculturation, in culture change, and religious training.

The Place of Ritual in Enculturation

At what point does ritual form no longer reflect the culture themes? Which rites of passage are the most formative in the lives

6. Melville J. Herskovits, "The African Cultural Background in the Modern Scene," in C. Grove Haines, (Ed.) Africa Today, p. 48.

of the participants and does this have anything to do with levels of cultural advancement?

Which of the rites of passage contains the most culture themes? Which of these rites presents the clearest picture of the culture's world-view, of the social and legal systems? Are there recurrent themes through all of the rites of passage and what are they?

The Place of Ritual in Culture Change

As a culture changes what happens to its ritual? Is there a possibility that the ritual can change without the culture changing? It was observed in the present study that, at the level of advancement of the present-day Bantu, there was still a correlation between the themes of the culture and the themes of the rites. The question arises, just how long can this situation exist? How elastic can ritual become before it no longer serves its purpose? At what point in a society's development is the correlation between rite and culture greatest? Which of the rites are the last to change? Which rites change the most readily? Are there stages in development when one rite supercedes another in importance, and why should this be the case? What can be expected with regard to ritual in Africa's immediate future?

This also leads to the question, what does a culture do with an antiquated rite? Does a rite become antiquated because it no longer reflects cultural values or because it has to do with another time and another place? Do antiquated rites ever have a revival and if so why?

That ritual reflects world-view is quite obvious but it is not as certain whether it also reflects social and political structure. As more and more studies as the present one are forthcoming, some of the questions regarding this may be answered.

Studies of ritual should be made following a culture from nomadic through settled agricultural living to detect the changes which take place.

Another whole problem area opens up when a person begins to ask about the effects of urbanization and education upon the cultural forms of which ritual is but one. Can the rural Bantu carry their ritual forms into the mining camps and cities? And what of the ritual which is attached to specific places such as rivers and particular trees? Does this mean that the Bantu need to return to the original home of the tribe to participate in cultural ritual? If this is the case then what new forms do "unsettled" tribesmen invent to meet their needs?

One of the striking features of African nationalism is the emphasis upon ritual form. Is this simply filling a void which de-tribalization has left?

Christian and Non-Christian Ritual

Study needs to be carried forward in the area of Christian ritual in an African setting. Some of the problems which present themselves are: How can the Christian Church provide as meaningful a ritual experience for its new members as they received in their traditional cultural setting? Are the inconsistencies too great between

the Christian religion and the Bantu world-view to allow a person to participate in both? Can the Christian ritual, especially Baptism and Confirmation be strengthened to help bridge this gap?

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GLOSSARY OF KIKAMBA TERMS

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| aimu | Spirits of the departed. |
| aimu ya kitombo | Spirits of those who departed with a grudge against someone |
| asilili | An elder who is skilled in law |
| atumia ya kisuka | "Elders of the lodge," whose include discussing affairs re war and peace. They also bur It is the first club into whi man is admitted. |
| atumia ya nzama | The elders who sit in council |
| atumia ya ithembo | The elders who are responsibl sacradotal affairs of a sacre |
| ika | A circumcision or initiation |
| ithaa | Neck ornament, usually of fin One is hung around a child's the fourth day after birth. |
| ithembo | The sacred grove where sacrific offered. |
| iveti | Wife. |
| kamwana | A circumcised lad who has not reached puberty. |
| kana | A male child too young to her |
| kibalo (pl. ibalo) | A district, a group of <u>motu</u> . |

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| kiimi | A newborn baby, literally a "little spirit." |
| king'ole | The meeting of the mass of the adult population of a group of <u>motui</u> , dominated by the elders, for the purpose of condemning and executing an evil-doer. |
| kisuka | The men's club of an <u>utui</u> , comprising a wide membership of married men. This club serves as a sort of police force to enforce the decisions of the <u>nzama</u> . From this club members are recruited into the <u>nzama</u> . |
| kithitu | An object upon which an oath is sworn. Should the one who swears swear falsely the object is expected to kill him or some relative of his before a prescribed number of days have passed. |
| kiu | Soul, spirit, shadow. |
| kivizi | A male child who can herd goats but does not yet participate in community dances. |
| makwa | A serious <u>thabu</u> . It is a supernatural sanction enforcing rules of conduct. |
| mbabani | The mythical river monster. |
| mbai | The clan or extended family. |
| mbebo | Discarnate spirits of neighboring tribes. |
| mbusia | The monster in the second initiation rite. |
| mbwiki (pl. abwiki) | One who instructs and protects a novice in the initiation rites. |

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| Mulungu | The Supreme Being. |
| mundu mbe (pl. mundu aue) | Medicine man. |
| mundu mvoi (pl. mundu aoi) | A person who deals in black magic. |
| musai | The sticks used during the second initiation rite upon which inscriptions are made. |
| musingi (pl. asingi) | Novices taking part in the initiation rites. |
| musyi | A homestead. |
| mutumia (pl. atumia) | Elder, old man. |
| mwaiki | The conductor of the initiation rites. |
| mwanake (pl. snake) | Young man, warrior. |
| ndundu | An object upon which an oath is sworn. It is not as potent as the <u>kithitu</u> and threatens only the life of the swearer. |
| Ngai | The Supreme Being. |
| ngala | Tormentors in the third initiation rite. |
| ng'ondu | A purifying medicine, usually made from roots and parts of plants and trees, and certain stomach contents of the goat. |
| nthele | Married man with children, who has ceased to dance with the young men but is not yet an elder. He may not drink beer. |

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| nthoni | Shame, bashfulness; used to describe the feeling and attitude of a wife to her husband's parents and of a husband to those of his wife. |
| Nzaiko | Circumcision. |
| nzaiko ila nene | The great circumcision. The second initiation rite. |
| nzaiko ila nini | The small circumcision. The first initiation rite, the ceremonies of the actual physical circumcision. |
| nzaiko ya aume | The circumcision of the men. The last initiation rite, in which only the men participate. |
| thabu | An illness which results from ritual uncleanness. |
| thome | The basic political unit. The cleared area before a village. |
| utui (pl. motui) | A group of homesteads in a geographically compact unit, probably containing members of several clans. It has its own independent organization. |
| woi | Witchcraft. |

GLOSSARY OF KIKAMBA TERMS

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| aimi | Spirits of the departed. |
| aimi ya kitombo | Spirits of those who departed this life with a grudge against someone. |
| asilili | An elder who is skilled in law. |
| atumia ya kisuka | "Elders of the lodge," whose duties include discussing affairs regarding war and peace. They also bury the dead. It is the first club into which a young man is admitted. |
| atumia ya nzama | The elders who sit in council. |
| atumia ya ithembo | The elders who are responsible for the sacerdotal affairs of a sacred grove. |
| iika | A circumcision or initiation class. |
| ithaa | Neck ornament, usually of fine chain. One is hung around a child's neck on the fourth day after birth. |
| ithembo | The sacred grove where sacrifices are offered. |
| iveti | Wife. |
| karwana | A circumcised lad who has not yet reached puberty. |
| kana | A male child too young to herd goats. |
| kibalo (pl. ibalo) | A district, a group of <u>mutui</u> . |