THARAKA AGE-ORGANIZATION AND THE THEORY OF AGE-SET SYSTEMS

BY

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THESIS

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the person who kept the author sane while collecting the data and writing the thesis:

my wife, Nancy R. Lowenthal

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A NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY

The spelling of non-English terminology in this work is derived from several sources. When the terms are from a group other than Tharaka, I have used the spelling provided by the ethnographer of that group. Thus, Tigania terms are from Mahner and Maasai terms from Jacobs. In Tharaka terminology I used spellings provided by my field assistant who was literate in both English and Tharaka. Pronunciation of Tharaka terms is generally according to the pronunciations in the International Phonetic Alphabet, except that "th" in Tharaka is always voiced, and "c" is always pronounced "ch".

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Problem

The purpose of this work is to apply a set of theoretical principles to a body of data in the hope of generating an adequate theory about the cultural domain of age-set systems. While it is intended that this theory explain much about age-set systems in general, it is not intended that this be a theory of origins. This is not due to any *a priori* objection to theories of origin, but merely to an insistence that theories be drawn from analyses to which the available data are amenable. The major test to which this theory will be put is the explanation of a situation of social change in the area investigated: the Meru District of Kenya.

Throughout his major theoretical work, Marvin Harris (1968) contrasts "idealist" and "materialist" strategies of research and explanation. While this contrast may accurately characterize the history of anthropology, it seems to me that Harris' general conclusion is as invalid as the theories which he attacks throughout the book. Having demonstrated that the materialist strategy can be productive, Harris then proceeds to assume that only the materialist strategy can be productive. Specifically, having argued that the materialist strategy is in great part diachronic (1968: 604), he concludes that diachronic interests are antithetical to an interest in cognitive rules. It is not perfectly clear here whether Harris means to exclude cognitive rules entirely, or merely to insist upon the inclusion of

materialist considerations, but the thrust of his book is clearly the former. I agree, however, with the latter interpretation, since I find it impossible to motivate a theory in a vacuum, but I find the exclusion of cognition every bit as debilitating to useful theory as the exclusion of practical considerations. After all, it cannot be doubted that humans everywhere find themselves in material environments with which they must deal and that their social organization will to some extent reflect this, but it can also not be doubted that humans everywhere have minds.

This latter fact is one to which Harris pays lip service, but when all is said and done, his search for "nomothetic" theory is nothing more than an insistence that all theory be in the form of laws of linear causality, and that furthermore these laws view social structure per se as the resultant end of a causal chain, not worthy of study in itself since it has already been "explained" by the material (e.g., raw behavioral) facts. Just in case the linear causal chains do not work perfectly then social structure becomes an annoying intervening variable to be explained away on the grounds that one can always find exceptions to generalizations in the world: the theory always works except when it does not.

My insistence that a theory of social structure include both cognitive and materialist aspects would likely be viewed by Harris as "confused eclecticism". However, I believe that I can demonstrate the efficacy of this approach, and present it in a non-confused way. Harris' scorn for the eclectic appears to be based upon an assumption that an eclectic formulation will automatically include all of any

given theory and all of any contradictory theories. Barring this obvious error, perhaps the eclectic mind is seen as one which fails to be selectively critical. In this regard, I do not believe my approach to be so much eclectic as synthetic: historically it is a new approach, and should be judged on the basis of its own productivity rather than on the fact that the approach recognizes some utility in parts of theories which on the whole have proved less than perfect. Such criticism would be valid only if the section of previous theory being used is precisely the portion to which the original objection was made; other than in such cases a new theory ought to be tested as an independent entity.

A major objection to much of anthropological theory has been the inability of specific theories of structure to handle the problems of diachronic analysis or social change. Since the primary test of the theory to be presented here will be in the explanation of social change, this work may appear to be weighted towards a discussion of theories of change. Despite the fact that this is essentially a theory of social structure in a particular domain, I do not consider this weighting entirely unwarranted. It is, on the other hand, the tradition in social anthropology that has viewed studies of change as separate from social structural studies that makes it appear so. Indeed most theories of social change are based upon assumptions about the nature of social structure; when they are not, then they fail as theories on precisely that ground, just as theories of social structure may be viewed as disconfirmed when they fail to account for social change.

The literature on the topic of "change" in anthropology is

immense. Keesing (1953) compiled a bibliography of change studies as of 1952, and since that time the literature has only grown. There is a particularly vast literature on social change in Africa, but little of it bears directly on the problems to be dealt with here. Most of this literature deals specifically with a range of problems called "urbanization" (cf. especially Mitchell's 1966 review article; a similar review by Epstein 1967; and Southall 1961). Other volumes exist which appear to fall under this rubric, but which are in fact generalized sociological accounts, albeit of some merit (Lloyd 1967, for example), but which do not consider the general problem of a theory about social change within an explicit and general theory of social systems.

This is not to imply that there is no literature available on the theoretical question of social change within small scale societies. From the literature on this topic, perhaps the most interesting arguments are those surrounding the utility of "equilibrium models".

In his (1968) article Gluckman is concerned primarily with getting around the problems which Leach (1954) attributed to an equilibrium model, namely, the apparent inability of the model to handle change over time. He does this by citing Fortes' (1945) concept of "dynamic equilibrium" (used also by Leach), and Evans-Pritchard's (1940) concept of "structural time" as a background to his own argument that any equilibrium model contains within it a structural duration: the period of time required for the full implications of the model to be worked out. Lehman (1967: 57) has pointed out that this sort of suggestion in no way obviates the problem of what is still

an essentially static model, either a sort of rubber-band affair which snaps back into an ideal position following disturbance, or a pair of ideal states with an oscillation between them that is itself not a state; and that indeed the somewhat naive view of structure adopted in Gluckman's early arguments leaves no other choice (see especially Gluckman 1967).

Gluckman has no recourse but to suggest what is essentially a view of social structure as two models at distinct time points: social change is now being viewed (just in case it is "structural change") as the agent responsible for the shifts between the two models.

This is precisely the approach that Barth criticises. Barth's solution is no real improvement, however. He suggests studying the "events of change" (1967: 661), by which he appears later to mean the actions of innovators and the institutionalization of innovations. To me this appears to be the study of historical accident, with perhaps a passing glance at regular societal process. However, despite his accurate critique of Gluckman's notions, Barth ultimately ends up with nothing more than two temporally discrete models of social structure, albeit with a concern for the relationships between the two. Again the problem is in the view of social structure.

Previous studies, including Gluckman's own (1958), and theoretical overviews (Mitchell 1966; Vogt 1960) constantly refer to different types of social change (situational, radical, institutional, etc.) as though it had been demonstrated that social change was either something that was done to a system from the "outside", or was some process through which the system, itself a single level of relational

representations, had to proceed. If, however, it is considered that change is a part of social structure, then there is no need to dilute analyses with different types of changes, a procedure which the authors themselves appear to find distasteful.

The argument can be made that social structure rules are simply a class of operations that "generate" or describe relational states. The set of rules describing a domain of necessity has within it certain limiting (empirical) conditions. If these conditions are changed, then the output of these rules also changes. Thus, the rules can be seen as governing not only relational states but relational transformations as well. It is then sufficient to accept the fact that conditions are always indefinitely variable: from a proper understanding of social structure it can then be predicted what the social situation will be for each possible condition. Note that this does not amount to the prediction of actual events, since the initial conditions are not determined. This limit, however, does not reflect a difficulty in analyses but merely the difference between predictive models and purest prophecy.

To summarize briefly, we are concerned with the nature of social systems in general, with the domain of age-organization in particular, and what is wanted is a theory about that domain as it is found within a specific and limited number of social systems. We will want the theory to generate hypotheses that may help us in understanding what we mean by social change. This is a viewpoint which sees as the goal of the anthropologist the understanding of the system, and it argues strongly that the understanding of the system includes the understanding

of it diachronically, i.e., social change.

Anthropologists have in the past often been active in what has been called "policy science". Without making any specific value judgment about such work, it is nevertheless the case that anthropological theorizing about social change has been to some extent incorporated into the ways in which some agencies handle problems of development (see Goodenough 1965). Following directly from the naive assumptions previously noted in some of the theories of change, development personnel with whom I have spoken appear to have a similarly naive view of the connection between economic development and social change; simply that the two are in a one-to-one relationship such that whenever one has development one has social change, and that development is the cause of that change. This type of notion appears to underlie Gluckman's (1967: 279-285) discussion of the equilibrium model for social change.

The specific social change problem to which this work is addressed is the situation in East Africa as it stood in 1970-71 when the main body of this research was carried out. My research was conducted among the Tharaka sub-tribe of the Kenya Meru, who are described in some ethnographic detail in Chapter II. The Tharaka are an extremely poor people, and there has been practically no serious economic development in Tharaka country over the past seventy-five years or so (Brokensha, 1971, documents Tharakan economic conditions in a report to the Kenya Government). If one were to believe the above-mentioned implication of the equilibrium model then one would expect to find that the Tharakan age-set system was fully flourishing today.

Amongst the neighboring Tigania who speak the same language and

are also viewed as a Meru sub-tribe, the land is far richer, and consequentially so are the people when compared to Tharakans. Tigania people have benefited over the past decades from external investment, and the sorts of developmental efforts as regards land holding that is often mentioned in the literature for some other agricultural peoples in Kenya (Clough 1965; Krishna 1966; Sorrenson 1967). The town of Meru is located within the Tigania area, so that most Tigania have some experience with a situation that is atleast non-rural (if not fully urban). Retaining a belief in the implications of the equilibrium model, one should expect that the Tigania age-set system has undergone significant social change.

As will be detailed in Chapter II, both of these predictions would be false. In Tigania age-sets are currently formed and promoted in precise accordance with the rules which governed that system prior to European contact, as will be shown in a later chapter. In Tharaka the age-set system has all but collapsed.

Given situations such as this, perhaps the implications of the equilibrium model might still be saved by a deus ex machina such as suggesting that "weak" and "strong" social structures react differently to social change, and its various types. However, unless there is some well-motivated means of determining what a "strong" or "weak" structure is independent of examining how the structure has reacted under a change in conditions, then there is no theory at all. Anything that happens will confirm the hypothesis--there is no test by which it could possibly be wrong. All of these objections do not arise, however, when social change is seen as a part of social structure.

B. Age-Organization Systems

It would be counter-productive to cite all possible references to age-organization systems in the literature, but a brief overview will suffice to demonstrate the range of materials available. An interest in ceremonials characterized the earliest anthropologists, and among types of ceremonies the most often discussed were the rites of passage (van Gennep 1909; Young 1965) some of which were associated with age-organization systems.

African systems of age-organization have been discussed in general in several places, among them Eisenstadt (1954; 1956) and Prins (1953), the latter of whom attempted to draw theoretical conclusions based on detailed studies of three systems. Fleming (1969) in his doctoral dissertation provided a comprehensive study of the East African systems, specifically from an historical viewpoint, and his dissertation also provides a comprehensive general bibliography for the various systems.

Many of the anthropologists who have worked among age-grading peoples have concentrated on this aspect of social organization in their general ethnographies (Huntingford 1953; Spencer 1965; Jacobs 1965). The most accurate and specific information available on age-organization comes from in-depth studies of a single group. Recently Hoffman (1965; 1971) has provided a mathematical analysis of the gada system of the Galla in a brief article, pointing up the utility of applying formal and semi-formal analytical systems to the study of age-organization.

The material on Meru age-organization, specifically on that of Tharaka, is extremely sparse. Middleton and Kershaw (1965) review the

most recent material up until 1965 and draw this same conclusion. Aside from brief reports such as Hobley's (1910) and Holding's (1942), little was noted about the Meru prior to Lambert's (1956) work. Lambert also is responsible for a large collection of general notes on the area on file (n.d.) at the University of Nairobi. However, my own investigations suggest that there is hardly a true statement about Tharaka age-organization in all of Lambert's materials. I am not in a position to state how sufficiently this can be said to characterize the work Lambert did on other groups, however, for Tharaka at least two major points stand out. The first is that it appears that Lambert did not himself make field inquiries in Tharaka, relying instead on oral or written reports from other Europeans. The second is that Lambert assumed, probably on the basis of a similarity in terminology, that the Tharaka system was either identical to or a minor variant of the Imenti or Tigania systems with which he was better acquainted. I will handle specific objections to statements of Lambert's in Chapter II.

The other volume covering Tharaka in some detail is Bernardi's (1959) study of the Mugwe, a ritual leader found in each of the Meru tribes. Bernardi's material is far more accurate, but deals almost exclusively with this ritual figure. The age-set systems of the various tribes are mentioned, but were not the essential topic of his research. Much of this material is credited to Lambert.

Thus, there is effectively no realistic or useful report on the Meru (and specifically Tharaka) age-set systems in the published literature. Lambert's material on the other Meru tribes must at least be viewed with some suspicion, considering its inaccuracy in the area of Tharaka.

In the area of Tigania, however, Lambert has recently been superseded by the field work of Jurg Mahner (1971; and personal communication). My own researches make up the material on Tharaka (Lowenthal 1971; 1972; and the present work).

I had the opportunity to speak at length in Nairobi with both Mahner and Bernardi, and so the data I will present on Tigania can be considered quite accurate. I also had the opportunity to interview a few Tigania people living in Tharaka and passing through Tharaka. All of these interviews confirm Mahner's material. The chance to speak directly with Mahner and Bernardi afforded me the possibility of asking direct and specific questions, and resulted in a greater confidence in my own material as well.

In East Africa there are two types of basic age-organization. One type is the so called generation-set system, the major diagnostic feature of which is that recruitment to sets is based on the set in which some prior lineal relative had been. The gada system of the Galla is of this type, but the Meru tribes do not have a similar system despite a certain surface similarity evidenced in Tigania (the Tigania system will be more fully discussed in Chapters II and III). Glazier (personal communication) described to me the generation-set system which is used by the Mbeere, and which exists side-by-side with their age-set system, the second type of basic age-organization. Indeed, I will argue below that generation-set systems may not really be age-organizational at all, and thus the existence of a generation-set system separately but at the same time as an age-set system is not representative of a double age-organization.

In general an age-set system may be described as a system in which members are recruited to sets based roughly on their chronological age, either at birth or at some form of initiation (often circumcision). Again in general, the sets then move through age-grades, which grades determine the public functions of the members of the set; thus, at one point a set is a warrior set, and at a later point an elder set, but set membership remains constant for any individual throughout his life once he has been recruited.

All of the Meru peoples have some form of age-set system, and age-set systems will be the area of greatest concern to this work. The age-set systems of the various Meru tribes are not identical, and in comparing them there emerges a reasonable classification of types of age-set systems based on social structure which may be applicable to the East African material in general. This suggestion is based on materials collected by David Rosen (Personal communication) from the Mukugodo, by David Kettel (1970; and personal communication) for a number of Kalenjin-speaking peoples in Western Kenya, and on materials from the literature previously cited. The classification follows from the analysis which will be presented later on in this work, and it will be fully discussed below.

C. Method

In the collection of data it is advised generally that one avoid a technique in which the results of the research are predetermined by the technique of collection: research method ought not to simply reinforce preconceived notions about the people under study. At the

same time it must necessarily be the case that the analytical method to be employed informs the method of data collection just insofar as it must be certain that sufficient amounts of the needed types of data are collected. These two constraints are not necessarily contradictory: they merely reduce the naivety of the research in general. It is important, however, that both the method of data collection and the analytical method be discussed so that the reader may judge whether or not both constraints have been followed.

Foremost among the assumptions underlying the analysis to be presented is the suggestion of Durrenberger (1971) that social structure may be effectively viewed as an aspect of "competence", in the sense that the term is used in linguistics, that is, competence is seen as an interpretive and monitoring system for real behavior (which is "performance"). Chomsky (1957) points out that competence in this sense can be described, while an inventory of all real behavior is essentially indescribable.

From performance the analyst can abstract a set of categories leading to a theory of competence. In the case of this study performance is represented by over 100 in-depth interviews with different Tharaka elders. In interviewing these informants it became abundantly clear that no two informants shared precisely the same view of the system. However, the theory of competence which was constructed could account for all of these performances save one. This one performance I have discounted as spurious for reasons which will be detailed below in the discussion of questioning procedures. The theory of competence which I will be presenting reflects Carden's (1970) criterion that the preferred

theory is one which accounts for variants amongst the data. That the performances are at variance with one another is expectable from the notion that competence does not directly generate performance, but rather interprets it.

Formal and semi-formal models have been used before in anthropology (Kay 1971), and one of the more popular appeals has been to the use of game theory (Buchler 1966; Buchler and Nutini 1969). Game theory, however, takes the rules of a game as given, and concerns itself with the various possible strategies for playing the game. Our concern here, however, is quite precisely not for strategies within a rule system, but for the rule system itself and its changes over time, and thus game theory has no application in this work.

That a model of competence is a theory follows quite naturally from the notion that cognitive models themselves are theories, unique and individual, and that all descriptions of fieldworkers are to some extent also theories. There can be no real question about the validity of the cognitive models (barring pathological difference), for if there were none, then the participants could not participate. There is considerable question about the theoretical validity of a fieldworker's theory, but that is a question for Chapter IV.

I have stated that competence is a monitor and interpreter of performance. In linguistics this is similar to the distinction between language (competence) and speech (performance), but does not take the view that competence is in any real sense a generator of performance. Competence here is viewed as a cognitive theory or machine which interprets incoming performances and which monitors outgoing performances.

The interpreting function of competence can be seen by the fact that we are able to interpret speech from others (or ourselves) which is ungrammatical, yet comprehensible. The monitoring function is exhibited in the phenomenon of "false starts", when we begin an ungrammatical (and possibly incomprehensible) sentence, but then stop midway and correct ourselves.

In the realm of social structure we can substitute "culture" for "language" and "behavior" for "speech", and retain the model. With this view language or grammar becomes a special case of competence, and we may speak of the cultural competence of our participants with respect to any given societal domain such as age-organization. That ungrammatical behaviors will now and then occur is assumed, but that these will be recognized as ungrammatical by other participants is also the case, and that is crucial. Were competence an ideal generator of behavior then any ungrammatical speech or behavior would reflect a competence failure and not simply performance error, or else we should have no account available of the ability people regularly exhibit to interpret (assign meaning systematically) to behavior they see as ill-formed.

The model to be presented, then, is a model of competence in the sense that it provides parameters. Items which fall within these parameters are grammatical, items falling outside are not. The extent to which this competence model reflects the competence of any given participant is another question. Competence in this case represents a map against which to judge performance.

A willingness to take direct account of the cognitions evidenced

by one's informants is a necessary part of field research, most especially in the case that one is claiming to build a model of competence. While I believe the model I will present to be the best available theory about the domain in question, it is still the case that most of the data from which the model was constructed were drawn from informant's statements, and that these statements are cases of performance (actual utterances), not competence. However, it is not possible to arrive at a theory of competence without using performance data.

While it is clearly possible to learn some things about, let us say, ceremonials and day to day activities, via the method of participant observation, the main bulk of ethnographic materials comes necessarily from informant statements. Further, participant observation itself may be impossible without such statements. This limitation is of course strongest in foreign situations.

I consider that it would be possible for an observer doing pure observation to learn something about the behaviors and even the motivations of persons with whom he is familiar in advance (but this of course implies that somewhere in his past experience the researcher has listened to informant statements). However, the likelihood of doing this with people who are basically strangers, and who furthermore speak a language which is essentially unfamiliar to the fieldworker, is minimal. Finally, if one is using spoken statements as data, a major precaution that must be taken is that the fieldworker be careful not to elicit statements which are precisely the informants' views of what they think the worker wants to hear. This is a greater problem than it would at first appear to be.

Among the Tharaka, for reasons which I will make clear below, people who are willing to answer questions are often so very willing as to agree with anything the worker might suggest. People, it would appear, generally enjoy puzzles, and social structure can be viewed as a puzzle in which apparently chaotic behaviors take place that people would like to expalin (hence the general public interest in social science publications written for lay readers in Western countries and elsewhere). Since many Tharaka today do not understand fully the social structure which their grandparents dealt with daily, they may be tempted to suggest, and agree to suggestions of, situations which could not even approximate the realities of the structure.

The best example of this behavior was during an interview I held with a comparatively young man, midway through my fieldwork. At this point I was looking for evidence that the Tharaka might have used a system of cyclical naming for their age-sets long ago. Until that interview I had found no evidence that such cyclicity might exist, despite the strong claim in Lambert (1956: 48) that it did, and indeed I am now convinced for several reasons that it did not. However, I led this informant into this area of questioning, and seriously attempted to convince him of this cyclicity and to elicit cyclical names. He gave me six. I then suggested that most other tribes which do have cyclical naming systems have seven or eight names for their sets, and he promptly gave me two more. I have no doubt at all that he would have just as gladly given me any number of others that I had requested. When I worked up the data from this interview, it became clear that this man was willing to assign any name to any set at any point in

time, simply because I had asked him to do so.

If I said, "Could Kiandere be called Kiandamba?" the answer was that it could be. Ultimately, his reasoning became a bit more clear. Indeed, any set could have any name that was assigned to it by the elders. Since I was a high-status person by virtue of my apparent wealth; since I was a European and therefore assumed to be connected with governments in general; and since furthermore I was the father of a circumcised boy and therefore an elder, he would agree to call any set by any name I might suggest.

Most informants were not like this man, and this is the interview which I ultimately disregarded as spurious because of the way in which I forced the data. Other informants probably viewed me in much the same way, but in addition must have considered me a rather ignorant chap, definitely unsocialized, and hence rather like a "village idiot" in some ways. However, they were quite willing to disabuse me of my confused and erroneous notions, and very pleased with me and with themselves when they managed to make a point clear to me.

The questioning procedure that must be followed in dealing with problems of this sort must ensure an accurate understanding of what the informants are trying to impart. This process can be a very long and apparently unrewarding one, and it has many implications for the eventual product. For example, it took me several months to achieve a workable and accurate definition for the word nthuke, which all of the literature on the area claims means an age-set. Tharaka informants told me over and over that there was no difference between the words nthuke and itana in their language: that both referred to age-sets. In fact, as

I later ascertained, it is itana that really refers to what I would call an age-set, and nthuke refers to something else. I will discuss the precise meanings of each in the next chapter.

The procedure that finally led to acceptable definitions made use of questions of roughly this form:

Q: What is the difference between nthuke and itana?

A: None, they are the same.

Q: Is a man of your itana a man of your nthuke?

A: Yes.

Q: Is a man of your nthuke a man of your itana?

A: Yes.

Q: Are all of your itana-mates in your nthuke?

A: Not always, but they may be.

In this sort of questioning I had to avoid getting specific names of individuals, for as it turns out, the term itana can include every Tharakan circumcised at a certain time; thousands of people. Understanding that both terms referred to collectivities of some kind, the important questions would be those which would establish the recruitment boundaries (define the membership) for each of the collectivities, and thus, establish the difference between them; for at some points their memberships overlapped.

This of course is not a point in analytic method, but rather a point in fieldwork method; yet it can readily be seen from this example how closely the method of data collection relates to the model which is ultimately constructed to explain the domain, and it is therefore vital that the researcher specify the manner in which his data were collected.

Much of the data to be presented are at great variance with what has been suggested in the past for this area, and the only method I had available of ensuring my own data to be correct was this careful questioning form, and the continued re-testing of previously collected materials.

The question that must be dealt with finally then, in terms of the model to be presented, is how accurately that model reflects "cognition": is the competence model I construct a valid one in terms of cognitive salience? I refer to my earlier statement that the model which I will be presenting accounts for all of my informants' statements with the above noted exception. This demonstrates that the cognitive models of the Tharakans and the model I will present come up with the same results when questions are applied. This does not imply that my model and the cognitions of my informants are identical, but it is a strong indication that they are related. The probability is that the relationship is along the lines of a homomorphism: my model is a simplification of the actual cognitive process, and while all elements in my model may not match all elements in actual cognition (indeed since cognition is individual there is no way in which such a feat could be accomplished) there is still every indication that the elements are properly maintained in equivilance classes, and that the ordering of elements is preserved.

The analytic process is as follows. Each system under study is constructed by taking the minimum number of rules necessary to motivate the system under the conditions prevalent about 75 years ago, just around the time of European contact in the area. Different structures

are then examined so as to determine the actual differences between them at this minimal level. An hypothesis is then made that the differences in reaction to changed conditions (differential rates of social change) are accounted for by the differences in structure. Beyond this, the models are then examined under the changed conditions and a second hypothesis emerges concerning the direction of social change taken by systems. The overall hypothesis to be tested is that social change is describable as a part of social structure itself; the way in which rules change under different conditions, and that social structure is thus properly describable not as an equilibrium model, but as rules existing within specific environments over time.

An additional output of the models used will be to suggest that the typologies used in the past for the description of different types of age-set systems are faulty. Typology, of course, is no more than classification, but the justification for setting up typologies is that they form an aid to the researcher. The literature on East Africa suggests in general (Fleming 1965) that age-set systems be divided into those with cyclical naming of sets and those with linear naming. However, the way in which items in social structure are labeled by their users is not necessarily an indication of the nature of the social structure. I feel I can demonstrate that there is indeed some connection between the two, but that this connection is not absolute, and that the typology of systems based on labeling is unlikely to lump together systems with the same underlying structures. Indeed, since the structures are themselves examinable, it is on the basis of social structure that these systems are most usefully categorized.

For the age-set systems of East Africa there are two paramount items to be handled by the social structures. The first is that sets be formed on the basis of age, and the second is that these sets be promoted through a series of grades. The rules for handling these two items are the crucial data in the study of age-set systems, and they form the basis for the model to be constructed.

II. GENERAL ETHNOGRAPHIC MATERIAL

A. General Overview

The Tharaka are a people speaking a Bantu language, and living for the most part in an area of Kenya known as the Tharaka plains, east of the foothills of Mt. Kenya. According to the most recent census (Republic of Kenya, 1970), they number just over 50,000, and almost all of them are living within Meru District, Eastern Province. Although Tharaka is listed as a separate tribal classification in the census (and the census states that this listing is not by sub-tribe), ethnographers generally (Lambert 1956; Bernardi 1959; Middleton and Kershaw 1965) have presented Tharaka among the sub-tribes of the Kenya Meru. The reports of early explorers and administrators (Gedge 1892; Hobley 1910) treat the Tharaka as though they were a separate tribe. Later British administrators appear, however, to have treated the Tharaka as a Meru sub-tribe, regardless of how they may have described the Tharaka, as evidenced by the appointment of "indigenous" leaders for the Tharaka from among members of other sub-tribes. This type of appointment was often mentioned by Tharakan elders, especially in regard to the collection of taxes. The other Meru sub-tribes were (and are) generally economically better off than the Tharaka, and this likely created the image of them in the British mind as being more "civilized".

It is clear that there are at least nine groups of people calling themselves Ameru, and that the Tharaka are among them. But my data indicate that there may be more. This is not the place to tackle the

overall problem of ethnicity (see Barth 1969; Lehman, 1972a), and what defines an ethnic category, but research in the marginal areas of Meru District would be a great help to understanding the nature of "tribe" (Helm 1968). There are apparently several small pockets of population in the District where it is quite uncertain to what ethnic group the people are alligned, and indeed, much of this area could be called "anthropologically unexplored". Since Tharaka people also call themselves Ameru, but since they simultaneously refer to the Imenti as the Ameru in order to distinguish themselves from the Imenti, what Tharakans "really" are is most unclear. Suffice it to say for now, however, that the cultural similarities between all of the peoples called Ameru is sufficient to allow one to reasonably compare them to one another in those areas in which they differ while maintaining a fair constancy of other variables.

With the exception of the previously mentioned literature, and a few early explorer accounts (Champion 1912; Dundas 1913; 1915) of some minor customs, the details of Tharaka social organization simply do not appear in print, despite the common occurence of sources on the Meru in general. Given this, and given also the faults of the literature mentioned in Chapter I, what follows is in effect the only available description of Tharaka social organization at all. Because of the nature of the dissertation, there will be no discussion of material objects, quaint customs or generalized ceremonials except insofar as these are germaine to a discussion of Tharaka age-sets, or other major aspects of social organization.

Tharaka, by any index, is the poorest area in Meru District.

During my period of fieldwork Prof. David Brokensha undertook a brief survey in order to make suggestions to government concerning development in this area. A few items from his report (Brokensha 1971) will serve to illuminate this contention. Rainfall records have not been kept for any great length of time, but rainfall is known to be small and quite erratic. Prospects for irrigation are not too bad, since there are several permanent rivers, tributaries of the Tana, in the division, but this potential has been actualized in only a very few areas. As a result of this pattern, crops are not particularly good, and in the event of the rains failing (a not uncommon occurence) hunger becomes a serious problem. Tharaka livestock (cattle, sheep, goats) is generally of very poor quality, and drought can kill off livestock as well as people.

There is only one government-operated secondary school in the Tharaka division. This school operates only two years (forms) with government aid. The other two years are operated as a "Harambee" self-help project. This involves charging very high fees, and provides generally poorer facilities. This situation may have somewhat improved by now; indeed, education is generally viewed as a high priority in Kenya, and government policy is to finance schooling as quickly as funds become available.

There is only one "Health Centre" in the division, at Marimanti. There are a few small dispensaries; some government-operated, and a few Mission-operated. My own investigation indicated that the government-run medical service was often faced with short supply situations for basic medications. It should be pointed out, however that the government

operation is free of charge for regular "office visits".

There are no hospitals in Tharaka division, although there are two nearby, one in the town of Meru and another at the Consolata Mission at Nkubu. They are about the same distance away from the division, about 45 miles from where I was located. Vehicle transportation in the area is severely limited, even when the roads are good, and doctors at Nkubu informed me that Tharakan patients rarely arrived quickly when need struck. Some Europeans attributed this to Tharakan "primitiveness" and fear of medication, however, it would appear that the transportation facilities have more to do with this. By the time the seriously ill can arrive at a hospital, it is often too late to aid them, and the hospital has a reputation as a place one goes to die. The long lines daily at the Marimanti government Health Centre and the Gatonga Consolata Mission dispensary belie the notion about Tharakan fears of modern medicine.

There are only three kilometers of all-weather road in the division, running from the "main road" (which may fall into greater disrepair with the completion of a new road several miles west and outside of the division entirely) to the administrative center near Chokorige. There are dry-weather roads, but none of them is particularly inviting to the traveler.

Tharaka division is located just east of the old Embu-Meru road, with the Imenti Meru to their west, on the slopes of the mountain. To the south their neighbors are the Mbeere and Embu, with the Chuka (who are also described as a Meru sub-tribe by some) to the Southwest. The eastern neighbors of the Tharaka are the Akamba (or Kamba), one of the

largest ethnic categories in Kenya. To the northwest are the Tigania Meru and beyond them the Igembe. Due north from Tharaka division is the uninhabited Meru Game Reserve, between the Tharaka and the Galla.

The prefix Ki- often denotes "language of" in Bantu tongues. Tharakans speak Kitharaka which is very close to Kimeru (or Kimenti as it is sometimes referred to); indeed, the dialects are sufficiently close so that two native speakers can understand one another without difficulty. Except for the Galla, all of the peoples mentioned in the previous paragraph speak closely related languages, as do the Kikuyu. Tharakans often refer to their language as Kimeru, just as they refer to themselves as Ameru, and the distinction between the vocabularies of Kimeru proper as it is spoken in Imenti and Kitharaka are indeed minimal. There are some striking differences in dealing with the names of age-sets and other items in social structure, and in such cases I always had to specify that I wished to know the answers for both Kitharaka and Kimeru. Once I had become aware that such differences existed, it was a relatively simple matter to specify which answers were wanted.

Most historical sources (Lambert n.d. and 1956; Fadiman 1970 and personal communications 1971-72; M' Inoti n.d.) state that the Tharaka and the other Meru sub-tribes have the same origin, and indeed their legends of origin are quite similar, involving a migration from a place of legendary servitude called Mbwa, to their current locations. There are some variations between the sub-tribes as to details, but all seem to agree with the general outline, a good example of which is in Fadiman's (1970) paper.

Lambert (n.d.) had suggested that the Tharaka arrived in the area about 200 years before the other Meru sub-tribes, a suggestion which Fadiman doubted (personal communication). Lambert's conclusion, however, was based upon his reconstruction of the Tharaka age-set system, and my data indicate that this reconstruction was incorrect.

Lambert failed to distinguish between the word itana, age-set, and the word nthuke, a problem I mentioned in the first chapter. Nthuke may indeed mean age-set in some Meru sub-tribes, but it does not in Tharaka. By confusing the Tharaka system with the other sub-tribes' systems Lambert automatically assigned a greater length to the open formation period for Tharaka age-sets than was in fact the case. Since he had a larger list of age-set names for Tharaka, he assumed an earlier arrival date for them. The details of the Tharaka system will be given in the next section; however, I can state here that if we use Lambert's collection of set names (itself not fully accurate, but reasonable enough) and assign to each set the open period for set formation which my data indicate, we find that the Tharaka have no greater antiquity in the area than the other sub-tribes of Meru. This conclusion I reported to Fadiman, and he agreed that it better fit his own data which had independently suggested that Lambert was wrong.

My major concern here is not with Tharaka history per se, but rather with showing the nature of the errors in the previous literature. In this case we have a fairly clear demonstration of how a misunderstanding of a current social structural situation can lead to errors in conclusions about history. Once these historical conclusions become a part of a body of accepted data, the errors reverberate into the

present. Thus, in Lambert's work just discussed his assumptions about the nature of Tharaka age-sets leads first to historical inaccuracies, and then this historical reconstruction is used to give erroneous support to conclusions about present age-set systems. Thus, throughout Lambert's notes (n.d.) he refers to the then-being-formed Tharaka age-set by a particular name, and also refers to which set will follow that one. As I will show later, these sorts of predictions cannot be successfully made about the Tharaka system, and indeed from a vantage point of later years it can be stated that Lambert's predictions did not come true.

There are two main institutions that describe and inform Tharaka social organization; the clan system and the age-set system. The age-set system will be the main concern of the entire dissertation, but I will briefly outline the clan system here becuase it will be seen to be relevant to a description of age-sets at least tangentially.

Bernardi (1959: 10) counted thirty-one Tharaka clans, whereas my own data indicate that there are currently thirty-two. Tharaka people themselves sometimes differ over the exact number, and this is understandable in light of the structure to be described below.

In the past, my informants tell me, clans were localized. Localization is no longer necessarily the case although one would be hard pressed to find representatives of all clans in any one area. Migration has been an almost constant feature of Tharaka life (not surprising when one considers the arid condition of the soil), and more recently population movements have been caused by the Kenya-Somalia border disputes of the 1960's. The Gatonga market area for example is

heavily populated by people who fled Kathangacini, some 15 miles away, driven out by Shifta raiders from Somalia. These migrations have necessarily had an effect on the localization of clans. While the smallest clans are still comparatively localized, most clans will have one or two members living in all areas of Tharaka.

Clans of Tharaka

In alphabetical order--spelling supplied by M. Njeru

Gankina	Kamugwe	Kathoga	Mutwa
Gankuju	Kamurige	Kirundu	Mwagitiri
Gantue	Kandia	Kitherini	Ncuria
Igoro	Kanjiru	Kithuri	Ndegi
Kagunda	Kanjogu	Mbaru	Nyaaga
Kamarao	Kanthakame	Mbogoni	Rurii
Kamugenia	Kanyaga	Mbura	Ukujio
Kamugao	Kanyaki	Muruguru	Utonga

Clan names are not easy to come by. In clans with many members people as often as not identify themselves by using their sub-clan name. Furthermore, there are also metaphoric nicknames for some of the clans, and these cause confusion. Hobley (1910: 170) lists 14 Tharaka clans, at least one of which (Ngimu) was known to me as Nkimu, a sub-clan of Gankina. Bernardi (1959: 64) mentions a clan named Kang'ondu which I was unable to identify. It could actually be a sub-clan or it could refer to a nickname, but in any case, none of my informants could identify the name. It can be noted that each of the sub-clans also has attached to it multiple metaphoric names, making the problem of understanding the Tharaka clan system just that much more dense. There comes a time early on in fieldwork when one wonders who, if anyone, one has just

spoken to, and then one discovers that the answer is not in the field notes. It is at this point that suicide appears to be a rather attractive alternative to writing a field report.

The Tharaka word for clan is mwiriga (plural: miiriga) which literally means "gate" and metaphorically refers to the enclosure surrounding a Tharaka household, implying a sense of belonging together. The other Meru sub-tribes use the same word. The mwiriga represents the largest unit of assumed direct kinship in Tharaka, and it is said to be composed of all of the male descendants (and their children) of a common ancestor. Because there is a segmentation process, some clans share an originating ancestor, thus, for example, Kagunda, Kanyaki, and Gankuju all claim descent from a man named Ndoga, and take their names from his three sons. In addition to direct genealogical inclusion, adoption into clans is common, and there are some cases of widows marrying other women, providing their "wife" with a consort, and taking the children of that union for the clan of their deceased husband. It is, of course, that much simpler if that clan can provide the consort, but it is not necessary.

The segmentation of miiriga is not a regular occurence, nor is it connected with a system of oppositions at discrete levels of clanship, and therefore is somewhat distinct from the classic notion of segmentation in the literature (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940; Middleton and Tait 1958). While the data on segmentation is not totally clear, it would appear that specific historical events may dictate such a happening, or that a substantial population increase may do so. Which of these (if any) provides an absolute explanation of segmentation is unclear because

the legends surrounding the origin of a given clan seem for the most part to be post hoc descriptions. Thus, a very large clan may segment into two or three smaller ones, and a story may build up tracing their actual separation back to the migration from Mbwa. The nature of this segmentation will appear a bit more clear when the various levels of clan inclusion have been discussed.

The Tharaka word for sub-clan is riko (plural: mariko), which literally means "fireplace", but which metaphorically refers to a group around a fireplace. This metaphoric use indicates that a riko is thought of as being enclosed by a mwiriga. Mariko are named units and the name is often that of the presumed riko ancestor. Mariko are usually traced back to the migration from Mbwa and the original formation of the clan; the riko ancestor is usually the son of the clan ancestor, and I could find no clan which contained only one riko. Therefore, the founders of the various mariko of a given clan are usually spoken of as being siblings. I did find clans, spoken of by informants as relatively young and small clans, which had no mariko. The segmentation process leads one to believe that such miiriga were themselves mariko of larger miiriga in the not so distant past.

It was stated by informants that no mwiriga in any case contains more than five mariko. There were several miiriga which had five mariko and they are spoken of as large. Tharakans appear unconcerned about the actual number of individuals in each clan, but they speak with pride of a large clan and in debate they cite the number of mariko in a clan as a proof of its size.

The smallest unit of kinship in Tharaka is that of mucii, which

means "family" and which is composed of a line of three lineal agnates, and their children. The term, however, is ego-defined, in the following sense. A man speaks of his family as being the mucii of his grandfather, and the man's son will speak of his family as being the mucii of the man's father (his own grandfather). While technically it could be stated that a mwiriga or a riko is made up of a collection of mucii, this would not be an accurate reflection of the situation, because for every individual (with the exception of direct siblings who share a single mucii) there would be a different mucii. The term mucii, then, does not really refer to a systematic unit within the clanship system.

However, the term mucii also has its metaphoric uses, and one commonly hears it applied at every possible level of kinship inclusion. One can hear comments such as "Tharaka na Muthambe mucii imwe" meaning "Tharaka and Muthambe are one family", and this will refer to two full sub-tribes. The metaphoric uses can be extended even further in a sense, because one can refer to people with whom there is no direct genealogical link at any point as a member of one family with ego, just in case there has been some form of alliance made between the two or their immediate families.

There is one other named kinship unit in Tharaka, the kiriko. The connection between this word and riko is mere metaphor because the unit described by kiriko is not equivalent to the unit described by riko except in special circumstances. Kiriko describes a male child born out of wedlock and his descendants in the male line. The connection between a mwiriga and any kiriko group contained within it is different from the connection between a mwiriga and a riko. This

difference is best exemplified in the rules for exogamy for each group, kiriko personnel being in some cases permitted to marry members of their stated mwiriga. This stems from the notion that their mwiriga is in fact the clan of their mother, and traditionally it is not only permitted but in some cases generally preferred to have a man take a wife from the same group as did his father.

Middleton and Kershaw (1965: 39) point out that the literature on Meru generally makes it quite unclear what constitutes an exogamic unit. There are two reasons for this, one being that the previous literature often fails to break down clanship into its constituent units in the first place, and the other being that some of the exogamic restrictions faced by any individual attach to the giciaro relationship which will be discussed fully below.

In terms of clanship, the rules for inclusion and exogamy can be stated briefly. Any individual will be a member of the mwiriga and the riko (if any) of his mother's jural husband. If there is no jural husband, the individual will be a member of his mother's mwiriga and riko, but he will not necessarily be bound by the same exogamic rules. If the biological father is known, and he is furthermore not the jural husband, the child will in all probability be bound by the exogamic restrictions of his biological father's mwiriga and riko, while being a member of his mother's mwiriga and riko. The descendants of this child may eventually form a large group of people with a name of their own, and this group may eventually have the characteristics of a separate riko or eventually even a mwiriga.

Nobody may marry a member of his or her own mwiriga (and this

of course subsumes the riko) unless one of the partners is really a kiriko member of the mwiriga. Even this is rare, because bride-price rights and obligations would be erased in such a case, and it is unlikely (though not impossible) that a man would give a daughter for no return.

Each mwiriga, it is stated, also has relationships with other miiriga such that their members may not marry one another. It is at this point that the riko becomes the significant unit, for in just about all cases where there are any mariko within a mwiriga, there will be slight differences between them as regards which other mariko and miiriga they may not exchange spouses with. These restrictions are usually based on the particular giciaro relationships which the riko has established, and which may be different from those of other mariko in the mwiriga. In the case of Gankina, the largest mwiriga, according to my informants, not a single one of the five mariko shared any exogamic restriction with any others, save that they could not marry one another. This gives the impression of a mwiriga on the verge of segmentation, and some informants agreed that in the future Gankina would really be five miiriga, or possibly fewer, but that eventually it would segment.

Having briefly outlined the nature of the various units of Tharaka clanship, it is now time to examine the relationships obtaining amongst these units, for it is in such relations that the system "comes alive" and is believable as a real system of social organization. The units themselves, devoid of any interrelationships, are uninterpretable. The fact is that almost all relationships amongst sub-clans, clans, sub-tribes, tribes, and even amongst individuals are spoken of as giciaro

relationships. Bernardi renders the word giciaro as "blood brotherhood" (1959: 16), but this is only a metaphoric rendering. Recall that Bernardi spends his entire book attempting to accurately translate the concept of the Mugwe into Euro-American terms, and the same procedure would probably be necessary to fully comprehend giciaro. The terminology that is associated with giciaro relationships is normally the terminology of kinship, and hence the view of giciaro as a form of fictive kinship is not without its merits; yet rather than try to affix a single Euro-American lexical label to the concept, I will describe the forms of giciaro, how they are created, and the obligations they entail.

There are no specific lexical differences in common discourse between the various giciaro types. While my research shows three major different types, the word giciaro is used to refer to all, and only the most careful and thorough probing brought out the fact that there were different types. The three types are, I can claim, classified according to the method whereby they are formed, and each formation method implies a different set of mutual obligations and exogamic restrictions. Furthermore, as mentioned briefly above, giciaro (of all types) may be created between almost any two social units. Thus, it would not be rare to find giciaro between an entire sub-tribe and a single clan in another sub-tribe; between a clan and a sub-clan of another clan; between a sub-clan and a family of another sub-clan; plus the more normal relationships between units of the same order of organization. Relationships of giciaro between units of greatly varying organizational order are, I suspect, legitimate, but I have no examples of this, and I suspect it to be unlikely simply because the relationship

would necessarily be unprofitable and short-lived, given the nature of the obligations to be described below.

1) Giciaro by kinship:

I have already stated that all giciaro relations involve the use of reciprocal kinship terminology, and this somewhat implies that the giciaro that is based upon an actual or stipulated past kinship relationship is the most basic form of giciaro. There is no actual formation procedure for this type, for it is simply the case that the units involved are presumed to have been related. Giciaro of a kinship type may be either through a common male ancestor entirely in the male line (the standard method for reckoning descent) or by a common ancestor whose commonality is possible only through a single female link.

These two sub-types are quite different in the obligations they entail. The form reckoned totally through male links is the strongest type of giciaro in Tharaka, and, I suspect, in all of Meru District. Tribes, clans, or sub-clans related in this way speak of each other as descendants of the common ancestor. For example, in the myth surrounding the origins of the clans of Kagunda, Kanyaki, and Gankuju, the three men who formed these clans are said to have been brothers, the sons of a man named Ndoga. A man of one of these clans speaks of the relationship between his clan and either of the others as one of a "great giciaro", and the clans may be metaphorically referred to as "one family".

As mentioned, clans related by this form of giciaro have a stronger set of rights and obligations vis-a-vis one another than do clans related in any other way. A member of any of these clans may

not marry a member of any of the others with which the clan has this form of giciaro. Jurally the members of each of the clans are treated as though there were a direct sibling link between each of them in terms of duties. If a man of one clan steals the wife of a man of another clan with which there is such a giciaro, then it is brother taking from brother, and the offender may not be punished or fined as would be the case otherwise; sanction is limited to his having to listen to the private reprimands of his own clan's elders who will instruct him in the proper behavior towards siblings. Even if the infraction is as grave as murder, there can be no direct punishment if the victim and perpetrator have a male-oriented kinship form of giciaro between them.

Because such infractions are unpunishable, and hence uncorrectable, they do not occur too often for to do so would seriously unbalance the Tharaka system of reciprocal obligations which acts as law. If a man took serious advantage of his giciaro relationships or his direct clan relationships to behave in an anti-social manner, he could eventually be dealt with by either banishment or execution. The execution would, of course, be performed by a clan-mate or a giciaro-mate, and would not be punishable as murder.

Unlimited hospitality is to be given freely to giciaro relatives regardless of the type of giciaro involved, and this is especially valuable to the traveler who has left his own tribal area and is journeying in another tribe's location. His or her giciaro with a clan or sub-clan in the other tribe is both a guarantee of safe conduct and of shelter and food. In the event of conflicting obligations that giciaro

relationship which is strongest predominates. A giciaro relationship between clans of different tribal units acts as a form of protection in case of warfare between the tribal units. The clans so bound will avoid contact with one another completely if possible. At all levels of giciaro it is expected that those related will not fight. At the level of male kinship giciaro this prohibition precludes the payment of fines or the carrying out of reciprocal killing.

With the weaker forms of giciaro these prohibitions still are supposed to obtain, however, small fines may be levied in the case of an offense, as will be detailed below. That the rules in general are not absolutes for behavior, but rather methods for judging behavior (cf. Lehman 1972b), can be seen from the following example. One informant related a battle between two sub-tribes wherein some warriors came face to face with enemy warriors with whom their clan had one of the weaker giciaro relationships. These enemy warriors could not be killed, but they could be caught and bound. The military situation, however, was such that the killing of the captives was deemed necessary. The bound warriors were left in a field, and the field was burned, the captives being "accidently" consumed by the fire. Had the giciaro relationship been of the male kinship type, I suspect from informant statements that this could not have been done either; whether any solution could have been found for such a dilemma is questionable, and it would appear that the warriors might well have simply gone their separate ways with both groups dissatisfied at the outcome.

In this form of giciaro the exogamic restrictions are quite wide in comparison with the other forms. One cannot marry a girl from

a clan or sub-clan with whom one has this type of giciaro. Indeed, in this particular form one could not marry a spouse from a tribe with which one's own tribe was so connected. Thus, there are Meru sub-tribes which never exchange wives.

In addition, a man could not marry a girl who came from a group with which his mother's group had such a giciaro. Further, in taking a second wife, one could not marry a girl from a group with which one's first wife's group had such a giciaro. This extending of the exogamic restriction through frmale links is indicative of the relative strength of this giciaro form.

It should be noted that in this last paragraph the giciaro obligation which the man was in each case required to observe was not even an obligation into which he or his clan had entered. There need be no punishment or fine for an infraction of this sort: it simply does not take place. No man would allow his daughter to be married to someone whose wife or mother had this form of giciaro with the man's group. Even were this overlooked, the women so related would not live in the same household as co-wives or in-laws. Were the relationship only discovered after all arrangements had already been made, the marriage would still be terminated. In the event of a questionable case (let us assume a kiriko relationship such that the names of the clans involved might indicate a giciaro exogamy violation, but where the actual biological relationship is within the jural bounds allowed to marry by this same rule) then whether or not a marriage in fact takes place is a function of just how far the parties involved are willing to rationalize the situation. The one fact that remains in such a case is

that it will never be stated that an actual violation was occurring.

When a giciaro by kinship obtains between two units (sub-clans, clans or tribes) which claim a relationship through a female link, then the obligations are completely different. This form of giciaro entails only two obligations: (a) that hospitality be extended to those so related, and (b) that fighting between those so related be avoided. Even in the second of these obligations, in the event of a conflict of alliances, the other forms of giciaro are stronger, and alliances through those forms will be honored first.

Persons related to one another by this female-linked giciaro may marry one another, and a man may take a wife from a group with which his mother or earlier wife (wives) have such a giciaro. The relationship is so weak as to hardly exist at all, except for stated bonds of friendship. The Chuka and Tharaka tribes are related in this way. Fadiman (personal communication) states that the Chuka claim this form of giciaro (and no other form) with all of the Meru sub-tribes. He seems to feel that this is indicative of the nature of the earliest historical relationship between the proto-Meru and the proto-Chuka, arguing for the interpretation that they have essentially different origins, and formed this relationship fictively. I agree with this suggestion for indeed no other Meru tribe claims such a weak giciaro link with the others, and in fact, no other Meru tribe claims a giciaro of any kind with all other Meru tribes. This would appear to indicate that either the relationship is fictive for Chuka or that Chuka represents an extremely early breakaway from the Meru in general, and both logic and other evidence from history support the former conclusion

better.

Lambert, in his unpublished notes (n.d.), suggests that this form of giciaro represents a holdover from an early stage of matrilineal descent practices by all of the peoples of the area. He attributes the weakness of the link so formed to its great antiquity, and the fact that non-patrilineal relationships are no longer recognized as real.

This explanation, even if one were to ignore the simple-minded evolutionism underlying it, simply does not fit the facts. Indeed, Tharaka pointed out to me numerous cases of clans in Tharaka which currently claim relationship to one another in this way. The recognition of biparentality by all of these peoples is absolute as can easily be seen from the section on the kiriko relationship described above. Tharakans continually stated that such a relationship would readily be recognized between families, sub-clans, or clans if it were to occur again; that is, if a woman were to marry twice, serially, her children from each marriage would recognize some form of kinship between themselves, and matrilateral parallel cousins recognize a relationship between themselves based on a common grandparent.

2) Giciaro by oath:

This second form of giciaro is not quite as strong a relationship as that involved in the giciaro by kinship through all male links, but is far stronger than the kinship giciaro based on female links. There is no separate term for any of the forms of giciaro in normal discourse, and the only way to differentiate between them is to actually know how they were formed, or to suppose the manner from the obligations entailed.

Informant statements were unclear as to exactly how this type of giciaro was formed, the one certain statement being that the original oath was made between two men not otherwise related. The basis for the oath apparently could be either the desire for such a mutual obligation pact or some event which was interpreted as an omen that the relationship would be a wise one. Although kinship terminology is used as a form of address between persons so bound, there is no stipulation anywhere that an actual biological link exists.

It is very common for informants today to be themselves uncertain about what form of giciaro links them to others. The story of how the giciaro was formed, even if it is based on stipulated common origin, is often lost in the past of oral tradition. However, the nature of the obligations one owes various peoples tends to remain known. If a man embarks upon any action which is likely to violate giciaro relationships about which he is uncertain, then the elders of his clan will inform him of the actual obligations. By this method it is of course possible that there have been and will continue to be errors in the execution of giciaro obligations, but the Tharaka attitude generally seems to be that what neither party knows will hurt neither. Either the elders prevent an error, or if not, then the relationship disappears in the breach.

Bernardi (1959: 16), speaking of giciaro, refers to it as "blood-brotherhood" and refers to formation procedures such as the sucking of each other's blood or the occurrence of a "miracle" during warfare preventing two men from killing each other. From the obligations he discusses it would appear that he is generally speaking of

this oath-type of giciaro. He too (1959: 17) speaks of cancellation of the relationship by breach of obligation, or by a mishap cancelling the original miracle, and I cannot envision such an occurrence having any real effect on a giciaro based on stipulated common origin.

This oath-form of giciaro entails military alliance as does the kinship form although my informants made it clear that in the event of a conflict in alliances the kinship form would prevail. Hospitality is due to anyone related in this manner in the same way it is due an actual relative.

In the event of a homocide in which victim and offender were related by this giciaro by oath between their groups, there would in fact be some payment made to the victim's group. While in a killing involving unrelated clans, there may be 40 or 50 or even more goats to be paid by the offender's clan, in the event of a giciaro relationship such as this, the payment would be much smaller and would be seen as a token to heal the breach of the relationship rather than as a payment to replace the victim.

One informant said that if he had killed a man of a clan to which his own clan was so related, his clan would have to pay no more than five goats. "But," he added, "they could not take those goats to their home, but they must consume them together with us at ours." Thus, the giciaro relationship, strained by homocide, is reinforced in the retribution.

An oath would have to be sworn again at such a time, by the elders of both groups, reinstating the relationship and insuring against a second breach. Should the same man again offend the relationship by

another homocide, his own clan would be obligated to do away with him. Such an execution would be carried out by members of his own clan and/or members of a clan with which his own clan had a giciaro by male kinship. Thus, the execution would not itself involve payments.

Clans related by giciaro by male kinship aid each other in getting up payments owed to unrelated clans due to such homocides. Clans related by a giciaro by oath may also be called upon to help with payments in case the payments are very large and cannot be met by the clan itself and its male kinship giciaro-mates.

Members of clans related by a giciaro oath may not marry one another. In addition, a man taking a second wife may not take a girl from a clan with which his first wife's clan has such a giciaro. The prohibition against marrying a girl from a clan with which one's mother has giciaro is not a feature of this form of giciaro and is limited to the giciaro by male kinship.

The rule about avoiding a second wife from a clan so related to one's first wife is most interesting when regarded next to the fact that taking a wife from the same clan as one's mother or first wife is not only legal but in fact often occurs. The clue lies in the relationship between the women involved. It would appear that if the mother or first wife is deceased, then the giciaro avoidance rule no longer applies since after all the man was not involved in this giciaro to begin with. The informants all stated that the reasoning behind the prohibition is that the women will not stay in the same household. Women from the same clan may in fact share a household (sisters, after all, must do so originally), and the dominance-subordinance relationship

between them is likely to be based on such simple matters as relative age, the eldest being dominant.

An in-law or co-wife relationship is also one which involves dominance, and it would appear that this sort of relationship is simply incompatible with the giciaro relationships of these two types. The giciaro prohibition against conflict may prohibit a first wife or a mother-in-law from exercising her perrogatives over the new wife, and this could only lead to frustration and possible conflict for the husband. The husband in a polygynous situation would probably wish to avoid either open conflict between his wives or between his mother and one of his wives, and furthermore, wish to avoid too close an alliance between his wives against him in any argument. Hence, also the avoidance of marrying actual sisters to the same man. The men say that to do this would mean that if one wife left him, then the other would go along with her, and the fathers of sisters are reluctant to (a) be owed too much bride-price by one man, lengthening the time in which he will be able to collect, and (b) having two daughters returned to him simultaneously and having to return all of the bride-price. It is for reasons such as these that relationships such as those above are to be avoided.

3) Giciaro by goat:

This last is the weakest form of giciaro, with the exception of the kinship through females type. The same hospitality and military obligations are entailed as in the other forms, but they are not nearly as strong, and the other types of giciaro easily outweigh this type in a conflict of alliances.

This form of giciaro is initiated by the ritual sharing of a goat between two men. While the obligations so assumed are to be carried out by the male descendants of the two individuals, it is rarely the case that this carries over many generations. Alliances of this type tend to be easily forgotten, and in the event of a conflict between such an alliance and a stronger giciaro, this giciaro by goat will lapse rapidly.

Payments for a killing owed between groups related by goat will be less than between unrelated groups, but they may involve more than the mere five goats of the previous giciaro by oath, and the goats paid may be removed to the homes of the victim's group and not shared with the offender's group. In the event of a breach of this giciaro, it is unlikely to be healed by a reaffirmation of the relationship, and a second offense is likely to involve payments such as are made between unrelated groups. Clans related in this way rarely assist one another in meeting debts to others; indeed, so rapidly are these relationships lapsed that it is only rarely that they involve entire clans.

An individual may aid another individual with whom he has such a giciaro, but this aid will not be extended to other members of either's clan. This weak form of giciaro is still sometimes formed today between individuals, and it would appear that it is the only type still being formed. Naturally, giciaro by kinship is no longer being created except as clans segment and this segmentation of clans may have ceased with the introduction of tax records which "freeze" clan membership. The giciaro by oath, involving serious military alliance is unnecessary today, given

governmental control over such matters. The giciaro by goat involves only simple obligations and mutual aid, and is to be viewed as friendship formalized by ritual rather than as serious alliance involving large numbers of people.

A man cannot marry the daughter of another to whom he is bound by this form of giciaro, but the extensions of exogamy to consider the giciaro obligations of one's mother or earlier wives in not necessary for this form. Currently, the elders say, if a marriage is in violation of a giciaro obligation, then it is usually a giciaro of this form. The violation is not particularly serious, and the giciaro may lapse (indeed, it does lapse), but no fines need be paid, nor need the marriage be terminated.

Given these types of giciaro, and what is known about the clan system, it should be possible to deduce the historical interrelations which characterized the Meru area when the people first arrived. I say this only to stipulate the use to historians of accurate field materials and analyses of modern social structures. While it is certainly not always the case that one can deduce the earlier state from the modern state, it is equally certain that beginning with poor data guarantees failure. I suspect it is precisely this type of poor data and naivety about social structure that led Lambert (n.d.) to his various statements about an early form of matrilineality. The job, however, of tracing the current relationships in detail would be immense.

It is insufficient to note, as we have here, what the mechanisms and rules are for clan and giciaro formation, but it is further necessary to have a detailed ethnographic corpus describing precisely which groups are related to which other groups and in which ways. This way

of doing ethno-history would require at least a full year's research project (heavily funded for local travel) in itself.

B. Political Organization

My data strongly suggest that the aboriginal political structure of Tharaka is best understood in relation to the clan and giciaro relations discussed in the last section. While there are certainly examples of age-grading societies wherein the age-organizational system is of paramount importance to an understanding of the political system, Tharaka happens to be a case with which it is relatively easy to separate out these features. Indeed, I will suggest below that the nature of the Tharaka age-set system is such that this conclusion seems most logical; that a system such as that of the Tharaka is not well suited to utilization as the basis for political behavior.

This happy separation allows me to save a discussion of the age-set system for a separate chapter, and yet allows for a full discussion of other items in Tharaka social structure, including some which have been puzzling anthropologists for some time.

This section will take up accounts of three areas of political structure which have been mentioned before in the previously cited literature on the area: the division of the tribe (and other Meru tribes); the councils of elders which function as the day to day decision-making units; and the office of the Mugwe.

It should be noted at the outset that unless otherwise specified the ethnographic account refers specifically to aboriginal organization, a situation obtaining just prior to European contact, and for a short time thereafter. The current political structure for

Tharaka may be seen as a subset of the national political structure of Kenya, and only in rare and relatively innocuous circumstances is there any reliance upon these methods today. Remarkably, despite the fact that traditional organization has all but disappeared in all of the domains to be discussed, and further despite the extreme poverty of Tharaka, high unemployment, and other features said to result in a degeneration of the authority of elders in other areas of Africa (Rosen personal communication: consider the problem of young warriors with no function in a society which has ceased warfare), Tharaka elders almost unanimously stated that there was still great respect for their elderhood amongst the young.

1) Tribal Divisions:

Almost all of the previously cited literature on the Meru tribes mentions tribal divisions. In the case of most of this literature, no distinction can be readily made between the various tribes. It is clear, however (Mahner 1970), that the Tigania at least, and probably the Imenti as well (Lambert 1956; Bernardi 1959), divide their clans into color groups: red, white, and black.

According to legends (Fadiman personal communications; 1970) this division dates from the migration from Mbwa. Those clans called black (njiru) left Mbwa by night; those called red (ntune) left at dawn; and those called white (njeru) left by daylight. I found a similar legend among the Tharaka, and again the color designations were used. However, among the Tharaka the legend differed. For example, while some maintained that the departure from Mbwa had indeed been by clan, they could not account for me which clans were to fit into

the three categories. That is, I was unable to achieve a coherent statement from any informant about which current clans would be related to which colors. On occasion a single clan was said to be somehow connected to a single color, but there was generally an explanation for this designation that had no connection with the Mbwa migration. For example, I was often told that the clan Kanthakame was associated with the color red (ntune).

However, the fact of the matter is that the word nthakame from which this clan draws its name literally means "blood", and the clan is reputed to have been originated in the climbing of a hill called by that name. The association of a clan named after "Hill of Blood" with the color red is not too surprising.

The majority of my informants, however, did not even associate clans with colors at all. In the few cases of those that did, I had several who claimed their own clan to be associated with red or white and all other clans with black.

The clearly favored (by the Tharaka) version of the legend has the people departing from Mbwa not by clan, but rather by age and associates the various colors with age groups. However, these associations do not continue today: no age-grade is associated with any particular color.

If this series of accounts seems somewhat confused, one can easily imagine how confused are the raw data and the informants themselves. About the only conclusion that can safely be drawn from the materials I have on file on this issue is that the Tharaka do not divide their clans into groupings according to color symbolism.

Mahner (1970) explains the color groupings of Tigania in terms of the reputed different origins of the sections of Tigania. He seems to feel that the association of the color terminology with clans departing Mbwa is a later legend which justifies the inclusion of the various sections as all being Tigania. Indeed, in Tharaka the story of the separate origin for the Kagunda-Kanyaki-Ganjuju clan cluster mentioned previously seems similar to this.

Tharaka territory is divided into two areas called Urio and Umotho. Literally, urio means "right" and umotho means "left", but in the case of Tharaka areal divisions these are better rendered north and south respectively. Directions are determined by facing Mt. Kenya (east), and thus the south side is the left side and the north side is the right side.

Bernardi (1959: 16) refers to clans divided in this way. My own informants were divided on this issue as well. The problem was to determine not simply if there were clans which were definitely urio or umotho associated, but rather whether or not the association was any more meaningful than a simple geographic division. It is certain that today there is nothing other than geographical meaning in this division. For the past I cannot be so certain.

However, in asking elders which clans belonged in which division, I was again unable to determine a coherent tabulation. By observing which clans were definitely agreed upon by the elders, I was able to convince myself that three or four clans definitely belonged on each side, but to make a determination for all thirty-two clans was not possible. Elders from the same clan would disagree on whether their

own clan was urio or umotho. For the smallest clans there was little problem, for most of them are quite localized, but for the largest clans (such as Gankina) elders could recite names of members living in all areas of Tharaka. When I asked specifically for which clans were where in the distant past, I got the same answers.

Tharaka elders agreed that if one were born in one division and moved to another then they would be members of the division moved to. This confirms my strong suspicion that the division is and was geographical, and that the symbolic importance of this division has been overrated in the literature (Needham, 1960).

There was only one difference between the behaviors of the people of urio and umotho that the elders could recall. This was that the warriors of umotho, during ceremonies, would smear a substance on themselves called rukunyi, which was said to have been taken from a tree. Nobody had an explanation for why the one group would do this and not the other group; indeed, nobody had an explanation of why anyone would do it at all.

It is interesting to note that the term rukunyi appears in Bernardi (1959: 22), and he says it refers to the Tharaka ceremony for the warriors' leaving the garu (warriors' house), and he feels that this ceremony is similar to the Imenti ceremony of ntuiko at which power is handed over to the warriors emerging as new elders. As will be detailed in the next chapter, my data show the Tharaka ceremony to be very different from the ceremonies reported for Imenti by both Bernardi and Lambert (1956), and while this itself is no great surprise, Tharaka elders also denied that rukunyi was a name for a ceremony of

any kind, but rather just the substance used at such types of ceremonies. Since the substance was in use, it is easy to see how the name of the substance might have been taken for the name of the ceremony, but the point to be made here is simply that this rukunvi was in use in umotho only.

Try as I might, I was unable to discover any actual practical or symbolic difference between urio and umotho insofar as political action was concerned with the single exception of the fact that the Mugwe was always of umotho. The manner in which this division may be significant in regard to the Mugwe will be discussed below.

Left- and right-hand divisions, but often using terms other than urio and umotho, have been reported as politically significant for other Meru tribes (especially Mahner 1970), and despite my awareness of these reports and many conscious attmepts to discover the same significance for Tharaka, I must regretfully report that my data strongly insist that it is not there.

2) Councils of Elders:

Most of the political activities of aboriginal Tharaka were concentrated around the elders of the tribe. In simple day to day decision-making relative seniority was most important in determining who was to be listened to: the members of the oldest living age-set being deemed the wisest. Beyond the necessity that one be an elder before one's views would be taken seriously in major issues, the age-set organization itself had little to do with Tharakan politics. Most decisions could be viewed as decisions involving clans, rather than matana as the significant units. Not one Tharaka elder could tell me

anything about a concept of a ruling age-set: all insisted that all elders were rulers. This is somewhat at variance with the situation in Tigania (Mahner 1970), and the other Meru sub-tribes (Lambert 1956; n.d.), where political power was said to have been held by each age-set serially for an amount of time (usually about 15 years), to the exclusion of others. Spencer (1965) reports a similar division of political power along age-set lines for the Samburu.

Kenyatta (1938) implies that for the Kikuyu once elderhood is reached the exact age-set into which one was circumcised is less important in determining political status than is the level of council membership which has been attained by the individual. Lambert (1956) reports similar councils for Meru in general. The Tharaka, indeed, had such councils (kiama; plural: biama), however, membership on these councils appears not to have followed a predetermined schedule, and while some councils were probably invested with more power than others, it did not appear from my data that an elder would join these councils in any given order.

It has been previously mentioned that in the past clans were generally more localized than they are today. In such a situation it can readily be seen that the political decisions made for a small area would be coterminous with the organization of the local clan and perhaps the few others represented in the area. For any village, it was suggested by informants, only two or three clans were likely to be represented as being present, and the relations between these clans would characterize the village organization.

At this local level, decisions which were not derived from

simple agreements were derived from the use of a mugambi (plural: agambi) a man selected because of his apparent wisdom and honesty. The office of mugambi is not a true office, that is, it is rather informal and cannot strictly be said to have a tenure. It is simply that certain elders would be recognized by their peers, over a period of many years, as having wisdom and would be called mugambi and called upon to mediate or arbitrate local quarrels.

Each area or village usually had several agambi. Certainly there would be at least one mugambi for every clan represented. Certain agambi were recognized (again informally) as being so good at speaking and delivering honest judgment, that they may be called upon to serve as agambi for the entire clan, no matter how separated the membership. The highest mark of honesty that a mugambi could show would be for him to deliver a judgment against his own clan in a dispute. This did not occur often, however, because the attempt was usually made to either find a disinterested mugambi, or to bring the question to a group of two or three agambi chosen from the several parties to the dispute.

In each garu (warriors' house) each age-set also had its mugambi. These agambi of the warriors would not participate in the sorts of decisions that regular agambi would, but were confined to speaking for their age-set in military matters, or in arbitrating disputes amongst warriors. In the event of some major dispute in the garu a final decision would be called for from a mugambi who was already an elder. Some informants suggested that each age-set also had an elder to act for it in the meetings of the elders, and he would also be called mugambi. A man who had served his age-set as a spokesman while still in the garu

would most likely be called a mugambi after leaving the garu and would be viewed as one who had had considerable experience.

The sorts of decisions for which agambi could be called upon were the simpler clan relationship squabbles involving payments for homocides and for bride-price. In the event of a recidivist killer, or a killing for which no culprit could be determined from prima facie evidence, a higher council would have to be convened. Bride-price disputes were common features of Tharaka political life, and indeed, they are not unknown today.

Bride-price is a considerable expense in Tharaka, especially when one considers the general poverty of the area. A typical price might be 48 goats, 3 cows, and a few hundred shillings (note: 100 Kenya shillings = approximately $14.00); all of this being paid in addition to the home-brewed beer contributions which must accompany courtship and the wedding itself.

For a bride with an education the price might run as high as over 70 goats, 5 cows, and perhaps 2000 shillings. Informants point out that this prices some girls right out of the market although it is supposed to ensure a rich and hopefully educated husband for her in addition to a considerable windfall for her father. However, young people with an education have often been exposed to Western novels with a strong love theme, and they may also have become antagonistic towards their peoples' traditions. In such a case the young couple may quite likely simply elope to the city or to a different area where jobs are available, and the girl's father ends up with nothing.

However, the payment of the bride-price is still very much the

rule today, and it is normally paid off in installments since to pay so high a price in a lump sum would bankrupt the boy and his father. Traditionally, a father is supposed to pay the price for his son's first wife, but in some modern cases, the son is educated and holding a paying job in addition to the production of his land, and so may pay the price himself. The bride-price must eventually be paid off, but such installment payments may drag out over a period of ten to twenty years. In such time there can easily arise disputes over how much has been paid and how much is still due. Also in the case of divorce, a man is normally entitled to receive his price back, less ten goats for each child produced in the marriage if the children remain with him as members of his clan, and disputes may arise over the exact details of this arrangement.

In such cases agambi may still be called upon today to deliver judgments. To avoid this sort of dispute in the first place, one Catholic missionary records price agreements and how much has already been paid on the back of the marriage license records for those of his parishioners who desire the service. Still, with most Tharakans not being Christians of any church, the disputes do break out.

In the case of major decisions, such as a recidivist killer or someone having cut a tree in a forbidden area (seen as an act which may cause drought, and thus endanger everyone), councils of elders (biama) would be the decision-making bodies. Such a council might well be composed of agambi from the various parties involved, but more important than the specific status of each elder was that each clan likely to be involved was either represented directly or indirectly by an

elder with whose group the clan had a strong form of giciaro.

The ideal council would be composed of eligible elders from every clan involved plus one or two elders from totally disinterested clans. The decision of such biama was final, but the penalties were normally in the area of fines. In the case of a repeated offender the council might decide for either death or banishment to prevent an additional recurrence.

The council most frequently mentioned by informants was the kiama kia mbiti (literally: council of hyenas). This council was a powerful one because it had the power to execute those it had convicted, and was normally convened only for the trial of recidivist killers. In case an execution was ordered, it could be best carried out by council members who were members of the accused person's clan, or of a clan with which his clan had a strong giciaro. This meant that no penalty could be assessed against the executioners, the most vital point being that the first blow must be struck by someone so related, while the council as a whole would participate in the dispatching of the accused. No penalty could be assessed against the council in general, for it was stated metaphorically that the man had been killed by hyenas rather than other men, and hence the name of the council.

For major decisions which did not involve trials, such as whether or not to conduct warfare, all of the elders would assemble. Small raids were often conducted against other tribes by the warriors of a single locality, and these meetings need not therefore be tribal-wide. At such a meeting all elders had the right to speak and decisions had to

be arrived at by a clear concensus. The members of the oldest age-sets were the first to speak, and they were most respectfully listened to because of the relative seniority which they possessed, but they could not impose a decision upon the other elders by virtue of their age alone. The decision, when finally reached, was said to have been made on the basis of the reasoned arguments presented rather than out of respect for the oldest elders.

3) The Mugwe:

Perhaps the best known feature of Meru social organization is that of the office of the Mugwe, made famous by Bernardi's (1959) book, and made notorious by Needham's (1960) analytical note. Yet despite the great amount of space that has been devoted to this figure, he remains essentially a man of mystery. After reading all of the literature on the Mugwe, one probably remains in doubt as to exactly what the Mugwe did when his power was at its height. After doing field research in the area, one is left with a similar uncertainty, but with the conviction that one's informants are equally uncertain.

Yet no discussion of Tharaka political power and authority would be complete without some mention of the Mugwe, however brief, because of his role in the literature rather than his role in Tharaka society. It would appear, and this will be explained below, that among the Tharaka at least, the Mugwe's role is at best marginal. Currently, it is stated, his only function is to bless the knives of the circumcisors at the beginning of the circumcision season, which takes place today during the long school vacation of July and August. In the past, it is said, his duties were far more important, but among the Tharaka,

I did not find the Mugwe standing in the same structural relationship with the remainder of the political organization as has been reported for Tigania by Mahner (1970) and earlier writers as well.

Indeed, among the Tharaka I found the Mugwe dead. This is not a particularly facetious statement: the last Mugwe of Tharaka was M' Ruanda, interviewed by Bernardi in his book (1959), and he died a few years before I entered the area (informants were unclear as to the exact date of his death). Among the Tharaka the Mugwe was always chosen from the clan Kithuri, and furthermore from a specific lineage in that clan. In fact, the Tharaka are the only group for whom the office is jurally inherited by primogeniture and barring complete incompetence the next Mugwe would be the eldest son of the previous Mugwe.

However, this son, during my fieldwork, was not yet an elder, and therefore, could not yet take office. Therefore, Tharakans told me, there could be no Mugwe at all. Until the next Mugwe is declared the function of blessing the knives is being handled by four elders of the clan Kithuri, in a sort of a regency, one supposes. This is quite an interesting situation for it implies that the Mugwe need not necessarily be learning a craft when he prepares for office among the Tharaka, but rather that his power as Mugwe is an entirely personal thing, that which he has by virtue of his being Mugwe. This is implied strongly in Bernardi's work (especially in the appended documents), and yet we find that for Tigania (Mahner 1970) a Mugwe is chosen from each age-set in turn when that set reaches a particular age-grade (senior elder).

This would make it appear that the office of Mugwe is a somewhat different item in each of the Meru sub-tribes, and that Needham's

material, drawn as it is from all of the tribes, may not be applicable.

I should point out that Needham at the outset of his article states that his conclusions should be applied only to the Mugwe of Imenti, and not necessarily to all Meru tribes, although he thinks further research will show that it does apply elsewhere. I would suggest on the basis of Mahner's (1970) report that his article probably best applies to the Mugwe of Tigania, and probably least applies to that of Tharaka. Indeed, I suspect the conclusions he draws would be totally vacuous in Tharaka except for a few instances of happy coincidence.

Tharaka informants were interviewed in all areas of Tharaka, but the bulk of my material is admittedly from the section known as Urio, and the Mugwe is of Umotho. Thus, it may well be the case that some more explicit knowledge of the Mugwe may have been achieved in doing my work in the southern portion of Tharaka. However, interviews taken in the southern area, with questions concentrating on the Mugwe revealed relatively little more definite information. Among the Tharaka of Urio I often recorded the belief that the Mugwe had a tail, that his power was unique to him because he was Mugwe, and that one of his hands was an important source of magic.

Informants did not always agree that the powerful hand was the left one, but this may be attributable to the distance from the Mugwe of these informants. It is, however, not at all surprising when taken within the context described in the first section of this half chapter, where the divisions of the Tharaka tribe were discussed: the Tharaka simply do not exhibit the strong duality-consciousness that has been

attributed to Meru in the literature. Add to this the fact that there has been no active Mugwe in Tharaka for a time now and the possibility that the next Mugwe may never take office due to general changing conditions, and the relative unimportance of the office to the Tharaka social structure becomes more evident.

Needham's (1960) article on the Mugwe was primarily concerned with fitting into the perspective of his theoretic framework the fact that the Mugwe was supposed to have his powerful hand as the left one. He associates the Mugwe himself with leftness, as opposed to the elders who wield political power and are associated with rightness. Again, these are essentially Tigania symbolic concepts, and not Tharaka, but also in Tharaka the Mugwe is associated with the left (or south) because his tribe is located in the Umotho area. In Tharaka it is also probably true that the Mugwe was associated with left-handedness in terms of power.

This is difficult for Needham, for then the Mugwe's more powerful hand should, by his scheme, be associated with right and not left. Needham's way out of this problem appears to be to simply state that the Mugwe's left hand is really his right hand, that is, that the simple fact that the hand is a left one is not enough to associate it with leftness in a symbolic study, and that it should properly be on the right side of the dual opposition chart.

This is a neat little trick, but entirely unnecessary since the problem itself is a bit of a red herring. To what extent must symbolism be consistant? That the left hand be the powerful one is not the least bit surprising in the context of a "left" clan membership, and a "left" association for the Mugwe himself. If, as I suggested, the power of the Mugwe is a power that is personal and not learned,

then his left hand is simply a part of him and shares in his leftness in the symbolic system. It is only Needham's own insistence upon "right", "good", "male", "power", etc. being in the same category that provides the problem. His fudging with the data does no good: the scheme simply does not fit. One might with equal assurance write of the south hand of the Mugwe, for indeed the Tharaka usages for urio and umotho, as I suggested above, are mainly geographical and refer not only to directions but to actual locations. Tharakans can say that they are in Urio or Umotho, and need not use these terms only relatively.

The opposition between the Mugwe and the elders is not all that clear in Tharaka. The Mugwe is, after all, himself an elder, and the lack of a ruling age-set in Tharaka prohibits the effective symbolic opposition one sees in Tigania. By the reports of Lambert (1956), Mahner (1970), and material in Bernardi (1959), it seems that in Tigania the Mugwe is selected from the age set that has just given up power in the political arena. The fact that types of power are distributed is not in itself a cause for suggesting a wide-ranging system of dual organization, but these associations do seem to actually occur in Tigania.

In Tharaka, while ritual power is seen as the domain of the Mugwe, and political power is seen as the domain of the elders, in Tigania these powers are divided amongst actual groups of elders. I would hesitate to impute to the American constitutional system of checks and balances any symbolic structure beyond the obvious, and the Tharaka system truly appears no more complex. In the past, if warfare were to

be conducted, it could not commence without the blessing of the Mugwe for it would otherwise fail. This is an effective check of a single man upon the power of the elders to wage war, but it does not seem to place the elders in opposition to the Mugwe. If the elders have concluded that warfare is advisable for political, military, or economic reasons, then the Mugwe blessing is necessary to ensure its success. But here it is unclear whether or not the Mugwe's blessing is really a use of ritual power to cause events. It seems more likely, and elders have suggested this, that the Mugwe withholds his blessing if his prophetic powers suggest that the warfare is ill-fated. In such a situation seeing the Mugwe as symbolically in opposition to the elders is as senseless as claiming that meteorologists are to be seen as in symbolic opposition to airline pilots, and Needham would not wish to make such an association.

Note, however, that this entire section is not truly a critique of Needham, for he recognizes the absence of sound data for many of his conclusions, but rather it may be seen as an input of some of the lacking data coupled with the suggestion that for the Tharaka the Needham scheme does not hold. It would appear to hold for Tigania, as I have said, except that the whole problem of left-handedness is in fact a red herring: the hand is a part of ritual power, and ritual power would be seen as "left", and in opposition to political power.

For Tharaka I prefer to think seriously of the south hand of the Mugwe, a perfectly rational symbolism of the southern association of his clan, and I honestly feel that the system of dual oppositions imputed by Needham simply does not exist in the same way in Tharaka.

Indeed, for Tharaka, the Mugwe does not truly belong in a discussion of political organization except for his role in warfare, and there he is an added factor rather than a symbolic opposite.

Except for the Mugwe's role in blessing the knives of the circumcisors he also does not truly belong in a discussion of Tharaka age-organization, for he is not associated with any particular set as he is in Tigania. It will be noted that the Tigania age-set system, as a system, can also be discussed structurally without a reference to the Mugwe, since his position in that system is related to the uses to which the system is put: function in this case being separable from structure analytically.

C. Tigania Ethnography

Material on the Tigania is drawn essentially from the same sources as material on the Tharaka, and these sources have been cited below. Generally, these writers (especially Lambert) wrote of the "Meru" as an undifferentiated whole, and I have already detailed how the ethnographic picture of the Tharaka was distorted through this procedure. However, in the case of Tigania there exists a field report by Mahner (1970) which is a recent and lucid account of the major features of Tigania social organization. This brief section is drawn from that report and from conversations with Mahner and some few Tigania I met.

The Tigania dialect of Kimeru is very close to the Tharaka dialect. Members of the two groups can understand each other with a minimal amount of ambiguity, according to their own statements. Members of both groups assume a common origin, and their legends of the original

migration exhibit only slight differences, primarily in recording the organization of the migrants. Not surprisingly, the Tigania version of the origin accounts for Tigania clan divisions into black (njiru), white (njeru), and red (ntune) clans. Mahner suggests an historical interpretation of this division on the basis of "insider" and "outsider", which will not be discussed here.

Looking at Tigania organization in any single locality gives a picture somewhat different from the picture of Tharaka. While kinship is in all probability reckoned in much the same way (details are lacking here), the clans in Tigania are probably more localized, even today, than those in Tharaka. Areas in Tigania are named for the presence of the clans on the basis of their "color".

As mentioned in the previous section, and as will be covered again in the next chapter, political and ritual organization amongst the Tigania are intimately connected to the age-set system in a way not found in Tharaka. The Mugwe of Tigania is always chosen from amongst the senior elders, the group that has already been out of the garu for fifteen years and which was in political control for that period. Political power is in the hands of the junior elders, those who have just emerged from the garu.

In terms of current conditions, political power in Tigania as in Tharaka is seriously in the hands of the national government and their local representatives. The power of the Mugwe, it would appear, is every bit as limited today as the power of the Mugwe in Tharaka. This statement is conciously made in order to refute a potential argument that the persistence of the Tigania age-set system is somehow

connected to the greater "number of functions" associated with that system. The fact of the matter is that the lapse of political control by elders probably took place in Tigania before it took place in Tharaka, simply because the Tigania area was more rapidly penetrated by European colonial leaders, and if this alone were to be viewed as explanatory, then we would have to argue for the reverse of the factual situation.

The allocation of political and ritual power in this way did in fact represent an important pre-contact surface structural difference between the Tharaka and Tigania. It is precisely this sort of division which makes Needham's (1960) analysis of ritual symbolism so effective when applied to Tigania alone, and one finds Mahner (1970: 1) in sympathy with the analysis.

It is known (Sandberg 1969) that the Tigania system of age-organization is essentially a Maasai system, and what the Tigania age-set system looked like prior to this acculturation is a matter for conjecture alone. However, the Mugwe would appear to be an aboriginal Meru institution, which in the case of the Tigania has been fitted in with the Maasai-like system. Thus, comparisons cited in Bernardi's (1959) book between the Mugwe and the Maasai Laibon make considerable sense in Tigania.

This also suggests, quite strongly, that features such as the division of political and ritual power are fitted to a convenient superstructure rather than being the cause of that superstructure. What is being argued against here is a functional explanation. The functions attached to the Tigania age-set system do not explain that

system, but rather the availability of a system into which such functions can conveniently be plugged makes it logical that they should actually be so plugged in. This, of course, also does not "explain" anything in any serious sense, but I will argue for the present that the evidence is sufficient to discount the functional explanation, and to make us want to seek further.

The details of the Tigania age-set system will be given in the next chapter.

III. AGE-ORGANIZATION

A. General Comments

Some sorts of relative age distinctions are present in all societies: the recognition of relative age is universal. The actual classification of a society's personnel into discrete categories based upon relative age is, however, not universal; and the elaboration of these categories into major societal systems is far from universal. Yet there are many examples of societies with age-organizational systems of some sort, and they have been discussed readily by anthropologists since Lowie (1920) first commented upon such systems. East Africa is particularly rich in societies with such systems.

It would be wise at this point to once again state the distinction between the two major types of systems found in East Africa. Both types of systems involve the placing of individuals into sets, membership in which is determined uniquely at one point and then remains either for the life of the individual or the duration of the set. Both may involve (but need not necessarily) the movement of these sets through a series of grades. In each grade the members of the set will be seen by themselves and others as performing a set of roles considered appropriate to the grade.

In the case of generation-set systems I would suggest that the diagnostic feature is simply that recruitment into any set is based upon the set membership of an ascending lineal agnate, in most cases.

That is to say, one is a member of a set precisely because one's father or grandfather was a member of a specified other set. Such a system is the gada system of the Gallapeoples (Hoffman 1965; 1971). This dissertation, however, will be dealing with age-set systems.

Age-set systems are those in which assignment to a set is based upon the individual's chronological age to some extent. This must be somewhat modified, for there are circumstances in which chronological age alone is insufficient for category assignment, and such circumstances will be discussed below. Additionally, in the absence of a western calendar system, the societal notion of chronological age may not always be identical to our own. What is clear about age-set systems is that recruitment to sets is based upon the age-status of the individual to be recruited rather than on the set assignment of some prior ancestor.

In the case of both age-set systems to be discussed comparatively in this dissertation, recruitment into an age-set comes at the time of, and in relation to, the act of circumcision. Thus, the age-status is coupled uniquely to a biological status, and there is no serious question about category assignment at that point. However, the crucial points about the reactions of age-set systems to changing conditions (social change) will be seen to turn on the question of the promotion of sets through the series of grades, and therefore, it is assumed that there may be considerable light shed upon systems in which circumcision does not take place. Simply, there may be any number of manners of motivating a system, and any number of these manners may result in the same sort of apparent social structure.

B. Circumcision in Tharaka

Tharakan age-sets are formed through circumcision for men and a similar clitoral operation for women. Both operations are referred to by the same word, utana, from which is taken the Tharaka word for an age-set, itana (plural: matana).

The actual extent to which the operation is performed upon women is unclear. While all women supposedly undergo the clitoral operation, there is apparently considerable variation in the severity of the operation itself, sufficient so that in one area at least it was felt necessary to pass a jural rule determining the extent to which the circumcisor could cut (Lambert 1956: 143). Glazier (personal communication) noted that within the Mbeere area, south of Tharaka, there was considerable variation in severity of the operation, and this is likely the case for Tharaka as well. It may well be the case that different operators employed different styles, and reports from informants range from a relatively simple sub-incision of the clitoris to its complete removal. A male may not view the operation as performed upon women, and I have no direct data to bring to bear on this question. Informants did state that there were currently some girls, well educated by Tharaka standards, who had not undergone the operation and were unlikely to do so. One such girl was married to a local teacher, and informants suggested that the average Tharakan man would not marry an uncircumcised girl. The ideal rule requires circumcision prior to marriage.

The physical operation on males is not an entire excision of the foreskin, but rather leaves at least a part of the foreskin remaining

below the glans. Fadiman (personal communication) reports this same method for Imenti, and suggested the possibility that another method, possibly complete excision, was followed in the past. A mutani (circumcisor) whom I interviewed agreed that different methods had been used in the past, but was not sure what they might have been.

Tharakan informants in general stated that they did not always circumcise their men in the current manner, but they differed as to the past method. Some suggested that the foreskin was formerly burned off, and others suggested a complete excision by the more standard method. All agreed that the current method, indeed the very act of circumcision itself, was learned historically and was not a practice of theirs when they dwelt in Mbwa. But how this was learned is again a matter for different opinions.

One story states that some young Tharaka men just happened to circumcise themselves one day, and that the practice caught on. There is a similar story for women, and both of these tales have three young persons making the initial discovery, reporting it to their elders, and the elders then validating the operation and making it mandatory for everyone. Some informants suggest that the Tharaka learned the practice from another tribe. Of these, some suggested that it was learned from neighboring tribes and others suggested that it was learned from a group encountered during the migration. All of the stories do date back to some time during or immediately after the migration from Mbwa. Yet other informants suggest that the Tharaka clan Gantue first came up with the idea of circumcision and then taught the practice to the others. This clan is known for the skill of their circumcisors.

Circumcisors may come from any clan, for it is a learned craft, but most are of Gantue.

A common statement is that prior to being taught the Tharaka were circumcising, but in the "wrong" way. The reasoning behind this appears not to be cosmological but medical. Informants suggested that prior to their being taught the proper method, many men died because the operation was performed in such a way that physical recovery was impaired. There is no suggestion, however, in any of the stories I heard, of supernatural displeasure with the old method, whatever that method might have been.

The age of males at the time of circumcision, prior to European contact, was said to be between the ages of 18 and 25. It is difficult to pin this down any more accurately because of the absence of any calendar method for remembering personal age: age is viewed in relation to circumcision and the age-set system, rather than the other way around. Additionally, it would not be surprising for men anywhere within that age range to have been circumcised. If the prefered age was 18-20, which seems likely from what informants said, then it would be entirely possible for any single individual to have his own circumcision delayed a year or several years due to family problems. If a member of the immediate family had died, then the candidate for circumcision is supposed to have had to wait an additional year. If the elders in general felt that the time was not ripe, or if some respected elder had dreamt of tribal misfortune, the circumcision for the entire tribe could be delayed an additional year or more.

I will be contending that the major reason for this particular

age being chosen for initiation by Tharaka was the need for a warrior group. As evidence for this, observe the fact that the current age at circumcision for males is as low as ten years, or in some cases even younger, and informants seem to feel that even younger children could be circumcised "if their father wanted this." Circumcision no longer necessarily means being a warrior although the term for a young circumcised male (nthaka) is still the same, and is normally translated by Tharakans speaking English as "warrior". Tharakans sometimes say that they are now "following the Kamba" who historically always circumcised at an earlier age (Middleton and Kershaw 1965). One informant said that the reason for lowering the age at circumcision was that young boys heal faster, and that they are not needed for fighting anyway. I mentioned to this man that in the Middle East and in some Western countries children are circumcised just after birth, and I asked if he thought this was a good idea. To my surprise he said it must by very good indeed because the even younger children would heal even faster and be less likely to be frightened or to feel much pain.

On the basis of this and similar statements, I conclude that the reason for choosing a particular age for circumcision in Tharaka is essentially a practical matter: at what age is a young man prepared to take up the burdens of warriorhood? When is he deemed strong enough to engage in fighting which may result in death? When is he mature enough to face such a situation without fear? This age is not an absolute, and while generally the new warriors are about the same age, there may be some variation, some young men waiting a few years longer than their actual chronological contemporaries, and others being initiated ahead

of the normal time.

With this criterion of warriorhood abilities absent today, the age at which circumcision takes place is free to float downwards in most of the age-set systems to be discussed. In Tharaka the age has floated lower than in Tigania, for example, and there are social structural reasons for this which will be discussed in the next chapter. Circumcision per se is a marker that a man is mutharaka (a Tharaka person), and the idea that the operation itself cease is not a welcome idea. That the rituals surrounding circumcision be dropped is not so radical: indeed, today, some wealthier families (especially those whose members have received some western schooling) have their sons circumcised in a hospital rather than by native operators in the bush.

Circumcision is also important in creating elders because in Tharaka when a child is circumcised, the parents are considered elders. This, however, is a recent alternative method of ascribing age-statuses, which has become current only in the absence of the full operation of the age-set system as it was before European contact. Since the system no longer provides the necessary data for determining elderhood, the circumcision of offspring which was inevitably later than the actual ascription of elderhood in the past is currently used. The gaining of the status of elder today then is not linked, as it was in the past, with membership in a particular age-set. In a sense this provides another example of how deeply circumcision is tied in with "being mutharaka", because its social structural utility has in fact been added to rather than diminished while the system which the act of circumcision motivated has collapsed.

Women were considered to be members of the age-set formed in the year that they were circumcised, but there was no special age-set including women only. A man and a woman circumcised in the same year were in the same age-set although normally women were chronologically younger than their male counterparts. Circumcision for men was between the ages of 18 and 25, according to my informants, while for women the age at circumcision was after first menses and, therefore, presumably they were younger.

While women refer throughout their lives to their original age-set when asked, they in fact will be more closely concerned with the members of their husbands' sets. While all informants agreed that a woman was a member of her own set for life, all also agreed that a woman would have practically no pragmatic affiliation with her set. Her age-set is simply a category into which she fits, but her relationship with other members of that category is purely ritual. Naturally she may have close friends who also happen to be in that category, but there is no mechanism for women similar to that of the garu for men, whereby the members of the category could ever be said to form a group. At the circumcision of her children the relevant age-set members to be called upon for ceremonial services will be members of her husband's set. While women play important ritual roles in circumcision ceremonies for males as well as females, these roles are based upon the relationship of the woman to the father of the candidate (if the candidate is male) or to the mother of the candidate (if the candidate is female), but not upon an age-set relationship, except in a very limited sense. This limited sense is simply that to serve as a sponsor for a candidate

for circumcision one must be circumcised oneself, and this goes for men or women.

In any case, women are never warriors, and when they are elders, they do not participate in the councils which make tribal decisions. In terms then of tribal roles the age-statuses of women are of little importance, and in terms of describing a system of age-sets, it is sufficient to describe the sets as though they contained only men. It is the age-status of the men that determines the roles of the members of the sets, and the women share in these age-statuses by virtue of their set membership only. This will become clearer when the actual operations of the age-set system are explained.

Holding (1942) reported on women's age-grades among the Meru. However, what Holding called grades are not what I will be calling grades in this work. In the analysis which will follow, the term age-grade will refer only to the statuses of non-initiate, warrior, and elder. In speaking of women, warrior would not be an adequate word, but the grade would still be the one it is for men, simply: that grade containing all those circumcised who are not yet elders. What Holding was speaking of was a list of terms denoting women's age-statuses, and except for one or two terms, they did not in general refer to the operations of the age-set system.

The burden of this discussion has been to show that although women do participate in the age-set system operations, it is nonetheless valid to describe that system analytically as though it were a system composed solely of men, and this is exactly what I intend to do. The only way in which the analysis would be different if women were to be

totally accounted for is that one could not then call the middle grade a grade of warriors. Since in the formal section of this work the middle grade is referred to by the rather asexual letter "B" even this minor problem does not arise. Each itana has a name of its own, which is provided by the elders soon after the set is formed.

Circumcision in Tharaka is and was in the past a seasonal affair. The Tharaka year is divided into two dry seasons and two rainy seasons, although in Tharaka one is likely to skip a rainy season or two every few years resulting in crop loss. Prior to European contact circumcisions took place in either of the two dry seasons. The season of thano, the dry period following the long rains and roughly equivalent to a northern hemisphere summer was the period of circumcision for men, and kiathu, the dry period after the short rains (roughly December to March) was the period of circumcision for women only.

While informant statements differ on this, and I am uncertain as to what is true, the bulk of the evidence suggests that while the men were restricted to the thano season for their circumcisions, women could in fact be circumcised in either season. Presumably a woman would undergo circumcision in the dry period immediately following her first menses.

Currently, thano is the only period used for the circumcision of both men and women. The use of thano, and specifically the month of August, is based on the simple pragmatic fact that most of the children currently undergoing circumcision are of school age, and August coincides with the longest school vacation, thus allowing ample time for the preparations, the operation itself, and a full recovery by the

initiate without missing any school. This is a pragmatic rule and not an absolute, and I would not be at all surprised if some girls were still being circumcised during kiathu, although no specific case was brought to my attention.

In the event of there being some death in the family or other serious omen of poor fortune, a young man's circumcision may be delayed. Some informants suggested that in the event of such a delay the boy might be circumcised during the following kiathu period, while others stated that he had to wait a full year for another thano. In the past when several years separated the actual performance of circumcisions, this presented relatively little problem, since when the boy was finally circumcised he would simply be a member of the same set to which he would have been assigned at the first, it being the most recent previous set. Currently, with circumcision taking place every year a boy whose operation was delayed would consequently be a member of a set junior to the one he had planned to be in.

Informants often suggested that there was no real rule in the past for determining when circumcision could take place except for the seasonal restriction. Apparently this was dictated by the need for more young warriors: the elders decided each year whether or not to circumcise that year. Some informants suggested that in fact even in the past circumcision could have taken place every year, but that there were two areas of choice which the elders had to operate in, and these two combined to make it never the case that circumcisions took place in consecutive years. The most commonly stated area of choice had to do with the need for warriors: if the aiji (circumcision candidates)

were not considered to be big enough or strong enough to fight as active warriors, the circumcisions would not take place, and this decision was reached collectively by the elders. If a respected elder had a dream of some sort in which he heard a supernatural voice instructing him to call off the circumcision, this also was given as grounds for waiting one more year. The assumption that is made is that since the circumcision is the act of forming the set, it had better be done quite properly and in accordance with available omens so as to avoid disaster befalling that age-set in its warrior activities.

With these bases for delaying the circumsisions of all of the tribe's candidates, the period between the formations of age-sets apparently ranged from four to seven years. No informant would state any period as being the "proper" one: all agreed that the period of time elapsed between set formations was based upon these two choices by the elders. The individual reasons for delaying the circumcision of any one candidate might result in his being circumcised in a year in which no set is formed. He then immediately joins the most recent set. In such a circumstance one can see that a continuing flow of bad omens and tragedies in a single family can prevent a man from being in the set to which he chronologically should belong, simply by delaying his own initiation so often that a new set is formed before he can be circumcised.

Names are no longer given to matana, and circumcision takes place every year. Still, if one were to ask a young man the name of his itana, he could simply answer with the year of his circumcision. Thus the young boy who did odd jobs around our house was of the itana 1967, and my field assistant was of 1961. The 1961 set is sometimes

named by its members with a particular name, but this name is not recognized by elders and is more of a bit of youthful jargon than an actual name. Most of the oldest elders do not recognize any age-set names later than 1948. The fact that the lack of real given names does not prevent people from referring to their age-set as an itana is indicative of the slight importance of the convention of naming sets. This will be discussed in detail in a later chapter.

The ceremonies surrounding circumcision have been severely truncated over the years. During July and August of 1968, I concentrated on collecting data about circumcision ceremonies. The pre-contact ceremonial as I reconstructed it then involved several weeks of preparations and several days of ceremonials opening the season, and the individual ceremonies at the homes of the initiates also involved a number of events over a series of days. Today the opening of the season is marked only by the authi dance, performed by groups of warriors and young girls in markets and at homesteads where candidates live. Rather than resembling the fierce mock battles and hostilities between warrior groups from different villages described by older informants, the authi of 1968 resembled nothing so much as an American junior high school dance. Dancing on the night before the actual operations take place is an all night affair in which the warriors are supposed to frighten the initiate and to abuse him by kicking and constantly reminding him of his status as a mere child. At the authi I attended, this "hazing" of the initiate took about 15 minutes, and the remainder of the night was spent in general dancing and socializing. The parents of the initiate provided food and drink for the dancers, and following the fifteen minute hazing

dance the initiate himself, supposedly having hidden in his house in fear of the warriors, sat around chatting with his friends and relatives fully relishing his moment of celebrity. I was acutely aware of having attended nearly identical rituals in synagogues on Long Island, and while the authi celebration lacked professional caterers, it clearly also lacked the full ceremonial richness which had been described by older informants for past ceremonies.

The authi, and the operation itself, however, are two of the very few remaining ceremonial events surrounding circumcision. My informants by and large attributed the decline in these celebrations to the influence of the missionary churches in the area. A fairly standard reply from a pagan was that "these Christians" (by which he meant his fellow Tharakans who had undergone conversion) do not do these things today. However, there are few Christian Tharakans. While exact data are not available, my interviews with local clergy revealed that the number of nominal Christians was probably fewer than 30% of the population (this is a rough estimate), and it is certain that only a percentage of the nominal Christians are truly concerned with careful observation of Christian ritual ideology. The churches, however, are well known and do exert some influence, and this conclusion by informants need not be entirely unwarranted.

For the Catholic mission at least, it was made clear to me that there is no clerical objection to ceremonies in general: only to those concerned with what the church considers to be magic (and this does not appear to include medicinal magic). Only a very small part of what I reconstructed about circumcision ceremonial could be said to fall into

the category of ritual which the church would oppose.

It would seem far more reasonable to me to attribute the decline in circumcision ceremonialism to the decline of the age-set system in general for which circumcision is the initiating feature. With the lack of warriors' houses (and hence the lack of a corporate group of warriors), the lack of pre-initiates' houses (and of the corporate group of pre-initiates), and the lack of large blocs of leisure time (due to the presence of a money economy and schooling for the younger children), there are simply not the personnel available for carrying on the full ceremonial cycles of the past.

C. The Tharaka Age-Set System

This section will detail the operations of the age-set system itself. Naturally this system is to some degree interconnected with the ethnography thus far presented, especially that on circumcision, and should be approached in that context. I will attempt to specify in each instance whether I am speaking of the present or of the past. The past in this case, and unless otherwise specified, refers to the time just prior to European contact, around the turn of the century for Tharaka. Statements with no particular time context apparent will refer to this ethnographic present.

In the past there were four pre-initiation sets in Tharaka. These are sets in the sense that they are named units composed of specific individuals, but they are not true age-sets in that they do not move through the grades as such. The pre-initiations sets are all found only in the uninitiated grade of course, but they do not truly

comprise that entire grade because children did not enter the pre-initiation sets until they moved from their mothers' houses to the house occupied by the children only. This generally occurred around seven years of age.

The pre-initiation sets in fact more closely resemble the grades of the system than they do age-sets. A youngster entered the first set at seven or so, and remained in it for a time. By the time of circumcision the youngster had presumably moved through all of the sets. In addition the sets were ordinally named, but the children did not move through these sets in blocs as age-sets move through grades.

The oldest pre-initiation set was always called Nkinyanthi, the second Mbuinjeru, the third Gikurukiumu, and the youngest Mwenji. Inquiries as to the exact meaning of the names drew no better response than "They are names." This rather dissatisfying answer was not at all atypical of Tharakan replies to questions of this sort. To a Tharakan the notion of a precise translation without an explanation of significance is a useless one, and the significance of these names is apparently lost in history.

The pre-initiation sets were supposed to be circumcised as groups. Ideally, in any circumcision year, all the members of Nkinyanthi would be initiated. In fact, however, the need for warriors determined who was taken, and it was not at all uncommon for the members of the first two or even three sets to be initiated, after which the oldest remaining boys would become the new Nkinyanthi set. It should be pointed out that taking the three eldest groups for circumcision at the same time was likely to occur only after some rather long period had elapsed

between circumcisions.

The boys of an area lived together in a house called kiburu which was a sort of junior representation of the garu, the warriors' house. Seniority was observed among the sets within the house.

Because circumcision candidates could be taken from sets other than the eldest, there is no one-to-one relationship between the pre-initiation set one occupies and the age-set into which one will eventually be circumcised. Thus, the kiburu sets do not really represent a part of the age-set system's structure. In the formal analysis to be presented later on, I will refer to an age-set prior to circumcision, but in fact no such unit exists on the ground. Age-sets (matana) are formed at initiation and not before, so the unit being referred to in the formal section represents the set of individuals who will ultimately be circumcised as an age-set. As individuals, and prior to their actual circumcision, there is no implication that they were members of the same pre-initiation set.

Among the Tigania, as will be discussed in detail in the next section, there are three sub-sets to each age-set. It was at one time suggested by a colleague that the pre-initiation sets of Tharaka might represent some structural equivalent to these sub-sets since several sets in Tharaka might all be in the same age-set. I believe the data thus far presented preclude such a judgment, and I suggest there is no real structural similarity between these units.

After circumcision the male initiates would retire to their homes to recover from the operation. This accomplished, they entered the garu to take their places as warriors. Today there are no standing

garu remaining in Tharaka. In the early 1960's the last few remaining garu were being used only four or five days a year for the purpose of educating young initiates in a private series of sessions. In the past the garu was the effectual home of the warriors, whether or not they were married. Privileges of returning to their own home during the night had to be granted by the garu leadership.

From the time of entering the garu and until elderhood is reached the men always slept the night in the garu, which formed a barracks of warriors, constantly prepared against night attack. Within the garu training was provided for the initiates both in military practice and in discipline. During the day the warriors might tend to ordinary business in their homes and on their farms, but at sunset they would return to the garu.

Within the garu relations among the matana were characterized by a strict observance of seniority. The age-set composed of the eldest warriors were the leaders. This set could give any orders it liked to younger sets, except an order to launch a serious attack. This had to come from a council of elders. The senior warriors were known as nthaka cia mwanki (warriors of the fire) and theirs was the privilege and responsibility of obtaining wood and keeping the fire going in the garu. While this rank carries clearly ritual implications as a mark of status, it is also the case that keeping the fire going permanently had its practical side. It would be necessary in order to allow quick preparation in case of a night attack, and thus, its maintenance was a prime responsibility. This rank was handed over to the next itana in line shortly before the senior warriors left the garu permanently, and this

ceremony of handing over the rank is the last official act of a senior itana as warriors.

An itana was considered ready to become elders when one member had a daughter old enough to go singing with warriors. When girls go singing with the warriors, it is just prior to the girls' own initiations and the singing is a part of courtship. The dancing that is a part of this singing event is most suggestive of intercourse, and is publicly performed. For a man to so perform with his own daughter would be considered totally inappropriate. But there is a further rule that a man may not marry, or even converse directly with, the daughter of an itana-mate. To do so would be considered identical with doing so with one's brother's daughter, and this is considered to be within the bounds of incest (there are methods for getting around this rule under special circumstances which are discussed below; however, these methods could not be applied to matana).

In order to avoid this sort of relationship from taking place, when a girl is old enough to go singing with warriors, her father and his entire itana must cease participating as warriors and must soon leave the garu. Therefore, when the girl begins to go with warriors, the father's itana begins to prepare for their ceremony of handing over the fire, called ntanko. The girl will have begun singing in the authi period opening the circumcision season. The father's itana will have completed their ntanko and left the garu before the circumcisions take place. The entire business is handled within the one season.

The word ntanko is derived from the same root as the word mwanki (fire), and the ceremony is a brief and not particularly elaborate event.

It requires that the itana which is handing over the fire provide a bull to be shared by all the warriors in a feast. In order to do this the senior warriors cultivated land for other people and pooled their payments for this work to purchase the bull. Payments were in kind prior to the coming of a money economy, and the small livestock or beer or grain were combined to get together the price of a bull.

The bull was then brought back to the garu and slaughtered by the warriors who had brought it. The slaughtering was by slitting the throat, and the senior warriors were said to have drunk the blood of the bull during the slaughter. Then the meat was cooked and shared. When the feast was done, the eldest warriors, those that were leaving, threw sticks from the garu and announced that they would no longer bring fire to the garu. The sticks being thrown was symbolic of this statement.

This brief and rather informal ceremonial simply served notice upon the garu in general that the senior warriors were to leave. They had by their actions turned over to their successors their ritual position as nthaka cia mwanki. Once the ceremony is concluded the senior itana may leave the garu. Individuals then leave when it suits them to do so, some staying on a few days, others a bit longer. From the time of the ceremony, however, they are elders and called mukuru (plural: akuru; old man).

Those of the new elders who are married generally leave rather soon after ntanko and take up permanent residence in their homes. Because the bride price in Tharaka can be rather costly (see Chapter II), some of the new elders may not yet be married. They may, if they so

choose, remain sleeping in the garu. This does not truly detract from their elder status, but they may not participate in the singing of the warriors. They may, however, travel to other garu located at great distances from their own and there they may court girls. Since the ntanko ceremony does not take place at each garu simultaneously, there may still be time for them to meet girls not daughters of their own itana-mates if they go far enough away. The garu closest to their own will hold their ntanko ceremony soon if they have not already so as to avoid meeting the daughters of those who have just gone out. Yet there is some time lag, perhaps most of a season, within which they are unlikely to meet women prohibited to them.

In addition, the rule regarding marriage to the daughter of an itana-mate becomes weaker with geographical distance. If one finds a girl and decides to marry, and the girl is met far away from one's own garu, and it is then discovered that she is the daughter of an itana-mate, there is an available ceremony to change this relationship. The suitor can present a goat to his potential father-in-law who is also an itana-mate. The effect of this, should the itana-mate consent to the marriage, is to change the relationship between the two men to that of in-laws. The normal relationship between itana-mates is relaxed and informal, and this is in no way compatible with normal behavior towards one's father-in-law. A father-in-law is to be highly respected, avoided when possible, and in general a dangerous man. Until the bride-price has been completely paid, often a matter of many years, the father-in-law is a creditor whose collateral is his daughter and his grandchildren.

This ceremony will be of no avail if the girl's father and the

suitor are close to one another prior to the courtship. If the girl lives in the same general area as the suitor, such a marriage cannot be contemplated under Tharaka rules and the relationship cannot be changed. If, in such a case, the young couple persist, their only recourse is to elopement and flight. If they remain in the area, the girl's family will simply take her back by force, and the suitor's family, aware that he is jurally in the wrong, will hesitate to meet force with force. They would rather prevail upon their kinsman to relent.

In Tigania (Mahner 1970) and possibly in the other Meru subtribes except Tharaka (Lambert 1956; Bernardi 1959), the word for an age-set is nthuki (or nthuke, as the Tharaka use the word). While the word does exist in Tharaka, it does not refer to an age-set. An age-set (itana) is a social category composed of individuals with a single common attribute: the time of their circumcision, and it includes all persons in Tharaka circumcised at the same season and in the same year. It also includes some few individuals whose initiations were slightly postponed, but who have been circumcised prior to the opening of the next itana. An nthuke, on the other hand, is a group of individuals belonging to one or several matana, members of the same grade who are dining together. Nthuke is basically a group which lacks permanent definition as to membership since one's nthuke is the collection of approximate age-mates with whom one is at any particular time. When one is a warrior in the garu, then all of the other warriors in the same garu are in one's nthuke. As a new elder, one can no longer claim to have an nthuke together with those in a younger itana, but one can

then claim as nthuke-mates elders slightly older than oneself.

Two men in adjacent matana and in the same garu will be in one nthuke for a time. When the older itana leaves the garu, this nthuke relationship is disrupted, but it can be renewed when the second itana graduates to eldermood. After one has been an elder for some time, it is likely that one's nthuke will be pretty well fixed: a close circle of friends who are members of two or three consecutive matana.

The prohibition against marrying the daughter of an itana-mate is extended to include the daughters of all nthuke-mates, and this relationship is not amenable to change by ceremony since nthuke-mates are by definition not found at great distances anyway.

In daily discourse the terms nthuke and itana are often used interchangeably since the informants are most commonly referring to nearby age-mates, almost always fitting the nthuke category. Since the word nthuke (or nthuki) does mean age-set in other groups, the literature always refers to Tharaka age-sets as nthuke. Europeans asking questions of Tharakans begin by asking about nthuke, and I have not seen the word itana in print in any of the sources cited earlier. The tax records of Tharaka, maintained until the middle 1950's by Imenti officials, record nthuke as age-set, and the average Tharakan will automatically respond to a European's questions about age-sets by reference to the word nthuke. It took me several months to ascertain the difference between the two words, and informants normally stated that they meant the same thing. They apparently found it hard to conceive of a European truly wanting to know about fine distinctions in Kitharaka. The clinching question is to ask if a man who is in one's itana but living far away

is also of one's nthuke. The answer is that he would be if and only if he had traveled into the neighborhood and joined his itana-mates in eating or drinking. Until this question is asked one might easily construct the notion of an nthuke being a real age-set and being composed of two or more matana. Due to the presence of sub-sets in the age-set systems of neighboring tribes, specifically the Tigania, this conclusion would sound correct to someone newly entered into Tharaka.

Neighboring tribesmen visiting Tharaka have told me that the Tharaka are considered somewhat foolish because, ". . . they do not even know the names of their nthuke." This is true, but it is true simply because in Tharaka nthuke are not named units, and the unit which corresponds to the outsider's notion of nthuke is itana. However, assuming correctly that the languages are very close, the stranger will normally ask for the name of an nthuke. When so questioned a Tharakan elder will give the name of the itana of his eldest nthuke-mate. It is therefore possible to carry on extended conversations over a long period of time about the age-set system and to come to two conclusions:
a) Tharakans are either stupid or liars because the names of their nthuke are either not available or very confused, and
b) Tharakans have an "unstructured" age-set system. This second conclusion is the private property of social scientists. Both conclusions are equally untrue.

At times a man will refer to a small group of friends, perhaps five or six, as his nthuke. These few friends are all actual nthuke-mates, but the totality of men potentially in that nthuke is a larger number. These closest friends are called to a man's home at times of

ceremonial importance, such as when he is announcing the impending circumcision of one of his children. Thus, an nthuke is made up at any time of those people who are legitimate potential members and are also present. This is somewhat disconcerting to an ethnographer who would prefer that group names refer to a set collectivity of personnel at all times. While an elder will, in discussion, refer to all potential members as being of his nthuke, the nthuke for any individual is probably made up of this small number of friends at most times.

Women do not, so far as I can determine, gather with their age-mates in a fashion comparable to the gatherings of men and their nthuke, although women will use the term nthuke to refer to their age-mates. On the occasion of an nthuke gathering to note the impending circumcision of one of its members' sons, the women present will not be necessarily age-mates of the boy's mother. They will be the wives of the husband's nthuke-mates, and their relative age is apt to vary greatly from elderly women with several children to young girls recently married.

The disappearance of the garu has had a meaning for the grade of elder as well as for the grade of warrior. Circumcision still marks the attainment of the warrior grade, but without a garu an ntanko ceremony is also absent. Today a Tharakan, male or female, is considered an elder when he or she has a circumcised child.

It is my understanding that the Tharaka age-set system rules are such that to circumcise a son would also cause a father's itana to become elders. Indeed, today, it is entirely possible for a given man to circumcise a son before he circumcises a daughter. However, in the past the fact that female circumcision was performed at a younger age

than male, and the additional fact that girls could begin singing with warriors before they themselves were circumcised made it highly unlikely that anyone in an itana would circumcise a son before anyone else had circumcised a daughter. My informants could not recall a single case, nor are there any tales that I was able to collect which suggest that this had ever happened. Thus, the Tharakans speak of being "taken from the garu by our daughters."

As a result of the daughters being the ones who "took" their fathers from the garu, and as a result also of the "back-up" rule that circumcising any child is sufficient cause for a man to be an elder, it was not possible for a father and son to be warriors at the same time. All of the elders could refer to all of the warriors as their sons, but this was clearly metaphor and an expression of relative age rather than kinship. The kinship metaphor is used in one other instance having to do with the age-set system.

Every boy, at the time of his circumcision, had a "father-in-circumcision", or sponsor. The sponsor was himself already circumcised, and was usually a close friend of both the boy and his father. The sponsor could not be the boy's actual social father. This sponsor was, therefore, in a sort of god-parent relationship with the candidate, and was usually (though not necessarily) a warrior rather than an elder. As a warrior he could assist the boy in "learning the ropes" in the garu,as well as performing the ceremonial sponsorship role at the initiation.

It was not uncommon to hear that a particular itana was considered to be the "fathers" of another itana only slightly younger, and that the two matana had at one time been in the garu together. It is clear that

these men were not related as fathers and sons in the kinship sense, and it was explained that the "father" itana had provided a large number of the sponsors for the members of the "son" itana. The use of kinship terminology here is therefore entirely metaphorical. I stress this because it is not the case in Tharaka that which age-set a man belongs to is in any way useful in predicting into which sets his sons will be placed (except for the rather vacuous prediction that they will be younger than he). That this is not the case will be important when the Tharaka system is compared with other systems in later chapters.

Each age-set in Tharaka is given a name soon after it is formed. This name is given by the elders, and is normally based upon some event occurring around the time of the set's formation, or some particular behaviors of the new warriors. There are some age-set systems, and some of these will be discussed in detail below, in which the number of names given to sets is fixed, usually at seven or eight. In those systems the names are given to the sets in order, and when all of the names have been given, they just begin again at the top of the list. It is this difference in set-naming conventions which has led to some systems being called cyclical while those like Tharaka are called linear.

I will show in a later chapter that there is indeed a connection between the naming convention used and the structure of the system, however, this connection is not the proper basis for classification of systems; I will be using the actual structure for such classifying. But the issue of typology aside, the Tharaka indeed have a linear method of naming sets. Lambert (1956: 48) states that the Tigania and Imenti systems use cyclical as well as linear names. For the Tigania Mahner's

(1970) work and my own brief interviews with Tigania informants leave no doubt that they use a cyclical system. I cannot be positive what system is used by the Imenti, but they at least use a linear convention in part. Lambert argues that the elders of the Meru tribes will not volunteer information about cyclicity, but will agree that it exists if they are shown. Lambert also says that the Tharaka system follows the Imenti system.

In Tharaka, so far as I was able to determine, there is no cyclical naming convention. I found in interviewing Tigania that there was no question but that they used a cyclical system, and that with Tharaka there was no question but that they did not. This would appear to contradict Lambert's implication that all of the Meru use a cyclical system, but all also mask this with additional names.

I did find one age-set name in Tharaka that had been repeated. Because of Lambert's very strong implication of cyclicity, while at the same time all of my data indicated linearity, this single repeat was disturbing. It was especially so in view of the fact that age-set names are not easy to collect in Tharaka, and I felt my lists could have easily been wrong. The difficulty stems in part from the fact that the period between circumcisions is not quite as long in Tharaka as in most of its neighboring tribes, and there are simply that many more names to collect: the memories of elders are not perfect. Also, if Lambert were correct then the cyclical names would have been masked all along. I decided to try to convince some elders that they were using a cyclical system since this had been Lambert's approach.

The procedure I followed was to suggest to an informant that a

given set might have more than one name. If this failed to evoke a second name, I then suggested that another, older man had told me that this might be the case. In the face of another possible authority, my informants would waver. After all, if someone even older than they had said this, then it might indeed be so, for in Tharaka the eldest is often presumed the wisest; if not the wisest, then at least the most likely to remember things from the far past. I would clinch my argument with a question such as, "Could Kiandere (an age-set) have been called Kiandeke (the set said to follow Kiandere in most lists)?" The answer to this question is usually "yes". Upon following this sort of questioning one comparatively young elder gave me a list of six names which he said cycled. When I suggested that most tribes have eight such names, he immediately gave me two more. I have no doubt that had I asked for more he could have helped me.

What remains to be explained is why Kiandere could have been called Kiandeke. It could have been, but it was not, and this is the important point. The elders I spoke to in this manner carefully explained several times that the assignment of a name to an age-set was the sole privilege of whomever had been elders at that time, and if they had wished to name the set other than the way they did, they certainly could have done so. Enough hypothetical questions were asked so as to make it clear that any set could have any name at all, but if and only if the elders had so wished. This, in fact, is an argument against the possibility of having cyclical naming, for cyclicity implies that there is a limit to what name any set could have: it would at least have to have the name which was next in order in the cycle. If

a set also had other names that was fine, but the cyclical name was an absolute necessity, and in no case could I get informants to give a coherent pattern of cyclical naming. In the case of the one informant who agreed absolutely to the notion of cycling names, he was unable to present the order in which such names should occur.

I undertook such outlandish questioning procedures in an attempt to discover if such a procedure might account for the previously mentioned statements in Lambert's work. This would imply that Lambert had used such a procedure and even following that misinterpreted what he had collected. It is not proper to state that he did so; my own "success" with this method does not demonstrate that this was Lambert's approach, but it does demonstrate either that this was his approach or that he was only wrong in believing that the Tharaka system was like the others he had studied. In either case, I believe the procedure lays to rest any question about the Tharaka set-naming procedure: it is linear.

What these few informants were agreeing to is that the naming of a cultural item can be arbitrary. Furthermore, aside from the single repeated set name, there is no independent evidence of a cyclical naming system.

The one name that was repeated was Kaburia. This name is said to refer to a type of grasping, pushy behavior. The original name was said to have been given because there was a famine at this time, and the warriors in this set were said to have taken food from others by force. A similar type of extortionary behavior was attributed to some of the members of the later Kaburia set. But no relationship was ever

suggested by any informant between the two sets other than their name.

The suggestion that the later Kaburia represented some sort of reincarnation of the earlier one, either individually or collectively, was greeted with blank stares, strange glances, and the countersuggestion that the ethnographer was perhaps some sort of escaped lunatic from Nairobi. I took this as a negative.

The suggestion that the current Kaburia men had ancestors in the original Kaburia set was greeted with, "Some of them must have, but so what? Somebody must have an ancestor in any older set."

The suggestion that the renaming implied that the same behavior or events was expected to occur again was greeted with derision also. The elders would at that point repeat what they had often told me: that the name was given because the behavior had already been exhibited, not because it was expected. As to the event occurring again, the reply was that famine was quite certain to come again, every few years in fact, since that is part of living in Tharaka.

It seems certain to me then that this repetition came simply because the name was felt to reflect the situation. The second Kaburia was one of the last age-sets to receive a name, and it is just possible that coming at this time the repeat was just simpler than thinking up a new name. By this time the elders were no longer giving much thought to matters like this: and it is always possible that the name was given under similar circumstances to the way names are currently assigned namely, the warriors just call themselves something, and others pick up on the name, but it is not really recognized by the elders. I should point out that the very oldest informants I interviewed had heard of

the first Kaburia, but not the second.

Tharakan informants deny absolutely that they use cycling names. They will agree to this suggestion, however, or to any other, if it is put persuasively and if the questioner appears to really want it to be so. The elders often go to great lengths to avoid disappointing a questioner of this sort.

Relations between matana in Tharaka are characterized by a constant reference to seniority and its attendant privileges. It would appear, however, that these relations are relatively unstrained when compared with groups such as Samburu. Spencer reports (1965) for the Samburu a situation similar to that reported by Rosen (personal communication) for the Mukugudu. In the age-set systems of both of these societies there is considerable conflict between the junior elders and the senior warriors. In these societies only elders may marry, and elders may delay the circumcision of a new group of warriors, thus also delaying the elderhood of the senior warriors, so that they themselves have more time to build their fortunes and marry more women.

Amongst the Tharaka this conflict is not created for two reasons. Firstly, elderhood is not conferred upon senior warriors by other elders, but is rather based upon a criterion from outside of the system: the age of daughters. The second reason, and either would be sufficient to prevent this form of conflict, is that among the Tharaka warriors may marry. Tigania warriors (Mahner 1970) may also marry, and while the elders in Tigania do exercise control of the mechanism for warriors to become elders, I suspect that the same conflict does not occur there either.

It is to be expected that there existed some strains between warriors and elders in Tharaka, particularly in times of war, if only because one group did all of the fighting while the other group made all of the decisions. A typical example of this sort of conflict was offered by informants explaining the meaning of the name of the itana Murango.

There were two interpretations given for this name, a common situation in fieldwork in Tharaka, since names for matana are often metaphorical. This set is known to have been circumcised around the time of the first arrival of Europeans. The word murango in Kimeru means "door", and one suggestion is that the group was so named because it was the first time doors were seen in the area, on the houses of Europeans. However, this seems doubtful to me for two reasons. One is that the very first Europeans seen in the area did not actually live in the area or build houses there. The other, and the more convincing one, is the ordinary metaphorical use of the term murango, as applied to one who is stubborn and refuses what he is told by his seniors (note: the mu- prefix is often indicative of an animate noun in Kimeru and Kitharaka).

The story surrounding this interpretation is that when the first Europeans arrived, the elders of Tharaka suggested cooperation with them, but that this suggestion was rejected by the young Murango warriors (not yet named) who wanted to fight rather than to be ruled. The two matana of warriors senior to Murango also sided with the elders. A few battles took place between Europeans and Tharaka warriors, and the elders of today state that it was for the most part Murango warriors

who were involved, and that the battles did not have the blessing of most Tharakans. The strongest resistance, interestingly, occurred in areas of Tharaka Urio, an area less influenced by the Mugwe.

It is probably for this reason that these warriors were named Murango. It is of interest to note that while some of the senior warriors did join in the attacks, most did not. Severe casualties are supposed to have been inflicted upon Murango while other warriors escaped injury. Reasons given by Tharakan informants for an unwillingness to fight the invaders wholeheartedly included that they had heard of the power of guns, but for the most part were concerned with the fact that the action taken by the warriors was against the orders of the elders. Tharakan informants agree that if they had all banded together, they might have driven off the Europeans a few times, but they point out the wisdom of the elders by suggesting that in any event they would ultimately have been subjected and in all probability treated far more harshly than they in fact were treated.

Unlike systems in some other tribes, the Tharaka age-set system has and had little political activity associated with it. In Tigania (Mahner 1970) and many other tribes there is a single ruling age-set in which power is vested. Among the Tharaka all elders, regardless of set, are involved in the decision-making process, and there do not appear to have been grades of elderhood (being a member of a particular council was a matter of individual achievement, not a simple matter of attaining a certain age). The operations of the agambi and biama discussed in the previous chapter, seem to have been sufficient for almost all political matters except decisions about warfare. In decisions

about warfare power ultimately rested with all of the elders although senior warriors were often consulted since they would be acting as field officers.

In Tigania (Mahner 1970; Bernardi 1959) the Mugwe is selected from a particular age-set while that set occupies the second elder grade, and he serves only so long as his set occupies that grade. In Tharaka the Mugwe serves for life and need only be an elder, not of any particular set.

In Mbeere (Glazier, personal communication) to the south of Tharaka, political power is handled through a system of generation-sets. However, this generation-set system is separate from the age-set system of the Mbeere, and it is only because of the use of the term "set" that it would appear that political power is being handled through age-organization. In this generation-set system one is assigned to the same set as one's father, and since there are two sets, the result is to have two categories, each of which contains all of the males of some patrilineages. Since all males are assigned to one of the two sets, this system is really a system of kinship moieties and not age-organizational at all.

In the absence of any clear political function it would appear that the main function of the Tharaka age-set system was to supply personnel to a warfare and raiding society on the basis of probable fighting abilities and capacities for decision making; in short, to ensure a supply of trained warriors, and a supply of leaders who had themselves experienced warriorhood. In the later absence of inter-tribal warfare it is understandable that the age of men at circumcision could safely

drop, that the garu could fall into disuse and eventually disappear, and that the age-set system in general could lose any importance short of acting as a boundary marker to determine who was and was not a full Tharakan.

The function of age-organizational systems, or of circumcision, as a boundary marker is not to be underrated as of little importance. Current political conditions in Kenya often exhibit a marked division between peoples who do and do not circumcise their tribal members, and marriage regulations may still be bound up in circumcision in many areas. Whether or not one is circumcised has been noted in the past as a potential criterion in determining eligibility for office holding in this area of the world. It is widely circulated that the late Tom Mboya, a Luo, had himself circumcised early in his political career, thus making himself more acceptable to the dominant Kikuyu. A case was reported to me, though not confirmed, of a forced circumcision having taken place in an area near (but not in) Tharaka. The victim was the son of an African official, and he and his father were members of a tribe of non-circumcisors, but living amongst a circumcising group. A local gang of boys, possibly drunk, "captured" this young man and circumcised him. In this case either a misguided tribalism or mere drunken revelry was at the base of what occurred, but it is interesting to note that the action taken was based on this same distinction between circumcisors and non-circumcisors.

Whether or not incidents such as these actually take place is of less importance than the fact that stories about them circulate and are readily believed. This belief in itself points up the importance

of circumcision in the area in general.

The age at which boys are circumcised has dropped radically in Tharaka. Where formerly a warrior was between 18 and 25 years of age at the time of his initiation, currently boys as young as ten (girls possibly somewhat younger) are being circumcised. It is quite understandable that this should happen since the need for an actual fighting force of warriors no longer constrains the system. In Tigania (Mahner personal communication) the age at circumcision has also dropped, but it has only dropped there to around 14 years.

A similar drop is reported by Rosen (personal communication) for the Mukugudu, boys of 14-16 years being circumcised there. It would seem in general that societies with age-set systems in East Africa in which the age-set system is initiated in a circumcision ritual have all experienced a drop in the age at initiation, but it would also appear that there was a greater drop among the Tharaka than among the neighboring Tigania, and this difference I will try to trace to the difference in the structure of their original systems.

D. The Tigania Age-Set System

For a number of reasons the Tigania represent an almost natural comparison with the Tharaka. Comparison between the two is most inviting because they are neighboring tribes, both of which have been described (by themselves and others) as sub-tribes of Meru, are both speakers of Kimeru, and yet exhibit a few major differences. The primary obvious difference to the casual observer is that the Tigania are economically far better off than the Tharaka. Another striking difference is that

the Tigania age-set system is still a functioning system while the Tharaka system has all but disappeared.

At first this appears a most unlikely combination of items. It would seem logical, perhaps, to conclude that where economic development has been encountered (Tigania), one is also likely to encounter social change; and that where there has been little or no such development (Tharaka), the aboriginal social structure would be virtually intact. While this brief outline does not do justice to the social change-economic development causal model, it is sufficient to note that the different set of correlations observed in this area suggest that a comparison of the Tharaka and Tigania age-set systems from a structural viewpoint might be most illuminating.

This section will provide a very brief outline of the Tigania age-set system. While my own fieldwork was carried out in neighboring Tharaka, I did have the opportunity to interview several Tigania informants who were traveling through Tharaka, and a few who had taken up residence there. Early on in my fieldwork I was given a copy of Jurg Mahner's (1970) field report on Tigania, which concentrated on a description of the Tigania age-set system. I also was able to have several conversations with Mahner in Nairobi and to put to him questions which were necessary to my understanding of the system he described. I also had the opportunity to carry on several discussions with Father Bernardi in Nairobi, and there was one brief meeting between the three of us. On the basis of this evidence I believe my description of the Tigania system to be correct in all vital areas. I presented an early version of this description to a meeting in Nairobi at which Mahner was

present, and he agreed that my description was correct. This description is of those portions of the Tigania system which are vital to my argument.

I do not include the full range of ethnographic material which I could include on Tigania: these data in a very serious sense "belong" to Mahner. However, our work is sufficiently disjoint that what follows does not detract in any way from what he had planned to do. I am assured by him that there are no additional data about Tigania which would invalidate the conclusions I have reached about the system. I include the rather long caveat just given because the Tigania data are positively vital to the theory I will be proposing in the next chapter. It will become clear to the reader eventually that the theory of age-set systems which I will propose is based primarily on the structure of the Tigania system, and systems like it, while the hypotheses about social change to be drawn from the theory are based more fully on the Tharaka data.

This is somewhat disappointing, because it suggests that I should have been doing fieldwork elsewhere, amongst a people with a system similar to that of the Tigania. Such systems, however, have often been described (Huntingford 1953; Jacobs 1965; Spencer 1965; and others), and the Tharaka system has never been adequately described before now. The theorem to be proposed, while true in the absence of the Tharaka material, would have been relatively uninteresting in one serious sense: the theorem was suggested as a method for delineating precisely the difference between two types of systems. That it does so delineate is the basis for suggesting that it informs a theory of age-set systems, and such delineation would have been unavailable from

work amongst a Tigania-like people alone. In a sense this is very much like the argument that a fish would be the least likely discoverer of water: a fieldworker dealing with a Tigania-like system would have no basis for suggesting the theory I will suggest, and it is only after the theory has been proposed that it becomes interesting to apply it consistently to systems of that sort.

It is known (Sandberg 1969) that prior to the arrival of the British there was considerable contact (and warfare) between the Tigania and the Maasai; and that the Tigania age-set system reflects this contact. In order to combat the Maasai on a more or less equal footing, Sandberg suggests that the Meru (specifically Tigania) adopted Maasai age-set practices. Indeed, the analysis which will follow suggests that structurally the Tigania age-set system is much more like the Maasai system than it is like the Tharaka system.

In Tigania nthuki means age-set, and nthuki are formed approximately every fifteen years. Within the fifteen years required to form each nthuki, there are three sub-sets of young men circumcised (again I will discuss only the men in regard to this system). These sub-sets receive ordinal names.

Nthuki are separated into left-hand and right-hand nthuki, alternately. I cannot be certain, but Mahner's (1970: 3) evidence suggests that the left or right position of an nthuki changes every fifteen years, as the nthuki move through the grades. There is a ceremony called ukura-aaru, which takes place at the close of each fifteen year period, in which political power is handed over to the nthuki that have become elders. The nthuki one below these new elders elects one of their

number who will eventually serve as Mugwe, while the nthuki one above the new elders has their Mugwe-elect actually assume ritual office at this time. The new elders will enter the right-hand side of the moiety system and the nthuki immediately above and below them enter the left-hand side (the use of "moiety" here refers to age-moieties, and while there will be some connection with kinship, discussed below, this is not the basis of the moiety division).

The political leaders are thus men in their forties and fifties, and the ritual leaders are men in their fifties and sixties. Nthuki senior to these are "retired" elders.

Once warriorhood is achieved men may marry and have offspring, and, therefore, it is extremely probable that most of a man's children will be in the nthuki two below his own (and hence on the same side of the left-right division as the father). It is, of course, also possible that a man will have children in nthuki three or even four junior to his own because the principle of recruitment to the age-set is age and not generation. If a child is three sets below his father, they will be on opposite sides of the left-right division.

An effect of the high probability of father-son placement being a separation of two is to make the Tigania age-set system resemble a generation-set system. Indeed, were it not for the exceptions to this placement probability, there would be no way of telling this system from a generation-set system by simple observation. The term "generation" is used by English-speaking Tigania as a direct gloss for the term nthuki, and there is evidence to suggest that the native view of the system is that it is a generation-set system.

If it were the case that fathers and sons were always placed into sets separated from one another by a single other set, and if the left-right division were maintained, then there would be a generation-set system. But it is also clear that in such a case the left side would be composed of all of the males of some of the patrilines and the right side would be composed of all of the males of all other patrilines. Such a system would likely profit more greatly from analysis as a kinship system, specifically a kinship moiety system, than from analysis as a form of age-organization. Indeed, I suggest that a true generation-set system is more likely to be analyzable in the domain of kinship in general, and I argue from this that inclusion of generation-set systems as age-organization is spurious.

Father and sons may not, in the Tigania system, be placed in sets immediately adjacent to one another. Given the fifteen year formation period this would be unlikely in any event since men may not bear offspring jurally until after they have become warriors, and warriors are initiated at around the age of fourteen today (and older years ago).

According to Mahner (1970: 2) the ukura-aaru ceremony takes place when the senior warriors begin to circumcise their sons, that is, when they leave the warriors' house to become elders. Since most of the senior warriors will probably have a son in this nthuki being formed, all of them leave the house together, leaving behind them as warriors the nthuki immediately below their own, and the one being initiated. Thus, the ukura-aaru ceremony (in Imenti the ceremony comparable to this is called ntuiko) may be seen as the focal point of a time period

during which several things are happening:

a) ritual power is being given to a set becoming senior elders.

b) political power is being handed over to the set below them.

c) this set is leaving the warrior grade to become elders.

d) the next younger set is closing initiation.

e) the set one more below is opening initiation and entering the warrior grade.

The system just described for Tigania resembles closely the systems described for Samburu (Spencer 1965), Maasai (Jacobs 1965), Mukugudu (Rosen personal communication), and others.

In the classic typology of age-set systems the Tigania system would be called cyclic, because there is a set cycle of names applied to the age-sets. In the case of Tigania, eight names comprise a cycle. There is no evidence currently available as to which is the "first" name although ethnohistorical research could probably uncover some suggestions about this. The cycle, however, is not seen as having a beginning and end, but rather is simply a continuous reapplication of the names used for the set eight previous to the one being formed.

Because of the cycling of names, and the father-son placement probability, it is common to hear men refer to the age-set of their as yet unborn children by name. Tharakans, who have neither of these two items associated with their system cannot make such "predictions", and it is the common view of their neighbors that they either have no real social structure or that they do but are too ignorant to understand it.

The age-set system of the Tigania has undergone relatively little change. While any number of ceremonial items may be absent, and while

the age at circumcision has dropped, the essential features of the formation of named sets, carrying on of the ukura-aaru ceremony, and the promotion of sets through established grades at intervals of fifteen years or so is continuous.

IV. THE THEORY OF AGE-SET SYSTEMS

A. Criteria for Theory

Following Durrenberger's (1971) suggestion that social structure is an aspect of competence, a suggestion which is clearly implied in the work of those calling themselves ethnoscientists, the theory I will be presenting will exhibit a major characteristic of a competence model. This is that competence is profitably viewed not as a machine for generating behavior, but rather as a cognitive device for monitoring and interpreting behavior. To require a model to directly generate behavior, would be to demand a model which must be so specific as to leave no room at all for cultural variation, and such a suggestion is contradicted by all of the ethnography ever collected. The other alternative is to require a model so thoroughly general that it is incapable of accounting for anything in a serious manner: this is the realm of theology.

In testing for the descriptive adequacy of the model to be presented, there are two criteria which must be met, and which, if met, overcome the two objections stated above. The first criterion is that the system being described be recognizable from the model. This ensures that the model is non-trivially representative of at least some of the behaviors which will be exhibited. The second criterion is that the data are all accounted for by the model, that is, each informant's statements must be allowable by the model provided that the informant is not completely abberant himself. This ensures that the behaviors (performances)

recorded are indeed interpreted by the model, thus allowing the model to claim at least some salience to actual cognition.

In testing beyond descriptive adequacy for theoretical adequacy, it is required that a theory be a generator of hypotheses. It matters not at all that competence is not seen as a generator, because one requires different things of a theory than one requires of what is to be described. In order for a theory to be anything more than a simple and elegant description, it must generate hypotheses about the data. The hypothesis need not be a predictive one; it is reasonable to claim theoretical adequacy if a theory explains the relationship between known occurrences.

None of these tests may, nowever, be argued here. They are applicable only after the theory has been presented, and they are discussed here merely so that they may be kept in mind by the reader as the theory unfolds.

There are, however, constraints on a theory that a worker keeps in mind during theory creation. In the case of a model claiming to describe competence, the model may not require the performance of cognitive operations which are not possible. The theory is thus constrained by what is already known about human cognitive abilities.

The actual description of competence is a tenuous notion insofar as what we know about the human brain is itself limited. The best that can be claimed for the theory that I will present is that it represents a homomorphism from human competence in the domain of age-set systems. The pure description of competence <u>per se</u> would require, to my way of thinking, a technology which we do not yet possess, and

such a description may or may not be truly useful for the sorts of questions being asked about social systems here.

The claim being made then is that what will follow represents at least a homomorphism, and that the actual competence of Tharakans or Tiganians must perform at least the operations which this theory performs. Competence itself may be much more complex than what is described here (indeed, I expect it is impossible for this competence to be less complex), and so this theory in a very real sense represents what the participant must minimally be able to handle.

Yet this is not a theory about how these people view their systems. Rather it is a theory about the systems themselves, and one which claims a cognitive salience: thereby claiming to explain age-set systems.

The theory will be presented as a formal analysis of the Tigania system, which analysis provides information enabling a comparison to be made with the Tharaka system. This comparison is based on a theorem about the Tigania system, and the comparison itself results in two hypotheses. The first of these hypotheses represents a typology of age-set systems, and the second is a hypothesis about social change in age-set systems. Together these hypotheses form a general theory of such systems.

There are several justifications for the use of formal method in this work. Indeed, the hypotheses themselves may be presented informally, and there might be some merit in arguing that formalism should not be justified for mere ease of expression since anthropologists in general are not normally trained to read formal materials.

Certainly truth is no more or less true because it has been presented as formal.

The formal method, however, represents a proof that the distinction which will be claimed to obtain between types of systems actually does obtain. As a formal proof, it can claim more power than a mere assertion which rests on the reliability of the reporter. A formal model moreover makes a more powerful claim to being a homomorphism from another formalism: human cognition.

Finally, a formal approach is a method of field investigation in one sense. While the final proof for this theory was not obtained until long after I returned from the field, it was only through thinking about the data in much the same terms as will be used in the formal proof that the theory was suggested. This is not to imply that the collection of data was forced by the theoretical concern: the data were for the most part collected before the theory was formulated. The distinction, however, which will be claimed to exist between these two systems is a mathematical one. If it is the case that differences in the mathematical structures of systems are what is at stake in answering questions, then the approach to the discovery of these differences must itself be mathematical.

I will be claiming in the next section that certain specific items about age-set systems are those items which are important to the analysis of these systems. There exists no method for stating this a priori although I admit to feeling throughout the research that I was intuitively correct. That the theorizing has been successful is itself the justification for this intuition. The creation of theory

remains, as it always has been, a process of induction for which formal rules cannot be available. The theory itself, however, does provide a formal discovery procedure for the future analysis of all age-set systems in at least some limited sense: any system is analyzable in this method by first obtaining those vital facts necessary to the analysis. No theory can provide a formal discovery procedure for additional theories, however, nor a fieldwork procedure that will guarantee results in other domains.

B. Formal Analysis of Age-Set Systems

In this section I will present the mathematical structure of the Tigania age-set system, and I will indicate along the way how the Tharaka system is either similar or different. Because age-set systems are very specific items in social structure, and because this theory is concerned with explaining a domain rather than explicating trivial surface differences, the mathematical structures of the two systems are nearly identical. They in fact differ in only one axiom, but this is precisely the vital difference which I will want to discuss.

The mathematics will be presented as an axiomatic system based on primitive elements which will be defined. The notation is the same notation that is standard in set theory. This may require some slight sophistication on the part of the reader, but most of the items will be defined within the text, and those few symbols not defined are so common that they can be found in any introductory mathematics text. In addition, I will provide a prose description of what is being discussed.

The mathematical structures presuppose a reading of all of the

ethnographic materials in Chapters II and III, however, the assumption is made that certain features are more important than others. The formal description contains the material necessary to motivate the systems, and it is assumed that cultural features not specifically included or excluded may or may not be present in any single case of an age-set system. The object is to describe a competence which would disallow certain features, thus providing the parameters of the system.

Age-set systems are being viewed here as systems in which individuals are placed into sets on the basis of age, and then the sets are promoted through a series of grades. With this definition I will make the additional assumption that the rules which are most vital in these systems are those which are concerned with (a) the formation of sets, and (b) the promotion of sets. This seems to be correct intuitively, but the actual test of the aptness of this statement will be whether or not an analysis resting on the assumption produces the desired result.

Since both the Tharaka and Tigania systems are based on circumcision, the analysis is a fit description of both systems until the 3rd axiom, at which point additional comments will be made. In those systems which operate in a similar fashion but without circumcision, there will be slight differences in the primitive elements. However, if we view circumcision here as a signal that a set has been formed, then we can replace circumcision in any other system with whatever signal is used and draw similar conclusions. This will be quite clear after the theory has been presented.

The symbols to be used here are generally standard notations.

Let us, however, include a brief key for readers unfamiliar with these usages. Given this key and the self-explanatory nature of much of the material below, readers not sophisticated in mathematics will be able to read the formal analysis if they are persistent.

$\times$ means Cartesian Product, and is read "cross", thus "G cross X" = $G \times X$

ε means "is a member of"

iff means "if and only iff"

$<$ means "is less than"

$>$ means "is greater than"

$| \, |$ expressions enclosed in these braces are absolute numbers, the braces denoting cardinality

/ means "is not" when drawn through another symbol

Let G = the set of groups such that the elements of G are age-sets.

Let B.S. = the set of biological states = $G \times \{Z, X\}$

where Z = uncircumcised

X = circumcised

Let A.S. = the set of age-states = $G \times \{A, B, C\}$

where A = uninitiated grade

B = warrior grade

C = elder grade

Let $\xrightarrow[b]{}$ = a relation, biological state changes = $(G \times \{Z\}) \times (G \times \{X\})$ such that $((x, Z), (x, X)) \varepsilon \xrightarrow[b]{}$ means that individuals in group x become circumcised if $x \varepsilon G$.

Let $\overrightarrow{A\ B}$ = a relation, age-state changes = $(G \times \{A\}) \times (G \times \{B\})$

such that $((x, A), (x, B)) \in \overrightarrow{A\ B}$ means individuals in group x become warriors if $x \in G$.

Similarly, $\overrightarrow{B\ C}$ = a relation, age-state changes

$= (G \times \{B\}) \times (G \times \{C\})$

and $\xrightarrow[a]{} = \overrightarrow{A\ B} \cup \overrightarrow{B\ C}$

There is also a relation, s = simultaneity of changes

$$\subset \overrightarrow{A\ B} \times \overrightarrow{B\ C}$$

1) Suppose f is a map $f : (\xrightarrow[a]{} \cup \xrightarrow[b]{}) \longrightarrow$ time

such that

a) if $c_1\ s\ c_2$ then $f(c_1) = f(c_2)$

b) if $c = (x, A) \xrightarrow[a]{} (x, B)$

and $d = (x, B) \xrightarrow[a]{} (x, C)$

then $f(c) < f(d)$

c) for each interval in time (t_1, t_2) the set of all values of f is finite.

d) f : 1 - 1 on $\overrightarrow{A\ B}$ and on $\overrightarrow{B\ C}$.

2) Given f we can construct

g_x : time $\longrightarrow$ age-states, for any $x \in G$, and

h_x : time $\longrightarrow$ biological states, for any $x \in G$,

such that, for any real number t,

a) $g_x(t) = A$ iff $h_x(t) = Z$.

b) $g_x(t) = B \vee C$ iff $h_x(t) = X$.

and further,

c) $g_x(t) = A$ if $t < f(c)$. (by 1,b and 2,a)

d) $g_x(t) = B$ if $f(c) < t < f(d)$.

e) $g_x(t) = C$ if $t > f(d)$.

Given these primitives, we can state the following:

Axiom 1: for each t $|\{x: g_x(t) = B\}| < \infty$

Axiom 2: for all $x \in G$,

$$((x, Z) \xrightarrow[b]{} (x, X)) \; s \; ((x, A) \xrightarrow[a]{} (x, B))$$

Until this point the structural description fits both Tharaka and Tigania. We can add, for Tigania only,

Axiom 3: if $x \in G$, then $\exists$ a unique $y \in G = \alpha(x)$ and

$\alpha : 1 - 1$ such that,

$$((x, A) \xrightarrow[a]{} (x, B)) \; s \; ((\alpha(x), B) \xrightarrow[a]{} (\alpha(x), C)).$$

This completes the structural description of the Tigania age-set system, and presents all of the state changes in that system in their interrelationships. The axiomatic system gives rise to a theorem concerning the Tigania age-set system,

Theorem: given $t_1 \neq t_2$, $t_1 < t_2$, and $t_1, t_2 \notin$ range of f, then,

$$|\{x: g_x(t_1) = B\}| = |\{x: g_x(t_2) = B\}|$$

Interpretation: with the exception of moments in time during which changes are actually taking place, the number of sets in the warrior grade at any time is equal to the number of sets in the warrior grade at any other time, in Tigania. That is, the number of sets in the warrior grade is constant.

Proof:

(t_1, t_2) contains a finite number of values of f. (by 1,c)

Let $t_1' < t_2' < t_3' < \ldots < t_n'$ be a sequence such that

$$t'_1 = t_1$$

$$t'_n = t_2$$

and $[t'_k, t'_{k+1}]$ is a segment of that sequence, containing one and only one value of f.

Then, at that value of f there is one and only one x such that either $(x, A) \xrightarrow[a]{} (x, B)$ or

$(x, B) \xrightarrow[a]{} (x, C)$ (by 1,b and 1,d)

However, for any $(x, A) \xrightarrow[a]{} (x, B)$ $\exists\ \alpha(x)$:

$(\alpha(x), B) \xrightarrow[a]{} (\alpha(x), C)$ (by axiom 3)

and, for any $(x, B) \xrightarrow[a]{} (x, C)$ $\exists\ \alpha^{-1}(x)$:

$(\alpha^{-1}(x), A) \xrightarrow[a]{} (\alpha^{-1}(x), B)$ (by axiom 3, since α: 1 - 1)

Thus, $|\{x : g_x(t'_k) = B\}| = |\{x : g_x(t'_{k+1}) = B\}|$

This holds for all k, since (t_1, t_2) contains a finite number of values of f.

$\therefore\ |\{x : g_x(t_1) = B\}| = |\{x : g_x(t_2) = B\}|$

The rules which underlie promotion to elderhood in Tharaka are such that no axiom similar to Axiom 3 can be written for Tharaka, whereby changes moving sets into the warrior grade effect changes moving sets out of the warrior grade. Therefore, the theorem generated for Tigania does not apply to Tharaka.

There are systems of age-set organization which have rules allowing a similar but not identical theorem to be written. One such example is Tuken (Kettel personal communication) and others are Maasai (Jacobs 1965), Samburu (Spencer 1965), and Mukugudu (Rosen personal communication). A full survey of ethnographic reports would no doubt uncover

many others. The variation in the axiom is as follows:

Assume x_1 is an age-set and x_2 is the age-set immediately junior to x_1, then,

Axiom 3': if $x_1, x_2 \in G$, then $\exists\ \alpha(x_1)$ and $\alpha(x_2) \in G$:

if $(x_1, A) \xrightarrow[a]{} (x_1, B)$ then,

$f((\alpha(x_1), B) \xrightarrow[a]{} (\alpha(x_1), C)) < f((x_2), A) \xrightarrow[a]{} (x_2, B))$

and if $(\alpha(x_1), B) \xrightarrow[a]{} (\alpha(x_1), C)$, then

$f((x_1, A) \xrightarrow[a]{} (x_1, B)) < f((\alpha(x_2), B) \xrightarrow[a]{} (\alpha(x_2), C))$

This axiom provides a slightly different theorem:

$$|\{x : g_x(t_1) = B\}| = |\{x : g_x(t_2) = B\}| \text{ within a range of } |1|.$$

Interpretation: If the rules of the system provide that when a set moves from grade A to grade B no second set may make the same move prior to another set moving from grade B to grade C, and, that when a set moves from grade B to grade C no second set may make the same move prior to a set moving from grade A to grade B, then, the number of sets in grade B at any time is within one of the number of sets in grade B at any other time. That is, there can be the same number, one fewer, or one greater number of sets in the grade at any time relative to any other time. The proof for such a theorem would be similar to the proof just given.

It should be repeated that for Tharaka there is no similar theorem that can be constructed, and this is, I believe, the crucial point of difference between the Tharaka and Tigania, and, I suspect, between two essential types of age-set systems. On the one hand we have the systems for which some theorem for defining the number of

sets in a grade at relative times can be constructed, and on the other hand we have those systems for which such a theorem cannot be constructed.

What makes the Tigania system similar to the systems for which the alternative theorem holds is that in all such cases the number of sets in the warrior grade is well-defined at any time relative to any other time. In the case of Tharaka, and in the cases of any other systems for which theorems of this sort are unconstructable, the number of sets in the warrior grade is unwell-defined for any time relative to any other time. The notion of unwell-definedness is similar to the notion of ill-definedness found in linguistics (Lakoff 1969) and mathematics.

It is clear for the Tharaka that the number of sets in the warrior grade cannot ever be infinite (by 1,c). Yet is is also the case that the maximum number of sets that there can be is unavailable to us from the rules of the system. A number is characterized as unwell-defined if it is without a bound, in this case, an upper bound, yet the rules strictly prohibit it from being infinite. In the current case, where we are defining numbers in a relative manner over time, an infinite value is out of the question.

The distinction between well- and unwell-defined numbers is a minimal pairwise distinction. Any system which has a warrior grade either provides a well- or unwell-defined number of sets in that grade at any time relative to any other time. Therefore, these two concepts together must encompass every possible type of age-set system with an age-grading grid. In addition the fieldworker need only discover one axiom of the system to determine which is the case in any single example.

The remainder of this work will be devoted to examining the nature of this distinction as it obtains between Tigania and Tharaka, but on the basis of the mathematics alone, we can state the following hypothesis. Hypothesis: Age-set systems can be divided into those in which the number of sets in the warrior grade is well-defined at any time relative to any other time, and those in which the number of sets in the warrior grade is unwell-defined for any time relative to any other time, on the basis of the structural description of the system. The former can be called Type-A systems, and the latter Type-B systems, as a shorthand.

On the basis of the mathematics of these systems already described, this hypothesis must be true. It is a corollary to the theorem already proved. It provides a taxonomy of age-set systems on the basis of social structure alone and not on the basis of simple surface conventions such as the ways in which sets are named.

I will argue that more is being said here than that the world can be divided into trumpet players and non-trumpet players. I will be demonstrating that this structural difference actually can be seen to account for a variety of interesting problems in the domain of age-set systems. What makes the famous trumpet players example a vacuous taxonomy is not that trumpet playing is a funny concept, but rather that there exist multiple differences between trumpet players and non-trumpet players, and that the single distinction is itself uninteresting because it provides no insight into the social structure (or any other type of structure) of the universe under examination.

Were the universe the set of all musicians, then the distinction

might have some value. In the case of our corollary it can be argued firstly that the distinction between Type-A and Type-B systems is the only structural distinction which appears at our level of analysis, the level of competence. This alone is a powerful argument for the significance of the distinction. In addition the distinction is of the sort that every example must fit into one of the two categories: these two arguments together make the hypothesis a useful one.

The taxonomy thus provided, while it arises from social structure alone, provides in turn some additional understandings about social structure, and it is in this sense an interesting theory. The structural descriptions, the theorem, and the corollary together form what I have called the theory of age-set systems. We can now proceed to see what can be learned from this theory about age-set systems.

V. SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL CHANGE

A. The Social Change Hypothesis

It will be recalled that the initial impetus was given to this study of age-set systems by the rather unexpected situation in the Tigania-Tharaka area with respect to social change. The Tigania system was found to be fully operational despite the fact that the Tigania area had undergone some economic development and was receiving monies for further development. The Tharaka system was found to be in a state of collapse despite the fact that the area was essentially undeveloped, and that administrative reports referred consistently to the "primitiveness" of the Tharaka and their attachment to their aboriginal social structure.

We can see, however, that the theory of age-set systems presented in Chapter IV suggests a natural hypothesis for explaining this supposedly anomalous situation.

Hypothesis: Type-B age-set systems are more amenable to social change than are Type-A age-set systems, all other things being equal.

If it is indeed the case that the Type-A--Type-B dichotomy represents the true structural distinction between types of age-set systems, and if it is further the case that differences in social change are attributable to structural differences, then this hypothesis appears to be correct at face value.

Indeed, I could find no concrete examples which might contradict this hypothesis. But it seems to me imperative that more be said

about this matter, and that an attempt be made to discover the connections between social structure and social change within this domain. In so doing we will be amplifying on the theory of age-set systems and increasing our understanding of how social structure in general operates.

The question to be pursued then is what is it about the natures of the two types of systems that provides information about the likelihood of social change? What is it about Type-A systems that allows them to continue operation while Type-B systems under similar circumstances collapse? What is the nature of the collapse in the Type-B system?

Our examples for the two types of systems will again be Tigania (Type-A) and Tharaka (Type-B). The hypothesis concerning social change is correlational: it is suggested by the theory of age-set systems, but it is not a direct corollary of the theorem as was the hypothesis about typology. Therefore, we cannot expect that this hypothesis can be fully confirmed, only that all of the data be made interpretable on the basis of the hypothesis, and that none of the data in any way disconfirm the hypothesis. The hypothesis may be continually tested and retested by examining all available age-set systems as data become available in the form necessary to this sort of analysis.

What makes the hypothesis so intriguing to me is that it was generated entirely from the mathematics of the two systems, in combination with the actual flow of events. What happened simply did happen, and I suggest that the mathematical difference is explanatory. If so, then the theory of age-set systems is an extremely powerful device.

It then would not only provide a comprehensive theory of the systems per se but of social change in the domain as well. This refers back to the introduction in which it was suggested that social change is best viewed as a part of social structure. Two major items will have to be handled at this point. First I will try to trace the Tharakan social change by making use of the social structural descriptions provided earlier. Then some reasons will be suggested for the concomitant lack of social change in the Tigania system. What will be suggested is that the social structures described have certain natural and necessary consequences, and that social change or the lack of it is resultant from these consequences.

B. How Type-B Systems Change

The Tharaka age-set system is a Type-B system and the defining characteristic of these systems is that there exists no axiomatic connection between the formation of a set as warriors and the promotion of other sets as elders. The mathematical result of such an axiomatic system is the unwell-definedness of the number of sets of warriors at any time relative to any other time. It is, therefore, the case that a very large number of sets at any one time, and a very small number at another time, or any other combination of numbers, is not a violation of Tharakan age-set competence.

It would not be a violation of Tharakan competence for the age-set system to operate for a length of time in a manner nearly identical to the Tigania or other Type-A systems. In fact, there is every probability that there will be apparent surface similarities when everything

is operating smoothly in Tharaka. The constancy of the need for fighting warriors would make it desirable for Tharakans to maintain regularity in the circumcision of new sets and the promotion of elders. No such regularity is required by the Tharakan rules, but to fail to provide at least a semblance of regularity in the context of inter-tribal warfare would certainly be maladaptive and invite ethnic extinction.

However, with the introduction of a Pax Brittanica, the presence of British troops and police, and the cessation of inter-tribal wars, the adaptive value of this regularity is lost. The new context is the encapsulation of ethnic groups by a nation-state, be it British or African. The need for ethnic identification, in all probability a human universal of sorts, is satisfied simply by the retention of circumcision. This is especially true in the context of Kenyan national politics where circumcision provides for the Tharaka not only their own ethnic identity, but a claim to identification with the dominant political group, the Kikuyu. There is a certain ambivalence in identity in this area, best exemplified by talks I had with young men going into the nearby town to seek jobs.

Because I had a car, I had ample opportunity to meet these young men who were hitching rides. I asked them what they expected their chances were of obtaining employment. In the case of those going into Meru, they were somewhat less than optimistic. The town of Meru is overflowing with Meru peoples, naturally enough, and of all the Meru peoples the Tharaka are the poorest and have attached to their poverty all of the traditional stereotypes of poor people. In relation to

other Meru it was assumed that Tharakans were a poor employment prospect. However, for those Tharakans going to Nairobi, there were two attitudes reflecting the ambivalence of identity in the area.

One boy felt that he would have a very hard time in Nairobi, specifically because he was a Tharakan rather than a Kikuyu, and the Kikuyu were "ruling". Another boy, also going to Nairobi, felt his chances for work were excellent because "we are Kikuyu people and we are ruling." This second fellow was probably heading for a major disappointment: his education was minimal, and he was relying on an ethnic identification which was not felt by the Kikuyu. He saw his identity as being on the proper side of the circumcised--non-circumcised dichotomy, and while he was no doubt correct about that, his identity as a Tharakan would probably be of little avail in Nairobi.

The boy's statement, however, does indicate that the claim to identification with the dominant political force is at least an available claim: that it is unlikely to be of much use is secondary.

With the question of identity handled by circumcision, albeit somewhat ambiguously, and with the lack of a need for constantly available fighting warriors, there remains no structural reason for the Tharaka to maintain a regularity in their age-set system's process.

Elderhood, as an individual status, is still highly valued for it implies wisdom and experience, and it obtains for the bearer an amount of respect. The attitudes surrounding seniority in age are still highly in evidence in Tharaka. Given what is known about the Tharakan social structure thus far, and given also the lack of need for warriorhood, it can be seen that individuals will attain elderhood more quickly

if they circumcise their children at a lower age.

Early circumcision also benefits the child's status since it places him in the warrior grade more quickly. Circumcisions in the past were delayed because of the feeling that those circumcised should be old enough and big enough to fight, as was stated in Chapter III. But this criterion for warriorhood is not applicable in the current situation and given the high value placed on making the age-status transitions, it is almost naturally expectable that circumcisions should not be delayed.

The result of this set of factors is that circumcisions can take place every year, and that the young people being circumcised can be younger and younger. It would be possible to view this situation as one in which sets are being formed every year, and, indeed, one refers to the year of one's circumcision as one's itana. But let us view for a moment the consequences of this at the upper end of the warrior grade.

Because of the way in which elderhood is conferred in Tharaka, it was a fairly certain feature in the past that no member of a junior warrior set would have a child old enough to go singing with warriors before any member of the senior-most warrior set had such a child. This was a simple demographic fact (or probability) that could be perpetually maintained so long as one could not jurally sire children prior to warriorhood, and there was a significant time elapsed between the formation of warrior sets.

However, with the amount of time between set formation dropped as low as one year, there arises the possibility that sets will become

ready for elderhood outside of the order in which they were circumcised. This would create a contradiction in the pattern of seniority observed between sets. When this possibility of contradiction is coupled with the disappearance of the garu, the situation at the senior end of the warrior grade becomes almost chaotic.

What happened at this point in Tharaka was simply that elderhood ceased to be a matter of set involvement and became individual. At this time elderhood was assumed for any individual who had circumcised a child, regardless of the set of the parent. If a man did not have children, or if he had children very late, he would eventually come to be called an elder as a large proportion of his age-mates became elders although he had not yet himself circumcised a child.

Thus, while one can argue successfully that sets are still being formed, one would be less successful with arguing that sets are being promoted to elderhood. And the argument that sets are being formed is itself attackable. It would not be entirely foolish to argue that the mere fact of circumcision having to take place at a certain time (within a given year) is insufficient to call the people circumcised in that time an age-set. The naming of an age-set by reference to the calendar year seems more an attempt to answer the question "What is your itana?" than it is a serious attempt to preserve a system of age-sets.

What has happened in Tharaka is that an age-set system has become an age-grade system. The grades remain, but the sets have effectively disappeared, and the entire function of the system today is to assign age-statuses to individuals. It should be noted that if the elements of G in the formal analysis are considered to be individuals

instead of sets of individuals, the Tharakan competence rules still hold, albeit almost vacuously.

It seems to me clear from this description that the social change in evidence in Tharaka is purely a result of the social structure of the age-set system in the presence of a Pax Brittanica (now a Pax Africana): the formation of a nation-state.

It is interesting to note that economic development, or its lack, here has nothing whatever to do with social change. No doubt the different time allocations required for a money economy would have some effect on the time allocated to the maintenance of a system like this. Indeed, there have been changes in the behaviors surrounding the Tigania system. But the Tigania system does not exhibit the basic structural changes that are exhibited by Tharaka. And the Tigania system still operates under the exact competence rules stated in the last chapter.

The argument in terms of the hypothesis is that while it would not be necessary for a Type-B system to undergo this sort of change in the context of a nation-state, it is certainly the case that the changed context is a sufficient cause for the system to change in this way. Further, it would seem that adaptation to general modernization is best served by this sort of change, and it is likely that a Type-B system would move in this direction: it is certainly the case that Type-B systems are amenable to such changes.

Given that there exist powerful industrial nation-states in the same world with small scale systems such as Tharaka, it becomes only a matter of time before there is social change in the smaller

system. This is simply a necessary adaptation to a planetary environment--the universal happening when the powerless meet the powerful. In this sense there is inevitably going to be change in both Type-B and Type-A systems. The differences in change which are suggested by the hypothesis are differences in the rate of change and in the direction in which change takes place.

It is conceded that direction is a weak concept. In the current context both types of systems change in the direction of diminution and ultimate disappearance. In the case of the Type-B systems, the theory of age-set systems predicts that the quality of change will be as described for Tharaka: from an age-set system to an age-grade system via the disordering of age-sets. The social change hypothesis predicts that given the same context the Type-B system will undergo structural change before the Type-A system will.

C. Why Type-A Systems Are Maintained

Recalling the hypothesis from the beginning of this chapter, we can envision circumstances under which both types of systems would change identically. Such circumstances are, however, abnormal or at least irregular. If, for example, the British had killed everyone in both areas, both systems would have changed identically: one can claim the overriding principle that zero population equals zero social structure. Therefore, when we say, "all other things being equal," we mean to simultaneously discard absurd situations. We could even claim that since the hypothesis refers to the amenability of systems to change, that it still operates in absurd situations, albeit vacuously. This is,

however, quite untestable, and would be in any case irrelevant.

Therefore, in speaking of the way in which Type-A systems are less amenable to social change than are Type-B systems, we will want to keep in mind that absurd situations do not count, and that what the hypothesis truly suggests is that within the same contexts if only one type of system changes, it will be the Type-B that does so. We also want to specify that what is being discussed is not spurious change: the disappearance of some small ceremonial or other, but rather what is meant by change is something on the order of magnitude of what happened in Tharaka: the disappearance of the actual units of the system.

In discussing possible social change we will be speaking of the Tigania system, and referring to axiom number 3 for the most part. We will bear in mind, however, that those systems operating with axiom 3' are also of Type-A. It will be seen that the social consequences of axiom 3 do not differ appreciably from the social consequences of axiom 3', and that the arguments advanced for Tigania would operate with equal effect in all Type-A systems.

Let us consider the Tigania system's social structure in the new context: the Pax Brittanica. It is every bit as much the case for Tigania as it was for Tharaka that the need for a regular supply of battle-ready warriors is now absent. It is also true that elder status is desirable, and that as a result the age at circumcision is lowered.

However, the age at circumcision in Tigania has not dropped below fourteen, while in Tharaka it has dropped below ten. Nor has

the period of time between the circumcision of sets lowered.

In Tigania, and in all Type-A systems, in order to circumcise a new set, an old set must be promoted to elderhood. Since there is still a value placed on elderhood, could the Type-A systems change in the same way as Type-B systems? It can be seen in Tharaka that by allowing elderhood to depend on the circumcision of children, there is still a gap of some years between initiation and elderhood.

Under the Type-A rules, however, if sets were circumcised every year, one would achieve elderhood only two years after initiation. This is not entirely from axiom 3 since that axiom does not specify how many sets will be in a grade: only that the number of sets in the warrior grade will be constant (and, under 3' within a range of one, also constant). However, it is ethnographic fact that under the earlier context (the need for fighting warriors), the number of warrior sets was two, and the axiom prohibits a change in this number.

Circumcising a child of ten years of age, and making that child an elder at twelve, would clearly contradict the high value placed on elderhood. This sort of change would obviate the only serious present day function of the age-set system: the assignment of age-status. This is not to argue that the functions of the system are explanatory of the system itself. Rather it is generally the case in the world that no society, insofar as I know, places political power in the hands of the chronologically immature as a class. While real power may no longer be involved here in terms of judicial, military and other rights, it would simply violate Tigania values (or Tharaka ones for that matter) to refer to young boys as elders. While not a violation of competence,

I believe we can safely refer to this situation as one which would be consciously avoided by the participants based on their general cultural sensibilities. One recognizes the teleology implicit in this statement but it is, I believe, legitimate to attribute awareness to people on this level.

From this point of view it is necessary to maintain the fourteen to fifteen year period between set formations in order to maintain Type-A competence. And such a maintenance automatically maintains a minimal age of fourteen for circumcision candidates.

What is absolutely clear from all of this is that given a Type-A social structure, encapsulation by a nation-state and the lack of need for battle-ready warriors is not a sufficient condition for a change in social structure, whereas in Type-B systems it is. In this limited sense the hypothesis is proved: under the single context of a lack of need for battle-ready warriors Type-B systems do change and Type-A systems do not. More than this, however, goes on in the real world, and so the hypothesis is stated a bit more generally. This more general statement makes the hypothesis useful as a predictive tool. One ought to be able to determine whether or not any envisioned change in context will have a social structural effect on an age-set system.

The more general statement also lays the hypothesis open to more question, and, therefore, liable to constant testing. Such testing, however, is part and parcel of any useful prediction.

From what has been discussed thus far, the hypothesis appears to be confirmed. It is recognized that only a part of the hypothesis has been confirmed, but, to my way of thinking, this is a vital part

because the specific context for which confirmation has been obtained is precisely the context under which most age-set systems operate today. It also provides a fairly firm intuition that the hypothesis is true in general.

There are, however, more data to be brought to bear on this question. They will go no further towards proving the hypothesis per se, but they will provide further intuitions for what has been said so far.

D. Surface Features of Type-A Systems

In reviewing the literature on age-set systems in general, attention is normally found to be placed upon surface features. This probably also characterizes the literature in most of social science since it is the feature which is visible that forms the basis of reportage.

In the domain of age-set systems two features stand out: the ways in which sets are named, and the similarity of these systems to generation-set systems in the placement of fathers and sons. In discussing these two features it will be seen that more intuitions are built up around the social change hypothesis.

1) The naming of sets:

Age-sets may be named in either of two ways. Either each set will have a unique name (linear system) or there will be a discrete set of names applied to each set in order (cyclical system). In a cyclical system there are usually seven or eight names, and after the last set has been named, the next set is given the first name again. The order remains the same in each cycle.

In systems using cyclical naming it is considered undesirable for members of two different sets bearing the same name to be alive at the same time. Quite obviously such conflict would make a cyclical naming system useless: there seems little point in naming sets if they cannot be distinguished one from the other. Naturally, there is no well motivated reason for saying that this is impossible, but it does seem an unlikely way of going about things, and in fact, I know of no cyclical naming rules in systems where such a situation is likely to occur.

I also know of no cyclical naming conventions using a very large number of names. Eight names would appear to be the limit, and using many more than eight would be likely to cause confusion. Such a cycle would be difficult to remember, again defeating the point of having a cycle at all although again it is not impossible.

Let us assume for the purposes of argument that the fifteen year period of set formation that the Tigania employ is generally acceptable as a reasonable length of time. Indeed, in an age-set system the purpose of which is to provide a warrior class a much longer period would be counterproductive, retaining warriors too old to fight and denying warriorhood to strong young men. In this argument we will be concerned with the longest period, and, therefore, a shorter period of formation would not be distressing.

In a system employing eight names in which sets were formed every fifteen years, the youngest member of a given set would be 135 years old before the same name would be given to another set. This is a highly unlikely, albeit not totally impossible, circumstance, and

it is, therefore, fairly safe to have an eight-name cycle and a fifteen year period. The cycle itself runs in 120 years, but recall that a member of a set must be fifteen before he is himself circumcised.

In a seven-name situation the youngest member of any set would be 120 years old before his set name came up again, given a fifteen year period. Again, this is pretty safe.

The actual situation in Tigania is a period of fourteen or fifteen years, however, and if a six-name cycle were used, a man could be as young as 98 before his set came up again. This is not so unlikely, and it is instructive that there are no examples of six-name cycles.

Let us, however, apply an eight-name cycle to the Tharaka case. In Tharaka the longest period between set formation that I was able to ascertain was seven years, and most periods were shorter than this. In such a system, operating at the longest period, a man could be as young as seventy before his set name came up again. It is most unlikely in such a circumstance that there would not be members of two sets with the same name alive simultaneously.

Now there is no rule which prohibits the Tharaka from employing a longer period between initiations, but we have already shown that the social structure of the Tharaka age-set system makes it fairly likely that a large number of age-sets will be represented at any one time. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that a cyclical system of naming is applicable to a Type-B system.

Indeed, the ethnographic corpus shows cyclical naming only in those systems which I have identified as Type-A. However, not all Type-A systems use cyclical naming. The Maasai (Jacobs 1965) for

example, are a Type-A system employing linear naming of sets.

This is a reasonable possibility because social structure is not seen as directly generating these features, but rather as applying a limit to them. Thus, Type-B systems cannot employ cyclical naming, while Type-A systems may. It is this fact, that Type-A systems may (not must) employ this naming pattern, that obviates the old classification of age-set systems into linear and cyclical.

In terms of the social change hypothesis, cyclicality of naming provides us with some more intuitions. A cyclical naming system means that one would be able to say in advance what the name of the next age-set will be. This gives the participant a certain amount of predictive ability about his social structure. Such an ability would be an excellent mnemonic device, making the system easier to learn, despite the apparent simplicity of the linear naming pattern.

Intuitively it would seem that in any changing situation the ability to make structural predictions would argue for the maintenance of the system. This surely is not as important in social change as is the vital social structural discussion of the previous section, but it does add to our understanding of the way in which these systems operate.

It would also appear that this sort of predictive ability makes it easier for the participant to understand his system. A relatively young Tigania man living in Tharaka was able to give me a full account of the Tigania age-set system in one sitting lasting under an hour. I checked this account with Mahner's (1970) report, and they tallied exactly. There were no Tharakan informants of any age who were able

to give me as accurate an account of the Tharaka age-set system.

No doubt a good deal of this stems from the fact that Tharakan age-sets have been collapsed for many years, but even the oldest men who had lived within garu walls for twenty years were unable to make as thorough an accounting of their system. Cyclicity is not the only feature which makes for this sort of predictability, but it no doubt adds to it.

It was noted before that the neighbors of the Tharaka seem to think the Tharaka are very foolish because the Tharaka do not "know the names of their nthuki" (as sets are called in Tigania). The reason for their not knowing, it should now be clear, is that the social structure in effect prohibits their knowing. Kettel (1970) suggested that cyclical naming may act as an anti-mnemonic for recalling history because the repetition of names tends to obscure during which cycle an event occurred. I suspect that this is quite true, but that alternately the cyclical naming pattern acts as a positive mnemonic for remembering how the system itself operates.

What this discussion suggests is that while the pattern of naming sets which a people adopts is not sufficient for categorizing the age-set system absolutely, it does give interesting clues. If a cyclical pattern is in use, then we must be dealing with a Type-A system, while a linear pattern does not tell us what system we are dealing with. The pattern of naming is a surface feature which "results from" (in a non-generative sense) the social structure, and is of significant interest to anthropologists, albeit not to the degree implied in the earlier literature.

2) Predictability of Placement:

Mahner's original report (1970) referred to the Tigania system as a generation-set system. This is hardly to be considered an error on Mahner's part because terminology used in discussing age-organization has hardly been standardized in the literature, and, furthermore, there are certain similarities between the Tigania system and a generation-set system that make for a useful analogy. It should also be noted that Meru peoples who speak English always translate the word nthuki as "generation". In the Meru edition of the Bible, translated by the Consolata Fathers, the phrase "generation to generation" uses nthuki for "generation" (Father G. Sosi personal communication).

This constant use of "generation" is not entirely accidental although it does not reflect the true rules of the age-set system. Nonetheless there are important features in Type-A systems which make for the similarity and which also add to our intuitions about the social change hypothesis.

Given axiom 3, coupled with the fourteen to fifteen year formation period, and with the fact that warriors may marry, it is highly probable that a Tigania man will have most if not all of his children in the age-set separated from his own by one. A man's children could not be placed in the set immediately adjacent to his own. It is possible, depending entirely on procreative longevity, for a man to have children three or even four sets below his own as well.

If it were the case that all of a man's children were automatically and jurally assigned to the set two below his own, then there would in fact be a generation-set system operating. The fact that men

are assigned to sets on the basis of age rather than generation is what makes this an age-set system, and, therefore, it is to be expected that numerous exceptions to the placement probability will occur. According to Mahner (personal communication) exceptions often occur, and, therefore, this is an age-set system.

For Tuken (Kettel personal communication) a similar situation obtains, and this is not in the least surprising because again, warriors may marry, there is a fifteen year formation period, and Tuken operates under axiom 3'. It will be recalled that the social consequences of axiom 3' are almost identical to those of axiom 3.

The theory of age-set systems insists, then, that any age-set system which is a Type-A system and which operates with a regular formation period, will enable its participants to predict with a fair amount of accuracy into which sets their unborn children will be initiated. In a system using cyclical naming the participants can even name the set.

This should be somewhat amended. Clearly, the shorter the formation period is, the less accurate will be the predictions. In a formation period of fifteen years predictive accuracy is sufficient for there to be some confusion on the part of ethnographers as to whether they are dealing with an age-set system or a generation-set system because the statistical models will be similar.

When a man is allowed to marry and jurally produce offspring is important for determining the gap between himself and his children. Jacobs (personal communication) stated that in some Maasai groups only elders could marry (as in Samburu; see Spencer 1965) while in others

senior warriors could. He also stated that in some Maasai groups father and son were never in the ol poroi (firestick--see Jacobs 1965 for a full discussion) relationship; this being a ritual relationship obtaining between sets separated from one another by one intervening set when the sets are in specific grades. Yet in other Maasai groups their being in this relationship was common. The theory of age-set systems predicts that the ol poroi relationship will obtain between father and son in precisely those groups in which warriors are allowed to marry. This sort of prediction may be made about a Type-A system, but not about a Type-B system.

Intuitively it would appear that in those systems about which predictions can easily be made, there is less likelihood of social change than in those systems in which predictions may not be made. Predictive ability is clearly a strong mnemonic device, and in this case the predictive ability stems directly from what I have suggested to be the competence model used by the participants. This is a fairly powerful intuition.

In the case of the Type-A systems, I know of no case where this placement predictability is absent. Literally all that is required, aside from the system being in fact a Type-A system, is that the period of formation for sets not be too small. Placement predictability is then automatic with a fair degree of success.

In Type-B systems this predictability is not provided by the social structure. In the event that a Type-B system has a continuing need for fighting warriors, the period of formation may be fairly stable over a long run. However, should there arise a sudden need for extra

warriors, an additional set can be formed at any time under Type-B rules, or in the event of opposite conditions a set may be delayed. Any instance of this would throw off the predictability of placement, a predictability which is weak to begin with.

In all of these intuitive arguments what has been at stake has been how much information is provided to the participant by the social structure competence. Type-A systems simply provide much more information based on the social structure alone than do Type-B systems. This information may serve as a series of mnemonic devices providing for the maintenance of the system during times of externally induced stress such as the presence of nation-state troops. Type-A system participants simply know in advance what is to be done.

These intuitive arguments are not explanations of the social change hypothesis, but rather are additions to it. The social structure of both types of systems acts as a limiting, monitoring, and interpreting device; one which in the Type-B systems allows for a greater degree of variation within the bounds of competence, a degree so large as to allow situations to occur under which the rules must fail to operate. It is this which is the strongest argument for the greater amenability to social change claimed for Type-B systems.

In a Type-A system far less variability can take place without a violation of competence. Massive social change in a Type-A system takes place at the cost of the social structure, while in Type-B systems such changes are practically programmed into the structure. Note that in the Tharaka example all of the shifts which took place were within the bounds of Tharaka competence, and ultimately that competence was

violated only after it had itself allowed for the changes. In this sense what is operating in Tharaka is akin to a self-destruct mechanism, whereby a machine programs its own dissolution.

This is not, despite how it sounds, necessarily a poorly adapted social structure. From the opposite point of view the Tharaka could be said to be well rid of a system which was at variance with the time allocation needs they would face under development conditions. This conclusion would be warranted had development taken place.

In his (1971) report to the Kenyan government David Brokensha pointed up the need for development efforts in Tharaka. Tharaka is in fact a prime target for development simply because they have faced the collapse of their aboriginal structure already. If the lack of development efforts in the past indeed reflected the fear of administrators that the people would fail to respond because of their "primitive" social organization, then these fears ought to now be gone along with the social structure.

The only argument left to those who oppose development efforts in this area is the argument that states that only the rich can be developed. I suspect that this prejudice on the part of British colonial administrators is more likely to have been the causal factor in the past failure to attempt development. If aboriginal social structures are indeed blocks against development (which I do not believe they necessarily must be), then the Tharaka should take to development efforts quite readily. With the social organization of Tharaka in a shambles, while development efforts might not help, they certainly could not hurt.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

A. About the Theory of Age-Set Systems

Despite published attempts to capture the nature of age-organization (Eisenstadt 1956; Prins 1953; Fleming 1969; etc.) there have appeared no true theories about systems of age-organization with respect to social structure. The works just mentioned have by and large been concerned with how age-organization may have arisen, or with what sorts of societies are likely to produce formal age-organization.

This work has taken a limited aspect of the general field of age-organization, the domain of age-set systems, and attempted to provide a theory about this domain with respect to social structure, herein viewed as an aspect of cognitive competence.

In all societies some recognition is given to the concept of relative age. The concept is, for example, a basic notion in kinship analysis, and the presence of the concept in discussions of other domains gives credence to its universality: relative age is a bio-cultural fact for anyone with a concept of time.

However, age-set systems, in my view, form a natural domain for analysis separate from the presence of the relative age concept in other domains. Both the domain of age-set systems and the domain of kinship systems provide methods of organizing personnel, and both make use of the relative age concept: therefore, how can we distinguish domains?

An age-organizational domain is present when the social system under discussion categorizes on the basis of the relative age concept alone. Age-organization differs from kinship organization in that the relationships between personnel in an age-organizational domain are not necessarily traceable by parent-child links, except in the vacuous sense that ultimately some genealogical link can be traced between all members of any society in isolation. The important feature is that these parent-child links cannot successfully characterize the age-organizational social structure.

In the case of the so-called generation-set systems there is apparent overlap. I will argue that in a true generation-set system the rule for recruitment into sets is based entirely on parent-child links, and not at all on the relative age concept except insofar as that concept characterizes generational difference. If this is acceptable, then true generation-set systems are a special case entirely in the domain of kinship systems.

There are also systems, Tigania in particular, which may be referred to as generation-set systems, but wherein the recruitment principle is based entirely on relative age. There simply happens to be an amount of congruence between the relative age and parent-child link concepts in the real situation. However, the exceptions to the parent-child placement predictability leave no room for doubt as to what the actual recruitment rule is, and in this case we are dealing with a system analyzable only as a member of the domain of age-organization.

The theory which has been propounded is meant to deal only with

social systems the result of which is placement of personnel into sets on the basis of relative age, and promotion of those sets through a series of grades: the domain, or sub-domain if preferred, of age-set systems. The theory does claim to be a comprehensive theory of this domain or sub-domain.

The formal analysis presented in Chapter IV provides what I have called the Theory of Age-Set Systems. The theory consists of a structural description of the domain, a theorem from this description which characterizes a particular sub-set of the domain, a proof of the theorem, and a corollary to the theorem which provides a taxonomy of age-set systems.

As a result of the corollary, age-set systems are characterized as either Type-A or Type-B systems, depending entirely on the social structure of the particular system under discussion. A claim is made that this social structure description represents a theory of competence about the system. Given what has been said here about domains, cognitive salience, and the nature of the typology (based, as it is, on a minimal pairwise distinction), I believe that it has been demonstrated that the theory, indeed, has descriptive adequacy.

To demonstrate that this is indeed a theory and not a non-productive description, let us review the new hypotheses given by the theory. Aside from the social change hypothesis, which will be discussed separately in the next section, the theory has provided intuitions about age-set systems which can be characterized as hypotheses.

The first hypothesis is that cyclicity of naming is restricted to Type-A systems. This has been amply discussed in the previous

chapter. What should be noted here is the way in which such an hypothesis is created directly from the theory of age-set systems. This is a demonstration of the efficacy of the theory: that it places into an explained perspective, facts, the relationships between which were previously unknown. This is not an hypothesis of prediction, but one of retrodiction. It explains the basis for what were previously known as facts and in so doing it presents new information about the social structure under consideration. Indeed, in some sense it makes suggestions about what sorts of things to look for in structural analysis, and can be seen in this sense to be a contribution to social structure studies in general.

The second hypothesis was that predictability of father-son placement is restricted to Type-A systems. This hypothesis has all of the features just mentioned for the first hypothesis.

These two hypotheses, together with the theory as a whole, say a good deal about the social structure of age-set systems, and this forms the basis for claiming theoretic adequacy for the theory.

B. About the Social Change Hypothesis

The social change hypothesis is entitled to a separate section because it concerns questions beyond the theory of age-set systems. Prior to beginning with these questions, it should be stated that this hypothesis has all of the features of the previous hypotheses, and, therefore, can be seen as adding to the descriptive and theoretic adequacy claims of the last section. This, however, is of relatively little importance since the theory could stand without this hypothesis.

Theory is rarely "right" or "wrong", but some theories are better than others. The only way to test for this is to have two theories to compare. In the case of the theory of age-set systems itself, there is no other theory with which to compare it, and since it claims both forms of adequacy, must be presumed the best (albeit, the only) theory available.

Therefore, the social change hypothesis will be discussed on its own, without concern for what it may add to the theory of age-set systems, but with concern for what that theory, through this hypothesis, adds to general theories of social change.

In the introduction I gave some attention to a discussion of the "equilibrium model" of social structure, and to a hypothetical straw-man to save that model. The straw man was to suggest that we could categorize structures as weak or strong just in case they did not behave the way we had predicted they should in the face of social change conditions.

There were two major problems with the straw man. The first, and less serious, was that we had no working definitions for the terms weak and strong. This was not felt to be too serious, because we could always appeal to the generally accepted common concepts of anthropologists and call these terms intuitive. Furthermore, we did have a way of telling which structures were weak and which were strong: the way in which they reacted to social change conditions. This, however, is the stronger error. Such a theoretical suggestion is entirely post hoc. In all seriousness we know no more about social structure after affixing such a label than we did before. The theory, which claims retrodictive

power, in fact has such power if an only if social change conditions have already taken place, and once it claims this power it must abandon the claim that the change conditions give labeling power. Unless we can provide a well-motivated means of labeling systems weak or strong independent of social changes actually happening, this theory is valueless.

The Type-A and Type-B dichotomy is such a method. We could, if we wanted to give credence to the straw man, call the Type-B systems weak. However, the use of such a term would simply obscure the actual nature of these systems. Further, the hypothesis that states that Type-B systems are more amenable to change than are Type-A systems is underlain by more powerful concepts than a simple two-pronged choice mechanism; one changing and the other remaining static.

What is in fact being suggested is that any age-set system, once its structure is known, can be analyzed in terms of its potential for change in respect of particular conditions. It is possible to suggest conditions under which Type-A systems would change. Indeed, the major thrust of the last chapter was to show that while both types of systems undergo some changes, they change in different ways, and the way in which they change is a result of the social structure they began with. This structure must be defined prior to the change taking place, and independently of the way in which the systems react under change conditions. The formal analysis provides this definition.

The social change hypothesis suggests something else about the nature of structure and change. Beyond the hypothesis itself in respect of age-set systems, what can be said about social change in general?

Is it possible to suggest a general hypothesis about social change in societal domains; something to the effect that any social system with well-defined features is less amenable to change than systems with unwell-defined features? I do not mean to make a suggestion like this here, but it does provide food for thought.

How do we describe domains formally so as to determine which features are relevant to such a hypothesis? What would be the underlying basis for such a theory?

As regards describing other domains, that is a topic for other papers. In this work I have demonstrated a formal description for a single domain that provides what we wanted: I can only assume that similar descriptions for other domains are possible and will be forthcoming from anthropologists. Perhaps we can suggest a possible underlying basis, however.

Is it the case that people are simply better able to maintain systems when they understand the systems more fully, and when they can make structural predictions about the systems? This is somewhat implied in earlier arguments, and if it is true, then it may yet form the basis for a formal cognitive theory of social change in general.

The scope of this dissertation would not permit the defense of such a general theory. It is mentioned here only as a demonstration of the way in which anthropological thinking may be directed as formal work proceeds. If it is indeed the case that theory is built upon prior theory, and that the building of such grounded theories is more likely to lead to the understandings we, as anthropologists, have sought about human social systems, then one might suggest that we, as a discipline,

stand on the verge of theoretical breakthroughs.

My personal view is that we do stand there today, and that within the next fifty years the theoretical explanations of social structure will bear as much resemblance to current theory in general as the Keplerian theory bore to the Aristotelian. I believe we will have a significant basis for dividing our work between the humanities and the sciences without constant argument, but that both endeavors will continue to be rewarding to the investigators. I hope that this work has been a contribution in that direction.

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