

**INVASION OF SPIRITS
EPIDEMIOLOGICAL SPIRIT POSSESSION
AMONG THE MAASAI OF TANZANIA**

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Map1. Map of Tanzania and the research area.



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PREFACE

In scholarly circles it is commonly assumed that such a thing as spirit does not exist. It is thought that although the term 'spirit' exists in language, the concept that it denotes has nothing to do with reality. It belongs to the same category as Christmas Man and brownie, which are good to think with but which have nothing to do with reality. It is even more difficult to conceive of a person who is possessed by a spirit, where a spirit, or a host of spirits, enter a person, or take the person into their possession. Many people, scholars and non-scholars alike, think that in understanding or explaining spirit possession phenomena, the very concept 'spirit' should be understood only in allegorical sense, as a means to cope with processes, for which there are no adequate concepts in real life. Thus explaining certain symptoms in terms of spirit possession would be merely another name for social stress, or for an attempt to gain recognition or draw attention of other people. In a sense, spirit possession would be an extraordinary form of exerting power over superiors. In fact, it is not rare to hear that spirit possession is a trick, or even a conscious and systematic method of deceiving those, whose authority otherwise cannot be challenged. One hears and reads repeatedly stories about deceitful women who shamelessly deceive their superiors by succumbing to spirit possession, and in this way acquire for themselves commodities and recognition, which in normal life is not possible for them.

The picture is not that straightforward at all. When one hears that people may die because of spirit intrusion, one is at least forced to think about the incidence as a serious matter. And when one sees with one's own eyes a person dying in circumstances, where people explain it unanimously as an evil activity by spirits, one remains wordless. This has happened to me deep in the Maasai area in Tanzania.

The person who died in front of my eyes was a woman in the age of 37 years. It was on a Sunday morning in Ruvu River valley, where a local Church had started its Sunday service. There was no Church building – people gathered under a large fig tree. People from all directions poured to the place, many of them troubled by a strange phenomenon, which they called *eibung'ita e 'mbepo*. They had troubles which they could not classify as any of the known diseases and ailments. They had gone to Maasai healers, iloibonok, without positive

results. Bantu diviners and healers had been consulted, again without desired outcome. The capabilities of the school medicine had also been tested with equally poor results. Much time, effort, and also money had been used for getting alleviation to ailments.

There were rumours that the Church could help them. The cure would not be effected by eating pills or through injections. It would require the participation in Christian instruction and joining the Christian community through baptism. This was the reason why people were now coming together in Ruvu River valley. Many of them were hopeful and walked long distances through the roadless savannah. In the minds of many of them, the hope was, however, overshadowed with fear that perhaps there will be no help after all. They knew that there were people who did not get help even through baptism. They also knew that some had died before they got that far.

This was the setting when I, staying inside a hut in a Maasai kraal, heard wailing from the neighbouring hut. After having asked the reason for wailing, I was told that there is a woman there preparing herself for baptismal service, and that her friends are there to help her. After some ten minutes the wailing weakened and finally died down completely. Hurriedly a word was brought to us that the woman had just died. We went quickly to the hut to see whether it really was true. And true it was. The woman was lying on a cow hide – silently. It was very hard to believe that this was true. She looked fully healthy, in the best age, a mother of several children. She seemed to sleep – but she did not breath. People were astonishingly peaceful. They did not start the heart-breaking wailing, so often experienced in such situations. They did not even accuse us, to whom they had laid so much hope. They just took it as a fate. This had to happen and nobody should fight against it.

What was then the reason for the poor woman's death? The common opinion was that a spirit strangled her. It killed her because it was in danger of being spelled out from the woman in baptism. In people's opinion, it was now even more sure than before that the troubles in the woman were caused by a spirit.

What was I, someone from an entirely different culture and with different education, thinking by seeing this? Did the woman die of excessive stress, which reached a breaking point at the moment when the time of taking a critical step in her life approached, and she did not stand the stress? Or was it thanathophobia, fear of death so strong that she in fact died because of fear? Who knows?

This incident and many others have taught me that in spirit possession there certainly is much more than self-induced trance or pretence involved. One cannot die just for fun. There is a thick cloud of mystery surrounding such phenomena, which makes the attempts to analyse these phenomena difficult, if not impossible.

There is vast literature on spirit possession in Africa, as well as on similar phenomena elsewhere in the world. There would not be much point in adding still one more book to the market, if the content would just be repeating what already has been said several times. The motivation for writing this book is in its extraordinary content. While spirit possession phenomena usually get an

established place in societies, with specified cult groups and experts with capabilities of manipulating spirits, the case described here departs radically from the usual course. We see how spirit possession invades a society with force, affecting half of female population, and then fades away almost totally. It would be utterly wrong to claim that the phenomenon fades away without trace, because it transforms the society radically, although in an unforeseen manner.

This book tells the story of spirit possession among the Tanzanian Maasai. Although occasional phenomena had occurred even in the 19th century, the epidemiological and intensified spread concentrated in the 1970s and 1980s. By writing this book the phenomenon is over in most places.

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A strong thrust to this study was given by the joint research team of the Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches, which invited me to join the research team in 1982–83. As a result of this co-operation, a study report in Swahili *Tatizo la Kushikwa na pepo Umasaini Tanzania* (Problem of spirit possession in the Maasai area, Tanzania) appeared in 1985. I wish to thank all the team members, of whom I wish to mention especially Rev. Elias, with whom I visited Terat, Emboret, Naperera, Olkesumet, Kitwai A, and Kijungu in 1983, and Saning'o Milliari, with whom I made a visit to Ilkidomugen, Meserani and Makuyuni, also in 1983. Many thanks to all the team members, on whose survey further research in depth was based. The team included, in one capacity or another, Paulo Lukumay, Frederick Oloishiro, Gabriel Kimirei, Jacob Naputi, Luka Marari, Mathew ole Timan, Saning'o Milliari, Gideon Soombe, Dean Peterson, Mort Kane, Miquel Lanzano, and Antonio. Special mention deserves John ole Rauto, with whom we visited every kraal in the Olkesumet area and acquired statistical data in 1984. Bishop Thomas Laiser of the Lutheran Church was very helpful in arranging the last research visit to the area in November 1996 and Rev. Gabriel Kimirei, Assistant Bishop, has given his positive support

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There are also people, who deserve thanks for their critical and theoretical contribution. Those include the late Peter Rigby, who in very early days pointed out a number of problems in the original research approach, and partly because of this discussion I postponed the treatment of spirit possession and focussed my research on other questions. I also wish to thank Marja-Liisa Swantz, who in many ways has given her constructive contribution. Her work on Zaramo rituals (1970, 1976, 1977) is relevant to the topic, and my research got an initial thrust when I was accepted into her research team in Jipemoyo Project in 1975–76.

Paul Spencer and Aud Talle have read the manuscript and given very valuable comments. I express my cordial thanks to both of them, as well as to Andrew Chesterman, who has corrected the language,

There are many more people who have given their valuable contribution. It is not possible to mention them here, partly because the list would be simply too long, and partly because the maintenance of a degree of anonymity is justified.

1. INTRODUCTION

If I would have been told in the 1960s that spirit possession in Maasai area would be one day a common phenomenon, I would not have believed it. It would have been against all expectations and as such an absurd idea. Of course, spirit possession is a widespread phenomenon in Africa, and also elsewhere, but its wide occurrence in Maasailand did not seem to make sense at all.

The Maasai are known of their monotheistic religion, *Enkai* being their god. According to the mythology, He may appear sometimes as *Enkai Naado*, a Red God, especially when he has reason to be angry and dissatisfied with the behaviour of people. In his anger He may cause disaster and even famine if needed. But normally he appears as *Enkai Narok*, a Black God, who gives people their needs, such as rain, food, health, fodder for livestock, and protection against enemies.

Of course, this is metaphoric speech. *Enkai* himself is not visible or tangible as such. Only his actions can be experienced. The metaphors of red and black get the explanation from the socio-economic circumstances of the Maasai. It is more than expected that dark rain clouds envisage new growth of grass for cattle and therefore they rouse new hope and joy. On the other hand, excessive and prolonged sunshine make the grass wither and the water sources dry up. Weakening and starving cattle become vulnerable to diseases, and milk production – the principal nutrient of the Maasai – dries up. All this is associated with the reddish sun, which rises and sets, day after day, in the hazy horizon. Direct sunshine is never essential for the Maasai economy, and for this reason

sun itself is not a metaphor for life. On the contrary, it foresees diminishing resources, diseases, and ultimately death.

In Maasai cosmology, below *Enkai* there are no lower divinities or categories of spirits. No nature spirits or spirits of animals are known, not at least in collective tradition. Not even spirits of ancestors have been subject to veneration, except perhaps in a few cases, when spirits of some notorious prophets are remembered in rituals and public prayers. Mbatian¹, who lived in northern Tanzania, is one of the great prophets (*oloiboni*, pl. *iloibonok*) who are almost in a status of an ancestral spirit. Yet ancestral veneration is rare, and it is an exception rather than a rule. Maasai cosmology is in sharp contrast with the majority of people in East Africa, where spirits play a major role in cosmology. In the cosmology of the surrounding ethnic groups, which are mostly Bantu, spirits are in fact those agents in the supernatural realm whom people should be concerned about. They can interact with people and witches can manipulate them for their own benefit and for causing harm to other people.

Why have the Maasai not developed a cosmology with spirits? This is a difficult question to answer. One can only try to find illumination from the history and from the socio-economic circumstances. Transhumance as a mode of pastoralism does not seem to allow the development of spirit cults. This is so especially if the spirits are bound to some location, as they normally are. People moving from place to place looking for suitable pasture for livestock have to leave their dead and sacred places behind and thus sacrifice the ties with spirits and ancestors to the sheer survival. This explanation may seem too straightforward to be true, but in its simplicity it is tempting, and may be true.

Be it as it may, traditionally the Maasai are not oriented towards spirit beliefs or ancestor veneration. However, occasionally one hears the spirit name *Olairirwa*, which is sometimes associated with spirits involved in the phenomenon discussed here, or *Kinyamkera*, which takes a shape of a whirlwind and moves fiercely and restlessly here and there in the savannah. Most often, however, the Maasai say that these occasional spirits have nothing to do with the new phenomenon. Therefore, there seems to be no ground for a belief in spirit possession among the Maasai.

However, now, after having studied the phenomenon in the course of more than twenty years, I have been forced to think that it is just the absence of spirits in collective tradition that contributes to the extensive spread of spirit possession in the 1970s and 1980s among the Maasai of Tanzania. As a whole the phenomenon is part of a very complex process of social change, which has strongly influenced the social space of the society.

When I first became acquainted with this phenomenon in 1974 in northern Tanzania, I was struck, as it appeared, by several anomalies in it. While in neighbouring Bantu societies spirit possession had been more or less part of everyday life since times immemorial, here it was a new phenomenon. There

¹ In 1975 I recorded prayers, sung by women in an authentic rain-making ritual, addressed to Mbatian.

were healers and their clients in Bantu societies, and spirit possession was an important means in relieving social stress, particularly among those who had few other possibilities of getting social recognition. Spirit possession and spirit mediumship are long established phenomena, often institutions, in a number of East-African societies. The numbers of people experiencing possession in those societies have remained more or less stable over the years. Among the Maasai, on the other hand, possession phenomena spread like an epidemic, involving in some places as much as a half of the female population. The society itself, the ordinary people ('commoners' in Monica Wilson's [1951] terms) and the medical experts (*iloibonok*) were totally unprepared to cope with this phenomenon.

In the first years of its spread, the phenomenon was very difficult to understand and locate on the social map of the society, not to talk about handling it in some intelligent way. It seemed to violate the Maasai social system, which was reputed of its coherence, to the extent that they were able to resist temptations and ill effects of modernity in times of colonialism as well as in the era of national independence.

I studied the phenomenon intensively in 1974–76, by interviewing a number of people possessed, and by trying to understand it as part of the social change which the society was evidently going through. In order to get better understanding of the value system of the society, I participated several communal rituals and discussed with people many kinds of issues pertaining to their life. I hoped to get sufficiently information and understanding of the aspects relevant to the issue for publishing the results. The task turned out to be difficult, and I had to postpone the attempt. In between I studied, among other things, the social and conceptual structure of one Maa-speaking group, the Parakuyo (Hurskainen 1984).

Now, many years later, things seem somewhat clearer. Much of what was suggested as a hypothesis that time has become true in the course of years. Spirit possession was really an epidemic-like phenomenon, which emerged and spread rather rapidly, and then declined and disappeared in most places. In some badly affected areas one now hardly finds a single incidence of spirit possession. Yet there are a few areas where the phenomenon has continued for decades, without virtually declining at all. These big differences in possession histories call for explanation, or at least some kind of understanding.

My intention here is to describe the whole phenomenon, its history, spread in the Maasai area, attempted means for coping with it, and its role in facilitating social change, which is taking place in accelerating speed in the Maasai society. I also try to describe its epidemiological features as a psychological mass phenomenon, where possession behaviour is partly learnt from others, and where also somatic symptoms occur as a result of psychical stress.

Hopefully the reader will keep in mind that the following description concerns only part of the Maasai area. I have tried to cover, at least summarily, the total area where spirit possession has spread among the Maa-speaking people of Tanzania, including also the Parakuyo. This means that in practice I shall deal with the Kisongo Maasai area south of Arusha and Moshi, and also

the eastern Parakuyo area in Western Bagamoyo District and Handeni District. On the other hand, I shall not say anything about the Maasai of Kenya, and also the western part of the Maasai area of Tanzania will be excluded. The delimitation is based on the reported spread of the phenomenon.

1.1 ABOUT THE MAASAI

The picture transmitted about the Maasai is in many respects distorted. On the one hand, there is plenty of idealisation and nostalgia instigated by the sheer appearance of the Maasai with hordes of cattle, sheep and goats in the endless grass plains. They are viewed with a peculiar mixture of respect, fear and – pity. Respect because of their ability to control an immense area between Lake Victoria and the Indian Ocean coast at the advent of the first Europeans in the 19th century, and because of their culture strong enough to resist the temptations of the modern world. Fear because of their reputed military force based on the age-set system. And now later also pity, because many think that the Maasai way of life has kept them out of reach of modern education and of benefits brought by it, and that ultimately their mode of life is doomed to failure.

For the Maasai themselves, life has less glamour and more constant fight against factors that threaten the basis of their mode of life, against drought and intruders of various kinds that threaten to take gradually all the fertile areas to the so-called productive use, such as mechanised agriculture, for example. And more than that, it is not that the Maasai have stubbornly resisted innovations brought from outside. Rather they have been eclectic and considerate, weighing gains and losses brought by innovations. And because the offers given have not promised much improvement in the pastoral mode of life, relatively little has changed.

To be honest, the Maasai have conducted exceptionally harsh life in semi-arid plains, where agriculture is hardly possible. Although clashes between various people over the control of certain areas are inevitable and part of the history, by large the Maasai have occupied different kinds of lands than the people practising agriculture. Open grasslands, favoured by pastoralists, are not necessarily ideal for agriculture because of insufficient rains. On the other hand, fertile soils in river valleys, mountain fringes, and in high rainfall areas are often unsuitable for livestock herding because of cattle diseases (especially *trypanosomiasis* infested by tsetse-fly). Therefore, over the years there has been a degree of natural division in selecting soils for different kinds of economical appropriation, the pastoralists preferring tsetse-free open areas, while agriculturalists have favoured areas with higher rainfall, but which at the same time are infested by tsetse-flies.

This basic division of economies according to types of soils has been disturbed over the years by a number of factors. The colonial occupation in the end of the 19th century caused a major disturbance. The Kikuyu in the Kenya Highlands were pushed away from the most fertile areas, and they caused stress

to the areas occupied by the Maasai and other pastoralists. Also the manoeuvres of the colonial administration to move the Maasai away from the area north of the Mombasa-Kampala railway had disastrous effects on the Maasai. The consequences would have been even more severe if it would have happened in a time prior to the Rinderpest Panzootic, which killed most of the livestock and people depending on pastoralism. In later times, however the rapid increase of livestock as well as of population has caused cumulatively increasing stress on soils, and clashes between various people over resources have been common.

Therefore, although pastoralism as a mode of life is often associated with a sense of freedom, in fact it is most often continuous fight for resources, while at the same time attempting to maintain the inherited mode of life and culture. The danger of clashes of conflicting interests between different ethnic groups became intensified particularly in years of draught, when pastoralists had to seek for fodder in river valleys and areas with higher rainfall. These contacts have given the pastoralists opportunities to follow the lives of non-pastoralists and adopt some customs from them.

Who are the Maasai? Often all those people are counted among the Maasai who speak one of the dialects of the Maa language. Using this criterion, the following dialects of Maa language would be included: Maasai Proper, Samburu, Tiamus, Arusha, and Parakuyo. But even this division is not satisfactory. The group 'Maasai' includes a vast area from central Kenya to central Tanzania, with several local divisions and variations in language use. However, in relation to people who do not speak any of the Maa dialects, the term 'Maasai' applies to all these groups. When speaking of people inside this dialect cluster, the Maa-speakers often mean with the term 'Maasai' only those, who above are referred to as Maasai Proper.

1.2 CONSIDERATIONS ON STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Although there is enormous literature on spirit possession available, very little is known about them beyond the fact that such phenomena exist in the given society and that there are various types of such phenomena. Very much of research is descriptive, and various phenomena are treated as if they were beads of the same size in the bead-string. The researcher may, and often does, elicit one or two of them as more important than others, as an *explanans*, an interpretative factor, for other factors which are in the role of *explanandum*, factors to be explained. The researcher does the choice often intuitively, relying on one's own feeling. By good luck the choice may be correct, but luck one needs indeed. By bad luck, and this is the more common case, we are left on the mercy of the researcher's own interpretation, if inferences made are not supported by any kind of quantitative data.

It is quite a different thing to say that there occur spirit possession phenomena among the Maasai, than to say that in a certain survey almost one

half (47%) of adult females had experienced spirit possession phenomena. It is also much more important to know that in almost half of the spirit possession cases the women had reproductive problems, than to hear that reproductive problems were among the over 100 symptoms of spirit possession. We may give many more examples to show the significance of quantitative data. Why they are available only in extremely rare cases is hard to know. One reason may be that such data are very difficult to obtain.

One should not exaggerate the significance of quantitative data either. They simply help to understand the comparative weigh of each factor in relation to other factors, and thus help in constructing the total structure of the phenomenon. The real 'stuff' still resides in qualitative data, but now each piece of data finds its own slot and is not used to support a claim which it should not.

In this study, quantitative data have been used wherever it has proved to be feasible. However, because this is not a comparative study, the level of sophistication in using statistical methods has been kept low. Only simple quantities, frequencies and percentages have been counted, and results have been presented in tabular and graphic form. The study is basically qualitative and examples from primary data have been used extensively for illustrating and substantiating the issues discussed.

2. RESEARCH MATERIAL

The data for the research were obtained through sporadic field research between the years 1970 and 1996. The earliest 20 case histories (p1–p20, see Appendix V) were recorded by David Peterson in 1970. His manuscript from 1971, which contains case histories in English, as well as a brief analysis and summary of the cases, constitutes the oldest written description of the epidemic spirit possession in the area of Naperera, Olkesumet and Ruvu Remiti.

Assisted by Steven Wanga, I started the research in late 1974 in the Maasai area south of Arusha, and in 1975 and 1976 I carried out field research mainly among the Parakuyo, a southern branch of the Maa-speakers in the Bagamoyo District, but also to some extent in the north, close to Arusha. I moved to study the Parakuyo area in the south, because I was offered a possibility to work in the Jipemoyo Project research team in Western Bagamoyo District, and the Maasai-speaking Parakuyo were living as a small minority in the research area. A substantial part of case recordings (a total of 28) of this research are from that area and from that time. Almost all the case histories were recorded on tape, but some of them were filled on interview schedules. In this work I got invaluable assistance from Yonas Wanga, a son of Steven Wanga's elder brother, Reuben, who had moved to Lugoba from Arusha. Yonas also helped me in interpreting Maa language, in which tapes were recorded. Because part of the time I was living in the north, east of Arusha, I also had opportunities to carry out field research in the north, among the Maasai. During those visits to the Maasai area I

was accompanied by Steven Wanga, who also helped me in transcribing tapes in Maasai language.

The recordings were supplemented by field notes, which were necessary for recording all relevant contextual information.

In the course of the research, and partly motivated by critical discussions with the Jipemoyo Project² team members, my research interest expanded to such issues as the age-set and clan structure of the Parakuyo, and the rituals associated with status transition. The participation in numerous rituals, presumably those connected with initiation, enabled me to observe a number of cases where trance behaviour was actualised among women and men alike. Particularly the prolonged dancing of warriors, which often involved violent trance behaviour, as well as other situations with strong emotional movements, offered possibilities to observe people and interview them afterwards. It was found that also women have trance behaviour in connection with rituals, although it is not as pronounced, and, I should say, as institutionalised as the trance of warriors.

Further field research on spirit possession was carried out again in 1982 and 1983, together with the research teams established by the Lutheran and Catholic Churches in the Arusha Region³. The motivation for establishing such joint research teams was the need to understand the phenomenon in more detail, and to find out the extent of its spread. The views of those two churches in regard to the spirit possession phenomenon were initially so different that a joint study was felt to be necessary in order to avoid open conflict. The research teams, composed of workers, mostly clergy of both churches, carried out field surveys in the area. In June 22–30 1982 one team, led by Saning'o Milliari, surveyed the area of Oloiborsiret, Etilata, Terat, Narosera, Kitwai A, and Olkesumet. Another team, directed by Mort Kane from Kijungu, and Jacob Naputi from Olkesumet, continued the work in the southern area in August 11–20 1982 in such places as Kibirashi and Kijungu. The work of those teams was discussed and evaluated in meetings of steering committees after each field trip.

On the basis of that survey, I, together with representatives of the team, carried out more detailed research in Terat, Emboret, Naperera, Olkesumet, Kitwai A in January 1983, and again in Ilkidomugen, Meserani, and Makuyuni in February 1983. A number of interviews of possession cases were made during those field trips.

A detailed area survey was carried out in the Olkesumet area in 1984. All kraals, 22 in total, were visited, demographical data were obtained, and possession cases were recorded. Most of the data in tables 1-4 are based on this survey.

² Jipemoyo Project was a joint research project between Tanzania and Finland, applying and testing participatory research approach in the Western Bagamoyo District. The approach has since then received wide acceptance in development-oriented research Swatz.

³ For details of that research, see Appendices VI-VII and Hurskainen 1984.

In the years 1989–92 I obtained comparative material of spirit possession from the coastal area as well as from the islands of Zanzibar, Pemba and Mafya, when I was involved, together with the researchers of TUKI (Taasisi ya Uchunguzi wa Kiswahili, Dar-es-Salaam), in the survey of Swahili language and culture. Also this information contributes to the general understanding of these phenomena, since spirit possession was a subject of part of the discussions in the survey.

In November 1996 I carried out a final brief survey in the Maasai area south of Arusha and Moshi. The purpose of this survey was to find out the situation at that time, and especially to see how the phenomenon had changed differently in various areas. I also made a number of interviews, some of which have been included into the list of case histories (cases p-78–p-91).

The research material consists of a total of 91 case histories of spirit possession, and a number of interviews carried out with other people relevant to the study, such as elders, husbands, traditional healers (*iloibonok*), teachers, pastors, evangelists, etc. Also observation was an important source of information, especially because it provided first-hand knowledge of what actually happened in various instances where spirit possession was activated.

One should not either underestimate the significance of the insights obtained by studying other aspects of the society, such as the kin structure, age-set structure, symbolism, and the economical and social roles attached to each group of people. The behaviour of people in different social categories in various contexts has helped to place the spirit possession phenomena into relevant frames of reference.

In order to understand these phenomena, it is necessary to relate them to similar phenomena in other areas, especially those which have been in contact with the Maasai area, directly or indirectly. Such are Bantu areas on the coast and adjacent areas in the south. Names of ethnic groups which frequently occur in case histories as instigators of spirit possession into the Maasai area are, for example, the Bondei in the coastal area, the Nguu in the south, and the Zigua in the south-east. It is important to know what roles spirit possession plays in those and related societies, how people view them, and how the phenomena are treated by the healers.

Since spirit possession is a phenomenon with a wide distribution in Africa, it is fruitful to relate these local spirit possession phenomena to the wide field of possession world wide, but particularly to those found in Africa. We will find, after all, that the phenomena in Maasai area have several similarities with those in other areas. The possession phenomena in the Somali society are particularly relevant in this respect. They are part of the spirit possession cult complex known as *zar* or *bori* in different areas. These cults extend from Senegal in the west to Iran in the east, covering much of the Islamic area in northern Africa. Although these are established cults with cult leaders and rather fixed forms, they seem to serve very similar purposes as those found in the Maasai area.

2.1 ARRANGING AND ENCODING FIELD DATA

The field-work material consists of the following types of material:

1. There are case histories, either recorded on tape or noted down on the interview schedule (see Appendix V), a total of 91 histories. The cases are numbered and the names of persons concerned have been omitted for ethical reasons. Each case is thus identified by its case number (eg. [p-45] indicates case no. 45). Cases p-1 through p-20 have been received as they were in the report of Peterson (1971) and modified to meet the structure of the other case histories. However, the original reports have been retained as source material. The language of cases p-1 through p-20 is English. Other case histories are partly in Maasai and partly in Swahili. Most case histories are translated also into English. The information of all these case histories has been modified to meet the structure of the interview schedule, and the information is stored in a structured database, each item identified with its code number. This facilitates the accurate and reliable search of different types of information about all the cases. This has been an invaluable source of information in writing many parts of this report. Unfortunately its large size does not allow us to reproduce it here.
2. Background material, such as discussions with medical healers about spirits and spirit possession and observations related to the subject (Appendix II, index codes are of the type [b-1], [b-2], etc.).
3. Tapes from 1975–1976 containing different kinds of information related to spirit possession. These tapes are part of Jipemoyo Project Archives. They are partly in Maa and partly in Swahili language. Transcriptions are made in the original language. Part of the contents of these tapes has been translated into English (included into Appendix II).
4. Field notes were recorded daily with a pen into notebooks. Because the field notes do not constitute an ordered archive, these are used as a background information without making reference to them specifically.
5. Reports of the joint research teams of the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church in 1982 (Appendices VI-VII).
6. Tapes (6 hours) from the field-work trip in 1996 contain many types of interviewing material, part of them being case histories. These tapes are partly in Maa and partly in Swahili language. Portions of discussions are translated also into English (included into Appendix IV).

All transcriptions in Maasai and Swahili and all translations into English have been done by the author.

3. THE ORIGIN OF SPIRIT POSSESSION IN THE MAASAI AREA

The question of the origin of a phenomenon, institution or belief may sound old-fashioned. Such questions were asked and studied in the 18th and 19th centuries, when detailed field-work was still a rare phenomenon. We know now that many phenomena and institutions do not have an ultimate origin or beginning, or if they have, there are no means of finding out the very moment of origin. They are often a result of several factors, and they themselves are not more than a passing phase in the continuous process of social change. This concerns also spirit possession phenomena. Such a question as, 'Where does the belief in spirit possession originate?' is ultimately beyond our ability to answer. Why should we then ask such a question, if we cannot reply it?

I think that the history of spirit possession in the Maasai area is different from the surrounding areas, and for this reason the question is justified. I would hesitate to study such a question in one of those Bantu societies surrounding the Maasai area. There the phenomenon is an established social institution with a history beyond people's memory, and the attempt to trace the origin would be mere guesswork. In the Maasai area things are different. There it is possible to trace the beginning of this phenomenon among these particular people. One can also follow its spread and development in different parts of the Maasai area. This is what I try to do in this section.

One basic thing in assessing the history of spirit possession among the Maasai is that it is told to be 'a totally new phenomenon' among them. There was a time, not long ago in their history, when such phenomena did not occur. When I say this, I only mean that the concept of spirit possession, termed in Maasai language as *eibung'ita e 'mbepo*, or *eibung'ita o 'lpepo*⁴, and in Swahili as *kushikwa na pepo*, was unknown not long ago. The phrasing of the concept in Maasai reveals that the term for spirit (*embepo* [fem.] < *pepo*; *olpepo* [masc.] < *pepo*) is derived from Swahili. This does not mean that no such ailments, pains and troubles, which today are interpreted in terms of spirit possession, were there earlier. In fact part of cases, which today are considered as spirit intervention, would earlier have received another type of explanation. Yet the vast majority of cases discussed here reveal symptoms which are typical of an epidemiological spirit possession syndrome. They would not fit easily into the older disease categories of the Maasai.

The key factor in the emergence of spirit possession among the Maasai is the contact with those ethnic groups, which have such phenomena in their tradition. The first evidence of these phenomena is tied up with the Great Rinderpest panzootic in the 1890s, which not only decimated almost all livestock in East Africa (over 90% according to some estimates), but caused big damage in a large area as far as Niger and Senegal (Koponen 1994: 591–595). After having lost livestock, pastoralists, those who survived starvation and diseases, such as

⁴ the first is a feminine and the second a masculine form of the noun, meaning 'being caught by a spirit'

smallpox and leishmaniasis, had to try to seek refuge among agriculturalists, whose economical basis was also badly destroyed by locusts and diseases of various kinds. In those desperate circumstances the Maasai, and also their close 'relatives', Parakuyo, were forced to come to close contact with the Bantu people surrounding the Maasai plain.

At this time they also came to know better the Bantu beliefs in spirits. Since each healing system is based on some kind of cosmology, or a system of beliefs, the Bantu healing operated within the framework of this cosmology. In other words, healing does not operate in a vacuum, but is tightly connected with what people believe to be the causes of illness, and how such ailments should be cured.

In these entirely new circumstances, let them be measured in terms of economy, ecology, culture, or, even more importantly, social status, the Maasai became subject to many kinds of influences. Just a few years before the catastrophic panzootic, they had been unchallenged rulers of the vast plains of Kenya and Tanzania, numbering perhaps as many as half a million people. Suddenly their numbers had been reduced to merely 100,000 or a bit more (Baumann 1891: 165). This hunger catastrophe, known as *olameyu* by the Maasai (Lemenye 1953), meant an abrupt end to the domination of the plains by the Maasai. It was also a blow against the traditional pride and forced the survivors to rethink their values.

The series of catastrophes did not, however, mean the end of Maasai culture. Those who had managed to save their lives in the coastal area and in the islands of the Indian Ocean returned to the plains as soon as they had managed to rebuild their herds big enough to secure their economy through pastoralism. The fact that the Maasai culture survived this disaster shows the immense strength of culture even in utmost difficulties. The Maasai did not end up with serfdom and with performing menial tasks in farms and plantations. The pastoral ideal as a mode of existence survived. Yes, it is more than mode of economy; it includes the overall orientation towards life, and all phenomena around are seen and evaluated from that viewpoint.

When the Maasai returned back from the unwanted exodus to the Bantu areas, they came with many kinds of memories and experiences from the times which they had lived with the Bantu. They had learned that the spirit world is extremely important to take account of in everyday life. This must have been a source of astonishment to the Maasai, whose cosmology does not have this realm, not at least to the extent that special rituals or cults would have developed around such beliefs. They had learned that, for the Bantu, not only ancestral spirits were important for the sustenance of healthy life, but that there are also myriads of all kinds of nature spirits and animal spirits, as well as spirits which do not have counterparts in the world of the living. How fully these Bantu cosmologies were grasped by the Maasai is not known. But certainly they must have had influence on the world view of the Maasai, at least on the individual level.

The population catastrophe and mass movement of the Maasai in the end of the 19th century is certainly not the only one of its kind in their history. Obviously they have had to search for refuge among other ethnic groups also earlier. But unfortunately we do not have records of those movements. The catastrophe, which took place 100 years ago, was certainly one of the most devastating ones, forcing practically all surviving Maasai to move to the proximity of other ethnic groups, which earlier had been more or less their enemies. From this tour they brought back knowledge of the existence of spirits, of their behaviour, and of how they should be treated.

It is therefore no wonder that the earliest reports of spirit possession in the Maasai area date back to the time of returning from exile. When did they actually return home? Oral traditions maintain that it was in the time when the age-set of Iltwati were morans. This does not give us accurate figures, since the warrior period of Iltwati was in 1896–1917 (Jacobs 1968: 16). Obviously they returned back in the course of several years, perhaps in small groups, as soon as economical conditions permitted it (Petersen 1971). Both the Maasai and the Parakuyo have a tradition that first signs of spirit possession in their area occurred in this period ([p78]).

The phenomena were, however, sporadic, and they had no major effect on Maasai culture. But it was the beginning, and it brought the Bantu healers to the Maasai area, because they were able to treat these phenomena, which were quite foreign to the Maasai healers, *iloibonok*.

The oral tradition maintains that spirit possession in the Maasai area declined or disappeared completely for decades. The next appearances of spirit possession are reported to date back to the years 1932–35. In those years, cases were found in Naperera area. From other oral sources we learn that such phenomena were found there in the time which is known as *olari le 'ndek* (the year of an air plain)⁵. Probably the first one with spirit possession was an elderly woman, who had pains all over the body. There were also some other cases.

Starting from the year 1965, there were more spirit possession cases in Naperera. Already this time there was also the habit of beating *debe* drums for appeasing spirits. Also children are reported to have been caught, due to hearing drums beaten⁶.

The case histories of spirit possession give a somewhat different, and probably a more precise, picture of the first occurrences of spirit possession in the Maasai area. Table 1 summarises the first occurrence of possession of each interviewed person, as far as information was available. It shows that the decade 1961–70 was the most intensive period with 31 cases, followed by the decade 1971–80 with 17 cases. The most intensive years of spirit possession were 1967–1970 with a total of 20 cases during those four years alone. On the other hand, sporadic cases were reported from all decades of the twentieth century, except for 1911–20 when there were no cases in this sample. The period before

⁵ An aircraft crashed down in the area in 1939.

⁶ Informed by Stephania ole Lemdaki, Evangelist, 12.1.1983.

the 1960s, however, was characterised by sporadic cases here and there, and it never reached epidemiological dimensions anywhere.

The case histories show a sharp decline of spirit possession cases in the 1980s, conforming to the information received also through oral tradition. By that time the peak of the phenomenon seemed to be over, and the occurrence of new cases was becoming increasingly rare. This fits well to the epidemiological nature of the phenomenon.

One should be cautious in interpreting the reports of some old people, who date the first occurrence of their spirit possession experiences back to early childhood. It is possible that they are post hoc interpretations of the ailments which they experienced in the early childhood, while earlier at the time when they actually were children the troubles were attributed to some other causes. Similar kinds of post hoc rationalisations can be found also in later case histories, as we shall see below.

Table 1. The first experience of spirit possession as reported in case histories. The year as well as the case numbers for each year is shown.⁷

1900+ 3	1965 27, 89
1910 30	1966 86
1924 21	1967 4, 14, 15, 32, 39
1931 22	1968 2, 18, 38, 61, 72
1936 44	1969 5, 19, 46, 55
1938 31	1970 24, 57, 58, 62, 70, 71
1941 49	1972 42
1943 41	1972 90
1946 51	1973 65
1950 36, 50	1974 23, 33, 47, 88
1951 6	1975 34, 48, 53
1953 53	1976 68, 69
1954 16	1977 76
1955 12	1978 60, 73, 74
1956 1	1980 67
1957 8, 35, 40	1981 75
1960 26, 66	1984 81
1961 11, 20, 25, 43	1987 79, 85
1962 17	1993 84
1963 7	Not known 9, 10, 29, 37, 45, 54, 56, 59, 63, 64, 77, 78, 80, 82, 83
1964 28, 87	

⁷ The data in Table 1 do not directly reflect the facts, since the number of interviews was insufficient for statistical generalisation. Moreover, interviews were carried out in four different periods (1971, 1976, 1983, and 1996), and therefore the sample of recent cases was rather small.

There is little doubt that the spirit possession spread to the Maasai area from the surrounding ethnic groups, notably the Nguu in the south as well as the Bondei and the Zigua in the east and south-east. Also names of other groups, such as the Gogo, the Pare, and the Kwere are mentioned. It is logical to think that the phenomenon first spread among the people close to the Bantu areas. The data also support this view. Kiberashi and Kijungu seem to be among the first to experience spirit possession in any significant degree. From there it spread northwards to Kitwai and Loonderkes. The valley of the Ruvu River also had its first cases in and this is largely explained by the proximity of the Pare and Shambaa people in the east. From Ruvu, the phenomenon spread westward to Olkesumet, Namalulu, Naperera, and Lendanai. The extensive spread of the phenomenon in these areas took place in the 1960s and the early 1970s, after which it started to decline.

The areas to the west, such as Terat and other areas of Simanjiro, were reached by spirit possession soon afterwards, as well as some areas in the north, such as Kerere and Shambarai, where the first cases appeared around 1970. The phenomenon had reached the area of Meserani by 1970, and the area of Makuyuni in 1974–75. By the beginning of the 1980s there had been a few cases further in the west, such as Mto wa Mbu and Engaruka, and also a few cases had been found in Longido on the border of Kenya. Further in the west, in places such as Ngorongoro and Loliondo, no cases were reported. Also the area north of Mount Meru was still free of spirit possession in 1985 when I surveyed the area. The Maasai area in Kenya was reported to be practically free of spirit possession phenomena. From that area no cases of spirit possession were heard, although fundamental processes of social, cultural and economic change took place there.

Further south in Tanzania the situation was quite different. The phenomenon was said to have 'originated' on the southern and south-eastern fringes of the Maasai area of Tanzania, including the Parakuyo of that area. The phenomenon has extended still further south-west, as far as the Usangu Plain north-east of Mbeya, which is the capital of Mbeya Region. The Parakuyo started to move to that area in the middle decades of the 20th century, and the immigration has continued, and even increased, since that time. Beidelman (1960) mentions their existence there, and the National Population Census (1967) reports 398 'Maasai' living there, although in fact almost all were Parakuyo. The area is infested by tsetse fly, but the Parakuyo have managed to herd cattle in those plains, where grass growth is much better than in drier areas in the north.

When I visited the area in 1984, spirit possession was already rather common there. On the other hand, in 1968, when I was living in Kidugala south-east of the Usangu Plain for some time, the phenomenon was not yet known. At least no reports were heard about it. The Parakuyo with whom I was in contact that time did not mention about it. The information which I received in 1984 during my visit to the area confirmed that the phenomenon had come there 'recently'. Yet it was extensive already that time, and it has, according to the information available, continued to increase over the years. It is possible that in the middle of

the 1990s, the big meetings arranged by the Lutheran Church together with the Maasai *oloiboni Tokoti* from Kenya in different places around the Maasai area, has indirectly and unintendedly spread spirit possession in different areas, including the Usangu Plain. This is, however, only a hypothesis without sufficient verification.

Perhaps more important in the spread of spirit possession to such a remote area, hundreds of kilometres away from other Parakuyo localities, is the Parakuyo communication system and the general social structure. Despite long distances, they communicate with each other intensively, and what is happening in one area is soon known in the other. Both the clan system and the age-set system (Hurskainen 1984: 129–173) favour the efficient communication within the society.

Another factor in spreading impulses and influences to the Parakuyo of Usangu Plain from other Parakuyo and Maasai areas is that the area finds itself peripheral and is therefore willing to receive insights, in good and bad, from the more central areas. The Parakuyo are divided into two major sections, each headed by a leading *oloiboni kitok*. The *oloiboni kitok* of the south-western section, to which the Usangu Plain belongs, acknowledges the *oloiboni kitok* of the north-eastern section as the head of all the Parakuyo. Therefore, what is happening elsewhere is considered carefully in Usangu Plains, spirit possession being one of the new puzzling phenomena.

In Usangu Plains, the treatment of spirit possession is not much different from the practice found in other areas. Bantu healers appease spirits with traditional methods, and the church has involved itself in treating people inflicted by spirits. At least the Lutheran Church, the Pentecostals and the Seventh Day Adventists operate there among the Parakuyo.

Although I have no detailed evidence from other remote Parakuyo areas, such as the area west of Iringa in the Ruaha Valley, according to the information received from the central office of the Lutheran Church in 1995, spirit possession has spread also there. No detailed statistical information exists, though. According to the National Population Census (1967) there were 2609 'Maasai' in Iringa Region. Almost all of them must have been Parakuyo. Reports from the 1990s from that area tell that spirit possession is also there one of the major phenomena, and that the local churches have taken it into consideration in their work, much in the same way as churches have treated spirit possession elsewhere. Also there, spirit possession functions as an agent of cultural and social change.

4. SPIRIT POSSESSION IN AFRICA

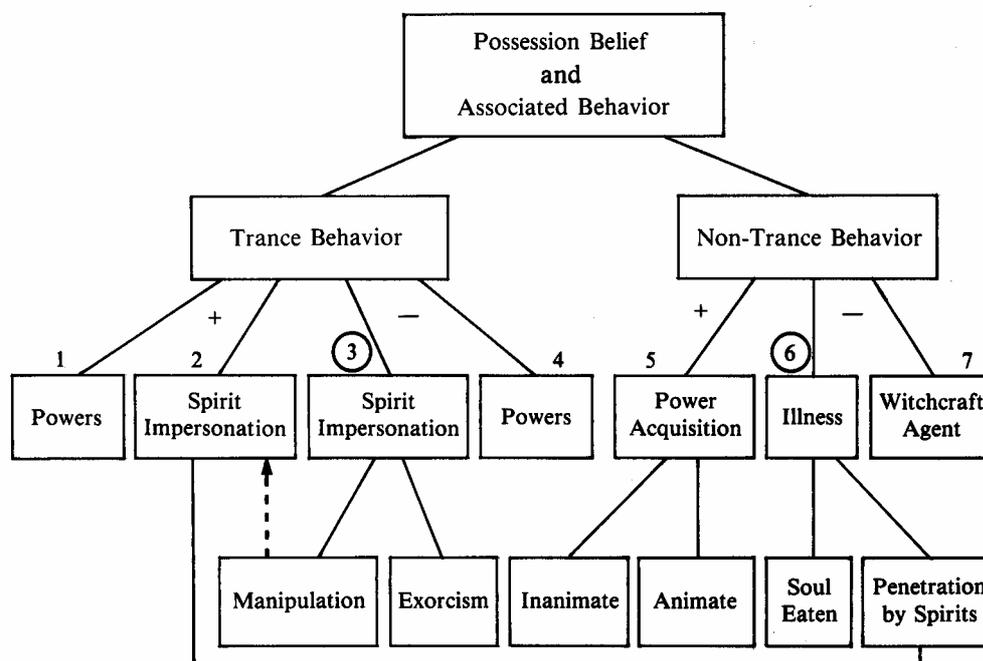
In a cross-cultural survey on spirit possession, Erika Bourguignon (1968, 1976) found out that in 74 % of the societies there were beliefs in spirit possession. The study was based on the Ethnographic atlas (Murdock 1967), from which a representative sample of 488 societies was extracted. The geographical area covers the whole world. However, interesting differences in frequency were found between geographical areas. The highest incidence (88 %) was found in the Insular Pacific, and the lowest (52 %) in aboriginal North America. The incidence of spirit possession in South America was the second lowest (64 %), while the rest of the world ranged from the 77 % for the Circum-Mediterranean region upwards to 88 %. According to this survey, spirit possession beliefs on the American continent are remarkably lower than in the Old World.

For the purposes of comparison, Bourguignon divided possession beliefs and associated behaviour into two main categories: those with trance behaviour and those with non-trance behaviour (Bourguignon 1968: 10; 1976: 19).⁸ These two basic types are further sub-divided into categories according to the presence or absence of certain features, and appropriate actions taken in each case are also shown. Figure 1 is an adapted version of the diagram of Bourguignon (1968, 1971), and it shows the types of possession found among the Maasai. We see that possession with trance and possession without trance are found. The division according to the presence or absence of trance is partly artificial, which is also shown in the diagram. Non-trance spirit possession revealing itself in the form of illness may lead to penetration by spirits, and this again to spirit impersonation with trance behaviour. This in fact takes place in Maasai spirit possession.

Knutsson (1975) paid attention to another distinction, which often has been ignored. Possession phenomena can be grouped according to whether they are institutionalised or not. In cases where possession has found established forms with initiated cult groups, possession is domesticated and it is viewed as a positive experience, which is actively sought for. Spontaneous and unpredictable possession, on the other hand, is regarded as harmful and fearsome, and efforts are made to get rid of intruding spirits. This distinction is relevant in the Maasai case, because it is the latter type which is dominant there.

⁸ Oesterreich (1922) had earlier compiled multitudes of information on possession from literature. He classified the material according to whether possession was 'voluntary' or 'involuntary'. This roughly parallels the division made by Bourguignon.

Figure 1. Possession belief and associated behaviour (adapted from Bourguignon 1878 and 1971).



4.1 SPIRIT POSSESSION IN EAST AFRICA

Various forms of spirit possession are a common phenomenon in Africa. A society such as the Maasai, where spirit possession has traditionally been almost unknown, is an exception. Rather commonly, different categories of spirits from a central part of cosmology in African traditional societies. Many ailments and diseases are even today, in the time of modernisation, interpreted in terms of affliction by spirits, including also deceased clan elders, who are thought to expect proper treatment by their living descendants.

Since the Maasai cosmology lacks the important category of spirits, it is not easy to find cases which are parallel to or easily comparable with that of the Maasai. However, below I shall discuss a few such cases which seem to have relevance to the present study.

Ethnically closest to the Maasai, with attested reports of spirit possession, are perhaps the Luo (Whisson 1964), who also speak a Nilotic language. Although the Luo and Maasai belong to different branches (Luo to the Western and Maasai to the Eastern) of this language family, and although the Luo practise primarily agriculture, culturally these people have many similarities. Much like the Maa-speaking Arusha, also the Luo are culturally and mentally pastoralists, although they only rarely can fulfil this ideal in practice. However, unlike the Maasai, the Luo have developed a rich, although not very systematic, belief system with categories of spirits. Ancestral spirits are one of the two main

categories, and people are expected to follow given rules of behaviour to avoid ritual impurity (*chira*). If the expectations of the ancestors are not fulfilled, the spirits may punish the descendants by sending diseases or misfortune to remind them of their duties. The relation with the ancestors could be restored through propitiation rituals and promise of a better conduct.

Witchcraft and sorcery are also a common cause of illnesses, but quite separate from them is the class of spirits, which are free to roam the world, but which in practice are associated with natural phenomena and certain places.⁹ Belief in those spirits has caused the development of a set of cults, each confined to a certain group of spirits. General ill-being and failure to respond to other types of treatment were often regarded as an indication of spirit infliction. While the healers were regularly those who earlier had been possessed by the respective spirit, the healing process created a permanent bond between the adherents of each cult group. As Whisson (1964: 296–302) shows, curing is a long process and is much more costly than the treatment of 'ordinary' diseases. Spirit possession and curing rituals are an established institution with a fairly well-defined structure, to which the members of the society become acquainted with in early childhood by watching healing rituals. Spirits are not driven away; rather they are nurtured and entertained. Therefore, in many respects spirit possession among the Luo is very different from that by the Maasai.

H. Koritschoner (1936) wrote about women in coastal Tanzania, who were caught by the 'illness of Sheitani'. The women had symptoms very similar to those found among the Maasai. The women were taken to local *waganga* who performed healing rituals. The spirits, speaking with the mouths of the hosts, demanded various kinds of gifts and services. Drumming was a way of diagnosing what the spirits wanted, as well as the cure itself. The *mganga* had people to assist in drumming, and often not only the patient but also her husband and other family members were present. The woman was a centre of a number of people, and all her wishes, interpreted to be wishes of the spirit(s), were fulfilled.

In the beginning of the 20th century, G. Lindblom (1920) studied the Kamba of Kenya reporting that women in that society were very much inflicted by foreign spirits, *mbepo*. For example, a woman possessed by a spirit called Mmasai would want a spear, red garment, club, etc. One possessed by a Mzungu would require things possessed by Europeans. The way of helping those women was to give them what the spirits wanted. Lindblom thought that this was the method of women to get things that they wanted and which they in other ways would not get. The method of healing among the Kamba was drum beating. The woman would first be covered by a cloth, and in the course of drumming the spirit would speak up and she would start dancing and ask for things the *mbepo* demands.

⁹ Some spirits were confined to the islands of Lake Victoria, other to rivers and lakes, and some to the sun and water snake, etc. Each of those spirits was associated with a specific possession cult and its practitioners (Whisson 1964: 287).

In the time of Lindblom, there was in Ukamba also a spirit called Kjesu or Kijesu, who was thought to have come from Europe. This spirit also had its drumming cult and it demanded things used by Europeans. The spirit was fierce and made the victim to fall down and shake. The spirit also spread rapidly over the area like an epidemic.

We have further information on spirit possession from the eastern part of Kenya, the Taita Hills (Harris 1957). Spirits in that area were called with a generic name *pepo* or *saka*, the latter being more common. It was thought that *saka* are foreign spirits who came there from other areas to cause trouble and illnesses. When the spirits were appeased by drumming, they spoke languages unknown to the local people. In some areas even half of women were said to have been affected, and also some men and unmarried girls were inflicted. However, it was more a trouble of married women. The usual way of treating those possessed was drumming at night. It was common that the spirits wanted things normally used by men, or items difficult to obtain. It was reported that drum beating helps the victims for a while. Part on women sought help also from the Church.

An interesting case of spirit possession is the Tonga society of Zambia (Colson 1969). The Tonga were divided into two groups, the Plateau Tonga and the Valley Tonga. The former had access to modern economic activities since the 1930s, and therefore the men did have no necessity to seek for income in distant places. Both men and women had access to modern activities, and the number of spirit possession cases was minimal. Those few who were possessed were women and men alike.

The Valley Tonga were in a quite different position. Their men had for many years been forced to move to distant mining areas to get jobs. There they also learned modern life styles. Women were forced to live at home and they only heard about a different kind of life in cities and luxuries there. Spirit possession was quite common among them, and the spirits, the *masabe*, often demanded things which were available in cities. By succumbing to spirit possession the women got access to things which otherwise were out of their reach.

O'Connell (1982) draws attention to the relationship between the role of stress and spirit possession among the Xesibe of Eastern Transkei. Possession among them, and other Nguni-speaking peoples, such as Xhosa, was called *intwaso*, and it was found among men and women, young and old. Although it was widely spread and commonly known, it afflicted only a small portion of the population. In the case surveyed by O'Connell, a total of 1.15% of the population experienced *intwaso* (11 out of 956 people). *Intwaso* was an established phenomenon, and the victims were normally expected to become diviners. Spirit possession was thus a divine calling to become an expert in healing.

The symptoms of *intwaso* included palpitation of heart, a sinking sensation in the solar plexus, restlessness, and even listlessness, which all seem to be linked to fear and anxiety. Because *intwaso* actualised in stress situations, it was

most commonly found among married women. They lived in stressful life conditions because of a number of factors. Their husbands were often working far away from home for months consecutively, and, in addition to having to fulfil the multiple tasks in the daily life of the family, they were expected to be faithful to their husbands. Spirit possession was then considered a culturally acceptable adaptive mechanism in a stressful situation.

In mainland Tanzania, the Kimbu and Nyamwezi were afflicted by spirits called *migawo* (Shorter 1970). These spirits, which were thought to be of foreign origin, afflicted mainly women. Also men with mental, physical or social problems were likely to be affected. Spirit possession in those areas was known already during the time when the railway was opened during the World War I. It seems that *migawo* are related to the spirits on the coast known as *shetani*. Both types of spirits were reported to have come from the coast, obviously through caravan traders first and through other contacts later. Spirit possession was found mainly among women who wanted to get rid of a difficult situation, to avoid an unpleasant task, or who wanted to get objects or services, which otherwise were difficult or impossible to get.

In Ukimbu spirit possession continued spreading and was developed into secret cults with initiated specialists leading the sessions. Access to these cults and ultimately to leading positions was through falling ill first because of afflicting spirits. Like in the coastal area, also here the healers themselves had first been ill.

In north-eastern Tanzania, among the Segeju, spirit possession was greatly influenced by Islam (Gray 1969). The group names of spirits were *mashetani* and *jinn*, both Islamic in origin, and the leader of these spirits was Iblis. People troubled by spirits were treated in drumming sessions, and after treatment they became cult members and participated cult sessions later. Also ethnic names, such as Kimasai, Kipemba, Mafira, and Kigala were found as names of spirits. The usual means of treating afflictions was through *kupunga pepo*. This was performed by drumming, dancing and by eating good food. These sessions were normally attended by crowds of people, and a session might last a whole week. Gray thinks that the cult of *shetani* had been there already before Islam spread to the coast, although with a different name. Although nearly all Segeju are Muslims, the *shetani* cult continues to thrive.

More recent reports of spirit possession in East Africa suggest that the phenomena are not at decline. It seems that in times of stress and insecurity spirit possession as well as witchcraft accusations tend to increase. Particularly in areas where AIDS has had devastating effects on societies, foreign spirits, and witchcraft, are often interpreted as agents of illness. Because AIDS is a disease overshadowed with shame and horror, it is socially more acceptable to attribute it to intruding or imported spirits than as an outcome of misbehaviour of the person concerned. It also seems that spirit beliefs may surface with considerable strength when means are sought for levelling economic imbalance. Hasu (1999: 407–440) has shown that the Chagga in Kilimanjaro 'bye' foreign spirits (*majini*)

from the coast in order to nurture them and use against people with lust for property.

In Zanzibar town, which has strong Islamic background, spirit possession and healing methods for dealing with spirits seem to have established themselves as part of people's worldview and medical system long ago (Nisula 1999). In the system, where people employ varying methods for dealing with illness and misfortune, spirit intrusion as a cause of illness belongs to the standard explanations. Such interpretations are particularly likely when treatment in hospitals and traditional herbalist treatment have failed. In the conceptual system, Islamic tradition with such spirits as Jini, Ruhani, and Mumiani blends with local traditions with their own spirits. In fact, although etymologically various spirits can be traced to different traditions (Islamic and Bantu), in practice the distinction is not clear at all. However, if divination shows that the cause is an Islamic spirit, cure is often sought from a Shehe (Sheikh) who is able to use Islamic curing methods. In other cases, methods based on Bantu traditions are used in curing.

4.2 SPIRIT POSSESSION IN NORTHERN AFRICA

Although spirit possession is a common phenomenon in all parts of Africa, it has a large variety of forms, and it is often not possible to determine whether a phenomenon in one area is historically related to the one in another area, although the phenomena themselves have similar features. Since motives for the emergence of possession phenomena exist to some extent in all societies, similar phenomena may very well have independent development histories. There are, however, some exceptions, the most widespread of them being *zar* and *bori* cults.

4.2.1 Zar Cult

Zar has spread to an area, which extends from Iraq in the east (Mudir 1977) to Senegal and Gambia in the west (I. Lewis 1991). Although *zar* is originally a non-Islamic phenomenon, and in many areas Muslim leaders dislike it as a 'pagan' phenomenon, it has spread virtually only to Islamic areas.

According to several scholars, the roots of *zar* are in the Ethiopian highlands (Natvig 1987; Seligman 1914; Messing 1958; Cerulli 1934). According to Natvig (1987: 180), it originated from a conflict between the Oromo and Amhara in Ethiopia, where it developed in the eighteenth or nineteenth century as a response to radical changes in socio-cultural conditions. Already in Ethiopia it was confined mainly to subjugated groups of people. It developed among the Oromo in conditions of deprivation. They themselves were in a deprived position in relation to the Amhara, and among the Oromo the deprived ones were the women.

Numerous contemporary accounts of *zar* possession cults in Egypt since the last decades of the 19th century show that the cult was well established there by the 1880s. The *zar* possession cult as a social institution seems to have come to Egypt either from the Sudan or from Ethiopia, or from both (Natvig 1991), along with slaves, who had been bought by wealthy Egyptians. Detached from the social and cultural environment of the area of origin, these cults were adapted to the new situations, where they found support also from low class people of non-slave origin. Nevertheless, *zar* possession cults were mostly confined to the circles of slave origin. According to Natvig, the rather late appearance of the *zar* cult in Egypt¹⁰ does not mean that the concept of *zar* spirits would have been unknown even earlier.

According to some views, spirit possession as a phenomenon has been known in Egypt from the times of Ottoman conquest in the early sixteenth century, and possibly already much earlier, but it is known as *zar* possession only in the nineteenth century, possibly as a consequence of the close relations between Sudan and Egypt (Morsy 1991).

The term *zar* is often traced to Amharic, but it is possible that it is a loan in that language, probably from the Cushitic Agaw, where the term *jar* may mean a sky god, as suggested by Constantinides (1991:84–85). Tubiana (1991: 29–30), on the other hand, suggests that it does not refer to sky god, but to 'Lord', or 'the Lord of the Earth'. He also points out the possible role of Islam among the Oromo as an agent in developing notions of *zar*.

It is possible that the Amhara conceived *zar* as an evil spirit already as early as the 16th century (Natwig 1991: 180). It is also possible that in Egypt the term *zar* is derived from *ziyara*, a visit to a saint's grave in a ritual procession. G.A.

¹⁰ It is important to note that slaves from the south had been imported to Egypt for thousands of years.

Wallin reports having participated such a ritual in Cairo in 1844¹¹ in a time, when *zar* cult had not yet arrived to Egypt. There is an interesting hypothesis that in Egypt there was a local women's spirit cult, arranged weekly on a certain day, and that the *zar* cult, coming from the south later, was integrated with this earlier cult. This would explain the persistence of the cult among the women until today (Natwig 1987: 183–84).

The term is found also in Persian, where it means 'weak' and 'helpless'¹². It is probably not possible to know the very origin of the term *zar* referring to spirits, as well as of the cult associated with it. However, by the end of the nineteenth century it had spread in surprisingly similar forms to an area covering Istanbul, Bahrain, Mecca, Cairo and Khartoum. Constantinides (1991: 85) suggests that the rapid spread of the cult was facilitated by the period of social change, which was the outcome of the military and political activities of Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt. When power was concentrated in Egypt, and the Red Sea area and the Upper Nile valley were pacified, the boost of economy and trade made possible the spread of foreign influences. This period of comparative peace boosted also pilgrimages to Mecca, where people from all over the Islamic world met.

It is likely that the pilgrimages from various directions contributed to the spread of the *zar* cult to that large area where *zar* is presently found. Although people certainly did not come to Mecca to learn about *zar*, they could not avoid coming to contact with these cults and practices, which had rooted there either as vestiges of pre-Islamic times, or as influences of pilgrims. Although Mecca was the sacred city of all Muslims, it was a melting pot of a multitude of cultural traits. Therefore, it is no wonder that *zar* was found as an established cult with surprisingly similar spirit possession rituals in Near East as well as in West Africa already in the beginning of the twentieth century (Constantinides 1991: 88–89).

Apart from *zar* possession, there are also reports of other types of possession in Ethiopia. William Shack (1971) has argued that anxiety related to hunger, in fact the institutionalised deprivation of food, was one source of spirit possession among the Gurage men. There was a correlation between a low social status and spirit possession. Jan Brogger has given quite a different kind of account by claiming that among the Sidamo wealthy men were suffering from periodic spirit possession. Furthermore, there is an established ritual termed *hayata*, which is performed periodically for appeasing the spirits, who have engaged into their hosts more or less permanently. These *hayata* cults are primarily means of ventilating hostility towards neighbours, because open hostility is not considered appropriate (Brogger 1975). These considerations were among the arguments of H. Lewis (1984), when he warned about too simplistic explanations of spirit possession.

¹¹ G.A. Wallin, G.A. Wallins Reseanteckningar från Orienten åren 1843–1849, 4 vols. Helsingfors, 1864–66.

¹² Informed by Morteza Almolhoda, a native speaker and scholar of Persian language.

Evans-Pritchard (1953) emphasises the flexibility with which the Nuer have absorbed new spirits into their conceptual system. This has taken place as a consequence of having absorbed people from other ethnic groups, such as the Dinka, into the Nuer society. Although Kwoth is considered the supreme spirit, who is one in relation to the creation of the world and to the mankind as a whole. Yet Kwoth has several manifestations according to the various categories which the society is composed of, such as lineages, families, and even individuals. Spirits may enter into personal contact with people by causing them to become sick. It is necessary to get the spirit to reveal its name, so that an appropriate treatment can be arranged. New spirits from foreign countries may enter the society any time, and appropriate means will be sought for treating them.

4.2.2 Bori Cult

Another widely distributed and institutionalised spirit possession cult is *bori*, which has spread to the western section of the northern African continent. It has several similarities with *zar* possession, and in fact these two have been considered by some scholars to form a complex, where similar socio-political situations create cults with much in common, although the names are different.

As is the case with *zar*, it has not been possible to find out the very origin of the *bori* cult either. However, it is deeply rooted among several ethnic groups in Northern Nigeria (Last 1991), and the Hausa, Fulani and Tuareg pastoralists (Echard 1991: 64). According to reports, *bori* has experienced a vivid revival and expansion in a number of areas, and new spirits have been introduced. It is interesting to note that whereas *zar* concerns almost exclusively women in marginal positions, *bori* cult followers are both women and men. Some local *bori* cults include only men (Echard 1991:65).

P.G. Harris (1930) believes that *bori* is an old 'religion' widespread in Africa in various local forms. On the basis of information from Sokoto province in northern Nigeria he suggests that various categories of Hausa are involved in *bori* in different ways. There are Maguzawa who have *bori* as their form of religion, and Muslims for whom *bori* cults are means of curing sickness, and finally those (mostly prostitutes and criminals) for whom *bori* is only a form of entertainment for personal gain. Also A.J.N. Tremearne (1912, 1913:145–50) notes the ancient origin of *bori*, suggesting that it has existed before the advent of Islam to the Hausa area. He also witnessed its spread as far north as to Tripoli, Tunis and Algiers among the Hausa communities, and listed a number of spirit names and their characters known in various areas (Tremearne 1914, 1915).

Much later King (1966, 1967) and Krieger (1967) found out that *bori* cult in Northern Nigeria is closely related to the old local religion, where *iskooki* spirits play an important role. While the *iskooki* form a large hierarchy of named

spirits, *bori* is one of the means for manipulating these spirits. *Bori* is usually associated with illness, and it is in fact an important means of managing illness induced by spirits. While *bori* is basically a healing cult, it is often also a means of initiating patients into the cult group. *Bori* has obviously an important role also as entertainment, where spirit possession is simulated rather than induced. Perhaps this entertaining function of *bori* has contributed to the fact that also Muslims accept it, although it does not fit to the doctrine of Islam.

In the view of Onwuejeogwu (1969), the spread of *bori* spirit possession among the Hausa Muslims is associated with the loss of power of the women, when Islam spread to the area in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Whereas *bori* occupied in pre-Islamic times an important place in the religious life of the people, it has later become a peripheral cult of deprived people such as divorced wives and prostitutes. At the same time it has become more secular with aesthetic and entertaining features. The peripheral role of *bori* is also emphasised by Price (1957).

4.3 CONCLUSION

Spirit possession is a deep-rooted phenomenon in many African societies. One can even claim that it is a predominant institution, which is integrated into people's conceptual system. Spirit world is considered instrumental in safeguarding people's health, and spirits play a central role in interpreting health problems and in coping with them. In research, *zar* and *bori* cults seem to have attracted more interest than the other forms of spirit possession. This may be due to the fact that both of them are wide spread, and they are found only in areas, where Islam is the dominant religion. Yet *zar* and *bori* are thought to be of fairly recent origin in the areas where they occur. Furthermore, they are peripheral phenomena, usually confined to deprived groups, and the official Islam condemns them as something inferior and certainly not as part of pure Islam.

Although in non-Muslim areas of Africa spirit possession has been common since times immemorial, we do not have a clear picture of it. This is fully understandable, because it takes many forms and each language group uses distinct names for spirits and cults. Nevertheless, common features can be found in them, for example the predominance of women as adepts, the presence of illness in interpreting spirit intrusion, pregnancy and delivery problems as indications of spirit intrusion, etc. Coping with problems caused by spirits is the concern of the whole society, and not only of women.

The spirit possession among the Maasai does not fall directly into any of the categories. It is not of the *zar-bori* type, nor does it follow the pattern of non-Muslim African societies. Characteristic of it is its epidemiological spread, very limited understanding of what it is, unsuccessful attempts to cope with it, complete inability of the *iloibonok* to cure the patients, and the exhaustion of its

energy through successful status improvement. Very few parallels, if any, have been found for the Maasai case.

5. NAMES OF SPIRITS

In the traditional Maasai cosmology, there is no generic name for the concept which in English is glossed as 'spirit' and in Swahili as 'pepo'. The word *oloirirwa* refers vaguely to a non-human entity, to a being associated with the realm close to Enkai, the High God. However, it is never used in connection with spirit possession. Instead, a Swahili term, *pepo*, is used and adapted to the Maasai grammatical and phonological system as *olbepo* or *olbeko* (Masc.) and *embepo* or *embeko* (Fem.). These are terms used for any kind of spirit inflicting a human being.

The absence of a generic term for spirit is in itself an indication of the fact that we are here dealing with a phenomenon, with which the Maasai are not well acquainted with, and which has intruded their area without being welcomed and which the people wanted to get rid of by all possible means.

Although the case histories and other sources of information reveal that part of the Maasai know a number of specific names for spirits, it is not communal tradition among them. Spirits are not comprehended as a category forming a system in their minds, as are more traditional features in their conceptual system (Hurskainen 1984: 174–196). It is even hard for them to remember the names of the intruding spirits, when asked to do so. Without much exaggeration it can be said that they have learned almost all what they know about spirits from the Bantu healers, with whom they have been in contact either by travelling to them when looking for help in possession cases, or by inviting the healers to their own home areas. Most of the case histories show (below in detail) that the patients were treated, often more than once, by Bantu healers. While the key in healing was the identification of the spirit, the Maasai patients must have heard the names of the inflicting spirits. Although the material available does not cover all the existing information on different categories of spirits, it points out especially those which are most important for understanding the socio-cultural background of the phenomenon.

The case histories contain names for 24 different spirits (Table 2). From other sources we get more, but nothing which would give a significantly different picture. We can group the spirits broadly into three categories: (1) spirits characterising groups of people; (2) spirits characterising various animals; and (3) extra-human spirits without counterpart in real life.¹³

¹³ The list of spirits is in no way exhaustive, and certainly many more names could easily be found. More important than an exhaustive list are, however, the categories of spirits and what these categories represent. Echard (1991: 72–80) has compiled a list of 138 bori spirits found in the Ader area in southern Niger. There each spirit is said to bear a specific signification, and the spirits form a pantheon and help in conceptualising the socio-historical reality of the

5.1 HUMAN SPIRITS

A spirit characterising a group of people can be virtually a 'representative' of any group of people. Among those, we find names of ethnic groups, such as Mwarabu, Mswahili, Mbondei, Mmasai, Ilmang'ati, Ndorobo, Mmakonde etc. Each of those groups is thought to have a characteristic way of behaviour and a favourite beat of drums, as well as dance and singing. Also other kinds of groups are found, for example, Mmorani (Warrior), Mtu (Man), Mwanamke (Woman), Mzungu (European), and Wa watoto wa shule (Spirit of school children).

Among these, most often features Mwarabu (Arab). The reason is perhaps that this spirit is associated with child birth. A woman with Mwarabu is likely to bear healthy children. Therefore, if the spirit reveals itself as Mwarabu, the patient is likely to rejoice, and the spirit usually demands several songs, which the patient will sing in the rhythm of the drums¹⁴.

Other commonly occurring spirits are Mmorani (Maasai warrior) and Mzungu (European), although the names themselves are only occasionally mentioned. The behaviour of the spirits, however, reveals the spirit in question. Mmorani is likely to be fierce. The spirit (i.e. the spirit residing in the patient) may demand a spear, a club, or a sword, which are symbols of a warrior. She may also exhibit excessive powers, so that several people are sometimes needed for holding the woman. If the patient has a spirit called Mzungu, then she is likely to ask for items considered luxury by the Maasai, such as a book, white cloth, and soap. Both of these, Mmorani and Mzungu, represent groups of people, who might be subject to envy by the patients.

5.2 ANIMAL SPIRITS

Among the spirits characterizing various animals, the most prominent is Simba (Lion, 12 times). In addition to being quite common in the Maasai area, it is the major danger for livestock, and the warriors have an important task of guarding livestock against the beasts. The Swahili term for a lion, Simba, occurs more frequently than the Maasai term Olowuaru, which actually means a carnivorous beasts¹⁵. This apparently derives from the fact that while the concept of spirit possession comes from the Bantu-speaking area, also the names of the animal spirits take a Bantu form. Among the names denoting beasts is also Olmanyama¹⁶, which is known to be blood-thirsty.

people (Echard 1991: 70). The bori spirits are, however, all human and constitute therefore quite a different type of spirit world than that found among the Maasai.

¹⁴ According to other reports, Mwarabu can also be dangerous. See Appendix II, b-10.

¹⁵ The Maasai term for lion, olng'atuny, was not used as a spirit name.

¹⁶ This might derive from the Swahili form wanyama, meaning animals.

Another category of animal spirits consists of animals with large size. Tembo (Elephant) and Kifaru (Rhino) are impressive because of their sheer size, but also because they are potentially dangerous to man, although they are herbivorous. These animals, however, feature quite seldom in spirit possession.

Among smaller animals, there is the cunning and often poisonous Nyoka (Serpent), which occurs also in Maasai form as Olasurai. Ndege (Bird) refers actually to a special kind of bird, which, when flying, vibrates the wings in the way that resembles the shaking of a possessed person.

5.3 EXTRA-HUMAN SPIRITS

There are also spirits coming from the Islamic tradition. Shetani (also Shaitani, Sheitani) is a typical spirit often found in the Islamic coastal area (Giles 1987: 244–245, 249). It is considered a useful companion for man,¹⁷ because it protects man from evil. Many coastal healers maintain that one cannot live without certain types of spirits, and instead of exorcising them, the healers try to appease them after they have expressed their wishes in drumming rituals. Jini (*jinn* in Arabic) is coming often from the sea and has many features and forms of appearance. Although the Maasai know very little about their characteristics, from the Islamic tradition we know that they derive from those children of Adam and Eve, whom Eve cunningly hid from God, when he came to inspect the children of the first human beings. As a punishment God then transformed those children into spirits. In the East African tradition, *jini* is also a spirit to be entertained rather than be driven away. This concerns especially Ruhani, which is considered the most important spirit in the category of *jini* (Giles 1987: 245). Mumiani, also of coastal origin, is considered white in colour and it is thought to be eager to suck people's blood. Consequently it is much feared and exorcised if possible.

It is interesting to note that such Islamic spirits as *shetani* and *jini* are considered quite differently in East Africa than in such areas as Sudan and Ethiopia, where *zar* is a dominant spirit possession cult. Where *zar* dominates, *zar* spirits are those which should be entertained and nurtured and not exorcised (Morsy 1991: 193, H. Lewis 1984: 421), whereas jinns, which are not a central part of *zar* cults, are considered intruders and should be driven away. In East Africa, where *zar* cult is not known, the role of 'good' spirits is taken by other spirits, and for this purpose spirits deriving from the more 'cultured' traditions, such as Islam, are preferred. However, the categorisation of *shetani* and *jini* spirits is ambiguous, as is in fact the classification of other spirits also. The spirit world is little known and only the requirements of the spirits made explicit in

¹⁷ This is in sharp contrast with the Judaeo-Christian tradition, which considers Shetani the main opponent of God and is therefore utterly bad and dangerous by definition. These very different connotations attached to the term 'shetani' in Islamic and Christian traditions are a major source of conceptual confusion among people in East Africa.

possession rituals, dreams or in other ways reveal whether they are beneficial or dangerous.

If the spirit does not 'speak', i.e. sing its favourite song, with the mouth of the patient, and yet there is reason to doubt that one is possessed, one conclusion is that it is a mute spirit, Pepo Bubu. At least in two cases (p-86, p-91) such a spirit was encountered. It may also be that one with Pepo Bubu is not able or willing to speak to anybody even outside the context of healing ritual, and just wants to be alone. There were also a few cases of this kind.

Finally there are spirits that reveal themselves only in dreams. It is unclear whether such spirits have proper names. Sometimes they were termed simply as Ndoto (Dream). They are not simply any kinds of dreams, but such dreams where some important message, usually negative, is given to the patient. Fear of losing a child was a common content of the dream, and it was not uncommon that the dream became true afterwards. The spirit appearing in dreams is therefore a messenger foretelling future events.

On the basis of the possession cases one can make some general conclusions. First, the intruding spirits are usually considered harmful by the Maasai, although at least part of the spirits are considered good and helpful by the Bantu healers. Practically all adepts wanted to get rid of the spirits regardless of their names and characteristics. Second, while the spirits were considered harmful, the hosts were not much concerned of what exactly the spirits were. For that reason, names of the spirits were often not remembered, and many patients perhaps never became fully aware of who the spirits actually were which occupied them. Third, several patients mentioned that they had 'many spirits', or 'all spirits', indicating that several spirits were residing inside them simultaneously. This was revealed in drumming sessions, where one style of beat was followed by another in succession. If a woman responded to several of them, it was interpreted as being possessed by more than one spirit, because each spirit has its own beat. Cases of being possessed by several spirits were found especially in the Parakuyo area in the south, and in the north-western Maasai area. In the former, the use of Bantu healers was intensive, and in the latter area home drumming using *debes* was common. In both cases there were established means for identifying spirits by name.

5.4 BEING SUSPECTED TO BE MUMIANI

The episodes from my fieldwork period in 1976 in Lugoba show what forms the belief in Mumiani may take.

5.4.1 Episode 1

Lugoba, June 1976

It was afternoon, the time of siesta when everyone tried to find shelter against the burning sun. I was hanging around in the village to hear what was going on. Especially the news concerning the Parakuyo interested me. I heard from two women that there will be a ritual in xx's kraal, starting that day. In fact it was going to be in their home kraal. I knew the place because I had visited it some days earlier and I told them that I shall come there later. The women welcomed me and we agreed that we shall meet later in the kraal. They started off earlier because I had still some things to do in Lugoba. After a drive of a couple of kilometres I turned off from the main road and followed the narrow track in the bush. Soon I saw those two women in front of me, heading towards their home. After having reached them I stopped the car and asked them to enter, so that we could travel together. Both of them were carrying heavy burdens on the heads, and one of them had also a baby on the back. This time I used Maasai language, which was quite usual when there were no Bantu people around. Within a fraction of a second both of them went into panic and started to run away as quickly as they could, disregarding the direction or what was ahead of them. They run through thick thorny bushes until I could not hear the slightest sound of them any more. The sunny evening was quiet and beautiful.

The incident puzzled me and I tried to figure out the reason for such strange behaviour. After a while I continued to my destination. By arriving to the kraal I told the people what had happened. They seemed to take very little notice of it, and they continued with preparations for the women's maturity ritual, *erikoto o 'lkerra*. After a while the frightened women arrived there, too. They behaved as they were ignorant of what had happened just a moment ago. They were cheerful and laughing as usual, and they showed no sign of being afraid of me. When I asked them the reason for such behaviour, they gave a lengthy lesson to me about the behaviour of Mumiani, the white spirits of the forest. They told that Mumiani are white-skinned spirits, pretending to be kind and helpful so as to lure innocent people to follow them. But they are blood-thirsty spirits who suck people's blood and finally kill them. The Mumiani are so cunning that they are even able to use people's own language, such as Maasai. By hearing me to address them in Maasai in the forest, without the company of other people, they instantly reckoned that this being must be a Mumiani. And the best they could do was to run away as quickly as possible. – It never became clear to me whether they really thought to have been mistaken by me, or whether I in fact was Mumiani, but as long as there were other people around and they were not in a forest, they were safe.

5.4.2 Episode 2

Lugoba, June 1976

As usual, soon after sunrise I walked along a narrow path through maize fields from the house of my hosts to the village centre. The path passed by the place

where people came to collect water into pots and canisters and carry them home. There was a water pipe in the village, but usually it did not work. So the people had usually to resort to the traditional method of carrying water from a small river. When I approached the river, two women with pots full of water were returning home. We obviously had to pass by on the narrow path. There was nothing extraordinary, because hundreds of people every day pass there to both directions. However, before we encountered on the path, they suddenly became into panic and started to run away as fast as they could. They left the water jars behind. One of them fell down but was quickly up again. They ran through the maize field and across a thorny fence until they disappeared. I heard the sounds gradually weakening until they could not be heard any more. How far they ran I do not know. – Who did they think I was? Obviously they thought that I was a Mumiani, a blood-thirsty spirit, willing to kill them. Unfortunately I did not know them so that I could have discussed with them later. This was not an area where the Parakuyo come to collect water. This was another instant, this time an encounter with Kwere women, when the belief in Mumiani caused uncontrolled horror.

Table 2. Names of spirits found in case histories.

(1) Human spirits

Mbondei (Bondei)	1
Mlungu	1
Mmorani (Maasai warrior)	2
Mswahili (Swahili)	1
Mtu (human being)	1
Mwanamke (woman)	1
Mwarabu (Arab)	5
Mzungu (European)	1
Ndorobo (Dorobo)	1
Olmang'ati (Barabaig)	1
Wa Makonde (a Makonde spirit)	1
Wa watoto wa shule (a school spirit)	1

(2) Animal spirits

Chui (leopard)	2
Kifaru (rhino)	1
Ndege (bird)	1
Nyoka (serpent)	1
Olmanyama (wants blood) (animal)	3
Olowuaru (beast)	1
Simba (lion)	12
Tembo (elephant)	2

(3) Spirits without counterpart in real life	
Ndoto (dream)	1
Pepo bubu (a mute spirit)	2
Shetani (Satan)	1
Wa baharini (an ocean spirit)	1

6. SYMPTOMS OF SPIRIT POSSESSION

The Maasai usually claim to be able to make a distinction between the so-called ordinary illnesses and those caused by the intervention of spirits. The case histories show, however, that it is not at all that easy. A number of patients were troubled by many kinds of pains for years before a conclusion was drawn that they were caused by spirits. In other cases the identification of spirit intervention was made, although the patient did not have pains of any kind, simply on the basis of the fact that the person started to dance and sing when hearing a certain type of drum beat. However, the majority of patients had earlier symptoms of illness or sickness, and attempts to cure by various means, before the conclusion was drawn that the symptoms were caused by spirits. A total of 128 different kinds of symptoms were found in case histories, which shows that we are here dealing with a complicated and multi-faceted phenomenon. All these symptoms were interpreted as indications of spirit intervention. Many of them were post hoc rationalisations of pains which had occurred several years earlier before the possibility of spirit intervention had become a viable explanation of pains among the Maasai. Below I shall discuss these symptoms in some detail.

Since almost all cases are women, the ability to bear children is a major issue. It is quite common that women have troubles and fears related to reproduction. A total of 13 had experienced one or more miscarriages, and often other symptoms were accompanied with these unfortunate events. Infant mortality among the Maasai is quite high, and the deaths are often interpreted as part of normal life without further considerations.

For part of spirit possession cases it was possible to get information on the number of children, live and dead. Such data were available for 36 cases. They had given birth to a total of 163 children (4.5 children in the average), out of whom 105 were alive and 58 had died (35.6% of all births)¹⁸. Most often the children had died in the age of under two years, and many were also stillbirths and miscarriages. In addition, there are records of 87 more children of 21 mothers, about whom we do not know whether they are all alive, because distinction was not made between live and dead ones. There are also a few cases with no children. Some of them are not yet married or have too recently married to consider fertility problems.

¹⁸ One has to note that these numbers do not reflect the total fertility rate of women, because many of them were still in fertile age and likely to bear more children.

When troubles in child bearing or rearing are accompanied by fears, bad dreams, or even hatred, the situation is considered abnormal. In some cases (4) children were interpreted as being killed by spirits, and in others (13) women had bad dreams where either the mother or the child was strangled or killed in some other way. In two cases a white person came in the dreams to strangle the woman. It is also noteworthy that not a few women (8) hated their own children. The sex of the children subject to hatred was not always indicated (4), but in other cases (4) it was clearly stated that the hatred was directed towards female children. In addition, in some cases the colour of the child which the mother considered acceptable was red or red-brown, while children with any other shade of colour were hated. The hatred was so strong that the mother was not able to breast-feed the child herself (p26). The hatred towards female children was interpreted as deriving from the fact that the mother had a spirit called Olowuaru, which means a carnivorous beast, such as a lion or leopard. Such a spirit is associated with warriors, who are males. Why should dark-skinned male children be hated is not clear.

In general, fear was associated with dreams at night¹⁹, but also less specified fear was experienced by some women. Some were fearing death²⁰, others were fearing even the company of other people and they wanted to be alone. Some felt that darkness was descending over them from above and embraced them totally²¹. Others characterised the experience as if a dark cloud descended on them²².

Fear is certainly involved also in the experience described as shivering or shaking, which was reported in as many as 29 cases²³. In fact this is the most common individual symptom of spirit possession, and it may occur randomly at any time, but particularly in occasions where the spirit is thought to make itself known. Shaking is often accompanied with situations of strong emotions. Seeing suddenly an unexpected guest, especially if the guest has characteristics of a pre-conceived figure of a spirit (white colour, for example), is likely to cause fits (p42). Gun salutes after a successful circumcision operation is another occasion where women start shaking. Seeing a temporarily lost relative may have a similar effect. Particularly common is shaking and wailing in baptismal services, even to the extent that it is sometimes difficult to bring the services to an honourable end.

If spirit possession is conceived as a kind of illness, pains of various kinds²⁴ are necessarily involved. This becomes obvious when looking at the long list of symptoms (Table 3). Fever was involved in at least 19 cases, although this was not considered as a primary indication of possession, because malaria and other 'ordinary' illnesses cause fever also. Headache (17) was considered a

¹⁹ Appendix V: p12, p18, p25, p26, p27, p40, p42, p50, p57, p63, p74, p83, p84.

²⁰ Appendix V: p5, p13, p39, p50.

²¹ Appendix V: p1, p5, p6, p57, p78.

²² Appendix V: p66, p67, p74.

²³ Appendix V: p1-p9, p12-p14, p18, p21, p22, p27, p36, p40, p43, p57, p69, p71, p74, p85.

²⁴ e.g. p26, p27.

clearer indication of true possession, although this alone is not yet a sufficient symptom. Other indications include: pains in stomach (28), swelling of stomach (3), stomach feeling hot (8), stomach feeling cold (3), fever in stomach (3) etc. In fact, stomach is the body part where most pains occurred. Some (3) also complained pains in womb, and others (3) vomited blood, while others (3) just vomited.

Among the most common symptoms of spirit possession was pain moving from one body part to another. It was thus not uncommon to find symptoms in several body parts by the same person. The back featured among the favourite locations of spirits. There were pains in back (7), or the back was as if it were burning (5). Hands were also subject to spirit intervention. They might feel stiff (3), or they might swell, become cold, or have pains. Also legs might have various kinds of ailments, such as pains (6), stiffness (3), loss of strength, and they might swell or become cold. Pains might occur also in the neck, throat, teeth, tongue, eyes, shoulders, chest, ribs, breasts, waist, joints, kidneys etc. Heart troubles were also quite common, such as heart disease (4), irregular heart beat, heart running fast, and sudden pains in heart. Not rare were troubles of the whole body, for example, pains in the body (3), swelling (4), weakening, getting stiff, or getting hot.

A person with spirit possession is considered to behave in a strange way. Part of the cases described their condition with terms indicating madness (7) or being startled (6). Others shouted aimlessly (12), or they were wailing (11), or staggering (5), and many of them lost consciousness (15). Some behaved in a way that was potentially dangerous for themselves. A person could, by hearing a cry of a lion, run towards the sound, although in normal conditions one would run away. One could rush through the thorny fence and get badly wounded.

When the spirit is identified, its behaviour may be predicted. A spirit may want a sword (*olalem*) or a spear (*embere*) worn by warriors. Another spirit may demand books and soap, used by Europeans, or snuff used by elders. Some spirits could demand an umbrella or binoculars.

In sum, symptoms of spirit possession are varied, and in general they are related to some kind of illness or sickness. Despite the wide range of ailments interpreted as deriving from spirits, the Maasai claim to be able to make a distinction between spirit-induced troubles and 'ordinary' pains and diseases. However, in practice this is not easy.

Table 3. Symptoms of spirit possession mentioned in case histories (alphabetical order).

anemia	1
back, paining	7
back, burning	5
back, going to one side	1
being in trouble	2
being startled	4
belt of a moran, wanting	1
blood of cow, wanting	1
blood pressure	1
blood, vomiting	3
body, burning (kuwasha)	1
body, burning (moto)	1
body, getting stiff	1
body, getting weak (kulegea)	2
body, paining	3
body, swelling	4
breasts paining	1
breasts swelling	2
breathing, not being able to	1
chest	2
chest swelling	1
children, being killed	3
child, losing	1
clothes, clean, wanting	2
clothes, colourful, wanting	1
consciousness, losing	15
cough	2
crying	11
dancing	13
darkness at night	1
dizziness	9
dream, bad	10
dream, white people	2
drinking blood, by pepo	2
drinking fat	1
eating and drinking, problems	3
eyes, paining	2
fearing	2
fearing death	1
fearing people	1
feeling cold (kupooza)	1
fever	19
fire, wanting to enter into	1
flesh in blood	1
going around aimlessly	1
hands, getting cold	1
hands, getting stiff	3
hands, paining	1
hands, swelling	2

hating child	4
hating female child	4
hating songs of the church	1
hating sun	2
hatred	1
head ache	17
head, cold	1
head, covered	1
hearing darkness	2
hearing voices in savannah	1
heart beat not regular	2
heart beating hard	1
heart disease	4
heart running fast	1
heart, kushtuka	1
heart, kuvuta	1
heart, paining	2
heat climbing up	1
inside, paining	1
joints, paining	1
jumping, entering calf pen	1
jumping and falling down	5
khang	1
kidney, paining	1
legs getting cold	1
legs, becoming powerless	2
legs, getting stiff	3
legs, paining	6
legs, swelling	1
liver, paining	1
loneliness when herding	1
madness	7
miscarriage	13
mouth, drying up	1
neck, paining	2
neck, swelling	2
paining	2
paining the whole body1	1
pains in loins	2
paralyzing	3
pulling (kuvuta)	1
pus from ears	1
pus in stomach	1
ribs, paining	1
running	2
seeing darkness	1
seeing death	1
shivering	28
shivering when hearing drums	1
shoulders, paining	2
shouting	12
singing of olaiyioni	1

snuff, wanting	1
soap, wanting	2
spear, wanting	2
staggering (kuseteta)	5
stomach, feeling cold	2
stomach, feeling hot	8
stomach, fever	3
stomach, diarrhoea	1
stomach, paining	23
stomach, paining (kusokota)	5
stomach, swelling	3
stomach, tightening	1
strangling, by pepo	2
stupidity	1
sword, wanting	2
teeth, paining	1
throat, paining	1
tongue, retreating backwards	1
umbrella	1
uneasiness	1
vomiting	3
waist, paining	1
weak	1
womb, paining	3
work, not being able to	

7. IDENTIFICATION OF SPIRIT INFLICTION

It should be noted that indications of spirit possession are not identical with the symptoms which give directly reason to conclude that a person has a spirit. It often turns out that a person may have for years such symptoms which later are interpreted as symptoms of possession, but the person concerned recognises them as infliction by spirits only afterwards. These symptoms were discussed in section 6. Here I try to describe those symptoms and situations which in fact revealed that the person was troubled by spirits. Part of these are the same as above, but the list is much shorter. In this respect the data are not covering, because only less than half of the cases contained information on this question. However, a total of 30 different types of 'triggers' of possession were identified.²⁵

²⁵ Peter Claus (1979: 32, 37) paid attention to the fact that in the Siri possession histories in India there was a lot of repetition, similar histories being a distinctive feature. The same can be observed also among the Maasai in part of the cases. However, there is a remarkable variety, as the case histories in Appendix V show.

7.1 DANCING IN HEALING RITUALS WITH DRUM BEATING

Local Bantu healers (*mganga*, pl. *waganga*) are the largest group of people (6) specifically mentioned as having first identified that the cause of trouble is a spirit. The actual number must be much bigger, because in at least 43 cases the patient was taken to Bantu healers one or more times, as we shall see in more detail below. Normally the healer used drum beating as part of the diagnosing process. Although diagnosis for finding the cause of illness involved several methods, in identifying spirit possession the use of drums was in central position.

It is thought that the spirit, who has entered the person, will reveal itself when hearing its favourite rhythm. If the patient starts to dance in the rhythm of the drum beat, and possibly to sing a song supposedly unknown to her, it is conceived as an almost sure proof of spirit intervention. Below are some examples of this.

"In 1965 (approximately) I went to a non-Maasai native healer in the Ruvu area. He played drums and then I began to feel something rising in my chest and tightening up. I began to shake and I danced to the drum as though I were in a trance, crying out all the while. The healer did not know what was wrong with me, but he brewed some medicine made from roots and herbs. I was better for a week but then the symptoms reoccurred. I paid the doctor 70 Sh. and a goat for his services." (p1)

"My condition remained the same as before and about November, 1970 I went to another native (traditional) healer in the area. By that time I knew I had a spirit as I had heard others speaking about symptoms similar to my own. This healer also played drums and I acted as I had with the other doctor, shaking, wailing, etc. Then he gave me some home-brewed medicine. I felt alright after I had finished playing the drums and he told me, "See? It worked." (She said that after each experience with the drums she was normal for a week's time as the spirit was appeased)." (p1)

"After about two years I was taken to a traditional doctor in Handeni. He mixed me a brew to drink and made cuts (*kuchanja*) on me into which he rubbed the brew. He then told me I had an evil spirit which would need drums played in order for it to be driven out. He played drums for me and I began a trance-like dance following the beat of the drums (without any noise however)." (p7)

"Due to the nature of the symptoms the elders decided I was crazy and that a spirit must be involved. It was decided that I should be taken to a traditional doctor at Pangaro. He boiled me a brew, made cuts in my skin and rubbed the brew in. Afterwards he played the drums for me. When the drums were played I began to shake, jump about and then threw

myself down on the ground repeatedly. I did this so often that I miscarried again." (p8)

"One day when I was over at the next *boma* I saw some women dancing who were possessed by spirits. I watched them, wondering what was happening. Suddenly I began dancing to the beat of the drums and crying out. (The women have no desire to dance themselves but the spirits inside of them prompt them to do this against their will)." (p16)

"I was advised by a church elder to go to church. Although I knew I had a spirit, I refused to go. Instead I went to get some money and went out to look for people to play drums for me. I went to Engassmet. I heard the people singing at church whereupon I went crazy again and began singing and dancing for another four days." (p17)

"I returned home, still ill, and lost another child by miscarriage. I agreed now to go to the traditional doctor at Engassmet, who also told me that I had a spirit. He played the drums for me until I began shaking and dancing and exhibiting the usual features of one possessed by a spirit." (p20)

"The first troubles were in 1960. I had fever and I had miscarriage on the seventh month. I got medical herbs from a Nguu healer. Then I got pregnant again. But I trembled when I was hearing the beat of drums. I also had pains in my back. But I did not dance by hearing drums. I had pains in my leg and I kept crying. Later on I started to dance. I had irregular heart beat and I felt darkness (falling on me). I almost lost consciousness." (p66)

"I came to know that I have a spirit when I suddenly started to dance after hearing drumming. I did not have any kind of illness. When other people with spirits were treated by drumming, also I started to dance. There are spirits which want a special kind of drumming. I was not able to identify which kinds of spirits I had. All of them troubled me. They caused the stomach to swell. They woke up by any noise, such as the sound of an aircraft or crowing of a cock." (p81)

"That illness did not like pills nor an injection needle. It did not like a hospital at all. I continued to have troubles and I was unable to work. Finally I was told that I should try to use drumming. After this was done, the spirit revealed itself. The first spirit was Simba (Lion). Then Chui (Leopard), Kifarua (Rhino) and Tembo (Elephant) revealed themselves. In the beginning I was troubled every day. When I began to be more acquainted with drumming and dancing, I gave way to other spirits. Now a whole month may pass without being troubled by spirits.

If one is happy and joyful, the spirit does not trouble her. Once one gets angry the spirit teases her. If drumming is not performed according to its wishes, it troubles you at night. You cannot sleep and you are afraid. If the spirit starts to trouble you at night, you should take water and put burning coal into it. When the coal has cooled down, you should drink the water, and then you can sleep again. I was told to do like this." (p74)

7.2 DANCING WHEN HEARING DEBES BEATEN

Beating drums in kraals features also as a trigger of spirit possession. Quite a few (8) of the cases reported that the spirit infliction in them was identified when they heard drums beaten for other women. They told that suddenly something inside them moved and they started to dance and sing according to the beat. Shivering (7) and shouting (6) was also involved.

This kind of home drumming has spread especially in the more northern area. In Meserani, Kerere, Simanjiro, Makuyuni, Naperera and Olkesumet, one finds local drumming, which is almost totally detached from its original context. Drumming is a wide-spread method of diagnosing, and also of healing, among the Bantu healers, with age-old traditions. The Maasai, who traditionally do not have drums at all, have adopted drumming for curing purposes in a profoundly modified form. Instead of proper drums they use empty kerosene containers, which they beat with sticks cut from local trees. Drumming is detached from the elaborate healing ritual, where it was an integral part in Bantu healing sessions. There is no healer directing the local healing sessions; almost anybody able to hold sticks can beat 'drums'. Sometimes one of the women, who earlier had spirit possession and was 'cured' by means of drumming, may act as a supervisor of the drumming session, but it is not necessary. It is thought that drumming is good enough if it works, i.e. the person starts to dance and, even better, to sing according to the beat.

In an area such as the wide Maasai plain, it is difficult and costly to acquire a Bantu healer each time needed for a sick person, especially because the healer has a whole team of drummers and helpers to assist him. It would be easier, and cheaper, to take the woman to the healer, but even that is troublesome, especially if the woman is not able to walk, as often the case is. In such a situation it is convenient to have drums in the kraal, and when needed, one or two of the women in the kraal performs the drumming for the patient.

"In order to find out for sure, they began to beat on debes (four-gallon tins which the Maasai use in place of drums). Hearing this, I began to shake and wail and then I began dancing to the beat of the drums." (p9)

"They beat on debes but nothing happened except that that night I slept better than I ever had since I had begun to have trouble. When I woke up the swelling was down somewhat and I wanted very much to have the drums played for me." (p12)

"Next I found some debes, started beating them and then ran off and persuaded some other women to beat them for me while I danced. Now they knew I had a spirit. After I danced I felt much better. In fact I was even able to milk a cow. That night, however, something started choking me and I went crazy again, singing and dancing." (p18)

"There were some people in the *boma* who knew about spirits and they thought this might possibly be my problem. They beat on debes for me in order to see if the spirit would manifest itself. I cried but showed no other signs such as the usual yelling, shaking and dancing which would indicate a spirit." (p20)

"I got the symptoms for the first time in 1975. One day I heard and saw how someone with spirits was treated by beating drums and debes. I saw how the patient was singing and dancing. So also I started to make noise, jump and fell down." (p34)

"In this kraal many women have spirits. The remedy they use is beating debes. They do not want to join the Church. Only I do this, together with my children whom I teach." (p56)

"They drummed with debes, and when they did this, I responded by singing a song. They felt that it is a spirit. Now a thing that indicates that something is or is not caused by a spirit is that if one is drawn to dance, sing and rejoice when debes are beaten, it is a spirit. If it is not a spirit, one stays silent." (p79)

"When I heard that other people were appeased by drumming, I fainted while being inside a house. Drums were brought inside the house, and when drumming started, I began to dance and sing." (p73)

7.3 SPIRIT POSSESSION ACCOMPANIED WITH BEING BEWITCHED

Witchcraft and witchcraft accusations are not common among the Maasai. Ritual eradication of witchcraft, at least the communal purification of the whole 'village' known among the coastal Bantu areas, is also virtually unknown. However, in a number of cases the *mganga* first suggested that the troubles are

due to being bewitched. Because ill deeds of witches are generally identified only afterwards, through divination rituals, it is quite common to bring forth a witchcraft hypothesis first. It should be said in passing that the Maasai do practise cursing (*alak* 'to curse'), but it is an open activity and is made in presence of the person to be cursed. A witch, on the other hand, does not carry out ill activities openly. In fact they are believed to operate at night when other people are asleep.

How much beliefs in witchcraft have infiltrated into Maasai thinking is not known. However, such beliefs do have some functions, concluding from a number of case histories. In fact, the belief in witchcraft is found quite commonly among the Maasai. But because it was very likely introduced by Bantu healers, it is natural that effects of witchcraft are also treated by them, and not by the Maasai iloibonok. The diagnosis may reveal that the troubles in the patient are caused by both witchcraft and spirits. Sometimes the patient may have several spirits at one time, and in addition be bewitched and have some 'ordinary' ailments. The treatment of such patients is often very expensive.

"During the fourth pregnancy I was taken to a doctor at Monduli. He shook the calabash of rocks which told him that I was bewitched. He then gave me medicine and charms and told me to put the charm on the child when it was born and then soak him in animal fat. I was better then until the fifth pregnancy. This doctor's charge was 100 Sh.

I went to a second doctor ('laibon'), an Mlumbwa (Parakuyo) by the name of Moreto. He gave me medicine and charms and told me I was bewitched. Although I received no benefit from this I was charged 60 Sh." (p10)

"I was then brought to a traditional doctor at Engassmet. Upon arrival at the doctor's home I refused his help saying that I did not have a spirit. I was then taken to a laibon at Kisongo who shook the calabash and told me I had a regular sickness plus the fact that I was also bewitched by someone." (p20)

"People at home told me that I have been bewitched. I was told that I should go to a *mganga* to be prepared a charm against witchcraft. After diagnosing, the doctor (Mkwere) told me that I had a spirit." (p37)

"Spirit possession in me was accompanied by witchcraft. I went to those local healers who know to take things out of people's bodies, from their blood. A thing like a piece of meat came out of my body. I was told that it was put there by someone. When the blood coagulated immediately after it came out of the wound, it turned into a kind of meat-like substance. It was a proof that I had been bewitched. There was a spirit, but I was also bewitched." (p57)

"When I came from Simanjiro I had a spirit. I felt something hot in my body. I was shocked and I started to cry. I was told that I have been bewitched. My body became swollen. The spirits wanted to drink the blood of animals. Later on emerged Chui (Leopard), Simba (Lion), Mwarabu (Arab), Pepo ya Wanawake (Spirit of Women), and Pepo ya Wamorani (Spirit of Morans). I had all kinds of spirits. Sometimes all the spirits come, in other times only a few. I am forced to dance and sing. I was sent again to Simanjiro for treatment by a *mganga*, and thereafter to Arusha for Ibrahimu Mapembe (a very expensive one). I had also pains in stomach, not only a spirit. I continue to be drummed until now. I started to participate Christian instruction when I was in Simanjiro. People told me that I should not come to the church before I had finished with those medicines. It is forbidden with mystical sanctions (*enturuj* in Maasai) to throw away medicine, and I had not yet finished with those medicines. Maybe I shall join the teaching class, but I have doubts, because the spirits continue to return to others who have been baptised. Yesterday I was again drummed because of pains, but they continue to be there.

A Swahili healer in Ngare Narok said that it is a spirit. After I had returned home the people there said that I should be drummed, because the *mganga* said so. I was drummed and I danced and sung." (p72)

"I experienced spirit infliction for the first time when I was already married. One day, when we had moved to a new kraal, one woman sent me to fetch water from inside the house. When I arrived to the container I fell down and fainted. The woman found me as if I were dead.

Since this time I continued to faint every now and then, and I was taken to a local doctor. It was thought that I am bewitched. Another doctor was invited to remove the curse. The doctor removed a horn, covered by a cloth, from the bed of the mother. Suddenly I started to shake and shiver while hearing the beat of the drums. This was an indication that I had a spirit.

I continued to faint daily, but I did not shake. Only afterwards I started to shake, and this continued almost without interruption.

First I was taken to a local doctor, who thought that I have been bewitched. One cow horn was found hidden in the bed, and another one was found at the door post. The doctor started drumming and I began to shake. When the spirit was asked to reveal itself, it stubbornly refused to say anything and nothing else could be done.

After I had given birth to the first child I started to have burning pain in chest. Breasts started swelling and issuing blood. Especially in the morning blood came out of breasts. Then the left breast dried up completely, and I was forced to stop the breast-feeding of the child. So I continued until I was pregnant to the second child.

Then I was again taken to a local doctor. He wore a hyena's hide on his head, a string of beads on chest, and a skin on loins. He looked very dreadful. He started to dance. And when I tried to follow him and dance and sing like he I failed completely. I fell down in a shade of a tree and I fell asleep. They called me saying, "So-and-so come, come to see your doctor." I could not respond to the call.

However, after this doctor had performed his drumming, I began to have fits." (p36)

7.4 TERRIFYING DREAMS

Bad dreams are also a recurring indication of spirit possession. Dreams may concern several kinds of topics, but it is common to them that they create anxiety and fear in the person concerned. Almost always these dreams have something to do with pregnancy, childbirth, miscarriage, barrenness, and reproduction as a whole. A common dream is that one hates one's own children, and this functions as a trigger for spirit possession. The hatred may be directed to only one sex, male or female.

White colour in dreams – also in day-dreams – seems to be particularly dangerous. Often this colour is associated to white people (Wazungu, Europeans), although in the form of a spirit (p18). Spirits of this colour are harmful for women who are pregnant or who want to become pregnant.

Some saw the death of infants or miscarriages as a symptom. Others thought that they simply got mad when they were entered by a spirit, and others lost power so that they were not able to walk or work.

"I was caught by a spirit for the first time when I had given birth to my second child, and when the child was still breast-feeding. It started by means of bad dreams. One night I had a dream that I had given birth to a male child with red skin. In the dream I prepared a charm of a lion nail and put it around his neck." (p26)

"Four of my children died. I felt that it is a spirit which hates children. I do not have troubles in getting pregnant, but the children died. Usually the spirit reveals itself during drumming. But my spirit was a mute spirit; it did not speak, and I did not dance. When I decided to join the church, I did not have trouble any more, and I have been able to bear children." (p86)

"When I gave birth to a child I was very ill and I hated my child a lot, and I did not feel that it was my child. It was a girl. I had some kind of vague feeling that it was a spirit which hates children, because there is no human being who can hate one's own child like a cow." (p89)

"After having had my first two children, my difficulties started at about the age of 24. One night as I was sleeping, I dreamed that I saw something white – white light or a white man – coming towards me. I woke up with a start. After falling asleep, the same thing happened again. In the morning I told people about this. They told me that I was just afraid of something. I was pregnant at the time and I dreamed this same sort of dream every night for three months until I gave birth." (p12)

"One day as I was sleeping I dreamt I saw a man in white coming towards me. Startled, I woke up and ran out of the hut. While I had been sleeping, a man in white had come to the boma! Upon seeing him, I ran to him and grabbed him. I took the white cloth and put it on my head. I ran off to wash and then afterwards I sang and danced with the white cloth over my head. Next I found some debes, started beating them and then ran off and persuaded some other women to beat them for me while I danced. Now they knew I had a spirit. After I danced I felt much better. In fact I was even able to milk a cow. That night, however, something started choking me and I went crazy again, singing and dancing." (p18)

"The first symptoms were in 1961, after the birth of the first child. I had a bad dream at night. In that dream, one woman came to me carrying two children, one female and the other one male. After having come to me the mother said, 'Take one child'. After this I woke up and started to cry. I was crying the whole night. The next night I had the same dream. That woman came to me and insisted that I have to go with her. After this I was very uneasy, and I had pains in heart and its beat was unstable. When I was praying and was advised to join the church I heard a voice saying, 'leave praying'. After that I decided to join the church. I was shaking, crying and I had pains in heart." (p25)

"I had headache and stomach ache, as well as fever quite often. I also fainted every now and then. I started to have dreadful dreams. Sometimes I dreamed that some animals attack on me." (p27)

"I started to have stomach ache when I vast pregnant for my first child. At night I had a very bad dream, but I did not tremble. My legs became cold and stiff, and the coldness extended until my head. Then I started to shake and make noise." (p40)

"I had strong pains, and my veiling was heard to a long distance. I also had bad dreams caused by spirits. I did know the names of the spirits, because I did not participate in drumming, where spirits reveal their names. So I never got to know what kinds of spirits they were." (p84)

"I started to have a spirit when I had given birth to two children. After that every pregnancy ended with a still birth. Every time when I give birth, the child dies. This trouble started in 1965 when I was living on the eastern side of the Ruvu River. I was taken to a Swahili healer living in Handeni. The healer who treated me told that I have a spirit, and that spirit is 'pepo bubu' (spirit which does not speak). I continued to have trouble, and my heart beat was irregular." (p91)

"I was caught by a spirit for the first time after having given birth to my first child. I had problems with pregnancy, and I had several abortions.

I had headache and stomach ache, as well as fever quite often. I also fainted every now and then. I started to have dreadful dreams. Sometimes I dreamed that some animals attack on me.

One day when I went out to *pori* to collect firewood I found myself crying in stead of cutting firewood. I simply failed to do my job. The whole body was powerless. I returned home without firewood. Later on that day when the cattle returned home I started to make noise, cry and shiver. This condition continued for many days. When I went to a *mganga* I did not get better. The illness came back when I returned home. I also felt dizzy quite often.

I was sent to a *mganga* of Kwere origin. I was prepared medicine by using the meat of a black cock. When he went to the *pori* to collect medicine I shivered badly, but after he had returned I had no trouble. Then he performed the *ngoma* ritual, but I did not dance. He failed to cure me.

Then I was taken to another *mganga* in Miono (Mzigua). He wanted from me a white cock. He prepared medicine with the cock, but did not kill it. He did not have any *ngoma* ritual. After his treatment I became pregnant.

The spirit told me that I should drink a certain medicine. He spoke inside me like a human being, and at the same time it was like a kind of dream.

At other times, when I gave birth to a child, the spirit would say, 'I will kill your child'. The spirit could also tell me to take my ill child to a certain *mganga*, and this cured him or her. I got relief to my head ache and stomach troubles from the *mganga*, but he could not chase the spirit away." (p27)

7.5 EXCESSIVE POWER

In other cases spirits were identified as cause of troubles, when people got excessive power, so that they could throw a spear or run towards the bush fearlessly. A desire for things normally denied from them was also noticed in a

number of cases. Things such as soap, books, spear, sword, khanga (colourful cotton cloth), and clean clothes were among the items they, or actually the spirits, wanted.

"First I had a spirit which demanded an umbrella. Another day I felt strong pains in my stomach, and at home I drank medicine prepared of a tree called *osokonoi* (). I also hate sunshine very much. – One day when I went to a Maasai ritual where they dance and sing, my back suddenly became stiff. I was ill for a long time, and also my legs had pains. I got sheep fat to drink, and immediately after that I got bad stomach pains. This continued for a long time, and the stomach became very badly swollen. They tried to give me all sorts of medicine, but those medicines did not help. The stomach was filled by pus.

I was sent to various hospitals. I was sent to seven different hospitals. I was also sent seven times to *olpul*. Still my illness was not overcome. After a while I became better and I thought that I have been healed. But then I started to have pains in mouth, hands and eyes. When people were thinking what this might be, it turned out that it was a spirit; I began to sing. When there was drumming far away, I knew that it is drumming (although I did not hear). I had a spirit called Simba (Lion). When I hear a lion roaring, although other people do not hear, I run through the kraal fence without opening the gate, after the roar of the lion.

I learned this by one man, Samweli. There are people who teach you. When they have taught you the Word of God, you will be healed completely. When I was sent for instruction and later was baptised, it was the end of *kelele* (noise) of the spirits until now. Pains in stomach still continued for a while, but until now I have not managed to get a child.

We did not ask any *mganga*, whether it is a spirit, because people told that it is a very strange thing. Therefore I was not in a position to ask. I myself realised that it is a lion, because when I hear the roar of a lion I feel that a lion is my friend. Therefore I have to look for its place." (p87)

7.6 EXTREME EXPERIENCES AND PROLONGED SUFFERING

In other cases the experiences of the person were so extraordinary that spirit intrusion as an explanation seemed most likely. Such experiences may be bad dreams and omens, extreme and prolonged suffering. The behaviour of the person, such as shaking, shivering and fainting add the likelihood of spirit infliction.

"The very first time the spirit attacked me when I was seven years old. One day when I was in the bush in an *olpul* ritual together with my age-mates I saw, in passing, how a Kwere woman was treated by a *mganga*. I started to shiver and get fits. After returning to the *olpul* place I was not

able to eat meat. After a while I started to feel like being drunken. This condition continued for a month at least.

Then one day after the *olpul* had finished and we had returned home, suddenly a snake dropped itself down from a tree, under which we were resting in a shade. All people there were shocked by this incident, and I was shocked that badly that I was not able to move. I started to faint and get fits. Since this time the spirit continued to trouble me every day, sometimes several times a day.

The time when the spirit started to attack me by force was when I was pregnant for my first child. I was in this condition when the snake dropped itself down." (p21)

7.7 COMPARING ONE'S OWN EXPERIENCES WITH THOSE OF OTHERS

In some cases the patient herself came to the conclusion that the trouble must be caused by a spirit. Such conclusion was reached after comparing one's own symptoms with those of the others. Sometimes the patient was ill for a long time, and if it could not be diagnosed as one of the known diseases, spirit possession was the only explanation left. Also if the pains moved from one body part to another, it was an almost sure sign of spirit intrusion. No drumming and dancing was involved in those cases.

"I fainted every now and then, and I was almost lame. When I was taken to a hospital, they were not able to see what it was. They said that I have no illness. But I fainted and was almost lame. On that point I began to look at my symptoms and compare them with those of others. So I concluded that it must be a spirit and I was taken to the church." (p77)

" I have got a spirit, but I have not danced; it is not a spirit wanting songs. It revealed itself as an illness which troubled me beneath the navel. I had severe pains. It is as if it has a 'room' there; if you press it, it cries. Also people here can hear it." (p84)

"I was caught by an illness. I was taken to a hospital, and I was close to death. I looked into the disease and concluded that it is of a 'cold' kind. When I leave my home even at day-time I see something moving this way, something black, and blue, or more bright. And sometimes like clouds, but they are no clouds. – It was God himself who revealed me (that it is a spirit)." (p85)

" I knew that it is a spirit, because I was ill for a long time and I was not able to eat, I did not eat gruel. Even now when I go to herd livestock I can bring only water. I was ill for a long time, and very badly ill. At

home inside the house I felt very dizzy and hit the wall so that it almost broke down. So I told to my husband that I will join the church. My husband told that if I wanted I could go. – After that my condition improved" (p90)

"I did not go to any healer. I just danced and it helped me to relax. I was not sent to a healer, because the Kwere do not know (how to heal). Here (in Lugoba) there is no help, but in the Gogo area (in the middle of the country) the healers are very able. Also Zigua healers are able to cure." (p43)

"I had stomach ache, and I walked around aimlessly and spoke nonsense. People tried to help me by drumming with kerosene tins, but it did not help. I was sent to a Mguu healer. I sent a big he-goat to the healer, so that he would use it for preparing charms for me. Another goat was sold for covering travel costs. The healer himself wanted money as a payment. When I noticed that troubles of possession just increased, I did not go to a healer any more." (p55)

7.8 SUMMARY

Drum beating was the most common means of identifying spirit intrusion. Divination was carried out often by Bantu healers, especially in the Parakuyo area and the southern Maasai area, where healers are living close to the Maasai. The identification was also carried out through home drumming, especially deep on the Maasai plain, where Bantu healers were not available. The spirit revealed itself by making, or forcing, the patient dance, and possibly sing its favourite song. Sometimes several spirits could dance and sing after one another.

Bad dreams, sometimes very terrifying ones, were fairly commonly occurring symptom. In those, fear of many kinds of things was often accompanied with the fear of losing a child, or even hatred of one's own child. These dreams were often followed by divination by a healer, and spirits were often found as the cause of those dreams.

Some felt having excessive power and courage, which are not characteristic of Maasai women. These symptoms were interpreted as signs of spirit intrusion. In some cases, prolonged and excessive suffering, for which no medical system could bring alleviation, was considered as sign of spirits. In areas where spirit possession was a common phenomenon people could just compare their own experiences with those of others and conclude that they had spirits.

8. ATTEMPTED REMEDIES

The case histories show that the patients attempted to get help for their ailments by using a number of means available. The cure involves, roughly speaking, two different phases: diagnostics and healing. Table 4 lists six basic methods, which were used in search for help in different phases of spirit possession. Below I describe in brief what each type of remedy means. Note that the names chosen are here used only as 'tags' to indicate each type of healing, and one should not include into them any further semantic connotations.

Mganga: This is a Swahili term (sg. *mganga*, pl. *waganga*) for a traditional medical expert, whose area of competence may include divining or healing, or both. By *mganga* I mean here any of the Bantu healers, regardless of one's ethnic affiliation, as far as one belongs to one of the Bantu groups. Common to all these healers is that they are acquainted with spirit possession phenomena since time immemorial. They use various kinds of divining methods, such as inspecting one's blood, interrogating the patient, divining from the intestines of killed animals, such as fowl and goat, etc. In divination, they often use drum beating, where usually a group of drum beaters is involved. They also prepare many kinds of medicines, using roots, bark, and leaves of medicinal plants. Charms are often prepared for protecting the patient against witchcraft and other kinds of evil. In regard to religious affiliation, a *mganga* may be a Muslim, an adherent of a traditional religion, or a Christian (although seldom the latter is the case).

Oloiboni: The Maasai themselves have a class of healers, which are termed as *iloibonok* (sg. *oloiboni*). They all are members of the Enkidong' sub-clan, which is a sub-branch of the Ilaiser clan. This belongs to the right-hand clan group, called Ilorokiteng. Although there are smaller rival groups of healers, such as *ilkuyatik* (sg. *olkuyati*), the *iloibonok* have managed to control the healing market among the Maasai almost without serious challenge. *Ilkuyatik* are mentioned as practising healing, but they have never challenged the supreme power of the *iloibonok*, who have been accepted as the supreme healers by the Maasai society. In addition to healing, the *iloibonok* have considerable power in regulating the sequence of age-sets, the moments of opening and closing the initiation periods of boys.

Iloibonok use a calabash containing stones and other small things in divining. After shaking the calabash and talking as if into the calabash itself secret words, the stones are thrown on the cow hide, and out of the configurations made by the stones the diviner is able to foretell what the trouble of the patient is. The *iloibonok* are also well known experts in preparing many kinds of medicines for

curing diseases. Their knowledge of medicinal plants is astonishingly extensive and detailed (Hurskainen 1994).

Although the *iloibonok* are skilled in treating several kinds of illnesses, they are virtually totally incapable of treating patients with spirit possession. This is what they say themselves and this is also experienced by the patients. However, many of the patients were treated by *iloibonok*, either because of other illnesses, or because they did not know what troubled them. But as soon as it was recognised that spirits were involved, the patient was taken somewhere else and not treated by the *oloiboni*.

Mwalimu: This term includes those healers who use Islamic methods of curing. They may have a status of a Koranic teacher, *mwalimu* (pl. *wa(a)limu*), or they may be sheikhs (*shehe*, pl. *mashehe*). In such healing, Koranic script may be read, after which it is soaked in hot water and given to the patient to drink. Alternatively it may be burned in fire, and the patient inhales the smoke. Also charms are prepared by Muslim healers. The healers of this category may also be called as *waganga wa kitabu*, referring to their use of scriptures in healing, but they should not be mixed with the *waganga wa pepo*, who use more African methods in healing (Giles 1987: 244).

Hospital: This type of healing includes all kinds of modern scholarly medical treatment, whether it is given in a local dispensary or a major hospital. Also this sector of medical health was considered by the patients almost totally incapable of treating people possessed by spirits.

Debes: This refers to a special kind of drum beating used by Maasai in their own kraals. Instead of proper drums, people use empty kerosene tins, which produce a fairly loud sound. Evidently this is imitation of the drum beating of the Bantu healers, which they have learned while being treated by those healers. Although the drum beating is detached from its ritual context, it reportedly works quite well. In some areas this is almost the only way of appeasing spirits.

Church: Ultimately the most important remedy is the treatment given by various Christian churches. Denominations mentioned in case histories are the Roman Catholic church, the Lutheran Church, the Anglican Church, and the Pentecostals. It is not fully known what methods are used by each of these churches. It may also be that methods of one church are different in various areas. Whether exorcism in the sense of casting out spirits is practised by any of them is not known. The most often mentioned method is teaching in baptismal classes and baptism afterwards in conjunction with a major Sunday service. The cure is often gradual and it is accompanied with certain conditions, which we shall discuss below in more detail.

Table 4. Attempts to seek for help in spirit possession cases. Information has been obtained from the case histories as it was told by the patients themselves.

	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	Sixth	Total
Mganga	28	19	9	8	2		66
Oloiboni	11	7	7	2	1	1	29
Mwalimu	1	2					3
Hospital	10	7	5	2	1	1	26
Church	10	14	14	7	3	4	52
Debes	10	4	1	1			16
Total	70	53	36	20	7	6	182

Table 4 shows how people used various remedies as their first, second, third etc. attempt to cope with the problem. Some attempted curing only once or twice before they found the 'final' and effective healing method. Some did not attempt anything at all before joining the Church.

8.1 MGANGA

The most commonly used method as a first attempt (28 cases) was *mganga*, a Bantu healer. Many of the patients attempted this also as a second (19), third (9) and fourth (8) method. Typically people in the areas where Bantu healers were readily available used this method first. There are also cases where a Maasai healer or a hospital was used first, and then a Bantu healer was consulted. The most general outcome of a healing session with a Bantu healer was that the patient felt relieved to some extent, but was not fully cured. The healers did not attempt to get the patients rid of spirits; they rather tried to make the spirits to express their wishes, which were then fulfilled if possible.

It can clearly be seen in the case histories that in the idiom of the Bantu healers spirit possession was a permanent condition rather than a passing trouble. For that reason, casting out spirits would violate their basic view of spirits, according to which spirits are a necessary companion of everybody, and people have to learn to cope with them, and possibly make use of their existence and power.

8.2 MAASAI HEALER

The Maasai healer, *oloiboni*, was also used rather often (11) as a first remedy, but considerably less often than the Bantu healers. This odd-looking situation is explained by the fact that although the Maasai consult *iloibonok* frequently, in matters of spirits they are not trusted, and even the *iloibonok* themselves confess their ultimate ignorance concerning such matters. The fact that patients used *oloiboni* quite often also as a second (7) and third (7) remedy is due to ignorance regarding the cause of the trouble in the patient. As soon as the conclusion was made that the illness is caused by a spirit, *iloibonok* were not consulted any more.

The *iloibonok* themselves readily confessed that they are not able to treat spirit possession. This was the case at least among the Parakuyo in the Western Bagamoyo District. Some *iloibonok* tried to belittle the trouble and thought that there is much pretence in women's behaviour, and that the Bantu healers want to make business with the so-called spirits, which in fact do not exist.

8.3 HOSPITAL

Hospitals were used almost as often as *iloibonok* in attempts to cope with the illness. The patients knew very little about the treatment they received. Often the only information mentioned was how many injections or pills they received. They knew nothing about the medicine itself. The general view of the patients was that hospitals, although those are good in treating 'normal' diseases, are not capable of treating illnesses caused by spirits.

One special feature concerning modern medical care occurs in some case histories. There seems to be a belief that medicines of a hospital belong to an entirely different realm than medicines of Bantu healers, or of *iloibonok*, and that these realms should not be mixed. This means that if one has started with medicines of one realm one should continue to finish that medication before starting in another realm. There is also a belief that medication in one realm should not be interrupted in order to start medication in another realm. Medicines should not be thrown away, but they should be used until they are finished. It can also happen that the illness does not fit into the treatment given in hospitals.

"I was troubled by day and night. I was helped by being brought to a hospital four times. In the hospital in Arusha I was given pills, but my condition got worse. That illness did not like pills or a needle; it did not like a hospital at all." (Case p74)

8.4 MUSLIM HEALER

There were only three cases where a Muslim healer, normally termed as *shehe* (sheikh), was consulted. Although they have considerable medical practice in the Islands and other Muslim areas with strong Arabic influence, in mainland villages they are less important than the traditional Bantu healers. Sheikhs are acquainted with spirits, particularly those known in the Arabic tradition, such as *jini*, *ruhani*, *mumiani* etc., but they are of minor significance in the Maasai area.

8.5 DRUM BEATING

Drum beating at home is a remedy which is typically used as the first alternative (10 cases). Some used it as a second attempt (4) after having failed with *oloiboni* or in a hospital. The 'drums' themselves are empty kerosene tins, which are often rusty and without any other use. Their appearance and sound are very far from the proper drums of the Bantu healers. Also the socio-psychological context of drum beating is quite different from that of the Bantu healers, where drum beating is only a part of a complicated and integrated ritual. Yet it seemed to function and patients became relieved. They danced and sung whenever the beat of the spirit in question was heard. Thus a patient might dance in the rhythm of several different beats, indicating that they were possessed by several different kinds of spirits. I never heard that a person was possessed by more than one spirit of the same type.

Although beating of drums at home is often quite clumsy and seems to be out of context, it is in fact the only form which has features of a cult developed around spirit possession among the Maasai. An elderly woman, who herself has gone through the possession, is often a cult leader and directs drum beating sessions. Sometimes this can be done by anybody who happens to be at home on the moment, when the spirits begin to demand attention. One has to know a number of different beats, of course, but the Maasai women in certain areas have become quite skilled in this.

Beating of drums at home used to be quite common in a fairly large area. It was totally unknown in the south among the Parakuyo in the 1970s. There was no major motivation for this kind of treatment, because there were plenty of Bantu healers in the neighbourhood of the Parakuyo. In the north, starting from Ruvu to Olkesumet, Naperera, Simanjiro, Terat, Kerere, and particularly Meserani, it is known to have occurred some time in the history of spirit possession. Although only 16 of the patients specifically stated having used beating of drums at home, the number is certainly bigger. In 27 case histories there are features which indicate clearly that beating of drums at home had influenced them in a way or another. Often it happened that when drums were beaten to someone else, the patient started to dance and sing, thus indicating that

she had a spirit. Sometimes, instead of dancing, the patient started to shiver or faint, or simply went in a semi-unconscious state.

Things have changed, however. While in the early 1970s beating of drums at home was common in Ruvu, Olkesumet and Naperera, it had become very rare in 1983, and virtually had disappeared by November 1996, when I was in the area last time. In Meserani and adjacent areas it was common in 1983, and still in 1996 it was there the most important remedy used, although patients in increasing numbers sought for help in the Church²⁶.

8.6 CHURCH

Ultimately the most effective remedy is claimed to be the Christian instruction classes and subsequent baptism. Not so many tried it as the first remedy (10 cases), but there were more who tried it as a second (14) and third (14) source of help. Some tried other methods several times first, so that in some cases people approached the Church only as a fourth (7), fifth (4) or sixth (4) possibility. In fact some tried other methods even more times, because attempts beyond six were not recorded in the survey, and are therefore not shown in Table 4. Church is typically the last attempt, and people joining the Church normally stopped using other methods.

In fact a belief developed that if one leaves the Church after having joined it, or is irregular in participating its activities, one makes herself vulnerable to spirit intrusion. And if spirits attack after one has already been baptised, her condition will become still worse than it was earlier. This belief keeps the healed women within the realm of the Church and keeps them active. In a sense, it looks like the women do not have a choice. They have to stay faithful to the Church, which has helped them to become healed.

One must keep in mind that healing through the Church is fundamentally different from the cure offered by the Bantu healers. While the latter wanted to get the spirits to speak out and express their wishes, so that they could be entertained, the Church attempted to get the spirits to leave their hosts permanently. Although the term 'exorcism' or its equivalent is not used when referring to activities of the Church, the baptism has features which include casting out spirits.

There are many kinds of stories of when and how healing took place. Many patients remembered the moment when they had symptoms for the last time. Here are some experiences:

"After hearing the First Commandment on my first day of baptismal instruction, I began to shake and wail and then the spirit left me for good. I later accomplished instruction and was baptised." (Case p3)

²⁶ Appendix IV: Tape2-96.

"When it was found that I had a spirit I joined the Church, but I also continued to go to the hospital to get medical treatment. I went to the hospitals of Mawenzi in Moshi, Kibongoto, and Karungo in Meru. I was given pills and I was injected, but these 'did not agree with this spirit'. After entering the church and learning the commandments of God, the spirit started to leave me. Now I do not have spirits, but I still have that what they say that it is witchcraft, but maybe it is a spirit." (Case p57)

"When I was in the hospital in Handeni, people of the Church told me that I have a spirit. On the third week of instruction my eyes got better. When I had finished studying all ten commandments, pains in the back were finished. After six months I was baptised. I did not want to go any more to Wanguu (healers of Nguu people). Now I am fully cured." (Case p64)

"I joined the Catholic Church in 1972. The Church did not have power; other people left, but I stayed. They did not have prayer. Rev. Köbler came and told that this church has prayers and teaching. The spirit left at a time when I was learning the third and fourth commandment." (Case p66)

Although the most often heard view is that joining the Church is a sure way of getting healed permanently, also counter-opinions occur. It is also said that one should not join the Church without first being possessed, lest the Church cannot help when the possession really occurs.

"Many of those who got help for being possessed by spirits have joined the church. But there are also those who, although they go to church, still are caught. If a person joins the church without being first possessed by a spirit, it will not be possible to cure her from spirit possession if she will be possessed later on. The only safe way of getting permanent cure is to wait until one will be possessed, and then join the church. If one joins it too early, the church cannot help." (Case p32)

Different experiences by various people of the effectiveness of the Church have perplexed the minds of the Maasai. Here is a testimony of an elderly woman, who experienced spirit possession in her early childhood. After having tried various methods, she was finally cured by joining the Church, and was also helping others troubled by spirits. Yet she still was ill, suffering pains allegedly caused by spirits.

"I am very surprised to see that there are many people who leave the church, commit sin, and the spirit comes back. Then they are performed *ngoma* rituals without getting much help. Then they repent and go back to the church and get forgiveness, and they are immediately cured. I am astonished to see how these people, whom I have been teaching in

Simanjiro, are cured, and I myself still continue to have pains. I still have head ache and pains under the arm." (Case p56)

8.7 COMPLICATED HEALING HISTORIES

Although some common trends can be seen in the healing histories of patients all over the large area, there are also outstanding extremes. Some have simply been tempted to dance and sing, when drums were beaten to appease somebody else. They experienced very little pain, or no pain at all. Dancing itself was a sufficient proof that one had a spirit, and that, in order to avoid becoming ill, it was better to join the Church. At least in certain areas there developed a belief that it was not wise to join the Church before it was sure that a spirit had intruded the person.

In other cases the situation was much more complicated, and much time, energy and money was used in searching for relief. The following cases clarify the complexities involved:

" The first occurrence of my difficulties was at the age of about 27. The symptoms were pain in the top centre of my head. The pain was not constant but periodic. For example, I would be troubled for a month and then be without symptoms for two months, or I would have pain for six months and then feel well for a week. This went on for four years. – Then one day my entire head hurt me. Within a week the pain had moved to my back. I had a hard, round painful lump in my stomach. Something would choke me. My whole back felt as though it were burning and I was almost out of my mind. I did strange things, such as claiming that my cattle belonged to someone else, or I was running to the tops of hills.

Because I had a family and I was a man of authority, I decided it would be wise to be cured as soon as possible. I went to two *iloibonok*. I also went to so many traditional doctors that I lost count of the number. I think I consulted over twenty of them. The fees I was charged amounted to sixty-five cattle. I even went as far as Tanga (coastal city) for help.

I was so bothered by my illness that at times I would not even wait to complete a cure with one doctor, but I would go off seeking the help of another. Many times I would sell more of my cattle in order to meet the fees. – In general the doctors followed these procedures. They would give me charms, shake the calabash, give me boiled roots and herbs to drink and make incisions on me into which they would rub the medicine. The only time I was helped was when I went to a traditional doctor in Moshi who killed a goat and boiled some fat for me to drink. He cut me and rubbed medicine into the cuts and gave me a purgative. I felt better for about three weeks.

Then one night I would awake shaking. The last traditional doctor I saw was Ipitet from Loitokitok. This doctor did all of the usual things and

I stayed with him for two months. But instead of improving I began to get worse and thought I would return home to die. Upon returning home, I was sure I had a demon although I did not show the same symptoms as the women. It was hard for me to go to church but my brother encouraged me because my herd was being reduced.

First of all, it was hard for me to admit that I had a spirit – it had been confined to the women only. Because of Maasai customs, it would also be very hard for me to be taught with women. Adam, the evangelist, was very smart and consented to teach me separately together with only a few older women. This allowed me to agree to participate instruction. One reason for disliking instruction was that some of my daughters were among those who were in the teaching class. I was afraid that because of the spirit my daughters might go crazy and throw off their clothes. A daughter naked in front of her father is strictly taboo. After I saw that my fears were unjustified, I asked to be taught with the others.

Ever since I started instruction in March, 1971, I have slowly improved. I was baptised on August 29, 1971. The slight symptoms that I do have are disappearing. Now I will only have an occasional head or back ache. Even though I am baptised, I am continuing instruction. I moved to a kraal close to the church. Most of the people in the kraal are Christians. I have only one wife and she does not like the fact that I am a Christian. Three of my children are Christian and I urge my whole family to become Christians. My wife is having a real struggle. – I am really bothered by other Maasai men. They come and ask me, "Are you the one who sits among women and children? You aren't worthy to be a Maasai!" My reply to this is that I do not blame God for this thing he had, but thank Him for his cure and thank Christ, His Son. I hope that others can receive that which I now have." (Case p13)

"I had my first occurrence of spirit possession about ten years ago in 1961, at a time when I was pregnant. I had a fever and a sickness that covered my body from my leg to my head. I lost the child by miscarriage. Afterwards I went to the dispensary at Naperera where they gave me two shots which had no effect on my condition. In fact, after this my arm swelled up, my heart began beating irregularly and I had fainting spells.

I was brought to a traditional doctor at Naperera, a Maasai named Marehemu. He shook the calabash to see what was wrong with me. He told me I had just a common sickness and gave me a charm and some medicine to drink. I paid him one shilling and felt alright for the next five or six months.

One day near the time of the rainy season I said, "It will rain tomorrow." As I said this, I felt a burning, shooting pain from my side which extended up to my neck. Someone asked me, "How do you know it will rain? Are you a laibon?" I replied, "I hear it raining in my head and

when I look I see water around me." The next day it began to rain and I began to have fainting spells as before.

There were some people in the kraal who knew about spirits and they thought this might possibly be my problem. They beat on debes for me in order to see if the spirit would manifest itself. I cried but showed no other signs such as the usual yelling, shaking and dancing which would indicate a spirit. – That night I woke with a feeling as though something like a blank cloud was lifting me. I sat up, put my hands over my face and after a time I dozed off. Then I saw a man holding a pail standing over me. The lower half of my body was white although the upper part was coloured as an ordinary Maasai. I asked him who he was whereupon he moved around and hit one of my legs from behind. Next I saw someone standing in the corner who told me to drink water because my heart was hot. Seeing a gourd of milk nearby, I drank that. – When I woke in the morning I found that the leg which had been hit was very stiff and almost paralysed. I could only move the leg with great effort and I had no appetite. Within a few days my leg was better but now I had fever and sickness. Pain would move over my entire body from side to side and from top to bottom. My family wanted to take me to the hospital but I refused. They beat on debes again and elicited the same response as before crying.

I was then brought to a traditional doctor at Olkesumet. Upon arrival at the doctor's home I refused his help saying that I did not have a spirit. I was then taken to a laibon at Kisongo who shook the calabash and told me I had a regular sickness plus the fact that I was also bewitched by someone.

I returned home, still ill, and lost another child by miscarriage. I agreed now to go to the traditional doctor at Olkesumet, who also told me that I had a spirit. He played the drums for me until I began shaking and dancing and exhibiting the usual features of one possessed by a spirit. I stayed with this doctor for a month and for three months after I was alright. The charge was 120 Shs, plus goats and other supplies used for the medicine.

The fever and sickness returned again as before. I found that if I didn't do anything – no activity or work – I felt much better. One night while sleeping I was told by the spirit to drink goat's fat in the morning and he would give me a boy child (I had lost the last three children through miscarriage). That morning I found some goat's fat and drank it. For the next eight to nine months I was unable to work without becoming violently sick. Then one night the spirit told me I was going to give birth soon. In a week or so I gave birth to a boy.

Three months later the spirit told me I would have a female child in the future but she wouldn't belong to him – the boy child was his. Now another spirit (another voice) said, "I want to kill this boy child". When I would nurse the child both I and it would faint. The other voice now said,

"If you don't want the child to die, go to Moshi and get shots." I went to Moshi where we were each given two shots and were both healed.

After a time I went berserk. I was unable to think clearly and would sit for hours staring at nothing. If the weather was cold, and they brought clothes for me, I would cry and throw the clothes on the ground. I was brought to a traditional doctor at Ruvu. Apparently I was in extremely poor condition because this doctor called for others and there was a total of four doctors who tried to help me. They brewed up more medicine for me which didn't help. In fact, at that time I was almost dead. I returned home in this condition. The payment was 100 Shs.

I became pregnant and after a year of pregnancy (although I was very sick), I gave birth to a girl. During this time the two voices struggled within me – one speaking for the girl child and the voice of the boy child's spirit speaking against the girl. When I nursed this child I had either to look away while nursing it or close my eyes or the child would choke.

The first spirit or voice spoke to me again, telling me that if I wanted another boy child I must drink goat fat as before. This time there was no goat fat to be had and my husband did not feel like killing one to suit my whim. The boy child I bore was dead.

My husband had heard from someone else that the church was the answer and he told me to go, but I refused. I became pregnant again and then agreed to attend church. At that time my stomach was abnormally large (three months pregnant). I couldn't straighten up and I was feverish and sick. I went to church at Namalulu for one week after which I could straighten up. They moved to Olokii where I attended baptismal instruction for three months after which my sickness left but my stomach was still unusually distended.

I went back to Namalulu for two months and my stomach was normal there. I gave birth with no problems. Now if the spirit comes to me in the form of pain or the usual shaking and dancing, I pray and go to church to worship. If I do this immediately, it leaves. Otherwise I am caught in its power for a time. The trance-like dance over which we have no control is an example of the spirit's power. I am not completely healed but am getting better all the time." (Case p20)

"I experienced spirit infliction for the first time when I was already married. One day, when we had moved to a new kraal, one woman sent me to fetch water from inside the house. When I arrived to the container I fell down and fainted. The woman found me as if I were dead.

Since this time I continued to faint every now and then, and I was taken to a local doctor. It was thought that I am bewitched. Another doctor was invited to remove the curse. The doctor moved a horn covered by a cloth from the bed of the mother. Suddenly I started to shake and

shiver while hearing the beat of the drums. This was an indication that I had a spirit.

I continued to faint daily, but I did not shake. Only afterwards I started to shake, and this continued almost without interruption.

First I was taken to a local doctor, who thought that I have been bewitched. One cow horn was found hidden in the bed, and another one was found at the door post. The doctor started to beat drums and I began to shake. When the spirit was asked to reveal itself, it stubbornly refused to say anything and nothing else could be done.

After I had given birth to the first child I started to have burning pain in chest. Breasts started swelling and issuing blood. Especially in the morning blood came out of breasts. Then the left breast dried up completely, and I was forced to stop the breast-feeding of the child. So I continued until I was pregnant for the second child.

Then I was again taken to a local doctor. He wore a hyena's hide on his head, a string of beads on chest, and a skin on loins. He looked very dreadful. He started to dance. And when I tried to follow him and dance and sing like he I failed completely. I fell down in a shade of a tree and I fell asleep. They called me saying, "So-and-so come, come to see your doctor." I could not respond to the call.

However, after this doctor had performed his drum beating, I began to have fits.

The following day they went to call for the doctor again. When he beated drums I had fits again. That day we were two who had fits. The other woman ran and wanted to hide herself inside the house. There she fell down and hit her head on a burning ember with the result that she got a bad wound above her eye. When her mother followed her inside, she found her shaking. But she herself did not recognise that she was hurt.

The doctor came to boil medicine, slaughtered a goat and beated drums to her again. From this time on I wanted to join the church.

When I was baptised my husband wanted to prevent me from participating the activities of the church. He thought that I would not go to church but that I rather am looking for men. For my husband is blind. When I wanted to go I was immediately returned back.

I had fits and I shouted. Every time when I became pregnant I had miscarriage. Troubles continued, and after moving to the other side of Miono I was sent to another doctor in Manga. He treated me and the spirit started to speak during drum beating. The doctor demanded, "Leave her!" It said, "No, I don't!" The doctor asked, "What do you want?" It replied, "I want a goat". It was given a goat, and the doctor told it, "Do not kill children again!" The doctor took me into the forest and killed a he-goat and two cocks. He also boiled herbs for drinking and beat drums.

Now my condition improved. The spirit did not kill children any more. My condition improved, but I still continued to have fits. I told to my husband that it is necessary for me to join the church again. When I

joined the church again and was baptised in the Pentecostal church, I have not experienced fits any more." (Case p36)

"I was possessed by a spirit when I was a small child. I was dancing with warriors when I was possessed. It was in a time when we were living in Oloilalei, and many kraals around were moving away. Our kraal was left alone there. I started to feel anger because of loneliness, because I was used to live with my friends. I cried from morning until evening when the cattle started to return from the pasture. After the cattle had come home I cried even more. I also cried when I past by the empty kraals. At night crying increased even more, and people around were worried because they did not know what to do. All that night my thoughts were in those songs which we had been singing with my friends. In addition, my whole body started to swell. My whole body turned heavy, and I could not even raise my hand.

When I heard debes being beaten I started to sing and dance, and I rushed into a calf pen. And my parents poured water on me when I fainted.

Then I was brought from Ruvu to Olkesumet to the kraal of Olmendea. There are many Christians. But even there they did not know what it was. They did not say it was *pepo*. They advised that I should be taken to a hospital, because it seemed an ordinary disease and not a *pepo*.

In the kraal of Olmendea I met women who had assembled to study the Word of God. They started to sing Christian songs. I started to hate these songs and run away here and there, because I did not like the songs they sung.

Now it became apparent that this is a spirit and the Christian women realised that it is a spirit. But my husband and others said it is not. They said that this woman pretends to be possessed by a spirit. Therefore we should beat her. They said that this woman is perhaps not ill, but tries to avoid herding cattle and comes to this area only for that purpose. Therefore they forced me every morning to go for herding cattle. Other women told that this girl should not be beaten but let her join the church. They said that the claims that the girls only pretend, and the consequent beating, will destroy their girls.

Now I was taken to the church. My hands were tied together, for if they were not, by approaching the church I would have started to hate the church and run away. People joined together to take me to the church, but inside the church I did not hear anything. When my fellow women told me in the morning to join them to go to the church I started to wail, and after arriving there I did not hear a word. After returning home my body was swollen because of having fallen down several times in the church.

In fact it was very little that I benefited from being taken to the church by force, because I did not want to hear their songs. But little by little I became used to this new environment. In about a month's time my

health improved and I could participate the teaching. But when my name was mentioned I started to get fits. After having been participating about two months in the teaching, I was fully cured.

The time of first experiences of spirit possession was in 1970, the time the initiation period of Ilmaka was opened." (Case p62)

8.8 SUMMARY

In conclusion we can say that in the average more than two remedies were used by each patient. Out of the total number of 91 patients we have information on, 70 was using some remedy. Altogether 182 treatments were recorded, and certainly there were many more. Bantu healers were used most often, 66 times in all. The good second was the Church with 52 times. This means that out of 90 cases, 52 joined the Church sooner or later. If the Church was chosen as a remedy, it was not repeated, because the patient normally stayed in the Church. There are a few cases where the patient moved from one Church to another, but these cases were recorded as one single cure. The third method experienced as helpful was the beating of *debes* at home (26 cases). Hospitals (26) and Maasai healers (29), *iloibonok*, although used quite frequently, were not experienced helpful at all.

9. ATTEMPTS TO UNDERSTAND

The difficulty in understanding the spirit possession among the Maasai was the major reason for postponing the publication of this study by more than 20 years. Although there is a vast literature on spirit possession in Africa, none of them seemed to fit to the situation which I was studying. There were good reasons to believe that it was a passing phenomenon, an 'epidemic' which comes as a surge, calms down and finally disappears. The past years have shown that this exactly has happened in most areas, where spirit possession was extensive. Yet there is much which calls for explanation.

Perhaps it is not realistic to expect that one possibly can explain this complicated phenomenon. It is not even fully clear what we should explain and what we mean by explanation. Does it mean that we try to give answers to all kinds of questions posed on the given theme or 'problem'? Who asks the questions and where are the answers to be found? Are they questions of the Maasai, or of the researcher and other scholars, or possibly of other groups? And are the answers a summary of the thoughts of the Maasai themselves, or of the various individual healers and healing institutions, or are they based on one or more scientific theories? These issues must be considered seriously, if we want to get some illumination to the questions.

Often a distinction is made between indigenous explanations, or folk philosophy, and scientific explanations, as if those two were mutually exclusive. Underneath this assumption is that folk explanations are based on faulty cause-effect relations, while scientific explanations base their argumentation on 'objective' theories, and are therefore trustworthy. This must be at least partly true; otherwise there would be no point in scientific research. It is, however, incorrect to make such a sharp dichotomy between scientific and folk methods, because, as we shall see below, much of what we call scientific explanation is already present in folk explanations, although the conceptualisation of phenomena is not as precise as we would expect. Another point to remember is that folk explanations are not a monolithic whole; people's answers and explanations differ sometimes very sharply within the same society.

9.1 DO SPIRITS REALLY EXIST?

The often heard question is, "Are the 'spirits' real or are they just people's imagination?" Although no scientific research can give an answer to such a question, it cannot be ignored because many people believe in them. And for many people who suffer from spirit possession, it is a question of life and death. People may take the thing so seriously that they die because of, as they think, spirit intrusion. So it cannot be a thing taken lightly.

All of those whose case histories were recorded believed that they had been attacked by real spirits. Perhaps they were not first aware what it was, but later they became to believe that the cause for illness was a spirit.

The most usual first reaction to spirit intrusion was fear and horror:

"Many women in my neighbourhood had spirits. One of them is Sepeko of the Limai clan, and another is Ngooiyoni of the Ilmooge clan. When I saw them I started to cry and I ran away, but nevertheless the illness caught me." (Case p25)

"My husband did not allow me to go to see other women who had been caught by spirits, because they might contaminate me. So I was afraid and tried to hide myself." (Case p24)

A few of them were already accustomed to spirits²⁷ and their reactions were quite practical. This was noticed especially later when spirit possession had become a common phenomenon:

"Many people in my home area had spirits, one of them being Sabise of the Ilmarumai clan. I never was afraid by seeing someone with a spirit. Even if one has fits I just look at her without fear." (Case p26)

9.2 FOLK EXPLANATIONS

Without claiming that people's own explanations, the so-called folk explanations, are opposed to more 'scientific' explanations, it is useful and interesting to see how the members of the society understand the spirit possession phenomena. The need to identify links between phenomena seems to be a human necessity in all societies, so that imbalances can be corrected. In East African societies this need is particularly outstanding. In people's opinion, things do not happen haphazardly; they have causes and consequences.

One local view, not very common, is that spirit possession is the invention of women to get modern and clean clothing for themselves. This explanation is rarely heard, but it comes up every now and then in discussions. This was very strongly put forward in 1996 by one of the leading Maasai healers (Case p83), who thought that they are not spirits which trouble women. Instead the women use the idiom of spirit possession for getting for themselves something that they very much want, but what they cannot get in the society which is so strongly controlled by men. The healer also saw a clear parallel between the two different types of cases, where in one the patient looks for help from Bantu healers and continues to be possessed, and in the other the patient joins the church and becomes free of spirits. Both lead to the desired end: access to modern cloths. In

²⁷ We have to leave the question on the existence of spirits open, because neither we, nor anybody else, has any means whatsoever to prove their existence or non-existence. Therefore we have to look for illumination somewhere else.

the former case the (Bantu) healer may find out that the spirit wants modern clothes and the husband has to acquire them. Since the patient then returns back to her old environment, the only chance to get again new clothes is to succumb to spirit possession and claim the clothes through the spirit(s). So the patient is perpetuated in the state where she can get things that she wants only by relying on spirits. For a woman who joins the church things are different. It is said that the church does not allow the women to come to the church in traditional leather cloaks. Their husbands are obliged to buy cloths for those women in any case. Spirits are not needed as a medium for getting cloths and therefore there is no spirit possession among those who are members of the church. Quite a clever explanation, and perhaps not far from truth in some cases. However, this cannot be a standard explanation for most of the cases.

The extract from the discussion with the *oloiboni* below reveals that the issue is not straightforward for the Maasai. The *oloiboni* thinks that there was madness in early times, and that in more recent times women just cheat the elders. Others do not readily join the opinion of the *oloiboni*, but they do not have any other firm opinion either.

[Case p83]

AH: Now you no doubt have heard that the problem of spirit possession has been there for a long time, and that people have been helped by various means. There have been healers (*waganga*), Bondei healers perhaps, or Nguu healers. They have come to help. Perhaps they have had drumming sessions there at the kraal. And others come to *iloibonok* to get help. How do you see, can you help in this problem of spirit possession?

NA. No. The thing that helps is the church only. Praying God helps.

AH: How do you see, the reason that the *iloibonok* cannot...

NA: That dirt comes out by beating debes...

AH: But why those Bondei healers and others can and you cannot?

NA: Those Bondei are business people. They make their medicines.

AH: Do you think they make business?

NA: Yes.

AH: And you see it is just business?

NA: Just business. And we cannot...

AH: And you cannot?

NA: We cannot.

AH: Were there problems by spirits in early times?

NA: I think that there was madness, here or there, but there was no spirit.

AH: So there was madness but no spirits?

NA: Madness there was ... only madness.

AH: And you are an *oloiboni*, no doubt you think about people's health a lot. Now how do you think, what was it that brought those spirits to the Maasai area?

NA: It is just business, because the Maasai do not buy clothes. Women claim that they become mad. It is better that cloths will be bought to them. It is business. (a woman aside laughs a bit)

AH: Do you think it is business, and that women in this way want clothes, or?

NA: They get those.

AH: And do you think yourself that they are not spirits who trouble them?

An elder interrupts discussion: It is possible that those are spirits, but is there anybody who has got ill because of a spirit?

AH: I as a foreigner cannot answer that question.

NA: Answer you (pointing to a woman).

Woman: I do not know.

Another elder: As for the healer (*oloiboni*), he sees that there is power, there is this power of a spirit. Or not? It would be better that he himself would answer whether there is spirit, but he fails to chase it away. (Therefore) he does not see that there is one.

AH: Is there or is there not?

NA: A spirit?

AH: Yes.

NA: There isn't.

AH: There isn't?

NA: No, there isn't.

AH: Therefore this is the way how women get good clothes.

NA: They do not want those made of skins. It is business, they cheat us.

AH: Now those women have agreed to get treated by those Bondei healers and others so that they would get clothes. And you as an elder pay for clothes and you also pay to the healer.

NA: Yes, you just give money and the women go to buy. The church has come to help to teach and they have left these things.

AH: How do you see those women when they go to the church, how do they get good clothes if there is no spirit?

NA: You just buy new cloths so that they can go to the church in those.

AH: So in any case you get clothes.

NA: All of them. There is no one who has dirty clothes. And those made of skins are not there any more. We sell those to Whites.

The *oloiboni* thinks that the Bantu healers from the coast, whom the Maasai call grossly 'Waswahili', do just business in the Maasai area. He also thinks that they may bring madness and thus spoil the people. He even momentarily consents that the Maasai are 'afraid of spirits', because the drum beating rouses strange behaviour. – But business it is.

[Case 83]

AH: In the coastal area among the Swahili people have constantly been occupied with spirits and such sorts of things. How do you see, if there are no spirits, how this is possible, because the Swahili have been dealing with spirits all times?

NA: They have brought those to 'burn' people. Instead of treating and 'burning' on the coast, it brings madness (here). These are the ones who spoil.

AH: Do the healers just cheat there or are there real spirits?

NA: It is business, bwana.

AH: Also there it is business?

NA: Yes.

AH: Thank you.

NA: You know that we are afraid of spirits, because the beat of debes is frightening... by seeing it the women are afraid because people get this thing. (laughter of people)

AH: But is the spirit real or just play?

NA: Just play. It is business.

The standard explanation of spirit possession among the church servants is that spirits are real and that they can be pacified, or rather driven out, only through teaching and subsequent baptism. It is thought that alien spirits have no power over people if they have been occupied by Holy Spirit, who is stronger than any of those. Therefore spirits have no place in the church. If spirits, however start to trouble someone who already has joined the church, it is an indication of the person's misbehaviour. The person has either hidden something from the parish authorities or has become irregular in participating in various activities of the church. It is even claimed that if the spirit gets a chance to come back, it will attack even more fiercely than it did earlier.

[Tape3-96]

AH: Have all those people caught by a spirit joined the church?

JN: Not all, but a large number. A big percentage have gone to the church, but others are stubborn and do not accept. They continue with that condition.

AH: But do they continue to be troubled by spirits?

JN: Yes, they continue to be troubled. Also the one who joined the church turned away from faith. And she came to be troubled more, and this is more dangerous than the case of the one who has not yet joined the church.

AH: Are there such people, who have been caught again?

JN: Yes. There are some, although not many, because there are not many who have left Christianity after joining the church. But when one loses faith, she will be troubled a lot, and others even die because of being caught suddenly. Someone else is taken to the hospital, but it does not help. They think that it is a disease of a hospital. You find that the person has just died, without thinking that this could happen.

9.3 DEPRIVATION

A rather popular hypothesis is that people are likely to succumb to spirit possession if they have been deprived other means to gain social acceptance, equality, power etc. According to this theory, also called deprivation theory, the subject of deprivation may be an individual, a social group, a group based on sex division, or a whole ethnic group. It is assumed that deprived people have a feeling of missing something that they think they would deserve to possess. The subject of desire may be material, such as luxury goods to which they do not have access, or immaterial, such as respect, freedom to travel, possibility to learn new things that are not merely rehearsal of tradition, etc.

In the traditional pastoral Somali society such deprived groups were young camel herders, who had to be months away from the main family compound in search for new pastures in dry season, women as a whole, and some other marginal groups (I. Lewis 1969). These were likely to experience spirit possession as a means to gain something what they otherwise could not get.

In a rather different kind of society, such as the socialist China, symptoms of social stress were surprisingly similar with the Maasai society. When public expression of opinion, and particularly of dissatisfaction, was prohibited, women had fainting and headache more than usual (Kleinmann 1998).

In the case of the Maasai, the deprived group would be the women, without subdividing them according to any criteria. When spirit possession histories were recorded, attention was also paid to such factors as (a) the economic status of the family compared to other Maasai families, (b) clan membership (assuming that some clans, such as Ilaiser, would be in a special position because of controlling indigenous medical practice), and (c) the relative peace in the family. Initially it was assumed that wives in prosperous families would be less likely to have spirit possession than those in poor families. It was also assumed that the *iloibonok* would control their wives so that they would not have a chance to take part in anything related to spirit possession cults, and that, being more wealthy than the others, they would not experience deprivation. Furthermore, it was thought that wives living with a quarrelsome and dominating husband would have spirit possession as a channel out of that control, and therefore more prone than the others to spirit possession.

Information on these variables is available on about half of the cases. It is not a simple matter to know whether there are quarrels in the family, or whether they consider themselves rich or poor. Questions on these matters were not asked from the interviewees themselves, but by using information available through the rich network of information channels within the society. In Maasai society, people know about each other's matters remarkable details, and this knowledge was utilised.

It was found out that the economic status itself does not play a role as an explanation, not at least in the way anticipated. If there is correlation between economic status and likelihood of spirit possession, it is in favour of the rich families, and not of the poor. In other words, women of rich families were probably more prone to spirit possession than those of poor families. But the difference was by no means significant, and it is very well possible that there are also other intervening variables that distort the total picture.

One such factor is the clan membership. It was found out, at least in the south in the Parakuyo area, that wives living in the families of *iloibonok*, who all belong to the Enkidong' sub-clan of the Ilaiser clan, were more affected by spirit possession than women in other families. At the same time they were living in rich families, because medical practice among the Maasai, as in many other places, is a rewarding business. It is very hard to judge whether these findings have wider relevance. Also in the Maasai area in the north, wives of the *iloibonok* were among those possessed by spirits. One thing is sure in any case: being a member in the family of an *oloiboni* does not ensure that one is safe from spirit intrusion.

One further point should be made on the concept of richness. The Maasai are an egalitarian society, and no formal distinction is made between rich and poor people. There are no castes or other kinds of mechanisms, which maintain boundaries between economically and socially distinct groups. All people are formally equal, and sharing is in high esteem. Nevertheless, there are considerable economical differences, measured with the criterion which the Maasai themselves use: the number of cattle. Perhaps one should not think that the number of livestock equals to the income level, because the number of cattle is what counts, not what they produce in terms of milk and meat, for example. The number of cattle per household fluctuates between a dozen or so and several thousand. Cattle as a form of property is, however, very vulnerable. The richest family in the Lugoba area with almost three thousand head of cattle in 1976 lost most of them through diseases, so that in 1980 there were less than 300 left.

One half of Maasai men live in polygynous marriages when measured according to population counts (Hurskainen 1985: 53–54). The rate of polygynous marriages is still bigger if we take the whole family history into account, leaving out marriages of young men and counting only those men who obviously do not marry any more. It is, therefore, realistic to consider whether the number of wives in a family counts, and whether the relative place of the wife in the family (whether one is the first, second etc. wife) has significance. Such facts were asked when case interviews were made. No significant

correspondence was found, however. In a few cases the bad feelings and uncertainty were reported by wives in situations where the husband was planning to marry again. The uncertainty had connections with spirit possession in those cases, as they have been reported to have also in other societies. Because polygyny is accepted and widely practised, and because a new wife does not replace the earlier one(s), the relative position of the wife within the family is not a major issue.

We may, then, quite safely conclude that spirit possession among the Maasai is not a peripheral phenomenon in the sense propagated by I. Lewis (1966, 1969, 1971). It is not confined to the marginalised people. On the contrary, the evidence available shows that no specific group of people can be identified as more prone than others to spirit infliction, if women as a whole are not considered as such a group. We should not conclude either that spirit possession is a central institution in the Maasai society, at least in the way possession cults are established on the Swahili coast (Giles 1987, 1995). An important difference between the Maasai situation and most of the others is that while in other societies there are established cult groups and cult leaders, as well as adepts (cf. Lambek 1981; Caplan 1982), recruited from the society itself, in Maasai society there are only the adepts. All healers and experts come from other societies. In this sense, the phenomenon is peripheral, of course.

Peter Wilson has argued against I. Lewis that spirit possession is not a 'sex war' between the males, who are privileged, and the un-privileged females. In his opinion, possession phenomena are an indication of conflict, competition, tension and rivalry between the members of the same sex rather than between members of opposite sexes (Wilson 1967: 366). This interpretation seems to have some relevance in the Maasai situation, because the female family members in a polygynous society are in constant competition with each other, and a deprived and neglected wife may find means for getting recognition through spirit possession. Although spirits are considered as agents of illness, they are at the same time vehicles for bringing the woman to the centre of events and to her improved social status. This is particularly the case if spirit possession is not only a substitute for something but a channel to a totally new status, as is often the case with the Maasai.

9.4 ENVY AND SELF-INDUCED IMITATION OF WARRIORS

Although spirit possession among the Maasai is not a culturally rooted phenomenon, trance behaviour is. And when spirit possession often involves trance-like behaviour, one could justifiably ask whether spirit possession is just an additional form of trance behaviour. It is well known that among young Maasai men, the warriors (*ilmurran*), trance is common, and in fact they try to induce themselves into trance. This happens in particular situations, usually in the course of prolonged dancing. It is thought, however, that it is not the dancing

itself that leads into trance, but rather the medicines that the warriors drink. There are a number of medical plants, usually trees, which are used as sources of various sorts of medicine. They are not used only for curing, but primarily for increasing in warriors such qualities that are thought to be essential for them to be ideal for their duties. For instance, there are medicines for increasing blood and fierceness, giving courage, strength, etc. (Hurskainen 1994: 128).

Could it be possible that women's trance behaviour is in fact imitation, where they adopt the behaviour of warriors, who are in many ways admired by the society. Since they do not have chances to play the roles of warriors in real life, they do it through the idiom of spirit possession. In it, the behaviour which in normal conditions would be interpreted aggressive and inappropriate becomes acceptable, because it is not the women who demand things and dancing, but the spirits invading the women. When possessed, the women are not responsible for their action irrespective of how much it deviates from the norm.

Indeed, the trance behaviour of women and warriors has similarities. For instance, the warriors may fall down during dancing and they may hurt themselves. Or they may run through thorny bushes and get bad wounds. This behaviour is always accompanied with shrieking sounds, sometimes low, other times high. Despite all these strange-sounding and often frightening features in the warriors' behaviour it is looked upon as normal for the warriors, but not for women. Trance is considered a sign that the warrior has reached maturity, and that the medicines have been effective and have given the warrior the qualities needed.

Behind the behaviour of women would thus be envy. And while they cannot turn into warriors, neither can they use medicines which warriors have as a basis for trance, they have no chances in real life to experience anything which is even close to what the warriors experience. Therefore they experience trance through spirit possession, which is acceptable, because it is out of control of the women, and of the whole society.

How plausible is this explanation? First, there are indications that women do envy warriors. In oral tradition there are stories with female envy as a theme. Also spirit possession cases reveal such envy, especially in cases where the spirit is Mmorani (warrior) with distinctive warrior behaviour and demands, or a lion, or another carnivorous animal (Simba, Olowuaru, Olmanyama, 16 cases in all). But certainly these do not suffice to explain but a few cases. Second, the trance behaviour of women sometimes resembles that of the fearless warriors. They may rush over obstacles to a calf pen (Case p62), or even towards a roaring lion.

"When I hear a lion roaring, although other people do not hear it, I hear and rush through the kraal and kraal fence without the gate being opened, and run after those lions ... I myself concluded that it is a spirit of a lion, because when I hear the roar of a lion, it shows that the lion is my friend. Therefore I have to go and find the place where it is." (Case p87)

The spirit may demand a song to be sung, which warriors sing after they have killed a lion (Case p67).

Second, the sounds which the women produce while being in trance are reminiscent of the sounds of the warriors. It is not clear, however, whether these similarities should be attributed to imitation or to the fact that both men and women are likely to produce similar sounds while being in trance. I would suggest that the latter is the case. Imitation hypothesis does not therefore get much support from the data, but it cannot be completely ruled out either.

9.5 SPREADING THROUGH CONTAGION

When considering the history of the spread of spirit possession, one cannot avoid the impression that many women learned the trance behaviour from others, who danced in the rhythm of drum beating. Socialisation in general takes place largely through imitation. Children learn from older people models of behaviour, in good and bad. Self-induction into trance is certainly also possible, but it need not take place purposefully at the person's own will.²⁸

There are various situations where such learning might have taken place. Several women told that they themselves started to get fits or began to dance when they were watching the healing ritual of someone else. This was then interpreted as being caused by a spirit residing in this person. Such healing rituals were organised by Bantu healers either in the Bantu areas, or in Maasai kraals by invitation.

Another major context of learning trance behaviour were the Maasai kraals themselves, where drumming was performed with *debes* by the Maasai themselves. This became more common particularly in the north, where the practice was strong, and where it still continues in some places. While it seems that this form of treatment is becoming an established practice, the spirit possession phenomena are likely to spread through contagion.

The case histories show, however, that 'contagious' spreading of spirit possession was more intense in the beginning of 1970s, and this led in fact to the boom of the cases in that period. An interesting contemporary example of similar type of spreading is reported by van Pelt (1976: 49) from a primary school of a Nyamwezi town.²⁹

"This school was built on a place that had been a cemetery, which fact was well known. There are still two other cemeteries in the neighbourhood. While a school meeting was in full swing, one of the

²⁸ Mischel and Mischel applied the psychological learning theory to the analysis of spirit possession in Trinidad. They claimed that much of the institutionalised possession behaviour in possession cult sessions was learned from others, and that these joined learning experiences reinforced and also standardised the phenomena (Mischel and Mischel 1958).

²⁹ Ingham (1996: 131) claims that 'contagious anxiety hysteria seem to occur mainly among school children and are often self-propagating'

teachers (female) got a case of fits and declared that she was seized by a spirit. Her fits must have made a deep impression on the children who attended the meeting. In the following weeks some seven children started to act queerly and said that they too were contacted by spirits. The teacher and the children spoke about *jini* and not about ancestral spirits, which might have perhaps been more expected because of the cemeteries. The conditions always happened in the school grounds. The children said that they were drawn towards a mango tree which is standing behind the school. The mango tree with its thick foliage figures in stories as an abiding place of spirits. Some children stopped suddenly while playing and said that they were beaten by a *jini* which was angry because they had collided with it in their game. Others started to make movements of eating and drinking and declared that a *jini* was giving them bread and tea. They all began to tremble and got nervous fits. They were treated in hospital, but for months could not attend school.

The alarmed parents convened a parents' meeting with the education officers. They wanted the school to be closed and not to be opened before the spirits had been exorcised. The officers refused. But the next day a child in St. VII was seized, and the Education Officer was called immediately. When he saw the child he was so impressed that he wisely ordered to advance the holidays. During the holidays Koran texts were placed ... on several places near the school. Christian leaders of the various denominations to which the children belonged arranged a bible meeting together, to which all parents were invited. But they kept away of the idea of exorcism and insisted in a faith in Christ. After the holidays the school reopened and no further cases have been mentioned."

9.6 PREGNANCY COMPLICATIONS AND DISEASES

The ability to give birth and raise children is a major issue in Maasai society. In almost half of the cases (42) questions on pregnancy, miscarriage, problems of giving birth and of feeding were discussed in conjunction with spirit possession. Spirits were often suggested as a reason, if the wife was not able to become pregnant. It was interpreted as intervention by such spirits, which prevent conceiving. Miscarriages were another major issue, and several of them had such problems. The third category causing doubts about spirit intervention were infant deaths. They were thought to be caused by spirits who hate children. In some cases there were problems in feeding, where spirit intervention was again thought to be the main cause. Problems were experienced sometimes especially in feeding female children, which refers to gender-selective psychological problems.

Difficulties in childbirth as such should not be connected directly to spirit possession, since such problems have been there always. There is no indication

either that there were more problems in the time of spirit possession epidemics than in other times. The time of giving birth is, however, a delicate period, and many kinds of tensions and fears may be attached to childbirth. It is possible that at the time when spirit intrusion is a readily available explanation, it is used also in cases where other remedies were sought for earlier.

Not only problems connected with pregnancy, childbirth and breast-feeding were interpreted as spirit intrusion, but also many kinds of ailments and diseases had this effect. Sometimes it was malaria, which is common in the area.

[Tape3-96]

AM: Another time they asked me very much to pray for a patient. But in close inspection it was cerebral malaria, and the patient died a bit later, three weeks afterwards. We prayed for her again and again and asked other Christians to take good care of her. They should not be concerned about spirits, because I thought that it was cerebral malaria. So there are only a few people who ask for this kind of help. It is not usual nowadays.

9.7 NUTRIENT-DEFICIENCY

An attempt has also been made to explain spirit possession phenomena on the basis of nutritional deficiency. Kehoe and Giletti (1981) suggest that women in many Eurasian and African societies are at a higher risk of nutritional deficiency than men. As a consequence, spirit possession in those societies is simply an institutionalised recognition of the symptoms of nutritional deficiency. They claim (Kehoe and Giletti 1981:550) that there is

“a strong correlation between populations subsisting upon diets poor in calcium, magnesium, niacin, tryptophan, thiamine, and vitamin D, and those practising spirit possession; conversely, populations reported as having probable adequate intakes of these nutrients generally lack culturally sanctioned spirit possession.”

Drawing data from a number of societies they claim that insufficiency of certain vital nutrients is far more common among women than men. In some extreme cases, such as that of the Djerid people of Southern Tunisia (Ferchiou 1968), women may be excluded from consuming milk, grain, and vegetables, which are men's food, and use spiced paste made of overripe dates. Spirit possession is common among Djerid women, while it is absent by men.

In south Africa among the Nguni-speaking peoples the situation is similar. Young married women may not eat meat or drink milk, although it is the staple food for others (Gussler 1973). Also among them spirit possession is common.

Kehoe and Giletti challenge also various interpretations of the *zar* and other similar cults in Ethiopia and elsewhere. They claim that those interpretations generally ignore biochemical explanations, although correlation of food

deficiency and spirit possession among women is clearly demonstrable in most cases. It is not women's social deprivation (I. Lewis 1966) or women's psychological disturbances (Messing 1958) that explain *zar* cults and spirit possession associated with it. Not all categories of women are likely to become afflicted by spirits, but rather the groups with lowest social status, i.e. those with problems of receiving sufficiently balanced nutrients. Kehoe and Giletti in fact claim global relevance for their hypothesis.

Is this hypothesis applicable to Maasai spirit possession? Do the women suffer from serious undernourishment compared to men? A cautious answer is that they do not starve in normal conditions. Milk is available most of the time, also for women, who do the milking. There are times towards the end of the dry season when milk is in short supply. There used to be a habit of extracting blood from the jugular vein of cattle as substitute of milk, particularly in times of drought. When a cow, goat or sheep is killed, women get their share. It is the left-hand side portions of meat what the women get, and in some rituals women get almost all meat. Yet men do have a better share of food, and they normally get the most valued parts of the animal. In addition, men use many kinds of medicines available in the savannah. The Maasai use also increasingly agricultural foods, such as maize and rice as their daily diet. This they do in times when there is not enough milk for the family.

Shortage of nutrients is not therefore a plausible explanation for spirit possession among the Maasai. There is also another factor which undermines the relevance of this explanation. Spirit possession is here an epidemic phenomenon, which suddenly encounters large masses of people and then vanishes. Fluctuations in food supply do not coincide with the spread of spirit possession, so that food shortage would be accompanied by intensified spirit possession. There remains, of course, the possibility that deficiency of nutrients may have influence on the intensity of spirit possession, but this cannot be considered a major cause for it.

9.8 SOCIAL STRESS

There are pertinent reasons to suggest that much of the processes connected with spirit possession can be attributed to social pressures which lead to permanent social changes. This hypothesis is partly connected to the deprivation hypothesis, because internal forces within the society may result to profound changes in social relations, culture, values etc. Societies have at the same time forces that try to keep it coherent and resist change, and forces that demand change. When forces of change are strong enough and forces attempting to maintain status quo do not allow outlet for forces of change, there may be a fully unpredictable outcome.

The large scale move to the church can be seen as such an outlet, and it is in some respects different from the other remedies. While women in other forms of

treatment were appeased and given temporary help without affecting their position in the society, the church brought profound changes to their lives. Bantu healers were not particularly appealing, because their treatment gave only temporary relief, and the social relations were left intact. The women returned back to their homes under the dominion of their husbands. Hospitals did not help much with pills and injections, and the *iloibonok* did not even try to cure. Home drumming was also a temporary remedy, and people succumbing to it experience it as a burden and a never-ending circle.

What was particularly appealing in the church was its reputation as a healer, which is able to give permanent results. The large majority of the interviewees (76) considered the church as the only effective remedy, although there were also those who doubted it. When asked which remedy is the most effective and which one the second effective, the results were as follows.

In the first place were considered: the church (76), Bantu healers (2), beating drums at home (2), and no help (3). The second effective remedies were: the church (4), beating drums at home (2) and Bantu healers (1). Maasai healers, *iloibonok*, were not suggested at all.

It can be argued that the role of the church was overestimated because of a snow-ball effect. Once the church had gained a reputation of an effective healer, people became inclined to favour it without thinking the matter further. But the issue has also another aspect. If there was a stress towards social change within the society, and particularly among women, the church represented a channel for such change more clearly than the other remedies. Traditional healers were familiar and they were still part of the tradition. They could alleviate the symptoms to some extent. But from the viewpoint of social change they had little value. The church was alien and certainly also frightening, but at the same time appealing. It brought along a whole network of new social relations, and a value system which has much in common with the Maasai system, but also exhibits major differences. It enabled people to learn the skills of reading and writing, and the common meetings and activities of Christians with teaching and fascinating songs provided a basis for experiences that were not available in the traditional culture. We do not know how much these exploratory motives played in the process.

The presence of the church enabled the people also to reconsider and re-arrange social relations within the society. It was a mass movement of women, the hidden aim of which was to get rid of the tight control of men. Once married, the women had very little to say about anything that concerned the matters of the kraal as a whole, not to mention the total exclusion from the political discussion and decision making, which were men's affairs.

In which areas and to what extent were the social relations rearranged in the Maasai society? Or, to present the same question more mildly, in what ways did the women expect the church to be able to help them to rearrange their social relations and power structures? One should be cautious in giving answers to such questions, because very obviously there was no overtly formulated aim in women's minds, still less conspiracy. Rather there were vague and even

unconscious hopes for betterment of life. When comparing the present situation with that before the epidemic, we can identify a number of indications of change. In fact we should speak about processes of change, because there was no stable situation prior to the epidemic, and another stable situation after it. The society continues to be in the process of changes. Part of these will be discussed below.

(a) The social position of women in relation to men has changed. Like several theories suggest, a major motive behind the spirit possession phenomenon was the desire of women to get more freedom. The social space as well as the physical environment of women was quite limited compared to that of men. Physically the women were tied to the kraal and its vicinity, whereas men had opportunities to travel long distances starting from the early warriorhood. Women took care of small children and the whole domestic household. These duties allowed for very few possibilities to maintain relations with people outside the homestead and the close neighbourhood.

Contacts even within the kraal were limited and sanctioned if violated. After having married, the women were supposed to avoid contacts with their earlier male friends, and contacts were allowed only with the men of the age-set, which her husband was a member of. Therefore, contacts with the age-mates of the opposite sex were virtually prohibited, especially if the husband was much older than the wife. This must have caused frustrations and hidden desire to change things. Sanctions concerning the warriors were also hard. They had a prohibition to avoid women of fertile age, so that they were not allowed even to eat meat seen or touched by such women.

The clitoridectomy of women at the age of puberty may also contribute to the problem. The sub-incision of clitoris and removal of labia minora affect the sexuality of women. Although this practice has not been questioned in the Maasai society, it may have indirect effects. The women must have sensations about their sexuality from the time when they still had sexual organs intact, and when they were allowed to live in close contact with warriors. Clitoridectomy broke this contact and removed a large part of their sexuality. It is likely that such memories do not pass without effects on later life.

These traditional practices serve, however, only as background factors, and they do not 'explain' the abrupt emergence of spirit possession. When the phenomenon broke out, the church was understood by most women merely as a healing institution, comparable to Bantu healers, Maasai *iloibonok*, or the modern hospitals. The most obvious point of healing was baptism, but many of them also reported to have been healed during baptismal instruction. Permanent healing required continual participation in the activities of the church. What else did all of this bring about was felt to be secondary. But from the viewpoint of long-term influences, these additional effects are in fact the most important ones. When the women came to baptismal classes, they did not experience full freedom. Rather they came under another authority. Yet this authority was not part of the traditional system, and therefore some degree of freedom, or at least a

possibility to make use of the double authority, emerged. The women were no more under full control of their husbands. New attacks by spirits were always a danger, and men were not willing to take risks after all those hard experiences. Therefore they let the women continue to take part of the church activities, lest the spirits would attack again. Now when the spirits have been tamed and practically no new cases emerge the role of the church also has changed. Women continue to take active role in the church, and not only women, but also boys and girls, warriors, and elders participate in increasing numbers.

Some twenty years ago there was a belief that Maasai women will overtake the church in the area and make it their own sphere of influence, where men will have little to say. This has become partly true because of the overwhelming majority of women in the church. The women are still in majority, although men also find their way into the church. But because women were the first to be baptised, they got strong hold of the local churches. Their illiteracy has, however, limited their possibilities to influence. In order to overcome this handicap they have participated in literacy campaigns in increasing numbers. The leaders of parishes, the clergy particularly, is male, and this decreases the possibility of women to dominate in parishes. The position of women has been further weakened by the increased participation of men in church activities. Therefore, the fear that the church would become a church of women, or still worse, a church of those possessed by spirits, has no ground any more.

(b) The contact to church has contributed to general cleanliness. The concept of cleanliness is of course a relative matter; what is considered clean or pure in one society need not be necessarily so in another. The Maasai have always considered themselves clean and smart, and much attention has been paid to physical appearance. In decorating themselves they have used, for example, animal fat, skins greased with fat, red ochre, soot, and colours and scents extracted from plants. Cow urine has been used in cleaning drink containers, and cow dung has been applied on house walls and roofs. Although they are natural products and certainly not poisonous, in many societies they are not considered clean.

There is a tendency to give up some of the most repulsive practices, such as cleaning calabashes with cow urine, and the use of skin garments, which are almost impossible to wash. Ash and burning embers are still used in cleaning calabashes, and instead of animal skins women are using washable cloth garments. The use of soap and washing powder in cleaning has also increased.

For decades there has been talk about the extinction of Maasai traditional practices. So far the traditions have persisted, although some institutions, such as the warriors' training camps, *ilmanyata*, have become obsolete in most areas, because they have no functions any more in a situation of relative peace. The initiation of boys and girls, and the whole age-set system, have persisted, although inevitable changes have taken place.

It seems, then, that there is no single fully satisfactory approach for understanding and explaining the spirit possession phenomena in the Maasai

area. It has certainly much to do with the relatively weak position of women, which is a cultural feature in the society. The availability of the behavioural model, adopted from the Bantu societies, is another contributing factor. It is hard to imagine that a spirit possession syndrome would have emerged if the Bantu healers would not have prepared way for it. Therefore, the phenomenon was quickly domesticated in the Maasai society, because it was understood as an established institution in surrounding Bantu societies. Although the Maasai cosmological structure seemed to have no place for spirits, this did not prevent them from adopting new beliefs. The readiness in adopting these new values may be at least partly explained by the fact that spirit beliefs did not hit the heart of the Maasai cosmology. They did not replace older beliefs; they rather enriched them. It is also important to note that these new spirits, although they were considered powerful, did not constitute a (new) core of beliefs. They were always considered as evil and harmful, as agents of illness. Therefore the attitude towards these spirits was generally hostile, although ambivalent feelings have also been recorded in some cases.

In brief we can thus conclude that spirit possession among the Maasai was not a primarily peripheral phenomenon, as far as the population it affected is concerned. It encompassed the female population in toto. Those affected were in no way more peripheral than the rest of the female population. And because women in the society cannot be considered a peripheral category, peripherality does not apply in this sense. On the other hand, spirit possession is not central either, because it is primarily a passing phenomenon, which can be characterised as a vehicle or means rather than as an end itself. Therefore, the term epidemiological might be a more appropriate term to describe it. But, as H. Lewis (1984) found out in his attempt to find interpretation to the *zar* spirit possession in Ethiopia, also here we have to accept that the phenomena are too complex, varied and adaptable to different situations for being reduced to a clearly defined set of causation. And in the case of the Maasai one can confidently say that the whole complex of spirit possession phenomena, together with its varying forms, accommodates change (Swantz 1976: 99) in a situation, where social stress, caused mainly by the government-imposed villagisation program, exceeds that of normal.

9.9 MASS MOVEMENT OF WOMEN

Above I have discussed and evaluated a number of approaches in placing spirit possession phenomena in wider ramifications and have tried to assess their applicability to the Maasai situation. Although the suggestions given help us to understand individual cases to some extent, the epidemiological character of the phenomenon calls for more satisfactory explanation. Why did the phenomenon spread in the extent unparalleled even in Bantu societies, where it is an established phenomenon and integral part of the culture? Above I have stated that among the women in Maasai society there must have been an internal social pressure and desire for change, which found an outlet through spirit possession. In addition, the phenomenon was spread through imitation, when women with various kinds of ailments and other symptoms were seen as victims of intruding spirits.

But there is more than this. Widespread spirit possession among women can be seen as a kind of mass movement of women, a collective expression of power, which has parallels in the old Maasai tradition.

Paul Spencer (1988: 198–209) has described in detail how Maasai women from time to time gather together to perform fertility rituals which may involve violence. The motivation for such collective rituals lies in their ambiguous position within the family and the larger society. As a member of family, a woman is dominated by the male domain from her early puberty. It is the right and duty of the father to arrange the marriage for his daughter. Understandably the father tries to arrange the marriage thinking the best of his daughter, but he has no obligation to investigate her opinion on the available bridegroom candidates. Because this is a custom, it does not seem to raise direct opposition among women. Marriage transactions in terms of cattle and possibly some amount of money play a role in deciding which spouse will be finally elected.

While in marriage, the woman is directly under the control of her husband. It is commonly accepted in the society that a disobedient wife should get a sound physical punishment from her husband. Such incidents often occur during the first years of marriage when the relation is still unstable and there are conflicting expectations from the side of the husband and his wife. A disobedient wife would make the husband subject to laughter and mockery from the side of his age-mates. Therefore, even a husband with gentle character is obliged to behave as if the wife were in his full control.

A disobedient wife is taken to the bush out of sight of other people. There her hands and legs would be tied together, decorations removed, and clothes taken away down to the waist. While she is lying down on her face, the husband would beat her with a finger-thick whip according to need, up to forty times. Beating on head, breasts and eyes should be avoided, because any kind of permanent injury is prohibited. The purpose of such beating is to make clear what her duties are and where are the limits of behaviour. Bleeding wounds on a woman's back are not a rare sight among the Maasai, and when asked for the

origin of wounds, they would laughingly tell that they are because of their misbehaviour, and that it was just right that the husband beat them.

The subservient position of women is of course not without problems. A wife may run away from a husband, who was chosen for her by somebody else. A recently married woman is likely to do this, if the behaviour of the husband is too harsh. She may go to her parental home or seek for help from her husband's age-mates, who by custom are responsible for the behaviour of the age-set members. A runaway young wife may be sent back, if the reason for running is considered insignificant. If she runs away repeatedly, she may endanger the reputation of her father's family, and the issue becomes more serious. In this case the father has to take the initiative and ask his sons to beat the daughter in the bush, because by custom he himself as a father is not supposed to touch his grown-up daughter.

The life of a woman is, therefore, strictly controlled by her father and husband. It is not exaggeration to call this relation as 'ownership', because a wife as a woman and individual is under full control of the husband. And the threat that a husband of a high spirited wife would be ridiculed by his age-mates will ensure that also timid and gentle husbands try to keep control of their wives. Whereas women as individuals and wives do not have much choice, they do have their institutionalised ways of expressing their power and dissatisfaction in a number of occasions. In fact, women as a group have an important role in all communal rituals. In initiation rituals, for example, which are quite frequent and involve a lot of communal action, men have the official overall responsibility. The women's dances accompanied by prayer songs are, however, a necessary part in them. Women as agents of continuity and reproduction of the society are in a critical position, and their fertility is continually at stake. Therefore, it is not uncommon to find that most of women's prayers in various ritual contexts are concerned with fertility, of their own and of their livestock. These songs are not merely prayer. They involve also playful mockery and scorn of menfolks, who abuse women in everyday life. Therefore, what men are allowed to do to women outside of ritual, that women are permitted to do within ritual (Spencer 1988: 200).

Women may also sometimes gather together as a semi-irresponsible gang, which moves from compound to another, attracting more women to join while the group proceeds. Their ultimate purpose is to restore the fertility, which is threatened. Signs of danger are barrenness of some women or increased miscarriages and stillbirths in the society. These gatherings erupt when the society enjoys lax time after the start of rains and there is less work in looking for food and water.

Miscarriages and barrenness are considered to be caused by misbehaviour of women during the time of pregnancy. A woman is expected to abstain from sexual relations while she is pregnant, and the violation of this rule is thought to cause above-mentioned problems. It is not only the woman who is to be blamed; also the husband has a share in it. Therefore, the group action of women is directed against the household, which is thought to be responsible for

reproductive problems. But often the behaviour of the women's group is unpredictable. Men would not stand to stop it. If a man would try to prevent his wife from joining the group, the women would take one of his favourite oxen and slaughter it and feed on it, and yet they would take the wife along with them.

The women have suddenly control of events in their own hands, and it is not known in advance which direction events take in the next turn, since the women do not have any appointed leader. Their advance and actions are tolerated since their ultimate aim is to ensure fertility, and nobody would take the risk of endangering it. In the end, it is thought, women's gathering brings blessing to the compound which they pass, and also to the whole society.

That such a women's gathering really brings about improvement in fertility may be subject to doubt, but there may be a certain point in it. When women are on their move in this way, men should not interfere in their activities, and in fact they stay respectfully aside. Signs of nervous behaviour in women are visible, especially in those with reproductive problems, and tension may lead to a mass hysteria with shaking and shivering. It also happens that women in this state may have sexual relations with men in bush, because they are not under the control of anybody, and therefore they are said to have good chances of becoming pregnant. By large these women's gatherings are controlled by elders, and they are supposed to give the final blessings to women after the ritual is over.

The above description of women's fertility rituals and license associated with them has parallels with spirit possession phenomena among the Tanzanian Maasai. Both are largely concerned with pregnancy and childbirth. In spirit possession cases, many women had problems with pregnancy or childbirth. As it is in the traditional society, also here the concern for offspring is of major importance, and if reproduction is endangered, various symptoms are likely to occur.

In addition to concern for fertility, perhaps even more important is the urge for joint activity of women that links the spirit possession and the traditional women's gatherings. Traditionally women have been able to exert power and temporarily reverse the normal order in society through women's fertility rituals. According to the same model they have been able to upset the men-dominated society through epidemic spirit possession. As the women's gathering started from a few women and more and more joined them when it moved from compound to another, so did spirit possession spread through imitation. In both the driving force was temporary freedom, relief from the everyday joke, feeling that the women were not dictated by men; rather it was vice versa. Women had the initiative, and men were forced to do whatever the 'cure' of women required. The problem could not be solved by putting discipline to the women by beating them. This was out of question. Neither could it be solved, as somebody suggested, by pouring cold water on the head of the victim. The women had the absolute lead and men had been left with no other choice than to obey.

But spirit possession was more than pure analogy to women's fertility prayers. Whereas in these the major concern was the overall fertility of women, and women with reproductive problems were the core element in them, in spirit possession many kinds of ailments and troubles were seen as an outcome of spirit intrusion. Therefore, women's mass movement was extended from fertility issues to concern women's problems as a whole.

Figure 5 illustrates the relationship of women's fertility rituals and spirit possession.

Figure 5: Women's fertility rituals and spirit possession.

Fertility rituals	Spirit possession
women's initiative	women's initiative
concern for fertility	concern for fertility and other problems
not centrally controlled	no control
mix of sanctity and mockery	sanctity and shameful behaviour
temporary relief of tensions	relief of tensions, temporary or permanent
ends in elders' blessing, ordinary relations resumed	ends in changed social position, ordinary relations only partially resumed and new created

We can see that whereas women's fertility rituals had, in addition to increasing fertility, the effect of temporary relief of tensions among women and between men and women, spirit possession brought irreversible changes and innovations to the society. It was not only one recurrent episode in a more or less static society with little change. Spirit possession can be characterised as a major agent or channel for change, and after the epidemic possession hysteria the society did not return to its previous course – it had changed permanently.

9.10 EPILOGUE

After having discussed the spirit possession phenomena among the Maasai from a number of viewpoints, I am tempted to return again to the question of absence of spirits in Maasai cosmology. It was assumed that while the Maasai cosmology does not have any categories of spirits, there should not be space for beliefs in spirit possession. Such an assumption sounds logical, no doubt, but it is not satisfactory, because it does not explain in any way why spirit possession did occur, and seemingly without resistance from the part of the Maasai. The explanation given by some, notably by one of the leading Maasai *iloibonok*, that spirit possession is simply a trick played by the women for getting modern clothing instead of the traditional leather garments, would, of course, fit to this picture. In this explanation, even the women did not in reality believe in spirits. But this does not make justice to several such cases where women were really ill for long periods, and some even died.

10. CASE STUDY OF OLKESUMET

Because Olkesumet (Map 1) had been an area with several spirit possession cases since the late 1960's (Peterson 1971), a detailed study was carried out in this area in November–December 1984. Data were collected from all of the 22 kraals of that area. Demographic data are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Demographic data, spirit possession cases and baptism in Olkesumet, 1984.

Kraal No.	Men	Women	Children	Total	Women possessed	Women baptised
1	5	13	48	66	9	10
2	5	9	33	47	3	3
3	2	5	21	28	4	4
4	10	19	53	82	9	10
5	3	4	20	27	0	4
6	3	4	24	31	4	4
7	2	6	18	26	0	0
8	4	7	17	28	1	2
9	14	24	75	113	12	11
10	7	11	43	61	5	7
11	5	8	29	42	4	5
12	2	6	26	34	2	5
13	4	9	25	38	5	8
14	4	9	41	54	3	8
15	5	8	35	48	3	3
16	4	11	41	56	6	7
17	4	13	36	53	5	6
18	3	5	19	27	4	4
19	9	11	52	72	3	5
20	2	5	16	23	4	5
21	4	9	33	46	6	8
22	3	10	28	41	5	6
All	104	206	733	1043	97	125

We can see that the total population in those 22 kraals was 1043, giving an average of 47.5 persons per kraal. The total number of adult men³⁰ was 104, and the number of married women was 206. Therefore, the number of women was almost double compared with the number of men. How is such a big difference possible? There are two major factors contributing to this imbalance. First, the women marry in much earlier age than men. As a rule, girls get married as soon as they reach puberty, while men very seldom marry until they are at least 25 years old. Often the marriage age is still higher, because the high bride-wealth and availability of marriageable girls are a considerable barrier for young men. In competition for girls, wealthy and established elder men often win, and the young men have to wait for better times and chances. Second, the Maasai also

³⁰ In this survey, males were considered adult men when they were in the expected marriage age, which is 25.

marry girls from other ethnic groups, which perform the kind of clitoridectomy which the Maasai consider appropriate. The influx of girls from other ethnic groups is accelerated also by the fact that the amount of bride-wealth to be paid for girls of other ethnic groups is usually much lower than the one paid for the Maasai girls. The big difference in bride-wealth between ethnic groups makes it very difficult for the non-Maasai to marry Maasai girls, even though the society would allow it. Therefore, there is an influx of girls into Maasai society, but very little outflow.

The number of children in the survey (733) seems unexpectedly high. The definition of a 'child' is based on local criteria rather than on international standards, which often are based on age. According to the definition applied here, a person is a child as long as one has not yet married. Therefore, we find excluded from this group females, who according to international standards would still be considered children, or at least not yet adults. Similarly we find included into the group of children such young men, who in most societies would be considered adult men. The survey was made in a time when the circumcision period of males had already been closed for several years and the new open period was about to be opened. Because uncircumcised boys are counted as children regardless their age, there were several 'boys' with the age of over 20 years in the group of children. This also partially accounts for the low number of married men. It is hard to judge whether the total numbers would be much different, even if we would apply general international standards in distinguishing age groups. On the other hand, the number of children per woman is only 3.6, far below the average in African families. This number does not reflect the total number of children whom those women have given birth to, but rather the number of children who at that moment still were in the category of children.

The survey contains also information on the people's relation to the church. The numerical data were obtained by investigating each kraal separately; statistics maintained by the local parishes were not used. The major reason for this was that the church statistics do not contain information on everything that we wanted to know.

Almost half of all women had experienced spirit possession (97, 47.1%), and most of them had joined the church. In all, more than half (125, 60.1%) of the women had joined the church, part of them without being possessed by spirits.

For most of the 97 women possessed by spirits, there is also information on their first experience of possession. These data, as well as information on baptism, are given in Table 6. From the year 1954 onwards, spirit possession cases started to appear, but until 1967 they were individual and rare cases, and the church did not react to them. Starting from 1967 and 1968, the church became more active, and people were invited to baptismal instruction. In that time, there were also two Bantu healers from the coastal area in Olkesumet treating people troubled by spirits. In 1974 the number of cases was already quite big, and the active role of the church became widely known and, instead of resorting to traditional healers, people started to come to church. Seeing that

people were not any more willing to approach traditional healers, the healers returned back to their home areas.

Table 6. Relation between spirit possession and baptism, Olkesumet 1984.

Year	First symptoms	Baptism of those possessed	Baptism without possession	Possessed but not baptised
Before 1967	8	2	1	0
1967	2	0	0	0
1968	4	4	0	0
1969	3	2	0	0
1970	6	2	0	1
1971	2	5	0	0
1972	3	1	1	0
1973	4	1	1	1
1974	8	8	2	0
1975	4	5	0	0
1976	5	4	0	0
1977	9	3	2	0
1978	4	6	2	0
1979	13	7	5	1
1980	5	13	9	1
1981	1	5	4	0
1982	2	4	2	0
1983	0	8	2	0
1984	0	1	1	0
Total	83	82	32	4

We can also see in Table 6 that if there was an increase in spirit possession cases in some year, it meant more baptisms the same or the next year. For example, years 1970, 1974, 1977 and 1979 were times of intensive spirit possession and subsequent baptism. In fact the year 1979 meant a culmination year in spirit possession cases in Olkesumet. A total of 13 new cases were found, and next year 13 women with spirit possession were baptised. After that there was a drastic drop. In 1980 there were still five new cases, but in 1981 only one, in 1982 two, and none in 1983 and 1984.

Table 6 also shows that in the years 1968–71 all those baptised were spirit possession cases, and until 1977 only four without spirit possession were baptised. After that, more and more women without spirit possession were baptised, although the number of spirit possession cases also continued to be significant. But the number of spirit possession cases in baptismal classes continued to diminish and finally disappeared altogether. We see further that

only four women with spirit possession in the whole area had not (yet) joined the church in 1984.

An interesting question is also the time span between the first spirit possession incidence and baptism. Detailed case histories (Appendix V) in Olkesumet and elsewhere show that often there were several attempts to get help from local doctors in a course of many years, until the person joined the baptismal instruction and was baptised. Table 7 shows that in four cases this time span was 13 years, and in two cases even more. With a time span of six to eleven years, there were one or two cases in each category. The most common time span was one year (26 cases), and in 21 cases the person was baptised already in the same year when spirit possession occurred for the first time. The data also show, although not indicated in the table, that the time span was shortest in the years, when spirit possession was most intensified, i.e. in 1973–80.

Table 7. Time span between first symptoms of spirit possession and baptism, Olkesumet 1984.

Years between	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	More	
People	21	26	9	5	4	4	1	1	1	2	1	2	0	4	2	Total 83

On the basis of individual case histories it can be assumed that there is connection between problems of pregnancy and spirit possession. As a rule, the girls get married immediately after the initiation rituals, including clitoridectomy, are over. This takes place regularly at puberty. Table 8 shows the time span between the year of marriage and the year of first childbirth.

Table 8. Time span between marrying and the birth of the first child.

Child born before marriage		Marriage													Child born after marriage		All
Years	More	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	More			
People	1	4	1	2	23	30	18	12	11	8	5	5	1	11	132		

The fact that children are born years before marriage shows that the Maasai ideal of female marriage age does not always become true. Most of the first childbirths (30) took place in the year following the marriage, but it was also common to give birth already in the year of marriage (23). There were 18 women who gave birth the second year after marriage. In all, more than half (54%) of women with children had their first childbirth within three years after marriage, including the year of marriage. Quite many had problems in pregnancy, and 53 (41%) of them had the first childbirth three years or more after the marriage. This number is rather big, and problems in pregnancy and childbirth may well be connected with spirit possession.

Finally, Table 9 shows the time span between first child-birth and first incidence of spirit possession. This information was recoverable in 74 cases in Olkesumet. Years shown on the horizontal axis indicate the moment of first child-birth in relation to the first incidence of spirit possession. A total of 28 women (38%) experienced spirit possession before giving birth to the first child. But there were still more women (46, 62%), who had their first spirit possession occurrences after the first child-birth. The data do not show how many of the women had pregnancy problems after the first child-birth. The detailed case histories indicate, that this was often the case. A woman may have given birth to a child or two, and pregnancy problems occur thereafter, coupled with suspects of spirit possession. Therefore problems of pregnancy obviously plays a role in more than those 28 cases identified here.

Table 9. Relation between the first child birth and spirit possession.

	Possession before child birth							Child birth		Possession after child birth														
Years	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	More	Tot.
Num	1	2	5	3	1	3	7	6	7	4	3	3	4	0	3	0	1	2	0	1	1	1	17	74

Have the spirits now deserted the Maasai area?

The preceding discussion has made it clear that spirit possession in the Maasai area is a declining phenomenon. In many areas, where it earlier was common, it has almost totally disappeared, to the extent that the younger generation hardly knows about it, although it was common less than 20 years ago. Recent reports from the Olkesumet, Naperera and Terat areas, which were central areas of the phenomenon in the 1970s, tell that there is not much left of the phenomenon. However, in none of those areas has it totally disappeared.

A report by Rev. Jakobo Naputi from Namalulu illustrates well the situation in the Simanjiro area.

[Tape3-96]

AH: And during the time that you have been here, what kind of development has there been in spirit possession? Have there been new spirit possession cases in this time or are they the same old ones who had this problem?

JN: When I came there were the old ones (i.e. people) who had been caught by spirits, and they have continued. But to some extent it has decreased compared with the old time. And now it has decreased even more. And (now) it does not appear as during the first time. Now it turns out as a somewhat secret thing, just as a disease, without making people shake and sing and make noise. But they identify it. And it has become a big number by now. Not like in first times,

because almost every *boma* had a person with spirit possession, three, four, or five. Now you see them somewhat less. Now for three, four or five years we have not seen people dancing like in those times.

AH: Have all those people caught by a spirit joined the church?

JN: Not all, but a large number. A big percentage have gone to the church, but others are stubborn and do not accept. They continue with that condition.

AH: But do they continue to be troubled by spirits?

JN: Yes, they continue to be troubled. Also the one who joined the church turned away from faith. And she came to be troubled more, and this is more dangerous than the case of the one who has not yet joined the church.

AH: Are there such people, who have been caught again?

JN: Yes. There are some, although not many, because there are not many who have left Christianity after joining the church. But when one loses faith, she will be troubled a lot, and others even die because of being caught suddenly. Someone else is taken to the hospital, but it does not help. They think that it is a disease of a hospital. You find that the person has just died, without thinking that this could happen.

AH: Do you see any differences between various parts of your parish? Are there villages where this problem is bigger than in other places?

JN: Just now there are some differences. Let us see in more detail. There are villages where people have become Christians without having any troubles before. Many of those are Christians now. Also young people have joined, and elders as well. In other villages the situation has continued as such; there is hardly any change. In this situation I see some who are troubled by spirits, because they do not want to join the church. They are unwilling to join because of the situation in that village.

The big majority of those possessed by spirits, females and males alike, have joined the church. There were no figures available from 1996, but the rough estimate reveals that the large majority of those possessed are females, but among the church members the women without possession constitute the majority. This is somewhat surprising taking into account the general view that people join the church after having possessed by spirits. The numbers can be explained so that even before the spirit intrusion people joined the church. During the epidemic period, the majority of new members were those with spirit possession. And later on, when the peak of possession was over, people still

continued to join the church, in recent years even in much bigger numbers than before. The following discussion with Jacob Naputi gives a rough idea of total numbers.

[Tape3-96]

AH: Can you estimate, just estimate, the number of women who have been caught by a spirit in your parish?

JN: This is a hard estimate. Maybe not less than 100.

AH: And the total number of Christians?

JN: There are more than 500 Christians.

AH: And the majority is women?

JN: The majority is women.

AH: Among those who were caught by a spirit, how many are males? Can you estimate?

JN: I cannot estimate well the number of men, but I shall try as I tried for females. Maybe 35, or 50 at the maximum.

AH: And those all have been caught by a spirit?

JN: Yes, I say this as an estimate. It is between 40 and 50.

AH: And among those who join the church right now, are there people with spirits or not, I mean among the men?

JN: Yes, there are, but only a very small number. Many of them join the church without having any problem.

AH: And young men, morani, also join?

JN: Yes, they do. You see, in our parish there are villages, where you do not find non-Christian young men. Many traditional customs have disappeared.

AH: When did this big difference begin to appear, because in old times it was very hard for a morani to join the church?

JN: This has started to appear in 1994 and 1995.

AH: Just recently.

JN: Just recently many have started to join.

In Terat area the situation with spirit possession is much the same as in Olkesumet and Naperera. People forget those things astonishingly soon, and also those who were there at that time might remember those events only after having been asked about them. Yet even here the cases have not disappeared totally.

[Tape6-96]

JL: When we have the problem of spirit in the church, it is a strange thing. People start to forget... (it is) different from earlier years. Those who still remember it are we who were there that time, and we were teaching people with these problems.

AH: And in these recent years there are not such problems?

JL: No. You may find perhaps one such person in the whole section of Terat. It is possible to find one or two persons. Now there is not such a problem as pepo.

AH: I discussed a bit with the medical doctor, that Barabaig (he was a medical doctor, of Barabaig origin, employed by the government in the Terat Medical Centre). He told that there are people with spirits here in Terat, and that he is not able to help them. He sends them to the church. The church helps them. He himself belongs to the Pentecostals.

JL: Yes, I told that there are a few. There are some who do not want to become Christians. Therefore they continue to be treated by beating debes. But this has been a big astonishment also to those who are not Christians, especially the elders. They ask, 'Why don't they go to the church?' Therefore, there are people who themselves want to remain in the old condition. They do not want to change.

AH: Do you use the custom of exorcising spirits in this parish? You know that in some churches they do so, they command the spirits to go away.

JL: No, in our parish we use teaching. And often we do not baptise anybody without teaching first. The exception may be when the person is in a big trouble or is very weak. The person herself is expected to ask for an emergency baptism. And then she shall continue with teaching. We have emphasized this in various

committees of the parish, especially in the committee of evangelism, that it is dangerous to baptise people without teaching them. It is also dangerous to baptise someone who has not decided yet, and later she may leave. And when she has left, the spirits return. And then she returns to the church again. It turns out to be troublesome for the servants of the church.

AH: Do you see any differences between various sections of your parish in relation to spirit possession? Are there areas where it has increased and others where it has decreased?

JL: There are differences. It derives from the poor presence of the Word of God in some sections. For example, some sections do not have servants. In such areas there are often a few people with spirits. It is also possible that there are servants, but they do not have groups which go from kraal to kraal. – We do not have now those spirits who are appeased by beating drums so that people dance. Many times I have heard people saying that they have stomach ache, and that they have not been cured, although they have gone to hospital. They have gone to local healers but have not been cured. When you ask them what they think the reason is, they reply that they do not know, but that perhaps it is spirit. Others have swollen legs for some time. But they get cured suddenly after entering the church, even before they are baptised.

[Tape6-96]

AH: When was the last time that you saw someone being caught by a spirit?

JL: It has not finished yet. There are one here and there, but we do not keep records of them.

AH: But not inside the church? Have you seen such a thing?

JL: Inside the church there is not.

AH: Now when you teach adults, are there women who come to instruction because of spirits?

JL: I have taught... I finished it on 9.6. 1996. I had a class. But there was not even one with a spirit, who was shaking or who danced, not even at baptism.

[Tape5-96]

AH: Have you heard these days whether there have been spirits in any places, anywhere in the Maasai area?

JO: Yes. I do not remember the date, but I went to baptise one woman with troubles here. She was from Arusha, and she had a spirit. She had dirty spirits; she made a lot of noise. She was treated medically, because she thought that it is malaria. Then she went home but could not sleep. Then she went to the hospital again, and then she came to invite me. When I went there with elders I saw that spirits troubled her.

AH: What did you do?

JO: We baptised her with emergency baptism.

AH: She was not a Christian?

JO: She continues with instruction; she is not yet a Christian. She had amulets in all places. She was afraid to sleep in her own home, and she went to sleep to the place of her mother. But she came from Arusha. She was a woman who had given birth to one child.

AH: But she is not yet grown up?

JO: No, not yet.

AH: And how was it found that she has a spirit?

JO: When we arrived there and she saw us she started to make noise... Her condition is now better. I asked her what she wanted. She said that I should baptise her. Why? I asked her. She said, I want it. I asked her to throw into the latrine all the amulets she had. She promised to do that. She also took away her wristlets. Then we baptised her and her condition improved.

[Tape5-96]

GS: I was returned to Naperera in 1992.

AH: And when you came here in Naperera, in what state did you find spirit possession here?

GS: Now when many people have been taught and many have become Christians, spirit possession starts to fade away. Only a few have it.

AH: And during this time when you have been here in Naperera, have you seen new spirit possession cases?

GS: Yes, I have seen them. Also last month I baptised two of them in this church.

AH: In this... ?

GS: The church of Lendanai.

AH: You mean that in the area of Lendanai there are people who are troubled by spirits? One comes from here Lendanai. And another one has moved here from Naperera. Are there (spirits) still today?

GS: There are. But many join the church now even before they have been caught by spirits. And they cannot be caught again. Others have started to bring their small children for baptism. So they baptise their children when they still are small.

Spirit possession has not disappeared totally, however, in all areas. There are some sporadic occurrences still in the central Maasai area, and it is more frequent in areas where it has spread only recently. Such areas tend to be located further in the south, in places such as Kibaya and Kitwai and Loonderkes.

However, it is not known in detail how common spirit possession is in those remote areas. Judging from the reports of church servants, cases do occur here and there, and sometimes in groups. One can conclude with considerable confidence that such reports reflect the true state of affairs, because the possession cases sooner or later end up to the parishes. Also, information of such cases spreads easily to the active parish members and through them to pastors and evangelists. Part of the evangelists seem to reinforce the stereotypical image of possession, maintaining the belief that the only safe way of coping with spirits is to ask the patient to come to baptismal instruction, to be baptised, and to stay active within the parish. They have obvious temptation to emphasise this, because it is a sure way to get converts and also to control people. There is a danger that concern of people's health and lives turns into direct domination, where the church servants take a role of a healer.

[Tape3-96]

JN: In our area, I have said that really we cannot see people dancing like earlier, and people with spirits like earlier. It is seen as a special case, like a disease. Hospitals are still unable to understand what the cause of the illness is. But if you go to Kibaya area, to the parish of Kibaya, past Makami, Ilkiushi, and other parts of this parish, until the place called Lyadyaltatu (?) where we travelled this year 1996...

AH: What is it called?

JN: Eloijoto. We travelled there this year, last month. We saw that people still dance like they did in old times. Although we did not see that people were beaten drums, but they danced, and we baptised some who were dancing. After being baptised they became quiet. And others had not yet gone through all the teaching. They continued dancing and we closed the seminar while things were in this condition. So this condition is still there in Kibaya, as I saw it. ... I did not look into this matter in more detail, because I did not know that there is this kind of research (referring to our work)... But I saw and witnessed these matters when I was helping the Dean of the southern Maasai area. Although in our parish and in the neighbouring parishes these things cannot be seen now, in the parish of Kibaya I have witnessed these things. So there are remnants of this phenomenon here and there, and people dance like in early times.

AH: But it seems that in this your area it has now finished?

JN: Yes, in our area we do not see it. I have said that maybe for three years or more we have not seen someone dancing.

[Tape4-96]

JP: Since I went there (Loonderkes) in February 1994, I have not seen any such problems among Christians who came to church. Others were caught by spirits, and others came on their own decision. And in September 1994 we went with the reverend to Kitwai to baptise and receive back others. After this we saw... I saw many people who were troubled by spirits. Also last year, June and July 1995, I went to look for six people who were caught by spirits... they were nine people. So I had hard time with them. Until today some continue to be taught, and others have been baptised. So part of the kraals still have spirit possession.

AH: Have you heard about the history of spirit possession, when did it start in that area?

JP: When I tried to ask about the history, it was found that it started in 1969, 1970, 1971 and 1972. People were caught by spirits at that time.

AH: Did it decrease here in between?

JP: It decreased in between. It calmed down until... people when they saw someone being caught by a spirit they were very astonished. Even now they are astonished.

AH: You mean that time when you went there for the first time?

JP: In the years between 1985 and 1990, and until 1993, when someone is caught by a spirit people are astonished. Therefore, when we saw this in 1994, it was very astonishing.

AH: And did you get an opportunity to study when it was the first time that it occurred?

JP: The problem is the people. Some people sometimes... need to go to church. Others are prevented by their husbands. And I, how I saw or how I studied, I said that God has the intention that people should not get lost. This is one way of hitting, through which God warns everyone to come to church, so that they could believe in God through this means of spirit. For when one is caught by a spirit and is thrown down and we pray for her, she wakes up and continues without troubles.

Spirit possession is often characterised as a peripheral phenomenon. It is peripheral also among the Maasai, in fact in two senses of the word. First, it is found in geographically peripheral areas more than in central places. Second, it is peripheral also in the sense that it affects often people who have a peripheral position in the society. Neither of these two interpretations is fully true in the Maasai society. The people affected are principally women, who as a social group can be viewed as peripheral. On the other hand, not only women of poor families are affected. The evidence shows that the relative economical position does not have much to do with the likelihood of getting possessed by spirits. Also the geographical remoteness does not correlate with the likelihood of spirit possession phenomena. This is reflected in the survey of 1996, which revealed that perhaps the most intensive process is going on in Meserani, Monduli Parish, which is located close to Arusha in the vicinity of the main road to Dodoma.³¹ There the phenomenon seems to have found a more or less stabilised form where the patients are treated by debe drumming. In other words, the phenomenon is domesticated, so that the officiants of the spirit ritual are members of the Maasai society. Spirits are appeased but they are not driven away.

Also what seems to be a trend in those areas is that the people use a multitude of means in coping with spirits. Hospitals are readily available there, and many have experiences of how they have tried to help them. Also many kinds of traditional Bantu healers are available, as well as Maasai and Arusha *iloibonok*. The domestication of spirits seems also to have taken place in the form of ritual drum beating in the kraals. And finally the church acts among them with its own means. However, the reliance of people to the activities of the

³¹ The observation that spirit possession shows traits of increase in well populated areas rather than in remote areas is reported also in coastal Swahili-speaking areas; Giles 1995.

church is not at all that overwhelming as it is more deep down in the Maasai area.

[Tape5-96]

AH: You are an elder of this parish?

ML: Yes, here in Meserani.

AH: Have you heard about this problem of spirit?

ML: I have heard, and I see it often, because when we are in the church, women can be caught. Often women are caught by spirits.

AH: Until now?

ML: Until now, many of them. So we have these problems.

AH: How long time have you been here?

ML: I have been here for a long time, about 30 years.

AH: During all these years, what kind of changes have you seen in this phenomenon?

ML: We have seen a difference within past few years, since people started to accept joining the church. When people are baptised, spirit possession is alleviated a bit. But when they refuse to come to the church for some time, spirits return.

AH: Do you know the time when this problem started to occur, or has it been there always?

ML: Yes, at the time when people were caught by spirits they got a lot of trouble. That time debes were beaten. People gathered outside to beat debes, and there was noise. The purpose was that the spirit would calm down. But when it was realised that the cure is the church, many of them have joined the church. Now spirits begin to decrease.

AH: Yes, but do you remember the year or time when it started to increase?

ML: Yes, I remember that it was about 1979, and about five years thereafter. We began to see that women get a lot of problems because of spirits. But after a short while since we joined the church it started to decrease.

AH: But you do not know in more detail what kinds of spirits they are?

ML: I do not know. We only know that these are spirits which, when they stay in a person for a long time, can kill the person. But when we go to visit those persons and sing and pray, the spirit which is residing in a person gets improvement. But when they are baptised they are cured right away. And there are others with problems. And I have heard that the one whom we baptised recently has not been cured. Yesterday on Sunday I got news that she was moved to Lolkisalie. because she was not cured.

ML: Yes, men tell the women, 'Go to church because you are troubled by spirits'. But if we compare with the earlier time, there is a difference, because we start to get also a few men. There are many Arusha, their males come. But the share of Maasai men is very small. But the share of Maasai women is big, they come to church.

CONCLUSION

The epidemic spirit possession phenomena in the Maasai area constitute a complex, which deviates radically from most possession phenomena in Africa. Possession is peripheral in the sense that it does not emerge from the conceptual system of the Maasai themselves, but rather from outside, and is thus treated as alien, frightening, and disturbing. In regard to the type of people affected by spirits the phenomenon is not peripheral. It concerns women in general, and in many places about half of the adult female population has been affected by spirits. The analysis shows that the relative wealth of the family does not correlate with the likelihood of being possessed, not at least in the way expected. In fact women of wealthy families are slightly more prone to spirit possession than others.

As the case histories show, the stereotypical behaviour of possessed people were learnt first from Bantu healers, who from the 1960s onwards practised their profession deep in the Maasai area, and not only on its fringes as earlier. Although those healers came there to help people, they did increase spirit possession in the area through their interpretations of people's various ailments. The identification of spirits only occasionally led to exorcism, while the more usual outcome was their entertainment and fulfilling their requirements. This again was consonant with the conceptual system of the healers, in whose opinion spirits were useful accompaniments for people. While those possessed continued to need the services of the healers, also new people became possessed, largely by seeing how others were treated and entertained. Drum beating had the effect that more and more people started to dance and sing, which was considered a sign of being possessed. Therefore, many earlier pains and ailments were now interpreted as being caused by the spirit, which only now spoke out and made its wishes known.

The case histories also show that people sought for help from several sources. The Bantu healers were the most favourite source of help. The Maasai healers, *iloibonok*, came far behind. This is understandable, because the *iloibonok* openly declared their inability to help those possessed. Hospitals were also consulted, but with poor results. Beating *debes*, home made drums, was a common remedy in some areas, but it had only a local distribution. The church was tried as a second or third remedy more often than as the first remedy, but ultimately the church attracted most of those possessed.

The large number of symptoms, 126 in all, tells that in fact we are here dealing with a wide variety of ailments, many of which would fall into the category of 'ordinary' diseases. Many Maasai claim that they are able to make a distinction between an ordinary disease and symptoms caused by spirits. There is little doubt, however, that in other circumstances most of the symptoms now interpreted as having been caused by spirits would be diagnosed in other ways. Whatever the symptoms, the culmination of the process was the identification of the spirit and the actions taken thereafter.

The detailed survey carried out in Olkesumet in 1984 reveals that almost half of the women who had experienced spirit possession had joined the church as the final remedy. This means that contrary to the claims that people with spirit possession join the church was not true. The situation has changed since that time, however. In 1996, when I visited Olkesumet, there was an influx to the church. People joined the church in multitudes, and there was no indication that spirit possession played a role in it any more. New possession cases had almost disappeared, and by no means was it a central issue, as it had been twenty years earlier.

Spirit possession among the Maasai was primarily an agent for change, affecting primarily the position of women, but through them the society as a whole. The pressures of women took the form of spirit possession, because through it they were able to challenge the dominance of males, and also of Maasai healers, *iloibonok*, who also were males by definition. The phenomenon spread in epidemiological dimensions, encompassing a large part of the society. This could happen, because people affected by spirits were not expected to become healers themselves, as was the case in many Bantu societies, and also in *zar* and *bori* cults. Possession was a passing phenomenon, which often ended up in improved position of women in society. It offered new possibilities for women to express themselves and create such social networks, which had been closed to them earlier. In those areas spirit possession has exhausted its power. It still continues in areas where such breakthrough has not yet taken place.

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