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## CUSTOM, PREGNANCY AND CHILD REARING IN TANGANYIKA

by

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### WAHEHE

**Clans.** The Wahehe tribe is divided in approximately 120 clans. Clan taboos (mostly food restrictions) are strictly followed. Exogamy is strict. Cousins may marry, provided they belong to different clans.

**Food Taboos.** There is a universal food taboo for women, they are not allowed to eat eggs.

**Marriage.** Women usually marry at 16-18 years. The customary bride price is three cows — not more, not less — plus cash (Shs. 40/- to 100/-) a couple of goats, tools or household goods. A woman, on marriage, remains in her own clan and has to obey its taboos, in addition she also has to obey those of her husband's clan. Sterility is not a cause for divorce. In the case of an illegitimate pregnancy, the man has to pay a fine (a cow-calf for a daughter, a bull-calf for a son) and "feeding charges" for the child after it has been weaned. The child belongs to the father. If the man marries the girl, he has to pay the full bride price plus the fine.

**Pregnancy** When a Wahehe wife becomes pregnant, she should first of all tell her mother. (Amongst the Wahehe the mother of the wife has a more influential position than the mother of the husband). In some areas pregnancy imposes one extra taboo on the wife as she is not allowed to eat honey. In other sections, goat's meat is not allowed. She is allowed to work throughout the pregnancy. *Dawa* (medicine) is often taken to ensure a strong child and/or an easy delivery. Sexual intercourse is not allowed during pregnancy. She should avoid tight fitting clothes and should not have any knots tied on her clothing.

**Delivery** At the onset of labour, the tribal midwife is called. A good midwife is able to recognize, for instance, a breach position and might even be capable of correcting it. The majority of midwives, however, are of a low standard. They have an arsenal of drugs, the secrets of which are closely guarded.

The mother and mother-in-law of the woman in labour, are always supposed to attend. Often another one or two elderly experienced women will assist. All men and children in the house are sent away. The woman is delivered lying on her back. She is allowed to drink, but not to eat. Pushing is not encouraged until towards the end. A piece of

cloth or a string is tied tightly over the lower part of the chest and the upper abdomen. In abnormal deliveries, drugs are usually given, but cases are recorded where a primitive craniotomy has been performed. (This is often so in cattle people — Masai, Watutsi and even the primitive reindeer people of Siberia do it).

*Indigenous Drugs* As a rule the midwife gives some *dawa* to the woman in labour (to speed up labour and to prevent complications).

*Cord* Often the cord is not separated immediately after the child is born, but the midwife waits until the placenta also has come out. The cord is tied with a long string and cut with a sharp reed. The string from the stump of the cord is tied in a loop over the neck and one shoulder of the child. The stump is treated with salt (has to be so-called Ugogo salt, rock salt) and a few drops of the milk-juice from an euphorbia-plant. Sometimes the stump is powdered with wood-ashes and salt. (It is said that the euphorbia juice makes the cord drop off quicker than normal, within 2-3 days). Until the cord has dropped, the mother is not allowed to prepare or to touch food for anybody who does not belong to her own family.

*Placenta* The placenta and cord are buried somewhere in the bush or *shamba*, (or in the root-fork of a "fertile tree," i.e. a tree which bears a rich crop of fruit). Apparently no particular beliefs are attached to the placenta. Blood-stained clothing can be washed and may be used again.

*Newborn* After birth the child is washed and its eyes are cleaned. It is given a herbal concoction in *uji* "to make it strong." The newborn child has to be kept inside the house or hut for forty days. Also, the mother keeps indoors and leaves the hut only for brief periods. (This forty-days spell is not always observed and is considered merely a period of rest). The father is not supposed to see the child until the 40-day period has passed. (This is not strictly observed nowadays). This rule also applies to all other males. Women, especially elderly relatives, are allowed to visit mother and child at any time. With regard to infant feeding, quite often children will be given *uji* when they are only 2 weeks old. It is the rule rather than the exception that additional food (*uji*) is given from very early on. Breast feeding goes on for about two years.

*Twins* Twins are considered very lucky. If one twin child dies, it must not be mourned as that might bring death also to the second twin.

*Beliefs* A woman who breast feeds a baby is not allowed to eat chicken, which is supposed to cause fever and convulsions in the child. Children are not allowed to eat meat until they are 4-5 years old as this is supposed to cause severe indigestion and/or to make the child greedy. It is an unlucky sign if the upper teeth are cut before the lower ones, as such a child may cause disease or death of its parents. It is also believed that this teething abnormality may cause epilepsy or madness in the child.

#### WAGOGO

*Clans* Wagogo traditions indicate a mixed origin of the tribe, with elements of Nyamwezi, Masai, Sagara and Hehe together with intermixture with the original inhabitants (Tatoga). This mixed origin also shows in the pattern of customs and beliefs. There are fourteen main clans and a great number of "sub-clans," but on the whole this organisation is not very strict.

*Food Taboos* These are insignificant. With one exception there seems to be no special food taboos for women. (The exception is that young, unmarried girls are not allowed to eat eggs).

**Marriage** Exogamy is not strict. Cousin-marriages are allowed. Wagogo girls usually marry at 16-17 years. The customary bride price (always on agreement) is 12-15 cows, occasionally 20, sometimes only 4-6. In addition 4-6 goats or a small amount of cash. (The present tendency is that more and more of the bride-wealth is paid in cash). Polygamy is common. Female circumcision is practised. If a Gogo wife has not become pregnant after one year's marriage, a tribal practitioner (*mganga*) is consulted. Infertility is not considered a cause for divorce.

**Pregnancy** When a married woman becomes pregnant she first tells her mother. She is allowed to work throughout the pregnancy. There are no special pregnancy taboos. Sexual intercourse is allowed during the first four months of the pregnancy. If a pregnant woman dies, the death is, from the point of view of tribal law, always considered to have been caused by the pregnancy, even if it is obvious that the death was caused by a disease or accident which had no medical connection with the pregnancy. The only exception is the murder of a pregnant woman.

**Delivery** The woman is, as a rule, not delivered in her own house. The first delivery usually takes place in the house of her parents, the subsequent deliveries in the house of her husband's parents. If a child should happen to be born in the house of the married couple, mother and child are moved over to the house of the maternal parents as soon as can be done and remain there for 4 to 6 days. When labour starts, the tribal midwife is called, all males and children are sent away and only two or three elderly female relatives of the woman in labour and her mother and/or her mother-in-law remain to assist the midwife.

The patient is placed in a half-lying position against the wall of the hut near the fireplace and leans against a piece of wood (*mugunga*) which has been shaped to fit the small of the back for support. In a normal delivery, the midwife does not interfere. The father is allowed to see mother and child immediately after the delivery. Other visitors are allowed after 5-7 days. In cases of prolonged labour, a lump of crushed herbs of various kinds (tobacco-leaves and others) is often pushed up into the vagina. Generally, if labour is prolonged, or complicated, a second and even a third midwife is called, a multitude of drugs are given and sacrifices made. Some of the herbal concoctions are fairly potent heart poisons and the outcome is often fatal. Manual removal of a retained placenta is sometimes done. Immediately after the birth, child and mother are given *uji* in which *dawa* has been mixed.

**Indigenous Drugs** Often the midwife and the helpers dip their hands in warm water into which certain roots and herbs have been put. This is not for cleaning the hands, the purpose is purely magical. Some *dawa*, the composition of which is secret and known only by the midwife, is usually given to the woman in labour.

**Cord** The cord is tied with a piece of string and cut with a sharp piece of grass or the edge of a maize-leaf. The ends of the string are tied round the neck of the child so that the stump of the cord is pulled upwards. The stump is treated with wood-ashes and/or soot and/or a powder made from the roots of a certain shrub, which is secret. (The "stringing-up" of the cord is to ensure that it will not fall downwards, towards the genitalia, when it drops off as this is supposed to cause infertility in the child once it has grown up. See also Wanyakyusa and Waluguru).

**Placenta** This is buried inside the house, near one of the central pillars. It should be buried with the cord facing upwards. Often a piece of the placental part of the cord is cut off and dried and hung round the neck of the child or suspended from the roof of the hut.

*Vernix Caseosa* If much of this substance is found on the skin of the newborn, it is supposed to indicate that the parents have had sexual intercourse during the pregnancy. (The same idea is found amongst the Wanyakyusa).

*Newborn* Normally the child is breast-fed for 6-8 months, from then on additional food (mostly *uji*) is given. Weaning is gradual and the breast is sometimes given until the child is 3-4 years old. If mother and baby are healthy, the child is given both breasts. Should one of them, however, get an attack of illness (particularly diarrhoea) a *mganga* is consulted. The *mganga* sucks both breasts and decides that the milk from one breast is bad (even poisonous) and advises that the child should only be fed from the other breast. Sexual intercourse is forbidden for 4 months after the birth of a child. A pregnancy during the breast feeding period (up to 4 years) is avoided.

*Twins* A twin-birth is nowadays normally considered a lucky thing. An interesting custom, which apparently was quite common 10-15 years ago, but is now disappearing, runs as follows: A mother, who has given birth to twins, has to go to the first wife of the local Chief. She brings with her two small clay "models" of the twins and these models or figurines are given to the Chief's wife who puts them in the hut where the rain-making stones are kept and pours water over them. (Stones and other implements for rain-making are parts of the insignia of the Chiefs). The belief is that twin-birth, by magical analogy, might cause abnormally heavy rains to fall, with resulting damage to crops. The water-pouring ceremony removes this danger. A twin child which dies must not be cried over as that might cause also the death of the second twin. Twins often have standard names: Chilongola for the first born (male or female). Nyuma (if a girl), Mtundo (if a boy) for the second.

*Beliefs* If a child cuts the upper teeth before it gets the lower ones, the child is called "the enemy of the thunderstorm." This is considered a bad omen. A cloth used by a married woman as a sanitary towel or any cloth or material soiled with menstrual blood can be used for purposes of witchcraft. If a married woman dies and a piece of this cloth is put into the vagina of the corpse, the husband of the deceased will become impotent. Therefore when a married woman dies, the female relatives of the husband always check on these things. One Mgogo who supplied this information stated that he knew of two instances where already buried dead women had been dug up again only because the husbands suspected that the corpses had been tampered with by his enemies.

#### WALUGURU

*Clans* The clan organisation is very strong amongst the Waluguru. Exogamy is strict and marriage rules are firm and complicated. Paternal cousins may marry but maternal ones may not. A child follows the clan of its mother (matrilineal ancestry). There are some fifty main clans subdivided in a large number of lineages (800 and more). There is a general pattern of customs which are common to all Waluguru, but in addition there are numerous clan-customs, which vary a great deal.

*Food Taboos* There are two general food taboos for adult women, they are not allowed to eat eggs or "twin bananas" (two bananas which have grown together). If a woman eats such fruits she is supposed to risk getting twins, which is a serious misfortune. If a woman eats eggs, her menstruation would become irregular or disappear altogether. If she becomes pregnant, the child will be stillborn. The Wasagara believe that if a woman eats eggs her deliveries will be very difficult and that the placenta will not come out.

*African Child Health, September, 1961*

**Marriage** Girls are betrothed at 11-12 years and married at 14-16 years. Prior to marriage they are often shut up in the parents hut for a considerable length of time (8-14 months) and have to follow a strict routine, they are not allowed to wash, nor to speak except in a whisper and are not allowed to leave the hut other than for short periods at night. They are also subject to a "fattening-up" procedure. The initiation ceremonies take place towards the end of this period and the teaching is done by the maternal grandmother called the *mhunga mkulu* or *mhunga mkubwa* (teacher-instructor) who is assisted by the *mhunga mdogo* (the guardian), the *mjandigu* (literally "the one who eats with") and the *mmandi* (messenger). This is the usual procedure amongst the hill-dwellers. The clans living on the plains follow an even more complicated pattern, but with the same basic ideas. The first menstruation of a girl is celebrated and is a day of joy amongst the Waluguru.

Bride wealth (dowry) is nowadays almost always paid in cash (Shs. 200/- to 300/-) plus goats and poultry. The uncle, on the maternal side, is the one who settles the dowry and he is a person of great importance in the field of marriage questions. Polygamy is the rule, but usually there are only two wives, the *bibi mkubwa*, who is the real wife, and the *bibi mdogo* who is half wife, half servant and is of a lower status (concubine). ("She is useful during all the time *bibi mkubwa* is nursing a baby.") The maternal grandmother is a person of great influence and few young couples would dare to oppose her.

**Pregnancy** When a wife becomes pregnant, she first of all tells her husband and her grandmother, who then informs the mother of the pregnant woman. If the pregnant woman has a sister, she will be specially informed. If a previous pregnancy has gone wrong, a local *mganga* or *mhunga* is consulted, but if the woman is strong and healthy and has not had any mishaps with previous pregnancies, *dawa* is not necessarily taken. When the pregnancy has reached six months, a special ceremony takes place. The older, experienced women come together and instruct the mother-to-be about child birth and what she should do during labour. A lot of food and meat is prepared and all share it. No man is allowed to be present.

A pregnancy imposes a few extra taboos on the woman. She is not allowed to eat meat from pregnant animals. If a woman eats meat from such an animal she is supposed to bring forth a stillborn baby. *Pofu* (eland) is also a taboo. It is believed that meat of this animal will cause the child to be born with generalised swellings on its body and that the placenta will not come out. (Because the "dew-lap" of a *pofu* disappears when the animal is dead). There is an important clan taboo: a pregnant woman is not allowed to eat *kunde* (the cowpea), an important part of the local diet, which for the poorer section of the population is practically the only source of protein. If *kunde* is eaten, there is a fear that the child will be very small and not grow (as the *kunde* is very small), or that abortion may occur.

The husband of a pregnant woman cannot take part in hunts. In Unguru and Uka-guru (towards Kilosa), a pregnant woman may not walk through a field with growing crops. She must even avoid her shadow falling on the field! Another somewhat peculiar taboo which is still obeyed in some backward areas is as follows: when a new hut is to be built, the builder-to-be after having completed certain ceremonies on the site chosen for the new house, deposits a sacrifice at a path or cross-road near to the building site. (A small quantity of honey is put in an earthenware pot and some magic *dawa* is added to the honey, a piece of snake-skin, lion's hair, etc.) This pot is taken to the cross-road and put there together with tufts of grass which have been collected elsewhere and are re-planted at the cross-road. This charm is called *tundururu*. A pregnant woman, when passing such

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Child Health

an offering, must take a detour and leave the path or road where the pot stands or else the child she carries may be malformed. A pregnant woman works throughout the pregnancy. Sexual intercourse is allowed during the first 6-7 months of the pregnancy, although it is not normal intercourse.

*Delivery* This usually takes place in the hut of the parents of the wife. When labour starts the midwife (*mlala*) is called. The mother of the wife and two or three elderly experienced women assist. Sometimes there is a ceremonial rinsing of the hands of the *mlala* and assistants. A flat stone is brought into the hut and the labouring woman sits on this stone during delivery. (She is actually half sitting, half lying, supported by an assistant who sits behind her and holds her in a comfortable position. The delivery takes place on the floor, not in the bed). Sexual intercourse is forbidden for one year after delivery. A new pregnancy is avoided until the child has been weaned (2 years).

*Indigenous Drugs* *Dawa*, of unknown type, is given.

*Cord* This is tied with a strip of cloth (which had to be black in the olden days, nowadays this rule is not strict) and is cut with a knife. The stump is treated with a paste made from castor oil (*mafuta ya mbalika, nyembe*) and a black powder containing charcoal and powdered herbs. The stump is then secured with the previously mentioned strip of black cloth, the ends of which are left long enough to go round the belly of the child. The stump must not fall downwards towards the genitalia, as this is supposed to cause infertility in the child once it has grown up. There is the same belief amongst Wagogo and Wanyakyusa. The child and mother are given *dawa* in *uji*. After the cord has dropped, the umbilicus is smeared with a mixture (castor oil and soot).

*Placenta* The placenta (*berikero*) is collected in a pot and buried outside the village. It is considered very important that children should not see the placenta, as it is felt that they might get leprosy or some other serious disease, mostly of the skin. If delivery takes place during day-time, the placenta is often buried inside the hut. Some midwives can do a manual removal of a retained placenta.

*Newborn* When the child is two days old, the father brings a small piece of the clan taboo (that is to say, the food which is forbidden for that particular clan to eat) and feeds it to the child. After that, the child should never touch it again for the rest of its life. If someone eats of his taboo, he, she and their offspring are punished with incurable skin diseases. When the child is 7-8 days old and the cord has dropped off, its head is shaved and it is rubbed with castor oil (*nyembe*). It is brought out of the hut by the mother or the *mlala* and is given its name (by the father). The mother and child usually return to their own home 2-3 months after the birth of the child. Waluguru children (from toddler age until puberty) spend more time with their maternal grandparents than with their parents and are very much under their influence.

*Twins* Twins (*wapacha*) were, and still are, considered very unlucky. In the older days twins were invariably killed (choked with wood ashes or buried alive in a large *chungu*). Even nowadays it happens quite often that one or sometimes both of the twins are "allowed to die." The putting of wood ashes down the throat of a twin-child is still practised. If twins are allowed to live, special *pombe* (local beer) is brewed and the old people of the clan gather at the twin-parents' house, where they curse and insult the parents. This ceremony of abusing the parents is repeated annually. Twins have standard names. Kulwa for the first and Dotto for the second. If one of the twins has to be punished also the other one will. Twins are buried in the bush or near a river. Their bodies must be wrapped in black cloth. Only the mother is allowed to mourn a dead twin.

*Beliefs* Breech births are also unlucky, and were often killed. A child can

*African Child Health, September, 1961*

upper teeth before the lower ones (*kigego*) is also unlucky. Often such a child was killed as it was believed that the child would be mentally diseased or morally defective, sometimes a murderer or thief. There is a common belief that any one who walks over a place where a *zalala* is buried will get ulcers or boils (*mazalala*) on his feet and/or legs. If a twin, a *kigego*, or a premature or deformed child is buried in a certain place (in the bush or at a cross-road) this place is called *huto*. Walking over it has the same results as walking over a *zalala*. Firewood may not be collected from a *huto*-site. *Zalala* and *huto* burial places are separated from the burial grounds for adults. An immature girl is not allowed to see menstrual blood, and if a pregnant woman is stung by a wasp, the child will die.

#### SUKUMA MEDICINES

**Protective Amulet** This is worn by the mother to protect her from evil spells. Two small pieces of different roots are sharpened at one end and the blunt ends pierced and a string threaded through. The pegs and string are smeared with a medicine whose magic ingredients are small pieces of a bird which lives on sorghum corn and pieces of a very extensive creeper. The dried ingredients are pulverized and mixed with oil. The interpretation is that the medicine annihilates the evil spell like a flock of birds does the corn and that it has a far reaching effect. Before hanging the amulet round her neck the mother presses it against her breast and allowing it to fall to the ground exclaims "This amulet shall turn the spell of sorcerers against those who wish to use it against me." The amulet's place is between the breasts as the mother's main fear is that her milk may get spoiled by evil influence.

**Medicine for cleaning the nipples** The dried roots of *Capparis kiku*, *Ximenia sp.* and *Pentamusia* are pulverized and poured into a small calabash, which the mother always carries with her. Before the baby begins feeding, the nipples are moistened with saliva and a little of the powder.

**Protective medicine against "magic trap" placed on paths** This has the following ingredients: roots of *Erethrina sp.*, *Accacia fisheri*, *Accacia orfota* and small pieces of an animal which never crosses a path. All the ingredients are dried and pulverized, the powder is wrapped into a maize leaf. Before the pregnant woman leaves the house, she throws some of the powder in a straight line on the floor and jumps over it exclaiming "May I jump like this over all the traps on the path." If the mother should experience an uneasy feeling while she proceeds on her way, she stops and puts a little of the powder on her hands blowing it first in the direction she is going and then in the direction from which she has come.

**Medicine to improve quality and whiteness of breast milk** The bark of *Mimusops pensiflora* is pounded and kept in a small bottle filled with water. The mother rubs the nipples with the liquid regularly and also drinks it. If the baby is not progressing well, the mother extracts a few drops of her milk and puts them on a tripod. If flies settle on it that indicates that the mother's milk is the cause of the baby's ailment.

**Dawa makile** This magic medicine in one form or other is the common property of Africans. The basic assumption for its use is that the sexual behaviour of parents before and after the birth of a child influences its well being:

- (i) Before birth: (a) for the mother abstinence except with husband;
- (b) for the father no restriction.
- (ii) After birth: (a) for both parents abstinence between themselves until the re-appearance of the menses;

- (b) for the father no restriction about extra-marital intercourse if he uses the *dawa makile*. Some informants state that in the case of the first birth the father remains abstinent like the mother ;
- (c) for the mother abstinence except with husband until the child is weaned. *Dawa makile* in her case is not considered an absolutely sure remedy against the consequence of transgression, e.g. if the husband dies the wife cannot re-marry before the child is weaned or can walk.

#### WANYAKYUSA

*Clans* There is a clan organisation of the usual pattern, but less detailed and of less practical importance than in most other tribes. There seem to be few food taboos in the clans and marriages inside the clan, although not common, are not strictly forbidden. In the past, though, exogamy was the strict rule.

*Marriage* The marriageable age for women is 16-18 years. Food taboos for women are : eggs (not strict) and cocks which have started to crow (not strict). Goat's meat is considered bad for women, at least in certain areas, and is supposed to cause favus.

*Pregnancy* On becoming pregnant, the woman first tells the husband. The husband then informs the mother and father of his wife about the pregnancy. His own parents are also informed. The pregnant wife usually consults one of the tribal midwives and is given certain advice (most by an instruction to avoid certain kinds of food) and some herbal medicines, which is supposed to make her and the child strong. In some areas pregnant women are not allowed to eat chicken or fresh fish, although they can eat dried fish. The woman is allowed to work as usual. Sexual intercourse is permitted.

*Delivery* Customarily a woman should be delivered in the house of her parents (especially for the first delivery) and it is the duty of the husband to take his wife to his in-laws well before the birth of the child is due. (She may also be taken to the house of her husband's parents — this is often done when the second child is due). If, for some reason or other, the woman cannot be moved from her own house, the wife of a reputable neighbour is asked to come and be present during the birth. If the child is born at home it has to be brought over to the maternal grandmother's house and remain there for a couple of months. (If a pregnant or labouring woman has to be taken to hospital, the consent of her parents is essential. This is specially so amongst the more backward Wanyakyusa).

At the onset of labour, all males and children are sent away and the tribal midwife is called. The midwife and the mother of the labouring woman are in charge. Some herbal concoctions are given, especially if a previous delivery has gone wrong. The midwife prescribes and gives the drugs, the composition of which are kept secret. If things proceed normally, the midwife does not interfere. The woman is delivered lying in a semi-recumbent position, leaning against the lap of an assistant who holds her in a comfortable position. The woman is delivered in a temporary "bed" made on the floor. After delivery and after washing and cleaning, she is put in the ordinary bed. The only complication the tribal midwife can sometimes deal with successfully is a retained placenta, where manual removal is sometimes done. The midwives are well aware of the danger of pulling the cord or membranes and this is carefully avoided.

*African Child Health, September, 1961*

*Cord* The cord is tied with a string made from banana-fibres and cut with any sharp instrument. In olden days with a reed or sliced bamboo, nowadays with a knife, scissors or razor-blade. The stump is powdered with soot taken from the roof of the hut and/or with a powder made from certain dried roots (*njere*). In some parts of the country a piece of the placental part of the cord is cut off and tied to a length of string suspended from the roof where it remains until the cord has dropped off the child and the umbilicus is healed, when both pieces are buried in the shamba or the bush. The child is kept lying on its side till the cord has dropped, the reason being that the cord should not be allowed to fall "downwards" (towards the genitalia) but only "sideways." If it does fall downwards, it is believed that the child, when grown up will become sterile. This custom, however, is not universal throughout the tribe.

*Placenta* This is buried in the *shamba* or the bush. It is often buried with the cord upwards, as there is a belief, that the child might get fever and convulsions if the cord faces down into the ground.

*Vernix caseosa* If there is much of this substance, it is supposed to indicate that the parents have had intercourse during the pregnancy.

*Newborn* The father is allowed to see both child and mother immediately after the birth and visitors are allowed. The child, as a rule, is entirely breast-fed for 6-8 months, when additional food is given. It is not fully weaned until it is about 2 years old. Sexual intercourse is allowed during the breast-feeding period, but it is the duty of the husband to see that it does not result in a new pregnancy, by employing coitus interruptus.

*Twins* If twins are born (or in the case of a breach-birth), the mother and children are speedily moved out of the house and are kept in an out-house or in a hastily erected small grass hut and nobody is allowed to enter this or even to look at mother and offspring. They are sometimes kept isolated for several weeks. Eventually a cleansing ceremony is performed, consisting in the sprinkling of hot water on mother and child (or children) and on the walls and floor of the hut. Certain herbs are usually mixed with the hot water. This procedure, *ipasa*, is supposed to remove the bad spiritual influence which the birth of twins and/or abnormal presentation has brought about. It is also supposed to prevent oedema (*safura*). Twins have standard names, the first born *Mbasa*, the second *Sindika* (abbreviated *Sinde*). These names can be both male and female.

*Belief* There is a belief that it is dangerous if a dog should eat the placenta, as it may cause disease and misfortune, especially epilepsy.

#### WACHAGA

*Clans* The Wachaga are divided in more than 700 clans. There are 16 royal clans. The clan system is still strong and is of considerable practical importance. Marriages between people who are related are forbidden (up to second cousin) but provided this rule is followed, marriages inside the clan are allowed. There is a tribal institution, obviously designed to safeguard interests of eugenic hygiene. Members of such families or sibs amongst which mental disease, epilepsy and similar inheritable conditions occur cannot marry without the consent of a "Board of Elders."

*Food Taboos* There are no real food taboos for women. Certain kinds of food are, however, regarded as "women's food" and are not (or only rarely) eaten by men. Such foods are blood, boiled or fried with oil, a mixture of blood and sour milk. Also vegetables used to be considered as women's food. Eggs, chickens and hens are rarely eaten, but are not covered by a specific taboo.

*Marriages* Chaga girls usually marry at 15-17 years of age. The dowry consists of 2 heifers, *pombe*, one goat and two sheep. Nowadays more and more is paid in cash (up to Shs. 2000/- to 4000/-). Female circumcision is still quite common. It is reckoned that 40-50 per cent. of the girls are circumcised. This is usually done when they are 14-15 years old and are betrothed. In the old days uncircumcised women or men were not allowed to marry and not given a fully mature adult status.

*Pregnancy* A pregnant woman is not allowed to eat black peas (*mba* or *buo*). It is believed that if she does so the child will be diseased. She is supposed to keep even-tempered, to avoid getting drunk and she is not allowed to laugh at anything ugly or fearsome. She should not eat together with a woman who has had a miscarriage. Fatty food is avoided, for fear that the child will grow too big. Also she should avoid drinking much (i.e. water or milk). Sexual intercourse is allowed until the sixth month. The husband is not allowed to be drunk when he sleeps with his wife, there is a belief that the child might become a drunkard.

She is allowed to work during pregnancy. If she is healthy and has had no previous mishaps with her pregnancies, no *dawa* is taken. Otherwise often a local *mganga* is consulted. (These *waganga* as a rule are not Wachaga, but come from neighbouring districts). Nowadays, there are hardly any true traditional tribal midwives left. Midwifery is in the hands of any old women and the knowledge of the old-type tribal midwives has been lost.

*Delivery* The delivery takes place in the hut belonging to the married couple. Usually a temporary "bed" is made on the floor. A couple of elderly women (relatives or friends) assist. There is a tendency to encourage the labouring woman to "push" at too early a stage, often from the very onset of the labour pains. In the case of a difficult labour, the helpers often try to "stretch" the vaginal aperture with their hands. Herbal concoctions are given.

*Cord* After the child is born, the cord is tied with a piece of string (banana fibre) and cut. The stump is treated with butter.

*Placenta* The placenta is buried under a banana plant (*machame*) or near the fire place (Old Moshi area). It is buried so near the fire that it is actually burnt, and when the cord has dropped off, the ashes are swept out and the whole of the hut is swept.

*Newborn* Often the newborn child is given a drink of water or a small amount of mashed (or pre-chewed) bananas to "clear its throat." The baby is not to be seen by other children until its cord has dropped. Children are told that newborn babies have no earlobes. When the cord has sloughed off, they are told "now the baby has ears" and they are allowed to see it. Usually a ram is killed when the cord separates and a small family feast is held.

After the delivery the mother is given a period of rest (2 months, at one time 4 months). During this period she is kept on a rich diet with plenty of milk, meat, blood and fat. Breast feeding usually goes on for 2 years. Additional food, fluid or semi-fluid (milk, mashed bananas) is given from the 4th to 5th month.

*Beliefs* A child who cuts his upper teeth first may cause death or illness of his father and such a baby used to be killed.

#### BAHAYA

*Clans* The clan-structure follows what may be called the general Bantu pattern. Every Mhaya is a member of a clan and has to obey certain clan rules or taboos, mostly

in the nature of food restrictions. There are some 150 clans. Marriages inside the clan are not allowed (the "exogamy principle.") With marriage a woman becomes a member of her husband's clan and has to obey not only the rules of her own clan but also the rules of her husband's clan — as long as she lives with him. If she becomes pregnant, she has to observe her husband's clan taboos more strictly than when she is not pregnant. In addition to the clan taboos — her own and her husband's — a woman also has to obey certain other taboos, peculiar to women only. For example, there is a general taboo for all women to eat a certain kind of fish, *kashurubana*\*. In the southern chiefdoms of Uhaya, the meat of goats and sheep is taboo for women. Contrary to common belief, eggs are not forbidden for women. The reason why eggs are not often eaten appears to be that in the old days birds and everything connected with them was considered unclean and unsuitable for human food.

*Omu-kisika* The Haya woman usually marries when she is seventeen to eighteen years old. The newly married woman is called *omu-gole* and she is traditionally kept in seclusion from the wedding until she has borne her first child. She is kept in the *omu-kisika*, a special partition of the Haya hut or house. If she does not become pregnant, she is kept in seclusion for "nine moons." She is not allowed to leave the house during day-time and is kept closely under the eyes of the mother-in-law. She, the *omu-gole*, is to be well-fed and is pampered like a child. This custom, of *omu-kisika*, is mentioned because it links up with certain traditional beliefs of great practical importance, the *bisisi*, which will be described later.

*Pregnancy* Once a woman discovers that she is pregnant she has to inform, first of all, her mother-in-law. If this person cannot, for some reason or other be informed, the senior female relation on her husband's side has to be told. After this has been done, the woman may inform her own mother and then her husband. It is the duty of the mother-in-law (or the female relative, as the case may be) to inform the expectant mother about what "to do" and "not to do." Usually there are a number of pregnancy taboos imposed. There are general and special pregnancy taboos.

*General Taboos* A pregnant woman must not walk under a stick, supporting a heavy bunch of bananas, or else the child might "get caught" during the birth. She must not move backwards through a door or an entrance. If she does, an obstructed labour will result. (These two examples are obviously simple "symbolical magic").

She must chew her food very carefully and swallow only small quantities at a time. She must even "chew" water and other fluids and swallow only a little at a time, or else the child might get hurt by lumps of food falling on it. There is also a belief that whenever the mother eats the child eats as well, therefore the mother has to eat slowly so that the child does not choke. The "special" pregnancy taboos are very variable, and though mostly in the nature of food taboos, there exist others, as for instance the taboo that the expectant mother is not to sit on a bed or is not allowed to cross a stream of flowing water.

The pregnant woman, with the exception of the *omu-gole* is allowed, even encouraged, to work throughout her pregnancy. Sexual intercourse is allowed. In the old days, offerings to tree-spirits (the tree being a fertility symbol) were often made in order to secure an easy delivery. Nowadays this is done only in more backward parts. Throughout pregnancy the expectant mother is given a great deal of herbal drugs which serve a variety of purposes — to give her strength, to ensure an easy delivery, to secure a male child, to ward off or nullify some dangerous influences and so on.

\* *Kashurubana* or *kasulubana* refers to the Elephant Snout fish (*Mormyrus kannume*). It is believed in several different areas that if pregnant woman eats this fish, it will cause her to miscarry.

*Labour* When the labour starts, a midwife is sent for. There are a great many traditional midwives of the common "tribal midwife" type, elderly experienced women who have learnt their trade from their mothers and who pass on their knowledge to their daughters. As a rule they are very secretive and do not volunteer information.

The midwife takes complete charge, with dictatorial powers. Only two or three helpers are allowed to stay, the rest of the household is sent away. Some of these midwives can make an external examination and determine the position of the child. A few of them can do corrections and repositions. The midwife makes sure that there is no knot of any kind in or on the clothing of the woman in labour, including clothes not actually worn but belonging to the woman. The patient is allowed to walk around till the membranes have ruptured, after that she is made to lie down. She is allowed to drink during labour, but is not allowed to eat.

The general attitude of the Bahaya midwife is that once labour has started everything should be done to shorten its duration. The principle of "masterly inactivity" on the part of the midwife is unknown. Hence the patient is given all sorts of drugs — *enshamba* — to speed up the process. *Enshamba* medicine is sometimes quite harmless but often is not. One of these drugs — a mixture of dried powdered bark and dried leaves of unknown origin — has the effect of stimulating the uterus and is used to strengthen weak pains. As the tribal midwife has no knowledge of physiology, she often uses this contraction-stimulating drug when there are absolutely contra-indications, with disastrous results. The author has seen many cases of ruptured uterus resulting from the use of this drug. Another drug is used in cases of retained placenta. This drug might contain strophanthine, which is a potent heart poison and the author is of the opinion that most cases of unexpected deaths of obstetric patients brought to hospital for a retained placenta (or abortions) are caused by this preparation.

*Placenta* The afterbirth is sometimes regarded as being the "brother" or the "dead brother" of the child born. This belief varies a great deal, it is common in Kanyangereko chiefdom, but known in Ihangiro chiefdom. In Kiziba the placenta is the "brother" only in cases of twin birth or in cases of breach-position. To make it even more confusing, in Kiziba a breach is called a "twin" — *barongo*. It may thus happen that women when asked how many children they have had will include the placentas amongst the children, saying for example that they have had four children which might then mean either four children or two children and two placentas. A reply "three children" might mean three children or twins plus one placenta or one child (a breach-birth) plus one placenta. These peculiarities, if not recognized, naturally tend to make statistics based on maternity histories somewhat unreliable.

The placenta must not be disposed of crudely. In principle it is treated as a corpse; that is it is wrapped up in a piece of brown bark-cloth which is the traditional shroud. (In olden days this bark-cloth was used for clothing but nowadays it has only ceremonial use). In Ihangiro the placenta is wrapped in leaves of a certain shrub, called *omulinzi* (*Erythrina abyssinica*) which means "the one which protects." The same is done in Karagwe. The "mouth" of the membranes — which is the hole where the membranes ruptured — should be put so that it comes "on top" of the placenta. If this is not done the woman will not have any more children. The mother-in-law carries out all these ceremonies which concern the placenta.

In Kiziba, customs are even more elaborate, especially after twin or breach births. The placenta is wrapped in bark-cloth, a small ant-heap of the round, hard, football-like type is brought to the hut, hollowed out, and the placenta, wrapped in its bark-cloth, is

deposited inside the ant-heap, which is then sealed with cow dung or clay. This is then either kept in the hut or buried near the bed-place or deposited somewhere out in the shamba.

There is a taboo attached to this ball and it is believed that anyone who touches it will get a certain skin-disease, *empyola*. (The author has seen two cases of reputed *empyola* and it appears to be vitiligo or leucoderma, a simple atrophy of the skin pigment). It is an interesting detail that violation of taboos connected with the placenta (and such taboos are common in practically all tribes) will be punished by a skin disease. The Waluguru believe that breaking a placenta-taboo will cause tropical ulcers; the Wagogo believe that tropical ulcers and/or leprosy will result, and the Wanyakyusa fear unspecified skin disease in the child if a placenta-taboo is broken.

Normally the placenta in its bark-cloth is buried, sometimes inside the hut (Kiziba and Bugabo), sometimes outside (Kyangereko, Ihangiro, Karagwe). If buried inside, it is deposited near the foot-end of the bed place. If buried outside, it is placed as close to the wall of the sleeping compartment as possible. In Ihangiro it can be buried anywhere in the shamba.

*Vernix caseosa* There is a peculiar belief attached to the presence of vernix. A mother whose child has plenty of this greasy matter on its body is scorned as one who has not obeyed the rules of hygiene and cleanliness during her pregnancy. It is also believed that constipation in the expectant mother will result in a "dirty" child, that is one with a heavy coat of vernix.

*Cord* The cord is tied with a thin string made of a kind of tough grass which grows everywhere in the area, and it is cut with a sharpened slice of reed (elephant grass—*Pennisetum purpureum*). The stem in this grass is silicate-encrusted and can be sliced in razor-sharp strips. The reed has to be dry and is usually taken from the roof of the hut, (or a hut, if the delivery takes place in a stone house). There is a widespread belief that the blood lost during a delivery can be used for purposes of witchcraft, causing barrenness of the women from whom the blood originated.

*"Virginal Status" of the Young Mother and the Bisisi Custom* The customs and beliefs attached to the period from the time of the delivery till the cord has dropped off are somewhat complicated. It is believed throughout the district (except in Kiziba chiefdom) that the man who has the first intercourse with a woman is always the father of the first child that woman bears. This is so even if the intercourse, from a medical point of view did not result in a pregnancy and the woman did not have her first child until years later. According to tribal belief, the first intercourse did produce a pregnancy, but this pregnancy "broke off" (*kuendeka*) and the child is "hiding in the back" to be born perhaps several years later. This is called "the long pregnancy" or *bisisi* and such a child is a *bisisi*-child.

If a marriage is sterile, the husband and wife separate and the woman marries another man. If she gets a child by her second husband, this child belongs to the first husband, it is a *bisisi*-child. (It does not matter if this child is born ten years after the separation, it is still legally the child of the first husband). The practical implication is thus that a man who can prove that he has had the first virginal intercourse with a woman can justly claim the first child of that woman as his. This is of great legal, social and economic importance in Buhaya. (There are areas where something like twenty per cent. of all children are *bisisi*-children).

During the period of time from the birth, of the child until the cord has separated\*, the woman reverts to the "virginal status," that is to say that any man who has intercourse

with her during this period can claim the next child of the woman as his. This is the reason why the relatives of the husband in the interest of the clan, keep a steady watch over the newly delivered woman to prevent any "outsider" from interfering with her. It is basically the same as the guarding of the *omu-gole*, the newly married woman who is kept in seclusion in the inner part of the Haya hut, the *omu-kisika*. To make the whole thing even more complicated, the intercourse, need not necessarily be a "real" physical one; a "symbolical" one is all that is required. When the cord has sloughed off, the mother has to perform a ceremonial cleaning of herself and a small family feast is held. This is also the time for the ceremonial-ritual intercourse.

*Twins* Twins are always given standard names, *Ishengoma* and *Kato* for boys, *Nyengome* and *Nyakato* for girls. Twins were and still are, at least to some extent, considered unlucky incidents. It appears that twin-births in the old days were regarded as an offence against the Chief and that certain fines had to be paid to the Chief by the father of the twins. (The Chief was in a magic way connected with the fertility of the land and the birth of twins was an insult against the fertility powers vested in the Chief).

*Burying Places for Twins* In the past twins were not buried in graves, but the corpses were put into one of the small caves or niches which are so common in the district, or under an overhanging slab of rock. (The author has twice come across such places, in both cases near to the skeletons a small earthenware vessel was found, also feathers, bits of wood and other paraphernalia).

*Newborn* The neonate is subjected to "medications" from the first day of its life. It is given medicines and preparations for everything under the sun. There is medicine to make the cord drop off, medicine to protect against diarrhoea, constipation, hiccoughs and running eyes, medicine to ensure that the child gets straight legs, and to make certain that the teeth erupt. Obviously large numbers of infants are every day slowly being poisoned to death by well-meaning mothers, grandmothers and other relatives.

*Midwives' Fees* The midwife collects the first stool which the newborn has produced, wraps it in grass from the floor of the hut and deposits the bundle close to a banana-plant which grows as near to the hut as possible. If the child is a girl, a "sweet" banana is chosen, if the child is a boy, a "bitter" (beer or flour) banana is chosen. All stools from the child are hereafter dealt with in a similar manner, always deposited round the child's banana plant until the time when the child is weaned (two and a half to three years). The heap can become quite sizeable, creating rather a nuisance from the point of view of smell and fly-breeding. The produce from the child's banana plant is regarded as the property of the midwife till the child has reached the weaning age. If the child should die, the midwife loses her right to the produce of the plant. There is a belief that if the grass heap is burnt, the child will get diarrhoea and will probably die.

*Mugumba* If a woman has had a sister, who died before having had any children, the spirit of the dead sister may cause sterility of the living sister. Should the woman nevertheless become pregnant, the spirit may cause disease, abortion and mental disturbances (*en-chweke*). This name, *en-chweke*, is also used for the mental depression of a barren woman and is caused by the spirit of the dead sister.

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Not generally recognized — often it is said that there is a time limit of eight days or sometimes no limit at all, in which case the husband has to establish his right to the next child by having a ceremonial (sometimes only symbolical) intercourse with his wife. After that, the next child is automatically his.

*African Child Health, September, 1931*

## CONCLUSION

As can be seen from the beliefs recorded, this collection of information can be of vital importance to the success of health workers. Without insight into these tribal customs, misunderstandings, which can easily lead to non-cooperation and hostility, can occur and prevent any success in health education activities.

## EXCERPT

CHANGES IN BODY WEIGHT AND BODY COMPOSITION DURING PREGNANCY (Venkatchalam, P. S., Shankar, K. and Gopalan, C. *Ind. J. Med. Res.*, 1960, 48, 511).

Body weights were recorded at four-weekly intervals in 130 pregnant women belonging to the low-income group. The mean weight gain during pregnancy (12th week to term) was found to be 6.02 kg. Maximum gain in body-weight took place between the 20th and 24th weeks. As pregnancy advanced, there was a progressive increase in the number of subjects who failed to gain weight.

In the six subjects between the 9th and 14th week of gestation, body fluid space formed 56.1 per cent. of the body-weight. In seven subjects between 20 and 28 weeks, the fluid space was 66.4 per cent. and, in the five over 28 weeks, it was 70.9 per cent. These figures represented a gradual increase in the amount of body fluids with the progress of pregnancy.