

CHAPTER FOUR

Eastern Bantu

(Coastals: Wataita, Wataveta, Wapokomo, Mijikenda)

Wataita

The Taita people occupy the mountains in west-southern Kenya now known as Taita Hills with the Dawida on the higher slopes and the Sagalla and the Kasigau on the almost uninhabitable surrounding plains. The administrative district includes the Taveta sub-district inhabited by a distinct community, the Taveta. The Kasigau people live around the great dome of the Kasigau hill and the Sagalla around the small Maungu Hill which joins with the imposing Sagalla ridge – south of Voi town, which is the main settlement of the Wasagalla. Some thirty-two kilometres to the north-west is the main cluster of the real Taita Hills rising from the undulating plains, carrying the bulk of the tribe (Wadawida). Hived off from this cluster but not actually separated from it, is Mbololo hill. Facing the Serengeti plains and Kilimanjaro is the Mwaktau hill.

Outside the district there are two colonies of the Taita people in Usambara Mountains in Tanzania and Taita have also penetrated into Pare, Chagga and Taveta. Taita trading parties often went to Chagga and Usambara via Taveta and that is when some Taita settled in colonies among the Shambala. Clanspeople of the Wanya, one of the Taita clans, claim that their ancestors are also the ancestors of some of the Pare and this is corroborated by Pare traditions. Of the surrounding people, the nearest who used to loam over the surrounding plains, and sometimes to come right up to the foot hills of Taita hills were Wakuavi Maasai (Wamasae in Kidawida).

The name Taita brings together three communities namely the Dawida, the Sagalla and the Kasigau, all who lived among the MijiKenda in Shungwaya before they migrated to their present home south of the confluence of the Tsavo, Athi and Galana rivers in a region east of the Tanzanian border. The Kitab al Zanuj has listed among the Kashur (peoples) in Shugwaya the Tita (Taita), Kadhiyaru (Kadiyaru) and Dara (Ndara) which correspond to the Taita present settlement locations at Dawida (Tita), Sagalla (Ndara) and Kasigau (Kadiyaru). Writing on migration from Shungwaya, Professor Thomas T. Spear has recorded:

The Swahili called the Singwaya people the Kashur (a name still used for the Mijikenda by the Pokomo and Waata) and recall they were first found along the coast near Brava. After some time Arabs coming from Mogadishu drove the Kashur to the south, where some settled in the Juba river valley and others occupied Singwaya further south. More importantly, they listed the Kashur in detail and all are readily identifiable as either Mijikenda or Taita. The first four are the Dighu (Digo), Shmuba (Shimba), Lughu (Lungo), and Sifi (Tiwi). These were the people at the Juba; they were the first to migrate to Kenya, and they are all Digo. The remaining Kashur are listed as the Ghiryama (Giriama), Shuni (Chonyi), Kamuba (Kambe), Ribi (Ribe), Jibana (Jibana), Tita (Taita), Kadhiyaru (Kadiyaru), and Dara (Ndara).¹

The Taita started their journey from Mwangea in three columns each heading in a different direction. The Taita clan of Wanya is said to have gone upstream along the banks of the Sabaki River to the confluence of Athi and Tsavo rivers and then turned south to the northern slopes of the Dawida range of hills. Meanwhile, they were joined by wandering Akamba who became

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incorporated among them and they moved slowly to the southern valleys, occupying Wundanyi, Wusi and Kidaya where they form the majority of settlers. They also expanded to occupy the eastern slopes of the Pare mountains in Tanzania.

The second column followed the coastline to Usambara from where they turned north, with some settling at Kasigau and the majority reaching the foothills of the main Pare mountain range near Mwatate. It is said that they were turned away from upper Mwatate valley by the northern group and they turned west along the Voi river, which they followed upstream before settling down at Msau, Mlechi and Mbale.

The third group of migrants consisted of two distinct clusters who arrived at the Usambara mountains in Tanzania and travelled right round it or climbed over to the Pare mountain area before turning towards the south-western end of the Dawida hills. They had been joined by Chagga elements of Tanzania on the way and they settled near Bura and at Umari on the Kenyan side of the border initially before migrating to the high-lying valleys and slopes in Sage-iguru and the border regions of Mrugua, Mwenda and Mgange. Later came immigrants of the agricultural branch of the Maasai (Wakuavi) who occupied north-western Taita Hills and are predominant among the inhabitants of Lushongonyi, Mgange and also in Mwenda. They form the Waikumi clan which is fully incorporated within the groups on the same footing with the original Dawida immigrants. People known as Ndigiri/Ndegere and Wambisha (opponents) occupied Taita country before the arrival of the Taita migrants from Mount Mwanagea. They are nowadays considered as one of the Taita groups with the status of a clan. Writing on this admixture, T.T Spear has stated:

While Taita clans today claim a bewildering array of origins, the most senior clans all claim they came from north eastern Kenya or south western Somalia with the MijiKenda. Once in the Taita Hills they intermarried with the previous inhabitants, known as the Mbisha, and absorbed wave on wave of subsequent Maasai, Kwavi, Kikuyu, Kamba, Shambaa and pare immigrants, all of whom adopted one of the two local languages. This interpretation is speculative and awaits further information regarding Taita origins, but the evidence so far does not exclude the possibility of Sabaki-speaking Taita at Singwaya and the parallel evidence of the Swahili, Mijikenda and Taita traditions confirm it.²

On the settlement of the Wasagalla, A. H. J. Prins has written:

There are various accounts of the settlements of Sagalla. The commonest and most probable ascribes it to inter-tribal strife on the southern slopes amongst the clans of the first and second group. The emigrants Sagalla were subsequently joined by Giryama. Linguistic evidence might throw more light on this point. It is said that no Waikumi live on this ridge and as the Waikumi mixed with the five original Dabida clans through intermarriage some time after their advent in the hills, it might be legitimate to conclude that the Wasagalla as such have existed only for a comparatively short period. Since they are considered culturally inferior it may be that the Dabida sense of superiority is a result of their own acculturation under Masaai influence, i.e that the five Dabida clans were amalgamated with the Waikumi rather than the reverse, the new immigrants being bearers of a more highly valued culture pattern. The contemptuous term of reference for the Wa-Sagalla: "those black people" (Wandu wa chilu) probably relates to this cultural divergence, the Wadabida using red ochre and grease for adorning themselves as the Masai, the Wasagalla using lamp-black instead.

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Social and Political Organisation

The Taita are composed of seven parent clans, five of which are supposed to be of original immigrant groups from Mount Mwangea. The first five are Wasadu, Wanya, Wasanu, Wasasadu and Wanyanya. The other two are Waikumi, representing the Wakuavi Maasai group and Wambisha, the clans incorporating the Dorobo (Ndegere/Ndigiri) original inhabitants. Taita clans are referred to as vichuku. None of the clans is limited to one portion of the hill alone but it is possible to discover regions in which members of one clan are preponderant, for example the Waikumi of Mgange, the Wasadu of Sagalla and the Wanya of Wusi. Clan offshoots have spread all over the hills to such an extent that it would be difficult to find areas where clansmen of a certain kichuku are entirely lacking. The vichuku are patrilineal groups with, it would seem, an additional grouping for females. Every daughter belonged to her mother's clan, the exclusively female clan to which no male could ever belong, the Wakenda (people of the "nine"). The lineage, referred to as kivalo or kichuku, has a span generally corresponding to a depth of four generations. It is a descent group incorporating relations by marriage not only by blood kinship. The kivalo is much more prominent than the clan in everyday life. For instance it is a cult group for affairs concerning the ritual status of its members, their village and their land. The segments of the kivalo, which are the next smallest units in the series of lineages, are known as nyumba ("house"). The nuclear unit in the series of kinship group is the patri-local extended family known as kinyumba. The kinyumba includes the father, his wife or wives, his sons with their wives and children and his unmarried daughters. Its main functions apart from maintaining the close relationships of people who are closely related and giving them a sense of community are economic as it is the principal land and cattle owning unit, of which the head of the extended family is legal representative. The nyumba is a dispersed group within one district; it is religiously self-sufficient in minor cases, and it has special significance as a group providing help, protection and shelter, if necessary, to its women who have married outside it. Cattle for bride price may be expected to be provided by its members and assistance in hut building.

The Taita territory was divided into administrative malolo (sin. ilolo) or districts and the boundaries were strips of no-man's land, such as high, bare, uninhabitable plateau, or too steep a slope. In more densely populated parts it might be a small river without natural vegetation in its bed. A. H. J. Prins has described the ilolo as follows:

Religious ties exist for the district and are of the same importance. Kinship ties also form an integral part of relationships within it, but neither are distinctive of this unit. The main principles are common territory and political identity, rights over land and conformity of culture. Conformity of culture is a vague expression and the whole body of the Taita shares this principle as a basis for unity, but the district is the smallest unit in which being culturally distinct is both felt and expressed.

Rights over land are also held by other units, by kin groups in general and specifically by the Kinyumba. The head of the Kinyumba holds the land rights and owns gardens on its behalf within the ilolo and may acquire any of the available cultivatable parts within the boundaries.

Wataveta

Taveta has been the home of the Wataveta people for about four hundred years. Originally they arrived in Taveta as refugees and immigrants from population groups living in the surrounding

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mountains and plains. While most Wataweta continue to live in the sub-district, approximately 20 per cent of all the Wataweta live elsewhere. It is also known that the Wataweta are no longer the principal residents of the Sub-district. Almost all of the newcomers are either sisal estate workers and their families or agricultural settlers. In pre-colonial times, Taveta territory beyond their home in the interior of the forest extended south to Lake Jipe on the Kenya-Tanzania border. This border marked the western limits of Taveta then extended north to the sacred grounds around Lake Chala and east to Kishota Ngonji or Grogan hill, a traditional burial place. The boundaries today have been extended farther and farther to the east, to Salita hill. However, this has been accompanied by Taveta's decline from a politically independent unit of some importance in the general Kilimanjaro area to the status of a political and economic backwater within Kenya.

Settlement

Taveta remained unoccupied forest until the later part of the seventeenth century, perhaps because the surrounding peoples preferred to derive their livelihood from the grassland plains as pastoralists and the forest may have seemed to have little to offer. Settlement of Taveta began after wars, famine and raiding in the Kilimanjaro area drove needy people into the forest for security and in search of sufficient sustenance of life. Tradition states that the first immigrants came from Usambara followed shortly thereafter by people from Ugweno, Ukamba, Taita, Chaggaland, Arusha and Kahe. Since there was sufficient land for all in this early period, no group constituted an immediate threat to the economic interests of any other.

No group is likely to have been more than a small minority of the total population of the area and possibly the weakness of each group in relation to all the others served to keep peace. From this shared background, a sense of community developed into a common Taveta culture. By entering Taveta they had broken kinship and lineage ties with their former groups and home areas, factors which favoured cross-assimilation. The political organisation these people established was functional and pragmatic, designed to enable them to maintain peace and order and to provide for defence against external threats. The new political organisation was derived from an amalgamation of the political principles and practices the diverse groups had brought with them from their original homes. One of the principal forces working for political changes in Taveta during the nineteenth century was Wakuavi (agricultural Maasai) immigration into the area as a result of conflicts between the Maasai sub-groups, arising from disputes over cattle raiding and grazing land and finding expression through the fighting culture built into their social structure. When the Wakuavi came under sustained military pressure from other Maasai sub-groups, possibly as early as in the 1820s, the Taveta who were impressed by the martial spirit of the Wakuavi sided with them. Apparently, even before the Wakuavi influx, the Taveta had already begun to adopt the Wakuavi style of circumcision, predisposing them to easily accept the Wakuavi request to come and live among the Wataweta during a time when Wataweta were still actively accepting immigrants from other population groups. Immigrant groups were given land and were attached to one of the existing Wataweta clans and thereby placed under the jurisdiction of the community elders. They were expected to participate in the community's circumcision rites and ceremonies and thereby to be brought into the Wataweta Irika (age-set) system. Through these processes, new comers were accepted and assimilated into the community and became Wataweta. As late as the famine of the 1880s the Taveta language, which is very similar to Kipare, remained more or less what it had been before the Wakuavi influx, with the contribution of the Wakuavi limited to a few words and idioms.

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Taveta settlement was set inside the forest with a forest perimeter surrounding area which by the end of the nineteenth century was about 0.8 kilometres deep. The inhabited area consisting of the market place, the people's huts, the traders camps and cultivated land was approximately 26 square kilometres. To defend themselves against the external threat, Taveta political institutions and customs, which predated the Wakuavi influx, were consolidated, however, the most distinctive Wakuavi institutions and practices were incorporated.

The Taveta refined and built upon their traditional tactics of defensive forest warfare. The number of entry points into the forest was reduced, the surrounding forest boundary was allowed to thicken so as not to permit easy entry by enemies. In the interior, they built ambush sites and paths with dead ends to confuse intruders.

Political and Social Organisation

The principal political institution developed by the Wataveta consisted primarily of, first, a single deliberative governing body, the Njama in which all of Taveta's principal political groups were represented; and, second, an age set, or irika system, which provided for the community's defence and other social relationships. On the Njama, Ann E. Frontera in her book *Persistence and Change: A History of Taveta* has written:

The Njama appears to have evolved from the traditions of several of the Bantu peoples that had come to Taveta. It consisted of lineage heads, chiefs from successive age-sets and wealthy, influential, or especially "talented", men in the community — e.g., particularly brave warriors, gifted orators, or those with special magical powers. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the Njama's membership appeared not to have exceeded forty members.

The duties of the Njama were to settle disputes among the clans and questions pertaining to land and to act as a court of law. It also had powers to make or alter laws to suit the needs of the time. The Njama also led the performance of ritual ceremonies conducted at special sacred sites on the occasion of such natural disasters as drought, epidemics or floods. Njama had no calendar for meetings but instead gathered whenever there was need for it to do so. Its decisions were based on established customary law and were always arrived at in deliberations carried out in strict confidence.

The second tier of authority was the irika age-set system. The origin of the system may be traced to Maasai and Bantu customs as both groups had developed the age-set system within their communities before Taveta area was occupied. The system provided a natural and mutually beneficial framework for organized life in Taveta. Ann E. Fontera has described the Taveta age-set system thus:

The age-set system divided the society into a succession of horizontal strata, with a new stratum beginning approximately every fifteen years. Each of the age strata or irika had its own name and special rights and responsibilities with regard to the rest of the community. Members of a particular age set, for example, participated in work, travel, wars, and expeditions together. Moreover, they were expected to help each other in times of crisis and to show hospitality to their agemates from other parts of Taveta. This corporate identity, along with the ceremonies that had gone into the formation of the age-set, helped engender an artificial bond of kinship uniting its members and getting them off from age-sets both before and after their own. Each age set strata

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was not founded on the basis of age alone, but by the initiation of all circumcised men over the age of puberty who did not yet belong to an age set. Consequently, there is some overlap in age between successive age sets, with some junior members of one irika being younger than some senior members of the next . . .

Each new irika formed in this way extended throughout Taveta, reaching from Malaboru (upper Taveta) to Malukaulu (lower Taveta). The irika was internally divided between two groups. The first of these was the Nding'ori, the senior members of the age-set. These individuals were distinguished by their greater wealth, influence, and age. The remaining members of the age-set constituted the Leme. While individual Leme might eventually accumulate sufficient wealth to surpass that of many Nding'ori, they nevertheless remained Leme. Once the age-set had been formed, the division between the two groups was permanent. The association between these two groups was restricted. With the exception of a single feast during the reign of their irika celebrating the election of their respective chiefs they did not even eat together.

The central political direction of the newest irika appeared to have been shaped by elders of previous irika operating as agents of the new Njama. The newest Irika's principal political officers, the wafumwa, were not chosen until just a few years before this age-set was displaced as the youngest by still newer Irika. Four Wafumwa were then chosen to represent the irika, including a full chief and an assistant for upper Taveta. In each part of Taveta the Nding'ori of the area elected one of their members to become a full chief of the age-set (mfumwa wa irika). The installation in office of these full chiefs would be followed in both upper and lower Taveta by the election by the leme of one of themselves as mfumwa wa leme or mfumwa wa mchili to become an assistant to the full chief already chosen by the Nding'ori for their area. The wafumwa were expected to serve as a bridge between the new age-set and the Njama and their position in the Njama was essentially that of first among equals. Among the wafumwa, the one with the greatest prestige and authority became the mfumwa wa irika; he invariably came from Malaboru.

Colonial Occupation

In 1890 Taveta was made a station of the Imperial British East Africa Company and when the East African Protectorate was established, Taveta came under its jurisdiction in 1897. Christian missionaries under Steggall had already made their first visits in the late 1880s. The collapse of the initial colonial administration in the form of the IBEA, had made the people to think of the Protectorate government as a weak and ineffective power that could not be a threat to them. However, it eventually became evident that the new government officials meant not only to settle in Taveta, but to rule over the Taveta as well. When the Taveta people realized this, the Njama consulted a diviner who advised them to bury a white fowl under the government flagstaff during the dead of the night. However, although the government official who was at Ndiid died, as was to be expected from the magic spell so cast, another one was posted there and the Taveta gave up hope of ridding themselves of white rule. Once government officials had established themselves other Europeans followed, and this created many problems for the Taveta with regard to their land. The Taveta did not differentiate between the political and economic implications of occupying a territory. To them a political community simply occupied an area and used its resources; the rights of ownership did not differ from the rights of sovereignty. Accustomed to a continual influx of outsiders as immigrants or traders, the Taveta were readily able to adjust to the first European settlers as simply one more group in a long series of

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newcomers. However, the Taveta feared the colonial government and its administrative bureaucracy.

The first European settler to arrive was Jeremy Dermos. He settled in the area near Njoro Springs. He was the first manager of Kilindini Harbour and Wharfs. Arriving shortly thereafter in Taveta were the partners Goodwilles and Sedgewick and the Homer brothers who having acquired 450 acres of land over the years sold out to Colonel Ewart Grogan in 1952. Between 1928 and 1932, Grogan bought 21,135 acres of semi-arid plains for four shillings an acre. This was made possible by the East African Land Ordinance of 1902. Under the terms of this Ordinance, unoccupied land in Kenya became Crown land which could be given out by the colonial government to individual European settlers for their own use.

In 1937 Ewart Grogan acquired 22,000 acres of Crown Land in the Ziwani area. Five years later he increased that total to 32,000 acres. Thereafter, he increased his holding by purchasing a large tract of land from the Taveta-Voi railroad down to Lake Jipe, equal to about one-third of the whole Taveta sub-district. By 1952 Grogan's total holdings amounted to approximately 81,296 acres distributed as follows:

Ziwani: 20,018 acres Ziwani Sisal Estate Ltd.

Taveta: 8,325 acres Ziwani Sisal Estate Ltd.

Jipe: 30,456 acres Kilindini Harbuor & Wharfs Ltd.

Taveta: 6,032 acres Kilindini Harbuor & Wharfs Ltd.

Taveta: 16,015 acres Kilindini Harbour & Wharves Ltd. Taveta: 450 acres Sold by Homer brothers.

TOTAL 81,296 acres

By 1937, Grogan had planted 6,054 acres of sisal with most of the workers brought from other districts, particularly the Akamba and Wataita. By 1937 he had a labour force of 1,500 living in or around Taveta, most of them being single men living outside the sub-district. The non-indigenous immigrants gradually came to constitute little communities of aliens and tended to live as squatters on the sisal estates or on government land in the vicinity. As their wages were very low, they were often permitted to grow vegetables between the rows of sisal and in that way, they became totally dependent on the estate while remaining independent of the local community. Grogan founded two camps for them: Homer's camp near Njoro springs and Reata camp near the boundary of his estate.

Wapokomo

The Wapokomo are one of the Coastal peoples of the North-Eastern Bantu group which includes the MijiKenda and Wataita, while the remaining North-Eastern Bantu peoples — the Wachagga, Wapare and Wataveta, with the exception of some of the Wataveta in Kenya are found further south in Tanzania. The Central Bantu clusters occupy central Kenya around Mount Kenya. The Western clusters have their ancestral homes in areas between the Rift Valley and Lake Victoria, better known as Western Kenya.

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The Wapokomo like other Coastal peoples have a common tradition of origin and migration from Shungwaya, the legendary town or territory supposed to have been situated on the southern Somali coast, somewhere in what is now Jubaland. They occupy the Tana valley in an area that extends from the coast into North-Eastern Kenya. The Tana river, which rises from the southern slopes of Mount Kenya and the Aberdares flows east through north-eastern Kenya, before making a south-easterly sweep to the Kenya coast. Tana River is called Tsana in Pokomo, Galana maro or dima in Oromo, Kiluluma in Kikamba and Gururuma (upper Tana) by the Swahili.

Traditions of origin and settlements of the Wapokomo are that Shungwaya must have been the original home of a number of clans, not only of the Pokomo, but also of Taita, Digo, Giriama and Segeju/Katwa tribes. The Wapokomo say that they were friends of the Galla until the latter began to covet their herds of cattle, resulting in wars, which made the Wapokomo to emigrate. They re-assembled and settled in a place remembered as Dana Sukutu along the Tana. After some centuries, they were attacked by the Galla. In an ethnographic survey by the International African Institute, A.H.J. Prins has written thus:

A more recent version is to be found in the account of the history of the Buu sub-tribe by a literate tribesman. He puts the advent of the Buu ancestor, Sango Vere, in the Tana in the days of Liongo Fumo long before the coming of the Galla (4). His original home was called Mungini or Mundini, in the country called "Inti Kuu" which is situated on the coast some twenty miles north of Lamu. The first attacks from the side of the Galla are supposed to have been directed against the Pokomo who had already been living on the Tana for centuries. Then the Galla came and fought them very much. The Buu were beaten and many of them ran away by way of the hill of Gede.¹

The ethnographic survey by the International African Institute which was sponsored by the Colonial Social Science Research Council on the timing of the Pokomo migration had the following to say:

The first drive southwards must have occurred either before Liongo Fumo (Boecking) or during his lifetime (Darroch). Liongo is variously placed in the 13th Century (if this is true he must have lived before the coming of the Galla), in the 12th or even 8th century which is difficult to believe. Other accounts make him contemporary with the Portuguese. The only certain date connected with the early history of the tribe is 689 A.D (the foundation of Pate (Patta), the first Arab town on the coast) as Werners' informants were positive that Swahili towns already existed when their first ancestors moved into the Tana valley.²

Wapokomo, who pronounce their name as Wafokomo, are divided into four main groups or vyeti and into thirteen sub-groups. The four groups have distinct identities, territories and dialects. The territory of the first major group, the lower Pokomo, is from Kipini to Bubesa in Salama location; the upper Pokomo occupy the area from Matanama in Ndera location to Roka near Masabuba; the Welwan (called Malakote by the other Pokomo) live in an area extending from Roka to Garissa; and the Munyo Yaya (meaning "Northern Pokomo" in Oromo; other Pokomo call them Korokoro) occupy an area extending from Garissa through Mbalambala.

The sub-groups or clans do not seem to have very distinctive characteristics. The names of the vyeti are associated with their long residence in their present settlements. Going down stream the vyeti, are in the following order: (1) Korokoro, (2) Malakote, (3) Malalulu, (4) Zubaki, (5) Ndura,

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(6) Kinakomba, (7) Grano, (8) Ndera, (9) Musina, (10) Ngatana, (11) Dzunza or Yunda, (12) Buu or Ngao, (13) Kalindi. The Zubaki are the largest sub-group.

The upper Pokomo call themselves Pokomo and refer to the lower Pokomo as Malachini (southerners) while the lower Pokomo in turn call themselves Pokomo and call the upper Pokomo Watu wa Dzuu (or Northerners); both descriptions have a derogatory tinge. Both the Oromo and the Somali call the Pokomo "Munyo", meaning sedentary agriculturists. The upper and lower Pokomo speak a dialect of a Bantu language called kipokomo, which is closely related to the Mijikenda dialects and to Kiswahili. Robert L. Bunker Jr. in the paper Islamization among the Upper Pokomo has written thus:

Although there are many differences in phonology, vocabulary, and grammar, the two dialects are mutually intelligible. Within upper Pokomo there are two sub-dialects, one spoken by the clan alliances of Ndera, Gwano, Kinakomba and Ndura and another spoken by Subaki and Malalulu. The Munyo Yaya speak Oroma, and the Welwan speak their own language, which is said to be different and not mutually intelligible with Pokomo, Oroma and Swahili. All

Pokomo dialects contain many Oroma loan words as well as some from Swahili and even English . . . Just in a hunch it might be interesting to see if the Kielwan language is related to Meru or Embu.

Mijikenda

The MijiKenda people who include Giriama, Digo, Duruma, Rabai, Kambe, Chonyi, Jibana, Kauma and Ribe came from Shungwaya in the southern Somali hinterland at the turn of the 17th century and settled initially in six individual, fortified, hilltop Kaya or villages, along the ridge behind the Southern Kenya coast. Three more Kayas were built later to make a total of nine. At Shungwaya the Mijikenda people were collectively called 'Kashur' by others. When they migrated and settled behind the Kenya coast they became known as 'Nyika' (meaning 'Bush' people). They had no collective name for themselves, until they chose the name Mijikenda in the late 1940s to replace the pejorative 'Nyika'. The name 'Mijikenda' is a purely descriptive term and means, quite literally, 'The Nine Kayas or Makayachenda'.

Shungwaya has been variously described as a major empire and as a mere town or even a temporary nomadic settlement. The most recent of the few modern historians to take it seriously sees it as a Bantu speaking proto-group occupying a fairly limited area at some indeterminate place in southern Somalia. The book *The land of Zinj* reports of a people it calls 'Kashur' and states that the most famous of their towns was called Shungwaya where their king lived and that their laws were famous. Shungwaya as remembered in traditions was somewhere on the Juba river near Deshek Wama and the junction of the Lagh Dera and the Juba River. On this James de Vere Allen has written:

A re-examination of all the relevant material suggests that, as so often, the traditions are right, and that Shungwaya was a phenomenon (as we shall for the moment continue to call it) much larger and more important than most modern historians give it credit for, also, that it began much earlier and lasted, in some shape or form, much longer. It must in fact have been in existence, at least in embryo, before c. AD 800 and still existed (at least in some peoples minds) as late as c. 1725

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A.H.J. Pins on Shungwaya has written:

Shungwaya is shown on three Dutch maps: Linschoten, 1596, Plaeuw, 1640, and de La Feuille, 1700, and on a British map of 1670 by Ogilby. The spelling are Jungaya, Tungaya or Xungaja and its position is just to the north of Patta. The name is also found in Portuguese documents of 1686 and 1689 (9). The Chinese name for East Africa — Tsungpao — may also have some connection with the town which must have been much more important before than after the arrival of the Portuguese.

Language

The Mijikenda speak dialects of a single language, which they attribute to Shungwaya origin. Each of the nine Mijikenda speaks a separate dialect of the same language, which is closely related linguistically and historically to the other languages along the Kenyan and Tanzanian coasts. Over the centuries these languages have slowly evolved from a single common ancestral or proto-languages through a series of intervening proto-language into the distinct languages that exist today.

This process of development occurs when people speaking the same language become separated and slowly change their patterns of speech and the single language diverges into separate but naturally intelligible dialects and eventually separate languages. Professor Thomas T. Spear has written the following on Mijikenda languages:

Related languages or dialects with a high percentage of common words, or cognates, are very similar and probably diverged from their common ancestor relatively recently, while those with lower percentage of cognates are less similar and diverged from each other at an earlier date. Classified in this way the Mijikenda dialects fall into three groups: Mijikenda A (Rabai, Ribe, Jibana, Kauma, Kambe, Chonyi and Giriama), Mijikenda B (Duruma), and Mijikenda C (Digo). Since the dialects of group A share an average of 77-85 % cognates among themselves, but only 59-64% with Digo, we can say the Digo split from the peoples of Group A at an earlier date than the peoples of Group A split among themselves.³

Traditions of the Bajuni which refer to double-storeyed houses in 'Shungwaya' say that its inhabitants left it to go either to Kisimayu or to Kayama, the northern-most of the island settlements off the southern Somali coast. From there they moved south to the other island settlements, then to Bur Gau which they usually call Buri Kavvo and into what is now called Kenya. Professor Thomas T. Spear on the Mijikenda Shungwaya period has written thus:

The traditions of all the Mijikenda, with the exception of the Rabai and the Duruma, are unanimous in tracing their origin to the region between the Juba River and Singwaya along Southern Somali coast. They lived there with the Taita, Pokomo and Galla until one day a Galla was murdered. Most Mijikenda say the Galla was sacrificed as part of the initiation of the first age-set, but others say that a Mijikenda bridegroom killed the Galla who came to fulfill the ritual duty of initiating intercourse with his bride. In either case, the Mijikenda refused to pay compensation to the dead man's kinsmen and the Galla took retribution on any Mijikenda they found. Unable to defend themselves, the Mijikenda, Pokomo, Taita were forced to flee to the

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south. They left in two groups — the Digo first, followed by the Pokomo, Taita, and remaining Mijikenda.

The Shungwaya legend relates that the father of all the Mijikenda was Muyeye who lived at Shungwaya with his two wives, Mbodze and Matseze. Mbodze was the elder wife and had two sons, Digo and Ribe. Matseze's sons were Giriama, Chonyi and Jibana. The Giriama say they are the younger brothers of the Ribe and defer to them in certain rituals.

The Chonyi and Jibana say they are brothers and often co-operate in war and ritual. The Kauma, who split off from the Ribe, acknowledge that they are the sons of the Ribe. The Rabai who came from Rombo, now in Tanzania, and the Duruma who are of heterogeneous origin, both append Shungwaya to their own origin legends to explain cultural origins, not demographic ones as a unifying or core tradition.

According to Swahili traditions found in Kitab al Zanuj and other manuscripts, the Swahili called the Shungwaya peoples the Kashur (and recall they were first found along the coast near Brava).

Arabs from Mogadishu drove the Kashur to the south where some settled in the Juba River valley area while others established themselves in Shungwaya farther south. They described the composition of the Kashur in detail as Professor Thomas T. Spear has written:

The first four are the Dighu (Digo), Shmuba (Shimba), Lighu (Lunga) and Sifi (Tiwi). These were the people at the Juba, they were the first to migrate to Kenya and they are all Digo. The remaining Kashur are listed as the Ghiryama (Giriama), Shuni (Chonyi), Kamuba (Kambe), Ribu (Ribe), Jibana (Jibana), Tita (Taita), Kadhiyaru (kadiyaru), and Dara (Ndara). The first five are all Mijikenda and are only those Mijikenda who themselves claim Singwaya origins. Omitted are the Kauma, who acknowledge they were Ribe then, and Rabai and Duruma, who both claim other origins. The last three are Taita groups and correspond to their settlement locations today at Dabida (Taita), Sagalla (Ndara) and Kasigau (kadiyaru). While the Pokomo are omitted in this listing, they are included later in the Kitab al Zanuj; though somewhat inconsistently. One reference groups them with the Digo while another places them at Singwaya with the other Mijikenda.

Political and Social Organisation of the Mijikenda

Differentiation among the Mijikenda peoples is evident when one examines cultural attributes and practices; one discerns a sharing of almost a total complex of cultural traits between certain sets of Mijikenda groups in opposition to other sets of groups. Mijikenda sub-groups can be classified by variation in the overall cultural complex as explained by Thomas T Spear:

The Northern Mijikenda (Kauma, Giriama, Chonyi, Jibana, Kambe and Ribe) all have cognate Kaya institutions, age-sets, residence patterns and descent patterns, as we shall see. Several even share some of the same clan names. At the opposite pole are the southern Mijikenda (Digo). Their Kaya institutions and age-sets are radically different from the northern group. The Digo do not have two tiers of clans differentiated by time of origin into clans and sub-clans, as the northern group does, but a single set of clans of indeterminate origins. And Digo age-sets are arranged in a complicated arrangement of alternating pairs, in contrast to the linear arrangement in the North. In between these two groups, both geographically and culturally, are the central Mijikenda

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(Rabai and Duruma). Both of these can be grouped primarily with the northern group, except for their descent patterns. Both practice double unilinear descent so that every individual belongs to two clans: a multiclan inherited from his mother's brother and a patrilineal inherited from his father. Inheritance is normally divided between the two, but the Rabai are predominantly patrilineal. Thus, both dialectal and cultural distributions confirm the Digo as a group apart from the other Mijikenda.

A.H.J. Prins on this differentiation of the Mijikenda has written:

A main dividing line seems to run between the southern and northern groups. The first is commonly known as Digo (Adigo); the second, known as Alupanga, includes Duruma, Giriyama and Rabai (these and Digo are the four major tribes) as well as Kauma, Chonyi, (Dschogni in German), Dzihana (or Jibana), Kambe (not to be confused with Kamba), and Rihe (or Ribe), the five minor tribes. Alupanga (also: Waliupangu, walupangu) seems to be chiefly a linguistic term used by the Digo to denote those Nyika who do not speak Digo. The Giriyama recognize another division: they consider themselves and the Digo as separate units to be distinguished from the other, the proper Nyika tribes.

Kaya Settlements

Kaya were fortresses built on the hilltops approachable only by narrow paths leading to the several entrances in a stockade built with stout stakes. With time, these ring fences have fallen down and disappeared; so have the gateways. The Kaya had heavy double or triple wooden gates. The individual settlements defined the individual peoples, for whether or not differentiated peoples moved into a Kaya settlement, Kaya residence redefined and consolidated their identity as one new and united community. Kaya were both central residential towns and political religious complexes. Instead of offering a hierarchical political organization, they each had a series of inclusive groups based on a common descent, ranging from the lineage to the clan. At each level, a group of elders exercised political leadership over the group and represented it in the councils of the next larger group inclusive of their own and others. Although these arrangements may appear to be diffuse and lacking in central control, Mijikenda common Kaya residence and a system of cross-cutting age-sets gave a degree of centralisation and cohesiveness unusual in segmentary societies.

People gradually moved out of Kayas to settle in the lowland farming areas and some engaged in trading. In a book published in 1952, A.H.J. Prins wrote:

We must distinguish two kinds of settlements: The original tribal fortified centres (Kaya) and the common villages (Mudzi). It is only in the latter that people actually reside today; the Kaya Kauma, Kambe and Jibana were the only ones still occupied some forty years ago. But in the days of Krapf and Guillain, a century ago, nearly all were still residential agglomerations with the exception of those of the Rabai, which were occupied only once a year by the whole of the population and periodically served as a tribal meeting place for the elders.