

THE MAINTENANCE OF ORDER IN RURAL TANZANIA

THE CASE OF SUNGUSUNGU¹

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Introduction

An increase in crime appears to have been a problem in the past twenty years or so in many different parts of the world. This increase has brought into question the social control capabilities of established institutions. Individuals and communities have tried different means and mechanisms to cope with these crises. In Tanzania, as elsewhere in the world, the increase in criminality in the 1970s became a cause for alarm. In this paper I describe the efforts to suppress crime made by the Sukuma and Nyamwezi of West-Central Tanzania since the 1980s. I intend to show how these people organized themselves in traditional ways in what came to be known as the *Sungusungu* groups.

Sungusungu groups, though creations of the 1980s, are based on, and borrow from, traditional Sukuma and Nyamwezi organizations. I will show that,

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although *Sungusungu* groups are comprised by individuals, they are not organizations to which an individual can apply to participate in their activities or to be a member. *Sungusungu* groups are constituted by all the villagers in a given village once a decision to that effect has been taken and other formalities completed. A member of the village ceases to belong to this group when he or she is ostracized by fellow villagers. That ostracism is lifted when that member takes the necessary steps towards readmission and makes the required payment to that effect.

The Sukuma and Nyamwezi rural inhabitants, who found themselves under threat and without adequate protection from the official state institutions, felt obliged to form *Sungusungu* groups to protect themselves and their property. But *Sungusungu* does not only provide protection to life and property; its members also perform other functions which demand collective community action. These organizations and their activities should be understood as part and parcel of how local communities cope with different circumstances in which they find themselves within the surroundings of which they are a part. In this case the Sukuma and Nyamwezi deal with the issue of crime and lawlessness in the same way as they deal with other social issues through neighbourhood collective action. They help each other to combat crime, and trace stolen cattle and other properties, as they help each other in matters related to marriages and funerals. They keep each other informed of criminal behaviour and potential criminal activities, in the same way as they keep each other informed of social events, like where dances are to be held, who is likely to attend or not, and why.

The Sukuma and Nyamwezi are the largest tribal group in Tanzania, with a population of four to five million people. They occupy an area of approximately 50,000 square miles. Although I do not intend to discuss how these efforts have spread beyond the Sukuma and Nyamwezi area, it is useful to mention that the Sukuma and Nyamwezi population, the size of the area that they occupy, and the nature of the problem (the magnitude of crime) that gave rise to the formation of these groups, have influenced the way in which private initiatives for community protection against criminality have spread in Tanzania during the past twenty years.

The Formation of *Sungusungu*

There is agreement among researchers on the subject that *Sungusungu* was formed to provide order and security among rural communities which found themselves confronted with insecurity and lawlessness (Abrahams 1987, Masanja 1992, Kerner 1983, Mbwiliza 1984, Shivji 1990, Campbell 1989, Sabasaba and Rweyemamu 1986, Bukurura 1993, and Mwaikusa 1994). After more than a

decade of *Sungusungu*'s existence, however, there is no agreement as to precisely when the groups were formed, where they were first formed, and who founded them. Notwithstanding this lack of precise information about the early history of the groups, there is agreement that *Sungusungu* was not founded by one person but by a group of elders who discussed and worked together in devising the mechanisms for its operation. The formation of *Sungusungu* was done in secrecy and the reasons suggested for the secrecy are twofold. First of all the elders were scared of the thieves and their collaborators. It was known that the thieves declared in their slogans that they were 'the vultures' feast' (meaning that they were willing to die in the course of their activities). Secondly, the measures that were being suggested involved confrontation with the thieves, and even their elimination where necessary. Such measures involved in some degree the commission of capital offences which the participants knew might attract the intervention of the police. Secrecy, therefore, was one and probably the only means of protecting the founders against potential undesirable consequences.

In addition to secrecy, one other important element in the formation and subsequent operations of *Sungusungu* has to be mentioned - that is the use of divination, other rituals, and traditional medicine. Divination is said to be an important part of the *Sungusungu modus operandi*. Through divination, informants say, it is possible to tell the identities of the thieves and the direction or routes they have taken after the theft. Such knowledge is crucial to the people chasing the thieves. Divination also helps to determine what to do after arresting the thieves who are said to be protected by traditional medicine. *Sungusungu* members are told these things by their leaders and the diviner before they set off on the task of tracking stolen cattle. They also have to be smeared with traditional medicine (*lukago*) to protect them against the dangers that they might encounter on the way. Informants say that such measures are necessary counter measures against the thieves who are also known to use traditional medicine in their criminal activities.

Before *Sungusungu* was formed individuals used traditional medicine to protect themselves, their families and their property against thieves and robbers who in turn used traditional medicine to break through this protection. From this it may be seen that cattle rustling and the *Sungusungu* tracking of stolen cattle have to be understood in the total context of the Sukuma and Nyamwezi life. For want of space I can only say that the participants' lives are replete with mystery and counter-mystery which are partly related to and explained by the power of divination.

When *Sungusungu* was founded in a village, the initiation was requested by some of the elders who felt that it was in the interest of the village, and the villagers

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as a whole, to become *Sungusungu* members. Such a decision was taken after secret meetings, leading to a conscious decision on the matter. It is necessary to stress the fact of the consciousness of the decision because not all villages became *Sungusungu* at the same time.

Once a decision to become *Sungusungu* members was taken, an ad-hoc committee was secretly formed and posts allocated on an interim basis. The crucial posts were: *ntemi* (chief), *ntwale* (assistant to chief), *katibu* (secretary) and *kamanda mkuu* (chief commander). The interim committee was composed of old men knowledgeable in the use of traditional medicine (*bugota*) including superior knowledge of divination. It is said that it was important that such knowledge and powers be in the hands of the *ntemi* in particular. The committee allocation of the posts were tentative proposals which had to be put before the village assembly on the day of initiation. It was the villagers who had to endorse the names of those proposed to constitute the committee, and there are instances where the villagers reversed these proposals. In the village where I lived, for example, the person proposed to be *ntemi* did not become one and someone else was unanimously elected by a show of hands at the village assembly.

The reason suggested for why the villagers' endorsement was needed for the committee composition in general, and the person in the post of *ntemi* in particular, is that upon initiation the *ntemi* becomes the custodian of the well-being of the village in general and of order and justice in particular. These are said to be enormous powers and it is said that there is a need for the villagers to decide who wields them. The *ntemi* has to have the unanimous support of all the villagers. The villagers endorse the appointment of the *ntemi* not only on the basis of his wisdom and experience but also on his ritual knowledge and ability. If anything were to go wrong in regard to the order, security and overall welfare of the people in the village, all the villagers are expected to put up with the resultant misfortunes because they participated in the appointments. It emerges from these requirements that the committee in general and the *ntemi* in particular are in some respects magico-religious roles and have to be performed by persons experienced in magico-religious matters.

The *ntemi* of another village, which had itself already been initiated into *Sungusungu*, was invited by the interim committee to perform the initiation ceremony.² Before accepting such an invitation the *ntemi* would ask his inviters

2 The *ntemi* who performs the initiation ceremony is known to the villagers whom he initiates as *Baba buhemba* (father-disciple). This is also the title given to a master diviner by his disciples. The villagers whom a *ntemi* initiates are, therefore, his disciples.

to complete certain things. These included the appointment of the committee (which in most cases was tentatively already in existence), the listing of suspected criminals in the village, and the identification of diviners associated with the listed criminals. The list of suspected criminals had to be read by the visitors on the day of the initiation as if it was compiled through the aid of the divination powers of the visitors. Diviners associated with the suspected criminals had to be kept in check to prevent them from sabotaging the initiation process under which their clients were being identified and named.

The visitors' initiation team arrived in the host village on the evening before the actual initiation day. It was within the discretion of the invited *ntemi* to decide how many people should accompany him in order to perform the assignment successfully and in style. I was, for example, told of one initiation team which was more than 400 men strong, composed of people from seven villages, which had themselves been initiated by the same *ntemi*. The ground work for the initiation proceedings was laid overnight and included:

- (a) going through the list of suspected criminals. This was done by the visitors and the host committees and was meant to confine the list to only those criminals suspected of involvement in large scale thefts;
- (b) the identification of the place where the village assembly was to take place. The place had to be known to the visitors because it had to be encircled with protective medicine (*lukago*) against potential adversaries (see Cory 1946, 1955 on how and why this is done in the case of initiation into secret societies);
- (c) the discussion between the visitors' and the host committees on the powers of the local diviners in order to ascertain the extent of opposition and interference likely to be posed and to prepare for it. This helped the visitors to prepare their counter-mysteries. Informants talk of instances in which the visitors failed to proceed with the following day's business because their plans had been interfered with by rival diviners.

In the morning of the initiation day the village community assembled. All men in the village had to carry bows, arrows and gourd-stem whistles (*ndulilu*). These were, however, surrendered to the visitors until the end of the ceremony when they were allowed to have them back. Women brought *bugali* (stiff porridge) to feed the visitors at the end of the ceremony.³

3 At the initiation stage of the formation of *Sungusungu* the visitors were not fed. This is because the ceremony was done in the shortest form possible taking into consideration the fact that it was being done in hiding and without

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The leader of the visitors' delegation, who was in most cases the *ntemi* or his assistant or other representative, introduced himself and the men accompanying him as *basalama* (people of peace or peaceable people or the people who brought peace) and said that they had come to the village to bring peace as well. In order to have that peace, the speaker would say, he had come with an anonymous letter (said to be a letter from god) which revealed that there were people in the village who did not want peace and read their names out. The named people were told to leave the assembly immediately and go back to their homes together with other members of their households. By being told to go back to their homes these people were being asked to think about their past criminal activities, which took them out of the group of peaceable people, and to which they would have to confess. These people were not to be associated with in any way until they had taken the necessary steps to state and confess their crimes and 'clean' themselves. They were expected to do this before the newly initiated *ntemi* and his committee. Subsequent village assemblies were expected to be told of these measures and to be a venue at which other criminals could be named. The announcement of these names at the village assembly, therefore, was in effect a declaration that they were being ostracized. An opportunity to think about their past criminal conduct and to confess their crimes was a precondition for their re-admission to the community of 'good and peaceable people' at a future date.⁴

The name of the *ntemi* and his committee was then announced and the assembly asked for its endorsement. Upon endorsement the *ntemi* was then brought forward and was the first to be handed back his bow, arrows and *ndulilu* which he had surrendered at the beginning of the ceremony. Put in front, he was told that he was now in charge of the peace and security of his people and their well being. The *ntemi*, together with the people, were obliged to eliminate criminals in their village, protect lives and property and cooperate with other villages in the war against bad elements. Since the letter from god had named the prime suspects, it was the duty of the villagers to continue the exercise of identifying other criminals and reporting them to the *ntemi* and his committee who would deal with these reports in confidence. Instead of facing the criminals alone and individually, the people in the assembly were asked to cooperate and work together. 'With such cooperation and the powers of their *ntemi*', the gathering

approval.

4 The point of rethinking ones's conduct and taking steps towards readmission into the community of 'peaceable people' is emphasized by the informants. It is said that *Sungusungu* is not about punishing wrongdoers but helping them to be peaceable and ensure that they 'cooperate' with fellow villagers.

was told, 'they were bound to succeed'. A mixture of sorghum flour and water, commonly known as *lwanga*, was blown by the visiting *ntemi* on the people at the assembly, as blessing and best wishes for the difficult and dangerous task ahead of them.

At the end of this occasion, the village community saw itself as having acquired a new impetus and the ability to make a fresh start with extra-ordinary powers which they did not have before. They had acquired the ability to handle and deal with their adversaries in a manner that was unthinkable before. They became determined and committed to confront the thieves irrespective of the fact that the thieves were known to be in possession of weapons superior to their bows and arrows. Singing in jubilation, they took possession of their bows and arrows. They had become the *askari* (the Swahili word for the soldiers or other armed staff) of the *Sungusungu* organization, with the committee being the 'top brass'. All that was done or was capable of being done from that point onwards was attributed to the knowledge and powers of the *ntemi* and this committee who provided the necessary inspiration.

The local term used to describe the initiation process is *kutemya* (or *kutawaza* and *kuapisha* in Swahili). The three terms can be translated as 'enthronement' or 'installing power' or 'swearing in'. When informants are asked to explain the meaning of the process, two seemingly contradictory answers are given. Some refer to the *Sungusungu ntemi* as the one who was being enthroned - and hence the term *kutemya* - which could mean making one a chief. There are others who consider this to be the process through which all members of the village are sworn into *Sungusungu*. This implies that the whole village community, including the *ntemi*, are enthroned (crowned or sworn in) concurrently.

The two interpretations of the process are not mutually exclusive. This process is a means through which the elders seek to achieve village unity and solidarity. Through it they deal with the problems, fears and anxieties of the community, in circumstances menaced with disunity and selfishness. The process could generally be said to provide an opportunity to forge new relations among the peace loving people in the village against the perceived few common enemies. The process of being enthroned into *Sungusungu* therefore became the peoples' initiation ritual. As we will see later the process not only helped the forging of new relations among members of one village, but also extended these relations to members of other villages who went through it. It became part of a process through which *Sungusungu* was spread from one village to another. The result of the process was the establishment of cooperative links among the villages that went through the initiation. The villages which did not undergo this initiation were at best considered to be outside the cooperation, and at worst to be hide-

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outs (*masaka*) for criminals.⁵ Being part of this cooperative network was therefore considered not only desirable but necessary by the villagers. The nature of the threat which criminality posed was such that the resources of a single village could not successfully combat it, and so the cooperative network was seen as necessary.

Sungusungu Organization

The description of the formation of, and cooperation between the *Sungusungu* groups might give the impression that *Sungusungu* is a unified, single organization. This is not the case. *Sungusungu* is for all intents and purposes a village organization. It is the villagers who are members of *Sungusungu* of a particular village. They are referred to as the *askari* of *Sungusungu*. The *Sungusungu* committee, which as we saw earlier, is 'elected' or 'endorsed' at the village assembly, performs the day-to-day activities of *Sungusungu* in the village. Its powers are limited to the village and are exercised against village members only. The committee decides its own activities, priorities between them, and how and when to perform them. *Sungusungu* in each village, therefore, is both organizationally and functionally autonomous from the *Sungusungu* of other villages and there is no coordination, central or otherwise, of what *Sungusungu* in each village does or should do. This *Sungusungu* autonomy and independence is, however, subject to the expectation of cooperation by members of the neighbouring villages.

In a decade or so of *Sungusungu* existence, some attempts have been made to formalize some of these cooperation patterns. I do not intend to get into the organizational changes that have taken place regarding *Sungusungu* coordination, but it suffices to mention that *Sungusungu* committees now exist at the Ward and District levels in Kahama District. The *Sungusungu* committee at the Ward level came into existence in 1983, the same year that the District Union of Traditional Guards (*Muungano wa Walinzi wa Jaji wa Wilaya*) was created. The District Implementation Committee, on the other hand, was formed in 1987 (for detailed discussion on this point see Bukurura 1994b).

5 If, for example, a theft was committed in a village that had not been initiated into *Sungusungu*, neighbouring villagers could not participate in pursuing the thief, even if the thief happened to have been seen going through their own village. They could be heard saying that 'it is their own problem'.

Sungusungu Activities

It is to the village assembly, at which the villagers are initiated into *Sungusungu* membership, that the objectives of the organization are first announced. The villagers who disapprove of cattle thieves and are tired of cattle thefts committed in the village come together promising to cooperate in order to eliminate the acts of which they disapprove. The people of peace (*basalama*) are expected to cooperate with one another and with their leaders in the village, and in collaboration with others beyond the village, in order to realize the stated objectives. The *Sungusungu* slogans summarize these objectives as follows:

<i>kwili basalama</i> =	let the people of peace multiply
<i>bashosha ng'ombe</i> =	those who recover stolen cattle
<i>bashosha mbuli</i> =	those who recover stolen goats
<i>bashosha bakima</i> =	those who return deserting women
<i>balinda busiga</i> =	those who protect the millet
<i>balinda banhu</i> =	those who protect people
<i>balinda maduka</i> =	those who protect shops
<i>bakuniguna</i> =	those who help me
<i>nani anigune</i> =	and who will help me
<i>ulu anhinjaga</i> =	when I am surrounded (in trouble)
<i>ani kwili kabili</i> =	let them multiply twofold.

The *Sungusungu* objectives and the ability to perform them are expressed in the spirit of *kwigunana* (helping each other) together with the concept of *kwili* (increase in number or to multiply).⁶ These concepts partly show that the participants see that the key to the realization of their goals lies in communal action. The concept of *kwigunana* is very broad and requires the helping of each other in almost all activities. As we will see in the following pages, it includes helping each other in other aspects of social life, ranging from pursuing a thief to keeping a look-out for suspicious deeds in the village and passing important information to others for collective action. The concept of *kwili*, on the other hand, shows that it is preferable for the 'people of peace' to increase in number (to multiply), so that there could be more people participating in the collective action, which, in turn, simplifies the doing of things. The multiplication of the number of participants was first achieved at the village assemblies at which the villagers were initiated into the organization and by the requirement that the initiated people of different villages cooperate with each other in their activities. Both concepts of *kwigunana* and *kwili* indicate the mobilization of human

6 For the context in which the concept of *kwili* was used in the past, see Collinson (1974: 110), Milroth (1965: 138) and Cory (1951: 24).

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resources, in the village and beyond, for the purpose of communal action. That elders with their knowledge of divination are mobilized, for example, has been shown above. The mobilization of financial resources and the abilities of the youth will be shown in the next section. For the sake of convenience I will discuss the *Sungusungu* activities under two broad headings. First those functions which are related to the maintenance of order and security in the village and, secondly, those functions which may not necessarily have anything to do with order and security but are performed as a matter of local necessity, as they arise from local anxieties and demand collective action in the furtherance of the general spirit of *kwigunana*.

The maintenance of order and village security

I mentioned earlier that one of the things about which researchers on the subject of *Sungusungu* are in agreement is that *Sungusungu* was formed as a result of rural lawlessness. This important fact is illustrated by the *Sungusungu* slogans and songs which partly mention the objectives which brought *Sungusungu* into existence. These slogans and the songs were, on the one hand, a declaration of war against the thieves (*basambo*) and their collaborators (*masaka* = hide-outs). On the other hand, however, there was a declaration of peace among those who disapproved of the criminal behaviour. The lines were being drawn between those who stood for war and those who stood for peace. *Sungusungu* members are expected to participate in the recovery of stolen livestock (cattle, goats etc.); protection of property (millet, shops etc.) and the protection of lives. The protection of property and lives involves surveillance by the village community and will become clearer when I discuss the hearing of village disputes.

(a) *Returning of stolen cattle*

I indicated earlier the extent to which the rural population is vulnerable to crime in general and cattle rustling in particular. It is necessary to add here that for any investigation of cattle rustling to be effective and successful, appropriate action has to be taken immediately after the commission of the crime. This is because the cattle are property on the move and the slightest delay in taking appropriate action allows the stolen cattle to be taken a long distance, reducing the chances of recovery.

The investigation of cattle rustling is a labour intensive exercise; it is very demanding in both time and energy. Those involved in tracking stolen cattle not only have to make their way through bushes and shrubs trying to find out which way the cattle rustlers have gone or where they may be hiding. They must also be prepared to travel long distances. These are some of the reasons why the

villagers feel that the police are unable to deal properly with crimes like cattle rustling. It is said that the Police are not only slow in responding to crime reports, but also that they do not seem to have the commitment, determination, courage and/or patience demanded for the task. The villagers also say that the police prefer to track cattle rustlers by using a motor vehicle, and if one is not available they will wait until one is obtained in order to avoid the demands of long and difficult travels.

Before *Sungusungu* started the villagers knew of these police weaknesses and limitations, and had often invoked the raising of a hue and cry (*mwano*) for the purpose of tracking stolen cattle. The increase in the intensity of crime, however, proved that this mechanism was inadequate. The frequency of cattle theft increased and on each occasion the number of cattle stolen also increased. This meant that more people had to spend time tracking and the party took longer to come back home. The use of arms by cattle rustlers also meant that the tracking party was exposed to danger, as they might encounter physical resistance in the course of arresting the rustlers.

These were new demands which required a reconsideration of methods and approaches. New kinds of information dissemination and exchange were introduced which involved different kinds of alarms for different activities and audiences. The first is the *ndulilu*,⁷ an alarm raised in regard to commission of thefts in general and cattle thefts in particular. The blowing of the *ndulilu* means a theft has been committed, people are called to pursue the thief or thieves, and the villagers from neighbouring villages are expected to participate in the chase. People responding to the *ndulilu* have to be armed with spears, bows and arrows because they have been summoned for an impending or imminent war against thieves.

It is thought necessary to use the whistle instead of a hue and cry in order to disguise the identity of the person raising the alarm and thereby provide protection against possible retaliation by the criminals or their collaborators. The *ndulilu* is a summons to the people of the village. It is blown to call people to come together to set out to track the stolen cattle. But it also means that the people in the neighbouring villages are informed of the event. They should be on the alert and prepared to participate in the search just in case the cattle thieves happen to be going in their direction or even passing through their villages.

7 The *ndulilu* was previously used by children as a playing instrument. With the rise of *Sungusungu* its use has been restricted. Blowing it without good cause is punishable.

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This means that the use of the traditional *mwano* or hue and cry, which is the second kind of information dissemination, is today restricted to alarms within a single village and village emergencies, like the burning of a house, that are not related to cattle theft. People attending the *mwano* have to respond quickly but need not come with spears or bows and arrows because these are not needed. Such an alarm does not attract people from other villages.

The third means of communication invented with the rise of *Sungusungu* is the village bell. Like the *mwano*, it is restricted to calls within the village. It is meant to summon the villagers to the village assembly as a matter of emergency when thieves have been caught red-handed. At such a meeting villagers need not be armed. The village assembly is convened in these circumstances in order to reveal the identity of the thief or thieves to the villagers, who might have some other information to give in regard to the conduct of the offender and his collaborators. Such a gathering serves as a means of collecting additional evidence against the criminal or criminals who are already in *Sungusungu* custody. It is not an exaggeration to say that the village assembly summoned in this way also turns out to be a public trial of the thief or thieves.

Raising any of the above-mentioned alarms without good cause is a very serious matter and is punishable after a hearing by the people who responded to it. Similar penalties are applicable for failure to attend these alarms without good cause.

Associated with the *Sungusungu* duty of tracking stolen cattle was the creation of a fund to make provision for the people who were involved in the chase. The fund was meant to help them to buy things to eat, like cassava, ripe bananas, sugar cane, etc. in the course of the journey.⁸ It is said that this fund was necessary because nobody could be sure as to how long the chase could take and that *Sungusungu* leaders did not want the members in the chasing groups to stop or cut short the exercise simply because they were feeling hungry. The amount contributed differs from village to village but shs. 30/= (approximately 8 pence) appears to have been the initial figure. Able-bodied members of the village where I lived, for example, contributed shs. 30/= towards this fund in 1982. The amount was later increased to shs. 100/=. Today informants refer to this contribution as a membership fee. After the creation of the fund, it was replenished by fines paid by criminals, a point which I will turn to later.

8 The items that *Sungusungu* members buy in the course of tracking cattle reflect the difficult conditions in which they perform their functions. The job has to be done on the bare necessities. Informants report that policemen would prefer to be away from these conditions.

In the course of tracking stolen cattle, *Sungusungu* members undertake a lot of investigations. These are very difficult because cattle rustlers travel through bushes and hidden routes in order to avoid detection and to disguise or mislead those following them. In order to overcome these difficulties *Sungusungu* members seek information, assistance, and cooperation from the villagers where they pass. The necessary cooperation is secured as a result of the process of initiation, which as we saw earlier, binds the participants together.

By acting collectively and promptly the stolen cattle and other property are recovered and restored to the respective owners. This aspect of their functions does not deal with the punishing of the offenders concerned. It only deals with the recovery and restoration of stolen property to their rightful owners. The punishment of those involved in cattle rustling and other crimes is the subject of the next section.

We can see from the above discussion that the youth and middle-aged villagers travel long distances in search of the stolen cattle. In doing that they are given the aid of financial resources collected from the villagers into a fund for that purpose. Spiritually, the teams involved in these long travels are supported by the powers of divination and by traditional medicine given by the diviners. The recovery of stolen cattle has been made possible by the spirit of *kwigunana*, under which the activities are performed, and by the multiplication (increase in the number of actors) expressed in the slogan of *kwili basalama*. The human, financial and spiritual resources of the village have been mobilized for the purposes of collective action in order to solve urgent problems of the locality.

(b) The settlement of village disputes

The other aspect of maintaining order and security in the village is the settlement of different aspects of disputes which, if allowed to continue, may lead to breaches of the peace and of security. As we will see below, *Sungusungu* attempts to take preemptive measures in situations that have the potential to lead to more serious consequences in local circumstances. We saw earlier, for example, that a village assembly is convened when a thief is caught red-handed, at which assembly the villagers take the opportunity to state what they know about the general character of the arrested person and his past criminal conduct. The people at the assembly may also reveal the arrested person's criminal associates if such people are known to exist but not yet arrested. The second point about the settlement of disputes is that *Sungusungu* members in each village can deal only with accused persons who are members of their village. Cases involving an accused person from another village, which I will turn to later, are sent to the village where the accused is a member and the *Sungusungu* members of that village are in turn expected to deal with them. Today a village

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assembly is still summoned for similar purposes, but it is the *Sungusungu* committee which deals with the hearing of all other disputes in the village.

The role of the committee in hearing village disputes after the formation of *Sungusungu* can be compared with the role of neighbourhood courts of village elders (*mabanza ga banamhala*) which settled disputes in their localities among the Sukuma and Nyamwezi in the past (see Abrahams 1965, 1967a; Cory 1954; Tanner 1955).

The *Sungusungu* committee, however, is partly a new and partly an old forum. It is new in form but in substance it deals with rather similar problems to those that its predecessor dealt with. It determines disputes and has enforcement mechanisms to back its orders. Unlike its predecessor, which was open to all interested village elders, the *Sungusungu* committee is exclusive as regards members, and no passer-by, for example, can sit in or participate in its proceedings. I will first attempt to outline its procedure which, I think, is the cornerstone of most of its activities.

In most disputes that come before the committee nobody appears before it as a complainant. That is to say initially the complaint is known to the committee through a rumour and/or gossip. In effect, however, a report of events is made to one of the committee members. The *katibu* (secretary) takes notes of the proceedings and he is the one who invites members to attend the meetings, at which disputes are also settled. It is the secretary's duty to give the members the background to the dispute as known to him. There are times when the secretary himself has inadequate background knowledge of the matter. In such cases he would ask any other committee member with adequate knowledge of the events that led to the dispute to explain them. Members ask questions and seek clarifications. It is then decided to call the accused person to give his or her version of the events in question.

I do not know of any dispute that came before the committee during my field work period for which there was no committee member who had prior knowledge. After a few months of my stay in the village I was also able to know the details of some of the disputes before they came to the committee.

The first thing that the accused person is expected to do when he or she comes before the committee is to greet the members with some or all of the *Sungusungu* slogans that we saw earlier. The slogans are used at almost every *Sungusungu* gathering. In Kahama District, the slogans are used even at the ruling Party meetings, by Party leaders who would like to be identified with *Sungusungu*. Their use is an indication that the person uttering them acknowledges both the purposes and capabilities of *Sungusungu*, and wishes

them well. *Sungusungu* should be able to multiply so that it performs the function of recovering stolen property. As can be seen from the slogans, the list of the property to be recovered is long and items have been added to it from time to time.

On this occasion, however, the slogans have one further meaning. That is the acceptance and acknowledgement of the fact that the committee is sitting to do what is just in the furtherance of the purposes and strength of *Sungusungu*. This is illuminated by two other factors. First, the accused who does not greet the committee members may be asked, for example, 'are you not *nsalama*? (a person of peace)'. The accused person will definitely say that he or she is a person of peace. In those circumstances the accused is told: *tugishage*' (greet us). The greetings expected by the committee members are the slogans.

Secondly, in the discussion that ensues at the end of the hearing, it is emphasized that once the matter is settled, the accused person is considered to be a person of peace again, and all that happened in relation to the dispute is forgotten. This implies that the crime(s) in which one is involved takes him or her temporarily outside the group of *basalama* (the peaceful and peaceable people or the people of peace), and it is his or her duty to work towards re-admission. Efforts towards that re-admission are demonstrated partly in the way the accused conducts himself or herself during the hearing. The hearing process is, therefore, conducted on the basis of consensus; not only between the committee members, but also between them and the accused.⁹

After greeting the committee members in an acceptable way the accused is asked by one of the members:

Committee: 'what brings you here?'

Accused: 'I have been summoned.'

Committee: 'summoned by whom?'

Accused: 'summoned by the secretary.'

Committee: '*What have you done?*' (my emphasis).

⁹ There are cases which were not finalized for lack of agreement between the accused and the committee. In these cases the accused persons did not think they had committed any wrong and the committee neither convinced them about their guilt nor did it impose any decision on them. The accused were understood to be uncooperative and rude. The hearing of these cases were suspended, but they are likely to crop up again when the accused persons get involved in some other wrong doing. When that happens the fines are likely to be even higher.

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At this point the questions and replies can take different dimensions. Some accused persons deny any wrongdoing and the committee members attempt to convince the accused to tell the truth, which they feel they already know. Other accused narrate the story of the events as they happened and how the conflict that brought them before the committee arose. On the whole the accused persons are expected to confess the commission of the offences believed to have happened and to proceed to punish themselves.

The committee members ask the accused person to punish himself or herself by saying, *ichimage* (knife or pierce yourself). He/she is expected, at this stage, to assess the gravity of the matter and to state the amount of fine (*masumule*) that fits the respective crime. An accused person starts by pronouncing a smaller amount of fine but goes on to increase it until a proper amount is pronounced that the members applaud signalling their acceptance (see Abrahams 1987: 189).

From the procedure described above, informants report that it is not within the role of the committee to tell the offender what offence was committed or the appropriate amount of the fine. These are matters for the accused person to determine. 'It is the offender who knows the crimes committed' one committee member observed. It is, therefore, upon him or her to punish himself or herself. The members argue that secrecy in obtaining complaints and the confidentiality of their sources is the basis of the committee's strength, and the foundation on which community harmony is maintained in the village. It is considered effective because the accusations are lodged anonymously and the accused person cannot point a finger at any of the members. It is also alleged that the procedure of self-punishment is meant to protect the committee members against potential accusations that may be levelled, to the police or other government officials, by the dissatisfied accused person (Abrahams 1987: 189). Informants hold the view that an accused person who punishes himself or herself has nothing to complain about.

An offender who goes through the above hearing procedure and does not confess his or her crimes and proceed to self-punishment may be ostracized. On the other hand, an offender who confesses the crimes but refuses to pay the self-imposed fine is also subject to ostracism. The local term used to describe ostracism is *bubiti* (or *kukindikwa* or *kutulijiwa*). Abrahams (1965: 179, 1967a: 161) has correctly translated *bubiti* as a 'state of hyenahood'. It is a mechanism which, on the one hand, is used to enforce the self-imposed fines and, on the other hand, a means of forcing those suspects who have refused to confess their crime to succumb.

As an enforcement mechanism, ostracism is not limited to the person who committed the crime, but covers and includes all his or her household members.

An ostracised household cannot expect any assistance in the village. Household members may not greet or visit any one in the village or participate in any of the village social activities. All the villagers' cooperation is withdrawn from the ostracized household members as long and this continues until the alleged crimes are accepted and the requisite fine paid. There are reports that when *Sungusungu* started, *bubiti* was even imposed on some Party branch leaders who were known to have been in collaboration with the thieves. *Bubiti* is reported to have been so severe that it included the exclusion from the use of the village well and the grain milling machine.

In order to enforce such a mechanism effectively, the participation and cooperation of the whole village community is required. These conditions are achieved by ensuring that those who violate these requirements are also punished. With the existence of cooperation between *Sungusungu* members in different villages, members of neighbouring villages are also asked to observe these measures. The mechanism of ostracism is relevant to the question of when, and who pays the fines once the crimes are reported to the committee. The offender who denies the commission of the crimes or resists or refuses payment of the fine, might be encouraged or even pressurized by members of his or her household to pay, acknowledging that any failure to do so is likely to affect them directly.

The fines imposed on self-confessing offenders are expressed in chicken, goats, sheep and cattle, but not all payments are made in these terms. Students of the Sukuma and Nyamwezi have observed that in the past different means, other than the items in which the fines are expressed, were used in payment. The most common form of payment is money (see Juma 1960: 27, Knudsen 1977: 72, Abrahams 1967a: 160). *Sungusungu* also has a provision for the payment of fines in the form of money and the items are allocated their money equivalents. These equivalents, like other *Sungusungu* measures, differ from one village to another. In the village where I worked, for example, one chicken is equivalent to shs. 200/= (approximately 50 pence), a goat/sheep to shs. 2000/= (approximately £5) and a bull to shs. 10000/= (approximately £50). In 1990, however, a bull was shs. 5000/= in the same village. It must be said that these money equivalents of fines are not market values of the items, but amounts set only for the purposes of these fines. The above provision is meant to help the villagers who might not have the items in which the fines are expressed or those who find it is easier or cheaper to pay the fines in cash. People do sell grain, goats or cattle at the open market to obtain money with which to pay the fines.

The animals and money paid as fines are collected by the committee and form the *Sungusungu* fund. The offenders and those who participate in their payment, on the one hand, and the village community on the other, expect that there

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should be a village feast at which these items should be consumed communally. Such feasts have a social and symbolic value. The feasts are occasions at which the offenders are readmitted in the community of 'peaceable people'.

In the discussion above I have shown how the breach of rural peace and wrongdoings are reported to the committee members in secrecy and how committees conduct their hearing in confidence and without giving away to the accused the sources of the complaints. Informants say that reporting the causes of trouble to the committee is a necessary duty in the *Sungusungu* spirit of keeping an eye on all the misconduct that takes place in the village. In so doing the villagers help each other to deal with trouble before it gets out of hand. This is expressed in the proverb: *ndolile ndolile igadishaga* (there is need to deal with matters before they get out of hand and cause injury to the eyes). It can be said that the villagers are being vigilant and performing a civic duty of exposing illegal behaviour. The person who fails to report the breaches of peace and security to the committee is considered uncooperative and the committee members do take that fact in mind when, at any time in the future, such a person gets involved in any form of misbehaviour.

Like the tracking down of stolen cattle, the hearing of disputes is said to be done in the furtherance of the *Sungusungu* objectives (of protecting life and property) and in the spirit *kwigunana*. This is, in effect, a recognition of the fact that crime in general and cattle rustling in particular is a problem not for an individual but for the whole village community. To fight this effectively and successfully requires a joint and communal action. This is done in the name of *Sungusungu*.

I would like to conclude this section with a few remarks about crimes committed in other villages than the one where the accused person lives, and the fate of the offenders in elopement cases. As I mentioned earlier both the village assembly and the committee only deal with cases involving fellow villagers and do not proceed against people from other villages. Cases involving the latter have to be sent to the respective villages to be heard there. In the case of elopement the man involved in eloping with another man's daughter is dealt with in his own village after the girl has been returned to her home by the *Sungusungu* members.

The *Sungusungu* secretary of the village where the crimes were committed sends a letter to his counterpart in the other village informing him and the committee what criminal conduct a member of their village has been involved in. The *Sungusungu* committee of one latter village summons the accused person and proceeds against him in the ordinary manner as if the offence was committed in their own village. Informants report that this procedure allows the people of the village where the offender belongs, who know the offender and his overall

conduct, to manage the case. It is the people in the offender's village who are capable of dealing with and enforcing any sanctions that may be imposed. Dealing with these cases is an extension of the principle of cooperation between the respective villages.

Beyond order and security

Sungusungu, as a grassroots organization, implies a lot to the villagers who constitute the rank and file of its membership and the leaders who perform the day-to-day activities. On the one hand, the villagers are able to put pressure on the leaders to make decisions and take action on the strength and even at the dictation of local demands. On the other hand, the leaders put demands on the rank and file. This situation arises because of the shared local knowledge of some facts and issues which all the local inhabitants consider to be of interest and cause anxieties at a particular time. Some of these issues are part of the long history of the locality in which they arise. This local knowledge has implications on matters of order, security and justice at the village level.

Local inhabitants put their knowledge to use when considering allegations of misconduct and criminality in the locality and it influences, in one way or another, the decisions taken. Such knowledge, in fact, forms part of the villagers' sense of justice. To an untrained and casual observer (including the police, magistrates and other government officials) past experiences may not be apparent and may seem irrelevant in certain accusations. This is illustrated by the concerns with witchcraft suspicions and the return of deserting women as part of *Sungusungu* activities which are a subject of this section.

(a) *Dealing with suspected witches*

Sungusungu activities do not end at the tracking of stolen cattle and the hearing of local disputes. Their activities are extended to other concerns and anxieties of the village community. The *Sungusungu* slogans, which we saw earlier, and the *Sungusungu* songs partly suggest what *Sungusungu* did at a particular time, and there is potential for expansion to include new concerns and activities. Whereas *Sungusungu* emerged in order to deal with lawlessness and insecurity in the rural areas, it has extended its mandate to the eradication of suspected witches and the returning of deserting women, as matters of local concern and anxiety. Later on *Sungusungu* songs also began to mention responsibility for protecting the ruling Party and its leaders. What this means is that *Sungusungu* is flexible in what it does and stands for. That flexibility is partly reflected in its willingness to take on new activities and responsibilities, which require communal action, in the

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spirit of *kwigunana*. The eradication of suspected witches should be understood in this context.

Although dealing with witchcraft suspicion can be said to be a part of the maintenance of order and security, I prefer to discuss it under a separate heading, first for convenience of presentation and, secondly and more importantly, because not all *Sungusungu* groups engage in these activities. Witchcraft is a community concern in some parts more than in others. In those villages where *Sungusungu* does not engage in the eradication of suspected witches, the implication is that the matter is not considered to be serious enough to merit *Sungusungu* attention.

Given the fact that *Sungusungu* is a local forum, local concerns and discussion about suspicions of witchcraft cannot be excluded when raised by the villagers. Suspicions of this kind are part of the mystery and counter-mystery which, as I indicated above, are prevalent among the Sukuma and Nyamwezi. Divination, as a public remedy, is invoked to discover who the witches are and the committee or the village assembly take action considered to be appropriate in the circumstances. Unlike cases of theft which are dealt with openly, allegations of witchcraft are problematic and very tricky. This is true not only to the observer but also to the committee as well. This is illustrated by the fact that the allegations are handled with such care and skill that one may not notice that the committee was hearing a case of witchcraft suspicion.

In the village where I lived, for example, the committee heard a case of witchcraft suspicion in circumstances which did not reveal witchcraft suspicions. The case was handled as one in which the villager was accused of inviting an unknown person to the village without informing the village authorities. I have elsewhere (Bukurura 1994a) described how the accused was forced to migrate by the *Sungusungu* members (fellow villagers) for what was considered to be her involvement in witchcraft activities. The villagers in general and the committee members in particular, however, did not see it as a matter of banishment. They saw it instead as a voluntary decision to migrate by a person who had refused to cooperate with her fellow villagers.

The central point here is that, in the villagers' view, the committee which heard the case could not have taken the accused to task if she had fulfilled her obligation - that of reporting her guest to the village authorities, as is required of all villagers. By failing to do that she had distanced herself from the 'people of peace' and her intentions were suspect. Secondly, the fine imposed on her, like those imposed on other accused persons, was only meant to rehabilitate her and re-admit her in the community of 'peaceable' people. The argument follows that if she had paid the fine, as required and expected, she would not have needed to

leave. She would have been rehabilitated and could have stayed as a peaceable person. In these respects the villagers felt that the accused was in the wrong and they were not at all sorry that she had to leave. She had failed to cooperate and that failure took her out of the community of the people of peace - the *Basalama* (the peaceable people). It was all her own fault, appeared to me to be the general conclusion of the villagers.

(b) The returning of deserting women

As in many parts of Tanzania, the Sukuma and Nyamwezi society is male-dominated. These tendencies are reflected in some of the *Sungusungu* activities. In the village where I lived and the neighbouring villages women did not seem to play any important role in *Sungusungu*. *Sungusungu* activities are to a great extent dominated by men.¹⁰ One of the activities that *Sungusungu* is involved in is the return of deserting wives and eloping daughters. This activity is expressed in the *Sungusungu* slogan as '*bashosha bakima*' (those who return women).

Sukuma and Nyamwezi marriages involve the payment of bridewealth. Marriages which are formed without these payments are at some stage converted to bridewealth marriages. Several head of cattle are paid by the man or his relatives to the parents of the prospective wife. In case of failure of the marriage, the matter has to be sorted out between the relatives in order to determine the cause of marital breakdown. If the wife is seen to be the main cause of the breakdown, some amount of bridewealth has to be returned. Parents expect that their daughters' marriages will bring in some head of cattle. By elopement the parents report that their daughters are denying them their legitimate due. So *Sungusungu* has been involved in returning deserting wives and eloping daughters in order to protect, on the one hand, the economic rights of men in the women as they see it and, on the other hand, to control women's sexuality.

During my field work I learnt about three instances in which *Sungusungu* members from different villages came to the village where I lived looking for women who were said to have deserted their husbands. In all these cases the women were not found in the village. In one of the cases *Sungusungu* came from as far away as Kwimba District in Mwanza region (about 140 kilometres). I also learnt of two instances in which *Sungusungu* members of the village where I lived were involved in returning eloping daughters. In one case *Sungusungu* followed the eloping girl to a village in Shinyanga district; in the other case the

10 Abrahams (1987: 184) notes that in some villages *Sungusungu* groups do have a women wing. I did not have the benefit of witnessing one myself.

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eloping girl was in the neighbouring village. The girls were found and returned to their parents, leaving their seducers to appear before the *Sungusungu* committees in their respective villages for these offences.

The returning of deserting wives and eloping daughters, like the tracking of stolen cattle, in some cases involves long-distance travel but may not necessarily involve intensive surveillance and investigation. The deserted husband and/or the father of the eloping daughter carry out their own investigations to discover the whereabouts of the women in question and ask *Sungusungu* members to travel to the named places to return them. On arrival at the places indicated to them *Sungusungu* members identify themselves to the *Sungusungu* leadership and ask for cooperation in identifying the women they may be looking for. There are instances in which such travels prove to be fruitless and *Sungusungu* members are unable to find the person they are looking for. In such cases *Sungusungu* members return home empty-handed to report their failure. When that occurs, the husband or parent launches fresh investigations into the whereabouts of the wife or daughter. *Sungusungu* members may be asked to make other travels to the place identified to them.

On the other hand, and probably related to the above, is the question of male control of the sexuality of women. This emerges in adultery cases which are also heard by the *Sungusungu* committee. Suffice it to say here that adultery is taken to be a serious crime among the Sukuma and Nyamwezi. In the adultery case that was heard by the committee during my field work, unlike other cases brought before it, the complainant brought the matter and attended the hearing to explain it. The accused person in this case did not contest the matter. It was known that he went away from the village with the complainant's wife for a number of days.

Unlike other crimes where the fines paid by the offenders went into the *Sungusungu* fund, the five head of cattle paid by the adulterer were given to the complainant husband and only one head of cattle went to *Sungusungu* fund as a fine. In cases of adultery, therefore, the hearing procedure is slightly different. The complainant appears before the committee and the accused is not asked to 'pierce' himself (*ichimage*). The difference in procedure is partly because the complainant husband is known to be the offended party and the need to protect the identity of the complainant does not arise. Secondly, the complainant is the primary beneficiary of the fine. His failure to complain means that he forfeits his right to the five head of cattle. It is, therefore, in his interest to see to it that the matter is brought to the attention of the committee and that it is heard.

When I asked why this case should be heard by the *Sungusungu* committee and not left for the complainant to pursue in the courts, the reply I got was that

courts were unpredictable and it could not be guaranteed that the complainant could succeed there. In addition, I was told that the matter involved the villagers as well. This was because if left to continue such instances were likely to lead to bloodshed. Bloodshed is something that the villagers are working to avoid, and they avoid it by making sure that matters of this kind are settled when they happen. The hearing of adultery cases by the *Sungusungu* committee is, therefore, interpreted as being part of the spirit of *kwigunana*. This is because, by avoiding bloodshed, the villagers are able to stay out of the troubles with the police that are likely to follow any homicide investigation.

(c) The case of the lost child

I indicated earlier that the concept of *kwigunana* is very broad and encompasses activities beyond the recovery of stolen cattle and general maintenance of order and security. I am inclined to see the concept as being so broad that it includes most aspects of the villagers' social life which demand collective action. This view is illustrated further by examining the involvement of *Sungusungu* in a case of which I was told on a visit to a neighbouring village. On a previous day the villagers were involved in looking for a child lost in the course of play. The village bell was rung and the villagers started to look for him. The child was found at the home of the *Sungusungu* commander in the next village. I also learnt that the villagers who failed to participate in the exercise without sufficient explanation were fined.

This case, like the returning of deserting women and the adultery cases discussed above, indicate that *Sungusungu* members are engaged in activities over and above the narrow questions of maintaining order and security in their respective villages. These functions, which do not necessarily fall under the maintenance of order and security, are performed by the villagers under the name of *Sungusungu* because *Sungusungu*, as a village organization, provides an institutional forum in which local concerns are raised and discussed, and action taken. That is to say that *Sungusungu* is an organization through which these activities could be performed.¹¹ After examining how *Sungusungu* was formed, how it is organized, what functions it performs and how, the next question: is how do we account for all its forms and functions in the light of the overall Sukuma and Nyamwezi social organization? That is the question that I attempt to answer in the next section.

11 For more examples of activities unrelated to order and security in the village, see Abrahams (1987: 191).

Sungusungu in the Sukuma and Nyamwezi Organizational Context

Abrahams (1965) documents the patterns of cooperation between villagers under five sets of relationships. These are: domestic groups, kinship and affinity, secret societies, neighbourhood organizations and chiefdom citizenship. There is overwhelming evidence to show that different activities were performed by each of these sets of relationships in the 1950s and that the pattern continues today. Some activities are performed by one set to the exclusion of all other sets. In other activities these sets supplemented, complemented, substituted and even conflicted with each other. Abrahams (1965: 173) gives the example of the eradication of agricultural pests as a task that used to be performed under the chiefdom leadership but was occasionally also performed by the neighbourhood.¹²

One of these sets of relationships, the chiefdom, was abolished by the government in 1963. One other set, the neighbourhood, was strengthened by the government policy of villagization in the 1970s which created nucleated villages. These villages brought the villagers into closer neighbourhood than before. With the rise in crime in the 1970s members of the neighbourhood (the village) came together, in the form of *Sungusungu*, to get rid of the criminals as they could have organized under the chiefdom or neighbourhood to hunt wild animals destroying crops in their farms. From this discussion we can see that the traditional and long term cooperation patterns that exist among the Sukuma and Nyamwezi partly gave an impetus to the formation of, and the activities performed by, the *Sungusungu* groups.

Sungusungu organization and methods suggest that there is great reliance on the organizational mechanisms and strength that are prevalent among the Sukuma and Nyamwezi (Abrahams 1989: 359). *Sungusungu* is organized around the village locale and every village organization is independent of, but in cooperation with, other villages. The features of autonomy and independence of these organizations and the patterns of cooperation between them are not new among the Sukuma and Nyamwezi. They partly reflect the mutually independent political organizations of chiefdoms that were officially abolished in 1963. There were 51 independent chiefdoms in Sukumaland and 31 in Nyamweziland. Though autonomous and independent of each other, these chiefdoms cooperated in a variety of ways. On the other hand, the same kind of independence and

12 Abrahams (1967a: 26) discusses how the customs that mark the individual's death bring into play all the five sets of relationships in which the dead person participated during his or her life time. Different sets of persons do different things on his or her death.

autonomy are found in the setting up and organization of secret societies that continue to exist among the Sukuma and Nyamwezi today. Although these secret societies are organized at the village level, and have independent leadership, there is a lot of cooperation that takes place beyond the village level at which they are based (Cory 1946, 1955; Abrahams 1967b). Cooperation between villages in the enforcement of neighbourly obligations and settlement of disputes is particularly relevant here. In the past neighbourhood courts heard disputes, and imposed and enforced sanctions on villagers for misconduct committed outside their own village. It has been shown above that *Sungusungu* committees also cooperate in the same way.

In the case of *Sungusungu*, however, this cooperation was secured with the reliance on rituals of initiation (*kutemya*). The cooperation between elders from neighbouring villages, in arranging the formation of these groups and activities after their initiation can partly be explained by the cooperation between the independent chiefdoms, on the one hand, and the cooperation between secret societies in the locale, on the other. The rituals and the initiation process that took place, as a prerequisite for admission into *Sungusungu*, have some relation to the initiations into the different secret societies that are prevalent among these people and the reliance on magico-religious powers for leadership.

The role of male elders in raising the idea about the formation of these groups and putting that idea into action, reflects the influence of elders' groupings - the *banamhala* in a number of Sukuma and Nyamwezi activities. The secrecy with which the arrangements were effected partly relate to the secrets that are part of the elders' instructions into the higher ritual ranks and the secrets that are held between those initiated into different secret societies as opposed to the uninitiated. A Nyamwezi proverb which expresses the wisdom of elders is relevant here. The proverb goes as follows: *unamhala ukunshiga kunhambo; ukumasala, yaya* (you can run ahead of an elder but you cannot outreach his wisdom). This means that the elders' expertise, experience and wisdom (which include the knowledge of divination, rituals and traditional medicine) gave rise to the formation of *Sungusungu*. The proverb suggests that the Sukuma and Nyamwezi elders have experience, wisdom and ability to organize their communities to solve their own problems.

The existence of the organizations for young men - *basumba*, among the Sukuma - is also relevant to the formation and operation of *Sungusungu*. The young men are the people who are sent over long distances in search of stolen cattle and in investigation of crimes in general. Before the formation of *Sungusungu* the young men travelled long distances to deliver messages of different kinds, especially about deaths, to the relatives of the deceased in other villages (see Abrahams 1967a: 26).

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What the above discussion shows is that although *Sungusungu* is an organization which partly borrows from the past, it also has some new features and dynamics. Initiation ceremonies, for example, which were in the past voluntary and limited to the members of secret societies, have been compulsorily extended to all the villagers for the purposes of the formation of *Sungusungu*. By creating *Sungusungu* at the village level, the villagers have become part of the network and secured themselves cooperation with people beyond their own village. These cooperation patterns, therefore, have widened the space within which *Sungusungu* operates.

The role of the village assembly and the *Sungusungu* committee are also expressions of a new cooperation dynamic. The village assembly is a forum at which a thief caught red-handed is exposed and even his past conduct discussed. It is a form of trial by the village community. No such procedure existed in the past. The committee which, I have suggested, has some resemblance with the past neighbourhood courts of elders, also took a new shape while retaining some of the past features. It is no longer an open forum, for all interested elders to participate in, but is exclusive in both membership and participation. Informants justify this exclusiveness in terms of the secrecy and confidence in which it has to operate. In order to be sure that its sources of information are not diverted beyond certain confines the composition of the committee and its proceedings have to be limited.

The preemptive measures and the avoidance of bloodshed that *Sungusungu* members in general and the committee in particular, are engaged in, are suggestive of community attempts at avoiding the alleged unpredictable interventions by external institutions like the Police. This is possible if the villagers cooperate in settling their own disputes without letting them to go outside the village.

The rise of *Sungusungu* and the form that it has taken illuminates very well the two conflicting trends which Abrahams noted among the Nyamwezi in the 1970s. On the one hand, he observed that the status of locally based law and custom was increasingly in doubt (Abrahams 1981: 130). On the other hand, however, there was the idea of local custom as a valuable possession:

[C]ustom is something which is theirs and which equips them with their special dignity and authority in situations where they are in other respects less well endowed than those with whom they may be dealing (Abrahams 1981: 133).

The fact that crime in general and cattle theft in particular had personal consequences for their lives and economic well-being, made it easy and

appealing for the Sukuma and Nyamwezi to resort to a stock of customary practices to deal with these threats and those who caused them. The lack of protection of their lives and property, exhibited by the absence of reliable mechanisms provided by the established institutions, gave room for these people to rely on customary means for their own protection. The *Sungusungu* organization, the spirit of *kwigunana* in general and the multiplication of its members (expressed in the concept of *kwili*) can be said to be a reflection of the 'dignity and authority', which Abrahams saw and expressed as the strength of the Nyamwezi people in their dealings with themselves and others. The war against crime and cattle rustlers was expressed in the cultural identity of the participants. *Sungusungu* became an organization with which all peace loving people in the village, the *Basalama*, identified. It became a centre around which new relations were forged.

Sungusungu groups can be said to have started along the lines of the Neighbourhood Watch, Guardian Angels, Vehicle Watch, Farm Watch and similar schemes that were formed in Britain and elsewhere in the 1980s. These were formed to combat crime where local communities felt that the Police were unable to do it. The Sukuma and Nyamwezi, however, have worked in their own particular socio-cultural settings and have followed different methods.¹³ They have relied on their familiar traditional institutions and methods. As we saw earlier, *Sungusungu* activities are not limited to order and security in their locality. They extend to other activities that demand common action. This partly explains the fact that these activities are only a functional extension of old institutions.

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13 Mazrui (1988) has suggested that the failure of colonial institutions imposed on the traditional societies of Africa has led to the revival of traditional institutions. *Sungusungu* is the best example of this.

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