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Infanticide: A Survival Strategy among the Gweno People during the Early Colonial Period in Tanganyika



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ABSTRACT

Traditions and customs carry socio-cultural and economic values of the community where they are practised. Infanticide was a traditional practice among the Gweno people in Kilimanjaro, northern Tanzania. This practice had socio-cultural, political, and economic significance which persisted. As a global phenomenon, infanticide has attracted enormous scholarship from different disciplines covering mostly its practice, its associated beliefs, and its eradication campaigns. Despite the popularity of infanticide practices among the Gweno people, particularly during the early colonial period, little has been revealed and documented on how it was practised, associated beliefs and the socio-cultural, political, and economic significance it carried in this community. Benefitting from research findings collected in 2015 through historical and ethnological methods such as oral traditions, interviews, archival materials, and anthropological accounts, this paper uncovers the socio-cultural, political, and economic grounds of infanticide practices among the Gweno people. The paper is built on the argument that infanticide practices served as cultural, socio-political, and economic survival strategy of the Gweno people.

KEY WORDS: Customs, Gweno people, Infant, Infanticide, Traditions, Ugweno

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Infanticide: A Brief Review

There has been no homogeneous definition of infanticide practice among scholars. While other scholars refer to infanticide as an act of killing of an infant under the age of one year (Miller 1987, 96), the term is also used to describe an act of killing new-borns and children (Dallo-Green-Fellows 2005, 751). It is a deliberate and conscious act of killing of a child between the ages of birth and less than one year (Milner 2000, 15-16; Brewis 1992, 317). While scholars like Samuel Kimball consider infanticide as a fatal violence to an infant and children by the existing generation, Schwartz on the other hand insists on age criteria that infanticide is an act of killing of an infant immediately after being born to the age of one year (Kimball 2007, 15; Schwartz-Isser 2000, 1). Infanticide as used in this paper refers to deliberate and circumstantial killings of the new-born babies by the preceding generation. Oral testimonies, travellers' accounts, missionaries, colonial reports, and anthropological accounts show that infanticide was a common practice among the African societies. Societies such as Bemba (Zambia), Baganda (Uganda), Maasai (Tanzania and Kenya), the Yaudapa Enga of New Guinea, Nankani of Ghana, Beng people of Cote d'Ivoire, Zaramo, Sukuma and Shambaa of Tanzania provide better examples. It has been found out that 80 percent of the societies globally had practised infanticide (Denham 2017, 21).

Anthropological accounts of Daly and Wilson reveal that out of sixty studied communities, thirty-nine practised infanticide (Daly-Wilson 1984, 489). Nonetheless, in these communities, the practice was not a problem, but rather a remedy to the challenges that were beyond traditional knowledge and technology. This is to say, infanticide was an accepted practice among the pre-colonial African societies. However, the practice does not debunk the fact that discontents existed within the aforesaid communities. Oral narratives, testimonies, and eyewitness accounts from the Gweno people uncover family, clan, and societal conflicts whenever this traditional practice was about to be carried out. Testimony from one elderly informant reveals the initiatives that were being taken among few individuals who rescued their infants from being killed. The woman attested that she hid her twins from being killed (Msami 2015). Likewise, missionary archive in Usangi documented a long list of baptised children who were brought to the mission in a bid to avoid the Gweno tradition. Intra-community, clan, and family conflicts developed whenever diseases, droughts, hunger, and social problems happened. These problems were considered as misfortunes which arose particularly after discovering that such tradition and customs were evaded. Social pain and humane concern might have been a reason

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for some individuals to get rid of such traditions. In fact, infanticide in Africa was carried out for heterogeneous reasons. For example, the Yoruba of Nigeria, Kedjon of Cameroon, Bunyoro of Uganda, and the Mende of Sierra Leone saw twins as having extra human power and a connection to the spiritual world. Thus, twins required special treatment to avoid societal calamities. The Kikuyu of Kenya saw twins as misfortune for the mother who gave birth to them. Hence, despite the mother's pity, it was decided that all the twins should be killed to save the respective society from disasters (Basden 1937, 183; Ball-Hill 1996, 856; Hobley 1922, 15).

The Zaramo were also known for killing unwanted children known as *Kibi*, a Zaramo name given to a child who during his or her birth, legs came first (breech birth) or a child who did not walk at the proper age or those who grew upper incisors before the lower ones. Unwanted infants also included twins. Most of these were killed immediately after the birth to save the tribe from calamities. Occasionally, the *kibi* were not killed. Instead, they were relocated to another ethnic group. It was traditionally believed that death would befall the tribe if the family did not kill the *kibi* or send them to another ethnic group (Mwaruka 1965, 62). However, the Zaramo and Luguru did not kill a baby girl with such noticed abnormalities. They were considered as benefits to the family because of the bride price paid to her parents when married (Swantz 1965, 35). Similarly, killings were also common among Sukuma, Kuria, Shambaa, and Bahaya societies (Cory 1955, files 17, 119). These communities considered such children as atrocious. They would therefore suffocate the child to death (Cory 1968, file 191). The event was perceived to bring misfortune, even the dead bodies of such babies were buried or thrown far beyond the boundaries of the community's settlement or tossed into a neighbouring pond or swamp. The parents of these children were deemed ritually unclean and had to undergo specific procedures for a ceremonial cleansing process.

Studies on infanticide associate the practice with the importance of a newborn at the adult age, potentials in production, accumulation, and consumption (Koponen 1988; Boserup 1989, 36-37; Drixler 2013, 1-22). The practices are also connected to lack of skills and technology, socio-political dynamics, poverty, food insecurity, limited health care options, and religious factors determined infanticide and a selection of which baby to be killed (Koponen 1988; Kasturi 2004, 117-140; Denham 2014, 157-164). Scholars such as Westhuizen, and Boserup show that in patriarchal societies such as Greece, Arabia and India, boys were more valued than girls in production and during wars. Thus, girls were more susceptible to infanticide than boys (Westhuizen 2009, 174; Boserup 1989, 36-37). Nevertheless, reasons for infanticide

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and the reactions of communities differ around the globe. The discrepancy stemmed from the fact that infanticide was heavily influenced by socio-political, economic, and cultural forces specific in each community, and were mirrored in pre-existing cultural beliefs (Denham 2014). Infanticide was further ascribed to population control, social immorality, and social burden (Heckmann 2002, 1; Spinelli 2003, XVI; Peek 2011, 4). Likewise, religious, and spiritual reasons figure out infanticide practices in different communities. Hans Cory demonstrates that spiritual beliefs based on traditional faith and philosophy made infanticide a cultural and respectable practice among the Sukuma, and Nyamwezi (Cory 1968, file 191).

Despite the detailed explanation and accounts offered by different scholars, little is available on how infanticide served as a socio-cultural, political, and economic strategy among the Gweno people of Kilimanjaro region in northern Tanzania. This paper therefore documents beliefs, uncovers the practice, and reveals the extent to which infanticide tradition was socio-cultural, political, and economic adaptation in this community. While achieving such objective, the paper also demonstrates the circumstances that contributed to the emergence of infanticide practices. Furthermore, it demonstrates how the socio-political and economic dynamics of the early 20th century resulted into the gradual decline of this practice. This study is limited to the Gweno people of Mwanga district in Kilimanjaro region. This study was motivated by the painful surviving memories and legacy left behind by infanticide practices among the Gweno people.

Infanticide Practices among the Gweno people

The Gweno speaking people refers to a small ethnic group found in Mwanga district in Kilimanjaro region in the northern part of Tanzania.¹ They have been identified as North Pare (Kimambo 1967, 25). They occupy the highland and lowland areas of the north Pare region. There has been a conflicting narrative regarding the origin of the Gweno people. The meta-narrative associates the Gweno people with the Pare. However, some narratives claim that the Gweno people originated from Taveta Kenya. Prior to the advent of the colonial period, the Gweno people were under the

¹ Tanzania is made up of two countries, Tanganyika and Zanzibar. Tanganyika gained its independence from British in 1961 and on April 26th, 1964, united with Zanzibar to form the United Republic of Tanzania.

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chiefdoms of Ugweno. The German colonial government named chiefdoms of Ugweno, Usangi, and Same in the north, and Mamba, Gonja, Hedaru, Suji, Chome, and Mbaga as Pare region (Kimambo 1967, 26). The Pare region was divided into two administrative districts: the north pare, administered by Moshi district, and the south Pare, administered by Usambara district (Kimmbo 1967, 25; 1991, 1). During the British administration period, the Ugweno area was put under the jurisdiction of the new Pare district from April 1, 1928, as an independent district (Kimambo 1967, 25). Recently, the Pare region has been divided into Same and Mwanga districts. Mwanga was founded in 1976, after splitting the Pare district into Same and Mwanga. Ugweno is one of the five divisions that make up Mwanga district. The Gweno people are concentrated in four wards within the Ugweno division, namely Shighatini, Msangeni, Kifula, and Mwaniko (Mwanga District Council Profile 2009).



Figure 1: *Huge stones commonly known as the stones of Children (Ighwe Iya Vana/Mkumba Vana) where children were thrown during infanticide practice.*

Photo: author, 21.1.2015

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Due to the geographical location, the people of Ugweno, Usangi and South Pare are separated from each other. Similarly, the Gweno people isolate themselves from South Pare and Usangi. The Gweno people developed social structures and practices which were slightly different from the rest of other groups mentioned above. This explains why there have been no histories of infanticide among inhabitants of the Southern Pare, particularly the Usangi. The Gweno people are geographically close neighbours of the Chagga, the Taita of Kenya, and the Maasai who might have influenced the practices. Traditionally, the Gweno have been predominantly farmers who heavily rely on rain-fed agriculture for their survival. Crops such as coffee and bananas were also cultivated to supplement farming efforts.

Available records, oral narratives and colonial reports demonstrate that infanticide was a social norm among the Gweno people (Simeoni 1977, 8-12; Kimambo 1965-1966, 533; Tanganyika Territory Annual Report 1924, 17-18). The Gweno people held a variety of beliefs that influenced infanticide. Among the Gweno people, there have been two kinds of infanticide for centuries, the killing of a healthy, but unwanted children, and the killing of diseased, misshapen, weak, or sick children. In both types, newborns were killed based on long-held traditional beliefs and customs that had been passed down through generations. Just like other ethnic groups in Tanzania, the Gweno believed that keeping those newborn babies displeased the ancestral spirits. Displeasing the spirits was believed to cause curses, misfortunes, diseases and other social misery and calamities such as drought and famine to the community or a specific clan. It was therefore the duty of the socio-political structures to prevent the community from such difficulties by prohibiting disobedience to traditions and customs. The first category of killed infants were those born with abnormalities and those who were born out of wedlock. The later, just like the former, were believed to bring about curse to the community since they were a result of social immorality and they belonged to no clan. According to Gweno mythology, such newborns were thrown away. The abnormal new babies included those born with six fingers or toes, a malformed ear, or a sexual organ, two sexual organs, albinism, those who touched the soil during delivery, and those with scars appearing after birth. Oral narratives show that many infants killed in Ugweno fell into this group (Msuya 2015; Kimambo 1965-1966, 533; Habari za upare January 1952, 3).

The second category of infants who were killed include prematurely born babies, babies whose feet appeared first during delivery (*Mchwili*), and those whose upper teeth came earlier (*Kigego/ Vigego*) (Simeoni 1977, 8-12; Habari za upare February 1958, 2-3); Koponen 1988, 327-328; Juma 2015; Msuya 2015; Msechu 2015;

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Kinanzaro 2015). This group also includes children born after the normal nine-month period. These were killed shortly after their birth. A child born before or after a typical period was considered to bring fear, bad luck and curse to the family and society. As a result, they were killed shortly after birth to protect the family and society from disasters. An older grandmother whose newborn was a victim explained the extent to which the practice was secretly and hurriedly conducted. She pointed out that the midwives were involved in the killing of her premature baby in the 1950s on similar grounds. Although at that point, the colonial government had already prohibited infanticide practices, the Gweno people secretly continued the practice (Kachenje 2014).

Another category includes the killing of infants who resembled people other than their biological parents and twins. The former were killed as part of the tradition to keep the community, clan, and the family pure from impurities and intrusion (Rev. Mwanga 2015; Rirayo 2015). On the other hand, twins were regarded as a social burden (Koponen 1988, 316; 327- 328). Killing of twins was also a common practice among the Gweno. However, in certain families, the killing was determined by the need of the family. For example, if a family needed a baby boy or girl and the newborn were hetero-gender, one of them was kept meeting the need of the family. Some other families killed both of them because they were afraid of calamities if they kept them (Kimambo 1965-1966, 533). Additionally, if the family did not want to kill both children, the first born was kept and the second born was killed (Rev Mwanga 2015; Rirayo 2015). As a result, after the twins were killed, a mother who had given birth to the twins was divorced by her husband to avoid giving birth to more twins. However, if her husband became deeply involved in love with his wife, traditional healers had to be found to solve the problem. Generally, the effects of killing twins among the Gweno made it difficult to find twins among the elder families who had survived to date.

Furthermore, Gweno traditions and customs forbade keeping a child born with a placenta and whose midwives spotted an opening space on the placenta during delivery. Such an infant was also killed shortly after birth. This abnormality during delivery was mostly associated with resentment, animosity, and envy on the part of the midwives, especially if they were from the same polygamous marriage (Kimambo 1965-1966, 533; Habari za upare January 1952, 3).

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Figure 2: *Another stone of children (Ighwe Iya Vana/Mkumba Vana).* Photo: author, 10.1.2015

Moreover, as per the Gweno traditions and customs, if the midwives failed to carry a baby during delivery, it was a negative sign for the family and society. This midwife was given the task of killing such infant to save the family and society from disasters (Silayo 2015; Msuya 2015). Also, a newborn from a mother who had a bleeding nose during her pregnancy was susceptible to infanticide. It was generally believed that if the child survives would later incur epilepsy (Kachenje 2015; Msuya 2015; Kalerwa 2015). Epilepsy was regarded as a sign of curse in the family.

The killing of infants also targeted the newborns from the parents who did not attend the Gweno initiation ceremonial customs. This was the case when a man who did not attend initiation rite known as '*Ngasu ya Kighonu*' in Gweno language impregnated a woman. The newly born infant was named '*Mshundi*' in the Gweno language meaning "an egg without a cock." This infant was also killed immediately after birth (Kimambo 1965-1966, 533). In the same vein, a woman who became

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pregnant prior to initiation was expelled from her home and named '*Kighiria*' in Gweno language which means "a woman who gave birth out of wedlock." When '*Kighiria*' was driven out of the house (*boma*), she was not allowed to pass through the common door used by the family. Instead, she had to pass through an opening space made at the back of the house. An elder member of the clan had to slaughter a sheep, and the offal contents were thrown at the opening space and sealed, implying that she would never see her relatives again (Kimambo 1965-1966, 533).



Figure 3: *A back face of the huge stone used as a way of climbing to the top of the stone where children with misfortunes were thrown. Photo: author, 26.1.2015*

Therefore, the socio-cultural beliefs among the Gweno people appeared to determine what child and how the killing was to be executed. It is evident that when the new-born was without any abnormality, free from socio-cultural barriers, condition, and circumstances, it was considered a blessing to the family. Such a baby survived. The newborn baby family had to prepare a big celebration. The

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celebration involved popular songs such as '*Mwana atoroka ikamba*,' which means a child has successfully crossed the rock (Habari za upare February 1952, 5). The belief systems were under the auspices of witchdoctors, spiritual leaders and elders who claimed that normal children were fit for survival and could not bring misfortunes and calamities to the Gweno society (Habari za upare February 1952, 5).

Executing Infanticide Tradition

As previously stated, Gweno traditions and customs required the killing of any deformed children, as well as any child that appeared to inflict misery in the family and society in general. All detected defective children were carried to the death location, known in Gweno language as '*Ighwe Iya Vana* or *Mkumba Vana*,' (a local word for stone of children) which were massive rocks where deformed children were dumped (Elihuruma 2015; Rirayo 2015; Elibariki 2015; Silayo 2015; Habari za upare February 1958, 3). The photos (see figure 1 and 2) illustrate some of the massive rocks found in Ugweno known as *Mkumba Vana* or *Ighwe Iya Vana* that portray scenes in which children were thrown.

At the top of these stones, (see figure 1, 2 and 3) there is a place that looks like a plate where a child was taken to and left there while asleep, and when it woke up, it rolled down and died.

According to oral traditions and customs of the time, a baby was taken to the death spot alongside the utensils used to feed it before being left there while soundly asleep. The utensils included the baby cot, cooking pot, spoon, and a bowl (see figure 4) (Elibariki 2015; Juma 2015; Mnzava 2015; Elihuruma 2015). Therefore, after ensuring that a child was well fed, parents also ensured that any risks that could lead to death were considered. Then they left the baby alone and did not look back after making all the necessary arrangements to ensure that such child would die. The parents would naturally be in excruciating discomfort because of this exercise. Traditions and customs, on the other hand, never allowed parents to mourn for a kid since they had thrown a child who was most cursed to save the family and society in general from calamity (Habari za upare February 1958, 3).

There was a narrative of a child named Nakijwa who was left on the *Mkumba Vana/Ighwe Iya Vana* during the period when infanticide was beginning to decline. The matter was reported to the public after Nakijwa was thrown to the death spot, and

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good Samaritans went to pick her up before she woke up and rolled down, thus falling prey to animals.



Figure 4: *One of the traditional cooking pots used to prepare food for a child before being thrown away.*
Photo: author, 26.1.2015

As a result, the good Samaritans, who were Christian families, adopted and raised Nakijwa. As time passed, her parents came to discover that their child was being reared by another family. Nakijwa was said to have a striking resemblance with her parents, which prompted her parents to seek for her. The parents decided to seek advice from a witch doctor regarding what they had witnessed. The witch doctor said:

“This child [Nakijwa] did not finish the required nursing period. She was terminated because of her mother’s pregnancy problems, which resulted in a preterm birth. This disaster could have been the result of a purposeful error made by us [the Gweno]. We made a mistake by allowing Semsu [Nakijwa] to live with six fingers” (Habari za upare February 1958, 3).

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Due to this divination, Nakijwa's biological parents believed the witch doctor's claims that Nakijwa was their true daughter, and she was thrown into *Mkumba vana/Ighwe Iya vana*, where a kid was adopted and reared by good Samaritans. In that regard, the church priests and good Samaritans resolved to tell Nakijwa and her biological parents the truth about her life. The priest said:

"The two were your biological parents. There is no question that they committed this heinous act because of the devil's infliction of absolute darkness on them. You must keep in mind, though, that you are not the only child who has been abandoned. A few children were also abandoned on the rock to die. Nashengena had thirteen children, but only two females survived the infanticide. One died of premature pregnancy difficulties, while ten were subjected to infanticide. Because of the difficulties, you were found to be responsible for the catastrophe and were sentenced to death. You were saved by God through Abraham [guardian], who was already a Christian convert. As your true father, respect Abraham. Love your father Sembua and mother Nashengena as well, because they, too, have abandoned their ancient ancestral gods. Forgive them; when they put you into the jungle, they were unaware of their wrongdoings. In the sense that they have repented, they are now different creatures. Formerly, you were being called Semsu, meaning, "born alone" (Habari za upare February 1958, 3).

Nakijwa's story illustrates how the colonial authorities and missionaries worked together to eliminate infanticide among the Gweno. The Gweno society had long been practising infanticide. However, infanticide began to decline immediately after the advent of missionaries and the establishment of colonial government that began to educate the Gweno, and the practice eventually came to an end in Ugweno in the 1930s.

Infanticide: A Socio-Cultural, Political and Economic Survival Strategy

Infanticide practices in many societies appeared to be rooted into the socio-cultural, economic, and political circumstances where the society evolved. To understand and make sense out of traditions, customs and beliefs that governed infanticide practices requires appropriate interpretation and contextual understanding of the tradition, belief, myth, verbal expression, local pre-existing knowledge of the people. This would enable us to avoid what Denham referred to as "misconceptions and mystification of infanticide". Thus, making sense out of infanticide practices among the Gweno people, studying the traditions, myth and beliefs by analysing and

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examining the local context and experience, is indisputable. To use Denham's words, making sense out of infanticide practices requires a proper examination of the societies' "social structure, history, myths, ancestors, the management of misfortune, and conceptions of deviance, illness, and well-being" (Denham 2014, 26). This would enable to establish proper dynamics of infanticide in relation to the socio-economic, political, and cultural factors. It is evident from the findings that infanticide among the Gweno people was potentially a socio-economic, political, and cultural survival strategy. By analysing and examining the traditional beliefs and customs, and making sense out of such beliefs, it is undeniable that the Gweno people strongly held this tradition due to the above-mentioned dynamics. The approach of making sense out of culture and traditional beliefs is not quite new. Scholars such as Smith, Lin, and Mendoza in their discussion about the influence of culture and belief in dealing with human health pointed out that:

"Humans in general have an inherent need to make sense out of and explain their experiences. This is especially true when they are experiencing suffering and illness. In the process of this quest for meaning, culturally shaped beliefs play a vital role in determining whether a particular explanation and associated treatment plan will make sense to the patient...." (Smith-Lin-Mendoza 1993, 38).

Although the context from which Smith, Lin, and Mendoza referred to was related to the treatment of mental disorder, it can be applied in different contexts. This approach is applicable only to health complications and treatment of diseases but also to every difficult phenomenon that the society or community cannot easily comprehend. This approach is in line with the concept of *space of multiple facets* which produces ideology in the society. The concept of *space* as developed by Lefebvre and as expanded by Karplus and Meir provides an understanding on how cultural values, customs, beliefs, tradition, and ideologies are created from lived experiences of such community (Lefebvre 1991, 83; Karpulus-Meir 2013, 25). According to Karplus and Meir:

"Space is simultaneously produced both as a concrete entity and as an abstract entity; it is both perceived and conceived, and it is also, and not least, emotionally, and poetically infused with symbolism and meaning derived from the lived experience of everyday life" (Karpulus-Meir 2013, 25).

Even though Karplus and Meir (2013) were correlating the concept of space and its influence on beliefs, values and customs, its applicability is also relevant to agricultural communities such as the Gweno people. In this perspective, the concept

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of multiple layers of space as put forward by Lefebvre (1974) includes the lived space where experiences of that society resulted into the development of beliefs, tradition and ideologies which bound the society and its space. It is from this ground that the Gweno infanticide practices and other related beliefs and traditions could not be without meaning and relevance because they were a result of the lived space where experience resulted into traditions, customs, and other related beliefs.

It can therefore be argued that the community's challenges and experiences necessitated what can be termed as societal accountability in adhering to traditions, customs, and belief systems. For instance, infanticide was directly linked to political tensions between the two Gweno clans, namely the Washana and Wasuya. These two clans had been at enmity for a long time. The first were iron forgers, whereas the second were farmers (peasants). Cattle confiscation, power mongering, and competitiveness were the main causes of the battle between the two (Maghimbi 1994, 24-25). Political tensions between the two clans which resulted into Washana being defeated by Wasuya (Maghimbi 1994, 24-25) left a living experience where infanticide emerged as a tradition. It was due to this Washana defeat that Wasuya controlled Ugweno and declared the killing of all baby boys from the Washana clan (Kimambo 1969, 50). The killings were meant to restrict and weaken the Washana politically that they would not have able men to confront and fight wars (Maghimbi 1994, 24-25). Such killings might legitimize the expulsion of the Shana clan by impending new generation who would dominate the Ugweno. In this regard, infanticide practice was more of a political strategy that evolved out of political tensions between different clans in Ugweno.

In addition, the existence of political tensions and wars necessitated the presence of able-bodied men. For instance, a series of battles between the Ugweno and the Chagga over resources ownership and cattle confiscation demanded the presence of well-able-bodied persons in the society. These able-bodied persons in the society, as opposed to physically deformed or abnormal people, were expected to participate in wars for the survival and wellbeing of the Gweno society. For instance, the killing of illegitimate children, including those who were seen not to resemble their parents was done to avoid raising traitors who later would suffocate the Gweno community. Also, political tensions and wars increased the social difficulties such as shortage of food which made killing of twins, impaired, or infants with signs of illness a norm. This was partly because the families became unable to provide food for its members. This also informs why both male and female infants were killed (Stange-Oyster-

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Sloan 2011, 751). The motive behind such a decision was to lessen the burden of dependants.

Infanticide practices among the Gweno emerged and developed as a strategy against famine. Since famine had resulted into tremendous loss of able-bodied men, the society required the physically capable individuals who would be producers than consumers. The existence of phrases such as '*Njaa ya Mnyime*, barren hunger', '*Njaa ya Kigogo*, hunger of *kigogo*/banana roots,' '*Njaa ya Kilombero*, hunger from Kilombero,' and '*Njaa ya Mkebe*' (a local word meaning a tool for measurements) among the Gweno proves terrible experiences that the Gweno went through. According to the oral traditions, the Gweno people experienced the sorts of famine throughout the pre-colonial period. For example, barren famine was experienced throughout the pre-colonial period but came to an end in the early colonial period (Banduka 1994, 7; Msami 2015; Elihuruma 2015; Haikael 2015). As a result, the term "barren famine," or "*Njaa ya Mnyime*," was coined to describe how people were compelled to eat anything they could get at the expense of their children. People ate banana roots because of prolonged famine during the *kigogo*/banana root famine which was unusual for the Gweno people. Therefore, the Gweno people were obliged to migrate to the plains in quest of irrigation schemes that would help them survive due to their extreme famine. The crisis pushed the Gweno people to develop a social, political, and economic ideology that allowed them to prevent the potential outbreak of famine. This justified the execution of all illegitimate children who were unable to participate in the production activities. As a result, all malformed children were subjected to infanticide, not only to reduce the number of dependants but also to prevent disasters such as wars, diseases, and starvation as they believed that the occurrence of dry seasons, for example, was due to the presence of deformed children in the household and the society at large (Msami 2015; Kinanzaro 2015). Even though Kilombero famine/*njaa ya Kilombero* was experienced at a time when infanticide had been abolished, the people felt that they were destined for wars, starvation, and other misfortunes because of their families' and society's treatment of the deformed infants. Since the government set out the rules against infanticide and other activities that influenced infanticide, the family and society abandoned it.

Furthermore, the infanticide tradition and the associated belief appeared to be constructed based on the lived space. The Gweno people drew the belief from difficulties and inability to deal with abnormality, mental illness, physical impairment, and any other biological and physical complications. Thus, to tackle many people with abnormality in the community infanticide was adopted as a community tradition.

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This was a social or community accountability for the survival and well-being of the community. For instance, low level technology and skills to handle premature babies, and those babies with deformations made the Gweno people to rely on tradition to decide the fate of such newborns. In the same perspective, Koponen pointed out that the challenges in birth spacing in the pre-colonial times made infanticide a social norm (Koponen 1986, 43; 1988, 323-324). This was because the cultural taboos created conditions that facilitated the presence of reasonable childbirth space. If social traditions were not followed, infanticide was an alternative way to overcome difficulties and health complications in keeping children with no significant interval in terms of age (Mvungi 2015; Rev Maeisa 2015). The Gweno people, for example, were operating to a four-year gap. If unwanted pregnancy happened and abortion was unmanageable, the unwanted newly born infant was subjected to infanticide (Koponen 1988, 327-328). According to oral traditions, it was a taboo for the husband to have sexual contact with his wife until the infant had been weaned, which took two to three years (TNA, NO 18881). Killing infants was the only technique justified under traditions, customs, and cultural norms. It can therefore be argued that the lack of scientific method to deal with complications of birth, diseases, and lack of knowledge justified the killings.

By examining the Gweno social structure in relation to its experiences of illness and misfortune on the one hand, and the interplay between the socio-cultural and psychological factors on the other, it is an undeniable fact that infanticide was the sole alternative to deal with incomprehensible circumstances by relying on socio-cultural sets of beliefs.

This explains why superstitious beliefs, as an important cultural element, played a significant role in influencing and shaping the infanticide practices. Tanganyika territory annual Reports of 1924 pointed out that infanticide among the Gweno was linked to traditional management of disasters, misfortunes, and wars (Tanganyika Territory Annual Reports 1924, 17-18; Mrema 2015; Msuya 2015; Kinanzaro 2015; Mvungi 2015). Moreover, a Gweno mythology signified psychosocial skills and community perception towards uncommon phenomenon such as irregularity during giving birth or child development. For instance, the myth that an elderly woman from Wafangavo clan of Ugweno, a traditional healer, turned Taita warriors into stones, intended to respond to the psychological motivation towards traumatic war experience that the Gweno went through. According to this myth, this traditional healer used her magical charms and succeeded in turning Taita warriors into stone. It is said that the medication worked so well that all of the soldiers turned into stones,

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putting an end to the battle between the Gweno and the Taita. The researcher visited the location, despite its remoteness. As the picture indicates (see figure 5), the site had fateful stones which appeared to relate to the narrative in appearance. They were several of them grouped in one area with no grains surrounding except one little tree that was thought to grow in an inhabited region. Despite difficulties in verifying the objectivity of this myth, the proper understanding of the political, social, and economic context that the Gweno people went through to derive their reliance in beliefs to handle incomprehensible circumstances such as drought, extended wars and diseases.



Figure 5: Historical stones commonly known as Varavira's stones (*Maghwe gha Varavira*). These stones are thought to have been people from Taita who were turned into stones during the Gweno-Taita battle. Photo: author, 10.1.2015

The further reflection that infanticide among the Gweno people was more rooted into the socio-cultural, economic, and political context was the arrival of missionaries and the advent of colonialism in the 20th century which led to the introduction of health

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services by the missionaries and colonial prohibition of the Gweno customs and traditions that encouraged infanticide practices (TNA, AB1/1733). Missionaries rescued some of the victims by abducting those infants. Most of them later became the earliest Christians in the Ugweno (KMRA Book 1, 1-11). Some of them also served as informants during fieldwork. Together with missionaries' religious teachings, solutions to unconceivable phenomenon, the changing of socioeconomic and political situation contributed significantly to the gradual abolition of infanticide. It is indicated that by the 1930s, the practice had significantly diminished. The 1931 census revealed that the population was 56.431 people. The number had quadrupled by the 1932 (Westhuizen 2009, 174; 177-178). However, it should be noted that neither the missionaries nor the colonial authority had any indigenous Gweno who were willing to speak out against infanticide. As a result, the anti-infanticide campaigns were hampered by the Gweno's lack of collaboration with the missionaries and the colonial authority. Despite the difficulties, both the German and British governments continued anti-infanticide initiatives, as most personnel in the colonial governments and good Samaritans continued their struggle against infanticide. As a result, by the 1930s, missionaries and the colonial administration had succeeded in ending infanticide among the Gweno people.

Conclusion

This research uncovered Gweno infanticide practices. The paper demonstrates that infanticide was common in many communities, including the Gweno, from pre-colonial through the early colonial times. Prior to the arrival of capitalist ideas in African countries, social, political, economic, and cultural ideologies influenced the infanticide practices. The Tanzanian societies by the 19th century were the result of both structural continuity and change brought about by historically more recent circumstances. Structural variables such as environmental restrictions and culturally based social processes that had formed over the course of the society's history regulated the functioning of things critical to the society's continuity. Therefore, only internally developed structures could allow externally driven changes to take effect (Koponen 1988, 179).

Economically, the Gweno people mostly practised artisan/craft and peasant modes of production, both of which contributed in one way or another to the emergence of superstructure ideology that led to infanticide practices in the society. Due to this superstructure ideology, all defective children were expelled from the society, as the

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society only required capable people who could assist in production and fighting wars. Many pre-colonial African societies believed that retaining the deformed children in the family and society would lead to disasters such as famine, sickness, war, and other calamities beyond their control. As a result, the deformed children were killed by their parents in collaboration with those in positions of power, and the parents were not allowed to weep for their children despite their agonising feelings. This is because they believed that they were doing the right thing to protect their family and society from misfortunes (George-Abel-Miller 1992, 1156).

Infanticide practice among the Gweno people, on the other hand, has been a cultural and survival strategy because the society struggled to maintain safety and security of its people. As a result, superstructure ideology devised all techniques to ensure that the society stayed safe and that everyone was involved in both production and resistance against the neighbouring society. Similarly, poor technology contributed to infanticide among the Gweno people and all pre-capitalist communities because the societies lacked other technological methods of controlling pregnancies, hence infanticide was used as a population control strategy. Thus, infanticide was used to choose able-bodied members of society who would be valuable to their society rather than becoming dependants. Infanticide was eradicated in many pre-capitalists' African tribes, including the Ugweno, when missionaries and subsequent colonialists arrived in the early 1900s. Even though infanticide was officially abolished in the 1930s, it still exists in the minds of the people since it posed a threat to many families in Ugweno and other societies that practised it.

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