

The *migawo*: Peripheral Spirit Possession and Christian Prejudice

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Introduction

The spirit possession guild, known as *migawo* (*migabo*) which is found among the Kimbu and southern Nyamwezi of West Central Tanzania, is not so well known as the *buswezi* cult with which it has affinities. This is scarcely surprising since there exists no detailed description of the *migawo* guild. The purpose of this article is to take a first step towards filling this gap¹. It also attempts a historical and sociological study, using analytical concepts which emerged in the recent controversy over spirit possession between I. M. LEWIS and P. J. WILSON. Without accepting LEWIS's almost exclusive application of "social peripherality" to women deprived of power in male dominated societies, the idea that there is a correlation between the insecurity of those who succumb to spirit possession and the peripheral character of the cult itself, appears to have some foundation. According to LEWIS, a peripheral

¹ This article is partly the fruit of a first period of fieldwork among the Kimbu between 1964 and 1967, but it owes more to a second period from November to January, 1968-1969 when a specific enquiry into the *migawo* was made. A very valuable source of information was Mr. Njelu E. Mulugala who assisted in the enquiry and who, during the research, was initiated into both *migawo* and *shetani* guilds.