THE SACRED MŨGUMO TREE: REVISITING THE ROOTS OF GĨKŨYŨ COSMOLOGY AND WORSHIP

A case study of the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ of Kĩrĩnyaga District in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to examine the Gĩkũyũ traditional cosmology and worship, taking the *Mũgumo* (*Ficus natalensis / Ficus thonningii*), a sacred tree among the Gĩkũyũ as the key to understanding their cosmology. The research explores in depth the Gĩkũyũ religio-philosophical world-view as an advent to preparing the ground for understanding why the sacred *Mũgumo* played a paramount role in the life of the Gĩkũyũ people. In the study of the sacred *Mũgumo* the thesis examines a three-tier relationship relevant and integral to understanding Gĩkũyũ cosmology: *Ngai* (God) as the *Mũmbi* (the creator) together with the *Ngoma* (ancestors); the Gĩkũyũ people, and finally with nature.

The thesis focuses on the sacred *Mũgumo* tree, taken as the axis of the Gĩkũyũ religio-political configuration. Consequently, crucial questions are asked: what are the characteristics of this tree? What religious and political role does it play in Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship? In other words, what are its religio-political functions? What ceremonies and rituals were conducted around it and how does this sacred tree and the rituals associated with it validate the Gĩkũyũ claim to land, political power, religious hegemony and identity?

Using mainly the theories of V.Y Mudimbe, B. Berman, R. Horton, and an analysis of data collected in the Gĩcũgũ Division, Kenya, the thesis contends that the Colonial government, the Missionaries, the African scholars and the Gĩkũyũ elders collaborated in the forging and invention of the Gĩkũyũ identity. Thus emerges the present image of *Ngai* and the Gĩkũyũ as we know them today. The crucial question addressed is whether this conception is congruent to the original Gĩkũyũ understanding of *Ngai*. The findings indicate that the sacred *Mũgumo* was mythically veiled both with religio-political power and used by the elders for social and religio-political control of the group. They also strongly indicate that it was this religio-political symbiosis which was celebrated, ritualised and revitalised around the sacred *Mũgumo* tree. Finally, following the research findings, the thesis shows that the sacred *Mũgumo* prepared the ground for the evangelisation in the Gĩkũyũ land and the continuation of political hegemony based on power-knowledge and control. This critical analysis will lead us on the one hand to demythologise the colonial and missionary discourses based on epistemological dynamics about Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship which were in fact meant to create an identity of the oppositional "Other", and on the other hand provide conceptual tools for a contextualised evangelisation and the study of local religions.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS

CCM- Catholic Church Mission

CMS- Church Missionary Society

COR-Colonial Office Records

CSM- Church of Scotland Mission

CSsp-Holy Ghost fathers.

DC-District Commissioner

DO-Division Officer

DP-Democratic party

Fr.-Father

GBM- Green Belt Movement

IMC- Consolata Missionaries

KANU-Kenya African National Union

KCA- Kikuyu Central Association

KLC- Kenya Land Commission

KNA-Kenya National Archives

MHM- Mil Hill Missionaries

NGO-Non Governmental Organisation

UKLC-United Kikuyu language Committee

GLOSSARY

Ahoi/ Mũhoi- tenant at will

Athomi- Christian converts/reader

Athuri-old men

Coro-ceremonial horn

Gĩchandĩ- Gĩkũyũ gourd with hieroglyphic work depicting its cosmology

Gĩkũyũ karĩng'a- pure Gĩkũyũ

Gĩthaka-land

Gĩthitũ- protective charm

Gũcũkũrithia- worship

Gũthĩnja- slaughter

Ira-diatomite/white soil

Iregi-rega (refuse/revolt)- Gĩkũyũ generation set

Iria- milk

Irimũ-ogre/mythical man-eater

Irua- circumcision and all its ceremonies

Itimũ-spear-Kamatimũ-council of warriors

Itĩri/Matĩri- field/circumcision or dancing ground

Ituĩka- from tuĩka(v)be cut. A traditional Gĩkuyu relio-political ceremony of handing over the government from one generation to the next

Itũra/Matũra- scattered homesteads-villages

Kabari/kahari-hill, one location in Gĩcũgũ division-Kirinyaga District

Kipande- identity card, in colonial times, it was a metal container containing identity card

Kĩbeco-wooden bludgeon carried by boys' candidates for circumcision

Kĩhĩ/kĩbĩ- uncircumcised boy

Kĩrĩgũ-uncircumcised girl

Kĩrĩma-mountain

Kĩrĩra-'tribal' lore

Kũhoya- implore/ask/beg

Mambura-ceremonies

Maguta-lotion/fat

Mathathi-from the tree of Mũthathimwa-st. john's wart-one of the Gĩkũyũ generation set

Mathĩnjĩro-platform used for sacrifices

Mbarĩ- lineage

Mbĩa/hĩa- horn of the cow traditionally used for drinking beer

Mbura-rain

Mbũgũ- divining counters

Muma- oath

Mũbĩro-a series of pre-circumcision dances in the traditional Gĩkũyũ

Mũciĩ-homestead

Mũgai-divider

Mũgariũ-black army worm/caterpillar

Mũgumo/Mĩgumo-*Ficus natalensis* (Sacred tree among the Gĩkũyũ people)

Mũgwanja-seven-used by the Gĩkũyũ to describe the part of the human and animal body-shoulder and some ribs

Mũhingo/Mũbingo-a period when all circumcisions ceremonies were closed

Mũhoi-tenant at will/ tenant in friendship

Mũhĩrĩga/Mũbĩrĩga- clan

Mũigwithania- reconciler

Mũgokoro-Magic powder

Mũmbi (kũmba)-to mould/create-therefore creator. Name of the founding mother of the Gĩkũyũ group. Also one name for the Gĩkũyũ deity

Mũndũ mũgo- medicine man/diviner

Mũngĩki-from mũingĩ (masses)-religio-political sect which came to force in the 80s fighting widespread corruption, poverty, political and religious oppression by the ruling hegemony

Mũratina-(*Kigeria Africana* tree)-name of the native blew made from the fruit of this tree

Mũrekio-messager/later translated by the missionaries as an angel of God

Mũruithia-circumciser

Mũthaiga-magic spell

Mũthĩgi-walking stick

Mũthũngũ-European-white/ also nyakerũ

Mũtiri-sponsor/supporter during circumcision

Mũturi-blacksmith

Mũtumia-woman/wife

Mũtĩ-tree

Mwakenya- political pressure group in the 80s that fought against one party regime

Mwene-Nyaga- another name for the Gĩkũyũ deity

Ndamathia-legedary dragon-later translated by the missionaries as the dragon of the apocalypse

Ndathimi-blessings

Ndawa-general name for medicine

Ndemi-generation set-the cutters

Ndungata- a servant, dependent

Ngai- one principal name for Gĩkũyũ deity

Ngemi- ululations

Ngoma-Ancestors-aria makomire tene (those who have gone before us), later translated by the missionaries as devil or Satan

Ngwati- pendent foreskin left during circumcision meant to stimulate women during sexual intercourse

Njaguti- a servant who receives his food but no wages

Nyoka/Njoka- snake

Nyũmba-house/family

Riika- initiation set or 'regiment'. In the precolonial Gĩkũyũ, a group of people circumcised at the same period

Taatha-entrails

Thabuni-soap

Thĩrĩga-ochre.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to examine the Gĩkũyũ[1] traditional[2] cosmology and worship, taking the *Mũgumo* (*Ficus natalensis / Ficus thonningii*), a sacred tree among the Gĩkũyũ as the key to understanding their cosmology. It also explores the ceremonies and rituals that were conducted around it and how the sacred tree and the rituals associated with it validated the Gĩkũyũ claim to land, political power, religious hegemony and identity. Finally, following the research findings, the thesis examines how the sacred Mũgumo prepared the ground for the new evangelisation in the Gĩkũyũ land and the continuation of political hegemony based on power-knowledge and control in Kenya today.

Exploring the place of trees in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology, what has come out clearly in the Gĩkũyũ arboreal knowledge is the fact that people use 'trees symbolically to make concrete and material the abstract notion of life'.[3] In doing this, the Agĩkũyũ demonstrate that nature is not an 'empty canvass' but rather a sophisticated one in which their culture, society, politics and religion are constructed. Thus, the work explores the holistic approach of the people towards the environment. In fact, it argues that in planting trees, the Gĩkũyũ would be planting a 'seed of peace' where religio-political stability could be realised and the environment managed sustainably. Thus, taking care of the environment within this arboreal affiliation is tantamount to taking care of the land and family so that when the environment is destroyed, plundered or mismanaged their quality of life is undermined.[4]

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[1] The word, 'Gĩkũyũ' stands for both the people and the language. The term is also synonymous to 'Agĩkũyũ' (people) and in some scholarly works, 'Kikuyu'. However, in this work, I have opted for the 'Gĩkũyũ' for both the language and people.

[2] Traditional does not mean here 'frozen' in time and space or an iconological continuity with some remote 'idyllic' past but rather that which is seen as reconfiguring with time, situation and space and thus in fluidity. I am putting the emphasis on traditional cosmology because I am aware that today, the majority of the Gĩkũyũ have been converted to different religions (Christianity and Islam). However, there is still a good number of people that is fundamentally faithful to the traditional religion even though Christianity continues to influence them.

[3] Rival, L, 'Trees, from Symbols of Life and Regeneration to Political Artefacts', in Rival, L., ed., *The Social Life of Trees: Anthropological Perspective on Tree Symbolism*, Oxford: Berg, 2001(1998), p.3; Jones, O & Cloke, P., *Tree Cultures: The Place of Trees and Trees in their Place*, Oxford, Berg, 2002.

[4] Using a similar philosophy, the Green Belt Movement has helped to empower women from grassroots through the process of planting trees as a symbol of political struggle. Maathai, W., *The Green Belt Movement: Sharing the Approach and the Experience*, New York: Lantern Books, 2003(1985).

The affinity between the Gĩkũyũ and trees, their knowledge of and use of them for herbal medicine, fruits, boundary markers, 'post offices', sanctuaries, abode of Ngai[5] and *ngoma*[6] (ancestors) and symbol of wealth demonstrate that in their relationship with them, there is more than an analogy. In fact, what comes out strongly from our research is an anthropomorphisation of trees with particular parts of the body using euphemisms. In addition, many places are still named after specific indigenous trees. The sacred Mũgumo is crucially important to the Gĩkũyũ people since unlike other indigenous trees, it is above all the symbol of power, life and fertility. It represents the sacred continuity of the Gĩkũyũ spiritual, cosmic and physical world. Quintessentially, there is, in the traditional Gĩkũyũ cosmology an implicit closeness and interconnectedness between the people, trees, sexuality and gender as the thesis will show. It is from this religio-political affiliation between the Gĩkũyũ and nature that the Mũgumo tree acquires its prominence, a key to understanding how power hegemony was exercised in the pre-colonial, colonial and even postcolonial Kenya especially within the Gĩkũyũ society.

The thesis therefore focuses on the sacred Mũgumo tree, taken as the axis of the Gĩkũyũ religio-political configuration. The sacred Mũgumo, as the research findings demonstrates, is the *'axis mundi'* of the Gĩkũyũ people. However, it is not the 'navel of the earth', a universal pillar, a meeting point of heaven, earth and hell, with its roots sinking into the underworld and its branches traversing the multiple world planes as depicted by M. Eliade.[7] The sacred Mũgumo is the axis due to its religio-political and symbolic role it plays within the Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship and not the whole cosmos.

Consequently, crucial research questions are asked:

a) What is the nature of the Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship?

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[5] The Gĩkũyũ have different names for deity: Ngai, Mũrungu, Mwene-Nyaga, Mwene-ndĩ (thĩ), Kĩthuku, etc. Of these names, Ngai is commonly used.

[6] *Ngoma* means the departed spirits. It is from the word *koma/gũkoma* (to sleep) and literally translated as *arĩa marĩ thĩ* (those who are in the ground). It refers to the belief that when somebody died, his/her spirit went to the bowels of the earth. These ancestors, although in another world, could nevertheless be called upon, spoken to, and prayed to in the homestead at anytime of the day or night. Kenyatta, J., *Facing Mount Kenya*, Nairobi: Kenway Publications, 1995(1938) pp.231-233, pp.266-67; Leakey, L.S.B., *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903*, London: Academic Press, 1977, p.1105-1107; Lambert, H.E., *The System of Land Tenurein the Kikuyu Land Unit*, Cape Town: School of African Studies University of Cape Town, 1963(1949), p. 120.

[7] For an extensive study on Eliade's understanding on the cosmic tree, see, Olson, C., *The Theory and Method in the Study of Religion*, London: Thomson, 2003; Eliade, M., *Histories of Religious Ideas*, *vol.3.*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1985; Sullivan, L., 'Axis Mundi', *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, *Vol.2*, edt.by Lindsay Jones, Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA., 2005, pp.712-713.

b) What are the characteristics, myths and religio-political functions of the Sacred Mũgumo tree?

c) What ceremonies and rituals were conducted around it and how does the tree and the rituals associated with it validate the Gĩkũyũ claim to land, political power, religious hegemony and identity? And finally,

d) In places where the worship around the sacred Mũgumo was, what symbol replaced it?

Moreover, the thesis explores in depth the Gĩkũyũ cosmology as an advent to preparing the ground for understanding why the sacred Mũgumo tree played a paramount role in the life of the Gĩkũyũ people. In the study of the sacred Mũgumo, the thesis examines a three-tier relationship relevant and integral to understanding Gĩkũyũ cosmology: *Ngai* (God) as the *Mũmbi* (the creator) together with the *Ngoma*; the Gĩkũyũ people, and finally with nature. It also critically explores the myths, songs and rituals associated with the Mũgumo examining how they validate the political and religious power polity based on dialectic discourses and contradictions but which nevertheless have continued to sustain the Gĩkũyũ society, giving them a place within the podium of power contestation in Kenya today. Thus, the ritual of *Ituĩka* (alternative changing of traditional government e.g. from generation-set of Mwangi or Irũngũ), the *Irua* (circumcision especially for boys)[8] and *Kũhoya Ngai mbura* (imploring Ngai for rain) are crucial to our study of the Mũgumo and the Gĩkũyũ.

In order to explore fully the complexities of the Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship, our study has used mainly three theories: V.Y. Mudimbe (power-knowledge), B. Berman (Constructivist) and R. Horton (intellectualist theory). Mudimbe argues that colonialism and colonisation in Africa meant organisation and arrangement so that Africa was eventually transformed into European constructs. This process created dual epistemological ethnocentrism, one based on epistemological filiations while the other one based on an ideological connection.[9] Mudimbe's theory is important because through it, one can understand the mechanisms of power and control that were exercised in colonial Kenya. Berman's theory highlights the discourses of power in the process of colonisation and how these discourses shaped the formation of various identities. Through Berman's theory, one understands that Gĩkũyũ ethnicity emerged because of

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[8] Concerning the *Irua* ritual, our work focuses primarily on the boys (excluding the Southern Gĩkũyũ group) although most of the rites and cerebrations involved both sexes.

[9] Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the order of Knowledge*, London: James Currey, 1988, pp.4 & 27.

intricate cultural amalgamation of colonial intrusion and African response.[10] Finally, R. Horton theory[11] enlightens our study of rituals around the sacred Mũgumo tree and a clear understanding of Gĩkũyũ cosmology. The thesis not only creates a space for dialogue between these three theories but also blends them together to enrich our research on and understanding of the Mũgumo and the Gĩkũyũ people. Using especially the theories of Mudimbe, Berman, Horton, and an analysis of data collected in the Gĩcũgũ Division, Kĩrĩnyaga District, Kenya, the thesis contends that the Colonial government, the Missionaries, the African scholars and the Gĩkũyũ elders collaborated in the forging and invention of the Gĩkũyũ identity.

It also demonstrates that through the discourses that arose from these affiliations, subaltern[12] groups like KCA (Kikuyu Central Association), Mau Mau and currently the religio-political sects like Mũngĩki[13] emanated, all fighting for a reverse hegemony. The study of the Mũgumo vis à vis Gĩkũyũ people is relevant because through its characteristics, rituals performed around it and its role in religion and politics, one clearly understands how power hegemony based on the epistemological categories of the 'Self' and the 'Other' continues to influence 'religion and the politics of the belly' among the Gĩkũyũ people and the rest of the Kenyans today.

Essentially, the thesis demonstrates that prominent ethnographers used and manipulated their position (power) and knowledge of the local tradition to shape their own individual and political agendas and even to invent the image of a people called

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[10] Berman, B., *Control and Crises in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination*, London: James Currey, 1990; Berman, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism', *African Affairs*, 97, 1998, p.305.

[11] Horton, R., *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West: Essays on Magic, Religion and Science*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 221-258; Horton, 'African Traditional Thought and Western science' in Grinker, R. & Steiner, C., *Perspectives on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History and Representation*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997.

[12] Subaltern was used by an Italian A. Gramsci in political philosophical debates. Although the term was initially a military concept, Gramsci used it to denote the oppressed people or oppressed classes who had no access to hegemonic power. Gramsci A., *Selections from Political Writings 1910-1920*, transl. by Matthews J., New York: International Publishers, 1977. In our studies, this term suits the experience of the Gĩkũyũ masses, oppressed by any religio-political or economical systems either in the pre-colonial, colonial or postcolonial Kenya. It could also be extended to resonate in other exploitive forces all over the world fighting for a reverse hegemony.

[13] *Mũngĩki* from the word *mũĩngĩ*, meaning masses. It refers to a religio-political movement in Kenya composed mainly of the younger generation which came to force in 1980s. It criticises among other things, widespread corruption, political and religious oppression, poverty and violence experienced in Kenya today. See, Wamue, G.N. 'The Politics of Mungiki', *Wanjibu: A Journal of Social and Religious Studies*, Vol.14, no.3, 1999; Wamue, 'Revisiting our indigenous shrines through Mungiki', *African Affairs*, 100, 2001, pp.403-467. Also, *Daily Nation*, October 5, 23,24, 25, 26, Nairobi: 2000; Kagwanja, P.M., 'Facing Mount Kenya or Facing Mecca? The Mũngĩki ethnic violence and the politics of the Moi succession in Kenya', 1997-2002, *African Affairs*, 102, 2003, pp.25-49.

Gĩkũyũ. Thus, there is a critical review of the works of some of the prominent writers on the Gĩkũyũ people like J. Kenyatta, L.S.B. Leakey, C. Cagnolo, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and other contemporary writers on Gĩkũyũ. The thesis creates a panel for dialogue among these scholars showing what each has contributed to the study of the Mũgumo and the Gĩkũyũ. It also unveils some academic blinkers that so clouded their work.

Consequently, our research findings strongly reveal that the conception of *Ngai* provided by Kenyatta, Leakey, Cagnolo and other scholars is not in fact the original conception of *Ngai*. Words used like omnipotent, omniscient etc. show how these writers, collaborating with Western scholars and missionaries, forged what today is universally referred to as the Gĩkũyũ conception of *Ngai*. Thus emerges the present image of *Ngai* and the Gĩkũyũ, as we know them today. The crucial question addressed is whether this conception is congruent to the original Gĩkũyũ understanding of *Ngai*.

The findings will investigate how and why the sacred Mũgumo was mythically veiled both with religio-political power and used by the elders for social and religio-political control of the group. They will also strongly indicate that it was this religio-political symbiosis which was celebrated, ritualised and revitalised around the sacred Mũgumo tree.[14] Additionally, it was around the sacred Mũgumo that the Gĩkũyũ forged their multiple identities.

The thesis therefore examines the Gĩkũyũ conception of *Ngai*, the attributes they give him and the way he manifests himself. In doing this, and using the research findings, the thesis shows the relevance of the sacred Mũgumo tree today and its symbolic religio-political end. It also unveils what it would mean to revisit the roots of Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship through the sacred Mũgumo tree. Moreover, by revisiting the Mũgumo within Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship, our work demythologises both the missionary, colonial and postcolonial discourses by creating avenues for dialogue between the two cultures (Western and African) and their religions. It is only through this arduous process, the thesis argues, that a meaningful cultural exchange could be said to flourish and a contextualised evangelisation be realised instead of the present palliative Western aid and missionary endeavours.

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[14] Kenyatta, J., *Facing Mount Kenya*; Middleton, J & Kershaw, G., *The Central Tribes of North-Eastern Bantu: The Kikuyu and Kamba of Kenya*, London: International African Institute, 1972; Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903*; Shaw, C.M., *Colonial Inscriptions: Race, Sex and Class in Kenya*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997; Cagnolo, C. *The Akikuyu, Their Customs, Traditions and Folklore*, Nyeri: Mission Printing School, 1933; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *The River Between*, London: Heinemann, 1980(1965).

Finally, following our research findings, the thesis will argue that the sacred Mũgumo prepared the ground for the new evangelisation in the Gĩkũyũ land and the continuation of political hegemony based on power-knowledge and control. This critical analysis will lead us on the one hand to demythologise the colonial and missionary discourses based on epistemological dynamics about Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship which were in fact meant to create an identity of the oppositional 'Other', and on the other hand provide conceptual tools for a contextualised evangelisation and the study of local religions.

The thesis is analysed in such a way that it creates a space for contextual information through analysis and discussion of research findings. Thus, it is divided into three main parts. The first part composes of the lead-in chapters (one-four). Chapter one expounds the theoretical frame-work where the three theories are extensively discussed. The second chapter is an exposé of literature that informs our work. The third chapter discusses the methodology used in our research, positing its challenges and opportunities while the fourth chapter contextualises the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ within their history and geographical location, discussing above all the role of myths in the reconstruction of history.

The second part forms the core chapters of our thesis. They are three chapters. Chapter five introduces the Gĩkũyũ religio-philosophical world-view discussing the way people conceive of Ngai, his manifestation, the role of the ancestors and how land acts not only as a platform for their religio-political communion with the divine but also as their 'mother'. As a result, the chapter elicits interesting affiliations existing between the Gĩkũyũ people and the arboreal culture so that chapter six discusses their relationship with trees in general, capitalising on their arboreal knowledge, which leads to a choice of the Mũgumo tree as their sanctuary. Thus follows chapter seven that succinctly discusses the characteristics and the dedication of the Mũgumo, tracing the existing Mĩgumo (sing. Mũgumo) trees in Gĩcũgũ division-Kĩrĩnyaga district-Kenya.

The third part has two chapters. Following the research findings, the thesis goes on to discuss the myths, songs and the functions of the sacred Mũgumo tree and its relevance to the Gĩkũyũ people. This is done in chapter eight. The Gĩkũyũ cosmology is rich in both cosmogony and rituals, which authenticate their place in the universe, their claim to land, power hegemony and religious control. Chapter nine explores the three rituals (*Ituĩka, Irua* and *Kũhoya Ngai mbura*), key to the understanding of Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship. Following the exploration of those three key rituals done around

thee Mũgumo, the symbolic significance of the sacred Mũgumo tree becomes apparent since it shows the religio-political and symbolic end of the sacred Mũgumo tree.

The dialogue elicited by our research and the use of three theories, the critical examination of the work of the prominent scholars of Gĩkũyũ people and the research findings creates some relevant avenues for various discourses. Thus the concluding chapter analyses various discourses elicited by the study of the Mũgumo and Gĩkũyũ people challenging these stakeholders of religion and politics to revisits their roots in order to rediscover the rich heritage of their culture, their religion and their political and social configuration. Finally, there are several appendixes such as myths and an extended detailed history of the Mũgumo in Gĩcũgũ division that backup our research findings. These supplementary materials relate to our research and although not integrated into various chapters, they otherwise give important additional information.

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Introduction

The first part of this chapter presents an explanation of three theories, blended together to illuminate the study of the Gĩkũyũ people within the context of their cosmology and worship. The second part demonstrates the relevance of these paradigms on the Gĩkũyũ-Mũgumo case.

The active period of colonisation in Kenya lasted for several years, between the nineteenth and twentieth century. The review of historiography reveals that the Kenya colony is not the history of the embattled white colonialists against the darkness of Africa; rather, the literature tells of colonialists and colonists who enjoyed their class position, worried over it, who were fascinated by the savage and who invented tradition and identities and forged the colonial rule.[15] History also demonstrates that between colonialists, missionaries and Africans there were varying contextualised degrees of openness and discourses which depended almost entirely on time, place and situation.

Although this period was brief, it nevertheless opened up a whole range of discourses ranging from history, anthropology, ethno-philosophy, religion and African traditional cultures. In most of these arguments and early writings one clearly encounters the discourses of power and the knowledge of the 'Other', together with those on intellectualism ('open' and 'closed' predicaments) and the construction of ethnicity. In this chapter, we explore the discourses as problematised by V. Mudimbe: on the power-knowledge of otherness, B. Berman on the constructivist theory and the making of ethnicity and finally, on the theory of R. Horton based on explanation-prediction-control and communion (intellectualist) approach.

1.2 The Three Theories: A critical appraisal
1.2.1 The paradigm of power - knowledge

Mudimbe, (a well-known African scholar) explores the genesis of African gnosis as a system of knowledge in which major philosophical questions have recently been

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[15] Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*, p. 7; Ngugi, J. *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary*, London: Heinemann, 1981.

debated. In his work: *The Invention of Africa*, he investigates the form, content and the style of 'Africanising Knowledge' and the status of traditional systems of thought showing how they relate to the normative genre of knowledge. His theory of power-knowledge is strongly influenced by the post-structural approach of M. Foucault especially his discourse on the 'Other' and the 'Self' proposition on the 'Disappearing Subject'.[16] Following Foucault's post-structuralism, Mudimbe convincingly argues that discourses have both socio-historical and epistemological origins. His analysis focuses on the latter. As a consequence, he argues that the various Western discourses on Africa and Africans have vehemently conditioned the establishment of the conceptual categories in which Africans today conceive and express their own identity.[17]

Adopting this methodological framework, Mudimbe explores the process of colonisation in Africa.[18] He asserts that colonialism and colonization meant organisation and arrangement. Consequently, Africa, as we see it today is, according to Mudimbe, a European invention. The process of organisation and arrangement used was tantamount to acquisition, distribution and exploitation. The colonial polices were intended to domesticate the natives, control ancient organisations and implement new modes of production.[19] Concerning Africa, Mudimbe adds:

> it can be admitted that the colonists (those settling a region), as well as the colonialists (those exploiting a territory by dominating a local majority) have all tended to organise and transform non-European areas into fundamentally European constructs.[20]

As a result of this colonising strategy, the marginal societies and cultures were produced. This structure created dual epistemological ethnocentrisms. The first kind of

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[16] Foucault highlights that the new *episteme* imposes itself so that, 'man appears in his ambiguous position as both an object of knowledge and the subject that knows'. Foucault, M., *Order of things*, New York: Pantheon, 1973, pp.235-330. Also, Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, New York, Pantheon, 1980; Faubion, J.D., Michael Foucault, Power: Essential works of Foucault 1954-1984, vol.3., London: Penguin Books, 2002 (1994); Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Transl. by A.M. Smith, London: Routledge Classic, 2005 (1969). Brown, S., et al., *One Hundred Twentieth-Century Philosophers*, London: Routledge, 1998.

[17] Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*; Masolo, D.A., 'An Archaeology of African Knowledge: A Discussion of V.Y. Mudimbe' in *CAllaloo*, Vol.14. No.4 Autumn, 1991, p.1001; Appiah, K.A., *In My Father's House: African Philosophy of Culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, Chapter One.

[18] Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, pp. ix-23& pp.24-43; Mudimbe, 'African Gnosis: Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge: an Introduction', in *African Studies Review*, No. 27, pp.149-133; Brenner, L., 'Religious Discourse in and About Africa' in Barber, K. & Farias, P., *Discourse and its Disguises: The Interpretation of African Oral Texts*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 1989, pp.87-103.

[19] Ibid. p.2. Also Shaw, *Colonial Inscription*; Sandgren, D.P., *Christianity and the Kikuyu: Religious divisions and Social conflict*, New York: Peter Lang, 1989; Kyle, K., *The Politics of Independence Kenya*, London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1999; Ross, W. M.C., *Kenya from Within*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1927; Sorrenson, M.P.K., *The origins of European settlement in Kenya*, Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968.

[20] Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, p.1.

ethnocentrism was basically an epistemological filiation, an association to an episteme which gave disciplines like anthropology and sociology their status as discourse, their significance and their credibility as science in human experience. The second was an ethnocentrism based on an ideological connection which produced an intellectual and behavioural attitude that varied among individual scholars. This dichotomising system created paradigmatic oppositions: traditional versus modern, oral versus written and agrarian versus urban. In these highly charged political asymmetries emerged the discourses based on the epistemological dichotomy which equated the West with scientific knowledge and progress while Africa was equated with primitiveness and thus scientifically was inert. On the religious level, this enterprise diffused new attitudes which were contradictory and as a result disintegrated the culturally and religious integrated schema of most African cosmologies.[21]

Mudimbe asserts that in these discourses, what was European was understood and even defined as normal while the non-European (Other) was regarded as pathological, disordered and primitive. He concludes that all the discourses on Africa whether from the African or European scholars have been conditioned by the categories emanating from a Western epistemological disposition and therefore, inevitable tensions between tradition versus modernity have been created.[22]

Consequently, Mudimbe accentuates that within the socio-historical and religio-philosophical pedestal arose three colonial hypotheses: a) domination of the physical space, b) reformation of the minds of the natives and c) the integration of local economic histories into a Western perspective.[23] Thus, Mudimbe rightly concludes: 'it is the power-knowledge of an epistemological field which makes possible a domineering or humbled culture'.[24] He understands these epistemological dynamics as exercised through the paradigms of the 'Other' (Africa) and the 'Self' (European). In consequence, the

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[21] Ibid., pp.4&27; Bimwenyi, O., *Discours théologique Négro-Africain. Problèmes de fondements*, Paris: Présence Africaine, 1981,

[22] Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, p.xv; P'Bitek, O., *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1970.

[23] Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, p.2; Christopher, A.J., *Colonial Africa*, New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1984, pp.27-87. Ngugi's narratives, ranging from *Weep not, Child*, 1964 to *Moving the Centre*, 1993, depict the people as agents of history since they provide the space for challenging our understanding of national identities and the way in which identities have been used in the contestation of power in Kenya. Ngugi, Wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child*, London: Heinemann, 1964.

[24] Ibid., p.11.

product of the colonising structure was a creation of marginal societies, culture and human beings.

The colonising enterprise based on the power-knowledge supposition diffused new complex and contradicting models in the realm of cultural and spiritual values. These were administered through churches, schools, by printing and audio facilities. At the cultural and religious levels, he identifies the hidden knowledge-power relations of the ethnophilosophical project in Africa accentuating that most of the ethnophilosophies are Western ideological constructions that bear little relation to African realities.[25] The power-knowledge theory created philosophies of conquests in the religio-political fields since it imposed categories of knowledge that disguised relations of domination. Hence, the Western 'Self' claimed its power through science and therefore contrasted the African 'Other' as primitive, superstitious and irrational.

The power-knowledge hypothesis no doubt provoked social, religious and political constraints whereby the dominated tried in vain to protect themselves against the external invasion which was assiduously swallowing up their traditional structures. Under these conditions, the tension between modernity and traditional values became inevitable. In order to create a viable power structure, the Africans started revitalising their old rituals. Mudimbe sees in these rituals, the agents of power in the life of the African community. These rituals are revolutionary in their symbolic and material dimensions. The African rituals, blended in the quagmire of complex relationships, achieved the power to actualise a form of political hegemony, raising and maintaining religio-political structures.[26]

Mudimbe acknowledges that within the African philosophy, *gnosis*[27] is glossed on the secret wisdom of cult. It is within this configuration that the power-knowledge hegemony is interpreted at local level. In fact, Mudimbe underlines that the Western discourses on and of Africa still dominate the political and religious pedestal. In *The Idea of Africa*, Mudimbe continues his reflection on the imaginary construction of Africa as envisaged by the West. He convincingly argues that African discourses have been

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[25] Ibid., pp.88-9. Also, Boulaga, E.F., *Christianity without Fetishes*, London: Transaction Publishers, 2002(1984).

[26] A good example is elucidated by the work of Turner, V., *The forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, New York: Ithaca, 1977, p.102. In the 'archaeology' of the ritual, he admits the presence of gnosis or arcane knowledge so that this cerebration accords the initiates the capacity to think critically about their society, their cosmos and renders them the opportunity to witness the powers that generate and sustain them, p.105.

[27] Here Gnosis is understood as a process and the method of investigation, a search for knowledge.

radically silenced or in some cases, converted by some conquering Western discourses.[28] In the political polity, the African bourgeoisie following the colonial system, and what B. Berman calls 'the politics of the belly'[29], continues to adopt the same system in order to slough off his name, 'primitive', which was given him by his Western counterpart.

Quintessentially, Mudimbe proposes some alternative channels of discourse outside the Western paradigm. In his book, *Parables and Fables*, he suggests a different theatre for discussion, whereby, the West will not be the centre and the African on the margin. He also underlines the reconstruction of African history using the oral tradition. This, he argues, is fundamental in endorsing the paramount work played by the oral tradition, myths and fables in the understanding of the African history. This recommendation brings him close to J. Vansina who argues that through the analysis of everyday language, myths and oral expressions and discourses, one can construct an objective history. It also reconciles the philosophical hiatus based on the prisms of power that clouds any kind of perspective between the African and the West. The novelty in this approach is that the oral tradition becomes 'memories' blended with power that goes back for many generations and which consequently reflect the current historical process.[30]

Mudimbe's work, *Tales of Faith*, explores religion (Christianity and to a lesser extent Islam) as a political performance. He has written: 'I would understand religion as a performance, namely, as an acting, an abstract or concrete practice of representing something that seems to be beyond human control'.[31] Thus, it is crucially important to note that Mudimbe explores religion as a 'political performance' so that in African tradition, cosmology and worship for instance, people are understood as actors and participants, grappling to make sense of their world, their conditions, their ancestors and God(gods) and also representing 'something' of their experience in their myriad

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[28] Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa*, p.xiv.

[29] The 'politics of the belly' was first used by J.F. Bayart to analyse the political and historical hegemony in Africa. Bayart, demonstrates that just as hunger is a concurrent phenomena in Africa and being 'well-fed' is a sign of wealth and immense power, African leaders, thirsting for power and prestige subordinate and exploits their subjects. Bayart, J.F., *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*, New York: Longman, 1993. L. Thomas, using a similar symbolism (politics of the womb) shows particular capacities of power attached to the female belly or the womb to demonstrate the centrality of reproductive struggles with Kenyan and indeed African History. Thomas, L.M., *Politics of the Womb: Women Reproduction and the State in Kenya*, London: University of California Press, 2003.

[30] Mudimbe, *Parables and Fables: Exegesis, Textuality and Politics in Central Africa*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991, p.98; Vansina, J., *Oral Tradition as History*, London: James Currey, 1997, especially chapters one and seven.

[31] Mudimbe, *Tales of Faith, Religion as a Political Performance in Central Africa*, London: The Athlone Press, 1997. A stringent review of this book is done by Brenner, L., in the *Journal of Religion in Africa*, xxx, 4. Leiden, 2000.

discourses. However, performance or acting represents this 'something'.[32] In this religio-philosophical confluence then, ritual makes a lot of sense.

1.2.2 The Constructivist Approach

B. Berman's constructivist theory highlights not only the discourses of power in the process of colonisation but also how they shaped the formation of Africa and indeed Gĩkũyũ ethnicity and tradition.[33] In his article, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State', Berman holds that 'modern African ethnicity is a social construction of the colonial period, through the reactions of the pre-colonial societies to the social, economic, cultural and political forces of colonialism'.[34] Ethnicity as such becomes, according to him, the product of a continuing historical process. Accordingly, Africans ethnic invention emerged through internal struggles over moral economy and political legitimacy. The two elements were configured under conflicts over a different access to resources of modernity, economic accumulation political and religious control. Further, he has written; 'ethnicities were in particular the creation of elites seeking the basis for a conservative modernisation'.[35] Berman uses his theory of constructivism to examine the construction of ethnicity under colonialism. He also applies it to explore the role of the colonial state and political economy, as well as that of missionaries and anthropologists.

Following this approach, Berman believes that from the colonial intrusion, along with the African response, emerged the unique linkage under colonialism between bureaucratic authoritarianism, patronage and clientelism, ethnic fragmentation and competition. In his works, Berman concludes that the continuity of these institutions, power relations and identities in post-colonial states continue to shape the 'politics of the belly' which is especially prevalent in Africa. He contends that creating a white capitalist class in Kenya colony required the formation of an accumulating class as well. The latter was aimed at speaking for, and exploiting the majority of the poor people under their

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[32] Brenner, 'Religious Discourses in and About Africa'.

[33] In most of Berman's writing, whether alone (Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya) or jointly with J. Lonsdale, (Unhappy Valley), he stresses the complexity of the colonial situation, questioning the applicability of all-encompassing theories of causation. Berman, B., and Lonsdale, J., *Unhappy Valley, Conflict in Kenya and Africa Book Two: Violence and Ethnicity*, Nairobi: E.A.E.P., 1997, p.3; Schiller, L., review of this book in *African Studies Review*, Vol.38. no.2, Sept., 1995, pp.169-175.

[34] Berman, B., 'Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State', p.305.

[35] Ibid., pp.305 & 327; Berman, *Control and Crises in Colonial* Kenya. The dominant discourses come from those groups who gained most from colonialism. These were the indigenous authorities of the colonial state and the educated elite who interpreted tradition to justify their gains and maintain control.

jurisdiction.[36] In the process of colonialism in Kenya and in the formation of multiple identities especially among the Gĩkũyũ, Berman contends that a successful development required that a domestic bourgeoisie took the lead in ensuring that certain essential tasks were fulfilled. This included the organisation of production and exchange, the provision of an economic infrastructure and finally, the organisation of the political conditions for the continued accumulation of capital.[37] Unlike Mudimbe, Berman sees the indigenous group as vitally important in the formation of multiple identities.

Exploring the African situation, he examines the eminent religio-political trends that took place in Africa and that played a predominant role in the shaping of identity. Using his constructivist theory, Berman concludes that the post 1945 analytic models were: *Primordialism* and *instrumentalism*. While Primordialism is deeply affective and emotional, originating from real cultural experience and emphasising the archaic cultural basis of ethnic identities, Instrumentalism focused on manipulation of ethnic identities and loyalties for political and economic ends.[38]

Equally important was the conservative neo-traditionalism of colonial officials which generated a crucial ambivalence about African cultures and societies. On one level,

> African societies were denigrated as savage and primitive, classified, in the evolutionary model of social development of turn of the century anthropology that seems to have supplied

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[36] Berman, B., 'Ethnicity, Patronage and African State': The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism, *African Affairs*, p.309; Berman, *Control and Crises in Colonial Kenya*; Berman, B. and Lonsdale, J., *Unhappy Valley:Conflict in Kenya & Africa- Violence & Ethnicity, Book* Two, Nairobi: E.A.E.P., 2002 (1992). The comprehension of the diversity, complexity and tension among both the Gĩkũyũ and Europeans is evident in all the chapters. Ngugi's work is also critical of the political situation in Kenya whereby, power is associated with wealth and corruption. If Kenyans associate the 'big belly' with power, then Ngugi forces them to debunk their view by understanding that the authority based on power and wealth is fake. Ngugi, *Devil on the Cross*, London: Heinemann, 1982. Also, Ogude, *Ngugi's Novels and African History*, London: Pluto Press, 1999, pp.61-2.

[37] Berman, B. & Leys, C., eds. *African Capitalists in African Development*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994, p.28; Berman, *Control and Crises in Colonial Kenya*.

[38] Berman, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and African State', p.309; Lentz, C., ' 'Tribalism' and ethnicity in Africa: a Review of decades of Anglophone research', *Cahiers des sciences humaines*, 31. 2. 1995; Young, C., 'Evolving modes of consciousness and ideology: Nationalism and Ethnicity', in Apter., D., and Rosberg, C., eds., *Political Development and New realism in Sub-Sahara Africa*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994.

the assumptions of the folk anthropology of the proconsuls, as ossified, stagnant, survivals of earlier stages of social evolution.[39]

This was not only confined to the colonial officials but also to some writers like Kenyatta, Leakey, Cagnolo and Ngũgĩ in their study of the Gĩkũyũ people. Berman contentiously holds that these ideologies (based on primordialism and instrumentalism) reinforced political expediency to generate an understanding of African ethnic groups as ancient communities and identities in which behaviour was governed by uniform and binding customs. Within this realm, the

> flexibility, fluidity and ambiguity of nineteenth century African communities and identities, understood today as the norm of pre-colonial societies, was seen as abnormal and, ironically, as often the disruptive effects of external intrusion, internecine wars and imperial conquest until order was restored by the establishment of colonial administration.[40]

In this theory Berman, like Mudimbe, highlights that the picture of stable bounded ethnic groups was further reinforced by the bureaucratic culture of the colonial state in order to locate, demarcate and classify the Africans as a means of social surveillance and control. Thus, the theory of power-control was a guiding political factor. Consequently, Berman notes that maps, the establishment of colonial museums, communities, persons, land and physical artefacts were all assigned a unique ethnic identity and physical location. The whole process of classification and enumeration was meant to control and classify the Africans. In the history of Kenya and Gĩkũyũ especially, colonialism was marked by the process of the native registration system, the tracking and the control of the Gĩkũyũ (*kipande*-metal container containing identity card) and other Kenyans within their ethnic boundaries. This is tantamount to what M. Mamdani calls the creation of citizen and subject that created institutional segregation not only in the pedestals of race but also in the mode of power, which characterised the colonial rule.[41] In other words, how did the minority European colonial power rule over

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[39] Berman, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and African State', p.320. Within this paradigm, tribal societies thus represented a form of social order and culture which colonial officials valued and regarded as 'natural' for Africans. For colonial officials 'every African belonged to a tribe, just as every European belonged to a nation', and they believed 'an Africa comprised of neatly bounded, homogeneous tribes'. Iliffe, J., *A Modern History of Tanganyika,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979. Such kinds of societies (ossified) are presented by Kenyatta, Leakey, Gathigira, Kabetu. Also Ngugi, *The River Between, A Grain of Wheat and Weep not, Child.* In *The River Between* for example Ngugi describes the Gĩkũyũ society using the image of the two lions. He has written: 'the two ridges lay side by side...they were like many sleeping lions which never woke. They just slept the big deep sleep of their creator'. *The River Between,* p.1.

[40] Ibid., p.320.

[41] Mamdani, M., *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism,* London: James Currey, 1996. Mamdani strongly believes that in the post-colonial paradigm, there is a clear dividing line between the citizen and the subject. The colonial administrators, settlers and missionaries were seen as separate from the indigenous population. As a consequence, the former were accorded the citizenship and certain rights while the latter the status of subjecthood with no rights of citizenhood.

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the majority indigenous population? Berman, like Mamdani strongly advocates that there was a creation of in-direct rule. This is true of the Gĩkũyũ people.

Within this political process, the colonial power also sought collaboration with 'created' chiefs and sub-chiefs which helped in their arduous plan to dominate, demarcate and create homogeneous administrative units composing of a single group: in our case the Gĩkũyũ. The underlining political factor is that the colonial government was using the already existing internal structures within the Gĩkũyũ society. Thus, these two classes co-existed uneasily creating what he calls the contradiction of colonialism. Berman concludes that by doing so, the colonial power was actively engaged in the invention of ethnicities that often bore little relationship to the pre-colonial identities and communities.[42]

The fact is, according to Berman, the colonial power, by adopting these theories, used their power and position to invent and define the African customs. They defined some laws especially those concerning marriage and access to land properties which were to be administered by the chiefs and headmen. As a repercussion, the codified custom concealed the new colonial balances of wealth and power.

In this context, one may ask: what role did the local ethnic power hegemony play in enforcing their power and in being the locus of resistance? Berman holds that the colonial government alone did not exercise the invention of the African customs and identities. There were also missionaries who were, according to Berman, eager to understand and communicate with present and future converts. These missionaries compiled grammars and dictionaries from among a diversity of variant local dialects, usually that spoken around the mission station. They transformed it into the authoritative version of the-image of a whole group and propagated it through their schools. By creating and disseminating a standardized print vernacular, the missionaries promoted the development of an indigenous literate elite. They propitiously encouraged the recording of standardized versions of local history and of custom and thereby had an important

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[42] Berman's notion of the invention of identity needs further examination in order to ascertain whether he acknowledges the fact that the pre-colonial Gĩkũyũ had their own identity so that what actually he calls the invention of identity is indeed the invention of the image of the Gĩkũyũ tradition and identity.

impact on the conceptual classification of ethnic groups and their cultures.[43] A good example is the formation of United Kikuyu Language Committee (UKLC) in 1909.

With his constructivists approach, Berman underlines that colonialism opened new sources of wealth and power for some, but threatened the social position and access to resources of others. Ethnicity emerged out of the consequent conflict concerning renegotiation of the rules of custom and identity as individuals struggled to take advantage of the new opportunities of colonialism or protect themselves against its disruptions. Berman also highlights the frequent confusion, uncertainty and ignorance that existed between the colonisers, settlers, missionaries and the Gĩkũyũ people, factors which led to storm-tossed relationships of power. These aspects led to the formation of multiple identities both at the national and local level.

How does the Gĩkũyũ Christian convert enter into his constructivist theory? Berman asserts that these converts, having indigenous religious beliefs and practice and having embodied Western modernity in their literacy, dress and occupation, directly challenged conceptions of cultural identity and community membership. In the constructivist theory, Berman finds the role of Christian converts who comprised the first generation of the literate elite to be crucial. Among the Gĩkũyũ the *athomi* (Christians) oscillated between the new Western religion and then back to their traditional Gĩkũyũ religion. Within this historical configuration, charged with historical consciousness, the *athomi* attempted to justify their position in the community and to clarify their relationship with the indigenous culture.[44]

In Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya*, Leakey's three volumes of the *Southern Kikuyu*, Mugo's, *Kikuyu Customs*, and Kabetu's, *Kĩrĩra kĩa Ũgĩkũyũ*, one clearly encounters the forging of Gĩkũyũ identity. It is striking that the *athomi* accounts interact with, and seem to be influenced by missionary and anthropological accounts of their cultures. But again, it should be clear by now that anthropologist and colonial states, in

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[43] Berman, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and the Africa State'. Berman also explores the role of the anthropologists in the invention of African ethnic groups, the so called 'tribes'. He concludes that British functionalist anthropology, with its emphasis on the depiction of homogeneity, contributed to the definitive versions of various groups in which evidence from field work in one community was taken as representative of the whole and from which all local variations, confusions, contradictions and ambiguities were virtually eliminated. In the Gĩkũyũ ethnography, the works of Kenyatta and Leakey are evident. See, pp. 322-5. Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*. About the UKLC, Karanja, J.K., *Founding an African Faith: Kikuyu Anglican Christianity 1900-1945*, Nairobi:Uzima Press, 1999, especially pp. 130-4.

[44] Ibid, p.327. The Gĩkũyũ *athomi* debated with the elders on the meaning of *Gĩkũyũ Karing'a* in 1920s. See, Lonsdale 'Listen while I read: The Orality of Christian Literacy in the young Kenyatta's making of the Kikuyu', in Louise de la Gorgendiere, ed., *Ethnicity in Africa: Roots, Meaning and Implications*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, African Study centre, 1996; Sandgren, *Christianity and the Kikuyu*.

collaboration with the missionaries, accentuated the importance of historical constructions of the past. They assisted in rectifying and objectifying the conceptions of their 'Western' culture and community in the Gĩkũyũ group.[45]

A relevant question to be asked at this point and in relation to the Gĩkũyũ people and the study of Mũgumo is: How was ethnicity constructed within this highly charged politico-religious environment? Concerning this, Berman contends that it was through the interaction of various, selective imaginings of 'tradition' and identity from a variety of cultural materials.[46] Complementing his theory on the formation of multiple identities among the Gĩkũyũ, J. Lonsdale discusses the interplay that existed between rich and poor, the demands of *mbarĩ* (lineage) and the demands of *riika* (initiation set or 'regiment') in the Gĩkũyũ religio-political context. This interplay was accompanied by religious, political and social anxieties that later animated the formation of nationalist movements culminating with Mau Mau.[47]

1.2.3 Horton and the intellectualist theory

Although the theories of Mudimbe and Berman are constructively relevant in our study of Gĩkũyũ people, their history, and the complexity in the forging of the Gĩkũyũ identities, they still do not fully explain the mechanism of the ritual performance around the sacred Mũgumo tree or the rationale of the tree itself. Here, the intellectualist approach of Robin Horton: The 'Closed' and 'Open'[48] predicaments enters into dialogue with the existing theories, illuminating a viable approach to explaining the rituals, characteristics and functions of the sacred Mũgumo and why for centuries, it has remained as a pivotal tree in the traditional Gĩkũyũ cosmology and religion.

In his theory of Explanation-Prediction-Control and Communion, Horton puts emphasis on the fact that religion emerges from a striving for 'communion' as well as the urge to understand and control the world. Religion, he contests,

> is seen as growing, persisting and declining under the influence of two completely
> independent strivings: on the one hand, the striving to achieve an adequate level of

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[45] Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*; Berman, 'Ethnography as Politics'; Droz, Y. S.K., *Migrations Kikuyus: des pratiques sociales à límaginaire*, Paris: Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1999.

[46] Berman, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State', p.326. These constructed identities were predominantly masculine and patriarchal with notable concern on the control of women. Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*.

[47] Lonsdale, J., 'The Moral Economy of Mau Mau: The Problem', in Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, pp.316-7.

[48] Horton, *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West*, pp.221-258. Also, Horton, 'African Traditional Thought and Western Science', in Grinker, & Steiner, *Perspectives on Africa*, pp.327-339.

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explanation, prediction and control of the world; and on the other, the striving to achieve certain communion relationships not permitted in the purely human context.[49]

Thus, religion becomes, according to him, an extension of the field of social human relationships. Although Horton does not explicitly say so, his theory, once well understood, demonstrates that in communion, participation of the individuals and the community is crucially important. This relationship weaved with personified non-human entities may be pursued for communion or manipulated for the well-being of the individual and community to avert any social, religious and even political calamity. In his intellectualist approach, social beings like the ancestors or gods are the unseen causative factors in the observable events of daily life. For Horton, apart from searching for an explanation, the 'why' of events, people within a specific cultural set-up want to control these events. For instance, they would like to transform the abhorred human state of sickness, poverty, dearth, and powerlessness, social, political and religious conflicts. The desire of every community is a good state of health, wealth, enough rain for their crops especially the agricultural people, good or equitable governance and religio-political harmony.

Horton stresses the social interaction in the levels of the family and community which creates strong relationships. The latter ones are stepping-stones to socio-religion and political communion. However, in this theory, there is a commitment to explanation from a sociological context, where religion continues to play a predominant role. In committing himself to explanation from a sociological context, one can say that Horton puts the community as a fulcrum through which explanation, prediction, control and communion take place. The intellectual approach implicitly underlines the aspect of communion although this is not understood at face value. Even though at times, Horton seems to present communion as a counterpart to explanation-prediction and control, he nevertheless underlines its relevance in the religious life of the group. In fact in his article on *African Conversion*,[50] he underlines the importance of communion in a society grappling to understand their religious cosmological framework. As a consequence, he enshrines a central point of community as important in African societies when dealing with supernatural entities: God and the ancestors. There is a subtle blend between explanation-prediction-control and communion (intellectualist) theory with the understanding of the relationship between the individual members, with the ancestors and

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[49] Ibid, p.372.
[50] Horton, R., 'African Conversion' *Africa,* Journal of the International African Institute, Vol.XLI, Vol.2, London: Oxford University Press, April, 1971, pp.85-108.

God. The intensity of this affiliation is mirrored in the theatre of the social, political and religious fields in which the community ascertains a more intense and effective affiliation in social and religious polity. Thus communion as a concept which, Horton advocates, can be understood in our study of the Gĩkũyũ as a religious participation.

Since there is a special interest in the study of the Mũgumo tree and the rituals in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship, one may ask: how does the intellectualist approach of Horton account for the African ritual? Although Horton does not explicitly address the implication of his theory to the ritual celebrations, nevertheless, one can draw a clear conclusion from his discourse that ritual, for instance, in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology, is fundamental to authenticate the relationship between the performers and the participants in their religious configuration. It is in the ritual, done in the ambience of the community, that the emotional involvement- the give and take of love takes place. Horton laments that this element is deficient in contemporary Christianity in the West.[51] He also argues that some rituals are therapeutic in social psychological terms though he does not demonstrate how traditional African actors recognise this effect. This is what will be applied in our study of the sacred Mũgumo and the Gĩkũyũ people, exhibiting how these people understand the instrumentality of the ritual.

Explanation-Prediction and Control refer to religion as 'a system of theory and associated practice directed to the comprehension and practical control of events in the very day space-time world'.[52] Thus Horton advocates that religious world-view has to be understood within the social order which encompasses the participative individual members in relation to the natural environment. Religion in the eyes of the intellectualist theory becomes not only a source 'model' of the world but also for the world. Thus, in this theory, Horton critically reconciles the underpinning dilemma: do religious values determine or are they a reflection of social relations?

Quintessentially, African traditional thought uses social analogies to model prediction while the Western scientific thought uses mechanical analogies.[53] According to Horton, with its highly secularised world-view and modernistic mode of thought, the West at first glance stands in spectacular contrast with a 'spirited' and traditionalistic

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[51] Horton, *Patterns of thought*, p.47.

[52] Ibid., P.5.

[53] Fardon, R., 'Keeping Faith with Science', A Review of Horton's Book *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West*, in *Africa*, 64 (3), 1994, p. 409.

Africa but in his intellectualist theory, he tries to bridge that hiatus in terms of discourses existing between Africa and the West.

Horton holds that in traditional religion (pre-modern) and modern science, there is a deep-seated similarity. The characteristic patterns of thought and practice in both traditional religion and those of modern science are similar. Both traditional religion and science make up for the explanatory, predictive and practical deficiencies of everyday common sense. This is done by portraying the phenomena of everyday world as a manifestation of daily reality and building up schemas of hidden reality by drawing some analogies with various aspects of everyday experience.[54]

Horton starts by showing that the 'closed' predicament can be associated with the African thought system and the 'open' predicaments with the West. In traditional cultures, he holds, there is no developed awareness of alternatives to the established body of theoretical tenets. Accordingly, in scientifically oriented cultures, such awareness is highly developed. Horton explains that it is the awareness of alternatives which is crucial for the take-off into science. He argues that 'absence of any awareness of alternatives makes for the absolute acceptance of established theoretical tenets and removes any possibility of questioning them'.[55] These established tenets endow the believer with a compelling force which in simple language could be referred to as the 'sacred'. Thus, in the traditional thought system, any challenge of these tenets could lead to cosmic chaos, causing serious anxiety.

In the 'open' predicament, according to Horton, there is an awareness of alternatives. Here, tenets are not absolute and therefore one does not lose completely everything concerning sacredness. Any challenge is no longer a horrific threat to chaos and so the challenge is not tantamount to absolute calamity. In this predicament, new tenets can be tried and therefore there is a move from the traditional to a scientific outlook.

To summarise, it can be deduced that in 'closed' predicament, there is lack of awareness of alternatives. Additionally, there is a deep seated anxiety to defend the sacredness of those beliefs. In the 'open' predicament there is awareness of alternatives, diminished sacredness of beliefs and diminished anxiety about threats to these beliefs.

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[54] Horton, *Patterns of Thought*, pp.347-8. Also a review of this book by John Skorupski, in *Athropological Forum*, vol.9. No. 1, Department of Anthropology, University of Western Australia, 1999, p.113.

[55] Horton, 'African Traditional Thought and Western Science', p.328.

Here, crucial questions are: how do we explain the presence of, and return to, magic in Western society?

In the 'closed' predicament, ideas are intimately bound to the occasions rather than to the ideas. The members of a given group cannot imagine an alternative way since their ideas are strictly bound to the context and the reality so that ideas are not opposed to reality. Thus according to Horton, the traditional thinker is unable to imagine possible alternatives to his/her established theories and classification and so can never start formulating generalising norms of reasoning and knowing. Additionally, he writes; 'for only when there are alternatives can there be choice, and only where there is choice can there be norms governing it'.[56]

1.3 The Relevance of the three theories on the analysis of the Gĩkũyũ and the Mũgumo

1.3.1 Mudimbe: Power-Knowledge theory

Mudimbe's theory helps in discovering the following:

a) The construction of the history of Kenya and indeed Gĩkũyũ reconstructed within the politically and religiously charged environment characterised by various affiliations between the colonial government, the missionaries and the local agents. His theory assists us to critically study the complex symbiotic relationship that has been characterising the history of the Gĩkũyũ people in their relationship with the past within their collective and individual memory.

b) This theory is also viable when exploring the role that the oral tradition play in the reconstruction and continuation of the religio-political systems of the group and the association existing between this social group as apart of a larger society in Kenya and the given area of memory (Gĩcũgũ). The theory also serves as an indicator of the relevance of myths (oral) and written histories today.

c) The theory is a usable tool to examine the role not only of the colonial power and the missionary enterprises but also the inversion of the 'Other' and 'Self' so that within the new Gĩkũyũ religio-political set up, the ruling elders become the new ruling bourgeoisie oppressing the other poor members of the society.

d) Finally, Mudimbe's insights help to understand the various contemporary discourses as problematised by the Africanists and especially the writers of the Gĩkũyũ

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[56] Horton, *Patterns of thought*, p.229. The definition that Horton uses for both logic and philosophy in order to conclude that the two are poorly developed in traditional African thought is highly questionable. Moreover, a clear distinction between the Western and African traditional thought system is also highly controversial since 'rational' versus 'irrational' cannot be limited primarily by geographical difference.

literature like Kenyatta, Cagnolo, Leakey, Muriuki, Wanjohi etc. It can be an eye opener in understanding the indigenous Gĩkũyũ in their fight to reshape or move the centre of power either from the foreign intrusion or from among themselves, with the Mau Mau movement being a clear example. As for the ritual, the theory illuminates how the rituals validate the Gĩkũyũ claim to land, political power and religious hegemony and how Gĩkũyũ identities were forged around the Mũgumo tree.

1.3.2 Berman: The Constructivist theory

a) In most of his writings, to which we have referred to, Berman demonstrates that the development of the state or any ethnic group, is an historical process and thus to understand it, we must balance theory with facts (historical narrative) and with all the complexities of human behaviour. In fact his constructivist approach insists that there was a conundrum of the interplay between colonial and local agents in the formation of Gĩkũyũ identities. Thus, the formation of Gĩkũyũ identities is characterised by flexibility, fluidity and ambiguity at international, national and local levels. Although this is threaded throughout our chapters, the specific chapters dealing with the history and that of literature survey strongly underline this approach.

b) The approach also emphasizes that ethnicity is a product of socio-historical and religious processes and is constantly in the course of renewal and re-making. Within these developments, there are external and internal struggles inside the community. The community endeavours to make sense of history, of religio-political and social crises and controls its cosmo-vision through political and religious rituals integral for the survival of the group. These rituals prevalent in this cultural and religious milieu are performed around the sacred Mũgumo, taking it as a religious and political symbol.

c) Reading the Gĩkũyũ literature through the eyes of Berman, and reviewing the literature of some of the most prolific scholars on Gĩkũyũ people, the hypothetical frameworks of primordialism and instrumentalism are apparent. Berman becomes an eye-opener by demonstrating that the study of this group can be understood within a cultural process based on the two. There is the archaic model, essentially ahistorical, showing the unchanged past, and the instrumentalism model that shows the manipulation of ethnic identities in order to create a decontexualised present.

d) Berman's constructivist theory examines the interaction between the global, national and local levels, the interaction among factors within each level and how the conglomeration of these factors enable us to understand the people who today we call Gĩkũyũ in their socio-religion, political and economic context.

The theory demonstrates the relationship that existed between the Gĩkũyũ, the colonial power and the missionaries and the enormous task the natives performed both in the making of ethnicities and in trying to adapt their traditional religion to the new Western religion (especially Christianity). The only shortcoming is that Berman does not offer an explanation of why the ensuing Mau Mau revolt in 1950s was confined mainly to the Gĩkũyũ, Embu and Meru and did not spread elsewhere in Kenya.

1.3.3 Horton: Intellectualist theory

Horton's hypothesis on unreflective versus reflective thinking is not applicable in the reconstruction of the Gĩkũyũ traditional religio-political set-up. In fact, the literature which relates to the Gĩkũyũ demonstrates that there was a transition of government from matriarchal to patriarchal.[57] Consequently, the planning and execution of the plan through overthrowing the government along with the ritual of *ituika* authenticated through the ritual around the sacred Mũgumo, demonstrates clearly that his theory of 'closed' and 'open' predicaments does not address sufficiently the external and internal pressure both at local and national levels and how these different levels of analysis influence religio-political and social changes within a charged Gĩkũyũ environment taking Mũgumo as a primary symbol. This challenges Horton's notion of lack of alternatives in the traditional as opposed to the scientific West.

Nevertheless, the intellectualist theory is viable when considering the traditional rituals performed around the sacred Mũgumo tree, since;

a) it underlines the instrumentality of the ritual and participation of the individuals and community in their struggle to control and contain the world through the uses of explanation and prediction mechanism.

b) illuminates the understanding of religion in the Gĩkũyũ cosmological framework whereby religious participation is crucially important leading to a sustainable communion.

Turning to 'protective versus destructive attitude towards established theory', Horton has observed that theoretical thought both in Africa and the West is vitally concerned with the prediction of events but with a difference in reaction to prediction failure. He has written; 'in the theoretical thought of the traditional cultures, there is a notable reluctance to register repeated failures of prediction and to act by attacking the

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[57] Muriuki, G., *A History of the Kikuyu 1500-1900,* Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1974; Mackenzie, F., *Land, Ecology and Resistance in Kenya, 1880-1952,* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998; Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya.*

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beliefs involved'.[58] Studying the Gĩkũyũ understanding of diseases and the role and function of trees in herbal medicine together with that of the *mũndũ mũgo* (diviner/medicine man) we find that the Horton notion of 'protective versus destructive' attitudes agree.

In fact, Horton gives an astute presentation of the relationship between the medicine man and the victim. In the process of secondary elaboration, the diviner is consulted by the victim and has to find the cause or the spiritual forces behind the happenings of the tangible world.[59] He/she has also to look for the remedy in order to restore the person and the community into wholeness, in which case a ritual might be necessary. What if the patient's health condition deteriorates? Then the victim moves on to another diviner. This search can continue until he/she dies.

From this case, Horton says that what is evident in most traditional African societies regarding diseases and cure is that within the process of visiting one diviner after another, there is no critical evaluation as to whether there can be alternative measures. Both the client and the community continue blaming the honesty of the diviners to the next, believing that there must be another one capable of restoring the patient into wholeness. For these people, the established belief is coherent with the socio-religio configuration of the society.

Horton's theory is a viable tool for exploring the functions of the sacred Mũgumo and the way diseases were treated. The Gĩkũyũ victim would for instance go to *mũndũ mũgo*. Then, the whole process of consultation took place in order to ascertain the cause of the disease, mostly attributed to ancestors. The ancestors needed to be appeased depending on the seriousness of the crime committed. If the patient did not get better, another diviner was consulted until the whole matter was settled either by being cured or by death. In the final analysis, if the *mũndũ mũgo* could not remedy the case, he would literary say: '*kũnjai mbũri na rũũa mũndũ nĩ witũ na Ngai*', (a total surrender to Ngai, leaving everything in his hands).

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[58] Horton, *Patterns of thought*, p.333.

[59] This is well demonstrated by Victor Turner in his study of the Ndembu and the role of the diviner in their cosmology where he asserts that the diviner not only refers to the unseen causes but also to the bleach or the disturbance of the socio-religious equilibrium and thus the Ndembu rightly believes that the patients can never get better until all these tensions and aggressions are resolved. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, especially Chapter X, pp.359-62. A similar pattern occurs among the Gĩkũyũ group. Horton rightly asserts that the traditional diviner, faced with a disease does not just refer to a spiritual agency, but uses ideas about this agency to link disease to causes in the world of visible, tangible events. Horton, *Patterns of Thought*, P.202.

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter has presented and explained the theories of power-knowledge of 'other', that of the constructivist approach and the open and closed predicaments based on explanation, prediction, control and communion. It has also underlined the importance of Mudimbe's, Berman's and Horton's theories in the study of Gĩkũyũ and the sacred Mũgumo tree. The chapter has emphasized as well, the relevance of these paradigms in understanding the dynamics of religio-political and social development in Gĩkũyũ land. It becomes apparent that these approaches involve a systematic assessment of the historical and religious development, demonstrating how events are shaped by the interaction between phenomena at the national and local level and the interaction among factors within each level.

Moreover, of the three theories explored in this chapter, Berman and Mudimbe fail to apply their theories to the present day Kenya. Although their theories are an eye-opener, in trying to explain the fact that the colonial government did not let historical facts and dynamics 'form' the state and indeed the Gĩkũyũ identity, but rather, made conscious efforts to build exploitive religio-political and economic structures, they do not explain the impacts that these structures have in contemporary Kenya and indeed on the Gĩkũyũ people. The fact that these structures continue to haunt the Kenyans, leading to the formation of underground movements like *Mũngiki* in the late 1980s, *Mwakenya* in mid-1980s, protests that led to multi-party elections in 1992 and Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ singing around the Sacred Mũgumo in Kĩanyaga every 12/12 (independence day) before the actual official celebration, demonstrates that these theories need to be contextualised and used to explore the current religio-political and social affiliations and contradictions among the Gĩkũyũ people. Besides, Mudimbe does not address the fact that the power-knowledge theory was also in operation in the pre-colonial African socities and was not just a creation of the colonial enterprise as the theis will demonstrate. The study of Gĩkũyũ vis-à-vis the sacred Mũgumo blends these theories within the Gĩkũyũ socio-cultural matrix to demonstrate that in revisiting the roots of the people through the sacred Mũgumo tree, those cultural, religious, political and economical indicators of 1920s show a people still fighting the 'built state', the 'built identity' already established during the colonial era. The logistics of these theories is enumerated and further discussed in the following chapter on literature survey.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE SURVEY

2.1 Introduction

The works of Kenyatta, Leakey, Cagnolo and Kitching help us to understand the repercussions of the power-knowledge hegemony and how it was translated into the Gĩkũyũ religio-political configuration. Through the eyes of Mudimbe and Berman, one sees clearly the complex affiliation that existed between the Gĩkũyũ and the colonial government, the missionaries and eventually, among the people themselves. It is from this religio-political convolution that the image and the identity of the Gĩkũyũ are formed. Kitching, using a Marxist approach demonstrates the changing patterns of the Gĩkũyũ image strongly influenced by the colonial factors that shaped the economy and authenticated the existing economic and political structure of the indigenous, based on power inequality and exploitation. The image created through a process of collaboration of colonial power, missionaries and the wealthy indigenous no doubt had a strong impact in the religio-political framework of the Gĩkũyũ, their use of the Mũgumo tree and the way Ngai was construed.

The work of G. Muriuki tries to demonstrate that within these complex affiliations which were extended to their neighbouring groups, the image that emanates is that of a people open to change and cautious of the intruder, a people unwilling to let go their religious polity and the system of land tenure which was weaved within a religious traditional system. There are strong elements of participation and performance (religious, political and economical) which characterises the Gĩkũyũ cosmology cemented by the ritual around the Mũgumo tree. This chapter presents a critical analysis of their literature showing the richness and the limitations in the study of the Gĩkũyũ and the Mũgumo tree.

2.2 The creation of the Gĩkũyũ image and identity

2.2.1 Scoresby and Catherine Routledge

The work of the couple started in 1902 and finally published in 1910, seeks to strategically place colonised Gĩkũyũ in a distant past, so that they could be brought into the present by the British imperialism. Moreover, their study demonstrates evidence of

nostalgia for the golden past of equality and community.[60] Reading critically through the mirrors of Mudimbe and Berman's theories, one notices that the Routledge were primarily interested in the progress of the people, the expansion of knowledge, with the extension of the British Empire and as Shaw rightly observes, in guiding travellers.[61] It was the *episteme* of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that seem to influence the Routledge couple, an episteme aimed at inventing the concept of a static and pre-historic tradition. This move, as Mudimbe ascertains was epitomised by the travellers reports, localising African cultures as 'being-in-themselves' and inherently incapable of existing as 'beings-for- themselves'.[62]

Examining their work, one notices a methodological bias. In fact, most of their informants were their employers or government-appointed chiefs and headmen or their family members. They conducted their interviews in Swahili or through non-Gĩkũyũ interpreters. Nevertheless, their work is of great ethnographic value in the study and knowledge of the people and how the ethnographers collaborated with the missionaries to the formation and invention of Gĩkũyũ tradition. Concerning religion, when the couple discusses the Gĩkũyũ conception of Ngai, one observes the discrepancy of their hypothesis. They use the terms like the Supreme Being, father, that Ngai lives in the sky and omnipotence which contradicts the Gĩkũyũ conception of Ngai. In fact, they confuse the *ituĩka* ceremony with the snake worship. Describing the circumcision ceremonies, they call the Mũgumo a special tree and explore in detail the ceremony of the 'leaf-gathering' (*kuna Mũgumo*) and its role in the Gĩkũyũ rituals.

2.2.2 Cagnolo: The Akikuyu

Fr. Cagnolo, a Catholic missionary belonging to the Consolata fathers from Torino-Italy published his work: *The Akikuyu* in 1933. This was shortly after the formation of K.C.A (Kikuyu Central Association) and the formation of Gĩkũyũ independent churches and schools by the *athomi* of the time. It was during the period of the controversy between the missionaries and the Gĩkũyũ *karing'a* (pure Gĩkũyũ) over the

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[60] Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*, p.29; Routledge, S & C., With *a Prehistoric People: The Kikuyu of British East Africa*, London: Frank Cass & Co., 1968 (1910), p.195. The Routledge, inspired by nostalgia for the Anglo-Saxon past, now destroyed by the process of industrialisation, show the Gĩkũyũ as a perfect example to be used in depicting an ossified, harmonious and non-hierarchical group in the British colony. Berman, B., 'Ethnography as Politics, Politics as Ethnography: Kenyatta, Malinowski, and the Making of Facing Mount Kenya', in *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, vol.30, issue 3, 1996.

[61] Routledge, *With a Prehistoric People*, p.167; Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*, pp.29-30.

[62] Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, p.189.

question of female circumcision and the *Ituika* ceremony.[63] Thus Cagnolo's work comes when the natives were requesting a greater political, economic and religious participation. They were demanding their cultural right to polygamy, land, rituals around the sacred Mũgumo and their forest commons (especially in Kĩrĩnyaga).[64]

Fr. Cagnolo boasts of the accomplishment of the missionaries, complains about the colonial government as opposed to missionary education and laments the rise of the Gĩkũyũ independent churches and schools. He writes:

> it is thus that we recently saw, much to our surprise, the Kikuyu audacity before the Parliament of England, and that we are observing the opening of independent schools, which the new Ordinance has rendered possible, real hot-beds of bolshevism rising here and there in the native reserve, with the ever increasing feeling of xenophoby and the childish pretence to be able and anxious to act by themselves.[65]

His unambiguously paternal position seems to have blurred his vision of seeing the Gĩkũyũ as a people who had a historical consciousness and thus being able to shape their own history. It distorted him from being self-critical, and critical of his Western approach in the study of any ethnographical work. He believes that scientifically, there was nothing to be learned from 'them' (natives) unless it had come from 'us' (Europeans). Cagnolo sees himself and members of the Consolata order as saviours of a Gĩkũyũ savage group destined to extinction. He could not envisage any form of similarity (as postulated by Horton) between the two cosmologies; the African and the Western.

Moreover, for him, Africans are not only the *'Other'* except him but rather, the essential key which could open the understanding of the identity of the *'Same'*. Thus, in him, and in his work, we encounter strong traces of 'Western epistemological ethnocentrism'. This academic 'blinker' hinders him from critically seeing the dynamics of affiliations between the colonial government, the settlers and the natives, which in the genesis was based on a co-existence theory. In this gantry, how could Cagnolo objectively present the Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship? How could he explore the Gĩkũyũ conception of Ngai without prejudice when he vehemently believed that the indigenous, without the Consolata missionaries, were doomed to extinction?

Critically, his work seems to have been influenced by the anticommunist discourse. The book coincides with the pre-war (World War II) discourses about fascism,

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[63] A detailed study of the formation of Gĩkũyũ independent churches, schools and the controversies that clouded the founders, followers and the missionaries between 1925-1930s is given by Sandgren, *Christianity and the Kikuyu*; Githieya, F.K., *The Freedom of the Spirit: African Indigenous Churches in Kenya*, Georgis: Scholars Press, 1997.

[64] Sandgren, *Christianity and the Kikuyu*; Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*, p. 30.

[65] Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*, p.265; Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*, p.31; Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*.

communism and democracy that shaped the political situation in Europe, and especially Italy at the time. Fr. Cagnolo gives us an interesting image which he and missionaries conferred to the Gĩkũyũ husband, juxtaposing him in the discourses of civilised West, the savage Africa and the barbaric Orient. Quintessentially, he has written that

> in the Kikuyu, the husband is not the absolute tyrant, the terror of the other members of the family, the master of life and death, such as we read in certain tribes of the far East, but he is the moderator, to the native mind, of every detail of the family routine, into which he admits no outside interference.[66]

Seen through the lenses of the theories of Berman and Mudimbe, we can say that Cagnolo forges the Gĩkũyũ image and identity with the discourse of the 'Self' and the 'Other'. He felt that the missionaries had a mission to liberate and improve the lives of Gĩkũyũ people, especially of women. Gĩkũyũ women under their men are, according to Cagnolo, overburdened by domestic chores even at times when emotionally alienated from their husbands. Thus, part of the ethnography is aimed at showing that they are in need of rescue from their cruel men as well as from the sexual freedom (Leakey, *Southern Kikuyu*) which was to him against the Christian morality. He comes across as someone fascinated by the customs of the Gĩkũyũ, wanting to present them so that his fellow Westerners could understand them as exotic but not impenetrable, as knowable and thus transformable. Furthermore, he and other missionaries were actively engaged in the battle to keep women in missionary schools and churches.[67]

At one time, Cagnolo has written:

> in short; every moral principle in which our civilisation glories and which our religion commands is here, at least in practice, simply reversed in its terms; and that is enough to argue that whatever inference is drawn in this connection must always confront us with a state of things essentially deplorable, barbarous, inhuman.[68]

Fr. Cagnolo's work gives us some insights into how missionaries collaborated with the colonial power though at times they were at loggerheads, to invent their image of Gĩkũyũ tradition and ethnicity. Finally in his preface, he has noted:

> the book has been written by a catholic missionary, and from the standpoint of the catholic apostolate: bearing this in mind, the reader will not be surprised at discovering in these pages, a genuinely catholic atmosphere, from cover to cover.[69]

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[66] Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*, p.50; Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*, especially chapter 5.

[67] Cagnolo, Ibid., p. 257; Shaw, Ibid., p.32.

[68] Cagnolo, Ibid., p.257; Shaw, Ibid., p.32. Cagnolo's work, it can be argued, mirrors the predominant role the missionaries played not just in imaging the African traditions but also in civilising and evangelising them. Cagnolo's work demonstrates how some missionaries were not self-critical, self-conscious and constantly wearing academic blinkers.

[69] Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*, p.viii.

Thus Cagnolo underlines the prime purpose of the book: a missionary apostolate primarily aimed at demonstrating the savage mind, poor black naked children and sick old people in need of help from Italy.[70] Concerning religion of the Gĩkũyũ and especially their conception of Ngai, it becomes difficult for the reader to reconcile Cagnolo's discourse that the people are animistic especially in chapter XII and that they believe in the only one God called Ngai as is analysed in *The Akikuyu*, chapter II.

Nevertheless, Cagnolo has devoted a great part of his work describing the rituals around the Mũgumo, showing its centrality in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship. Although the book could be helpful especially in the description of some rituals, it should nonetheless be treated with caution.

2.2.3 Leakey: The Southern Kikuyu

Leakey as an ethnographer and Paleohistorian was concerned with the distribution and coherence of cultural traits, while as an adherent of the colonial pastoral[71] he was interested in the maintenance of the traditional culture in the face of the corrupting influence of the West.[72] Leakey, like Kenyatta, depicts the Gĩkũyũ people as an integrated organic community. He writes:

> within a tribe so long as it kept to itself, every one was provided for in one way or another. Individuality was discouraged. There were rules and regulations governing every aspect of life and the rules had to be obeyed...The overall picture is of people going about their business in a community that provides everyone with a place and an occupation, and that made use of the natural resources at its disposal.[73]

Here, we may ask: Did Leakey, like Kenyatta want to depict the Gĩkũyũ society as a British or as a Kenyan museum? In other words, how would Leakey reconcile his creation of the traditional image of the Gĩkũyũ people with the anxieties, political and religious tumults created within the group by the *mbarĩ* system? How would he explain

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[70] This is a common trend in the missionary stories over Europe but more apparent within the Consolata missionaries especially when one scopes the official mission magazines (*Da Casa Madre*) written between 1902 and the1940s.

[71] For a detailed notion of ethnographic and colonial pastoral, see, Clifford, J., 'Introduction: Partial Truths' in Clifford, J., & Marcus, G.E., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, London: University of California Press, 1986, pp.1-26. Also Rosaldo, R., 'From the Door of His Tent: The Fieldworker and the Inquisitor', in Clifford and Marcus, Ibid., pp.77-97. Rosaldo holds that the use of pastoral justifies and betrays the introductory efforts to suppress the interplay of power-knowledge. p.97.

[72] Shaw, *Colonial inscriptions*, pp.95-100. Also in her other detailed article 'Louis Leakey as Ethnographer: On The Southern Kikuyu before 1903', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, volume 23, issue 3, 1990, pp.380-398. Shaw represents Leakey as a fair-minded colonial administrator protecting the Gĩkũyũ 'little community' against the centralising state demands, the disrespect of the settlers and the disruption of the Western education and Gĩkũyũ elites.

[73] Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, Vol.III., p.vii. His work can be read through the eyes of Mudimbe, Berman, Horton and P'Bitek, underlining the aims of most of the writers on Africa and how they manipulated the time and events to create an image that could suit both them and their Western confreres.

the power and the knowledge of the rich *mbarĩ* which created socio-religious cleavages by exploiting the poor members of the society?[74] Leakey presents a clear example of an ethnographer who uses what Berman calls primordialism model, to create an archaic indigenous group.

However, in *Southern Kikuyu*, Leakey fails to acknowledge the social and religio-political discrepancies that clouded the colonial period, an era charged with many contradictions within the Gĩkũyũ community and even in a wider national scale. Although Leakey acknowledges the existence of *mbarĩ* system in relation to land, he critically fails to address the hiatus that existed among the people in terms of land ownership and which went hand in hand with power-control and the manipulation of the rituals around the sacred Mũgumo tree. Again, the *Southern Kikuyu*, fall short of explaining the mechanisms of power and control especially in relation to the Gĩkũyũ versus the government, Gĩkũyũ against their neighbours and amongst themselves. It fails to take into account the reasons for the cosmological upheaval: how do the people (missionaries, colonists and colonialists), originally treated as *ahoi* (tenants in friendship), later come to decide how land was to be distributed, pushing the primal owners away. How did they come to subordinate the original religion of the Gĩkũyũ in favour of Christianity? In creating the Gĩkũyũ community as the 'Eden', Leakey fails to depict the contradictions of the creation of the 'Citizen' and 'Subject' seen as a problem by Mudimbe and Mamdani.

Leakey's work, seen within the theory of Berman is both an ethnographic and colonial pastoral in the sense that on the one hand, it demonstrates a nostalgic portrayal of the past, while on the other hand propounds a picture commonly shared by the colonial power at the time in the invention of Gĩkũyũ tradition and identity.

In fact, Leakey's use of allegories and moral statements should be checked. This is particularly the case when he describes the Gĩkũyũ conception of Ngai but above all in his treatment of women. He forges the image of a Gĩkũyũ woman as opposed to that of the Victorian woman in Britain. While the Gĩkũyũ woman is sublimated by the male, she enjoys her sexual freedom. In contrast, the British woman in the eyes of Leakey does not.[75] The book offers the reader, the opportunity to explore and unearth the moral

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[74] Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley, Book Two*; Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*; Anderson, D., *Histories of the Hanged: Britains dirty war in Kenya and the end of the Empire,* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005; Elkins, C., *Imperial Reckoning: The untold story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya,* New York: Henry Holt & Comp., 2005.

[75] Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, Vol.II., p.796.

statements and allegories that Leakey infuses into the Gĩkũyũ culture. It also critically demonstrates the collaborative ministry between the ethnographers and the Gĩkũyũ elders. As Berman advocates, the book shows how each of the group manipulated its knowledge of history and power to invent the Gĩkũyũ tradition and identity. Shaw, commenting on this ethnographic study, observes that in *The Southern Kikuyu*, more important than its content is Leakey's collaboration with the Gĩkũyũ elders in the construction of the Gĩkũyũ past. The repercussions were that this shaped the elders' different positions in and perception of the then current Kenyan politics, religion and economics, and their expectations for the future. This is why Leakey lamented when the elders denied him the information on *ituika* ceremony.[76]

In *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903*, Leakey places the pattern of the paternalistic, fair-minded local-level official who fought to maintain the integrity of the little community, the disrespect of the settlers and the individualised politics of the African educated elites. The fact of imaging Gĩkũyũ society as integrated and conservative is well depicted by Leakey when the Mau Mau offered an alternative description of the traditional Gĩkũyũ society. One can understand why Leakey, in his book, *Defeating Mau Mau* reacted strongly against them as semi-educated and gangsters.

Quintessentially, does Leakey see the Gĩkũyũ as capable of depicting their own destiny, their own history and their own religion without the help of the West or a 'white Gĩkũyũ'? Like Kenyatta, Leakey ignores the value and the magnitude of the rituals performed around the sacred Mũgumo (*irua* and *ituĩka*), rituals that empowered people all through to the Mau Mau period enabling them to face the colonial bullets.

The Mau Mau movement, with an historical consciousness, seems to have distorted the image of the traditional society that Leakey, Kenyatta, other ethnographers and missionaries had invented and this was a staid threat.[77] Besides, in his outlook on Mau Mau, Leakey comes across as more European than Gĩkũyũ. He saw them as criminals and renegades. He believed in the possibility of a just colonial rule and thus regarded the Mau Mau and their followers as traitors to justice. He even saw this religio-political movement as a syncretic religious movement gone terribly wrong. His serf-serving beliefs imaged all through the *Southern Kikuyu* blinded him from seeing the power-knowledge hegemony that had shaped and in fact, continues to model Gĩkũyũ society to the present day.

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[76] Clark, 'Louis Leakey as Ethnographer' p.396; Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*, pp.100-2.
[77] Leakey, *Defeating Mau Mau*, London: Mathuen, 1954; Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*; Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*, pp.107-8.

2.2.4 Jomo Kenyatta: The 'invention' of Gĩkũyũ

Shaw has written that during his seventeen years in Europe, Kenyatta self-consciously manipulated his image as 'authentic African'. He was colonised and cosmopolitan and his ethnography of his own people was strongly influenced by international politics and the development of modernist anthropology.[78] In *Facing Mount Kenya*, Kenyatta was demonstrating that he was a true Gĩkũyũ and an authentic representative of his people. He was also indicating that far from what his Western critics asserted, he was not a 'detribalised' African. In order to do this, he used the functionalist theory[79], an alternative tool to invent a harmonious and egalitarian Gĩkũyũ group. In the process of reinventing himself by changing his name from Johnstone Kamau to Jomo, he also invented the Gĩkũyũ tradition. In *Facing Mount Kenya*, one encounters the novelty of the theories of Mudimbe's power-knowledge, Berman's, constructivist theory, and above all, the functionalist approach. This last was from his tutor and mentor B. Malinowski. Through a Malinowskian functionalist approach, Kenyatta has offered in this book a portrait of Gĩkũyũ as a well-defined and even rule-based and egalitarian community to consciously arch claims on the disruptive nature of colonialism.

He agreed with Leakey's 'redemptive political grammar, which coded the past, perfect, and future tense, but, in his present, Kenyatta imagined and presided over black rule in Kenya'.[80] Jomo, in his work demonstrated that power existed alongside knowledge, cannot function without knowledge and in fact, power produced knowledge.[81] In a nutshell, *Facing Mount Kenya* critically presents the interplay between the 'Self' and the 'Other' so that, while in Mudimbe's ideology the 'Self' is portrayed by the Westerner and the 'Other' by the African, in the world of Kenyatta, the Gĩkũyũ people are the 'Other' while he, as an author, is the 'Self'.

Being consumed by colonial politics and the politics of authenticity, Kenyatta in *Facing Mount Kenya* firmly supported those who saw pre-colonial Gĩkũyũ society as

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[78] Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*.

[79] Functionalist theory is understood in this context as that which put emphasis on the interrelations between various elements of social system, paying less attention to the evolutionary origins. In this theory, the sacred is viewed and defined by the attitude of the people. Rituals are only sacred if they are performed with reverence and awe. Bowie, F., *The Anthropology of Religion*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004, p.16.

[80] Shaw, ibid, P.117. Also Berman, B., 'Ethnography as Politics, Politics as Ethnography: Kenyatta, Malinowski, and the making of Facing Mount Kenya', in *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol.30, Issue 3, 1996.

[81] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*.

harmonious and egalitarian, as opposed to those who represented it as competitive and dominated by large, landowning, wealthy *mbarĩ*.[82]

Kenyatta was seemingly interested in shaping the future of the Gĩkũyũ people through the exposé of the past. He wanted to enlighten the outsiders; his training had provided him with the technical knowledge not only of a 'participant observer' but one who was able to record the information which hitherto had remained in his head. *Facing Mount Kenya*, as Berman rightly holds, is Kenyatta's ethnographic autobiography. He consciously depicts the Gĩkũyũ society as an Arcadian republic of elders, democratic, orderly, civilised and free from disruptive internal conflict. He does not see the colonial administration capitalising on cleavages that existed between the Gĩkũyũ and their neighbours.

In fact, *Facing Mount Kenya* does not explicitly underline how the colonial power promoted ethnic isolation especially among the Gĩkũyũ who became targets of forced labour. It does not highlight how the elders used the rituals around the sacred Mũgumo to reformulate and remake the Gĩkũyũ identity and to create the new citizen-subject relationship. One can barely see the theory of explanation, prediction and control which no doubt was prevalent in the Gĩkũyũ literature in their relationship with the cultural contextual framework. The work, in its functionalism model does not tersely explain the contemporary situation of Kenya, the insurgence of many revolution movements like *Mwakenya*, and *Mungiki* and the insistence of some members within the Gĩkũyũ group on revisiting the roots of their cosmology and religion through the sacred Mũgumo.

With this picture of Kenyatta, how can one truly envisage the traditional Gĩkũyũ conception of Ngai? How can one fully understand the characteristics and the religious functions of the sacred Mũgumo tree within Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship? How can one get from his work a critical well researched history of the Gĩkũyũ people and not a manipulated history forged by Kenyatta and others? In *Facing Mount Kenya*, Kenyatta depicts an egalitarian Gĩkũyũ society. The crucial question is, was it egalitarian or dominated by wealthy *mbarĩ*? He is almost silent on the outcome of the power-

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[82] Berman, 'Etnography as Politics', p.331 and Shaw, *Colonial inscriptions*, p.26. In *Facing Mount Kenya*, Kenyatta, assumes the elderly status of authority to counteract his actual status of a *Mũthomi* (Christian convert). He also declared his independence from his critics. Here, he has written; 'I am well aware that I could not do justice to the subject without offending those "professional friends of African" who are prepared to maintain their friendship for eternity as a sacred duty, provided only that the African will continue to play the part of the ignorant savage so that they can monopolise the office of interpreting his mind and speaking for him…but the African is not blind. Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, p.xviii.

knowledge influence on his inscription and the life of the people he writes about and eventually controls until 1978.

Thus, in *Facing Mount Kenya*, there is a striking silence on eminent issues concerning wealth and power, conflicts between the *mbarĩ* or wealthy land owners and the landless Gĩkũyũ, (the *ndungata* and *njaguti*). *Njaguti* was simply a servant who received his/her food but no wages and lived a life or servitude while *ndungata* was often herdsmen who with time, through their toil and labour could earn them marriage with the daughters of the rich *mbarĩ* although all their children 'belonged' to the landowner. There is also silence about the position of women in Gĩkũyũ society and how they were denied full participation in important issues of nation building within the socio-political and religious configuration. In fact, for Kenyatta, the women are described as subordinate to men. They figure in his work only in relation to men and are understood in this cultural context as Gĩkũyũ men with their women.[83]

Finally, if we go along with Mudimbe's, Berman's and Horton's theories to understand the invention of identities where both the colonial power, as well as the Western and African scholars participated in the process of invention, then we encounter the same process happening in *Facing Mount Kenya*. Kenyatta has correctly written: the Europeans 'would have to let the Africans choose what parts of European culture could be beneficially transplanted, and how they could be adapted'.[84] In *Facing Mount Kenya*, the idea of transplanting and adaptation is apparent especially in the form of education and conception of Ngai, the form of traditional government, just to mention but a few. Finally, it should be noted that the image and identity of the Gĩkũyũ invented by Kenyatta, Leakey, Cagnolo and some of the contemporary scholars of Gĩkũyũ does not in fact correspond with the representations about the origin, ownership and the control of property in recent history especially in the work of Muriuki and Berman, Lonsdale and Shaw. The discourses in the work of Kenyatta have to be understood under the aegis on which identities were being formulated: British colonialism, impending battles between democracy and fascism and finally capitalism and communism.

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[83] Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, p. 163; Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*; Berman, 'Ethnography as Politics'; Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*.

[84] Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, p.318. His marriage to an English woman from Sussex, surely contradicts his claim and radical revolutionary leader in the struggle against colonial oppressions. See, Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, p.29.

2.2.5 Middleton and Kershaw

The work of Middleton and Kershaw, *The Central tribes of the North Eastern Bantu* is critically compiled under the principle of Functionalism. It is terse, well researched and identifies the Gĩkũyũ structures and authorities. Above all it demonstrates the tasks, activities, and the production of social relations. It also manifests a Gĩkũyũ culture crowded by power-wealth relationship, whereby the elders are depicted as the apex of political and judicial power and at the centre of the system.[85] In describing the religio-political and economic context that crowded the Gĩkũyũ people at the making of his book, he has written:

> nowadays you go to what was the Gĩkũyũ reserve and people are elegant, with nice clothes, though they are poor. But in those days, the older men and women wore goatskins...and many of them had their land taken-enough so that they had to work as squatters on white farms...many of us were aware of the considerate brutality of some of the settlers... It's cosmic now when you go back to see how the British misinterpreted what they saw: they mapped out these territories, made boundaries between ethnic groups, and gave them all moral attributes.[86]

Middleton stresses a few elements relevant for the study of Gĩkũyũ and the sacred Mũgumo.

a) His work tersely shows that Mudimbe's power-knowledge theory was eminently present in the religio-political affiliations existing between the Gĩkũyũ, the colonial government and the settlers. He underscores that colonial enterprise was characterised by the organisation, arrangements, mapping, designing and transforming the Gĩkũyũ into Europeans constructions.

b) The British often misinterpreted what they saw or, to use Berman's theory, the colonial enterprise in collaboration with the missionaries used analytic models of primordialism and instrumentalism to control the natives. The Gĩkũyũ as well used the process of explanation, prediction and control to fight for their rights.

c) He accentuates some of the conflicts between the settlers and the natives. Both were interested in the same thing: land. But one group had both the power and knowledge to acquire and exploit it at the expense of the other. In fact, the traditional *gĩthaka* (land) system was cloned by the colonial system with incredible brutality.

d) The British exploited the cultural cleavages that existed between the Gĩkũyũ people and their neighbours. It was the hierarchy of power that mattered. The colonial

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[85] Middleton, *The Central tribes of the North Eastern Bantu*; Shaw, *Colonial inscriptions*, p.33; Pellow, D., 'An Interview with John Middleton, in *Current Anthropology*, volume 40, Issue 2, April, 1999, pp.217-230.

[86] Pellow, 'An Interview with John Middleton', p.220.

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hegemony manipulated and capitalised on 'ethnic' conflicts to create the false identity of the group which later led to using one group to torture the other. All these manoeuvres were tantamount to embracing the cultural repercussions underlined by Horton's intellectualist theory. Surely, one could ask; who were 'closed' in these religio-political and social parameters: the colonial or the indigenous hegemony?

2.2.6 Kitching: The making of an African 'Petite Bourgeoisie'

Gavin Kitching in his work *Class and Economic change in Kenya* demonstrates the impact of colonialism on the internal structures of a dominated economy and in particular the patterns of stratification within that society. The work aims at making a contribution from the perspective of Marxist theory and in particular, to explore some of the most central theoretical problems which arise when an attempt is made to apply a Marxist perspective to a non-capitalistic society.[87] His work describes two classes of men among precolonial Gĩkũyũ, the landowners and the landless. Detailed reports on the resources and conduct of wealthy men illustrate how they insinuated their greater political power and knowledge. The book demonstrates that among the precolonial Gĩkũyũ, wealth, knowledge and power went hand in hand. The work also shows the mutual relationship that existed between the colonialists, wealthy *mbarĩ* and the elders who owned massive tracts of land.

These three groups became in their own way economic or business partners. Colonial officials protected them while providing safety for both the settlers and European traders. In the end, colonial officials appointed chiefs and headmen 'from among these 'big men', and as a result, the differences between the landed and the landless were exacerbated by the privileges and power accorded to the chiefs'.[88] But what was the aftermath of the colonial set-up and the collaborative ministry of the wealthy Gĩkũyũ? For Kitching, the wealthy landowners grew richer and more powerful. Additionally, the migration of labour to the urban areas by young men created one society engaged in the wage labour promoted by the colonial government. Thus, this accumulation of control based on power and wealth became the bedrock for the Gĩkũyũ petite bourgeoisie which was further reinforced by their access to European education and jobs. Thus, reading between the lines, one understands in this work how through the process of power-knowledge (Mudimbe), explanation, prediction and control (Horton),

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[87] Kitching, G., *Class and Economic change in Kenya; The Making of an African Petite-Bourgeoisie 1905-1970*, London: Yale University Press, 1982, p.1.

[88] Shaw, *Colonial inscriptions*, p. 122; Kitching, *Class and Economic change in Kenya*, pp.8-20.

the British moved from the state of co-existence with the Gĩkũyũ people to that of control.[89] This shift of power was later manifested through the ruling system of the African themselves as postulated in the constructivist approach.

Despite the thoroughness of Kitching's work showing the differentiation between the social and political configuration and the role the Gĩkũyũ family played in organising their society and thus creating politico-economic inequality, the work falls short of explaining why, even to the present time, the Gĩkũyũ is one of the dominant groups in the merchant class economy in Kenya. Moreover, as Shaw observes, Kitching's work, 'following the convention of social history, represents a continuous dialectical process where as ethnographers Kenyatta and Leakey portray destruction and disjuncture'.[90] Although he does not address the repercussions of these issues in the religious pedestal of the Gĩkũyũ people, still, one can draw the conclusion that this system was strongly woven into the Gĩkũyũ religio-political framework. Besides, in the traditional Gĩkũyũ, land, politics and religion went hand in hand under the management of the wealthy *mbarĩ* and the ruling elders.

2.2.7 Muriuki: The Gĩkũyũ Ethnographic Past

The historian Muriuki in his work *A History of the Kikuyu 1500-1900*, explores the pre-colonial Gĩkũyũ as does Kitching, *Class and Economic change in Kenya*, together with the work of Lonsdale, *The state of Agrarian unrest*[91] as well as Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*. Like these other scholars, Muriuki depicts the image of the Gĩkũyũ society where the wealthy land-owners mercilessly exploited the poor landless members. Thus his work differs fundamentally from that of Leakey, Kenyatta and Cagnolo. Critically reading his work, Kitching's pictures of the 'petite Gĩkũyũ bourgeoisie' and Berman's 'politics of the belly' are evident. It shows the power and wealth in society and how this controls the Gĩkũyũ people within different parameters of socio-religious affiliations. There is, of course, emphasis on the economic relationship between the wealthy *mbarĩ* and the poor members of the society which creates a social

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[89] Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*; Horton, *Patterns of thought*; Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*; Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*.

[90] Shaw, *Colonial inscriptions*, p.123.

[91] Lonsdale, J., 'A State of Agrarian Unrest: Colonial Kenya', in *Agrarian Unrest in British and French Africa, British India and French Indo-china in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 1-8, Conference in London, Oxford: Past and Present Society, 1982.

fissure.[92] Moreover, this could well be understood by the use of power-knowledge, constructivist and intellectualist theories which feature predominantly in his work.

In *A History of the Kikuyu*, Muriuki, in his methodology, surpasses the earlier works especially of Kenyatta, Cagnolo, Routledge and Leakey which trace the origins and settlement of the Gĩkũyũ right from the myth of the origin of Gĩkũyũ and *Mũmbi*. The work is a thorough and serious piece of historical research providing insights into the history of Gĩkũyũ, their cultural and religio-political configuration. In his historiography, Muriuki underlines that the Gĩkũyũ had a historical consciousness and were the agency of their own cultural making. This is demonstrated by his theory of migration and settlement which contends that *Mũkũrwe wa Nyagathanga* (Gathigira, Mugo, Leakey, Kenyatta, Wanjohi) was not the cradle of the Gĩkũyũ.

However, in adopting this method, Muriuki ignores important details. For example, he disregards the myths of origin especially those of the king of the Gĩkũyũ people (Kenyatta), but accepts the myth of the matriarchy. He does not accept the myth that explains the cultural transmission between the Gĩkũyũ and their neighbours.[93] This last myth is important because it denotes that although the Gĩkũyũ have a history of cleavages, there exist a harmonious relationship evidenced through intermarriage and the sharing of common beliefs and practices. In fact Muriuki's work gives an impression that the oral tradition did not really facilitate the enterprise of the reconstruction of Gĩkũyũ ethnicity, a point that our thesis has contested. In *A History of the Kikuyu*, colonialism accommodated already existing divisions among the Gĩkũyũ society and created more exploitative relations among them.[94]

Finally, Muriuki seems to have paid little attention to the work of H.E. Lambert, *The System of Land Tenure in the Kikuyu land unit* which is painstaking and differs not only in its historical reconstruction but in the possible dates of origin and settlement. Lambert for instance rightly holds that the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ settled earlier than the other members of the group around Mount Kenya and that the Gĩcũgũ, contrary to Muriuki's thinking, are not cousins of the southern Gĩkũyũ.[95]

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[92] Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu* p.77; Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*, pp.120-23.

[93] Beecher, L.J., 'Stories of the Kikuyu', *Africa*, Vol.XI.No.1, Jan 1938.

[94] Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu*, p.95.

[95] Lambert, H.E., *The System of Land Tenure*; Mutahi. K.E., *Sound Change and Classification of the dialects of the Southern Mount Kenya*, Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1983.

2.2.8 Ngũgĩ: The Gĩkũyũ Image

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is another scholar whose approach seems to agree with the ideologies of Mudimbe, Horton and Berman and most of the post-colonial literature. His narratives, ranging from *Weep not, Child,* 1964 to *Moving the Centre,* 1993 and *Mũrogi wa Kagogo,* 2004, depicts these narratives as agents of history since they provide the space for challenging our understanding of national identities and the way in which identities have been used in the contestation of power in Kenya. Ngũgĩ however, does not see anything good brought by colonial power and missionaries.

He envisages religion either as a tool of oppression or a vehicle for lulling the poor and blocking them from seeing the true material reality of the world.[96] In these works, Ngũgĩ presents the colonial powers as doing everything to suit their own personal political and economic agendas. In doing this, Ngũgĩ sees no participation of or input by the Africans in the making of multiple identities in colonial Africa. Although there is literature showing how religion entrenched and justified the exploitation of Africans in both colonial and postcolonial period, it is also true that religion was not always a mute tool of exploitation.[97] There is in the work of Ngũgĩ an attempt to promote the work of independent movements, (churches and schools) which had an enormous contribution to the political and religious struggle in Kenya. His current narratives demonstrate that between the 1920s and 1960s, these movements in the Gĩkũyũ land attempted to offer an alternative to missionary education and thus became major vehicles of politico-religious mobilisation which spread all over the country.

Thus, Ngũgĩ's understanding of the role of religion is one dimensional. It is a blinkered view of a full understanding of Gĩkũyũ historiography and religiocity. He does not appreciate the role the church continues to play in the contemporary Kenyan politics. Accordingly in his novels, especially those dealing with his earlier work, he is deeply grounded in the dependency theory. This of course is relevant but it does not allow him to deal with specific contradictions and socio-political and economic divisions and conflicts that existed in both the pre-colonial and postcolonial Gĩkũyũ. Ngũgĩ however underlines the centrality of the sacred Mũgumo in Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship. His

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[96] Ogunde, J., *Ngũgĩ's Novels and African History,* p.41. Also in Ngũgĩ's work especially, *The River Between, Weep Not, Child,* and *A Grain of Wheat.*

[97] Anderson, J., *The Struggle for School,* Nairobi: Longmann, 1970, especially chapter 8; Ranger, T., 'African Attempts to control Education in East and Central Africa, 1900-1939', in *Past and Present,* 32, 1965, pp.56-89.

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novels, especially the *River Between* and *A Grain of Wheat* clearly demonstrate Mũgumo as the fulcrum of Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship.

Ngũgĩ passionately depicts the power of the Gĩkũyũ traditional cosmology and worship in these works.   In the *River Between* for instance, Joshua, embraces the missionary teaching, rejects the Gĩkũyũ heritage and the custom of his people.   In renouncing the group's magic, power and ritual and refusing his daughters to be circumcised, he is ostracised.   His daughter Mũthoni, although a Christian, affiliates herself more with the indigenous belief than the *mũthomi*. As a consequence, she decides to circumcise secretly in the traditional way. The mother, thrown in the quagmire of two conflicting worlds, Christian and tradition, is unsure on whom to support.

Ngũgĩ uses the Biblical allegories with a lot of ease and thus the cosmology he epitomises in his work is suspicious. However, having said that, Ngũgĩ, like Kenyatta, underlines the importance of the mythical founding couple of the Gĩkũyũ people where Gĩkũyũ is the father and Mũmbi the mother of the Gĩkũyũ group. It is Ngai the *Mũgai* (divider) who gave the land to Gĩkũyũ. In Ngũgĩ like Kenyatta, Leakey and many ethnographers of the Gĩkũyũ people, land has a strong religious connotation. Ngai is also depicted by Ngũgĩ as having immense power and the Mũgumo epitomises his presence. Thus religion is an important element in his work.

2.3. Gĩkũyũ Religion

Mbiti, exploring the intrinsic attributes of the deity in Africa uses the words omniscience, omnipresent, transcendent, omnipotent and immanence. He claims that by 'attributing omniscience to God, African people are placing him in the highest possible positions'. Again Mbiti assumes that there is 'but One Supreme God'.[98] E.G. Parrinder like J. Mbiti, writes: 'omnipotence and omniscience of God are indicated by the names...the ancient of days, the limitless, the irreversible, the high up one, the inexplicable'.[99]

Leakey comments: 'the Supreme being made the world, created mankind, created all animals and other life and was in sole control of propagation in all life'.[100] On the conception of Ngai, Kenyatta has written; 'the Gĩkũyũ believes in One God, Ngai... a single High God...the common name used in speaking of the Supreme Being is

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[98] Mbiti J. S., *Concepts of God in Africa,* London: SPCK, 1970, pp. xiii and 3-16.

[99] Parrinder, E.G., *African traditional Religion,* London: Sheldom Press, 1974, pp.33-40.

[100] Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu,* p.1075.

Ngai...God lives in heavens...no individual may directly supplicate the almighty'.[101] C. Cagnolo writing about the Gĩkũyũ conception of Ngai states; 'since our arrival among this people, we found out that the Kikuyu believes in a Supreme being, Spiritual Ruler, and Governor of the Universe...the Supreme Being is believed to be good per-se'.[102]

Kibicho along the same lines writes that God lives above in the sky and is omnipotent. He is almighty, invisible and a mystery. God is transcendent and immanent. He is benevolent. God is the owner of all mysteries.[103]

The metaphysical terms as used above to describe the Gĩkũyũ conception of Ngai raise several imminent questions: (a), Did the traditional Gĩkũyũ conceive of Ngai in these given categories? (b), Does this conception of Ngai reflect the fruits of Western scholars, Missionaries and Africanists? (c), How would the traditional Gĩkũyũ conceive of Ngai? What attributes, what names?

The first point of contention here is that any conception of Ngai as that presented above, detached from day-to-day experience of the Gĩkũyũ people in their socio-political and religious life and configuration is alien and thus does not make sense to the traditional Gĩkũyũ. The Gĩkũyũ Ngai could not have been described in those Western Christian metaphysical terms such as omnipotence, omniscience, all-seeing and transcendence. These terminologies, apart from the fact that they are blended within a different morphological linguistic structure (Western), are also from a different historical background and ideology. In fact, they demonstrate the power-knowledge discourses whereby, the Western paradigm superimposes its categories to the African religio-political framework. This is tantamount to what Mudimbe and Mamdani contend in their understanding of the Western and African relationship based on the citizen-subject affiliation. Following this argument and as our thesis will show, one can assert that Ngai conceived in these terms described by Kenyatta, Mbiti, Idowu, Parrinder, Cagnolo, Kibicho etc. will be beyond recognition of the ordinary Gĩkũyũ especially in the countryside.

O.p'Bitek rightly calls these scholars 'intellectual smugglers', people who are 'busy introducing Greek metaphysical conception into African religious thought'.[104] He

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[101] Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya,* pp. 233-236.

[102] Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu,* pp.26-27.

[103] Kibicho, S.G., 'The Continuity of the African Conception of God into and through Christianity', in Fashole-Luke, et al., *Christianity in Independent Africa,* London: Rex Collings, 1978, p.372.

[104] P'bitek, O., *African Religions in Western Scholarship,* Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1971 (1970), p.88.

reiterates that this process of hellenisation introduced to Christianity and later smuggled by the African and some Western scholars and missionaries tries to describe Ngai as the Supreme Being. Berman rightly asserts that this was a process that was going on in Africa, whereby, the colonial system was busy reinforcing the African custom and identity. This process took at least two directions: on the one hand, the missionaries in their endeavour to understand and communicate with the natives in order to convert them compiled dictionaries and grammars and created a standardised vernacular. On the other hand, professional anthropologists, mainly British functionalist anthropology worked arduously to create a homogenous, democratic and integrated African culture. In doing so, there was also an invention of a religious configuration, whereby, the Christian God became the only supreme deity.[105]

About the myth of origin for instance, Y. Droz has written;

En filigrane au récit de Jomo Kenyatta apparaissent l'origine chrétienne de l'éducation de son auteur ainsi que les grands thémes et l'origine de l'ethnographie fonctionnaliste britannique qui ont imprégné sa formation à Londres.[106]

In watermark to Jomo Kenyatta's account appears the Christian origin of education of its writer as well as the big and the origin of Britannic functionalist ethnography that influenced his formation in London.

He goes on using the European concepts such as state, church economics and even concepts about Ngai that Malinowski had warned him against.[107] Some of the Biblical allegories found in his work *Facing Mount Kenya* are too obvious to be taken as coincidental. According to Kenyatta, the first couple receives from Ngai the whole territory of Gĩkũyũ stressing from *Kĩrĩnyaga*[108] (Mount Kenya). Ngai the Gĩkũyũ creator and divider ask Gĩkũyũ to colonise them and make them yield. Reading the Kenyatta myth, one feels strongly the vibrations and the influence of the Biblical myth of creation in Genesis chapter one, adapted and manipulated to form a Gĩkũyũ myth. In fact, here one would question the authenticity of Kenyatta's myth of origin and settlement,

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[105] Berman, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism' *African Affairs* (1998), 97, 305-341. Hastings confirms that missionaries in Africa collaborated in the invention of the tradition where the Bantu words for either spirits of deities were reinvented and used to depict the one Supreme Christian God. Hastings, *The Church in Africa 1450-1950*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, pp.333-335; Ranger, T., 'The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa', in Grinker, R.R., & Steiner, C.B.,(eds.) *Perspectives on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History, and Representation*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1997; Hobsbawn, E. & Ranger, T., *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 211-262.

[106] Droz, *Migrations Kikuyus*, p.72.

[107] Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, p.xi; Berman, 'Ethnography as Politics', p.334

[108] *Kĩrĩnyaga/Kĩrĩ-Nyaga* literally means with brightness and thus the Mountain of Brightness. It is a snow capped mountain (Mount Kenya). The Gĩkũyũ believed that this mountain was the abode of Ngai (God) their creator and provider. As a mountain, it had religious, political, and social significance.

particularly of the 'Gĩkũyũness' in the myth. This could perhaps explain as to why the myth neither appears in Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu* (1933) nor in Hobley, *Bantu Beliefs and Magic* (1922) and Routledge, *With a Prehistoric people* (1910).[109]

Finally, Kenyatta, in his final chapter of *Facing Mount Kenya* writes that the Africans have the right and ability to choose what is of value in their own cultures and select from European culture what could be adapted (that which is superior to the one the ancestors lived before).[110] But, does he give the Gĩkũyũ people this right to be active participants in his orthographical work? If Kenyatta strongly believed in the authenticity of the Gĩkũyũ traditional religion, why then did he fail to promote it along other traditional religions in Kenya or even encourage a space for a genuine religious dialogue when he became the first president of the republic?

How about Leakey and religion? Reading the three volumes of Leakey on the *Southern Kikuyu before 1903*, one discovers ethnography of an immense anthropological value relevant for a comparative work. He provides us with a meticulous description of the rites in all their ethnographical complexities. C. Clark argues that Leakey's work was a combined effort between him and the Gĩkũyũ elders each using history and implicit social knowledge for their own purpose. It is 'the construction of a Kikuyu past, shaped by their different positions of the then current Kenyan politics and economics, and their desires for the future'.[111] She also point out that Leakey's work is full of allusions to the resemblance of the Gĩkũyũ with the ancient Hebrews especially in the chapter on the rituals, sacrifices and penalties. So in writing about the *Southern Kikuyu before 1903*, Leakey was writing a Gĩkũyũ Bible. He was keen to show that he identified himself with the Gĩkũyũ and thus felt he could provide information about their customs to the colonial administration. His view of Gĩkũyũ

> society and culture focused on the qualities of democracy, harmony, and integration lost to
> class-ridden, industrial Britain. He argued for the maintenance of Gĩkũyũ traditions and for
> an interpretation of Gĩkũyũ culture as similar to the laws of the Old Testament.[112]

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[109] Droz., *Migrations Kikuyus,* p.73., Instead C. Cagnolo gives a myth with three names, *Mũrĩithi* (designating the pastoralist group), *Mũrimi* (agriculturalist like the Gĩkũyũ) *Mũguĩmi* (hunters and gatherers) and *Mũturi* (blacksmith), Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu,* pp.226-228. These myths explain elements of inter-relations and complementarity among the Gĩkũyũ and the neighbouring groups.

[110] Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya,* p.318; Berman, 'Ethnography as Politics', p.336.

[111] Clark, 'Louis Leakey as Ethnographer', p381; Droz, *Migrations Kikuyus,* p.79 and 82.

[112] Ibid., p.394; Droz, *Migrations Kikuyus,* p.81; Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu vol.I.,* p.Xii.

These Biblical allegories found spread in this work of the *Southern Kikuyu* strongly suggest that both Leakey and the elders might have used Christian imageries and ideologies for separate political agendas.

Another crucial element to support this argument is found when exploring some of the Gĩkũyũ prayers to Ngai and their communion with *ngoma*. These prayers demonstrate that although the Gĩkũyũ might have had a clear distinction between Ngai worship and *ngoma* communion especially in ritual celebrations around the sacred Mũgumo tree, the differentiation becomes 'vague' in their prayer which are sometimes addressed to both. Kenyatta goes on to contend:

> the Gĩkũyũ people, it is certain, maintain a close and vital relationship with spiritual entities. Their daily lives, both individual and groups, are influenced at all points by belief in the supernatural...sacrificial practices are of such importance in establishing connections with both the High God and the other supernatural Beings. Gĩkũyũ religion has definitely two departments...both are really vital; they function in unison but in different spheres...when sacrifice is made to the High God on an occasion of national (tribal) importance, the ancestors must join in making the sacrifice...sacred sacrifices are carried out ...in connection with both Ngai worship and *ngoma* communion.[113]

Whereas it is true that the structure of the Gĩkũyũ traditional religion is envisaged in a two-tier-structure, with Ngai taking the highest level in their religio-political hierarchy while the *ngoma* take the second, it is also true that the *ngoma* had come to dominate the religious scene of the people so that they were more feared than Ngai. Both Ngai and *ngoma* like other living beings can be pleased or displeased by the behaviour of the individual, family or members of the community and thus the Gĩkũyũ had to commune with them constantly,[114] in fact, more frequently than they did with Ngai. Nevertheless, it looks like their prayers and sacrifices to Ngai and their communion with the *ngoma* were closely linked. It seems the people valued more the participation and constant communion with the ancestors through the process of control as postulated by Horton's theory. The gap between the *ngoma* veneration and the worship to Ngai was not significant. Routledge in 1910 noted concerning *ngoma*, that drink-offerings were made to them as well as Ngai. He further accentuates; 'it is a little difficult at times to say for

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[113] Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya,* pp.231-233, pp.266-67. *Ngoma* means the departed spirits. It is from the word *koma/gũkoma* (to sleep) and literally translated as *arĩa marĩ thĩ* (those who are in the ground). It refers to the belief that when somebody died, his/her spirit went to the bowels of the earth. These ancestors, although in another world, could nevertheless be called upon, spoken to, and prayed to in the homestead at anytime of the day or night. Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu,* p.1105-1107; Lambert, *The System of Land Tenure,* p. 120.

[114] Ibid., p.266.

whom such sacrifices are intended. Possibly the distinction is not always clear to the worshipers'.[115]

In the Gĩkũyũ traditional *cosmology*, there existed combined offerings to both Ngai and *ngoma*. Moreover, when

> Members of the soda mines guild (sic.group) went on a journey to lake Magadi, they always took at least one ram and one he-goat to be slaughtered in the Maasai country as a combined sacrifice to the deity and to the spirits of the deceased soda-miners, to accompany prayer for the safe and successful journey...as they returned, before they actually came back to the villages, they sent a messenger to get a ram, and this they slaughtered in the bush as an offering of thanks to God and the spirits.[116]

In the event of a blacksmith building a new house for his workshop or a new furnace for a smelter they sacrificed to both Ngai and *ngoma*. On completion, prayers for blessing were addressed not only to the *ngoma*, but also to Ngai. When the Gĩkũyũ scouts went to spy to the Maasai country, in order to raid their cattle, they sacrificed a ram in the plains. Again they did a combined sacrifice to Ngai and to the *ngoma* of former scouts and solemn prayers for blessing were offered to both the deity and the ancestors.[117]

During the initiation ceremony for example, in both the Gĩkũyũ and Maasai groups, sacrifices were made to the *ngoma* in order to purchase from them and Ngai the right to initiate the children. In doing this, there was a combined sacrifice both to them and to Ngai.[118] This is why, given this fact, though the prayers and sacrifices to Ngai were different from that of *ngoma*, their conception of their deity and *ngoma* and their role could not have been as purified (Westernised) as Kenyatta presents. Seldom, people's relationship with the *ngoma* through their prayers and ritual offerings may give an impression that this affinity mirrors the one they cultivate with Ngai. The harmony and unity that *ngoma* wanted both in the family (*ngoma cia mũciĩ*), clan and community are the same ethical values that Ngai demands of the Gĩkũyũ people. On the one hand, Ngai demands recognition in prayers and sacrifices and on the other hand, *ngoma* in their own way request their own acknowledgment in these social political and religious circles. The prayers uttered to Ngai at the base of the sacred Mũgumo can demonstrate our point:

> Ngai, o wee ũikaraga o kũu igũrũ rĩa Kĩrĩnyaga, wee ũtũraga o kũrĩa mbura yumaga rĩ, twoka gũkũria na ihaki rĩrĩ rĩa ndũrũme na njohi ũturĩrie mbura. Kĩthuku, andũ aku nĩ mekũrĩra, ciana na mbũri ona ng'ombe nĩ ikũrĩra. Mwene-Nyaga tũgũkũthaitha na thakame na maguta

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[115] Routledge, *With a Prehistoric People*, p. 241.

[116] Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu, Vol.III.* p.1115

[117] Ibid., pp.1114-1115

[118] Ibid.,p.1107, also vol.II, pp.603-606. Kenyatta adds that the *mũndu mũgo* (medicine man) sprinkled *njohi* (honey beer) in the ground to appease the *ngoma* and to bring them in communion with those of the living. Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, p.139; Kabetu, M. N., *Kĩrĩra kĩa Ũgĩkũyũ*, Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1947, p.74.

ma ndũrũme ĩno, tũgĩgũkũngũyagia ota ũrĩa maithe maitũ magũkũngũyagĩra o mũtĩinĩ ũyũ wa Mũgumo na ũkamoirĩria mbura ya kĩguni. Thaai thathaiyai Ngai thaaai.[119]

Ngai, you who live on Mount Kenya. You who live in the source of rain, we come to offer this sacrifice of lamb and beer to you so that you may give us rain. Kĩthuku, people and children are crying, sheep, goats and cattle are crying too. Mwene-Nyaga, we beseech you with blood and fat of this lamb, praising you as our ancestors did under this same Mũgumo tree, and you heard them and brought them rain of prosperity. Peace we beseech you, Ngai, peace be with us.

In the prayer of blessing the new house the traditional Gĩkũyũ ceremonial elder addresses both to *ngoma* and Ngai in these words:

Wee Githuri oikaraga Kere-Nyaga; kerathimo giaku nikeo gitumaga micii ithegee. Namo marakara maku, nemo mahukagia mecie. Togogothaitha tweturaneire ohamwe na ngoma cia aciari aito. Togokoria ati orinderere mocie uyu na otome wethegee. Reke atumia ona mahio mathathare. Thaaai, thathayai Ngai, Thaaaai.[120]

You the great elder, who dwells on the Kĩrĩ-Nyaga, your blessings allows the homesteads to spread. Your anger destroys homesteads. We beseech you, and in this we are in harmony with the spirits of our ancestors. We implore you to guard this homestead and let it extend. Let the women and livestock be plentiful. Peace we beseech you Ngai, peace be with us.

These and other prayers addressed to Ngai as expressed by the informants and Kenyatta, do not explicitly show metaphysical names of Ngai such as omnipotence but depict a deity who is strong and who is in touch with the Gĩkũyũ people. They also indicate the implicit connection between Ngai and *ngoma* a*s* well as elucidating that a traditional Gĩkũyũ would conceive of Ngai in relation to his ancestors. That is why in this prayer, done in the blessing of the new house, the Gĩkũyũ assure Ngai that whatever is being asked for is in unison with the will of the *ngoma*. It also explains why people believed that Ngai, together with the ancestors, would bless their homesteads, guard them against calamities, give them health, bestow unity in their home, clan and society and bless them with abundant children and livestock. The Gĩkũyũ constantly beseech Ngai and commune with *ngoma* for peace and tranquillity.

Ngai is a deity who can bless and destroy (*Ngai wa kĩguni na gĩtei*). These prayers and the attributes do not depict a traditional Gĩkũyũ using those metaphysical terms such as the ones previously depicted by Kenyatta and his colleagues. This fact could probably explain why, Ngai was also understood as the deity of other races. This form of religious liberty equally explains why in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology, one could be a Christian, Muslim and yet remain 'authentic' Gĩkũyũ.[121]

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[119] Interview, Gĩcũgũ, 2003-4; Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, pp. 246-7.

[120] Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, pp.82-83.

[121] Lonsdale J. 'Kikuyu Christianities' in *Journal of Religion in Africa, Vol.XXIX*, Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 1999, p.215.

As already attested, the gap between the Ngai worship and the *ngoma* communion was not always clear in the traditional Gĩkũyũ cosmology. Indeed if the religious hiatus between these two spiritual beings was not easily conspicuous in the Gĩkũyũ religio-philosophical world, it was even more confusing for the missionaries who first came into contact with the Gĩkũyũ people. Indeed, 'Western missionaries made their first contact with peoples from the West, East, and South of the continent, some of them were impressed by the African image of God and attempted to adapt their message to it'.[122] This was especially true in the attributes of creation and origin.

In their primal contact with the Gĩkũyũ, missionaries might have found it easier to hellenise the Gĩkũyũ deity than to reconcile their religious veneration and communion with the ancestors. On the same note, Hastings observes:

> Only in regard to the reality of God was there a shared inclusivity. Here missionaries themselves increasingly recognised that the traditional belief they actually had an ally... May be, African traditional beliefs about the nature of God were not often as clear as some missionaries affirmed and many modern African Christian scholars tend to suggest... This applied not only to god names but to other words as well, relating to human virtues or divine attributes.[123]

What Hasting underlines is evidently the nub of the discussion of Gĩkũyũ conception of Ngai since he confirms that most of what has been presented whether by African or Western scholars and missionaries has to be treated with caution. J. Lonsdale affirms that while dealing with the Gĩkũyũ people, the main problem of the missionaries was to find a properly Gĩkũyũ distinction between the Old and the New Testament and they were happy to turn Jehovah into Ngai.[124] The New Testament in Gĩkũyũ came out in 1926 during the Murang'a and Gĩcũgũ *ituĩka*. In the Swahili Bible, the dragon in the Apocalypse had been a *nyoka* (snake) similar to the serpent of Eden, but with the Gĩkũyũ translation, the dragon was no longer a snake but the *Ndamathia* (dragon), cast out from heaven and which was now translated as the devil.[125] Even the *ngoma* were now translated as devil or demons.

In case a disease befell a family, a fat lamb was was sacrificed to Ngai and *ngoma* by the father. While he sprinkled the fat, he uttered this or a similar prayer:

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[122] Sundkler, B. & Steed, C., *A History of the Church in Africa,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.92.

[123] Hastings, *The Church in Africa 1450-1950*, pp.332-3.

[124] Lonsdale, 'The Moral economy of Mau Mau', pp, 373; Karanja, *Founding an African Faith*, p.131.

[125] Ibid., p. 373; Kenyatta *Facing Mount Kenya*, p. 326; Lonsdale, 'The Moral Econony of Mau Mau', p.374. As missionaries thought Gĩkũyũ feared the *ngoma* and wished to keep them at a distance they adopted the term *ngoma /shaitani* (from Swahili Shetani) for evil spirits. A good example is in Mark 8:33, Luke 11:15,18 and Matthew 15:22 in the Gĩkũyũ Bible.

Ngai, kĩnyue maguta maya nĩguo ũrakarũke. Nacio ngoma cia baba na cia maitũ na cia agui na cia cũcũ nĩikĩnyue; na mũkĩrakarũke nĩgũo mahiũ na ciana na andũ aria mari mũciĩ ũyũ mahone na mathagae, na marĩtũke.[126]

Ngai, drink this fat and be content. And the spirits of father and mother, of my grandfathers and grandmothers drink and be content so that children and the family members may be healed, multiply and flourish again.

Here we notice that although the prayer is supposed to be addressed to the ancestors in the mind, in the religious practice of the traditional Gĩkũyũ the conception of both Ngai and ancestor are intimately connected. There is a strong indication that Kenyatta's meticulous presentation of dichotomising that which is of *ngoma* and Ngai might have been due to his strong religious missionary formation. The traditional Gĩkũyũ would not conceive of Ngai as distanced from his normal life and his/her communion with *ngoma*. These two spiritual beings worked closely for the family, clan and community either for the good or the punishment.

Kenyatta while trying to make a distinction between the worship of Ngai (*gũcũkũrithia* Ngai) and to commune with the ancestors (*gũitangĩra ngoma njohi*: to pour libation for the ancestors) or to sacrifice to the ancestors (*gũthĩnjĩra ngoma*) failed to mention this intricate and intimate relationship between the two spiritual beings that seem to exist in the traditional Gĩkũyũ religion. Whether this was a deliberate and conscious move or an academic blinker is difficult to ascertain. From the evidences treated in our thesis, it emerges clearly that Kenyatta and most of these scholars were out to prove that the Gĩkũyũ were monotheistic and that their deity was the same as that of Christians in Europe and America at the time. What Hasting has said about the attitude of the missionaries and the quest to Christianise the African deities is important. The Gĩkũyũ were not immensely different from other African ethnic groups in terms of their geo-political set-up. It can also be argued that some African scholars were following a similar path.

2.4 Conclusion

The review of the literature of the Gĩkũyũ illuminated mainly by the theories of Mudimbe, Berman and Horton raises pertinent methodological issues to be probed. They have underlined the complexities involved in the formation of the Gĩkũyũ identity. What is apparent is the fact that power, control and competition saturated and continues to haunt the indigenous Gĩkũyũ. But within this interplay of affiliations there is a strong religious, political and economical participation that constantly needed to be

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[126] Gathigira, S.K., *Miikarire ya Agikuyu*, London: The Sheldon Press, 1952 (1933), p. 40. The translation is mine. Also, Bernardi, B., *La Religione dei Primitivi*, Milano, Instituto Editoriale Galileo, 1953, p.225.

authenticated through the use of myths and rituals. It is from these affiliations that the conception of Ngai, *ngoma* and the Mūgumo makes sense. Under this conceptual framework, a feasible methodology arose that directed our research on the Gĩkũyũ and the role of the sacred Mūgumo tree. This will be explored in our next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The study started as a pilot project to understand the role the sacred Mũgumo tree played in Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship. As a Gĩkũyũ, I had lived with the People of Gĩcũgũ division for a long time; after all, they are our neighbours (Mwea division). Moreover, we migrated to Mwea division in 1958 from the Gĩcũgũ area. What strongly motivated me in this research were the numerous myths narrated to me by the old people during our grazing experiences. One of the myths that always struck me was that of a boy named Wacici who, after going round the sacred Mũgumo seven times, turned his gender and became a girl. Although the myth was tantalisingly scaring, it left me questioning at the back of my mind the power of the Mũgumo tree. There were also other stories about the *ethaga* (one of the nine clans) and how gifted they were in magic and specialists in imploring Ngai for rain in the time of drought. They would persistently lament that most of the social and religio-political chaos found in their society at the time was as a result of neglecting the 'old ways' of living and forgetting the rituals found around the sacred Mũgumo tree.

Again, these people grieved that Ngai seemed to have forgotten them since they gave their forest common (Njũkĩinĩ) to the government. The same government, they retorted, had failed them. It was still following the 'old colonial ways' by claiming back all the forest commons and thus refusing them the permission to ritualise around the sacred Mũgumo tree. Furthermore, the Gĩkũyũ, over time, had moved away from their traditional religion in favour of the new-found religions including Christianity and Islam. The greatest lamentation was that the important rituals that cemented society, the *Irua* and the *Ituĩka*, were neglected. As a result, unknown diseases as well as droughts had invested the community. Thus, the old generation also lamented that although the ritual of *kuhoya Ngai Mbura* was necessary, few people seemed to care anyway. According to them, there was a dire need to revisit the roots of Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship through the sacred Mũgumo tree. That was more that twenty years ago. It was this 'need to revisit the roots' which motivated my decision to research on the Mũgumo within the Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship.

Between 1996 and 1997, I happened to work in the parish at the confluence of Gĩcũgũ and Mwea division (Kutus). This town has an interesting history of the conflict

between Gũtũ wa Kĩbetũ (a paramount chief) during the colonial period and the missionaries: CMS of Kabari and the Consolata Missionaries in Kĩanyaga stations. In fact, Kutus town is named after chief Gũtũ. However, the controversy was two-fold: The missionaries wanted the indigenous population to discard all the traditional rituals and dances. These included above all, the *irua* for boys and girls, the *ituĩka* and imploring Ngai for rain by the slaughter of the lamb around the sacred Mũgumo. Therefore, while the missionaries on the one hand discarded these rituals as satanic and pagan, the indigenous Gĩkũyũ on the other hand wanted a genuine process of syncretism, accommodating the new religion into their own cosmological framework. After all, Gĩkũyũ traditional religion had been enriched through the constant process of borrowing and sharing with their neighbouring communities. Why was it so difficult to borrow from this new European religion without compromising their own? The elders could not understand for instance why the *mũthũngũ* (European) had to erect a building called church for a sacrifice while the sacred Mũgumo was there.

From the myths told, and the history learned about the Gĩkũyũ people, I felt that the Mũgumo had a significant role to play in the formation of the Gĩkũyũ ethnic identity, their religion and cosmology. I also felt that it was a tree endowed with lots of religio-political powers and thus, studying it could reveal the strong elements of Gĩkũyũ traditional religion and the power relation within their society. Indeed, some of the characteristics of the Mũgumo e.g. its height, size, the way it is strongly anchored into the ground, its milky sap already made a lot of symbolic religio-political connection especially with the Gĩkũyũ power hegemony, sexuality, the question of rootedness and territorialisation of the people. But since this was a hypothesis, it needed to be tested in the field by collecting relevant data using phenomenological tools, doing an analysis of the myths about the Mũgumo, synthesising and evaluating different relationships in order to find out what this tree means to the Gĩkũyũ people and its role in religion and politics.

The study of Mũgumo, within the cosmology of the Gĩkũyũ manifested itself twofold: the traditional cosmology which has been less researched and the postcolonial Gĩkũyũ world-view. The latter no doubt has a lot of ontological connections with the former. Researching on the sacred Mũgumo tree was like taking a journey in a forest and coming to a crossroads. One of the roads was constantly used while the other was less travelled. Like R. Frost (1894-1963), I took the one less travelled by and surely, as the thesis will demonstrate, this has made a lot of difference.

3.2 Area of study

The Gĩkũyũ group is one of the largest in Kenya with a population of about six million people. Although at present the people are found all over the country, the greatest majority is still distributed in the central part of the country especially in rural areas. There are geographical dialects which correspond to the four administrative districts (Kĩrĩnyaga-Gĩcũgũ and Ndia-Eastern, Nyĩrĩ-Northern, Mũrang'a-Central and Kĩambu-Southern). Our research concentrates on the Gĩcũgũ administrative division in Kĩrĩnyaga district. The choice of this area is important principally because of the strong affiliation that the Gĩcũgũ people have shown throughout history with the two forests: Mount Kenya and Njũkĩinĩ, involving above all the traditional rituals, herbal medicine and sacrifices to Ngai. Both of these forests consist mainly of indigenous trees. Mt. Kenya covers an area of 29, 839 hectares while Njũkĩinĩ, an area of 92 sq.km. There are also a good number of the sacred Mĩgumo trees surviving and a good number of people who still follow their indigenous Gĩkũyũ religion. Finally, there are a good number of Gĩkũyũ in the division who have simply put one foot on to the traditional way of life and the other foot rest on other religions especially Christianity and Islam. One such group that has sprouted and gained considerable popularity is the *Mũngiki* sect. The core of their religion is to return to the Gĩkũyũ roots by revisiting the traditional way of life through the sacred Mũgumo tree.

3.2.1 Time scale and Field work

In 1997, I set upon collecting some data about the Mũgumo tree although this was simply out of personal interest. It was only when I returned to Britain (SOAS) and examined my data closely, that serious research questions arose. I decided therefore to explore the sacred Mũgumo tree to understand whether or why it is such an important tree in the evolution and the shaping of Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship. I also wanted to find out its relationship with the power hegemony in the Gĩkũyũ religio-political set-up. Again, I felt that the religious significance of land and its relationship with Ngai, ancestors and *mbarĩ* has not been exhaustively explored in order to show the genesis of the colonial, missionary and postcolonial discourses on power-knowledge and the role of religion and politics in Kenya today. I also felt that from the previous literature, little has been done to explain the genesis of the subaltern group within Gĩkũyũ society and indeed in Kenya, groups like the *Gĩkũyũ Karing'a, Mwakenya* and the *Mũngĩki* which continue to puzzle the Kenyans and indeed African scholars today. Although I had not worked for

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a long period in the Gĩcũgũ division, the background information I had got in our previous encounters proved essential to my thesis.

My field work for the research was in two phases. The first part was conducted between August and December 2003, concentrating on the Gĩkũyũ conception of Ngai and the relationship the Mũgumo tree had with him. Finally it focussed on the myths related to the Mũgumo. Thus, the exploration of how the traditional Gĩkũyũ conceives of Ngai through the names and attributes given him was paramount. It was also important to explore the intricate and necessary affiliations between the Gĩkũyũ people, Ngai, land and the Mũgumo tree, since I felt this formed the background for understanding the crucial cosmological framework of the people and the role religion impact on their politics today. After documenting the data of the initial phase of the research, I recognised the need for further additional information especially the relationship that the Gĩkũyũ had with trees in general, the main rituals performed around the Mũgumo, its religious, socio-political significance, the fate of the tree and the symbols that might have replaced it.

Some indispensable questions needed pragmatic answers concerning the choice of the Mũgumo as a cultural and primary symbol rather than any other tree. For instance, why do the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ prefer the Mũgumo to other trees? Again what relationship do these people have with trees? What are the functions of the traditional trees in general? In other words, what are trees for and for what religio-political ends? What are the myths that epitomise this religio-political and social symbiosis? What role does the Mũgumo tree play within the principle rituals of the Gĩkũyũ, aimed at restoring the religio-political hegemony? How does the tree enter into the history and the politics that weave the forging of the Gĩkũyũ ethnic identity? Thus I decided to collect other data, this time concentrating on the relationship the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ have with trees and the choice of the Mũgumo taking the later as the spindle through which the Gĩkũyũ religion and politics revolved. This second part of the research was conducted between March and August 2004. Doing this survey, I thought, could give some insightful answers not only on the knowledge the people had of the Mũgumo but also on the place they allocated to it in their cosmology and worship. It could also be a litmus test as to why the tree acquired such a paramount role both in the precolonial and colonial era and why it continues to figure prominently in the contemporary discourses on power hegemony and religion in the Gĩkũyũ cosmological framework. Consequently, it could elicit imminent challenges and opportunities in the study of the indigenous religion, other religions and politics in Kenya today.

3.2.2 The language

One advantage I had was the knowledge of the local language which facilitated my research since I did not need an interpreter. As a result, there was an almost immediate rapport from the beginning because I did not appear a 'stranger' to the people. Additionally, I found the people very friendly indeed. As for the language, there are some lexical and phonological differences between the dialect of Gĩ-Gĩcũgũ and others. For instance while the people of Nyĩrĩ, Mũrang'a and Kiambu will pronounce "come here" as ũka haha, the Gĩcũgũ will say ũka aba. Kũhaica-to climb (Kiambu, Nyĩrĩ, Mũrang'a) while in Gĩcũgũ will be kũbaca or kũthũca (Ngariama-location) in the Gĩcũgũ division. Although one can argue that there are minor orthographical differentiations between the Gĩ-Gĩcũgũ and the rest of the group, this, if not seriously observed, could possibly present a minor obstacle to other members of the Gĩkũyũ from outside Kĩrĩnyaga district while conducting a research in Gĩkũyũ language. The research was conducted and recorded in the local vernacular. There was also a discussion on the language equivalent of the English pronouns 'his' and 'he' used to refer to Ngai. Why do the contemporary Gĩkũyũ refer to Ngai as the male divinity while one of Ngai's epithet is presented as a female role in Gĩkũyũ cosmology? The thesis found out that there are the limitations of English used as the metalanguage for discussing the Gĩkũyũ and indeed most African divinity.[127]

3.2.3 Research Assistants

All my four research assistants were aged between 20 and 40 years and had a command of the language (born and educated there). I had four research assistants (Mbugi, Mambo, Mũkami, Mũciri) who were savant not only with the language but also with the environment and geography of the Gĩcũgũ division. These four were permanently with me all through the two phases of the research. I needed them for logistic purposes. Apart from doing the interviews, they also helped me in identifying the people who could be of help in every location we visited. Since the division has six location, and transportation is poor especially during the rainy season, their support was paramount for the success of our research. These research assistants coordinated with the local people (of each location), and prepared them. After that we met every Friday afternoon for lunch, where a fruitful discussion about our experiences and difficulties was discussed and a way forward was sought. Finally, the date for our next meeting was also

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[127] See, for example, Hastings, *The Church in Africa 1450-1950* and Karanja, *Founding an African Faith*.

set. This was important not only because of our critical evaluation of the way the research was going, the success and drawbacks, but also because not all of them had access to the telephone.

During the first week of our research, some of these young research assistants conducted the first thirty cases of the interview in the Gĩkũyũ language but wrote it down in English. The reason, they argued, was that they found it easier to write in English than in their mother-tongue. I had to insist that all the interviews were to be done and written down in the language of the local people. In fact, there were incidences when our informants wanted to know what had been jotted down and for those who could not read and write, somebody read the recordings in Gĩkũyũ. In doing this, they explained, the informants felt that they were earnestly well represented.

3.2.4 Informants' age

The choice of age was deliberate. Most of our study deals with oral material and thus vivid accounts of the relationship the trees have with the Gĩkũyũ people and their influence on traditional cosmology and worship. It also deals with the traditional religion. Parts of the rituals like the traditional *irua* of which the *pre-irua* dances and rites might have been stopped as early as 1940s, thus requiring some informants of a mature age. The ritual of imploring Ngai for rain also required informants who had either actively participated in or witnessed one of the ceremonies in order to give varied and authentic accounts. The last *ituika* ceremony was celebrated in 1925 in the Gĩcũgũ division and so very few of our informants could remember what they had been told about the ceremony. Besides, the old generation knew a lot of Gĩkũyũ myths. This was a pragmatic experience because when I was doing a pilot study in 1996, I deliberately interviewed informants whose ages were between 20 and over 80 years. Although the data was not extensive, nevertheless, the research findings indicated that those under 50 years of age knew less about the Gĩkũyũ tradition and especially the myths and the role of the Mũgumo.[128] The combination of all these factors led me consider the ages of our informants to be between sixty and over one hundred years. In fact, the youngest informant was sixty two while the oldest was one hundred and twenty years and starting to lose some memory. The total number of the informants interviewed was 250.

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[128] This is an indication that in less than two generations, a whole life was wiped away. This being the case, we should not be surprised that there is a identity crises in the entire groups of people.

3.2.5 Questionnaire

Our questionnaire was divided into three sections.[129] The first concentrated on the Gĩkũyũ conception of Ngai, the second on the Gĩkũyũ and trees in general while the last section was on the Mũgumo tree, rituals associated with it and its symbolic significance. As already noted our youngest informant was 62 years of age. Most of our informants did not know how to read and write and thus, it would have been fruitless distributing our questionnaire to them, expecting them to write down the answers. Actually, even those who were literate preferred to answer the questions in the form of dialogue while we were taking notes. Some even preferred their contribution be put on tape and insisted on hearing the end results. This, they maintained, was crucially important especially for the younger generation of Gĩkũyũ to hear and learn the richness of their heritage. Thus, the questionnaire was distributed to our research assistants. They used the written questionnaire to interview our informants and then recorded them down in the Gĩkũyũ language. Concerning the data collection, I also visited other parts of Gĩkũyũ land to obtain some comparative data about the Mũgumo, especially the areas of Kiambu, Mũrang'a, Othaya and Thika.

3.2.6 Support of Officials and Personnel

It was very difficult to obtain a permit to hold a meeting or even an interview during the previous government under President Daniel Arap Moi, as was my experience in 1996. Many of these gatherings were treated with suspicion and one was closely monitored. However, when I went back for the fieldwork in 2003, the situation had improved dramatically and, although I informed the DO (Division Officer), and the administrative chiefs of my project and even offered them a copy of my research proposal, I did not need any permit from them. In fact, they were very co-operative and even offered their time to speak extensively about the division and the development projects being done. In both the division (Kĩanyaga) and the district (Kerugoya) headquarters, I had a lot of support. This collaboration was also evident when we visited the forest department in Mount Kenya and Njũkĩinĩ. The Njũkĩinĩ forest officer willingly offered her time to be interviewed and gave us a lot of information about the indigenous trees and theirs uses. She had a rich arboreal knowledge.

There are a good number of the old people in Gĩcũgũ, who fought the Mau Mau war against the British colonial government. They belong to the Mau Mau association

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[129] For a complete questionnaire, see the appendix no.1.

recently formed in order to honour those who sacrificed for the freedom of Kenyans. Thus, during the research, I held lengthy talks with them. Indeed, I interviewed one of the ex-Mau Mau veterans who is currently in-charge of the new found Mau Mau association in Kĩanyaga, Mr Cassam Njogu. However, since my area of research does not focus specifically on the Mau Mau, I concentrated on the Gĩkũyũ traditional religion and the Mũgumo.

I also interviewed the area chiefs and headmen. All of them were very co-operative. However, I had a slight problem with some clergy especially the Anglican ones who, having insisted on knowing my religious affiliation treated me with caution. The underlying reason, they said, was that the Catholic church was there to 'steal' their flock from them. This in a way goes back to the time of colonialism where the scramble for land and political power went hand-in- glove with the scramble for converts to Christianity: the Catholics and the Anglicans. We consulted some leaders of the Pentecostal churches but most of them were unwilling to give us any interview since, they retorted, we were taking them back to the world of Satan.

3.2.7 Reaction of the local people

Some people were curious when they saw my research assistants or me with files. Their experience with the previous government was bitter especially in the sensitive question of the land where there had been a history of corruption and deceit leading to illicit land alienations. Once settled, they were friendly and ready to give us the interview. In fact most of our informants never seemed to be in a hurry once the topic on the Mũgumo and issues on the traditional Gĩkũyũ life were re-visited. Talking with them was like entering into an enigma of life and trying to understand its mechanism of power and influence. Probing deeply into Gĩkũyũ cosmology, the Mũgumo and myths in particular was tantamount to an experience of opening the Gĩkũyũ encyclopaedia engraved in the memory of the elderly members that took one into another world of time and space.

However, there were small problems that we encountered in the field. Quite a number of the local Christians were unwilling to share in the initial stage about their traditional way, as this, they claimed, was returning them back into the time of 'darkness'. But once the purpose of the research was explained, they felt at home with us and relaxed in themselves, narrating all they remembered about the sacred Mũgumo, the way Gĩkũyũ related with Ngai and the significant role the trees played in their cosmology as is ascertained in the recorded interviews. Some of the informants were of course asking for

money in exchange for information. We could not offer them money, as that consequently would have had serious repercussions on the truthfulness and authenticity of the data collected.

3.3 Techniques used for the data collection

All through the period of research, we employed a wide variety of techniques for data collection. They were crucial to contextualise us phenomenologically within the Gĩkũyũ world-view and in the analysis of their myths and songs relevant to our study. These techniques were essential in order to attain the plausible answers for our practical and cognitive goals in the study of the Gĩkũyũ and the Mũgumo.

3.3.1 Participant observation

I lived among the Gĩcũgũ people all through the period of research. Few people knew me either from our previous encounters or from the very early years when I did my primary education there in *Gĩkumbo* primary school. People accepted me partly because of my personal background and because I had previously worked in the neighbouring parish before I embarked on this research. The old people were very interested especially, as we could easily discuss relevant issues relating to the traditional marriage, religion, names of Ngai and the *mambura* (ceremonies). Thus, in the course of my research, I was nicknamed *gathee* (a short old man of wisdom). This was a good indication that I had assumed an acceptable role in their community. During the research, there were times when the only place I could meet the *athuri* (old men) for interview was in the beer drinking. It was either in one of their neighbours' homesteads or the village bar. There, we arranged the day for our interview since as they insisted, that day was set for the *kĩrĩra* (traditional teaching) only. When the day came, I made sure to arrive early during the day since in the evening, I was almost certain that the old men, having swallowed a few *hĩa* (horn of cow traditionally used for drinking beer) or glasses of their *mũratina* (indigenous beer) would have been difficult to hold an extensive discourse with them. That said, I must underline that not all of our informants drank beer. Some of them were in fact very devout Christians who had given up alcohol during their conversion to the new religion; others had never taken it at all in their life-time.

All through the research period then, I was actively involved and so a participant observer and an extensive note taker. My experience was that in this process of observation, notes were to be taken promptly otherwise delay meant that one could lose good recall or the chain of events. Therefore, I wrote up notes after a round of observation before I engaged in any further interaction. The experience of note taking,

although cumbersome was interesting. I felt that writing field notes was a productive process because it was not just a descriptive element. In fact, I could reflect on the feasible connections between the various processes involved and the elements of interaction that had happened during the day.

This process helped me in developing certain methodologies that facilitated a deeper understanding of the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ in their effort to revisit their roots through the sacred Mũgumo. Other methods employed included role play, focused family discussions and individual interviews (one-to-one). The family discussions also served as avenues for good story telling on trees, the Mũgumo and the songs related to it. I also learned a few *irua* songs during these fruitful encounters.

April to July was a rainy season and most of the farmers were busy either weeding their maize and beans or taking care of their coffee and tea. I had to not only do the interview but also work with them in the fields as we dialogued. When this happened, I continued with the interview while working and my research assistant took notes. This exercise was empirically convenient since it saved us a lot of time, as we had to walk long distances. It also saved us the pain of taking our informants out of their daily chores. Some of our informants insisted on working for sometime first and later doing our interview while resting. We contextualised and adapted our interview to the situation and time that suited our informants. Therefore, throughout my research period, data was gathered following conversations with a variety of people especially the elders (male and female) and in a more contextualised situation. There was also the observation of events and questioning those events. All this was realised through dialogue based on mutual respect and trust.

Participant observation and mutual respect were the most important ingredients of the research since I was relating with the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ daily for more that one year. This made me realise the fundamental role I played as a participant observer keenly inserted into the reality of the people. This empathetic participation was also rewarding since, some people offered to teach me traditional herbal medicine and took me several times to the Njũkĩinĩ forest in order to instruct me on the different types of the indigenous trees and their uses especially in the traditional medicine and magic. In doing so, our relationship was further strengthened by the fact that I was willing to learn from the old men and women about the traditional herbal techniques in which most of the young people were not interested. I also learned a number of old songs which, to some people, especially the Christians were branded as 'obscene' yet have a lot of cultural

significance. This method also enabled me to know a variety of trees and their traditional uses, to increase my arboreal knowledge and to understand why certain trees were preferred to others for specific rituals and functions. It also helped me to understand the complexities that existed between the Gĩkũyũ use of trees and the problem of deforestation not only in Kĩrĩnyaga district but also in other parts of the country. Consequently, it helped open my eyes to the discourses of power and the Mũgumo and the essential role the tree played in the formulation of gender in the Gĩkũyũ cosmological framework. Quite a lot of history, religion and politics seem to be engraved in the sacred Mũgumo tree.

The fact that I was a participant observer, deeply immersed in the Gĩcũgũ people's life, also entailed a degree of creating some boundaries in order to be objective in the process of the research experience. In fact, I had to 'move back and forth' as this was crucial for an objective data collection and analysis.[130] My research experiences strongly taught me that I could not discover the richness of the new world (Gĩkũyũ cosmology) until I had the courage to lose sight of the shore and return back again enriched.

3.3.2 Focussed family discussions (FFDs)

The focus groups[131] were very relevant as a research tool since they played an important role in the generation of the qualitative and quantitative data. They are referred to as such because in various instances, the father of the family insisted that all the members had to be present during our discussion.[132] Nevertheless, I maintained that they were supposed to be voluntary, but most of the elders insisted that the kĩrĩra of the Gĩkũyũ was done by the whole family not just one or a few individuals. There was also the sensitive question of gender. All during the research, I tried to have a balance-gendered research so that that both males and females were well represented. As our research indicates, there were 92 women and 158 men interviewed. This was functionally interesting because of the results produced. To cite an example, when women recounted some myths especially those of matriarchy and Wacici the herd boy, there was a subtle

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[130] Spierrgelberg, S., 'Phemomenology and Observation', in Glassner, B., (ed.), *Essential Interactionism*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980, p.42.

[131] The focus group is simply a group interview or discussion where the facilitator leads the group guiding some relevant discussions. Gilbert, N., (ed), *Researching Social Life*, London: Sage, 2001, pp.164-193; Barbour, R.S., & Kitzenger, J., (eds) *Developing Focus Group Research: Politics, Theory and Practice*, London: Sage, 1999; Krueger, R.A., *Focus Groups: A Practical guide for Applied Research*, Newbury Parl: Sage, 1994.

[132] Apart from showing a certain form of hierarchical structure within the family, the FFDs reveal the importance of the 'group/community' as an essential element for celebrating rituals, recounting stories etc.

insistence on the paramount active role of women in society, a repertoire that lacked in men. Women were also generally better singers than men especially on the *irua* songs.

These discussions, which were organised by various families, provided a large amount of comparative data. In each family, the questions explored were similar. From our discussions, a tape was taken from which I later made some written transcripts. These transcripts had an accurate description of the number of people and what was discussed. In all instances, before any discussion could take place, an explanation was given of the reason I wished to meet the people and use their information for a research project.

There were advantages and disadvantages of using this method. The first obvious advantage was that this was a convenient way of collecting contextualised data using a tape recorder, thus overcoming the burden of note taking. The experience is that families liked to come together and talk with minimal persuasion. This means of data collection has many advantages but also some disadvantages. What was found to be a primary disadvantage was that some elders dominated our interviews since as the tradition goes, they believed that they were the only ones who could talk and be listened to. At times, the facilitator could manipulate the group.[133] Apart from these few loopholes, the FFDs were an appropriate way of getting variable information in the Gĩcũgũ division.

3.3.3 Interviews

The research focused primarily on one-to one dialogue. However, as already indicated, family focused discussions were also very useful and became, with time, a useful way of gathering viable data. During the period of research, some of the experts were interviewed. We could put them into three different categories:

a) Government officials and people linked with the forest department especially the forest of Mount Kenya and Njũkĩinĩ. There were also a number of them from the agricultural department in Kĩrĩnyaga district. From these sources, I understood the infrastructure of forest and agricultural services and the role they played in the lives of the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ.

b) There were also informal interviews with some missionaries who had worked in the division especially between the 1930s and 1960s. Most of them had worked in Kabari and Kĩanyaga parishes. These informants viewed the situation from the

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[133] Morgan, D.L., *Focus Groups as Qualitative research*, London: Sage, 1988; Gilbert, *Researching Social Life*.

perspective of their own field work experiences thus enriching the literature done on the whole division.

c) Structured and unstructured interviews were conducted with the local people in their own vernacular both by field assistants and by me. This helped in having succinct and clear answers to our questions of research.

3.4 Additional tools

There was a variety of other tools used in this research for data collection. Some of these have provided the data used in the text of the thesis.

3.4.1 Tapes and Photographs

Tape-recording facilitated our data collection in the field. We used the tape recorder where necessary but always with the permission of our informants. They even listened to those tapes after the recording and made some important comments which also enriched our interviews. Photographs were also taken especially of the sacred Mũgumo and other indigenous trees. There were also a number of photographs of our informants. Again their permission was always sought. Only on one occasion was a video taken. It was done with the permission of the informants and later combined with another video that was taken many years back when a group of Gĩkũyũ people in Difathas church were cerebrating what they called their 'rich tradition incorporated into Christianity'. This was done with the permission of the parish priest. The field notes, fieldwork journals, photographs, tapes and diaries were necessary research aiding tools. There were also written works of some of the prolific scholars on the Gĩkũyũ people. This has been briefly explored in the literature review.

There were types of other written sources that were consulted: the colonial reports and other documents from Kenya KNA (Kenya National Archives), also Embu District archives (EDE) since Embu administered Gĩcũgũ division for a long time during the colonial period. The latter was very important since it included daily correspondence files regarding the Kenya land commission, trees planting, soil conservation and the controversies regarding the forest of Njũkĩinĩ. All these materials proved to be crucial in the study of the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ, the Mũgumo and understanding Gĩkũyũ cosmology and cosmogony. I obtained mission diaries that were never accorded access to the public since the 1920s. One important diary (Anglican) was in KNA. They were a source of valuable information since they were well recorded with dates of the events in Gĩcũgũ division. One of them was on Kabari mission. The library of the Kabari Bible School (Anglican) also provided some important piece of information especially about the first

contact between the indigenous community and the missionaries although some of the archives have been poorly kept.[134]

Kĩanyaga Catholic parish was also a good resource for our interview since from there we could trace some of the oldest members of the church who knew a lot of history of the Mũgumo and the controversies between the church and the indigenous people of the area. When analysing data, all these sources required careful sieving and cross-checking. In some of these sources, several writers were biased in their depiction of the people and their affiliation with the trees in general and so their interpretation of the cosmology was misconstrued. Most of the informants, not adults in the precolonial era, were nevertheless acquainted with the local custom and history of the Gĩkũyũ and indeed of Kenya. They had first-hand knowledge of the deracination of the Mũgumo and the controversies that clouded the church and the traditional Gĩkũyũ religions. They were also a fruitful repository of the events that happened from the 1930s till after independence, the forces of power that continue to influence the religio-political configuration in Kenya today.

3.5 Data Analysis and Ethical considerations

Quantitative data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to generate descriptive statistics such as percentages, charts and graphic representations. The content analysis was also carried specifically on qualitative data.

From the beginning of the research, I knew of my responsibility and accountability both to the people I was researching and to my colleagues and so avoided any covert observation. I discussed my project with my informants and so there was maximum cooperation between both parties. There was an established empathy between the informants and myself since, from the outset, I was open with them about what I was doing and why I was doing it. Therefore, the auspices and purpose of the study were made clear to them. I also made them aware of my identity not only as a researcher but also as a priest within an Italian religious congregation.

During our encounters, I developed the doctrine of the informed consent: that the informants were free to participate in the research. I also told them of my intention to

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[134] It could be profitable for future research to invest of Kabari library since its one of the first mission in Kenya (1910). Perhaps these important documents should be well protected to prevent ants destroying them so as to aid future consultation. As for the Kianyaga Catholic church, most of the documents have been taken to Torino (Italy) by the Consolata Fathers. Why don't the Consolata create a good archive in Nairobi, accessible to the public since Kenya was their first Mission?

publish the research findings. Indeed, they gave me permission to do so. Quite a number of them asked to be given the work once it was finalised.

3.6 Evaluation of the Methodological approach

As already indicated, the first time I collected some data in 1997 it was simply out of personal interest and few methodological tools were employed. Again, when I started my official research in 2003, I concentrated mostly on one-to-one interviews. This was no doubt very rewarding but I soon realised within the cause of my findings that the family focussed discussions were crucial. It was through these discussions that we got comparative data from different members of the same family. It was also a time not only for the family to come together and discuss interesting topic that concerned their relationship with Ngai but also a learning process where the majority came to learn the names and importance of indigenous trees and the Mũgumo. The young people, who at first seemed uninterested and looked at the research process with curiosity, later came to be involved in these family re-unions since as some confessed they came to know many beautiful things about their culture, things that they had been told in the church and schools were insignificant. However, the findings from the FFD complemented the other existing data. By using these tools therefore, I obtained the data needed for my analysis.

3.7 Conclusion

There was certainly a stark difference between the research I did between 2003and 2004 and the one done in 1997 since the latter was much more planned and focussed. Critically looking back, I can give a few recommendations. The first one was about transport. I started my research by using a bicycle. Although this was practical in the beginning, it nevertheless became difficult during the rainy season. There were other times when we spend a lot of money and time trying to repair them. Thus this made my research a bit slow and unnecessarily tiring. Later on, during the second part of the research, the Consolata Fathers offered me an old car, which saved a lot of our time, since we could drive up to where the roads became inaccessible and then walk for the rest of the journey. Looking back, I believe this experience was rewarding.

There were also other unpredictable factors that I had not foreseen; that some people are still insecure after the negative experience of the last government. There were occasions when some of my research assistants were refused entry into a few families since they thought they were working for the rival political party KANU (Kenya African National Union) and the family were strong supporters of the DP(Democratic party). Other factors included the change of climate since, as one moved towards Mt Kenya, it

became generally very cold and chilly. But with time, I was able to adjust to all these changes.

In Gĩcũgũ, people are extremely generous so much so that when one visits a family, they insist on giving you something to eat or drink. The point is, if one refuses, then they openly ask you whether you consider them as practitioners of witchcraft. Although this was not done in every family, nevertheless it was a common phenomenon observed all through my research. I felt that this approach was also very time consuming.

The combination of these methodological tools of openness, participation, assimilation and empathetic dialogue, trust and ethical consideration was of paramount importance in enabling me to collect very relevant data that were crucially important for the study of the Gĩkũyũ and the Mũgumo tree. Having said that, I knew that the bulk of data collected meant that in the analysis of any survey, the reality is multivariate: every effect has not one but several causes. As a consequence, to find the relationship between two variables is not an end in itself but only the beginning of my analysis.[135] It was my duty as a researcher to be sceptical about the causal interpretation that might be made from such relationships, thinking carefully in a theoretical sensitive way on what might be involved in the system of variables, finding feasible ways of testing my hypotheses on the Gĩkũyũ, Mũgumo and their cosmological configuration. These combinations of educational and ethnographic skills also demonstrate how to use a framework of the research theory and employ it in the field for rigorous academic findings as will be demonstrated throughout the chapters.

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[135] Gilbert, *Researching Social Life*, p.266.

CHAPTER FOUR

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

4.1 Introduction

Reconstructing African history before and after colonialism has been an arduous and challenging task to the historians. Roland Oliver in his work *In the Realms of Gold* discusses the difficulties of reconstructing history from oral sources between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[136] In Europe, especially in England, this gigantic move initiated in the 1950s, was an eye opener to many scholars, especially those who still believed that Africans had virtually nothing to offer to the world except servile labour. The academic blinkers could tersely be put in Hugh Trevor-Roper's words: 'what could one benefit by investigating meaningless gyrations of barbarous tribes in remote and irrelevant parts of the globe?'[137] Within this conundrum of doubts, there followed other serious academic shortcomings. How was one to reconstruct a history of Africa without one being too Eurocentric in conception and without depending totally on existing external influences based entirely on the frame of reference of a Western paradigm? Thus the question of methodology was and continues to be crucial.

The conference held in London at SOAS (School of Oriental and African studies) in 1952 underlines the problems the historians had to grapple with on their attempt to explore, use and authenticate the use of oral materials in reconstructing the African history. As a consequence, the conference came up with four relevant points:

(a) in reconstructing history from oral traditions, these narratives are not to been seen as the tradition of the entire people but rather of ruling groups and other interested in the preservation of special rights and privileges.

(b) the traditions of migration were seldom to be interpreted as mass movement of entire peoples over long distances but more often as the local interchange of minority groups, either as conquerors or a refugees, in which those who moved usually lost their original language and learnt that of those among whom they settled.

(c) even in the most favourable circumstances traditions could not be much older than the ruling groups that propagated them and that by and large a period of about twenty generations was about the limit of the historical depth that could be reached by this means.

(d) the approach through oral traditions could make possible a more Afrocentric perspective than that which began with the records of exploration by the outsiders.[138]

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[136] Oliver, R., *In the Realms of Gold: Pioneering in African History*, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997, chapter 2.

[137] Trevor-Roper, H., 'The Rise of Christian Europe' in *Listener*, November 28, 1963, p.871. Also quoted by Oliver, *In the Realms of Gold*, p. 139.

[138] Oliver, Ibid., p.143.

A similar crisis seems to have been happening in American universities. It was not until the 1970s that scholars in these institutions started taking the study of African history seriously thus focussing on the people that had been excluded from the general history of humanity for centuries.[139] S. Feierman in his work explores the complex methodological trends that continue to be used by the historians in the reconstruction of the African history and the scientific repercussions that follow.

Feierman underlines how difficult it is to defend the position that historical processes among non-European people can be seen as the consequence of all-encompassing influences emerging from a dominant European centre. In fact, the shift from historical narratives that originate in Europe has been both accompanied and aided by innovations in methods for constructing knowledge about people who had previously been left out of academic histories. These methods include oral history, historical archaeology and historical linguistic as well as anthropologically informed historical analysis.[140]

The Gĩkũyũ, like many other ethnic groups of sub-Saharan Africa, transmitted substantial bodies of knowledge from generation to the next and even sustained complex political religious and economical hierarchies all without practising writing. Thus the oral tradition continues to be alive even today though their influence in the reconstruction of their current history has often been taken for granted by some contemporary scholars.[141]

By studying the history of the Gĩkũyũ people G. Muriuki, Lambert, Vansina and other historians have underscored how these oral narratives as told within the contextual cultural framework of the people demonstrate the religio-political and economical struggle spindled in a web of power affiliations. As a consequence, these oral traditions must be read, listened to with acute attention to the forms of domination inscribed in them and the religio-political and economical relations in which they are embedded. Thus, in the attempt to reconstruct African and indeed Gĩkũyũ history, the challenge of taking the oral traditions continues. The crucial question to ask as we explore the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ

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[139] Feierman, S., 'African Histories and the Dissolution of the world history', in *African and the Disciplines*, edt. by Robert, H. Bates et al., Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993, p.167.

[140] Feirman, 'African Histories', p. 182.

[141] Other parts of Africa have had a similar experience. J. Vansina's work demonstrates an authentic methodological historical approach using the rich oral narratives. Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*; Cohen, D., 'Doing Social History from *Pim's* Doorway', in *Re-living the Past: The Worlds of Social History*, edt. By Oliver Z., Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985.

history is: What religio-political role did the Gĩkũyũ people play in forging their multiple identities?

Using the insights of these theories, this chapter goes on now to reconstruct the history of the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ origin showing how within a highly charged religio-political atmosphere came to settle in their present geographical area, constantly forging their multiple identities through the use of the sacred Mũgumo tree. Moreover, it discusses the history of the Gĩkũyũ people using both written and oral material. It also traces the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ in their present geographical location trying to underline the power hegemony that is weaved all through their historical and religious narratives.

4.2 Geographical Location
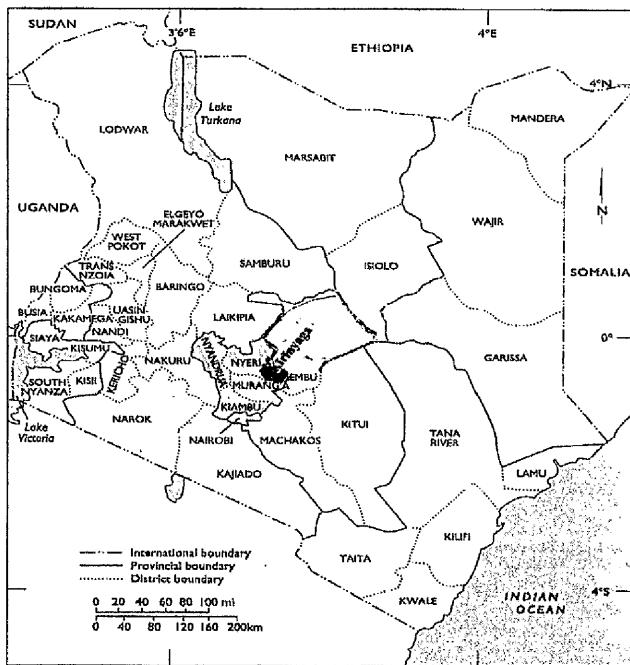
4.2.1 Linguistic background of the Gĩcũgũ people

Gĩkũyũ language has four main dialects that correspond to the four administrative districts. These include, North-Nyĩrĩ, South-Kĩambu, Central-Mũrang'a and Eastern-Kĩrĩnyaga. The Gĩcũgũ speak an eastern Gĩkũyũ dialect called Gĩ-Gĩcũgũ.[142] This dialect stretches out from river Rubingaci in the East and river Rũtuĩ, a tributary of river Thiba, in the West. To the north lies Kĩrĩma kĩa Kĩrĩnyaga (Mount Kenya). It is also spoken in the Mwea division, which borders Gĩcũgũ in the south, the majority of them having migrated to this place in the last century.

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[142] The Southern Gĩkũyũ dialect is the defacto 'standard' judging by current practice in Gĩkũyũ publishing and media broadcasting in Kenya today. All other dialects are unfornateltly treated as 'vernaculars' (household or regional speech). Benson, Kikuyu-English dictionary; Gecaga, B., A Short Kikuyu Grammar, 1953; Mugane, J.M., A Paradimatic grammar of the Kikuyu, Stanford: CSLI Publications, 1997. Mutahi has postulated that little has been done to promote the two Eastern dialects. It is also surprising that in primary schools both in Gĩcũgũ and Ndia, children are taught using these dominating dialects. The Gĩ-Gĩcũgũ dialect is only learnt at home. Mutahi,, Sound Change and the Classification of the Southern Mt. Kenya, pp.27ff.

Fig. 4.1. Kenya: Administrative Boundaries

The Gĩcũgũ division is one of the four divisions in Kĩrĩnyaga[143] district. The other three administrative divisions are Mwea, Ndia and Kutus-Kerugoya municipality. As a district, Kĩrĩnyaga covers 1,437 sq. km and is approximately 0.3% of Kenya's total land area.[144] Kĩrĩnyaga is one of the six districts of the central province of Kenya. Others include Mũrang'a, Nyandarwa, Kiambu, Thika and Nyĩrĩ. The districts of Embu and Machakos border Kĩrĩnyaga district, on the East and Southern sides while Mũrang'a and Nyĩrĩ are on the West. Topologically, the northern part of the district is entirely covered by the forest of Mount Kenya. This forest and mountain, important for our study, occupy a relatively large area of the district. The government forest reserve in Kĩrĩnyaga covers 21%, which is about 308 sq km of the district.

Mount Kenya is the source of rivers and streams. The rivers *Rubingaci*, *Nyamindi*, *Thiba*, *Kamweti*, *Rwamũthambĩ* and *Ragati* are the main source of water that sustains the population of Kĩrĩnyaga district. Some of these rivers are utilised for irrigation settlement projects. In simplified agro-ecological zones, we can say that from Mount Kenya descending down, we have the alpine zone, forest zone, tea- daily zone,

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[143] Kĩrĩnyaga district is named after Mt Kenya (*Kĩrĩma gĩa Kĩrĩnyaga*). Mt Kenya, located south of the equator is the second highest mountain in Africa (5199m).

[144] See, *Kirinyaga District Development Plan (1997-2001), Kerugoya: a Rural-planning department in the ministry of planning and national development-Kenya*, 2001, p.4.

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coffee-tea zone, coffee zone and marginal cotton zone. In Mwea, the lower part of the district, rice is grown under irrigation.

4.2.2 Gĩcũgũ Division

Gĩcũgũ is situated in the high rainfall geographical areas north of the Kutus – Embu road. The topological area covers 214 sq. km of the district. The population density of the division exceeds 714 persons per sq. km.[145] The division has a population of about 152,782.[146] However, a lot of the people especially the younger generation have migrated into the big cities of Kenya in search of employment. Although Gĩcũgũ is the smallest of the four divisions that form Kĩrĩnyaga district, it is nevertheless the most populated. Administratively, Gĩcũgũ has six locations: Ngariama, Njũkĩinĩ, Baragwĩ, Karumandĩ, Kĩrĩma and Kabari. The main rivers geographically divide not only the divisions but also the locations within the district. The division has 23 sub-locations.

The map 4.2 shows the location of Gĩcũgũ division within Kĩrĩnyaga district.
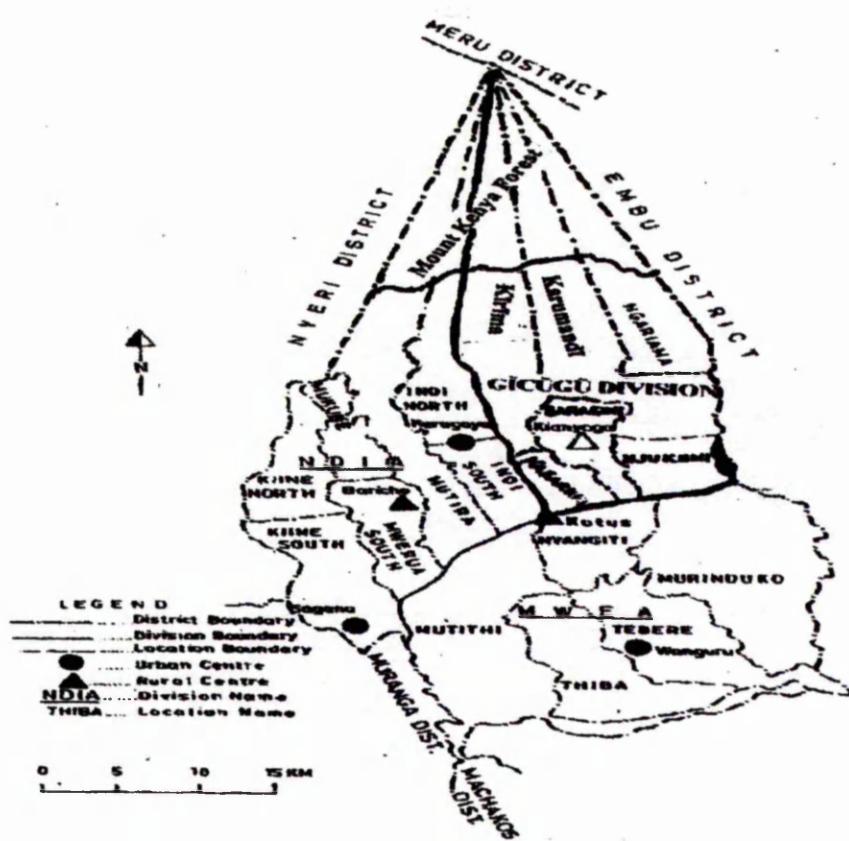
Fig. 4.2. Kĩrĩnyaga District administrative boundaries

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[145] *Kĩrĩnyaga District Development Plan*, p.13.

[146] Ibid., p.13.

The division is composed of U-shaped valleys which can be a good source for the construction of dams for water storage, irrigation and electricity. There are ridges that radiate southwards from the summit of Mount Kenya. The area is full of valleys that are fed by many streams, some of them deriving from the moors, forests, and highland tarns of Mount Kenya. The rivers widely distributed in the division run southwards and drain in *Thagana* (Tana) river and *Nyamindi*.

4.2.3 Seasons

Gĩcũgũ division has a high agricultural potential. Although the ecological crises and the deforestation of Mount Kenya have drastically modified the climate in the division, Gĩcũgũ generally has a bimodal climate. It has two main rainy seasons, *mbura nene* (long rains) or *mbura ya mbembe* (so named because maize does well). *Njũgũ* (peas-*Cajanus cajan*) and *Njahĩ* are usually planted during this season. The long rain usually begins in mid March and continues to the end of May. Short rains fall between October and December. This season is good for planting important seasonal crops, e.g. cereals especially millet (*Pennisetum typhodium*) and sweet potatoes (*Impomia batatas*). Both rains favour the planting of food and cash crops. For centuries, agriculture has played a paramount role in the life of the Gĩkũyũ. In fact, it has been the economic mainstay of Gĩkũyũ land. Until the last century, agriculture was of subsistence nature, which involved the growing of crops and keeping livestock.

4.2.4 Food and cash crops

Gĩkũyũ people are mainly vegetarians. Thus, bananas, millet, sweet potatoes and beans are very important for their daily diet. The food habit has now changed considerably with outside influences and government initiatives to improve farming. The main cash crops grown in the division are coffee and tea. However, there are other food and cash crops grown in Gĩcũgũ division:[147]

4.2.5 Roads

Gĩcũgũ division is well fed with transport. It has many roads leading to the main economic centres like the coffee and tea factories and major town centres. Most of the roads are murramed. The division is well serviced by bitumen roads, murram (gravel) and earth roads. There are primary, secondary, minor, and rural access roads. A road that connects *Ndaraca Njerũ* (new bridge) to *Mbiri* is six kilometres long. The *Kiamũgumo* -

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[147] Gachatha, F.N., *Kikuyu Botanical Dictionary of plant names and uses,* Nairobi: Amref, 1989, pp. 199-220; Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu,* vol.III and Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu.* A full list of Food crop grown can be found in the appendix no.2.

Kĩthũre - Mũthĩgĩinĩ rural access road is eleven kilometres while *Ngiriambu -Gakũyũinĩ* is five kilometres. There is a rural access road that runs from *Gatugũra to Mbarĩ ya Ngeci.* There is also a minor road that runs from *Gakoigo- Kabari- Kianyaga* twelve kilometre in length. The bitumen road, *Kutus- Samson Corner- Pi* (police inspection during the colonial period), is an acting boundary that divides the Gĩcũgũ and Mwea divisions. Another bitumen road is from *Kutus-Kĩanyaga* approximately eight kilometres long. Other minor roads built to improve communication and to enhance the sale of produce and linking other facilities like schools and health centres are; *Mukengeria–Kiĩ* around sixteen kilometres in length, *Kabari-Njikũ* (11km) and *PI- Kianyaga* (23km).

4.2.6 Rural centres and Markets

Gĩcũgũ division has Kĩanyaga as a rural centre and other market centres distributed all over the division in its six locations. Some of these important shopping centres are Kutus, Rukenya, Ruambiti and Kĩanyaga. There is also Kanjũũ, Njũkĩĩnĩ, Pi, Gĩconjo, Mũrũri, Karuco and Ngiriambu. Kĩamũtũgũ, Kĩthũre, Kamwana on the one hand are in Ngariama location while Mũtige, Mũkarara and Kimunye on the other hand are in Kĩrĩma location. Karumandi location has Mũcagara, Thumaita Kamũgũnda, and Karumandĩ. Finally, Kabari location, one of the first headquarters of CMS (Church Missionary Society, 1910) has its main shopping centres at Kutus, Rukenya, and Kabari. Of all these centres, only Kianyaga the divisional headquarter has a tarmac road that bridges it with Kutus-Embu main road.

4.3 The History of Origin and Settlement

4.3.1 Historical Account

The present Gĩkũyũ country was first inhabited by the *Gumba*[148] and *Athi* (sing.*mwathi*-hunter and berry gatherer). The *Athi* were important trading partners. They contributed greatly to the Gĩkũyũ economy due to the fact that they traded skins, ivory and hides. They were astute in trade and acted as intermediaries between the Gĩkũyũ, the

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[148] *Gumba*, probably from *humba* (v), to cover, thus *Agumba*, those who cover themselves. This description augurs well with that of Leakey and Benson who maintain the *Gumba* as a race of diminutive people, former inhabitants of Gĩkũyũ country who dwelt in holes in the ground covered by a rough shelter. Benson, T.G., *Kikuyu- English Dictionary*; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 (1964); Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*; Lambert, *The System of Land Tenure.*

Maasai, the Arabs and Swahili traders.[149] The present land attracted the Gĩkũyũ because of its adequate rainfall, cool temperature and fertile soil.

Apart from the *Gumba*, the *Okiek* people were also among the earliest inhabitants of the present Gĩkũyũ country. The *Okiek* are hunters and gatherers. Although they still exist, scattered particularly in the Aberdare ranges, they cannot be identified as a strong cultural group and most of them have been assimilated by the Gĩkũyũ. The Maasai identified these primal owners of the land as the *Il Torobo* or Dorobo (Maasai word for bush).[150] The actual Gĩkũyũ are said to have originated from two ethnic groups: the *Thagicũ* and *Ngembe*, the latter being originally from the *Dorobo*. Consequently, the history of the Gĩkũyũ reveals that there were two branches: the *Agumba* and the *Okiek*.

The *Gumba*, described as small in stature and generally hairy, are said to have been hunters and gatherers. They lived in the caves, covering their loins with wild banana leaves.[151] They were also experienced bee keepers, iron-makers, and potters. In the history of migration and settlement, the *Gumba* are an important group since they were the original occupants of the land south of Mount Kenya. Within the experience of first cultural contact, the *Gumba* became victims of the Gĩkũyũ atrocities of killing and annexation of their land. The remnants abandoned their culture altogether and were assimilated into the culture and economies of the agricultural Gĩkũyũ people.

The Gĩkũyũ history of migration underlines how difficult it is to appreciate the nature of any one group without examining its affiliation with the neighbouring communities. There existed between them and their neighbours a cultural exchange cemented in regular interaction. This was not always peaceful since at times some casualties occurred. Thus, the migration and the settlement of the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ

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[149] Muriuki, *A history of the Kikuyu*, p.40. Also, Sorrenson, *Land Reform in the Kikuyu Country*, p.6; Routledge, *With a Prehistoric People*, p.3. There was an intricate network of interdependence which cut across both ethnical and geographical boundaries so that other farming societies and their neighbouring groups of hunters and pastoralists played their part in this religio-economical system. Ambler, C.H., 'Population Movement, Social Formation and Exchange: Central Kenya in the Nineteenth Century' in *The International Journal of African Historical studies*, Vol.18, no.2, 1985, pp.201-206.

[150] Dundas, K.R., *"Notes on the Origin and History of the Kikuyu and Dorobo Tribes"*, *Man*, vol.8, no.76, London: Royal Anthropological Institute, 1908, p.136. In 1908, Dundas observed that the Okiek were the first to inhabit this part of the Gĩkũyũ country. Also, Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu*, p.37.

[151] During the time of research, we came across a unique place of historical relevance. There exists along the Kamweti river, (Ndiara at general Cassam- freedom fighter's land), about two kilometres from Kianyaga in Gĩcũgũ division, a stretch of area marked with foot prints on the volcanic rock. The picture taken demonstrates that they are human foot prints. This can be an eye opener to refute Muriuki's theory of migration taking the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ as the last lot of groups to migrate and settle. If well studied by relevant archaeologists, this can take us back to the time when Mount Kenya was active and thus stretching many centuries back and authenticating that the Gumba were the original people of this area of Mount Kenya with the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ as the immediate group in migration.

highlight a time of political and religious symbiosis joined through symmetries of social interaction and power hegemony. Throughout the period of movement and settlement cultural exchange was extremely valued. It often led to economical transactions and thus to a network of kinship and patronage geared towards the integration of the Gĩkũyũ group. The Gĩkũyũ for instance are said to have acquired the art of pottery from the *Gumba* people.

The latter are said to have inhabited the Gĩkũyũ country after displacing a race of dwarfs called *maitho ma ciana*.[152] As to their settlement, information obtained from Fort Hall in Mũrang'a, a significant migratory stop, demonstrated that the Gĩkũyũ could have inhabited that place some hundred years ago. C.W. Hobley holds that the *Athi*, the descendants of an ancestor called *Digiri*, displaced the *Maitho* (*maitho ma ciana*) people.[153] Later on, Routledge identified the *Maitho* with the *Gumba* people.[154] An estimate from H.E. Lambert evidences that Gĩkũyũ exodus reached Fort Hall about A.D. 1575 from the Gĩcũgũ area, which had been occupied as early as A.D 1475, and Kiambu around A.D. 1800.[155] In fact, in Kiambu district, the southern movement was still in motion at the time of the British occupation.[156]

One school of thought pioneered by Muriuki holds that the ancestors of the Gĩkũyũ, the *Embu*, and *Mbere* migrated from Igembe and Tigania in Meru in the fifteenth century. Consequently, this theory advocates a movement to the east so that the southern Gĩkũyũ become the first to settle in Gĩkũyũ land. They were the *Thagicu* who intermarried with the *Gumba* and *Il Tikiri*. By the middle of the seventeenth century, the Gĩkũyũ had formed themselves as a group with their own well-developed political, social,

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[152] Beech, M.W.H., 'Pre-Bantu Occupants of East Africa', *Man*, vol.15, no.24, London: Royal Anthropological Institute, 1915, p.40. *Maitho ma ciana*, (*Maitho ma ciana* literary translated as the eyes of children). They are believed to be fierce little people who inhabited the forest south of Mount Kenya. Also, Middleton, and Kershaw, *The Kikuyu and Kamba of Kenya*, p14. For an extensive reading on how this exchange might have taken place, see Waller, R., 'Ecology, Migration and Expansion in East Africa', *African Affairs*, Vol.84.no.336, July, 1985, pp.347-370.

[153] Hobley, C.W., 'Notes concerning the Eldorobo of Mau, British East Africa', *Man*, vol.3, no.17, 1903, p.33.

[154] Routledge, With *a prehistoric People*, pp.3-5.

[155] Lambert, *The System of Land Tenure*, p. 42. Lambert Hypothesises that Metumi people and Gaki had occupied these areas by 1750 A.D and due to overpopulation (over a period of several years) had began to occupy the northern Gaki and around Karura forest so that between 1895 and 1900 another migration due to population overflow was taking place. Thus, Metumi and south Gaki were peopled by an overflow from Ndia, Gĩcũgũ and Embu as early as 1546 A.D., making the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ be the first of the Gĩkũyũ group to settle around Mount Kenya and only years later moving towards Metumi and Gaki. Lambert, *The System of Land Tenure*, pp.35-6.

[156] Lambert, *The System of Land Tenure*, p.22; Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*; Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, Book One; Castro, *Facing Kirinyaga*; Routledge, *With a Prehistoric People*.

and religious system. The Gĩkũyũ clan system had already developed by the time they crossed the Tigania river on the way to the present land.[157] From Igembe, there was a series of short tentative moves towards Tharaka and later on to Igamba Ng'ombe, where some migrated towards Chuka and Mũthambi. From Igamba Ng'ombe, the Thagicu carried on Southwards along the Thagana river valley. Small groups of Thagicu origin amalgamated into one large group and trekked on to settle at Ithanga in the confluence of the Thagana and Thika rivers late in the sixteenth century.[158]

Ithanga is very significant in the history of the Gĩkũyũ people because it was here that a momentous migration took place. It was in Ithanga that they dispersed into three different groups: the Embu, the Mbere, and the Gĩkũyũ. Later on, the latter group separated into three groups: the Southern and Northern Gĩkũyũ, which moved towards Mũrang'a and Nyĩrĩ, and the Eastern Gĩkũyũ of Ndia and Gĩcũgũ, which settled in the upper part of *Kirinyaga* district. Thus, Ithanga has more historical significance than the mythical *Mũkũrwe wa Gathanga*, the latter being postulated in the works of Kenyatta, Gathigira and Mugo.

However, there is another school which advocates a movement from the East so that the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ becomes one of the first groups to occupy the present land. Lambert, for instance, gives a detailed account of this migration underlining the fact that Kĩrĩnyaga Gĩkũyũ, far from what the historical and economical propaganda would lead us to believe, are the cradle of the southern group of Gĩkũyũ particularly the Kiambu people. Karega while studying the linguistic structure of the Gĩkũyũ people also backs this hypothesis.[159] Other reliable sources reveal that the main invasion, which triggered the migration and the settlement of the Gĩkũyũ, came from the East and not vice versa. This would place the Gĩcũgũ people as representing a group of people less divergent and who might have been in their present area longer than the other branch of Gĩkũyũ. Lambert gives the tentative date of the settlement of the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ as A.D 1475 and Embu about 1425.[160]

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[157] Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu*, p.45. Thagana, also called *Mũnga* means the river that gathers up all the other streams and rivers.

[158] Ibid., p.56.

[159] Mutahi, *Sound Change and the Classification of the Southern Mt. Kenya*; Lambert, *The System of Land Tenure*.

[160] Studying the Gĩkũyũ migration, H.E. Lambert discovered that the Gĩcũgũ and Ndia dialect is the older form of Gĩkũyũ language. Lambert, *The System of Land Tenure*, pp.30& 35; Taylor, 'Changing Food Habits in Kikuyu Land', p.335.

These two divergent historical approaches in the study of the migration and settlement of the Gĩkũyũ group ascertain that there was indeed a migration that took a long period to accomplish. These two groups, the southern and the eastern are a product of different identities forged in the course of migration and settlement. Our present study acknowledges how difficult it is to forge a history of the Gĩkũyũ people starting from 1500 as Muriuki attempts to do.[161] The crucial point here is not so much to determine the geographical distribution on who settled where first, although this is relevant, but to acknowledge the fact that the period of migration and settlement was crucial in the formation of Gĩkũyũ identity as an autochthonous group in Kenya. Thus, there was a historical cultural process of the forging of the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ identity based on annihilation, assimilation and integration so that in this socio-political expedition the group became Gĩkũyũ.[162] Here, it suffices to elucidate that in the process of settlement, the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ saw it as a tangentially profit-oriented enterprise because of land. Land was important not only for their survival but also for the accumulation of power and control over the poor. This power and control was symbolically ritualised around the sacred Mũgumo tree.

What is important to understand is that by 1475, when the Gĩcũgũ were settling in Kĩrĩnyaga district, there were socio-political, religious and economic factors that shaped their adaptation. In fact, these cultural dynamics of the Gĩcũgũ people lay in the interplay of centrifugal and centripetal forces. As a consequence, the thirst for wealth, land and control was strongly shaped in all Gĩkũyũ men during the time of initiation creating a warrior tradition.[163]

As an agricultural group, the question of land acquisition and control was crucial. Labour was also important for the survival of the group and especially the wealthy *mbarĩ*. The history of migration and settlement demonstrates the land as a focal point for the survival of the group. It was a 'mother' that sustained them. They had, in the course of migration, developed some socio-political and religious mechanisms willy-nilly for their survival. This power and the knowledge of the land helped to safeguard the control of human production to ensure that both supply of labour and production was linked to their

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[161] A well balanced but critical work is done by Droz in his work on the Migration of Bantus. Droz, *Migrations Kikuyus*.

[162] Ambler underlines that this process of expulsion, elimination or incorporation of the previous inhabitants was also prevalent among the Akamba. Ambler, 'Population, Movement', p.213; Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*.

[163] This is well elucidated in the chapter exploring the relationship between the Sacred Mũgumo and the *Irua* ceremony for boys among the Gĩkũyũ people.

economy which was controlled by the elders. Studying ecology, migration and expansion in East Africa, R. Waller underlines the fact that in primordial societies, there was a constant need for labour so that refugees were welcomed in the position of 'dependants'. Wives of the enemies were also assimilated into the group or acquiring the status of the integrated members of the society.[164]

For security purposes, the Gĩcũgũ people lived in scattered homesteads instead of villages and as they occupied the land around the southern part of Mount Kenya, families possessed usufruct right to the land they occupied. As skilled farmers, they continued clearing the Mount Kenya area gradually in order to establish communities.

According to Lambert, the Gĩcũgũ and Ndia people obtained their names from the brothers of the ũmbũi clan who are said to have been the pioneers of this part of Mount Kĩrĩnyaga.[165] As they migrated, they grouped themselves into different groups and lived in a particular area around Mount Kĩrĩnyaga strongly bound by a common root and language and related eastern dialects.[166] Already, by the late nineteenth century, the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ organised themselves as an independent community but with regular cultural contact with the other Gĩkũyũ around Mount Kĩrĩnyaga. They were also economically linked together as one family and occasionally traded with neighbouring groups like the Maasai, Akamba and caravans from the Kenyan coast.

Historical reconstruction has demonstrated that the power-knowledge theory was in operation in the socio-political and religious configuration of the precolonial Gĩkũyũ. It has also endorsed the fact that as a small society, Gĩkũyũ evolved out of a politico-economical process through which it thrived in the midst of its neighbouring communities, exercising its role and position to maximise its political and economical potential based on power hegemony. Thus, its political power, coupled with its

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[164] Waller, 'Ecology, Migration and expansion in East Africa', p.354; Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*; Waciuma, *Daughter of Mumbi*, Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1974; Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu*; Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*. It is common even today to meet some people with the name of *Wamaitha* or *Naivasha*. *Wa* (of) *Maitha* (Maasai) means that these *mbarĩ* have Maasai ancestral origin either through blood assimilation by marriage or as the victims of war captured from the Maasai country.

[165] Lambert, *The System of Land tenure*, p.18. The answer as to the mystery of the names lies in their etymology, Gĩcũgũ from *njũgũ* (noun) seed of the tree-bush or pigeon pea. It was only a very small part of the division originally called Gĩcũgũ (now Karirũ) where these beans grew in abundance. It also has another meaning; a 'female goat' or 'cow of speckled colour'. This suggests that as the people settled in the southern part of Mount Kenya, they discovered that these peas were flourishing there and that the place was suitable for grazing and ideal for an agricultural group. Ndia (noun) means a 'broad, deep, pool in the river'. Most of the informants dismissed Lambert's hypothesis and underlined that Gĩcũgũ and Ndia were named for their agricultural potential and topological configuration but not the name of the two brothers. Interview, 2003-4.

[166] Mutahi, *Sound Change and the Classification of the Southern Mt. Kenya*.

agricultural flair and trade, helped in the exploitation of the changing environment which saw strong links and collaboration with the outsiders. But the history of Gĩkũyũ migration and settlement is not one-sided. There exist other popular versions known all over the Gĩkũyũ country. These are the myths of origin and settlement. We will now proceed to explore the myths[167] of the Gĩkũyũ origin.

4.3.2 Gĩkũyũ Myths of Origin and Settlement

Although the historical (scientific) account has been reconstructed, giving some tentative dates of the migration and settlement of the Gĩkũyũ people in general and the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ, this account leaves room for some fundamental questions about the origin and settlement of the group. For instance, how did the group embrace agriculture? What is the origin of the nine clans endorsed today in their history? What is the origin of their religio-political configuration? What partnership existed with the neighbouring groups in the beginning? Why does the Mũgumo tree feature prominently in their cosmology and worship? These are some of the questions which the historical and scientific account does not adequately answer. It is against this background that we now turn to the myth that give adequate explanations not only of the origins but also to the *WHY* of the rituals performed around the Mũgumo as the *Mũtĩ wa Ngai* (the tree of Ngai).

In recalling the Gĩkũyũ myths of origin and settlement, most of the informants, 246(98%) gave well-detailed accounts. On the one myth, they asserted that in the beginning, when humankind started to occupy the earth, a man named Gĩkũyũ, the founder of the Gĩkũyũ nation, was called by Ngai and given his share of the land. This is how the myth was narrated.

> One day, Ngai took Gĩkũyũ the founding father of the Agĩkũyũ people on top of Mount Kĩrĩnyaga. He showed him where to build his *mucĩĩ* (homestead), not far away from the mountain, a place filled with the Mĩgumo trees. It was a very beautiful land with many rivers and trees of every kind. Then, during the conversation, Ngai told Gĩkũyũ: 'You and your ancestors will at times be in need of my help and blessings. When that need arises, slaughter a goat around the Mũgumo for me, raise your hands towards Kĩrĩnyaga and I, Ngai of Kĩrĩnyaga and Gĩkũyũ will come to your aid.' Then Gĩkũyũ went to the sport indicated him by Ngai. There he met already waiting for him, a beautiful woman whom he took as his wife. Her name was *Mũmbi* (moulder/creator).

> After some time, they had nine daughters but no sons at all. Gĩkũyũ was greatly perturbed since he needed a male heir. Remembering his conversation with Ngai, he took a goat around the Mũgumo tree and killed it. Gĩkũyũ poured the blood and the fat on the trunk of the Mũgumo and then made a big fire to roast the sacrificial meat for Ngai. Raising his hands and facing Kĩrĩnyaga, he implored Ngai to help him with sons to marry his daughters.

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[167] The work does not address the controversial discussions on the definition of and the ambiguity of the term 'myth'. A good literature can be read in the works of Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, Bowie, *The Anthropology of Religion*; Glazier, S.D., *Anthropology of Religion*, London: Praeger, 1999 and Segal, R.A., *Myth: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Having done that, Gĩkũyũ went home to return the following morning. The following day, there, standing around the Mũgumo were nine handsome men waiting to marry his daughters.[168]

In the version of Kenyatta, the families were joined together under the name of *Mbarĩ ya Mũmbi*, in honour of their founding mother Mũmbi. With time, the family had many descendants. By the time Gĩkũyũ and Mũmbi died, the number of each family had grown enormously and thus it became impossible to continue living together.[169] The descendants of the Gĩkũyũ and Mũmbi decided to congregate. It was decided that each of the nine daughters was to form one clan under her own name. Thus, this was the origin of the nine *Mĩhĩrĩga* (clans). These are the names of the nine[170] clans named after each of the daughters of Gĩkũyũ and Mũmbi:

CLAN	DAUGHTER
Aceera	Waceera/ Wanjeri
Agacikũ	Wanjikũ
Airimũ/Agathithia	Wairimũ
Ambũi	Wambũi
Angarĩ	Wangarĩ
Anjirũ	Wanjirũ
Ethaga/Akiũru	Nyambura
Angũi/Athiegeni	Wangũi
Aithĩrandũ	Waithĩra/ Wangeci[171]

There are also other myths of origin and settlement. We will examine three of them. The first one locates Gĩkũyũ in relation to their neighbours.

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[168] Interview, Gĩcũgũ, 2003-4. A similar myth is reported by Mwangi but with variations. Mwangi, R., *Kikuyu Folktales, their nature and value*, Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1983; Lambert, *The System of Land Tenure*, p.19; Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, pp.3-6.

[169] They dispersed themselves in different parts of the Gĩkũyũ country. Some moved north towards Mt. Kĩrĩnyaga, others to *Kĩanjahĩ* (Ol-Donyo Sabuk), others to the West Aberdare (Nyandarua), while the rest moved towards Ngong Hills (Kĩambirũirũ).

[170] Interview, 2003-4. A traditional Gĩkũyũ will talk of 'full nine'. This means that in reality, the Gĩkũyũ have ten clans. The tenth clan is called *"Aicakamũyũ"*. The myth recounts that there was a girl named *Wamũyũ* from one of the nine clans who became an unmarried mother. The Gĩkũyũ do not succinctly give an exact enumeration of the clans e.g. ten clans. This is because in their tradition, human beings and animals could not be counted exactly. Giving the exact number, was believed, could bring catastrophic results to the family or livestock. Gathigira, *Miikarire ya Agĩkũyũ*, pp.1-2; Wanjohi, G., *The Wisdom and Philosophy of Gĩkũyũ Proverbs: The Kĩhoto World-view*, Nairobi: Paulines Pub., 1997, p. 28; Beecher, L.J., 'The stories of the Kikuyu', *Africa*, vol.XI no.1. Jan. 1938.

[171] Interview, 2003-4. Wanjohi, *The Wisdom of Gĩkũyũ Proverbs*, P. 27; Gathigira, *Mĩikarĩre ya Ũgĩkuyũ*, pp.1-2; Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, p.6.

In the beginning, there were four sons. They were given four articles to choose from. One of the articles was a herding spear, the second was a bow and arrows, the third was a stabbing spear and finally a digging stick. The first was chosen by the son who became the ancestor of the Maasai, the second by the son whose children became the Kamba, the third by the son whose children became the Dorobo and the forth was taken by the last son whose children became the Gĩkũyũ.[172]

This myth is reinforced further by the hieroglyphic on the *Gĩcandĩ*[173] in Gĩkũyũ cosmology. H.R. Tate also recounts the story of the origin of the Gĩkũyũ as follows:

A man named Mũmbere left his own country and travelled towards the east. There, he was instructed by the Sun to travel many days towards the West, and was given sufficient meat for the journey. When the meat was finished he had reached Mbere country. There he found a woman and lived with her. She bore him three sons and three daughters. When the sons grew up, Mũmbere called them together and placed on the ground before them a spear, a bow and arrows, and a digging stick and told them to choose. One chose the spear and his children became Maasai. The second chose the bow and arrows and his children became the Kamba. That left the digging stick for the third and his children became Kikuyu.[174]

Another important myth shows the internal conflicts existing among the pre-colonial Gĩkũyũ:

Once upon a time, as the legend goes, there lived a king in the Gĩkũyũ land named Kikuyu, a grandchild of the elder daughter of the founder of the group. His method of ruling was tyrannical. He prevented people from cultivating the land and thus the population lived a sort of nomadic life. At last they grew tired from wandering from place to place and finally decided to settle down. They implored the king to let them cultivate the land but he was adamant. He refused to attend to their plea. In desperation, they revolted against him. The generation that carried out the revolt was called *iregi* (revolter). And the next generation which started cultivation was called *ndemi* (cutters) in remembrance of the period when the Gĩkũyũ people began to cut down the forest and established themselves as agriculturalists.[175]

Our myths authenticate that there existed a historical phenomenon of dependence and complementarity between the Gĩkũyũ and their neighbours.[176] This is clearly shown by the borrowing of some of the most important words in Gĩkũyũ on Ngai and war techniques. But at the same time, the group remained autochthonous. Again these myths authenticate what Muriuki refuses to acknowledge in his historical reconstruction, the

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[172] Research, Gĩcũgũ Division, 2003-4. Also by Lambert, *The System of Land Tenure*, p.19. A similar story 'the man with a swollen knee' told during the time of research, will be explored in the appendix no.3.

[173] *Gĩcandĩ* is a gourd full of hierographies that depicts the cosmology of the Gĩkũyũ people and also their relationship with their neighbours like the Maasai and the Gumba., Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*, p.227.

[174] Beecher, 'The stories of the Kikuyu'; Lambert, *The System of Land Tenure*, p.19.

[175] Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, pp.186-7. *Ndemi* from *tema* (v.t.) meaning to cut or fell down. Thus the generation named after the action was called *Ndemi* that followed the *Iregi/rega* v.t (to refuse or disobey). After these two, there was the *Mathathi* generation.

[176] Research, Gĩcũgũ, 2003-4; Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*; Muriuki, *A History of Kikuyu*; Lambert, *The System of Land Tenure*; Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*; Ambler 'Population Movement, Social Formation and Exchange'; Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*.

meaning and value of myth in the reconstruction of the history.[177] The two myths stipulated above, for instance, demonstrate the affinity of the Gĩkũyũ people with other neighbouring groups specifically the Maasai, Kamba and Dorobo.

In conclusion, we can say that there are also other relevant myths in the history of the people that clearly demonstrate the struggle and scramble for power between some chauvinistic Gĩkũyũ men, who had the control of land and their women. The myth of the tyrannical king who was overthrown by his country men, for instance, confirms the struggle for democracy within the group. Thus, both the 'scientific' and mythical approaches are relevant tools in the making of Gĩkũyũ history since one complements the other.

The history of Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ migration and settlement, done within a wider history of Kenya, reveals how they attained multiple identities within the social and religio-political configuration. At one time, they could define themselves as belonging to a certain founder (myth of the origin), or clan (the nine clans). In other instances, they could delineate themselves as pertaining to either Irungu or Mwangi ruling generations. At other times, they would identify themselves with a specific geographical area (Kiambu, Metumi, Gaki, Gĩcũgũ and Ndia) or a professional group or simply as agriculturalists. This exhibits overlapping networks of association and exchanges so that Gĩkũyũ history is culturally vibrant. It cannot be defined entirely within the boundaries of 'tribal' polity.

Again this migratory experience furnishes us with a group juxtaposed between its neighbouring groups (Maasai, Ndorobo, Kamba and Gumba), a group grappling with a serious question of cultural identity amidst the political storms of its adversaries. Within this historical confluence Gĩkũyũ struggles to adapt its stock of theoretical concepts to what Horton calls: 'explanation, prediction and control of events in a new and unfamiliar social situation'.[178] Therefore, in this forging of a new identity of what it meant to belong to a certain group, clan or age-set, the Gĩkũyũ were also confronted with very fundamental religio-political questions on Ngai, his attributes and how that history shapes their religion and politics in their cosmology. Thus, the history of Gĩcũgũ and the Mũgumo tree has to be looked at under these parameters. This interrelation will be explored in greater depth in our next chapter.

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[177] Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions,* p. 121; Lambert, *The System of Land Tenure*; Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*; Ambler, 'Population Movement, Social Formation and Exchange', pp.204-5.

[178] Horton, *Patterns of Thought.*

PART TWO

CHAPTER FIVE

THE GĨKŨYŨ RELIGIO-PHILOSOPHICAL WORLD-VIEW

5.1 Introduction

The study of the reconstruction of the local religions before and after colonialism has been a complex arduous scholarly attempt in Africa. There are crucial questions that have set the discourses on and about religion moving: what is it that is typical in religion and what is it that makes African religion special?[179] What exactly is religion? What is its nature? Such questions have made the definition of the concept 'religion' even more complex. Actually, even if we get a rough outline idea of what a certain ethnic group means when they talk about 'religion', such an idea or definition is still limited. What is important to understand is that in defining religion, we are constructing a category 'religion' primarily based upon European languages and cultures. Thus as a category, 'religion' is fluid and contextual so that any attempt to define it too narrowly may lead to what F. Bowie call 'a positivist stamp to what is an interpretive process'.[180]

Our thesis instead sees 'religion' not only as belief in the spiritual beings but also 'that' which is incorporated into various dimensions, e.g. in ritual, myth, social, political and economic aspect. Thus 'religion' is understood as contextualised in various social,

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[179] Blakely,T.D., et al., (eds), *Religion in Africa: Experience and Expression*, London: James Curry, 1994; Aguilar, M., *Dios en Africa*, Navarra: Verbo Divino, 1997; Peel, J., *Aladura: A Religious Movement among the Yoruba*, London: Oxford University Press, 1968; P'bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship*; Mbiti, J., *African Religions and Philosophy*, Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1990 (1969); Horton, *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West*; Brenner, 'Religious' Discourses in and about Africa'. In fact the literature is vast and complex. Our work is not set for discussing the concept and or definition of 'religion' but to see how the Gĩkũyũ understand Religion and the position they give Ngai in their cosmology.

[180] Bowie, F. *The Anthropology of Religion*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004 (2000), p.28. There are various tentative attempts to define 'religion'; e.g. E. Taylor, defines religion as the belief in spiritual beings. Here one could ask: what are these spiritual beings? G. Clifford sees religion as a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivation in men. M. Spiro sees religion as an institution consisting of cultural patterned interaction in culturally postulated superhuman beings. R. Horton defines it in terms of social relationship. N. Smart defines religion in terms of dimensions. What all these scholars underline is the existential problem and complexities involved in defining 'religion'. For a comprehensive reading, see, Taylor, E. B., *Primitive culture: Researches into development of Mythology, Philosophy and Religion*, London: Murray, 1871; Clifford, G., *Writing Culture*; Spiro, M., 'Religion: Problems of definition and explanation', in Michael B. Edt., *Anthropological Approaches to the study of religion*, ASAMonographs 3. London: Tavistock, 1973; Smart, N., *Dimensions of the Sacred: an anatomy of World's Beliefs*, London: HarperCollins, 1996. Ellis, S & Ter Haar, G., *Worlds of Power: Religious thought and political Practice in Africa*, London: Hurst & Company, 2004.

economic and political dimensions where human experience and individual or/ and communal participation are crucial.

In the study of the Gĩkũyũ for instance, 'religion' as a set of beliefs or creed does not seem to be apparent. What is prevalent is the 'religious' experience. Indeed, the equivalent word for 'religion' would be *ndini* (dini-Swahili). The Gĩkũyũ word would be *wĩtĩkia* or *kĩrĩra*. Here again *wĩtĩkia* means to consent or be willing while *kĩrĩra* refers to the ethnic teachings or customs given by the elders of the community. As such then these words do not seem to convincingly translate the word 'religion'. As a consequence, the concept 'religion' as understood today from a Western paradigm of thought (religion firmly associated with a system of 'belief') seem to have been absent in Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship. In this thesis, we underline that what was strongly rooted in their cosmology is the concept of human interaction and religious participation so that one can speak of a 'religious' participation and experience, more than 'religious' knowledge. For the traditional Gĩkũyũ people, 'religion' served to explain, predict and control everyday events. The repercussion was a favourable communion between the people, Ngai and their ancestors. Their 'religious' thought was primarily based on social and political models so that Ngai and ancestors, though not visible had a lot of influence in the day-to-day events of the people. They participated in the lives of the people. Thus, 'religion' seems to have been intrinsically linked to the other aspects of their culture. It is under these parameters that they conceive of Ngai and he in return manifests himself to them. But to do this, Ngai uses the land, and as a consequence, it becomes sacrosanct. Thus, land and trees become a podium for a 'religious' interaction, participation and experience. This chapter attempts to explore the Gĩkũyũ understanding of 'religion', their conception of Ngai and how he communes with them.

5.2 The Gĩkũyũ Conception of Ngai
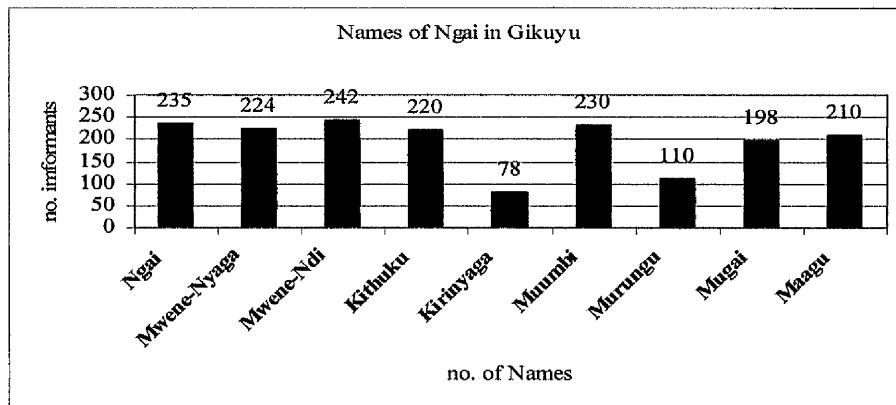
The Gĩkũyũ conception of Ngai can specifically be understood well by examining the names given him.[181] However, our research findings exhibit relevant names that the people used when referring to Ngai. Some of the most conspicuous names they gave

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[181] Some of these names have to be looked at in reference to the translation of the Bible into the Gĩkũyũ language between 1909 and the 1950s under the auspice of the United Kikuyu Language Committee (UKLC). The task of the committee was to reduce the Gĩkũyũ language to a standard written form and to arrange for Bible translation. It experienced some dilemma in its attempt to set up a religious vocabulary. Some members of the committee were scrupulous that some of these words could evoke non-Christian ideas and thus ended up borrowing some word from Hebrew e.g., angel (malak) which was translated to *mũraika*. The Gĩkũyũ equivalent of an angel is *mũrekio*, which means the one who has been sent either by the Gĩkũyũ deity or by another person. Karanja, J., *Founding an African* Faith, especially chapter five.

were, *Ngai, Mwene nyaga, Mwene ndĩ, Kĩthuku, Kĩrĩnyaga, Mũmbi, Mũrungu, Mũgai, Mwene hinya* and *Maagũ ngũrũ.*

Figure 5.1. Names of Ngai in Gĩkũyũ

Gĩkũyũ people call their deity Mũrungu. Out of the 250 informants (158 males and 98 females)[182] interviewed, 110(44%) gave the name of Mũrungu. This name might be the original Gĩkũyũ word for deity since it has a strong Bantu origin (Mulungu).[183] *Mũrungu* has a personal prefix (mũ) from Bantu denoting humanity. This might be the original name for the Gĩkũyũ deity. Another name commonly used by the Gĩkũyũ in talking about their deity is Ngai. This is a more popular name used all over the Gĩkũyũ land. In fact, 235 (98%) informants gave the word Ngai as one of the official names. This word, from Maasai *enk-ai* was later assimilated into Gĩkũyũ religio-philosophical world. Ngai is from the *Ma Maasai* meaning rain, deity, sky.[184] According to the new Maasai language and culture dictionary, the word for Ngai is *enk-ái* (not *engai*) whereby the *en* feminine gender prefix, changes into *enk*. Thus, *enk-ai na-rók*-means the deity who is black and *enk-ai na-nyokié* is the deity who is red.[185]

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[182] Research, Gĩcũgũ, 2003-04.

[183] The Swahili word for the deity is Mungu with a similar prefix (mu) denoting the Bantu origin. Mũrungu from mulungu in some Bantu communities means the spirit of an ancestor. See, Hastings, *The Church in Africa 1450-1950,* p.333. It does not however mean power and omnipotence as Kibicho suggest. Kibicho 'The continuity of the African conception of God', p.372; Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu,* p.1075.

[184] Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu,* Vol.III. p.1075. In addition to the name *en-kai* the Gĩkũyũ also borrowed the concepts of the deity, especially those connected with the sun, sky and the dual personality. Macperson, R., *The Presbyterian Church in Kenya,* Nairobi: Presbyterian Church of East Africa, 1970, p.10; Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu,* p.98; Hobley, C., *Ethnology of the Akamba and other East African Tribes,* Cambridge: 1910; Routledge, *With a Prehistoric People;* Thomson, J., *Through Maasai Land,* London: 1887; Hobley, *Bantu Beliefs and Magic,* especially in chapter five and Beecher, L.J., *The Kikuyu,* Nairobi: Ndia Kuu Press, 1944.

[185] Frans, M., *Maasai Language and Culture Dictionary,* Lemek: Kolbe press Limuru, 1996.

Although in practice the Gĩkũyũ are believed to be monotheistic, there is compelling evidence that they might have a dual conception of the divine. This is striking especially when we explore the word Ngai from its Maasai origin. The Maasai on the one hand have, according to their literature, a dual understanding of deity: *enk-ai na-rok* (black deity) and *enk-ai na-nyokie* (the red deity). The Gĩkũyũ on the other hand talk of the Ngai of the Gĩkũyũ and the Maasai deity; the two deities seldom engaging in war. In fact, the informants underlined that the traditional Gĩkũyũ believed that there were two gods before the coming of Christianity. They retorted:

> Agĩkũyũ a tene meciragia atĩ Ngai nĩ igĩrĩ, ĩmwe njega na nĩyo ya rũrĩrĩ ruitũ na ĩngĩ njũru na nĩyo ya Maitha. Ngai ũcio wa Maitha niwe athĩnagia Agĩkũyũ rĩrĩa Kĩthuku atekũmwona.

> The traditional Gĩkũyũ believed that there were two gods, one good (who belongs to the Gĩkũyũ) people and another bad one (who belongs to the Maasai). It is the Maasai god who bothers people when he is not being watched by Kĩthuku.[186]

What the informants and Gathigira are suggesting is that the Gĩkũyũ acknowledge that there is Ngai, their deity and another of the Maasai. In fact, during the research, there were informants who confirmed that in the old days the two gods used to fight but now they have stopped.

Ngai is also referred to by the Gĩkũyũ as *Maagũ* or *Maagũ ngũrũ*. 210 (84%) informants gave this name explaining that it comes from the word *agu-aagu* meaning early, ancient, very ancient ancestor. Thus Ngai is that ancient ancestor of the Gĩkũyũ people. The traditional Gĩkũyũ would say '*no Maagũ ũngĩmũteithia*' (only Ngai can help him/her). They would also say; *no Maagũ ngũrũ* (only Ngai is old).

Ngai is also known as *Mũgai* (divider/distributor). He is the provider and in times of crisis, provides what is needed for his children (Gĩkũyũ). Thus, Ngai as the *Mũgai* was the choice of 198 (79%) of the informants. *Mũgai* is the one who gave the present land to the Gĩkũyũ people through their progenitor Gĩkũyũ. He gave them a share of the land with ravines, the rivers and the forest.[187] According to the informants, *Mũgai* distributes gifts, talents, wealth and land. A common Gĩkũyũ proverb says: *ũtonga nĩ wa Ngai* (wealth comes from Ngai) and thus the Gĩkũyũ has to be thankful for what he/she has

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[186] Interview, Gĩcũgũ 2003-4. Gathigira has also observed a similar point and has also written in detail the way the Gĩkũyũ conceive of Ngai. Gathigira, *Miikarire ya Agikuyu*, p.29. Wanjohi, quoting Gathigira, holds that this declaration should not be taken seriously since when the Gĩkũyũ talk about these two deities, they are just bluffing. He had apparently asserted that the Gĩkũyũ conception of Ngai is ambivalent, p.178. The question here is not only on the number of deities but on how the Gĩkũyũ conceived of Ngai. Wanjohi, *The Wisdom and Philosophy of the Gĩkũyũ Proverbs*, pp.178-9. The Problem I suspect with Wanjohi is to defend the Hellenised Gĩkũyũ Ngai thus following the footsteps of his predecessors like Kenyatta, Leakey, Cagnolo, Kabetu etc.

[187] Interview, Gĩcũgũ, 2003-4.

received.[188] Another proverb underlines that Ngai is indeed the divider: *ciumaga kwa Ngai irĩ ngaye* (things leaves Ngai's place already divided).

The Gĩkũyũ conception of Ngai is also enriched by the name *Mũmbi*. Our respondents firmly sayed: *Ngai ni Mũmbi* (Ngai is the creator). *Mũmbi* was chosen by 230(92%) informants. Our informants underlined the myth of origin and settlement which depicts *Mũmbi* as the founding mother of the Gĩkũyũ group and also authenticates the origin of the matriarchal system later changed to patriarchal. *Mũmbi*, from *kũmba* (verb) means to mould, knead or to create. In traditional Gĩkũyũ cosmology, *mũmbi* would be a potter, usually a woman with clay pots. Middleton and Kershaw confirm that pottery was 'made by women specialists, men being debarred from any contact with the process',[189] Thus, *mũmbi* is the potter, maker and moulder and therefore female.

Furthermore, it is common to use *kũmba* as a verb to describe the work of Ngai. Women in Gĩkũyũ cosmology were treated with respect when it came to the question of bearing children since the children perpetuated the name of the family, the clan and the larger group. Moreover, children sealed the bond, not only of the husband and wife or wives, but also the two families. It is only understandable therefore that for Ngai to make sense in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology he had to be described in these simple but powerful symbolic terms; Ngai *mũmbi* (Ngai the creator). This is because he had the potency to generate life not only for nine months like a woman but to sustain the Gĩkũyũ people throughout their life time. This, critically evaluated, demonstrates that the Gĩkũyũ people originally might have conceived of Ngai as a female.

As a result, the action of 'creating' denoted by the word *Mũmbi*, and which constitutes one of Ngai's epithets, is presented as a female role in Gĩkũyũ cosmology. This is strongly supported by ethnographical evidences that accentuate that, in the myth of their origin, the nine men were granted permission to marry the daughters on the condition that they would all embrace the matriarchal system under *Mũmbi*. Accordingly, they became *mbarĩ* of *Mũmbi* and all clans were named after the daughters of *Mũmbi*. The myth of origin also narrates how the change from a matriarchal to a patriarchal system might have occurred at one time in history. These facts were clearly underlined during the time of the research. Most of the informants accentuated: *'Ngai*

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[188] Interview, Gĩcũgũ 2003-4; Wanjohi, *The Wisdom and Philosophy of Gĩkũyũ Proverb*, p. 180; Bernardi, *Le Religioni dei Primitivi*, pp.204-205.

[189] Interview, Gĩcũgũ 2003-4; Midleton, & Kershaw, *The Central Tribe of North-Eastern Bantu*, p.22.

nĩwe wombire andũ, andũ matingĩhota gũkũmba Ngai' (Ngai is the one who created human being, people cannot create you Ngai).[190]

The informants also underlined that during the occasion of kindling afresh the domestic fire when a new house was elected in the traditional set-up, the wood of the Mũgumo tree was essentially used to drill the fire. During this important occasion, the Mũgumo, strictly associated with Ngai, was essentially female, and, could not be used as the male.[191] Furthermore, the milky sap of the Mũgumo was strongly associated with fertility and the women's potential to sustain and nurture life. We could therefore conclude that these facts strongly underline the original Gĩkũyũ conception of Ngai in feminine terms.

Ngai is also *Mwene Nyaga* (the possessor of brightness or owner of light). *Nyaga* (noun) means black and white or white parch or stripe. *Rũnyaga* also means black or white patch especially on a goat's dark skin and thus white spotted. It means clear, pure or shiny. *Nyaga* also means ostrich. Gathigira says that the Gĩkũyũ associated the sun with the ostrich. Although 224 (90%) of the informants accepted that *nyaga* also refers to this bird, they nevertheless accentuated that *Mwene-Nyaga* would have been understood not as the owner of the ostrich but of the sun. The original Gĩkũyũ were fascinated by the height and the size of Mount Kenya. They were confronted with the glistening snow on top of Kĩrĩnyaga (white spotted mountain, white as the ostrich's feather and shiny as the sun).[192] This might have left the Gĩkũyũ asking fundamental questions about the creator and the power beyond creation. They would, in turn, have said that Ngai was the one who owned and ruled the sun, the moon and the stars. After all, who else apart from the Ngai would live and survive in such a cold and magnificent place, they would retort?

Thus, when the Gĩkũyũ conceive of Ngai as the bright one or the 'dazzling one', they attribute him to Mount Kenya which they believe to be his abode. They would say that *Ngai aikaraga kĩrĩma-inĩ gĩa Kĩrĩ-Nyaga* (Ngai lives in the mountain of *Kĩrĩnyaga.*

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[190] Research, Gĩcũgũ, 2003-4.

[191] Interview, Gĩcũgũ 2003-4. Beech also accentuates that in this occasion, the sacred Mũgumo is fundamentally used as a female while *mutarakwa* (juniperus procera) is used as the male. Beech, M., 'The sacred fig-tree of the A-Kikuyu of East Africa', in *Man*, 1913, no.3, p.5; Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, vol.III., p.1300.

[192] Interview, June, 2004; Gathigira, *Mĩikarĩre ya AGĩkũyũ*, p.30.

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In consequence, most of the informants said that Ngai did not live in the sky but actually in Mount Kenya and therefore close to them.[193]

Also connected to Mount Kenya is the Gĩkũyũ understanding of Ngai as residing in a vast number of different places at once. They speak of different mountains; Mount Kenya, *Kĩa-nyandarwa*, *Kĩa-mbirũirũ* and *Kĩa-Njahĩ*. This is why perhaps the conception of Ngai as *Kĩrĩnyaga* received the lowest number of informants 78 (31%). The informants explained that although Ngai is associated with Mount Kenya, he nevertheless makes endless journeys every day to inspect the land, and in doing so, stays in other mountains as well. Ngai also dwells in the sacred Mũgumo (*ficus thoningii/natalensis*) tree. This big tree symbolises the mountains and thus the presence of Ngai. As a result, Ngai can be found in many places simultaneously but has some special, preferential dwellings.[194]

During the research period, another name for Ngai, which has never been mentioned before in the scholarly literature, emerged. The informants underlined that Ngai is also called *Kĩthuku*. There were 220 (88%) of the informants who emphasised this name of Ngai. They were asked to explain the meaning of *Kĩthuku*. They gave interesting answers. About 60% said that *Kĩthuku* is from *thuka* (shake) and thus Ngai is the one who, because of his power, can shake the earth. There were a large number of informants, about 82% who added that, apart from Ngai having the physical power, he is known to attract his people to him with 'good' magic (rũthuko).[195] However, what can be deduced from this is the fact that Ngai is powerful and attracts his people the Gĩkũyũ to himself. It also denotes a close ontological relationship that Ngai has with the people and nature and especially the land.

Another name for Ngai is *Mwene ndĩ/thĩ* (owner of the earth). As a matter of fact, 242 (97%) associated Ngai with the land. According to the informants, Ngai is the owner of the earth and can do what he pleases with it. The people are the custodians of the earth which from the beginning was given to their ancestors. That is why, according to the respondents, Ngai has a continuous communion with the people through the sacrifices

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[193] Interview, Gĩcũgũ, August 2003. This is also confirmed by the works of Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, p.234; Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, vol.III.; Routledge, *With a Prehistoric people*; Middleton, & Kershaw, *The Central Tribe of North-Eastern Bantu*, p. 61; Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*; Cavichi, E., *Problems of Change in Kikuyu tribal Society*, Bologna: Emi, 1977, p.12. There is no dispute as to Mount Kenya being the duelling place of Ngai in the Gĩkũyũ Cosmology.

[194] Research, 2003. Other scholars have found a similar understanding. Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, *Vol.III.*, pp.1075-1078; Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, p.236.

[195] Interview, Gĩcũgũ 2003-4.

offered to him. He also maintains his creation by giving enough rain to water the earth. Accordingly, he has given to the Gĩkũyũ a country full of rivers, ravines, beautiful mountains and trees. Most of the informants retorted: *Kaĩ gũkĩrĩ bũrũri ũngĩ mwega ta wa Agĩkũyũ* (is there another country as beautiful as that of Gĩkũyũ?).[196]

These names, enumerated above, were mentioned and discussed at length in the course of the research. There exist other names which are also important to explore though the informants were not keen to discuss them in detail since, they said, they came with the new religion and the colonial government. One of these names is *Mwathani* (the greatest ruler). Etymologically, this has its root in *'gwatha/ gwathana'*, meaning reign with authority and power. Thus, the Gĩkũyũ conceive of Ngai as the one in-charge of people's lives, demanding respect and recognition. They will say, *thutha wa maũndũ mothe nĩ Ngai* (in the final analysis, Ngai is in-charge). However, during the research, the word *Mwathani* was not used and when the informants were asked why they did not mention it, about 140 of them claimed that this was given by the Christian church although no one explicitly said the church that was responsible.[197]

At other times, Ngai is referred to as *Baba* (father). Today, when prayers are addressed to him, the attribute of *Baba* (father) is usually used. Again, the missionaries might have given this name. In fact most of the informants accentuated that Ngai as *baba* was not common in the traditional Gĩkũyũ. Indeed one would expect to be confronted by the word *Baba* when exploring the Gĩkũyũ traditional prayers to Ngai. Instead, in most of these prayers available, especially in Kenyatta's work and our research, there is no mention of Ngai addressed as *baba*. In almost all the prayers addressed to Ngai the words *Gĩthuri* (great elder) or *Kĩrĩ-nyaga* or *Mwene-Nyaga, Mũrungu and Kĩthuku* are used.[198]

Accordingly, Ngai has many attributes. He could be spoken to while at the same time he could speak with people, sending messages whenever he thought it necessary. Ngai is touched by the supplications of his people. Certainly, in times of need the Gĩkũyũ approach him without fear of disturbing him or of incurring his wrath. He takes his time and does not normally send punishment and tribulation upon his people unless angered.

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[196] Interview, Gĩcũgũ 2003-4.

[197] Interview, August 2003.

[198] Interview, Gĩcũgũ 2003-4; Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, vol.III., p.1076; Kihara, J., *Ngai, We Belong to you: Kenya's Kikuyu and Meru Prayers,* Spearhead no.89, Eldoret: Gaba Publications, 1985; Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, pp.81, 215, 246, 253, 258, 274-75; Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*, pp. 18, 26-7, 196-7; Routledge, *With a Prehistoric People*, p.231. Hobley has written that in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology, there is little abstract spirituality because almost everything in their religion is concrete; e.g. 'We pray to you Ngai, we sacrifice a goat', Hobley, *Bantu Beliefs and Magic*, pp.43, 45, 47, 49.

He is willing to stop any punishment sent, if sacrifices are made around the sacred Mũgumo to prove the sincerity of the people. Ngai hates and loves people according to their behaviour or in other words, *Ngai arehaga kĩguni na gĩtei* (Ngai punishes and blesses).

Quintessentially, Ngai likes relating with people and shares his generosity especially during the sacrifices where he comes to eat the meat of sacrifice from the mountain through the ladder of the sacred Mũgumo tree. The informants stipulated that during their offering and sacrifices to Ngai, he is not far from the place of sacrifice (the sacred Mũgumo tree). He watches them prepare the fire and the sacrificial lamb. He observes them as they implore him through their prayers and gladdens by the smell of the roasted meat of sacrifice. Later, he descends from his dwelling place to his tree, consumes the offering and returns to where he came from.[199] That is why when the Gĩkũyũ offer their sacrifices to him, fulfilling all the ritual requirements, they are sure to get what they request. After all, the Gĩkũyũ believe in a give-and-take relationship (*kanya gatune nĩ mwamũkanĩro*) and thus in a very convenient deity.

There are other attributes that depict Ngai in anthropomorphic language. The Gĩkũyũ would say that Ngai does his own work and thus is not to be pestered (*Ngai ndagiagwo*). *Ngai ndabaranagia gĩthithi kĩa mũndũ* (Ngai does not judge by the countenance of people). There is a Gĩkũyũ proverb that put this attribute concisely; *mũthũri mũndũ tiwe Ngai* (he who hates the other person is not Ngai).[200] The power of Ngai is also manifested in the lightning, the sun, the moon, rain, stars, rainbow and thunder. The thunder and lighting in traditional Gĩkũyũ cosmology are taken as manifesting the presence of Ngai as he moves from one place to another and thus cracking his joints on his journey. With them Ngai can crush down his enemies on earth. These are not Ngai but objects of reverence.

Having given the names they attribute to Ngai, the informants were then asked to narrate how Ngai manifests himself to the people and to the world. We will now explore the manner in which Ngai reveals himself in Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship.

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[199] Interview, 2003-4. This communion between Ngai and people is also reported by Hobley, C., 'Further Research into Kikuyu and Kamba Religious Beliefs and Customs', in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland,* Vol.41, July-Dec. 1911, pp.406-457.

[200] Interview, 2004. Similar proverbs are recorded by Barra, G., *1,000 Kikuyu proverb:* London: Macmillan, 1998 (1939), no. 573. Also, an article of Lonsdale, J, 'Kikuyu Christianities', *Journal of Religion in Africa,* Vol.XXIX, Leiden: Keninklijke Brill,NV, 1999, p.216. Wanjohi, discusses in details the philosophy of the Gĩkũyũ people found in the rich heritage of their proverbs. Wanjohi, *The Wisdom and Philosophy of the Gĩkuyu proverbs.*

5.3 The Manifestation of Ngai

When the respondents were asked: *Ngai eonanagia kũrĩ andũ na njĩra ĩrĩkũ?* (How does Ngai manifest himself)? They responded by demonstrating six ways. The informants, when talking of Ngai as manifesting himself, associated his presence with the mountains, thunder and lightning, rainbow, rain and big trees. The Mũgumo was the tree by which Ngai manifested himself regularly.

5.3.1 The Ngai of Mountains

5.3.1.1 Kĩrĩnyaga

As for the mountains, 199 (80%) of the informants highlighted that Ngai lives in the four mountains; Mount Kenya, Kinangop in the Aberdares, *Kianjahi* in the east *Kiambirũirũ* in the south and Longonot Crater in Maasai territory.[201] It is revealing to explore the nature of these mountains where Ngai is believed to dwell and to manifest himself in Gĩkũyũ cosmology. Mount Kenya believed to be the cardinal of all the mountains in Kenya, is exceptionally high. It is 5199 m above sea level and the second highest mountain in Africa. Thus its height is impressive with its three snow-capped peaks appearing dwarfed by their own immense pedestal. Precisely because of its influence on the local ecology and land use, the Gĩkũyũ consider it to be an intimate part of Ngai's creation. It is a source of many rivers and streams that feed most of the Gĩkũyũ country.[202] The people associate Mount Kenya with strength, height, beauty and as a source of water, rain, and forest that the Gĩkũyũ need for their survival. In addition to Mount Kenya, Ngai manifests himself in the small mountains of;

5.3.1.2 Kĩrĩma kĩa-njahĩ (Donyo-Sabuk).

Njahĩ[203] - lablab bean (*Dolichos lablab*) is associated with this mountain. The seeds of *njahĩ* are black with white marks at hilum, or brown but stippled with white. These beans were believed to have grown in abundance on the lower slopes of this mountain. The informants also referred to them as *njahĩ cia Ngai* (Ngai's lablab). They believed that Ngai grew his crops in this mountain and thus having prayed to him first facing Mount Kenya, the people supplicated to him next facing this second mountain.

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[201] Interview Sept, 2003. This is also observed by others scholars; Middleton & Kershaw, *The Central Tribe of North-Eastern Bantu*, p.61; Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*, p.27; Kabetu, *Kĩrĩra kĩa Ũgĩkũyũ*, and Gathigira, *Mĩikarĩre ya Agĩkũyũ*.

[202] Interview, Sep-Nov, 2003; Huxley, J., *African View*, London: Challes and Windus, 1931, p.171; Castro, *Facing Kirinyaga*, p.10.

[203] Interview, Gĩcũgũ 2003-4; Fisher, J.M., *The Anatomy of Kikuyu Domesticity and Husbandry*, London: Department of Technical Communication, 1954, p.229. Kenyatta refers to it as the mountain of big rain. *Facing Mount Kenya*, p.236.

Within this historiography, there exists a strong connection between the description of *njahĩ* (black and white marks), with *Donyo Sabuk* and that of Mount Kenya. Both of these mountains are defined as spotted either in black and white or brown but bespeckled in white. Again the two mountains are attributed to be the abode of Ngai, Mount Kenya being the chief one and *Kĩa-njahĩ* the second. However, given this topographical connection and description, we can say that in these two mountains the Gĩkũyũ see the work and presence of Ngai relating with him in a more ontological way.

5.3.1.3 Kĩrĩma kĩa- Nyandarũa (Aberdare Range)

It is situated on the west of Mount Kenya. The prefix *nya* is associated with feminine names and terms and with some insects, vegetables and other common objects. *Ndarũa* (noun) is the hide of a cow or ox which was used by the traditional Gĩkũyũ as a sleeping mat. Thus, *Nyandarũa* would mean the Mountain of hides or sleeping place. It was also called *Kĩrĩma kĩa thimbara*. *Thimba* (verb) means 'to look dull, gloomy, cloudy or misty' thus the misty/cloudy mountain. As well as being the resting house of Ngai, it was associated with rain.

5.3.1.4 Kĩrĩma kia-Mbirũirũ (The black mountain-Ngong hills)

This was the fourth temporary home of Ngai. The evidence of Ngai as living in these mountains spread all over the Gĩkũyũ land and manifesting himself in them can be strengthened by some Gĩkũyũ prayers.[204]

In these prayers, the Gĩkũyũ acknowledge that Ngai is in affiliation with Mount Kenya by the fact that he lives there and in the vicinity of his people. They see his home, feel his movements through the thunder and lightning and experience his presence when he accepts and eats the meat and food offered to him around the sacred Mũgumo tree. It also endorses the fact that he is stronger than that mountain since he is the source of rain and makes rivers flood. During the planting ceremony for instance, the informants emphasised that when people were anxiously hoping for an abundant rainfall and a plentiful harvest, the elders responsible for imploring rain beseeched Ngai.[205]

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[204] Most of these prayers will be explored in the chapter on the sacred Mũgumo and rituals. Other prayers can also be found in the works of Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*; Leakey *The Southern Kikuyu*; Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*; Routledge, *With a Prehistoric People*; Middleton & Kershaw, *The Central Tribes of North-Eastern Bantu*; Kabetu, *Kĩrĩra kĩa Ũgĩkũyũ*; Gathigira, *Miikarire ya Agikuyu*; Wanjohi, *The Wisdom and Philosophy of the Gĩkũyũ Proverbs*.

[205] Interview, Sept-Dec, 2003, June –July, 2004. The prayer for rain is referred to in the chapter dealing with the Mũgumo and rituals.

5.3.2 The Ngai of Lightning and Thunder

For the Gĩkũyũ, hierophanies are not limited to the mountains only. We have seen that Ngai blesses the people but punishes them if they do not exercise their moral responsibility. Occasionally, Ngai comes down from Mount Kenya either on an inspection tour or to take his present offered to him under the sacred Mũgumo tree. When visiting the people in this way, a route is prepared by his two envoys, thunder and lightning. About 140 (56%) of the respondents emphasised that Ngai revealed himself through these phenomena. Some of the informants said that when there was thunder, Ngai was stretching himself so as to move from one place to another. If one was struck by the lightning, then it was believed that he had crossed the path of Ngai and Ngai in return had retaliated.[206] Others associated this phenomenon with the apparent disagreement between gods.

5.3.3 The Ngai of Rain

There were about 161 (64%) of the informants who underlined that Ngai manifested himself through *mbura* (rain). The etymology of the word Ngai as already attested means 'rain'. Thus, it was only plausible that the Gĩkũyũ used this epithet to demonstrate how Ngai revealed his presence to them and to the world. Once more, being an agricultural community, Ngai as rain, according to the respondents, had a more ontological value. During the prayer for rain for instance, some of informant reiterated by recalling how the Gĩkũyũ demonstrated that Ngai and *mbura* came from the same source. They would say: *Ngai tondũ mbura yumaga o kũu wĩkaraga ĩĩ, tũiguĩre tha na ũtũhe yo*[207] (Ngai, since rain comes from where you live, be merciful to us and give us rain). Accordingly, the presence of abundant rain means that Ngai is pleased with his people and through the rain, he blesses them. Whenever it started raining, some informants would say: *Ngai nĩ aratũrathima na mbura* (Ngai is blessing us with rain Ngai).

5.3.4 Ngai and the Rainbow

The name for rainbow in Gĩkũyũ is *mũkũnga or mũkenga mbura. Kenga* (v) literally means to hoodwink or to cover up the rain. Thus, 107 (43%) of the informants highlighted that the rainbow stopped the rain in order to demonstrated the beauty of Ngai.

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[206] Interview, Dec, 2003. They underlined that to be struck by lighting was a bad omen that needed a slaughter of a goat to reconcile with Ngai. The pragmatic question that would preoccupy the people would be: Why was this person struck and not the other? What taboo had he/she broken?

[207] Interview July, 2004.

Ngai nĩ mwendi ũthaka (Ngai loves beauty), they would say.[208] They also believed that the rainbow ended in a great pool somewhere in the world or in the waterfall where the *ndamathia* (sea/river monster) lived.

5.3.4 Ngai and the Seers

Within traditional Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship, the *arathi* (seers/diviners) and *ago* (medicine men) had a lot of religio-political influence. However with the introduction of the new religions, the number has become dismally low. Nonetheless, 179 (72%) of the informants underlined that the two groups of people were believed to be mediators between Ngai and his people. Some of the respondents narrated how Mũgo wa Kĩbiro, the famous seer, was taken by Ngai through the *kathũrũmũndũ /gacumbĩrĩ* (peak) of his house and spend long hours talking with Ngai. He would then be sent back to give the message to the people. Mugo is remembered in the history of the Gĩkũyũ as having foretold the coming of the Europeans and the Kenya-Uganda railway. In Gĩcũgũ, the informants mentioned another seer by the name of Kĩmaru who had similar experiences. It was through these people that Ngai communicated and warned his people. Even after the proliferation of many religions, the informants believe that the seers and medicine men continue to influence the life of many people and that some Christians and Muslims visit them in secret.[209]

There were a few informants, about 40, who said that in the past, Ngai used to manifest himself through the *nguyo* (colobus monkey). When the Gĩkũyũ spotted a solitary colobus monkey around their village, they believed that it had a message from Ngai and was therefore treated with the utmost respect and never killed. The work of the seers and medicine men was to divinise the message it had brought to the people, its religio-political repercussions and eventually to communicate this to the people.

The conception of Ngai and his hierophanies was understood not as an abstract discourse but that which was pragmatically experienced through the contacts that the Gĩkũyũ had in their daily chores. In this way Ngai made a lot of sense. He was an anthropomorphic deity who loved to commune with his people and cared for what was happening to them. What really mattered in this world-view, we could say, was not so much the question as to whether Ngai existed or not. The Gĩkũyũ could feel his immeasurable presence and power. They could know his 'thinking' in the sense that

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[208] Interview, Sept.-Dec., 2003.

[209] Interview, Gĩcũgũ 2003-4.

when Ngai was angry with the people, he demonstrated it. This also happened when he was contented. Between the people and their deity, contact was more invested in feeling and socio-religious experiences. The continuous interaction between Ngai, the Gĩkũyũ and the ancestors happened not in the vacuum but in the land. That is why land, in its entire cultural artefact, had a very strong religious value. We will now move on to explain the religious significance of the land to the Gĩkũyũ people and it role in their cosmology and worship.

5.4 The land: its meaning and religious value

5.4.1 Gĩkũyũ and Land Tenure

The land debate substantially exposes the impact the land could have played in Gĩkũyũ rituals performed around the sacred Mũgumo tree. We will explore these issues by positing this research question: *Ngai, Gĩthaka na Agĩkũyũ matarainie atĩa?* (What kind of relationships exists between Ngai, the land and the Gĩkũyũ people?)

Kenyatta spends the whole of chapter two of his book *Facing Mount Kenya* in trying to expound and explain the concept of land tenure, demonstrating how the Gĩkũyũ are attached to the land. Inevitably, the central issue of Kenyatta's prime concern was land. In the preface of the book, Kenyatta observes that land is

> the key to the people's life; it secures for them that peaceful tillage of the soil which supplies their material needs and enables them to perform their magic and traditional ceremonies in undisturbed serenity; facing Mount Kenya...any one who wants to understand Gĩkũyũ problems must have a correct grasp of the questions relating to land tenure.[210]

Apart from the land being the key, it is also the mother. In fact, on land tenure and its religious significance, Kenyatta has written:

> the Gĩkũyũ consider the earth as the "mother" of the tribe, for the reason that the mother bears her burden for about eight or nine moons while the child is in her womb, and then for a short period of suckling. But it is the soil that feeds the child through lifetime; and again after death it is the soil that nurses the spirits of the dead for eternity. Thus the earth is the most

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[210] Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, p.xxi. Kenyatta had acquired a particular knowledge of land and land problems during the 1920s. He had acted as an interpreter in 1921, in a land case before the Supreme Court in Nairobi. He had been a spokesperson for the KCA in 1928 before the Hilton Young Commission. In *Facing Mount Kenya*, he continued to boost KCA's ideologies especially the questions of land and female circumcision. Shaw, *Colonial Inscription*; Rawcliffe, D.H., *The Struggle for Kenya*, London: Victor Gollancz LTD, 1954, especially pp.157-164; Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*; Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*.

sacred thing above all that dwells in or on it…It supplies them with the material needs of life, through which spiritual and mental contentment is achieved.[211]

Kenyatta uses the powerful images of 'mother' and 'womb' to demonstrate that in traditional Gĩkũyũ land tenure, there existed an ontological connection between the people and their land. Although Kenyatta does not employ these symbolisms to suggest that the notion of mother goddess existed in Gĩkũyũ cosmological understanding, nevertheless, by using the image of the key, mother and the womb to demonstrate the religious significance of the land to the people, he confronts his readers to acknowledge the difficulty of separating the land from the social, religious, economic or political gestalt of the agricultural Gĩkũyũ. As the womb has a latent potentiality to creative power, so has the land. Moreover, in the myth of origin, land was a free gift from Ngai so that the Gĩkũyũ became the first ancestor. As the Gĩkũyũ can trace their origin from the male ancestor, so can they equally understand their cultural genesis and position in history and how this historical configuration legitimises their claim to their land. Thus, through this ontological connection, the Gĩkũyũ became culturally, politically and religiously associated with the land. The group could be identified with the land within their socio-political organisation.[212]

In the light of this background one can understand why in the beginning of *Facing Mount Kenya* Kenyatta invokes the ancestors to join the Gĩkũyũ in rebuilding the destroyed shrines and recapturing the annexed Gĩkũyũ lands. To underline this political mandate of Kenyatta, we need to emphasize what he has written in his book dedication;

> to moigoi and Wamboi and all the dispossessed youth of Africa: for perpetuation of communion with ancestral spirits through the fight for African Freedom, and in the firm faith that the dead, the living, and the unborn will unite to rebuilt the destroyed shrines.[213]

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[211] *Facing Mount Kenya*, p.21; Droz, *Migrations Kikuyus*. The idea of associating the land or soil with the symbolism of a mother is observed not only by the Gĩkũyũ people. There is a rich literature of the use of these symbolisms to demonstrate how, in agricultural people, land holds strong religious and political affiliations. In Egypt for instance, there is evidence that the mother goddess associated with fertility played a significant role in the worship of Isis. Other African agrarian societies also consider the earth as mother and the earth goddess as important in understanding and formulating their land tenure. Handy, Craighill, E.S, 'The Religious significance of the land', *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol.XXXVIII, no.CL. Jan.1939, London: Macmillan and Co.,LTD., pp.114-123; Thomas, *Politics of the Womb*.

[212] Interview, 2003-4; Anderson, *Histories of the* Hanged; Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*. For the rural Gĩkũyũ, livelihood usually depends on the land. He can built a house and raise his family and to which he can retire if working in an urban area and eventually rest as an ancestor after death. Thus, land is synonymous with security and within the *mbarĩ*, social status. Interview, 2003-4; Rawcliffe, *The Struggle for Kenya*, p.158.

[213] Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*. Berman, '*Ethnography as Politics'*, p.333. Having accentuated the myth of origin to show the Gĩkũyũ relationship with the land, which of course had a personal political agenda, Kenyatta succinctly, invites the reader to understand the bitterness that he shares with all his Gĩkũyũ people against the white man who stole the land. Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, pp.46-52. For his political agenda through the forging of the myth of origin, see, Droz, *Migrations Kikuyus*.

The names mentioned by Kenyatta were those of both his parents and his firstborns, *Mũigai* and *Wambũi*. Thus in his entreaty we discover not only his and other rich Gĩkũyũ political agenda but also some of the fundamental issues that underpin Gĩkũyũ land tenure, their conception and relationship with the land. Land, it seems, elicits in the Gĩkũyũ people a certain spiritual and emotional value. The relationship the people have with the land appears to be symbolically mirrored in the empathy between a mother and child thereby exhibiting a religio-political interconnection. Without this communion, the Gĩkũyũ would suffer spiritual, political and economic starvation.[214]

The prayer of Kenyatta and the symbolism of mother and child is the key to understanding traditional Gĩkũyũ land tenure. In their cosmology, the spilling of the blood of a member of the same *mbarĩ* or clan was a serious affair. It was believed that the blood could seek revenge through the ancestors, which would have been detrimental to the *mbarĩ* or clan. Shedding the blood of a member belonging to a different *mbarĩ* or clan was, as Lambert puts it, of slight importance, although it required an indemnity. It is crucial to understand this point because land in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology contained the blood of the ancestors and their bones thereby forged a strong link between the people and land.[215]

Concerning the strong bond that exists between the people and land, J. Lonsdale puts it concisely that the Gĩkũyũ as an aggregation of migrants had for centuries toiled and forged themselves into what they and others recognised as a people. Their sweat while toiling on the land and clearing the virgin forests had produced a culture from nature. Working on one's land gave an identity and self-respect. In their relationship with the land, the people were searching for the religio-political meaning and identity so much so that what emerged from this relationship was a theory of labour and value, both material and moral.[216]

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[214] Handy, 'The Religious significance of the land', pp.114-123; Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, p.21ff; Berman, 'Ethnography as Politics', p.234.

[215] Interview, 2003-2004; Lambert, *The system of Land Tenure*, pp.140. Also, Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*; Routledge, *With a Prehistoric people*, p20; Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, pp.226-230.

[216] Lonsdale, 'The Moral economy of Mau Mau', pp.333-4. Besides, the Gĩkũyũ argued that one could acquire property either by human toil, first cultivation, first clearance (*kuna*) or bartering it with livestock. Njũrũri summarises this transaction by adding that *Mwendi Mbũri nĩ Mũrĩmi* (he who love the goats is a farmer). Njũrũri, N., *Gĩkũyũ Proverbs*, London: Macmillan Co. Ltd., 1969, no. 386; Dundas, C., 'The Organisation and Laws of some Bantu tribes in East Africa', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, vol.45. 1915*, p.297; Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, p.27; Sorrenson, *Land Reform in the Kikuyu Country*, p.8.

Nevertheless, it also seems plausible that land became a podium of economic suppression in the traditional Gĩkũyũ *gĩthaka*[217] system. Having amassed a lot of land, the wealthier *mbarĩ* created a system of social-economic dependence so that what was supposed to be a fair distribution of wealth created a relationship whereby the richer became richer while the poor sank into destitution. It is important to emphasise that the complex relationship that existed between the Gĩkũyũ, land and family was meant to increase the wealth and fame of the *mbarĩ*. Wealth was measured in the form of livestock, land and people. It was also a sign of blessing from Ngai. The products of the land could be used to trade with the Maasai, Kamba and Arab traders. Alliances with other *mbarĩ* were kept alive through feasts, beer drinking and finally, it could feed the labourers who toiled hard to prepare and clear the forest for planting.[218] It is striking to notice that Kenyatta, who had initially claimed to have a specialised knowledge of land tenure and land law as a future *mũramati* does not highlight the discrepancies that existed in traditional land tenure, where the rich *mbarĩ* had reduced the poor and landless Gĩkũyũ to a form of servitude. One can only deduce that he deliberately ignored these cultural conflicts in order to present the community as democratic, integrated, orderly and civilised, using Malinowski's functional approach.

5.4.2 The Genesis of Gĩkũyũ Land tenure

Land bonded the members of *mbarĩ* because it strongly defined the character of their collective life. The Gĩkũyũ community looked on the land as a pivot through which the family was built, the people conceived of it in relationship to life.[219] It assisted the agrarian Gĩkũyũ in the struggle to find their meaning and position in the world and at the same time placing Ngai and the ancestors among them. The land equally united Ngai and ancestors with the Gĩkũyũ and the neighbouring groups.

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[217] *Gĩthaka* (pl.*ithaka*) is a privately owned piece of land belonging to a family or clan. It is also referred to as *mũgũnda* or *ng'ũndũ*. In traditional Gĩkũyũ land, tenure the term *gĩthaka* was generally used to mean both the uncultivated and cultivated land. The Maxwell report defines *gĩthaka* as the Gĩkũyũ unit of land tenure which consisted of entirely bush or forest land, entirely cultivated land or some of each. Kenya Government, Native Land Tenure in Kikuyu Province: Report of Committee, 1929 (Maxwell report), p.69; Middleton, & Kershaw, *The Central tribes of North-Eastern Bantu*, p.45; Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, pp.21-22.

[218] Clark, C.M., 'Land, Food, Women and Power, in the Nineteenth Century Kikuyu', *Africa*, 50 (4), 1980, pp.365-367; Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*; Lambert, *The System of Land Tenure*.

[219] Wa-Githumo, M., *Land and Nationalismin Kenya: The impact of land expropriation and land grievances upon the rise and development of Nationalism movement in Kenya*, 1885-1939, Washington, DC: University Press of America, Inc., 1981, p.34; Wilson, C., *Before the Dawn in Kenya*, Nairobi: The English Press Ltd., 1953, p.68; Lambert, *The System of Kikuyu Land Tenure;* Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*; Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged.*

It was the main unifying factor in Gĩkũyũ cosmology as well as being a focal-point of religious, economic and political asset. At the same time, it served as a symbol of unity among the members of *mbarĩ* all over the Gĩkũyũ country. Thus, land even today remains one of the most sensitive single factors influencing Gĩkũyũ thinking. When the informants were asked to narrate the relationship between Ngai, the land and the people, they gave interesting answers. According to them, the affiliation can be understood under the three categories. In the first category, Ngai is related to the people and the land as the *Mwene gĩthaka* (owner of the land). Thus, 198 (79%) emphasised this factor. In the second category, Ngai is understood to be the *Mwene ndĩ/thĩ* (owner of the earth). This had 225 (90%). Ngai is also the *Mũmbi* (creator) and thus he created the world. 241 (96%) said that the land belonged to Ngai.[220]

However, for the informants there were terms which they believed validated these relationships. For instance, the word 'land' is ambiguous. Land (*thĩ*) can mean 'the country' (*bũrũri*) or 'district'. It can also mean an area of land (*gĩthaka*) under certain rights. Land is also *ng'ũndũ* (plot) or *Mũgũda* (cultivation ground). It is under these parameters that the Gĩkũyũ understand the genesis of land tenure. Consequently, Ngai is the creator and therefore the owner of the earth and the Gĩkũyũ land. This is well impressed through the myth of the origin.[221] Consequently, the data shows that over 90% of the informants accentuated the strong bond that existed between Ngai and the land. Using these categories of creation and ownership, the Gĩkũyũ can see the hand of Ngai in creation, not as a detached being, but the one who uses the soil to create. Creation is not, in the cosmology of the Gĩkũyũ, an *ex nihilo* phenomenon. Ngai is *mũmbi* and *mũmbi* does not start creating from nothing. In fact, this has already been enriched by the way they conceive of him and his various ways of manifestation. The table below demonstrates how Ngai is related to the land.

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[220] Interview, Gĩcũgũ 2003-4.

[221] The myth of origin depicts Ngai as the owner of the earth and the one who gave Gĩkũyũ, the founding father of the Gĩkũyũ people, the country they now live. Some attributes of Ngai also underline this factor.
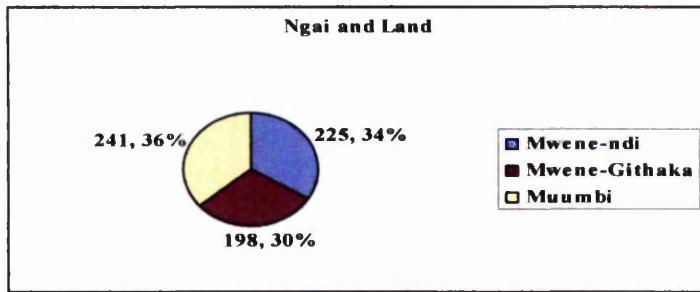
Fig.5.2. Relationship between Ngai and Land

5.4.3 The Religious significance of land

While the Maasai pastoralists bordering Gĩkũyũ territory tried to solve their manifold problems of maintaining sufficient stock and access to grazing and water to ensure their survival by organising themselves into small, mobile herding units, the traditional Gĩkũyũ ensured access to their basic resources through land. Land acted as a podium through which they could communicate with Ngai around the sacred Mũgumo and other sacred groves spread throughout their territory.

These Maasai pastoralists protected their access to animals and grazing land by viewing their Gĩkũyũ neighbours as profligate consumers of valuable resources especially when they burned up the grass suitable for grazing.[222] It is only plausible that these pastoralists would value more their livestock than the land itself and thus attach more religious significance to their herds than the land. The Ndorobo (hunters and gatherers) who needed access to large reserves to secure the variety of gathered and hunted resources, had attached more significance to the game than the land. Unlike the Maasai, Gumba, Samburu, and Ndorobo, the Gĩkũyũ monopolised their concept of land tenure through the system of *mbarĩ* or clan and made their land sacrosanct. Although it is difficult to dichotomise the Gĩkũyũ understanding of land tenure from its political and economic implications, nevertheless, we can attempt to study the religious significance of the land since there is strong evidence that land encapsulates diverse cultural elements in the traditional life of the Gĩkũyũ.

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[222] Spear, T & Waller, R., (edts.), *Being a Maasai: Ethnicity and Identity in East Africa*, London: James Currey, 1993, pp.5-6; Bernstern, J., 'The Maasai and their Neighbours: Variables of interaction', *Africa Economic History*, 2, 1976, pp.1-11. Also, Galanty, J., 'Land and Livestock among Kenyan Maasai' in Galanty, J., & Salzman, P.C., *Change and Development in Nomadic and Pastoral societies*, Leiden: Brill, 1981, pp.68-88; Zwanenberg, R., 'Dorobo Hunting and Gathering: A way of life or Mode of Production?' in *African Economic History*, 2, 1976:12-24.

In order to understand the religious significance of land to the Gĩkũyũ people, we will explore it under two important headings namely: (a) land as a mother and a resting place for the ancestors. (b) as a podium for the ritual sacrifices.

5.4.3.1 Land: The Ancestral Home

Writing about the ancestral communion, Kenyatta notes that 'communion with the ancestral spirits is perpetuated through contact with the soil in which the ancestors of the Gĩkũyũ lie buried'.[223]   Leakey also remarks that the *ngoma* dwell in the bowels of the earth[224] but they are nevertheless invisibly present in and around the home they used to inhabit when alive and could be called upon at any time of the day or night. He further accentuates that whenever the Gĩkũyũ slaughtered animals for any purpose, the first gush of blood that spurted out when the knife was plunged into the animal was allowed to fall down as an offering to the ancestors. Cagnolo also observes that *ngoma* have their abode on various hills and whenever a grass fire burned those hills, one could hear them wail.[225]

From these observations, one begins to understand why scholars like Kenyatta, Leakey, Lambert and Middleton demonstrate not just the tradition concept of land tenure to the Gĩkũyũ but also the role the traditional religious beliefs played in Gĩkũyũ land tenure. As long as the Gĩkũyũ underlined that land belonged to *mbarĩ* who in return had acquired it from their ancestors, then, the religious implications are predominant. This underscores why the informants underlined that the *gĩthaka* belongs to *mbarĩ* and only they have power over its management.[226]

However, if the Gĩkũyũ believe that Ngai gave land to them, why, on their primal contact with the Ndorobo (a hunting group), prior inhabitants of the land especially the southern part of Mount Kenya, did the Gĩkũyũ not drive them out? Why had the Gĩkũyũ to pay their goats in exchange for land while they, being numerically so large and being

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[223] Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, pp.21&14. Ngugi also shows the strong religious relationship existing between the Gĩkũyũ and the land. In one of his work, Ngotho reminds his children that they belong to the house of Gĩkũyũ and Mũmbi that Ngai gave them the land they now occupy and which a substantial part had been taken by *muzungu* (white man). Ngugi, *Weep Not, Child*, p.24. From the perspective of the *mbarĩ*, in the traditional Gĩkũyũ religio-political set-up, a father with many wives and children knew that after his death, he could rest since he would not be wandering in the wilderness or lose contact with the earth. Magesa, *African Religion*, pp. 70-79. Ancestors are conceived by the Gĩkũyũ and indeed by many other African societies in the same way as the living elders of the society within the kinship communion. Kopytoff, I., 'Ancestors as Elders in Africa', in Hammond, P.B., *Cultural and Social Anthropology: Introductory readings in Ethnology*, London: Macmillan, 1975, pp.282-90. The Gĩkũyũ is constantly in debt to his ancestors due to the fact that they gave him the piece of land and his family.

[224] Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, pp.1105-1107.

[225] Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*, p.176.

[226] Interview, Gĩcũgũ 2003-4.

so well organised militarily, could easily have chased the Ndorobo away? Why had they to undergo the ritual of adoption with the Ndorobo in order to acquire their land? The answer to these questions lies in exploring the relationship between the ancestors and the land.

The Gĩkũyũ feared the ancestors more than they feared Ngai. They knew that were they to pour out the blood of the Ndorobo people and confiscate their land, the spirits of the Ndorobo would call for revenge. This would have had serious repercussions, either by rendering the land barren, bringing calamity to their animals, wives and children, making the crops fail, or worst of all, bringing drought all over the newly acquired land. The Gĩkũyũ believed that the ancestors who were buried beneath the soil sanctified it. In the underworld, *ngoma* continued to give life to the living members of their *mbarĩ* and this strongest ontological contact was actualised in the land. Under these circumstances, the only pragmatic and religious method of acquiring land from the Ndorobo or Maasai was by either entering into peace treaties or conducting some adoption rituals with them.[227] Now, given these facts, one begins to understand why Kenyatta dedicated his book not just to his parents, his first son and daughter (Wambũi and Mũigai) but also to the dispossessed youths and why he highlights a perpetual communion with the ancestors in the fight for both freedom and land. It also explains why the Mau Mau insurgence was inevitable in the Gĩkũyũ land.[228]

From the available literature, it is clear that land for the Gĩkũyũ is the indispensable source of their subsistence. It is an essential factor in their religious and political system. Although many scholars have tried to establish the significance of the land, no one has used such a powerful symbol as Kenyatta when he compares the land to a mother, woman, womb and suckling. This use of symbolism demonstrates the religious significance the Gĩkũyũ group bestowed to the land.

Land is, according to the Gĩkũyũ people, their mother, because it produces everything that sustains human beings everywhere.[229] But people have to invest in it

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[227] This is why in 1929, the Gĩkũyũ of Kiambu for instance, told the land committee: 'we always bought them (Ndorobo) out and never drove them out. If we had driven them out, there would have been a curse on the land'. Lambert, *The system of Land Tenure*, pp.92-112, also pp.82-88; Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, pp.92-102; Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu*.

[228] Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, p.vi; Arnold, G., *Kenyatta and the Politics of Kenya* London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1974; Kilson M., 'Land and the Kikuyu: A study of the Relationship between Land and Kikuyu Political Movements', *Journal of Negro History*, Vol.40.Issue 2, April, 1955, pp.103-153; Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*; Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*.

[229] Interview, 2003-4. Also in Mworia H., *I, the Gĩkũyũ and the white fury*, Nairobi: E.A. Educational publishers, 1994, p.101.

asking their ancestors to bless the soil and their harvest. According to the informants, when one works hard, maintaining a strong bond between his family, Ngai and the ancestors, then, the reward is that of an abundant harvest. Besides, they added: *mũgũnda mwega ũmenyagwo na ngetho* (one knows a good field from its crops). In consequence, to take someone's land in Gĩkũyũ cosmology is like depriving a newborn baby of her mother's milk and as such is tantamount to denying her an essential for survival. Even after death, it is the soil that continues feeding the *ngoma* for eternity. Regularly, members of the *mbarĩ* and clan would pour libations and propitiate the ancestors to ensure a smooth running of their families and clans. During the period of research, we would see people pouring libation to their *ngoma* before drinking anything as a form of communion with them. The respondents explained that in doing so, whenever necessary, they implored the ancestors to bless them together with the land they occupied and laboured on. Phrases like, *gũitangĩra ngoma njohi*, (pour libation-beer for the ancestors) or *gũthĩnjĩra ngoma* (to slaughter for the ancestors) or other phrases that validated the close communion between the land and *mbarĩ* were used.[230]

As an agriculturalist community the Gĩkũyũ depend almost entirely on land. This is because symbolically, land acts as their 'mother' in the sense that it supplies them with the material needs of life, through which spiritual and mental contentment are achieved.[231] The land constitutes the bones and sinews of their religious, social, economic, and political structures.[232]

5.4.3.2 Land: A Podium for Ritual Sacrifice

The Gĩkũyũ seem to have been united by a common mythological sentiment of the origin, the investment of the land under the power of *mbarĩ* and the ritual sacrifices conducted by the religious or sacrificial council (*kĩama kĩa matũranguru*) around the sacred Mũgumo. Additionally, they were also united by the concept of a religio-political

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[230] Interview, Oct-Dec, 2003. Also reported in Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu*, p.75; Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*; Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, pp232-33; Kabetu, *Kirira kia Ugikuyu*; Gathigira, *Miikarire ya Agikuyu*; Routledge, *With a Prehistoric People*; Hobley, *Bantu Beliefs and Magic*; Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*, p.27; Bernardi, *Le Religioni dei Primitivi*.

[231] Interview Oct-Dec, 2003; Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, p.21; Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, p.168.

[232] wa-Githumo, *Land and Nationalism*. Ngugi foregrounds land as a recurring economic, religious and political metaphor in the decolonisation process in Kenya. As Ogunde has emphasised, Ngugi's most outstanding image in his recreation of the colonial and postcolonial experience is land. Land for him remains an important metaphor for explicating Kenya's past and present history in his later novels. Land is depicted as a metaphor for life and thus the source of livelihood. It is both a metaphor for struggle and the physical space for political contests. Ogunde, *Ngugi's Novels and African History*, P.28. See for example, Ngugi, *Petals of Blood*, *Devil on the cross* and *Mũrogi wa Kagogo*, Nairobi: East African Education Publishers, 2004.

community of joint armed forces to defend their land. When the sacrificial council was performing a sacrifice at the territorial sacred tree, one of the fundamental stages involved the erection of the *mathĩnjĩro* (platform) as the informants called it, around the sacred Mũgumo tree. This was vital since the sacrificial meat offered to Ngai was placed and roasted on it and it was from there that Ngai would come down from Mount Kenya to the sacred tree to take his share. The *mathĩnjĩro* offered one means through which Ngai communed with his people and in this religious configuration, land was vital. It was a podium for this ritual communion.

Concerning this aspect, the informants underlined in their vernacular: *hatarĩ na mũgũnda, Mũgĩkũyũ angĩrutĩra Ngai magongona atĩa? Tũtarĩ mũgũnda rĩ, ngoma citũ nacio ingĩikara kũ?* (Without land, where would the Gĩkũyũ offer the sacrifice to Ngai? Without land, where would our ancestors rest?). *Gũtarĩ Mũgunda rĩ, andũ na ngoma no makorwo na wĩyathi?* (Without the land, would the people and and ancestor live in freedom?).[233]

Further, fat and beer were poured out as a libation to both the ancestors and Ngai, making the land even more sacrosanct. It was on the land that rituals (*ituika, irua* and imploring Ngai for rain) which cemented the society were held and therefore diverse strands of religious life were bonded. This bond was strengthened by the sacrifice of the goat either to Ngai or to ancestors with the blood and *tatha* (entrails) sprinkled over the land and around the sacred Mũgumo during the ritual sacrifices to perpetuate their claim to land ownership. Furthermore, land was a temporary home for Ngai. It supported his homes which were associated with Mount Kenya and other small mountains of religious significance. It also supported and nurtured Ngai's sanctuary: the sacred Mũgumo, other sacred trees and groves. As such, land was endowed with strong religious powers.

In some regions of the Gĩkũyũ country, whenever there was a serious dispute about property in land, the evidence was weighed but if it was insufficient to determine the real owner of the piece of land, an oath was administered under the supervision of the council of elders. To underline the religious value of land, a goat was slaughtered and blood was mixed with the soil. The oath was called *muma wa Gĩthathi*[234] (the oath of gĩthathi) or *muma wa kũringa thenge* (the oath of smashing the goat). Each party swallowed a portion of the mixture in the presence of the elders saying these or similar

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[233] Interview, Gĩcũgũ Dec. 2003.

[234] *Gĩthathi* is a cylindrical stone with a hole drilled axially. In the traditional Gĩkũyũ, it was used for taking oaths and pronouncing comminations. It is also called *kũringa thenge* because in most cases, the goat was killed and some of its bones smashed.

words: '*ndĩrogũthũo ta mbũri ĩno nĩ hinya wa Ngai angĩkorwo mũgũnda ũyũ ti wakwa o hamwe na ngoma ciakwa*' (may I be struck like this goat by the judgment of Ngai if this land is not mine or did not belong to my ancestors).[235]

Confirming the relationship the Gĩkũyũ had with the land and the religious value they accrued to it, Berman has written:

> the idea of land lay at the core of the colonial relationship: it was the emotional bedrock of dominance and subordination, of achievement and loss, of possessing a social identity, and therefore, either a fitness to exist or a reproach for living...Land was also time: the past with its ancestral bones; the present as the resource with which people made their wealth and civic virtue in a competitive world; and the future, sustaining the marital networks of reproduction and preserving the possibilities of productive labour for one's grand children.[236]

Thus the land gave the people an identity, a reason for being. It was a platform for a power struggle in religious and political organization. It placed them in time, both in the past, in the present and in the future, unifying them with the world of the dead. The land which fed and sustained the Gĩkũyũ was sanctified by the ancestors beneath it, giving the present occupiers a strong link and claim to that soil.[237] To the Gĩkũyũ, the earth is the most sacred thing above all that dwells in or on it. Consequently, the soil is especially honoured by them. During birth, for instance, the traditional Gĩkũyũ buries the umbilical chord in the soil to welcome the living and unite them with their ancestors. As well, during circumcision, blood was allowed to ooze out slowly wetting the ground so that the initiates were ontologically united and blessed by the ancestors. From these and other important cultural instances one can understand why an everlasting and binding oath was to 'swear by the earth'.

5.5. Conclusion

A thorough study of the attributes the Gĩkũyũ give to Ngai, together with the way they conceive of him, has been presented. The chapter has also discussed the way Ngai manifests himself to the traditional Gĩkũyũ taking the land as the podium of this intricate communion. The Gĩkũyũ explain, manipulate and communicate with their ancestors using the land as the medium.

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[235] Interview, Sep-Oct, 2003; Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*, p. 154; Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, pp222-225.

[236] Berman, 'Ethnography as Politics', pp.313-344.

[237] Interview, Gĩcũgũ, August-Dec, 2003. Lambert, *The system of Kikuyu land Tenure*, p.114. W. Wade rightly argued that every African loves the land with a special devotion since it unites the people with their ancestors. Wade, W., 'Headline Series', *Foreign Policy Bulletin*, Vol. 32, London: July, 1953. This idea is seconded by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his novel *Weep not, Child*, where he rightly refers to the land as the 'highest of all values'. Ngugi, *Weep not, Child*; Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*; Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*.

Some of the attributes used by the Gĩkũyũ people to conceptualise Ngai are: great, powerful, *Mũmbi* (creator/ moulder), owner and giver. These clearly demonstrate the immensely significant role that Ngai has played in their cosmology. It also indicates a solid and active relationship that has been kept and nurtured by both parties: the Gĩkũyũ and Ngai. These attributes also explain why the relationship between the Gĩkũyũ and Ngai is hierarchical, an affinity translated throughout their socio-political organisations. In this type of bonding, Ngai the creator is placed as the axis through which everything else revolves, an ontological pivot through which all other forms of relationships are based. Within these parameters, these attributes of a strong, powerful creator and owner were also mirrored in the religio-philosophical world of the Gĩkũyũ people led by the cohort of elders, who, using their power and secret knowledge, controlled the group.

It is also interesting that one powerful epithet of Ngai is *Mũmbi* thus showing one of the dominant characteristic of Ngai. Ngai, like a traditional Gĩkũyũ woman, is the moulder. He created the Gĩkũyũ and the world. He takes care of the people and nature like a responsible mother by sustaining the people. The Gĩkũyũ nourish themselves from the 'breast' of Ngai-nature and thus she as a mother, sustains them. Ngai is also closely related to the Mũgumo tree, a tree associated with the milk of a mother. All these compelling facts as stipulated by the research findings lead us to conclude that the traditional Gĩkũyũ might have conceived of Ngai as having a female gender. This might have changed with time as the people forged their different identities.

The Gĩkũyũ conception of Ngai along with the attributes underlined above can lead us to conclude that they relate with Ngai in a very pragmatic and ontological way. They conceive of him anthropomorphically, as a deity interested in other relationships; between him and the people, amongst the Gĩkũyũ, and the rest of creation. The other labyrinths of association mirror the first type of rapport: between Ngai the creator and the Gĩkũyũ people. He is as near to the people as the marrow is to the bone and thus can understand them even in times of misfortune.

These attributes, shaping their conception of Ngai, seem to be a reflection of the ethical and moral responsibilities that every adult Gĩkũyũ was required to practise. The Gĩkũyũ could turn to Ngai in order to obtain a symbolic immortality of both the individual and the community. In this religio-philosophical world, Ngai cannot be pigeonholed. He moves and inspects everything freely. As a consequence, the research findings seem to strongly indicate that the genesis of the many attributes given to Ngai

might have started in the Gĩkũyũ relationship with nature, demonstrating that Ngai in their cosmology manifests himself through natural phenomena.

This being the case, the idea of Ngai as a distant or absent person as expressed by scholars like Kenyatta, Leakey, Cagnolo and missionaries cannot be the original Gĩkũyũ conception of Ngai. In fact, the research has established that the Ngai of Gĩkũyũ is a 'localised' deity, living in Mount Kenya or other minor mountains spread all over the country and who occasionally visited the people. He also communed with the Gĩkũyũ around the sacred Mũgumo and sacred groves in Gĩkũyũ territory. This became even more strengthened when we explored the religious significance of land to the people.

Ngai is thought of as the creator and as the one who loves life. But Ngai has feelings since he is said to be happy when people live in harmony but sad and angry when they go against their ethical responsibility. Ngai was a deity who either punished or blessed his people according to their behaviour. As he was strong, great, morally straight and could strike them hard in times of drought, diseases and other natural calamities, the Gĩkũyũ could have felt that it was their responsibility to imitate him and their ancestors within the confluence of their families, clans and in a larger community.

Within the Gĩkũyũ religio-philosophical world, height is an important factor both in their conception of Ngai and in how he relates to and communicates with them. This thesis becomes even stronger as we demonstrate that in their cosmology, Mount Kenya is one of the official abode of Ngai since it is higher than all other mountains in the Gĩkũyũ territory. This is also applicable when exploring their traditional shrine (Mũgumo) where one of the characteristics of Mũgumo, as will be seen, is its immense height and length and its strong anchorage in the ground. Actually, the research sample did not depict Ngai as associated with rivers.

The research findings also indicate that the Gĩkũyũ conceive of Ngai in a dualistic form. There is a deity who is black and another red, a good deity and a bad one. There is a deity of the Gĩkũyũ and another one of the Maasai. These two deities seem to be constantly engaged in contentious disagreement or in war. Colour seems to be an important element in understanding the deity of the Gĩkũyũ people. For instance, Gĩkũyũ Ngai is black: *enkai-narok*. Mount Kenya, his dwelling place, is referred to as a spotted mountain (black and white). Mount *Kĩanjahĩ* is named after the beans of Ngai which are spotted black and white. Ngong hill is *enkai-narok* (black mountain), *Nyandarũa* is also black or cloudy (thumbĩri). Such evidence is not coincidental and thus leads to a strong conclusion that the traditional Gĩkũyũ conceived of Ngai as a black deity therefore

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localised. It can also indicate that the colour black was fundamentally important in their religious configuration and the conception of Ngai.

In conclusion, it is important to emphasize that the Gĩkũyũ have a strong religious attachment to their land so that it has become something sacred and deeply associated with their religious rituals and ceremonies. Land denotes to them certain spiritual and emotional values and some socially integrating factors, without which they would suffer a religious and economic starvation. This affiliation also exhibits an interconnection between the Gĩkũyũ and land to the extent that, in the absence of communion, their religious, political and economic configuration would be incomplete. In the Gĩkũyũ cosmology as shown, the soil is ingrained with a strong sense of sacredness. This communion with nature is not a vague sentiment. It is conceptualised and celebrated around the sacred Mũgumo tree.[238] To the Gĩkũyũ, the soil he treads, the lands he works, the mountains, trees and groves, even the field where he plays, are all ontologically bound up with him.

Crucially, the land fed and sustained the sacred Mũgumo tree. It fed other sacred groves to which were of significant importance for the offering of sacrifices in the Gĩkũyũ community. Thus, land provided a space for divine manifestation, since Ngai was associated not only with the mountains but also with the sacred trees. Land is the basis through which the people can commune both with Ngai and with their ancestors. Quintessentially, important mountains in Gĩkũyũ cosmology rest on land inhabited by the Gĩkũyũ, serving as either the abode of Ngai or his resting place while on inspection tour.

Within this cosmology, land becomes a kernel of the religious, political, and social sentiments of belonging. Consequently, studying traditional land ownership in Gĩkũyũ cosmology involves the study of a complex social, religious and political structure and practices which form an integral part of the group. Land had an important role in determining both the economic history and the religio-political narrative of the group.[239] Land to the Gĩkũyũ therefore epitomises every aspect of their endeavour, as well as offering fulfilment of daily needs.

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[238] Interview, Gĩcũgũ, 2003-4.

[239] It is important to spell this out because neither missionaries, nor some colonial officers and settlers seem to have fully grasped the concept of Gĩkũyũ traditional land tenure between 1900 and early 1930s. Most of the studies related to the Gĩkũyũ land tenure are biased. Blebuyck, D., *African Agrarian System*, London: Oxford University Press, 1960; Wa-Githumo, *Land and Nationalism*, pp.40-44; Meek, C.K., *Land, Law and Custom in the Colonies*, London: Edinburgh House Press, 1945, p.18; Ogude, *Ngugi's Novels and African History*, p.89; Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*; Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*.

From a pragmatic point of view, the Gĩkũyũ thanked Ngai principally for having given them fertile land, rain, women, children and livestock and having secured their lives through the land. Therefore, in this world-view, Ngai can only make sense by revealing himself within and through what the peopled loved and cherished most: the land. Underlying their conception of Ngai is the belief that he is a creator fascinated with mountains and trees. These places are his home on earth. Ngai is both a mountain and a tree dweller. He loved to demonstrate his power in the mountains and even chose some to live in and plant his favourite seeds; *njahĩ* (lablab) which is so named after one mountain attributed to him (*Kĩa-njahĩ*).

Although Ngai seems to play a dominant role in these relationships there are no indications of the land being worshipped as Ngai or of the land acting as a replica of Ngai. This becomes clearer when we explore the way Ngai manifests himself through the mountains, thunder and lightning, rainbow and rain. All of them seem to be regarded by the Gĩkũyũ people either as the manifestation of the power, the love or hatred, the blessing or the curse of Ngai. Mount Kenya and other minor mountains associated with the manifestation of Ngai are by nature strongly rooted in land. In their geographical location, they are not only tall and strong but deeply grounded. This will become more apparent as we explore the nature and the functions of the sacred Mũgumo tree. So, given this line of thought, it is understandable that in the minds of the Gĩkũyũ, Ngai was not only strong but deeply grounded in his moral thoughts and judgements.

Our evidence has strongly designated that such an image of Ngai as otiose was foreign to the traditional Gĩkũyũ people especially when their prayers and sacrifices are considered. This leads to the one compelling conclusion that such a deity was a creation of and the invention of Kenyatta, Leakey, Cagnolo, other ethnographers and missionaries.

The Ngai of the Gĩkũyũ is not only a mountain dweller, but also prefers some specific trees to manifest his potency and dwell in them. For this reason, in Gĩkũyũ cosmology the sacred Mũgumo tree is regarded as the 'shrine' of Ngai where sacrifices are offered. This predominant tree will be explored in depth later in our work.

Finally, the chapter has also triggered a few relevant questions about the relationship the Gĩkũyũ had not only with the mountains and land but also with the environment and especially the trees. This is crucial to understand as it paves the way for a greater understanding of the sacred Mũgumo tree and the role it plays within Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship. Thus, the relationship that exists between the Gĩkũyũ people and trees will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

GĨKŨYŨ AND TREES: THE RELIGIO-POLITICAL SYMBIOSIS

6.1 Introduction

The Gĩcũgũ division is characterised by its ecological diversity. Some places, especially the areas around Mount Kenya and Njũkĩinĩ forest, are wetter than others. Over the centuries, this has produced a great variety of ecological niches which have predominantly contributed to the population distribution. The history of migration and settlement depicts the agricultural Gĩkũyũ as closely related to the environment. However, whereas some colonial discourses portray the Gĩkũyũ as forest destroyers, other serious ethnographers and historians such as Muriuki, Leakey, Cagnolo, and Kenyatta view the relationship between people and the environment as strongly rooted in the concept of life. As a result, the propagation of life and the rootedness in Mother Nature are common contested grounds where both trees[240] and people nurture themselves. In fact, both colonialists and colonists exploited the Gĩkũyũ landscape to mirror the political and social quagmire that existed during the colonial hegemony.[241]

What is clear in the literature of the Gĩkũyũ is the conflict between the needs of the people and the survival of the trees in general. There are myths that portray a subtle coexistence where trees are integral parts of the Gĩkũyũ cosmological framework. There is also a strong literature that portrays society's need for control in order to incorporate valuable trees into the social, religious, cultural and household production. In pre-

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[240] In Gĩkũyũ language, *Mũtĩ* (tree) has a variety of meaning. It can mean plant, piece of wood, shaft, handle, stick or even a post. It is also an epithet for 'a point' especially in court. Eg. *Mũtĩ wa mbere nĩ ũyũ* (the first point is this). Again, tree could have multiple meaning apart from the plant. When the traditional Gĩkũyũ goes to the medicine man, they would generally say; *ndathiĩ gũcuka mĩtĩ* (cast lots). *Mũtĩ* is also understood to denote a sacred place, e.g. *Mũtĩ wa mbũri*, something or somewhere set aside as sacred, forbidden or even an oracle. *Mũtĩ* can also express human feelings; *rũra ta mĩtĩ*, meaning to taste bitter or be extremely angry with somebody or something. Thus, trees in themselves are ambiguous and perhaps it is this ambiguity that helps them symbolically to make concrete and material the abstract notion of life. Rival, L., 'From symbols of life and regeneration to political Artefacts' in Rival, *The Social Life of Trees*, p.3; Benson, *Kikuyu-English Dictionary*.

[241] In recreating the myth of origin, Kenyatta demonstrates the ontological symbiosis existing between the Gĩkũyũ and the environment. Leakey does a detailed study of Gĩkũyũ botany but laments that this was only limited to the Southern Gĩkũyũ thus leaving many trees and plants unclassified. Cagnolo too describes the relationship between Gĩkũyũ and the environment as very strong. Shaw, using the work of Huxley, explores how Colonial inscriptions used trees and forests not only to forge their superior identity but also to denigrate the local people. Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*; Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu vol.III*; Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*; Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*; Castro, A.P., *Facing Kirinyaga, : A social History of Forest Commons in Southern Mount Kenya*, London: Intermediate Technology Pub., 1995.

colonial times and even during the colonial regime, this control was exercised by the members of *mbarĩ* and *mũhĩrĩga*. It ended with the gazetting of all Kenyan forests.

However, over the last decade, trees and forest commons have been the touchstone of bitter conservational battles in Kenya. This underlines the fact that trees form the core of both the community and national forests seen as emblematic of government progressive environmental policies. In fact, the current Kenyan literature of 'trees and forest' is not a good one. Contemporary research has indicated that the country has literary lost over 85,000 hectares of forest since the early 1980s. Moreover, Kenya continues to lose 19,000 hectares every year.[242] These factors emphasise the need for people to revisit their roots, co-exist once more with the trees and change their attitude towards the negative exploitation of nature.

Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ not only see life in trees; far from it, they see themselves as sharing a common life. Both of them owe their survival to the topological placement, openness to different possibilities of socio-arboreal configurations and the inevitable continuous religio-political and cultural interpenetration. Still, in relation to the concept of interdependence and interconnectedness (both trees and people as created by Ngai) which has strengthened the affiliation between Gĩkũyũ and trees, there are important questions to ask. These questions formed part of the questionnaire in our research. a) *Mĩtĩ ya ũgĩkũyũ nĩ ũmĩũĩ* (Do you know indegenous Gĩkũyũ trees?) b) *No ũgũete marĩtwa mayo* (Can you name them?) c) *Wĩra wa mĩtĩ ĩyo nĩ ũrĩkũ* (What were/are their functions, their social, political or religious end? In other words; What is the place of trees in the Gĩkũyũ cosmological framework?).

Again, if we argue that trees and Gĩkũyũ people are inseparably connected within a given locale, we are confronted with a deep-seated religio-philosophical argument: how far have trees influenced the forging of Gĩkũyũ identity? Once more, does the life of trees end with its deracination? In using trees for construction, medicine, home management and various culturally important functions, are the Gĩkũyũ not subtly confirming an ideology that trees, after deracination continue to exist, only taking a different configuration in the societal framework? As a consequence, people can easily identify themselves with trees and just, as the identity of trees is adaptable, so are the Gĩkũyũ people in relation to their environment which has enormously influenced their

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[242] Various articles reported by the Daily Nation, Nairobi. Patrick Zioka 'Researchers free to cut trees', Daily Nation, 26/03/004; David Okwembah, 'Land probe team had tough job', 10/06/004. Currently, the total forested area in Kenya is less than 3%, most of it being semi-desert and savanna. Maathai, *The Green Belt Movement*.

religious, political and social asymmetries. Besides exploring the above mentioned questions, the chapter will also show that in Gĩcũgũ division, the social and religio-arboreal affiliation is strong and deep-seated. Apart from the tree myths, this kinship has also been shown by associating and naming various places under the dominant trees. As an example, *Kabutĩ* (a place in Kĩrĩma location) is named after the *Mũbutĩ* (*Erythrina abyssinica*) tree. There are also other conspicuous places named after the trees. Notable places like *Mũrũri* in Njũkiini location, *Karuco* (*Mũruco*) market, *Gacatha* (*Mũcatha*), *Mũringa* (*Cordia africana/abyssinica*), *Ngerwe* (Mũgerwe), *Ithare* (Ithare) *Kagumo* (Mũgumo) and *Gakoigo-Mũkoigo* (*Bridelia micrantha*) are clear examples. The chapter will go on to explore the knowledge the Gĩcũgũ people have of the indigenous trees, their uses and symbolic end.

6.2 Gĩkũyũ and their Trees

A number of Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ reiterated that the value of trees has never been taken for granted by the people. Trees were, according to the many myths, planted by Ngai. People believe that Ngai created the trees first because if he had created the people before the trees, they would have died for lack of oxygen and shade. This ideology is popular because a comparative analysis done during the time of research in other parts of Gĩkũyũ country, notably, Mũrang'a, Nyĩrĩ and Kiambu generated similar results. In fact most of the respondents recalling the myth of origin accentuated that Ngai created the world first. Gĩkũyũ, the founding father of the Agĩkũyũ was given the land full of trees, water and ravines.[243]

However, looking at the history of afforestation projects around Mt Kenya and Njũkĩĩni forests, nearly 90% of Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ lamented that most of those projects were a farce. They acknowledged that trees in the area are disappearing rapidly, being cut for timber, charcoal or just to clear the land for cultivation to cater for the increasing population. As these trees become scarce, people have become more aware of their importance and usage. Without trees, where will people shelter from the heat of the scorching sun? Without these trees, what will people and their animals eat? What will they build their shelters with? Where would they get their honey for *mũratina* (the local beer)? In fact without indigenous trees, as many of our informants put it, where would rain come from? These were some of the most poignant questions raised by the people.

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[243] A comparative interview was done in Mang'u-Kiambu, Mũranga and Othaya in Nyĩrĩ where informants underlined their affiliation, interdependence and co-existence with trees. Oral interview, Mũrang'a, Mang'u and Othaya in Oct. 2003.

They saw the trees primarily from the point of view of their functions. Fig.6.1 demonstrates the results of the questionnaire concerning the knowledge the people have of the indigenous trees and how they co-exist with them. The questions dealing with the knowledge of the Gĩkũyũ indigenous trees generated interesting results. There were 250 people interviewed.

Fig. 6.1 shows the relationship between Gĩkũyũ and trees based on their knowledge of them.

No of informants	Sex-M/F	Age (years)	Names of the indigenous trees known	No. of informants-percentage
5	2m, 3f	60	11-20	2%
13	8m, 5f	Mostly 61-70	20-30	5%
100	79m, 21f	Vary (from 71-90)	30-40	40%
132	40m, 92f	Vary (71-100), 13 aged over 100 years	Over 40 trees and their uses	53%

The majority of people who gave over 40 tree names were between 80 and 100+ years old.[244] The survey indicates that although age was important, it was not always a determining factor. In fact there were younger people (65-78) who knew more than forty names of trees while a few others over a hundred years old who remembered very little about the trees even though they were lucid on other topics. An in-depth study of data indicates that nearly 28 % gave over 40 trees while only 15 % mentioned less than 20 names.

There were also some important indigenous trees that were mentioned by all the interviewees. These included: *Mũgumo* (*Ficus Natalensis*), *Mũringa* (*Cordia africana/abyssinica*), *Mũũ* (*Markhamia hildebranditi*), *Mũkoigo* (*Bridelia micrantha*), *Mũratina* (*Kigelia africana*), *Mũkũngũgũ* (*Commiphora zimmermanni*), *Mwĩria* (*Pygeum africanum*), *Mũthaiti* (*Ocotea usambarensis*), *Mwarĩki* (*Ricinus communis*), *Mwĩngirima*, *Mũthare*, *Mũthakwa* (*Vernonia auriculifera*), *Ithare*, and *Mũrumbawe* (*Vangueria linearisepala*). Mũgumo tree came always as the favourite of those indigenous trees while *Mũringa* was renowned for its versatile functions. About 50 % of the respondents catalogued their trees according to their functions and the myths that are associated with

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[244] It was difficult to determine the number of trees known vis á vis the ages of the people since it was not constant. There were people aged between 60-70 years who could name over 40 indigenous tree. Others aged over 80 years could only name about 12 trees. However, Gĩcũgũ might be one of the few places in Kenya where there are still some people over one hundred years old. There were 13 people over hundred years. Ten of these had a lucid mind and could spend hours talking about trees and their functions in the cosmology. Three of these thirteen had poor memories and recalled very little. In fact, a few months after the research, six of them died. These are their names: Nyaga Maguru, Wa-goat (Njoki wa Nyamburi), Njuguna (deceased), Njuki (deceased), Burana, Karanja wa Ciuthi, Emanueli Nyaga (deceased), Biribo-Philip (deceased), Meti (now deceased), Nancy Micere, Ngurungu (now deceased), Biata Embu and Cedi Obadiah.

them. *Mūratina* was mentioned as the third or fourth in the list due to its cultural importance in the making of the native beer. Trees like *Mūkoigo, Mūkūngūgū, Mwariki, Mūngirima (Ochna holstii), Mūthare, Ithare* and *Mūrumbawe, Mūtate (Polixias Kikuyensis)* and *Mūīrī (Pygeum africanum)* were spontaneously mentioned without any difficulty.

However, other trees that were indicated by about 50 % of the people interviewed were; *Mūigoya (Plectranthus barbatus), Mūkambura (Dovyalis abyssinica), Mūtare*[245]*(Rubus keniesis), Mūbiru, Mūkengeria*[246]*(Commelina benghalensis), Mūtūndū, Mūkawa, Mūrangi* and *Mūkūyū (Ficus capensis/sycomorus)* although they all accentuated that Mūkūyū grew in the lower part of the division. The naming of these indigenous trees also seemed to follow certain topographical criteria. While the people in the upper part of the division, near Mt Kenya, seemed to scratch their head to remember trees like *Mūkūyū, Mūmbū* and *Mwage*, those in the lower region put them among the first names in their list.[247]

6.2.1 Trees, Gĩkũyũ life and community

As our results indicate, Gĩcũgũ people have, over the centuries, developed a considerable and highly utilitarian botanical knowledge so that although there is a history of deforestation, these people have some mechanisms of afforestation based on affinity with the trees. This has contributed to the nurturing of a filial relationship with trees and forests. Trees and people co-exist with each other, competing for the natural resources from the same Mother Nature. In this process, religious beliefs and customs are important elements for the management of trees and forests common in the area. Even curses are imposed on some of the most utilised trees in the division.[248] When the informants were asked whether they knew who was responsible for the management and exploitation of trees and forest, most of them indicated that before the colonial

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[245] Different kinds of this tree were mentioned. There is *Mūtare mūirū* (black) and *Mūtare mwerū* (light-coloured). They resemble the English blackberry.

[246] Along the undulating valleys of Njūkīinī, Mūcagara Kīanyaga and Thumaita area, a different type of Mūkengeria (*Floscopa glomerata*) was found. Thus called *Mūkengeria wa kianda* (kianda literary means the valley).This kind of shrub grew both in the valleys and around the Mūgumo tree, together with *Ithare*.

[247] The List could exceed one hundred trees. However, apart from the trees already mentioned, 80 % of the respondents spontaneously mentioned these trees: *Mūnderendū (Teclea nobiles), Mwethia (Sesbania sesban), Mūīrī (Prunus africanun/Pygeum africanum), Mūthengera (Podocarpus milanjianus), Mūcarage (Olea welwitschii), Mūtatī (Polyscias kikuyuensis), Mūtero (Olea Africana), Mūthaītī (Ocotea Usambarensis), Mūbūtī (Erythrina abyssinica), Mūkeu (Dombea goetzenii), Mūkūrwe (Albizia grummifera/cariana), Mūgūgū (Acasia abyssinica)* and *Mwerere (Tsbernae mentana)*.

[248] Castro accentuate that Ndia and Gĩcũgũ remain very dependent on forest and trees. See, Castro, *Facing Kirinyaga*, pp.4-5; Hobley, *Bantu Beliefs and Magic*.

government took over the forests, communal grounds like Njukĩinĩ were supervised by the member of the ruling generation (Irungu/Mwangi). Other areas were also managed by the members of the local mbarĩ. These common forests were available for firewood, beehives and hunting. The ruling generation also controlled sacred places (Mũgumo) where sacrifices, including those of ituĩka and kũhoya Ngai mbura were made. The informants also reported the antagonism that existed between the ruling generation and the colonial government over the control of Njũkĩinĩ forest until the government surrendered the area to local management but with some limited supervision.

Most of the people in Gĩcũgũ division classify trees as native, alien, evergreen, deciduous, young or old. Those who could name over 40 names of trees seemed to favour the evergreen trees more. They explained that although most of them were not utilised in building and making traditional stools, nevertheless, they had also multiple uses in the daily life of the people. Again, the fact that 53% would name as many as sixty names indicates that Gĩkũyũ botanical knowledge and forest resources comes as a result of a close interaction with and dependence on the local eco-zones. Most of these people live around the forest of Mount Kenya and Njũkĩinĩ and have constant access to these forests. Now, with the disappearance of the large tracts of forests and the subtle deforestation, fewer people, especially the young, can hardly name more that twenty names of the indigenous trees. In fact, as figure 6.1 shows, 2% of those interviewed and who gave from 11-20 were 60 years old. While it was clear, according to the survey that the knowledge of the indigenous trees decreased with age, it was difficult to indicate that as people grew older, their knowledge of indigenous trees increased. This was not plausible in many cases.

The picture became blurred when considering those who could remember from thirty indigenous trees and over (fig.6.1). Although in the traditional Gĩkũyũ, elders were significant repositories of the knowledge of trees which they passed on to the young generation, the survey seem to indicate that this is no longer applicable in the contemporary Gĩkũyũ. In fact those aged between 60 and 70 or less than 60 years old seemed to remember more of the imported brand of trees like Mũtarakwa (Juniperus procera), coffee, sisal (Agave mexicana), pawpaw, and irigũ (Musa sapientium).

Quintessentially, the research found out that each of these labels, old, young, deciduous, evergreen, milky and dry, carried with it a raft of cultural meanings which influenced how people reacted and related to and acted upon some specific trees and how this affiliation was assimilated in the forging of the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ identities. The

Mũgumo for instance was culturally valued because it was evergreen, tall and gigantic and also for its milky sap which epitomised sexuality. The milky sap[249] was associated with the breast milk of Gĩkũyũ women as will be explored in our following chapters.

Once again the research underlined that in Gĩcũgũ, trees still have a strong emotional and intricate spiritual connotation. Considering the site area of our research, stretching from *Kutus* to *Pi*, then up towards *Ngariama, Kabari* to *Kĩmunye*, our findings demonstrate that trees continue to play an active role in the religious life of the people. It is a matter of fact that trees continue to project themselves into the political, economic, religious and cultural fabric of the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ. This was one of the reasons why some of the sacred Mĩgumo trees continue to exist in this division in spite of a prolonged period of proselytism. Asked whether this affinity was due to their closeness to the forest of Mount Kenya where traditionally Ngai was believed to have lived, 90 % of the respondents agreed that although this factor played a significant role, trees are, *inter-alia* always part and parcel of Gĩkũyũ religious life from *Ndemi* and *Mathathi*.[250]

The research also found out that there were many women groups who have associated themselves with the Green Belt Movement (GBM). In a nutshell, the movement specialises above all, in empowering women from the grass roots to be self reliant, especially economically. This is done in its holistic approach to the understanding of the human person in relation to the environment. Members and affiliated groups are mobilised towards a conservational environmental commitment whereby, many indigenous trees are planted. So far, according to the statistics, they have planted nearly thirty millions trees in Kenya as a process of 'greening the country'. However, there is also the philosophy of planting trees weaved with political awareness and mobilisation so that in planting trees, these people are planting a 'seed of peace' and trying to manage the environment sustainably. Thus, the planting of trees becomes the symbol of political struggle. In the late eighties and early nineties, many people, mobilised by GBM and

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[249] There is no distinction of the word *iria*, n. (milk) and sap from the trees. The word is used to describe both woman's milk and tree's latex. The difference lies with the article *rĩa* (of) so that *iria rĩa ng'ombe* (cow's milk), *iria rĩa mwitha or rĩa mori* (milk of heifer calved for the first time) and *iria rĩa mũtumia* (woman's milk). Essentially they would refer to the same article *rĩa* when referring to any milk-like juice from the plants, latex, e.g., *iria rĩa ngwacĩ* (sap exuding from the cut end of sweet potato) or *iria rĩa Mũgumo* (milky-sap from Mũgumo tree).

[250] *Ndemi* from *gutema* (cut) thus meaning that which cuts. *Mathathi* from *Mũthathimwa* tree (*Hyperricum lanceolatum*)-St John's wort. These two are attributed to the two first generations in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology. The *Mathathi* leaves were traditionally carried by the elders as a sign of peace. There is also a myth told in Gĩkũyũ on how the *Ndemi* generation overthrew the Gĩkũyũ despotic government thus creating religio-political chaos and how eventually, the situation was saved by the intervention of elders of *Mathathi* who brought peace and reconciliation.

other associations conducted political activities demonstrating that environment, politics, religion and economic misappropriations were acute in Kenya.[251]

The informants also underlined that the planting and taking care of the environment entails significant responsibility for taking care of the land and their families. In fact, 98 %, most of them women emphasised that when environment is destroyed, plundered or mismanaged, the quality of people's life is undermined. In planting trees, women gain some degree of power and control over their lives. They understand the concept of cultural biodiversity especially with respect to indigenous trees. According to the informants, the process of planting the trees is tantamount to assisting the earth to heal her wounds caused by human mismanagement and in doing so the planters undergo the process of healing themselves.

According to the survey, Gĩcũgũ have also named various places with tree names as already indicated. This is historically emblematic because those places remind the people of the abundance of certain indigenous trees that used to grow there. There are clear examples of places such as *Mũringa wa Ngai ndeithia,*[252] *Mũkarara* (*Phylantus discoideus*) and Gĩcũgũ. These topographical places were once associated with important trees in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology. The Gĩkũyũ knowledge of trees also indicates that in their relationship with them, there is more than an analogy, an anthropomorphisation of trees with particular parts of the body through the use of euphemisms. Gĩkũyũ would for instance use *mũtĩ* (tree) to depict the male penis. They would also use *njũgũma/thiarĩ* (bludgeon or wooden club), again related to trees, to depict the same male sexual organ.

The association of the tree and sexuality was apparently brought forth through the use of euphemism by the informants. In traditional Gĩkũyũ for instance, there is no direct

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[251] Interview done July and September 2003 in Gĩcũgũ (Karirũ), Rũkenya, Kĩamũtũgũ, Mũrũri, Kĩanyaga, Karumandĩ, Kabari, Kĩmunye, Kanjũũ and Njũkĩinĩ area. As for the political mobilisation through the use of environmental associations in Kenya, it is important to note that in 1989, many Kenyans, most of whom belonged to the Green Belt Movement mobilised a political demonstration at Uhuru Park in Nairobi that stopped the erection of the 62-storey building and thus saving the park and the important indigenous trees. In 1992, there was another demonstration, again empowered by the friends of the environment to support the mother of 'political prisoners' demanding their release. In 2000, again, members of different environmental associations affiliated to Green Belt advocated the cancellation of debts that most of the poor African countries owe to the North. See, Maathai, *The Green Belt Movement*, p.48. Also Maathai's Nobel Peace Prize lecture given on 10/12/2004, Oslo-Norway where she accrues that Green Belt Movement has helped women associate critically the trees as symbols of democratic struggle in Kenya.

[252] *Mũringa wa Ngai Ndeithia* literarly means *Cordia abyssinica* tree where only Ngai can help. According to the informants, this area where the *Mũringa* still stands, (on the road from Mũrũri via Gacatha to Kianyaga) was known to be a very dangerous place. People used to be beaten, or even killed by the gangs. Thus when one passed through that tree without being molested he/she would joyfully exclaim: *Nĩ Ngai wandeithia Mũringainĩ ũcio* (it is Ngai who has helped me pass through in that *Mũringa* tree).

name for the initiated male penis. All the words *mūthita* and *mūthinū* describes either the tail of a fat sheep or ram or uncircumcised boys but never that of the initiated member. However, for the initiated members (socially recognised as adults through ritual of circumcision), the euphemism of trees (*njūgūma, thiarī, thimbū, mūtī, mbogoro*) is used.[253] This euphemism does not seem to be popularly used to refer to women although there is a tree called *Mūnyondo*[254] because its thorns form themselves into lumps resembling the breast of a young girl. Thus, this underlines, as we will see later, the implicit closeness and interconnection between the people, trees and sexuality. This interconnectedness between the people and trees becomes even more apparent when we explore the functions the Gīkūyū attribute to the trees.

6.3 Trees and Functions: Religio-Political Symbiosis

The survey unveiled 27 functions mentioned by various informants. These included above all, building, fodder, and rain catchments, sacrifices, hiding and protection, shade, medicine, magic and divination.[255] The majority of the respondents mentioned about eight general functions, which, they underlined, are still useful today in the division. Building houses (gwaka), fencing, beds and stools were grouped into one unity under building. 220 people (100%) put it as their top priority in the hierarchy of tree names and their uses. Most of the trees mentioned in this category included *Mūgumo, Mūringa, Mūthaiti, Mwīngirima, Mūkoigo, Mūtero, Rūthirū (for thatching) Mūkeu and Mūbatia*. The second function that was mentioned by all the respondents was medicine. Indigenous trees continue to be useful for herbal medicine. Again, 250 people (100%) underlined the importance of herbal medicine in the life of the Gīkūyū people especially now with the Aids epidemic. Some of the indigenous trees which are important for medicine according to the informants are: *Mūgumo, Mūtonga, Mūthiga, Mūbuti, Mūthuthi, Mūrurue, Mūcege, Mūgaita, Mūgū, and Mūbinga*.[256] Apart from shelter and medicine, Gīkūyū indigenous trees were also valued for the variety of fruits

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[253] It is not only the Gīkūyū who uses trees homologically. Bonnemere depicts the Ankave of Papua New Guinea as using the salient homology between palm trees and humans. Giambelli, also discusses in details the personification of trees. See, Bonnemere, P., 'Trees and people: Some vital Links', Chapter five and Giambelli, R. A., 'The Coconut, the Body and the Human Being', Chapter six, in Rival, *The Social life of Trees*.

[254] Here, *Mū*, is used as a preposition to describe certain trees. E.g. *Mūnyondo* (with breast) or *Mūrangi-*Bamboo (*Arundinaria alpine*) a tree with colour. Gīkūyū seldom use this preposition to describe the condition of the tree. There is a common tree called *Mūnunga naī* (a bad smelling tree).

[255] For a complete list, see the appendix no.4 on Gīkūyū indigenous trees and functions.

[256] For an extensive number of trees useful for medicine, refer to the appendix no.4 on trees and functions.

they provided to the agricultural Gīcūgū Gīkūyū. There are some indigenous trees known for their juicy fruits. About 246 (96%) respondents mentioned *Mūkawa* (*Carissa edulis*), *Mūkambura* (*Dovyalis abyssinica*), *Mūtare* (*Rubus keniesis*), *Mūbiru*,(*Vangueria linearisepala*) and *Mbota*. Although these trees are still abundant in Gīcūgū division, their fruits are eaten by children.

Pivotal to the research was the question that covered the trees and their functions: *Wīra wa mītī īyo ya ūgīkūyū nī ūrīkū* (What were/are their functions, what social, political or religious end?). 2 interviewees (1%) gave four to five functions. 53 (21%) respondents, 6-7 functions while 195(78%) people gave over seven functions of Gīkūyū indigenous trees. Some of the most conspicuous functions were: *gwaka* (building and home management), *ndawa* (medicine), *kūhanda mūhakainī* (boundary markers), *kwīgita kuma kūrī maitha* (protection from enemies), *kūgucia mbura* (rain catchments), *irio* (food), *bothita* (post offices especially during the Mau Mau), *gūcuka mītī īgotiinī* (traditional court), *gūcuka mītī kwī mūndū mūgo* (divination) and *gwīthamba na gwītheria* (toiletries). Figure 6.2 shows the number of informants and the average number of functions they know in relation to the indigenous trees in Gīcūgū division.
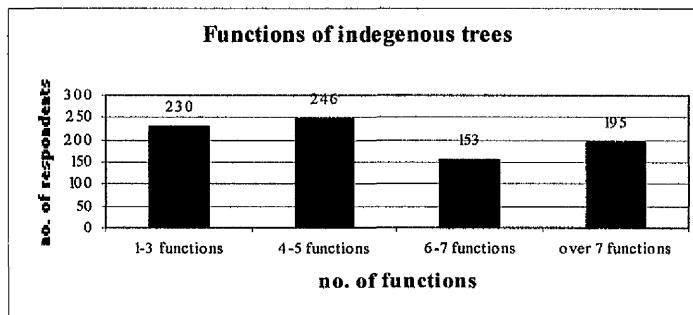
Fig. 6.2 Respondents' number vis à-vis tree functions[257]

6.3.1 Building and Home Accessories

One of the fundamental questions the respondents asked us was: without trees, what will we built our houses with? The fact that trees are important for building was underlined by everybody. The Gīcūgū area is not yet 'urbanised' and most of the houses are made of timber. There are also several stone houses but the majority are mud with corrugated iron sheets. With the knowledge of the environment and trees, the people know which trees are best for building, especially the hard wood that can resist termites. Trees like *Mūringa*, *Mūū*, *Mūirī* and *Mūthaitī* are commonly used for building, door frames and furniture. The traditional houses (*nyūmba*), usually of round types, were

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[257] A more detailed figure on name and functions of the Gīkūyū indigenous trees is in the appendix no.4.

made of wooden poles and wattle sticks daubed with clay. In the Gĩcũgũ area, these types of houses are non existent but instead have been replaced by rectangular types.

Other wooden instruments like baskets, made from the strings or bark of some trees are also very marketable in the traditional Gĩkũyũ world-view. Household furniture continues to be utilised. Wooden mortars in the lower part of Gĩcũgũ are still in use especially by the older generation. After all, most accentuated that *mũcĩĩ ũmenyagwo na ndĩrĩ na inoro* (a good Gĩkũyũ homestead is known by the presence of a mortar and a whetstone). These two essential tools were found in the homes of 78 % of the interviewees. Some of these informants are between 90 and 120 years. There are Hardwood trees like *Mũthaiti*, and *Mũringa* which are employed for bridge building. This technology is still observed today in most of the Gĩkũyũ agricultural areas and other parts of Kenya.

The Gĩkũyũ use trees for making stools on which to sit. In the past years, this was important because old men carried a stool with them so that they had somewhere to sit for beer drinking and in settling various disputes in society. Although stools are no longer carried, nevertheless, they are used in many homesteads especially where old men still live or even by young people wanting to satisfy their nostalgia for the past.

6.3.1.1 Boundary Markers

Trees are highly regarded as boundary markers. Nearly all the boundaries between different *mbarĩ* are marked by using some specific indigenous trees. As early as the 1900, there are numerous ethnographical works showing how this system of planting trees was used to justify the ownership of land in the *gĩthaka* system.[258] During the colonial period, boundaries between different locations in the district were marked by using indigenous trees. In 1939 for instance, the boundary of Gĩcũgũ division was marked by using some of the most important indigenous trees in the area. On the North and East, on the Valley of Mbũri, the *Mũringa* tree belonging to the *mbarĩ* of Gachogu demarcated the northern border while the Mũgumo and *Mũkũriambũngũ* trees marked the eastern border towards Njũkĩinĩ forest. Thus, important and gigantic trees like *Mũgumo, Mũringa, Mũkũriambũngũ, Mũũ, Mũkũyũ, Mũkũngũgũ, Mũbũtĩ* were commonly used.[259] Even though the right of first clearance was relevant in establishing land ownership in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology especially in the primordial era, Gĩcũgũ and Ndia, people protected

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[258] Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*; Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*; Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*; Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*; Castro, *Facing Kirinyaga* and KNA/DC/EBU/3/3/1939, no.8.

[259] Interview, Gĩcũgũ, 2003-4; KNA/DC/EMBU/3/3.

and planted trees as a means of establishing land ownership.[260] 236 people (94%) thought boundary marking was crucial to avoid conflicts among different members of *mbarī* and *muhiriga*. Trees like *Mūratina* (*Kigelia africana/ethiopum*), *Mūringa* (*Cordia africana*), *Mũũ, Mũgumo, Mũkũngũgũ, Mũthakwa* are still used to mark boundaries. Where *Gĩtoka* (*crinum*) lily is not there, especially in the lower part of Gĩcũgũ, *Mwatha* (*Synadenium compactum*) is used.[261]

6.3.1.2 Shade and Water Catchments

Trees provide environmental amenities to people. They provide shade and act as catchment areas. Indigenous trees for the Gĩkũyũ are vital since they attract rain.[262] 232 informants (93%) underlined that trees like *Mũgumo, Mũkũyũ, Mũnyondo, Mũthakwa, Ithare, Mũkũriambũngũ, Mũthandũkũ* and *Mũrangi* are vital for the eco-system due to their power of attracting the rain and retaining the moisture. It was interesting that most of the interviews were done around the tree. The old people preferred sitting under a tree, mostly indigenous with good shade. There were always one or two indigenous trees providing shade in most of the homesteads visited. Most of the respondents were quick to underline that even in today's environmental change due to the scarcity of trees, pollution and other causes, trees continue to be key iconic symbols of nature, 'natural' Gĩkũyũ community and religio-political and social hope. They are a symbol of a wider nature and landscape. They are attractive; they purify the soil, freshen the air and bring down rain. They also preserve water and reduce soil erosion. Other big trees act as wind-breakers at

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[260] Castro, *Facing Kirinyaga*, p.29. Mwaniki, H., *Embu Historical Texts*, Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1974; Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*; Mugo, *Kikuyu People*, p.37. There are records obtained by the Maxwell committee of the trees planted in Nyĩrĩ and Kĩrĩnyaga area to mark the boundaries. Some of these trees included *Mũringa* (*cordial abyssinica*), *Mũkũngũgũ* (*Commiphora Zimmermanni*) and *Gitoka* (*Crinum Kirki*), also included are Mũgumo (*Ficus natalensis*). See, Maxwell, G., Fazan, S., and Leakey, L., Record of evidence given by the natives at Barazas held by the committee. *Colonial Office Records* (CO 533/398, London: Public Records Office, 1929; Leakey, *Southern Kikuyu* Vol.III., and Cagnolo in *The Akikuyu* also underlines the same functions of trees in Gĩkũyũ cosmology.

[261] Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, Vol.III.; Dale, and Greenway, *Kenya Trees and Shrubs*. Other trees like Mũtundu (*Croton macrostachyus*) and Mũkinduri (*Croton megalocarpus*) were used as boundary markers especially in Gĩcũgũ and Ndia area, Castro, *Facing Kirinyaga*, p.30. The issue of using one or various types of trees to mark the boundaries depended much on *mbarī*, so that whereas one *mbarī* will use Mũkoigo (*Bridelia micanthra*) and Mũũ (*Markhamia hildebrandtii*), another one might prefer to use Mũringa (*Cordia abyssinica*) and Mũmbũ (*Ficus wakefieldii*) or Mũgumo (*Ficus natalensis*). Riley, and Brokensha, *The Mbeere in Kenya*, Vol.II.

[262] Interview, May-July 2004 especially with the members of Green Belt Movement in Gĩcũgũ who underlined the importance of planting indigenous trees for shade and bringing back the topological beauty lost over the years of deforestation. By planting trees, they bring back the birds that have disappeared over time and the animals that co-existed with the people. It is the return to their roots through the ritual of planting trees. The informants insisted that under the shade, the old people, the encyclopaedias of Gĩkũyũ traditional education freely offered their knowledge to the aspiring young children. Under the shade, the animals also rested after feeding.

times of the year when the wind is unbearable. In fact these respondents accentuated that trees exude an atmosphere of peacefulness wherever they are planted. They also transmit the atmosphere of tranquillity and well-being. They are, as the old people say; *mahũri ma thĩ tũhetwo tũhũ nĩ Ngai* (planet's lungs freely given by Ngai).[263]

6.3.1.3 Trees and Fodder

Due to the population increase and the scramble for arable land among the members of *mbarĩ* and *mũhĩrĩga* in the division, people have taken up zero grazing where only two good breeds of cattle are kept. Most of the families have one cow to provide milk and one bull to transport their coffee into various factories and for any other domestic uses. However, trees useful for fodder received much attention. About 228 people (91%) reiterated that without some trees like *Mũgumo, Mũgico, Mũkengeria(Commelina benghalensis), Mũcomoro* (especially in the northern Gĩcũgũ) and *Mũrama, Mũtoo, Cong'e, Mũkũtha and Ndabibi* (southern part of Gĩcũgũ) their cattle would literary die of starvation since the lands were not enough to plant coffee, tea, cereals and *thara* (type of grass) at the same time. Many of the trees have continued to be used to provide food for goats and other livestock especially the leaves of *Mũgumo* and creeping *Mũkengeria*, the latter used as fodder for stall-fed goats and sheep. Other small trees and shrubs are still used to feed the cattle. Those people living near the forest of Mount Kenya and Njukĩinĩ go every day to collect fresh creepers which are edible for their livestock.

6.3.1.4 Protection

In the history of migration and settlement of the Gĩkũyũ, we noted that trees and forests acted as buffer zones against the Gĩkũyũ enemies especially the Maasai who used to make surprise attacks on them regularly. During the time of the Mau Mau insurgency, in the 1950s, the forests of Mount Kenya and Aberdare were used as havens to protect them from the attacks of the colonial government. R. Edgerton vividly recalls how

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[263] There is a corpus of study done by several scholars which underlines this point more poignantly. See, Jones, and Cloke, *Tree Cultures*, especially Part I; Rival, *The Social Life of Trees*; Perlman, M., *The Power of Trees: Reforesting of the Soul*, Woodstock: Spring Publications, 1994; Grange, J., *Nature: An Environmental Cosmology*, Albany: State University of NewYork Press, 1997; Ingold, T., *The Perception of Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, London: Routledge, 2000; Kaza, S., *The Attentive Heart: Conversation with Trees*, Boston: Shambhala, 1993; Lewington, A., and Parker, E., *Ancient Trees*, London: Collins & Brown, 1999; Block, M., *Prey into the Hunter: The Politics of Religious Experience*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

important trees and forests were to the Gĩkũyũ people especially during the Mau Mau war against the Brtish colony.[264]

Also, at times when the Gĩkũyũ warriors carried out ambushes on their neighbouring groups, either Maasai (for the Southern Gĩkũyũ) and Embu and Mbere (for the Gĩcũgũ and Ndia people), trees acted as hiding places to camouflage their presence and give them protection and cover.

Today, although there are no more traditional raids in the division or anywhere in central Kenya, people feel that trees are still valuable for protection. In fact, 220 informants (88%) said that they still fence their homesteads using various trees. They use them to build safe cattle enclosures. *Mũkũngũgũ* (*Commiphora zimmermanni*), *Mwĩria* (*Pygeum africanum*) are commonly used although in most cases, *Mũkawa* (*Carisa edulis*) or any thorny tree is preferred by the southern Gĩcũgũ. In some other places, *Mũgumo, Mũirĩ* and *Mutĩ* are used.

6.3.1.5 Toiletries

Toiletries have always been part and parcel of the Gĩkũyũ community. This has included traditional soap, toilet paper and body lotion. All these were acquired from the trees. An average of the informants, in fact 65 % admitted having used *Mũgico* and *Mũkũtha, Mwondue and Mwethia* leaves as *thabuni* (soap). They also accentuated that the seeds of *Mwariki* were dried, crushed and used as *Maguta* (lotion). The *Mwariki* tree was used in the past for producing castle oil which people used as lotion as well as for softening their (*njũa*/sing. *rũa*-skin) traditional clothes. However, of these 65%, those aged between 80 years and over underlined the necessity of these indigenous trees for toiletries. Again, these respondents admitted having used regularly. Even in contemporary times the leaves of the *Mũigoya* tree are used as a toilet paper. There are many rural areas in Gĩcũgũ where *Mũigoya* trees are planted just near the pit latrines to serve the purpose of toilet paper. Besides, it is cheap and available. However, today leaves are no longer used for soap neither are the *Mbariki* (Mwarĩki seeds) for lotion.

6.3.1.6 Strings and Walking sticks

Trees are also useful for making strings. In the higher parts of the division especially the areas near Mount Kenya, the barks of *Mũgico, Mũkũtha, Mũgumo, Mũrindangũrwe, Mũkeu, Mũondwe* and *Mũrenda* and *Mũkeu* are stripped to prepare very

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[264] Edgerton, R.B., *Mau Mau: An African Crucible*, London: The Free Press, 1989, p. 131; Wachanga, H.K., *The Swords of Kirinyaga, the fight for land and freedom*, Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1991, p. 76; Castro, *Facing Kirinyaga*, p.24; Meinertzhagen, R., *Kenya Diary*, London: Oliver and Boyd, 1957.

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strong strings, for tying heavy loads. Some of these cords are also handy in the construction of simple pens for chicken or rabbits, built especially by the younger boys. In Gĩcũgũ, there are people who use these strings for handcraft materials like baskets, houses or even using them to tie arrow heads.

As well, indigenous trees provide walking sticks. In the traditional Gĩkũyũ, the *mũthĩgi* (walking stick) was a sign of power, carried by a member of a senior grade of elders. In fact, the first two presidents of Kenya, Kenyatta and Moi used the *mũthĩgi* as a sign of power and prestige. Today, the elders still use walking sticks made from *Mwĩngirima, Mũruba,* and *Mũnderendu* trees. However, the survey sample demonstrates that although 198 (79%) of the informants saw that the *mũthĩgi* [265] was traditionally a sign of knowledge and power, 25 % of them do not see it any more useful or related to any social political or religious authority and control. They acknowledged that old men could use it as a walking stick. Finally, the leaves of *Mũturanguru* (*Vernonia holstii*) together with the *mũthĩgi* were used by the elders as a sign of belonging to the highest grade of elders in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology and with these leaves, he could reconcile two warring parties. The leaves of this tree were a symbol of peace, justice and reconciliation.

6.3.1.7 Beehives and Mortars

Beehives in Gĩcũgũ are essentially connected with indigenous beer. It is not common to see people eating honey today in rural Gĩcũgũ. The *Mũratina* (tree) is *sine qua non* in the preparation of the traditional Gĩkũyũ brew, also called *mũratina*. That is why beekeeping is extremely important in traditional and contemporary Gĩkũyũ cosmology. It requires a sophisticated knowledge of trees and plants. For instance, on the one hand, one needs to know special species of trees that attract the bees and on the other hand to know the best trees to use for smoke for repelling bees in the process of honey extraction.[266] The survey reveals that 190 (76%) of the informants thought that without special indigenous trees like *Mũringa, Mũbũtĩ, Mũtatĩ, Mũrembu, Mũkandu, Mũkangũ, Mũgumo Mũkũyũ, Mũkũrwe, Mũgũ, Mũnunga* and *Mũnderendũ,* traditional

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[265] Interview, 2003-4; Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*, p.122. Cagnolo highlights that at the culmination of *Ituĩka*, sticks painted red were given to the new government as a sign of power and control. The informants underscored that the stick (symbols of knowledge and power) were ceremoniously made from the *Mwingirima* and *Munderendu* (*Teclea nobilis*) trees. Interview, Gĩcũgũ, December, 2003. Benson underlines that of those items, *mũthĩgi*, dyed black belonged to the member of the senior grade, while, if it was plain, it meant that it was for the member of the lower grade. Benson, *Kikuyu-English Dictionary.*

[266] Reserch, Sept.20, 2003. Oral interview with Ejidio Mukangu, Perisia Wanjuki, Meti Mwaniki, Nyaga Maguru and Mbiriah. Most of the informants underlined that different kinds of bees prefer specific trees. Bees of the family of *ndambarari* and *mbaru cia mbogo* are only attracted with special smelling plants while *ndirio* and *mbũgĩ* type are not as sophisticated.

honey would disappear from the division. Trees, they said make very durable beehives and mortars.

Most of the people who live near Mount Kenya and Njūkĩinĩ forest confessed that they could exploit the forest to hang their beehives or even collect honey from some trees. Thus, beehives and mortars are generally prepared by using specific trees. Mūringa (*Cordia abyssinica*), Mūtate (*Polyscias kikuyuensis*), Mūthaitĩ (*Ocotea usambarensis*) Mūkeũ (*Dombea burgessiae/daweri/goetzenii*), Mūndererendũ (*Teclea simplicifolia*), Mūrurĩ (*Trichilia roka/emetica*) and Mūnunga (*Ekebergia capensis*) were the most popular trees. They were accompanied by *Mūtarakwa (Juniperus procera)*. The bark of Mūtei (*Migroclossa*) was used for torches when smoking out the bees in order to extract the honey.

6.3.1.8 Fire-drill

Within the traditional cosmology fire-drill technology was important since it ensured that the people had fire for cooking, roasting and offering the meat of sacrifice to Ngai. The indigenous method of making fire was by the use of the hand drill, mostly used by men. There were also women who were experts in fire drilling as well. In the fire-drilling mechanism, one of the trees had to be 'male' with the other 'female'. The most common indigenous trees for fire-drilling are *Mūtarakwe (Juniper procera)*, *Mūcatha(Vernonia lasciopus)*, *Mūrika(Inula decipiens)* and *Mūimba na igūrũ*. This practice is no longer used in the division. In fact 126 (50%) of the respondents acknowledged that the practice was very common before the coming of the colonial government but later faded away. Those between 80-120 years even demonstrated how fire was drilled, insisting that in this 'ritual', the 'female' fire-stick must be made of wood of Mūgumo especially when kindling afresh the domestic fire after the new house was erected.[267]

6.3.1.9 Herbal Medicine and Fertility

In the Gĩkũyũ cosmology, trees are also associated with environmental health, community welfare and prosperity. They are above all prominent for their medicinal

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[267] Interview, Gĩcũgũ, Sep-Dec, 2003. 13 informants aged between 100-120 years were also interviewed. Also, Middleton, *Kikuyu and Kamba of Kenya*, p.22; Beech, W.H., 'The Sacred Fig-Tree of the A-Kikuyu of East Africa' *Man*, Vol.13, 1913, pp.4-6. There are other trees used as 'females' in fire drilling. This includes a climbing herb with a very large root-stock called *Mūĩmba-igūrũ (Periploca linearifolia)*, *Kagutu (Vernonia brachycalys)*, a semi-scandent shrub and *Mũcũgũ (Cajanus cajan)*. Leakey reiterates that *Mūtarakwa* was used for both the male and female elements for the fire drill while Mūgumo could sometimes be used as a 'male'. Most of the informants did not go along with Leakey in this aspect for they strongly held that under no circumstances would Mūgumo be used as 'male' in fire drill. Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, vol.III.

value. As early as 1906, Hobley noted a variety of trees used by the people for their medicine. He has written that the concoction of Mūgumo called *Kagumo* was administered to a person who fainted. After Circumcision, the chewed bark of Mūgumo was administered to the girl's private parts. The ashes of the root of this tree were placed on the tongue of the victim. He also noted that the leaves of *Mūchanja mūka* tree were used to treat a victim suffering from temporary madness and thus could be cured.[268]

The literature on the Gīcūgū people reveals a group with specialised herbalist knowledge who could treat almost all known diseases.[269] In fact, of 250 people interviewed, all of them (100%) demonstrated not only a knowledgeable insight into indigenous trees but also into the use of these same trees for herbal medicine. Asked whether they found it compatible with the modern medicines in hospitals, 78 % of the respondents indicated that there are some diseases which modern medicine cannot cure and as a result people must revisit their roots again and take seriously the power of trees in curing human malaise. There are a number of trees mentioned which are still used to cure both humans and livestock. There are also some diseases that modern medicine is unable to cure and so the research revealed that most of the people are returning to their traditional way of treatment although not without some abuse.

A tree like *Mūthengera* (*Podocarpus gracilior*) is known for the treatment of chest complaints. The bark and the roots of *Mūringa* are also employed for a similar purpose or chewed to relieve a sore, an ulcerated throat and coughing. The roots of *Mūimba-igūrū* (*Perploca linearifolia*) are exploited by medicine men to make special magic powder called *Mūgokoro*. Traditionally, the stem of this tree was used to prepare the magic powder called *thenge*.

Mūrerema (*Basella alba*) or a creeping herb is known for its power to cure sterility in women. About 35 % of the women interviewed, aged 80-100 years admitted having taken it once or twice in their lives. *Mūirūngi*(*Catha edulis*) is good as a sexual

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[268] Hobley, C.W., 'Kikuyu Medicines', *Man*, Vol.6, 1906, pp81-83. This is one of the earliest but well detailed examples of Gīkūyū Medicine. The list was extended and confirmed by Leakey in *The Southern Kikuyu* and Dale, I & Greenway, P., *Kenya Trees and Shrubs*, Nairobi: Buchanan's Kenya Estate Limited, 1961.

[269] Interview, 2003-4. Leakey for instance collected more that four hundred trees among the Southern Gīkūyū only which a lot of them were revered for the medicinal value. This was done by using different parts of trees and shrubs. In some trees, barks were used. Most of herbalist used either the leaves or roots to make a medicinal concoction. Cagnolo, acknowledges the fact that in medicine, the Gīkūyū in the cultural context knew a lot about diseases and how to treat them. Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*, especially pp.131-134; Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, vol.III, pp.1286-1354; Middleton, *The Kikuyu and Kamba of Kenya*; Castro, *Facing Kirinyaga* and Castro, *Household Energy use and Tree planting in Kirinyaga*, working paper no.397, Nairibi: Institute of development studies, University of Nairobi, 1983; Rilley, B. and Brokensha, D., *The Mbeere of Kenya* vol.II., Lanhan: University Press America, 1988.

stimulant and as a treatment for bilharzias and gonorrhoea. A variety of trees and shrubs is used to cure or relieve toothache. Among them, *Gathararia-ita* (*Spilanthes mauritiana*) is commonly used especially in the Gĩcũgũ area.

There were some trees in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology used for fertility and other family ceremonies. These included Mũgumo, which had a variety of functions in the Gĩkũyũ world-view. Mũgumo was a special tree because apart from being regarded as a sacred tree and thus a place for sacrifices to appease Ngai, its leaves were associated with the circumcision ritual, fundamental to the Gĩkũyũ world-view. Its milky-sap too was believed to possess special powers related to life and female fertility. The latex of this tree was associated with female milk and thus a symbol of life and fertility. This is a clear example of anthropomorphisation of a tree whereby, the milky-sap is not only associated with the mother's milk but also a specific part of the woman's body, the breasts.[270] The bark of *Mwarĩki* (*Ricinus communis*) tree was used to stitch wounds while its roots were used to make ceremonial earrings in initiation ceremonies.[271]

6.4 Traditional courts, 'Post Offices', 'Banks' and 'Sign posts'

Traditionally, during the time of the executing jurisdiction and penalties among the Gĩkũyũ, sticks, cut from green living trees were used. Most of the informants, 226 (90%) remembered how it was done either in court or having visited the witchdoctor. The procedures they explained are the same. Accordingly, the informants elucidated that in traditional courts, dry sticks were not be used since that was tantamount to desiring death for the opponent. Every green stick corresponded to the article of accusation or to the number of the items used or to the point one was deliberating. Sticks got from trees like *Mũkandu, Mũcatha, Mũgumo, Muutĩ, Cong'e, Mũkengeria, Mũthĩrathĩrĩ* and *Mũkenia* were generally used. The process was called *gũcuka mĩtĩ* (lit. to accuse the sticks). Trees here were used for various symbolic purposes. They were used to

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[270] Women in traditional Gĩkũyũ smeared themselves with the milky sap of Mũgumo to ensure fertility. This is plausible since fertility was highly valued in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology and thus no woman would stand the shame of sterility. Beech, W.H., 'The Sacred Fig-Tree of the A-Kikuyu of East Africa', *Man*, Vol.13, 1913, p.4. This anthropomorphisation of trees is not typically Gĩkũyũ. It is also found in many other cultures that have special affiliation with trees. Yasushi Uchiyamada, 'The Grove is our Temple' in Rival, L., *Social Life of Trees*, chapter 8; James, E.O., *The tree of life: An archaeological Study*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966. In the Bible, 1Sam:7:3-4, 2Kings 23:4, Jug2:13-14. Frazer, J.G., *Folk-lore in the Old Testament, vol.1*, 1923, p.48ff; Graham, D.C., *Folk Religion in SouthWest China*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1961, pp113-114. Yu Chien does a detailed work on the three types of Chinese deities, in her PhD thesis. Cf., Chien Yu, *Three Types of Chinese deities*, PhD thesis, Lancaster University, Jan. 1997

[271] There are many trees that are of great medicinal value but which cannot be explored here. A well detailed work on trees and their uses is especially done by Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, vol.III., Dale and Greenway, *Kenya Trees and Shrubs*.

represent the guilty party. They were also used to represent the number of accusations brought forth so that different species of trees represented different crimes committed. At the same time, different sticks would also be emblematic of the points the accuser or the accused wanted to make.

On the side of the *athuri a Kiama* (council of elders) responsible for the administration of justice, trees served a similar purpose. It was through the sticks that they came to the conclusion as to whether the accused was guilty or innocent. Each could use a similar method to express his opinion of the case. In extreme cases where capital punishment was to be administered, the democratic cast of lots (using sticks) was done.[272] So, indigenous trees were at the centre of social, political and religious control in the traditional Gĩkũyũ.

There were a good number of the respondents interviewed who confessed to having participated directly or indirectly with the Mau Mau war in the fifties. Some of them fought directly against the colonial government and what they referred to as colonial sympathisers and Gĩkũyũ traitors. In fact the Mau Mau association recently formed in Kenya has a considerable number of members from the Gĩcũgũ division. A total of 20% between 80-100 years are already registered members. There were 128 (51%) of the informants who stated that indigenous trees were used during the time of Mau Mau either as post offices or banks. According to them, messages were written on pieces of paper, wrapped and inserted into small hollow sticks of *Mũrangi* (bamboo-*Arundinaria alpina*) and hidden under one of the rotten cavities of a gigantic tree such as *Mũringa*, *Mũthaitĩ*, *Mũũ*, *Mũirĩ*, *Mũnyondo* and *Mũgumo*. Different groups and Mau Mau affiliations secretly knew where to get their letters or messages. One of the informants underlined that the Mũgumo tree in his land was used by the Mau Mau fighters as a bank. The procedure of hinding the money was similar to that in letter and other important information.

About 158 (45%) of the respondents reported that during this war, some branches known only to the group would be laid on the path. However, if the branch crossed the path, it was a sign of an imminent danger warning ahead and thus the advance was stopped. When the branch was laid parallel to the pathway, the symbol indicated that the path and place were safe.

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[272] Interview, Gĩcũgũ division, September 2003 and June 2004. Even today in many parts of the Gĩkũyũ, when one expresses a relevant point among his/her colleagues, it is common to hear someone commenting: *ĩĩ, ĩyo nĩ mbũthĩ, or ũcio nĩ mũtĩ or simply, mutĩ* (meaning: that is a fact). This is also common in the Southern group of Kiambu near Thika where a comparative research was conducted around the areas of Mang'u, Gatũkũyũ, Mũtũma, Kĩraĩ and Mwea.

6.5 Indegenous trees, wealth and death

6.5.1 Trees as traditional symbol of wealth

Among the Gĩcũgũ people, there are some trees associated with prosperity and power especially with the rich *mbarĩ*. The presence of *Mũringa* in a Gĩkũyũ homestead is still considered by the older generation as a sign of power and prestige. The tree could be planted by any Gĩkũyũ without any problem although in most cases these trees naturally germinated without the help of the people. In the areas near Mount Kenya and Njũkĩinĩ, they were abundant. However, *Mũratina* was essentially associated with riches since it germinated in the areas around the old cattle boma (cattle shed). So, to have this tree in your place meant that you had a lot of cattle and goats associated with wealth and power. It also meant that you could get the *miratina* (fruits of that tree) which was intrinsic in the preparation of the indigenous beer. In doing this, you could prepare in abundance and share it with friends and other members of *mbarĩ*. It also denoted a subtle kind of control in the sense that you could give or refuse this important fruit to other people. As an indigenous tree therefore, *Mũratina* was principally associated with wealth and even social and religious control. Today, most of the people in Gĩcũgũ practise zero-grazing and thus the *Mũratina* tree is scarce. Most of it grows in the lower area of the division or in Mwea division. *Mũratina* continues to be a highly valued tree in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology because it is used to make traditional brew which was used in almost all sacrifices undertaken by the Gĩkũyũ people. It was also associated with rituals of marriage and bride wealth.

6.5.2 Trees and Death

Traditional Gĩkũyũ people did not bury their dead. In fact, burial ceremonies in their cosmology are a recent practice which started with the coming of the missionaries and the colonial government. Before 1900, people were thrown into the forest or nearby bushes and severe penalties were incurred by those who dared to touch the corpse. According to the informants, it was a taboo to hold a corpse or even sleep in the house where one had died. The house had to be burned down. From their accounts it appears that people were scared of the death phenomenon. The majority of old people did not want to discuss the concept of death. It was only a small number, 120 (48%), who underlined that there was a plethora of beliefs about death and ancestors which were quite dramatic. The Gĩkũyũ cosmology has very few legends concerning death. Quintessentially, of these 120 people, only a small number, about 48 could remember the myth regarding death in detail. Would this, hypothetically, suggest that the Gĩkũyũ

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people were not very much preoccupied with the after life; rather the life of here and now, 'nowism'?

Accordingly, the respondents insisted that the Gĩkũyũ believed that when one died he/she perished beneath the roots of a mythical tree *Mũkongoe* which acted as an avenue to the other world. When asked about the location of the *Mũkongoe* tree or whether anyone had ever seen one, the emphatic response was that since whoever found that tree died; as a consequence, no one has ever really bothered to find it. The common myth about death held by our informants went like this:

> Ngai after finishing his work of creating the world sent a chameleon as a trusted messenger to tell the people that they would never die. The chameleon, going slowly and stealthily not to destroy the world, took a long time to reach the earth from the abode of Ngai. Meanwhile Ngai changed his mind. He sent *Ndũngũrũrũ* bird to give the bad news to the Gĩkũyũ that death would befall them. So when the *Ndũngũrũrũ* arrived, it met the chameleon stammering to the people: you..y.you..you were..w.were... t...told, th..at you..y...you will...ill.d.die. and before the chameleon could finish the sentence, the bird told the people: you have been told that you will die and decay under the roots of *Mũkongoe* tree.[273]

6.6 Trees as abode of Ngai and *Ngoma*

Belief in trees as the abode of divine and or ancestral spirits is widespread in Africa. The Heroro for instance regarded all their cattle to have come from the mythical tree of life. A similar belief is extended to the Nuer of Sundan and Sandawe of Tanzania. The Gbaya people of Cameroon have a sacred tree called *Sorè-cool thing* which is believed to renew broken relationships and preserve human life.[274] The Mbemba of Zambia have sacred trees that act as the corpus of their matrilineal community. In their cosmology, the *Musuku* tree is taken as a symbol of womanhood, while *Mwenge* tree represents the pliancy of the woman. They believe that these trees are ibued with the divine power. The neighbours of the the Gĩkũyũ; Kamba, Meru and Embu have sacred trees which they regard as shrines.[275]

As well, the cosmo-vision of the Gĩkũyũ is webbed with the belief not only in Ngai as the one who communes with the people but also with the ancestors who are in

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[273] Interview, Gĩcũgũ, May-August, 2004. Story told by Lucia Wanduma, Juliana Waguama, Njoki wa Nyamburi and a few other women aged between 80 and 115 years. Also in Waciuma, *Daughter of Muumbi*, p.86; Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, Vol. III., p.1105. A similar myth about death, from Waciuma and Leakey will be presented in the appendix no.5. Mugo gives a very parochial understanding of death in Gĩkũyũ cosmology, Mugo, *Kikuyu people*, pp.32-39, Also Gathgira, *Miikarire ya AGĩkũyũ*, pp.84-88; Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*.

[274] Christensen, T.G., *An African Tree of Life*, New York: Orbis book, 1990; Cook, R., *The Tree of Life*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1974, illustration no.11.

[275] Kanyua, J.N., 'The Traditional Religion of Embu People', in the collection of special studies by the students of the department od religious studies-Kenyatta University, *SOAS archives*, no.PI/SI-1968, pp.18-19. Mbiti, J,S., *African Religions and philosophy*, pp50ff; Magesa, L., *African Religion, the moral tradition of abundant life*; Andrey, R., *Chisungu, A Girl's initiation ceremony among the Mbemba of Zambia*, London: Tavistock Publication, 1992, pp.67-70.

constant communication with the people. Within this labyrinth of relationships, reflected in different hierarchical structures of the community, is the belief in spirits. Spirits can be good or bad. There are spirits that can destroy or bless. Thus the people needed to continually appease them. 200 (80%) of the informants agreed that indigenous trees in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology were known to be 'nyumba cia ngoma' (house of spirits). Traditionally, when felling trees, there was one specific big tree spared from the axe named as mũrema kĩrĩtĩ (that which resisted the cutting). This conspicuous tree was believed to absolve all the spirits around. When the need arose to fell it afterwards, a ceremony had to be performed so as to avoid waking the spirit that could harm the people or create chaos in the community.[276]

Most of the informants when asked whether they could name the trees associated with the spirits, underlined that every tree, with the exception of Mũgumo, was potentially capable of being inhabited by the spirits of the living dead. Most of them live in trees, especially big trees. Asked how they knew that those spirits were present in the trees, they said that people could hear voices at night and that if one cut all the big trees without leaving any of them to accommodate ngoma, revenge was inevitable. Ndaraca ya Ngai (Ngai's bridge) was cited as a famous place where most of the ngoma used to live.[277] Thus, forests and trees had considerable supernatural and mystical importance. Trees had supernatural forces. Most of the informants postulated that spirits did not mind when the tree they formerly inhabited, was cut as long as there was another tree nearby for them to live in.

There are also other functions mentioned by the informants which have been detailed in the appendix. Here, it suffices to underline that the Gĩkũyũ people have a deep-seated knowledge of the indigenous trees and the multiple functions. This is clear from what they emphasised. The functions ranged from cooking, melting, building, magic and witchcraft, divination and sacrifices, wealth and power, medicine and as the abode of Ngai. This entrenched knowledge could act as a litmus test for any person working among the people in development programmes based on afforestation and any other

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[276] Hobley, Bantu Beliefs and Magic; Itote, W., Mau Mau General, Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967; Leakey, The Southern Kikuyu, Vol.III.; Castro, Facing Kirinyaga, p.25.

[277] Interview, Gĩcũgũ, September to December 2003. Ndaraca ya Ngai, a magnificent natural bridge is situated about half a kilometre from Mururi shopping centre along the Nairobi-Embu road. The river Nyamindi passes underneath it. There are myths from the local people which say that even the Europeans wanted to destroy it in order to build the new one; ndaraca njeru (new bridge) along the Nairobi-Embu road but could not manage because whenever they destroyed it, the ngoma would rebuild it again at night.

social, political and religious projects. It is lamentable that this knowledge of and control of trees and affinity to nature is slowly fading and disappearing with the death of the older generation but the myths about these trees, common among rural people, is a witness to the proliferation of the socio-arboreal culture in Gĩcũgũ division. Some trees names might be forgotten, but this is not a permanent condition. It is just an ember, well imbedded deep in the cultural ash.

In the realm of the socio-religious labyrinth of connections between the Gĩkũyũ and trees, there arose various myths in the Gĩkũyũ world-view demonstrating the power of trees in offering protection in times of peril. These myths underline our primary concern: the religio-political and cultural symbiosis that exists between the people and the trees. We will now examine a few of them. These myths recount not only the relationship between trees and the Gĩkũyũ people but also their attitude to nature in their cosmological framework.[278]

6.7 Trees, Gĩkũyũ and Myths

The first myth underlines how the forest and tree boughs saved girls and boy from the danger of death.

6.7.1 Ogres and the power of trees

Ten Kikuyu girls decided one day to go on a long journey in order to avoid being troubled by the boys who annoyed and insulted them every time they missed a dance. Having provided themselves with a good supply of food for the journey, they started. One of them had a little brother: he by no means wished to abandon her, and joined the party. The journey lasted one month, after which they found themselves in the middle of a large plain, where a big house had been built. There they met a man-eater (irimu) whom they believed to be a respectable man. He was very rich and slaughtered ten goats so that the girls might eat their fill. In the evening he showed them a large bed for the night. The little boy was satisfied to sleep by the door.

At midnight the man-eater sharpened a knife with which he wished to behead the girls so as to devour them. The noise awakened the boy who cried because he was hungry

The man-eater killed a goat, roasted it and gave it to the boy that he might eat and sleep. The boy refused to eat it alone, but shared it with the girls, so as not to be overpowered by sleep. So they lived together several months and the girls got enormously fat. One day the man-eater went out to call on other man-eaters, friends of his in the neighbourhood, and said to them: 'Come to my house the day after tomorrow, with knives, water and firewood, because I have a big goat to slaughter'. The girls and the boy had gone out to enjoy the morning sunshine. A fly rested on the face of one of the girls, making as if it would speak to her. The girl got vexed and wished to drive it away: but it came back and said: 'I want some blood from you, but if you refuse, I will not tell you what I have come to tell you, and if you meet bad luck, it will be your fault'. The boy persuaded his sister to prick her finger. The fly sucked at the drop of blood, then it spoke and said: 'Your destiny has been decided: the day after tomorrow all of you are to be devoured by the man-eaters. Do thus: *go quickly into the forest, cut*

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[278] These myths were recorded during the field work done between 2003 and 2004 in Gĩcũgũ division. This specific myth was narrated by Jane wa Nyamburi 115 yeas in Karumandi location. Similar myth is recorded by Cagnolo in his book, *The Akikuyu*, pp.228-235 and Waciuma, C., *Daughter of Mumbi*, Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1969.

boughs and much tall grass, and with these wrap your bodies'. Thus they did, and the boy masked all the girls. They looked like bundles of green grass walking about.[279]

The man-eaters who had been invited met them on their way and, surprised at the strange procession, they called out: *'Even the grass and trees* walk today; it will be a great feast'. They did not pay much attention to them and went their way. The man-eater, the master of the house, arrived at the house the night before the appointment, and saw with regret that the girls had run away. He got frightened, thinking that his friends, believing themselves to have been fooled, would kill him and devour him. So he dug a big hole in the place occupied by the fire and hid there.

Apart from emphasizing that trees and forests could harbour dangerous animals and creatures, there are other myths which highlight how tree saves the poor people from the jaws of ogres. In other words, trees appear in the cosmology of the Gĩkũyũ people as agents of life. The second myth highlights, apart from other things, the paradox seen in trees as protecting humans on the one hand and the incapacity to shield the victims, despite their height and overgrown foliage on the other hand. It will also be presented in the appendix.

Finally, there is also the myth showing the intoxicating power of trees. They have special powers to foster growth and transformation in the life of humans. It is incumbent on human beings to exploit positively that potency either for harmony, unity or for selfish reasons. Like the deciduous tree, the woman has a morphological change from ugly to beautiful and back again. However, the state is not permanent and thus can also metaphorically explain the fluidity of the Gĩkũyũ identities.

Once upon a time there was a poor fisherman with a wife called Mũthoni and her son Wagacembe. One day Wagacenbe complained to Ngai asking him why he left them in poverty. Ngai appeared to him and gave him three leaves: one for him, one for the father and one for his mother Mũthoni, telling him: 'Whatever you will ask with these three leaves, Ngai of Kĩrĩnyaga will grant you'.

The boy ran home and told his mother the marvellous secret. The father had not come home. Mũthoni got hold of her leaf and said: 'My leaf, I want you to procure for me beauty superior to all the beauties of this world'. In a moment she became surprisingly beautiful. The servant of the great ruler saw her and reported to him that there was in his territory a woman so extraordinarily beautiful, who, if taken to his palace, would be the splendour of the court. The ruler ordered that she be brought to him and made her his wife.

When Wagacembe heard that his mother had been remarried, he went to call on her in the ruler's house. 'What do you wish, boy?' questioned the servants.

'I wish to see the woman who has been recently married to our ruler: she is my mother'. The woman appeared and scornfuly denied her son, saying: 'Kick him out! How could I be the mother of a dog like that?'

The boy was deeply offended and planned his revenge. He took his *leaf* and said: 'May that woman become an ugly bitch'. And so it happened.

The servants of the ruler went into her house to wait upon her, but they did not find her but a dog. They reported the matter to the ruler who ordered them to open the door and let the animal out. The latter made for her old house. The husband, coming back from fishing, questioned Wagacembe whose dog it was. The son told him what had happened.

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[279] Interview, 2003-4.

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Having listened to the whole story he took his *leaf* in his hands and said: - May this dog becomes a woman as it was before; and the ugly old Mũthoni reappeared.[280]

6.8 Conclusion

Concluding this chapter on the religio-political and social symbiosis that exists between the Gĩkũyũ people and trees, there are some fundamental issues that apparently have underlined the role trees and forests have played in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology. The mechanisms that lead to this symbiotical affiliation could be a combination of complex factors ranging from economical astuteness, social and religious values, local political associations or fear and wonder on and about trees. The population pressure and the need for survival in a highly charged economic environment where the land is scarce have also contributed to a more humane relationship between the people and trees in the Gĩcũgũ area.

Although the people, for a long period of time believed that trees could not be planted in huge numbers since only Ngai planted them on large scale, Gĩcũgũ people over the centuries, nevertheless developed a feasible ecological strategy of co-existing with and positively taking care of trees so that a place like *Njukĩinĩ* forest remained for a long period under the customary care.[281] Today, Mount Kenya and *Njukĩinĩ* forest continue to serve the Gĩcũgũ population even in the midst of deforestation that has been politically and economically accelerated by the former government. With the current Forest Bill 2004, the government has guaranteed to work together with the local communities in order to establish a sustainable development, management and utilisation as well as conservation of forests and local indigenous trees.

However, from the research findings we can conclude that the Gĩkũyũ 'discover' himself/herself in mastering nature. The Gĩkũyũ can exploit it with dexterity for religio-political gains. Nevertheless, the Gĩkũyũ also know that nature, when misappropriated, can strike back causing serious damages and repercussions to social, political and religious hypostases. In this, the centre of power-knowledge is constantly shifting, thus oscillating from the exploiter to the exploited according to the needs based on cultural and

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[280] Story narrated by Monica Micere 98 years, Elnest Munene, 110 years and Phillip 115 years in Gĩcũgũ division July 2004.

[281] Castro gives a terse but well researched work on how the people of Gĩcũgũ and Ndia divisions took care of the forest commons in Kirinyaga district. Castro, *Facing Kirinyaga*, p.34. In 1925, Orde-Brown noting on the trees used by the Gĩkuyu confirmed that trees were part and parcel of the people. This was previously affirmed by Crawshay in 1902. In 1913, Stigand noted that the Gĩcũgũ people collected their medicine from the forest and thus were savant in the knowledge of trees and their uses. Crawshay, R., 'Kikuyu: Notes on the Country, People, Fauna and Flora', *Geographical Journal* 20, 1902, pp.24-49; Stigand, C., *The land of Zinj*; Orde-Browne, G., *The Vanishing Tribes of Kenya*, London: Seeley and service, 1925.

religious affiliations. The symmetry between the spindles of relationships is to be kept as close as possible. Trees and forests are held in awe and fear. They can seldom dominate and kill. They harbour the most dangerous animals and snakes on earth. Their medicine could both heal but, above all, also kill. Thus the affiliation between the Gĩkũyũ and trees, though strong, is still clouded in many mysteries. They try to make sense of these affiliations through a variety of myths. It is under this contextual framework that the literature of Gĩkũyũ and trees need to be understood.

It is not only because trees and Gĩkũyũ share a common natural tapestry (Mother Nature) that makes their relationship conspicuous. The survey has established that the affiliation that exists between Gĩkũyũ and trees is mirrored in the social, religious and political prism. This is made even more apparent by the afforestation programmes led by non governmental organisations (NGO's). The Green Belt movement for instance have, since 1977 used the planting of tree as a starting point for the political mobilisation. It has mobilised the women to take gigantic roles in politics and national building.[282] Trees seem to influence the three dimensional life of the agricultural Gĩkũyũ. They are social, religious and political emblems.[283] They feature pragmatically in the social and religious constructions. Indigenous trees also manifest themselves poignantly in the continuous construction of Gĩkũyũ identities. They form a necessary tapestry for Gĩkũyũ cultural construction and configuration. One of the powerful characteristics that has appeared in our study is the capacity to adapt in almost all topological areas and religio-political rigour of Gĩkũyũ cosmology. It is paramount therefore to underline that the Gĩkũyũ, learning the adaptable attribute of trees, used a similar mechanism to help them forge their multiple identities. In fact, the relationship that exists between trees and people and the directly observable facts that trees continue to exist in different forms after deracination, like in building stools and basket making, underline even more the fact that the Gĩkũyũ can identify themselves with certain trees. It was from around the Mũgumo tree that they originated. In relating with trees, they are going back anthropomorphically to their origins.

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[282] Maathai, *The Green Belt Movement.*

[283] In June 5, 1977, there was the first 'save the land' *Harambee* (pull together) tree planting ceremony at Kamukunji Park in Nairobi to plant seven trees symbolising the seven heroes who have shaped the Kenyan political history. The seven trees were planted in honor of (1), Wangu wa Makeri from Mũrang'a (known to have been a great leader under chief Karuri wa Gakure), (2), Madam Ketilili from Kilifi, (3), Waiyaki wa Hinga from Kiambu, (4), Nabongo Mumia from Luwero-Mumias), (5), Ole Lenana from Maasai Land, (6), Gor Mahia wuod Ogalo from Nyanza and (7) Masaku Ngei from Machakos. Of all these seven trees, only two have survived. Maathai, *The Green Belt,* p. 21.

The results of the survey have also underlined that the Gĩkũyũ continue to embody trees in the cosmology. Some parts of the trees are used to describe parts of the human body. This underlines how trees have influenced the formulation of gender in Gĩkũyũ cosmology making the symbol even more intense. At another level, trees have also been 'embodied' in the place. As already mentioned, many places in Gĩkũyũ land are named after some trees and thus the memory, the interconnectedness, the interrelation and interdependence is ontologically stronger with time and topological configuration.

Having explored the role that trees play in the social web of the Gĩkũyũ people, we can emphatically conclude that these people feel themselves attached to the trees and forest and thus, with time and with modern technology, have collaborated with the government in transforming the environment. J. Lonsdale had put the relationship based on interdependence and responsibility in a nutshell: the Gĩkũyũ

> were brought together by the demands and opportunities of forest clearance. Only then did they become Agikuyu...they were people who knew how to civilise the land where the Mukuyu (sic Mũgumo) fig tree grew, to which they brought their harvest offering.[284]

This utilitarian knowledge of forest and trees derived from a close interaction with, and dependence on them in a range of eco-zones no doubt has shaped the pattern of thought of the Gĩkũyũ people especially in the way they use their cultural symbols. Trees in Gĩcũgũ are until now intrinsically patterned and incorporated into household products, economic and religious constructions. Thus even after many years of modern technology in the field of medicine and forestry, this attachment to and dependence on trees is still with the people so much so that some important sacred trees like *Mĩgumo* may have been abandoned by some *athomi*, but in Gĩcũgũ, and most certainly in other parts of the country, the memory of these trees did not die nor did the offence caused by their removal and abandonment. It continues to have a profound religious and political significance for some people, especially the older generation.

Exploring the nature and the functions of the trees in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology, we have investigated how different part of trees, leaves, barks, roots and trunks are positively exploited for the survival of the community. In doing this, trees and forests have excited the moral imagination concerning the health, social organisation and even the religio-political configuration of the group. The fact that the Gĩkũyũ and trees have a common source of life: Ngai, cements the relationship even more and thus makes trees suitable for religious symbolism.

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[284] Lonsdale, J., 'The moral economy of Mau Mau', p334.

In the Gĩkũyũ cosmology therefore, special emphasis is laid on the particular roles that trees play. The belief that Ngai would descend via Mũgumo to feast on the meat of sacrifice and attend to the people's plea is deeply embedded in their religio-political and social configuration. This is why, among other things, the sacred Mũgumo became their traditional sanctuary. It also became a primary symbol that shaped the Gĩkũyũ religious and political world. In this composition the sacred Mũgumo became an emblem of Gĩkũyũ identity and has been for centuries a periodic symbolic focus of the identity of the group. The Gĩkũyũ, Mũgumo, and other important trees derive their character and sustenance from the fact of 'rootedness'. They are both planted in a specific geographical location and configured to a similar religio-political ambience. The Gĩkũyũ and trees grow old together, they co-exist with one another. As the informant accentuated, trees are a symbol of hope. Without them, people will not survive for lack of medicine, food and oxygen.

Finally, exploring the symbolism of Mũgumo, it is important to recall that tree symbolism is of the greatest importance to these people since ecologically speaking, Gĩcũgũ is one of the most densely forested areas of Kenya with Mount Kenya in the north and *Njukĩinĩ* in the East. It is also logical that given that strong bond between trees and people, and having a common creator and provider, the Gĩkũyũ would strongly choose specific tree symbols in their social and religious formation and integration. Thus the nature and characteristics of the sacred Mũgumo tree will be explored in our next chapter.

PART THREE

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE SACRED MŨGUMO

7.1 Introduction

Mũgumo wagũũka acokaga ithare (when the Mũgumo trees fall down, *ĩthare-Dracaena sterdneri*, a small trees 'replaces' it). This proverb underlines the popularity and the central place that the sacred Mũgumo takes within Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship. The proverb also highlights the strength and endurance of the tree which epitomises the ruling generation of the Gĩkũyũ. In the traditional Gĩkũyũ, if somebody as strong as Mũgumo died, a ruler or elder, the less powerful one took over. The great ruler is 'irreplaceable'. The Gĩkũyũ believed that if the Mũgumo tree fell impromptu, it was, according to the informants, communicating a strong message to the people. It would either symbolise the imminent death of a renowned ruler, a chief or the ruling government. Because it is a gigantic tree, its falling effect would be heard far and wide. In case it was the ruler who died, these effects were synonymous with the mourning for the ruler by the people of far flung regions who were under his fiat.

However, within Gĩkũyũ historio-cosmogony emerges the sacred Mũgumo tree which, during the colonial period, was the cause of religio-political and social controversies between the Gĩkũyũ people, some government officials and the missionaries. This chapter aims to put Mũgumo in its place, exploring the place of Mũgumo in Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship by extrapolating the knowledge the local people have of the tree. It will also demonstrate how the tree was chosen and dedicated by the ruling generation. Once more, the chapter will trace the place of the sacred Mũgumo in the local history and find out whether there are still some Mĩgumo trees left in the Gĩcũgũ division. Having investigated the sacred Mũgumo through its characteristic, and history, the question as to the choice of Mũgumo and not any other tree as a central ritual symbol will become evident. Its significant role in the forging of Gĩkũyũ identity will lucidly manifest itself.

In order to tease out from the garner of the sacred Mũgumo, the following questions were adopted: *Mũtĩ wa Mũgumo nĩ ũũĩ?* (Do you know the Mũgumo tree?) *Nũũ wamenyagĩrĩra/ũmenyagĩrĩra) Mũgumo?* (Who kept/ keeps watch over it?) *Warĩ/ nĩ waũ* (Who owned(s) it?) and finally why Mũgumo?

7.2 General Characteristics of Mũgumo tree

The Gĩkũyũ name for *Ficus natalensi/thonningii* is Mũgumo (pl. Mĩgumo).[285] Mũgumo is a type of fig and its fruits are called *ngumo*. It belongs to the group of Moraceae, a family primarily composed of laticiferous trees and shrubs. It is an evergreen tree. Mũgumo leaves can be stipulate or alternate, single, or palmately compound, penninerved or palminerved. The flowers are usually unisexual with small heads. The fruits are small, nut or drupe with a fleshly outer covering surrounding a hard stony seed. A multiple of them arises by the union of the fruits with the fleshly common receptacle.

Naturally, Mũgumo does not grow in a grove or coppice. Its features are conspicuous. It is neither useful for timber nor is it good for firewood. However, Mũgumo has an enormous capacity to conserve the soil moisture and an aptitude to increase soil fertility. Fig. 7.1 shows the picture of one of the Mũgumo Sacred tree in Gĩcũgũ division

The sacred Mũgumo can grow up to 90 metres high. It usually grows in the forest or savannah and thus Gĩcũgũ is an ideal place for it. It has aerial roots extending from the

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[285] Mũgumo belongs to a genus of about 800 species of woody trees, shrubs and vines in the moraceae family found throughout the tropics and in the temperate zone. There are about 34 ficus species recorded from Kenya with *Ficus thonningii* as predominant. Tanzania has about 43 while Uganda 36. Bergs, C.C. & Wiebes, J.T., *African Fig Trees and Fig Wasps*, Netherlands: The Publishing house of Royal Netherlands Academy, 1992. Burrow, J. & Burrows, S., *Figs of Southern and South-Central Africa*, Hartfield: Umdaus Press, 2003.

base of the major limbs which makes it fluted or even multi-stemmed. The bole is generally long. Its crown is thick and heavily foliaged. The bark is grey and smooth, having a white-sticky milky, rubber-like fluid. The leaves are entirely papery or subcoriaceous (slightly leathery), glabrous (hairless), oblanceolate (narrow but broad towards the tip). They are also entirely green. In general, these leaves are broad and the apex is obtusely pointed or rounded at both ends.[286]

Most of the *natalensis* group have a narrow base and glabrous petiole, auxiliary on younger branchlets. The fruits are abovoid-globose, (spherical) about ½ in diameter in some trees while others are ¼ inches in diameter. Unlike the other type of ficus like Mūkūyū (*Ficus sycomorus*), Mūgumo is widespread in the wetter parts of Gĩkũyũ country, especially the central region, although it might be found elsewhere in the highland areas throughout Kenya.[287] It often grows from sticks put in as cuttings, but also from seeds sprouting in the forks of other trees, when the dependent roots slowly swallow the host tree. Thus, Mūgumo is as well a parasitic tree. In a nutshell, Mūgumo is a large, gigantic, well-foliaged tree. It exudes latex, conserves moisture and increase soil fertility.

7.3 Mūgumo, scholars and the Gĩkũyũ

The general characteristics of Mūgumo have been presented. However, it is important to understand how some scholars studying the Gĩkũyũ people described Mūgumo and its position within the cosmology of the group. In this context, a few scholars will be examined as a key to understanding a comparative description of the Mūgumo tree which has for centuries been associated with and even culturally reformulated the identity of the Gĩkũyũ as an independent cultural autochthonous group in Kenya.

Routledge acknowledges that the Gĩkũyũ had Mūgumo as a tree of sacrifices. Describing how he performed a traditional sacrifice around the sacred Mūgumo tree he remarks:

> the God is one and the same, but the M'Kikuyu, who has no "temples made with hands", turns for worship to the nearest object of reverence, probably in much the same way as an ordinary Christian regards a sacred building as the "House of God"...Engai, who had seen the fire being made in his grove, and watched the preparation of the sheep, now descends from heaven into his tree, and when the old man places the offering on the ground and retires, then does God...eat up the food and climb back again into its depths where he may be heard moving among the branches.[288]

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[286] Dale, and Greenway *Kenya Trees and Shrubs*, p.316; Bergs, & Wiebes, *African Fig Trees and Fig Wasps*. Also, appendix no.7a.

[287] Castro, *Facing Kirinyaga*, p.16.

[288] Routledge, *With a Prehistoric people*, pp.229-234.

The Mũgumo is not just the nearest temple of reverence since as we have seen, there was a thorough process done to ascertain the correct Mũgumo for sacrifices. Brother Benedetto Pietro, a Consolata Missionary, describes Mũgumo as *Mũtĩ wa Ngai* (tree of Ngai) adding that this tree is the *Sancta Sanctorum* of the Gĩkũyũ people.[289] In 1922, Hobley acknowledges that Mũgumo is *Mũtĩ wa Ngai* to the Gĩkũyũ people adding that the people frequently went to sacrifice around it in order to beseech Ngai to protect them from the evil spirits.[290] Writing, in 1933, Cagnolo, notes that apart from Mũgumo being the sacred tree for the Gĩkũyũ people, it is also used for a variety of rituals like *irua*, imploring Ngai for rain and the *itũĩka* ceremony. Cagnolo also underlines the connection between the sacred Mũgumo, Ngai and the people especially in the time of *irua* where the *Magumo* (leaves of Mũgumo) were used as mats during circumcision. Despite Cagnolo's unfortunate conclusions and unscientific comparative analysis, his work nevertheless shows that Mũgumo was the fulcrum of Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship.

For Kenyatta, Mũgumo is the key institution of the Gĩkũyũ people. He demonstrates how the relationship between the people and Mũgumo is so intense so that in Mũgumo and through the rituals around Mũgumo, the Gĩkũyũ are seemingly united as a people and through it commune with Ngai.[291] Finally, Castro lucidly accentuate the importance of the sacred Mũgumo in Gĩkũyũ cosmological framework and especially the Ndia and Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ, acknowledging that as a tree, Mũgumo provided a spiritual continuity for the Gĩkũyũ who, during the time of European settlement were undergoing 'dislocation and forced socio-economic change'.[292]

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[289] Benedetto, P., La 'Superstizioni e Templi Ghekòio' in *La Consolata*, Anno XVII-N.7, Luglio,1915, pp.104-108. Apart from the description of Mũgumo and its religious role in Gĩkũyũ cosmology, Benedetto also provides a photo of Missionaries, some sitting while the other climbing the Mũgumo and the sacred grove as a spectacular antithesis of the old Gĩkũyũ religion. The taboo about desecration of the sacred groves and Mũgumo tree has been broken and the new religion has replaced the old one so that any fear of those sacred places has been finished by the Western missionaries through their religion, p. 107.

[290] Hobley, *Bantu beliefs and Magic*, pp.29 & 40. There are other scholars who acknowledge the pivotal role the Sacred Mũgumo played in Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship. See, Barlow, A., 'The "Mugumo" Tree in connection to Kikuyu circumcision ceremonies' in *Journal of East Africa and Uganda Natural History Society*, 1913, 3:41-44; Dundas, C., 'Organisation and Laws of some Bantu Tribes in East Africa', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Society*, 1915, 45:234-306; Beech, M, 'The Sacred Fig-tree of the A'Kikuyu of East Africa', *Man* 13:4-6, 1913. Also his other article, 'A Ceremony of the Mugumu or Sacred Fig-tree of the A'Kikuyu of East Africa', *Man* 13:86-9.

[291] Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, especially, P.250. A critic about Kenyatta's work and his attempt to forge his own image of the Gĩkũyũ people is done in the Literature review. Leakey has also deeply explored the rituals around the Mũgumo tree in his work; *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903*. See, especially Vol. II.

[292] Castro, *Facing Kirinyaga*, p.113.

7.3.1 How Gĩkũyũ describe the Sacred Mũgumo Tree

The Gĩkũyũ people describe Mũgumo through its size, colour, strength and height. They also define it through its social, religio-political functions, through myths and songs. The etymology of the name, like many other Gĩkũyũ names for trees is contestable. However, we will examine its morphological composition. Mũgumo comes from the word *guma* (to become mouldy, grow mould, or grey) and therefore grey and old. Therefore, Gĩkũyũ describe Mũgumo in terms of colour as that old grey tree. Thus, Mũgumo would be referred to as *Mũtĩ mũgumo* or *Mũtĩ mũbuu* (grey/mouldy tree).

Mũgumo(n) also means a jugular vein from which blood is drawn when cattle are bled.[293] Thus it is also associated with blood. This is comprehensible since the myth of the origin depicts Mũgumo as giving life to Gĩkũyũ, the founding father of the group by providing him with a beautiful wife and 'nine' sons to marry their daughters. As a result, this gives it a very powerful name and role in their cosmology and religio-political framework. In this, it becomes the primary symbol in their world-view.

Apart from describing the Mũgumo by its colour and association with blood, Gĩkũyũ also describes it by one of its conspicuous characteristics. They call it *Mũtĩ mũũgũ*[294] (a tree that climbs). This is because of its aerial roots that suspends downwards like ropes. These roots are vital for its survival and its topological conquest. Through the roots, Mũgumo can suffocate any tree that blocks its way and growth so that in the end, it remains the most conspicuous and dominant tree surrounded by other trees and shrubs. It has the potential to dominate, conquer and rule.
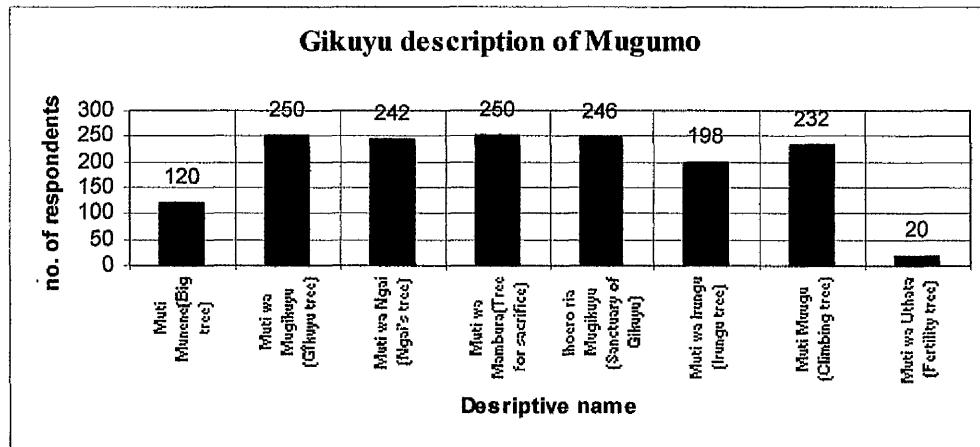
When asked to describe Mũgumo in their own way, the respondents gave eight general description of the tree. These ranged from *Mũtĩ mũnene* (big tree), *Mũtĩ wa Mũgĩkũyũ* (Gĩkũyũ tree), *Mũtĩ wa Ngai* (Ngai's tree), *Mũtĩ wa Mambura* (a tree for sacrifices), *Ihoero* (sanctuary), *Mũtĩ wa Irũngũ* (irũngũ's tree), *Mũtĩ mũũgũ*(climbing tree) and *Mũtĩ wa ũthata* (fertility tree). These results are well expounded in figure 7.2.

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[293] Gĩkũyũ are known to draw blood from their cattle, an exercise that was inherited from the Maasai. This was generally done in times of drought since blood is associated with life and thus restoring back to wholeness the sick or feeble victim.

[294] *Mũũgũ* (n) is a climbing plant (*Landolphia ugandensis*). It also refers to any big liana or strong supple used for ropes and for making hurdle doors for houses. See, Benson, *Kikuyu-English Dictionary*.

Figure 7.2 Number of respondents as per description

Gikuyu description of Mugumo

Number of respondents (y-axis: no. of respondents, 0–300):
- Muti Munene [Big tree]: 120
- Muti wa Mugikuyu (Gikuyu tree): 250
- Muti wa Ngai [Ngai's tree]: 242
- Muti wa Mambura [Tree for sacrifice]: 250
- Ihoero ria Mugikuyu [Sanctuary of Gikuyu]: 246
- Muti wa Irungu [Irungu tree]: 198
- Muti Mwagu (Climbing tree): 232
- Muti wa Uthata [Fertility tree]: 20

Descriptive name

Most of the respondents referred to Mũgumo as that 'grey old tree which gives life' (mũtĩ mũkũrũ mũno, mũtĩ Mũgumo or mũtĩ wa Ngai (Ngai's tree). The informants were asked to describe the sacred Mũgumo in their own way. 120 (48%) described it in terms of size; Mũgumo nĩ mũtĩ mũnene mũno (Mũgumo is a very big tree). Here, size meant both the height and the circumference. About 242 (97 %) called it Mũtĩ wa Ngai (the tree of Ngai) while all the interviewers called it Mũtĩ wa magongona/mambura or Mũtĩ wa Mũgĩkũyũ (lit. the sanctuary of the Gĩkũyũ). There was a small number 198 (79%) who referred to Mũgumo as Mũtĩ wa Irũngũ (the tree of Irũngũ). Irũngũ, a ruling generation was supposed to have replaced Mwangi in 1925 in Gĩcũgũ division but since this was the last ituĩka ceremony, they are still regarded by the old Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ as the ones still in power. However, there was a good number of informant 246 (98%) who described Mũgumo as Ihoero ria Gĩkũyũ (a sanctuary of the Gĩkũyũ people). Mũgumo as Mũtĩ Mũũgũ also had a good number 232 (93%) while very few people 20 (8%) described the tree as Mũtĩ wa ũthata (fertility tree).

Figure 7.2 shows that the number of respondents describing Mũgumo as Mũti wa Ngai, Mũtĩ wa Mambura/Magongona, Mũti wa Mũgĩkũyũ and finally Ihoero ria Agĩkũyũ and Mũtĩ Mũũgũ is almost constant, 242, 250, 250, 246, and 232.[295]

The findings of the survey demonstrate that the Gĩcũgũ people describe the sacred Mũgumo in different cultural configurations. Mũgumo is primarily classified as a tree. This tree is endowed for its size and height (Mũtĩ mũnene). It is also revered for its strength and power. The proverb: Mũgumo wagũka acokaga ithare is very significant into understanding this notion of size and power in the Gĩkũyũ world-view. While describing the Mũgumo as Mũti munene, Gĩkũyũ people underline that it has both the

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[295] A detailed chart is given in the appendix no.7b where both age and sex of the respondents is expounded.

capacity to co-exist with other trees and to engulf them, eventually killing them and becoming the most conspicuous tree in the region. In a nutshell, Mūgumo epitomises unlimited power, space and recognition. In the Gĩkũyũ traditional world, the impact of its size is critical. Its size dominates our view and encloses us. The size of this tree means that it can block our views, make vistas and offer us different avenues to interpret and understand our surrounding and our cultural identity. Under these parameters, Mūgumo as *Mūti munene*[296] is iconic.

The Mūgumo tree offers us the whole field of exploring what is beneath, around or behind it, thus presenting itself as 'mysterious'. As a tree of this enormous size and a symbol of power, the sacred Mūgumo demonstrates how it can survive, 'colonise' and grow independent of, or even in contest with human intentions. It also shows how trees, with time, have the ability to transform places and identities.

Although Mūgumo as *Mūtĩ wa Irungu* had 198 (79%) respondents, it nevertheless demonstrates its immense religio-political connection with the ruling generation. It is a symbol of office. The Irungu being the ruling generation, were respected both for the social, political and religious position they occupied in the agricultural Gĩkũyũ. They had the knowledge of trees, of social, political and religious fields, which they kept intact through the vow of secrecy. In fact, the sacred tree and groves strongly reflected the traditional divisions among the Gĩkũyũ people. They showed the cultural, religious and political fragmentation which was reflected in scattered homesteads ruled by the dominance of the Gĩkũyũ elders under the guise of Irungu or Mwangi ruling generations. As the tree used its topological space to dominate its neighbours, so did the ruling council of elders. Like the distinction created by Mūgumo in relation to its other surrounding trees, the traditional ruling generation created clear religio-political discrimination based on wealth, and status.[297]

Identifying themselves with Mūgumo tree means that they are associating with its size, greatness and importance. In the traditional Gĩkũyũ these qualities were associated with power, ruling and domineering. The ruling generation, like Mūgumo, has a significant cultural position in need of admiration. As the people of and in power, they could condemn, save or kill. They epitomised social, political, economic and religious

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[296] *Mūnene*(n) meaning, 'big' hence a metaphoric extension of power e.g. chief or headman. It also means great, important e.g. the size of something startling or causing consternation. The issues of domination and landscape in Britain are also lucidly discussed by Jones and Cloke. Jones, & Cloke, *Tree Cultures*. Rival's edits a series of work done by different authors discussing the place of trees in the world, their social, religious value as well as their symbolic acumen. Rival, L., (ed), *The Social Life of Trees*.

[297] See the work of Lonsdale, in Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, Book Two.

control.   Consequently, associating them with Mũgumo tree also shows their characteristics. They were quite elderly men and women who in most cases had passed the age of child-bearing. Like Mũgumo, they were old, wise and thus cultural 'encyclopaedias'. Finally, like the Mũgumo tree, they were mediators of life (Mũgumo and jugular vein). They gave religious and political direction that helped shape various identities of the agricultural Gĩkũyũ. In a nutshell, identifying the ruling generation with Mũgumo meant that they were the yardstick through which the traditional society was evaluated and through them, life flowed through and knitted the society together.

Mũgumo is also *Mũtĩ wa Ngai*. The informants underlined that this understanding came from the Gĩkũyũ conception of Ngai as the owner and the source of life. In fact, most of them accentuated that *Ngai nĩ nyene* (Ngai is the owner). The myth of the origin also stresses the fact that Ngai chose Mũgumo as a place where he could commune with the agricultural Gĩkũyũ. This is one of the principal reasons as to why the informants refer to it as *Mũtĩ wa Ngai* and therefore a sacred tree. It is for these reasons that Mũgumo attains its cultural, religious and political power. It was in Mũgumo and through it that Ngai occasionally visited the Gĩkũyũ people. It was a pivot and the Gĩkũyũ stepping stone in their attempt to commune with Ngai in times of cultural crises. The tree offered a place where the exchange of gift and favours was realised between Ngai and his people. Around the sacred Mũgumo, Ngai would eat the meat of the lamb offered him by the ruling generation (Irungu or Mwangi) and in exchange, he would attend to the people's needs especially in times of crises like diseases, drought or any social calamity that affected them. Today, even after more that one centenary of religious proselytisation in Gĩkũyũ land, Christian still sing that *Mwathani nĩ Mũgumo ũrĩa ũta ũmaga, nao akristũ a kanitha nĩyo honge* (Ngai is the Mũgumo that never dries while Christians are its branches).[298]

All the informants acknowledged that Mũgumo was *Mũtĩ wa Agĩkũyũ* (Gĩkũyũ tree). However, this demonstrated the place that this tree occupied in their cosmology and worship. People felt that it was their tree. Literally, the people were underlining that this tree was part of them. It helped them in defining themselves as a group and acted as a compass through which they could find their way to social and religious integration in times of crises. It is evident that it plays a paramount part in the forging of their multiple identities as the myths of origin have demonstrated. Mũgumo therefore becomes not only a symbol of power but also a hinge through which people can identify themselves as a

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[298] From the Catholic Hymn book: *Mitha Mũgĩkũyũ na Nyimbo ciake*, Nairobi: Kenya Litho Limited, 1992.

group called Gĩkũyũ. It is also a mirror through which people can understand and locate themselves in the social, religious and political cultural stratification. The understanding of Mũgumo as *Mũtĩ wa Agĩkũyũ* is according to the informants, ontologically linked to the concept of the myth of the origin and that of sacrifice around the sacred tree. In this religio-political symbiosis, Gĩkũyũ would refer to Mũgumo as *Mũtĩ witũ wa magongona/mambura* (our tree of sacrifices and prayer). Here, the concept of ownership (*witũ*)[299] is very strong.

The traditional Gĩkũyũ did not frequent specific places for prayers as is done today by Christians, Muslim and other religions. They thanked Ngai in their different ways before the start of the day and when resting from their daily chores. When sacrifices were to be done, then Mũgumo was their sanctuary and the place where fundamental rituals were realised. They knew Mũgumo as *Ihoero rĩa Agĩkũyũ*[300]*na Mũtĩ wa igongona*. Thus, of the people interviewed, 98 % emphasised that Mũgumo was *per se, ihoero rĩa Agĩkũyũ*. As the sanctuary, people would, on the one hand, ask Ngai for their basic needs and he, on the other hand, would listen to their plea. They relied on Ngai to reciprocate the love shown him and the gift given to him. Today, Mũgumo endures in the memory of the old Gĩkũyũ people as a place where the exchange of gifts is realised. It is a place not only of social and religious encounter but also where the divine reveals himself by consuming the goods offered him.

Most of the informants, 98 % accentuated that after the ceremony around Mũgumo was finished and the 'priests' had gone home, if any of the sacrificial articles had been forgotten around Mũgumo during the sacrifice, and they were to go back for it, they would never have recovered it since Ngai would have eaten his meat and carried everything away with him. As the *ihoero* (sanctuary), then, Mũgumo was also a place (*Mũtĩ wa igongona*) where Gĩkũyũ would implore Ngai and invite him to bless the community and family with peace, abundant food, fertile women, healthy children and cattle.

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[299] *Witũ/itũ-* article. It is a possessive article, e.g. *witũ* (our) thus *Mũti witũ* (our tree), *Ihoero ritũ* (our sanctuary) denoting both the concept of belonging and locality.

[300] *Ihoero* from *Hoya* means to ask, implore, request/ invite. It means the place of asking. Thus, around the sacred Mũgumo, Gĩkũyũ would ask, request, implore, thank and invite God for help or blessings.

In July, 1915, for instance, Benedetto Pietro, a Consolata Missionary wrote about Mũgumo as a sanctuary:

> we encountered many of these temples of Ngai spread all over Gĩkũyũ land. They were very majestic. These temples are endowed not with modern artefacts but with natural art...I could not doubt why the Gĩkũyũ had high reverence for this sacred Mũgumo tree and groves. It is to them *Sancta Sanctorum*.[301]

In order to underline the Mũgumo as *Mũtĩ wa Ngai* or *Ihoero*, most of our respondents ceremoniously recited the prayer to Ngai which they underlined, is still deeply engraved in their cosmology taking the tree as the *ihoero*. They prayed like this:

> Ugai thaai, Thaai, ciana ciroagĩra thaai, mĩciĩ itũ ĩrorathimwo thaai, atumia aitũ marothegea thaai, ona mahiũ maitũ thaai...Kũroaga mũrimũ thaai...thaai thathaiyai Ngai thaai.[302]

> Say peace, peace. May our children be healthy... peace. May our homesteads be blessed... peace. May our women be fertile, and our cattle... peace. May there be no disease or any calamity... peace. Peace we beseech you Ngai, peace.

They finished this prayer by spitting on their chest so that the blessing might be complete and that their prayers might be answered by Ngai. Here it is clear that, contrary to many scholars like Leakey and Kenyatta who insist that this prayer was prayed around the sacred Mũgumo during sacrifice, our research indicate that this or a similar prayer was not ceremonial but was integral to the daily life of the Gĩkũyũ. The one in charge of the house would say this prayer. However the informants insisted that the high point of the prayer was when it was recited by the religious elders around the sacred Mũgumo tree when 'bribing' Ngai. This underlines even more the Mũgumo tree as the *ihoero ria Agĩkũyũ*.

Recapitulating the way Gĩkũyũ describe the sacred Mũgumo, the research has found out that this tree is sacred to the people. All the physical descriptions, as already enumerated, demonstrate how close Mũgumo tree is to the people since it threads all through their political, religious and social labyrinths. As a consequence, the Gĩkũyũ ontologically identify themselves with this tree. Under this asymmetry, the sacred Mũgumo takes a pivotal role in the forging of Gĩkũyũ identities. Mũgumo as a tree continues to be reflected in all traditional and contemporary Gĩkũyũ asymmetries of power. It is strongly associated with age, leadership, knowledge and sovereignty. This anthropomisation is culturally important, in the study of the Gĩkũyũ because it demonstrates their cultural stereotypes that have been ignored by many scholars,

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[301] Translation is mine. Benedetto write: 'Oh, io non istupisco che gli Aghekòio abbiano in tata venerazione questi boshetti sacri, che direbbero il *Sancta Sanctorum* di questo popolo...' A report in the diary of Benedetto Pietro, a Consolata Missionary in *La Consolata*, Anno XVII-n.7, Luglio, 1915, pp.105-6.

[302] Interview, Gĩcũgũ, August –December, 2003.

stereotypes based on domination and control of the elders in the guise of traditional democracy.

7.4 The Dedication of the sacred Mũgumo

As already attested, the Gĩkũyũ people chose certain trees as dwelling places for Ngai. Mũgumo is Ngai's official dwelling place as he descends from Mount Kenya. They also believed that *ngoma* lived in some trees and bushes. Certain trees too were dedicated for the offering of small sacrifices among the members of *mbarĩ*. Kenyatta has written that Gĩkũyũ chose huge trees as temple for worship and has highlighted the *Mũgumo*, *Mũkũyũ* (*Ficus capensis*) and *Mũtamaiyu* (*Olea africana*) underlining that Mũgumo was the principal sacred tree preferred by the people of Southern Gĩkũyũ. Writing on the Southern Gĩkũyũ, Leakey has insisted that Mũgumo was the tree *per excellence*, while *Mũthakwa* (*Vernonia auriculifera*) tree was occasionally used by the *mbarĩ* for a small family sacrifice.[303] What is clear is that Mũgumo features prominently as the pivotal tree for public prayers and sacrifices all through Gĩkũyũ society regardless of the topological distribution. Here, the crucial question is: how was the tree selected and dedicated for public sacrifices?

The choice and the dedication of the Mũgumo as a sacred tree has to be understood within the Gĩkũyũ religio-political configuration where a group of a few elders belonging to the ruling generation reigned and officiated at all public religious and political duties. It was Mwangi or Irũngũ generation who chose, dedicated and owned the sacred Mũgumo through the ceremony of *ituĩka*. Once dedicated, the ruling generation performed all the public religious ceremonies around the sacred Mũgumo. The repercussion of the choice of specific Mĩgumo trees means that not all of them were sacred and that the religio-political and cultural intersection between the sacred and profane was primarily determined by the same ruling generation.

In Gĩcũgũ, informants were asked how the Mũgumo tree was dedicated and whether, once dedicated, remained sacred even after the end of the ruling government. The majority of them did not remember with clarity as the last dedication of Mũgumo in the division took place in 1925 with the last *ituika* ceremony. However, they underlined

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[303] Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, pp.204 &236. Kenyatta does not discuss the dedication of the Mũgumo tree but rather the rituals associated with it. Leakey however has lucidly shown how the Southern Gĩkũyũ chose and dedicated the sacred Mũgumo. His work has some resonance with the research done in Gĩcũgũ where the choice and dedication of Mũgumo starts with the *ituĩka* ceremony. See, Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, *Vol.III.*, pp.1078-1119.

that the dedication of Mũgumo took place during the *ituika* ceremonies. According to the informants, the dedication of Mũgumo and the *ituika* ceremony are closely knit.

This is how, according to the respondents, the Mũgumo tree was dedicated. There were eight senior elders each representing the age-group of the ruling generation and one other elder who prepared the *Mũratina* beer for the ceremony of dedication. Two rams chosen from different parts of Gĩkũyũ territory, spotless and without any form of deformity, were chosen for that purpose. Both the beer (*itete igĩrĩ* -two vessels from gourd) referred to as *njohi ya mambura* (ceremonial beer) and the two rams were taken to the selected Mũgumo. A small *ndathi* (horn) was also part of the paraphernalia. It was used to pour the beer around the stem (four corners) of the tree. Around Mũgumo, the officiating elders gathered and, facing Mount Kenya and other three mountains believed to be abodes of Ngai, prayed, asking Ngai to accept the sacrifices offered him in the form of meat, beer made of the best honey of the region and fat from the selected unblemished rams.

The beer and fat were poured around the Mũgumo tree while some of the meat was roasted and eaten by the officiating elders. Part of the breast (*gĩthũri*) was offered to Ngai as pact of having shared the same sacrificial meat and having drunk the same beer. Solemn prayers, led by one of the officiating elder, followed. First, they implored Ngai to accept the Mũgumo as his sanctuary (*Mũtĩ wa Ngai*) and therefore the tree of sacrifice. Second, they implored Ngai to bless and empower the new ruling generation to be as strong and fruitful as the Mũgumo tree in their religious and political deliberation. Again, the elders facing Mount Kenya prayed to Ngai to give them enough rain to avoid starvation. Thirdly, they besought him to make the women fertile with many children, bless them with livestock and prevent the Gĩkũyũ from diseases. They also asked Ngai to protect their warriors. After these solemn prayers, the elders poured the fresh blood of the ram around the stem of Mũgumo as the ultimate sacrifice for Ngai asking him once again to accept them as officiating elders and accept the tree as the sanctuary of the Gĩkũyũ people. With this ceremony, the dedication and the consecration of the Mũgumo tree to Ngai culminated.

In Gĩcũgũ, once the Mũgumo was dedicated, it became the official sacrifice for the ruling generation. The next generation could continue with the sacrifices around the

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same tree.[304] This was not practised by the Southern Gĩkũyũ since every ruling generation dedicated its sacred Mũgumo and deracinated once their time of power was over.[305] However, Leakey's hypothesis postulates that every incoming ruling generation chose its own Mĩgumo while the outgoing generation deracinated its sacred trees. This would mean that for the Southern Gĩkũyũ, the sacred Mĩgumo trees, once selected and dedicated, did not continue to exist physically as the sacred trees after the government was taken over. On the contrary, for the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ, the sacredness of Mũgumo continued to be sacrosanct even after the other generation had taken control. These sacred Mĩgumo were not uprooted but continued to be revered as sanctuaries for society as a whole even though no sacrifices continued to be done around them. A brief history of the sacred Mũgumo in Gĩcũgũ division is presented in the appendix.

The chapter will now go on to explore the presence of the Mũgumo in the division today. In other words: are there still some Mĩgumo trees surviving in Gĩcũgũ division? Who takes care of them?

7.5 The spread of Mĩgumo trees in Gĩcũgũ Division
7.5.1 Mũgumo wa Karumba

Mũgumo wa karumba also by the name *Mũgumo wa Ngiriambu* is located in Njũkĩinĩ location in Ngiriambu sub-location, less than half a kilometre from Ngiriambu girls secondary school. It marks the political boundary between Ngiriambu and Thirikwa sub-locations. It is located within the sacred grove which has been preserved till now. This was, according to the informants, the original ritual sacrifice of the *Irũngu* generation. What is striking about this Mũgumo is the fact that unlike the other *natalensis* we saw, this one has a spring that gushes southwards towards Karuco market, down to Mũrũri shopping areas, a few kilometres from Ngiriambu. This stream is used for irrigation, drinking, and watering the livestock. The informants underlined that a few years ago, Cedi and his *mbarĩ* wanted to cut this Mũgumo but people of the whole sub-

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[304] Interview, Gĩcũgũ, September, 2003-july, 2004. Mũgumo wa Ngiriambu now belongs to the Irungu ruling generation which took power in 1925. Before, them, the same Mũgumo was used by Mwangi and according to the informants, since the *Itũĩka* ceremony was peaceful and aimed at the service of the people, the ruling generation was not quarrelling over the control of the sacrificial tree since, when one was in power, the other accepted their service with ease.

[305] Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu Vol.III*, p.1085. The fact that in Gĩcũgũ, the incoming generation could continue officiating in the same Mũgumo or even add some more, could be a key to understanding why there are still a good number of official Mĩgumo trees left whereas very few in Southern Gĩkũyũ especially in parts of Kiambu and Nyĩrĩ. The number in Mũrang'a is also limited. Gĩcũgũ leads in the number of existing houses of Irungu according to our research findings.

location refused him since they said, if the Mũgumo was cut, then the stream would dry denying a big population and their cattle access to water.

Circumrotating the sacred Mũgumo are other indigenous trees. These are some of them: *Mũringa, Mũthare (Dracaena sterdneri), Mũũ, Mũtũndũ, Mũkindũri (Croton megalacarpus), Mũkoigo (Bridelia micrantha), Mwĩria, Mũthakwa Mũthakwa wa Aathi or Mwathathi, Mwarĩki, Mũkũrwe* and *Mũtathi.* There are some bushes with variety of shrubs covering the whole of the sacred grove. Creeping plants, *Mũkenia and Mũkengeria* are also present. The approximate area is about one hectare of land, in the middle of the two adulating plains. There is a road that divides this Mũgumo from another one just a few metres in the opposite direction. According to the informants, these two trees were originally from the same *gĩthaka*. The second Mũgumo is small and ranges about forty five metres in height and 7 metres in circumference.

Mũgumo wa Karumba is approximately ninety metres high with a circumference of eleven metres (33 ft.). It has gigantic aerial roots spreading from top to bottom and suffocating its victim. These two sacred Mĩgumo and grove are found on the land now owned by Cedi Obadiah. Just a few metres from these trees there is an Anglican church (CMS) started in 1920 by a fervent believer Samuel Mũkuba, the father of Archbishop David Gĩtarĩ. Mũkuba started this church with Daniel Ngure to oppose any sacrifices or prayers by the Irungu generation around the sacred Mũgumo tree.

7.5.2 Mũgumo wa Kĩthara-inĩ

Kĩtharainĩ, a place in Njukĩinĩ location has also some sacred groves and Mĩgumo. The first Mũgumo is about sixty metres high, with a circumference of eleven metres. There is a stream that flows southwards towards Kĩaũmbũi area, just a few metres from it. The area is cultivated with bananas, arrowroots and sugarcane. There are very few indigenous trees since the area has been utilised for farming. Just about five hundred metres away there is another Mũgumo, bigger than the first one, intertwined with another of about forty metres. This has also been described as an official *Irũngũ* sacrificial site. It is difficult to give even a tentative age of these twins Mĩgumo but their capacity to incorporate other indigenous trees and bushes is striking. Besides, they have grown on a big volcanic rock, prodding their roots deep into the rock and therefore anchoring themselves firmly in the ground.

Right opposite, about two metres distant are *Mũũ, Mũringa* and *Ithare* trees. They seem to agree to the affiliation of the two sacred Mĩgumo. A few metres from the ground are the protruding parasitic roots of both trees and another tree, now dry, that has been

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suffocated by these two sacred trees. On the ground are indigenous creeping plants, *Mũkengeria*, also *Mũkengeria wa kĩanda* (*Floscopa glomerata*) and *Gĩtoka* (pyjama lily because of its pink stripes). Fig. 7.3 shows one of the Kĩtharainĩ Mũgumo in Njũkĩinĩ location deeply rooted into the rock and some indigenous trees flourishing around it.

7.5.3 Mũgumo wa Kĩanyaga

This Mũgumo was certainly planted by the Irungu generation. The informants could not remember the actual date of planting but still recall the songs[306] of Mũgumo sung every year to commemorate Independence Day in Kenya. A number of elderly respondents of the Irungu generation (most of whom were remnants of Mau Mau) were keen to sing the song of planting the Kĩanyaga Mũgumo. The song goes like this:

> Ĩĩ aĩ ũiya, ndere ngĩruruma,
> ndere ngĩruruma, ngũĩgwa karĩra, karĩra,
> Karĩra na Mũgumo wa Irũngũ ũkĩbandwo,
> wa Kĩanyaga, Wa Kĩanyaga Mũgumo ũkĩbandwo.
>
> (I spent the whole night roaring...I hear the cry,
> thundering as the Irungu's Mũgumo is being planted.
> Mũgumo of Kĩanyaga is being planted).

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[306] Tape 3 of the interview done in Gĩcũgũ division in 2003. There are also written interview done between August 2003 and July 2004. As the people sing this second song, they thump strongly on the ground while the women utter the joy-thrill (ngemi-ilulation).

As they sang, all those belonging to the Irungu generation encircled the Mũgumo. There is another song that was reported to be sung: it was popular among many Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ. It is started by a soloist, generally a woman with these words:

Sol: Mũkũbanda kĩĩ,
People: Tũkũbanda Mũkũngũgũ na Mũgumo,
Sol: Mũgumo nĩ Kĩĩ,
People: Mũgumo nĩ Gĩtugĩ kĩa Mũgĩkũyũ
        nĩkĩo Gĩtugĩ kĩa Mũmbi
All: Ngakindĩra, kinyi, kinyi...
        Kindĩra x3
(what will you plant? We will plant
Mũkũngũgũ (Commiphora zimmermannii) and Mũgumo.
What is Mũgumo? It is the pillar of the Gĩkũyũ, the pillar of Mũmbi.
I ram down with confidence, slowly but surely...ram down x3).

The *Mũgumo wa Kĩanyaga* is in Kĩanyaga town about six kilometre from Kutus town. Kĩanyaga is the division headquarter of Gĩcũgũ. After the planting of this Mũgumo, the Irungu generation continued to offer sacrifices around it so that when the government decided to make Kĩanyaga a divisional administrative centre, they put the D.O's office and police headquarter, in the very core of *Gĩthaka kia Irungu*, the centre of the sacred grove. This tree is approximately eighty metres in height and twelve metres in circumference. In December 2003, a group of people gathered around this Mũgumo to sing the song of Mũgumo (*Mũgumo wa Thika* will be stipulated) and then proceeded to the stadium, about half a kilometre from this tree across Kĩanyaga town.

7.5.4 Mũgumo wa Kariko

This tree is about sixty metres high with the circumference of seven metres. The trunk is hollow but has very strong and with deep roots. There are roots descending half way from the top. It is situated of the *Kĩanyaga- Kiamũtũgũ* road near *Kamagambo* shopping centre. This Mũgumo was definitely not used by the Irungu generation. It might have been used for minor *mbarĩ* sacrifices. Coffee has been grown in the area. There are indigenous trees scattered within a radius of five hundred metres from the tree. Some of these trees circumlocating the Mũgumo are: *Miũũ* (sing. *Mũũ*), *Mũkoigo*, *Mũthare*, *Mũtũndũ*, *Mũringa* and *Mwiria*. Unlike other Mĩgumo, there is no undergrowth around it and its milky-sap seems to have been used by boys for trapping small birds.

7.5.5 Mũgumo wa Ndiara[307]

Located about twenty metres from *Ndiara* in *Kamweti* river is another Mũgumo which doesn't seem to have been used either by Irũngũ or Mwangi generation for religious sacrifices. The tree is about four metres from the waterfall on the *Kĩanyaga - Karumandi* road. Opposite this tree, there are, marked everywhere in the volcanic rocks, human foot and hand prints. Although the Gĩcũgũ people visit the place and treat it with admiration, it has nevertheless been neglected and nobody as yet, regretfully, initiated any research into the age of these footprints since they could be an eye opener in relation to the history and migration of Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ. It is located on the land of General Kassam Njogu, a well known Mau Mau freedom fighter.

However, informants stressed that this tree was used by different *mbarĩ* for their private sacrifices and thus was owned neither by Irũngũ or Mwangi generations. There are other indigenous trees growing around it although most of them have been cleared for timber. A few months after the research was done, this Mũgumo was cut down and sold for firewood for use in the nearest tea factory of Thumaita.

There are other Mĩgumo trees that were encountered during the period of research scattered all over the division. We will mention some of them. In *Thumaita- Mucagara* area, two Mĩgumo trees were reported which traditionally belonged to the Irungu generation. One of them is situated in the present land of Dionisio Kabute. The other one is in Karirũ, the land now belonging to Samuel wa Mbũrũ which, the informants reported, had been used by the Mwangi generation and later given to Irũngũ in the *ituĩka* of 1925.

Between Rukenya and Kabari area, two Mĩgumo trees and groves which culturally served as the sacrificial sites for Irungu and Mwangi were noted. One of these trees is still strong and flourishing in the land of Mariko while the other one is located at the *shamba* of Mũgo wa Kabĩnju.[308] In the lower Mirichi location there are also some Mĩgumo trees. *Mũgumo wa Rwandĩri*, as it is commonly known by the local people, is situated between Kimweas shopping centre and Mbũri coffee factory. The grove around

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[307] *Ndiara* (noun) from *rũriara* means rocky or a mass of rock. This place might have been named because of its geological configuration. The place as indicated in the history of the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ is famous for foot prints of both animals and humans that are marked on the volcanic stones along the river *Kamweti*. Where this Mũgumo stands was used as a field for a traditional dance called *Kĩbata*. Our respondents from Kĩanyaga and *Kagamba nyoni* took us to see those footprints.

[308] Oral interview, tape 3. Also interview done in Kabari location in November 2003. Most of the informants remember that in the past, there was a big grove surrounding the two Mĩgumo which have now been cleared and the land utilised for coffee. However, there are still some indigenous trees growing around the Mũgumo extending about thirty metres in radius.

this tree has been cleared and the area is being utilised for planting coffee, maize and beans.

About half a mile from Kiamūtūgū shopping centre, stood, previously one of the largest houses of Irūngū. It was opposite the present Kiamūtūgū boy's secondary school in the land of Njine wa Beata, as the local people know him. This Mūgumo is known as *Mūgumo wa Kiambūkū*. The informants underlined that this tree was there until the late 1990s when tea planting was commercially introduced in this area. Faced with the conflicting choice, between keeping the Irūngū Mūgumo and the possibility of an economical boost, the owner decided to deracinate the Mūgumo and cut the entire grove circumrotating it. Today, there is no trace of Mūgumo; it only lingers in the memory of the older generation who look at the place with nostalgia.

On the road stretching from Mūrūri market (on the Kutus Embu Road), there is another Mūgumo just a mile from *Karuco* shopping centre in Kīri tea factory. The tree is still there although nobody seems to be taking care of it or the small grove around it. Mugo, the owner of the land, has also cleared the area leaving a very small portion around Mūgumo.

There is also another famous Mūgumo around Kamagambo area in Baragwi location. The informants, who have an insight into and knowledge of the history of the area and Mūgumo, claimed that this specific Mūgumo originally belonged to the previous ruling generation (Mwangi) but during the *ituīka* ceremony of 1925, the tree was passed into the custody of the Irungu generation. However, a few miles from this Mūgumo another one was discovered known locally as *Mūgumo wa Karia or Karirū*.

In Mūthīgīinī a magnificent Mūgumo was spotted which, until the time of research, was still flourishing. It is located near Mūthīgīinī coffee factory. Again, a few miles from *Mūgumo wa Mūthīgīinī* is another gigantic tree which is still surrounded by some groves. Most of the informants agreed that these two Mīgumo has been the sacrificial place for the two ruling generation.[309] It is in the land now belonging to *mbarī ya Ndiga wa Gatii* (house of Ndīga son of Gatīi). Further research around the North East of Gīcūgū division in Kīrīma location indicated that sacrificial sites were not far from *Kimunye* shopping centre. However, according to the informants, most of the these sacrificial sites were cleared after the 1950s when people acquired usufruct right to their land through title deeds in the Gīcūgū division. They also underlined that as Christianity,

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[309] Interview, May 2004 in Njūkīinī location strengthened by the recorded interview in tape no. 3 of the research done between April and June 2004.

especially the Anglican Church (CMS) from Kabari, spread in most parts of the division, the Mũgumo tree lost its fame and most of them were cleared.
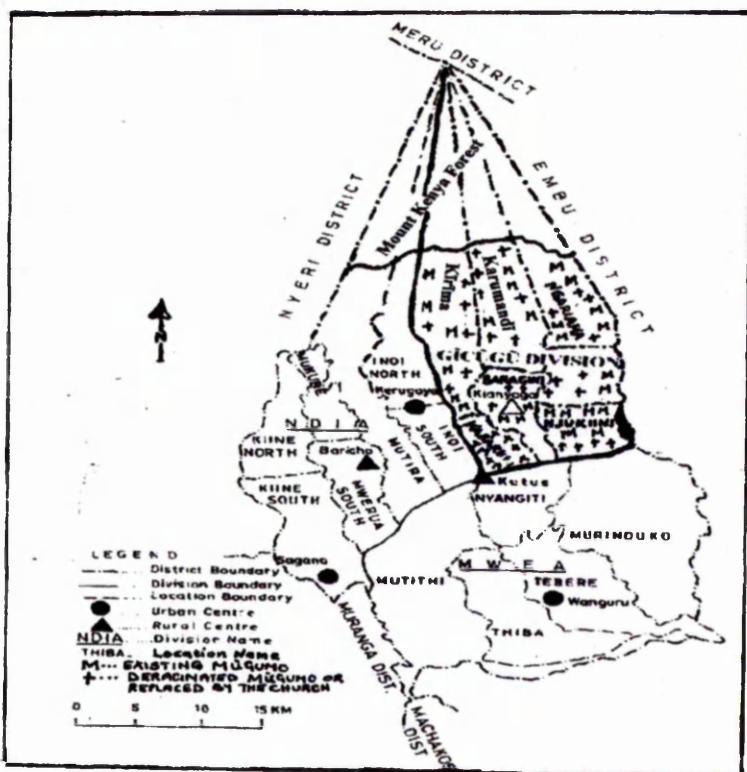
Fig. 7.4. Spread of the Mũgumo tree in Gĩcũgũ Division

Finally, there was a research done in Kiambu, the upper part of Thika. Although Kiambu is far from the Gĩcũgũ division a comparative analysis of the research findings among the people interviewed demonstrates that Mũgumo in Kiambu lost its religious and political value as early as the 1940s. The most remarkable Mũgumo people could still remember is the Mũgumo of Thika (*Mũgumo wa Thika*) which historically seems to have fallen simultaneously with the colonial power in Kenya and which is known all over Gĩkũyũ land. A small Mũgumo now grows in the place of the original one but it is a protected tree.

7.6 Conclusion

Our analysis of the relationship between Gĩkũyũ and Mũgumo has postulated that it is a tree of significant cultural influence. The Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ are not indifferent about it. They have a deep religious and political affection. The people have a strong affinity with the tree, a relationship that is ritualised and revitalised through myths and songs and today, by the planting of these trees in their home compounds. The sacred Mũgumo tree and groves are associated with traditional rites and ceremonies that fostered a sense of

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community, identity and belonging among the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ dispersed homesteads. The Mũgumo was used as a place for worship and sacrifice (*Mũtĩ wa Mambura/ ihoero*), and as a result had a great religious and political significance.

It was essentially associated with the ruling generation (Irũngũ or Mwangi) and was protected by them. Identifying themselves with Mũgumo as *Mũti wa Ngai, Mũti Munene, Mũtĩ wa Mũgĩkũyũ, Mũtĩ wa Igongona, Ihoero, Mũtĩ Mũgũ, Mũtĩ wa ũthata and Mũtĩ wa Irũngũ*, the Gĩkũyũ show clearly the content and context of their cosmology and worship. It is in Mũgumo that the Gĩkũyũ read the sacred in the cosmos and understand that the world and its elements are only virtual carriers and silent witnesses of symbolism. Their knowledge of Mũgumo and the restrictions and taboos embodied in it, means that the clique of a few elderly men of the ruling generation could also manipulate the epitomic symbolism of the Mũgumo tree to maintain and control the whole society.

Thus, under Mũgumo, symbols become both revealing and unveiling. Mũgumo conceals and reveals. As the pivotal tree in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology, Mũgumo conceals a labyrinth of their traditional, social, political and religious secrets. These occultisms are not conspicuous if one studies the rituals around the sacred Mũgumo without exploring the history, characteristic and the intricate cultural indicator of the tree *per se*. The sacred Mũgumo also reveals the way the world of Gĩkũyũ people is culturally configured with all its religious and political complexities and contradictions. Mũgumo reveals above all, that the Gĩkũyũ society continues to be much more complex than the diplomatic and democratic image depicted by some scholars like Leakey, Kenyatta, Mugo, Gathigira, and many other contemporary scholars of the Gĩkũyũ people.

The tree appears in a manifold cultural milieu of the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ people. It is apparent in their music, conversations, rituals and myths especially with the older generation. It is also embodied by a number of taboos, cultural restrictions and sanctions. As well, Mũgumo synthesises a complex system of ideologies within the Gĩkũyũ religio-philosophical world and thus epitomises the religio-political power and knowledge under a unitary cultural form so that it stands as a key or primary national symbol. It is a source category, important for conceptualising the order of the Gĩkũyũ world-view. Against this background, key sacrifices and ceremonies are performed around it.

Having explored in depth the characteristics and the history of the Mũgumo, and having listed some of the trees still existing in Gĩcũgũ division today, the next chapter moves on to explore the functionalities and significance of the Sacred Mũgumo tree.

PART THREE

CHAPTER EIGHT

MYTHS, SONGS AND FUNCTIONS OF THE SACRED MŨGUMO

8.1 Introduction

The Gĩkũyũ are known for their use of myths and songs which form an integral part of their cosmology. The combination of these myths and songs underlines how closely knitted the relationship between cosmology and cosmogony is. This symbiosis is fundamental in understanding the Gĩkũyũ religio-philosophical framework. However, it is relevant to understand the prominence and persistence of the Mũgumo tree in the religious, cultural, and political milieu of the Gĩkũyũ religio-philosophical world, unfolded through myths and songs. Here, some fundamental questions that help in placing the Mũgumo in its cultural and religious framework are worth an arcane exploration. The key research questions are : *Nĩ kũrĩ rũgano rwa Mũgumo ũũĩ?* (What is/are the myths of the Mũgumo that you know?) *Wĩra wa Mũgumo warĩ/nĩ ũrĩkũ?* (What were/are the functions of the Mũgumo in general?). *Nacio nyĩmbo?* (What were/are the songs?). Finally, the Mũgumo is also known for its symbolic significance.

This chapter aims to illustrate the role that myths and songs about the Mũgumo play in Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship by examining two myths and songs popularly told by the informants. Finally, it will examine it general functions and its symbolic significance.

8.2 The Mũgumo and Myths

Of the respondents, (40%) 100 people could remember one myth. There were 76 (30%) of them who could narrate two myths. Out of 250 people interviewed, 65 of them (26%) remembered three myths while 9 people (4%) could easily tell four myths about the Mũgumo.

Figure 8.1 depicts the number of myths told about the Mũgumo in relation to the number of the respondents.

No. of myths	No. of informants	Informants%	Age(60-70)	Age(71-80)	Age(81-90)	Age(91-100)	Age(100+)
1	100	40%	34	37	12	4	13
2	76	30%	20	10	10	33	13
3	65	26%	-	8	11	33	13
4	9	4%	-	1	4	2	2

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The results clearly indicate that 100 people, (40%), distributed according to different age groups, could remember one myth. The majority of the respondents were aged between sixty and eighty years. All the thirteen informants interviewed (aged from one hundred years and over) could narrate three myths with clarity. However, for those who narrated one story about the Mūgumo underlined, in most cases, the story of the origin of the Gĩkũyũ people. Emphasis was put on the first meeting between Ngai and Gĩkũyũ, the founding father of the group. The informants also emphasised the importance of the Mūgumo as the cradle of the first Gĩkũyũ family. They accentuated the first ritual that Gĩkũyũ performed to Ngai which they referred to as (kũhaka Ngai-bribing Ngai) through the slaughter of the goat around the sacred Mūgumo.

However, 76 informants, (30%), comfortably remembered and narrated two myths about the Mūgumo. There were 33 informants aged between ninety one and one hundred years. Apart from these, there was another significant number (13) aged between 100-120 years of age. Again, emphasis was put on the story of the origin which places the Mūgumo as a theatre through which gift exchange between Ngai and Gĩkũyũ was realised. The second popular myth was that of Wacici the herd boy, to demonstrate, according to them, how Ngai answers the prayer of the Gĩkũyũ and how the Mūgumo, as a tree and a primary symbol of the Gĩkũyũ has the power to transform life and gender. Those who could recall three myths about the Mūgumo were about 65 people, (26 %). The number of the respondents (33) and their age (91-100) and (13) aged (100-120 years) remained almost constant. It is also interesting to note that of these 65 people, about 60 of them were women. In fact, women seemed to remember more myths than men. They had also the aptitude and dexterity to narrate them.

Accordingly, there were also a small number of informants, 9 people (4 %), who could narrate four stories about the Mūgumo. Once gain, the majority of the informants were aged between 81-100 years. As well, out of these nine people, seven of them were women who were aged between nineties and over one hundred years.

As a consequence, figure 8.1 demonstrates that the majority of the myths and songs about the Mūgumo are in the repository of the older generation. Thus, the younger generation seems to know more about the myth of the origin. In fact, the lesser the number of years one has, the less one knows about the various myths on the Mūgumo. The results also indicate a decline in the knowledge of the myths and songs about the Mūgumo in the Gĩkũyũ cosmological framework.

The underlining story was that of the origin where the Mũgumo featured prominently in the scene. It was followed by the story of *Wacici* the herd boy. In the other stories therefore, the Mũgumo was mentioned either as an important tree where important messages of saving the life of the mother and child was delivered to the blacksmiths or to the place inhabited by dangerous creatures which could devour the people.

Another crucial observation is that most of the people interviewed demonstrated the importance of weaving together the myths and the songs. The myth about *Mũturi* (blacksmith) for instance could not be told without listening to the song of the *Wamũndigi*[310] (mythical bird) which delivered the message and helped save the life of the mother and child from the jaws of the devouring Ogre. The following are the myths and songs relating to the Mũgumo as recorded during the research period.

The first myth serves to explain the origin of the Gĩkũyũ people as a group identifying themselves with one founding father (Gĩkũyũ). It also explains the origin of Gĩkũyũ relationship with the Mũgumo tree and how important rituals came to be associated with it. Finally, it demonstrates the symbolic power of the Mũgumo as a meeting place where gift exchange between Gĩkũyũ and Ngai takes place. The myth exhibits the location and the place of the Mũgumo in Gĩkũyũ cosmology and how, as a tree, it has influenced the forging of their religio-political identity.

8.2.1 Gĩkũyũ, Ngai and the Mũgumo

One day, Ngai took Gĩkũyũ the founding father of the Agikuyu people on top of Mount Kenya. He showed him where to build his *mũciĩ* (homestead), not far away from the mountain, a place filled with the Mĩgumo trees. It was a very beautiful land with many rivers and trees of every kind. Then, during the conversation, Ngai told Gĩkũyũ: 'You and your descendants will at times be in need of my help and blessings. When that need arises, slaughter a goat around the Mũgumo for me, raise your hands towards Kĩrĩnyaga and I will come to your aid.' Then Gĩkũyũ went to the spot indicated to him by Ngai; there he met already waiting for him, a beautiful woman whom he took as his wife. Her name was Mũmbi (moulder/creator).

After some time, they had nine daughters but no sons at all. Gĩkũyũ was greatly perturbed since he needed a male heir. Remembering his conversation with Ngai, he took a goat around the Mũgumo tree and killed it. Gĩkũyũ poured the blood and the fat on the trunk of the Mũgumo and then made a big fire to roast the sacrificial meat for Ngai. Raising his hands and facing Kĩrĩnyaga, he implored Ngai to help him with sons to marry his daughters. Having done that, Gĩkũyũ went home to return the following morning. The following day, there, standing around the Mũgumo were 'nine' handsome men to marry his daughters.[311]

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[310] *Wamũndigi* is a famous mythical bird (thrush) in Gĩcũgũ and feature in many of their myths. It is said to be beautiful, friendly and very swift.

[311] Oral interview, November 2003. A similar myth is reported by Mwangi but with variations. See, Mwangi, R., *Kikuyu Folktales, their nature and value*, Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1983. Also, Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*.

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The second myth, of a different nature, explains the power of the Mũgumo to transform and give new life to the Gĩkũyũ people. It might also explain how the Gĩkũyũ consciously chose to be an agricultural community. It is the story of a small boy called Wacici.[312]

8.2.2 Wacici the herd boy

A long, long time ago, there were small boys who were very good friends. They came from different *matũra* (homesteads) and used to graze their cows and goats in the forest. One day, the boys started playing together and in their enjoyment, they forgot all about their cattle. The goats invaded somebody's land. After a very, very long search, this boy called Wacici found them. But it was too late; his father had already found out and was burning with fury. The father went after Wacici but since the boy was faster than the old man, he could not get hold of him. That evening, Wacici was beaten terribly by his father. Wacici used to be beaten almost everyday since every time they started playing, the goats roamed away in the *shamba*.

Wacici was not pleased to see that his sister was not beaten. She was working with her mother in the garden, fetching water and collecting firewood as Wacici was going to look after their cattle all day. He regretted as to why he was not born a girl. One day, as they were grazing, one small boy told Wacici the story of what boys and girls used to do to change their sex. He was told this particular story of how one girl went round the Mũgumo tree seven times and she turned into a boy. Wacici was really impressed even though those other boys refused to take him to the Mũgumo tree. Their fathers had prohibited them since it was here that Ngai of the Gĩkũyũ lived.

Wacici *ndarĩire marigu* (did not hesitate) and went there alone. After rotating round the Mũgumo seven times, he turned into a girl. He was very happy since from that day, he never looked after the cattle again and thus escaped the beatings of his father. The tale ends there.[313]

In this story of Wacici, the notion of androgyny is surpassed by the fact that the boy does not embody both the femininity and masculinity traits but rather assumes the feminine persona of the woman who in the historical narratives of the Gĩkũyũ people had little religio-political participation. It seems that Wacici desires to be a girl for some specific cultural reasons: labour and power. In Gĩkũyũ society where the division of labour is strongly weaved into the gender formation, it is difficult to shift those paradigms. Wacici can only wish he was a different person. Eventually, his wishes are realised.

In the story, Wacici finally changes his sex and gender and happily embraces his new state and *status quo* as an agriculturalist. The ritual of gender and sex transformation is accomplished around the sacred Mũgumo tree where the boy rotates seven times. This becomes more interesting when we explore the meaning of number seven in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology. The number seven (Mũgwanja) is associated with the work of magic spells in witchcraft. The same number is also associated with some parts of the body of both

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[312] Wacici comes from *cici* meaning fragile because of a disease. It can also mean that the child is very healthy but tender.

[313] The story told by Naomi Wanjiku Kaara (99 years), Jane Wanuthu (101 years), Tabitha Wanduma (93 years)between August 2003 and August 2004 in Gĩcũgũ division. The original of this myth was told in Gĩkũyũ and will be presented in the appendix no.9.

people and animals. There is the desire for the body transformation, men searching for their femininity.

In the story, one also encounters the struggle in the understanding the asymmetry of power and control (the father beating the son) and also the division of labour that is reflected in gender. Wacici depicts a society that acts as a mirror of the changing social, cultural, religious, political and ideological climate. The Mũgumo in this story is a place where Ngai lives and this makes it even more sacrosanct.

8.3 The Mũgumo and Songs

There are several songs that were underlined by the informants and will be presented in different parts of this work. Here, it is important to underline the two short songs related to the Mũgumo, the colonial government and how Gĩkũyũ people show this tree as the epitome for power and control.

8.3.1 The Mũgumo of Rĩanjerũ

Mũgumo ũrĩa ũrĩ Rĩanjerũ[314] ũbandĩtwo bendera nĩ ngabana,
Ndaraca *ciake* ikĩambatĩra
ĩĩ ũũ-ĩĩ umaĩ oe aiya, umaĩ wone ũrirũ
Gĩcũgũ kana ũrĩ Ndia
araria moni moni akĩingĩra thaa mũgwanja
Akĩingĩra thaa mũgwanja x3.

A flag has been hoisted on the Mũgumo that is in Rĩanjerũ by the governor as his rank of honour raises, ooh...come out, come out and see the catastrophe, You in Gĩcũgũ and Ndia, he speaks english as he resumes the duty at one o'clock.

The song underlines two conspicuous but crucial symbols of power: the flag which, according to the traditional Gĩkũyũ represents the colonial power in all its configurations and the Mũgumo, which, according to the Gĩkũyũ, is a symbol of power and control especially by the members of the ruling generation. Accordingly, hoisting the flag on the Mũgumo meant that the colonial government was taking control of all the religious and political offices of the traditional Gĩkũyũ and this was unacceptable as it was sacrilegious. It was catastrophic because their symbol of power hegemony had been rooted out and desecrated. The traditional powerful symbol was replaced by the foreign symbol of the flag which had no cultural contextualisation in the Gĩkũyũ world-view. Thus, through the song, the people can lament the subjugation by the colonial power by means of the

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[314] Rĩanjerũ is a place in Njũkĩinĩ location. During the colonial period, this area stressed as far as Murinduko hill. However some informants attested that there was a big chief named Gĩcerũ who had a lot of cattle. He had accumulated a lot of land embracing both the present Gĩcũgũ and Mwea division. There was an Irungu house (Mũgumo) in one of this grazing area which was called *Mũgumo wa mbarĩ ya Giceru* or *Mũgumo wa Rĩagicerũ*. This Mũgumo was deracinated and a big marking stone (ĩboya)was constructed by the government. The stone was also destroyed by the people in the late 90s in the land of Michael Karangi, a few miles from Gĩcũgũ division. Today, there is *Rĩagicerũ* sub-location in Mwea division, named after this Mũgumo

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commitment to use the indispensable cultural, religious and political symbols. As a result, the government intends to demonstrate their power and control by defeating the Gĩkũyũ traditional system of government.

8.3.2 Mũgumo wa Thika

The second song, famous all over the Gĩkũyũ land was sung to fulfil what Mũgo wa Kĩbirũ, a famous Gĩkũyũ seer had foretold about the coming of the colonial government, the confiscation of Gĩkũyũ land and eventually, the decline of the colonial supremacy. Many other seers in the Gĩcũgũ area like Kĩmarũ had also foretold the fall of the Mũgumo in Thika- Kiambu. It fell just before independence. The government, believing in the prophesy strengthened the tree with blocks and iron bars. When it subsequently fell in 1962, another Mũgumo, still existing today, was planted. The song is called *Mũgumo wa Thika* (the Mũgumo of Thika) and goes like this:

Ĩ Mũgumo x2
Torĩa ũrĩ Thĩka-ĩĩ ũratiragwo na igera ndũkagwe, nĩ mũku-ĩĩ
Mwana wa Gĩcoya atũrehere wĩathi na ndege,
Jeremiah Nyaga ngũmwarĩra ndaraca aringe nayo
Kenyatta wa Mũĩgai atũrehere wĩathi na ndege
Mwana wa Mũĩgai Ngũmwarĩra ndaraca aringe nayo,
wathani wo cũngũ ũrĩ kũgwa thĩ.

Ĩ Mũgumo x2
Torĩa ũrĩ Thĩka-ĩĩ ũratiragwo na igera ndũkagwe, nĩmũku-ĩĩ
Kĩrimũ nĩ kĩũru ũtũhere wĩathi na ndege, nĩ mũku-ĩĩ
Kahora andũ a Kenya ũtũrehere wĩathi na ndege
kinya o ũgo ũkinyĩte ũtũhere wĩathi na ndege,
wathani wo cũngũ ũrĩ kũgwa thĩ.

Ĩ Mũgumo x2
Kĩgumo[315] kĩnene ũtũrehere wĩathi na ndege nĩ mũku-ĩĩ
kahora kinyũkia ũtũrehere wĩathi na ndege nĩ mũku-ĩĩ
mambũrwo matuĩke ũtũrehere wĩathi na ndege nĩ Mũku-ĩĩ
wathani wo cũngũ ũrĩ kũgwa thĩ.[316]

The Mũgumo, like the one in Thika, which was being supported by steel, its coming
son of Gĩcoya, bring us freedom by plane, we lay a bridge for Jeremiah Nyaga to cross over.
Kenyatta, son of Mũigai, bring us freedom, son of Mũigai, I lay a bridge for you,
European colonial rule is gone.

European was a fool, give us freedom, slowly the people of Kenya, freedom is coming,
keep that pace, do not change, freedom is coming,
European colonial rule is gone,

Big Mũgumo, bring us freedom…its coming,
go slowly, it's coming,
Beat them (Europeans), crash them…give us freedom,
European colonial rule is gone.

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[315] Kĩgumo is another word for the Mũgumo.

[316] Oral interview, Tapes 1, 3 and 5, conducted between 2003 and 2004 in Gĩcũgũ division. Also, written interview in the same area. It is important to understand that Mũgumo epitomises power and thus the fall of the tree means the fall of a great power. That is why the song is very significant even today.

The belief in the association and symbolic representation of the Mũgumo and its gigantic role in the formation of the Gĩkũyũ religio-political identity seems to have also been assimilated in both the Western and traditional pillars of power. The songs depicts the colonial government trying to support the Mũgumo of Thika with iron bars so as not to fall down in the fear that if this happens, the Gĩkũyũ will interpret it as the fulfilment of the prophesy. The Gĩkũyũ are depicted in this song as waiting anxiously for the fulfilment of the prophesy of Mũgo wa Kĩbirũ.

In these conflicting quagmires of interests arises the freedom song that underlines the imminent coming of freedom through prominent Kenyan leaders like Kenyatta, Jeremiah Nyaga and the commitment of the people in the fight for freedom from colonial hegemony. In fact these African leaders are associated with the inherent qualities of the Mũgumo: power, vigour, control, rootedness and freedom. The Gĩkũyũ people no doubt see the imminent coming of freedom represented by the Mũgumo tree. However, this involves unwavering commitment on the side of the people to engage in the fight against the Europeans. Freedom will come alright, but only after a persistent struggle and war led by some of the prominent Gĩkũyũ leaders committed for a reverse religio-political hegemony.

8.3.3 The Mũgumo and the Ogre

The other song associated with the Mũgumo is found in one of the myths which elaborate on how a man deserted his pregnant wife and went to the smithy to join the other smiths in iron work. After some months, while the man was still away, the wife gave birth helped by the ogre. Then, one day, while the woman was spreading her castle oil seed, a small bird, *wamũndigi*, came to help itself from the seeds. The wife said to it: 'you always come here and eat my seeds. Will you go if I send you to Mũturi my husband?' The bird replied: 'Yes, certainly, send me on the condition that I first have my fill'. And so, as the story goes, *Wamũndigi* went. Perching itself on top of the Mũgumo tree, *Wamũndigi* sung this message to the husband.

> Mũturi ũgũtura ĩĩ cangaraca![317]
> Turanga na ihenya ĩĩ, cangarara ũthiĩ,

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[317] Interview, Nyaga wa Maguru in Gĩcũgũ, September 2003. Story told by Elizabeth Wanjiru (Thumaita), Beata Embu(Njũkĩinĩ), Theresia Kuthii (Kĩaũmbũi) and Esther Wambere Cedi(Mibiriga kenda-Njũkĩinĩ). There are similar stories about the ogre and Gĩkũyũ presented in the work of Mwangi. See, Mwangi, *Kikuyu folk tales*. Mũturi, come from the word *tura* (to smith) thus demonstrating the career of the husband. The smiths were held in a lot of respect and awe since, because of their secrets, they could also make strong weapons for war. *Cangarara*, (v), to glisten or sparkle. In the traditional Gĩkũyũ, it was a refrain in the blacksmith's song as they drew out the red hot iron from the fire and hitting it with a hammer to prime it. They would generally sing: *cangarara...ca, ca ca.*

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Mũkagwo nĩa ciara ĩĩ cangarara ĩĩ ca!,
ciarithĩtio nĩ irimũ ĩĩ, cangarara ĩĩ ca!
(Blacksmith smithing away on your iron,
  Smith, smith quickly and go home,
  your wife a baby she delivered
  helped by the Ogre).

The smiths scared the bird away but after a while, it came back and perching on the Mũgumo tree, persistently sang the message until one of them called Mũturi remembered the fate of his wife at home. The man went back home, killed the ogre and migrated to another place where they build a new homestead.

The overall observation was that in the myths and songs about the sacred Mũgumo, women tended to remember more stories than men even though they were not closely related to the traditional ritual sacrifices and prayers around the sacred Mũgumo tree. These rituals and prayers were reserved for the ruling generation. The myths on the Mũgumo also generated interesting observations. Apart from the emphasis put on the ontological quest for the origin, settlement of the Gĩkũyũ people, transformation of life and gender within their cosmology, the informants also had a myth on which the Mũgumo was believed to harbour very dangerous animals and mythical man-eaters. Asked to comment on the moral teaching of this myth, the respondents insisted that this was done to discourage people from desecrating and abusing the sacred Mũgumo. Thus, while on the one level, myths about the Mũgumo served to reveal its inextricable cultural link with the Gĩkũyũ people as a category of life-form, they, on the other level, underlined the mechanisms of power and control threaded all thorough their cultural constructions.

What is conspicuous in these myths is that they address the concern and preoccupation of the Gĩkũyũ people. Some underline the answer to the more fundamental ontological questions: where do the Gĩkũyũ come from? In other words, what is their origin? What place does the Mũgumo tree occupy in their cosmological framework? Once again, the concern of the identity change is quintessential. Myths and songs about the Mũgumo transmit, in a powerful manner, the social, religious and political configuration of the group. In these myths and songs, the tree is woven into the imaginative cultural fabrics of the Gĩkũyũ. This essential cultural weaving takes different meanings. The size, height, longevity and the power of the Mũgumo have a profound impart in both the cosmology and cosmogony of the Gĩkũyũ people.

The myth of the origin also concedes an affiliation between the Gĩkũyũ and Ngai which has constantly to be tested through human crises. When this happens, then there is an intrepid communion realised around the Mũgumo through the shedding of animal blood. This religio-political symbiosis between Ngai and the people is realised primarily

around the sacred Mũgumo since it marks the first sanctuary of the people. Around this tree, Gĩkũyũ did not only tent his first homestead but acquired his first wife (Mũmbi), the founding mother of the Gĩkũyũ people. Around the Mũgumo, Gĩkũyũ emerges as the most important creature and key figure in building his society. In the matriarchal system Mũmbi is also intimately related with the land. In crucial terms, around the Mũgumo tree, the earth and the cosmos have a unified entity. In this myth of origin, the Mũgumo is authenticated as pivotal in the formation of the Gĩkũyũ identity within a matriarchal society. It is the founding father Gĩkũyũ who moved towards his future wife and founding mother of the society. It is he who paid the first bride-price to Ngai in the form of the goat sacrificed around the Mũgumo to obtain the young men who eventually married their daughters and thus authenticating even more the matriarchal system. Finally, in this myth, the Mũgumo is a pedestal where gender complementarity is strongly forged. Gĩkũyũ does not have control over Mũmbi; he met her waiting for him. He did not give her the name since, at her age, she already had one: Mũmbi. They are two equal partners.

However, there are also some powerful didactic qualities hidden in the myth of Wacici. In this myth, there is a possibility of a continuous change. Wacici can still go to the Mũgumo tree again, and each time he or she changes her new condition if she is not pleased with the new identity. Gĩkũyũ myths above all demonstrate that deification is not part of their cosmology. Gĩkũyũ is an earthly creature and can communicate with Ngai whenever the need arises with a surety of being attended in return. Besides, Ngai seems to be pleased with the continuous change of identity. In the realm of social tensions epitomised by the relations between Wacici and the father, the Mũgumo tree is a theatre through which the cultural, social, religious and gender identity change takes place. The transformation occurs when the ritual around the Mũgumo is performed.

Like Wacici, who changes his gender, the Gĩkũyũ can expect to cope with, and accept the multiple identities that arise within their history in social, political and religious fields. This is a change that opens different religious, political, social and even topological prisms in the life of the people. This point is crucially underlined by the fact that the history of Gĩkũyũ is that of a people whose identity is constantly in fluidity. It is in their rituals, their forest clearing, and constant affiliation with the environment despite its mutability that the people become Gĩkũyũ through a multiple religio-political and cultural transformation over the centuries.

Finally, the result of the survey of the myths and songs about the Mũgumo demonstrates that the tree had to be protected from desecration or misuse. The myth of the dangerous animals is a deterrent for anybody wishing to violate the rule of keeping the sacred tree and grove specifically for their religio-political purpose. It adds to the religio-political taboo mostly imposed by the ruling generation especially during the time of dedication and consecration.

8.4 Functions of the Mũgumo

Having seen how myths and songs present an immense power of and the presence of the Mũgumo threading all through Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship especially in Gĩcũgũ division, leads to a question relevant in examining the general functions of the Mũgumo. In other words, *Wĩra wa Mũgumo warĩ/nĩ ũrĩkũ?* (What were/are the functions of the Mũgumo in general?).

Our survey indicates that there were about eleven general functions of the Mũgumo mentioned by the respondents. These include charm, rain catchments, the place of sacrifice, boundary marker, the sanctuary for Ngai and the Gĩkũyũ people, fertility, fodder, bee hive, medicine, hiding place, and circumcision. The figure 8.2 can well illustrate the number of people interviewed in relation to the functions of the Mũgumo tree.
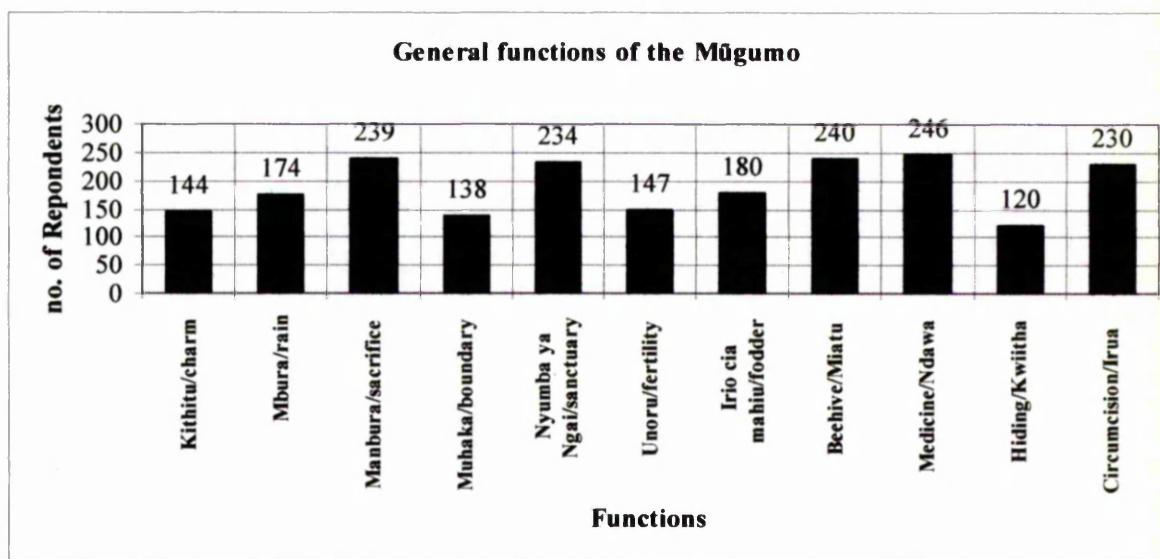

Fig. 8.2. General functions of the Mũgumo

The Mũgumo as good for medicine received the highest number. About 246 people, (98%) underlined that the tree is commonly used for *ndawa* (herbal medicine) good for both humans and cattle. The bark of Mũgumo can be used in the treatment of liver problems and diarrhoea for both people and animals. The decoction of boiled bark

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of the sacred Mũgumo is added to milk to cure dysentery. The milky sap is also used as a treatment for intestinal worms especially on livestock.[318] Some of the respondents said that before the coming of modern medicine, traditional Gĩkũyũ used to prepare the ashes from the roots of the Mũgumo as the first aid for the people who occasionally fainted. They explained how the ashes, placed on the tongue and navel of the victim would revive the patient. However, this practice, according to them is no longer used.

Apart from medicine, the Mũgumo is useful for hanging Mĩatũ (beehives). This was underlined by 240 (98%) informants. The characteristic of the Mũgumo as gigantic and multi-branched tree means that it can accommodate many beehives and thus plenty of honey for brewing the native beer and other purposes. In fact, in one of the Mũgumo visited during the time of research in Njukĩinĩ location, there were ten beehives hanging. There were other beehives spread all over the division mostly hanged in Mĩgumo trees. Honey continues to be valued by the Gĩkũyũ for brewing the local brew. Honey, mixed with the juice of sugarcanes and the fruit of the Mũratina[319] tree makes local brew for general drinking. In the traditional Gĩkũyũ world this Mũratina beer is quintessential for all the ceremonies and ritual sacrifices around the sacred Mũgumo.

The Mũgumo functioning as Mũti wa Mambura (a tree of sacrifice) was mentioned by 239 people, (96 %). These informants stressed that the most important of these sacrifices were; irua, ituĩka, kũhoya Ngai mbura and kũrinda mũrimũ (bury the disease). Together with this function, the tree also served as a house of sacrifice and therefore the house of Ngai and the ruling generation. Indeed, 234 people, (94 %) held strongly that one of the main functions of the Mũgumo was that it functioned as the sanctuary.

There were a good number of respondents who accentuated that the Mũgumo acted principally as an important tree for the irua ceremony since its leaves were believed to have special power for protecting the candidates from any evil. The informants underlined that part of the pre-circumcision ceremony was done around the Mũgumo in the gũte ũhĩ (throwing away the boyhood) ritual. This involved the symbolic throwing of the club as if fighting against the tree. As well during the circumcision, the leaves of the

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[318] Interview, 2003-4. Around Njũkĩinĩ and Mount Kenya forest, a lot of people use herbal medicine. Gachatha explains how in other parts of Gĩkũyũ, the tree is used for medicine. Gachatha, *Kikuyu Botanical Dictionary of plant names and uses*, pp.163-165.

[319] Interview, August 2003 - July 2004. The fruits of *Mũratina* are called *ĩratina* (sing. *Kĩratina*) but those slices used for fermenting honey and sugar-cane beer are generally referred to as *Mĩratina*. Sometimes the Gĩkũyũ refer to this indigenous beer as simply *Mũratina*. Dale, *Kenya Trees and Shrubs*, p.60; Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu* Vo.II., p.1305.

Mũgumo were traditionally used as mats on which to sit on so that after the cut, the oozing blood first touched the sacred leaves and then the soil thus creating an ontological connection not only with the Mother Nature but also with Ngai who chose the Mũgumo as his sanctuary. Thus, as an important tree for circumcision, the Mũgumo tree received 230 people, (92%).

The Gĩkũyũ, like many other people in Africa and the world have been affected by the contemporary change of climate. When there is drought, the people turn to trees for fodder for their cattle and goats. Since the Mũgumo tree is evergreen, there is an assurance of using it whenever there is shortage of rain and thus a lack of grass and food for cattle and goats. Some of the informants underlined that with the lack of enough land to grow their crops as well as *igoka* (*Cynodon dactylon*) for cattle, people are now planting the Mĩgumo and other evergreen trees to feed their cattle. Therefore, 180 people, (72 %) highlighted that the leaves and fruits of the Mũgumo are good food for animals especially in times of drought.[320] Besides, the fodder increases the fertility of animals.

Consequently, on the current climatic change in Gĩcũgũ division, many of the respondents acknowledged that the Mũgumo and other indigenous trees are important for the purpose of attracting rainfall. There were 174 (70 %) informants who reiterated that the Mũgumo tree, because of its size, attracted rain. The Mũgumo, together with *Mũringa* tree were good rain catchments areas. The survey also discovered that some of the *Mĩgumo* in *Ngiriambu* sub-location owe their survival primarily to this belief.[321]

There were a number of respondents who put emphasis on the fact that the Mũgumo was traditionally used to induce fertility. Many male informants were not willing to talk about it. However, they acknowledged that the tree was used for that purpose. In fact, most of the information on the Mũgumo in relation to fertility was given by women informants. There were 147 people, (59 %) who gave a detailed account of how the sacred Mũgumo functioned to make barren women fertile although they were quick to explain that this practice is no longer exercised. According to the informants, the white-sticky, milky and rubber-like fluid of the Mũgumo is epitomic. The milky sap of the Mũgumo tree symbolises fertility, which is central in Gĩkũyũ cosmology as it is linked with the question of life, progeny and the survival of the society. It is the mother's

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[320] Interview, Gĩcũgũ, 2003-4. Most of the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ practice zero-grazing as there is scarcity of land. However, there are areas especially near the forest where people have to wake up to collect fresh grass and leaves for their cattle.

[321] Oral interview, 2003.

milk that feeds the future heirs. The informants therefore accentuated that by smearing themselves occasionally all over the body, women increased their potentiality for child-bearing. Most of the people used the saying: *ũrorathimwo nĩ mwene-nyaga ũciare ta mũtĩ wa Mũgumo* (may you be blessed by Ngai, may you be as fruitful as the Mũgumo tree). It seems credible to argue that the abundance of fruits that the Mũgumo produces together with the milky sap is comparable to the actual milk of the women and fertility. This can explain why many of the traditional women used it to ensure that their fertility in a male dominated society was not compromised.[322] Indeed, most of the informants underlined: *'iria rĩa Mũgumo no ta rĩa Mũtumia'* (the milk of Mũgumo looks like that of a woman). Men also used the Mũgumo for fertility reasons. They would pick the leaves of the tree and lie on then. In doing this, they believed that fertility will pass through them to their women who will be blessed with many children to provide security and labour.

The question of witchcraft in Gĩkũyũ land, as in many other African countries, is complex and contested.[323] In Gĩcũgũ for instance, witchcraft is still very rife. Even with the presence of Christianity and Islam, a lot of controversies concerning the land within *mbarĩs* (families) are clouded with scenarios of witchcraft.[324] When some neighbours are not in harmony and one of the members die, again the question of witchcraft is highly raised. There is a growing insecurity both psychologically and physically so much so that, as some informants put it, the need for a protective charm is inevitable. However, 144 respondents, (58 %) said that the Mũgumo was important for making *gĩthitũ* [325] (protective charm). The respondents noted that although *gĩthitũ* is not trendy, there are

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[322] Oral interview, Gĩcũgũ, September to December 2003. In 1913, Beech had observed a similar practice taking place in the southern Gĩkũyũ. Beech, W.H., 'The sacred Fig-Tree of the A-Kikuyu of East Africa', *Man*, 13:no3, London, Royal anthropological Institute, 1913, pp.4ff.

[323] Quite a number of scholars on Gĩkũyũ have presented an extensive reading on witchcraft among the Gĩkũyũ people. Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*; Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*; Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*; Routledge, *With a prehistoric people*. Witchcraft also features in Gĩkũyũ cosmogony; Mwangi, R., *Kikuyu Folktales*. Hobley, *Bantu Beliefs and Magic*.

[324] Interview done with the parish priest of Kianyaga Catholic Church, Fr. Elias Muriithi demonstrated that 30% of the land cases reported to him by his parishioners are accusations based on witchcraft. Interview, June 2004. A similar interview done in Kabari Parish, the oldest mission in Gĩcũgũ division, revealed almost similar results.

[325] Interview, 2003-2004.*Gĩthitũ* is a protective charm. There were various ways of making it. The most common one was by using the horn of a lamb and filling it with *mũthaiga* (charm) which was composed of various trees like *Mwĩbukora, Mũgumo, Mũthĩrathĩrĩ, Mũũgũ wa nyakamwe-Mũnganga (Hippocratea)* and *Mũkenia (Lantana trifolia)*. These trees were burned and their ashes used. Once filled, the horn was sealed by a special wax and a string made from the Mũgumo was used as a strip to tie it to the individual either on the neck or on the hips. The tip of the gourd was also used instead of the horn especially for women.

other mechanisms used to ensure total protection. Surprisingly, they were not speaking of the 'obvious' protection by Ngai but a more human to human protection deeply rooted in witchcraft belief. They insisted that people get *maĩ marigite/manage* (water 'magically' treated) to protect themselves from any harm. There was one famous 'magician' named by many respondents from Embu town by the name of Amina. Other Gĩkũyũ people, especially the Christian ones, get their water of protection and healing from their churches especially during Easter time. Behind the charm and water, lies the question as to whether, even with the new religions, the Gĩkũyũ people feel protected from the forces of evil that seems to strangulate their social and religious equilibrium.

The Gĩcũgũ landscapes are still divided according to different clans. Thus, a number of the members of the same *mbarĩ* and clan live in scattered homesteads with the *gĩthaka* which once belonged to their ancestral clan members. There has been an acute population increase so that borders are currently divided by small plants like *mũigoya* and *gĩtoka*. Nevertheless, the informants, 138, (55 %) insisted that the Mũgumo is traditionally known for marking the boundaries among different members of the *mbarĩ* or clan. According to them, the Mũgumo is no longer used because it occupies a lot of land and thus limits the utilisation of the land as the people are in dire need. Instead, most of the people now plant only one Mũgumo in the home compound for shade and to fodder their cattle and goats during dry season.

The historical reconstruction of the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ highlights that in the traditional set-up and during migration and settlement there existed constant raids from neighbouring people, especially the Chuka and the Maasai.[326] The victims were generally women and cattle. Thus to secure the people from impromptu raids, Gĩcũgũ people build rafts on top of the Mũgumo tree for cover. The enemies, fearing that people could easily attack them from the top of the tree, never attacked them. In fact, one of the areas is named after a series of raids from the Maasai. The place, Thumaita, just a few miles from Kĩanyaga, is known in the history of Gĩcũgũ from the attack of *Maitha* (Maasai). According to the informants, the etymology of the name bears the mark of war raids. Thumaita from *Thũ* (enemies), *Ma* (Maitha) and *Ita* (war/raiding warriors) thus meant that they were Maasai raiding warriors and therefore enemies of the Gĩcũgũ people. Mũgumo as *mũtĩ wa kwĩitha maitha* (a hiding place from Maasai) was underlined by 120 people, 48% of the respondents. Most of those who accentuated this function of the

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[326] Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu*; Lambert, *The System of Land Tenure.*

Mũgumo mostly came from the Eastern and North Eastern part of the division where the raiding used to happen.

Traditionally, Gĩkũyũ believed that when animals fed on the leaves and seeds of the Mũgumo especially in the time of dearth, they would grow healthy and their fertility would increase. Likewise, women would smear themselves for a similar goal. Equally, men would sleep on the leaves of the same tree so as to pass on their fertility to women who in return would beget many children needed for labour and other social functions. There is also a third element which seems to be connected with these two functions. The Mũgumo acts like the rain catchments. Rain is a sign of health and abundance of harvest. The presence of abundant rain denotes fertility for the agricultural Gĩkũyũ, thus the tree as good for fodder, for fertility and rain catchments are ontologically connected in the cosmology of the Gĩkũyũ people. Besides, rain is also a great sign of the presence of Ngai.

Moreover, the research findings illuminate that there is a connection between the Mũgumo as good for protecting charm and hiding from the enemies. While on the one hand there is an actual enemy to hide from (Maasai or Chuka), on the other hand, there is the preoccupation with liberating oneself from the forces of evil surrounding them in their daily lives. Traditional Gĩkũyũ seem to have lived in constant fear especially of ancestors and witchcraft. Whereas the former could be appeased through an offering, the latter needed to be guarded against throughout the live of the Gĩkũyũ and the most convenient way was to wear a magic protective charm, made from the Mũgumo and other trees, by a witch-doctor.

Apart from those specific functions already enumerated, there were also other general functions mentioned by the informants. The cuttings of the Mũgumo were used to reinforce the *kiugũ* (cattle shed/ enclosure) since with time, they would sprout and grow into trees. In most cases they grew into a living hedge. This is still done by some families although it is no longer popular. Some of the informants reported that people used the woods of Mũgumo to make their fire apparatus. When this was done, Mũgumo acted as a 'female'[327] tree. They preferred the Mũgumo to *Mũcatha (Vernonia lasiopus)*. Sometimes cord and strings used to carry heavy loads were made from the fibre extracted from the bark of the Mũgumo tree. Although the Mũgumo was not utilized for building

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[327] Interview, 2003-2004. Informants insisted that in any traditional fire drill, one tree acted as male or female in the sense that one had to lie down and the other to drill, an epitome of the Gĩkũyũ traditional way of making love. It was not common to use the Mũgumo tree for fire except when one moved to a new house and had to go through a ceremony of warming the house by drilling fire from the Mũgumo.

purposes, its bark, according to the respondents, was used for preparing food especially during special feasts. The bark prepared the tonic soup that accompanied the meat.

The Mũgumo also played a paramount role after circumcision. The majority of the people interviewed claimed that thè inner bark of the Mũgumo was chewed as a combined absorbent and astringent on female circumcision wounds. However, this included another antibiotic from *mũkengeria* used especially to treat the pendent foreskin after circumcision. People no longer use the tree for this function today. A good number of people insisted that during the *irua* ceremony, the initiates sat on Mũgumo leaves which had been cut the previous day during the ceremony of *gũta ũhĩ* (casting away boyhood).

Finally, a lucid exploration of the myths and songs relating to the Mũgumo as well as its general functions has demonstrated that the tree is of great symbolic significance in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship. This will be briefly discussed in the following section.

8.5 The Symbolic significance of the Mũgumo

In order to establish the symbolic significance of the sacred Mũgumo, two further questions were asked to the informants: a) *Nĩ rũri rũrĩkũ rwokire handũinĩ ha mũtĩ wa Mũgumo?* (which symbol replaced the Mũgumo tree?), b) *Mũtĩ wa Mũgumo nĩ ũrĩ bata ũmũthĩ?* (Is the Mũgumo tree still relevant today?).

In the first question, 236(94%) of the informants reported that the church was the new symbol that replaced the Mũgumo tree. 97(39%) people attested that the symbol of the Mũgumo was replaced by the new government while 22 (9%) said it was the Bible that replaced the Mũgumo tree. There was a small number of the informants 8(3%) that strongly held that there was no symbol that could replace the Mũgumo tree. For this group of people, the tree was irreplaceable. It is interesting to note that this research sample, although Islam religion is known in the division none of the informant mentioned either the Mosque or the Koran as having replaced the Mũgumo tree. Fig 8.3 demonstrates the symbolic significance and the influence of the sacred tree today that continue to influence the Gĩkũyũ religio-political discourses on and of power hegemony in the contemporary Kenyan politics.

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Symbol of the Mugumo today

- Ndiui/Don't know, 8, 2%
- Bibiria/Bible, 22, 6%
- Thirikari/Government, 97, 27%
- Kanitha/Church, 236, 65%
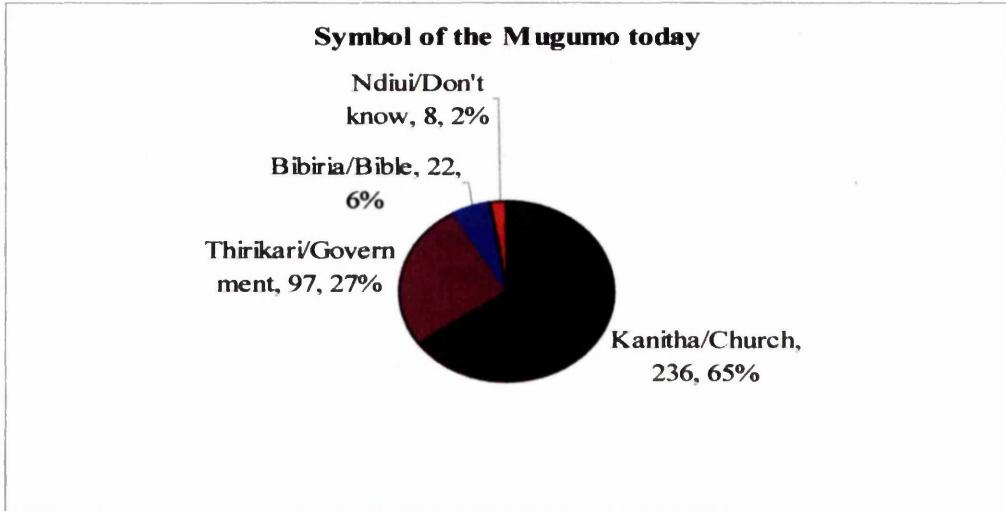
Fig. 8.3. Symbol of the Mũgumo today

Concerning the relevance of the Mũgumo tree today, 235 (94%) respondents said that the Mũgumo tree continues to be relevant while only 15 (6%) did not see any religious or political relevance of the Mũgumo today.[328]

The research samples demonstrate that although the majority of the Gĩkũyũ have been converted into other religions, especially Christianity, the inherent concept of the Mũgumo as a traditional sanctuary is still deeply embedded in their minds. As a consequence, the people continue associating the church with the Mũgumo. According to the informants, the crux of the matter was the fact that in the Church, like in the old Mũgumo sanctuary, many rituals are performed. A good example is the Catholic Church whereby, in the celebration of the Eucharist, Jesus is portrayed as the lamb of Ngai sacrificed to atone for the *waganu* (sins) of adherents. For the informants, this is one area in which there is a strong ontological affiliation with the lamb offered by the Gĩkũyũ elders around the sacred Mũgumo tree especially during the *ituĩka* and *kũhoya Ngai mbura* ceremonies. As well, the informants underlined that the sacraments of initiation in the Catholic church (Baptism, Holy Communion and Confirmation), can be compared to the ritual of the *irua*, whereby the initiates were reborn into their family, secluded for specific rites and finally were incorporated in the family as new adults with social responsibility. Perhaps this can explain why the symbol of the church as having replaced the Mũgumo had the highest number of adherents among informants.

As for the government and the Bible replacing the Mũgumo, most of those who gave these answers explained that the government meant power and prestige just as the

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[328] Interview, Gĩcũgũ, 2003-4.

traditional government had. Those in favour of the Bible explained that, like the Mũgumo which united the Gĩkũyũ people with Ngai, the same role is played by the Bible today. It was also interesting to discover that for most of the proselytised Gĩkũyũ, the contemporary priests/pastors and other religious leaders play similar role as that of the traditional elders.

However, from our study of the Mũgumo, its characteristic and the rituals associated with it, the symbolic significance of the tree becomes inevitable. Let us now briefly explore the symbolic significance of the Mũgumo tree.

8.5.1 Reconciliation and Transformation

Whenever there was a misfortune, or great public calamity, the Gĩkũyũ believed that the relationship between them and Ngai was destabilised either as individuals or as members of the whole community. As a result, a sacrifice to Ngai around the Mũgumo was done. In this context, the tree acted as a podium through which reconciliation between the Gĩkũyũ, Ngai and ancestors as well as the mother nature was exercised. Ontological relationship in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology extended from among the people to Ngai and the rest of creation. After the sacrifice, the past fractured relationship was once again restored and harmony and unity continued to reign again in the families and in Gĩkũyũ society. In other words, the ritual around the Mũgumo entailed the indelible desire to be reconciled and transformed. It involved, to use Horton's theory, the religio-political rituals that gave adequate explanation, prediction and control of events. It also strove to achieve a certain level of communion between the people and Ngai as well as amongst themselves.

8.5.2 Life, Health and Fertility

As a sacred tree, Mũgumo symbolically gave or restored life. Its milky sap was compared to the mother's milk that nourished the new born till they fed for themselves. This maternal image given to the Mũgumo permeated the whole of Gĩkũyũ cosmological understanding so much so that killing somebody around the Mũgumo tree or its groves was considered a grievous taboo. It was tantamount to destabilising the life-giving forces. In fact, if, having committed a serious crime one took refuge around the Mũgumo tree, he/she could not be harmed. A lamb was sacrificed to cleanse the victim and necessary arrangements were done to reinstate the person into the community and appease Ngai whose shrine had been desecrated. Additionally, the Mũgumo, as a cultural and ritual symbol, acted as a catalyst to new life. That is why both mature males and

females rubbed its latex all over their bodies in order to symbolically become agents of life.

The bark of the Mũgumo was used in the treatment of liver disease. It was also used to treat diarrhoea for both people and animals. Its milky sap was used as a treatment for intestinal worms especially for livestock. Both men and women rubbed themselves with the milky sap from the Mũgumo as a symbol of fertility. They believed that by doing so, men would pass this power to women and to their animals so that life could be given, and nurtured.

8.5.3 Protection

Mũgumo was symbolically used for breaking the strength of dangerous forces or 'enemies of life'. The Gĩkũyũ believed that the sacred Mũgumo had the power of averting evil and evil forces in their families and in society as a whole. Most families planted the branches of the Mũgumo around the cattle shed which, with time, grew into a very strong fence and thus protected the animals from wild lions and hyenas. Regularly, mixed latex from the Mũgumo was sprinkled over animals in order to protect them. Sometimes, the animals were passed under the Mũgumo tree to protect them from wild animals and their neighbours especially the Maasai, who constantly raided Gĩkũyũ country. As well, the string of *gĩthitũ* was made from the Mũgumo.

8.5.4 Belonging

The Mũgumo was also used as a symbol of ownership of land between and within the *mbarĩ* and *mũhĩrĩga*. It was, in this case, a symbol of possession. Land could only be possessed within Gĩkũyũ society by the rightful heirs.

8.5.5 Symbol of Ngai's presence and power

In his novel, *The River Between*, Ngũgi wa Thiong'o explores the importance the sacred Mũgumo had within Gĩkũyũ cosmology. In depicting the shrine of the Gĩkũyũ people, Ngũgi concisely showed how this tree was respected.

> A big Mũgumo tree stood near the edge of the hill. It was a huge tree, thick and mysterious. Bush grew and bowed reverently around it. And there the ancient tree stood, towering the hill, watching, as it were, the whole country. It looked holy and awesome, dominating Waiyaki's soul so that he felt very small and in the presence of the mighty power. This was a sacred tree. It was the tree of Murungu.[329]

The Mũgumo sacred tree together with the grove that surrounded it was imbued with special powers. It symbolised the presence of Ngai in a very powerful ontological way. This is why in *The Rriver Between*, Waiyaki encounters Ngai's presence, followed by a

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[329] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *The River Between*, p.15

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strong mystical experience. Around the Mūgumo tree, Waiyaki discovered that Ngai, the creator of the Gīkūyū people, was the *Mūmbi* of all creation. The Mūgumo sacred tree was a podium through which communion between the Gīkūyū and Ngai took place and therefore endorsing it as a shrine of the Gīkūyū people.

8.5.6 Human power

The sacrifice of *Ituika* culminated around the Mūgumo tree. It was from this sanctuary that Ngai gave the ruling generation the power to perform all religio-political rituals. Moreover, the new ruling generation literally owned the Mūgumo through the ritual of dedication. Their power was primarily vested in the capacity to offer sacrifices around the sacred tree. Owning this shrine entailed power, a sovereignty that generally lasted for thirty or forty years until another ruling generation took over during the *ituīka* ceremony. Like the Mūgumo, the Gīkūyū ruling elders dominated the religio-political pedestal. Like this tree, they made their power visible. But they also had a duty to give life to the Gīkūyū community through ritual. They identified themselves with the Mūgumo and from this strong affiliation forged the identity of the group based on the same power hegemony.

8.6 Conclusion

The sacred Mūgumo authenticated the place of each individual Gīkūyū and thus gave him a sense of belonging and consequently an identity. Within this labyrinth of relationships permeated in cultural, religious and political milieu, the Mūgumo linked not only the families together but also reflected the salient social relationships. It embodied strong emotions which these affiliations generated.[330] Essentially, in Gīkūyū cosmology, rich cultural elements like health, hope, unity, harmony, wholeness and communion found their fulfilment in this master symbol.

The findings of the survey exhibit that the Gīkūyū have an arcane knowledge of the myths, songs and the functions of the Mūgumo tree. Myths about the Mūgumo clearly reveal that the old Gīkūyū people continue to be the repositories of the knowledge relating to the stories and songs about the sacred Mūgumo. Through the various myths related to the Mūgumo, one can read and understand the cosmology of the Gīkūyū people which underlines their origin, their day-to-day religious and political preoccupations, fears and anxieties and their struggle to adjust to religio-political change (Wacici). The

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[330] A similar experience is reported in Mexico. See the article of Eric. W., 'The Virgin of Guadalupe; A Mexican National symbol', in Lessa, A.W. and Vogt Z.E., *Reader in Comparative Religion*, New York: Harper &Row Publishers, 1979, p.115.

myths also demonstrate not only the role and place of the Mūgumo in their cosmology and religion but also the mechanisms of control cemented in the taboos in order to secure that the tree was not desecrated. There are myths that elicit the Mūgumo tree as harbouring dangerous ogres which really epitomise the outside forces that can destabilise the Gĩkũyũ religio-political equilibrium. The songs about the Mūgumo seem to have very strong political overtones, reminding the people that the struggle continues. Even when the colonial power might figuratively be deemed gone, there is another subtle kind of colonialism creeping into the lives of the Gĩkũyũ that needs to be addressed. Thus, the songs of the Mūgumo are not static, congealed in time, but have a contemporary message. There is a dire need to contextualise them in the current religio-political structure.

The results of the survey further indicate that the Gĩkũyũ use the Mūgumo tree for a variety of functions. Some of these functions, such as a place of sacrifice, as the sanctuary and for herbal medicine, seem to have been more accentuated and culturally integrated in their world-view than the rest. As a matter of fact, the Mūgumo tree seems to have had a paramount role in the Gĩkũyũ religio-political configuration.

As the data show, the functions related to the religious world-view like *mambura*(sacrifices) and *nyumba ya Ngai*(sanctuary) are among the variables that received the highest number of informants (96% and 94%). When a comparison is drawn between the number of people interviewed and their religious affiliations to the responses given about the religious functions of the Mūgumo, the results are intriguing. In fact, 185(75%) of the respondents belonged to different Christian affiliations (Catholic 32%, Protestant 43%), while only 25% affiliated themselves to the GTR (Gĩkũyũ Traditional Religion). As a consequence, the fact that the majority of Christians underlined these two principal functions of the sacred Mūgumo indicates that the trees continue to permeate their religious cosmological framework. The sacred Mūgumo seems to be associated with the present Christian sanctuaries and thus strongly influencing most of the old Gĩkũyũ's religious beliefs even to the contemporary era. A clear example is the memorial chapel build by the Consolata Missionaries to celebrate their centenary in Kenya in a place where the Mugumo originary grew as is discussed in our last chapter. This is strongly endorsed by the Gĩkũyũ use of myths and songs about the Mūgumo which continue to be imbued in their lives and common hymns in the churches.

The functions of the Mūgumo have also demonstrated that, like other people in the world, the Gĩkũyũ are constantly preoccupied with security. In the past, they would use whatever possible ways available to secure their religio-political hypostasis and symmetry

through the use of protective charms and during the time of persistent raids, would hide themselves in the vast branches of the Mũgumo. Today, as the data indicate, quite a number of people continue using protective charms in the form of magically treated water either given by the magicians or the pastors of the church.

Furthermore, the results reveal that through the mirror of the Mũgumo, the Gĩkũyũ secure their health and wholeness. The Mũgumo as good for medicine received the highest number of respondents, 246(98%). Sickness which is mirrored in all social, religious and political asymmetries continues to be a major preoccupation of the agricultural Gĩkũyũ. The return to the roots of the Mũgumo symbolically means curbing the causes of social, religious and political sickness, to bring wholeness and integration into society again. Traditionally, this was done through the use of public rituals performed around the sacred Mũgumo by the chosen member of the ruling generation. These fundamental rituals included above all, the *irua* (circumcision), *kũhoya Ngai mbura* (Imploring Ngai for rain) and the *ituĩka* ceremony. These rituals will be explored in the following chapter.

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CHAPTER NINE

THE SACRED MŨGUMO AND RITUALS

9.1 Introduction

Although the traditional Gĩkũyũ life was mapped by innumerable rituals, divided and cerebrated in different stages of the life of the individual and the wellbeing of the community, there are notably two core rituals that formed the backbone of Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship: the *ituĩka* and the *irua*[331] ceremony. However, there was a third ritual that was crucial to the survival of the agricultural Gĩkũyũ: *kũhoya Ngai mbura Mũgumoini* (imploring Ngai for rain around the Mũgumo). The *irua* was *sine qua non* in the Gĩkũyũ religio-political framework. It was generally performed every year with the exception of when there was an epidemic, a drought or when the ruling elders had imposed the *mũhingo* which generally extended for a period of nine seasons.[332] The muhingo was another form of social, religio-political contral by the elders.it could be imposed if for instance any or several of the riika member broke a taboo, misbehaved or otherwise proved themselves unworthy of undergoing the ritual according to the judgement of the elders. Within the Gĩkũyũ cosmology, the implications of such a delay were monumental. It delayed marriages, inheritance and indeed social mobility in general. This is a clear example of power exercise and control by the elders over the rest of the people. The *ituĩka*, crucial for an understanding of the political configuration of the agricultural Gĩkũyũ, was ritualised every thirty or forty years. Each traditional government (Mwangi and Irũngũ generations) took over the religious, political, social and economic powers of the whole group. They ruled alternatively.

The history of the Gĩkũyũ people is characterised by sporadic episodes of drought and diseases so that constantly, the religious and political elders enacted the ritual of imploring Ngai for rain. Thus, the ritual of *kũhoya Ngai mbura* went hand in hand with the needs of the agricultural Gĩkũyũ. It is under these parameters that this ritual is moreover considered to be an integral part of the marrow of traditional Gĩkũyũ life.

This chapter aims at exploring the role that the Mũgumo tree played in these core rituals, posing these fundamental research questions: *Nĩ mambura marĩkũ mekagĩrwo Mũgumoinĩ?* (Which rituals were performed around the Mũgumo?) *Nũũ watongoragia?*

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[331] This research does not explore the circumcision for girls.

[332] Interview, Gĩcũgũ, September, 2003.

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(Who performed them?) *Nĩ kĩĩ gĩatũmaga mambura macio mekĩrwo Mũgumoinĩ?* (Why were they performed around the Mũgumo tree?).

9.2 Mũgumo and the three rituals

The general observation on the research done on the Mũgumo and the rituals of *irua, ituĩka* and *kũhoya Ngai mbura* revealed that 171 informants (68%) knew the *ituĩka* ceremony and its cultural significance insisting that it was associated with the Mũgumo tree. The relationship between the *irua* and the Mũgumo was also underlined. In fact, 232 informants, (93%), accentuated that *irua* was one of the core religio-political rituals in their cosmology and worship, followed by the *ituĩka* ceremony. These rituals were closely related to the Mũgumo tree. Concerning the *irua* for instance, the informants underscored that as a Gĩkũyũ male, one has no choice even today. Circumcision is required for all males and thus running away from it is not an option since such a possibility would be tantamount to self-exile. Finally, the ritual of imploring Ngai for *Mbura* (rain) and its relation to the sacred Mũgumo were also underlined by 224 informants (90%). Only 23 informants mentioned one other ritual relating to the Mũgumo, especially that of *horohio ya Mũrimũ Mũgumoinĩ* (ritual of atonement, imploring Ngai to stop the epidemic by sacrificing around the Mũgumo tree). The results can well be demonstrated by the figure 9.1 below.

The Mugumo and Rituals

Others, 23

Irua, 232

Mbura, 224

Ituika, 171
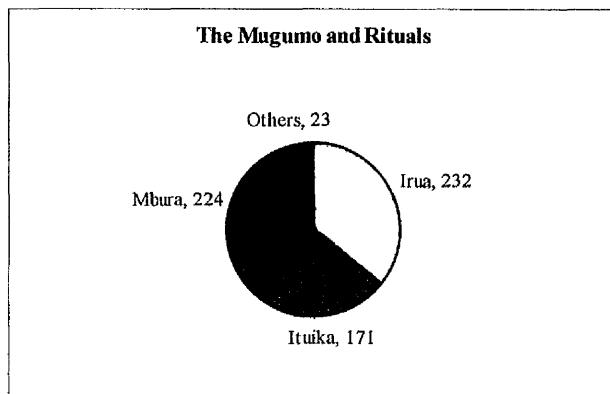
Fig. 9.1. Mũgumo and associated rituals

Thus, in order to fully understand the Gĩkũyũ cosmological framework and their religio-political configuration, we will explore the role of the complex relationship between the sacred Mũgumo and these three rituals.

9.2.1 The *irua*[333] Ceremony

Having mentioned the relationship between the *irua* and the Mũgumo, the informants were then asked to describe how the ritual was re-enacted and what role the Mũgumo tree played in the whole ritual. The *irua* is a Gĩkũyũ word for both male and female circumcision. The etymology of the word is contestable. V. Neckebrouck for instance argues that the word *irua* is derived from *ruo* (pain).[334] But critically, the word refers to a series of rites which are not necessarily painful only culminating with the actual physical operation of the genitalia. Following our research findings, there seems to be a strong connection between the word *irua*(n), *kĩruĩko*(n) and the land.[335] *Kĩruĩko* is a lid of a honey pot, a drumhead while, *ruĩra*(v) refers to a land left for fallow sometime or a path that has become overgrown or narrow. In Gĩkũyũ cosmology, these two words are euphemisms for the genitals. As for the boy, the lid that needs opening and the path that has grown fallow and narrow is the foreskin that is trimmed during the *irua*. The vulva of the girl or the clitoris has also 'overgrown' and thus needs trimming.

In the case of the *irua* for boys, there are two Gĩkũyũ proverbs that put the *irua* ceremony into its cultural perspective: *mũruitha arũme aarĩ kĩhĩĩ* (he who circumcises the boys was a boy too) and *mũruithia arũme nĩ aruithirio* (he who circumcises the male was also circumcised).[336] Among the Gĩkũyũ people, the initiation of both sexes was a civil and religious rite since it was through this ceremony that one was admitted into public life. It was only after the *irua* that one could officiate in any religio-political ceremonies like *ituĩka*, and *kũhoera mbura*. One could also attain, with time, the highest social, political and religious status by joining the councils of elders. Consequently, the *irua*, as a religious rite united more ontologically the initiates and the whole society with the ancestors and Ngai. Before circumcision, the boys were referred to as *ihĩ* (sin. *kĩhĩ*-

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[333] The relationship between the Mũgumo and *Irua* ceremony has to be understood within the whole ritual of circumcision. It is in both the pre-*irua* and the actual *irua* that the role of the Mũgumo is clearly visible.

[334] Neckebrouck, V., *Irua Circumcision Songs of the Kikuyu*, Belgium: Studia Anthropologica, Leuven University Press, 1998, p.1.

[335] Interview, 2003-4. During the interviews, about 68% of the informants used this euphemistic language to describe their understanding of the *irua*.

[336] Barra, *A Thousand Kikuyu Proverbs*, no.554 and 555.

uninitiated) while the girls as *irĩgũ* (sin. kĩrĩgũ), but the word for the whole physical operation on both sexes is *irua*.[337]

The rich literature done by some scholars on the Gĩkũyũ people underline that the *irua* is an outward sign of belonging to the group (Hobley, 1922), admission to adulthood (Mugo, 1983), a civil and religious rite which was *conditio sine qua non* (Kenyatta, 1938 and Cagnolo, 1933). Initiations took place every year except in extraordinary cases. They were generally held when the crops were already in the field but before harvest and thus food was plenty. Both sexes underwent the initiation ceremony in the same month usually between April and May.[338] Since the traditional circumcision ceremonies for boys are no longer held in any part of the Gĩkũyũ land, the work focuses on the description as narrated by the informants who underwent the traditional *irua* ceremony. The texture of the rite generally took three dominant phases: a) pre-*irua* ceremonies which culminated with the great *matuumo* dance, b)*irua*, c)post-*irua* rites. We will not explore the post-*irua* rites since our focus is predominantly on the sacred Mũgumo and *irua*.

9.2.1.1 Pre-*irua* ceremonies

According to the informants, pre-*irua* ceremonies generally took eight days[339] for the Gĩkũyũ group and the *ciumĩri* (neophytes-newly circumcised) were brought home from seclusion on the ninth day. The number nine (Kenda) is crucially important in Gĩkũyũ cosmology. *Kenda* is associated with the *nda* (womb). The woman nurtures human life for nine moons and then gives birth. Likewise, the core texture of the *irua* ceremony entails a process of symbolic rebirth which is actualised in many different rites culminating in the coming home of the *ciumĩri* to attain their full status within the society.

The pre- *irua* rites started with the dances of *mũbĩro*. The *mũbĩro* was composed of a series of dances traditionally meant to ask the elders to allow the boys and girls for

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[337] The *irua* for boys continues to be observed by the Gĩkũyũ people although the traditional method has been discarded and boys are taken to the hospital. In the case of the girls, it is officially not practised although during the research, many of our informants admitted that it is still done in secret especially in the Gĩcũgũ division.

[338] The traditional Gĩkũyũ divide the *mwaka* (year) into two seasons: *Kĩmera kĩa Njahĩ*(February-June) and *Kĩmera kĩa Mwere*(July-January). According to the informants, the *irua* in Gĩcũgũ took place during the *Kĩmera kĩa Njahĩ*. Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*; Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*; Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*; Middleton, *The Kikuyu and Kamba of Kenya*; Gathigira, *Miikarire ya Agikuyu*; Kabetu, *Kirira kia Ugikuyu*; Hobley, *Bantu Beliefs and Magic*.

[339] The Southern Gĩkũyũ had their own way of celebrating the *irua* ceremony and although the ritual was practised for a similar end (incorporating the initiates into the Gĩkũyũ religio-political arena) nevertheless, there were some minor variations e.g. in days and paraphernalia. See, Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, especially vol II.

the *irua*. Some dances like *riũmbũra* were meant to demonstrate to the elders that the boys had, over time acquired a number of skill and strength and thus were potential candidates to defend the Gĩkũyũ country. There followed a series of dances which culminated in the *maatumo* dances, one day prior to the actual circumcision. These pre-*irua* dances were prerequisites to attaining warriorhood status. A few months before the initiation, boys and girls went about the countryside singing and dancing. The father consulted the elders of the ruling generation with traditional gifts of jars of *mũratina* beer, millet porridge and a fat *thenge* (he-goat). This fee, called *indo cia kũhoya irua* (things needed to pay for circumcision), was paid before circumcision. The elders closely monitored the whole process to make sure that all necessary rituals were accorded their value and were in their right place and time. The *mũruithia* (circumciser) was also closely involved in the whole process right from the beginning. He was directed by the elders of the ruling council on the secrets of the *irua* ritual to make sure that everything was in accord with the norms and traditions of the Gĩkũyũ people. These elders had a lot of power and control because of their religio-political roles they played in the community.

During the research period, all the informants involved accepted having undergone the ceremony of *njiarano* (rebirth). They insisted their conscious participation by using a common Gĩkuyu proverb: *maruaga mamenyete irua na nguthi ciothe ciarĩo* (they undergo circumcision conscious of all its prestige). During this pre-*irua* ceremony, the candidate was re-born in his/her family with all the family members present. This was meant to exclude any possible doubt about their legitimacy as members of the family and thus authenticate their qualification for future social, political and religious responsibilities in Gĩkũyũ society. Thus, the informants held that the *njiarano* rite was indispensable before circumcision. It involved the slaughter of a goat by suffocation. The *taatha* (entrails) was extracted and mixed with blood and used for the ritual of cleansing. Then the *rũkwaro* (leather strip) was tied on the right arm of the boy. The candidates were anointed with *ira* (white soil) by the father of the family or in the case of the homestead of *mũruithia* by the elder of the ruling generation with these or similar words:

> *ciana citũ irogĩa thaai. Thai Thathaiyai Ngai. Thaa-ai-ciana irogĩa thai, thaaai-thai-thai-*
> *thaaa-i* (peace be with our children, we beseech thee Ngai, peace-peace peace, let the
> children have peace).[340]

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[340] Interview, Dec, 2003 and May, 2004. This prayer was enacted by Burana, Muriuki, Wanduma, Ali and Mungai (Karuco area), Munene, Gatembe, Kibebu (Mucagara), Wa-goat in Kariru area. A similar incantation is reported by Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* pp.137; Routledge, *With a Prehistoric People*, pp.155-6; Middleton, *The Kikuyu and Kamba of Kenya*, pp.57; Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*, p84.

After the anointing, a spontaneous prayer and blessing were administered to them to solemnise the oath they had taken. The informants used these words to recall how the candidates were blessed:

> Mûroendwo nî ng'ombe na mbûri na indo ciothe! Mûroendo nî ciana na Mûmbane! Mûmbe ng'ombe na mbûri na ciana, na athuri, na atumia na indo ciothe!...Mûroendwo nî Baba-ï, na mwendagwo nî andû, na mûtonge na mûtûre mîaka na miaka![341] (May you be loved by cows and sheep and all livestock! may the children love you and may you enchant them! Attract the cows, goats, the children, men and women and property! May your fathers love you, and may you be liked by the people. May you be prosperous and may you live long!).

With this blessing, the people retired to their homes. The following morning the parents washed their bodies ending the *njiarano* ceremony and legitimising their children. They were now ready for the physical operation.[342] Meanwhile, another minor ceremony of blessing and protecting with magic the homestead (where the candidates would spend some days in recovery and instruction after circumcision) was being conducted. The place where the candidates retired after circumcision was well guarded with a *mûthaiga* (magic spells). The medicine man made sure that it was protected from all evil so that none of the candidates would be harmed. In the entrance, two sugarcanes were cut and their stem planted to make an arch. Here, some of the informants differed, 58% claiming that during their time, especially in the lower part of Gîcûgû, bananas were used instead of sugarcanes. The medicine man put strong spells under the arch so that whoever entered or went out of that compound was protected. According to the informants, there was no other entrance or exit. They believed that no one could bring a bad omen to the initiates since the medicine neutralised all the evil spells. The informants used these words to re enact the rite done by the medicine man in order to bless and protect the place and the people:

> Nî ndariinda mûndû ûrîa ûngîrehe ûru mûciînî ûyû, na ndarinda ûru ûrîa ûngîtûma mwana agwe agîthiî Mûgumoinî kana rûîinî...nî ndariinda mûndû o wothe ûrîa ûngîrehe ûru mûciî ûyû o na mûndû wa mbaara kana ûru o wothe ona ûrîkû...nî ndarinda mûndû o wothe ûrîa ûngîrehe mûthaiga mûru mûciînî ûyû.[343]
>
> I have buried anyone who could harm this homestead, and I inter any bad luck that can harm the child as he goes to the Mûgumo or the river...I entomb anybody of ill luck, any war or any other evil. I have buried anybody who could bring any magic or poison in this homestead.

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[341] Interview, Gîcûgû, 2003-4.

[342] Interview, Gîcûgû, 2003-4. A more accurate account was given by Manueli Nyaga, Elias Ndereba, Justin, Murage, Tabitha Wanduma and Gladys Kiragu. Some scholars also give their description especially, Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*, p.84; Mugo, *Kikuyu Customs*.

[343] Interview, Gîcûgû, 2003-4 especially in Karumandi, Njukiini and Ngariama locations. Also a simira experience is reported by Kabetu, *Kirira kia Ugikuyu*, p.26.

The initiates, having been legitimately adopted both in their families and in the homestead of *mūruithia* were ready to undergo another important ceremony of *matumo*[344]dances, one day prior to the initiation. According to the informants, the ceremony started sometime before noon. Each candidate had his hair shaved off and his neck and chest anointed with red ochre mixed with castle oil. They were all decked in ornaments. Then, the members of the family escorted them to the homestead where *matuumo* dances were to take place. The site had already been prepared and the ceremonial doctor had already sprinkled the *mūthaiga wa rūthuko*.[345] On arrival, each candidate passed through the arch again, protected by *mūhaiga*. In doing so, they became ritually purified. The dancing continued until the medicine man and his advisors were ready to perform another rite meant to bless and strengthen them. While the dance went on, the ceremonial horn (*coro*) was constantly blown. Some medicine (*itwanda*) was applied inside the *coro*. This medicine was believed to be potent in chasing away any evil spirits and thus preventing them from harming the initiates. On completion, the initiates rushed towards the sacred Mūgumo which had been secretly identified by the medicine man to perform the last ritual before the physical operation: the ritual of *kuna Mūgumo* (breaking off the branches of the Mūgumo).

9.2.1.2 The ceremony around the Mūgumo

During the *irua*, the Mūgumo tree was of fundamental importance. It was used as a symbol of transition, a bridge that the boys had to cross to enter into adulthood. Around the Mūgumo, they put away all childish behaviour and prepared themselves to embrace adulthood with its full responsibility. This rite was called *gūte ūhĩ* (to cast away boyhood). The ceremony started with the boys competing towards the Mūgumo and whoever reached there first became the leader of that initiation set or 'regiment'. In the Southern Gĩkũyũ for instance, the boy who threw his *ndorothi* over the entire tree emerged *ipso facto* the leader of the 'regiment'. This is crucial in understanding the symbolic power expressed by the Mūgumo tree. In case the candidate fell during the race, he was automatically declared ritually unclean and had to be cleansed with the slaughter of a lamb before the initiation ceremony. On their way, they were given some

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[344] *Matumo*, from *tuuma* (verb) means palpitation or to make palpitate thus to trample the ground. Prior to circumcision, these ceremonial dances were an integral part of the circumcision, sung by the initiates and their relatives. They culminated the pre-*irua* dances of *mūmbūro* and *mūbĩro*. Interview, 2003-4.

[345] *Rūthuko*, from *thuko*(n)magic medicine in the form of powder used against enemies. The informants underlined that it was made from special trees but nobody could name the trees since, they claimed, it was a secret of the medicine man.

roasted bananas prepared by the *anake* (young circumcised men) and would eat them in haste since their focus was the Mūgumo tree. There were 198 (68%) men who admitted having participated in these ceremonies up to the 1940s. About 30% of women also participated before their circumcision.

In the Southern Gĩkũyũ, the candidates flung their clubs over the Mũgumo tree and threw their *ndorothi*[346] through its verdant branches. This was not usually done by the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ. Instead, arriving at the base of the tree, these candidates climbed up the Mũgumo to break off its flourishing branches. The small branches of the Mũgumo were then tied together, five for boys and four for girls. The boys used them as mats during the actual operation.

Then the candidates removed their *thira*[347] (emblem for boyhood) and started to beat the Mũgumo tree. This was repeated until all the *ngobo* (banana seeds) and grass (thage) had fallen leaving only the leather belt. In some parts of Gĩcũgũ, the informants reported that boys were given the *kĩbeco*[348] to symbolically beat the Mũgumo as a sign of fighting and defeating their childhood and in readiness to embrace adulthood and warriorhood. In fact, the *ngobo* seeds represented abandoned childhood.

After each candidate had put on his battered belt back on, the *mũtiiri*[349] (sponsor) removed his own sword from its sheath and fastened it around the candidate's waist as a sign of warriorhood. He also presented him with the ceremonial staff of *mũthakwa* (*Vernonia auriculifera*) or *mũkeũ* (*Dombea buressiae*) wood to symbolise the spear.[350] Having done that, each of the candidates was given the leaves of the Mũgumo to carry

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[346] *Ndorothi* is a short staff decorated by the initiated young men and handed to the neophytes for throwing over the Mũgumo on the day before circumcision. The Maasai called it *En-toros*. Among the Southern Gĩkũyũ, Leakey and Kenyatta have given vivid accounts. Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, vol.II. p.615; *Gathigira, Miikarire ya Agikuyu*, p.46; Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*; Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*.

[347] *Thira* is a grass kilt that was worn by the candidates approaching circumcision. This kilt was decorated with the *ngobo* (large black seeds of the wild banana). Destroying it symbolically meant leaving behind their boyhood and entering into a period of transition to embrace adulthood, realised only through circumcision.

[348] *Kĩbeco* is a wooden bludgeon carried by boy candidates for circumcision.

[349] *Mũtiiri* from *tiira*(v), to prop up, support or lift to an upright position. In circumcision, it means to hold a boy or a girl when being circumcised. Thus *mũtiiri* is a supporter and sponsor of the candidate, one for the boy and two for the girls. The relation between *mũtiiri* and the candidate is like that of total respect and mutual love between father-son or mother-daughter and therefore an everlasting one.

[350] In the Southern Gĩkũyũ, it was meant not only to symbolise the spear but also to replace the discarded *ndorothi*. Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, p.616. In Gĩcũgũ, these symbolic gifts of spear and sword were presented by the council of the third grade elders (*kiama kia Maturanguru*), who politically owned the *irua* ceremony. Both boys and girls surrendered their *mathaga* (ornaments of personal adornments/ trinkets). All these articles were either to be given or thrown away before circumcision since after that no one was allowed to wear them. If one did, there was a strong proverb used for him or her: *Ng'ania orire o irua-inĩ* (he/she did not understand the teachings of adulthood and so has not grown).

during the procession to the *matīri*. According to the informants, the procession was accompanied by many songs. Often, the candidates would break into this or a similar song:

> *Hũũi, hũũi, ũũi, ngũinũkie mũcii, ũmenye ũkoragio waruĩire kũ! Hũũi, hũũi, ũũi,* (I will take you home, know you will be asked the place you got circumcised!)
> *Haiya ngũĩnũkie mũcii ũmenye ũkoragio waruĩire kũ!* (Alas, I take you home; know they will ask you where you got circumcised!)[351]

In some parts of Gĩcũgũ, initiates would also sing this popular song (in two choruses) so as to involve each group.

> The boys asked the girls: *Mwetia kĩĩ (*what do you ask of us?*)*
> Girls' replied: *Twetia Mũgumo, Mũgumo waga-ĩĩ mũtũhe mũthinũ* (we have asked the Mũgumo, if it is not there, then, give us your penis)
> The girls' turn: *Mwetia kĩĩ* (what do you ask of us?)
> Boys: *Twetia Mũgumo, Mũgumo waga-ĩĩ, mũtũhe mbĩnĩ* (we have asked for Mũgumo, but if it's not there, then, give us your vagina).[352]

The candidates had also another song, commonly danced by the candidates before circumcision:

> *Ndĩgũtiihĩrũo rĩrĩa rĩa njũkĩ,* (I have been blessed with the product of bees)
> *Nderiragĩria , ngĩhakwo ira,* (that I longed for, as *ira* (diatomite) was rubbed on me)
> *Wa kĩgumo akahakwo mũhu!* (As the son of Kĩgumo had ashes rubbed on him!)
> *Rora rũgũrũ! Mũrũmegũo riua rĩrĩ gũthũwa.*(Look to the West, your husband, the sun has set).
> *Kwaroka gũkĩa wĩrathanĩre.* (When the day breaks tomorrow, the responsibility will be yours).
> *wona warĩra, iceera rĩa anake ndũgakinya* (If you cry, you will never enjoy the warriors' companionship).
> *Itĩri rĩatemwo,* (when the circumcision field is ready)
> *Ndĩrĩ wa Nyũkwa* (I am not your mother's child!)[353]

The Mũgumo leaves were collected by the sponsors packed well to be given to each candidate during the time of circumcision the following day. Then *matumo*[354] dance continued. All the pre-*irua* ceremonies were generally called *thauthia ya ihĩ* (pre-initiation rites for the boys).

The following day, at *ngũriũriũ* (very early in the cold morning before sun-rise), the boys bathed in the river and started a procession towards the circumcision ground.

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[351] Interview, Gĩcũgũ, 2003-4.

[352] Interview conducted at *Ngiriambu* and *Karumandi* sub-location in Gĩcũgũ division. According to the informants, there are other versions of the same song. However, the message is clear: Mũgumo, fertility and sexuality seem to be intrinsically linked in their cosmology. The song was succinctly sung by Monica Muthoni, 115 years. Interview, 2003-4, tape 1.

[353] Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, vol.II, p.618. In this group, the pre-circumcision time was associated with a lot of 'abuses' of the sponsors to the candidates to strengthen them and make them virile and endure the actual ceremony. Very few of the informants in Gĩcũgũ remembered this song correctly and thus could as well not have been a popular song in this part of the Gĩkũyũ country.

[354] There were other pre-initiation dance-songs mentioned by the informants all over the Gĩcũgũ area. They were all grouped under *ngũcũ*, a dance that had many stages e.g., *ngũithia, mwereri* and *mbũtũ*.

The chilling water was meant to be an anaesthetic. Meanwhile people joined them in singing circumcision songs to encourage them to face the knife without fear. One of these songs was called *karũngũru*.[355] These or similar words were used depending on the people and place:

Karũngũru -ũũĩ, ũĩ- karũngũru, karĩire marigũ! ũĩ karũngũru, karĩire marigũ! Wĩũmie, gũtirĩ wanyu ũngĩkwenda! ũĩ, Wĩũmie, gũtirĩ wanyu ũngĩkwenda! Caragia-ĩũĩ, ũĩ-Caragia karima wanona ũkĩrĩithia! ũĩ, Caragia karima wanona ũkĩrĩithia!Kinya ũkinyĩte maita merĩ

Karũngũru, you ate bananas, be strong, no body can help you...be strong, nobody can really help you there! Look, look for the hole, for the hole you ever saw when grazing. Step on it with force. Be strong!

Or this popular song in Gĩcũgũ as attested by 60% of the informants.

Ii ũũi x3 aaa
ũyũ mwana ekũma mũno,
mwana ekũma mũno nĩaigĩrĩrwo thũmbĩ (ndũmbĩ in Gĩcũgũ)
Gĩkĩ kĩhĩ kĩhana ota ithe, kĩhana riũa rĩkiuma x2
Nĩ wa ngiciri ekũma mũno, nĩaigĩrĩrwo thũmbĩ,
Gĩkĩ kĩhana ota ithe, kĩhana riũa rĩkiuma.

This child is very hard (meaning the penis), the boy is very hard, crown him (literary, circumcise him). This boy is like the father, handsome like the sunrise. The boy is of *Ngiciri* (one generation, probably circumcised in 1905), crown him. This boy is like the father, like the sunrise.

The procession was now approaching the *itĩri* where circumcision was to take place.

9.2.1.3 Ritual ceremony of *irua* for boys

The initiates had now bathed in the river with very cold water and thus their bodies were very numb. They were led to the *itĩri* where many people were already waiting since the *irua* ceremony was a public ritual. Everybody was eagerly waiting to witness the occasion of these young men taking the traditional responsibility by going through the last rite of the *irua* ceremony. The *mũruithia*, hiding among the crowd, was waiting for the candidates to be prepared by their sponsors. The candidates sat down on the sacred Mũgumo's leaves[356] plucked during the ritual of *gũte ũhĩ*. These sacred leaves served as mats and, according to the informants, they sealed their union with Ngai and ancestors. In other parts of Gĩcũgũ the *coro* (ceremonial horn) was used to announce the

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[355] Interview, Gĩcũgũ, 2003. *Karũngũru* is a song sung by the boys on the way from bathing in the river to the place of circumcision. It might have been associated with the ancient Gĩkũyũ proverb: *Mũrũngũru wa njamba ũragaga na ime* (a male weasel kills in the dew-early in the morning) since the boys went to bathe before sun-rise and like the weasel, they had to overcome everything to attain a full religio-political stature. The informants in Gĩcũgũ call it *Gũthoithua*, (from *thoitha*(v.), to march, or exercise like soldiers). A similar rite is also mentioned by Gathigira, *Miikarire ya Agikuyu*, p.49.

[356] This was one of the differences between the *irua* of Ukabi and Gĩkũyũ group. While the latter used leaves from the sacred Mũgumo to sit on, the former would sit on cow hide. For the Gĩkũyũ group, one branch of Mũgumo was tied to the corner of the newly initiated man's cloak as a sign of blessing, healing, protection and fertility. Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, vol.II.p.622.

great ceremony. The initiates sat down with legs wide open to leave a gap for the *mūruithia* when performing the operation. The *atiiri* (sponsors) supported them from behind.

The circumciser approached wearing a large skin hat on his head adorned with ostrich feathers and colobus hair. His body was covered with bracelets, with rattles around his arms and legs. His face was adorned with *thīrīga* (ochre). A leather bag hung loosely on his shoulder in which the circumcision paraphernalia were kept. With dexterity, the *mūruithia* cut off part of the foreskin leaving the other part for *ngwati*.[357] The blood gushed out profusely through to the Mūgumo leaves and to the ground, thus authenticating the bond between the *irui* (newly circumcised) and their ancestors. No candidate was supposed to show any sign of fear. He was not supposed to wink or do any slight movement on his limbs otherwise he would have failed the most significant test of joining manhood within his age-group or even miss a suitable girl for a future marriage.[358] After circumcision, each of the candidates was led to a fire place already prepared in order to warm themselves. Meanwhile, the warriors broke into a song. According to the informants, this is how it went:

> *Kahiū-ĩĩ kahiū nĩ wandema, kahiū-ĩĩ wandema ta itūgūta* x2. (little knife you have cut me, cut me as if clearing the bush) x2.
> *Nimwarūngara ūĩ kahiū, nĩ wandema kahiu ni woyia miromo* (you have straightened out now...slashed my mouth.
> *Nake mūtiiri ūĩ kahiū, nĩ wandema, kahiu ni woyia miromo* (and the sponsor...)
> *Ekūrūngara-ĩĩ, ūĩ kahiū, nĩ wandema kahiu ni woyia miromo* (has also straightened out...)
> *Ngĩruma arūme- ĩĩ, ūĩ kahiū, nĩ wandema wandema ta itūgūta* (when I used to insult men...)
> *Ndĩoĩ kahiū kanungaga arūme, ūĩ kahiū niwandema, kahiu ni woyia miromo.*[359] (I didn't know that the knife smell likes them...)
> *Ni wagimara uĩ kahiu nĩwandema, kahiu ni woyia miromo* (you have become an adult...)
> *Ndūrĩ mwana rĩngĩ, uĩ kahiū niwandema, kahiu ni woyia miromo* (you are no longer a child...little knife, you have cut me, slashed my mouth).

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[357] *Ngwati* is a pendent foreskin after circumcision meant to stimulate the woman during sexual intercourse. According to some informants not all parts of the Gĩkũyũ land left *ngwati* during circumcision and today it's not done in the hospital.

[358] Interview, Aug-Dec, 2003; May-Aug, 2004.

[359] This was reported by most of the informants from Gĩcũgũ division especially the areas of *Kĩanyaga, Kĩthũre, Karumandĩ* and *Kamũgũnda*. Leakey, studying the Southern Gĩkũyũ records a similar song although with a variation of words. Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, vol.I, p.412.

The boys, now initiated, were supposed to prove tough and unshakable since, from then on, their task was to defend the country by joining the *kiama gia kamatimũ* (council of warriors). They also joined the *riika* (initiation set or 'regiment').[360]

The newly circumcised lived together in one house until they were healed. It was a slow process. From then on, they were no longer *ihĩ* (uninitiated boys) but *irui* or *ciumĩri* (initiates). The leaves of *Mũkengeria* (*Cammelina benghalensis*) were applied as antiseptic for both boys and girls. Unlike the boys, the girls also received the bark of the sacred Mũgumo, chewed by the *atiiri* and applied over the wound to act both as an absorbent and astringent.[361] The time of healing was important both to the candidates, the *atiiri* and indeed the whole community. They were all supposed to remain clean and ensure purity. Their *atiiri* could not engage in sex during this time and the respect and bond between sponsors and candidates were long-lasting. Respect especially for the elder was to be maintained at all costs from the bottom of the ladder up to the top.[362] The fact that they were now full members of society entitled them both with all the privileges of manhood and the challenges that accompanied their new responsibilities. Once they were healed, they joined the *kĩama gĩa kamatimũ* so that, should any war breaks, they were ready to fight and defend their country. After circumcision, the new warriors danced *njukia, mũgoiyo, ngurũ, kĩbata and karĩ*.

9.2.2 The Mũgumo and *Irua*: religio-political symbiosis

The relationship between the Mũgumo and the *irua* ceremony can be explored within two phases. The first stage was during the pre-*irua* ceremonies especially the rite of *Kuna Mũgumo* (breaking up the Mũgumo leaves) and beating it with their *thira* belt. The leaves of the Mũgumo were then used as mats by the boys during circumcision. During the research, all the 158 (63%) of men interviewed acknowledged having participated in the *mambura* (ceremony) of *kuna Mũgumo*. However, 92 (37%) of the

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[360] *Riika* is a single initiation, generation set or 'regiment' so that those circumcised together became a *mũrika* (co-initiates) without regard to the family or clan to which they belonged. Every *riika* was named after an outstanding event of the season. During the time of research, many of the informants could not remember the year they were born but could easily remember their *riika* and so from there, one could calculate their age. For example, one of our informants Monica Mũthoni belongs to the *riika* called *Kĩng'ora*. Going back to the history of the Gĩkũyũ, this *riika* was circumcised in 1902. Now, girls in Gĩcũgũ were circumcised between the age of ten and fifteen years. If Monica was fifteen, by the time of circumcision, then she was born in 1888 and thus is 115 years. This is also true for the other *riika* of *Njendũrũ*-general(1933), *Njabani*(1937), *Ngiciri* (1905), *Gatego*-syphilis (1901), *Gĩcina bangi* (1945), *Hitira*-Hitler (1939), *Ng'aragu ya rũraya* European famine (1900)etc. The *riika* gives the time of circumcision, not the year of birth.

[361] Interview, Gĩcũgũ 2003-4. Also among the Southern Gĩkũyũ people, Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, vol.II.p.623.

[362] Interview August-December 2003. Also, Mugo, *Kikuyu Customs*.

female informants also admitted having participated in the ceremony although they did not climb the tree.

According to the informants, the *kuna Mũgumo* ceremony is not only meant to mark a transition from childhood to adulthood but also to authenticate the presence of Ngai in the *irua* ceremony. By associating themselves with the tree, they would be assured of a smooth ritual of circumcision. In fact, 189 (76%) informants accentuated that the Mũgumo empowered the initiates and as they sat on these mats during their circumcision the power they had gathered from the *kuna Mũgumo* became apparent. Adulthood was also associated with a stage of self-reliance. The adults could earn their own living and maintain their family and society. The climbing of the Mũgumo, the symbolic beating and the sitting on its leaves during circumcision also associated the male initiates with its potential in sexuality and fertility, attributes closely associated with the Mũgumo tree in Gĩkũyũ cosmology.

The ceremony around the Mũgumo was not done by the candidates alone. The whole community participated with the ritual being controlled and monitored by some elders and *atiiri*. They epitomised the mechanisms of power and control in Gĩkũyũ society. They had a close affiliation with the Mũgumo and it was through their hands that these young boys made a transition to adulthood. Once again the Mũgumo tree joined them together, two groups of people with a similar vision: power and control. One group already enjoyed the fruits (elders) while the other (ihĩ) in potentiality.

The Mũgumo being a symbol of social cohesion and transformation in Gĩkũyũ cosmology opened up vistas of the new social, political and social possibilities. Although the pre-*irua* ceremonies were important in the preparation of the actual ceremony, the beating of the tree and plucking of its branches were symbolically relevant. The Mũgumo symbolised the breaking of and the turning point, a juncture where the two notable phases were ritualised. In it, boyhood and adulthood were imbued. Around the Mũgumo, boys began an arduous journey of what Van Gennep calls, separation, transition and incorporation and which are elaborated by R. Grimes in his work on the rites of

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passage.[363] Thus, the Mũgumo in the *irua* ceremony becomes the matrix through which many relevant, cultural, religious and social phases are re-enacted and re-lived.

During the actual *irua* activity, the Mũgumo was also fundamentally important. The male initiates sat on the leaves of the Mũgumo acquired the previous day. The research found out that 158 (63%) of the male informants admitted having sat on the Mũgumo leaves during their circumcision. However, 238 (95%), male and female respondents underlined that the relationship between the Mũgumo and the *irua* is that the tree entailed the presence of and the union with Ngai and their ancestors. In the Mũgumo, therefore, the *irua* ritual attains its most sacrosanct value in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology.

Moreover, the data analysed exhibit a very strong connection between the blood poured out during the circumcision and the Mũgumo through the leaves that served as mats for the boys. Once the boy was given the first cut, he was left unfinished while the mũruithia proceeded to the next candidate until all of them were finished. If there were two hundred, the first one cut was to wait until the circumciser had gone through all of them and then return to the first one. Meanwhile blood was dripping down through the Mũgumo leaves to the fertile Mother Nature. Here, it is important to note that the two worlds were intimately united: the world of Ngai and the ancestors when blood touched the soil and the concrete world in which the people lived. It was the Mũgumo which acted as a matrix that ontologically joined these two worlds in the *irua* making the ceremony attain unquestionably its religio-political value and authenticity.

Thus, the Mũgumo in the *irua* ceremony linked adulthood, manhood and warriorhood. Having sat on the Mũgumo and shared its transformative power the boys graduated into men. In the Mũgumo, adulthood and warriorhood became intertwined, so much so that virtues like courage, endurance and ruthlessness were regarded in Gĩkũyũ cosmology as masculine virtues. In fact during circumcision, as some informants explained, the whole place smelt of blood, people became nervous and the more the blood

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[363] Van Gennep, A., *The Rites of Passage*, translated by Monika, B. Vizedom and Gabrielle, L., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960. Gennep and Eliade use a three phased model in exploring the rite of passage. However, in some communities like Gĩkũyũ, the division is not as clear as it has been accounted by scholars like Hobley, Middleton, and Leakey. In fact, in the *irua* ceremony, there is the preparation of the place, removal of the initiates from the ordinary space, instruction by the elders, symbolic death through *kuna* and *kũhũra* Mũgumo, receiving the new name of *riika*, community festivities and the return to ordinary life. Turner uses a similar pattern but calls the middle stage Liminality and thus making it even more difficult to know the middle in cultures that do not necessarily follow his pattern. Turner, *Forest of Symbols*. A more elaborate insight as to the modern ritual and a fair Criticism of Gennep and Eliade is done by Grimes. See, Grimes, R.L., *Deeply into the Bone: Re-inventing the Rites of Passage*, London: University of California Press, 2002.esp. pp100-109; Sullwold, E. 'Rites of Passage at the end of Millennium.' *In Crossroads:The Quest for the Contemporary Rites of Passage*, edt. Louise, Carus Mahdi et al., Chicago: Open Court, 1996, pp.287-90.

smelt the more people asked for it especially through songs and *ngemi* (ululations). It was the men who sat on the Mũgumo leaves, it was they who went to war, defended their country, their land, livestock and clan. The women neither climbed the Mũgumo nor sat on it during their circumcision and *ipso facto* were not regarded as defenders of the Gĩkũyũ land.

As a consequence the presence of the Mũgumo tree in the *irua* ceremony seems to have been used to categorise not only the roles that men and women played in Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship but also became an integral part of the gender construction in Gĩkũyũ society. According to the traditional Gĩkũyũ, men are sexually virile, tough and brave while women are the opposite and thus are to be ruled.[364] The change in this mentality was gradual since in 1950s, during the time of Mau Mau, Gĩkũyũ men and women fought side by side against their common oppressor: the colonial government.

9.3 Kũhoera Mbura Mũgumo-inĩ

The Gĩkũyũ knew that when rain was abundant, food too would be plenty both for the people and the animals. When drought befell the Gĩkũyũ land, it was interpreted that something had gone amiss within the society and thus Ngai had decided to punish them. Thus, the ritual was done and prayers were said entreating him for mercy. They believed that *Mwene-Nyaga* (Ngai) the owner and provider, would, with the sacrifice of the *ngoima* (ram or he-goat stall-fed for sacrifices) give them back the rain. When the informants were asked to narrate the relationship between the Mũgumo and *mbura* (rain), 224, (90%) emphasised that the Gĩkũyũ as any agricultural community need rain to survive. They also underlined that the Gĩkũyũ as far as they could remember, were constantly threatened by persistent drought that occurred every few years. In fact, most of the informants remembered the history of droughts that resulted in *ng'aragu* (famine). Most of the famine and droughts were remembered because of the *riika* named after the episodes. There was, for instance *ng'aragu ya ruraya* (European famine) in 1900 and *n'garagu ya gathea* (famine that easily spread) 1911. In 1909, there was *ng'aragu ya Nduĩga wa Ngaara* and *ng'aragu ya Kĩmotho* in 1918 which was called by the Gĩcũgũ people as *ng'aragu ya gĩthioro*. There was locust invasion followed by a serious famine

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[364] Interview, 2003-4. This is authenticated by some Gĩkũyũ myths that depict the women as a shy and weaker sex, who could not survive without the presence of and the help of men. For instance, the myth of the women who refused to dance as well as that of men overthrowing the women ruling government in the former Gĩkũyũ matriarchal system. Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*.

in 1928. There was also the *ng'aragu ya karũgia mũthuru* in 1934, *ng'aragu ya mianga*, 1943, and *ukame* in 1984.[365]

The informants were then asked to narrate what they remembered about the *kũhoya Ngai mbura* ceremony. 228 (91%) respondents remembered succinctly one or more ceremonies done during their lifetime. In fact 170 people (68%) remembered that in the *ukame* (famine) of 1984, there were a lot of *mũgariũ* (black army-worm, caterpillar) in Gĩcũgũ and Mwea and the elders of the Irũngũ ruling generation under the leadership of Njiga wa Gacoki from Rĩagĩcerũ sub-location, performed the ceremony. The following day, the *mũgariũ* had left.[366]

9.3.1 The Ceremony of Mbura around the Sacred Mũgumo tree

According to the informants, when drought came, the *njama* (ruling elders) who looked after the interest of the Gĩkũyũ religio-political affairs gathered and consulted the *mũndũ mũgo* (medicine man) to know the cause of the calamity and the remedy. The witchdoctor consulted his *mbũgũ* (divining counters) to ascertain the cause and the cure. The informants insisted that when Ngai was angry with the people, he brought punishment in the form of an epidemic or a severe drought and many people and livestock died. Having found the cause of the misfortune, the *mũndũ mũgo* commanded the elders to look for the lamb of one colour and without blemish. At this important ritual period, no one went to cultivate in the fields so as not to upset the rituals.[367] The lamb was taken under the Mũgumo tree and the ceremony of imploring for rain from Ngai began.

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[365] Interview, Gĩcũgũ, 2003-4. Most of the informants underlined that in the1984 drought, a traditional sacrifice was done by the elders of Irungu and eventually it rained, but too late to save the maize and beans. Only the grass flourished and as a result saved some livestock.

[366] Interview, Sept-Dec, 2003. Most of those informants who witnessed the ceremony are from the lower Gĩcũgũ, especially from Rũkenya, Kĩanjirũ, Samson corner, Mũrũri, Ndaraca Njerũ, Njoga, Difathas, Kanjũũ, Gĩtuto, Gathoge, Kĩaũmbũi and Njũkĩinĩ area.

[367] Interview, 2003-4. According to the informants a day chosen for the ceremony was called *mũtĩro* where nobody went to work in the field. However, if one did, he or she was fined a goat as a punishment. Generally, it was done by people of different ridges who amalgamated to perform the ritual and so everybody collaborated in this public ritual.

One of the officiating elders (usually from *Ambura/Ethaga* clan-known for their magic and power to attract rain in time of drought) raised the lamb with its forelegs[368] facing Mount Kĩrĩnyaga and said:

> Ngai, wee wĩkaraga kĩrĩmainĩ gia Kĩrĩnyaga, wee mwene matĩri na indo ciothe, nĩtwakũhoya
> ũturĩrie mbura. Kĩthuku, andũ aku nĩmararĩra nĩ kwaga mbura. Rora ciana nĩ irarĩra,
> ng'ombe na mbũri nĩ irarĩra. Mwene-nyaga, tondũ mbura yumaga Kĩrĩnyaga, o kũu
> wĩkaraga-ĩĩ, twĩiguĩre tha na ũtuhe yo.
> Twoka Mũgumoinĩ ũyũ waku gũkũthaitha na thakame, maguta na ũkĩ. Ĩtĩkira mbũri ĩno
> tũgũkũthĩnjĩra. Kĩthuku, tũgũkũhaka ota ũrĩa maithe maitũ mekaga na ũkamahe mbura.
> Ĩtĩkĩra igongona rĩrĩ mũtĩinĩ ũyũ waku na ũturĩrie mbura ya gũtũguna. Thai, thai, thathayai
> Ngai thai.[369]
>
> Ngai, you who live in Mount Kenya, you who are the owner of the earth, we beseech you to
> give us rain. Kĩthuku, your people are crying for lack of rain. See, your children are crying,
> livestock are crying too. Mwene-Nyaga, since the rain comes from Kĩrĩnyaga where you live,
> have mercy on us and give us rain.
> We come to your Mũgumo to beseech you with blood, fat and honey. Accept the lamb we
> are offering. Kĩthuku, we praise you just as our forefathers did and you gave them rain.
> Ngai, accept this sacrifice in your Mũgumo and give us rain. Give us the rain of prosperity.
> Peace, we beseech you peace, peace be with us.

Then facing towards the hills of *Donyo-Sabuk* (Kirima kia njahi), *Nyandarua* (Aberdare range, *Mbiruiru* (Ngong hills), other small mountains associated with the abode of Ngai, he repeated the same prayer. After that, the lamb was slaughtered and all the meat roasted at the platform prepared for that purpose. Before they consumed the meat, the same officiating elder, holding the roasted breast of the lamb said another prayer:

> Ngai Mwene matĩri na mwendi andũ nitũgũkũrĩrĩra na tha nyingi hamwe na maithe maitu
> maria makomire tene ũtũhe mbura.[370] (Ngai, owner of the land and lover of people, we
> beseech you together with our ancestors to give us rain).

When they had finished, a portion of the meat (*mũgwanja*[371] *wa Ngai*) was hung carefully on one of the branches of the Mũgumo while the other ritual elders stood around the sacred tree singing:

> Mbura iroira, ĩ thaai, mbura iroka, ĩ thaai. Ya gũtũguna-ĩĩ thaai. (May the rain come, may
> the rain of prosperity come). Then the officiating elder chants; 'ũũi ya -ũ-ũũya – ũũya
> thathaya Ngai thaai nĩ ithuĩ irũngũ-ĩ thaai'. Response: 'ũũi ya -ũ-ũũya – ũũya thathaya Ngai

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[368] Interview 2003-4. Hobley holds that the sacrificial lamb was lifted up on its hind legs facing the sacred Mũgumo (kũrũgamia ngoima Mũgumoĩni). Kabetu, Kenyatta, Kathigira and Leakey retain the fact that the lamb was always held facing Mount Kenya-the duelling place of Ngai *par-excellence*. The latter seem to be more accurate in their account of Gĩkũyũ ritual sacrifice for rain. After all, Hobley at times seems to confuse the Gĩkũyũ language with the *Gĩ-kamba*, a conspicuous fact throughout his work. See, Hobley, *Bantu Beliefs and Magic*, especially pp.40-52.

[369] Interview, Gĩcũgũ 2003-4. In other part of the Gĩkũyũ, especially in Nyĩrĩ, Mũranga and the Southern Gĩkũyũ, a similar pattern seems to have been followed. A parallel interview was conducted in June 2004 at Tuthu in Mũrang'a where the daughter of the late chief Karũri narrated the ceremony. See also in Kabetu, *Kĩrĩra kia Ũgĩkũyũ*; Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* and Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*.

[370] Interview, Gĩcũgũ, 2003-3.

[371] *Mũgwanja*(n) is the side of the body of human beings or animals but specifically the part of the one shoulder or the foreleg of the animal with some ribs. It is currently used in Gĩkũyũ as the number seven.

thaai nĩ ithuĩ irũngũ-ĩ thaai'.[372] (may the rain come, peace we beseech you Ngai, we are the Irũngũ generation peace we beseech you Ngai).

Having completed the ritual of imploring for rain, the elders returned to their home and earnestly waited for rain. In Gĩcũgũ, the prayer for rain and the ritual sacrifice (igongona) around the sacred Mũgumo was attended by many people from different ridges led by the elders of sacrifice. Around the sacred Mũgumo, these elders of Irũngũ or Mwangi implored Ngai to give them rain, finish all diseases and accept their offering.[373]

Concluding on the relationship between the Mũgumo and rain as underlined by the research, it becomes apparent that Ngai hears and answers the supplication of the Gĩkũyũ people and gives them rain. The Mũgumo is also closely associated with rain. In fact, 98% of the informants believed that rain has decreased in the twenty-first century because many Mĩgumo and other indigenous trees have been deracinated. In the Mũgumo of Ngiriambu for instance, people living in the ridges stretching from Mũrũri shopping centre all the way to Ngiriambu and Kamagambo have protected it. The stream that gushes out from this Mũgumo nourishes the inhabitants with water all through the year. Thus by cutting it, (the informants argued), the water will dry and thus serious repercussions may follow.

About 245 (98%) of the informants underlined that the Mũgumo tree cries rain. They demonstrated by describing its aerial roots that sprouts from above its trunk descending down. These roots therefore collect rain from Ngai and pass it deep into the earth. This water is later dug by the people or simply oozes out as a natural well to nurture the Gĩkũyũ people and their environment. The fact that the Mũgumo collects water from Ngai makes it an evergreen tree. The close affiliation that seems to exist between the traditional Gĩkũyũ and the Mũgumo might also critically underline why they associate it strongly with Ngai. The word Ngai originally meant rain. The Mũgumo is closely associated with Ngai and thus attracts the rain from him and gives it to the people. It is also associated with life (latex and fertility). Pragmatically, this means that the

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[372] Interview, Gĩcũgũ Sept-Dec, 2003. See also a similar ritual as reported by Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya.*

[373] Interview, 2003-4. Among the Gĩkũyũ of Southern Gĩkũyũ, Leakey reports that the prayer for imploring Ngai for rain and the sacrifices around the sacred Mũgumo were conducted by the head of the family. There is contrasting evidence to disapprove his ideology. Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu, Vol. II.* In fact the research done in Othaya (Nyĩrĩ), Mũrang'a, and part of Kiambu did not support his hypothesis. Even other scholars dispute his view. Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*; Kabetu, *Mĩikarĩre ya ũgĩkũyũ.* However, since this was a community event and one which affected every member of the Gĩkũyũ society and thus was a societal concern, it was only plausible that these sacrifices were performed communally, with the *njama* officiating them.

sacrifices performed around it, especially of rain, will yield positive results. This might also explain why the informants underlined that rain always fell when the sacrifice around the Mũgumo was performed by the ruling generation, lamenting the insensitivity of the new religions and the current political configuration that seem to erode all the traditional values and ceremonies instead of protecting them. In a nutshell, the ritual of kũhoya Ngai mbura Mũgumoinĩ, epitomises the presence and action of Ngai by reconciling himself with the people and assuring them of his continuous presence in their agricultural life and the presence of rain which is associated with the abundant life for the traditional Gĩkũyũ. In this ritual, the Mũgumo is not only the sanctuary but also the fountain in which life flows again and nourishes the Gĩkũyũ community.

9.4 The Ituĩka Ceremony

The ituĩka is from the verb tuĩka, meaning to separate, cut or terminate. Among the Gĩkũyũ, the ceremony of ituĩka meant the handing over of religio-political and economic power from one traditional government to the next. This practice was not peculiar to the Gĩkũyũ only. Their neighbouring groups also practiced it. The Meru and Chuka people called it ntuĩko while the Embu had a similar ceremony called nduĩko. Among the Maasai, the hand-over ceremony was called eunoto while the Ndorobo called it eunotwet.[374] Here, the crucial question is: what is the origin of ituĩka and what is its religio-political significance? Finally, what is its relationship with the Mũgumo? Kenyatta, giving an extensive description of the ritual, traces it back to the primordial era, placing it within the revolution that might have happened in Gĩkũyũ history and which led to a change of their cultural configuration.[375] Cagnolo calls it an 'immemorial custom endowed with secrets', while Leakey laments having been denied the inner information about the ceremony by the elders of the Southern Gĩkũyũ.[376] The ituĩka took place every thirty or forty years. The last date of ituĩka is conflicting. Kenyatta underlined that it was supposed to have taken place in 1928 but was stopped by the British colonial government. Cagnolo reports the ceremony of ituĩka as taking place in 1932. The research done in

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[374] Interview, 2003-4. Some elders who were interviewed came from Embu, the neighbouring group of Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ, Meru, especially the area of Mũthambi going down to Gaciambaki and Mũmbũiinĩ. Most of the old people remember lucidly their riika system although, to really understand its complexities, a thorough research is needed.

[375] Kenyatta writes that the ituĩka started with the Iregi(from rega meaning to refuse or revolt). It was followed by Ndemi (cutters) that saw the starting of Gĩkũyũ people as an agriculturist, then Mathathi and so on. Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, p.187, Also, Munene, A.W., Mũtaarani Mũgĩkũyũ, Nairobi: East African Education Pub., 1995.

[376] Cagnolo, The Akikuyu, p.120; Leakey, The Southern Kikuyu, p.xiii.

Gĩcũgũ revealed that the last recorded *ituĩka* was conducted on 29th September, 1925, where the Mwangi ruling generation handed over the power to the in-coming Irũngũ generation.[377] The *ituĩka* ceremony in Gĩcũgũ, well documented, underlines that it was poorly attended around the Kabari station area which was predominantly protestant. Other areas of the research including Karuco, Kĩanyaga, Kĩamũtũgũ, Ngariama, Kamũgũnda and Karumandĩ agreed with the date but added that according to their oral history, it was attended by many people. However, in the Kabari diary, the officiating elders of the *ituĩka* ceremony are clearly documented as: Mĩrama wa Mwanĩki, Kathanju and Nyaga on the side of Mwangi and Gatu wa Karenji, Mbũĩ wa Njirũ, Kogĩ wa Mwĩnja on the side of Irũngũ. Chief Chomba Kareti also participated.[378]

Part of the questionnaire emphasised the relationship between the *ituĩka* and the Mũgumo tree. The informants were asked to describe what they knew about the *ituĩka*, who conducted it, how and where it was conducted. 171 (68%) of the informants acknowledged that the *ituĩka* ceremony was integral to the Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship. However, none of the informant participated in the *ituĩka* of 1925 and thus most of the data was based from what has been passed on to them orally for many years especially through their grandparents. In spite of having not physically participated, most of them boasted of belonging to the 'now' ruling generation of Irũngũ and thus could identify themselves strongly with the traditional government.[379]

The informants were then asked: what was *ituĩka* for? Who participated and what was its relationship with the Mũgumo tree? Here again 171 people reported that there were many elements related with the government that constituted the *ituĩka* ceremony. About 68% of them insisted that during the *ituĩka*, a constitution was drafted by the elders who were chosen from different ridges of the Gĩkũyũ land. Contrary to what Kenyatta

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[377] KNA/MSS/61/639. The Diary on Kabari station. See also Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, p.196; Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*, pp.120-1. It is probable that the *ituĩka* ceremony did not take place at the same time in the whole of the Gĩkũyũ land so that each place had its own time and the manner of celebrating it. What is important is the fact that the ritual took place and was an important religio-political period where power and control were exercised.

[378] KNA/MSS/61. There are other names mentioned in the archive but are not legible. The informants reported that there was another *ituĩka* in Kĩanyaga and Ngariama that took place on the same date as that of Kabari. However, none of the informants took part in it. In fact most of those who took part in the *ituĩka* of 1920s and 30s are long dead.

[379] Despite the fact that the ruling system has changed with the modern government, the traditional Gĩkũyũ are keen to trace their ruling generation in the Gĩcũgũ area. Most of the informants belonged to the Irũngũ generation and to commemorate their power without portfolio, they sing around the Mũgumo of Kĩanyaga before attending the official ceremony of independence every 12th December. Then they join the rest of the people in the Kĩanyaga stadium for the ceremony to mark the independence of Kenya led by the D.O (Divisional Officer).

holds, that the elders convened at the *Mūkūrwe wa Gathanga*, 95% of the informants accentuated that the elders met in the very central place of the division. In Gīcūgū for instance, the informants insisted that the elders met at Kīanyaga. In this meeting, they laid some rules ranging from acquisition of land, the ritual of circumcision and warriorship, especially the young men who joined the *kīama gīa kamatimū*. They also put emphasis on the power and control of the people and land. Quintessentially, they also underlined the power to officiate in all the public religio-political sacrifices around the *Mūgumo wa Ngai* (Ngai's tree). Associating themselves with the Mūgumo, the ruling generation were the *athamaki, athani and akūri a thī* (ruler, lord and the redeemer of the land).

Thus, the *ituīka* gave the ruling generation control. It vested them with unquestionable power since their word was final in all matters ranging from the acquisition of land, the levy one had to pay as a fine for the offence, the way the religious rituals were to be performed and the one to perform them. The ruling elders were heavily guarded by the magicians to protect them from evil. Their strongest weapon was the secret they held about the *kīrīra* ('tribal' lore). This was a form of knowledge and control.

9.4.1 Ituīka and the Mūgumo

According to the informants, when all the goats had been paid by the in-coming generation to the out-going one, say for instance Irūngū paying Mwangi to acquire the power, then the actual ceremony of the *ituīka* started. The out going ruling elders met in some temporary thatched houses built for that purpose and there followed several days of meeting in order for the out-going government to pass on the secrets on how to rule, manage, organise and control the Gīkūyū land. When all these bureaucratic meetings were over, the ceremonial horn was sounded and people gathered in the meeting ground. The *kībata*[380] (a dance for warriors only) was done and as it was going on, one of the elders, gifted in oratory, started announcing to the people their new constitution in the form of a song. When it was over, the people continued to dance.

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[380] *Kībata*(n) is a dance held in the traditional Gīkūyū by the warriors only. It had two main objectives: consolidating warriors from different parts of the country in order to plan an attack or defend themselves from Maasai or for the purpose of making an announcement to the local community by the senior elders. The Maasai had a similar dance called *En-Kipata*. Benson, *Kikuyu-English Dictionary*; Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, vol.I. p.429.

Meanwhile, the medicine man, followed by the elders of the new government, went away to a secret place to meet and symbolically fight the *ndamathia*.[381] It is believed to reside in the rivers and streams. About 246 (98%) of the informants believed that this monster is real and even named different places where it continues to reside. These places were also associated with the *ituĩka* ceremony of 1925. The rivers are: *Nyamindi*, *Rũbingacĩ*, *Kĩri*, *Kamweti*, *Thitha* and *Thagana*. After some time, the ruling elders came back pronouncing that they had fought with the *ndamathia*, got some hair from its tail and were now the most courageous men in the land. As a result, they were now empowered men credited to lead the Gĩkũyũ people.

Then the *kĩbata* dance was interrupted again. The ritual of handing over the symbols of power was done from the elders of the old *ituĩka* to the new governing one. The informants acknowledged that the first item to be handed over to the new ruling generation was a stick of *mwĩngirima* tree which was a symbol of the government. There followed a series of articles. A knife was given to symbolise their right to slaughter and to offer all the public sacrifices to Ngai for the people. There was also a spear to symbolise their power and control in war. A razor was also given as a symbol of control over all the circumcision ceremonies and finally, the new government was given a *coro* (ceremonial horn) to give it the power to call all the meetings, dances when necessary and to summon the warriors in case a raid was needed or an enemy attacked the Gĩkũyũ land. Then the *kĩbata* dance continued.

The final ritual and which, according to the informants, was crucial to authenticate the ruling generation took place around the sacred Mũgumo tree. As some of the informants put it:

> ndathimi cia ituĩka nĩ cia kũohania atuĩki na Ngai. Mambura ma ituĩka Mũgumoinĩ nĩ marĩ ngoga mũno tondũ andũ nĩmamenyaga atĩ Gĩkũyũ gĩothe nĩ gĩkũrathimwo nĩ Ngai hĩndĩ ĩyo ya magongona ma ituĩka. Atuĩki nĩ mamenyaga atĩ ona maithe mao nĩ mekũmarathima. Nake Ngai nĩamarathimaga na njĩra mwanya makĩmũrutĩra mbũri Mũgumoinĩ. Gĩtũmi kĩa igongona rĩrĩ nĩ kwohania Gĩkũyũ na Ngai. Rĩtwa rĩa mambura macio nĩ ndathimi cia ituĩka.

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[381] *Ndamathia* is a mythical monster of great length which is believed by the Gĩkũyũ to live in rivers. During the ceremony of *ituĩka*, the elders used to pluck its hairs from the tail which were then sent to different parts of the Gĩkũyũ land as a symbol of unwavering power. This name was later translated by missionaries as the dragon of the apocalypse thus distorting the whole semantic configuration and meaning. See, also Benson, *The Kikuyu-English Dictionary*.

Ndũgũ ĩno ĩtũraga o kuma mbere ya riika ria ndemi na mathathi na kwa ũguo ituĩka nĩ rĩohithanagia atuĩki na arĩa makomire tene.[382]

The blessings of *ituĩka* are meant to unite the new generation with Ngai. The ceremonies of *ituĩka* around the sacred Mũgumo tree are very good since everybody is sure that Ngai will bless the whole of Gĩkũyũ people during the ceremony. The in-coming generation also knows that their fathers and elders will bless them. Ngai blesses them in a very special way as they offer him sacrifices around the Mũgumo tree. The chief reason of the *ituĩka* is to cement a long-lasting relationship between the Gĩkũyũ and Ngai around the sacred Mũgumo tree. This filial relationship has always been there even before the age-set of *Ndemi* (cutters) and *Mathathi* and so the ritual around the Mũgumo seals the strong relationship between the Gĩkũyũ and their ancestors.

The *atuĩki* (new government), now in procession walked in silence towards the sacred Mũgumo and, on reaching the tree, made a small altar with the skewers of different indigenous trees like *Mũthakwa, Mũgumo, Mũcatha,* Mũkeu. The *Mũkenia* (*Lantana trifolia*) and *Ithare* were integral for the preparation for all the rituals around the Mũgumo. Other officiating elders carried with them the *mũratina* beer.

When everything was set, the principal officiating elder said a prayer commonly done in all the ritual sacrifices around the sacred Mũgumo facing all the four mountains associated with Ngai, starting with Mount Kenya. Other elders, forming a circle held each other's shoulder so that the blessings of Ngai could be bestowed on all of them. The prayer addressed to Ngai revolved around the theme of the blessings. According to the survey, 98% of the informants underlined that the prayer was a spontaneous one. Most of the informants were of the Irũngũ generation which took religio-political power in the *ituĩka* of 1925. The prayer went on like this:

Ngai, rathima Agĩkũyũ na bũrũri wao. Nĩ ithuĩ atuĩki a Irũngũ na akũri a bũrũri wa Gĩkũyũ. Twoka gũkũria ndathimi na mbũri ĩno tũrakũthĩnjĩra Mũgumoinĩ. Rathima, athani a irũngũ nĩgetha mahote gũtongoria na gĩtio, ũgĩ, ona kĩhoto. Rathima, mambura marĩa mothe marĩrutaga nĩũndũ wa bũrũri ũyũ witũ wa Gĩkũyũ. Rathima marua marĩa mothe marĩtongoragia, rathima atumia, ciana ona mahiũ. Rathima anake aitũ niũndũ wa kũgitĩra bũrũri kuma kũrĩ thũ citũ. Ĩtĩkĩra mbũri na njohi ĩno tũrakũrutĩra. Ngai, nĩ ithuĩ atuĩki a irũngũ tũrakũrongoria. Tũrathime na ũtonga, ũgĩ na kĩhoto. Kĩthuku, rathima athamaki a irũngũ. Thaai, thai thathaiyai Ngai thaai. Thaai![383]

Ngai, Bless the Gĩkũyũ people and their country. We are the new Irungu, the redeemers of the Gĩkũyũ country. We have come to beseech you for the blessings by offering you this lamb around the sacred Mũgumo. Bless the Irungu rulers so that they can rule with respect, wisdom and justice. Bless all the sacrifices they will be officiating for the sake of the people. Bless the circumcision ceremonies that will be conducted during our reign. Bless our women, children and livestock. Bless our young warriors so that they may protect our country from our enemies. Ngai, accept the lamb and beer we are offering you. Bless us, the new ruling

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[382] Interview, Sep-Dec, 2003 and May-July, 2004 in Gĩcũgũ division. Nyaga wa Maguru emphasised that when the last *ituĩka* was done in 1925, he was 35 years old but did not participate since he was a strong Christian and they were warned that whoever participated in that satanic cerebration would be excommunicated from the school and the church. A similar story was told by many of our informants, now already over a hundred years old and especially those coming from Kabari location where the missionary parish was opened in 1910.

[383] Interview, 2003-4 in Gĩcũgũ division.

government. We are imploring you! Bless us with wealth, wisdom and justice. Kīthuku, bless the rulers of Irungu. Peace we beseech you peace! May we have peace.

As soon as the prayer was finished, the lamb was smothered, slaughtered and the *taatha* was spread at the foot of the sacred Mūgumo tree together with some fat and beer. Some meat was roasted and shared among the incoming and the outgoing elders, while the other part of the meat (*mūgwanja wa Ngai*) was left hanging on one of the branches of the sacred Mūgumo tree as a gift for Ngai who, having been present at all the ritual ceremony, would eventually consume his part of the lamb when the elders left the sanctuary. All done, the elders dispersed to their respective homesteads and normal life in their society resumed under the new government.

In Conclusion, the research findings indicate that the relationship between the *ituĩka* and the sacred Mūgumo is ontologically strong among the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ. In the *ituĩka* ceremony, the Mūgumo is the source of religio-political power. The Irũngũ for instance authenticate their hegemony for the rituals around the Mūgumo tree and in fact, all the public rituals in the Gĩkũyũ country. They affiliate themselves with the Mūgumo, they are empowered by it, inspired by its awesome presence and thus their control of their society is culturally validated. The Mūgumo is epitomised by the new government encompassing all its power, strength and control. In fact, it is around the sacred Mūgumo that their power takes different religio-political asymmetries.

As a result, around the Mūgumo, Ngai blesses the in-coming ruling generation. Around the same tree, the new ruling generation seals its vow of secrecy for thirty or forty years of religio-political power and control. The new elders, gathered around the Mūgumo, authenticated their power as inspired by and cemented by Ngai through the slaughter of the lamb. Actually, the *ituĩka* could never be complete until the blood of the lamb was poured around the sacred Mūgumo tree and Ngai was invited to share the meat. The prayer of *ndathimi* (blessing) depicts Ngai as a warrior since he is first of all called to bless the *kĩama gĩa kamatimu*. Around the sacred Mūgumo, Ngai is asked to bless the *matĩri* and thus authenticating the *irua* as a solemn religious and political *sine qua non* of the Gĩkũyũ people. As previously seen, Ngai is ontologically present in the *irua* ceremony through the Magumo leaves.

As well, around the sacred Mūgumo Ngai blesses the ruling generation with wisdom (*ũmenyi-ũgĩ*), wealth (*ũtonga*) and justice (*kĩhoto*). In fact, these three elements carried with them not only political and religious meanings but were essential components of the ruling generation. Even in the post-colonial Kenya, these elements continue to be assimilated in the Gĩkũyũ cosmological understanding of power and

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control. As well, research shows that for the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ, the Mũgumo epitomises a lasting union and relationship between the people, Ngai and their ancestors, a filial bond, as the informants called it. This ontological bond is believed to have been there since time immemorial. Thus, the rituals around the sacred Mũgumo manifest a tree that is symbolically very relevant in the cosmology and the religion of the Gĩkũyũ people. It is quintessential therefore to understand that the Mũgumo acted as pivotal in which the Gĩkũyũ identity was 'frozen' thorough the rituals performed around it and re-forging a new identity. Around it the two worlds, the world of Ngai and ancestors and that of the Gĩkũyũ people were ontologically united as one under the ruling generation.

9.5 Conclusion

What has come out clearly from the study of the three rituals (*irua, ituĩka* and *kũhoya* Ngai *mbura*) is that the sacred Mũgumo is a 'localised' tree. The fact that every territory had its own Mũgumo as a sanctuary demonstrates clearly the territorialisation of the Mũgumo and the Gĩkũyũ people. The Gĩkũyũ people from different *matũra* could identify themselves with a specific Mũgumo. The same applied to the ruling generation, either Mwangi or Irungu. As a consequence, the tree played a crucial role in the formation of the identity of the group.

What is spelled out clearly in the exploration of the three rituals is the fact that the Mũgumo is central to the understanding of Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship. It is around the Mũgumo that the now settled Gĩkũyũ forged their religio-political identity. This identity is lucidly manifested through the *ituĩka* and the *irua*. Through these rituals the identity of Gĩkũyũ is celebrated, ritualised and revitalised around the Mũgumo. We can actually conclude that from what has been stipulated so far, the Gĩkũyũ identity is "frozen" through the celebration of these rituals. This process is tantamount to the one stipulated by Mudimbe; mapping, cultivating and designing and that of Berman on primordialism.

The elders were crucially important in the process of 'freezing' the Gĩkũyũ identity around the Mũgumo. Under this conceptual framework, the Mũgumo becomes even more central in understanding the internal religio-political mechanisms based on power hegemony in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology. They had the knowledge, the secrets and the power and as such, they could 'manipulate' the situation especially through the rituals in order to forge the identity of the group with at times, a minimal participation of the rest of the members of that society. Thus, while on the surface, everything seems to contribute

to a religio-political harmony of the society, there is an undercurrent subtle power hegemony hinged on the ruling elders through their knowledge of the *kĩrĩra*.

The Mũgumo unites the Gĩkũyũ people with Ngai and their ancestors through the three principal rituals performed around it. By celebrating these rituals, the people have a sense of belonging and like the Mũgumo, they are topologically deeply anchored into the boils of their Mother Nature. In this context, the tree becomes to the traditional Gĩkũyũ, their religio-political axis, a pivotal through which they can reformulate and interpret their history and constantly reformulate their various identities. Critically assessed, we can say that although the Mũgumo tree was crucial in the formation of the identity of the group, nevertheless, there are some instances when a ruling 'cliché' used it for their own political ends and therefore created what Berman calls the 'politics of the belly'.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS ON THE STUDY OF GĨKŨYŨ AND THE MŨGUMO

The thesis set out to examine the Gĩkũyũ traditional cosmology and worship taking the sacred Mũgumo tree as the key to understanding their cosmology and as the axis of their religio-political and economical configuration. Through the use of the questionnaire, our work explored three principal areas of interest: (Gĩkũyũ Religio-philosophical world-view, their affiliation with trees, the Mũgumo- myths and the rituals) which are integral to comprehending the gestalt of Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship and the role that the Mũgumo tree plays. Therefore, illumined mainly by the theories of Berman, Mudimbe and Horton, our research explored the role of myths in the historical reconstruction of the migration and settlement of the Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ and in their religio-political hegemony. It also explored the conception the Gĩkũyũ have of Ngai and its relevance in understanding their cosmology. As well, these theories helped in investigating the affiliation that the Gĩkũyũ have with the trees in general and the influence that the arboreal culture has had over the centuries in the forging of their ethnic identity and power contestation. Again, the research was extended to examine not only the characteristics of the Mũgumo tree but also its religio-political and symbolic role in apprehending the Gĩkũyũ power hegemony, ethnic identity formation and the return to the roots through some of the revivalist groups. It was through the various rituals around the sacred Mũgumo that power contestation and the 'politics of the belly' became imminently apparent.

This concluding chapter aims at examining pertinent discourses on some of the crucial issues raised while probing Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship that initially triggered our interest for a thorough research. Consequently, discourses on power hegemony, identity formation, the role of religion and the rise of the subaltern groups are succinctly being examined. It will also demonstrate the relevance of the research in answering our central thesis questions and the themes that were set out at the start of our research. The chapter also shows what our research has achieved, opens avenues for further discussions and consider some viable direction and controversies in which future research may invest.

The Mũgumo, Gĩkũyũ and the paradigm of power-knowledge

When discussing the concept of power-knowledge, it is paramount to explore two questions at the outset. How did power-knowledge discourse dislocate the local discourses on power? How and where did they locate the Gĩkũyũ people? Creating a

space for the discourses on power-knowledge hegemony, Mudimbe accentuates that discourses have both socio-historical and epistemological origin. Discussing the colonial hegemony, Mudimbe concludes that contemporary Africa is a creation and an invention of a European agent (scholars, missionaries and colonial administrators). The discourses on colonialism and its repercussions underline that the West created a dialectic world where Africa was viewed through the lenses of the West. In the Western cosmology belonged scientific knowledge, power and progress. The West was Christian. The African (Other) was an antithesis of the West (Self).[384] The colonial and missionary discourses assumed that African cosmology was primitive and thus the natives were pathological and disordered. In these discourses, it was the 'Other' who was pagan. As a result, both the colonial and post-colonial discourses created contradicting models in the realm of cultural and spiritual, which were, and continue to be administered through the churches, schools, audio-facilities and reigning political systems.

The discourses on power and class struggle are critical to an understanding of the pivotal role the Mũgumo assumed and continues to play in Gĩkũyũ cosmology. P. Ahluwalia affirms that both colonial and post-colonial experiences in Africa demonstrate that Europe has for centuries affirmed its identity in relation to the 'Other', based on fears, fantasies and demons.[385] Mudimbe refers to this type of colonial process as that of domination of the physical space and or reformation of the African minds. In Kenya, these colonial discourses were principally aimed at civilising the natives, under the label of the 'white man's burden'.[386] The whole colonial process, later followed by the colonial legacy in the postcolonial era was meant to integrate the local economy, religion and politics into a Western perspective. Looking at the Gĩkũyũ experience for instance, the research has found out that the process of colonisation went hand-in- hand with that of inscribing the 'Other' into the European epistemological discourse with the dictum that 'knowledge is power'.

The experience of the Gĩkũyũ and the Mũgumo demonstrates how the colonial discourses created a binary world, a world of a dislocated self. Missionary and colonial discourses were used to etch and locate the natives. There was a binary opposition

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[384] Discussing colonialism and Mission, Zene critically explores similar discourses that clouded the Christian enterprise in various mission territories especially in Bangladesh and other parts of Asia. Zene, C., *The Rishi of Bangladesh: A History of Christian Dialogues*, London, Routledge Curzon, 2002 especially chapter 17 and 18.

[385] Ahluwalia, P., Politics *and Post-Colonial Theory*, London: Routledge: 2001, p.20.

[386] Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*; Mamdami, *Citizen and Subject*; Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*; Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*.

between Europe, the West, the rational, the dynamic, the civilised (Self) and the African (Other) or to be specific, the Gĩkũyũ world that was depicted as irrational, strange, culturally static and savage.[387] It was a world tantamount to what E. Said identifies in his work as the study of the Orient within the yardstick of a Western political vision of reality whose structure is composed of the opposition between the familiar and the strange.[388] The missionary discourses, like the colonial ones, were also strongly rooted in and based on the dialectic and binary visions of reality and cosmological paradigms. As already seen in the works of Cagnolo and his fellow missionaries, this binary epistemological vision is apparent. In fact, even as late as 1950's, J. C., Carothers and L.S.B. Leakey, writing about the Mau Mau uprising reprises the same discourses of the early colonial and missionary mentality.[389]

Between 1890 and the 1940's colonial discourses in relation to the Gĩkũyũ people were characterised by two clearly marked zones. The first zone was composed of the colonial officials and the settlers while the other was a native zone. Within the colonial world-view, these two distinct zones never politically and economically assimilated. They were like the two ridges, *Kameno* and *Makũyũ*, depicted by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in his work; *The River Between*, ridges which never met.[390] These discourses, based on the colonial mentality and specifically pioneered by the settlers and the missionaries, postulated that the Gĩkũyũ, within their cosmology and worship, were a quintessence of everything evil whereas the settlers and the missionaries were the civilised saviours. The joined project of civilising the Africans, forged between the government, settlers, missionaries and some Gĩkũyũ *athomi* delineated an old colonial identity of the traditional Gĩkũyũ and the Mau Mau freedom fighters for instance, as savages and pathological beings who rejoiced in the killing of other people. At the end of the Mau Mau war, the colonial government, collaborating with the settlers and to a great extent with the missionaries had massacred many thousands of Gĩkũyũ people either in the concentration

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[387] Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*, Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*.

[388] Said, E. *Orientalism*, London: Routledge, 1978, p.45.

[389] Carothers, J.C., *The African Mind in Health and Disease: A Study in Ethnopsychiatry*, Geneva: World Health Organisation, 1953. After only six months of training in psychiatry, Carother became an 'expert' in ethno-psychiatry. In his work, he confirmed the colonial binary discourse claiming that the Mau Mau fighters were coming from a legacy of Gĩkũyũ barbarism and thus psychopathological. Some could never be cured while others could be cured only by using principles of Christian stewardship. Leakey followed the same course claiming for a remedy through confessions. Leakey, *Defeating Mau Mau*, London: Methuen, 1954, pp. 85-6; Carothers, J.C., *The Psychology of Mau Mau*, Nairobi: Government Printer, 1954; Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*, p.106-108; Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, pp.282-4.

[390] Ngugi, *The River Between*.

camp or in the villages.[391] These unfortunate horrid episodes came as a result of mapping, inscribing a name to the 'Other' in the name of modernisation just as the research has shown and what Mudimbe and other scholars have confirmed.

While the theories of Mudimbe and other scholars discussed in our work are illuminating, what they have failed to discuss is whether Africans had similar discourses in their traditional cosmology before colonialism. In other words, how was power negotiated in the pre-colonial Gĩkũyũ? Where was its genesis? Who was on the receiving end? In the pre-colonial Gĩkũyũ, were there categorical classifications of the 'self' and the 'other' similar to those binary categories in colonial and later postcolonial discourses? In the pre-colonial Gĩkũyũ, who are the subaltern and who represents them in the power-knowledge discourses of and on power? Furthermore, in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Kenya, did the Gĩkũyũ have a voice? Who represented them in the quagmire of power polity? What role did the sacred Mũgumo play in 'giving a voice' and religio-political consciousness to the subaltern Gĩkũyũ mass? To extend our discussion on power hegemony and religio-political control, our discussion recapitulates our research findings delineating how power hegemony was managed and controlled in the pre-colonial Gĩkũyũ.

When exploring the relationship between Ngai, ancestors, the ruling council of elders and the role of the Mũgumo in rituals, the research findings underlined three fundamental points. Firstly, there was a three tier hierarchical relationship where Ngai was the *Mũgai* (giver-myth of origin) of land, progeny, power and wealth. Ngai was also the *Mwene* (owner) and *Mũmbi* (creator-moulder). Secondly, the ancestors were very important since, together with Ngai they gave life to the Gĩkũyũ family and society. Thirdly, the ruling elders, either Mwangi or Irungu, through the ritual ceremonies that culminated around the sacred Mũgumo acquired power from Ngai and ancestors to control the land and all its religio-political functions. The presence of Ngai was powerfully felt around the sacred Mũgumo so much so that the ruling council, intimately associated with the tree, epitomised it with all its powerful characteristics. In them, religion, politics and power were one and the same thing. Since the boundaries between these agencies of power were blurred, it was difficult to know when any of them was used as a tool for exploitation or reconciliation.

Nevertheless, our research findings have strongly indicated that the discourses based on power-knowledge or and class struggle were prevalent in the pre-colonial

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[391] Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*; Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*.

Gĩkũyũ. But power based on class and kinship scuffle seems to have been lesser than that exercised during the colonial regime. The Gĩkũyũ had strong traces of social, economic, religious and political manipulation and subjugation. We can qualify this hypothesis by probing deeper into their traditional cosmology and extracting from there through our research findings, elements of power manipulation within the three periods, namely; a) in the history of migration and settlement, b) within the understanding of traditional land tenure and c) through the rituals performed around the sacred Mũgumo tree.

a) Migration and Settlement

The Gĩkũyũ history of migration and settlement is saturated with discourses on power-conquest, of negotiations and assimilations. As an agricultural group, the Gĩkũyũ were involved with valid degrees of negotiations with the *Maasai*, the *Ndorobo* the *Gumba* and the other neighbours. As the population increased, so did the need for more land and the quest for expansion. But as the thesis has shown, this process was charged with internecine wars. The Gĩkũyũ people engaged in barter trade with their neighbours. They also conducted ceremonies of blood brotherhood where each party swore to protect the other and treat each other as consanguine. These rituals were fundamental to strengthen their group.[392]

Within Gĩkũyũ cosmogony, there are myths that explicate the power-knowledge discourse. Kenyatta[393] highlights the myth that shows how the Gĩkũyũ people moved from nomadic to an agricultural style of life. As the myth goes, the first ancestor had prevented the people from cultivating the land and even after a prolonged period of negotiations, he was adamant. The Gĩkũyũ people, having exhausted all forms of dialogue with the leader without positive results, revolted against him. As a result, the first generation that carried out the initial coup d'état was called the *iregi* (from the *rega* (v)-refuse, disobey or reject). Another myth shows how the Gĩkũyũ moved from a matriarchal to a patriarchal managed system of government. It starts by demonising the reign of women, depicting them as domineering and ruthless. The myth explains how men tricked the women by making most of them pregnant and, in their weakest time, overthrew the government. There is also the latest story told about the Wangu wa Makeri, the first colonial woman chief from Murang'a who lost her power and resigned in June 1909 when, as she dance the *kĩbata* (a dance for male only), exposed her body to the

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[392] Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu*; Lambert, *The System of Land Tenure*; Routledge, *With A Prehistoric People*; Castro, *Facing Kirinyaga*.

[393] Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, p. 186.

public.[394] Finally, there is a common myth about the people of a small stature whom the Gĩkũyũ call the *Gumba* narrating how they either disappeared into the forest or were massacred by the Gĩkũyũ ancestors as they moved deep into the forest to claim the land.

What all these myths point to, as our work has clearly shown, is the religio-political configuration based strongly on power hegemony in the pre-colonial Gĩkũyũ society which augurs well with the existing theory of Mudimbe and Horton but goes beyond the literature of colonial era. These myths also explicate the discourses on gender and power struggle in Kenya today. The other area that poignantly shows how the power contestation was exercised is that of land. Land is a podium for power discourses in the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial Gĩkũyũ.

b) The Mbarĩ and the Land

The agricultural traditional Gĩkũyũ valued land and equated it to the mother that fed them. The fact that they could authenticate their position by going back to the myth of origin and seeing the land as given by Ngai is crucially important to the understanding of power-knowledge discourse in their cosmology. The religious significance of the land was endorsed by the fact that it was Ngai the *Mũmbi* who gave it to the people and that the ancestors were buried in the soil. The most sacred mission of every Gĩkũyũ was to 'civilise' the soil through the tiling of the land. Land gave the Gĩkũyũ people an identity. Through their sweat while toiling on the land and clearing the forest, they produced what J. Lonsdale calls 'a culture from Nature'.[395] This being the case, every Gĩkũyũ was in principle supposed to own a piece of land, a situation which as our work has shown, did not always happen.

In traditional land tenure, land belonged to and was controlled by *mbarĩ*. But the pre-colonial Gĩkũyũ, as the research has revealed, was riddled with a complex hierarchical economical and religio-political structure which proliferated with unequal distribution of wealth and land. In this system, there was the rich *mbarĩ* and the *ahoi* (tenant at will). The *ahoi* were the Gĩkũyũ members of a different *mbarĩ* having more stock than they could graze and therefore who were invited by a householder with more land than he could use. The relationship was sealed by marriage so that the *ahoi* acquired some female right to land. Between the *mbarĩ* and the *ahoi*, there was an interdependent relationship based on alliance. Unlike the *ahoi*, the *njaguti* and *ndungata* were

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[394] Wanyoike, M.W., *Wangu wa Makeri*, Nairobi: East African Education Pub., 2002.

[395] Lonsdale, J., 'The Moral Economy of Mau Mau, p.334.

proletariat, the poor, and the landless who relied on the generosity of the rich *mbarĩ*. They had little or no security and could be evicted at any time. The amassing of wealth by *mbarĩ* through the exploitation of the *njaguti* and the *ndungata* created in the pre-colonial Gĩkũyũ, a dialectic and binary world based on the haves and have nots, a class of super proletariat or what A. Gramsci calls 'the subaltern'.

Through their knowledge of tradition, wealth and power, the powerful *mbarĩ*, as our research has demonstrated, mapped and designed the Gĩkũyũ world. They were now the 'Self' while the *njaguti* and the *ndungata* were the 'Other'. This language of 'self' and 'otherness' camouflaged within the power polity, was not starkly different from that of colonialism. But in traditional cosmology, the difference is twofold: the *mũhoi* or and *ndungata* could traverse the boundaries of 'otherness' by marrying from the family of the rich *mbarĩ*. Moreover, in this cosmological framework, discourses were based on neither skin pigmentation nor racial classification as was the case of colonialism. Nevertheless, the rich *mbarĩ*, like the colonial masters, demanded loyalty from their subjects cementing the subtle relationship with the exchange of gifts and services especially during the planting and harvesting periods. The *njaguti and the ndungata* were for instance obliged to provide labour in exchange for a piece of land given to them, land that was not commensurate to the labour offered.[396] Within the pre-colonial Gĩkũyũ group, there emerged a Gĩkũyũ identity strongly rooted in the common language, topology, class and kinship affiliations based on power and wealth. The interplay of social, political and religious constructions was acted in such a way that each individual participated in his own way. This process became even more apparent during colonialism. It was a process tantamount to what B. Berman calls constructivism, whereby, colonialists, the missionaries and the Gĩkũyũ people participated in different ways and through negotiations, created multiple identities. Within the postcolonial hegemony, it was the interplay of these pre-colonial and colonial discourses on power-knowledge and those of globalisation that would create the 'politics of the belly' so prevalent in the Kenyan government and the church today. Finally, another area that prompts discourses on power in the traditional Gĩkũyũ is that of the rituals around the Mũgumo tree.

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[396] Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance in Kenya*; Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*; Wa-Githumo, *Land and Nationalism in Kenya*; Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*; Lambert, *The System of Land Tenure*; Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*; Kilson, 'Land and the Kikuyu'; Muriuki, *A History of the Kikuyu*; Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*; Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*.

c) The Rituals around the sacred Mūgumo

In the pre-colonial Gĩkũyũ, the power-knowledge discourse becomes even more quintessential when we consider how the rituals performed around the sacred Mūgumo validated the position of power for the ruling generation and gave unlimited status to the newly circumcised males. Exploring the characteristic of the Mūgumo tree, the research has detailed that it was the tree of religio-political and cultural value. First, the Mūgumo was revered for its potency. It was believed to transmit sexual power and so was esteemed for its fertility potential. Thus, the fact that Ngai, the giver of fertility constantly communed with the people around the Mūgumo through rituals guaranteed fertility to the people, their land and livestock. As a result, the sacred tree could make barren women fertile and impotent men sexually potent. In associating themselves with the Mūgumo, Gĩkũyũ people guaranteed the future progeny. The story of Wacici the herd boy highlights above all, the power of the Mūgumo in gender and religio-political transformations. Besides, milky-sap of the Mūgumo symbolically epitomised mother's milk.

However, in traditional Gĩkũyũ, discourses on power-sexuality and religion were deeply rooted in the Mūgumo tree. This is plausible since as the research has underlined, the Gĩkũyũ had a very intimate affiliation with trees. Trees fed, sheltered, protected and healed them. In the realm of this cosmology, the knowledge of the trees meant power. Some of the most revered but also feared people were associated with trees. The medicine men for instance had an in-depth botanical knowledge. As a consequence, they, like the ruling elders and the witchdoctors had created a 'world' of their own so that through their arboreal knowledge and dexterity in treating the people, they had acquired colossal power and prestige.

As the research findings indicate, the Mūgumo was primarily invested with a lot of power because it was the *mũtĩ wa Ngai* (tree of Ngai). Around it, Ngai communed with the Gĩkũyũ people. Around this tree, he accepted their offerings and blessed them with abundant rainfall, productive lands, luxuriant men, women and livestock. The Mūgumo had above all, the potency to transform gender, topology, and Gĩkũyũ religio-political lives. Within the affiliations between the Gĩkũyũ and the arboreal culture, it stood out as the primary symbol. In the rituals around it, individuals and the whole community were transformed. Around the Mūgumo, those who took part underwent what R. Grimes calls; 'a momentous metamorphosis, a moment after which one is never again

the same'.[397]   The story of Wacici serves to illustrate not only gender and sexual transformation through the power of the Mũgumo but also the fact that the Gĩkũyũ people were conscious of their choice as an agricultural community.   There are two principal rituals that clearly delineate the power discourse in the pre-colonial Gĩkũyũ.   The *ituĩka* ceremony in which the ritual culminated around the sacred Mũgumo, vested the ruling generation (Mwangi or Irungu) with monumental religio-political power.   These ruling elders, associating themselves with the sacred Mũgumo became the mirrors through which the traditional Gĩkũyũ community viewed, evaluated and reformulated its identity. They embellished the reigning Mũgumo, since, having asked Ngai and the ancestors to bless them, the ruling elders like the Mũgumo tree, acquired unquestionable power and authority.   The ritual of *ituĩka* like that of *irua* was powerful and instrumental.   Through the *ituĩka*, power was vested in the minority ruling council.   As a consequence, the ruling petit bourgeoisie could use these religio-political rituals, as Horton's theory stipulates, to manipulate and control events as well as command respect from the rest of the Gĩkũyũ population.

The *irua, sine qua non* ritual among the traditional Gĩkũyũ made the initiates socially mature adults who could, with time, marry and continue climbing the ladder of power-knowledge and social prestige achieved by joining the *kĩama kĩa maturangũrũ* (council of the ruling elder of the highest degree).   Among the rituals of *irua* was that of *kuna Mũgumo* (breaking the Mũgumo) which epitomised the shedding off of boyhood and embracing warrior-hood.   This ritual, publicly cerebrated by every Gĩkũyũ member, underlines pertinent issues on power and social, religious and political transformation in society.   But our research has unearthed interesting debates concerning the *irua*.   Today, the young and globalised generation among the Gĩkũyũ continues to question the relevance and end of the *irua*.   In other words, if in the traditional Gĩkũyũ, the *irua* rituals ascribed one with powerful social and political status within the community, what is the goal of circumcision in the hospital today?   What does one socially achieve?   In a nutshell, what is the *irua* for?   This is an interesting area that prompts future thorough research in contemporary Gĩkũyũ culture, an area that our research did not specifically deal with as it was outside our scope.

Concluding this section, we can underline that our research findings have strongly revealed that discourses on the power-knowledge hegemony were prevalent in the pre-colonial, colonial periods and continued to manifest themselves within the political

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[397] Grimes, R.L., *Deeply into the Bone*, p.6.

platform of the post-colonial Kenya. It can be argued that the 'novelty' of colonial discourses is the introduction of racism and tribalism as a yardstick for creating and evaluating its own dialectical and binary discourses which resulted in the system of 'divide and rule'. The complexities of these cultural configuration and religio-political discourses can be understood using Berman's constructivist approach. His theory has illuminated our study and understanding of the pre-colonial Gĩkũyũ showing how various identities were forged within their society. A clear example is based on the binary and dialectic relationship that existed between the powerful *mbarĩ* and the *ahoi* within the Gĩkũyũ traditional land tenure. This economical and religio-political schism created two groups of people within their society; the rich and the poor, the latter population being the subaltern. Furthermore, the relationship between the ruling elders and the rest of the community can be understood within the epistemological discourses on the 'Self' (people in power) and the 'Other' (subaltern). These dichotomies, exercised either in the sharing of the political and economical power or in the subjugation of traditional religio-political rituals in colonial hegemony later found strong resonances in the post-colonial hegemony in Kenya creating what Berman and Bayart call, the 'politics of the belly' which as our research has demonstrated were manifested in social stratification and leadership in the Gĩkũyũ cosmology. A clearer picture of these power hegemonies becomes more apparent when we explore the discourses on identity formation both in the pre-colonial and colonial Gĩkũyũ society.

The Mũgumo and Gĩkũyũ: Discourse on the Ethnic Identity

Our research findings have clearly shown that discourses on identities were well established both in the pre-colonial and colonial Gĩkũyũ. They trigger sensitive questions, for instance: who was a Gĩkũyũ before the coming of the colonial government, the settlers and the missionaries? In other words, how were Gĩkũyũ ethnic identities configured in pre-colonial Gĩkũyũ society? What role did the missionaries, the settlers and the colonial hegemony play in the forging of the new images and identities of the local people?

Through the theory of Berman, our thesis has argued that the modern Gĩkũyũ identity is a social construction of pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial periods through the reaction of the people to the social, economic, cultural and political forces and power hegemony brought about by the ruling elders but exacerbated by colonialism. Further, through our research findings, we have attested that the Gĩkũyũ ethnic invention emerged through internal struggles over moral economy and political legitimacy. In all these

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religio-political configurations, our thesis, supported by the survey, has strongly argued that in the forging of the Gĩkũyũ ethnic identities, the petit bourgeoisie played a great part, the majority seeking a conservative modernisation.

Although Berman does not critically examine the traditional Gĩkũyũ, we have used his theory, strengthened by research to demonstrate controversial issues of identity formation especially in the pre-colonial Gĩkũyũ and how these debates are still important to the modern Gĩkũyũ.

Ethnic identity and the pre-colonial Gĩkũyũ

One of the strength of this research is how strongly it has elucidated the way the pre-colonial Gĩkũyũ perceived themselves, how they identified themselves not only as an autochthonous group united by a common language and kinship relations but also the fact that they came from one founding father: Gĩkũyũ. Further, the land they occupied was inherited from their ancestors who in return acquired it from the founding father. As the myth has shown, it was Ngai who gave them the land. Thus, the land, the ancestor and localised deity (Ngai) are pivotal to understanding the complexities involved in the formation of the Gĩkũyũ identity. But myths are also essentially important in ethnic and national identity formation. Through the relevant myths and songs, the research has established how the Gĩkũyũ consider their history and how they communicate with each other as to who they are. By means of the myths and songs and by the way the people relate with Ngai, *ngoma* and nature, and through the rituals that are the key to forging the identity of the individual and the group, one understands how Gĩkũyũ membership is defined internally.

The pre-colonial Gĩkũyũ, like other human societies, classified themselves and other people as belonging to certain categories. In their cosmology, there were the kin and non-kin (*mbarĩ* and non *mbarĩ*). In relation to land ownership, there were *ene* (owners), the *ahoi* (tenants at will), *njaguti, ndungata* and the *ndũrĩrĩ* (foreigners). There was also the *mũrika* (co-initiate) and the non *mũrika*. In fact, there is a proverb that says that *riika na nyũmba itiũraga* (one neither loses the initiation set nor the clan right). This ethnic classification is paramount in understanding the genesis of the binary discourses both in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Gĩkũyũ.

The Gĩkũyũ, as our research findings have shown not only classify but also attach cultural significance or meaning to their categories. The classification of *mbarĩ* vis à vis non-*mbarĩ*, family members and strangers, chief and subject, master and servant, settler and squatter means that the Gĩkũyũ give them constellations of feelings. Even in their

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affiliation with the trees, they use similar classifications, e.g., deciduous and evergreen, those good for building, for food, medicine and those that are not. In fact, stressing as far the pre-colonial Gĩkũyũ, kin is construed differently from non-kin, *mũhoi* as different from *mwene* (owner), *njaguti* as different from *ndungata* and thus social and political interactions are differentiated. In this configuration, social behaviour critically reflects the putative differences. Throughout the history of the Gĩkũyũ, the discourses on 'Self' and 'Other' are prominent. What is clear from our research is the fact that these social categories provide the basis for status ascription, a pedestal that fluctuates with economical and religio-political change.[398]

The fact of revisiting the roots of Gĩkũyũ cosmology has been quintessential as our research has shown. The autochthonous myths of origin and those of their relationship with Ngai, trees and nature in general, have indicated a 'journey' of the indigenous Gĩkũyũ in ethnic identity formation. Generally, in cosmogony, myths explaining the origin tend to buttress a conviction that one specific group arrived in a given locality from elsewhere. These myths deny the diversity of origin by subtly disguising evidences of the initial amalgams. In the Gĩkũyũ cosmological framework, apart from the myth of origin, there are others, as our research findings have indicated, which show the cultural interdependence between the Gĩkũyũ and their neighbours. They also confirm how the Gĩkũyũ consciously came to choose their present identity as an agricultural group as portrayed, for instance, by the story of Wacici. Critically, evaluating these myths, we can emphasize that mythological explanations of origin and the settlement of the Gĩkũyũ does explain today, differences between them and other groups and provides the rationale for such ethnical differences. The myths provide a feeling of social belonging: 'I am because I belong'. In doing this, the mythical world of the Gĩkũyũ demonstrates a people concerned with parentage: to know who they are by looking back genealogically to their ancestors. As our research has attested, Gĩkũyũ cosmogony elicits interesting discourses not only of identity formation but also of ethnic inclusion, exclusion and national identity formation in Kenya today, discourses which will need further research.

This is important because a Gĩkũyũ who has grown up for instance in the urban Nairobi area, surrounded by people who speak various languages and who belongs to a mixture of cultural backgrounds will certainly acquire a different personality from the one

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[398] Romanucci-Ross, L. & Devos, G.A., *Ethnic Identity: Creation, Conflict and Accommodation*, London: Altamira Press, 1996.

brought up in the rural milieu of Gĩcũgũ. In fact within the urban culture, it will be important to research the myths that people might have forged in order to explain their origin and their place in the world today. This can be done by asking disturbing but serious questions about the role that modern religions have played in buttressing other traditional myths and replacing them with only one soteriological myth.

Apart from the role land, kinship ties and myths play in ethnic formation and power hegemony, there is also the question of ritual and its role in the forging of identity and creating a sustainable Gĩkũyũ community. In analysing various rituals, what has clearly emerged is that in various rituals around the sacred Mũgumo, the Gĩkũyũ celebrate their sense of history. In the rituals of *irua* and *ituĩka* for instance, there is an intense degree, as Horton's theory has asserted, of collective experience. This experience could be understood as encompassing both the religious and political milieu of the people. In these rituals, especially of the *irua*, society demanded participation which was in most cases accompanied by reinforcing an emotional response and allowing the participants to identify themselves with one another. Rituals of *irua* and *ituĩka* taught the people who they were and gave them a sense of purpose.[399] In the life of the traditional Gĩkũyũ, these rituals could be referred to as those that were geared towards affirming and reinforcing ethnic identity. It can be argued that it was from these public rituals that individuals were made aware of the expectation and the regulation of the group so that by learning what was expected of them, they could not only identify themselves as Gĩkũyũ people but also knew who they were and their religio-political role within the family and the group.

What has emerged clearly from the research is the dwindling of these myths and rituals in Gĩkũyũ cosmology. If myths, and especially rituals of initiation, gave the people a sense of purpose and the sacred Mũgumo empowered both the rulers and the young warriors in the traditional Gĩkũyũ, then, diminishing or annihilating them with the processes of colonialism and Christianity seem to have created a very confused generation of the Gĩkũyũ. Throughout the research, what was culturally shocking was not the fact that with colonialism and postcolonialism the Gĩkũyũ people renegotiated with different hegemonic systems in Kenya to forge their new identities, but the fact that today many Gĩkũyũ people are still grappling with the question of identity e.g. what does it mean to be a Gĩkũyũ in a multiethnic Kenya today? What does it mean to be a Christian or a Muslim Gĩkũyũ? Again, who is an authentic traditional Gĩkũyũ today in a globalised

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[399] Grimes, *Deeply into the Bones.*

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and Christianised Kenya? These are some of the issues that our research has opened, issues that create an enormous field of research today.

Following our research findings, we can assert that, far from what Berman argues, most of the young Gĩkũyũ as well as the majority of the elderly are 'culturally schismatic'. Since, neither religion nor politics seem to offer a way out of the murky definition of whom they are, they try to bridge this 'identity crisis and identity thirst' by forming or joining religio-political and revival groups like the *Mũngiki*.

Trees and ethnic identity formation

In the pre-colonial Gĩkũyũ, the Mũgumo tree acquired prominence in their cosmology. Apart from kinship relations, language and *mbarĩ* system one could easily understand who the *Mũgĩkũyũ* (a Gĩkũyũ) was by having participated in the rituals around the sacred Mũgumo. From this cultural vantage, the history of the affiliation between Gĩkũyũ and nature, especially the relationship they have with the trees, is a key to understanding why the sacred Mũgumo tree is a primary symbol for traditional Gĩkũyũ. In the pre-colonial configuration, it was around the sacred tree that the founding father of the group acquired his wife who became the founding mother of the Gĩkũyũ group. It was around the sacred Mũgumo that the first dowry was paid to Ngai in order to acquire sons to marry the 'nine' daughters of the first founding couple. It was around the same sacred tree that Gĩkũyũ celebrated his first religio-political ritual to Ngai and Ngai in return blessed him, promising him his anthropomorphic presence.

In all these affiliations that are cemented through the rituals around the sacred tree, the Mũgumo acts as an axis of identity formation. Around the Mũgumo, the existential angst of the Gĩkũyũ people is offered to Ngai and the ancestors, imploring them to cure their sick, strengthen the young as warriors and in their adult responsibilities as mothers and fathers, and bless them with children and wealth. We can emphasise that around the sacred Mũgumo, Gĩkũyũ identity was 'frozen' within time and re-forged again in order to adapt to the challenging religio-political and economical situations. This was done, as our research has shown, through the celebration of principal rituals like *irua*, *ituĩka* and imploring Ngai for rain.

Researching on trees and their role in identity formation, our findings have underlined that traditional Gĩkũyũ still have an immense and impressive botanical knowledge. Their arboreal understanding meant that they could cure many diseases which even modern medicine has been incapable of eradicating. This, as has been argued, meant that specific diseases could only be cured by using traditional remedies.

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During the colonial and even in the postcolonial epoch, a lot of people especially from our area of research and in fact from other parts of Kenya, still practice herbal medicine (*miti shamba*). The crucial question is: why has *miti shamba* practice like in the pre-colonial epoch proliferated today in Kenya? Is it simply because of modern diseases like Aids and cancer? As part of understanding the answers to some of these questions, our research revisited the traditional herbalists to decipher their role in the wider society and how people viewed them.

The findings of our research done on the relationship between the Gĩkũyũ and nature (especially with trees) has revealed that within their cosmology, the traditional medicine men created a culturally 'inner space', rich with traditional symbols. These men were not only admired for their astuteness in the use of the forces of nature, including trees to cure the people but also as cultural pointers that gave both a direction and meaning to who a Gĩkũyũ was and what his/her cosmology entailed. They were both the healers and keepers of traditional Gĩkũyũ symbols like divining gourd, divining seeds, trees associated with different causes of social malaise etc. They had, using Horton's theory, the dexterity to penetrate not only the world of the socially and religiously dislocated Gĩkũyũ through sickness but also to interpret those symbols which otherwise were difficult to the common folks and to show how these symbols were viable cultural instruments necessary to perceive and arrange the Gĩkũyũ cosmological framework. Thus, in the discourses on identity, we can argue that traditional healers nurtured, maintained and to a large extent, controlled those religio-political forces necessary for the survival of the families and the group. Even today, any Gĩkũyũ can revisit his/her roots by returning to the traditional healers and although immersed in a murky world in disarray or in economic, political and religious disintegration, can recapture his/her identity in this traditional world so cleverly managed by the *miti shamba* doctors.

The Gĩkũyũ religio-philosophical world-view has also revealed that identity is not fixed, but is first of all localised. Thus, the surroundings, the topological location, the scenery, the mountains, trees and the whole arboreal structure acquire a sacrosanct value. Traditional Gĩkũyũ could identify themselves with Mount Kenya since it was there that Ngai their *Mũrungu* lived and where he manifested his power and affinity to the people through his anthropomorphic nature. The sacred Mũgumo, a tree per excellence, as the research findings indicate, manifested a real presence of Ngai in the midst of the people. Those who associated themselves with Ngai affiliated themselves with the Mũgumo and likewise extended this ontological relationship with other members of society and

eventually with nature. Under this conceptual framework, religion served to instil social and political harmony. This does not preclude the fact that the Gĩkũyũ religio-political hegemony was far from being perfect as is presented by Kenyatta. What this form of arrangement underlines is that religion was not based on dogmas, explained as mysteries and used to subjugate the subaltern mass within society. Religion was the hand-maid of the Gĩkũyũ society that served to answer very existential questions. From these perspectives, the identity of who was a Gĩkũyũ was topologically defined with regional valiations of language and ritual so that there was the Gĩkũyũ of Kabete, Kiambu, Metumi, Gaki, Kĩrĩnyaga (Ndia and Gĩcũgũ).

The formation and the forging of Gĩkũyũ ethnic identities was also reinforced by their relationship with nature. People were not Gĩkũyũ but became so through their act of 'civilising' the soil as the history of migration and the myths demonstrate. This personal and communal tilling of the soil played a crucial role in the forging of Gĩkũyũ identity. The Gĩkũyũ were a people of the land, they were the people of the highlands especially those around Mount Kenya and Nyandarua. They were a people associated with primordial forests like Mount Kenya and Njũkĩinĩ. Finally, Gĩkũyũ were a group who with centuries of working with the soil had come to be called the *rurĩrĩ rwa Mũmbi* (people of Mũmbi) where women played a crucial role.

Women and Gĩkũyũ identity formation

One of the most instrumental groups in the forging of Gĩkũyũ identity was that of the women. Women had contributed to the creation of identity principally by their capacity as mothers. Their role in ethnic identity formation was a continuous process which never ended. In the division of labour for instance, women had a giant share in the field apart from their daily domestic chores. In the land, they continued their role as *ombi* (creators/moulders). By working with the soil, women moulded the Gĩkũyũ ethnic identity which was constantly changing with the signs of the time and geographical space. Like talented moulders, these mothers were the *aki* (constructors) of Gĩkũyũ ethnic identity. In working with the soil, they gave a Gĩkũyũ identity based on topological location and reproduction with regional variation.

As our thesis has argued, women, by using the 'politics of the womb',[400] as *ombi*, contributed enormously to the Gĩkũyũ identity formation especially in the pre-colonial and colonial hegemony. They continue to do so in postcolonial Kenya. By their role as

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[400] Thomas, L.M., Politics of the Womb: Women Reproduction and the State in Kenya. London: University of California Press, 2003

mothers, they forged an identity based on consanguinity, an identity that could trace its cultural trajectory through the *mbarī* and a common ancestor. Gīkūyū women, by actively living their role in the community, helped to forge a Gīkūyū image and identity that was fluid, open to challenges, contextualised and constantly modernised, negotiated within time and space. Additionally, women made their men into 'big' and influential people in the Gīkūyū religio-political hegemony and so were great contributors to the development of a strong and vibrant national identity.

Moreover women in the pre-colonial and all through the colonial and postcolonial time have had a lot of power and religio-political influence. They sustained the traditional economy in the pre-colonial Gīkūyū, maintained it during the colonial period especially between 1952 and 1961 during the Mau Mau era. In these tumultuous years women took care of the Gīkūyū families both in the concentration camps and in the colonial and missionary created villages. They collaborated with their men both in the forest and in the concentration camps to fortify the Gīkūyū identity which was threatened by the forces of colonialism and missionary exploitation. Gīkūyū women gave hope for an independent Kenya by fighting had-in-hand with their men against the colonial hegemony. Some even circumcised themselves as a sign of defiance of the colonial and missionary hegemony.[401] Like in the story of Wacici, these women consciously forged and re-forged different identities configured within the socio-political and religious configuration of the time. In a nut shell, Gīkūyū women kept and remained faithful to their call as life-givers, as moulders, as social and economical regulators but above all, as caring mothers, epitomising what any modern state is called to be.

In a world hierarchically organised and dominated by the male, the best slogan to recapitulate the role of women in the Gīkūyū cosmology and worship would be: behind every successful Gīkūyū man, a woman (or women) were involved. However, these internal forces of power within the Gīkūyū world need to be investigated even more in order to see the role of women in the creation of the 'politics of the belly' and the 'womb' and how the Mūgumo became a source of their power and encouragement. Their role is also vital in the future study of the ethnic identity formation, gender and politics, as well as the discourses of and on power in Kenya. Moreover, we may ask: how much has this role of women been recognised in concrete terms by the men? Do women occupy some

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[401] Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*; Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*; Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*; Mackenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance in Kenya*.

places of prominence in Gĩkũyũ society or always 'secondary' roles? If not, what need to be done pertaining the question of gender vis à vis religion and politics in Kenya today?

Negotiated Identity: The Mũgumo and the Colonial Experience

The colonial discourses on power-knowledge hegemony are also classified through ethnic, racial, socio-economic and religio-political organisations. In Kenya, for instance, racial classification of black and white was differentiated from each other through the lenses of skin pigmentation. The settlers, the missionaries and some colonial officials believed that there were socially meaningful differences based on colour between the whites and blacks. By virtue of being white, they argued, whites were better than the natives.[402] This was a classical definition of racism which, in colonial Kenya was weaved through the web of politics, religion and economy.

As K. Appiah, V. Mudimbe, A. Mbembe, M. Mamdami and our research findings have reminded us, European racism was experienced in different degrees in various colonial conditions.[403] In relation to the Gĩkũyũ, the research has underlined that colonial hegemony, sustained by the missionaries and settlers, shows the Gĩkũyũ as a threat to the colonial government and missionaries. In this world-view, being a Gĩkũyũ meant that there was a terrible racial tag. Within this experience, the indigenous Gĩkũyũ felt that they belonged to a world of stigmatised sub-culture, a world where everything from their music, religion and language was defined by the colonial and the missionaries as inferior. It was from this experience that indigenous people, torn between the traditional and the modern world collaborated with the colonial regime to forge a Gĩkũyũ identity that was commensurate to the religio-political and economical environment of the time.

Going along with the theory of Berman, we can conclude that what we have today as a Kenyan state is the interplay of social construction. In this process of forging various identities, each of the group, the colonial, the settlers and the missionaries together with the indigenous population participated in its own way. Ethnic identity emerged through the process of internal struggles over moral economy and political legitimacy. As a result of colonialism and the African response, there appeared new identities based on what Berman rightly calls authoritarianism, patronage, clientism, ethnic fragmentation and competition. All these identities depended primarily on the social, political, economical

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[402] Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*; Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*; Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*; Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*; Castro, *Facing Kirinyaga*.

[403] Appiah, *In my Father's House*; Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*; Mbembe, A., *On the Postcolony*, London: University of California Press, 2001; Mamdami, *Citizen and Subject*.

and religious situation in Kenya. In these new identities, as the Gĩkũyũ bourgeoisie led in the religio-political and economical platform, there was a creation of binary worlds based on class, where the majority remained as a super proletariat. Loyalty was rewarded with wealth and/ or a place in government positions. The first two presidents of Kenya, Kenyatta and his successor Daniel Arap Moi, assiduously followed this pattern. Kenyatta's contribution to the forging of the Gĩkũyũ identity is noteworthy. As already specified, in changing his name from Johnstone Kamau Ngengi to Jomo Kenyatta, he consciously invented his own image of Gĩkũyũ, putting them into a distant past. Quintessentially, using primordialist model, he 'froze' the Gĩkũyũ community in time. He collaborated with the colonialist project aimed at creating a stable bounded ethnic Gĩkũyũ. He even participated, to use Mudimbe's ideology, in mapping demarcating and controlling different ethnic groups until his death in 1978. A similar political trajectory was followed by Moi until his retirement in 2002.

The crucial question is: what was the aftermath of this joint project between the colonial government, the missionaries and the Gĩkũyũ elites? Most of the subaltern Gĩkũyũ felt surrounded by the massive cultural predators that tore the heart of their traditional system very slowly, bit by bit. They smelt imminent death of their culture since the cultural calabash so to speak, from which they drank their rich heritage, was breaking. Day by day, the traditional Gĩkũyũ experienced the impact of cultural decay. It haunted them like a bad dream as they watched their most valued customs, their land, their music and rituals around the sacred Mũgumo tree slip into oblivion under the auspice of missionaries and the colonial government. In this religio-political crisis which strongly threatened the unity of the group, affirmation through rituals principally around the sacred Mũgumo or oathing ceremonies were conducted in order to resolve the internal stresses resulting from the political and social degradation of the group. These oathing ceremonies culminated during the Mau Mau war and extended into the concentration camps and barbed wire-villages.[404]

Consequently, most of the Gĩkũyũ were torn between the two worlds: traditional versus modern. This crisis is well demonstrated by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his various postcolonial works. Wa Thiong'o subtly shows the conflict existing within the world-view of the modern Gĩkũyũ. For instance, in his work: *The River Between*, this binary vision is epitomised by the characters of Waiyakĩ, Mũthoni and her uncircumcised sister, Nyambura. The two ridges emblemise the unfathomable chasm between the traditional

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[404] Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*; Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*.

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and the modern, the colonial-missionary versus the indigenous Gĩkũyũ. In this work, Mũthoni rebels, is circumcised but later dies. However, before dying she summons Waiyakĩ with a very poignant message for her sister Nyambura. She claims that she had seen Jesus and had done so by going back to the roots of Gĩkũyũ tradition. Mũthoni therefore ontologically marries the rituals of *irua* with Christ.[405] She can be said to represent the subaltern group in Africa, vested with colonial and missionary influence sandwiched between the traditional and the modern Christian world.

Again, in the other works of Ngugi: *A Grain of Wheat* and *Weep not, child*, both based on postcolonial discourses in Kenya, the author demonstrates how the discourses on power-knowledge hegemony, together with those of ethnic identity formation, are all based on dialectic and binary religio-political visions and how they blur the road to a religio-political independence in the Kenyan state. The neo-colonial Kenya suffers from its colonial legacy. It has created a world where the subaltern, having fought for *ithaka na wiathi* (land and freedom), are still left out. The power cake with all the ingredients of independence is divided between the loyalist and the sell-outs. The postcolonial Kenya, guided through the 'politics of the belly' is full of betrayal, vengeance and political demonstrations. The 'new' Kenya under the auspice of Kenyatta and Moi has not only disgraced the heroes[406] of freedom but has put the history of the Mau Mau and other subaltern leaders into oblivion. This, it can be argued, created a fertile ground for the revivalist movements like *Mungiki*. But these discourses on the negotiated identity become clearer as we analyse the data of our survey. Thus the missionary discourses are fundamental.

Mũgumo and the Missionary Discourse

Missionaries, especially from 1900 up to the 60s depicted the Gĩkũyũ people as pagans. There emerged discourses of derision where ancestral veneration and the Gĩkũyũ traditional temples of worship were attacked. Other discourses included that of refutation whereby Christianity, using its Western epistemological approach, refuted as absurd Gĩkũyũ traditional beliefs and cosmology showing the dominance of Christianity over the traditional religion. Under the discourse of refutation, Gĩkũyũ *ngoma* (ancestors) became

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[405] Ngugi, *The River Between*, pp. 53 & 103. Also Carlin, M.M., Review of The River Between, *Transition*, no. 19, 1965, pp.52-3.

[406] This can be ascertained by looking back at the trajectory of Kenya unfortunate record of assassination. Some of the most critical and vocal political heroes were brutally murdered during the reign of Kenyatta and Moi. People like Kungu Karumba, J.M Kariuki, Tom Mboya at the time of Kenyatta while Bishop Muge, Robert Ouko and Fr, John Kaiser during the reign of Moi. One may critically ask: Is this the way Kenya repays its political heroes?

Satan. Some dogmas relating to the trinity were reinforced, hell, limbo and purgatory were introduced, all doctrines that had little resonance within the traditional cosmology. It demonstrated this with its scheme of revelation strengthened through the discourses of orthodoxy and conformity.[407] This meant that the indigenous population, according to them, levelled beneath the level of human nature.[408] As a consequence, the missionaries believed that it was this paganism that contributed to infanticide, polygamy, night dances associated with the works of darkness, barbaric circumcision and other rituals done around the Mũgumo tree. According to Fr. Cagnolo and other missionaries (Catholic and Anglican) the Gĩkũyũ, mirrored all manners of imperfection. The best and first mission of these missionaries was to eradicate their traditional temples of worship; the Mũgumo tree, replacing them with churches and schools.

Missionaries, coming from the same territories as the colonial masters and the settlers, either from Europe or America, viewed their mission as that of civilising the natives. They shared the 'white man's burden'. According to the missionaries, Christianity was the last religion. It was pure as opposed to all other religions that needed purification through a merciless eradication of local religions. Since Gĩkũyũ traditional religion was, in the eyes of the first missionaries, a religion of death, a pagan and fetish, a religion that worshiped around the tree, it needed a drastic process of deracination in order to plant the last and the ultimate religion: Christianity. The Gĩkũyũ had to be 'taught about God', a Western God. Through the missionaries, Gĩkũyũ Ngai was 'baptised' and re-named, no longer *Mũrungu, Kĩthuku, Magũ Ngũrũ* as our research has shown but *Baba* and *Mwathani* or *Jehova* as the only God who reigns in power. This 'new' type of God was powerful and thus capable of taking all the non-baptised Gĩkũyũ into limbo or purgatory while the insubordinate Gĩkũyũ were condemned to hell-fire. With the missionary discourses, the question of the gender of Ngai became crucially important. In the traditional Gĩkũyũ, the gender of Ngai was ambivalent, at times using the female epithet of *Mũmbi*, whereas with the new religion, Ngai had to be male, a father who sent his son for the soteriological purpose. How could any Gĩkũyũ easily make sense of these teachings? Following our research findings, we can underline that this type

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[407] A similar criticism is given by Mudimbe commenting on the work of E. Boulaga in Boulaga, *Christianity without Fetishes*, pp.II -III

[408] Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*; Sandgren, *Christianity and the Kikuyu*; Religious Magazine: *La Consolata*, especially those written in the years between 1902 and 1958. Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*; Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*; Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*.

of discourse demonstrates how insensitive to the local cultures the Christian churches were and continues to be in Africa even today.

The Gĩkũyũ underlined the role of the missionaries in their land by putting into a nutshell the intricate relationship involved between these two colonial masters: one acting on behalf of the earthly kingdom while the other one acted on behalf of the heavenly one. One was sent to mediate the British monarch's power from Britain while the other one mediated for God. The slogan: *gũtirĩ mũthũngũ na mũbia* (there is no difference between the priest and the coloniser) demonstrates the direction the missionary discourses went.

Between 1900 and the 1940s, the missionaries in Gĩkũyũ land saw the indigenous people completely as the 'Other'. They believed that the people were heading for hell-fire and hence they were determined willy-nilly to win souls for Jesus. But they needed special tools: education and catechesis. It was through education that missionaries would tutor the indigenous Gĩkũyũ as minors with the hope that one day, the *athomi* (coverts) would attain a full stature in a global society as civilised beings and therefore win their emancipation. Missionaries used religion through the processes of explanation, prediction and control[409] to exploit and fulfil their own personal fantasies but gave a meagre education to the Africans.

Our research has demonstrated why there reigned a lot of controversies between the missionaries and the Gĩkũyũ people. As early as 1902 Kenya had some principal economic advantages to be seized. The first one was the fertile land most of which belonged to the Gĩkũyũ people. Cheap labour was a prerequisite, according to the settlers, for good economic potential and thus the natives were to be persuaded or forced to work on the land of the settlers and the missionaries as squatters.[410] By 1930s, land and forced labour became a bone of contention and since the missionaries and the settlers benefited from the colonial hegemony, they found it difficult to publicly condemn the colonial unjust and exploitative system. Besides, as early as 1902, the Italian missionaries had taken the land of indigenous people as *ahoi* in order to build churches but over a period confiscated large tracts without serious negotiations with the local inhabitants. In Tigoni (Kiambu district) for instance, the Italian missionaries, going against the traditional status of a *mũhoi* grabbed land belonging to the ten *mbarĩ*, numbering about 600 people at the time.[411] The misery to the local people brought about

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[409] Horton, *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West.*

[410] Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, pp10, 122-123, 148-51.

[411] Ibid, p.142.

by land alienation was acute in the 1930s so that Gĩkũyũ politics was saturated with constant land grievances.

There was also the problem of taxes and the carrying of *kipande*. The colonial and missionary binary discourses of the 'Self' and 'Otherness' had completely alienated the local people. They had denied them any form of religio-political voice. The 'Other' could not speak. The 'Other' was politically dumb. Within these discourses, missionaries were the conduit of African opinion. In the eyes of their mother churches in Europe or America, they were the *nābĩ* (Heb. prophet/ *nabii*-Kiswahili). Their first call was that of prophecy (to speak on behalf of). Missionaries mediated between their Christian God and the local people. Like the Old Testament (O.T) prophets, missionaries had the obligation of speaking out on behalf of the most vulnerable members of society about the injustices inflicted on them. As educators, committed to their vocation, these missionaries were called to bring the liberating Gospel to the Africans, nurturing in them the already existing socio-political and religious consciousness relevant for the project of liberation. Christianity was the true religion while the other was a farce. Christian truth was equated with might.

Although their projects of progress are as acknowledged as they are contestable, nevertheless, missionaries in Gĩkũyũ land failed in their duty as prophets. Although some were empathetic with the indigenous grievances, their closeness to the colonial government had rendered them vulnerable to initiating viable projects of justice and peace in Kenya, a legacy that continues today. Once more, some missionaries abhorred the African traditions. The trajectory of missionaries initiating projects of deracinating the sacred trees like the Mũgumo and other sacred groves all over the Gĩkũyũ land with the ideology that they were eradicating the temples of paganism also added to the controversy between the missionaries and the indigenous Gĩkũyũ.[412]

What really culminated the missionary and indigenous controversy was the rituals done around the sacred Mũgumo especially those of *ituĩka* and *irua* for girls. Well, if the Gĩkũyũ had 'collaborated' with the missionaries and colonialist to compose the dictionary and to translate the Bible, christianising Ngai, their local deity, didn't they have the right to exercise their old traditions? The conglomeration of all these sensitive factors, later led to the formation of revival groups. These groups, having been socially and politically conscientised of the injustices of colonial enterprise in the 1920s going to the 40s later

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[412] Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*; Sandgren, *Christianity and the Kikuyu*; Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*; Castro, *Facing Kirinyaga*. Also, interview done in Gĩcũgũ and other part of Kenya, 2003-4.

became a fountainhead for the Mau Mau resistance movement in the fifties. The subaltern 'other' who in the eyes of the 'self' was barbaric and stupid, and who was hunted together with his land and game would slowly overturn the mantle of power in which the hunter would become the hunted. This clearly came when the subaltern Gĩkũyũ tried to question both the missionary and colonial enterprise in Kenya. E. Boulaga rightly accentuates that despite the missionaries preaching peace and equality to the indigenous as dictated by their book (Bible), they, with their paternalistic approach believed that the new *athomi* could never be on the same footing with them and their Western officials. In fact, despite all the Christian rituals bestowed on the new converts, of baptism and confirmation into Christianity, missionaries demanded loyalty, obedience and gratitude from the new converts.[413]

Among the crucial issues in missionary discourses in Kenya was territorialisation of their missions. While the colonial government on the one hand was mapping and designing the colony into European constructs, the missionaries on the other hand used a similar strategy so that proselytisation in Kenya went hand in hand with territorialisation. Some areas were reserved only for specific religious affiliations either catholic or protestant. Kenya was not only partitioned politically, it was religiously divided with different missionary approaches either from Italy, Britain or America. Among the first missionaries to establish their power in Kenya were: the fundamentalist AIC (African Inland Church-from America), the CMS (Church Missionary Society-Britain), CSM (Church of Scotland Mission- Scotland), the Catholics (Irish, English and Italian) which included the Consolata Missionaries (Italy), the Holy Ghost Fathers (France) and the Mill Hill Fathers (Britain). These missionaries created their own 'petit bourgeoisie', Christian elites with what Anderson calls, the 'zest for progress and modernity'.[414] Under those demarcated missionary territories, politics were organised under their patronage and tutorage. Their results were visible during the 40s and 50s. People like Kenyatta were the product of the amalgamation of these missionary and colonial enterprises.

At the core of the missionary discourse were the Christian religious symbols like the Bible, the church, the cross, the Virgin Mary, the Vatican flag (in the case of Catholics) and the British flag as symbols of unwavering power and control. The indigenous people had also their own symbols like the Mũgumo, the lamb, the platform

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[413] Boulaga, *Christianity without Fetishes*, p.22; Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, Book Two; Sandgren, *Christianity and the Kikuyu*; Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*; Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*.

[414] Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, p.15.

for sacrifice and the *Gĩcandĩ* (which told the history of their cosmology). As our research has found out, when the informants were asked about the symbols that replaced the Mũgumo for instance, 236 (94%) said that it was replaced by the church, 97 (39%) said that it was the government while only 22 (9%) gave the Bible as a symbol that replaced the Mũgumo. In fact, one of the 'metaphors' used at that point in time was that of *'plantatio ecclesiae'*, the planting of the Church, or 'transplanting'. This was because it was supposed to be a reflection of the Church at home. However, by eradicating the Mũgumo, Western Christianity would replace it with the Church.

Our hypothesis is confirmed by the fact that when the Italian missionaries: the Consolata fathers, were celebrating their centenary in 2002 in Kenya, they built, to replace the Mũgumo in Tuthu-Murang'a diocese, a centenary chapel to commemorate their first mass celebrated in June 1902. In a way, they may have been on the one hand revisiting the roots and finally recognising the richness of the Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship. If that was the case, it is unfortunate that they ignored these traditional temples in their process of acculturation in Kenya for such a long period. On the other hand, the church may have been giving a strong message to the Gĩkũyũ and to the rest of the Kenyan and Africans that the symbols of power hegemony, used in process of colonisation and missionary proselytisation are still operational in the twenty first century but in a more subtle way so that in the place of the deracinated Mũgumo will reign forever the centenary chapel, a powerful symbol that has been reinforced to stay. However, the motives behind the building of these memorial chapels in the strategic places in the Gĩkũyũ land by the missionaries need to be critically evaluated with a further research. As figure 10.1 shows, the memorial chapel is built with the design of the trunk of the sacred Mũgumo tree. The chair behind the altar is also from the Mũgumo wood.

However, the wind is slowly changing in the cause of evangelisation. Perhaps the missionary church is recognising its inherent catalogue of error in its project of evangelisation in Kenya. We hope the church, by slowly revisiting the roots will be able to apologise to the many Gĩkũyũ still mourning for the injustice done for over one century at the auspices of the colonial government and the missionaries. It is only then that dialogue between traditional religion and Christianity will be possible and a contextualised evangelisation may take place.

Although the thesis has argued critically on the impact of the missionary discourse on the traditional Gĩkũyũ, it has also underlined the fact that religion served to explain, predict and control day-to-day events, and when participation and experience[415] through rituals rich in symbols were crucially important, it is plausible that Christianity could easily have been contextualised some important elements even with its limitations.

This is plausible because, for the Gĩkũyũ people, syncretism was common in their religion and cosmology. They had a very rich heritage of syncretic practices ranging from religion to the formation of warrior-hood especially acquired through the process of borrowing and assimilation with their neighbouring groups. One clear example is the name of Ngai. They also borrowed war paraphernalia especially the shields and most probably the system of alternative ruling councils. Thus, when the missionaries came targeting the Gĩkũyũ traditional sanctuary: the Mũgumo, the indigenous population reacted with indignation especially with the songs like the *Mũthirigũ, Mũgumo wa Thika, Mũgumo wa Rĩanjerũ* and circumcision songs associated with the Mũgumo tree. Besides, if the missionaries preached that Ngai lived in the sky and the churches, then, Gĩkũyũ thought it made sense since Ngai like that of the *Mzungu* (European) lived either in the sky, a mountain like Sinai, in church and or around the Mũgumo. Nevertheless, the missionaries were faithful to their mission, to 'civilise' the local folks by annihilating any symbols of paganism which included the Mũgumo and rituals of initiation, the latter being replaced by the Christian sacraments.

However, between the missionaries and the Gĩkũyũ, it was the arm of power that ruled. The missionaries had an ally; colonial officials and the settlers, the Gĩkũyũ and their neighbours were not a nation but divided agnatic groups. Time was running out for the Gĩkũyũ and the only sensible solution was to give in to the demands of the

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[415] Horton, *Patterns of thought in Africa and the West*; Horton, 'African Traditional Thought and Western science'; Fardon, 'Keeping Faith With Science'; Brenner, 'Religious Discourse in and About Africa'.

missionaries and the colonial power, for the time being, in order to regain their control in the late 40s and early 50s.

What is provoking about these colonial and missionaries discourses is the immense capacity of the indigenous Gĩkũyũ to assimilate into the Western projects of modernisation. In the church for instance, Christianity made sense. When the missionaries preached that Jesus was the Lamb of God, Gĩkũyũ made an analogy with the lamb sacrificed around the sacred Mũgumo tree. When they were told that the churches, which were now, erected a few yards from where the sacred Mũgumo traditionally survived or in a place where it actually was before deracination, was a house of Ngai, they believed it since the Gĩkũyũ had a heritage of Ngai living around the Mũgumo tree. The Gĩkũyũ also made an allusion between Mount Kenya and Mount Sinai as Ngai's dwelling places and this was a powerful connection in the projects of religio-political struggle in postcolonial Kenya.

But the missionaries were cunning. They knew that there were a lot of common elements between the Gĩkũyũ and Jewish tradition. Common episodes of polygamy are spread all over O.T. Ngai of the Israelites was a mountain dweller (Mount Sinai) and constantly visited the people. The Bible too has a lot of instances of ancestral veneration and polygamy. Having said that, the missionaries astutely knew that they were doomed to fail in their civilising mission, which was based on the Western epistemological paradigm if they translated the Old Testament first. The repercussions would have been that the Gĩkũyũ and other Africans would easily have assimilated elements from the Bible without much ado. Polygamy like in Islam would have had a rightful place in the Catholic church, ancestral veneration would have been promoted instead of venerating some saints who are never contextualised in the cultural milieu of the indigenous Gĩkũyũ. Consequently, Ngai would have made much more impact in the religio-political framework of the natives without even the doctrine of the Trinity. Instead, the missionaries in Kenya translated the New Testament first with all its moral implications.

Despite the lack of mutual dialogue between Christianity and the local culture in Kenya, the traditional religion prepared a fertile ground for the future palliative evangelisation. Looking back to what our research has unearthed, it would be difficult to believe that the church in Gĩkũyũ land did any genuine inculturation. Besides, how can that be possible if the discourses were primarily based on the binary categories of the 'self' and 'other'? How could one positively acclaim that in a century of Catholic

endeavour[416] there was a genuine dialogue between Christianity and local religions if not a proselytisation based on mapping, designing, annihilation, division and collaboration with other colonial powers? Under the colonial and missionary enterprise, how can one talk of Christianity in Kenya as a voice for the voiceless, as representing the subaltern when all its projects, starting from 1900, demonstrate the inconsistencies in their lives and preaching and using their religion as a tool for the exploitation and the eradication of the local culture? Evaluating critically our research we can conclude that just as there has been a critical evaluation of colonialism and neo-colonialism, there should be a parallel project of re-evaluating the missionary discourses and their enterprise in Kenya in order to evaluate whether their presence can still be validated today.

As the study has shown, the Mũgumo tree was vested with religio-political power and used by the Gĩkũyũ elders for social and religio-political control of the group. When colonial hegemony took over the country and the settlers confiscated most of the best lands of the Gĩkũyũ people, many of the Mĩgumo trees were deracinated. This was as a result of the colonial misunderstanding of the Gĩkũyũ land tenure, replacing it with the Western conceptual land economy especially between 1902 and the 1930s. This meant that the Gĩkũyũ had no access to their ancestral land and thus no rituals could be performed around them. The missionary undercurrent campaign of eradicating the Mũgumo and all that it stood for also contributed to the decline of the sacred trees. But as the thesis has argued, the Mũgumo continued eliciting strong religious and political sentiments from the Gĩkũyũ people especially during the colonial period. It continues to do so even today. As postulated, both in the pre-colonial, the colonial and the postcolonial Gĩkũyũ, the Mũgumo epitomises the unlimited power, an axis through which Gĩkũyũ identity may be reconstructed and also a source of power in the fight against economic, political and religious injustices and gross corruption in Kenya today.

In the history of the desecration of the Mugumo and eradication of rituals associated with it, Christianity, like colonial power, aroused resistance. There were innumerable independent churches dissenting from the mainline churches. There were also many political movements and radical groups. As a consequence, various revival movements have managed to keep the history of struggle for land and freedom vibrant. These revivalist movements, starting with the *Gĩkũyũ Karing'a*, which led to the formation of Gĩkũyũ independent churches and schools, the different demonstration in

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[416] Njoroge, L., *A Century of Catholic Endeavour*, Nairobi: Paulines, 1999.

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1930s together with the songs of *mūthirigū*,[417]the Mau Mau revolt and *Mūngīki* in the 80s are a manifestation of defence against a threatened power polity. This is because both the colonial and postcolonial governments imposed ruling polity seeking the ultimate loyalty of all its subjects through its policies.

Having deracinated the Mūgumo or literary making them culturally and religiously 'inept', the colonial and postcolonial governments and the missionaries thought that they had created an ideal 'civilised' state. But the subaltern revivalist groups continued to evoke old images and emblems around which they could shed the shame, renew their ethnic pride and gain a sense of self-acceptance in the globalised Kenya. And as Kenya moved towards globalisation, the Gīkūyū people, like the rest of the Kenyans, experienced a fierce intra-psychic struggle. This was not new since, during the end of colonial brutality and towards independence, Mau Mau fighters, coming from the concentration torture camps and others from barbed wire-villages had similar feelings of a subaltern. They had no voice and were politically ignored or cast into oblivion by the postcolonial hegemony.

This has been to a greater extent due to the emergence of the subaltern groups having been aware of the injustice and inequality created by the colonial hegemony based on power and social, political and religious control.[418] We encounter the subaltern resistance in the history of the Gīkūyū and the Mūgumo taking strong roots with the formation of KCA (Kikuyu Central Association) in 1920s whose members grieved for land and freedom as well as resisting the carrying of the abhorring *kipande*. We can argue that the subaltern groups, having undergone a process of conscientisation deepened their conscience in the sense that, as P. Freire underlines, they learned to perceive, social, political and economic contradictions and took actions against their oppressive elements of reality.[419]

If the Mūgumo was used in the precolonial Gīkūyū to empower them during the *ituīka* ceremony in order to execute good governance, and if it was used during the *irua* ceremony as a symbol of casting away childhood, embrace warrior-hood and thus defend the Gīkūyū land, then the subaltern Gīkūyū of the 1920s, going all through to the 1950s,

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[417] *Mūthirigū* were the songs which poured a lot of scorn on missionaries and new *athomi* who opposed female circumcision. They were abusive and highly emotive and politically charged songs done by the ex-mission defectors who lamented that Christianity was the cause of their cultural decay. Njoroge, *Century of Catholic Endeavour*, pp.79-80.

[418] Said, E.W., *Culture and Imperialism*, London:Vintage, 1993, p.258.

[419] Freire, P., *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Harmondsworth: Perican, 1985, p.15; Freire, *Pedagogy of the City*, New York, Continuum, 1993, p.50.

would return to the roots of the Mũgumo to find some answers to the most persistent injustice happening in colonial Kenya at the time. After independence some groups will still revisit the Mũgumo searching for answers to their contemporary religio-political quagmires in Kenya.

In the 1919-1940s for instance, there emerged three groups fighting over power. There was a conservative, firebrand product of missionary enterprise; most of them were originally the *athomi* who, although, they saw the injustice of colonialism and exploitation of the missionaries were not willing to betray their colonial masters. To this group, the Mũgumo was a temple of paganism, a devil incarnated while the followers of this religion were devil worshipers. The moderate group instead struck a kind of balance. They were nationalists but ready to reconcile with the colonial masters by creating avenues for dialogue. To them, the traditional religion was essential since it showed the identity of the Gĩkũyũ people in reference to the Mũgumo tree. Kenyatta and Mbiyu Koinange, the paramount colonial made chief belonged to this group although Koinange later shifted to the militant one when he was denied his ancestral land by the colonial government.[420]

The third revivalist/resistant group was the militant one. This last group, going back to their traditional rituals and praying their Ngai of Kĩrĩnyaga and offering the necessary rituals around the Mũgumo accused the conservatives as corrupt betrayers of Gĩkũyũ values. The group also attacked the moderate nationalists claiming that their project of reform, based on reconciliation, had failed to address their basic concerns over unequal land distribution and low African wages.[421] By returning to their roots, this last group played a greater and crucial role in the Mau Mau war over colonialism. These last two groups are important in the study of the Mũgumo and the Gĩkũyũ, because they were the genesis of primary resistance. This resistance, according to E. Said, entails physical resistance as expressed in liberation movements, demonstrations and actions.[422] Drawing most of their energy from the Mũgumo tree as a symbol of political empowerment as well as from Christianity these last groups sought to re-map the reality of Gĩkũyũ and Kenya terrain by initiating discourses of resistance which presented them differently from how they had been presented by the colonial and missionary discourses. They also paved the

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[420] Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*; Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*.

[421] Anderson, *Histories of the hanged*, p.13; Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*.

[422] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.260; Ashcroft, B., et al. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, London: 2002.

way not only for the fight for independence but also for other postcolonial discourses based on secondary resistance. This secondary resistance was especially constructed on the fiction of African writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Gakara wa Wanjau. Their writings disrupt the European narratives of the Orient and Africa replacing them with either more playful or more politically powerful new narratives. Using the Mūgumo tree Ngugi's explores imminent issues in Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship showing how important the tree is, not only in the fight for freedom (*mĩri ya wĩathi*- roots of freedom) but also in the construction of the Gĩkũyũ ethnic, national identity and gender. All this underlines that African leaders, writers, scholars and missionaries have over the centuries been actively engaged in the 'invention' of modern Africa through their awareness of 'knowledge as power'. In this pedestal, Ngai-ancestors, land, power, wealth and fertility and the sacred Mūgumo forms the basis of Gĩkũyũ cosmo-vision.

Finally, the thesis has challenged the Gĩkũyũ people to revisit their roots once more through the sacred Mūgumo and try to find out not only their genesis but also where they are going. The work has on the one hand answered our initial research questions namely; a) the nature of the Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship, b) the characteristics, myths and the religio-political functions of the sacred Mūgumo tree, the ceremonies and rituals around it and how they consequently validate the Gĩkũyũ claim to land, political power, religious hegemony and identity. As well, the thesis has unearthed the possible religio-political symbols that replaced the Mūgumo tree. On the other hand our work has triggered important questions for a sound discourse; troubling and challenging the Gĩkũyũ people to recover something that essentially belongs to them.

However, by creating various avenues for dialogue and asking prominent questions, the thesis has demythologised the colonial and missionary discourses based on epistemological dynamics about the Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship. Quintessentially, by critically exploring the Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship through the study of the sacred Mūgumo tree, the thesis has also provided conceptual tools for a contextualised re-evangelisation in Kenya and indeed other parts of Africa based on dialogue and a critical study of the indigenous religions. One of the best ways, as has been argued, is by revisiting the roots of their cosmology and worship through the sacred Mūgumo tree.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1

Questionnaire

a) *Mũgĩkũyũ etaga Ngai na marĩtwa marĩkũ?* (Which name(s) do the Gĩkũyũ give to Ngai?) *Ngai na gĩthaka matara-inie atĩa?* (How is Ngai related to the land?).

b) *Ũĩ mĩtĩ ĩigana ya ũgĩkũyũ? No ũgwete marĩtwa mayo?* (How many indigenous Gĩkũyũ trees do you know? Can you name them?). *Wĩra wa mĩtĩ ĩyo nĩ ũrĩkũ?* (What are the functions of those trees?). *Nĩ kũrĩ rũgano ũũĩ rwa mĩtĩ na Agĩkũyũ?* (Do you know of any myths between trees and Gĩkũyũ people?).

c) *Mũtĩ wa Mũgumo ni ũũĩ?* Do you know the Mũgumo tree? *Nĩ kũrĩ rũgano rwa Mũgumo ũũĩ? Rũrĩkũ?* (What is the myth about Mũgumo?). *Wĩra wa Mũgumo warĩ (nĩ) ũrĩkũ?* (What were/are its functions in general?). *Nũũ wamenyagĩrĩra (ũmenyagĩrĩra) Mũgumo?* (Who kept (keeps) watch over it?) *Warĩ/ nĩ waũ* (Who owned(s) it?).

d) *Nĩ mambura marĩkũ ũũĩ mekagĩrwo Mũgumoinĩ?* (Which rituals were performed around it?). *Nũũ watongoragia mambura macio?* (Who performed those rituals?). *Nĩ kĩĩ gĩatũmaga mambura macio mekĩrwo Mũgumoinĩ wa Ngai?* (Why were those rituals performed around the sacred Mũgumo tree?). *Mambura macio nĩ marĩ bata ũmũthĩ?* (Are those rituals and ceremonies still valid today?).

e) *Nĩ kĩĩ gĩokire ithenyainĩ rĩa mũhoere wa Agĩkũyũ Mũgumoinĩ?* (In places where the worship around the Mũgumo was, what symbol replaced it?).

Appendix 2

Food crops in Gĩcũgũ division

Irigu –banana (*musa sapientum*), Gĩkwa-yam, Mboco-beans, ndũma-arrowroot (*Maranta arundinacea*), Gĩtũngũrũ-onion, Karanga-ground nuts. Mwere- Bulrush millet, Kabici- cabbage, Njũgũ-*cajanus cajan*, Manjani-Tea, Mũbabaĩ (tree)-*carica papaya*-ĩbabaĩ (fruit). There is also Karati-carrot, Mwanga-cassava, Mũrimau-*citrus*, Mũcungwa-orange, Pigeon peas, Kaũa-coffe, Ndania-coriander, Ndoroko-cow peas, Marenge-*cucurbita maxima*, Custard (aple-mũtomoko), Ũgĩmbĩ-*eleusine coracana*, also finger millet-ũgĩmbĩ, giant millet-(mũbĩa), Italian millet-mũkombi, and foxtail millet-mũkombi. There is also green Ndengũ-gram, Ngĩna, Thuu, mbera-guava, field Minji-pea, Njabĩ-hyacinth bean. They also grow ngwacĩ-*ipomoea batatas*, Ngwacĩ-sweet potatoes, waru-Irish potatoes, Gĩtũngũrũ-leek, lemon-mũrimaũ(tree)-marimaũ (fruit), Ndimũ-lime, Nyanya-tomatoes, Mũkandamia-tree(*Macadamia tetraphylla*), Makandamia (fruit), Mbembe-maize, Maembe-fruit(mango), Mũembe(tree), Thara-nappier grass, for feeding animals, Kigwa-sugarcane Managu-*solanum nigrum*, Sukuma wiki-spring greens and Thandara-tangerine orange.

Appendix 3

The man with the swollen knee

A long long, time ago, there lived an old man who had no children. He developed a swollen knee[1] that used to trouble him and hurt him a lot. He spent many days writhing in pain and when he could not sustain it any longer, he decided to consult the medicine man called Ndambŭki. After the divination, the medicine man cut open his knee. Now, when his knee was open, there came three little children, one girl and two boys. The girl he named Karĩmi, her first brother was named Mŭguĩmi and the last one was named Mŭrĩithi. Now, the old man used to leave these children in search for food. When he brought back the food he sang:

> My right knee, made me rich made rich,
> bore me Karĩmi, Mŭguĩmi and Mŭrĩithi,
> bore me one, two, three children,
> I bring something you know,
> I bring food you never tasted before
> Karĩmi open for me.
> And Karĩmi would joyfully open the door for her father.

This went on for many years until they were all grown up. One evening, the old man told them: 'never listen to any other voice except mine, never open to anybody else except me'.

Now, near the village, there were some men who wanted to marry Karĩmi because she was very beautiful. They tried to imitate the fathers voice but all in vain. One day a young ruddy man sang and Karĩmi, thinking it was her father opened...the courting went on secretly until one day the man proposed to marry her and carry all of them with him to his village. Although Karĩmi loved her father very much, she accepted the offer and persuaded both Mŭguĩmi and Mŭrĩithi to accompany her. Eventually, they left their old house. Before they left, Karĩmi took four calabashes full of seeds and as they journeyed, she sowed them along the path.

When they reached the village on the other side of the forest, she married the young man. Her brothers too married beautiful girls (Wanjiru and Wambui) from different part of that vast country.

Back home her father sang. There was no response. He sang and sang and sang and when there was no response, he pushed the door open and alas, the house was empty and the granary emptied. He was very sad and started weeping for the loss of his children. After many moons, while Karĩmi's father was wasting away sitting outside his rugged hut hoping that one day his children would come back home, he noticed that the castle oil plants that had germinated along the path were in a straight line. He decided to follow them...he followed them on and on. The castle oil plant finished and the muhia plant followed. Again he followed on and on until he found a village at the end of this line. He went to the first hut and there he found Karĩmi. Her father recognised his daughter but Karĩmi could not recognise him and so the old man decided to be patient. He was very happy that finally, he had found one of his children safe and sound. The family decide to adopt the old man to take care of the young children while they were weeding in the fields. When old man was left with the little child, he would willingly sing to her the song he used to sing to his children:

> My right right knee, made me rich made rich,
> bore me Karĩmi, Mŭguĩmi and Mŭrĩithi,
> bore me one, two, three children,
> I bring something you know,
> I bring food you never tasted before
> Karĩmi open for me.

In the evening the little girl sang the song to her mother and before she would finish it, Karĩmi would pinch her saying: 'why do you remind me of the loved lost ones?'

Then one day, Karĩmi did not go to the shamba and as usual the old man sang:

> My right right knee, made me rich made rich,
> bore me Karĩmi, Mŭguĩmi and Mŭrĩithi,
> bore me one, two, three children,
> I bring something you know,
> I bring food you never tasted before
> Karĩmi open for me.

She heard the song and it vibrated in her head like the sting of the bee...she cried, this time filled with happiness for finding her lost father who she had believed was dead. That evening she told her husband who was also filled with joy. They invited the other two brothers, Mŭguĩmi and Mŭrĩithi. They all build a hut for the old man and gave him enough land and cattle. All of them stayed near each other. That is the ends of the story.

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[1] Interview, Gĩcŭgŭ, 2003-4. A similar version is told by Mwangi, R., Kikuyu Folktales.

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Appendix 4. Indigenous trees and functions

Name of tree in Gĩkũyũ	Functions	Number of informants	Sex: M/F	Places where found/Locations	Number of informants %
Muringa, Muu, Muiri, Muthaiti, murema ngigi, Muthaiti, Mungirima, Mucarage, Mubuti, Muthakwa, Mukungugu, Mukoigo, Mutundu, Mubiru, Munderendu, Mugambwa, Mutero, muthathi, Muiri, Mukeu, Mubatia, Muthiriti, Ruthiru, Mukawa, Mutandambogo	Building houses, furniture, poles, bed, fences	250	M-158 F-92	Kirima, Kabari, Baragui, Karumandi Ngariama, Njukiini	100%
Mukawa, Mutare, Mukambura, Mubiru, Mucuca,Mutambararu,Mbota .	Fruits	246	M-154 F-92	All	98%
Mugumo, Mukengeria, Mugico, Ihurura, Mucomoro, Mutoo, Murama, Mwage, Mucong'e, Mukutha, Maigoya, Ndabibi	Fodder	228	M-136 F-92	All	91%
Mugumo, Mukutha, Murinda ngurwe, Mukeu, Murenda, mugico, mwondwe.	Strings, straps	209	M-129 F-80	All	84%
Mugumo, Muiri, Muuti	Hiding and protection	220	F-138 F-82	All	88%
Mugumo, Muiri, Murama, Mutoo, Mukungugu	Shade	243	M-151 F-92	All	97%
Mutonga, Muthiga, Kagutui, Mucege, Muhooru, Muteta, Mubuti, Mwania-thenge, Mugumo, Mugaita, Gakaraku, Murumbawe,Munjuga iria, Mururue, Muringa, Mutanga, Muthuthi, Gathararia, Muthengera, Mubugu, Mutonga, Mukenia, Mugu, Muthuthi, Murerema, Mwariki, Mwatha, Mubinga (sterility in women)	Medicine	250	M-158 F-92	All	100%
Mugumo, Muringa, Muratina (principle)	Symbol of wealth	20	M-18 F-2	All	20%
Muturanguru (leaves carried by elders of third grade and inner circle of the ruling generation	Power	220	M-138 F-82	All	88%
Mutero, Muricu,Mutundu, Munderendu, mununga, Murangi, Thaara, Githuri	Weapons	205	M-136 F-69	All	82%
Muthakwa, Mutero, Mubatia, Muruba, Mukinyi, Muingirima	Digging sticks	189	M-97 F-92	All	76%
Mugumo, Mukuyu	Abode of Ngai and spirits	250	M-158 F-92	All	100%
Kieha, Muhoru, Muthakwa for removing withcraft,	Witchcraft	186	M-108 F-78	All locations	74%

Mukuri (drive away witchcraft)					
Mutandambogo, Muthariandundu, Ngwaci yan Ngoma, Mubugu, Muraria, Murembu, Mutundu, Mururi,Mubunga, Mugumo	Magic	210	M-150 F-60	All locations	84%
Mutunanguru, Mugambwa, Mutero, Muthirathiri, Mubatia, Muiri, Mwingirima	Clubs	200	M-140 F-60	All	80%
Muthaiti, Muringa, Muthanduku, Mururi, Muiri, Muthirathiri	Bridges	124	M-94 F-30	All	50%
Muringa, Mubuti, Mutati, Murembu, Mukandu, Muu, Mukoigo, Mununga, Mukurwe, Mugumo, Mukuyu, Muiri, Munderendu, Mubuti, Mugu	Bee-hive and mortars	190	M-170 F-20	All	76%
Muratina, Kigwa,	Beer(Local)	220	M-138 F-82	All	88%
Mukutha, Mugico, Maigoya, Mugutha, Mwariki, Mwethia, Mwondwe	Toiletries-soap & 'toilet paper' & Lotion	165	M-73 F-92	All	66%
Mugumo, Muringa, muu, itoka, Mukungugu,Muthakwa, mwatha	Boundary	236		All	94%
Muthiga, mubuti, Mwathathia	Smelting and Ironware (Blacksmithing)	69		All	28%
Mugumo, Mucatha, Muimbaigrui,	Fire-drill	126	M-76 F-50	All six locations	50%
Mwingirima, Muruba, munderendu, Muthakwa	Muthigi/Njuguma - Walking sticks and bludgeon	198	M158 F-40	All six locations	79%
Mugumo, Mumbu, Mukuyu, Mumbu,Mururi, Munyondo, Muthakwa, Ithare, Muringa, Murangi, Muthanduku	Rain Catchments	237	M-145 F-92	All six locations	93%

Appendix 5a

The Myth of trees and death

When Ngai had created the beautiful land for the Gĩkũyũ, he sent a chameleon to tell the people that death would never befall them. As usual, the chameleon walked very slowly and delicately fearing that the world would collapse under him. In the meantime, Ngai changed his mind and thus sent *Nyamĩndigi* (thrush) bird to tell the people that his final decision was that they will all surely die. *Nyamĩndigi* swiftly flew to the earth where he found the chameleon still stammering out his message. This is how he said: *mwe-eee, mwee-eee-rwo atĩrĩrĩ, mwee-ee...*(you-uuu, are-to-oold...). Before the chameleon could finish the message of immortality, *Nyamĩndigi* interrupted declaring that all human beings would die and perish beneath the root of the *Mũkongoe* tree.[1]

Appendix 5b

Trees as life savers [2]

A Gĩkũyũ went out one day for a walk in the forest, where the man-eaters live. Having entered a few steps into the thick of the forest, he heard a loud conversation, and thought it was a party of hunters who were busy eating the game they had killed. He approached them, hoping to share in their meal. But much to his surprise he found himself facing men who looked nothing like the other Gĩkũyũ. They were of huge stature; their heads, big as granary baskets, were hidden under thick uncut hair, and their mouths were full of very sharp teeth. Frightened, he was thinking how he could go back, but before he could make a step backward, one of these ogres, the hugest of them all, said: 'We are the man-eaters of the forest, and you are welcome! You will supply us with a good meal of fresh meat: within two minutes you will be devoured'. And saying thus he grasped his arm.

How could he escape from such a predicament? He remembered that the man-eaters are fond of songs, and promptly told them: 'Be patient, do not eat me; I wish to teach you a very nice new song...I met the man-eaters who were pitching tents: their mouths were provided with the sharpest teeth, and three times I fell down with fear...'

The man-eaters laughed immoderately feeling great pleasure, and one of them said: - I know we are called the man-eaters but we shall not eat this man. At these words the unfortunate fellow took courage and made another proposal, in order better to secure his safety.

Do this - he said - Tie me to this *tree trunk* with a long rope so that I can go to and fro and always sing new songs : and if I happen not to come back, you must pull the rope: if even when you pull the rope, I do not come back, think then that I have been unable to come back an account of being too fat: come along then before I am devoured by others. - All agreed, and the Gĩkũyũ carried on several days with his trick, singing. One day he untied the rope from his body and made it fast to the *stump of a tree*, and ran away. The men-eaters, seeing that he did not come back, pulled the rope, but it resisted. - He must be extremely fat, they said; - and they hurried to their intended victim. They overran one another, and the first to arrive rushed upon the stump, thinking it was the fat man: he broke his teeth and died. The second arrived, and seeing the first flat on his face, thought he wanted to choose the best meat. He rushed upon the stump, broke his teeth and died. The same happened to the third, the fourth and all the others. Last came the lame man-eater, and seeing all his friends lying on the ground he thought they did so because of having eaten too much meat, he approached them and found them all dead. Much surprised he said: "How is this! This entire crowd has been finished by a stump! I, poor cripple! I am safe. I have only to help myself... - and one by one he devoured all his friends.

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[1] This story was commonly told by most of the informants around the Mũcagara, Karucho and Karumandĩ, Thumaita and Kabari area in Gĩcũgũ division. There is also a similar story narrated by Wacĩũma. See, Wacĩũma, C., *Daughter of Mumbi*, pp.85-6. Also, Mwangi R. *Kikuyu Folktales, their nature and value,* Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1983(1970).

[2] Most of these myths were collected during the time of research. The myth about the power of trees over life and death is also recorded by Rose Mwangi in her work. See, Mwangi, R. *Kikuyu Folktales*, pp. 92-7.

Appendix no.6

Gĩkũyũ and the Mũgumo: General Data

No of people interviewed	Sex M/F	Rika/Age	Muhiriga/Clan	Ndini/Religion	Names of Ngai/God	Ngai-Manifestation	Ngai and Land	Ngai-people
250	M(158) F(92)	60-70(36) 71-80(73) 81-90(68) 91-100(60) 100+(13)	Acera(180 Agacikũ(35) Agathithia(37) Ambũi(51) Angarĩ(13) Anjirũ(58) Ethaga(10) Aitherandũ(16) Angũi(12)	Catholic(79) ACK(54) GTR(63) AIPCA(25) SDA(26) PCEA(3)	Ngai(235) Mwene-Nyaga(224) Mw. Ndi(188) Kithuku(172) Kirinyaga(138) Mumbi(154) Murungu(110) Mugai(112)	Irima-239 Arathi-179 Mukunga-107 Miti-232 Nguyo (colobus monkey-120 Flowers-162	Mumbi-235 Mwene githaka-240 Mwene ndi-188	Mumbi-232 Mugai-196 Nyene-104

No. of Myths/Trees	Trees/Names	Trees: Functions	Mũgumo: Description	Mũgumo.No. of Myth	Mũgumo: Functions	Mũgumo: Rituals	Mũgumo valid today	Mũgumo: Symbol today
1(161) 2(96) 3(48) 4(4)	10(135) 20(198) 30(245) 40(100) 40+(132)	3(230) 4(232) 5(246) 6(153) 7(130) 7+(195)	Muti munene(120) M.wa mugikuyu(250) M.wa Ngai(242) M.wa. Mambura(250) M.wa.Aka-uthata(20) M.mugu(232) Ihoero(246 M.wa Irungu(198)	1(100) 2(76) 3(65) 4(9)	Kithitu(144) Mbura(174) Mambura(239) Muhaka(138) Nyumba ya Ngai(234) Unoru(147) Irio cia mahiu(180) Miatu(240) Ndawa(246) Kwihitha(120) Irua(230)	Ituika(171) Irua(232) Mbura(224) Murimu(194) Ugo/cira(120)	Yes(235) No(15)	Kanitha(236) Thirikari(97) Bible(22) Dont know(8)

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Appendix 7a.

Some characteristics of the Mũgumo tree

i. Strong aerial roots to conquer & suffocate

iv. Mũgumo, Milky-sap & Fertility

v. The gigantic trunk of the Mũgumo

ii. Ngumo: The fruits of the Mũgumo

vi. Mũgumo & other indigenous trees Existing is co-existing.

iii. Mugumo: Friendly but a parasite

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Appendix 7. Characteristics of the
Ficus natalensis/**Mũgumo**
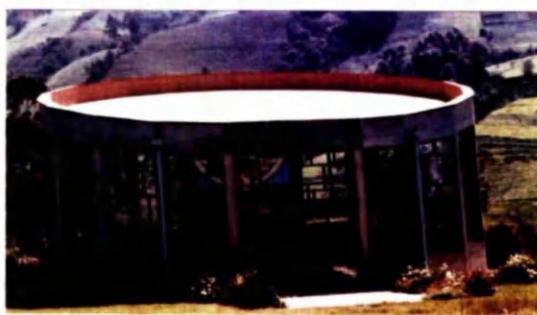
i. **The leaves & fruits**

ii. **Mũgumo: Evergreen tree**

iii,**Tuthu-Mũrang'a: The new symbol of the Mũgumo? Chapel?**

iv. **Tuthu: A replacement for the Mũgumo?**

v. **Leaves: good for fodder**

vi. **Slowly forming a canopy: sanctuary**

vii. **A chair in the chapel made partly of the Mugumo wood**

viii. **Deeply anchored on the volcanic stone**

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Appendix 7b. Description of the Mũgumo tree in Gĩcũgũ

Name	No. of people	No. of people %	Sex(M/F)	No. of informant in age (60-70)	71-80 years	81-90 years	91-100 years	100+ years
Muti Munene	120	48%	M 86 F 34	22	60	16	9 people	13 people
Muti wa Mugikuyu	250	100%	M 173 F 77	38	72	67	60	13
Muti wa Ngai	242	97%	M167 F75	34	70	66	59	13
Muti wa Mambura	250	100%	M 173 F 77	38	72	67	60	13
Ihoero ria Gĩkuyu	246	98%	M177 F69	38	71	67	59	12
Muti wa Irungu	198	79%	M120 F 70	36	60	65	24	13
Munina uthata	20	8%	M3 F17	1		2	4	13
Muti Muugu	232	93%	M160 F72	35	68	62	57	10

Appendix 9.
The Myth of Wacici

Tene tene mũno nĩ kwarĩ na tũhĩ twarĩithagia mbũri na ng'ombe ciao. Tũhĩ tũtũ nĩtwacemanagia na tũrĩa tũngĩ tumĩte mĩrĩmo ĩrĩa ĩngĩ magathĩ kũrĩithia marĩ hamwe.
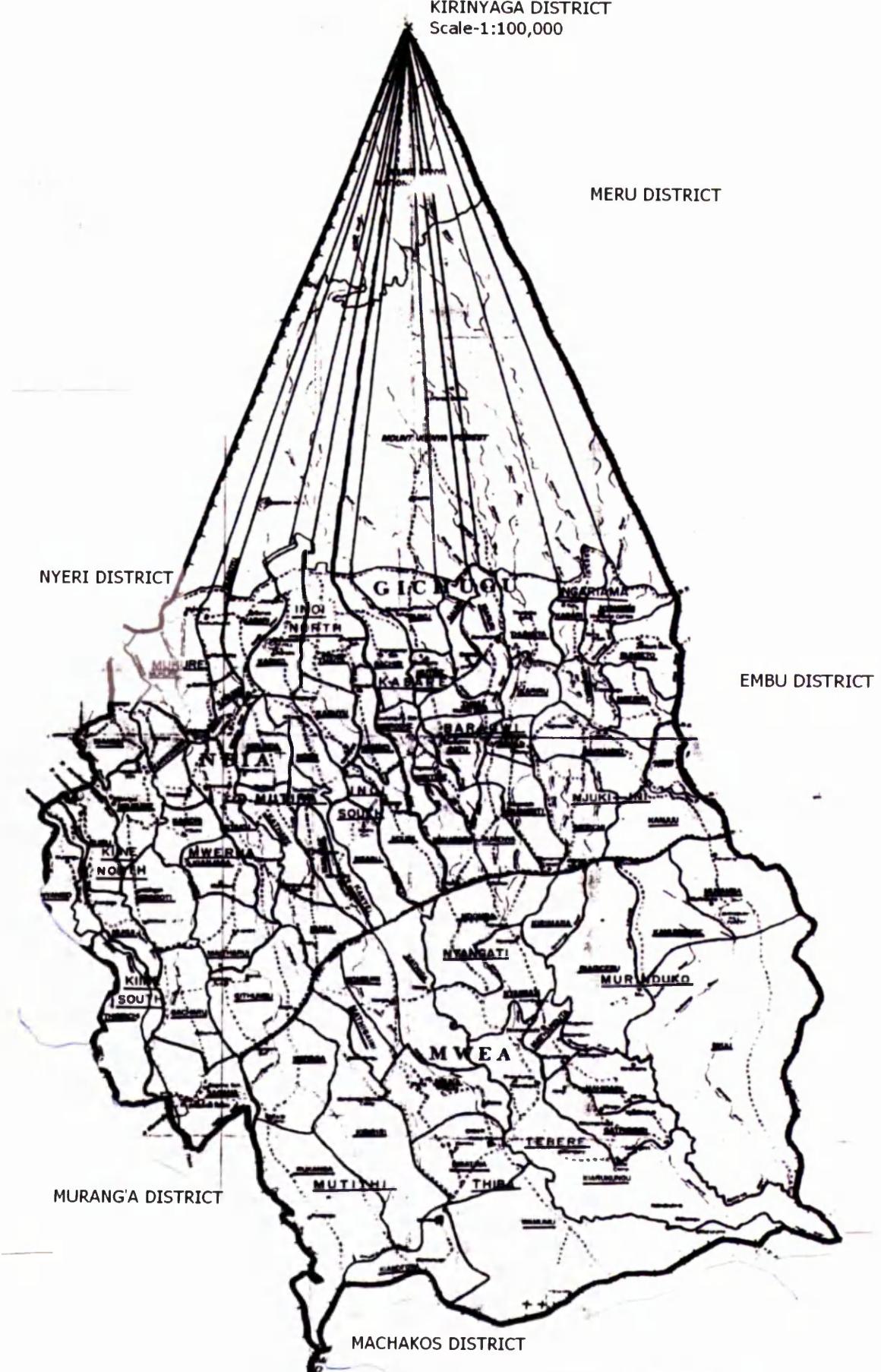
Tũhĩ tũtũ tũkĩambĩrĩria gũthaka twĩhamwe tũkĩriganĩrwo nĩtwarĩithagia. Mbũri nĩ ciathire mũgũnda wene na thutha wagũcicaria mũno, kahĩ gaka getagwo Wacici nĩgacemanirie na ithe arĩ na mbũri.

Ithe wa Wacici nĩamũteng'eririe mũno no ndaigana kũmũnyita. Hwaĩnĩ Wacici nĩahũrirwo mũno na akĩrakara. Warĩ ũndũ wa kamenyeri tondũ o athiĩ kũrĩithia nonginya mangĩathakire na tũhĩ tũrĩa tũngĩ kwa ũguo mahiũ magathĩ mĩgũnda yene nake Wacici akahũragwo o mũthenya nĩ ithe.

Wacici ndakenaga nĩkwona nowe arahũrwo na mwarĩ wa nyina ũrĩa watindaga agĩtaha maĩ, kuna ngũ na kũrĩma ndahũragwo. Nĩerirĩrie mũno akorwo no atuĩke kairĩtu ona kana nĩaciarirwe arĩ kairĩtu nĩgetha ndakarutage wĩra wa tũhĩ na kũhũrwo nĩ ithe. Makĩrĩithia, kahĩ kamwe nĩkanwĩrire ũrĩa kaganĩirwo karũgano nĩ gakawe, ũrĩa tũhĩ na tũirĩtu twekaga nĩguo mũndũ agarũrũke. Niaganĩirwo karũgano ka ũrĩa kairĩtu kamwe kathiũrũrũkire mũtĩ wa Mũgumo maita mũgwanja na gagĩtuika kahĩ. Wacici niakenire mũno aigua ũguo ona gũtuĩka twana tũu nĩtwaregire kũmũtwara Mũgumoinĩ tondũ nĩtwagirĩtio gũthiĩ ho nĩ maithe mao atĩ tondũ nĩ ho Ngai wao aikaraga.

Wacici ndarĩire marĩgu, agĩtwara ho arĩ o wike na thutha wagũthiũrũrũka maita mũgwanja agĩtuĩka kairĩtu. Niakenire mũno tondũ kumanagia na mũthenya ũcio ndacokire kũrĩithia rĩngĩ na agĩtigana na mbara ya ithe.

KIRINYAGA DISTRICT
Scale-1:100,000

MERU DISTRICT

NYERI DISTRICT

EMBU DISTRICT

MURANG'A DISTRICT

MACHAKOS DISTRICT

Source: Survey of Kenya