THE SACRED MŪGUMO TREE: REVISITING THE ROOTS OF GĪKŪYŪ COSMOLOGY AND WORSHIP

A case study of the Gīcūgū Gīkūyū of Kīrīnyaga District in Kenya

By

Matthew Muriuki Karangi

Thesis Presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
School of Oriental and African Studies
University of London

2005
ABSTRACT

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

The thesis focuses on the sacred Mūgumo tree, taken as the axis of the Gikuyu religio-political configuration. Consequently, crucial questions are asked: what are the characteristics of this tree? What religious and political role does it play in Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gicugu Division, Kenya, the thesis contends that the Colonial government, the Missionaries, the African scholars and the Gikuyu elders collaborated in the forging and invention of the Gikuyu identity. Thus emerges the present image of Ngai and the Gikuyu as we know them today. The crucial question addressed is whether this conception is congruent to the original Gikuyu understanding of Ngai. The findings indicate that the sacred Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo tree. Finally, following the research findings, the thesis shows that the sacred Mūgumo prepared the ground for the evangelisation in the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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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I am especially thankful to my parents, Waguama wa Mambo and Karangi wa Magū, who first introduced me to the richness of the Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship. I am also grateful to the Consolata Missionaries who made this research possible. My special thanks go to Antonio Bellagamba for his tremendous encouragement, support and constructive criticisms. I am profoundly grateful to my supervisor Cosimo Zene for his encouragement, patience and understanding. With his inspiration as my supervisor, he has helped build and nurse this thesis in its various stages, listening attentively as my ideas and endeavours to revisit the roots of Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship through the Mũgumo tree unfolded. Special thanks to Professor Paul Gifford (Soas) for his support during the most trying moments of my writing. I am also thankful to Mr. Conn for reading through my work and offering constructive ideas.

My gratitude goes to Njuguna Kabutu, Wambūi wa Ngatho, Victoria Kîmani, Naivasha, Karobia, Thera Giezen, Jaehoe Koo, the late Mary Collier, Xavier, Magū, and my research assistants; Mbugi, Morris Mũriũki, Mũkami, Kariũki, Mũciri and Mambo. Special dedication to uncle Matthew Mũriũki Mambo and aunt Angela wa Ndambiri for their guidance. I am grateful to Justinah Wanjikũ (Gakindũru) for her friendship and support. I thank my colleagues of Finchley-London; Battifolo, Serafino and Kiowi for their patience and understanding.

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/Mühoi- tenant at will
Athomi- Christian converts/reader
Athuri- old men
Coro- ceremonial horn
Gichändi- Giküyü gourd with hieroglyphic work depicting its cosmology
Giküyü karĩng’a- pure Giküyü
Gĩthaka- land
Gĩthitũ- protective charm
Gũcũkũrũthĩa- worship
Gũthĩnja- slaughter
Ira- diatomite/white soil
Iregi- rega (refuse/revolt)- Gĩkũyü generation set
Iria- milk
Irimu- ogre/mythical man-eater
Irua- circumcision and all its ceremonies
Itimui- spear-Kamatimu- council of warriors
Itiri/Matiri- field/circumcision or dancing ground
Ituika- from tuika(v)be cut. A traditional Gikuyu relio-political ceremony of handing over the government from one generation to the next
Ituira/Matira- scattered homesteads-villages
Kabari/kahari- hill, one location in Gicugu division-Kirinyaga District
Kipande- identity card, in colonial times, it was a metal container containing identity card
Kibeco- wooden bludgeon carried by boys’ candidates for circumcision
Kiihi/kibii- uncircumcised boy
Kiriigii- uncircumcised girl
Kiriima- mountain
Kiiira- ‘tribal’ lore
Kiihoya- implore/ask/beg
Mambura- ceremonies
Maguta- lotion/fat
Mathathi- from the tree of Muthathimwa-st. john’s wart-one of the Gikuyu generation set
Mathinjiro- platform used for sacrifices
Mbari- lineage
Mbfa/hfa- horn of the cow traditionally used for drinking beer
Mbura- rain
Mbiiugii- divining counters
Muma- oath
Mubhiro- a series of pre-circumcision dances in the traditional Gikuyu
Mucif- homestead
Mugai- divider
Mugariu- black army worm/caterpillar
Mugumo/Mugumo- Ficus natalensis (Sacred tree among the Gikuyu people)
Mugwanja-seven-used by the Gikuyu to describe the part of the human and animal body-shoulder and some ribs
Muhingo/Mubingo-a period when all circumcisions ceremonies were closed

Muhoi-tenant at will/tenant in friendship

Muhiriga/Mubiriga-clan

Muigwithania-reconciler

Mugokoro-Magic powder

Mumbi (kumba)-to mould/create-therefore creator. Name of the founding mother of the Gikuyu group. Also one name for the Gikuyu deity

Mundu mugo-medicine man/diviner

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

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

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

Muruithia-circumciser

Muthaiga-magic spell

Muthigi-walking stick

Muthungũ-European-white/also nyakerũ

Mutiri-sponsor/supporter during circumcision

Muturi-blacksmith

Mutumia-woman/wife

Mutũ-tree

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

Mwene-Nyaga-another name for the Gikuyu deity

Ndathimia-legendary 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 Gikuyu deity

Ngemi-ulations
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
Thĩrũga-ochre.
GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to examine the Gikuyu traditional cosmology and worship, taking the Mugumo (Ficus natalensis / Ficus thonningii), a sacred tree among the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu claim to land, political power, religious hegemony and identity. Finally, following the research findings, the thesis examines how the sacred Mugumo prepared the ground for the new evangelisation in the Gikuyu land and the continuation of political hegemony based on power-knowledge and control in Kenya today.

Exploring the place of trees in the Gikuyu cosmology, what has come out clearly in the Gikuyu arboreal knowledge is the fact that people use ‘trees symbolically to make concrete and material the abstract notion of life’. In doing this, the Agikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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.

1 The word, ‘Gikuyu’ stands for both the people and the language. The term is also synonymous to ‘Agikuyu’ (people) and in some scholarly works, ‘Kikuyu’. However, in this work, I have opted for the ‘Gikuyu’ 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 Gikuyu 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.


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 Gikuyu 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 Mûgumo is crucially important to the Gîkûyû people since unlike other indigenous trees, it is above all the symbol of power, life and fertility. It represents the sacred continuity of the Gîkûyû spiritual, cosmic and physical world. Quintessentially, there is, in the traditional Gîkûyû 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 Gîkûyû and nature that the Mûgumo 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 Gîkûyû society.

The thesis therefore focuses on the sacred Mûgumo tree, taken as the axis of the Gîkûyû religio-political configuration. The sacred Mûgumo, as the research findings demonstrates, is the 'axis mundi' of the Gîkûyû 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 Mûgumo is the axis due to its religio-political and symbolic role it plays within the Gîkûyû cosmology and worship and not the whole cosmos.

Consequently, crucial research questions are asked:

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

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\(^5\) The Gîkûyû have different names for deity: Ngai, Mûrungu, Mwene-Nyaga, Mwene-ndî (thî), Kîthuku, etc. Of these names, Ngai is commonly used.

\(^6\) Ngoma means the departed spirits. It is from the word *koma*/*gûkoma* (to sleep) and literally translated as *aria marîthi* (those who are in the ground). It refers to the belief that when somebody died, his/her spirit spoke 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 Tenure in the Kikuyu Land Unit*, Cape Town: School of African Studies University of Cape Town, 1963(1949), p. 120.

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

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

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

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

In order to explore fully the complexities of the Gikuyu 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. 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 Gikuyu ethnicity emerged because of

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

intricate cultural amalgamation of colonial intrusion and African response. Finally, R. Horton theory enlightens our study of rituals around the sacred Mūgumo tree and a clear understanding of Gikūyū 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 Mūgumo and the Gikūyū people. Using especially the theories of Mudimbe, Berman, Horton, and an analysis of data collected in the Gicūgū Division, Kirinyaga District, Kenya, the thesis contends that the Colonial government, the Missionaries, the African scholars and the Gikūyū elders collaborated in the forging and invention of the Gikūyū identity.

It also demonstrates that through the discourses that arose from these affiliations, subaltern groups like KCA (Kikuyu Central Association), Mau Mau and currently the religio-political sects like Mūngiki emanated, all fighting for a reverse hegemony. The study of the Mūgumo vis à vis Gikūyū 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 Gikūyū 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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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 Gikūyū 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.

Gikũyũ. Thus, there is a critical review of the works of some of the prominent writers on the Gikũyũ people like J. Kenyatta, L.S.B. Leakey, C. Cagnolo, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and other contemporary writers on Gikũyũ. The thesis creates a panel for dialogue among these scholars showing what each has contributed to the study of the Mūgumo and the Gikũyũ. 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 Gikũyũ conception of Ngai. Thus emerges the present image of Ngai and the Gikũyũ, as we know them today. The crucial question addressed is whether this conception is congruent to the original Gikũyũ understanding of Ngai.

The findings will investigate how and why the sacred Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo tree. Additionally, it was around the sacred Mūgumo that the Gikũyũ forged their multiple identities.

The thesis therefore examines the Gikũyũ 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 Mūgumo tree today and its symbolic religio-political end. It also unveils what it would mean to revisit the roots of Gikũyũ cosmology and worship through the sacred Mūgumo tree. Moreover, by revisiting the Mūgumo within Gikũyũ 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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Finally, following our research findings, the thesis will argue that the sacred Mugumo prepared the ground for the new evangelisation in the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 comprises of the lead-in chapters (one-four). Chapter one expounds the theoretical framework 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 Gicugù Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Mugumo tree as their sanctuary. Thus follows chapter seven that succinctly discusses the characteristics and the dedication of the Mugumo, tracing the existing Mtgumo (sing. Mugumo) trees in Gicugù 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 Mugumo tree and its relevance to the Gikuyu people. This is done in chapter eight. The Gikuyu 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 (Ituika, Irua and Kühoya Ngai mbura), key to the understanding of Gikuyu cosmology and worship. Following the exploration of those three key rituals done around
thee Mūgumo, the symbolic significance of the sacred Mūgumo tree becomes apparent since it shows the religio-political and symbolic end of the sacred Mūgumo tree.

The dialogue elicited by our research and the use of three theories, the critical examination of the work of the prominent scholars of Gīkūyū 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 Mūgumo and Gīkūyū 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 Mūgumo in Gīcūgū 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 Gikuyu people within the context of their cosmology and worship. The second part demonstrates the relevance of these paradigms on the Gikuyu-Mugumo 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.\(^5\) 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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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’. 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.

Adopting this methodological framework, Mudimbe explores the process of colonisation in Africa. 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. 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.

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

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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

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 ethnosophical project in Africa accentuating that most of the ethnosophies are Western ideological constructions that bear little relation to African realities. 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, gnosis27 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


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. In the political polity, the African bourgeoisie following the colonial system, and what B. Berman calls ‘the politics of the belly’, 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.

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’. 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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discourses. However, performance or acting represents this ‘something’. 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 Gikuyu ethnicity and tradition. 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’. 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’. 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


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. In the process of colonialism in Kenya and in the formation of multiple identities especially among the Gikuyu, 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. 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.

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


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 Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ especially, colonialism was marked by the process of the native registration system, the tracking and the control of the Gikũyũ (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  

\(^{39}\) 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 Gikũyũ 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 citizenship.
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

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. 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 Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ the athomi (Christians) oscillated between the new Western religion and then back to their traditional Gikũyũ 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.

In Kenyatta’s Facing Mount Kenya, Leakey’s three volumes of the Southern Kikuyu, Mugo’s, Kikuyu Customs, and Kabetu’s, Kiréra kĩa Ügikũyũ, one clearly encounters the forging of Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ 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.

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 Gikuyū group.\(^{45}\)

A relevant question to be asked at this point and in relation to the Gikuyū people and the study of Mugumo 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 Gikuyū, J. Lonsdale discusses the interplay that existed between rich and poor, the demands of *mbarī* (lineage) and the demands of *riika* (initiation set or ‘regiment’) in the Gikuyū 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 Gikuyū people, their history, and the complexity in the forging of the Gikuyū identities, they still do not fully explain the mechanism of the ritual performance around the sacred Mugumo 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 Mugumo and why for centuries, it has remained as a pivotal tree in the traditional Gikuyū 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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\(^{46}\) 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*.


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*, 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

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 Gikuyu as a religious participation.

Since there is a special interest in the study of the Mugumo tree and the rituals in the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Mugumo and the Gikuyu 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

51 Horton, *Patterns of thought*, p.47.
52 Ibid., P.5.
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.


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’.

1.3 The Relevance of the three theories on the analysis of the Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ 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 (Gicũgũ). 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 Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ

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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 Gīkūyū 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 Gīkūyū claim to land, political power and religious hegemony and how Gīkūyū identities were forged around the Mūgumo 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 Gīkūyū identities. Thus, the formation of Gīkūyū 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 Mūgumo, taking it as a religious and political symbol.

c) Reading the Gīkūyū literature through the eyes of Berman, and reviewing the literature of some of the most prolific scholars on Gīkūyū 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 decontextualised 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 Gīkūyū in their socio-religion, political and economic context.
The theory demonstrates the relationship that existed between the Gikuyu, 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 Gikuyu, 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 Gikuyu traditional religio-political set-up. In fact, the literature which relates to the Gikuyu demonstrates that there was a transition of government from matriarchal to patriarchal. 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 Mugumo, 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 Gikuyu environment taking Mugumo 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 Mugumo 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 Gikuyu 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

beliefs involved'. Studying the Gikuyu understanding of diseases and the role and function of trees in herbal medicine together with that of the mündū mūgo (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. 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 Mugumo and the way diseases were treated. The Gikuyu victim would for instance go to mündū mūgo. 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 mündū mūgo could not remedy the case, he would literary say: ‘kunjai mbūri na rūūa mündū nī witū na Ngai’, (a total surrender to Ngai, leaving everything in his hands).

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 Gikuyu 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 Mūgumo 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 Mūngiki in the late 1980s, Mwakenya in mid-1980s, protests that led to multi-party elections in 1992 and Gĩcũgũ Gĩkũyũ singing around the Sacred Mūgumo 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 societies and was not just a creation of the colonial enterprise as the theis will demonstrate. The study of Gĩkũyũ vis-à-vis the sacred Mūgumo blends these theories within the Gĩkũyũ socio-cultural matrix to demonstrate that in revisiting the roots of the people through the sacred Mūgumo 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 Gikuyu religio-political configuration. Through the eyes of Mudimbe and Berman, one sees clearly the complex affiliation that existed between the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu are formed. Kitching, using a Marxist approach demonstrates the changing patterns of the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu, their use of the Mugumo 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 Gikuyu cosmology cemented by the ritual around the Mugumo tree. This chapter presents a critical analysis of their literature showing the richness and the limitations in the study of the Gikuyu and the Mugumo tree.

2.2 The creation of the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{61} It was the \textit{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’.\textsuperscript{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-Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu tradition. Concerning religion, when the couple discusses the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu conception of Ngai. In fact, they confuse the \textit{ituika} ceremony with the snake worship. Describing the circumcision ceremonies, they call the Mugumo a special tree and explore in detail the ceremony of the ‘leaf-gathering’ (\textit{kuna Mugumo}) and its role in the Gikuyu rituals.

\textbf{2.2.2 Cagnolo: The Akikuyu}

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


\textsuperscript{62} Mudimbe, \textit{The Invention of Africa}, p.189.
question of female circumcision and the *Ituika* ceremony. 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 Mūgumo and their forest commons (especially in Kĩrĩnyaga).

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.

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 anticommmunist discourse. The book coincides with the pre-war (World War II) discourses about fascism,  

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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 Gikúyu 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.

Seen through the lenses of the theories of Berman and Mudimbe, we can say that Cagnolo forges the Gikúyu 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 Gikúyu people, especially of women. Gikúyu 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 Gikúyu, 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.

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.

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 Gikúyu 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.

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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.

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. Concerning religion of the Gikuyu 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 Mugumo, showing its centrality in the Gikuyu 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 he was interested in the maintenance of the traditional culture in the face of the corrupting influence of the West. Leakey, like Kenyatta, depicts the Gikuyu 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.

Here, we may ask: Did Leakey, like Kenyatta want to depict the Gikuyu society as a British or as a Kenyan museum? In other words, how would Leakey reconcile his creation of the traditional image of the Gikuyu people with the anxieties, political and religious tumults created within the group by the mbari 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 the 1940s.


73 Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*, Vol.III., p.vii. His work can be read through the eyes of Mudimbe, Berman, Horton and P’Bitèk, 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 mbari which created socio-religious cleavages by exploiting the poor members of the society?\textsuperscript{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 Gikuyu community and even in a wider national scale. Although Leakey acknowledges the existence of mbari 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 Mugumo tree. Again, the Southern Kikuyu, fail short of explaining the mechanisms of power and control especially in relation to the Gikuyu versus the government, Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu in favour of Christianity? In creating the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu conception of Ngai but above all in his treatment of women. He forges the image of a Gikuyu woman as opposed to that of the Victorian woman in Britain. While the Gikuyu woman is sublimated by the male, she enjoys her sexual freedom. In contrast, the British woman in the eyes of Leakey does not.\textsuperscript{75} The book offers the reader, the opportunity to explore and unearth the moral


\textsuperscript{75} Leakey, The Southern Kikuyu, Vol.II., p.796.
statements and allegories that Leakey infuses into the Gikuyu culture. It also critically demonstrates the collaborative ministry between the ethnographers and the Gikuyu elders. As Berman advocates, the book shows how each of the group manipulated its knowledge of history and power to invent the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu elders in the construction of the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu society as integrated and conservative is well depicted by Leakey when the Mau Mau offered an alternative description of the traditional Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu as capable of depicting their own destiny, their own history and their own religion without the help of the West or a ‘white Gikuyu’? Like Kenyatta, Leakey ignores the value and the magnitude of the rituals performed around the sacred Mugumo (irua and ituika), 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 Gikuyu. 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 Gikuyu society to the present day.

2.2.4 Jomo Kenyatta: The ‘invention’ of Gikuyu

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. In *Facing Mount Kenya*, Kenyatta was demonstrating that he was a true Gikuyu 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, an alternative tool to invent a harmonious and egalitarian Gikuyu group. In the process of reinventing himself by changing his name from Johnstone Kamau to Jomo, he also invented the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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’. Jomo, in his work demonstrated that power existed alongside knowledge, cannot function without knowledge and in fact, power produced knowledge. 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu society as...
harmonious and egalitarian, as opposed to those who represented it as competitive and dominated by large, landowning, wealthy mbari.\(^2\)

Kenyatta was seemingly interested in shaping the future of the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu and their neighbours.

In fact, *Facing Mount Kenya* does not explicitly underline how the colonial power promoted ethnic isolation especially among the Gikuyu who became targets of forced labour. It does not highlight how the elders used the rituals around the sacred Mugumo to reformulate and remake the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu group on revisiting the roots of their cosmology and religion through the sacred Mugumo.

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

\(^2\) 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 Mutthomi (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 monopolize 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 *mbari* or wealthy land owners and the landless Gikuyu, (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 *mbari* although all their children ‘belonged’ to the landowner. There is also silence about the position of women in Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu men with their women.\(^8^3\)

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’.\(^8^4\) 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 Gikuyu invented by Kenyatta, Leakey, Cagnolo and some of the contemporary scholars of Gikuyu 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.

\(^8^3\) Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, p. 163; Shaw, *Colonial Inscriptions*; Berman, ‘Ethnography as Politics’; Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*.

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 Gikuyu structures and authorities. Above all it demonstrates the tasks, activities, and the production of social relations. It also manifests a Gikuyu 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. In describing the religio-political and economic context that crowded the Gikuyu people at the making of his book, he has written:

nowadays you go to what was the Gikuyu 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.

Middleton stresses a few elements relevant for the study of Gikuyu and the sacred Mugumo.

   a) His work tersely shows that Mudimbe's power-knowledge theory was eminently present in the religio-political affiliations existing between the Gikuyu, the colonial government and the settlers. He underscores that colonial enterprise was characterised by the organisation, arrangements, mapping, designing and transforming the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 gihaka (land) system was cloned by the colonial system with incredible brutality.

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

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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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the British moved from the state of co-existence with the Gikuyu people to that of control. 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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’. Although he does not address the repercussions of these issues in the religious pedestal of the Gikuyu people, still, one can draw the conclusion that this system was strongly woven into the Gikuyu religio-political framework. Besides, in the traditional Gikuyu, land, politics and religion went hand in hand under the management of the wealthy mbari and the ruling elders.

2.2.7 Muriuki: The Gikuyu Ethnographic Past

The historian Muriuki in his work *A History of the Kikuyu 1500-1900*, explores the pre-colonial Gikuyu as does Kitching, *Class and Economic change in Kenya*, together with the work of Lonsdale, *The state of Agrarian unrest* as well as Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*. Like these other scholars, Muriuki depicts the image of the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu bourgeoisie’ and Berman’s ‘politics of the belly’ are evident. It shows the power and wealth in society and how this controls the Gikuyu people within different parameters of socio-religious affiliations. There is, of course, emphasis on the economic relationship between the wealthy mbari and the poor members of the society which creates a social

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

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 Gikũyũ right from the myth of the origin of Gikũyũ and Mũmbi. The work is a thorough and serious piece of historical research providing insights into the history of Gikũyũ, their cultural and religio-political configuration. In his historiography, Muriuki underlines that the Gikũyũ 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 *Mükürwe wa Nyagathanga* (Gathigira, Mugo, Leakey, Kenyatta, Wanjoji) was not the cradle of the Gikũyũ.

However, in adopting this method, Muriuki ignores important details. For example, he disregards the myths of origin especially those of the king of the Gikũyũ people (Kenyatta), but accepts the myth of the matriarchy. He does not accept the myth that explains the cultural transmission between the Gikũyũ and their neighbours. This last myth is important because it denotes that although the Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ ethnicity, a point that our thesis has contested. In *A History of the Kikuyu*, colonialism accommodated already existing divisions among the Gikũyũ society and created more exploitative relations among them.

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 Gicugu Gikũyũ settled earlier than the other members of the group around Mount Kenya and that the Gicugu, contrary to Muriuki’s thinking, are not cousins of the southern Gikũyũ.

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2.2.8 Ngugi: The Gikuyu Image

Ngugi 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 Murogi 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. Ngugi 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. In these works, Ngugi presents the colonial powers as doing everything to suit their own personal political and economic agendas. In doing this, Ngugi 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. There is in the work of Ngugi 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 Gikuyu 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, Ngugi's understanding of the role of religion is one dimensional. It is a blinkered view of a full understanding of Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu. Ngugi however underlines the centrality of the sacred Mugumo in Gikuyu cosmology and worship. His

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

Ngūgī passionately depicts the power of the Gīkūyū traditional cosmology and worship in these works. In the *River Between* for instance, Joshua, embraces the missionary teaching, rejects the Gīkūyū 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 Mūthoni, although a Christian, affiliates herself more with the indigenous belief than the mūthomi. 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.

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

### 2.3. Gīkūyū 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 Gīkūyū believes in One God, Ngai... a single High God...the common name used in speaking of the Supreme Being is

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Ngai...God lives in heavens...no individual may directly supplicate the almighty'. Cagnolo writing about the Gikuyu 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’. 

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.

The metaphysical terms as used above to describe the Gikuyu conception of Ngai raise several imminent questions: (a), Did the traditional Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu people in their socio-political and religious life and configuration is alien and thus does not make sense to the traditional Gikuyu. The Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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’. He

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.\textsuperscript{105}

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

\begin{quote}
En filigrane au récit de Jomo Kenyatta apparaissent l’origine chrétienne de l’éducation de son auteur ainsi que les grands thèmes et l’origine de l’ethnographie fonctionnaliste britannique qui ont imprégné sa formation à Londres.\textsuperscript{106}
\end{quote}

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.\textsuperscript{107} Some of the Biblical allegories found in his work \textit{Facing Mount Kenya} are too obvious to be taken as coincidental. According to Kenyatta, the first couple receives from Ngai the whole territory of Gikũyũ stressing from \textit{Kĩĩnyaga}\textsuperscript{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,

\begin{footnotes}

\textsuperscript{106} Droz, \textit{Migrations Kikuyus}, p.72.

\textsuperscript{107} Kenyatta, \textit{Facing Mount Kenya}, p.xi; Berman, ‘Ethnography as Politics’, p.334

\textsuperscript{108} Kĩĩnyaga/Kĩr-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.
\end{footnotes}
particularly of the ‘Gikũyũness’ 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 Gikũyũ people this right to be active participants in his orthographical work? If Kenyatta strongly believed in the authenticity of the Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ Bible. He was keen to show that he identified himself with the Gikũyũ and thus felt he could provide information about their customs to the colonial administration. His view of Gikũyũ society and culture focused on the qualities of democracy, harmony, and integration lost to class-ridden, industrial Britain. He argued for the maintenance of Gikũyũ traditions and for an interpretation of Gikũyũ culture as similar to the laws of the Old Testament.¹¹²

109 Droz., *Migrations Kikuyus*, p.73., Instead C. Cagnolo gives a myth with three names, *Mũrũthi* (designating the pastoralist group), *Mũrĩmi* (agriculturalist like the Gikũyũ) *Mũguũmi* (hunters and gatherers) and *Mũturĩ* (blacksmith), Cagnolo, *The Akikuyu*, pp.226-228. These myths explain elements of inter-relations and complementarity among the Gikũyũ and the neighbouring groups.


111 Clark, ‘Louis Leakey as Ethnographer’, p381; Droz, *Migrations Kikuyus*, p.79 and 82.

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 Gikũyũ prayers to Ngai and their communion with *ngoma*. These prayers demonstrate that although the Gikũyũ might have had a clear distinction between Ngai worship and *ngoma* communion especially in ritual celebrations around the sacred Mugumo tree, the differentiation becomes ‘vague’ in their prayer which are sometimes addressed to both. Kenyatta goes on to contend:

> the Gikũyũ 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. Gikũyũ 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.  

Whereas it is true that the structure of the Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ had to commune with them constantly, 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 *kom̄a/guk̄oma* (to sleep) and literally translated as *art̄a mar̄ th̄* (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 Gikuyū traditional cosmolgy, 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 Gikuyū 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 Gikuyū 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 mțići), clan and community
are the same ethical values that Ngai demands of the Gikuyū 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 Mūgumo can demonstrate our point:

Ngai, o wee ūkaraga o kūf iigūrī rī Kūrũyaga, wee ūtūraga o kūfīrī mbūra yumaga rī, twoka
gūkkūrī na ihai kūfī rī ndūrīme na njōhī ūtūfrīe mbūra. Kūthku, andū aku nī mekkūrī,
ciāna na mbūri ona ng’ombe nī ikūrīrī. Mwene-Nyaga tūgūkūthaitiha na thakame na maguta

117 Ibid., p.1114-1115
118 Ibid.,p.1107, also vol.II, pp.603-606. Kenyatta adds that the mūndu mūgo (medicine man) sprinkled
njōhī (honey beer) in the ground to appease the ngoma and to bring them in communion with those of the
Literature Bureau, 1947, p.74.
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. Kithuku, 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 Mugumo 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 Gikuyu 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 Kiri-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 Gikuyu people. They also indicate the implicit connection between Ngai and ngoma as well as elucidating that a traditional Gikuyu would conceive of Ngai in relation to his ancestors. That is why in this prayer, done in the blessing of the new house, the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu constantly beseech Ngai and commune with ngoma for peace and tranquillity.

Ngai is a deity who can bless and destroy (Ngai wa kiguni na gitel). These prayers and the attributes do not depict a traditional Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu cosmology, one could be a Christian, Muslim and yet remain ‘authentic’ Gikuyu.121

120 Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, pp.82-83.
As already attested, the gap between the Ngai worship and the *ngoma* communion was not always clear in the traditional Gikuyu cosmology. Indeed if the religious hiatus between these two spiritual beings was not easily conspicuous in the Gikuyu religio-philosophical world, it was even more confusing for the missionaries who first came into contact with the Gikuyu 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’.

This was especially true in the attributes of creation and origin.

In their primal contact with the Gikuyu, missionaries might have found it easier to hellenise the Gikuyu 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.

What Hasting underlines is evidently the nub of the discussion of Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu people, the main problem of the missionaries was to find a properly Gikuyu distinction between the Old and the New Testament and they were happy to turn Jehovah into Ngai. The New Testament in Gikuyu came out in 1926 during the Murang’a and Gicugu iituTka. In the Swahili Bible, the dragon in the Apocalypse had been a *nyoka* (snake) similar to the serpent of Eden, but with the Gikuyu translation, the dragon was no longer a snake but the *Ndamathia* (dragon), cast out from heaven and which was now translated as the devil. 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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125 Ibid., p. 373; Kenyatta *Facing Mount Kenya*, p. 326; Lonsdale, ‘The Moral Economy of Mau Mau’, p.374. As missionaries thought Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu Bible.
Ngai, kinyue maguta maya n'guo ūrakūrē. Nacio ngoma cia baba na cia maîtū na cia agui na cia cūcū ṉi kinyue; na mūkūrakūrē n'guo mahiū na ciano na andū aria mari mūcū ūū mahone na mathagāe, na marītūrē.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 Gīkūyū 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 Gīkūyū 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 (gūcūkūrithia Ngai) and to commune with the ancestors (gūtāngīra ngoma njōhi: to pour libation for the ancestors) or to sacrifice to the ancestors (gūthūnfīra ngoma) failed to mention this intricate and intimate relationship between the two spiritual beings that seem to exist in the traditional Gīkūyū 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 Gīkūyū 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 Gīkūyū 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 Gīkūyū 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 Gīkūyū identity. What is apparent is the fact that power, control and competition saturated and continues to haunt the indigenous Gīkūyū. But within this interplay of affiliations there is a strong religious, political and economical participation that constantly needed to be

authenticated through the use of myths and rituals. It is from these affiliations that the conception of Ngai, ngoma and the Mugumo makes sense. Under this conceptual framework, a feasible methodology arose that directed our research on the Gikuyu and the role of the sacred Mugumo 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 Mūgumo tree played in Gīkūyū cosmology and worship. As a Gīkūyū, I had lived with the People of Gīcūgū division for a long time; after all, they are our neighbours (Mwea division). Moreover, we migrated to Mwea division in 1958 from the Gīcūgū 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 Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo tree.

Again, these people grieved that Ngai seemed to have forgotten them since they gave their forest common (Njūkīnī) 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 Mūgumo tree. Furthermore, the Gīkūyū, 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 Irūa and the Ituīka, 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 Gīkūyū cosmology and worship through the sacred Mūgumo tree. That was more that twenty years ago. It was this ‘need to revisit the roots’ which motivated my decision to research on the Mūgumo within the Gīkūyū cosmology and worship.

Between 1996 and 1997, I happened to work in the parish at the confluence of Gīcūgū and Mwea division (Kutus). This town has an interesting history of the conflict
between Gütū wa Kībetū (a paramount chief) during the colonial period and the missionaries: CMS of Kabari and the Consolata Missionaries in Kīnyaga stations. In fact, Kutus town is named after chief Gütū. 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 *ituika* and imploring Ngai for rain by the slaughter of the lamb around the sacred Mūgumo. Therefore, while the missionaries on the one hand discarded these rituals as satanic and pagan, the indigenous Gīkūyū on the other hand wanted a genuine process of syncretism, accommodating the new religion into their own cosmological framework. After all, Gīkūyū 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 *mūthingū* (European) had to erect a building called church for a sacrifice while the sacred Mūgumo was there.

From the myths told, and the history learned about the Gīkūyū people, I felt that the Mūgumo had a significant role to play in the formation of the Gīkūyū 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 Gīkūyū traditional religion and the power relation within their society. Indeed, some of the characteristics of the Mūgumo 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 Gīkūyū 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 Mūgumo, synthesising and evaluating different relationships in order to find out what this tree means to the Gīkūyū people and its role in religion and politics.

The study of Mūgumo, within the cosmology of the Gīkūyū manifested itself twofold: the traditional cosmology which has been less researched and the postcolonial Gīkūyū world-view. The latter no doubt has a lot of ontological connections with the former. Researching on the sacred Mūgumo 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 Gikuyū 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 (Kirinyaga-Gicugu and Ndia-Eastern, Nyirĩ-Northern, Mūrang’a-Central and Kiambu-Southern). Our research concentrates on the Gicugu administrative division in Kirinyaga district. The choice of this area is important principally because of the strong affiliation that the Gicugu people have shown throughout history with the two forests: Mount Kenya and Njukiini, 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 Njukiini, an area of 92 sq.km. There are also a good number of the sacred Migumo trees surviving and a good number of people who still follow their indigenous Gikuyū religion. Finally, there are a good number of Gikuyū 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 Mungiki sect. The core of their religion is to return to the Gikuyū roots by revisiting the traditional way of life through the sacred Migumo tree.

3.2.1 Time scale and Field work

In 1997, I set upon collecting some data about the Migumo 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 Migumo tree to understand whether or why it is such an important tree in the evolution and the shaping of Gikuyū cosmology and worship. I also wanted to find out its relationship with the power hegemony in the Gikuyū 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 Gikuyū society and indeed in Kenya, groups like the Gikuyū Karing’a, Mwakenya and the Mungiki which continue to puzzle the Kenyans and indeed African scholars today. Although I had not worked for
a long period in the Gicugu 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 Gikuyu conception of Ngai and the relationship the Mugumo tree had with him. Finally it focussed on the myths related to the Mugumo. Thus, the exploration of how the traditional Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu people, Ngai, land and the Mugumo 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 Gikuyu had with trees in general, the main rituals performed around the Mugumo, 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 Mugumo as a cultural and primary symbol rather than any other tree. For instance, why do the Gicugu Gikuyu prefer the Mugumo 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 Mugumo tree play within the principle rituals of the Gikuyu, aimed at restoring the religio-political hegemony? How does the tree enter into the history and the politics that weave the forging of the Gikuyu ethnic identity? Thus I decided to collect other data, this time concentrating on the relationship the Gicugu Gikuyu have with trees and the choice of the Mugumo taking the later as the spindle through which the Gikuyu 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 Mugumo 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 Gikuyu 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 Gi-Gicugu and others. For instance while the people of Nyirĩ, Mūrang’a and Kiambu will pronounce “come here” as ṭaka haka, the Gicugu will say ṭaka aba. Kūhaica-to climb (Kiambu, Nyirĩ, Mūrang’a) while in Gicugu will be kūbaca or kūtūca (Ngariama-location) in the Gicugu division. Although one can argue that there are minor orthographical differentiations between the Gi-Gicugu and the rest of the group, this, if not seriously observed, could possibly present a minor obstacle to other members of the Gikūyũ from outside Kĩrĩnyaga district while conducting a research in Gikūyũ 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 Gikūyũ refer to Ngai as the male divinity while one of Ngai’s epithet is presented as a female role in Gikūyũ cosmology? The thesis found out that there are the limitations of English used as the metalanguage for discussing the Gikūyũ 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, Mūkami, Mūciri) who were savant not only with the language but also with the environment and geography of the Gicugu 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

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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu. 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 Gikuyu 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 Gicugu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu tradition and especially the myths and the role of the Mugi. 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.\textsuperscript{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, Mûrâng’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 (Kĩñyaga) 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 Njůkĩnĩ. The Njůkĩnĩ 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

\textsuperscript{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 Mūgumo.

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 Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo, 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 Gikũyu 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 Gikũyu and the Mūgumo.

3.3.1 Participant observation

I lived among the Gĩcũgu 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 Gĩkũmbo 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 kirira (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 mĩratura (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 Gicúgú Gíkúyú in their effort to revisit their roots through the sacred Múgumo. 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 Múgumo 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 Gicúgú Gíkúyú 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 Njůkĩnň 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 Gikuyu 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 Mūgumo and the essential role the tree played in the formulation of gender in the Gikuyu cosmological framework. Quite a lot of history, religion and politics seem to be engraved in the sacred Mūgumo 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. My research experiences strongly taught me that I could not discover the richness of the new world (Gikuyu cosmology) until I had the courage to lose sight of the shore and return back again enriched.

3.3.2 Focused family discussions (FFDs)

The focus groups 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. Nevertheless, I maintained that they were supposed to be voluntary, but most of the elders insisted that the kũrũ 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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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. Apart from these few loopholes, the FFDs were an appropriate way of getting variable information in the Gicugu 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 Njukini. There were also a number of them from the agricultural department in Kirinyaga district. From these sources, I understood the infrastructure of forest and agricultural services and the role they played in the lives of the Gicugu Gikuyu.

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 Kirinyaga parishes. These informants viewed the situation from the

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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 Mwigumo 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gicugu 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 Njukini. All these materials proved to be crucial in the study of the Gicugu Gikuyu, the Mwigumo and understanding Gikuyu 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 Gicugu 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.\textsuperscript{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 Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo 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

\textsuperscript{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 Kĩanyaga 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 Múgumo. 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 2003 and 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 Gicugu, 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 Gikuyu and the Mugumo 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.\textsuperscript{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 Gikuyu, Mugumo 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.

\textsuperscript{135} Gilbert, \textit{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. 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?' 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 be 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 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. 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.

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.

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 Gicugu Gikuyu

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

Using the insights of these theories, this chapter goes on now to reconstruct the history of the Gicugu Gikuyu 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 Mugumo tree. Moreover, it discusses the history of the Gikuyu people using both written and oral material. It also traces the Gicugu Gikuyu 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 Gicugu people

Gikuyu language has four main dialects that correspond to the four administrative districts. These include, North-Nyirí, South-Kiambu, Central-Murang’A and Eastern-Kiřinyaga. The Gicugu speak an eastern Gikuyu dialect called Gĩ-Gicugu.142 This dialect stretches out from river Rubingaci in the East and river Rutu, a tributary of river Thiba, in the West. To the north lies Kĩrĩma kĩ Kĩrĩnyaga (Mount Kenya). It is also spoken in the Mwea division, which borders Gicugu in the south, the majority of them having migrated to this place in the last century.

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142 The Southern Gikuyu dialect is the defacto ‘standard’ judging by current practice in Gikuyu publishing and media broadcasting in Kenya today. All other dialects are unfortunately treated as ‘vernaculars’ (household or regional speech). Benson, Kikuyu-English dictionary; Gecaga, B., A Short Kikuyu Grammar, 1953; Mugane, J.M., A Paradigmatic 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 Gicugu and Ndia, children are taught using these dominating dialects. The Gĩ-Gicugu dialect is only learnt at home. Mutahi, Sound Change and the Classification of the Southern Mt. Kenya, pp.27ff.
The Gicugu division is one of the four divisions in Kirinyaga district. The other three administrative divisions are Mwea, Ndia and Kutus-Kerugoya municipality. As a district, Kirinyaga covers 1,437 sq. km and is approximately 0.3% of Kenya's total land area. Kirinyaga is one of the six districts of the central province of Kenya. Others include Murang'a, Nyandarwa, Kiambu, Thika and Nyírí. The districts of Embu and Machakos border Kirinyaga district, on the East and Southern sides while Murang’a and Nyírí 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 Kirinyaga 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, Rwamuthambi and Ragati are the main source of water that sustains the population of Kirinyaga 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 Kirinyaga district is named after Mt Kenya (Kírùma gía Kirinyaga). Mt Kenya, located south of the equator is the second highest mountain in Africa (5199m).

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 Gicugu Division

Gicugu 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. The division has a population of about 152,782. However, a lot of the people especially the younger generation have migrated into the big cities of Kenya in search of employment. Although Gicugu is the smallest of the four divisions that form Kirinyaga district, it is nevertheless the most populated. Administratively, Gicugu has six locations: Ngariama, Njukini, Baragwi, Karumandi, Kirima 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 Gicugu division within Kirinyaga district.

Fig. 4.2. Kirinyaga District administrative boundaries

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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

Gicúgú division has a high agricultural potential. Although the ecological crises and the deforestation of Mount Kenya have drastically modified the climate in the division, Gicúgú 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). Njúgú (peas-Cajanus cajan) and Njahí 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 Gikuyu. In fact, it has been the economic mainstay of Gikuyu 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

Gikuyu 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 Gicúgú division:

4.2.5 Roads

Gicúgú 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 murred. The division is well serviced by bitumen roads, murrum (gravel) and earth roads. There are primary, secondary, minor, and rural access roads. A road that connects Ndaraca Njerú (new bridge) to Mbiri is six kilometres long. The Kiamúgumo -

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Kithūre - Mūthīgūnī rural access road is eleven kilometres while Ngiriambu - Gakūyūnī is five kilometres. There is a rural access road that runs from Gatugūra to Mbarī 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 Gicūgū and Mwea divisions. Another bitumen road is from Kutus-Kīanyaga 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–Kīì around sixteen kilometres in length, Kabari-Njikū (11km) and PI- Kīanyaga (23km).

4.2.6 Rural centres and Markets

Gicūgū division has Kīanyaga 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 Kīanyaga. There is also Kānjū, Njūkīnī, Pi, Gīconjo, Mūrūrī, Karuco and Ngiriambu. Kīamūtūgū, Kithūre, Kamwana on the one hand are in Ngariama location while Mūtīge, Mūkarara and Kimunye on the other hand are in Kīrīmā location. Karumandi location has Mūcagara, Thumaita Kāmūgūn̄da, and Karumandī. 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 Kīanyaga 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 Gīkūyū country was first inhabited by the Gumba148 and Athī (sing.mwathi-hunter and berry gatherer). The Athī were important trading partners. They contributed greatly to the Gīkūyū economy due to the fact that they traded skins, ivory and hides. They were astute in trade and acted as intermediaries between the Gīkūyū, the

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 Gīkūyū 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. The present land attracted the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu. The Maasai identified these primal owners of the land as the Il Torobo or Dorobo (Maasai word for bush). The actual Gikuyu are said to have originated from two ethnic groups: the Thagicu and Ngembe, the latter being originally from the Dorobo. Consequently, the history of the Gikuyu 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. 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu people.

The Gikuyu 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 Gicugu Gikuyu


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 Gikuyu 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 Kiandyiga in Gicugu 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 Gicugu Gikuyu 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 Gicugu Gikuyu 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. As to their settlement, information obtained from Fort Hall in Mūranga, 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. Later on, Routledge identified the Maitho with the Gumba people. 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. In fact, in Kiambu district, the southern movement was still in motion at the time of the British occupation.

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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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.\textsuperscript{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 Muthambi. 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.\textsuperscript{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 Mūrang’a and Nyírĩ, 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 Mūkūrwë 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 Kirinyaga 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{160}

\textsuperscript{157} Muriuki, \textit{A History of the Kikuyu}, p.45. Thagana, also called Mũnga means the river that gathers up all the other streams and rivers.

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., p.56.

\textsuperscript{159} Mutahi, \textit{Sound Change and the Classification of the Southern Mt. Kenya}; Lambert, \textit{The System of Land Tenure}.

\textsuperscript{160} Studying the Gĩkũyũ migration, H.E. Lambert discovered that the Gĩcũgũ and Ndia dialect is the older form of Gĩkũyũ language. Lambert, \textit{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 Kirĩnyaga 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.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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

\textsuperscript{161} A well balanced but critical work is done by Droz in his work on the Migration of Bantus. Droz, \textit{Migrations Kikuyus}.

\textsuperscript{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, \textit{Unhappy Valley}.

\textsuperscript{163} This is well elucidated in the chapter exploring the relationship between the Sacred Mũgumo and the \textit{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 Gicugu 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 Gicugu and Ndia people obtained their names from the brothers of the Ambüi clan who are said to have been the pioneers of this part of Mount Kirinyaga.165 As they migrated, they grouped themselves into different groups and lived in a particular area around Mount Kirinyaga strongly bound by a common root and language and related eastern dialects.166 Already, by the late nineteenth century, the Gicugu Gikuyu organised themselves as an independent community but with regular cultural contact with the other Gikuyu around Mount Kirinyaga. 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 Gikuyu. It has also endorsed the fact that as a small society, Gikuyu 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

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 mbari 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, Gicugu from njügi (noun) seed of the tree-bush or pigeon pea. It was only a very small part of the division originally called Gicugu (now Kariru) 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 Gicugu 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 Gikuyu migration and settlement is not one-sided. There exist other popular versions known all over the Gikuyu country. These are the myths of origin and settlement. We will now proceed to explore the myths of the Gikuyu origin.

4.3.2 Gikuyu Myths of Origin and Settlement

Although the historical (scientific) account has been reconstructed, giving some tentative dates of the migration and settlement of the Gikuyu people in general and the Gicugu Gikuyu, 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 Mugumo tree feature prominently in their cos- mology 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 Mugumo as the Mutu wa Ngai (the tree of Ngai).

In recalling the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu, the founder of the Gikuyu nation, was called by Ngai and given his share of the land. This is how the myth was narrated.

One day, Ngai took Gikuyu the founding father of the Agikuyu people on top of Mount Kirinyaga. He showed him where to build his mucii (homestead), not far away from the mountain, a place filled with the Mugumo trees. It was a very beautiful land with many rivers and trees of every kind. Then, during the conversation, Ngai told Gikuyu: ‘You and your ancestors will at times be in need of my help and blessings. When that need arises, slaughter a goat around the Mugumo for me, raise your hands towards Kirinyaga and I, Ngai of Kirinyaga and Gikuyu will come to your aid.’ Then Gikuyu 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 Mumbi (moulder/creator).

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

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

In the version of Kenyatta, the families were joined together under the name of Mbarī ya Mūmbi, in honour of their founding mother Mūmbi. With time, the family had many descendants. By the time Gikūyū and Mūmbi died, the number of each family had grown enormously and thus it became impossible to continue living together.¹⁶⁹ The descendants of the Gikūyū and Mūmbi 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 Mihūrīga (clans). These are the names of the nine¹⁷⁰ clans named after each of the daughters of Gikūyū and Mūmbi:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLAN</th>
<th>DAUGHTER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aceera</td>
<td>Waceera/ Wanjeri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agacikū</td>
<td>Wanjikū</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airimū/Agathithia</td>
<td>Wairimū</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambūi</td>
<td>Wambūi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angarī</td>
<td>Wangarī</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anjirū</td>
<td>Wanjirū</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethaga/Akiūru</td>
<td>Nyambura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angūi/Athiegeni</td>
<td>Wangūi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aithfrandū</td>
<td>Waithīra/ Wangeci¹⁷¹</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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


¹⁶⁹ They dispersed themselves in different parts of the Gikūyū country. Some moved north towards Mt. Kirinyaga, others to Kianjahi (Ol-Donyo Sabuk), others to the West Aberdare (Nyandarua), while the rest moved towards Ngong Hills (Kambirirī). Interview, 2003-4. Wanjohi, The Wisdom of Gikuyu Proverbs, P. 27; Gathigira, Miikarire ya Ugikuyu, 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 Gikuyu.172

This myth is reinforced further by the hieroglyphic on the Gīcandi173 in Gikuyū
cosmology. H.R. Tate also recounts the story of the origin of the Gikuyu as follows:

A man named Mūmbere 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, Mūmbere 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
Gikuyū:

Once upon a time, as the legend goes, there lived a king in the Gikuyū land named Kikuyu, a
grandchild of the elder daughter of the founder of the group. His method of ruling was
tyrranical. 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 (revoler). And the next generation
which started cultivation was called ndemi (cutters) in remembrance of the period when the
Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu and their neighbours.176 This is clearly shown by
the borrowing of some of the most important words in Gikuyu 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

story ‘the man with a swollen knee’ told during the time of research, will be explored in the appendix
no.3.
173 Gicandi is a gourd full of hieroglyphies that depicts the cosmology of the Gikuyu people and also their
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 (revoler). And the next generation
which started cultivation was called ndemi (cutters) in remembrance of the period when the
Gikuyu people began to cut down the forest and established themselves as agriculturalists.
176 Research, Gicugū, 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.

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meaning and value of myth in the reconstruction of the history. The two myths stipulated above, for instance, demonstrate the affinity of the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu history since one complements the other.

The history of GicusGU Gikuyu 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, GicusGU and Ndia) or a professional group or simply as agriculturalists. This exhibits overlapping networks of association and exchanges so that Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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’. Therefore, in this forging of a new identity of what it meant to belong to a certain group, clan or age-set, the Gikuyu 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 GicusGU and the Mugumo tree has to be looked at under these parameters. This interrelation will be explored in greater depth in our next chapter.


178 Horton, Patterns of Thought.
PART TWO
CHAPTER FIVE

THE GIKUYÛ 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,


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

In the study of the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu word would be witiokia or kirira. Here again witiokia means to consent or be willing while kirira 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu understanding of 'religion', their conception of Ngai and how he communes with them.

5.2 The Gikuyu Conception of Ngai

The Gikuyu conception of Ngai can specifically be understood well by examining the names given him. 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 muraika. The Gikuyu equivalent of an angel is murekio, which means the one who has been sent either by the Gikuyu deity or by another person. Karanja, J., Founding an African Faith, especially chapter five.
were, Ngai, Mwene nyaga, Mwene ndi, Kithuku, Kirinyaga, Mumbi, Murungu, Mugi, Mwene hinya and Maagü ngürü.

Figure 5.1. Names of Ngai in Gikuyu

Gikuyu people call their deity Murungu. Out of the 250 informants (158 males and 98 females) interviewed, 110 (44%) gave the name of Murungu. This name might be the original Gikuyu word for deity since it has a strong Bantu origin (Mulungu). Murungu has a personal prefix (mu) from Bantu denoting humanity. This might be the original name for the Gikuyu deity. Another name commonly used by the Gikuyu in talking about their deity is Ngai. This is a more popular name used all over the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu religio-philosophical world. Ngai is from the *Ma Maasai* meaning rain, deity, sky. According to the new Maasai language and culture dictionary, the word for Ngai is *enk-ai* (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-nyokie is the deity who is red.

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182 Research, Gicugu, 2003-04.
Although in practice the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu on the other hand talk of the Ngai of the Gikuyu and the Maasai deity; the two deities seldom engaging in war. In fact, the informants underlined that the traditional Gikuyu believed that there were two gods before the coming of Christianity. They retorted:

Agikuyu a tene meciragia ati Ngai n'igiri, imwe njega na njyo ya ruirir ruitu na ingi njuru na njyo ya Maitha. Ngai uchwa wa Maitha niwe athinagia Agikuyu riria Kithuku ateckumwona.

The traditional Gikuyu believed that there were two gods, one good (who belongs to the Gikuyu) 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 Kithuku.

What the informants and Gathigira are suggesting is that the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu as *Maagu* or *Maagu ngūrū*. 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 Gikuyu people. The traditional Gikuyu would say ‘*no Maagu ɪŋɪˈmúteithia*’ (only Ngai can help him/her). They would also say; *no Maagu ngūrū* (only Ngai is old).

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

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

received.\textsuperscript{188} Another proverb underlines that Ngai is indeed the divider: \textit{ciuma\-ga kwa Nga\-i iri ngaye} (things leaves Ngai’s place already divided).

The Gikuyu conception of Ngai is also enriched by the name \textit{Mumbi}. Our respondents firmly said: \textit{Ngai ni Mumbi} (Ngai is the creator). \textit{Mumbi} was chosen by 230(92\%) informants. Our informants underlined the myth of origin and settlement which depicts \textit{Mumbi} as the founding mother of the Gikuyu group and also authenticates the origin of the matriarchal system later changed to patriarchal. \textit{Mumbi}, from \textit{kumba} (verb) means to mould, knead or to create. In traditional Gikuyu cosmology, \textit{mumbi} 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’.\textsuperscript{189} Thus, \textit{mumbi} is the potter, maker and moulder and therefore female.

Furthermore, it is common to use \textit{kumba} as a verb to describe the work of Ngai. Women in Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu cosmology he had to be described in these simple but powerful symbolic terms; Ngai \textit{mumbi} (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 Gikuyu people throughout their life time. This, critically evaluated, demonstrates that the Gikuyu people originally might have conceived of Ngai as a female.

As a result, the action of ‘creating’ denoted by the word \textit{Mumbi}, and which constitutes one of Ngai’s epithets, is presented as a female role in Gikuyu 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 \textit{Mumbi}. Accordingly, they became \textit{mbari} of \textit{Mumbi} and all clans were named after the daughters of \textit{Mumbi}. 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

\textsuperscript{188} Interview, Gic\-g\-u 2003-4; Wanjohi, \textit{The Wisdom and Philosophy of Gikuyu Proverb}, p. 180; Bernardi, \textit{Le Religioni dei Primitivi}, pp.204-205.

\textsuperscript{189} Interview, Gic\-g\-u 2003-4; Middleton, & Kershaw, \textit{The Central Tribe of North-Eastern Bantu}, p.22.
niwe wombire andū, andū matingihota gūkūmba 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 Mūgumono tree was essentially used to drill the fire. During this important occasion, the Mūgumono, strictly associated with Ngai, was essentially female, and, could not be used as the male.191 Furthermore, the milky sap of the Mūgumo 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 Gikūyū 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. Rūnyaga 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 Gikūyū 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 Gikūyū were fascinated by the height and the size of Mount Kenya. They were confronted with the glistening snow on top of Kirīnyaga (white spotted mountain, white as the ostrich’s feather and shiny as the sun).192 This might have left the Gikūyū 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 Gikūyū 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 kirīma-ini gīa Kirī-Nyaga (Ngai lives in the mountain of Kirīnyaga).

190 Research, Gicugu, 2003-4.
191 Interview, Gicugu 2003-4. Beech also accentuates that in this occasion, the sacred Mūgumono 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, Miikarire ya A Gikūyū, p.30.
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-mbiriirũ* and *Kĩa-Njaňi*. This is why perhaps the conception of Ngai as *Kirĩnyaga* 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 ndĩlthĩ* (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.


\(^{195}\) Interview, Gĩcũũ 2003-4.
offered to him. He also maintains his creation by giving enough rain to water the earth. Accordingly, he has given to the Gikũũ a country full of rivers, ravines, beautiful mountains and trees. Most of the informants retorted: *Kai gükũũ bũũри ūngĩ mwega ta wa Agĩkũũ* (is there another country as beautiful as that of Gikũũ?).\(^1\)96

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 ‘gwath/ gwathana’, meaning reign with authority and power. Thus, the Gikũũ 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.\(^1\)97

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 Gikũũ. Indeed one would expect to be confronted by the word *Baba* when exploring the Gikũũ 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*, *Mũrũngũ* and *Kĩthũku* are used.\(^1\)98

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 Gikũũ 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.

\(^{196}\) Interview, Gĩcũũ 2003-4.

\(^{197}\) Interview, August 2003.

\(^{198}\) Interview, Gĩcũũ 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 Gikũũ 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 Mûgumo to prove the sincerity of the people. Ngai hates and loves people according to their behaviour or in other words, *Ngai arehaga kîguni na gîlei* (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 Mûgumo tree. The informants stipulated that during their offering and sacrifices to Ngai, he is not far from the place of sacrifice (the sacred Mûgumo 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.\footnote{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.} That is why when the Gîkîyû offer their sacrifices to him, fulfilling all the ritual requirements, they are sure to get what they request. After all, the Gîkîyû believe in a give-and-take relationship (*kanya gatune nî mwaamûkanîro*) and thus in a very convenient deity.

There are other attributes that depict Ngai in anthropomorphic language. The Gîkîyû would say that Ngai does his own work and thus is not to be pestered (*Ngai ndagiagwo*). *Ngai ndabarana* gîithi kîa mûndû (Ngai does not judge by the countenance of people). There is a Gîkîyû proverb that put this attribute concisely; *mûthûri mûndû tiwe Ngai* (he who hates the other person is not Ngai).\footnote{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 Gîkîyû people found in the rich heritage of their proverbs. Wanjohi, *The Wisdom and Philosophy of the Gikuyu proverbs*.} 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 Gîkîyû 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 Gîkîyû cosmology and worship.
5.3 The Manifestation of Ngai

When the respondents were asked: *Ngai eonanagia kūrī andū na njīra irtū?* (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 Mūgūmo was the tree by which Ngai manifested himself regularly.

5.3.1 The Ngai of Mountains

5.3.1.1 Kīrīnyaga

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 *Kiambirūri* in the south and Longonot Crater in Maasai territory. It is revealing to explore the nature of these mountains where Ngai is believed to dwell and to manifest himself in Gikūyu 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 Gikūyu 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 Gikūyu country. The people associate Mount Kenya with strength, height, beauty and as a source of water, rain, and forest that the Gikūyu need for their survival. In addition to Mount Kenya, Ngai manifests himself in the small mountains of;

5.3.1.2 Kīrīma kā-njāhī (Donyo-Sabuk).

*Njāhī* - lablab bean (*Dolichos lablab*) is associated with this mountain. The seeds of *njāhī* 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 *njāhī 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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Within this historiography, there exists a strong connection between the description of njahi (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 Kia-njahi the second. However, given this topographical connection and description, we can say that in these two mountains the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 kĩa-Mbirũrũ (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 Gikuyu land and manifesting himself in them can be strengthened by some Gikuyu prayers.204

In these prayers, the Gikuyu 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 Mugumo 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

204 Most of these prayers will be explored in the chapter on the sacred Mugumo 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 Ŭgikũyũ; Gathigira, Miikarĩre ya Agikũyũ; Wanjoji, The Wisdom and Philosophy of the Gikũyũ Proverbs.

5.3.2 The Ngai of Lightning and Thunder

For the Gikuyu, 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 Mugumo 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. 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu demonstrated that Ngai and mbura came from the same source. They would say: Ngai tondū mbura yumaga o kāu wīkaraga īī, tūiguatre tha na īūhe yo (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 nē aratūratīma na mbura (Ngai is blessing us with rain Ngai).

5.3.4 Ngai and the Rainbow

The name for rainbow in Gikuyu is mūkānga or mūkena 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.

206 Interview, Dec, 2003. They underlined that to be struck by lightning 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?

*Ngai nĩ mwendi úthaka* (Ngai loves beauty), they would say. 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 Gikũyũ 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 *kathurũmũndũ* /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 Gikũyũ as having foretold the coming of the Europeans and the Kenya-Uganda railway. In Gĩcũgũ, the informants mentioned another seer by the name of Kĩmarũ 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.

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 Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ could feel his immeasurable presence and power. They could know his “thinking” in the sense that

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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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu people and its role in their cosmology and worship.

5.4 The land: its meaning and religious value

5.4.1 Gikuyu and Land Tenure

The land debate substantially exposes the impact the land could have played in Gikuyu rituals performed around the sacred Mugumo tree. We will explore these issues by positing this research question: Ngai, Githaka na Agikuyu matarainie aitia? (What kind of relationships exists between Ngai, the land and the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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

Kenyatta uses the powerful images of 'mother' and 'womb' to demonstrate that in traditional Gikuyú 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 Gikuyú 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 Gikuyú. 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 Gikuyú became the first ancestor. As the Gikuyú 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 Gikuyú became culturally, politically and religiously associated with the land. The group could be identified with the land within their socio-political organisation.

In the light of this background one can understand why in the beginning of Facing Mount Kenya Kenyatta invokes the ancestors to join the Gikuyú in rebuilding the destroyed shrines and recapturing the annexed Gikuyú 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 rebuild the destroyed shrines.

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 Gikuyú 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, Craigill, E.S, 'The Religious significance of the land', Journal of the Royal African Society, Vol.XXXXVIII, 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 Gikuyú, 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 mbatí, 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 Gikuyú 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 Gikuyú 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, *Mūgāi* and *Wambū*. Thus in his entreaty we discover not only his and other rich Gikūyū political agenda but also some of the fundamental issues that underpin Gikūyū land tenure, their conception and relationship with the land. Land, it seems, elicits in the Gikūyū 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 Gikūyū 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 Gikūyū 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 Gikūyū 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 Gikūyū 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


Nevertheless, it also seems plausible that land became a podium of economic suppression in the traditional Gikuyū gihaka\textsuperscript{217} system. Having amassed a lot of land, the wealthier mbarī 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 Gikuyū, land and family was meant to increase the wealth and fame of the mbarī. 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 mbarī 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.\textsuperscript{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 mūramati does not highlight the discrepancies that existed in traditional land tenure, where the rich mbarī had reduced the poor and landless Gikuyū 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 Gikuyū Land tenure

Land bonded the members of mbarī because it strongly defined the character of their collective life. The Gikuyū community looked on the land as a pivot through which the family was built, the people conceived of it in relationship to life.\textsuperscript{219} It assisted the agrarian Gikuyū 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 Gikuyū and the neighbouring groups.

\textsuperscript{217} Gihaka (pl. iihaka) is a privately owned piece of land belonging to a family or clan. It is also referred to as mtīgīndā or ng'īndū. In traditional Gikuyū land, tenure the term gihaka was generally used to mean both the uncultivated and cultivated land. The Maxwell report defines gihaka as the Gikuyū 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.


It was the main unifying factor in Gikuyū 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 mbari all over the Gikuyū country. Thus, land even today remains one of the most sensitive single factors influencing Gikuyū 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’ (būrūri) or ‘district’. It can also mean an area of land (gĩthaka) under certain rights. Land is also ng’ũndũ (plot) or Muguda (cultivation ground). It is under these parameters that the Gikuyū understand the genesis of land tenure. Consequently, Ngai is the creator and therefore the owner of the earth and the Gikuyū 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 Gikuyū 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 Gikuyū, 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.

²²⁰ Interview, Gicugu 2003-4.
²²¹ The myth of origin depicts Ngai as the owner of the earth and the one who gave Gikuyū, the founding father of the Gikuyū people, the country they now live. Some attributes of Ngai also underline this factor.
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. 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 mbaru 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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In order to understand the religious significance of land to the Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ lie buried’. Leakey also remarks that the ngoma dwell in the bowels of the earth 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 Gikũyũ 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.

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 Gikũyũ but also the role the traditional religious beliefs played in Gikũyũ land tenure. As long as the Gikũyũ 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.

However, if the Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ not drive them out? Why had the Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ and the land. In one of his work, Ngotho reminds his children that they belong to the house of Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ is constantly in debt to his ancestors due to the fact that they gave him the piece of land and his family.


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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 mbari 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 (Wambui and Muigai) 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 insurgency was inevitable in the Gikuyu land.228

From the available literature, it is clear that land for the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu group bestowed to the land.

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

227 This is why in 1929, the Gikuyu 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; Muruki, A History of the Kikuyu.


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: mūgūnda mwega ùmenyagwo na ngetho (one knows a good field from its crops). In consequence, to take someone’s land in Gikuyū 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 mbari 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, gütangtra ngoma njohi, (pour libation-beer for the ancestors) or güthūnjtra ngoma (to slaughter for the ancestors) or other phrases that validated the close communion between the land and mbari were used.

As an agriculturalist community the Gikuyū 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. The land constitutes the bones and sinews of their religious, social, economic, and political structures.

5.4.3.2 Land: A Podium for Ritual Sacrifice

The Gikuyū seem to have been united by a common mythological sentiment of the origin, the investment of the land under the power of mbari and the ritual sacrifices conducted by the religious or sacrificial council (kläma k乱象 matıranguru) around the sacred Mūgumo. Additionally, they were also united by the concept of a religio-political

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 Mūrogi 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 *mathĩňũro* (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 *mathĩňũro* 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: *hatari na mũgũnda, Mũgĩkũyũ angĩratĩra Ngai magongona atĩa? Tũtari mũgũnda ri, ngoma citũ nacio ingĩkara kũ?* (Without land, where would the Gĩkũyũ offer the sacrifice to Ngai? Without land, where would our ancestors rest?). *Gũtarĩ Mũgũnda ri, andũ na ngoma no makorwo na wiyathi?* (Without the land, would the people and ancestor live in freedom?).

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 Mugumo 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 Mugumo, 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* or *muma wa kũrĩnga 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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234 Gĩthathi is a cylindrical stone with a hole drilled axially. In the traditional Gĩkũyũ, it was used for taking oaths and pronouncing combinations. It is also called *kũrĩnga thenge* because in most cases, the goat was killed and some of its bones smashed.
words: ‘ndirogūhūo ta mbūri ìno nì hinya wa Ngai angikorwo mūgūnda ìyū ti wakwa o hamwe na ngoma cikwaka’ (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).

Confirming the relationship the Gikuyu 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.

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 Gikuyu was sanctified by the ancestors beneath it, giving the present occupiers a strong link and claim to that soil. To the Gikuyu, 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu taking the land as the podium of this intricate communion. The Gikuyu explain, manipulate and communicate with their ancestors using the land as the medium.

Some of the attributes used by the Gikuyū people to conceptualise Ngai are: great, powerful, Mūmbi (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 Gikuyū and Ngai. These attributes also explain why the relationship between the Gikuyū 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 Gikuyū 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 Mūmbi thus showing one of the dominant characteristic of Ngai. Ngai, like a traditional Gikuyū woman, is the moulder. He created the Gikuyū and the world. He takes care of the people and nature like a responsible mother by sustaining the people. The Gikuyū nourish themselves from the ‘breast’ of Ngai-nature and thus she as a mother, sustains them. Ngai is also closely related to the Mūgumo 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 Gikuyū might have conceived of Ngai as having a female gender. This might have changed with time as the people forged their different identities.

The Gikuyū 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 Gikuyū, and the rest of creation. The other labyrinths of association mirror the first type of rapport: between Ngai the creator and the Gikuyū 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 Gikuyū was required to practise. The Gikuyū 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu conception of Ngai. In fact, the research has established that the Ngai of Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu around the sacred Mugumo and sacred groves in Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu territory. This is also applicable when exploring their traditional shrine (Mugumo) where one of the characteristics of Mugumo, 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu people. For instance, Gikuyu Ngai is black: enkai-narok. Mount Kenya, his dwelling place, is referred to as a spotted mountain (black and white). Mount Kianjaria is named after the beans of Ngai which are spotted black and white. Ngong hill is enkai-narok (black mountain), Nyandarua is also black or cloudy (thumbrid). Such evidence is not coincidental and thus leads to a strong conclusion that the traditional Gikuyu conceived of Ngai as a black deity therefore
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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu and land to the extent that, in the absence of communion, their religious, political and economic configuration would be incomplete. In the Gikuyu 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 Mugumo tree. To the Gikuyu, 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 Mugumo tree. It fed other sacred groves to which were of significant importance for the offering of sacrifices in the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu cosmology rest on land inhabited by the Gikuyu, 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 Gikuyu 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. Land to the Gikuyu therefore epitomises every aspect of their endeavour, as well as offering fulfilment of daily needs.

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238 Interview, Gicugfi, 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 Gikuyu traditional land tenure between 1900 and early 1930s. Most of the studies related to the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyū 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; njahi (lablab) which is so named after one mountain attributed to him (Kīa-njahī).

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 Gikuyū 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 Mūgumo tree. So, given this line of thought, it is understandable that in the minds of the Gikuyū, 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 Gikuyū 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 Gikuyū is not only a mountain dweller, but also prefers some specific trees to manifest his potency and dwell in them. For this reason, in Gikuyū cosmology the sacred Mūgumo 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 Gikuyū 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 Mūgumo tree and the role it plays within Gikuyū cosmology and worship. Thus, the relationship that exists between the Gikuyū people and trees will be explored in the next chapter.
CHAPTER SIX

GİKÜYЎ AND TREES: THE RELIGIO-POLITICAL SYMBIOSIS

6.1 Introduction

The Gĩcugu division is characterised by its ecological diversity. Some places, especially the areas around Mount Kenya and Njūkĩnĩ 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 Gĩkūyũ as closely related to the environment. However, whereas some colonial discourses portray the Gĩkūyũ 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 and people nurture themselves. In fact, both colonialists and colonists exploited the Gĩkūyũ landscape to mirror the political and social quagmire that existed during the colonial hegemony.

What is clear in the literature of the Gĩkūyũ 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 Gĩkūyũ 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 Gĩkūyũ language, Mũũ (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. Mũũ wa mbere nĩ ĕyũ (the first point is this). Again, tree could have multiple meaning apart from the plant. When the traditional Gĩkūyũ goes to the medicine man, they would generally say; ndaitũ gũcũkũ mũũ (cast lots). Mũũ is also understood to denote a sacred place, e.g. Mũũ wa mbũũ, something or somewhere set aside as sacred, forbidden or even an oracle. Mũũ can also express human feelings; rũra ta mũũ, 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, Kĩkũyu-English Dictionary.

241 In recreating the myth of origin, Kenyatta demonstrates the ontological symbiosis existing between the Gĩkūyũ and the environment. Leakey does a detailed study of Gĩkūyũ botany but laments that this was only limited to the Southern Gĩkūyũ thus leaving many trees and plants unclassified. Cagnolo too describes the relationship between Gĩkūyũ 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 *mbari* and *muhūrīga*. 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 literally lost over 85,000 hectares of forest since the early 1980s. Moreover, Kenya continues to lose 19,000 hectares every year. 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) *Mitũ ya ũgĩkũyũ nũ ũmĩũũ* (Do you know indigenous Gĩkũyũ trees?) b) *No ũgũeũte marrũtwɔ mayo* (Can you name them?) c) *Wiri ųa mii nĩ ũrũkũ* (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 Gicugu 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, Kabuti (a place in Kirima location) is named after the Mubutu (Erythrina abyssinica) tree. There are also other conspicuous places named after the trees. Notable places like Mūrūri in Njūkini location, Karuco (Mūruco) market, Gacatha (Mūcatha), Mūringa (Cordia africana/abyssinica), Ngerwe (Mūgerwe), Ithare (Ithare) Kagumo (Mūgumo) and Gakoigo-Mūkoigo (Bridelia micrantha) are clear examples. The chapter will go on to explore the knowledge the Gicugu people have of the indigenous trees, their uses and symbolic end.

6.2 Gikuyū and their Trees

A number of Gicugu Gikuyū 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 Gikuyū country, notably, Mūrang’a, Nyūirī and Kiambu generated similar results. In fact most of the respondents recalling the myth of origin accentuated that Ngai created the world first. Gikuyū, the founding father of the Agikuyū was given the land full of trees, water and ravines.243

However, looking at the history of afforestation projects around Mt Kenya and Njūkini forests, nearly 90% of Gicugu Gikuyū 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 mūratina (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.

243 A comparative interview was done in Mang’u-Kiambu, Mūranga and Othaya in Nyūirī where informants underlined their affiliation, interdependence and co-existence with trees. Oral interview, Mūrang’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 Gikuyu indigenous trees generated interesting results. There were 250 people interviewed.

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

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

The majority of people who gave over 40 tree names were between 80 and 100+ years old. 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: 

- *Mugumo* (Ficus Natalensis), 
- *Muringa* (Cordia africana/abyssinica), 
- *Mii* (Markhamia hildebrandtii), 
- *Mukoigo* (Bridelia micrantha), 
- *Muratina* (Kigelia africana), 
- *Mukungugu* (Commiphora zimmermannii), 
- *Mvithai* (Ocotea usambarensis), 
- *Mwariki* (Ricinus communis), 
- *Mwingirima, Muthare, Muthakwa* (Vernonia auriculifera), 
- *Ithare*, and 
- *Murumbawe* (Vangueria linearisepala).

*Mugumo* tree came always as the favourite of those indigenous trees while *Muringa* 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-à-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, Gicugu 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. Muratina was mentioned as the third or fourth in the list due to its cultural importance in the making of the native beer. Trees like Mukoigo, Mukunggū, Mwariki, Mungirima (Ochna holstii), Mūthare, Ihare and Mūrumbawe, Mūtate (Polixias Kikuyensis) and Mūrī (Pygeum africanum) were spontaneously mentioned without any difficulty.

However, other trees that were indicated by about 50% of the people interviewed were; Muigoya (Plectranthus barbatus), Mukambura (Dovyalis abyssinica), Mūtare (Rubus keniesis), Mūbiru, Mukengeria (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.

6.2.1 Trees, Gikuyū life and community

As our results indicate, Gicūgū 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. 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

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

246 Along the undulating valleys of Njūkīň, Mūcagara Kūnya and Thumaita area, a different type of Mukengeria (Floscopa glomerata) was found. Thus called Mukengeria wa kianda (kianda literary means the valley). This kind of shrub grew both in the valleys and around the Mugumo tree, together with Ihare.

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), Mūrī (Prunus africana/Pygeum africanum), Mūthengera (Podocarpus milanjianus), Mūcarage (Olea welwiischit), Mūtati (Polycis tus kikuvuensis), Mūtero (Olea Africana), Mūthaiti (Ocotea Usambarenensis), Mūbūti (Erythrina abyssinica), Mīkē (Dombea goetzennii), Mūkūrwe (Albizia grumifera/cariana), Mūgūgū (Acasia abyssinica) and Mwerere (Tsbernae mentana).

248 Castro accentuates that Ndia and Gicūgū 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 Njukīnǐ were supervised by the member of the ruling generation (Irungu/Mwangi). Other areas were also managed by the members of the local mbari. These common forests were available for firewood, beehives and hunting. The ruling generation also controlled sacred places (Mūgumo) where sacrifices, including those of ituika and kūhoya Ngai mbura were made. The informants also reported the antagonism that existed between the ruling generation and the colonial government over the control of Njūkīnǐ forest until the government surrendered the area to local management but with some limited supervision.

Most of the people in Gicūgū 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 Gikīyū 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 Njūkīnǐ 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 than 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 Gikīyū, 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 Gikīyū. 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 Mūtarakwa (Juniperus procera), coffee, sisal (Agave mexicana), pawpaw, and irigu (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 Gicūgū Gikīyū identities. The
Mugumo for instance was culturally valued because it was evergreen, tall and gigantic and also for its milky sap which epitomised sexuality. The milky sap\textsuperscript{249} was associated with the breast milk of Gikuyu women as will be explored in our following chapters.

Once again the research underlined that in Gicugu, 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 Kimunye, 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 Gicugu Gikuyu. This was one of the reasons why some of the sacred Mugumo 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, \textit{inter-alia} always part and parcel of Gikuyu religious life from Ndemi and Mathathi.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{249} There is no distinction of the word \textit{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 \textit{ria} (of) so that \textit{iria ria ng’ombe} (cow’s milk), \textit{iria ria mwitwa or ria mori} (milk of heifer calved for the first time) and \textit{iria ria mUtumia} (woman’s milk). Essentially they would refer to the same article \textit{ria} when referring to any milk-like juice from the plants, latex, e.g., \textit{iria ria ngwac’t} (sap exuding from the cut end of sweet potato) or \textit{iria ria Mugi\textsuperscript{u}} (milky-sap from Mugumo tree).

\textsuperscript{250} Ndemi from gutema (cut) thus meaning that which cuts. Mathathi from Muthathimwa tree (\textit{Hyppercum lanceolatum})-St John’s wort. These two are attributed to the two first generations in the Gikuyu cosmology. The Mathathi leaves were traditionally carried by the elders as a sign of peace. There is also a myth told in Gikuyu on how the Ndemi generation overthrew the Gikuyu 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.\textsuperscript{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, Gĩkũyũ 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,\textsuperscript{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 \textit{mūtī} (tree) to depict the male penis. They would also use \textit{njugūmalthiari} (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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\textsuperscript{251} Interview done July and September 2003 in Gĩcũgũ (Karirũ), Rūkenya, Kiamũtuĩgũ, Mũrũri, Kiyanagya, Karumanɗi, Kabari, Kmũnye, Kanjūũ and Njũkũnũ 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, \textit{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.

\textsuperscript{252} Mũringa wa Ngai Ndeithia literally means \textit{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 Kiyanagya) 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: \textit{N̄ Ngai wandeithia Mũringainĩ ëcio} (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. This euphemism does not seem to be popularly used to refer to women although there is a tree called Mūnyondo 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 Gikūyū 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. 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, Mwēngirima, 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 Gikūyū 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. Apart from shelter and medicine, Gikūyū indigenous trees were also valued for the variety of fruits


254 Here, Mū, is used as a preposition to describe certain trees. E.g. Mūnyondo (with breast) or Mūrangi-Bamboo (Arundinaria alpīne) a tree with colour. Gikūyū seldom use this preposition to describe the condition of the tree. There is a common tree called Mūmunga nai (a bad smelling tree).

255 For a complete list, see the appendix no. 4 on Gikūyū 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 Gicugu Gikuyu. There are some indigenous trees known for their juicy fruits. About 246 (96%) respondents mentioned Mukawa (Carissa edulis), Mukambura (Dovyalis abyssinica), Muttere (Rubus keniesis), Mubiru,(Vangueria linearisepala) and Mbota. Although these trees are still abundant in Gicugu division, their fruits are eaten by children.

Pivotal to the research was the question that covered the trees and their functions: Wira wa miti Tyo ya ugikuyu m uriku (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 Gikuyu indigenous trees. Some of the most conspicuous functions were: gwaka (building and home management), ndawa (medicine), kahanda mukhaini (boundary markers), kwagita kuma kuriri maitha (protection from enemies), kugucia mbura (rain catchments), irio (food), bothita (post offices especially during the Mau Mau), gicuka miti igotini (traditional court), gicuka miti kwiri mundry mugo (divination) and gwithamba na gwitheria (toiletries). Figure 6.2 shows the number of informants and the average number of functions they know in relation to the indigenous trees in Gicugu division.

![Chart showing the number of functions of indigenous trees](image)

**Fig. 6.2 Respondents' number vis-à-vis tree functions**

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 Gicugu 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 Muringa, Mui, Muiri and Muthaiti are commonly used for building, door frames and furniture. The traditional houses (nyumba), usually of round types, were

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257 A more detailed figure on name and functions of the Gikuyu indigenous trees is in the appendix no.4.
made of wooden poles and wattle sticks daubed with clay. In the Gĩcūgũ 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 Gĩcūgũ are still in use especially by the older generation. After all, most accentuated that mūćiĩ imenyagwo na ndirĩ 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 Mūthaiti, and Mūringa 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 Gĩcūgũ division was marked by using some of the most important indigenous trees in the area. On the North and East, on the Valley of Mbūrĩ, the Mūringa tree belonging to the mbarĩ of Gachogu demarcated the northern border while the Mūgumo and Mūkūrĩambūngũ trees marked the eastern border towards Njūkūn forest. Thus, important and gigantic trees like Mūgumo, Mūringa, Mūkūrĩambūngũ, Mūū, Mūkũyũ, Mūkūngũũ, Mūbūți 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, Gĩcūgũ and Ndĩa, people protected

259 Interview, Gĩcūgũ, 2003-4; KNA/DC/EMBU/3/3.
and planted trees as a means of establishing land ownership.\textsuperscript{260} 236 people (94\%) thought boundary marking was crucial to avoid conflicts among different members of \textit{mbari} and \textit{muhiriga}. Trees like \textit{Mūratina} (\textit{Kigelia africana/ethiopum}), \textit{Mūringa} (\textit{Cordia africana}), \textit{Mūī}, \textit{Mūgu}, \textit{Mūkūngūgū}, \textit{Mūthakwa} are still used to mark boundaries. Where \textit{Gitoka} (\textit{crinum}) lily is not there, especially in the lower part of \textit{Gēcūgū}, \textit{Mwatha} (\textit{Synadenium compactum}) is used.\textsuperscript{261}

\subsection*{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 \textit{Gīkūyū} are vital since they attract rain.\textsuperscript{262} 232 informants (93\%) underlined that trees like \textit{Mūgu}, \textit{Mūkūyū}, \textit{Mūnyondo}, \textit{Mūthakwa}, \textit{Ithare}, \textit{Mūkūriambūngū}, \textit{Mūthandikū} and \textit{Mūrangi} 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’ \textit{Gīkūyū} 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

\begin{itemize}
\item Leakey, \textit{The Southern Kikuyu}, Vol.III.; Dale, and Greenway, \textit{Kenya Trees and Shrubs}. Other trees like \textit{Mūtundu} (\textit{Croton macrostachyus}) and \textit{Mūkūndūri} (\textit{Croton megalocarpus}) were used as boundary markers especially in \textit{Gēcūgū} and Ndia area, Castro, \textit{Facing Kirinyaga}, p.30. The issue of using one or various types of trees to mark the boundaries depended much on \textit{mbari}, so that whereas one \textit{mbari} will use \textit{Mūkūgo} (\textit{Bridelia micrantha}) and \textit{Mūū} (\textit{Markhamia hildebrandii}), another one might prefer to use \textit{Mūringa} (\textit{Cordia abyssinica}) and \textit{Mūmbū} (\textit{Ficus wakefieldii}) or \textit{Mūgu} (\textit{Ficus natalensis}). Riley, and Brokensha, \textit{The Mbeere in Kenya}, Vol.II.
\item Interview, May-July 2004 especially with the members of Green Belt Movement in \textit{Gēcūgū} 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 \textit{Gīkūyū} traditional education freely offered their knowledge to the aspiring young children. Under the shade, the animals also rested after feeding.
\end{itemize}
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; mahūri ma
thī tūhetwo tūhū nī 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 mbarī and mūhīrīga 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 Mūgumo, Mūgico,
Mūkengeria (Commelina benghalensis), Mūcomoro (especially in the northern Gučūgū)
and Mūrama, Mūtoo, Cong’e, Mūkbūtho and Ndabibi (southern part of Gučūgū) 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 Mūgumo and
creeping Mūkengeria, 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 Njukūnī 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 Gučūyū, we noted that trees and
forests acted as buffer zones against the Gučūyū 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

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 1; Rival, The Social Life of Trees; Perlman, M., The
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
important trees and forests were to the Gikuyu people especially during the Mau Mau war against the British colony.\(^{264}\)

Also, at times when the Gikuyu warriors carried out ambushes on their neighbouring groups, either Maasai (for the Southern Gikuyu) and Embu and Mbere (for the Gicugu 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. MükängÜgü (Commiphora zimmermannii), Mwĩria (Pygeum africanum) are commonly used although in most cases, Mukawa (Carisa edulis) or any thorny tree is preferred by the southern Gicugu. In some other places, Mũgumo, Mũirĩ and Mutũ are used.

6.3.1.5 Toiletries

Toiletries have always been part and parcel of the Gikuyu 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 Mukũtha, 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 (njĩũa/sing. rĩa-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 Gicugu 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 Mbaruiki (Mwariki 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, Mukũtha, Mũgumo, Mũrindangũrwe, Mũkeu, Mũndwe and Mũrenda and Mũkeu are stripped to prepare very

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 Gicugū, 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 Gikūyū, the mūthūgī (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 mūthūgī as a sign of power and prestige. Today, the elders still use walking sticks made from Mwīngīrima, Mūruba, and Mūnderendū trees. However, the survey sample demonstrates that although 198 (79%) of the informants saw that the mūthūgī 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 Mūturanguru (Vernonia holstii) together with the mūthūgī were used by the elders as a sign of belonging to the highest grade of elders in the Gikūyū 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 Gicugū are essentially connected with indigenous beer. It is not common to see people eating honey today in rural Gicugū. The Mūratina (tree) is sine qua non in the preparation of the traditional Gikūyū brew, also called mūratina. That is why beekeeping is extremely important in traditional and contemporary Gikūyū 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. The survey reveals that 190 (76%) of the informants thought that without special indigenous trees like Mūringa, Mūbūtī, Mūtätī, Mūrembu, Mūkandu, Mūkangū, Mūgumo Mūkūyū, Mūkūrwe, Mūgū, Mūnumma and Mūnderendū, traditional

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265 Interview, 2003-4; Cagnolo, The Akikuyu, p.122. Cagnolo highlights that at the culmination of Ituika, 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 Mwīngīrima and Mūnderendū (Teclea nobilis) trees. Interview, Gicugū, December, 2003. Benson underlines that of those items, mūthūgī, 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 Research, 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 mbūgī 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 Njūkīnī 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*), Mūthaitī (*Ocotea usambarenensis*) Mūkeū (*Dombea burgessiae/daweri/goetzenii*), Mūndererendū (*Teclea simplicifolia*), Mūrurī (*Trichilia roka/emetica*) and Mūnunga (*Ekebergia capensis*) were the most popular trees. They were accompanied by Mūtakwā (*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 igūrū. 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 Gīkūyū cosmology, trees are also associated with environmental health, community welfare and prosperity. They are above all prominent for their medicinal

²⁶⁷ Interview, Gīcūgū, 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 Mūmamba-igūrū (*Periploca linearifolia*), Kagutu (*Vernonia brachycalys*), a semi-scandent shrub and Mūcūgū (*Cajanus cajan*). Leakey reiterates that Mūtakwā 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 Mugumo called Kagumo was administered to a person who fainted. After Circumcision, the chewed bark of Mugumo 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 Muchanja muka tree were used to treat a victim suffering from temporary madness and thus could be cured.268

The literature on the GECGUL 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 Muthengera (Podocarpus gracilior) is known for the treatment of chest complaints. The bark and the roots of Muringa are also employed for a similar purpose or chewed to relieve a sore, an ulcerated throat and coughing. The roots of Muimba-igüü (Perplola linearifolia) are exploited by medicine men to make special magic powder called Mugokoro. Traditionally, the stem of this tree was used to prepare the magic powder called thenge.

Murerema (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. Müüriingi(Catha edulis) is good as a sexual

268 Hobley, C.W., 'Kikuyu Medicines', Man, Vol.6, 1906, pp81-83. This is one of the earliest but well detailed examples of Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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, 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, Nairobi: Institute of development studies, University of Nairobi, 1983; Riley, 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 Gicugu area.

There were some trees in the Gikuyu cosmology used for fertility and other family ceremonies. These included Mūgumo, which had a variety of functions in the Gikuyu world-view. Mūgumo 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 Gikuyu 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. The bark of *Mwariki* (*Ricinus communis*) tree was used to stitch wounds while its roots were used to make ceremonial earrings in initiation ceremonies.

### 6.4 Traditional courts, ‘Post Offices’, ‘Banks’ and ‘Sign posts’

Traditionally, during the time of the executing jurisdiction and penalties among the Gikuyu, 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 *Mukandu*, *Mucatha*, *Mūgumo*, *Muuți*, *Cong’e*, *Mūkengeria*, *Mūthūrathīrī* and *Mūkenia* were generally used. The process was called *gūcuka mūrī* (lit. to accuse the sticks). Trees here were used for various symbolic purposes. They were used to


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*. 

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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. So, indigenous trees were at the centre of social, political and religious control in the traditional Gikuyū.

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 Gikuyū traitors. In fact the Mau Mau association recently formed in Kenya has a considerable number of members from the Gicūgū 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 Mūrangi (bamboo-Arundinaria alpina) and hidden under one of the rotten cavities of a gigantic tree such as Mūringa, Mūthaiti, Mūū, Mūīrī, Mūnyondo and Mūgumo. Different groups and Mau Mau affiliations secretly knew where to get their letters or messages. One of the informants underlined that the Mūgumo tree in his land was used by the Mau Mau fighters as a bank. The procedure of hiding 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.

272 Interview, Gicūgū division, September 2003 and June 2004. Even today in many parts of the Gikuyū, when one expresses a relevant point among his/her colleagues, it is common to hear someone commenting: Ḳi, ṭyo nti mbūthi, or nci nti múũ or simply, múũ (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, Gatūkfūyu, Mūțūma, Kīrañ and Mwea.
6.5 Indigenous trees, wealth and death
6.5.1 Trees as traditional symbol of wealth

Among the Gicugu people, there are some trees associated with prosperity and power especially with the rich mbari. The presence of Muringa in a Gikuyu homestead is still considered by the older generation as a sign of power and prestige. The tree could be planted by any Gikuyu without any problem although in most cases these trees naturally germinated without the help of the people. In the areas near Mount Kenya and Njukini, they were abundant. However, Muratina 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 mbari. 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, Muratina was principally associated with wealth and even social and religious control. Today, most of the people in Gicugu practise zero-grazing and thus the Muratina tree is scarce. Most of it grows in the lower area of the division or in Mwea division. Muratina continues to be a highly valued tree in the Gikuyu cosmology because it is used to make traditional brew which was used in almost all sacrifices undertaken by the Gikuyu people. It was also associated with rituals of marriage and bride wealth.

6.5.2 Trees and Death

Traditional Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu
people were not very much preoccupied with the after life; rather the life of here and now, ‘nowism’?

Accordingly, the respondents insisted that the Gikuyu believed that when one died he/she perished beneath the roots of a mythical tree Mukongoe which acted as an avenue to the other world. When asked about the location of the Mukongoe 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 Ndëngëurë bird to give the bad news to the Gikuyu that death would befall them. So when the Ndëngëurë arrived, it met the chameleon stammering to the people: you...you...you were...were...t...told, th...at you...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 Mukongoe 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 Herero 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 imbued with the divine power. The neighbours of the the Gikuyu; Kamba, Meru and Embu have sacred trees which they regard as shrines.275

As well, the cosmo-vision of the Gikuyu 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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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 Gikuyu 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 murema kiri (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 Mugumo, 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 Gikuyu 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


277 Interview, Gicugi, 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 Gicugu 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 Gikuyu and trees, there arose various myths in the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu people but also their attitude to nature in their cosmological framework.278

6.7 Trees, Gikuyu 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 hungiy

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 Gicugu division. This specific myth was narrated by Jane wa Nyamburi 115 yrs 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.

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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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu identities.

Once upon a time there was a poor fisherman with a wife called Muthoni and her son
Wagacembe. One day Wagacembe 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 Muthoni, telling him: 'Whatever you will ask with these three leaves, Ngai
of Kirinyaga will grant you'.

The boy ran home and told his mother the marvellous secret. The father had not come home.
Muthoni 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 scornfully 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.

279 Interview, 2003-4.
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 Muthoni reappeared.\textsuperscript{280}

\textbf{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 \textit{Njukĩnĩ} forest remained for a long period under the customary care.\textsuperscript{281} Today, Mount Kenya and \textit{Njukĩnĩ} 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

\textsuperscript{280} Story narrated by Monica Micere 98 years, Elnest Munene, 110 years and Phillip 115 years in Gĩcũgũ division July 2004.

\textsuperscript{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, \textit{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’, \textit{Geographical Journal} 20, 1902, pp.24-49; Stigand, C., \textit{The land of Zinj}; Orde-Browne, G., \textit{The Vanishing Tribes of Kenya}, London: Seeley and service, 1925.

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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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu and trees need to be understood.

It is not only because trees and Gikuyu share a common natural tapestry (Mother Nature) that makes their relationship conspicuous. The survey has established that the affiliation that exists between Gikuyu 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. Trees seem to influence the three dimensional life of the agricultural Gikuyu. They are social, religious and political emblems. They feature pragmatically in the social and religious constructions. Indigenous trees also manifest themselves poignantly in the continuous construction of Gikuyu identities. They form a necessary tapestry for Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu cosmology. It is paramount therefore to underline that the Gikuyu, 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 Gikuyu can identify themselves with certain trees. It was from around the Mugumo tree that they originated. In relating with trees, they are going back anthropomorphically to their origins.

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 Muranga’s (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-Mumia), (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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu cosmology making the symbol even more intense. At another level, trees have also been ‘embodied’ in the place. As already mentioned, many places in Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu

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 Mugumo) 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 Gikuyu people especially in the way they use their cultural symbols. Trees in Gicugu 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 Migumo may have been abandoned by some athomi, but in Gicugu, 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu and trees have a common source of life: Ngai, cements the relationship even more and thus makes trees suitable for religious symbolism.

In the Gikuyu cosmology therefore, special emphasis is laid on the particular roles that trees play. The belief that Ngai would descend via Mugumo 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 Mugumo became their traditional sanctuary. It also became a primary symbol that shaped the Gikuyu religious and political world. In this composition the sacred Mugumo became an emblem of Gikuyu identity and has been for centuries a periodic symbolic focus of the identity of the group. The Gikuyu, Mugumo, 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 Gikuyu 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 Mugumo, it is important to recall that tree symbolism is of the greatest importance to these people since ecologically speaking, Gicugu is one of the most densely forested areas of Kenya with Mount Kenya in the north and Njukini in the East. It is also logical that given that strong bond between trees and people, and having a common creator and provider, the Gikuyu would strongly choose specific tree symbols in their social and religious formation and integration. Thus the nature and characteristics of the sacred Mugumo tree will be explored in our next chapter.
CHAPTER SEVEN

THE SACRED MŪGUMO

7.1 Introduction

*Mūgumo wagūũika acokaga ithare* (when the Mūgumo trees fall down, *ithare*-Dracaena sterdneri, a small trees ‘replaces’ it). This proverb underlines the popularity and the central place that the sacred Mūgumo takes within Gikũũyũ cosmology and worship. The proverb also highlights the strength and endurance of the tree which epitomises the ruling generation of the Gikũũyũ. In the traditional Gikũũyũ, if somebody as strong as Mūgumo died, a ruler or elder, the less powerful one took over. The great ruler is ‘irreplaceable’. The Gikũũyũ believed that if the Mūgumo 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 Gikũũyũ historio-cosmogony emerges the sacred Mūgumo tree which, during the colonial period, was the cause of religio-political and social controversies between the Gikũũyũ people, some government officials and the missionaries. This chapter aims to put Mūgumo in its place, exploring the place of Mūgumo in Gikũũyũ 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 Mūgumo in the local history and find out whether there are still some Mūgumo trees left in the Gĩcũũ division. Having investigated the sacred Mūgumo through its characteristic, and history, the question as to the choice of Mūgumo and not any other tree as a central ritual symbol will become evident. Its significant role in the forging of Gikũũyũ identity will lucidly manifest itself.

In order to tease out from the garner of the sacred Mūgumo, the following questions were adopted: *Mūti wa Mūgumo nǐ ūū?* (Do you know the Mūgumo tree?) *Nūū wamenyagĩrĩra/ĩmemyagĩrĩra* Mūgumo? (Who kept/ keeps watch over it?) *Warĩ/ nĩ wari* (Who owned(s) it?) and finally why Mūgumo?
7.2 General Characteristics of Mūgumo tree

The Gĩkũyũ name for *Ficus natalensis/thom ningii* is Mūgumo (pl. Mūgumo). Mūgumo 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. Mūgumo 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, Mūgumo 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, Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo Sacred tree in Gĩcũgũ division

![Image of a tree](image)

The sacred Mūgumo 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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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.  

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 Müküyü (Ficus sycomorus), Mūgumo is widespread in the wetter parts of Giküyũ country, especially the central region, although it might be found elsewhere in the highland areas throughout Kenya. 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 Giküyũ

The general characteristics of Mūgumo have been presented. However, it is important to understand how some scholars studying the Giküyũ 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 Giküyũ as an independent cultural autochthonous group in Kenya.

Routledge acknowledges that the Giküyũ 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.  

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 Mũtũ wa Ngai (tree of Ngai) adding that this tree is the Sancta Sanctorum of the Gĩkũyũ people. In 1922, Hobley acknowledges that Mũgumo is Mũtũ 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. 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 itutka 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. 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’.

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289 Benedetto, P., La ‘Superstizioni e Templi Ghecöio’ 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.


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 Gikuyu describe the Sacred Múgumo Tree

The Gikuyu people describe Múgumo 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 Gikuyu names for trees is contestable. However, we will examine its morphological composition. Múgumo comes from the word guma (to become mouldy, grow mould, or grey) and therefore grey and old. Therefore, Gikuyu describe Múgumo in terms of colour as that old grey tree. Thus, Múgumo would be referred to as Mütí múgumo or Mütí mubuu (grey/mouldy tree).

Múgumo(n) also means a jugular vein from which blood is drawn when cattle are bled. Thus it is also associated with blood. This is comprehensible since the myth of the origin depicts Múgumo as giving life to Gikuyu, 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 Múgumo by its colour and association with blood, Gikuyu also describes it by one of its conspicuous characteristics. They call it Mütí mûûgu (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, Múgumo 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 Múgumo in their own way, the respondents gave eight general description of the tree. These ranged from Mütí mûnene (big tree), Mütí wa Mûgîkîyû (Gikuyu tree), Mütí wa Nûgai (Ngai’s tree), Mütí wa Mambura (a tree for sacrifices), Ihoero (sanctuary), Mütí wa Irûngû (irûngû’s tree), Mütí mûûgu(climbing tree) and Mütí wa îthata (fertility tree). These results are well expounded in figure 7.2.

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293 Gikuyu 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 Mûûgu (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.
Most of the respondents referred to Műgumo as that ‘grey old tree which gives life’ (müť mûkûrû mûno, müť Műgumo or müť wa Ngai (Ngai’s tree). The informants were asked to describe the sacred Műgumo in their own way. 120 (48%) described it in terms of size; Műgumo nî müť mûnene mûno (Műgumo is a very big tree). Here, size meant both the height and the circumference. About 242 (97%) called it Mütî wa Ngai (the tree of Ngai) while all the interviewers called it Mütî wa magongona/mambura or Mütî wa Mûğıkûyû (lit. the sanctuary of the Gikûyû). There was a small number 198 (79%) who referred to Műgumo as Mütî wa Irûngû (the tree of Irûngû). Irûngû, a ruling generation was supposed to have replaced Mwangi in 1925 in Gicûgû division but since this was the last ituûka ceremony, they are still regarded by the old Gicûgû Gikûyû as the ones still in power. However, there was a good number of informant 246 (98%) who described Műgumo as Ihoero ria Gikûyû (a sanctuary of the Gikûyû people). Műgumo as Mütî Mûûgû also had a good number 232 (93%) while very few people 20 (8%) described the tree as Mütî wa ithata (fertility tree).

Figure 7.2 shows that the number of respondents describing Műgumo as Mütî wa Ngai, Mütî wa Mambura/Magongona, Mütî wa Mûugiûtû and finally Ihoero ria Agkûyû and Mütî Mûûgû is almost constant, 242, 250, 250, 246, and 232.²⁹⁵

The findings of the survey demonstrate that the Gicûgû people describe the sacred Műgumo in different cultural configurations. Műgumo is primarily classified as a tree. This tree is endowed for its size and height (Műtî mûnene). It is also revered for its strength and power. The proverb: Műgumo wagûka acokaga ithare is very significant into understanding this notion of size and power in the Gikûyû world-view. While describing the Műgumo as Mütî mûnene, Gikûyû people underline that it has both the

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, Mũgumo 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, Mũgumo as Mũti munene\(^\text{296}\) is iconic.

The Mũgumo 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 Mũgumo 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 Mũgumo as Mũti 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 Mũgumo in relation to its other surrounding trees, the traditional ruling generation created clear religio-political discrimination based on wealth, and status.\(^\text{297}\)

Identifying themselves with Mũgumo 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 Mũgumo, 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

\(^{296}\) Mũnene(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 Mūgumo tree also shows their characteristics. They were quite elderly men and women who in most cases had passed the age of child-bearing. Like Mūgumo, they were old, wise and thus cultural ‘encyclopaedias’. Finally, like the Mūgumo tree, they were mediators of life (Mūgumo and jugular vein). They gave religious and political direction that helped shape various identities of the agricultural Gikūyū. In a nutshell, identifying the ruling generation with Mūgumo meant that they were the yardstick through which the traditional society was evaluated and through them, life flowed through and knitted the society together.

Mūgumo is also Mutū wa Ngai. The informants underlined that this understanding came from the Gikūyū conception of Ngai as the owner and the source of life. In fact, most of them accentuated that Ngai nē nyene (Ngai is the owner). The myth of the origin also stresses the fact that Ngai chose Mūgumo as a place where he could commune with the agricultural Gikūyū. This is one of the principal reasons as to why the informants refer to it as Mutū wa Ngai and therefore a sacred tree. It is for these reasons that Mūgumo attains its cultural, religious and political power. It was in Mūgumo and through it that Ngai occasionally visited the Gikūyū people. It was a pivot and the Gikūyū 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 Mūgumo, 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 Gikūyū land, Christian still sing that Mwathani nē Mūgumo ūrīa ūta ūmaga, nao akristū a kanitha nīyo honge (Ngai is the Mūgumo that never dries while Christians are its branches).298

All the informants acknowledged that Mūgumo was Mutū wa Agikūyū (Gikūyū 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. Mūgumo therefore becomes not only a symbol of power but also a hinge through which people can identify themselves as a

group called Gikuyu. It is also a mirror through which people can understand and locate themselves in the social, religious and political cultural stratification. The understanding of Muggumo as Muti wa Agikuyu 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, Gikuyu would refer to Muggumo as Muti witu wa magongona/mambura (our tree of sacrifices and prayer). Here, the concept of ownership (witu)\textsuperscript{299} is very strong.

The traditional Gikuyu 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 Muggumo was their sanctuary and the place where fundamental rituals were realised. They knew Muggumo as Ihoero ria Agikuyu\textsuperscript{300} na Muti wa igongona. Thus, of the people interviewed, 98% emphasised that Muggumo was per se, ihoero ria Agikuyu. 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, Muggumo endures in the memory of the old Gikuyu 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 Muggumo was finished and the ‘priests’ had gone home, if any of the sacrificial articles had been forgotten around Muggumo 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, Muggumo was also a place (Muti wa igongona) where Gikuyu would implore Ngai and invite him to bless the community and family with peace, abundant food, fertile women, healthy children and cattle.

\textsuperscript{299} Witu/witu- article. It is a possessive article, e.g. witu (our) thus Muti witu (our tree), Ihoero witu (our sanctuary) denoting both the concept of belonging and locality.

\textsuperscript{300} Ihoero from Hoyta means to ask, implore, request/invite. It means the place of asking. Thus, around the sacred Muggumo, Gikuyu would ask, request, implore, thank and invite God for help or blessings.
In July, 1915, for instance, Benedetto Pietro, a Consolata Missionary wrote about Műgumo 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 Műgumo tree and groves. It is to them Sancta Sanctorum.\textsuperscript{301}

In order to underline the Műgumo as Mûtî 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:

\begin{quote}
Ugai thaai, Thaai, ciana cirongāra thaai, mičii ċitũ ūrorathimwo thaai, atumia altũ marothegea thaai, ona mahiũ maitũ thaai...Kūroaga mūrimũ thaai...thaai thathaiyai Ngai thaai.\textsuperscript{302}
\end{quote}

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 Műgumo 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 Műgumo tree when ‘bribing’ Ngai. This underlines even more the Műgumo tree as the ihoero ria Agĩkũyũ.

Recapitulating the way Gĩkũyũ describe the sacred Műgumo, the research has found out that this tree is sacred to the people. All the physical descriptions, as already enumerated, demonstrate how close Műgumo 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 Műgumo takes a pivotal role in the forging of Gĩkũyũ identities. Műgumo 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,

\textsuperscript{301} Translation is mine. Benedetto write: ‘Oh, io non istupisco che gli Aghekōio abbiano in tata venerazione questi boschetti 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.

\textsuperscript{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 Mūgumo

As already attested, the Gīkūyū people chose certain trees as dwelling places for Ngai. Mūgumo 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 mbarī. Kenyatta has written that Gīkūyū chose huge trees as temple for worship and has highlighted the Mūgumo, Mūkūyū (Ficus capensis) and Mūtamaityu (Olea africana) underlining that Mūgumo was the principal sacred tree preferred by the people of Southern Gīkūyū. Writing on the Southern Gīkūyū, Leakey has insisted that Mūgumo was the tree per excellence, while Mūthakwa (Vernonia auriculifera) tree was occasionally used by the mbarī for a small family sacrifice.303 What is clear is that Mūgumo features prominently as the pivotal tree for public prayers and sacrifices all through Gīkūyū 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 Mūgumo as a sacred tree has to be understood within the Gīkūyū 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 Irūngū generation who chose, dedicated and owned the sacred Mūgumo through the ceremony of ituika. Once dedicated, the ruling generation performed all the public religious ceremonies around the sacred Mūgumo. The repercussion of the choice of specific Mūgumo 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 Gīcūgū, informants were asked how the Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo tree but rather the rituals associated with it. Leakey however has lucidly shown how the Southern Gīkūyū chose and dedicated the sacred Mūgumo. His work has some resonance with the research done in Gīcūgū where the choice and dedication of Mūgumo starts with the ituika ceremony. See, Leakey, The Southern Kikuyu, Vol.III., pp.1078-1119.
that the dedication of Mūgumo took place during the ituika ceremonies. According to the informants, the dedication of Mūgumo and the ituika ceremony are closely knit.

This is how, according to the respondents, the Mūgumo tree was dedicated. There were eight senior elders each representing the age-group of the ruling generation and one other elder who prepared the Mūratina beer for the ceremony of dedication. Two rams chosen from different parts of Gīkūyū territory, spotless and without any form of deformity, were chosen for that purpose. Both the beer (itete igīrī -two vessels from gourd) referred to as njohi ya mambura (ceremonial beer) and the two rams were taken to the selected Mūgumo. 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 Mūgumo, 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 Mūgumo tree while some of the meat was roasted and eaten by the officiating elders. Part of the breast (gīthūrī) 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 Mūgumo as his sanctuary (MutT 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 Mūgumo 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 Gīkūyū 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 Mūgumo 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 Gīkūyū people. With this ceremony, the dedication and the consecration of the Mūgumo tree to Ngai culminated.

In Gicugu, once the Mūgumo was dedicated, it became the official sacrifice for the ruling generation. The next generation could continue with the sacrifices around the
same tree. \textsuperscript{304} This was not practised by the Southern Gikuyu since every ruling
generation dedicated its sacred Mugumo and deracinated once their time of power was
over. \textsuperscript{305} However, Leakey's hypothesis postulates that every incoming ruling generation
chose its own Mugumo while the outgoing generation deracinated its sacred trees. This
would mean that for the Southern Gikuyu, the sacred Mugumo 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 Gicugu Gikuyu, the sacredness of Mugumo
continued to be sacrosanct even after the other generation had taken control. These
sacred Mugumo 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 Mugumo in Gicugu division is presented in the appendix.

The chapter will now go on to explore the presence of the Mugumo in the division
today. In other words: are there still some Mugumo trees surviving in Gicugu division?
Who takes care of them?

7.5 The spread of Mugumo trees in Gicugu Division

7.5.1 Mugumo wa Karumba

Mugumo wa karumba also by the name Mugumo wa Ngiriambu is located in
Njükini location in Ngiriambu sub-location, less than 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 Irungu
generation. What is striking about this Mugumo is the fact that unlike the other
natalensis we saw, this one has a spring that gushes southwards towards Karuco market,
down to Mürūri 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 mbari wanted to cut this Mugumo but people of the whole sub-

\textsuperscript{304} Interview, Gicugu, September, 2003-july, 2004. Mugumo wa Ngiriambu now belongs to the Irungu
ruling generation which took power in 1925. Before, them, the same Mugumo was used by Mwangi and
according to the informants, since the Ituika 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.

\textsuperscript{305} Leakey, \textit{The Southern Kikuyu Vol.III}, p.1085. The fact that in Gicugu, the incoming generation could
continue officiating in the same Mugumo or even add some more, could be a key to understanding why
there are still a good number of official Mugumo trees left whereas very few in Southern Gikuyu
especially in parts of Kiambu and Nyūrū. The number in Mūrūng'a is also limited. Gicugu leads in the
number of existing houses of Irungu according to our research findings.
location refused him since they said, if the Mūgumo was cut, then the stream would dry
 denying a big population and their cattle access to water.

Circumrotating the sacred Mūgumo are other indigenous trees. These are some of
them: Mūringa, Mūthare (Dracaena sterdneri), Mūũ, Mūũndũ, Mūkindũ (Croton
megalacarpus), Mūkoĩgo (Bridelia micrantha), Mwĩria, Mūthakwa Mūthakwa wa Aathi
or Mwathathi, Mwarĩki, Mūkũrwe and Mūtathĩ. There are some bushes with variety of
shrubs covering the whole of the sacred grove. Creeping plants, Mūkenia and
Mūkengeria 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 Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo is small and
ranges about forty five metres in height and 7 metres in circumference.

Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo 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 Gĩtari. Mũkuba started this church with Daniel Ngure to oppose any sacrifices or
prayers by the Irungu generation around the sacred Mūgumo tree.

7.5.2 Mūgumo wa Kĩthara-inĩ
Kĩtharainĩ, a place in Njukĩninĩ location has also some sacred groves and Mūgumo.
The first Mūgumo is about sixty metres high, with a circumference of eleven metres.
There is a stream that flows southwards towards Kiũmbũũ 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 Mūgumo, 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 Mūgumo 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 Mūũ, Mūringa and Ithare trees. They
seem to agree to the affiliation of the two sacred Mūgumo. A few metres from the ground
are the protruding parasitic roots of both trees and another tree, now dry, that has been
suffocated by these two sacred trees. On the ground are indigenous creeping plants, *Mükengeria*, also *Mükengeria wa kĩanda* (*Floscopa glomerata*) and *Gĩtoka* (pyjama lily because of its pink stripes). Fig. 7.3 shows one of the Kĩtharainī Mũgumo in Njũkĩnĩ 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\(^\text{306}\) 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:

\[\text{I spent the whole night roaring...I hear the cry, thundering as the Irungu's Mũgumo is being planted. Mũgumo of Kĩanyaga is being planted).}\]

\(^{306}\) 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-ilutation).
As they sang, all those belonging to the Irungu generation encircled the Mūgumo. There is another song that was reported to be sung: it was popular among many Gīcūgū Gīkūyū. It is started by a soloist, generally a woman with these words:

**Sol:** Mūkūmbanda kī,
**People:** Tūkūmbanda Mūkūngū gu na Mūgumo,
**Sol:** Mūgumo nī Kī,
**People:** Mūgumo nī Gītūgu kīa Mūgikūyū
   nīkī Gītūgu kīa Mūmbi
**All:** Ngakindīra, kīnyī, kīnyī...
   Kindīra x3
   (what will you plant? We will plant
   Mūkūngū gu (*Commiphora zimmermannii*) and Mūgumo.
   What is Mūgumo? It is the pillar of the Gīkūyū, the pillar of Mūmbi.
   I ram down with confidence, slowly but surely...ram down x3).

The *Mūgumo wa Kīanyaga* is in Kīanyaga town about six kilometre from Kutus town. Kīanyaga is the division headquarter of Gīcūgū. After the planting of this Mūgumo, the Irungu generation continued to offer sacrifices around it so that when the government decided to make Kīanyaga a divisional administrative centre, they put the D.O’s office and police headquarter, in the very core of *Gīthaka kīa 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 Mūgumo to sing the song of Mūgumo (*Mūgumo wa Thika* will be stipulated) and then proceeded to the stadium, about half a kilometre from this tree across Kīanyaga town.

### 7.5.4 Mūgumo 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 *Kīanyaga- Kiamūtūgū* road near *Kamagambo* shopping centre. This Mūgumo was definitely not used by the Irungu generation. It might have been used for minor *mbarī* 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 Mūgumo are: *Mūũ* (sing. *Mīũ*), *Mūkoigo, Mūthare, Mūtūndū, Mūringa* and *Mwiria*. Unlike other Mūgumo, there is no undergrowth around it and its milky-sap seems to have been used by boys for trapping small birds.
Located about twenty metres from Ndiara in Kamweti river is another Mugumo which doesn’t seem to have been used either by Irungu or Mwangi generation for religious sacrifices. The tree is about four metres from the waterfall on the Ktanyaga - Karumandi road. Opposite this tree, there are, marked everywhere in the volcanic rocks, human foot and hand prints. Although the Gicugü 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 Gicugü Gilkyü. 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 mbari for their private sacrifices and thus was owned neither by Irungu 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 Mugumo was cut down and sold for firewood for use in the nearest tea factory of Thumaita.

There are other Mugumo 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 Mugumo 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 Kariru, the land now belonging to Samuel wa Mburu which, the informants reported, had been used by the Mwangi generation and later given to Irungu in the ituika of 1925.

Between Rukenya and Kabari area, two Mugumo 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 Mugo wa Kabinju. In the lower Mirichi location there are also some Mugumo trees. Mugumo wa Rwandiri, as it is commonly known by the local people, is situated between Kimweas shopping centre and Mburi coffee factory. The grove around

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Ndiara (noun) from rurira 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 Gicugü Gilkyü is famous for foot prints of both animals and humans that are marked on the volcanic stones along the river Kamweti. Where this Mugumo stands was used as a field for a traditional dance called Kibata. Our respondents from Ktanyaga and Kagamba nyoni took us to see those footprints.

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 Mugumo which have now been cleared and the land utilised for coffee. However, there are still some indigenous trees growing around the Mugumo 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 Kiamūtugū shopping centre, stood, previously one of the largest houses of Irūngū. It was opposite the present Kiamūtugū boy’s secondary school in the land of Njine wa Beata, as the local people know him. This Mūgumo is known as Mūgumo wa Kiamūkū. 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 Murūri market (on the Kutus Embu Road), there is another Mūgumo just a mile from Karuco shopping centre in Kīrī 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 ituika ceremony of 1925, the tree was passed into the custody of the Irungū generation. However, a few miles from this Mūgumo another one was discovered known locally as Mūgumo wa Karia or Karirū.

In Mūthīgīnī a magnificent Mūgumo was spotted which, until the time of research, was still flourishing. It is located near Mūthīgīnī coffee factory. Again, a few miles from Mūgumo wa Mūthīgīnī is another gigantic tree which is still surrounded by some groves. Most of the informants agreed that these two Mūgumo has been the sacrificial place for the two ruling generation. It is in the land now belonging to mbarī ya Ndīga wa Gatti (house of Ndīga son of Gatti). Further research around the North East of Gicūgū 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 Gicūgū division. They also underlined that as Christianity,

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309 Interview, May 2004 in Njūkīnī 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 Mūgumo tree lost its fame and most of them were cleared.

Fig. 7.4. Spread of the Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo in Kiambu lost its religious and political value as early as the 1940s. The most remarkable Mūgumo people could still remember is the Mūgumo of Thika (Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo tree and groves are associated with traditional rites and ceremonies that fostered a sense of
community, identity and belonging among the Gĩcũũ Gĩkũũyũ dispersed homesteads. The Mũgumo was used as a place for worship and sacrifice (Mũtũ 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 Mũtũ wa Ngai, Mũtũ Munene, Mũtũ wa Mũgĩkũũyũ, Mũtũ wa Igongona, Ihoero, Mũtũ Mũgũũ, Mũtũ wa ùthata and Mũtũ wa Irũngũ, the Gĩkũũyũ show clearly the content and context of their cosmology and worship. It is in Mũgumo that the Gĩkũũyũ 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 Gĩkũũyũ 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 Gĩkũũyũ people is culturally configured with all its religious and political complexities and contradictions. Mũgumo reveals above all, that the Gĩkũũyũ 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 Gĩkũũyũ people.

The tree appears in a manifold cultural milieu of the Gĩcũũ Gĩkũũyũ 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 Gĩkũũyũ 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 Gĩkũũyũ 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 Gĩcũũ 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 MŪGUMO

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 Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo in its cultural and religious framework are worth an arcane exploration. The key research questions are: Ṣuri kūrũ rūgano rwa Mūgumo ūū? (What is/are the myths of the Mūgumo that you know?) Ṣira wa Mūgumo warĩ/ni ūrūkũ? (What were/are the functions of the Mūgumo in general?). Ṣacio nyĩmbo? (What were/are the songs?). Finally, the Mūgumo is also known for its symbolic significance.

This chapter aims to illustrate the role that myths and songs about the Mūgumo play in Gĩkũyũ cosmology and worship by examining two myths and songs popularly told by the informants. Finally, it will examine its general functions and its symbolic significance.

8.2 The Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo.

Figure 8.1 depicts the number of myths told about the Mūgumo in relation to the number of the respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of myths</th>
<th>No. of informants</th>
<th>Informants%</th>
<th>Age(60-70)</th>
<th>Age(71-80)</th>
<th>Age(81-90)</th>
<th>Age(91-100)</th>
<th>Age(100+)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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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 Gīkūyū people. Emphasis was put on the first meeting between Ngai and Gīkūyū, the founding father of the group. The informants also emphasised the importance of the Mūgumo as the cradle of the first Gīkūyū family. They accentuated the first ritual that Gīkūyū performed to Ngai which they referred to as (kūhaka Ngai-brbing 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 Gīkūyū 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 Gīkūyū and how the Mūgumo, as a tree and a primary symbol of the Gīkūyū 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 Gīkūyū cosmological framework.
The underlining story was that of the origin where the Mugumo featured prominently in the scene. It was followed by the story of Wacici the herd boy. In the other stories therefore, the Mugumo 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 Muturi (blacksmith) for instance could not be told without listening to the song of the Wamündigi (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 Mugumo as recorded during the research period.

The first myth serves to explain the origin of the Gikuyu people as a group identifying themselves with one founding father (Gikuyu). It also explains the origin of Gikuyu relationship with the Mugumo tree and how important rituals came to be associated with it. Finally, it demonstrates the symbolic power of the Mugumo as a meeting place where gift exchange between Gikuyu and Ngai takes place. The myth exhibits the location and the place of the Mugumo in Gikuyu cosmology and how, as a tree, it has influenced the forging of their religio-political identity.

8.2.1 Gikuyu, Ngai and the Mugumo

One day, Ngai took Gikuyu the founding father of the Agikuyu people on top of Mount Kenya. He showed him where to build his micii (homestead), not far away from the mountain, a place filled with the Mugumo trees. It was a very beautiful land with many rivers and trees of every kind. Then, during the conversation, Ngai told Gikuyu: ‘You and your descendants will at times be in need of my help and blessings. When that need arises, slaughter a goat around the Mugumo for me, raise your hands towards Kĩrũnega and I will come to your aid.’ Then Gikũyũ 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 Mugumo tree and killed it. Gĩkũyũ poured the blood and the fat on the trunk of the Mugumo and then made a big fire to roast the sacrificial meat for Ngai. Raising his hands and facing Kĩrũnega, 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 Mugumo were ‘nine’ handsome men to marry his daughters. 311

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310 Wamündigi is a famous mythical bird (thrush) in Gĩgũ 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.
The second myth, of a different nature, explains the power of the Mūgumo to transform and give new life to the Gīkūyū people. It might also explain how the Gīkūyū 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 matira (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 Mugumo tree seven times and she turned into a boy. Wacici was really impressed even though those other boys refused to take him to the Mugumo tree. Their fathers had prohibited them since it was here that Ngai of the Gikuyu lived.

Wacici ndarire marigu (did not hesitate) and went there alone. After rotating round the Mugumo 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 Gikuyu people had little religio-political participation. It seems that Wacici desires to be a girl for some specific cultural reasons: labour and power. In Gikuyu 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 Mūgumo tree where the boy rotates seven times. This becomes more interesting when we explore the meaning of number seven in the Gikuyū cosmology. The number seven (Mūgwanja) is associated with the work of magic spells in witchcraft. The same number is also associated with some parts of the body of both

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 Gikuyu division. The original of this myth was told in Gikuyu 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 Mūgumo in this story is a place where Ngai lives and this makes it even more sacrosanct.

8.3 The Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo, the colonial government and how Gīkūyū people show this tree as the epitome for power and control.

8.3.1 The Mūgumo of Rīanjerū

Mūgumo ūřa ūři Rīanjerū314 ūbandītwo bendera nī ngabana,
Ndarača ciake ikĩmbatīra
Tī ū-b-i umaf oe alya, umaf wone ūři
Gīcūgū kana ūři Ndīa
arari moni moni akiĩngĩra thaa mūgwanja
Akiĩngĩra thaa mūgwanja x3.

A flag has been hoisted on the Mūgumo that is in Rīanjerū by the governor as his rank of honour raises, ooh...come out, come out and see the catastrophe, You in Gīcūgū and Ndīa, 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 Gīkūyū represents the colonial power in all its configurations and the Mūgumo, which, according to the Gīkūyū, is a symbol of power and control especially by the members of the ruling generation. Accordingly, hoisting the flag on the Mūgumo meant that the colonial government was taking control of all the religious and political offices of the traditional Gīkūyū 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 Gīkūyū world-view. Thus, through the song, the people can lament the subjugation by the colonial power by means of the...

314 Rīanjerū is a place in Njūkīnī location. During the colonial period, this area stressed as far as Murinduko hill. However some informants attested that there was a big chief named Gicēru who had a lot of cattle. He had accumulated a lot of land embracing both the present Gīcūgū and Mwea division. There was an Irungu house (Mūgumo) in one of this grazing area which was called Mūgumo wa mbari ya Gicēru or Mūgumo wa Rīagicēru. This Mūgumo was deracinated and a big marking stone (iboya) 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 Gīcūgū division. Today, there is Rīagicēru sub-location in Mwea division, named after this Mūgumo
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 Kĩbĩrũ, 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 Kĩmarrũ 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:

I Mũgumo x2
Torĩa ūrī Thĩka-īī ūratiragwo na igera ndũkagwe, nī mũku-īī
Mwana wa Gĩcũyũ atũrerehere wĩathi na ndege,
Jeremiah Nyaga ngũũmarĩra ndaraca aringe nayo
Kenyatta wa Mũũgai atũrerehere wĩathi na ndege
Mwana wa Mũũgai Ngũũmarĩra ndaraca aringe nayo,
warithi wo cũngũ ūrĩ kũgwa thĩ.

I Mũgumo x2
Torĩa ūrĩ Thĩka-īī ūratiragwo na igera ndũkagwe, nĩmũku-īī
Kũŋūmu nĩ kũũru ñũlũhere wĩathi na ndege, nĩ mũku-īī
Kahora andũ a Kenya ūtũrerehere wĩathi na ndege
Kinya o ūgo ūkũngũlũle ūtũlũhere wĩathi na ndege,
warithi wo cũngũ ūrĩ kũgwa thĩ.

I Mũgumo x2
Kũũmu715 kũŋũle ūtũrerehere wĩathi na ndege nĩ mũku-īī
kahora kũŋũlũka ūtũrerehere wĩathi na ndege nĩ mũku-īī
mũmbũrwo matũũle ūtũrerehere wĩathi na ndege nĩ Mũũkũ-īī
warithi wo cũngũ ūrĩ kũgwa thĩ.716

The Mũgumo, like the one in Thika, which was being supported by steel, its coming son of Gĩcũyũ, bring us freedom by plane, we lay a bridge for Jeremiah Nyaga to cross over. Kenyatta, son of Mũũgai, bring us freedom, son of Mũũgai, 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.

715 Kũũmu is another word for the Mũgumo.
716 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 Mūgumo and its gigantic role in the formation of the Gikūyū 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 Mūgumo of Thika with iron bars so as not to fall down in the fear that if this happens, the Gikūyū will interpret it as the fulfilment of the prophesy. The Gikūyū are depicted in this song as waiting anxiously for the fulfilment of the prophesy of Mūgo wa Kībirū.

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 Mūgumo: power, vigour, control, rootedness and freedom. The Gikūyū people no doubt see the imminent coming of freedom represented by the Mūgumo 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 Gikūyū leaders committed for a reverse religio-political hegemony.

8.3.3 The Mūgumo and the Ogre

The other song associated with the Mūgumo 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, wamūndigi, 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 Mūturi my husband?’ The bird replied: ‘Yes, certainly, send me on the condition that I first have my fill’. And so, as the story goes, Wamūndigi went. Perching itself on top of the Mūgumo tree, Wamūndigi sung this message to the husband.

Mūturi ūgūtura ĩ cangarara!317 Turanga na įhenya ĩ, cangarara ıithiį,

317 Interview, Nyaga wa Maguru in Gĩcũgũ, September 2003. Story told by Elizabeth Wanjiru (Thumaita), Beata Embu(Njukĩnĩ), Theresia Kuthii (Kĩũmbũ) and Esther Wambere Cedi(Mibiriga kend-Mũjũkĩnǐ). There are similar stories about the ogre and Gikũyũ presented in the work of Mwangi. See, Mwangi, Kikuyu folk tales. Mūturi, 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 Gikũyũ, 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.
Mükagwo nía ciara ñi cangarara ñi ca!,
ciarithíto n'írimu ñi, cangarara ñi 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 Műgumo tree, persistently sang the message until one of them called Műturi 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 Műgumo, 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 Műgumo tree. These rituals and prayers were reserved for the ruling generation. The myths on the Műgumo also generated interesting observations. Apart from the emphasis put on the ontological quest for the origin, settlement of the Gîkûyû people, transformation of life and gender within their cosmology, the informants also had a myth on which the Műgumo 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 Műgumo. Thus, while on the one level, myths about the Műgumo served to reveal its inextricable cultural link with the Gîkûyû 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 Gîkûyû people. Some underline the answer to the more fundamental ontological questions: where do the Gîkûyû come from? In other words, what is their origin? What place does the Műgumo tree occupy in their cosmological framework? Once again, the concern of the identity change is quintessential. Myths and songs about the Műgumo 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 Gîkûyû. This essential cultural weaving takes different meanings. The size, height, longevity and the power of the Műgumo have a profound impact in both the cosmology and cosmogony of the Gîkûyû people.

The myth of the origin also concedes an affiliation between the Gîkûyû and Ngai which has constantly to be tested through human crises. When this happens, then there is an intrepid communion realised around the Műgumo 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 Mugumo 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 Mugumo

Having seen how myths and songs present an immense power of and the presence of the Mugumo threading all through Gikuyu cosmology and worship especially in Gicugu division, leads to a question relevant in examining the general functions of the Mugumo. In other words, Wira wa Mugumo warūnĩ ārikū? (What were/are the functions of the Mugumo in general?).

Our survey indicates that there were about eleven general functions of the Mugumo mentioned by the respondents. These include charm, rain catchments, the place of sacrifice, boundary marker, the sanctuary for Ngai and the Gikuyu 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 Mugumo tree.

![General functions of the Mugumo](image)

Fig. 8.2. General functions of the Mugumo

The Mugumo 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 Mugumo can be used in the treatment of liver problems and diarrhoea for both people and animals. The decoction of boiled bark
of the sacred Mūgumo is added to milk to cure dysentery. The milky sap is also used as a
treatment for intestinal worms especially on livestock. Some of the respondents said
that before the coming of modern medicine, traditional Gīkūyū used to prepare the ashes
from the roots of the Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo is useful for hanging Mitatū (beehives). This
was underlined by 240 (98%) informants. The characteristic of the Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo
visited during the time of research in Njukūnī location, there were ten beehives hanging.
There were other beehives spread all over the division mostly hanged in Mūgumo trees.
Honey continues to be valued by the Gīkūyū for brewing the local brew. Honey, mixed
with the juice of sugarcanes and the fruit of the Mūratina tree makes local brew for
general drinking. In the traditional Gīkūyū world this Mūratina beer is quintessential for
all the ceremonies and ritual sacrifices around the sacred Mūgumo.

The Mūgumo functioning as Mutī wa Mambura (a tree of sacrifice) was
mentioned by 239 people, (96%). These informants stressed that the most important of
these sacrifices were; irua, ituika, kūhoya Ngai mbura and kūrinda mūrimū (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 Mūgumo was that it functioned as the
sanctuary.

There were a good number of respondents who accentuated that the Mūgumo
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 Mūgumo in
the güte ühī (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 Njūkūnī and Mount Kenya forest, a lot of people use herbal medicine.
Gachatha explains how in other parts of Gīkūyū, 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 Mūratina are called iratina (sing. Kīratina) but those
slices used for fermenting honey and sugar-cane beer are generally referred to as Mīratina. Sometimes
the Gīkūyū refer to this indigenous beer as simply Mūratina. Dale, Kenya Trees and Shrubs, p.60;
Leakey, The Southern Kikuyu Vo.II., p.1305.
Mugumo 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 Mugumo as his sanctuary. Thus, as an important tree for circumcision, the Mugumo tree received 230 people, (92%).

The Gikuyu, 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 Mugumo 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 Mugumo and other evergreen trees to feed their cattle. Therefore, 180 people, (72 %) highlighted that the leaves and fruits of the Mugumo are good food for animals especially in times of drought. Besides, the fodder increases the fertility of animals.

Consequently, on the current climatic change in Gicugũ division, many of the respondents acknowledged that the Mugumo and other indigenous trees are important for the purpose of attracting rainfall. There were 174 (70 %) informants who reiterated that the Mugumo tree, because of its size, attracted rain. The Mugumo, together with Müringa tree were good rain catchments areas. The survey also discovered that some of the Mugumo in Ngiriambu sub-location owe their survival primarily to this belief.

There were a number of respondents who put emphasis on the fact that the Mugumo 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 Mugumo in relation to fertility was given by women informants. There were 147 people, (59 %) who gave a detailed account of how the sacred Mugumo 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 Mugumo is epitomic. The milky sap of the Mugumo tree symbolises fertility, which is central in Gikuyũ 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, Gicugũ, 2003-4. Most of the Gicugũ Gikuyũ 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.

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: "ũrōrathimwo nĩ mwene-nyaga ūciare ta mūtĩ wa Mūgumo (may you be blessed by Ngai, may you be as fruitful as the Mūgumo tree)." It seems credible to argue that the abundance of fruits that the Mūgumo 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. Indeed, most of the informants underlined: 'iriia rĩa Mūgumo no ta rĩa Mātumia' (the milk of Mūgumo looks like that of a woman). Men also used the Mūgumo for fertility reasons. They would pick the leaves of the tree and lie on them. 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 Gikyũyũ land, as in many other African countries, is complex and contested. In Gicugu 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. 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 Mūgumo was important for making githitu (protective charm). The respondents noted that although githitu is not trendy, there are


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 Gicugu division, revealed almost similar results.

325 Oral interview, 2003-2004. Githitu 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 mūthai̓ga (charm) which was composed of various trees like Mwi̓bukora, Mūgumo, Mūthirathĩrĩ, Mūgi̓ũ wa nyakamwe-Mūnganga (Hippocratea) and Mĩkenia (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 Mūgumo 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 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. 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 Kĩnyaga, 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 mũũi wa kwĩthmaai̊tha (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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Mugumo mostly came from the Eastern and North Eastern part of the division where the raiding used to happen.

Traditionally, Gikuyu believed that when animals fed on the leaves and seeds of the Mugumo 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 Mugumo 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 Gikuyu, thus the tree as good for fodder, for fertility and rain catchments are ontologically connected in the cosmology of the Gikuyu 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 Mugumo 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu and the most convenient way was to wear a magic protective charm, made from the Mugumo 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 Mugumo were used to reinforce the *kitugá* (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 Mugumo to make their fire apparatus. When this was done, Mugumo acted as a 'female' tree. They preferred the Mugumo to *Mucatha* (*Vernonia lasiopus*). Sometimes cord and strings used to carry heavy loads were made from the fibre extracted from the bark of the Mugumo tree. Although the Mugumo was not utilized for building structures.

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 Gikuyu traditional way of making love. It was not common to use the Mugumo 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 Mugumo.
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 Mûgumo also played a paramount role after circumcision. The majority of the people interviewed claimed that the inner bark of the Mûgumo was chewed as a combined absorbent and astringent on female circumcision wounds. However, this included another antibiotic from mûkengeria 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 Mûgumo leaves which had been cut the previous day during the ceremony of gûta ühër (casting away boyhood).

Finally, a lucid exploration of the myths and songs relating to the Mûgumo as well as its general functions has demonstrated that the tree is of great symbolic significance in the Gîkîyû cosmology and worship. This will be briefly discussed in the following section.

8.5 The Symbolic significance of the Mûgumo

In order to establish the symbolic significance of the sacred Mûgumo, two further questions were asked to the informants: a) Nî rûri rûrikû rwokire handûinî ha mútî wa Mûgumo? (which symbol replaced the Mûgumo tree?), b) Mûtî wa Mûgumo nî ùrî bata úmûthî? (Is the Mûgumo tree still relevant today?).

In the first question, 236(94%) of the informants reported that the church was the new symbol that replaced the Mûgumo tree. 97(39%) people attested that the symbol of the Mûgumo was replaced by the new government while 22 (9%) said it was the Bible that replaced the Mûgumo tree. There was a small number of the informants 8(3%) that strongly held that there was no symbol that could replace the Mûgumo 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 Mûgumo tree. Fig 8.3 demonstrates the symbolic significance and the influence of the sacred tree today that continue to influence the Gîkîyû religio-political discourses on and of power hegemony in the contemporary Kenyan politics.
Fig. 8.3. Symbol of the Mūgumo today

Concerning the relevance of the Mūgumo tree today, 235 (94%) respondents said that the Mūgumo tree continues to be relevant while only 15 (6%) did not see any religious or political relevance of the Mūgumo today.\(^{328}\)

The research samples demonstrate that although the majority of the Gikũyũ have been converted into other religions, especially Christianity, the inherent concept of the Mūgumo as a traditional sanctuary is still deeply embedded in their minds. As a consequence, the people continue associating the church with the Mūgumo. According to the informants, the crux of the matter was the fact that in the Church, like in the old Mūgumo 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 wagānu (sins) of adherents. For the informants, this is one area in which there is a strong ontological affiliation with the lamb offered by the Gikũyũ elders around the sacred Mūgumo tree especially during the ituĩka and kūhoya 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 Mūgumo had the highest number of adherents among informants.

As for the government and the Bible replacing the Mūgumo, most of those who gave these answers explained that the government meant power and prestige just as the

\(^{328}\) Interview, Gĩcũgũ, 2003-4.
traditional government had. Those in favour of the Bible explained that, like the Můgumo which united the Gǐkũũyũ people with Ngai, the same role is played by the Bible today. It was also interesting to discover that for most of the proselytised Gǐkũũyũ, the contemporary priests/pastors and other religious leaders play similar role as that of the traditional elders.

However, from our study of the Můgumo, 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 Můgumo tree.

8.5.1 Reconciliation and Transformation

Whenever there was a misfortune, or great public calamity, the Gǐkũũyũ 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 Můgumo was done. In this context, the tree acted as a podium through which reconciliation between the Gǐkũũyũ, Ngai and ancestors as well as the mother nature was exercised. Ontological relationship in the Gǐkũũyũ 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 Gǐkũũyũ society. In other words, the ritual around the Můgumo 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, Můgumo 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 Můgumo permeated the whole of Gǐkũũyũ cosmological understanding so much so that killing somebody around the Můgumo 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 Můgumo 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 Můgumo, 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 Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo 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

Mūgumo was symbolically used for breaking the strength of dangerous forces or ‘enemies of life’. The Gīkūyū believed that the sacred Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo was sprinkled over animals in order to protect them. Sometimes, the animals were passed under the Mūgumo tree to protect them from wild animals and their neighbours especially the Maasai, who constantly raided Gīkūyū country. As well, the string of gūhitū was made from the Mūgumo.

8.5.4 Belonging

The Mūgumo was also used as a symbol of ownership of land between and within the mbarī and mūhūrīga. It was, in this case, a symbol of possession. Land could only be possessed within Gīkūyū society by the rightful heirs.

8.5.5 Symbol of Ngai’s presence and power

In his novel, The River Between, Ngūgi wa Thiong’o explores the importance the sacred Mūgumo had within Gīkūyū cosmology. In depicting the shrine of the Gīkūyū people, Ngūgi concisely showed how this tree was respected.

A big Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo 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 River Between, Waiyaki encounters Ngai’s presence, followed by a

329 Ngugi wa Thiong’o, The River Between, p.15
strong mystical experience. Around the Mūgumo tree, Waiyaki discovered that Ngai, the creator of the Gikũyũ people, was the Mǔmbi of all creation. The Mūgumo sacred tree was a podium through which communion between the Gikũyũ and Ngai took place and therefore endorsing it as a shrine of the Gikũyũ 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 ituĩka ceremony. Like the Mūgumo, the Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ have an arcane knowledge of the myths, songs and the functions of the Mūgumo tree. Myths about the Mūgumo clearly reveal that the old Gikũyũ 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 Gikũyũ 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

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 Gīkūyū 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 Gīkūyū 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 Gīkūyū 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 Gīkūyū 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 (Gīkūyū 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 Gīkūyū’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 Gīkūyū 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 Gīkūyū 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 Mūgumo. 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 Mūgumo, the Gīkūyū secure their health and wholeness. The Mūgumo 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 Gīkūyū. The return to the roots of the Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo by the chosen member of the ruling generation. These fundamental rituals included above all, the irua (circumcision), kūhoya Ngai mbura (Imploring Ngai for rain) and the ituika ceremony. These rituals will be explored in the following chapter.
CHAPTER NINE

THE SACRED MŪGUMO AND RITUALS

9.1 Introduction

Although the traditional Gikūyū 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 Gikūyū cosmology and worship: the ituika and the irua\(^{331}\) ceremony. However, there was a third ritual that was crucial to the survival of the agricultural Gikūyū: kūhoya Ngai mbura Mūgumboini (imploring Ngai for rain around the Mūgumo). The irua was sine qua non in the Gikūyū 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 mūhingo which generally extended for a period of nine seasons.\(^{332}\) The muhingo was another form of social, religio-political control 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 Gikūyū 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 ituika, crucial for an understanding of the political configuration of the agricultural Gikūyū, was ritualised every thirty or forty years. Each traditional government (Mwangi and Irūngū generations) took over the religious, political, social and economic powers of the whole group. They ruled alternatively.

The history of the Gikūyū 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 kūhoya Ngai mbura went hand in hand with the needs of the agricultural Gikūyū. It is under these parameters that this ritual is moreover considered to be an integral part of the marrow of traditional Gikūyū life.

This chapter aims at exploring the role that the Mūgumo tree played in these core rituals, posing these fundamental research questions: \(Nī mambura marīkū mekaғīrwo Mūgumboini?\) (Which rituals were performed around the Mūgumo?) \(Nū wa tongoragia?\)

\(^{331}\) This research does not explore the circumcision for girls.
\(^{332}\) Interview, Gicūgū, September, 2003.
9.2 Múgumo and the three rituals

The general observation on the research done on the Múgumo and the rituals of *irua*, *ituĩka* and *kãhoya Ngai mbura* revealed that 171 informants (68%) knew the *ituĩka* ceremony and its cultural significance insisting that it was associated with the Múgumo tree. The relationship between the *irua* and the Múgumo 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 Múgumo tree. Concerning the *irua* for instance, the informants underscored that as a Gikúyu 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 Múgumo were also underlined by 224 informants (90%). Only 23 informants mentioned one other ritual relating to the Múgumo, especially that of *horohio ya Murimu Múgumoinĩ* (ritual of atonement, imploring Ngai to stop the epidemic by sacrificing around the Múgumo tree). The results can well be demonstrated by the figure 9.1 below.

![Figure 9.1: Múgumo and associated rituals](image)

**Fig. 9.1. Múgumo and associated rituals**

Thus, in order to fully understand the Gikúyu cosmological framework and their religio-political configuration, we will explore the role of the complex relationship between the sacred Múgumo and these three rituals.
9.2.1 The irua\textsuperscript{333} Ceremony

Having mentioned the relationship between the irua and the Mūgumo, the informants were then asked to describe how the ritual was re-enacted and what role the Mūgumo tree played in the whole ritual. The irua is a Gīkūyu 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).\textsuperscript{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), kiruiko(n) and the land.\textsuperscript{335} Kiruiko is a lid of a honey pot, a drumhead while, ruira(v) refers to a land left for fallow sometime or a path that has become overgrown or narrow. In Gīkūyu 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 Gīkūyu proverbs that put the irua ceremony into its cultural perspective: mūruitha arūme aarī kīhī (he who circumcises the boys was a boy too) and mūruithia arūme nī aruithirio (he who circumcises the male was also circumcised).\textsuperscript{336} Among the Gīkūyu 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 ituika, and kūhoera 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 ith (sin. kīhī-

\textsuperscript{333} The relationship between the Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo is clearly visible.


\textsuperscript{335} Interview, 2003-4. During the interviews, about 68% of the informants used this euphemistic language to describe their understanding of the irua.

\textsuperscript{336} Barra, A Thousand Kikuyu Proverbs, no.554 and 555.
uninitiated) while the girls as irigū (sin. kīrigū), but the word for the whole physical operation on both sexes is irua.337

The rich literature done by some scholars on the Gikuyū 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 Gikuyū 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 Mūgumo and irua.

9.2.1.1 Pre-irua ceremonies

According to the informants, pre-irua ceremonies generally took eight days339 for the Gikuyū group and the ciumiri (neophytes-newly circumcised) were brought home from seclusion on the ninth day. The number nine (Kenda) is crucially important in Gikuyū 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 ciumiri to attain their full status within the society.

The pre- irua rites started with the dances of mūbrō. The mūbrō was composed of a series of dances traditionally meant to ask the elders to allow the boys and girls for

337 The irua for boys continues to be observed by the Gikuyū 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 Gicuhu division.

338 The traditional Gikuyū divide the mwaka (year) into two seasons: Kimera kia Njahi(February-June) and Kimera kia Mvere(July-January). According to the informants, the irua in Gicuigi took place during the Kimera kia Njahi. Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya; Leakey, The Southern Kikuyu; Cagnolo, The Akikuyu; Middleton, The Kikuyu and Kamba of Kenya; Gathigira, Mūkuri ya Agikuyu; Kabetu, Kirira kia Ugikuyu; Hobley, Bantu Beliefs and Magic.

339 The Southern Gikuyū had their own way of celebrating the irua ceremony and although the ritual was practised for a similar end (incorporating the initiates into the Gikuyū 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 *rūmbūra* 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 Gikūyū 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 *mūratina* beer, millet porridge and a fat *thenge* (he-goat). This fee, called *indo cia kūhoya 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 *mūrūithia* (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 Gikūyü 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 *njia-rano* (rebirth). They insisted their conscious participation by using a common Gikuyu proverb: *maruaga mamenyete irua na nguthi ciothe ciario* (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 Gikūyü society. Thus, the informants held that the *njia-rano* 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 *rukwaro* (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 *mūrūithia* by the elder of the ruling generation with these or similar words:

>ciana ciți irogña thaa. Thai Thathaivai Ngai. Thaa-ai-ciana irogña thai, thaaal-thai-thaai-thaa-i (peace be with our children, we beseech thee Ngai, peace-peace peace, let the children have peace).\(^340\)

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:

Mūroendwo nī ng'ombe na mbūri na indo ciothe! Mūroendo nī ciana na Mūmbane! Mūmbec ng'ombe na mbūri na ciana, na athūri, na atumia na indo ciothe!...Mūroendwo nī Baba-T, na mwenda-gwo nī andū, na mūtonge na mūtūre mīaka na mīakat! (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. 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 mūthaiga (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 stein planted to make an arch. Here, some of the informants differed, 58% claiming that during their time, especially in the lower part of Gīcūgū, 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:

Nī ndarinda mūndū ūría ūŋgērehe ūru mūcīnī ūyū, na ndarinda ūru ūría ūŋgītūma mwana agwe agțīnī Mūgumoinī kana ūrīnī...nī ndarinda mūndū o wothe ūría ūŋgērehe ūru mūcī ūyū o na mūndū wa mbaara kana ūru o wothe ona ūrīkū...nī ndarinda mūndū o wothe ūria ūŋgērehe mūthaiga mūru mūcīnī ūyū.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 Mūgumo 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, Gīcūgū, 2003-4.

342 Interview, Gīcūgū, 2003-4. A more accurate account was given by Manuelli 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, Gīcūgū, 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 muruithia 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 matatumo dances were to take place. The site had already been prepared and the ceremonial doctor had already sprinkled the mūhaiga 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 giite uhi (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 Gikuyū 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 mūmbiro and mūbīro. 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 Gikūyū, the candidates flung their clubs over the Mūgumo tree and threw their *ndoroθhi* through its verdant branches. This was not usually done by the Gĩcũgũ Gikūyũ. Instead, arriving at the base of the tree, these candidates climbed up the Mūgumo to break off its flourishing branches. The small branches of the Mūgumo 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* (emblem for boyhood) and started to beat the Mūgumo 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* to symbolically beat the Mūgumo 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 *mutiiri* (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. Having done that, each of the candidates was given the leaves of the Mūgumo to carry

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346 *Ndoroθhi* is a short staff decorated by the initiated young men and handed to the neophytes for throwing over the Mūgumo on the day before circumcision. The Maasai called it *En-toros*. Among the Southern Gikūyũ, 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 *Mutiiri* 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 *mutiiri* is a supporter and sponsor of the candidate, one for the boy and two for the girls. The relation between *mutiiri* 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 Gikūyũ, it was meant not only to symbolise the spear but also to replace the discarded *ndoroθhi*. 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 (*kĩama kĩa 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-ini* (he/she did not understand the teachings of adulthood and so has not grown).
during the procession to the matiri. According to the informants, the procession was accompanied by many songs. Often, the candidates would break into this or a similar song:

_Huui, huui, uu, nguiniki muci, imenye ukoragio waruure kii! Huui, huui, uu, (I will take you home, know you will be asked the place you got circumcised!)
_Haiya nguiniki muci, imenye ukoragio waruure kii! (Alas, I take you home; know they will ask you where you got circumcised!)

In some parts of Gicugú, initiates would also sing this popular song (in two choruses) so as to involve each group.

The boys asked the girls: _Mwetia kii_ (what do you ask of us?)
Girls' replied: _Twetia Mugumo, Mugumo waga-Jii mutuhe muthinii_ (we have asked the Mugumo, if it is not there, then, give us your penis)
The girls’ turn: _Mwetia kii_ (what do you ask of us?)
Boys: _Twetia Mugumo, Mugumo waga-Jii, mutiihe mbinii_ (we have asked for Mugumo, 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:

_Ndigitihiroo riria ria njuki, (I have been blessed with the product of bees)
Nderiragri, ngiharwo ira, (that I longed for, as ira (diatomite) was rubbed on me)
Wa kigumo akakahwo mugumi! (As the son of Kigumo had ashes rubbed on him!)
Rora rigiti! Muhumegeo rina rir gitihiwa. (Look to the West, your husband, the sun has set).
Kwaroka gikia wrrathanre. (When the day breaks tomorrow, the responsibility will be yours).
wona warira, iceera ria anake ndigakinya (If you cry, you will never enjoy the warriors' companionship).
Iiri ratemwo, (when the circumcision field is ready)
Ndiri wa Nyukwa (I am not your mother's child!)353

The Mugumo leaves were collected by the sponsors packed well to be given to each candidate during the time of circumcision the following day. Then matumo354 dance continued. All the pre-irua ceremonies were generally called thauthia ya ihii (pre-initiation rites for the boys).

The following day, at nguriiru (very early in the cold morning before sun-rise), the boys bathed in the river and started a procession towards the circumcision ground.

351 Interview, Gicugû, 2003-4.
352 Interview conducted at Ngiriambu and Karumandi sub-location in Gicugû division. According to the informants, there are other versions of the same song. However, the message is clear: Mugumo, 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 Gicugû remembered this song correctly and thus could as well not have been a popular song in this part of the Gikuyû country.
354 There were other pre-initiation dance-songs mentioned by the informants all over the Gicugû area. They were all grouped under ngucci, a dance that had many stages e.g., ngûithia, mwereri and mbûti.
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 *karūngūru*. These or similar words were used depending on the people and place:

*Karūngūru*-ūui, ĕi- *karūngūru*, karūre marigū! ĕi karūngūru, karūre marigū! Wūmie, gūtiri wanyu ūngikwenda! ĕi, Wūmie, gūtiri wanyu ūngikwenda! Caragia-ūui, ĕi-Caragia karima wanona ūkūrūthia! ĕi, Caragia karima wanona ūkūrūthia! Kinya ūkūnyite maita merī

*Karūngūru*, 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 Gicūgū as attested by 60% of the informants.

*Iī ūui x3 aaa*

ūyū mwana ekūma mūno,

mwana ekūma mūno nāagūrūweru thūmbi (ndūmbi in Gicūgū)

Gīč kīhī kīhāna ota ithe, kīhāna rīu a rī kitum a x2

Nī wa ngicīrī ekūma mūno, nāagūrūweru thūmbi,

Gīč kīhāna ota ithe, kīhāna rīu a rī kitum a.

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 *Ngicīrī* (one generation, probably circumcised in 1905), crown him. This boy is like the father, like the sunrise.

The procession was now approaching the *iīrī* 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 *iīrī* 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 *mūruithia*, hiding among the crowd, was waiting for the candidates to be prepared by their sponsors. The candidates sat down on the sacred Mugumo’s leaves plucked during the ritual of *gūte ūhī*. These sacred leaves served as mats and, according to the informants, they sealed their union with Ngai and ancestors. In other parts of Gicūgū the *coro* (ceremonial horn) was used to announce the

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355 Interview, Gicūgū, 2003. *Karūngūru* 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 Gikūyu proverb: *Mūruithia wa njamba īragaga 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 religious-political stature. The informants in Gicūgū call it *Gūthoithua*, (from *thoitha* (v.), to march, or exercise like soldiers). A similar rite is also mentioned by Gathigira, *Miīkarire ya Gikūyu*, p.49.

356 This was one of the differences between the *irua* of Ukabi and Gikūyu group. While the latter used leaves from the sacred Mūgumo to sit on, the former would sit on cow hide. For the Gikūyu group, one branch of Mūgumo 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 *mūrūithia* when performing the operation. The *attiiri* (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 *mūrūithia* 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 *īrui* (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:

\begin{verbatim}
Kahiū-īī kahīū nī wandema, kahīū-īī wandema ta itūgūta x2. (little knife you have cut me, cut me as if clearing the bush) x2.
Nimwarūngara uū kahīū, nī wandema kahīu ni woyia miromo (you have straightened out now... slashed my mouth.
Nake mūlīiri uū kahīū, nī wandema, kahīu ni woyia miromo (and the sponsor...)
Ekūrūngara-īī, uū kahīū, nī wandema kahīu ni woyia miromo (has also straightened out...)
Ngūrūma arūme-īī, uū kahīū, nī wandema wandema ta itūgūta (when I used to insult men...)
Ndīto kahīū kanunagaga arūme, uū kahīū niwandema, kahīu ni woyia miromo.\(^{359}\) (I didn’t know that the knife smell likes them...)
Nī waguimara uū kahīu niwandema, kahīu ni woyia miromo (you have become an adult...)
Ndīri niwana rūngī, uū kahīū niwandema, kahīu ni woyia miromo ( you are no longer a child...little knife, you have cut me, slashed my mouth).
\end{verbatim}

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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 Gikuyū land left *ngwati* during circumcision and today it’s not done in the hospital.


\(^{359}\) This was reported by most of the informants from Gicugu division especially the areas of Kīanyaga, Kīthūre, Karumandi and Kamūgūnda. Leakey, studying the Southern Gikuyū 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 kamatimu* (council of warriors). They also joined the *riika* (initiation set or 'regiment').

The newly circumcised lived together in one house until they were healed. It was a slow process. From then on, they were no longer *ihī* (uninitiated boys) but *irui* or *ciiumiri* (initiates). The leaves of *Mūkengeria* (*Cammelina benghalensis*) were applied as antiseptic for both boys and girls. Unlike the boys, the girls also received the bark of the sacred Mūguumo, chewed by the *atiiri* and applied over the wound to act both as an absorbent and astringent. 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. 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 *kiama gia kamatimu* so that, should any war breaks, they were ready to fight and defend their country. After circumcision, the new warriors danced *njukia, mūgoiyo, ngurū, kībata and karī*.

### 9.2.2 The Mūguumo and *Irua*: religio-political symbiosis

The relationship between the Mūguumo and the *irua* ceremony can be explored within two phases. The first stage was during the pre-*irua* ceremonies especially the rite of *Kuna Mūguumo* (breaking up the Mūguumo leaves) and beating it with their *thira* belt. The leaves of the Mūguumo 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 Mūguumo*. 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 *miirika* (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 Mūthoni belongs to the *riika* called *Kīng’ora*. Going back to the history of the Gikūyu, this *riika* was circumcision in 1902. Now, girls in Gicūgū 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 *Njendīrī-general* (1933), *Njabani* (1937), *Ngicīri* (1905), *Gatego-syphilis* (1901), *Gicīna bangī* (1945), *Hitīra-Hitler* (1939), *Ng’aragya ya rīraya* European famine (1900) etc. The *riika* gives the time of circumcision, not the year of birth.


362 Interview August-December 2003. Also, Mugo, *Kikuyu Customs*. 193
female informants also admitted having participated in the ceremony although they did not climb the tree.

According to the informants, the *kuna Mugumo* 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 Mugumo empowered the initiates and as they sat on these mats during their circumcision the power they had gathered from the *kuna Mugumo* 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 Mugumo, 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 Mugumo tree in Gikuyu cosmology.

The ceremony around the Mugumo 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 Gikuyu society. They had a close affiliation with the Mugumo and it was through their hands that these young boys made a transition to adulthood. Once again the Mugumo 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 (ihi) in potentiality.

The Mugumo being a symbol of social cohesion and transformation in Gikuyu 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 Mugumo 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 Mugumo, 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
passage.\textsuperscript{363} Thus, the Mūgumo in the \textit{irua} ceremony becomes the matrix through which many relevant, cultural, religious and social phases are re-enacted and re-lived.

During the actual \textit{irua} activity, the Mūgumo was also fundamentally important. The male initiates sat on the leaves of the Mūgumo acquired the previous day. The research found out that 158 (63\%) of the male informants admitted having sat on the Mūgumo leaves during their circumcision. However, 238 (95\%), male and female respondents underlined that the relationship between the Mūgumo and the \textit{irua} is that the tree entailed the presence of and the union with Ngai and their ancestors. In the Mūgumo, therefore, the \textit{irua} ritual attains its most sacrosanct value in the Gikūyū cosmology.

Moreover, the data analysed exhibit a very strong connection between the blood poured out during the circumcision and the Mūgumo through the leaves that served as mats for the boys. Once the boy was given the first cut, he was left unfinished while the mūruithia 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 Mūgumo 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 Mūgumo which acted as a matrix that ontologically joined these two worlds in the \textit{irua} making the ceremony attain unquestionably its religio-political value and authenticity.

Thus, the Mūgumo in the \textit{irua} ceremony linked adulthood, manhood and warriorhood. Having sat on the Mūgumo and shared its transformative power the boys graduated into men. In the Mūgumo, adulthood and warriorhood became intertwined, so much so that virtues like courage, endurance and ruthlessness were regarded in Gikūyū 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

\textsuperscript{363} Van Gennep, A., \textit{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 Gikūyū, the division is not as clear as it has been accounted by scholars like Hobley, Middleton, and Leakey. In fact, in the \textit{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 kihūra Mūgumo, 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, \textit{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., \textit{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.’ \textit{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 Mugumo leaves, it was they who went to war, defended their country, their land, livestock and clan. The women neither climbed the Mugumo nor sat on it during their circumcision and ipso facto were not regarded as defenders of the Gikuyu land.

As a consequence the presence of the Mugumo tree in the irua ceremony seems to have been used to categorise not only the roles that men and women played in Gikuyu cosmology and worship but also became an integral part of the gender construction in Gikuyu society. According to the traditional Gikuyu, men are sexually virile, tough and brave while women are the opposite and thus are to be ruled. The change in this mentality was gradual since in 1950s, during the time of Mau Mau, Gikuyu men and women fought side by side against their common oppressor: the colonial government.

9.3 Kūhoera Mbura Mūgumo-ini

The Gikuyu knew that when rain was abundant, food too would be plenty both for the people and the animals. When drought befell the Gikuyu 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 Mugumo and mbura (rain), 224, (90%) emphasised that the Gikuyu as any agricultural community need rain to survive. They also underlined that the Gikuyu 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 Nduiga wa Ngaara and ng’aragu ya Kimotho in 1918 which was called by the Gicugu people as ng’aragu ya gūhioro. There was locust invasion followed by a serious famine.

364 Interview, 2003-4. This is authenticated by some Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu matriarchal system. Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya.
in 1928. There was also the *ng'aragu ya karūgia mūthuru* in 1934, *ng'aragu ya mianga*, 1943, and *ukame* in 1984.365

The informants were then asked to narrate what they remembered about the *kūhoya 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 *mūgariū* (black army-worm, caterpillar) in Gicugu and Mwea and the elders of the Irungū ruling generation under the leadership of Njiga wa Gacoki from Rīagīcerū sub-location, performed the ceremony. The following day, the *mūgariū* had left.366

### 9.3.1 The Ceremony of Mbura around the Sacred Mūgumo tree

According to the informants, when drought came, the *njama* (ruling elders) who looked after the interest of the Gikūyū religio-political affairs gathered and consulted the *mundū múgo* (medicine man) to know the cause of the calamity and the remedy. The witchdoctor consulted his *mbūgū* (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 *mundū múgo* 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 Mūgumo tree and the ceremony of imploring for rain from Ngai began.

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365 Interview, Gicugu, 2003-4. Most of the informants underlined that in the 1984 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 Gicugu, especially from Rūkenya, Kīanjiră, Samson corner, Mūrūri, Ndaraca Njerū, Njoga, Difathas, Kanjūū, Gūhuto, Gathoge, Kīaūmbūi and Njūkūnfi area.

367 Interview, 2003-4. According to the informants a day chosen for the ceremony was called *mūṭirō* 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 facing Mount Kirinyaga and said:

Ngai, wee wikaraga kirímain gia Kirinyaga, wee mwene matiri na indo clothe, niwikikihoya uturúrie mbura. Kithuku, andi aku nimvararina ni kwaga mbura. Rora ciana ni iraríra, ng’ombe na mburi ni iraríra. Mwene-nyaga, tondi mbura yumaga Kirinyaga, o kiu wikaraga-it, twigutire tha na ituhe yo.

Twoka Míngumoone inyí waku giikíthaita na thakame, maguta na ǐkí. Ìíkkira mbúri ino tiívärikíthúriwa. Kithuku, niwikíthúka ota ìrítí matíte matíti mekaga na ikímane mbura. Ìíkkira igóngona inrun inyí wiku na uturúrie mbura ya giitúguna. Thai, thai, thathayai Ngai thais.269

Ngai, you who live in Mount Kenya, you who are the owner of the earth, we beseech you to give us rain. Kíthuku, your people are crying for lack of rain. See, your children are crying, livestock are crying too. Mwene-Nyaga, since the rain comes from Kirinyaga where you live, have mercy on us and give us rain.

We come to your Míngumo to beseech you with blood, fat and honey. Accept the lamb we are offering. Kíthuku, we praise you just as our forefathers did and you gave them rain. Ngai, accept this sacrifice in your Míngumo 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 matiri na mwendi andi niwigikíthúra na tha nyingi hamwe na maite maitu maria makomire teni ìtíhe 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 (mígwanja wa Ngai) was hung carefully on one of the branches of the Míngumo while the other ritual elders stood around the sacred tree singing:

Mbura ìróra, ìthaai, mbura ìroka, ìthaai. Ya giitúguna-ìthaai. (May the rain come, may the rain of prosperity come). Then the officiating elder chants; ‘ìíí ya -ù-ùíya - ìííya thathayay Ngai ìthaai ni ithuù irúngù-ìthaai’. Response: ‘ìíí ya -ù-ùíya -ùííya thathayay Ngai

368 Interview 2003-4. Hobley holds that the sacrificial lamb was lifted up on its hind legs facing the sacred Míngumo (kúrigamia ngoíma Míngumóni). 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 Gikítyú ritual sacrifice for rain. After all, Hobley at times seems to confuse the Gikítyú language with the Gí-kamba, a conspicuous fact throughout his work. See, Hobley, Bantu Beliefs and Magic, especially pp.40-52.

369 Interview, Gícígú 2003-4. In other part of the Gikítyú, especially in Nyíífí, Míínga and the Southern Gikítyú, a similar pattern seems to have been followed. A parallel interview was conducted in June 2004 at Túthú in Míínga where the daughter of the late chief Karíí narrated the ceremony. See also in Kabetu, Kiríra kia Úgíkíyú; Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya and Leakey, The Southern Kíkíyu.

370 Interview, Gícígú, 2003-3.

371 Mígwanja(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 Gikítyú as the number seven.
Having completed the ritual of imploring for rain, the elders returned to their home and earnestly waited for rain. In Gicugu, the prayer for rain and the ritual sacrifice (igongona) around the sacred Mugumo was attended by many people from different ridges led by the elders of sacrifice. Around the sacred Mugumo, these elders of Irungu or Mwangi implored Ngai to give them rain, finish all diseases and accept their offering.

Concluding on the relationship between the Mugumo and rain as underlined by the research, it becomes apparent that Ngai hears and answers the supplication of the Gikuyu people and gives them rain. The Mugumo is also closely associated with rain. In fact, 98% of the informants believed that rain has decreased in the twenty-first century because many Mugumo and other indigenous trees have been deracinated. In the Mugumo of Ngiriambu for instance, people living in the ridges stretching from Mururi shopping centre all the way to Ngiriambu and Kamagambo have protected it. The stream that gushes out from this Mugumo 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 Mugumo 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 Gikuyu people and their environment. The fact that the Mugumo collects water from Ngai makes it an evergreen tree. The close affiliation that seems to exist between the traditional Gikuyu and the Mugumo might also critically underline why they associate it strongly with Ngai. The word Ngai originally meant rain. The Mugumo 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, Gicugu Sept-Dec, 2003. See also a similar ritual as reported by Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*.

373 Interview, 2003-4. Among the Gikuyu of Southern Gikuyu, Leakey reports that the prayer for imploring Ngai for rain and the sacrifices around the sacred Mugumo 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 (Nyirri), Murang’a, and part of Kiambu did not support his hypothesis. Even other scholars dispute his view. Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*; Kabetu, *Miikarire ya Ugikuyu*. However, since this was a community event and one which affected every member of the Gikuyu 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 Mūgumo 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 kīhoya Ngai mbura Mūgumoini, 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 Gīkūyū. In this ritual, the Mūgumo is not only the sanctuary but also the fountain in which life flows again and nourishes the Gīkūyū community.

9.4 The Ituīka Ceremony

The ituīka is from the verb tuīka, meaning to separate, cut or terminate. Among the Gīkūyū, the ceremony of ituīka meant the handing over of religio-political and economic power from one traditional government to the next. This practice was not peculiar to the Gīkūyū only. Their neighbouring groups also practiced it. The Meru and Chuka people called it ntuīko while the Embu had a similar ceremony called nduīko. Among the Maasai, the hand-over ceremony was called eumoto while the Ndorobo called it eunotwet. Here, the crucial question is: what is the origin of ituīka and what is its religio-political significance? Finally, what is its relationship with the Mūgumo? 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 Gīkūyū history and which led to a change of their cultural configuration. 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 Gīkūyū. The ituīka took place every thirty or forty years. The last date of ituīka 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 ituīka as taking place in 1932. The research done in

374 Interview, 2003-4. Some elders who were interviewed came from Embu, the neighbouring group of Gīchūgī Gīkūyū, Meru, especially the area of Mūthambi going down to Gaciambaki and Mūmbūnī. Most of the old people remember lucidly their riīka system although, to really understand its complexities, a thorough research is needed.

375 Kenyatta writes that the ituīka started with the Iregi(from rega meaning to refuse or revolt). It was followed by Ndemi (cutters) that saw the starting of Gīkūyū people as an agriculturist, then Mathathi and so on. Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, p.187, Also, Munene, A.W., Miitaarani Mūgikūyū, Nairobi: East African Education Pub., 1995.

376 Cagnolo, The Akikuyu, p.120; Leakey, The Southern Kikuyu, p.xiii.
Gicugu revealed that the last recorded ituika was conducted on 29th September, 1925, where the Mwangi ruling generation handed over the power to the in-coming Irungu generation. The ituika ceremony in Gicugu, well documented, underlines that it was poorly attended around the Kabari station area which was predominantly protestant. Other areas of the research including Karuco, Kianyaga, Kiamutugu, Ngariama, Kamugunda and Karumandí 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 ituika ceremony are clearly documented as: Múrama wa Mwáníki, Kathanju and Nyaga on the side of Mwangi and Gátu wa Karenji, Mbúí wa Njirú, Kogí wa Mwínja on the side of Irungu. Chief Chomba Karetí also participated.

Part of the questionnaire emphasised the relationship between the ituika and the Múgumo tree. The informants were asked to describe what they knew about the ituika, who conducted it, how and where it was conducted. 171 (68%) of the informants acknowledged that the ituika ceremony was integral to the Gikíyú cosmology and worship. However, none of the informant participated in the ituika 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 Irungu and thus could identify themselves strongly with the traditional government.

The informants were then asked: what was ituika for? Who participated and what was its relationship with the Múgumo tree? Here again 171 people reported that there were many elements related with the government that constituted the ituika ceremony. About 68% of them insisted that during the ituika, a constitution was drafted by the elders who were chosen from different ridges of the Gikíyú 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 ituika ceremony did not take place at the same time in the whole of the Gikíyú 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 ituika in Kianyaga 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 ituika of 1920s and 30s are long dead.

379 Despite the fact that the ruling system has changed with the modern government, the traditional Gikíyú are keen to trace their ruling generation in the Gicugu area. Most of the informants belonged to the Irungu generation and to commemorate their power without portfolio, they sing around the Múgumo of Kianyaga before attending the official ceremony of independence every 12th December. Then they join the rest of the people in the Kianyaga stadium for the ceremony to mark the independence of Kenya led by the D.O (Divisional Officer).
holds, that the elders convened at the Mükürwe wa Gathanga, 95% of the informants accentuated that the elders met in the very central place of the division. In Gícūgū for instance, the informants insisted that the elders met at Kĩanyaga. 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 këmëmë gĩa kama timũ. 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 Mũgumo wa Ngai (Ngai’s tree). Associating themselves with the Mũgumo, the ruling generation were the athamaki, athani and akũri a thĩ (ruler, lord and the redeemer of the land).

Thus, the ituĩka 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 kĩrĩra (‘tribal’ lore). This was a form of knowledge and control.

9.4.1 Ituĩka and the Mũgumo

According to the informants, when all the goats had been paid by the in-coming generation to the out-going one, say for instance Irũngũ paying Mwangi to acquire the power, then the actual ceremony of the ituĩka 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 Gikũyũ land. When all these bureaucratic meetings were over, the ceremonial horn was sounded and people gathered in the meeting ground. The kĩbata380 (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 Kĩbata(n) is a dance held in the traditional Gikũyũ 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.1. 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 *ituika* ceremony of 1925. The rivers are: *Nyamindi, Rūbingacĩ, Kiri, 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 Gikuyũ people.

Then the *kibata* dance was interrupted again. The ritual of handing over the symbols of power was done from the elders of the old *ituika* 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 Gikuyũ land. Then the *kibata* dance continued.

The final ritual and which, according to the informants, was crucial to authenticate the ruling generation took place around the sacred Mugumo tree. As some of the informants put it:

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\(^{381}\) *Ndamathia* is a mythical monster of great length which is believed by the Gikũũyũ to live in rivers. During the ceremony of *ituika*, the elders used to pluck its hairs from the tail which were then sent to different parts of the Gikũũyũ 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*. 

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The blessings of *ituika* are meant to unite the new generation with Ngai. The ceremonies of *ituika* around the sacred Mugumo tree are very good since everybody is sure that Ngai will bless the whole of Gikuyu 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 Mugumo tree. The chief reason of the *ituika* is to cement a long-lasting relationship between the Gikuyu and Ngai around the sacred Mugumo tree. This filial relationship has always been there even before the age-set of *Ndemi* (cutters) and *Mathathi* and so the ritual around the Mugumo seals the strong relationship between the Gikuyu and their ancestors.

The *atuiki* (new government), now in procession walked in silence towards the sacred Mugumo and, on reaching the tree, made a small altar with the skewers of different indigenous trees like *Muthakwa*, *Mugumo*, *Mucatha*, *Mukeu*. The *Mukenia* (*Lantana trifolia*) and *Ithare* were integral for the preparation for all the rituals around the Mugumo. 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 Mugumo 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 Irungu generation which took religio-political power in the *ituika* of 1925. The prayer went on like this:

Ngai, rathima Agikuyu na bururi wao. Nǐ ithu Atuiki a Irungu na akūri a būrūri wa Gikuyū. Twoka gūkūria ndithimi na mbūrī nā tūrakithūnifra Mūgumoinī. Rathima, athani a irungū nĩgetha mahote gūtongoria na gūtī, ona kūhoto. Rathima, mambura mařha mothe marūrutaga nũndu wa būrūri ūyū wūtū wa Gikuyū. Rathima marua mařha mothe marītongoragia, rathima atumia, ciana ona mahū. Rathima anake aitū niũndu wa kūgūfa būrūri kuma kūrī ūhū cinī. Tīkūra mbūrī na njoji n̤o tūrakūrutfra. Ngai, n̤i ithu Atuiki a irungū tūrakūrutgaria. Tūrathime na ūtongo, ūgū na kūhoto. Kūthuku, rathima athamaki a irungū. Thaai, thai thathaiyai Ngai thaai. Thaai! Ngai, Bless the Gikuyu people and their country. We are the new Irungu, the redeemers of the Gikuyu country. We have come to beseech you for the blessings by offering you this lamb around the sacred Mugumo. 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 Gicūgū division. Nyaga wa Maguru emphasised that when the last *ituika* 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 Gicūgū division.
government. We are imploring you! Bless us with wealth, wisdom and justice. Kithuku, 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 Mûgumo 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 (mûgwanja wa Ngai) was left hanging on one of the branches of the sacred Mûgumo 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 ituika and the sacred Mûgumo is ontologically strong among the Gîcûgû Gîkûyû. In the ituika ceremony, the Mûgumo is the source of religio-political power. The Irûngû for instance authenticate their hegemony for the rituals around the Mûgumo tree and in fact, all the public rituals in the Gîkûyû country. They affiliate themselves with the Mûgumo, they are empowered by it, inspired by its awesome presence and thus their control of their society is culturally validated. The Mûgumo is epitomised by the new government encompassing all its power, strength and control. In fact, it is around the sacred Mûgumo that their power takes different religio-political asymmetries.

As a result, around the Mûgumo, 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 Mûgumo, authenticated their power as inspired by and cemented by Ngai through the slaughter of the lamb. Actually, the ituika could never be complete until the blood of the lamb was poured around the sacred Mûgumo 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 kîama gia kamatimu. Around the sacred Mûgumo, Ngai is asked to bless the maîri and thus authenticating the irua as a solemn religious and political sine qua non of the Gîkûyû people. As previously seen, Ngai is ontologically present in the irua ceremony through the Magumo leaves.

As well, around the sacred Mûgumo Ngai blesses the ruling generation with wisdom (îmenyi-ûgî), wealth (îlonga) and justice (kîhoto). 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 Gîkûyû cosmological understanding of power and
control. As well, research shows that for the Gĩcūgũ 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
dominion hinged on the ruling elders through their knowledge of the ᱞĎra.

The Mūgumo unites the Gikuyu 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 Mūgumo, they are topologically deeply anchored into the
boils of their Mother Nature. In this context, the tree becomes to the traditional Gikuyu,
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 Mūgumo 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 GİKÜYÜ AND THE MŨGUMO

The thesis set out to examine the Gıküyũ 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: (Gıküyũ Religio-philosophical world-view, their affiliation with trees, the Mũgumo- myths and the rituals) which are integral to comprehending the gestalt of Gıküyũ 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 Gıküyũ and in their religio-political hegemony. It also explored the conception the Gıküyũ have of Ngai and its relevance in understanding their cosmology. As well, these theories helped in investigating the affiliation that the Gıküyũ 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 Gıküyũ 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 Gıküyũ 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, Gıküyũ 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 Gıküyũ 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 Mūgumo assumed and continues to play in Gikūyū 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 Gikūyū 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 Gikūyū and the Mūgumo 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


386 Mudimbe, The Invention of Africa; Mamdani, 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 Gikuyu world that was depicted as irrational, strange, culturally static and savage.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{389}

Between 1890 and the 1940's colonial discourses in relation to the Gikuyu 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 Makuyu, depicted by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in his work; \textit{The River Between}, ridges which never met.\textsuperscript{390} These discourses, based on the colonial mentality and specifically pioneered by the settlers and the missionaries, postulated that the Gikuyu, 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 Gikuyu athomi delineated an old colonial identity of the traditional Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu people either in the concentration

\textsuperscript{387} Cagnolo, \textit{The Akikuyu}, Shaw, \textit{Colonial Inscriptions}.
\textsuperscript{390} Ngugi, \textit{The River Between}.
camp or in the villages. 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 Gikuyu? Where was its genesis? Who was on the receiving end? In the pre-colonial Gikuyu, 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 Gikuyu, 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 Gikuyu have a voice? Who represented them in the quagmire of power polity? What role did the sacred Mugumo play in 'giving a voice' and religio-political consciousness to the subaltern Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu.

When exploring the relationship between Ngai, ancestors, the ruling council of elders and the role of the Mugumo in rituals, the research findings underlined three fundamental points. Firstly, there was a three tier hierarchical relationship where Ngai was the Mūgai (giver-myth of origin) of land, progeny, power and wealth. Ngai was also the Mwene (owner) and Mumbi (creator-moulder). Secondly, the ancestors were very important since, together with Ngai they gave life to the Gikuyu family and society. Thirdly, the ruling elders, either Mwangi or Irungu, through the ritual ceremonies that culminated around the sacred Mugumo 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 Mugumo 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.
Gikuyu. But power based on class and kinship scuffle seems to have been lesser than that exercised during the colonial regime. The Gikuyu 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 Mugumo tree.

a) Migration and Settlement

The Gikuyu history of migration and settlement is saturated with discourses on power-conquest, of negotiations and assimilations. As an agricultural group, the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu cosmogony, there are myths that explicate the power-knowledge discourse. Kenyatta393 highlights the myth that shows how the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 kibata (a dance for male only), exposed her body to the

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.
Finally, there is a common myth about the people of a small stature whom the Gikuyu call the Gumba narrating how they either disappeared into the forest or were massacred by the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu.

b) The Mbari and the Land

The agricultural traditional Gikuyu 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 Mumbi who gave it to the people and that the ancestors were buried in the soil. The most sacred mission of every Gikuyu was to ‘civilise’ the soil through the tiling of the land. Land gave the Gikuyu 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’. This being the case, every Gikuyu 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 mbari. But the pre-colonial Gikuyu, 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 mbari and the ahoi (tenant at will). The ahoi were the Gikuyu members of a different mbari 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 mbari and the ahoi, there was an interdependent relationship based on alliance. Unlike the ahoi, the njagutu and ndungata were

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proletariat, the poor, and the landless who relied on the generosity of the rich mbari. They had little or no security and could be evicted at any time. The amassing of wealth by mbari through the exploitation of the njaguti and the ndungata created in the pre-colonial Gikuyu, a dialectic and binary world based on the have 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 mbari, as our research has demonstrated, mapped and designed the Gikuyu 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 mıhoi or and ndungata could traverse the boundaries of ‘otherness’ by marrying from the family of the rich mbari. Moreover, in this cosmological framework, discourses were based on neither skin pigmentation nor racial classification as was the case of colonialism. Nevertheless, the rich mbari, 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 Gikuyu group, there emerged a Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu is that of the rituals around the Múgumo tree.

c) The Rituals around the sacred Mūgumo

In the pre-colonial Gikuyū, 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, Gikuyū 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 Gikuyū, discourses on power-sexuality and religion were deeply rooted in the Mūgumo tree. This is plausible since as the research has underlined, the Gikuyū 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 mūti wa Ngai (tree of Ngai). Around it, Ngai communed with the Gikuyū 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 Gikuyū religio-political lives. Within the affiliations between the Gikuyū 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'. The story of Wacici serves to illustrate not only gender and sexual transformation through the power of the Mūgumo but also the fact that the Gīkūyū 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 Gīkūyū. The itũĩka ceremony in which the ritual culminated around the sacred Mūgumo, vested the ruling generation (Mwangi or Irungu) with monumental religio-political power. These ruling elders, associating themselves with the sacred Mūgumo became the mirrors through which the traditional Gīkūyū community viewed, evaluated and reformulated its identity. They embellished the reigning Mūgumo, since, having asked Ngai and the ancestors to bless them, the ruling elders like the Mūgumo tree, acquired unquestionable power and authority. The ritual of itũĩka like that of irua was powerful and instrumental. Through the itũĩka, 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 Gīkūyū population.

The irua, sine qua non ritual among the traditional Gīkūyū 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 kīama kīa maturangṳ rū (council of the ruling elder of the highest degree). Among the rituals of irua was that of kuna Mūgumo (breaking the Mūgumo) which epitomised the shedding off of boyhood and embracing warrior-hood. This ritual, publicly cerebrated by every Gīkūyū 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 Gīkūyū continues to question the relevance and end of the irua. In other words, if in the traditional Gīkūyū, 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 Gīkūyū 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

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
religio-political configurations, our thesis, supported by the survey, has strongly argued that in the forging of the Gikuyu ethnic identities, the petit bourgeoisie played a great part, the majority seeking a conservative modernisation.

Although Berman does not critically examine the traditional Gikuyu, we have used his theory, strengthened by research to demonstrate controversial issues of identity formation especially in the pre-colonial Gikuyu and how these debates are still important to the modern Gikuyu.

**Ethnic identity and the pre-colonial Gikuyu**

One of the strength of this research is how strongly it has elucidated the way the pre-colonial Gikuyu 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: Gikuyu. 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu membership is defined internally.

The pre-colonial Gikuyu, like other human societies, classified themselves and other people as belonging to certain categories. In their cosmology, there were the kin and non-kin (*mbari* and non-*mbari*). In relation to land ownership, there were *ene* (owners), the *ahoi* (tenants at will), *njaguti*, *ndungata* and the *nduriri* (foreigners). There was also the *mūrika* (co-initiate) and the non-*mūrika*. 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 Gikuyu.

The Gikuyu, as our research findings have shown not only classify but also attach cultural significance or meaning to their categories. The classification of *mbari* vis à vis non-*mbari*, family members and strangers, chief and subject, master and servant, settler and squatter means that the Gikuyu give them constellations of feelings. Even in their
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 Gikuyu, kin is construed differently from non-kin, mūhoi 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 Gikuyu, 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu cosmological framework, apart from the myth of origin, there are others, as our research findings have indicated, which show the cultural interdependence between the Gikuyu and their neighbours. They also confirm how the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu demonstrates a people concerned with parentage: to know who they are by looking back genealogically to their ancestors. As our research has attested, Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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

brought up in the rural milieu of Gicugu. 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 Gikuyu community. In analysing various rituals, what has clearly emerged is that in various rituals around the sacred Mugoumo, the Gikuyu celebrate their sense of history. In the rituals of irua and ituika 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 ituika taught the people who they were and gave them a sense of purpose.399 In the life of the traditional Gikuyu, 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu cosmology. If myths, and especially rituals of initiation, gave the people a sense of purpose and the sacred Mugoumo empowered both the rulers and the young warriors in the traditional Gikuyu, then, diminishing or annihilating them with the processes of colonialism and Christianity seem to have created a very confused generation of the Gikuyu. Throughout the research, what was culturally shocking was not the fact that with colonialism and postcolonialism the Gikuyu people renegotiated with different hegemonic systems in Kenya to forge their new identities, but the fact that today many Gikuyu people are still grappling with the question of identity e.g. what does it mean to be a Gikuyu in a multiethnic Kenya today? What does it mean to be a Christian or a Muslim Gikuyu? Again, who is an authentic traditional Gikuyu today in a globalised

399 Grimes, Deeply into the Bones.
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 Gikuyu 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 Mungiki.

Trees and ethnic identity formation

In the pre-colonial Gikuyu, the Mugumo tree acquired prominence in their cosmology. Apart from kinship relations, language and mbari system one could easily understand who the Mugiuki (a Gikuyu) was by having participated in the rituals around the sacred Mugumo. From this cultural vantage, the history of the affiliation between Gikuyu and nature, especially the relationship they have with the trees, is a key to understanding why the sacred Mugumo tree is a primary symbol for traditional Gikuyu. 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 Gikuyu group. It was around the sacred Mugumo 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 Gikuyu 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 Mugumo acts as an axis of identity formation. Around the Mugumo, the existential angst of the Gikuyu 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 Mugumo, Gikuyu 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, ituika and imploring Ngai for rain.

Researching on trees and their role in identity formation, our findings have underlined that traditional Gikuyu 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.
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 precolonial 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu was and what his/her cosmology entailed. They were both the healers and keepers of traditional Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu could identify themselves with Mount Kenya since it was there that Ngai their Mbirungu lived and where he manifested his power and affinity to the people through his anthropomorphic nature. The sacred Mugumo, 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 Mugumo 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, Kĩrũnyaga (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 Njũkĩĩĩ. Finally, Gĩkũyũ were a group who with centuries of working with the soil had come to be called the *rurũri 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’, 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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mothers, they forged an identity based on consanguinity, an identity that could trace its cultural trajectory through the mbari and a common ancestor. Gikuyu women, by actively living their role in the community, helped to forge a Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu, 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu identity which was threatened by the forces of colonialism and missionary exploitation. Gikuyu 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, Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu cosmology and worship would be: behind every successful Gikuyu man, a woman (or women) were involved. However, these internal forces of power within the Gikuyu 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

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. 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. Membre, M. Mamdami and our research findings have reminded us, European racism was experienced in different degrees in various colonial conditions. 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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and religious situation in Kenya. In these new identities, as the Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu identity is noteworthy. As already specified, in changing his name from Johnstone Kamau Ngengi to Jomo Kenyatta, he consciously invented his own image of Gikuyu, putting them into a distant past. Quintessentially, using primordialist model, he ‘froze’ the Gikuyu community in time. He collaborated with the colonialist project aimed at creating a stable bounded ethnic Gikuyu. 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 Gikuyu elites? Most of the subaltern Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Mugumo 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 Mugumo 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.  

Consequently, most of the Gikuyu 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 worldview of the modern Gikuyu. For instance, in his work: The River Between, this binary vision is epitomised by the characters of Waiyaki, Muthoni and her uncircumcised sister, Nyambura. The two ridges emblemise the unfathomable chasm between the traditional

404 Anderson, Histories of the Hanged; Elkins, Imperial Reckoning.
and the modern, the colonial-missionary versus the indigenous Gikuyu. In this work, Muthoni 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 Gikuyu tradition. Muthoni therefore ontologically marries the rituals of irua with Christ.\textsuperscript{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: \textit{A Grain of Wheat} and \textit{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 \textit{ithaka na wiathe} (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\textsuperscript{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 \textit{Mungiki}. But these discourses on the negotiated identity become clearer as we analyse the data of our survey. Thus the missionary discourses are fundamental.

\textbf{Mugumo and the Missionary Discourse}

Missionaries, especially from 1900 up to the 60s depicted the Gikuyu people as pagans. There emerged discourses of derision where ancestral veneration and the Gikuyu traditional temples of worship were attacked. Other discourses included that of refutation whereby Christianity, using its Western epistemological approach, refuted as absurd Gikuyu traditional beliefs and cosmology showing the dominance of Christianity over the traditional religion. Under the discourse of refutation, Gikuyu ngoma (ancestors) became


\textsuperscript{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 Mũrũngu, Kiũthuku, Magũ Ngūrũ 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

407 A similar criticism is given by Mudimbe commenting on the work of E. Boulaga in Boulaga, *Christianity without Fetishes*, pp.II-III

of discourse demonstrates how insensitive to the local cultures the Christian churches were and continues to be in Africa even today.

The Gikuyu 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: gutiri muthungu na mubia (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 Gikuyu land saw the indigenous people completely as the ‘Other’. They believed that the people were heading for hellfire 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 Gikuyu 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 control409 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 mūhōi grabbed land belonging to the ten mbarī, numbering about 600 people at the time.411 The misery to the local people brought about

409 Horton, Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West.
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 nābī (Heb. prophet/ nabī-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 *ituīka* 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 conglomereration 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

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.  

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’. 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 Gicandi (which told the history of their cosmology). As our research has found out, when the informants were asked about the symbols that replaced the Mugumo 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 Mugumo. 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 Mugumo, 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 Mugumo 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 Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu 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 Mugumo 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 Gikuyu 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 Mugumo tree. The chair behind the altar is also from the Mugumo 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 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

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 Mũgũumo tree. When they were told that the churches, which were now, erected a few yards from where the sacred Mũgũumo 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 Mũgũumo 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 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 Mūgumo tree was vested with religio-political power and used by the Gikūyū 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 Gikūyū people, many of the Mūgumo trees were deracinated. This was as a result of the colonial misunderstanding of the Gikūyū land tenure, replacing it with the Western conceptual land economy especially between 1902 and the 1930s. This meant that the Gikūyū had no access to their ancestral land and thus no rituals could be performed around them. The missionary undercurrent campaign of eradicating the Mūgumo and all that it stood for also contributed to the decline of the sacred trees. But as the thesis has argued, the Mūgumo continued eliciting strong religious and political sentiments from the Gikūyū 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 Gikūyū, the Mūgumo epitomises the unlimited power, an axis through which Gikūyū 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 Gikūyū Karing'a, which led to the formation of Gikūyū independent churches and schools, the different demonstration in

1930s together with the songs of mūthirigū, 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 Mugumo 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 revitalist 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 Gikũyũ 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. We encounter the subaltern resistance in the history of the Gikũyũ and the Mugumo 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.

If the Mugumo was used in the precolonial Gikũyũ to empower them during the ituūka 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 Gikũyũ land, then the subaltern Gikũyũ 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.


would return to the roots of the Mûgumo to find some answers to the most persistent injustice happening in colonial Kenya at the time. After independence some groups will still revisit the Mûgumo 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 Mûgumo 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 Gîkîyû people in reference to the Mûgumo 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 Kîrînyaga and offering the necessary rituals around the Mûgumo accused the conservatives as corrupt betrayers of Gîkîyû 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 Mûgumo and the Gîkîyû, 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 Mûgumo tree as a symbol of political empowerment as well as from Christianity these last groups sought to re-map the reality of Gîkîyû 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

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 Gīkūyū cosmology and worship showing how important the tree is, not only in the fight for freedom (mūrī ya wēathi- roots of freedom) but also in the construction of the Gīkūyū 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 Gīkūyū cosmo-vision.

Finally, the thesis has challenged the Gīkūyū 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 Gīkūyū 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 Gīkūyū 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 Gīkūyū 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 Gīkūyū cosmology and worship. Quintessentially, by critically exploring the Gīkūyū 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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<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher and Year</th>
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</table>

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1

Questionnaire

a) Mūgikūyu etaga Ngai na marithwa marikū? (Which name(s) do the Gikūyu give to Ngai?) Ngai na githaka matara-inie aña? (How is Ngai related to the land?).

b) Üti mitti ūgana ya ūgikūyu? No ūgwete marithwa mayo? (How many indigenous Gikūyu trees do you know? Can you name them?). Wīra wa mitti ūyo nū ūrkū? (What are the functions of those trees?). Nū kūri rūgano ūū wra mitti na Agikūyu? (Do you know of any myths between trees and Gikūyu people?).

c) Mūti wa Mūgumo nū ūū? Do you know the Mūgumo tree? Nū kūri rūgano rwa Mūgumo ūū? Rūrkū? (What is the myth about Mūgumo?). Wīra wa Mūgumo warī (nū) ūrkū? (What were/are its functions in general?). Nūū wamenyagūrūra (ūmenyagūrūra) Mūgumo? (Who kept (keeps) watch over it?) Wari/ nū waa (Who owned(s) it?).

d) Nū mambura marikū ñū mekagūrwo Mūgumoinū? (Which rituals were performed around it?). Nūū watongoragia mambura macio? (Who performed those rituals?). Nū kī kūri gūtūmaga mambura macio mekirwo Mūgumoinū wa Ngai? (Why were those rituals performed around the sacred Mūgumo tree?). Mambura macio nū marī bata ūmūthī? (Are those rituals and ceremonies still valid today?).

e) Nū kī kū gūkūre ithenyainū ēra mūhoere wa Agikūyu Mūgumoinū? (In places where the worship around the Mūgumo was, what symbol replaced it?).

Appendix 2

Food crops in Gicfigu division

Irigu –banana (musa sapientum), Gikwa-yam, Mboco-beans, ndūma-arrowroot (Maranta arundinacea), Glūngūry–onion, Karanga-ground nuts. Mwere- Bulrush millet, Kabici- cabbage, Njūgū-cajanus cajan, Manjani-Tea, Mūbāba (tree)-carica papaya-tabābā (fruit). There is also Karat- carrot, Mwanga-cassava, Mūrimau-citrus, Mūcungwa-orange, Pigeon peas, Kāťa-coffē, Ndānia-coriander, Nōdoko-cow peas, Māreng-cucurbita maxima, Custard (apple-mūtomoko), Įgūmbī- eleusine coracana, also finger millet-ūgūmbī, giant millet-(mùbīn), Italian millet-mūkombī, and foxtail millet-mūkombī. There is also green Ndēngū-gram, Nūna, Thu, mbēra-guava, field Minji-pea, Njahē-hyacinth bean. They also grow ngwacī- ipomoea batatas, Ngwacī-sweet potatoes, waru-Irish potatoes, Glūngūry- leek, lemon-mūrimau (tree)- marima (fruit), Nūmũ–lime, Nvmn-tomatoes, Mūkandamia-tree (Macadamia tetraphylla), Makandamia (fruit), Mbmē- maize, Mbmē-fruit(mango), Mūmē (tree), Thara-nappier grass, for feeding animals, Kīgwa-sugarcane Managu-solanum nigrum, Sukumawiki-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 knee¹ 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 Ndambuki. 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 Karîmi, her first brother was named Mûguûmi and the last one was named Mûrfîthi.

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 Karîmi, Mûguûmi and Mûrfîthi,
bore me one, two, three children,
I bring something you know,
I bring food you never tasted before
Karîmi open for me.
```

And Karîmi 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 Karîmi because she was very beautiful. They tried to imitate the fathers voice but all in vain. One day a young ruddy man sang and Karîmi, 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 Karîmi loved her father very much, she accepted the offer and persuaded both Mûguûmi and Mûrfîthi to accompany her. Eventually, they left their old house. Before they left, Karîmi 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 Karîmi’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 Karîmi. Her father recognised his daughter but Karîmi 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 Karîmi, Mûguûmi and Mûrfîthi,
bore me one, two, three children,
I bring something you know,
I bring food you never tasted before
Karîmi open for me.
```

In the evening the little girl sang the song to her mother and before she would finish it, Karîmi would pinch her saying: ‘why do you remind me of the loved lost ones?’

Then one day, Karîmi did not go to the shamba and as usual the old man sang:

```
My right right knee, made me rich made rich,
bore me Karîmi, Mûguûmi and Mûrfîthi,
bore me one, two, three children,
I bring something you know,
I bring food you never tasted before
Karîmi 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, Mûguûmi and Mûrfîthi. 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.

¹ Interview, Gîcûgû, 2003-4. A similar version is told by Mwangi, R., Kikuyu Folktales.
## Appendix 4. Indigenous trees and functions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of tree in Gikuyu</th>
<th>Functions</th>
<th>Number of informants</th>
<th>Sex: M/F</th>
<th>Places where found/Locations</th>
<th>Number of informants %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muringa, Muu, Muiri, Muthaiti, murema ngigi, Muthaiti, Mungirima, Mucarage, Mubutu, Muthakwa, Mukungugu, Mukoito, Mutundu, Mubiru, Munderendu, Mugambwa, Mutero, mutathii, Muiri, Mukeu, Mutatia, Muthiriti, Ruthiru, Mukawa, Mutandambogo</td>
<td>Building houses, furniture, poles, bed, fences</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>M-158 F-92</td>
<td>Kirima, Kabari, Baragui, Karumandi Ngariama, Njukiini</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mukawa, Mutare, Mukambura, Mubiru, Mucuca, Mutambararu, Mbotab</td>
<td>Fruits</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>M-154 F-92</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mugumo, Mukengeria, Mugico, Ilurura, Mucomoro, Mutoo, Murama, Mwage, Mucong’e, Mukutha, Maigoya, Ndabibi</td>
<td>Fodder</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>M-136 F-92</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mugumo, Mukutha, Muniranga, Mukeu, Murenda, mugico, mwononde</td>
<td>Strings, straps</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>M-129 F-80</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mugumo, Muiri, Muuti</td>
<td>Hiding and protection</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>F-138 F-82</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mugumo, Muiri, Murama, Mutoo, Mukungugu</td>
<td>Shade</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>M-151 F-92</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutonga, Muthiga, Kagutui, Mucege, Muhoor, Muteta, Mubutu, Mwania-thenge, Mugumo, Mugaita, Gakaraku, Murumbawe, Munjuga iria, Mururue, Muringa, Mutanga, Muthuthi, Gathararia, Muthengera, Mubugu, Mutonga, Mukenia, Mugu, Muthuthi, Murerema, Mwariki, Mwatha, Mubinga</td>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>M-158 F-92</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mugumo, Muringa, Muratina (principle)</td>
<td>Symbol of wealth</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>M-18 F-2</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muturanguru (leaves carried by elders of third grade and inner circle of the ruling generation</td>
<td>Power</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>M-138 F-82</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutero, Muricu, Mutundu, Munderendu, mununga, Murangi, Tharu, Githuri</td>
<td>Weapons</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>M-136 F-69</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muthakwa, Mutero, Mubatia, Murubu, Mukinyi, Muingirima</td>
<td>Digging sticks</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>M-97 F-92</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mugumo, Mukuyu</td>
<td>Abode of Ngai and spirits</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>M-158 F-92</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kieha, Muhoru, Muthakwa for removing witchcraft,</td>
<td>Witchcraft</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>M-108 F-78</td>
<td>All locations</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Magic</td>
<td>F-60</td>
<td>All locations</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mukuri (drive away witchcraft)</td>
<td>Mutandambogo, Muthariandundu, Ngwacyan Ngoma, Mubugu, Muraria, Murembu, Mutundu, Mururi, Mubunga, Mugumo</td>
<td>210</td>
<td></td>
<td>All locations</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutunanguru, Mugambwa, Mutero, Muthirathiri, Mubatia, Muiri, Mwingirima</td>
<td>Clubs</td>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muthaiti, Muringa, Muthanduku, Mururi, Muiri, Muthirathiri</td>
<td>Bridges</td>
<td>124</td>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muringa, Mututi, Mutati, Murembu, Mukandu, Mu, Mukoigo, Mununga, Mukurwe, Mugumo, Mukuyu, Muiri, Munderendu, Mubuti, Mugu</td>
<td>Bee-hive and mortars</td>
<td>190</td>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murtatina, Kigwa,</td>
<td>Beer( Local)</td>
<td>220</td>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mukutha, Mugico, Maigoya, Mugutha, Mwariki, Mwethia, Mwondwe</td>
<td>Toiletries-soap &amp; ‘toilet paper’ &amp; Lotion</td>
<td>165</td>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mugumo, Muringa, muu, itoka, Mukungugu,Muthakwa, mwatha</td>
<td>Boundary</td>
<td>236</td>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muthiga, mubuti, Mwathathia,</td>
<td>Smelting and Ironware</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mugumo, Mucatha, Muimbaigrui,</td>
<td>Fire-drill</td>
<td>126</td>
<td></td>
<td>All six locations</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mwingirima, Muruba, munderendu, Muthakwa</td>
<td>Muthiga/Njuguma - Walking sticks and bludgeon</td>
<td>198</td>
<td></td>
<td>All six locations</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mugumo, Mumbu, Mukuyu, Mumbu,Mururi, Munyondo, Muthakwa, Ithare, Muringa, Murangi, Muthanduku</td>
<td>Rain Catchments</td>
<td>237</td>
<td></td>
<td>All six locations</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 5a

The Myth of trees and death

When Ngai had created the beautiful land for the Gikuyu, 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 Nyamindigi (thrush) bird to tell the people that his final decision was that they will all surely die. Nyamindigi swiftly flew to the earth where he found the chameleon still stammering out his message. This is how he said: mwe-ee, mwee-ee-rrwo atriiri, mwee-ee...(you-uuu, are-to-oold...). Before the chameleon could finish the message of immortality, Nyamindigi interrupted declaring that all human beings would die and perish beneath the root of the Mukongoe tree.

Appendix 5b

Trees as life savers

A Gikuyu 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 Gikuyu. 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 Gikuyu 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.

1 This story was commonly told by most of the informants around the Mucagara, Karucho and Karumandi, Thumaita and Kabari area in Gicugu division. There is also a similar story narrated by Waciūma. See, Waciūma, 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

**Gikuyu and the Mugumo: General Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of people interviewed</th>
<th>Sex M/F</th>
<th>Rika/Age</th>
<th>Muhiriaga/Clani</th>
<th>Ndini/Religion</th>
<th>Names of Ngai/God</th>
<th>Ngai- Manifestation</th>
<th>Ngai and Land</th>
<th>Ngai-people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Myths/Trees</th>
<th>Trees/Names</th>
<th>Trees: Functions</th>
<th>Mugumo: Description</th>
<th>Mugumo: No. of Myth</th>
<th>Mugumo: Functions</th>
<th>Mugumo: Rituals</th>
<th>Mugumo: valid today</th>
<th>Mugumo: Symbol today</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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Appendix 7a.

Some characteristics of the Mugumo tree

i. Strong aerial roots to conquer & suffocate

ii. Ngumo: The fruits of the Mugumo

iii. Mugumo: Friendly but a parasite

iv. Mugumo, Milky-sap & Fertility

v. The gigantic trunk of the Mugumo

vi. Mugumo & other indigenous trees
Existing is co-existing.
Appendix 7. Characteristics of the *Ficus natalensis/Mūgumo*

i. The leaves & fruits

ii. Mūgumo: Evergreen tree

iii. Tuthu-Mūrang’a: The new symbol of the Mūgumo? Chapel?

iv. Tuthu: A replacement for the Mūgumo?

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
Appendix 7b. Description of the Műgumo tree in Gicûgû

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>No. of people</th>
<th>No. of people %</th>
<th>Sex(M/F)</th>
<th>No. of informant in age (60-70)</th>
<th>71-80 years</th>
<th>81-90 years</th>
<th>91-100 years</th>
<th>100+ years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muti Munene</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>M 86 F 34</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9 people</td>
<td>13 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muti wa Mûnikûyu</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>M 173 F 77</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muti wa Nûgai</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>M 167 F 75</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muti wa Mâmûbura</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>M 173 F 77</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ihooero ría Gikûyû</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>M 177 F 69</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muti wa Irûngû</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>M 120 F 70</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munîna uthata</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>M 3 F 17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutl Muûgû</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>M 160 F 72</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 9.
The Myth of Wacici

Tene tene mûno nî kwarî na tûhî twarîthagia mbûri na ng’ombe ciao. Tûhî tûtû nîtwarîmanagia na tûrû tûnîgî tumîte mîrîmô îrîa îngî magathi kûrîtethia mâri hamwe. Tûhî tûtû tûkâmîbirîria gûthaka twihamwe tükîriganîrwo nîtwarîthagia. Mbûri nî ciathire múgûndia wene na thutha wagućîcaria mûno, kâhî gaka getagwo Wacici nîgacemanirie na îthe arî na mbûri.

Îthe wa Wacici nîłamûteng’eriri mûno no ndaîgana kûmûnyîta. Hwainî Wacici nîltûhûrîrwo mûno na aîkîrakara. Warî ûndî wa kaményeri tondû o aîthî kûrîtethia nongînya mangüathakhire na tûhî tûrû tûnîgî kwa úguo mahiî magathi múgûndia yene nake Wacici akahûragwo o múthénya nî îthe.


Wacici ndarîrere maîtû, aģîtwara ho arî o wîke na thutha wagûthûrûrûkka maîtû mûgûnjan aģûrûrûka kairûtu. Nîakenire mûno tondû kumanagia na múthénya úcîo ndacokiûre kûrîtethia rîngî na aģûtiganana na mbara ya îthe.

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