

**THE TRANSFORMATION OF CIRCUMCISION
AND MASCULINITY AMONG THE AGIKUYU OF
KIAMBU, 1945-2008**

BY

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C50/21779/2010

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS (HISTORY), KENYATTA UNIVERSITY.**

MARCH, 2015

DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree award in any other university.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to all lovers of history.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work would not have been possible were it not for the Almighty God. Secondly, I sincerely thank my supervisors, Dr. Godwin Murunga and Dr. Pius Kakai. They trained me through criticism, opened my mind from the cocoon of ignorance and introduced me to the scholarly world. They gave me a lot of support and kept encouraging me that I can make it.

I also would like to thank the Department of History, Archaeology and Political Studies (HAPS), the Chairman, Dr. Washington Ndiiri, staff including Dr. Edward Kisiang'ani, Dr. Edwin Gimode, Dr. Joseph Wasonga, Dr. Felistas Kinyanjui, Dr. Felix Kiruthu, Dr. Martha Musalia, Mr. Julius Nabende, Mr. Joel Imbisi, Mr. Isaiah Oduor, Mr. Ken Gitu, among others.

Special gratitudes go to my informants who made this research a success by willingly giving me the information that I needed in the various interviews. I also acknowledge the help of librarians in the Post-Modern Library, Kenyatta University, Jomo Kenyatta Library in the University of Nairobi, McGauley Library in Catholic University and the Kenya National Archives for they helped me locate books and materials that proved useful to this study. I cannot forget my classmates, Dorcas Muthui, Esther Kibe, Joseph Epuu and Eunice Tai, who kept challenging me, gave me support and hope in the long hours in libraries. Finally, sincere gratitudes to my family, especially my siblings and parents; more so, my father, David Kimani Itimu, for the encouragement, advice and financial support. I also appreciate friends; Simon Mwaniki, Lilian Mulati, Florence Moraa and Jack Mwangi for the support they gave me during this study. Due to time and space I may not be able to mention all the people but all those who helped in one way or the other in the completion of this work, feel appreciated.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immune-Deficiency Syndrome.
CIPEV	Commission of Inquiry into Post-Election Violence
CMS	Church Missionary Society
CODESRIA	The Council for the Development of Social Science research in Africa
CSM	Church of Scotland Mission
DVD	Digital Video/Versatile Disc
EALB	East African Literature Bureau
FORD	Forum for Restoration of Democracy.
HIV	Human Immuno-deficiency Syndrome
IEBC	Independent Electoral and Boundaries commission
KADU	Kenya African Democratic Union
KANU	Kenya African National Union
KAU	Kenya African Union
KLB	Kenya Literature Bureau
KLC	Kenya Land Commision
KNCHR	Kenya National Commission on Human Rights
KNH	Kenyatta National Hospital
KPU	Kenya People's Union
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
MOU	Memorandum of understanding
PEV	Post-Election Violence
RCC	Roman Catholic Church
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, scientific, and cultural Organisation

VCD	Video compact Disc
WHO	World Health Organization

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

- Agikuyu** This is a Bantu group of people in whose original home of settlement is Central Kenya but they are also found in many other regions in Kenya today. The term Agikuyu, Kikuyu and Gikuyu used to refer to this group are used interchangeably in the text.
- Hegemony** Hegemony means indirect control. It is a concept that acquired its meaning in 1930s from the works of an Italian Scholar, Antonio Gramsci entitled 'Prison Notes' Hegemony is thus a concept used to refer to the dynamics by which a dominant group claims and sustains a leading position in social life and also exerts indirect control on the subjects.
- Masculinity** This is used to refer to the mannerisms and qualities associated with being a man.
- Hegemonic masculinity** A type of masculinity possessed by some men who view themselves as superior and therefore dominating over women and other marginalized men.
- Reserve** These are settlements that were created for Africans by the British. These reserves were created to accommodate the Africans who had been alienated from their lands. The reserves were also created in order to access cheap and quick labour from the Africans.

GLOSSARY

- Aanake a Forti:*** This was a group of Kikuyu men that resisted the colonial rule. It was formed in 1940s. This group was proud of its masculinity which was based on circumcision which enabled them to form a basis of political resistance against the colonial rule.
- Irua:*** Kikuyu name for circumcision
- Imbalu:*** Bagisu term for circumcision
- Kiama:*** A group of men and women among the Agikuyu believed fit to deliberate on judicial, political and religious matters. However there were several *ciama* (plural for *kiama*) among the Agikuyu. They included such groups as *Kamatimu* (warriors), *Mataathi* (middle aged men) and *Maturanguru* (the wise and old)
- Kihii:*** Kikuyu word for the uncircumcised
- Kiumiri:*** A newly circumcised man, traditionally the one who was just from seclusion. Seclusion would take a month.
- Mugithii:*** A new genre of Kikuyu music which has incorporated traditional aspects of the Gikuyu society.
- Mungiki*** This is a religious sect that emerged among the Agikuyu that sought to practice traditional Agikuyu culture as a way of getting the ‘river back to its course’. The group advocated for sniffing of tobacco and circumcision of girls. However the group is considered by the state as an illegal sect.
- Morran:*** Samburu word for a young man
- Muruithia:*** Kikuyu word for circumciser
- Mwanake:*** A circumcised young man among the Gikuyu

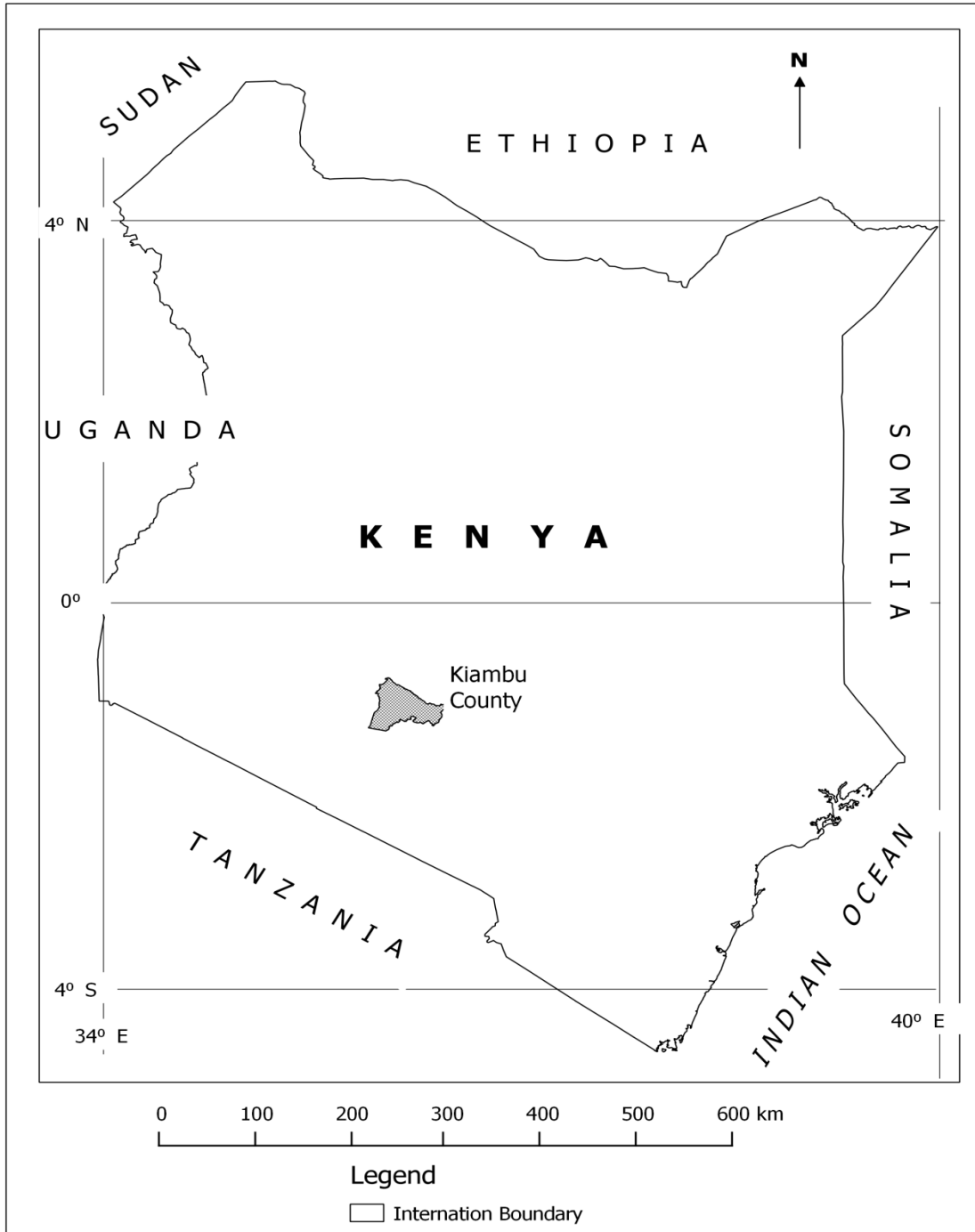
- Muiguithania:*** Kikuyu for unifier/ reconciler; refers to a paper edited by Kenyatta in the 1920s.
- Nduriri:*** Kikuyu word mostly used derogatively for other tribes.
- Majimbo:*** Regionalism or quasi-federalism; an idea that was at independence, proposed by KADU, to have Kenya divided into regions (majimbo) that would be self-governing.
- Majeneti:*** Kikuyu for the State of emergency
- Nyayo:*** Nyayo is a Swahili word which means Footsteps. A term that was coined in President Moi's philosophy to indicate that he would follow Jomo Kenyatta's footsteps.
- Ngwati*** This was a piece of skin that was left dangling on the penis after a man underwent Agikuyu circumcision.

ABSTRACT

**THE TRANSFORMATION OF CIRCUMCISION AND
MASCULINITY AMONG THE AGIKUYU OF KIAMBU, 1945-2008**

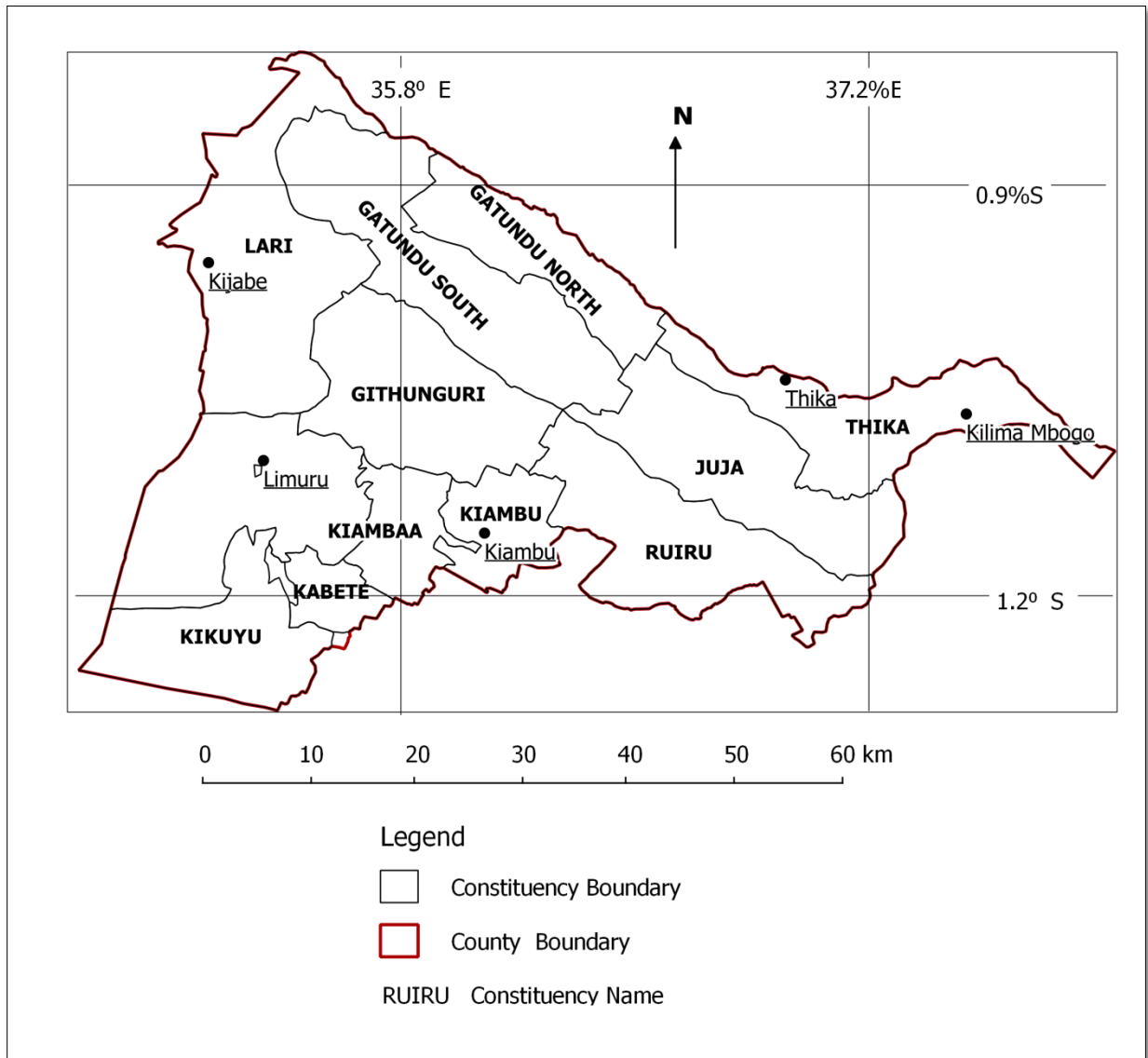
Rites of passage are very significant in many African societies. They mark a critical stage in a person's life. Of the many rites of passage that exist, circumcision is common. Traditionally, the practice entailed elaborate procedures that required early planning and was accompanied with specific rituals. However, circumcision has undergone major transformation overtime. This study analyzes the transformation of Agikuyu circumcision over the period 1945-2008. The research focused on the rite in the traditional setup and how it transformed during the colonial times and post-independent era, due to the influences of many factors including the impact of missionary work, western education, western medicine and the monetization of the economy. The research is based on the principle that Agikuyu circumcision was and still remains an important practice with deep cultural significance and the basis upon which manhood and identity among the Gikuyu is determined. This study elaborates this concept as it informs the Gikuyu notion of masculinity and political leadership. The research also analyses the social changes in the Agikuyu society as informed by circumcision. The process of becoming a man and identity formation in the Agikuyu society and how this notion has changed over time is also assessed. The study employs hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical tool to analyze the notions of Agikuyu masculinity in the context of its changing character. In this study, sampling was based on purposive technique. Secondary and primary data were core to this study; the latter was collected through interviews and observations. Data analysis was done by employing historical criticism, evaluation and corroborating collected and existing data. Based on these principles, the premises of this study were analysed and we observed that before colonialism circumcision was important in the making of the Agikuyu man. The study also confirmed that Agikuyu circumcision has transformed not only due to the influence of colonialism but also due to social changes in the society even after independence. This transformation in Agikuyu circumcision influenced Kenya's 'politics of the foreskin'. This study concludes that Agikuyu circumcision has transformed over time and this change has affected the making of a Gikuyu man. These changes have also affected the Agikuyu political hegemony over other communities.

FIGURE 1: LOCATION OF KIAMBU COUNTY IN KENYA



Source: IEBC 2013

FIGURE 2: MAP OF KIAMBU COUNTY



Source: IEBC 2013

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

There is no human community without a culture. Culture is the total way of life of a people and is characterized by many aspects. Among these aspects are the rites of passage. Rites of passage are a category of rituals that accompany the transition of an individual over time from one stage to another (Onuh, 1992: 58). Of the many rites of passage in any culture, initiation is held with a lot of importance as it is an identity marker and represents the transition from childhood into adulthood transforming boys into men and girls into women. Different societies carry out different initiation rites. Of these rites, however, Circumcision could easily pass as the most conspicuous cultural practice affecting many African communities.

Etymologically, circumcision is an amalgam of two Latin words, *circum* which means round and *caedere* which means to cut (Gollaher, 2000). In the case of the Agikuyu, it entails the removal of a male foreskin and excision of the clitoris for girls. The purpose of circumcision varies depending on the community involved. It is done in different parts of the world to satisfy particular local needs. In some communities, circumcision is a religious rite while in others it is an identity mark denoting belonging to a particular group. Others conceive of it simply for hygienic reasons. In the USA, the operation is done as anti-masturbatory secular rite (Lightfoot, 1989: 183). In most African communities such as the Akamba, Aembu, Agikuyu, Akan, Igbo and Amaasai, circumcision marks a transition from childhood to adulthood (Kenyatta, 1938: 133; Muriuki, 1971: 118; Sankan, 1971; Mwaniki, 1974: 55). Literary and fictional writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ole Kulet, Timothy Wangusa and Camara Laye have also emphasized the

importance of circumcision in African communities (Layes, 1954; Ngugi, 1965; Ole Kulet, 1972; Wangusa, 1989). Recently, the practice has been popularized worldwide due to its importance in curbing the transmission of the Human Immuno-deficiency Virus (HIV) (WHO, 2009).

Among the Agikuyu, male circumcision was and still is a prerequisite for attaining full adulthood status. It is an identity which, if not acquired, could confine a male person to perpetual childhood. Erickson (1970) notes, that human beings are born with no identity but acquire it with time. Among the Agikuyu, circumcision gave one an identity which is vital in order to fit in the society. It was the most important custom through which one socially and psychologically became a man or a woman (Kenyatta, 1938: 75). Traditionally, it was the only criterion from which one attained full membership of the community (Muriuki, 1971: 9). It was the only route towards maturity after which young men became warriors, and were later allowed to marry. More important, one could only assume political responsibility and claim rights after circumcision as he was subsequently believed to be able to make responsible decisions.

Agikuyu male circumcision was done through elaborate procedures. The elders decided on the day of circumcision. Songs and dances preceded the ceremony and they were meant to hasten the elders' decision on circumcision. Traditional circumcision songs have today been incorporated in the famous *Mugithii* songs, a new genre of Kikuyu music which has incorporated customary aspects of the Gikuyu society. The 'profession' of circumcising was undertaken by a few who were from specific families. Each initiate was supported by a sponsor (*mutiiri*) and dues were paid in kind (Leakey, 1977: 604). The age of the boys to be circumcised varied from 17-22 years because it was not done annually as that of women. This is because male circumcision could take

nine seasons (four and half calendar years) so that the various sets would be grouped together to form an army contingent (Muriuki, 1974:17).

However, male circumcision among the Agikuyu has changed over time due to the 20th century colonialism and missionary activities and also internal changes within the community. In Mt. Kenya region, penetration of the British colonization undermined the initiation system (Mwaniki, 1985: 18). The missionaries condemned circumcision as mutilation of sexual organs that affected the body of Christ. In some areas such as the Masasi diocese in Southern Tanganyika and Kiambu in Kenya, the British came up with policies meant to modify the rite of circumcision so as to perform it under the auspices of Christianity (Opoku, 1985: 518). This included taking the boys to hospitals to be circumcised by doctors and not the traditional circumcisers.

Further changes took place after the end of colonialism in the practice of Agikuyu male circumcision. Colonialism had opened up the interior and enabled greater interactions between the Agikuyu and other people thereby leading to change in cultural practices. The influence of modernization and urbanization on circumcision among the Agikuyu is also notable.

Indeed circumcision was one of the criteria used to measure up a man's masculinity. In effect, if circumcision gave a Gikuyu man the social standing among the Gikuyu, this standing was continually strained by the changes to be examined. Masculinity meant physical strength which was believed to be only possessed by 'real men'. One of the criteria of becoming a 'real man' was largely through circumcision. Thus, in a country where only three out of the forty two communities did not circumcise, masculinity was openly portrayed. A good example was seen in

the symbol of the former long ruling party, Kenya African National Union (KANU), the cockerel, which though not circumcised, it was a symbol of masculinity. This was a sign of masculine virility, strength and domination. In independent Kenya, circumcised men were accorded political rights in comparison with the uncircumcised in popular imagination. These men were respected not only in the public but also in the private arena at the family level. Thus, Gikuyu men were implicitly used the notion of masculinity whose symbolic influence politically and socially was enormous. This has often had adverse effects on the relationship between the Kikuyu and other non-circumcising communities. Before the year 2002, Moi regime survived so long partly because the Kikuyu dominated parties like FORD Asili and the largely Luo parties such as FORD Kenya were strong but could not cooperate to oust Moi (Mohamed and Markakis, 1998). Often these differences were refracted through lens of circumcision since, 'men', as some Gikuyu politicians often put it, could not come to terms with 'boys' (referring to the uncircumcised) (KNCHR, 2006: 44). This poses questions of ramifications circumcision has had in identity construction, in molding notions of manhood and influence in the character of Kenyan politics.

During the colonial period, the change in the way Gikuyu men were regarded was influenced by such policies as land alienation, taxation, labour, religion and literacy among the Agikuyu, was also growing tremendously (Sandgren, 1982). The decade of the 1940s, saw the Agikuyu society come up with strategies of opposing colonial rule. During this period the spirit of resistance against the British rule grew stronger especially after the Africans' participation in Second World War. The British retaliated by carrying such punitive measures as confiscating the Agikuyu cattle. This affected ceremonies such as circumcision that required animals to be

slaughtered in order to complete the ritual. These issues affected the nature and significance of Agikuyu male circumcision. After independence, the transformation continued and was fundamentally influenced by urbanization and popularization of capitalist economy in Kiambu. Since the year 2000 there has been a notable wave in Kiambu where preparation, actual circumcision procedure and ceremonies have been taken up by churches and schools in collaboration with medical institutions. This transformation had impact on the entire life of the Kikuyu of Kiambu. These issues form the core interest of this study which seeks to analyze the transformation of male circumcision and identity formation among the Agikuyu of Kiambu, 1945 to 2007.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Circumcision means different things to different societies. In Kenya, traditional circumcision among the Agikuyu marked the graduating of the initiates from childhood to adulthood. It was a stage in life at which the initiates took up new responsibilities and acquired an identity of 'real men'. However the practice of circumcision has changed over time as seen in the importance people attach to it, the ceremony and attention it attracts from the society. While there is a lot of valuable literature on Agikuyu circumcision, most of the studies are either anthropological or focus mostly on female clitoridectomy, especially its colonial controversies. This study instead focuses on transformation in nature and significance of male circumcision among the Agikuyu of Kiambu from 1945-2007. It investigates into how such transformation relates to Agikuyu notions of masculinity, identity formation and what significance these notions had to the Agikuyu society and to Kenyan politics.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

This study was based on the following objectives;

1. To describe the social, economic and political organization of the Agikuyu in the pre-colonial period,
2. To analyze the practice of Agikuyu male circumcision in the colonial set up up to 1945,
3. To assess the transformation in the practice of male circumcision in the period 1945-2008,
4. To assess how the changing notions of Agikuyu masculinity and its impacts on the Agikuyu society and the politics of Kenya since 1992 to 2008.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How was the social, economic and political organization of the Agikuyu in the pre-colonial period?
2. How was the rite of Agikuyu circumcision practiced under the new dispensation of colonial rule before 1945?
3. What transformations have the Agikuyu male circumcision undergone in the period 1945-2008?
4. How have the changing notions of Agikuyu masculinity affected the Agikuyu society and the politics in Kenya since 1992?

1.4 Research Premises

The study was based on the following premises;

1. Agikuyu people had attained a level of social, economic and political organisation in the pre-colonial period.

2. The Agikuyu circumcision was transformed by such colonial aspects as urbanization process, land alienation, colonial education, capitalist economy and activities of missionaries.
3. Agikuyu circumcision continued to transform after 1945 due to changes brought by the colonial government and later due to independence.
4. The Agikuyu notions of masculinity as constructed through circumcision have, since 1992, had negative effects on the Agikuyu society, identity formation of Kikuyu men and the democratization process in Kenya.

1.5. Justification and significance

There exist various studies on initiation rites among the Agikuyu. Most of them concentrate on women initiation rites (Namu 1969; Kanake, 2001; Lynn, 2003; Muraya, 2009). Those that study men initiation rites are generally very descriptive, treating male circumcision in its “ethnographic present” (Ogot 1974: 4). They focus on socio-cultural importance of the rite in the community as if, as Ogot’s emphasizes, the community itself is timeless (1974: 4). This study is justified because of its focus on a historical analysis of Agikuyu male circumcision between 1945- 2008.

The year 1945 was chosen because it is a significant year in the world history. It marked the end of Second World War. Post War politics saw many Africans mount stronger resistance against the British. The seeds of MAU MAU were being sown at the time. Dominated by a group of Agikuyu landless, this resistance culminated into the 1952 eruption of war and state of emergency. The leadership of this movement brought together many people; core among them was a generation of combatants identified as *Aanake a forti* (Forty Group) whose influence on the Mau Mau was instrumental (Furedi, 1973: 280). *Aanake a forti* was a proud vocal group

which claimed to be born, circumcised, married in 1940 and openly portrayed their masculinity which was pegged to circumcision (Wachanga, 1975: xxxii). Although Furedi's work (1973) was an urban study, he clearly notes that the activities of the Forty Group had, by mid 1940s, extended to all parts of the then Central Province and some parts of the Rift Valley (1973: 280). Due to proximity to Nairobi, Kiambu people were mostly affected by the activities of the Forty Group. Indeed, it is noted that most of the Agikuyu traders from Kiambu went to Nairobi daily, thus increasing the influence of the Nairobi activities to the rural set up (Furedi: 1973: 281). The members of the Forty Group opposed policies of the colonial government and called for the circumcision of all girls. Thus, this study took 1945 as an important year to analyze the masculinity of Agikuyu and trace the transformation of Agikuyu male circumcision which forms the core interest of this study. The year 2008, on the other hand, provided a good framework to analyse the aftermath of the 2007 elections. The year 2007 was a unique election period for Kenya as it provided a basis to analyze the influence of Agikuyu masculinity to Kenyan politics. The 2007 General Election was also marred by violence and ethnic rivalry that was hardly witnessed five years earlier.

The study contributes to the ongoing studies on masculinities in Africa. A critical part of the debate has focused on the boy-child whose transformation from childhood to manhood is hardly the subject of extensive discussion. Recently, many parts of the world including the developed countries have termed the boy child as an endangered species and reasons advanced for this description range from the need to give priority to the girl-child to the fact that boys grow and mature with absentee fathers. This study focused on gendering the male category and

understanding the historical transformations of circumcision which gives us rewarding lessons on the growth of boys into men.

This research also sheds important lessons on the ethnicised politics of manhood and masculinity in Kenya's democratic processes. The role of circumcision in identity creation and the context within which such roles are imagined and deployed was examined. Cultural elements of ethnicity and how they influence thinking about political power and leadership were also analyzed.

1.6. Scope and Delimitation

The Agikuyu community of Kiambu County was purposely selected for this study (see figure 2). The Kikuyu people live in different parts of Kenya. However, Kikuyu "proper" live in three major regions; Gaki (Nyeri), Metumi (Murang'a) and Kabete (Kiambu). Thus "Kikuyu Proper", is a name given to the people of the central region of Kenya as it was considered to be the ancestral home of the Kikuyu people before the coming of the European rule (Muriuki, 1974: 25). This study specifically examines at the Gikuyu of Kiambu and how male circumcision transformed in the colonial and post-independent period.

1.7 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

1.7.1. Review of Related Literature

This review of related literature focuses on the studies that discuss the practice of circumcision in different societies. The literature review is organised chronologically where changes to the rite of circumcision over the years are analysed in order to understand the history behind this practice

and its impact to identity formation of men. Also, the politics of democratisation in Kenya in the context of the Agikuyu society is discussed.

The beginning of male circumcision is not known. There is no doubt however the origins may be different depending on the history and the culture of the practicing community. Some communities have myths of origin while some rely on the oral tradition. Mwanzi (1977: 107) notes that for the Kipsigis circumcision was learnt accidentally after a habitual offender was punished through circumcision. However, because he did not die as expected but instead prospered, oral tradition has it that this led the other people to adopt the rite. Liyong (1972) notes that the Bukusu learnt the circumcision rite from the neighbouring Barwa community, when one of them, named Mango, killed a monster and was rewarded by the Barwa with a beautiful bride who he could only take after circumcision. For the Agikuyu, the origin of circumcision is said to have been borrowed from the Cushites.

Lightfoot (1989:184), argues that circumcision probably dates back to antiquity and has been practiced ritualistically by a wide variety of people. He points out that circumcision was practiced by the Australian Aborigines, Aztec, Caribs and also ancient Egyptians from whom the Phoenicians, Arabs and Jews derived the practice. A great emphasis is given to the Egyptian circumcision. Herodotus, as quoted by Chiekh Anta Diop, notes that Egyptians and the Ethiopians have practiced circumcision for a very long time. Diop (1983: 68) notes that Herodotus' judgment has never been disputed and in fact it has been confirmed by the archaeologists who through the preserved mummies proved that circumcision in Egypt had been practiced for a long time. Indeed, further evidence on the origins of circumcision is found in the

Holy Bible where God authorizes Abraham to circumcise all males including himself as a requisite of making of the covenant (Genesis, 17: 11ff). By locating the origins of circumcision in ancient times, it becomes obvious that the practice has a long history but the pace and character of transformation in the nature of the practice differs from society to society. This study sheds light on the specific case of the Agikuyu under colonial and post-colonial times in Kenya.

The origin of circumcision is important, but Ann Laura Stoler (cited in Glassman, 2011:7), cautioned against the over-emphasis on ‘the moment of the origin of sin’ when the dice for any practice (in her case racial discourse) was cast. In this study, the importance of circumcision as a practice overrides its origin. Lightfoot-Klein (1989: 23) examination of the circumcision as a practice concludes that it replaced human sacrifice as a way of placating hostile forces and spirits. Bolande (1969) also underscores the value of circumcision as a requisite to marriage for many communities. Likewise, the Agikuyu’s importance of circumcision goes beyond its origin.

Circumcision in Africa is a very crucial stage in life and was marked by a formal retreat into ‘school’ (Anderson, 1970; Herzog, 1973). According to these authors, when initiates retreated into seclusion, they were taught the necessary skills for growth and maturity in society and the new roles they would assume following circumcision. These studies do not however, discuss the essence of this ‘formal schooling’ as a site where the construction of masculinity took place. They, however, provide a useful basis for this research to connect circumcision to masculinities among the Agikuyu.

Droggers (1980: 62) notes that although the Cushites and some Nilotes practice circumcision, the practice is dominant among the Bantu. In support of this, Battignole (1984: 32) posits that the practice of circumcision is one of the most important rituals in one's life. For the Bantu speaking people, he argues, circumcision is the cornerstone of 'tribal' life. Mandela (1994: 93) notes that a Xhosa man could only inherit property, marry or officiate ethnic rituals after circumcision. He adds that a Xhosa man counts his years as man from the date of circumcision. In many communities in Africa, age set system is pegged on circumcision. These studies anchored the premise of my work since the circumcision rite was so much important for the development of the age-set system.

In many cases including among the Abatachoni of Western Kenya, delayed circumcision meant delayed maturity (Lihraw, 2010: 137). Among the Samburu, circumcision and age set system are qualified as rites of maturation as they mark the gradual physical and social maturation of the *morran* because they reinforce values, ideals, behaviour and social obligations (Fumagali, 1977). Indeed, among the Bantu circumcision gives a man the identity of being an adult and those who do not practice it are seen as children. Wawire (2010) notes that, the Luo man is seen by the other ethnic communities as a child simply on the basis of circumcision.

For Hollis (1990), Waller and Spear (1993: 42), the Maasai boy only became mature after circumcision. He was then given special treatment that included staying in his own hut and joining other warriors. The Maasai circumcision was also the avenue through which the non-Maasai could be accepted and integrated. The Nuer did not ordinarily circumcise but the ritual was very important as a cleansing ritual especially for those who had committed incest. Though

these studies do not directly deal with the Kikuyu history and have not interrogated the transformation of the kikuyu circumcision rite, they anchor the goals of the current investigation.

The relationship between circumcision and manhood was central to this research. This relationship has been the subject of studies among the Bukusu and the Meru of Kenya, Gisu of Uganda, the Aranda, the Aborigines of Australia to name but these few. Suzette (1994: 188) notes that for the Gisu, circumcision is the only way boys validate their manhood. Among the Aranda of Australia, she posits that the initiates were not supposed to show any sign of pain during the circumcision procedure. Among the Aborigines, male solidarity and hierarchy are closely associated with the bestowal of and submission to pain in the circumcision ritual. Ngxamngxa, (1971) argues that any Xhosa man who chose to undergo the hospital circumcision was ridiculed as not being “man enough”. Indeed, South African manhood status is held with a lot of importance. These studies illuminated this research through giving insightful information on how societies attach “real” masculinity and “true” manhood to the practice of circumcision. They gave the basis on which this study was underpinned as it analyzed the formation of Agikuyu notion of masculinity as encapsulated in circumcision.

The theme of circumcision as a site of learning refers us to how the initiates confronted new ideas of belonging to society. Njiru (1981) describes how the youth were inducted into ethnic knowledge. Mbiti (1969: 119), Kakai (1992), and Lihraw (2010: 153) emphasize the relationship between circumcision and community rituals. Like Njiru, they reiterate the value of initiation as the period when initiates learnt the secrets of their community, sexuality, marriage and procreation. Kenyatta (1938: 75) observes that the initiation of both sexes was the most

important custom among the Gikuyu as it was looked upon as a deciding factor in giving the boy or the girl the status of manhood or womanhood. Kenyatta argues that the Gikuyu ethnic community was based on three important factors; these were *nyumba* (family), *muhiriga* (clan) and *riika* (age grade system) (1938:1). *Riika* was directly dependent on circumcision of males and therefore this shows how important circumcision was and without it there was no harmony in the whole community. It is within the *riika* that the community values were acquired. While these studies are very informative, most of them with the exception of Kakai's (1992), describe a pre-colonial/traditional setting and locate the practice in its 'ethnographic present'. Thus, they do not address the colonial and post-colonial setting and do not track the dynamism in the practice over time.

The nature of male circumcision among the Gikuyu has also been described at length by many scholars. Leakey (1977: 603) is an anthropological study which is largely descriptive of the nature of Agikuyu circumcision. Noting that the circumciser was an expert who must have had many years of experience, he shows that each initiate was supported by a sponsor who, in turn, received a number of goats from the parents of the initiates. Elders played an important role in this process and were also rewarded with a goat from the parents of the initiates. According to Rukunga (1993: 13), there was the physical withdrawal of the initiates from the family members to where they received instructions and learning concerning their new status. The studies highlighted above were valuable in this research as they helped to lay a basis on the traditional nature of Agikuyu circumcision, upon which the transformations that have occurred over time could be traced. However, they accord little attention to the content of the knowledge imparted and how it related to formation of men in the society.

The westernizing and modernizing influence of the colonial period transformed the nature of circumcision. Such influences were strongest in the socio-economic and political life of the Africans (Huxley, 1948; Rodney, 1972; Leys, 1975; Tignor, 1976). The key objective of the missionaries was to change the African “primitive” way of life and “civilize” them. The colonialists and the missionaries used the chiefs and the leaders in order to change the African culture. In particular, the impact of western medicine and education on the social life of Africans is notable (Anderson, 1970; Odinga 1990; Shilaro, 1991; Gimode, 1993). These studies illuminated my study by helping us understand the transformation that occurred during the colonial period.

Odinga (1990: 49) shows how Western forms of health services were introduced in Kenya through doctors who accompanied various expeditions, missionaries, explorers and later the colonial government. This followed the opening up of health facilities in many parts of the country. Though Odinga's is an urban study of health services, it gave this study a basis to explore effects that Western medicine had in the rural areas on circumcision. Shilaro (1991: 105) explains that the chiefs and headmen were occasionally invited for tea and the converted (to Christianity) Africans would be given gifts in order to encourage and entice others into joining Christianity and adopt a European lifestyle.

Prior to the coming of the Europeans, Anderson (1970: 104) asserts that rites of passage were the equivalent of ‘formal school’ in many African societies. He notes the role played by Europeans in reshaping Africans notions of formal school with the introduction of reading, writing and examinations. This had an impact on the indigenous institutions because the new type of

education was seen as the key to economic and political progress. This change affected African rites of passage a great deal. Today, Agikuyu male circumcision is affected by the school system as described in chapter four. This study analyzes how the formal element of retreat after circumcision helped to forge notions of manhood among the initiates.

The introduction of Western education and medicine had impacts on the African culture. Missionary and medical discourses understood African circumcision rite to be unhygienic, barbaric, painful and hence torturous (Opoku, 1990: 533; Shilaro, 1991:105). Opoku shows how circumcision was opposed by the missionaries. However, his study, like many others, easily shifts to focus on clitoridectomy. Writing on clitoridectomy, scholars have outlined the changes, conflict and continuity of the practice during the colonial period (Bewes, 1953; Kanake, 2001; Thomas, 2003; Muraya, 2009). Such studies illuminate this study by providing a basis to analyze the impact of European activities on the Africans' way of life. However, our study seeks to understand the impact of colonial influences on male circumcision.

Thomas, (2003: 10) clearly outlines the controversies between the colonialists, missionaries and the African converts on the one hand and those who stuck to tradition on the other hand. This conflict was exacerbated by the fact that circumcision was attached to reproduction. This led to seclusion of the uninitiated Meru girls as they were seen as a group that was physically able but not socially consecrated to conceive and give birth. Muraya (2009) studied the Agikuyu clitoridectomy and shows the changes that the rite underwent during the colonial period. Kanake (2001: 6), writing on the Tharaka, shows that even though the practice of clitoridectomy was opposed by colonialism and health workers, it continues to be practiced. Though these studies

are on female circumcision, they informed our study and generated questions about the attitudes and perceptions of the colonialists, missionaries and Africans towards male circumcision especially during the colonial period that were germane to our work.

How was manhood constructed through the process of urbanization in colonial Kenya? White's (1990) study aptly illuminates the discourse among the Gikuyu on responsible manhood in the context of changes wrought by the Mau Mau. She describes men as a gendered category, an idea that is in most cases ignored. She discusses the movement of men to urban areas to seek for employment and the changing gender relations as effected by the problem of housing in the urban areas. White does not discuss circumcision and misses an important avenue for the construction of manhood. This study sought to find how urbanization and the new gender relations constructed in the colonial period affected the rite.

In post-independence Kenya, scholars have analyzed African cultural practices. Mwaniki (1985) posited that customs are being weighed down by modernization and modern education and thus will die a natural death. Rukunga (1993: 4) reiterates that the modern societies have lost or are in the process of losing the rites of passages. In addition, Were and Wandibba (1986) note that, though the practice of male circumcision has remained, only the 'physical cutting' has prominence because the socio-cultural meaning of the cut has lessened. Nonetheless, the above writers have argued with only the traditional concept of circumcision in their minds. They do not trace the changes in the society that could have impacted on the rite. Therefore, this study analyzed how male circumcision among the Agikuyu has transformed to fit the modern social setup of the Agikuyu community.

Finally, there is the literature that examines the nexus between ethnic politics and circumcision in Kenya and the impact it has had on the Gikuyu society and the nation as a whole. The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) referred to this as ‘the politics of the foreskin’, the stereotyping that individuals in some communities deploy as a measure for leadership (KNCHR, 2006: 44). Although this type of stereotyping was evident during the colonial period (Wachanga, 1975; Mutiso, 1975; Atieno-Odhiambo, 2002), it became more pronounced in Kenya, with the return of multiparty politics in 1991. Atieno-Odhiambo (2002: 242) is explicit on how the Luo were considered as the ‘other’ in the Kenya political space as explained in chapter five. This research inquires into the relationship between political tribalism and circumcision. It analyzes how circumcision was used to frame ethnic differences historically and also in contemporary times.

In a nutshell there are studies that describe or analyze the Agikuyu male circumcision whether from political, socio-cultural or anthropological perspectives. These studies are useful in their description and accounts of how the Agikuyu male circumcision was done and its importance. However, this study too engrossed a historical analysis of the practice of Agikuyu male circumcision. It sought to shed light on how the practice has transformed over time and impacted on the perceptions and attitudes within the community and values around masculinity and politics in contemporary Kenya. Thus, this work focused on transformations in nature and significance of male circumcision among the Agikuyu of Kiambu from 1945-2008. The study analyzed how such transformation in circumcision related to Agikuyu notions of masculinity and what salience it had in Kenyan politics.

1.7.2 Theoretical Framework

Initiation rituals in Africa have been extensively studied by historians, sociologists and anthropologists. Consequently, there is a lot of information on initiation rituals written from a variety of perspectives. At the beginning of 20th Century, many writers on initiation rites aimed at explaining their origin or function in the society. During this period, which coincided with colonialism, the studies on culture were dominated by amateur anthropologists, administrators, settlers, traders, missionaries and adventurers (Ogot, 1976: 2). Most of these researchers preferred a descriptive approach to simply explain the origin and role of various institutions and values in the African culture from an evolutionary and functionalist perspective. Let us examine some of these theories that have been used to study circumcision as a rite of passage.

First, evolutionary theory draws from the pioneer work of Auguste Comte, Hebert Spencer and Charles Darwin (Kakai, 1992: 18; Piel and Oyeneye 1998: 280). It was perhaps Darwin who popularized this theory with his work on the biological evolution of species, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. Evolutionary theory adopted the notion of survival for the fittest. Anthropologists who adopted the theory looked at the development of institutions as a ladder, evolving and progressing from simple to complex forms (Ogot, 1972: 3). For these anthropologists however, studying African institutions was held up as a means of understanding themselves, that is, where they were before modernity. This constituted what scholars such as Edward Said (1979) characterize as the process of ‘othering’ the non-western world experience. The image of the other was therefore fostered on Africa, as it became the perfect laboratory for European self-understanding.

This process of ‘othering’ was exacerbated by the already sown seeds of racial inequality through slave trade and by writings of Joseph Gibineans entitled *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races* (Thornton, 1965). Those operating from within the colonial school of thought adopted evolutionary approach in order to justify their superiority over “uncivilized” Africans. As Evans-Pritchard (1940) argued, Europeans should study primitive societies in order to understand how they were long time ago. Given this background, the theory has been criticized for the racial overtones that signify it. Indeed it was used to justify colonialism as the Europeans sought to “civilize” the “primitive” Africans.

Devoid of its racial overtones, evolutionary theory has been used by some African scholars. In his study of the Kipsigis Mwanzi (1977:107), uses this approach to explain how some institutions, including the circumcision the rite, within the Kipsigis society came into being. Writing on the Pare of Tanzania, Kimambo (1969) explains the emergence of the Pare and their various institutions having come from Kiumbi (God the creator).

The evolutionary theory is weak on other grounds. Piel and Oyeneeye (1998: 285) argue that sometimes there is little that is known about the origin of institutions or values. Thus the evolutionary theory relies on observation, guesses and assumptions which lead, at best, to conjecture. In addition, this approach fails to explain the continuity and survival of traditional religious rituals in modern or developing societies. This is because such studies are largely ahistorical as they fail to capture the nuances in the pattern of change in society fully. Piel and Oyeneeye (1998: 286) note that change, for example, in the economic way of life from pastoral to agricultural are not the same as change in religious institutions. The evolutionary approach is

therefore not adequate for this study. This study is about the survival, continuity and transformation of Agikuyu male circumcision.

Secondly, the functionalist perspective was developed in the 20th Century by a group of anthropologists, notably Bronislaw Malinowski. The approach explained the functions of various institutions in a society. Writing as a critique of evolutionary theory, functionalists believed that evolutionary theory lacked the tool to explain institutions in 'primitive' societies. Instead functionalists argued that a society is a whole body consisting of interrelated parts which function for the wellbeing of the whole.

Functionalism lays its emphasis on equilibrium rather than change. It argues that a society purposes to promote equilibrium in order to maintain its wellbeing. The study by Kenyatta (1938; 1942), and Leakey (1977) have this postulation. Others like Muriuki (1977), Battignole, (1984), Mwaniki (1985) and Kakai (1992) have applied the theory in their historical studies. However, functionalist approach has been criticized for insisting on order, consensus and stability.

Male circumcision is a rite that lies at the intersection of the functioning of the society's gender relations. While understanding its origins and functions in contemporary society is important, the task of understanding its function as conceived by this study must be located within gender relations in the society. Thus, we cannot locate our theoretical appreciation of this rite simply at the level of evolution of institutions and their functions. There is need to locate circumcision in the context of changing gender relations in society.

In most patriarchal societies in Africa, people were and still are required to pass through some rite of passage into adulthood. The value and significance of initiation was structured around gender power dynamics. Thus, not only did males get circumcised in order to assume new roles and responsibilities in society, but these roles were primarily driven by gendered power relations. This was clearly depicted in the type of education the initiates were given, as men were prepared to become warriors, elders and husbands. Through clitoridectomy, girls were ushered into a perceived 'domestic' domain where the division of labour expected them to take charge of the care giving economy. As such, one cannot avoid locating the study of male circumcision among the Gikuyu within these gendered relations.

Unfortunately gender has been taken to be synonymous to women (Cornwall, 2005: 1), thereby obscuring the fact that men are just as gendered as women. This study sought to understand what role circumcision plays in the construction of masculinity. The central premise of gender has been the manner in which relations between genders sanction to exercise power over women (Maria Correia and Bannon, 2006: 245). However, this is one side of the story because gender is all about the way social structures and authority gives men power over other men and women. Gender and power are central to the relations not just between men and women but also between men and men. The acknowledgement that gender struggles are not just between the two genders but also within the same gender, lay the foundations for the analysis of gendered power relations among men. This, in Connell's words, refers to a distinction between hegemonic and subordinated masculinities (Connell, 1987). This study seeks to analyse the Agikuyu hegemonic masculinities and subordinated masculinities through the prism of the circumcision rite.

Gender is central to any illuminating discourse of how to become a man. Indeed there are many ways of becoming or being man and every society has its notion of this process. Every society has its own set of values, rites and expectation to becoming a man. For most societies, maleness is associated with hard work, assertiveness and consequently laziness is rebuked (Bryant, 1949; Uchendu, 2008: 5). Becoming a man is portrayed since childhood (Uchendu, 2008), while in others most rituals would be accompanied by games such as bullfighting that imbue people with a sense of manhood (Kabaji, 2008: 34). In other words, manhood rotates around physical strength, hard work, assertiveness and power/authority.

Masculinity in Africa, just like any other, is characterized by the fact that how one becomes a man is not simply socially constructed but that such construction comes with pressure to conform to the ideals of manhood (Pleck, 1981). While there are many criteria applied for this transition to adulthood, circumcision is an overwhelmingly important process across many cultures. Through circumcision a man symbolically gained power, and could then marry, become a warrior and dominate. Therefore, hegemonic tendencies accompany the practice. This is why hegemonic masculinity is an important aspect of exploring Agikuyu male circumcision and the notions of masculinity that pertain to being a circumcised man.

The notion of hegemonic masculinity has its roots in a study conducted in Australian high schools by Kessler et.'al. in the 1980s (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Since then hegemonic masculinity, has been extensively used in different fields such as education (Brod, 1987; Martin 1995), criminology (Messerschmidt, 1993), sports (Hanke, 1992), health (Kupers 1993) and ethnographic studies (Cheng, 1996). Robert Connell defines it as the culturally

idealized form of masculine character (1990: 83). He clearly borrows heavily from Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony. According to Gramsci, hegemony is indirect control of a dominant group over the subordinate one. In this study, the older men in the Agikuyu society exercised indirect control over younger men. However, Gramsci also showed aspects of hegemony in the struggles of people as they try to maneuver their position in society. As such this study analysed how the younger men tried to overcome the indirect control of the older men. Apart from the gender struggles between the genders, Connell shows the distinction between subordinate and hegemonic men. From this understanding, it became clear that gender relations are nuances beyond exploitative relation between men and women, and also within any gender.

Hegemonic masculinity has not been without its critics. Whitehead (1999: 5) has criticized hegemonic masculinity as a fluid concept. However, this criticism portrays the very same strength of a hegemonic model. Hegemonic tendencies are not fixed and this makes it very useful in this historical study as it takes the fact that change is inevitable and masculinities are socially constructed and therefore they are subject to change. Thus hegemonic masculinity embeds a historically dynamic gender. By using this theory the study analyzed how notions of Kikuyu hegemonic masculinity as spawned through circumcision have changed over time.

Collier (1998), notes that hegemonic masculinity is only used to portray the 'negative' character of men such as aggressiveness, dispassionate and indignant. However this criticism is weak as hegemonic masculinity is used to understand the unequal relations between men and the different gender roles different men play in their family and work relationship (Connell and

Messerschmidt (2005). Therefore, hegemonic masculinity is not a representation of a certain type of men but rather a way that men position themselves through discursive practices.

For the Agikuyu, circumcision has been used as the way to becoming man. The circumcised man looks down upon the uncircumcised as inferior and becomes a role model for the uncircumcised. Indeed uncircumcised ‘boys’ look up to the day they will also become “real” men through circumcision. This credence possessed by the Gikuyu man has been used to misjudge the societies who do not practice circumcision. Kenyan politics have in the past been filled with this type of stereotyping. It is important to note however, circumcision is not the only stereotyping issue in Kenyan politics. This is because, politically, the Kikuyu have failed to support communities that practice circumcision. However, this political scenario is beyond the scope of this study. Thus this research, using the concept of hegemonic masculinity, explores this claim in the context of changing Agikuyu masculinity as influenced by circumcision.

1.8 Research Methodology

This study analyzed the changing nature of circumcision among the Agikuyu of Kiambu in the period 1945 to 2008. To do this, it adopted a historical methodology to derive the relevant data and analyze it. Where necessary, and given the nature of data, an interdisciplinary perspective was employed to facilitate a better understanding of the issues.

1.8.1 Site of the Study

The study was conducted in Kiambu County, which among other counties came into existence after the promulgation of the New Constitution on the 27th August, 2010. The County is predominantly occupied by the Kikuyu speaking people. Kiambu is the home to the first

president of Kenya, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta and a large number of prominent politicians whose influence on Kenyan politics was notable. As such, it is believed that the Kiambu people dominated the politics of Kenya during Kenyatta's era and this has implications on the politics of masculinity as they relate to perceived notions of leadership. Kiambu County borders Murang'a to the North and North East, Machakos to the East, Nairobi and Kajiado to the South, Nakuru to the West, and Nyandarua Counties to the North West (see figure 2). The County is strategically positioned especially due to its proximity to Nairobi County. Due to her high altitude, the climate of Kiambu is generally cool with reliable rainfall. The major economic activity is agriculture, with the region producing such crops as coffee, tea, and dairy products.

1.8.2 Data Collection Procedure

The study involved collecting data from both secondary and primary sources. Secondary sources are those sources of data that have gone through the process of interpretation and reach the researcher as a third person. These sources reflect the knowledge of those who might not have evidence of the actual events. They played a vital role in determining the gaps in knowledge and form a useful building block for this study. They included journal articles, opinion pieces, books and related publications. Most of these secondary sources were found in the libraries. For this study, this data was sourced from the Kenya National Archives, relevant hospital and church records, the Post-Modern Library at Kenyatta University, Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library of the University of Nairobi, and British Institute of Eastern Africa Library. A major shortcoming of the secondary sources is that they may be biased through the process of interpretation. However, this shortcoming was overcome by proving the veracity of the secondary sources against the primary sources.

Primary sources of data are the sources that have not gone through the process of interpretation and come to the researcher directly from those who witnessed an event or have firsthand knowledge of it. These sources report witness account and are very important to a historian. Some historians like Arthur Marwick define history as the systematic analysis of primary sources and reliability of a historical work is based on the extent it uses these sources (Marwick, 1970:131; Marwick, 2001: 1). Primary sources are divided into two: written and oral sources. Written primary sources include data derived from the archives. For this study, such data included but was not confined, to ethnographic reports of regions, political record books, personal diaries and newspaper reports. The data was derived primarily from the Kenya National Archives in Nairobi whose collection on Kiambu in particular and other regions where circumcision is practiced is extensive. In particular, archival data for socio-economic profiles of Kiambu was examined. Further, attention was paid to transformations in circumcision as reported in ethnographic reports of early anthropologists including the writing of early missionaries, school teachers and personnel in the medical department.

The second form of primary sources is the oral. Arthur Marwick distinguishes between oral tradition and oral history. He notes that, oral history includes evidence that is passed down over the last 100 years. This is different from oral traditions which include information that is older than 100 years (2001:1). This study sourced this information mainly through oral interviews. In this process observation was also employed as it helped in evaluating authenticity of information given.

1.8.3 Sampling Procedures

Oral information was collected through the snow balling sampling method. Informed by the fact that this is a historical study, informants were purposively selected. The focus was largely on people whose knowledge of the history and practice of circumcision in Kiambu was established. Thus, respondents were cautiously and purposely selected and also through recommendation to specific people in the field. This means that though an age criteria was useful, where younger people were recommended, the basis of their knowledge was established and hence interviewed them. Ultimately, though precedence was given to the elderly people above the age of 60 who were expected to provide oral testimony on the Agikuyu circumcision. The choices were flexible, guided by the judgment on what was relevant. People from other communities with relevant information on the subject were interviewed. Even though the study is on male circumcision, respondents were both males and females.

1.8.4 Research Instruments

It is important to insist that contemporary practices of circumcision differ both in terms of how they are organized, who participates, and where the initiates are circumcised. Today much of circumcision takes place in centers organized around churches. To develop an understanding of this a questionnaire guide was used to elicit information on traditional aspects of circumcision (see Appendix A1). It ensured a flexible guide designed to elicit comprehensive coverage of the issues.

1.8.5 Data Analysis

The research culminated with analysis of the collected raw data. The aim was to derive information that illuminates the historical transformations of circumcision. The data analysis was largely qualitative. Primary data elicited through interviews and questionnaires (see appendices

A1 and A2) was transcribed immediately after collection in order to retain and keep track of its validity and to ease the analysis. Specific methodologies of history were applied in order to come up with the pattern of how Agikuyu male circumcision was and how it has transformed over time. One of the weaknesses of a historical study according to Jenkins is that, it is epistemologically fragile because the object of history is in the past and studying the past is problematic because it is not directly accessible and testable (Jenkins 1991: 8). It relies on the availability, resourcefulness and reliability of the sources. Due to this fact, primacy was given to establishing authenticity of the sources of information. This authenticity was attained through historical criticism, evaluation and comparison of the collected information with the existing one. The results were then interpreted in support or disapproval of the assumptions of the proposed study.

1.8.6 Data Management and Ethical considerations

Ethics were considered and data collection commenced after getting permission from the various authorities. The researcher upheld the various principles of research such as voluntary participation of the informants without coercion or inducement. The researcher maintained high level of confidence and respect for the informants. All sources used in this research were acknowledged or credited. For the case of written documents used in this study, copyright was maintained and plagiarism was avoided.

1.8.7 Summary

It was the objective of this chapter to provide a background and objectives of this study. This study aimed at analyzing the transformation of Agikuyu circumcision from 1945 to 2008. The background of the importance of the rite among the Agikuyu in the making of men is established as men took up new roles and responsibilities only after undergoing circumcision. The

hegemonic masculinity theoretical tool as used in this study was also addressed in this chapter. This theory is used in this work to bring out how indirect control was exerted by older men upon the younger men based on gerontocracy and circumcision. In addition, this chapter has pointed out the methodological tools that were used in this study. Collaboration of primary data and secondary data to outline the authenticity of the information gathered, as a way of data analysis is emphasized in this chapter. In the next chapter, we analyse the practice of circumcision in the pre-colonial setting of the Agikuyu society.

CHAPTER TWO

SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ORGANISATION OF THE AGIKUYU IN THE PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD

2.0. Introduction

In chapter one, we outlined the objectives of the study and stated its theoretical and methodological tools. In this chapter we examine the political, social and economic life of the Agikuyu in the pre-colonial set-up. Among the key issues to be discussed are that, contrary to the Eurocentric preposition, African traditional societies had attained some level of development prior to the coming of the Europeans. There was order in the manner of economic, social and political organization of these societies. The Agikuyu community was no exception. This chapter discusses the Agikuyu male circumcision before 1945 in the context of the overall development of the Agikuyu society. The chapter is an analysis of the Gikuyu people; their origin, economic, political and social organization as a basis of establishing the context in which circumcision emerged as one of the most important ceremony among the Agikuyu before 1945. The core argument is that the importance of circumcision was reflected in every aspect of the Agikuyu life. Using the theoretical tool of hegemonic masculinity, the chapter shows that the importance of male circumcision was not simply for the whole community but specifically for the individual Gikuyu man, as it paved way for them to demonstrate courage and exercise hegemony.

2.1 The Agikuyu Setting before Colonialism.

The Agikuyu are Bantu-speaking group in Kenya. The origin of the Agikuyu has been explained through various migration theories, myths and oral traditions. In one particular myth, the Agikuyu are portrayed as brothers to the Maasai, Akamba and Athi. This relation is traced from

the myth that Gikuyu, Maasai, Kamba and Athi were sons of the same father (Ochieng, 1974:11). When the father was about to die, so the myth goes, he gave a herding stick, a quiver of arrows, a bow and a digging stick to his sons. Depending on the choice of each, the four sons became the ancestors of Maasai, Kamba, Athi and Gikuyu. In this case, the Agikuyu are descendants of the son who choose a digging stick. The choice of each of these sons is reflected in the economic activity of each community mentioned here. Hence according to this myth, Agikuyu are farmers.

The second myth is that of *Mukurwe wa Gathanga*, probably the most common of all them. According to this myth, *Ngai*, created a man, *Gikuyu*, gave him a wife, *Mumbi* and gave them a beautiful garden called *Mukurwe wa Gathanga* to settle in (Kenyatta, 1939: 3; Muriuki, 1971: 46; Ochieng, 1974: 24). Later Gikuyu and Mumbi were blessed with nine daughters namely *Wanjiku*, *Wanjiru*, *Wambui*, *Waithera*, *Wairimu*, *Waceera*, *Mwithaga*, *Wangari*, and *Wangui* (Ochieng, 1974). When the daughters came of age, their father, Gikuyu, was distressed as they did not have men to marry them (Kenyatta 1938; Ochieng 1974: 26). However, after praying and sacrificing to *Ngai*, He provided nine men who married these girls, raised families from which Gikuyu people are believed to have originated. This myth reverberates with the biblical Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and hence some argue that this is the reason why the Agikuyu accepted Christianity easily¹. It is worth noting that Agikuyu myths of origin do not mention circumcision or even trace its origin. The dearth of information on circumcision in Agikuyu

¹ See chapter 4 on how Kikuyu compare themselves to the Israelites hence 'favoured' by God.

myths of origin, give credence to the argument that the Agikuyu may have learnt circumcision from a community they had interacted with.²

Apart from the myths, the Agikuyu, together with other Bantu-speakers, are said to have migrated from the Congo Basin, moving eastwards until they reached present day Kenya (Ochieng, 1974: 20; Wanguhu, 2010). After arrival in Central Kenya, the Agikuyu settled in 3 territorial areas of Metumi/Fort Hall (Murang'a), Kabete/Karura (Kiambu) and Gaki (Nyeri) (Muriuki, 1974: 15). Kiambu area, originally owned by the indigenous Aathi, is believed to have been the latest settlement of the Gikuyu (KNA, DC/KBU/7/2A). Other migration stories state that the Agikuyu together with other Bantu, migrated from *Misri* or *Abyssinia* (may be Egypt and Ethiopia respectively), to their present homelands (Muriuki, 1971; Ochieng, 1974)

In the Agikuyu migration story, historians and anthropologists alike have mentioned that they learnt the rite of circumcision from the Cushites (Tamrat, 1972; Lightfoot, 1989). Though migration stories may be more factual than the myths of origin and due to the linguistic similarities between communities, we may not discard the mythical theories because they form an integral part of any community's history.

2.2. Socio-Economic Organization of the Agikuyu

The Agikuyu people practiced farming. Though they are described as largely cultivators who grew crops such as sorghum, millet, arrow roots and beans, they also kept animals such as goats,

² Many communities practicing this rite have an explanation of where the rite began. However, despite the wide literature on Agikuyu circumcision, its origin is not known. It is stated that that the Kikuyu learnt circumcision from either the Cushites or the Aathi, see Muriuki, 1977:39.

cattle and sheep for their social purposes such as paying dowry, cleansing or purification rites, offering sacrifices and also for food. This explains their consummate attachment to land (Kenyatta, 1938: 55; Sorrenson, 1967: 2).

Agikuyu had a sense of time and their socio-economic life was described using seasons. Muriuki describes Agikuyu calendar which had two seasons (*imera* singular: *kimera*) (Muriuki, 1974: 3). These seasons were named after the crops the Agikuyu were planting in that particular time. According to Muriuki, these two seasons; *kimera kia njahi* (the seasons of the *dicholos lablab* beans) and *kimera kia mwere* (season of the Bulrush millet) formed the one year in the Agikuyu 'calendar'. The season of *dicholos lablab* coincided with long rains probably because these beans required long rains in order to have a bounty harvest. On the other hand, *kimera kia mwere*, was a period of short rains. These seasons were very important in the calendar of circumcision of men. This is because, if there was no rain and consequently less harvest or famine, male circumcision would be postponed as discussed below.

In the Agikuyu calendar, circumcision played a very important role. This is because it was after circumcision that Agikuyu men joined age-sets. Apart from the seasons, age sets were used as markers of time (Muriuki, 1974). The names of the age set were given to mark important events just before or after circumcision. For instance the 1864 age set was called *Ngigi* (Locust), 1885 age set was referred to as *Mutung'u* (smallpox), and the 1892 age set was named *Njenga* (from *cenga* which means to cut). This acted as a mark that in the year 1864 there was a locust invasion in Agikuyu land, in 1885 there was an outbreak of smallpox and in the 1890s the Agikuyu were experiencing raids from the Maasai which the Agikuyu warriors retaliated by fighting and

cutting the Maasai using swords. These age-sets were very important for a community that did not have any written records (Kenyatta, 1938).

The Agikuyu economic production was not only for subsistence but they also traded with other people like the Maasai, Akamba, Gumba and the Coastal merchants (Muriuki, 1974:136; Ochieng, 1974, Tignor, 1976: 14). The Agikuyu understood their ecology and they rarely experienced economic crisis. In the event of a crisis, they had ways of dealing with it. For instance, Tignor (1976: 11) describes how the year 1898 in Kiambu was characterized by such epidemics in Kiambu as rinderpest and smallpox, which made people to seek refuge in less affected areas like *Metumi* (Murang'a).

The family was a very important institution among the Agikuyu. Kenyatta describes the family as the basic economic unit and one of the three most important pillars of the Agikuyu community, others being the clan and the age-set (1938: 1). Bogonko (1992) notes that, the family was the center of giving and receiving instructions. Among the Agikuyu the father was the head of the family. In case of his death, *irigithathi* (first child) would take over. This explains why the Agikuyu community, being a patriarchal society, gave more recognition to a boy-child than a girl child right from birth. The birth of a boy child was announced by five ululations while that of a girl received four ululations. Indeed the boy was treated with prominence and superiority from birth. However, when a boy attained the age of circumcision, it was mandatory to undergo the rite or failure to which he would be treated with contempt.

Indeed, Kenyatta (1938: 20) describes how the first born son received instructions from the father as a way of preparing him as the family *muramati*, (trustee). Hence, giving birth to a boychild was seen as an achievement. In some cases, if a woman did not give birth to a boy child, the husband would often get married to another wife (Milka, O.I, 22/11/2012). A boy child was seen as the perpetuator of the family line. Of more importance was the respect and status the boy accorded both the mother and the father. Due to the importance accorded to a boy child, any woman who gave birth to a boy child was seen as stronger woman than the one who gave birth to girls only. However, the virility of the boy and his strength as a man was only affirmed after undergoing circumcision. To the father, the criterion to rise up the socio-political ladder was based on his sons. The Kikuyu man would only be promoted to a junior elder when his son attained the circumcision age (Lambert, 1956: 80).

The Agikuyu also had special trades that contributed to the society's wellbeing. Iron workers, tanners, bee keepers, potters were all important people. These special trades were gendered as men did iron working, tanning and bee keeping while pottery was mostly a preserve of the women. Indeed circumcision process was incomplete without the special trades. For instance, circumcisers relied directly on iron workers to acquire their tools of work such as *ruenji rwa irua* (special clitoridectomy razor) and *kahiu ka irua* (a very thin razor-like used to circumcise boys) (Milka, O.I, 22/11/2012). Honey and iron tools were gifts offered to the circumciser and elders by the parents of the initiates (Leakey, 1977: 313). In addition, the initiates had special attire after graduation (*Nguo ya kiumiri*), which was made by tanners. Religious specialists were also very important in the circumcision process (Leakey, 1977: 1120). The medicine men for

instance, blessed the initiates and sanctified the circumcision field so as to free it from any evil eye (Cagnolo, 1933: 86).

Socially, the life of any Gikuyu man remained incomplete without circumcision. According to Kenyatta (1938: 33), circumcision was the only qualification which gave a man the recognition of manhood and the right of citizenship. Although this qualification of manhood was only for the Gikuyu man, it was generalized to mean every other man, which was the basis of discriminating against communities that did not circumcise. Circumcision was also the antecedent to marriage. Kenyatta adds that no Kikuyu woman would dream of marrying an uncircumcised man. The importance of circumcision was also seen in leadership circles as no man could be a leader without circumcision.

2.3. Political Organization of the Agikuyu and the *Itwika* Ceremony

Among the Agikuyu, political leadership illustrates how gender interacted with gerontocracy. This is because leadership was not only a preserve of the men but specifically of elderly men. Age was therefore an important factor that was considered when taking a political office. Politically, Agikuyu were a decentralized community where decisions were made through consensus of the people especially the council of elders.

After circumcision Agikuyu men would join age sets. However, there were two dominant age sets (*Maina and Irungu*) that formed the leadership core. The change in leadership from one age set to another was called *itwika* and took place after a generation which would take between 25-40 years (Lambert, 1956; Muriuki, 1971; Leakey, 1977). Kenyatta describes how the Kikuyu

itwika ceremony came into being. For him, Agikuyu were ruled by an authoritarian ‘king³’ who could not allow people to cultivate or clear the land. Therefore, the people organized a revolt led by the *aregi* (revolters) who formed the *iregi* group. After the *iregi* group came the *ndemi* (cutters) who cut trees and cleared bushes in order to cultivate. This revolution came to be known as *itwika* (to break away).

Kenyatta thus describes that the idea of *itwika* was adopted by the Agikuyu when they formed two generations; *Maina* and *Irungu* to be leading the community alternatively in order to avoid despotic leaders again (Kenya, 1938: 186). This explanation by Kenya is probably mythical, as the elders in Kiambu could not relate to this story of origin (As quoted by Leakey, 1977: 1281). However the importance of *itwika* in the lives of Agikuyu men and the whole community at large had grown to override its origin.

Although *itwika* was held after a generation, disparity in the number of years that each generation would be in ‘office’ is seen in the writings of different scholars with Cagnolo (1933: 202), citing 20-30 years, Lambert (1956: 38), 30 years while Hobley (1938: 93) cites 15 years. Prinns (not dated) even cites as many as 40 years. However, this disparity may not be consequential because, as Prinns puts it, the years were not in strict sense European years. Still, Hobley (1938: 94) adds that this disparity was due to the fact that the next *itwika* ceremony was decided upon by the elders and therefore it was not brought about by some automatic elapsing of years.

³The Kikuyu social and political organization did not include any system of kingship or chieftainship. However, most Europeans confused the leadership of a *Muthamaki* to mean a chief or a king. Leakey explains that a *Muthamaki* would be any person selected to lead a committee of elders, but he did not have any powers vested in his title since he had to consult the others (1977: 993). In this case Kenya’s explanation could be mythical.

After circumcision, each man would join one generation. Since then, *itikwa* became a peaceful rotational change of government between the two generations. The ceremony continued until the Europeans came to Kikuyu land and they were against the traditional life of the Agikuyu because they saw it as primitive. The last *itwika* ceremony said to have been held in 1890s, the next one was to be held in 1925 but was declared illegal by the British government in 1925 (Lambert, 1956: 36; Muriuki 1974: 23).

2.4. Circumcision and the Development of Hegemonic Masculinity among the Agikuyu.

The general name given to circumcision by the Agikuyu is *irua*. Traditionally, it was used to encompass the whole process of initiation including the preparations and the ceremonies that were linked to it. Agikuyu circumcision was so important and one would not be considered fully Gikuyu without having undergone the process.⁴*Irua* applied for both girls and boys. While clitoridectomy has attracted enormous literature (Lightfoot-Klein, 1989; Kanake, 2001; Lynn, 2008; Muraya, 2009) given the controversies around it, this research focuses circumcision.

For the Agikuyu, male circumcision had several functions in society. Primarily, it was used to initiate the boys into adulthood. However, this process also implied accepting the initiate into full membership of the community. The process also had a learning (formal schooling) function. It was full of teachings of varied nature (see also section 2.5.2). It was during the seclusion that followed circumcision that teachings such as obedience and reverence for seniors, rules and regulations (taboo) on particular sexual behaviour and values were inculcated (KNA, MSS/7/3). For Kenyatta (1938), the process of *irua* was very important because it was a source of harmony for the Agikuyu. This harmony was created through formation of age-sets and the teachings

⁴For more on circumcision as a prerequisite of Agikuyu manhood see Kenyatta 1938; Lambert, 1956, Muriuki, 1974 and Leakey, 1977.

given during circumcision such as respect for authority. Leadership was organized based on gerontocracy. Elders exercised hegemony over younger men precisely because of circumcision and age. Hegemony was therefore central since there was no way the young men would oppose the senior men. However, if a young man portrayed a sense of wit, he would be allowed to sit in the circles of elders to help in making decisions. This organization in the Agikuyu society was impossible without circumcision because it was the base on which age-sets were formed.

The transition to adulthood carried rights and responsibilities. Lambert (1956: 66) notes that circumcision conferred the right of marriage and procreation. It was a taboo for the Agikuyu man or woman to marry or bring forth children before circumcision. This is because a grown up but uncircumcised man or woman was only physically able but not socially 'sanctified' to marry or give birth.

Of more importance was Agikuyu political organization which was directly pegged to circumcision. This is because a Gikuyu man would only climb the leadership ladder after joining an age set. Age-sets were formed through circumcision. After circumcision age-sets would form regiments (Lambert, 1956). It is from these regiments that the leaders would be chosen. Indeed no one would assume political responsibilities nor grow in the political ladder without having gone through the rite of circumcision. As a result, circumcision-based masculinity developed among the Agikuyu. Classical literature on the Gikuyu such as Kenyatta (1938) notes, only a circumcised man knows the right and wrong and therefore uncircumcised ones were regarded as children. Agikuyu masculinity led to the assumption that communities that did not circumcise

would not produce leaders.⁵ Prinns adds that an uncircumcised boy was not a full member of the community and it was only circumcision that would give a corollary entry into the community as a *mundu murume* (a real he-man). Thus circumcision was the only criterion for becoming a 'real' man in the Kikuyu community.

For the circumcising communities, circumcision process was not a mere event as the Europeans thought of it. It was a process that was well organized and planned in advance. The physical cutting was just a part of the event as circumcision would encompass a whole lot of procedures and rituals. The whole circumcision process would take days if not months depending on the practicing community. For the Bukusu, the preparation would take two months before the actual cut (Nalianya, 2012) while Dipio (2012) describes seven phases for a complete *imbalu* ceremony among the Bagisu. For the Agikuyu the preparations would vary from one or two weeks to several months (Cagnolo, 1933).

The Agikuyu circumcision was a communal affair where the young and old participated. The initiates were identified on the basis of age. Cagnolo (1933) observed that the age of the initiates was between 15-18 years while Leakey (1971) puts it at 18-22 years. The difference in age as cited by different scholars has less significance since circumcision was not held annually clitoridectomy. This is because a *muhingo* (closed period) of five seasons was practiced (Muriuki, 1971) in which no male circumcision was done. In addition, the boys waited until their numbers were enough to form an army regiment. Further, the Agikuyu years may not be identical to the European years (Lambert, 1956: 30).

⁵This research sought to analyze the relationship between Agikuyu male circumcision and political leadership. It sought to evaluate whether circumcision makes a man a good leader. This is explored in chapter four.

Once the circumcision year and candidates were identified, the elaborate procedures kicked off. Normally, each boy in the circumcision list went through a ritual called *guciarwo ringi* (to be born again) (Leakey, 1977: 550). The mother of the initiate was supposed to perform this ritual to commemorate the giving birth of the boy. This ritual signified that the boy was now detached from his mother and was ready to be a man; in other words, free from the soft and cowardly.

Secondly, the initiate and his parents were purified using blood from a slaughtered goat. After purification, the initiates painted themselves with the white chalk and carried a shield. Preparation for boys was different from the girls (Leakey, 1977: 667). The boys were painted using the white chalk while the girls used the red ochre. This was to make the girls more attractive and show their beauty. For boys, the issue was stoicism, strength, hegemony and courage. The symbolism here is unmistakable as it relates to the construction of masculinity. This masculinity was displayed in the seclusion period where boys involved themselves in hunting. Hunting skills showed readiness to join warriorhood. This explains why each initiate was given a shield made from the buffalo skin by his father as an indication that the father was preparing the boy to be a warrior. However, in the 20th century, the colonial government banned the Africans from hunting wildlife which affected the making of these shields (Salvadori, 1979).

A few days to the circumcision day, a well informed instructor gave lessons to the initiates. The gerontocratic logic was evident since the instructor was normally an old man who was wise enough to be trusted with the affairs of the community (Cagnolo 1933: 87). This was an important moment in every initiate's life since a form of education was imparted and the secrets of the community given (Agikuyu traditional education is elaborated in section 2.5.2 below). It

was during this period that the fathers of the initiates gave gifts to the elders. These gifts included several jars of beer, iron tools, honey, millet porridge and goats. They acted as a form of appreciation and respect to the elders.

Normally, the eve of circumcision entailed increased celebrations characterized by cooking lots of food and beer brewing. There were songs and dances (*maambura*) for everybody. The crowd participated in the dance to encourage the initiate and divert their attention from thinking of the painful experience ahead of them. However, Mugo wa Gatheru (1964: 60) describes how the singing crowd which included women and children followed him to the river while he was naked and this made him more embarrassed than encouraged. The dance was also believed to keep off evil spirits.

The actual circumcision day was a very important one for each initiate. It was a day to prove one's courage and manhood. The father of each initiate played a significant role. According to Cagnolo (1933: 87), each initiate was assisted out of the seclusion hut by the father. It was thus mandatory for the initiate's father to be physically present when his son was being circumcised.⁶ In case the biological father was not there, a man who befitted to be his father was sought to play the role. The circumcision process was carried with a lot of respect and secrecy. Although the Agikuyu male circumcision was and still is a cultural rite that was publicly conducted, it involved a level of secrecy that an outsider could not fathom. This explains why Europeans failed to understand the rituals performed in this process.

⁶Traditionally, the father was an important figure in the circumcision of his sons. However, various changes in the lives of the Agikuyu made women to become directly involved in their son's circumcision, see chapter 3

The circumciser was the man to make the difference in the life of the initiates. Traditional circumcisers were highly respected. Until the coming of the European, the circumciser was paid in kind using items such as iron tools, honey and goats. Ordinarily, as the circumciser carried out the much awaited operation, the initiates could not look at his face. They were supposed to be strong as any sign of cowardice could not be tolerated. If anyone showed fear or cried, he would be scorned by the whole community. Mugo wa Gatheru (1964: 62) points out that in 1936, he witnessed how one initiate was spat on the face by the fellow initiates because of crying during the circumcision rite. Since circumcision was a public affair, the crowd witnessing the procedure was very keen to point out any sign of flinching and such an initiate would be the community's laughing stock and a disgrace to the family, especially the father.

Indeed, this was the moment when the real man was made among the Agikuyu and all the women present were keen to point out any sign of cowardice from the initiates. This was because no woman would agree to be married by a coward. The same has been pointed out in other communities in Africa. Nalianya (2012) described the Bukusu circumcision as only for the brave. Among the Gisu the boys were not only supposed to remain silent but also not to show any emotions portraying pain (Khanakwa, 2010: 63) while among the Xhosa, Mandela describes the process as a trial of bravery and stoicism where a boy would cry but a real man conceals the pain (Mandela, 1994: 24).

Thus the 'Face the knife moment' was used by many communities to separate the brave from the cowards. This was the moment of making or breaking each initiate's masculine ego. It was a significant event in the development of hegemonic tendencies. Although men demonstrated

hegemony on women, cowardice during circumcision would relegate a man to the women's category. This is what Connell (2004) describes as inferior masculinity versus superior masculinity. While power is an element of hegemonic masculinity, Kimmel (2002) notes that it is exerted by men to women in the private sphere but dominant men exert such power to subordinate men in the public sphere. Thus, while in terms of gerontocracy, it was obvious to be a subordinate man to the seniors but on the other hand, it was a nightmare for any man to be considered a subordinate by his peers by the fact he showed cowardice during circumcision. Therefore, it was the aim of each initiate to portray courage and win the right to subsequently exercise hegemony.

Among the Agikuyu, the boys would at dawn walk to the river where they took a cold bath (Kamanja, O.I, 22/11/2012). This bath was symbolic in that the initiate was washing off his old life and ready to start a new one. In addition this early morning bath was believed to numb the body (*kugandia*) and hence lessen the pain since no anesthesia was used. The circumciser operated on the boys, one after the other. The boys were accompanied by their sponsors whose role was to give them moral support, advice and see them through the healing process. However, some writers have noted that the sponsors would not hold the boys since they were supposed to show courage while the girls would be held by two sponsors on either side since they were thought to be weaker (Gakuhi, 1972).

After the cut and the celebrations, the initiates would be secluded to allow the healing process. Cagnolo (1933: 91) notes that a temporary hut was built to accommodate the initiates during the seclusion period. The purpose of seclusion was two-fold. First, the initiate could not mix with the

community as they were considered ritually unclean. In addition, seclusion ensured continued education to the initiates (Lambert, 1956: 53). The ceremony would start by shaving the boys' heads. Cagnolo (1933: 90) notes that shaving each initiate was the role of women particularly the mother. However, in most cases, the real mother of the initiates looked for a trusted friend to shave the son on her behalf. While shaving, the hair was not allowed to drop on the ground because the Agikuyu believed that anyone would use it for witchcraft. Any misfortune occurring to either of the initiate was associated with the evil or bad omen. Thus, any abnormality or complications after circumcision was never considered as a health issue until the coming of the Europeans.

Afterwards, the community celebrated and engaged in feasting and drinking, songs and dances for the whole night with even the old participating to revive their memories of their past (Cagnolo, 1933: 91). The end of the physical cut did not mean that the circumcision process was over but it was just the beginning. The initiates retreated to the seclusion hut where they were fed and rested through the healing period. During their stay in seclusion, the initiates engaged in hunting to demonstrate their manhood because such skills were important as they showed that the initiate could be depended upon in the provision of security to his family and the community at large.

The initiates would walk around the home area where they would receive gifts and complements from the people. Cagnolo (1933: 93) also adds that the initiates would have their ears pierced and the elders would insert some piece of woods to the ear-holes. These wooden marks on the ear holes were to differentiate between the circumcised and the uncircumcised youth.

Once they healed, the initiates would reward the head elder who was also their spiritual father by cultivating his land. After this event, a festivity was held, a goat was slaughtered and that the same night the last *mambura* (celebrations) was done and the following morning the new *anaake* (newly circumcised) went back to their homes as full men. At their homes they were received with celebration and jubilation (Leakey, 1977: 646; Cagnolo. 1933: 94). This was to announce to the whole village that a hero has been made. This process affirmed the confidence of the initiate in being a man and also created the ideas of hegemony not only in them but also to the young ones. However this celebration depended on the status of the family. Thus the rich families would have elaborate celebrations. This celebratory end symbolized the initiates' graduation and the reacceptance to the communal world.

After graduation the initiates commanded respect especially from their juniors and women. Uncircumcised men were not regarded as full citizens of the community. They could not represent any issue regarding the community affairs. Cagnolo (192: 83) observes that uncircumcised Kikuyu man was seen as a foreigner and such a man could not marry or own property. Such a man could not lead and was regarded as a boy.⁷

2.5 Summary

It was the objective of this chapter to analyse the origin and settlement of the Agikuyu. This chapter also established that the Agikuyu had attained a level of political, social and economic order. Socially, circumcision was an important rite among the Agikuyu. The importance of circumcision was seen in the Agikuyu political, social and economic aspects of life prior to the

⁷Such belief dominates the Agikuyu idea of a leader. As such circumcision has been used to discriminate the uncircumcising communities as people who cannot lead in national politics. Indeed Kenyan politics have been filled with discriminatory sentiments on the basis of circumcision. Chapter four analyses the influence of circumcision in the Kenyan political space since independence.

coming of the Europeans. Circumcision was a major event among the Agikuyu, and more importantly to the life of an individual Kikuyu man. Circumcision rite attracted family and communal attention. It accorded each man the respect and acquisition of family, social and political responsibilities. We also established that through circumcision, hegemony was exerted as the older circumcised men exercised indirect control on the younger men and the womenfolk. Nevertheless, with the coming of Europeans the life of the Africans was transformed. In the next chapter, we seek to analyse how circumcision transformed with the introduction of the colonial rule and the changes this transformation brought in the construction of Agikuyu masculinity.

CHAPTER THREE

THE COMING OF EUROPEANS: AGIKUYU CIRCUMCISION IN THE COLONIAL SET UP UPTO 1945

3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have analysed the origin of the Agikuyu and their settlement in their present day homeland. We have established that the Agikuyu originated from the Congo basin and migrated eastwards up to their current areas of settlement. In addition to migration stories, we looked at the various genres of oral tradition that explain the coming to existence of the Agikuyu. The previous chapter also outlines that the Agikuyu were well organized politically, socially, and economically. In all these aspects, the chapter has established that circumcision was indeed a very important rite in the development of a Gikuyu man. A man would only climb the political and economic ladder only after circumcision. Socially, it was only after circumcision that a man was allowed to marry and know the secrets of the community. Circumcision was not only a one day event but it was a whole process with procedures and rituals that involved almost every member of the community. However, with the coming of the European and the subsequent colonization, the life of the Agikuyu, just as the other African communities, was greatly transformed. Circumcision also underwent great transformation. In this chapter, we analyse the transformation of Agikuyu circumcision and how it affected the formation of men and hegemony in the society. In doing so, we hope to show that the relationship between the older men and the younger men was also altered and hence hegemony and the gerontocracy were also affected.

3.2 Colonial Transformation and its Implication on Agikuyu Circumcision to 1945⁸

There is enough evidence to show that the Kikuyu interacted with foreigners early enough. Foreigners included the Arab and Swahili traders who were Agikuyu trade partners (Muriuki, 1974: 136). Some scholars describe the Kikuyu as warm to visitors. Traditionally the Kikuyu believed that *mugeni ni rui* (a visitor is like a river that passes on). This meant that a visitor had to be treated well since he/she would only stay on for a few days. However, one of the early explorer, Von Hohnel, described the Kikuyu as dangerous, treacherous and violent (Elspeth, 1935: 8). Also in 1938, the District Commissioner in Kiambu, E.L.B Anderson wrote:

“...it must be confessed that the Kiambu Kikuyu is not an easy man to deal with....as he is intensely suspicious in all matters...” (KNA, MA1/12/32)

Thus, we cannot generalize the attitude of all Kikuyu towards visitors. The first European group comprised of the missionaries whose major aim was to spread Christianity. They were followed by administrators, traders, explorers among other European groups, each of which had its own interests. Though from an educational point of view, Anderson (1970) describes how each of the various European groups perpetuated its own interests. However, all of these groups seemed to have been working towards a common goal and by 1900, the Africans could not tell the difference between the missionary and the colonizer. Thus, a common saying that “*Gutiri mubea na muthungu*” (there is no difference between the missionary and the white settler), had emerged among the Agikuyu (Muriuki, 1974: 175).

⁸This section focuses on colonial agencies and policies such as land alienation, Western Medicine, urbanization and colonial education to 1945. However, a further analysis on these agencies after 1945 will be discussed in the next chapter.

Thus from 1850s, the missionaries came in their numbers and continued with their mission of preaching the gospel and 'civilization' On the other hand in Europe, there was an unprecedented scramble for colonies in Africa which necessitated the convening of the Berlin Conference in 1884. By 1895, a colonial office was opened in Kenya and as stipulated in the Berlin Act of 1884 and the Imperial British East African Company (IBEACo) was given the mandate to administer Kenya on behalf of Britain. Kenya was then a British Protectorate. However, while the company rule collapse due to mismanagement and other challenges, Britain ruled Kenya directly. Therefore, various British officials came to Kenya the British colonial government informed by their economic interests went ahead to adopt regulations which would help them realize immense profits. Such regulations included land alienation and introduction of labor laws. These policies were hidden in the call for civilizing the 'primitive' Africans. Hence, all the Europeans, missionaries and the government officials took it upon themselves to civilize the Africans through the introduction of Western education and Western medicine.

These new regulation by the British would alter the life of the Kikuyu in Kiambu. This is because Kikuyu land that was identified as fit for British settlement was strategically placed near the railway line and Nairobi, which later would be the capital of British operations. The new changes introduced by the colonial government saw a major transformation in the whole life of the Agikuyu. Tignor (1976) termed Western education, labor and medicine as fundamental European institution while Zeleza (1989) refers to them as the agencies of colonial civilization. In the sections that follow we shall explore how these agencies interacted with the Agikuyu people and their influence on circumcision.

3.2.1 Land alienation before 1945

Land was an important asset among the Agikuyu. To an extent, land ownership in Kiambu defined masculinity because circumcised men were the owners of land. Senior men also held the responsibility of distributing land to their juniors. As such changes in land ownership and distribution, as brought about by colonialism, would automatically affect the making of Agikuyu men. Traditionally, land produced food and hence it was looked upon as the sustainer of life. Kenyatta (1938: 21) notes that the Gikuyu valued land as the 'mother of the tribe'. He adds that land could not be compared to a woman since a woman carries her pregnancy for nine months but after giving birth it is the land to feed the baby forever. The Kiambu Kikuyu occupied the central highlands with fertile soils and cool weather. This region was also at the center of the colony. Thus the highlands were alienated therefore became a centre of conflict between the Agikuyu and British (Sorrenson, 1967; Anderson, 2005: 10)

Since the Agikuyu were agriculturalists, land ownership was therefore a crucial issue. Initially one could claim ownership of land by clearing it. In the other Kikuyu districts of *Gaki* (Nyeri) and *Metumi* (Murang'a) this kind of ownership was common due to the fact that they were the first to settle in these areas. However, Karuri (Kiambu) was a later settlement and the land was occupied by the Dorobo (Athi). Some scholars have argued that Agikuyu owned land communally. However, ownership was determined by the means that were used to acquire the land. If an individual 'bought' a piece of land he had the right to own it privately as opposed to when a particular family or clan cleared a piece of land communally. Kenyatta (1938: 26) explains that communal land ownership among the Agikuyu did not mean that the *githaka* (land) was owned collectively by every member of the community. However, if a piece of land was inherited, the land could be owned communally by the heirs. In this case the chosen family

‘caretaker’ (*muramati*) took care of it on behalf of the family and such land could be described as that of *mbari* (family).

As noted earlier, land could also be privately owned. This kind of ownership was common among the Southern Agikuyu (Kiambu) because they purchased the land from the Dorobo.⁹ It is argued that since the Dorobo were hunters and gatherers and were not interested in cultivation, they sold the land to the Agikuyu in exchange with goats. Due to the different economic activities, the relationship between the Dorobo and the Agikuyu was symbiotic. The Agikuyu did not push the Dorobo out of the land, they lived peacefully until the Dorobo were fully assimilated by the Kikuyu.

The Kikuyu of Kiambu were land conscious, a concept that the British did not understand. The British thought the ‘primitive’ Africans did not have an idea of land holding but for the Agikuyu this was not true because they had the *githaka* system where all land was demarcated and known to all residents in an area (Sorrenson, 1967; Tignor 1976: 184). The Agikuyu also showed hospitality to the *ahoi* (landless poor). They would accommodate them and give them permission to cultivate or build on their land. The Agikuyu received the British with the same attitude. They thought that just like the other foreigners they had interacted with, such as the Arab traders, the British would come and go. As a result, the Agikuyu, without knowing the motives of the Europeans gave them building rights to set up stations such as Dagoretti and Fort Smith (KLC, 1934).

⁹ For more on Agikuyu-Ndorobo land transactions See Kenyatta, 1938; Sorrenson, 1967; Muriuki, 1974; and Leakey, 1977.

However, the British were not the usual visitors that the Agikuyu were used to. The British had social, economic, political interests in Africa. The earliest explorers such as Teleki, had selected Kamba land as a suitable area for settlement (Elsbeth, 1954). Their judgment was informed by the fact that they had travelled to Kamba land during the rainy season, and they felt that it was suitable for settlement, without knowing that the region was generally dry. This could explain why the first center of British operations was situated in Machakos but later moved to Nairobi.

However, explorers such as Fredrick Lugard, Von Honhel, and Fredrick Jackson did not make the same mistake as Teleki because they all recorded that the Kikuyu region was densely populated with well cultivated fields. Consequently, the Europeans preferred the highland. The British interest in Kikuyu land led to their occupation, domination and rule over the Agikuyu. The construction of the Kenya-Uganda railway made the British annexation and occupation of Agikuyu land simple as it eased the transport network from the Coast (Sorrenson, 1968: 25).

In addition, the colonial government was not willing to spend money on the protectorate and argued that it was better for the protectorate to be self-sufficient (Muriuki, 1974: 165; Zeleza, 1989). Due to lack of any other source of revenue in East Africa, agriculture was the only alternative. As a result the access to the railway determined the ability to produce for export market (Brett, 1973: 200). Brett also argues that the railway was instrumental in opening up the highlands for potential settlement of the white settlers.

The issue at hand at that time was to make the railway yield returns. Kenya was not endowed with minerals and the local economy produced too little to earn the colonial government any

revenue (Sorrenson, 1967). The only asset that seemed exploitable was the fertile soils in the Highlands. Charles Eliot, the then commissioner of the protectorate from 1900 to 1904, argued that the only way to make the railway pay was to encourage settler farming in the highlands. He encouraged settlers from Britain, New Zealand and South Africa to come to settle on the highlands. Eliot was so determined and therefore settler farming was confined to the Europeans as he wanted to create a white man's country (Sorrenson, 1968: 61; Muriuki, 1977). Eliot's efforts bore fruit because there was an influx of settlers to the 'White Highlands'. Between 1903 and 1906, about 60000 acres of Kikuyu territory had been alienated and the number of settlers rose from 600 in 1905 to 2,000 in 1907 (Sorrenson 1968: 180; Zeleza, 1989). This meant that more Kikuyu land was alienated for the settlers.

The methods used by the British to alienate Kikuyu land were diverse. Kenyatta (1938: 47) argues that the land was taken 'by force through trickery and hypocritical treaties'. Some of the British officials such as Lugard declared that they did not sign treaties with the 'natives' However, his diary records how he signed 'brotherhood' treaties with Kikuyu chiefs such as Eyaiki Wahinga (This is probably Waiyaki wa Hinga) (KLC, 1934). In some of these treaties, the Kikuyu signed and agreed to the terms and conditions in a language they could not understand. In his diary, Lugard notes that those present, during his treaty with Waiyaki, were

“...other petty chiefs named Kahusu, Miriakahara, and Miroo who are
inspired by Waiyaki to make similar agreements.”

Of more importance was the fact that the treaty was signed by F. D. Lugard on behalf of Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) and Dualla Istri on behalf of Wayaiki wa Hinga (Bull and Perham, 1959). Wolf (1968) also notes that the treaties between chiefs of Ukambani and British were done in Arabic and English.

Another method that contributed to land alienation in Kiambu was that in the last decade of the 19th century and early 20th century, Kiambu suffered disasters such as diseases, locust invasion and famine. This made most of the Kiambu Kikuyu to retreat to the less affected areas of Fort Hall. They therefore left their lands unattended. As European settlers came to Kikuyu land, they thought that the land was vacant and occupied it. However, Kiambu Kikuyu even in absentia knew each family's land and the elders could trace the owner and the boundaries of each *githaka* (Sorrenson, 1967: 17; Tignor, 1976: 17). The British regarded the vacant land as 'no man's land' and the 1902 Crown Land Ordinance was passed. This ordinance declared that all land belonged to the British Imperial Government (Kenyanhui, 1992).

Thirdly, in rare cases, some Europeans sought to buy land from the Agikuyu. But outright sell of land was unknown among the Agikuyu as the issue buying and selling came after the introduction of capitalist mode of production by the European's money economy (Zezeza, 1989). In the mid 1890, Thomas Watson of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) tried to purchase land from Agikuyu but they were reluctant to sell it (Kovar, 1970).

Regardless of the methods used to acquire land, it is evident that the British managed to alienate Kikuyu land. It is argued that Central region lost more land than any other region in Kenya but

the Kikuyu from Kiambu were the most affected (Zezeza, 1989). Indeed in comparison with the Kamba and the Maasai who had such pastoral goods as milk, and meat, the whole economy of the Agikuyu was affected because they were entirely dependent on land (Tignor, 1976: 40). The situation worsened after the First World War because more settlers and ex-soldiers came to settle in the white highlands. This was as a result of a promise by the British government that it would reward the soldiers who participated in the war. The reward was land in the Kikuyu highlands and therefore the settlers came in large numbers. The 1931 census recorded 16,812 settlers compared to just 9,651 in 1921 (Tignor, 1976: 146).

Most of the settlers practiced large scale cash crop farming. Cash crop farming disrupted the social-economic order of the Agikuyu because it required a huge labour force. In the case of coffee, the berries are picked by hand which had to be done quickly before the berries could overripen. This meant that harvesting coffee required a large labour force (Tignor, 1976: 98). Africans were not allowed to grow cash crops so that they could continue to be dependent thus providing labour to the British. Therefore, cash crop farming was involving and it led to the neglect of food crop production leading to constant food crisis (Zezeza, 1989). It is worth noting that land alienation was not only done by the colonial government for the purposes of farming, missionaries also alienated land for their own purpose. For instance, Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) acquired 3000 acres in Thogoto where it started a church, school, health unit, and farming units (Anderson, 1970).

Loss of land affected the traditional life of the Agikuyu. Those who could not access land became poor and this led to disruption of social order. Older men started to lose their authority.

The rules of hegemonic masculinity as spelt through gerontocracy started to wade off. Zeleza (1989) argues that the old social divisions based on gender and age, were now articulated in the capitalist economy. Young Kikuyu men could no longer depend on the old men for land because the notion of masculinity especially aspects that touch on men as owners of property and protector was changing. Young men from Kiambu could work in the settler farms and in Nairobi to get money which defined a new notion of property ownership (Kitching, 1980: 17). Circumcision and formation of age-sets was also transforming and lost its traditional glory since being a man was also determined by new notions of property acquisition such as making some money in the settlers' farms or in labour sites in the towns.

Further, land alienation in Kiambu made some Kikuyu to migrate from their ancestral land to other areas to search for land, new economic opportunities and to escape colonial oppression (Tignor, 1976: 41). Mugo wa Gatheru (1964: 50), Kanogo (1989: 17) and Anderson, (2005: 139) describe how Kikuyu from Central region migrated to Rift Valley. Moreover, when land was alienated, majority of men in Kiambu went to urban areas to look for alternative employment (Sandbrook, 1970: 17). As the Agikuyu people migrated, family and communal ties were weakened. A good example was the Lari settlement which was occupied by Agikuyu from different areas in Kiambu and the evictees of the Olenguruone settlement (Kiriga, 1991; Anderson, 2005). These movements and resettlements weakened communal ties which were very important in the organization of circumcision and in the socio-political life of the Agikuyu at large.

Land alienation did not only disrupt the economic life but also the social and political life of the Agikuyu. The notion of manhood was transformed by the changes in land ownership. Young Gikuyu men did not have to look up to the older men for property (Zezeza, 1992; Zwanenberg, 1975: 292). Construction of power and hegemony through the prism of circumcision became less prominent as the younger men could identify with new sources of wealth such as wages. These changes were augmented by the other western influences such as introduction of education and health. Thus, to a large extent, land alienation made change in the Agikuyu social order especially circumcision and masculinity inevitable.

3.2.2 Colonial Education up to 1945

Education refers to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits (Sifuna, 1990). Hence education exists in every society. However, the Europeans thought that the Africans did not have education. However, African education was wholistic and was dispensed in day to day life. According to Sifuna (1990), education is supposed to address the needs of the community. Bogonko (1992) reiterates by noting that African education was unique to each community in order to address the needs of the people.

Traditionally, education among the Agikuyu started at birth, continued into adulthood and ended at death (Kenya, 1938: 99). African education was moral, progressive, gradual and practical (Bogonko, 1992). Bogonko adds that indigenous African education developed one's character, physical aptitudes, moral qualities and social knowledge, all of which were necessary for an active role in the society. Traditional education was an everyday activity. At puberty, however the teachings were intensified (Kenya, 1966; Anderson, 1970; Sankan, 1971; Bogonko, 1992). The importance of education during puberty cannot be overemphasized. Though Agikuyu

education was largely informal, it became formal during the initiation period since it was well organized, had specific 'tutors' chosen on the basis of their experience (Kovar, 1970). Informal education was used to usher in young boys and girls into maturity. It is through this education that either masculinity or femininity was enhanced. Thus any change in the way the informal education was organised and disseminated, affected the formation of young girls and boys into women and men respectively.

However, for the Agikuyu, education given during circumcision was an important factor for the transformation of boys to real men and girls to women. All through their childhood the initiates received education through story-telling, apprenticeship, and observation. Mothers were responsible for the education of infants, nevertheless after children attained the age of 5 years Agikuyu education became gendered until death. Girls would be taught by the womenfolk while boys would learn from the men folk. Nonetheless during circumcision, the initiates were secluded. As noted earlier, a trusted man and woman would be selected to give intensified education to the initiates. On the one hand women taught the girls how to be good mothers, wives, cooks, general care givers and how to uphold feminine privacy, personal hygiene, taboos and religion. On the other, boys were given formal instructions on how to conduct themselves as men, respect for elders and respect for superior different grades for men, sex education, war and taboos (Glashan, 1964).

For boys, this educational process was also a test of bravery, courage and endurance. For the Gikuyu people, the next educational stage was marriage. However, most of what was to be learned in marriage was disclosed during circumcision. Kovar (1970) gives another education

stage which he describes as special and meant for a few men in the top leadership circle of Agikuyu elders. Thus, the most significant educational arena for the Agikuyu was during circumcision.

However, at the beginning of the 20th century, the Agikuyu were introduced to a new type of education by the missionaries. Certainly, Western education was one of the fundamental European institutions in the service of colonialism. Thus, this period saw an influx of missionaries whose aim was to spread Christianity. By 1900, the missionaries had made efforts to introduce formal education in Kikuyu land. Indeed, education was knotted with religion and therefore "...those who sought schooling became Christians and those interested in Christianity went to school" (Anderson, 1970).

Missionary operations were eased by the building of the Kenya-Uganda Railway which enabled them to penetrate the interior. In 1901 and 1908, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) founded a mission station in Kikuyu and Tumutumu respectively. In 1902, Gospel Missionary Society (GSM), started a mission station in Kambui and Ng'enda while the Italian Consolata Catholic Mission started stations in Kiambu, Limuru and Mang'u in 1902, 1903 and 1906 respectively (KNA, MA/1/12/32). By 1914, seven missions; Church Missionary Society (CMS), Church of Scotland Mission (CSM), African Inland Mission (AIM), Holy Ghost Fathers (HGF), Gospel Missionary Society (GMS), Roman Catholic Fathers (RCF) and Evangelical Lutheran Mission (ELM) were already operating in Kiambu (KNA, MA1/1/12).

The Agikuyu in Kiambu did not accept the Western education readily. Some parents and elders complained of their children 'wasting' time in school instead of working in the farms (Kovar, 1970). However, others like Chief Koinange wa Mbiyu, encouraged people to seek for education. Demand for western education would soon rise as Gikuyu youths saw those that had accepted Western education work as clerks or interpreters in government offices, jobs that the Agikuyu considered prestigious. By 1920, the Agikuyu in Kiambu wanted more access to education and better schools. The demand was based on the belief that Western education would help to conquer poverty. This education was not only meant to give instructions but also to transform the African wholly and rid them off their 'savage and primitive' behaviour. To the British missionaries, everything African was seen as heathen. Scholars have noted that among the aims of the missionary education, was to create workforce for the colonial administration. Education was also aimed to achieve a break with traditions. Among these traditions, circumcision was at the center of the controversy between the Kikuyu traditionalists and British missionaries as seen in the 1929 conflict (Kanogo, 1989: 17; Anderson: 1970; Anderson, 2005: 18)

The type of education given to Africans by the missionaries was below the expectations of the Africans. The instructions given would include simple industrial education in agriculture and technical training, reading, writing and arithmetic (3Rs). Missionary education was also gendered. Women were mainly taught about hygiene. Indeed scholars have argued that the 3Rs curriculum was for men while women were taught the 3Bs (baby, broom and bath) (Tignor, 1976: 206). Education enlightened women on 'home crafts' such as cooking, nutrition, housewifery and sewing (Kanogo, 2005: 205). In Kiambu, there were European medical

personnel who were concerned with the sanitation. In 1938 Mr H. Martin and Mr F. Gaffaney were the sanitary inspectors while Miss H.M Cochrane and Mrs M. Withall were the nursing sisters (KNA, MA/12/32).

In order to understand the choice of curriculum for Africans by the Europeans, it is worth noting that different European groups had different goals to achieve through education. These groups included the traders, government officials, settlers, and adventurers. Each of these groups had goals and interests to achieve in giving education to Africans. Anderson's 1970 study aptly titled "*The Struggle for the School*" demonstrates how giving education to the Africans was indeed a struggle between the missionaries, the government official, the settler, the trader and the aider. The missionaries, for instance, had their aims for educating Africans, which was largely to produce a teacher-cum-evangelist to aid in evangelical work. The government official needed skills such as masonry and carpentry which were essential in construction, while the settler needed an African who could provide a healthy and skilled labour force.¹⁰ It is thus evident that even though the European aim was to transform the African person to adopt a European kind of life through education, practically this was not the case.

Majority of the British missionaries and officials looked down upon the Kikuyu as inferior. Thus, it was hard for the British to equate himself with the 'primitive African'. Despite the different interests of the various British groups, they had one common aim; they were against African 'primitive and savage' traditions. Various African cultural practices such as polygamy, circumcision and traditional medicine were termed evil. In 1909, Dr Arthur of CSM saw the

¹⁰See Anderson's *Struggle for the School* chapters 2-6, for aims and goals of Western education as organized by European missionaries, traders, settlers and the colonial government.

unhygienic condition under which boys were circumcised and vowed not to allow traditional circumcision again (KNA, MA1/12/1).

Traditional circumcision was seen by the European missionaries as the mutilation of the body of Christ (Opoku, 1990: 518). British officials in Kiambu did not pay attention to the cultural significance of the elaborate circumcision rituals in Africa. In 1920, the Provincial Commissioner of the then Central Province wrote to the District Commissioner of Kiambu ordering him to stop circumcision ceremonies in the district, since according to him, it was a 'waste' of time, which was required in the farms (KNA, CP.6/4/2). The British thus took as their role to civilize the Kikuyu in matters of circumcision. Protestant missionaries especially C.S.M. insisted that circumcision be conducted under the auspices of Christianity. However, as the Protestant missionaries took a rigid and uncompromising stance, the Catholic missionaries were not against Agikuyu circumcision and the rituals involved. Catholic missionaries argued that circumcision did not involve the question of faith or morals (Kovar, 1970). Whether this was a strategy to win more converts from the protestant side or that the catholic missionaries were seriously in support of Agikuyu circumcision is not known. However, bearing in mind that the protestant missionaries were the majority in Kikuyu land, their attitude towards circumcision was largely felt.

The schools and mission stations became the major centers where circumcision reforms would be made. The early converts conformed to the missionaries' rule that their sons be circumcised in the mission stations and that each initiate's sponsor be a Christian. Young men circumcised in the mission centres would marry girls from the same centers. The notable point here is that these

men were circumcised in hospitals run by missionaries who were against the Agikuyu notion of circumcision and the making of manhood. Mugo wa Gatheru describes the physical difference between the traditionally circumcised men and those circumcised in mission stations. According to Mugo (1964: 61), Agikuyu boys circumcised in mission hospitals did not have *ngwati* (a small skin left on the penis) which was a symbol of Agikuyu traditional circumcision. At this juncture, it is worth noting other communities also insisted on the modalities of the cut. For instance, the Bagisu cut had to be deep and not just a mere pinch (Khanakwa, 2011: 142). However, how the cut was done was not an issue in the mission circumcision. The weighty matter is that these young Gikuyu men from the mission stations got married to *irigu* (sing. *Kirigu*) (uncircumcised girls) from the mission stations (Kanogo, 2005). This was a taboo and the Agikuyu community could not take it. A circumcised Gikuyu man marrying a *kirigu* saw great uproar in the 1920s which culminated in the 1929 conflicts over female circumcision. There was a great division between the Kikuyu who held to the traditions on one hand and the missionaries and *Athomi* (converted Kikuyu) on the other.

However, the Agikuyu wanted to be Christians but also practice their culture. These differences resulted in the formation of independent schools and in order to cater for the Kikuyu who were interested in Christianity and education without renouncing their culture. Despite the controversy, there arose a new group of men circumcised in mission centers, educated and ‘civilised’. These men could not socialize with the ‘traditionalists’ who they considered as ‘primitive’. The traditionalists on the other hand considered those circumcised in the missions as weaker men since anaesthesia was used on them and also due to the fact that they did not participate in the rituals that showed their stoicism. However, the new crop of educated students

circumcised in the mission stations transformed the nature of circumcision. This is because as they were scorned by some, those that wanted to acquire Western education admired them. Consequently, a section of Gikuyu men chose to take their sons to schools. Such a mixed scenario was not only seen in Kiambu but also in other places. As Mandela (1994: 415) notes, any Xhosa who underwent hospital circumcision was seen as cowardly. Similar sentiments are reiterated by Bogonko (1992) on the Abagusii, Khanakwa (2010) on the Gisu, Nalianya (2012) on the Bukusu, and Kakai (1992) on the Abatachoni. Kakai for instance, tells about the concept of *olupao* (piece of timber) on which the men who got circumcised in hospital would lie on, contrary to the traditional circumcision where one was to be circumcised while standing. Thus among the Abatachoni, there emerged two types of men depending on where one was circumcised, that is, hospital circumcision (*Ba Olupao*) and traditional circumcision (*Ba Yingo*).

These differences however, did not prevent transformation which eventually led to formation of new notions of African masculinity. Khanakwa shows how education transformed the Gisu men to the extent that it became a more important asset to acquire than the ego one would acquire in traditional circumcision. The Gisu saw education as “a gateway to social advancement and to non-agricultural occupations’ (Khanakwa, 2010: 151).

Even as the new group of educated hospital circumcised men increased, there were those that felt that one could uphold his/her culture and still be educated. Independent schools became the solution for this category of people. Independent schools in Kiambu were not the first of their kind in Kenya. Independent schools and churches such as the Nomiyo Luo Mission in the Nyanza region had started as early as 1907 due to the realization that Africans were being given

a raw deal in education. As early as 1912, protests against the education given to Africans were experienced. The same year saw the Mumias High school Boys go on strike due to what they termed as low quality education in form of religious and industrial training (Bogonko, 1992: 21).

However, the late 1920s and early 1930s can be seen as the period which the Kikuyu independent churches and schools came up strongly not on the basis of the curriculum but because of the the British intrusion of their culture. Female circumcision was at the center of this controversy. Though literature is mostly silent on the reaction of the British on male circumcision, in essence it was affected just as the female one. This is because outlawing female circumcision would affect male circumcision; it left the question open as to who would the circumcised men marry? How would age sets be formed? Certainly male circumcision was at the centre of female circumcision's controversy. Therefore the reason why the Kikuyu opposed the missionaries' call to eradicate female circumcision was because it equally influenced the life of the Kikuyu men. Missionaries such as Dr Arthur of CSM went ahead and called all the African teachers in Limuru, Kinoo and Ririgi to sign the agreement that;

“...on my life I will not speak on account of Female circumcision. Female circumcision is a bad custom and if we do it, God will ask of us on our doomsday”

(KNA, PC/CP 8/1/1)

However, these teachers refused to sign and ended up being fired by Dr Arthur. The greater majority of the Africans could not rise above the colonial masters since they had been impoverished by the colonial policies of taxation and labour. Koinange (1955), notes that a farmer would be paid 4/= a month after working from 6am to 6pm or up to 8pm depending on

the crop season. This was too little compared to the needs of the Africans and to what their Asians and European counterparts were earning. Koinange however adds that after the Second world war, Africans were able to make more money from trade, and also get better jobs from the 'little' formal education they had acquired (Koinange, 1955: 17). Thus in reaction to these issues, independent schools such as Kikuyu Karing'a Education Association (KKEA) and Kikuyu Independent Schools Association (KISA) were formed (KNA, AV/1/17). These schools allowed the Kikuyu to perform traditional male and female circumcision and polygamy.

The formation of the Githunguri Teacher's College in 1939 by the Agikuyu saw the training of teachers who would work in the independent schools since the government would not support them. This college was in operation up to 1952 when it was closed down by the colonial government which accused the school for being a center of political activism for the Africans (Koinange, 1952).

Thus, up to 1945 Western education marked some changes and affected the culture of the Agikuyu. The latter's response such as starting of the independent schools ensured continuity and survival of traditional practices, circumcision being the major one. However there was a section of the Kikuyu who were already adapting the 'Europeanised' circumcision in mission stations and this meant that changes were inevitable. Major transformation brought about by colonial education occurred after the Second World War and the subsequent years as discussed in the next chapter.

3.2.3 Labour and Money Economy in Kikuyu Land up to 1945.

In the pre-colonial period, Agikuyu community organised their labour along gender lines. Women were involved in the care-giving sector where they took care of babies, cooked and did cleaning while men were engaged in hunting, trade, and leadership. Indeed, proceeds acquired through one's labour defined the strengths of their womanhood or manhood. For the Agikuyu man, economic stability was an important aspect in the social standing in the society. It was a source of prestige and reputation. With the coming of colonial rule in Kenya, new forms of labour were introduced.

Economic gains were at the core of colonial domination (Rodney, 1973). Thus, for the British in Kenya, achieving maximum return in their economic ventures was paramount. Land alienation for agriculture was one venture, but turning land into productive gain could not be achieved without labour. Colonialism was about exploitation both of natural and human resources, the latter being the channel through which land was turned into a usable product (Zezeza, 1992). Thus from the very beginning, the colonial administrators, most notable being Charles Eliot, as the colonial Commissioner, promised the settlers adequate supply of labour from the Africans since farm machinery and fuels were expensive (Kitching, 1980: 29). Consequently, the coming of the colonialists transformed acquisition of wealth. Kitching notes that in Kiambu, men were not involved in the traditional roles of agriculture and pastoralism rather, they engaged in colonial economy such as teaching, clerking, service activities, semi-skilled and skilled manual labour on the road and railway construction (Kitching, 1980: 17).

The concept of labour introduced by the Europeans was, however, different from the understanding of Africans. Among the Agikuyu, for instance, traditional labour provision was

organized in different ways. Labour provision was meant for the wellbeing of the society. There are many ways in which labour pooled and was used. Polygamy, for instance, feed into the logic of pooling labour from one's wives and children¹¹. The age-set system also ensured provision of labour. The young circumcised men provided security and labour in the farms before they were independent enough to start their own families. In addition, labour among the Agikuyu just like in other African communities, could be provided through the organized work parties (*ngwatio*) (Leakey, 1977: 9).

However, with the coming of the Europeans, labour organization in Kikuyu society changed drastically. As noted earlier, the colonial government under Commissioner Sir Charles Eliot encouraged settlers to come to Kenya and they settled in the Highlands. After settling down, the settlers needed labour services. Various policies were adopted to ensure continued supply of labour. In Kiambu, as early as 1901 hut tax was introduced (Zwanenberg, 1975: 76). Hut tax was at first payable in kind, where the Kikuyu would take sheep or goats. However in 1910, the colonial government insisted that the tax would be paid in cash. This was to force the Agikuyu to work in order to get money to pay the tax and in the process provide labour. It was obvious that the Kikuyu could only get money from the British settlers through selling their labour. In order to get maximum labour, Africans were overworked and given low wages probably just enough to pay the tax. The Europeans would earn as much as 1000 Euros while the Asians would earn 600 euros annually. The wage of an African in 1915 was 4 to 5 Rupees which was equivalent to the hut tax of a single African (Tignor, 1976; Clayton and Savage, 1974).

¹¹See Gavin Kitching, (1980: 8) for an introduction of how African labour was organised during pre-colonial period.

Labour provision was provided under the regulation in the Master and Servant Ordinance of 1910 and the Native Authority Ordinance of 1912. These ordinances were described as inadequate and inefficient, since they did not capture organization of labour and hence labourers would often run away. These ordinances were also very oppressive. Professor Mamdani confirms this by noting that Labour recruitment and control in Kenya was very harsh (1996: 28). He adds that the number of Kenyans charged and convicted under the Master and Servant Ordinance was higher than in any other British colony in Equatorial Africa. Labour recruitment was harsh especially to the young boys who were expected to join the labour force. Among the Agikuyu, circumcision made boys into men; however, the Europeans could not understand how teenage boys could be regarded as children just because they were not circumcised. Instead of checking whether a boy was circumcised, the District Officers (D.O) would look for hair in a boy's armpit to establish whether he had attained the status of a man and hence as a result join the labour force (Zwanenberg, 1975: 88). This is because, the Agikuyu would practice circumcision on older boys probably at the age of 25 due to the *muhingo* period as noted in chapter 2. However, for the Europeans, any boy who had grown hair in the armpit was regarded as mature whether circumcised or not.

After the First World War, more settlers came to the highlands. These were ex-soldiers who had been promised land as a reward for their service to the country. In addition, there were new settlers from Britain, New Zealand and South Africa. Hence, agriculture expanded and prospered. Tignor (1976) refers to the period after the First World War as "the golden age of European agriculture". Statistics showed that in 1931 there were 16, 812 settlers compared to 9, 651 in 1921 (Tignor, 1976). This influx demanded an organized provision of labour. The Native

Labour Commission called for the registration of all the Africans. The most notable feature of the proposition made by this commission was the 1920 law which saw all the African males above 16 years registered and being issued with a registration certificate called *Kipande*.

The *kipande* contained the holder's name, location, finger prints and wage given by the current employer. During the same period, the colonial government suggested that boys be circumcised at an earlier age. In this suggestion the government and missionaries alike posed as if they had the interests of the initiates at heart by arguing that, circumcision at an early age would have the patient suffer less in health (KNA, DC/KPNRIA/9/3, 1920). However, the actual motive for early circumcision was to make the boys acquire the adulthood status, own huts and marry. This meant that the circumcised men would pay taxes and also join the labourforce.

In other Kikuyu districts such as Nyeri, the same approaches were taken by the colonial government. In 1920 for instance, the Provincial Commissioner (PC) at Nyeri wrote to the District Commissioner (DC) ordering the curtailing of circumcision ceremonies because they were consuming so much time. The PC categorically ordered that all circumcision be done in one week possibly in the whole district (KNA, PC/CP.6/2/2, 1920-1923). In 1928, *muhingo* (closed period) was abolished by the colonial government. With vague European understanding on African culture, the colonial government looked at *muhingo* period as waste of time which delayed circumcision of boys and consequently delayed the latter's entry in the labour market (Lambert, 1956: 12). The abolition of *muhingo* meant that the formation of age-sets was affected, and the creation of army contingent was also disrupted. In the 1920s symbolic acts such as dressing like a warrior, application of the white chalk and red ochre performed during

circumcision was declared illegal and termed as wastage of time by the colonialists who argued that those that painted themselves white were just staying idle and discouraging the others from working (KNA, PC/CP/7/1 1929-1931). This orders made the whole circumcision ritual to loose meaning because as noted in the previous chapter, circumcision was a whole ritual of procuedures and not just the physical cut. In addition, the colonial government passed the Resident Native Ordinance in 1918, which required that future squatter payments be made in form of offering labour instead of cash. In 1926 Resident Native Bill was passed in order to legalize the squatter system. All these laws were passed to ensure that the Agikuyu labour force was fully tapped.

Consequently, these colonial ordinances altered how Agikuyu circumcision was organised. First, boys who were 16 years old in the traditional setup had not attained the age of circumcision and were hence regarded as children. Secondly, the Agikuyu circumcision procedure was an organized and elaborate process that could take weeks or months and thus, trying to compress it in one week would affect the rite negatively. However, it is clear that the British made such decisions due to the issue of labour. Boys circumcised at an early age would be regarded as mature and hence could take part in labour provision (Lambert (1956). In addition, circumcised boys would move out of their mother's hut to get their own which meant payment of hut tax.

These changes affected Agikuyu masculinities in that younger men could no longer be controlled by the older men and therefore the younger men took it as a way of escape from the domination of old men. Indeed at this time the concept of masculinity was changing. As Tignor (1976: 103) notes, 1920 not only saw mounting pressure for the Kikuyu to get money for taxation but also

traditional transactions such as bride price and land exchange were being monetized. Therefore, this automatically gave young men freedom as they would not need their fathers to pay for their first wife's bride price in kind, but they would do it using their own acquired money. Thus the capitalist economy which entailed individual ownership of property, the right and freedom on personal property, monetization, competitive and self-regulating market and limited governance was introduced in Kikuyuland. On the same vein, Sandbrook (1975: 10) notes that capitalist economy as introduced through colonialism became the fundamental determinant of class structure.

The monetization of African transactions was a major turning point for the whole concept of masculinity not only among the Kikuyu but in the larger continent. The indigenous modes of production such as traditional shifting cultivation and pastoralism were seen as complementary and not self-sustaining. Consequently, there was a turn of events where the rich Kikuyu men (rich of land and wisdom) and often termed as the rich Kikuyu were now seen as poor. In addition, the young could move freely from the rural to the urban areas to look for employment (Kitching, 1980; Kanogo, 2005). This meant that the young unmarried and property-less could not depend on elders for access to means of production and women. Due to these changes the old divisions based on gender and age were replaced by the capitalist economy (Zezeza, 1989).

Due to the monetization of the economy, the colonial authority at local level took advantage of the Kikuyu majority. The introduction of the chiefs Act saw appointment of just the ordinary men who according to the traditional precepts could not rule. This also played part in changing the notion of masculinity among the Agikuyu. Hegemony was now exerted by these chiefs upon

the others, young men and old alike. The colonial chiefs through the indirect rule policy were entrusted by the colonial governments to organize labour and collect taxes. Zeleza (1989) notes that the emerging Kikuyu petty bourgeoisie could be exempted from taxation and *Kipande* registration after paying to the chiefs an amount not less than £4. The chiefs took advantage of their authority to enrich themselves by exploiting their subjects. Corruption was evident as the people bribed chiefs to be exempted from taxation. Zwanenberg argues that there was enough evidence to demonstrate tax evasion as the amount of revenue collected was lesser compared to the population increase. Zwanenberg (1975: 88) adds that tax evasion was very high in Kiambu. This exploitative behaviour of chiefs was not only in Kenya but cut across most of the British colonies. In Natal the chief was so empowered to demand respect and obedience from the 'natives' while the chiefs in Tanganyika would use the children of the natives to work in their houses (Mamdani, 1996). Mamdani adds that in some colonies people would literally run away on seeing the chief. Thus, the authority of the chiefs altered the traditional concept of leadership and acted as a catalyst of the changing aspects of masculinity.

Among the Agikuyu, Chief Karuri for instance, decreed that before the closed period (*muhingo*) could be lifted any prospective initiate had to pay a rupee (Muriuki, 1974: 168). This idea was adopted by other chiefs who became not only a symbol of colonial oppression but also a reminder that traditional political structure had been transformed. In other instances, men were forcibly taken out of the rural setup in order to take part in other colonial projects such as constructing buildings, participating in European wars and compulsory communal labour (Zeleza, 1989). Because jobs were found in towns and settler farms, men were forced to migrate to these areas to seek employment. This type of labour saw African men migrate away from their

homes temporarily to the site of production to sell labour (Stichter, 1982: 25). Agricultural workload in the rural was now left to women and the raising and heading the families were now centered on women¹².

Traditional labour relations in Kiambu were completely transformed by the introduction of wage labour by the European. Circumcision and ceremonies accompanying the rite could not be organized like in the pre-colonial period. Old men lost their control over the young men as the latter could work in the farms for a pay. Money became the defining criterion of manhood. The circumcisers were also payable in monetary terms and with time the prices they charged as circumcision fee needed to be controlled by the government (KNA, MA/3/1). This is due to the fact that the circumcisers would hike the charges regularly. At one instance, the fee was hiked from sh 6 to sh 20 (KNA, MA/3/1). After 1945 labour relations and penetration of capitalism continued to influence the circumcision and formation of Agikuyu men.

3.2.4 Western Medicine up to 1945

The introduction of Western medicine was at the center of the transformation of Agikuyu masculinity. It is in the mission hospitals that circumcision procedures were carried out and hence reformed in a way that was different from the traditional Agikuyu circumcision. However prior to the coming of Europeans, Africans had a well established field of medicine. Oral traditions show that most, if not all, African communities had medicine men and women. To be a

¹² The Second World War period as demonstrated in the next chapter, brought about major changes in the socio-economic and political sector. Gender roles changed tremendously with women taking more family responsibilities as men took up new industrial jobs created by Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI). ISI was the creation of industries in Africa in order to produce goods to be used locally and also for export especially after the complication brought by the war in the transport sector as opposed to relying on imported goods. Women were therefore forced by circumstances to be directly involved in the circumcision of their sons. Sharon Stichter (1982: 25) confirms this argument by noting that women were shouldering most of the burden of land cultivation,

medicine man in Africa, one had to undergo through thorough training. The field of medicine was a special one for it affected all the aspects of the Agikuyu life. In some communities such as the Agikuyu, medicine men came from certain clans. For instance the *Anjiru* and *Ethaga* clans were known to produce medicine people. Among the Luo, one would become a medicine man after being possessed by a good *Juogi* (spirit) (Ayot, 1987: 124).

The Agikuyu medicine men were revered not only by the community, but also by other communities. Muriuki (1974: 91) describes how the Maasai frequently consulted the Agikuyu medicine men. The African medicine people understood their environment from which they got the different types of herbs for each ailment.

As colonialism was established in Africa, European medical doctors and health workers accompanied explorers, missionaries and the government officials in their various expeditions (Odinga, 1992). The result was that the 1st decade of the 20th Century saw many health centers started all over Kenya. Indeed, the trademark for a mission station was a school, a church and a health centre. In Kiambu, mission stations were opened as early as 1902, 1907 and 1910 in Kikuyu, Thogoto and Tumutumu respectively (Anderson, 1970). In these stations a health care was a vital unit. According to Odinga (1992) western medicine had become a means of drawing the population to the church.

The spread of Western medicine in Kiambu was amplified by the bad picture portrayed by British on the African medicine. This is because the British saw Kikuyu traditional medicine as evil primitive and unhygienic. The British could not differentiate between a medicine man and a

witchdoctor. Thus with the belief that Europeans were advanced, Western medicine was also considered superior to the African traditional medicine. However, Kikuyu traditional medicine was affected by land alienation and mechanization as these interfered with their sources (Odinga, 1992).

It is apparent that the Kikuyu readily accepted Western medicine because the introduction of mission stations and health centers coincided with a number of catastrophes in Kikuyu society. Muriuki (1974: 155) notes that, the move of East Africa Scottish Mission from Kibwezi to Dagoreti in 1898 coincided with famine and diseases in Kikuyu territory. With the confusion and rapid changes that took place at this time, the Kikuyu in Kiambu were left with no other alternative but to seek help from the missionaries. Indeed, in their testimony over their alienated land, members of the *Mbari ya Hinga* told of how Mr Thomas Watson of the CSM was helpful to the community during the time of 1889 famine and during the small pox outbreak (KNA, GP 333.2). In return the missionaries were able to win the Agikuyu trust.

Various health stations were opened all over Kiambu. In 1938 Annual Report, Kiambu DC, Mr Anderson noted that:

“...the Kikuyu have thoroughly realized the advantages offered him in medical services” (KNA, MA1/12/32).

The DC also noted that about 33% of Kikuyu sought medical assistance and the number increased every year. Due to the demand, three more dispensaries were opened at Mukinye,

Wangigi and Githunguri in 1938 (KNA, MA1/12/32). The demand for medical services in Kiambu continued to increase. By mid 1940s, the DC in Kiambu, Mr DJ Penwill noted that the Kiambu Hospital was overcrowded registering 7393 in-patients and 60,942 out-patients. Mr Penwill noted other twelve dispensaries operating in Kiambu. These were Githunguri, Ndumberi, Gatundu, Lusigiti, Wangige, Kirenga, Dagoretti, Banana Hill, Ng'enda, Kamirithu, Rurigiti, and Gachika (KNA, MA1/12/45).

Soon after the introduction of Western medicine to Africa, the missionaries and the colonial government alike discouraged the use of African medicine. For the Agikuyu, this affected their lives since medicine was intertwined with religion. Circumcision was largely affected by western medicine. The Native Affairs reports of 1920 to 1923 records how the colonial government from 'a moral and a health perspective' proposed that arrangements be made to give a medical supervision to circumcision rituals (KNA, PC/CP.6/4/2 -27/5/1920). Opuku (1990: 518) shows that circumcision was a major point of conflict between the British on one side and the Kikuyu in Central Kenya and the Maasai in the Masasi diocese of Tanganyika on the other. After witnessing traditional circumcision, Dr Arthur of CMS persuaded Christian parents to take their boys to the missions to be circumcised. Although the parents were initially reluctant, they agreed to take the boys on condition that they would be operated on by the traditional circumcisers. Dr Arthur agreed to their demand also on condition that the usual rituals and ceremonies that accompanied circumcision would be avoided (KNA, PC/CP 8/1/1). Although this agreement appeared to have been a win-win situation for both Dr Arthur and Kikuyu, transformation to the Kikuyu circumcision rite was evident and further changes were inevitable.

The colonial government and the missionaries alike did not understand the importance of the environment to African religion. Religion in Africa was incomplete without environment. Holy places such as trees, hills, shrines and mountains played a crucial role in African religion. Among the Agikuyu, the fig tree (*mugumo*) was very important as a holy place where sacrifices were offered and the rituals were conducted. Cagnolo (1933) described how *mugumo* tree was important during circumcision. It was where the elders and other religious specialists would meet to conduct prayers. The Europeans however showed no respect to the African shrines. In some cases, they were reported to have cut down a *migumo* (sing. *mugumo*) trees and clear the forests which were the sources of the African medicine.

With time, the Kikuyu became reliant on the western medicine which was accompanied by teachings on sanitation and hygiene. Due to medical care and improved hygiene, the mortality rate was reduced. Muriuki (1974) describes how improved health services led to increased population among the Agikuyu. The population increase in turn, led to problems which the rapidly disintegrating Kikuyu power could not handle. With the weakening of the Kikuyu socio economic and political structure, some of the Kikuyu men and women migrated to towns like Nairobi and other areas such as the Rift Valley (Kanogo, 1989; Furedi, 1972). This led to divisions of the *mbari* (family) system which affected the circumcision rite a great deal since it was a family and a communal affair as described in the next chapter.

By 1945, traditional medicine in Kiambu had been overtaken by Western medicine offered in various mission stations, dispensaries and hospitals. The elders, circumcisers, sponsors and religious specialists who exercised hegemony over the initiates lost their power to the western

trained medics. The initiates had to rely in the expertise of the medics for the operation and healing. Indeed western medication, hygiene and sanitation played a central role in transformation of Agikuyu male Circumcision in Kiambu. Consequently, this change resulted in a new form of masculinity of men who were circumcised in hospitals and did not adhere to traditional rituals.

3.2.5 Summary

This chapter aimed at exploring the impacts of colonial policies on the circumcision rite among the Agikuyu. The chapter has established that the colonial agencies such as capitalism, medicine, labour, education, monetization and land alienation affected circumcision greatly. Although the Agikuyu tried to preserve their culture and avoided the British control by starting the independent schools and churches, the impact of the British could not be avoided. This chapter has demonstrated that transformation in Agikuyu male circumcision rite was evident even in the first decades of colonial domination. As colonial domination went on, the Agikuyu response differed, where some collaborated and others resisted the British, made transformation in the nature of circumcision rite more inevitable. In addition, the economic, social and political organization of the Agikuyu as informed by the colonial policies was changing rapidly. This meant that the major transformation in the Agikuyu life continued. The next chapter demonstrates how Agikuyu male circumcision transformed in late colonialism and in the post-independence era.

CHAPTER FOUR

AGIKUYU MALE CIRCUMCISION AND THE (DE) CONSTRUCTION OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY, 1945-2008.

4.0 Introduction

In chapter 3, we argued that with the coming of the Europeans, Agikuyu male circumcision was greatly transformed. Informed by their ‘civilizing’ mission, the British, saw Agikuyu circumcision as ‘primitive’ and ‘savage’. In addition, the various colonial policies that were introduced by the colonialists made change inevitable. As a result, Agikuyu circumcision in Kiambu was transformed not just because of colonial influence but also the dynamics within the community in the late colonial years.

This chapter explores the idea of continuity and change in Agikuyu circumcision especially how colonial policies of monetization, western medicine, and labour among others, continued to affect circumcision. It also captures the resilience and transformation of circumcision in the late colonial years and post-independent era up to 2008. The chapter argues that even with the colonial influence, Agikuyu male circumcision continued to be practiced and it remained important in the formation of ‘real’ Gikuyu men. Thus circumcision opened up an avenue for the exercise of hegemony; one that was defined by circumcision. Despite the continued effort by a section of Kikuyu in Kiambu to retain traditional meaning of manhood, change was inevitable. The chapter is divided into two sections; the first deals with the last years of colonialism where Agikuyu hegemonic masculinity was reaffirmed and emphasized through militant groups such as *Aanake a Forti* and Mau Mau. The second part deals with transformation of circumcision in the post-independent era.

4.1 Continuity and Change in Agikuyu Circumcision 1945-1963

The last years of colonialism were characterized by socio-economic and political changes. Politically, Africans became more conscious about their political situation especially after the Second World War. The War experience motivated some to fight for independence. As a result African nationalism which was characterised by resistance and insurgency rose (Shiroya, 1992: 2). At this particular period, the British also faced resistance and pressure from their citizens at home who thought that colonies should be granted their independence.

However, the British felt that it was not yet time for independence. Instead, they intensified the strategy of divide and rule to ensure that there was no unity among African communities. They had hoped that this would undermine and destroy African demands for independence. The British also pursued colonial developmentalism, a concept that was introduced in the 1920s to emphasize that the welfare of Africans be considered. Although colonial developmentalism as a concept emerged in 1929 during the Great Depression, it became robust in the 1940s due to the effects of the World War II (Zeleza, 1997: 218).

Colonial developmentalism was thus propagated by the British through the offering of 'better' education to Africans, 'better' housing, expanded healthcare, allowing Africans to grow cash crops and developing infrastructure such as railway construction (Zeleza, 1997: 225). Even male labourers were allowed to bring their wives and children to the urban areas (White, 1990: 3). Although colonial developmentalism brought some positive changes to Africans, it also brought many challenges to the colonies. Let us examine how Agikuyu circumcision transformed as it interacted with late colonial changes that included increased monetization of the economy, education, medicine, labour and urbanization.

4.1.1 Monetisation of the Agikuyu Community and its Effects to Masculinity.

The Agikuyu lived a more communal than individualist life during the pre-colonial period. However the coming of the British transformed the communal economy of the Agikuyu introducing among other things, private ownership of property. Hence the change from communal to individual ownership of property directly affected Agikuyu masculinity.

Capitalism penetrated faster in Kiambu than in any other part of Kenya. In Kiambu, capital accumulation and individual ownership of property was embraced almost immediately and a class of wealthy Kikuyu was formed (Sandbrook, 1971: 17; Kitching, 1980: 445). These became rich farmers who could afford to buy land from poor farmers and farm inputs (Tignor, 1976). Some Kikuyu bourgeoisie such as Chief Koinange fought for the rights to grow cash crops, which was a preserve of the Europeans (Sorrenson, 1967).

In Kiambu, individualism quickly replaced communalism, which as early as 1940, caught the attention of the then DC, Mr Harold Lambert. Lambert confirmed the 'disintegration' of the Agikuyu community and their social system because colonialism had removed them from the position of equilibrium they had achieved before colonialism (KNA, MA1/12/36). Although Lambert helps us to understand what was happening amongst the Agikuyu at that particular period, his notion of 'disintegration' is anthropological and racist. Hence historically, the Agikuyu community was transforming and not disintegrating. In his 1942 annual report, Lambert also observed that Kiambu Kikuyu was not as good as he should have been because;

“...he is too much inclined to wanting as much as possible, as quickly as possible and for as little as possible” (KNA, MA1/12/35).

In 1947, Kiambu DC, Mr Windley reported that in 1947 there was a tendency for the richer Kikuyu to increase their land holdings by purchasing land from poorer Kikuyu. The DC also noted that such tendencies were,

“...shaped by modern conditions which were against co-perative farming and old customs of land holding” (KNA, MA1/12/41).

Agikuyu inclination to money was conspicuous. Agikuyu developed a propensity for money making, a thirst for knowledge and a complete inability to be contented (Robertson, 1997: 78). On the other hand, Robertson adds that, the Kikuyu were naturally industrious agricultural people.

In the long run the Kikuyu economy was monetized which in return affected the other aspects of life. The differences among the rich and poor Kiambu Kikuyu grew. Such level of individualism in Kiambu hindered co-operation of community members on social matters simply because there were social-class divisions between the haves and the have-nots. The poor Kikuyu were forced to sell their labour in the settlers' farms and in urban areas, while others migrated out of Kiambu to other districts to look for land to settle. Such impacts of intensified capitalism forced many people to migrate from Kiambu because of land problems, not only for those that were entirely landless but also who wanted more land. Some Kikuyu from Kiambu said that they could not

stay on a *karurimi* (tongue), meaning a small plot of land (Kariuki, O.I. 12/5/2013). Escape from taxation and also from chief's oppression also made people to migrate to areas that levels of capitalism were not as high (Kanogo, 1989: 13).

Capitalism was intertwined with monetization. Monetization became an issue of contestation as far as circumcision was concerned. This was especially in so far as the behavior of the circumciser was concerned. Unlike previous periods, in the 1950s, when the circumciser was paid in cash, this time, circumcisers wanted to be paid by the government as recorded in the minutes of the sub-financial committee held on the 5th and 6th of February 1951 (KNA, DC/KBU/3/1). The main concern of this committee was the regulation of circumcision fee since the circumcisers charged as much as Ksh. 20 which was considered too high and exploitative. To regulate this fee, the government ordered that the circumciser be paid in monetary terms for not more than sh. 6 (KNA, DC/KBU/3/1).

This push for monetary payment for circumcisers was part of a broader process of monetization of society. Almost every aspect of the Agikuyu lifestyle was monetized as everyone thought of how much they could gain. By mid 1940s, land and farm produce were minimal and hence majority of the Agikuyu in Kiambu started small business in Nairobi, Kiambu and Rift Valley. These businesses included groceries, sale of second hand clothes, tailoring, shoemaking, carpentry, mechanics, masonry, charcoal burning and provision of industrial labour in places such as Uplands bacon factory (Anderson, 2005: 121). During the same period, Kikuyu women were also practicing trade as a full time occupation in and around Nairobi where they sold *marigu* (bananas), *njahi* (dicholus lablab), *iria imata* (curdled milk), *ngwaci* (sweet potatoes), *waru* (English potatoes), *marenge* (pumpkins) and boiled or roasted maize (Robertson, 1997:

83). Kitching (1980: 162) notes that in Kiambu people involved themselves in businesses such as poultry keeping which had a big market in Nairobi, maize milling, butchering and sale of food and drinks in order to earn money.

Monetization of the economy led to formation of social classes which continued to weaken Agikuyu communal life. Formation of social classes weakened the *mbari* (family ties) which meant that the Agikuyu could not come together as a community because circumcision procedures were different between the haves and the have-nots. Migrations to other districts and urban areas led to the break up of *mbari* and hence communal organization of circumcision became difficult. For instance, in Lari, the elders saw no reason to allow dependents or *ahoi* (tenants at will or landless) to use their land when far greater gains could be made through commercial farming (Anderson, 2005: 121). This was contrary to traditions where *ahoi* would be given land to cultivate.

The spirit of brotherhood, which was very important in circumcision, was similarly transformed. This was further worsened by the struggle for independence where the loyalists could not agree with those that resisted colonial rule. Land was a sensitive issue in Kiambu and it was one of the major problems and grievance not only against the colonial rule but also amongst the Gikuyu. A case in point was the Lari region in Kiambu. In 1950s Lari residents who had been dispossessed of their land at the beginning of 20th century, started to return to Lari from the settled areas. However, they found their *mbari* land already occupied. Thus Lari was full of embittered strands of people (Kiriga, 1991: 92). The land problem in Lari was worsened by the response of the Lari community towards the colonialists. Perhaps former inhabitants of Lari felt that the loyalists had been unfairly given their land by the British. Thus the loyalists were hated by those that resisted

colonial rule. These differences culminated into the Lari massacre of 1953. Anderson (2005) refers to it as an African massacre where Africans in this case the Agikuyu killed their fellow kinsmen mainly due to land ownership. Anderson continues to note that the homes of the loyalists were carefully selected, locked from outside and torched (2005: 127).

The aftermath of the massacre continued to put strain to the already weakened Agikuyu social relations. This is because the colonial government resorted to punitive expeditions on the people of Lari. Consequently, the local inhabitants resorted to either committing suicide or migrating to the forest. Others especially children got lost in the confusion (Kiriga, 1991: 176).

Though in many areas in Kiambu tension between the loyalists and those that resisted colonial rule did not lead to a massacre, the turbulent situation in Lari was experienced in other areas. Kiriga notes that the MAU MAU whose ideology had spread to all the three Kikuyu districts was involved in the massacre. As a result, colonial government put curfews not only in Lari but also in other areas. Communal circumcision was difficult to conduct because; first, the colonial government put increased sanctions and curfews in the villages and reserves. After the massacre the colonial government intensified their vigilance on the Agikuyu whose resistance was growing stronger. Secondly, the community itself was not united in the sense that some collaborated while others resisted the colonial rule. Thirdly as the *mbari* structures weakened, most people did not rely on the traditional social economic setup but they had already been integrated in the colonial state labour and capitalistic mode. Due to these dynamics, circumcision was henceforth a family affair as opposed to the communal ceremony as openly seen after independence (see section 4.2 below).

4.1.2 Western Medicine

Western medicine was one of the major factors that transformed Agikuyu circumcision. Were it not for the introduction of western medicine perhaps Agikuyu circumcision procedures could not have transformed as quickly as they did. Majority of Agikuyu in Kiambu embraced western medicine. Out of a population of 90,000, 33% of the Kiambu population sought western medical services (KNA, MA/12/32) and by 1958, Mr. Penwill, the then DC, recorded that Kiambu hospital was overcrowded.

Each mission station had a dispensary which meant that it was easy for the people to access health services at the local level. Male circumcision in Kiambu was quickly transformed by western medicine. The missionaries sought that the procedure be done ‘hygienically’. Agikuyu boys from Christian families were thus circumcised by the medical doctors at the mission stations. This was unlike the girls who despite the fact that they were circumcised in the mission station, the process was carried out by Kikuyu traditional circumcisers (Lynn, 2003). Why was it that Agikuyu male circumcision was done in hospital by doctors and without much contestation?

The quick transformation could be due to the fact that the British did not take as radical a position on male circumcision as they did with female circumcision. This was due to the politics of the way clitoridectomy was done; that is, the removal of all or part of the clitoris, was central in the formation of a Gikuyu woman. On the other hand, the surgical issues of male circumcision did not attract a lot of attention. Perhaps the only difference was that hospital circumcision, popularly known as *kurua githungu* (English circumcision) did not leave a small piece of dangling skin on the penis called *ngwati* as noted in the previous chapter. However, this did not attract a lot of contestation in the making of a Gikuyu man.

In Kiambu, hospital circumcision was embraced early enough. During my field work, Mwangi, 50 years old, born and bred in Kiambu, did not seem to understand the traditional circumcision where *ngwati* was an emblem on the penis. Yet, Mr. Kamau in his late 30s, living in Kiambu but was brought up in Murang'a underwent the traditional circumcision (Mwangi, O.I, 21/7/2012; Kamau, 9/12/2012). Hence, it seems that transformation in the nature of circumcision occurred earlier in Kiambu than in Muranga. During the interview Mwangi was quick to associate the traditional circumcision with outlawed *Mungiki* group, which seeks to retain some cultural aspects of the Agikuyu; but Kamau was quick to note that Kiambu culture was eroded by the European early enough that even older people in Kiambu today may have missed a touch of the traditions.

However, there were areas in Kiambu County that still insisted on the traditional circumcision. Those who embraced change were adherents of the mission churches while the followers of independent churches stuck to traditions. Elders confirmed that in Ng'enda location in Gatundu (see location on figure 1), the cultural identity was still strong and the initiates had to go to the river to be circumcised but such were not as many as those who sought hospital circumcision (Kamanja, O.I, 22/11/2012). Mr. Kamanja reiterated Ann's (O.I, 17/11/2012) remarks that before 1952 conservative Kikuyu still insisted on traditional rituals, however after the declaration of the State of Emergency, following the Mau Mau outbreak, any kind of social groupings were banned and thus circumcision dances and ceremonies were slowly abandoned. The ban on social groupings and ceremonies transformed Agikuyu circumcision because only the physical cut was left which, as described in chapter two, was incomplete without the rituals.

4.1.3 Advancement of Colonial Labour and Urbanization.

When the traditional economic organisation was disrupted by colonialism, Agikuyu men could no longer hold on to land or cattle to define their wealth. This is because land was in shortage and as a result a new form of wealth acquisition was adopted like that of selling of labour. Colonial labour was gendered. Before the Second World War, men were preferred by the settlers to work in the domestic and industrial sectors (Illife, 2005: 284). Skilled labour for instance, required one to have had some training. This favoured majority of men compared to women since the former had had the privilege of going to school. Unlike the traditional labour which, though gendered was offered within the community, colonial one would necessitate the movement of people from the homes to the labour sites.

World War II saw a great influx of settlers in Kenya. More land was alienated in Kiambu to settle these new comers. This also meant that there was need for increased labour from the Agikuyu to satisfy the need in the settlers' farms. The already oppressed landless Kikuyu, did not have an alternative rather than to sell their labour. In urban areas, labourers from Kiambu retained their attachment to the rural area as they could not be sustained by their wages. As a result, the women in the rural area had to produce food to feed the children while the little wage the man got from Nairobi would pay school fees, buy clothes and shoes (Sandbrook, 1975: 17). Some Kiambu traders, including women commuted daily to Nairobi (Furedi, 1972; Robertson, 1997:77) Thus due to the proximity to Nairobi, Kiambu was largely influenced by the urban lifestyle compared to other districts of the Agikuyu such as Murang'a and Nyeri.

In the rural Kiambu, low wages and conscription for labour made people to be attracted to Nairobi. However, in the urban area, housing and sanitation were deplorable. White (1990: 3)

notes how up to eight African men were living in a congested room. Immediately after 1945, labour was scarce since a huge labour force was taken up by the war. This scarcity led to the hiring of women who had earlier been relegated to household chores in the rural areas. However, hiring of women was still unpopular since not even the white woman would want an African woman as her domestic worker (Lynn, 2003: 12). This was meant to prevent intimate liaisons between African women and white men.

Nevertheless, after World War II, many opportunities emerged in Nairobi which attracted women. Majority of the women were traders. The situation was still unfavourable for a woman because according to the traditions, they were controlled by patriarchy (Robertson, 1997: 78). Nonetheless, Kikuyu women from Kiambu continued flooding Nairobi and for some, prostitution became the easiest option for making money (White 1996: 147). White also notes that, some of the women prostitutes in Nairobi made more money than skilled labourers which enabled them to be rich landlords and owners of property (1996: 54-55). As owners of property women were able to detach from patriarchal control.

The movement of Kikuyu women to Nairobi was therefore enabled by the disruption of the social fabric where they could not be controlled by men or senior women. The movement of women from the rural setup and involvement in trade added to the transformation of the Agikuyu society. With their newly acquired freedom, some women engaged in drunkenness which, together with prostitution, were not acceptable behaviours in Kikuyu culture (Robertson, 1997: 92).

Urban life for men also brought considerable number of challenges. Majority of the men had been impoverished by the colonial economy and went to the urban area in the hope of finding well-paying jobs. However, difficulties in finding jobs and frustrations of being poor, which translated to the fact that an African man had nothing to bequeath, added to the lot of embittered men in the urban set up. As a result, the urban area brought about an arena for political consciousness. It is the urban areas where men from different areas but with common grievances met and formed political associations such as *Aanaake a forti* (see discussion on *anaake a forti* in section 3.2).

After World War II, the colonial economy expanded tremendously. This is because as the War continued, colonial powers had no choice but to ‘develop’ the colonies for them to be ‘self-sustaining’ (Zezeza, 1997: 218). This expansion was seen in trade, manufacturing, industrial sector and also in small and private businesses (Zezeza, 1989). As most of this development occurred in Nairobi, the trickle-down effect was felt in Kiambu due to its proximity to the capital city. H.E Lambert, Kiambu DC noted that World War II meant success to the people of Kiambu. This was due to the fact that Britain’s production and transportation of her finished goods was crippled by the war and the alternative was to let the colonies produce and manufacture goods.

Majority of these industries were set up in urban areas. People migrated to the urban areas because of better wages and also due to the fact that urban labour force was seen as a representation of the elite minority (Grillo, 1973; Anderson, 2005: 189). Anderson adds that even with all the challenges in Nairobi, for an African worker, a city job was an attractive option. Majority of these workers in Nairobi came from the neighbouring Central province, but of all the

districts in the province, Kiambu was most affected by the labour needs of Nairobi and East Africa at large (Robertson, 1977: 102; Musalia, 2010: 107).

Some Kikuyu from Kiambu went as far as Tanganyika and Mombasa. It was reported that 348 of Kikuyu labourers in Tanganyika were returned to Kiambu District in three batches (KNA, MA1/12/45). The breakdown of labourers who went to Mombasa was 35 men from Kiambu, 105 from Fort Hall and 1,048 from Nyeri (Musalia, 2010: 80). This distribution showed that the proximity to Nairobi made few men from Kiambu to migrate to other areas compared to Nairobi since the latter was a favourable alternative. Furedi (1972), notes that, the population in Nairobi, had by mid 1940 numbered up to 50,000. Furedi also notes that 10,000 of these worked for the government, railway and the municipal; 22,000 were private employees; 1500 worked as tailors, masons, hawkers and petty traders; while about 2000 to 3000 were unemployed. In addition, 3000 commuted daily from Kiambu. The reason why a large number of Agikuyu from Kiambu participated in businesses is because of shortage of land. Robertson (1997: 80) notes that Kiambu relied on Nyeri for maize since she concentrated more on fast growing food such as vegetables which had a ready market in Nairobi. This meant that the lifestyle in Nairobi was impacting on Kiambu instantaneously.

In 1945, the DC of Nairobi clearly stated that the population in Nairobi was becoming unsustainable (KNA, DC/NBI/1945). A government policy for the eviction of women, children and unemployed men in the city was enacted. Thus in 1945, 10,000 people were evicted (Furedi, 1972). This migration and movements to and from the city led to the Kikuyu being exposed to the new urban life which was taken to the rural area. For instance, the urban worker adopted

European customs such as putting on shorts, trousers, shirts and trimming their hair (Clayton and Savage, 1974: 27; White, 1990: 3).

Nonetheless, just as it was prior to 1945, urban life continued to be unfriendly to the African workers. The wages were low and discriminatory, with the African worker earning £100 per annum compared to £600 for Asians and £1500 for Europeans (Grillo, 1973). While most of the African male labourers were married and had left their families in the rural area, this wage was based on the need of a single man. The situation was worsened by the fact that African men were not allowed to bring their wives in the city (White, 1990: 3). As a result, many men could not be able to sustain their families in the rural areas with the meager salary they earned in Nairobi. Traditionally, when a Gikuyu man could not provide for his family, it was considered to be against the norm. This was due to the fact that since time immemorial Gikuyu man was the head and breadwinner of the family. Neglect of family duties by men resulted to a section of Kikuyu women becoming the sole bread winners, heads of family and the figures of authority (Likimani, 1998; Anderson, 2005: 204). Mothers were directly involved in the bringing up of their children both boys and girls. Even during circumcision it was the woman who would take care of the requirements of the process because men were either away working or they had been detained by the colonial government (Kiriga, 1991).

After Second World War, a section of African men, were allowed to bring their wives to the city. This was because it was believed that an African man with his wife in the city would bring a sense of responsibility (White, 1990: 3). White notes that, allowing families in the city, was a way of keeping African men from mixing and meeting together at night in overcrowded rooms

and beer halls which were breeding grounds of crime and resistance. This rural-urban movement had noticeably contributed to the disintegration of families and hence communal circumcision was affected. Apart from selling their labour, people from Kiambu also started small businesses in Nairobi. In his annual report, Kiambu DC, Mr Perreau noted that Kikuyu from Kiambu supplied firewood, charcoal, vegetables, eggs among other things (KNA, MA1/12/37). These businesses had impact on the transformation of Agikuyu masculinity. First, young men had the option of becoming vendors or hawkers in Nairobi and this removed them from the rural setup where communal matters were practiced. Secondly, it gave men security and freedom from social conditions such as gerontocracy, thus slowly breaking the cycle in which men were formed.

Young men did not have to follow the older men's orders to acquire wealth or marry. The social relations were altered and young Kikuyu men would consume liquor which traditionally was a preserve of the old men (KNA, MA/12/46). Older men lost their traditional authority because the social fabric which was guided by rules, regulations and taboos were also weakened. In addition, traditional liquor was no longer fashionable compared to the European drinks. These drinks were sold in bars which did not have restrictions on the basis of age. The young and old people shared a drink comfortably. This accelerated the death of gerontocratic organisation in the Agikuyu community. Respect for elders was eroded as access to labour defined gikuyu men in terms of resources owned and not age (Kamanja, O.I, 12/12/2012). Therefore, means of production, especially labour was great influence to the formation of Kikuyu men and the male to male relations in the colonial period.

4.1.4 Impact of colonial Education to Agikuyu Male Circumcision, 1945-1963

Traditional Kikuyu education was intensified during circumcision. It was targeted at enlightening a Gikuyu man and also affirmed manhood by giving the initiate the secrets of the community. However, this changed with the introduction of Western education.

The demand for Western education by Africans increased rapidly since 1920s for it would help them to get jobs in the colonial economy. By 1945 the demand for education by Africans was increased tremendously. After the Second World War, African interests were transformed by education. African men wanted their children to acquire western education, access political power and compete on equal terms with the European and Asian pupils (Furley and Watson 1978: 243). This shows cultural demands were slowly being eclipsed by other factors even for the elders who were meant to preserve the same culture¹³.

An educated son's esteem trickled down to the father. Fathers of educated sons became heroes and they were praised in *barazas* and beer parties (Bogonko, 1992: 103). The need for education was prioritised by many Kikuyu. The fame of traditional elite such as the medicine men and rulers was replaced by the emerging elite of western education. In Kiambu, traditional elite like Waiyaki wa Hinga and Wangombe wa Ihura were being overtaken by such emerging elite as Jomo Kenyatta, Mbiu wa Koinange, Josiah Njonjo and Harry Thuku (Bogonko, 1992). The educated boys became the reference point of the community. As they went out to acquire education, they developed new ideas and principles that tended to shy away from the traditional way of life especially circumcision dances and rituals which to them were backward. Kamanja

¹³Traditionally men were raising their sons to be great warriors and be strong elders. It was always the pride of a father to have a brave son (See Chapter 2). However, in 1940 older men wanted their sons to get education and hence the whole concept of Agikuyu masculinity was changing.

remembers vividly that he was not taken to the river for circumcision neither did he put on the animal skin piece of cloth because his father worked for Europeans and therefore he (Kamanja) was taken to school (Kamanja, O.I, 22/12/2012).

Because of the demand for education, more primary and secondary schools were put in place. In addition, independent schools had also grown so tremendously that in 1952 there were 400 of such schools (Eshiwani, 1993: 18). In 1945, the RCC mission at Mang'u increased its building to accommodate more boys (KNA, MA1/12/45). In the same period female education was gaining popularity. Various missions and government schools trained Kikuyu women. This had direct effect in the making of Kikuyu men since the traditional roles of women was also transforming. It was observed that female education in Kiambu was good in order to 'provide educated Kikuyu men in Kiambu with wives of similar outlook' (KNA, MA1/12/45). Indeed women education contributed greatly to the transformation of the Agikuyu customs.

The demand for education graduated to the need for higher education. Because there were few colleges that offered higher education, Kikuyu boys would attend school far from their home areas. Some went as far as Makerere in Uganda. This exposure alienated the educated Kikuyu men from this community and its culture. It was difficult for an educated man to continue adhering to the communal and traditional life. For the Kikuyu elite, it was easy to mingle with an educated man from another community or his community than socialize with his uneducated but circumcised age mates. Indeed, this is how the Kikuyu class system was cemented and Kikuyu masculinity changed around elitist notion. Even the MAU MAU fighters argued that "if our fathers had had education...then we would not be living as the children of foreigners" (White,

1990: 11). Thus, education became a priority for many men not only in Kiambu but also in other communities. Among the Gisu in Uganda education was more important than *imbalu* (circumcision). In his novel, *Upon this Mountain*, Wangusa (1989) notes that the protagonist Mwambu prayed,

“Please please God, let me pass my primary leaving examinations”

Wangusa notes that as Mwambu said this prayer, he postponed his circumcision that was to take place that holiday, in order to remain in school. This proves that for an African man, circumcision was becoming secondary to education.

With time, Western education became one of the determinants of the Agikuyu circumcision calendar. In 1952, the PC of Kiambu ordered that circumcision be conducted during school holidays to avoid disrupting schooling (KNA, PC/CP/8/7/1). This was the beginning of transformation of the Kikuyu circumcision. Education continues to influence circumcision in Kiambu. Most of Kikuyu boys, despite their age, are only circumcised after completing class eight (see section 4.2.2). It is interesting to note that even if a boy is retained or repeats in a certain class, he will not be circumcised until he completes class eight. Thus, it is not the age which determines but the clearance of primary education. The age-set system was altered by the education system in the sense that it was easier for a man to speak of those that they schooled together with than those that they were circumcised with. As such, education system in colonial and post-colonial period cannot be ignored in the making of Agikuyu men. It is the various dynamics brought about by education that led to formation of political groupings such as *Anaake*

a forti. On one hand, the educated Africans led the masses in demanding for independence. On the other hand, uneducated or less educated Africans felt alienated from the colonial political-economy and therefore resisted colonial rule.

4.2 Increased Agikuyu Political awareness and Hegemony after Second World War as Seen in Anaake A Forti and MAU MAU

The previous sections in this chapter have analysed various changes that occurred after 1945. Socio-economic and political changes as inspired by colonial developmentalism were notable. Politically, the spirit of nationalism among Africans grew stronger. African nationalism was predominantly articulated along ethnic lines. This was to the advantage of the British who, because of their divide and rule strategy, thought would keep communities fragmented. However, communities looked for a unifying factor within the culture thus blending cultural revivalism with nationalism.

Among the Agikuyu, a group of men calling themselves *anaake a forti* that was invigorated with a sense of cultural unity, emerged in the 1940s. Forty in this case was used in reference to the year 1940, when these men were recruited or conscripted into the British armed forces. *Anaake a forti* (young men of forty) was largely formed by men who had participated in the Second World War. It also consisted of the unemployed, petty traders and other members of lumpen proletariat, who made just enough money for their consumption only (Wanyubari, 1993: 55). African soldiers who fought in the World War II had been promised rewards by the British government (Shiroya, 1992). However, many African war veterans were frustrated because they were neither rewarded nor recognized by the colonial government. Moreover, socio-economic changes meant

that these men had been removed from the rural set-up and hence most of them found themselves in the urban areas looking for jobs.

However, jobs were not forthcoming to every African. Indeed, the ex-war soldiers were relegated to African locations where life, housing and basic sanitation were a serious problem (White, 1990). It is under these circumstances in Nairobi that *aanake a forti* was formed. Members of this group were united by the fact that they were circumcised in 1940s and hence this gave them a sense of power upon which they would congregate and try to show their hegemony. This group emerged as a militant wing of Kenya African Union (KAU). *Aanake a forti* were frustrated by the mild way KAU was handling the British. They believed independence could be achieved instantly. Their radical nature could have been motivated by the experience of the war and the feeling of being excluded from the colonial economy. They also felt alienated from their fellow Africans who were educated. The educated African men were in a better position socially and economically since they could get better paying jobs. Indeed, in the 1950s, it was possible to speak of two categories of men whose literacy and skills informed how they conducted themselves (White, 1990: 9; White, 1996: 204). Illife (2005: 285) argues that African men also felt frustrated because land was scarce and in towns the adults were too poor to support families or transfer inheritance. Hence, it was in towns where they sought honour hitherto denied to them. This honour could only be achieved through gaining independence which explains their motivation towards resistance.

Anaake a forti were proud of their masculinity. They openly declared that they were circumcised in 1940 (Wachanga, 1975). Circumcision was a proof of manhood and that no one would talk

about their secrets since only a *kihii* (uncircumcised man/boy) who could not keep secrets. This gave them the confidence that as 'real men' they could exercise hegemony over the whites and those that had collaborated with them. The Bamasaba of Uganda also used the cultural symbol of *imbalu* to fight for their land (Khanakwa, 2010: 197). The southern communities of Tanganyika and Xhosa of South Africa also used circumcision to enhance their nationalism (Opuko, 1990; Mandela, 1994).

By mid 1940s, the activities of *anaake a forti* attracted not only ex-soldiers but also men in the rural areas of Kiambu whose situation was also desperate. This was due to the fact that after the war there was the introduction of agricultural mechanization which had for a long time been considered expensive by the European settlers. This rendered African labour less important. Human labour was left to public works such construction of *benji* (bench terraces) to curb soil erosion (Murugi, O.I 12/8/2012). This type of labour was not paid for and hence majority of the labourers were conscripted. This led Kiambu people to migrate to Nairobi. Here, they added to the group of unemployed, frustrated and radicalised Africans.

The struggle for independence by the *anaake a forti* and their radical activities is thus said to have attracted a lot of people. As a result of *anaake a forti* becoming radical, their group dissolved and joined MAU MAU. Political activities *anaake a forti* in the urban areas would climax in Nairobi while *anaake a forti* in the rural area went to the forests. The colonial government reacted by putting curfew in order to monitor movement of people. The leaders of the political movements were arrested, killed or deported. The interactions between MAU MAU and the colonial government contributed to the transformation of Agikuyu circumcision. This is

because in Nairobi, every Kikuyu was treated as a MAU MAU suspect in Nairobi. By 1956, Nairobi was a no-go zone for the Kikuyu and related groups of Embu and Meru (Elkins, 2003). Due to the harsh treatment and curfews by the British, thousands of Agikuyu fled to Rift Valley, Aberdare Mountains and Mt. Kenya forest ready to fight the British (Kiriga 1991: 176; Elkins, 2003).

Nairobi was the hub of political activities and hence it had to be secured. In 1954, the British declared 'Operation Anvil'. This operation was aimed at ensuring that only legally permitted Africans were in Nairobi. All city dwellers were screened and those that were commuting daily to Nairobi found the roads blocked and they were turned back. Of all communities in Nairobi, the Kikuyu were treated with a lot of suspicion. Many Gikuyu men were termed as MAU MAU followers were arrested and taken to concentration camps and prisons such as Manyani, Mackinnon Road and Lang'ata (Anderson, 2005: 203). Anderson adds that by the end of 1953 more than 24,100 Kikuyu men had been detained. This turbulent situation led to disappearance of many Kikuyu men, some died while others were arrested. Family ties were broken and many women were left to mourn the death or disappearance of their sons or husbands. One particular woman stripped naked and begged the home guards to kill her because her only living son had been arrested, while other sons were killed and her husband's where about unknown (Likimani, 1998: 33).

The detention and disappearance of Agikuyu men had direct impact on Kikuyu circumcision because men played an important role in circumcision of their juniors or sons as described in chapter 2. Moreover, life in detention camps was hard and many Agikuyu men would die never

to come back to their families (O.I, Kung'u Ituiku, 22/11/2012). Political awareness contributed to the transformation of Agikuyu masculinity. Agikuyu men used circumcision and portrayed hegemonic tendencies as motivation for their nationalism. Circumcision made them 'real' men who were free from cowardice and hence they could stand up strongly against the British.

Therefore, circumcision and its traditional role as described in Chapter Two were still important. However, the struggle for independence and political radicalism of the Gikuyu transformed circumcision because most of them went to the forest and those that were arrested by the British were detained. Women took up men's role such as heading and maintaining homes. By the 1950, Agikuyu social cohesiveness had been weakened and therefore circumcision of both boys and girls was affected. Ann Nduta notes that after declaration of *majeneti* (state of emergency) in 1952, circumcision process was closely monitored by the colonial government because it was believed that such events were used for political mobilisation and oathing (Nduta, O.I, 17/11/2012). As a result, a permit had to be issued by the colonial government to allow circumcision to take place.

4.3 New Patterns in Agikuyu male Circumcision in Independent Kenya, 1963-2002.

In 1963, Kenya attained the much awaited independence. However, in as much as the Africans were eager about freedom, independence did not mean going back to pre-colonial lifestyle. Socially, the interaction of more than six decades between the Africans and the white man were irreversible. Politically, the elite who took over from the colonialists propagated the same old principles of their predecessors. Thus, the Kenyan leadership at independent was largely 'flag independence' or a mere change of guard; from the white man to the African elite. African

grievances were not fully addressed by the African government. The land problem, for instance, formed not only the core motivation for Kiambu freedom fighters but also the optimism that Africans had at independence. However, the land issue was not given the seriousness it deserved. This meant that the much anticipated reforms by the freedom fighters remained a mirage. Many people remained landless, others were resettled in other districts outside Kiambu, while others continued being labourers in Nairobi and other towns (Wanyubari, 1989). Moreover, Europeans sought to retain immense influence to her former colonies through cultural and economic links.

At independence the Agikuyu economic, social and political set up had been completely transformed and this affected their lifestyle in totality. Circumcision was not exempted in this transformation. Here, we illustrate the new patterns that Agikuyu male circumcision took after independence.

4.4 Circumcision as an individual family affair

Due to the social, economic and political changes that were brought about by colonialism, traditional circumcision was faced by new challenges after independence. Circumcision could not be conducted communally but it became an individual family affair. Here we refer to this process of circumcision as ‘home-based’ as opposed to communal circumcision.

In ‘home-based’ circumcision, a family would take their initiates to hospital and after the surgery, the initiate came back home where he would be nursed and fed by a sponsor who was selected by the family concerned, to look after their son over the healing period. As noted in Chapter 2, sponsors in pre-colonial period were respected and were sought on the basis of “experience”. The idea was that a sponsor was supposed to be a person who the initiate would

look up to and probably emulate. Although up to the 1980s sponsors were taken seriously, things changed 1990s. Kamau observed that:

“Today it is easier for an initiate to be sponsored by another circumcised a year ago, years back this was unacceptable, what can an inexperienced sponsor teach the initiate?” (Jamleck Kamau, O.I, 14/12/2012).

This affects formation of boys to men in Kiambu because sponsors lack good mentorship qualities. Traditionally and up to 1990s, a sponsor was almost like a mentor. He was supposed to have stayed for some years after circumcision may be to have ‘experienced’ manhood. This would in turn equip such a man with knowledge enough to make him a mentor.¹⁴

During the fieldwork, it was clear that home-based circumcision gained popularity as a result of the spread of western medicine and the accompanying weakening of communal ties. Besides, home-based circumcision was preferred because it was cheaper compared to communal ceremonies. Each family would, based on their financial ability, carry out circumcision their own style rather than the complex, elaborate communal ritual and procedures that took a lot of time and resources. Slaughtering of animals for instance, was very important for various rituals accompanying traditional circumcision. Certainly ‘Agikuyu traditions began to die away with the extinction of goats because tradition demanded slaughtering....’ (Kanogo, 1987).

¹⁴ It was not certain how many years one had to stay before qualifying to be a mentor, but some informants put it at 3-5 years. For more on the role of the mentors/ sponsors see chapter 2. Also see Muriuki, G 1971 and Leakey, 1977.

Although rituals and sacrifices are not common today, slaughtering of animals has directly been replaced with money. Today, all processes carried out during circumcision, including provision of food, requires money unlike in the past where most of the requirement during circumcision were readily available in the home. In modern day, such traditional rituals in circumcision can be very expensive and hence not economically viable. For instance, not every family owns a goat today as it was the case in the pre-colonial era.

Ownership of property also relates to changed lifestyle, the family set-up and socio-economic lifestyle. In modern day, people are busy working in formal or informal jobs and trying to make their ends meet. Most people are living in an urban set-up, and their neighbours may be from other communities. Therefore with this kind of system, it has become hard to organize communal circumcision ceremonies for their sons. Thus in post-independent era, circumcision was simple and restricted to the family level.

However, home-based circumcision was not without its disadvantages; it was exhausting especially to women. Mama Mbugua observed that:

“Keeping the initiate at home ‘ties’ the woman there to cook food for him and the visitors. Our husbands have left everything to us” (Mama Mbugua, O.I, 17/11/2012).

In the case where the woman was not a ‘housewife¹⁵’, a scenario that is very common in Kiambu, it proved difficult to stay at home to cook and look after the initiates or even receive guests of their circumcised sons. The circumcision process was also entirely in the woman’s domain since unlike in the pre-colonial period it was no longer a taboo for a woman to engage in the process of her son’s circumcision.

Some people also expressed their concern over the so called mentors or sponsors. According to Mama Mbugua,

“Today it is very hard to find a good sponsor. Some of those sponsors teach our sons bad vices such as smoking, drinking and force them to join bad groups like the mungiki¹⁶. That is the reason I have chosen to take my son to school circumcision” (Mama Mbugua, O.I, 17/11/2012)

She therefore took her son to be circumcised at Riabai High School where she paid for her son’s medication; accommodation and food (see school circumcision in section 3.2.2).

Since home-based circumcision weakened communal ties, it further led to transformation of male circumcision in Kiambu. For instance the age-set system was greatly affected. The individualised family affair did not favour classification of men into age-sets. Traditionally, an age-set would be formed by every group of initiates and a name would be given as described in

¹⁵ In this context, we use housewives to mean women who do not have any form of employment but their role is home making.

¹⁶ Mungiki is a religious sect that identifies with Agikuyu traditional rituals that arguably are outdated today. This group believes in sniffing of tobacco, keeping role hair and circumcision of women.

chapter 2. Jamleck observes that his circumcision year in 1989 was the last *irua* that had a name (Jamleck, 14/12/2012). It was called “*Kia Meri*”, a Kikuyu word for two hundred, as that was the time Kshs 200 was printed for the first time. As noted earlier in the previous chapter, traditionally *irua* names were important markers of time.

Although the Kikuyu adopted the European calendar after colonisation, neglecting circumcision names was seen by many as losing touch with their culture and togetherness. Often men who were circumcised together would be very proud of their masculinity citing their circumcision name and also calling themselves pet names as *wakini* (of the same age set). This name gave these men a sense of power because as they called each other such names proved that indeed they underwent through the process of circumcision. This would bring out hegemony over the younger men and women. A Gikuyu elder, Njuthi, noted that, in expressing the year one was circumcised, European calendar is insufficient compared to how Kikuyu used to associate such time with an important event. Njuthi explained that one cannot compare say, “1998” and the “Bomb blast” as the latter is more weighty (Njuthi, O.I, 17/11/2012).

Male circumcision in Kiambu was also transformed by the abolition of female circumcision. Home-based circumcision for men coincided with campaigns against female circumcision in the 1990s. Since 1990, and with the abolition of female circumcision, the age-sets lost meaning (Gitau, O.I, 14/12/2012). Female circumcision would ensure that the age-set system was followed especially as a way of controlling sexual relations. However when female circumcision was banned men could just marry or associate with any female. This change affected hegemony because women would be taught submissiveness in the period of seclusion. This meant that the

ideas of men power over women were not being inculcated in the latter and hence hegemony was weakened. With time, the same trickled down to the relations between men where senior men and younger men would relate without any traditional rules or regulations. These relations were even made more unrestrained because of other factors such as wealth and education as discussed elsewhere in this chapter.

As described above the shortcoming of home-based circumcision such as time and resources saw a new trend come up in the year 2000 where such organisations as churches, hospitals and schools started to organise boys' circumcision. Depending on the aims and goals of such groups, they tried to reform male circumcision either to make it cheaper or even bring back some traditional element in a modern sense. For instance, some groups have tried to bring back traditions such as naming of the age-sets to bring back a sense of identity for Agikuyu men as discussed below.

4.5 Circumcision as influenced by Formal Schooling programs and churches in independent era.

As early as 1910 in Kiambu, circumcision was influenced by the school system. Schooling became an integral part of every man's life who embraced education. For such a man, a larger part of his life was spent in school. Certainly, circumcision was directly influenced by school system. By 1963, circumcision came second to education and was conducted over school holidays so as not to interrupt the school calendar. Around the 1980s to 1990, most school administrations were against circumcision of boys who had not completed primary education. Hence they encouraged circumcision to be done after clearing primary school. This would allow the initiates enough time to heal as they waited to join high school.

Education gave a man a unique type of ‘elite’ masculinity that appealed to the masses. As a result of changes in the society, traditional type of masculinity which largely taught men to be macho lost touch and was replaced by education and wealth creation. Peter Kamanja noted that most men of 1980 and 1990s were concerned with a new type of masculinity that came from the benefits of being educated as one would get a decent job or join a class of elite (Kamanja, O.I, 12/12/2012).

Therefore, ‘home-based’ circumcision was carried out immediately after clearing primary education. However in some cases, it had a negative impact on the formation of Agikuyu men. As described above, home based circumcision had disadvantages as nobody knew what would happen in the ‘cubicle’ (initiate’s room) of young men especially if one had untrustworthy or uncommitted sponsor.

Due to the setbacks that faced home-based circumcision as discussed above, schools, churches¹⁷ and hospitals started to organise boys’ circumcision as an alternative to the home-based circumcision. This does not mean that home-based circumcision is not practiced any more. It depends on an individual family’s preference and many underlying factors such as social-economic status. Thus schools, churches and hospitals across Kiambu County started to work in partnership to perform circumcision as an alternative to the home-nursed circumcision. School/church circumcision is on the other hand a collaborative initiative where churches or

¹⁷ It is important to clarify that not all churches involve themselves in the circumcision issues. The churches that are so active in this are the mainline churches such as PCEA, ACK and Catholic, probably due to the fact that these churches have the resources required for the process.

schools provide the spiritual and material support, including accommodation and payment of *muruthia* (circumciser).

The school/church-based circumcision came up as a result of many reasons. First, churches and schools came up as a way of ‘protecting’ the ‘endangered’ Gikuyu boy child. This is because the home-based circumcision where everything was done at the family level led to the loss of culture. As such these groups wanted to ‘*gucokia rui mukaro*’ (get the river back to its course). Secondly, the school-based circumcision was less involving on the side of the parents, in terms of organisation of the whole procedure since the planning is left to the church or the school. Thirdly, due to the busy lifestyles that parents have, they do not have time to advise their circumcised sons. As such churches and schools came to fill the gap by preparing ‘relevant’ lessons to teach to the initiates.

In Churches/schools we visited during the field work in 2012, we observed procedures that are followed. For instance, prior to circumcision every parent or a guardian was to fill a form outlining the initiate’s medical condition. These details are used in case any initiate had a special condition in order to avoid complications. This form also consists of a list of items that the initiates required to carry for use for the period they would be absent from home (see figure 2, pg 118). This was contrary to traditional circumcision where no prior testing was done thus making the chances of complication after the surgery high. Indeed, this shows that the ideas of hegemony were eroded because, the pain and suffering that the initiates endured in the traditional circumcision made them to have a sense of power and pride. Manhood has therefore transformed

because traditionally those who suffered or died in circumcision procedures did so as a way of portraying their stoic masculinity.

Apart from the churches, hospitals and school, other organisations continued to form in order to organise circumcision of boys in Kiambu. During the fieldwork, a group called *Kiambaa men* had organized themselves in order to ‘save’ the boy child. This group was not church-based but it was composed of Agikuyu elders whose aim was to ‘restore the glory of the Gikuyu man’. The chairman of Kiambaa men, Mr Njuthi explained that the group saw that there was a gap in the development of a boy child because whenever boys attained the initiation age, fathers were too busy for them. Thus circumcision of boys was only reduced to the physical procedure without putting into consideration the importance of teaching them values of manhood.

However, some of these organisations were blamed for being only interested in money but not developing values of manhood. Njuthi also added that,

“Some scrupulous groups have come up in Kiambu to organise circumcision and in the process took advantage of the people by charging too much money. Kikuyu masculinity is no more, and we have left our boys in the hands of people who are out there for business. Some organization are charging as much as 8000 for 8 days, no counselling, no character formation it is just business” (Njuthi, O.I, 17/11/2012).

We also established that in the school/ church circumcision, there is no unified code of teachings of values to the initiates. Teachings offered to the boys during circumcision differed depending

on the interest of the group. The major teachings that the boys were taught in the churches during seclusion were mainly Biblical. In 2012, at the PCEA church *Thindigua*, circumcision motto was “Stand up ye and be a man” (1st Kings 2:2). This motto affects formation of Agikuyu masculinity as the church seeks to produce a Christian man and not a cultural man. It was conspicuous that independent churches which had circumcision at the center of conflict in the colonial period have circumcision at the least of their priorities today.

Thus in most cases, teachings offered in some of these centers did not in any way cultivate Agikuyu masculinity. This scenario continues to transform Agikuyu masculinity. At Queens of Apostle centre, an outline of what the initiates were taught were Christianity, Drug abuse, Hygiene and HIV/AIDS; how to be a ‘real’ man as defined by traditions was not among the priority. Thus emphasis on being stoic as in the traditional circumcision was not part of these teachings. In most of the centers, each initiate was issued with a circumcision certificate to show the knowledge they had acquired in the training at the end of the program (see figure 3). This was different from the past where no paper was given as proof of circumcision. However, some people raised concerns on the importance of that certificate. Another respondent, Mr John Mwathi argued that the certificate could not be used anywhere and that one did not need to produce it to show that he is a man. Mr Njuthi, however, noted that the certificate was to act as a reminder to the initiate of what he had learnt and also to make it easier to trace the group ‘products’ as they were to do follow up of the initiate for four years.

Although School or hospital accommodation after circumcision had its advantages, it was also criticised. Sarah Nyambura observed that “9 days for an initiate is too little time, some are

coming back without being completely healed and parents incur more losses to treat the initiate”. She also complained about the process arguing;

“My son was circumcised in 2010, my nephew in 2011, I was surprised to learn that my son was my nephew’s sponsor as the two are age mates” (Nyambura, O.I, 22/12/2012).

Nyambura’s concern confirmed what was raised earlier about mentorship. Mwangi also confirmed this by noting that

“Nine days were too few for an initiate to heal completely” (Mwangi, O.I, 22/12/2012).

Mwangi (aged about 50 years) narrated that during his time one could not be healed in less than 21 days.

Even with the school and church based circumcision, schooling continued to affect circumcision. Most of these groups organized circumcision over school holiday especially during the month of December. Unlike the past, age did not play as the key determining factor as to when a boy was to be circumcised. Consequently, boys who started schooling at a tender age could finish school earlier and thus end up being circumcised at an early age. Age-group and age-sets were therefore no longer important compared to schooling. Consequently, it was common to hear men nowadays talking of schooling together than being circumcised together.

Figure 2: Initiates Details Form.

**KIAMA KIA ATHURI AGIKUYU
KIAMBU EAST DISTRICT**

INITIATES APPLICATION FORM 2012

NAME OF INITIATE (CANDIDATE) _____
 AGE _____
 RELIGION _____
 NAME OF PARENT/ GUARDIAN _____ TEL NO. _____
 RELATIONSHIP WITH THE INITIATIVE _____

ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS

1. Has the initiate suffered any of the following ailments:

a. Heart complication	Yes	No
b. Anaemia	Yes	No
c. TB	Yes	No
d. Hepatitis B	Yes	No
e. Asthma	Yes	No
f. Diabetes	Yes	No
g. Does the initiate suffer any allergy	Yes	No

If yes, which one? _____

h. Are there certain food stuff that the candidate does not eat? Yes/ No
 i. Is your child on a Medical Diet (special food)? _____

2. **REMEMBER**
 Registration is **Kshs. 150/-**
 The cost of the whole exercise is **Kshs. 2,800/-**

3. **PERSONAL EFFECTS**

1. Mattress
2. Bed sheets
3. Blankets
4. Tissue paper
5. Detol soap
6. Towel
7. Basin
8. Slippers
9. Toothbrush and tooth paste
10. Vaseline
11. Cup
12. Plate and spoon
13. Exercise book and ball pen

Parent/ Guardian signature _____

Recipient signature _____

Figure 3: Circumcision Certificate.

KIAMA KIA ATHUURI AGIKUYU



KIAMA KIA MA

Certificate of Circumcision

Agikuyu rite of passage

Riika ria **COUNTY 2012**
at Riabai Boy's High School

This is to certify that

Master

*has in accordance with Agikuyu Culture and Traditions,
been circumcised and undergone the full counselling
program in the following areas:*

- *Agikuyu Culture and Traditions*
- *Civic Education*
- *Religious Education*
- *Ethics and Morality*



PETER N. KAROMO
Chairman - Kiambu East District

4.6 Summary

It was the objective of this chapter to analyse the transformation that took place in the practice of circumcision among the Agikuyu in the period 1945 to 2008. This chapter has demonstrated that the meaning and purpose of male circumcision in Kiambu continued to change even with the end of colonialism. In the last years of colonisation, colonial policies of monetization of the economy, increased western education, western medicine, urbanization and changes in modes of labour were accepted by the greater majority. These changes coincided with the World War II which also led to the political awareness of Africans, leading to formation of such groups as *anaake a forti* and MAU MAU. These groups used circumcision as a unifying factor. After independence each family organized circumcision individually. Further transformation was seen as such groups as churches organised circumcision. Such groups gained popularity as it was seen as more appropriate to pay cash to such groups rather than keeping the initiate at home, as the latter was involving. These changes affected the development of boys into men. From the fieldwork, it was clear that male circumcision in Kiambu will keep transforming. This transformation also influenced how Agikuyu masculinity was used in national politics as described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

POLITICS OF THE FORESKIN¹⁸:

AGIKUYU MASCULINITY IN THE MULTIPARTY CONTEXT, 1992-2008.

5.0 Introduction

In chapter four, we discussed the transformation of Agikuyu circumcision in the period 1945 to 2008. We observed that circumcision rites continued to transform in the late colonial period and even after independence. During the struggle for independence, such groups as *Aanake a Forti* used circumcision to affirm their masculinity and stoicism. These groups considered themselves as ‘real’ men who were fit enough to fight for independence. This chapter explores contemporary Agikuyu expressions of masculinity as they relate to Kenyan politics since 1992.

By taking 1992, the chapter refers to the context of the transition from an authoritarian political structure to a multi-party dispensation involving competition for power, among other things. It seeks to investigate if, and why, this transition has been mediated by cultural perceptions of leadership. In this framework of competition, traditional frames of reference on leadership were transposed from their original meaning into a new context of political organization, in which contestation over who qualifies for leadership was discussed in reference to circumcision. The example of invocation of ethnic rivalries, whether real or imagined, between the Kikuyu and Luo will illustrate the argument. The chapter explores how circumcision became a political tool for mass mobilisation especially after 1992 when political competition was revived by re-introduction of multiparty politics.

¹⁸We borrowed the title ‘politics of the foreskin’ from KNCHR study, *2006 Referendum Report*.

This chapter argues that Kikuyu-Luo rivalry was a creation of the political elite, an imagined concept that raise many interesting questions especially because it is based on imagining into reality the assumption that leadership capacities are enhanced or diminished by the act of circumcision. Although the scope of this chapter is 2008, the chapter prospectively analyses data that was acquired during the fieldwork that was arguably important in understanding the politics of the foreskin even after the 2007 general elections.

5.2 Background to Multiparty Politics in Kenya Before 1992

The fight for democracy in Kenya has a long history. However, aspects of democracy gained popularity at independence. At independence, Kenya was a multiparty state and politics was dominated by two parties, Kenya African National Union (KANU) and Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU). The major difference between the two parties was ideological, revolving around KANU's preference for a unitary government while KADU wanted *majimbo*¹⁹Anderson, 2005). By the turn of the 1960s, due to internal and external factors, it was clear that Britain would concede autonomy to Kenya. Preparation for the formation of an African government became a priority. The nationalism portrayed by the freedom fighters quickly gave way to the question of who, between KANU and KADU, would form the government.

The politics of exclusion after independence could be traced to early rivalries between KANU-KADU. KANU had the support of the masses; from the urban working class, traders, lumpens, peasantry, and most importantly the embryonic indigenous bourgeoisie (Ajulu 1995: 231). The latter, in the name of KANU, captured state power at independence. The KANU bourgeoisie were convinced that any division fostered by political pluralism would be detrimental to

¹⁹ Majimbo is a Swahili name for regions. It refers to the idea of political devolution of power to different regions in the country to make these regions self governing.

maintaining a united nation (Kyle, 1999). Moreover, it was believed that a multiparty system would open doors to ethnic, regional and religious interests (Tordoff 1984). Thus, KANU supporters called for unity among all the communities.

However, as the leader of KANU, Jomo Kenyatta did not embrace the unity that his party was preaching. He was exclusionary in his leadership as seen in his cabinets which were predominantly made of the Kikuyu elite. In 1974, seven out of twenty cabinet ministers were Kikuyu and five of these seven were from Kiambu (Murunga, 2004; Muchoki, 2012). Power was concentrated in the presidency and hence the president's decisions went almost unquestioned. Many people who went against the government of the day were detained or even killed. This authoritarian rule trickled down through the Provincial Administration and the organs of national security and the police in particular. Kenyatta 'favoured' the Kikuyu elite which made him to be branded a 'tribalist' who used Patron-client network and allied himself with loyalists (Throup, 1998: 144; Kyle, 1999: 25; Muchoki, 2012). Certainly, in 1971 when JM Kariuki and Dr Njoroge Mungai came from Israel with scholarship offers, Kenyatta is said to have delegated the role of choosing those qualified to Julius Kiano with the mandate to select only from the Agikuyu 'tribe' (Kyle, 1999: 171).

As the editor of *Muigithania* (reconcillor), Kenyatta aimed at reconciling the traditions of the Agikuyu (Kyle, 1999). In his writings, Kenyatta called for Agikuyu unity and in fact discouraged Gikuyu women from being married by *nduriri* (usually derogatory for other tribes) (Kenyatta, 1938: 29). Backed up by such a powerful presidency, it was very difficult for the opposition to survive. KADU was thus courted and voluntarily joined KANU. Consequently, eleven months

after independence, Kenya became a one-party state and KADU was dissolved (Widner, 1993). Later, efforts by Kenya People's Union (KPU) to form an opposition were equally suppressed (Tordoff, 1984).

However, the fact that KANU was the only party did not mean that there were no disagreements. There were differences within KANU especially from those that felt shortchanged in offering quality leadership to Africans after many years of colonial oppression. Such leaders as Oginga Odinga, Tom Mboya, Pio Gama Pinto and J.M Kariuki who propagated a broad nationalist agenda based on a social model were often frustrated by the Kenyatta leadership. Except for Oginga Odinga, most of the others became victims of political assassinations. The Luo political elite perceived the death of Mboya as a scheme to eliminate the Luo from participating in national politics. Mboya was a young politician who was very promising in the political leadership of the Luo, but on the other hand he was seen as a threat by the government of the day. As such, the death of Mboya 'confirmed' that the Luo community was targeted by the Gikuyu political elite under Kenyatta and this united it against a common this ethnic enemy (Kyle, 1999).

Oginga Odinga was branded an enemy of the government. Individual differences became communal differences and hence Odinga was viewed as an enemy of Kenyatta and Kikuyu at large. Ethnically, this was interpreted by the political elite to mean that it was Oginga and the Luo on one side verses Kenyatta and the Kikuyu on the other. Individuals became analogous to their communities. This is how a Kikuyu-Luo rivalry was re-interpreted by the Kikuyu elite in terms of 'immaturity' on the part of Luo elite who, incidentally, did not circumcise their male.

After the death of Kenyatta, Moi promised to walk in the *nyayo* (footsteps) of Kenyatta. True to his *nyayo* philosophy, his style of leadership was also exclusionary and did not favour political competition. Indeed, Moi transformed Kenya from a *de facto* to a *de jure* one party state (Cowen and Kanyinga, 2002; Muchoki 2012). However, the scrapping of the infamous section 2A of the independence constitution, which defined Kenya as a *de jure* one party state, was followed by formation of many political parties. This was just one year before the 1992 general election. This was followed by intense party competition where ethnic dominance and 'tribal' arithmetics featured greatly. Although there was dynamic of political competition in the multiparty era, this chapter is interested in how exclusionary politics within this context of political competition was justified by circumcision. This is because circumcision among other aspects of culture is a primary site for plotting the process of 'othering' (Darby 1998 as quoted by Atieno-Odhiambo, 2002: 240).

5.3 Politics of the Foreskin: Circumcision as a Tool for Mass Mobilization, 1992-2008

As described in chapter 2, internal differentiation of Gikuyu men was based on the physical cut. Circumcision was used by the Agikuyu to separate 'real' men from 'boys'. Circumcision was also a basic pillar of the community, and of manhood. It defined the social status of a man and dictated the politics of who was to lead the community at a particular period of time as it directly influenced the *itwika* ceremony. Hegemonic masculinity was displayed by circumcised men as they distinguished themselves from those who were not circumcised. All these were procedures that were carried in a community almost uniformly.

However, at independence, a nation was born that ought to have integrated all communities into one unified state. The system of government was based on democratic principles and hence

elections and political competition were part of the larger process. This competition gained currency in the 1990s after the call for a democratic government and subsequent re-introduction of multiparty politics. For the elite, political survival took precedence over any consideration. Hence, the ability to mobilise the masses was considered an important tool to get and sustain political relevance and gain political mileage. For the Agikuyu political elite, circumcision was used as a unifying factor and a basis of 'othering' those that did not practice the rite. Thus, what was an innocent cultural rite among the Agikuyu was hegemonically applied externally to other communities in national politics. Although there is enough evidence that the Kikuyu have not supported even candidates from circumcising communities, this section was to deal with the rivalry between kikuyu and the Luo and analyse whether such a rivalry is real or imagined. Why did this appeal by the political elite resonate so fast in the Kikuyu community? Let us seek to answer this question by analyzing how circumcision affair was played for almost two decades of multiparty politics. The first part analyses 1992-2002 and the second part deals with 2002-2007.

After the re-introduction of multiparty politics in 1992, people were optimistic that the despotic rule of KANU would come to an end. Two main opposition parties, Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (FORD) and Democratic Party (DP) were formed. However, FORD had internal wrangles to deal with as they could not agree on who was to compete with KANU's president Moi. FORD's internal wrangles were quickly labelled as ethnic in nature as Kenneth Matiba and Oginga Odinga competed for the FORD's Presidential candidature. Ironically, FORD could not use the democratic principle that they had fought for to iron out their differences through party primaries. Therefore, FORD split into two; Matiba's FORD Asili and Oginga's FORD Kenya.

To appeal to the masses, the Kikuyu elite used propaganda to unite the Agikuyu and other communities against Oginga. Thus, Oginga was dismissed based on propaganda about circumcision. This propaganda that considered him as 'immature' to lead, since, being a Luo he was supposedly uncircumcised. Oginga was apparently a lesser man compared to the other three *njamba* (strongmen) in the race including President Moi, Mwai Kibaki of DP and Kenneth Matiba (Atieno-Odhiambo, 2002: 243). During this period, circumcision politics were internally used in the opposition. It was argued that 'men' would not come to terms with 'boys' to form a party (Mohamed and Markakis, 1998). Consequently, the opposition remained divided and lost in 1992 elections.

In 1997, the opposition was still not ready to oust Moi because they had not overcome their differences. Many candidates vied for the presidency where each tried to outdo the other through propaganda. The same circumcision politics rallied against Oginga in 1992 were used against his son, Raila Odinga, in 1997 (Atieno-Odhiambo, 2002). However, in 2002, the opposition merged and formed a coalition, the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) led by Mwai Kibaki, Raila Odinga, Kijana Wamalwa, and Charity Ngilu, among others. Kibaki was the flag bearer. This coalition was able to remove Moi from power after a twenty four years rule and Forty year rule of KANU. It was a new dawn for Kenya and the country was filled with optimism (Murunga and Nasong'o, 2004). However, the Kibaki led group was accused by the Raila led group of violating the coalition's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed prior to elections. The different segments of the coalition government split into the Raila led group, Orange Democratic Party (ODM) and Kibaki led Party of National Unity (PNU) factions, which battled it out for the presidency in 2007. Raila and Kibaki emerged as the two main candidates.

Again, for the sake of the political survival for the elite, the 2007 political campaigns side stepped issues. This time, it was a Kikuyu against a Luo which made it easier for the political elite to propagate their differences. Communal divisions were also fashioned to mean that political representation guaranteed access to national resources. On the part of the Luo, the elite made their people to feel that 2007 was the time to get what had been denied to them all along by the ‘greedy’ Kikuyu since independence. On the other hand, the Kikuyu elite believed that they so deserved the presidency and hence it was their duty to keep it in the house of *Mumbi* (Muchoki, 2012). A popular old saying; “*gaka ni gaitu*” or *mundu wa mucii* (this is our own) in contrast with *kihii giki* (little boy) to refer to the Luo, resurfaced in Kiambu (Muchoki, 2012). This difference was cemented by the belief that with “our own” in power, the bigger will be our portion of the “national cake”, if not all.

In the long run, nationalism was replaced by zero-sum politics. The political elite knew how to play their cards to maintain their position and relevance. For the Agikuyu elite, circumcision was the much needed disguise for settling political scores. The Luo were regarded as ‘boys’ and ‘immature’ and hence could not be trusted with political leadership. Earlier on, circumcision as a gauge for political ‘maturity’ or eligibility was also used by other communities such as the Bukusu and the Kisii. Simeon Nyachae would publically disregard the Luo on the basis of circumcision saying that ‘*wale hawajaenda jandoni waende*’ (those that have not undergone circumcision should go) (KNHRC, 2006: 46). However, in 2007, many communities, including the Luhya, whose emphasis on circumcision cannot be underestimated, ignored differences based on circumcision as they overwhelmingly supported Raila. This as explained later in this chapter

could be associated by access of information from the media and hence the masses were more enlightened.

Why was mobilisation through circumcision by the political elite penetrating so fast to the masses? Various methods were used to enhance Kikuyu and demean Luo masculinity. Some of these methods include music, comedy, vernacular radio stations, and technological advancement.

Stereotypes based on manhood were spread through music. According to Mbugua (2008), Agikuyu musicians were labeled as prophets. Joel Ndirangu, as cited by Mbugua, noted that:

“There are many seers now. Do you know that long ago every ridge had its own *murathi* (prophet), and if you found that there was something going wrong in your household then you consulted him...these singers that you now hear are playing the role of the seers of the old. Listen to them” (Mbugua, 2008).

During the fieldwork some respondents reiterated that Agikuyu singers were indeed prophets and the name of John De’ Mathew was repeatedly mentioned as one such a ‘prophet’ in his songs. Simon indeed posed the question “is not what they sang prior to 2005 referendum, 2007 General Election fulfilled?” (Simon, O.I, 10/11/2012). Indeed, some of the things that these musicians sang can be justified with some events in the country and cements the comparison between a singer and prophets of the pre-colonial era (see some of the Gikuyu songs below)

Kikuyu singers among them, Albert Gacheru, Makibi James, Muigai wa Njoroge, Sovinger wa Viviana, Joseph Kamaru, Kamande wa Koi and John De’ Mathew have praised Kikuyu

masculinity. However, to the Agikuyu majority, rarely would these songs be interpreted as hate speech. Indeed until recently, music was not taken as a tool of spreading hate speech and political mobilisation. Although some musician would cross with the government and their songs banned, Mbugua (2008) concludes that the reason for the disagreement between singers and politicians was direct competition for public attention. Besides Mbugua's argument, musicians also pointed out the evils of the ruling regime hence the disagreement between them and the government.

Most of these musicians have in their compositions constructed the Agikuyu as natural leaders of the multi-ethnic Kenya who are hardworking, and heroically fought for independence. Some of the Kikuyu lyrics that uplift the Agikuyu masculinity are illustrated below;

Prior to 2007 elections, Sovinger and Muigai in their song '*Gathaaraini*' (Kasarani) warned the Kikuyu against intra-ethnic divisions, to them:

"Mwana na ithe makiruiru muiritu umwe Gikuyu ni mugiyo" (Father and son fighting for the same woman is a taboo among the Agikuyu).

In this context the father and son who fought for the same bride are Kibaki and Uhuru when, in 2002, both competed for the presidency. The singers are thus warning the Kikuyu against such divisions as it would give the 'enemies' an advantage.

John De Mathew is known for the song

“Muthuri akiire thii onaga haraya biu gwi kihii kiri muti iguru”

(When a man is seated, he sees far beyond a boy who is on top of a tree (in this context, a boy refers to uncircumcised man).

This song was interpreted to mean that despite the age, a Luo was a lesser man to a Kikuyu one since he had not gone through the process of circumcision. Music is an effective way of spreading a message and mobilizing people and the propaganda in these songs trickled down to the masses. Other musicians such as Makibi James, warn the Agikuyu about how they suffered during the time of Moi. The Kikuyu believed that Moi’s regime excluded them from the corridors of power, which they had enjoyed during Kenyatta’s time.

In the year 2000, Makibi thus warned that:

“Riua ni tuotete, na mwaga kunjigwa mutiui hiti iria ikamuria” (We have been scorched by the sun, if you do not listen to me, you won’t know the hyenas that will eat you).

Being scorched by the sun refers to the bad times the Agikuyu had during the time of Moi and hence if they choose a president who is not their own, they risk the same hardships. Makibi also insists that:

...utongoria ukwenda athuri marutite mburi ithatu (leadership should be held by men who have sacrificed three goats).

It was a tradition that not until a man had given three *thenge* (he-goat) to his clan, could he be respected²⁰.

Music popularity was also enhanced by technology such as VCD/DVD players, computers and digital camcorders (Mbugua, 2008). Music was further given a boost by the advent of Frequency Modulation (FM) which was later followed by the opening of many vernacular radio stations. Vernacular music became a very powerful medium of communication where some ethnic radio stations fuelled a culture of intolerance in the country (Warah, Daily Nation, July 9, 2012). Often, vernacular radio station's idea of nationhood evaporates into negative ethnicity. Such stations become a major impediment to nationhood. Indeed, during the 2007/2008 Post Election Violence (PEV), the media was put in the limelight for having played a significant role in the perpetuation of ethnic hatred (CIPEV, 2008).

Comedy was also another avenue where ethnic differences were aired. Even if comedians mean to showcase diversity in culture, they helped to exacerbate ethnic differences. As such, through technology, music, FM stations, and comedy, messages trickled down very fast to the masses and even the young children learnt of it at a tender age. Gateru noted that his twin boys (barely 10 years old) keep insisting that they are Kikuyu and not *Jaluo*...he insists that:

“Nobody trains such children of ‘tribalism’ but they learn most of it via songs and the media, even our comedians come up with tribal jokes” (Gateru, O.I, 25/12/2012).

²⁰ In Agikuyu culture, a man would rise up the upper most ladder after sacrificing three goats. The first one was to be sacrificed as an introduction or welcome (Murangano) to becoming an elder, the second when the man got married, and the third when the first born son attained the age of circumcision. For more details on this and other types of goats payments see Lambert, 1956: 76.

Interestingly, mobilization via circumcision within the Agikuyu depicts a certain picture of gender relations. That as the Kikuyu praised Kenyatta and other men as *njamba* (literally means male but in this context, it denotes strength), women are not seen in this circle except, perhaps for Martha Karua who too qualified for the title of *njamba* when she defended Kibaki during the 2007 post-election tensions. Most of the songs analysed above are sang by men as a way of praising their masculinity and not femininity. This shows that although women were traditionally involved in communal matters they played subsidiary roles. In the independent era, this mobilization only regards women as voters and not in themselves potential leaders. It is worth noting that Raila was referred to by the Agikuyu elite as *njamba* in 2002 for supporting Kibaki's bid for presidency. However, in 2007 he was openly scorned as unfit to lead. This affirmed the premise of this chapter that Agikuyu masculinity was only used by the political elite to satisfy their needs.

Certainly, politics of the foreskin was conspicuous in the 1992-2002 within the opposition and from 2002-2007 where political differences in the ruling coalition led to its split. In these two elections, Oginga Odinga and his son Raila Odinga were subjected to political propaganda based on circumcision. Though mobilization is a creation of the elite, its impact is felt by the masses. In the 1992 and 1997 general elections, this mobilization resulted to violence. However, the aftermath of the 2007 PEV was so immense that it left 1133 dead and more than 350,000 displaced (CIPEV, 2008: 1). In the Rift Valley region, 'non-indigenous tribes' were evicted from the 'natives' land. Agikuyu became the major target as they were branded *madodoa* (blemishes) in all the other areas except in their home districts in the Central region (Murunga, 2009: 38). Nairobi and Central Kenya Counties, being metropolitan in nature, were also volatile.

However, with Agikuyu as the majority in Central and Nairobi they also sought to discriminate against ‘others’ as a retaliation of what their ‘tribesmen’ were experiencing in Nyanza and the Rift Valley.

The Luo in Nairobi and Central Kenya Counties became the target of Agikuyu wrath. Luo men were forcibly and brutally circumcised by the Kikuyu. Dr. Micheni of Kenyatta National Hospital (KNH), confirmed that he attended to cases of forced and traumatic circumcision performed on Luo by the outlawed *Mungiki* sect (CIPEV, 2008: 198). In Nakuru, Luo men were circumcised using machetes and broken bottles, while in Naivasha, crowds poured into streets chanting anti-Luo slogans, shouting that the Luo should be circumcised. Consequently, Agikuyu militia flagged down vehicles and literally hunted for Luo passengers. The outlawed sect members asked, “...*kuna mjaluo kwa hii gari?*” (is there a Luo in this Vehicle?) (CIPEV, 2008: 102). Similar incidences occurred in Limuru where two Luo men were taken to Tigoni Sub-District Hospital for treatment after being circumcised with a blunt tool. This was a way of trying to intimidate the Luo and exercise hegemony over them.

Paul Otieno also narrated how men went to his Limuru home armed with machetes and axes and threatened to chop off his foreskin. Similarly, Roy Ochiengwa, on his way back home from the grinding mill was forced by Agikuyu men to sit down. The Kikuyu bullies asked him, ‘are you circumcised?’ Luckily, Roy was of the Luhya community and hence was already circumcised (Los Angeles Times, January 9, 2008). Roy’s experience, tally with Timothy Wangusa’s narrative, where the protagonist, Mwambu was ambushed by his kinsmen who had all long thought that he was not circumcised only to find that he was! (Wangusa, 1989: 118). However,

Wangusa notes that those that were hunting for Mwambu concluded that he was a lesser man to them because he opted for hospital circumcision which was done by *Etsot* and that it was done while he was lying down instead of standing²¹.

Whenever the Kikuyu-Luo imposed rivalry turned physical, Luo men became targets of forced circumcision or mutilation of sexual organs (Wanjiru-Rutenberg, 2009). This rivalry was created and exacerbated by hate speech and inflammatory sentiments by politicians. Simeon Nyachae, a long serving Kisii politician was quoted severally as saying that “*wale hawajaenda jandoni waende*” (those that have not undergone circumcision should be circumcised) (KNHRC, 2006: 46). Prior to 2007, there was also a feeling of betrayal to the Luo political elite as Kibaki failed to support Raila as the latter had done in 2002 when Raila had declared Kibaki *tosha* (*tosha* here means, fits the bill for presidency). Although this is beyond the scope of this study, it is worth noting that the same politics were witnessed in 2012 when the Luo elite also expected that Kibaki would support Raila’s presidency. Some politicians like Gem Member of Parliament (MP), Jakoyo Midiwo wanted Kibaki to also declare Raila *tosha*, which was a clarion call he aired during the opening of Kisumu airport by the then president Kibaki. However, Kibaki ignored the subject throughout the meeting.

The failure of Kibaki to support Raila was interpreted by others as the lack of willingness on the part of the Kikuyu community to support others. Dominance of the Kikuyu elite in the national politics also became an issue of concern by the ‘non-Kikuyu’ elites. Indeed as early as 1999, Raila urged the Kikuyu to emulate Hausa and the Fulani of Nigeria, who despite being many in

²¹Etsot, this is a name that the Gisu gave to the Iteso. In this context, the Gisu looked down on the Iteso since they did not practice circumcision and hence hospital circumcision produced ‘lesser men’ since they were circumcised by uncircumcised circumcisers.

number opted not to field a presidential candidate in order to unite other minority tribes (Laakso and Cowen, 2002). With time, political mobilisation transformed. Circumcision politics was outplayed by mobilization based on access to resources. Some communities felt that they were 'poor' because they had been denied political leadership at national level. For the other circumcising communities such as the Abagusii and the Abaluhya, circumcision politics faded away as they readily became political allies with the Luo. Thus Kikuyu masculinity was being weakened and this affected the extent to which they would exercise hegemony over the other communities, including the Luo.

A section of Agikuyu has also realised that the Gikuyu elite used circumcision as a tool for mobilization and not for the good of the common citizen. Kiambu, for instance, is highly stratified on class basis and poverty levels remain high. This is a lesson for the other communities that having a leader at the national level does not always mean access to national resources. The conclusion of many scholars that Kikuyu benefitted during Kenyatta's time is also questionable (Laakso and Cowen, 1998; Throup and Hornsby, 2005). Indeed, only a section of the Kikuyu (political elite) benefitted as the masses were left landless, poor and excluded from national resources. This realisation has enlightened some Agikuyu. Constitutional changes, civic education and human rights awareness have also contributed to this enlightenment. Access to the media has also portrayed that the political class are friends and allies to each other despite their ethnic differences. Waweru recalls when Kibaki and Raila were signing the National Peace Accord after the PEV in 2008:

“...they were laughing sharing a drink, while the ordinary citizens had been killing each other for over a month” (Waweru Paul, O.I, 27/12/2012).

Thus cultural identities “...are political projects used by the political elite to maintain their political power for their private economic accumulation and reproduction of their class position” (Laakso and Cowen, 1998). Indeed, politicians invoked local and ethno-regional identities since if one campaigns on a class-based issue, he/she risks polarising his/her ethno-regional base (Haugerud, 1993). Moreover, some writers have sought to disengage political leadership with circumcision. Rasna Warah (2008) notes that 70% of males around the globe are not circumcised. Indeed in some countries circumcision is regarded as mutilation of the male organ. Mbitiru notes that in Germany, the jury declared circumcision as “violation of physical integrity” (Mbitiru, Daily Nation, July 16, 2012). Atieno-odhiambo (2002: 243) asserts that the ‘small’ difference made by the cut is a laughable, superficial and non-essential feature.

Warah also noted that circumcision was not a consideration for some of the world’s famous leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Winston Churchill, David Cameron and Maumohen Singh. No Kenyan ever regarded or thought of these powerful men as ‘boys’ or unfit to lead (Daily Nation, July 9, 2012).

5.4 Summary

This chapter aimed at analyzing the use of circumcision by the Agikuyu men in the political context in Kenya to exert their authority. We argued that the Kikuyu used circumcision to affirm political ‘fitness’ and to alienate the Luo who, due to the fact that they did not circumcise, were arguably unfit to lead. However, in this chapter, we have argued that such strategies were a creation of the political elite to seek political survival through mobilization of the voters. The idea that circumcision made a strong, courageous man as described in chapter 2, was used to legitimize the fact that only a circumcised man was fit to be a leader. Although the issue of

ethnic divisions can be traced back to the colonial period, the African elite continued with the same trend after independence in order to win the support of their communities. Ethno-mobilisation became a major campaign tool right from the political parties as seen in KANU and KADU politics at independence. The repeal of section 2A of the old constitution in 1991 intensified ethnicity.

‘Tribal’ clashes characterised each General Election. Circumcision continued to be used in politics to legitimise the Agikuyu elite and for them to exercise hegemony over their Luo counterparts. The Kikuyu elite and their allies discriminated against the Luo who did not practice circumcision. While this was so popular in the past, where even the Luhya and Kisii would oppose the Luo on grounds of circumcision, circumcision politics have withered with time. This is seen in the sense that communities such as the Bukusu and Kisii who are known for elaborate circumcision rituals, overwhelmingly supported Raila Odinga in 2007. A section of the Agikuyu has also embraced the fact that circumcision is not a requisite to good leadership. Hence Agikuyu masculinity has weakened over time and hence the power to exert indirect control over the ‘other’ has also been sapped. The next chapter provides a detailed summary of this thesis.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary and Conclusion

This study sought to analyze the transformation of Agikuyu male circumcision in the period 1945 to 2008 in Kiambu County. The area was chosen, first, for its proximity to the capital city, Nairobi which continues to influence Kiambu County's social, economic and political history as inhabitants have historically negotiated the urban-rural transitions. Nairobi was cosmopolitan in nature and hence its proximity to Kiambu speeded up the transformation of Agikuyu life. Secondly, familiarity of the County by the researcher was considered an important research advantage. Indeed the study was conceived on the basis of researcher's observation of contemporary male circumcision practices in Kiambu County.

In chapter one, a background upon which this research was anchored was provided. The study shows that male circumcision in Africa marked the graduation from childhood and adulthood. Circumcision was very important and was honoured by the whole community because it was considered sacred. In this chapter the objectives of the study were clearly outlined. A review of related literature and the research design were also outlined in the same chapter.

In chapter two, the study examined the social, economic and political organisation of the Agikuyu. The chapter argued that before the coming of the colonial masters, the Agikuyu had attained a level of development in all aspects of life. In all these aspects, circumcision was considered an important rite. For instance, it was through circumcision that a man would be socially accepted as a full member of the Gikuyu community. Economically, a man would be

allowed to inherit property after circumcision and politically, a man would only climb the leadership ladder after having undergone the rite of circumcision. It was during and after circumcision that one was educated on the secrets of the community, joined warriorhood, joined age-set group and, more importantly, provided a gateway to coveted hierarchies for the exercise of leadership. It was also during circumcision that a man would bind himself with his ancestral land and ancestors through the blood that he shed in the process. The chapter also established that circumcision was the basis upon which the age-set system was built. Age-sets were important markers of time in the Gikuyu community. Clearly, male circumcision often took several months of preparation and mobilizing the community.

Chapter three provides an analysis of the interaction between the Agikuyu and the Europeans. Driven by several new forces, including the entry of Western medicine, the traditional “river” circumcision of the Agikuyu was overtaken by the hospital circumcision. This was intertwined with the spread of Christianity as every mission station established a dispensary and a school. Not only did colonialism present Western medicine as superior to traditional medicine, missionaries also looked down upon Kikuyu medicine which they termed as inferior and ‘primitive’. They did not understand that Agikuyu circumcision was not just a physical cut but the rituals had social, political and economic meanings. Therefore, missionaries sought to eradicate female circumcision and reform male circumcision by performing it under the auspices of Christianity. Kikuyu Christian boys were circumcised in hospitals, stayed in schools and later married uncircumcised Kikuyu girls. This culminated into the circumcision crisis of 1929, between conservative Kikuyu and the missionaries. Although this crisis was mainly about colonial attitude towards female circumcision, it directly affected male circumcision.

Other colonial policies such as land alienation, taxation, capitalism, western education also affected the rite of circumcision. For instance, Agikuyu men who wanted education would also get circumcised in the mission stations. This change affected the formation of Agikuyu men because it weakened the tendencies of hegemony over young by the old men. Capitalism also meant that the circumcisers would be paid in cash and not in kind as was the case in the pre-colonial set up. Although there were a section of Kikuyu who wanted to retain their culture, change in the society was inevitable and hence circumcision rite also transformed.

In chapter four, a transformation of Agikuyu circumcision in the period 1945-2008, is analysed.

The chapter argues that the late years of colonialism saw great changes in the social, economic and political aspects in Kenya. Colonial policies at this time had taken root. These policies such as labour, monetization of economy, land alienation and urbanisation were analysed to show how they interrelated with Agikuyu male circumcision. New forms of labour and employment were introduced by the colonialists. African men took up new jobs, which were either manual or formal for those that had acquired formal education. This kind of employment was mainly found in the urban areas or on settlers' farms. As such, taking up of these jobs altered the Agikuyu organisation of *nyumba* (family), since men went for these jobs leaving the women in charge of homes in the rural areas. As a result, women took up the role of fathers in circumcision of their sons, a role which was traditionally undertaken by the men.

With time, accumulation of wealth became a major concern of many Kikuyu men. Leakey (1952) notes that:

“The needs of the young men...in the olden days were small and were met without difficulty by their own families. Young men seeking to enhance their reputation did so by deeds of bravery...today, a young man after initiation feels in order to make an impression with the girls he must dress well in European clothes, must have a bicycle with a pillion to take his girlfriends for rides...”

Young men therefore, sought employment and could accumulate wealth, marry and rise in the social ladder without relying on the older men. Consequently, authority shifted from the gerontocratic logic of the old times to be dictated by other aspects such as formal education, well-paying jobs and wealth. This weakened the authority of the elders.

The Second World War also affected the economy of the colony. Goods could not be imported from Britain due to crisis brought about by the war, and hence the influence on circumcision was intense. The creations of industries in Kenya led to more job opportunities in the urban areas. In Nairobi, more Kikuyu men took up these opportunities to work in the industries while others voluntarily joined the soldiers. Moreover, some were conscripted to the war. In the long run, these led to further changes in the way the Kikuyu society was organised. Labour policies also changed. Following the Swynnerton plan in 1954, Africans were allowed to grow cash crops. By mid-1950s, it was evident that Kiambu Kikuyu did not have time for communal circumcision rituals. Monetization had penetrated the circumcision circles and the traditional circumcisers sought to be paid in cash and not in kind. Some circumcisers charged exorbitantly forcing the colonial government to intervene.

The chapter also assessed the struggle for independence and the formation of such groups as *Aanake a forti*, who based their motivation on the fact that they were circumcised in the 1940s. Circumcision was used by the freedom fighters as a mobilization tool and also as a unifying factor. Land was the main area of contention between the Agikuyu and the British. As land was alienated by the British, the Kikuyu were congested in the reserves and villages while others migrated to other areas outside Kiambu County. This made it hard to organise circumcision which was largely a social affair. The breakup of family and communal ties led to further transformation of circumcision. On the other hand new forms of urbanisation represented in the emergence of towns like Nairobi led to the migration of Kikuyu men to the urban areas in search for jobs. Due to Kiambu's proximity to the capital, Kiambu men saw a lot of opportunities in Nairobi. Some were hawkers, tailors, labourers, or traders. In addition some men in Kiambu were daily commuters to the capital and this led to the high diffusion of city life to Kiambu and hence speeded up further re-organisation of traditional life. In the city, Kikuyu men sought to adopt European lifestyle including dressing. The traditional regalia associated with circumcision such as animal skins and spears were slowly overtaken by new modes of dressing. The chapter ends by assessing how Agikuyu circumcision continued to transform after independence. Home-based circumcision was embraced and later, perhaps more recent times, the rite is organised by churches, schools and independent groups.

In chapter five, the study examined how Agikuyu masculinity related to the politics of the independent Kenya. Circumcision has become a potent metaphor for leadership in the multi-party electoral politics in Kenya. The Agikuyu political elite used circumcision to mobilise the Gikuyu voter. In this context, circumcision has become a way of 'othering' those that did not

circumcise. The Luo became the major target of the Agikuyu elite's politics of the foreskin since they did not practice circumcision and hence they were thought of as still 'immature'. This was because the Luo elite were the main threat to their Agikuyu colleagues. However, the study established that, with time, circumcision politics withered as circumcising communities such as the Luhya supported those that were allegedly not circumcised. The Agikuyu importance of circumcision has also been weakened by education, labour and formal employment. Today, circumcision takes utmost two weeks after which the initiates join high school. There is no time for circumcision euphoria.

Thus, going back to the statement of the problem and the assumptions that guided this study, it is clear that the view that circumcision was traditionally an important event is confirmed. In the pre-colonial era, Agikuyu were organised politically, socially and economically. In all these spheres, circumcision was an important rite. The research shows that Kikuyu male circumcision has undergone transformation especially in the colonial and post-colonial era as influenced by policies and practices relating to labour, Western medicine, Western education, taxation, monetisation, land alienation and missionary activities. After independence, circumcision transformed further as influenced by social economic status of a family, urbanization and education. However, a section of the Kikuyu still insisted on the importance of the traditional way of circumcision. Although the traditional rituals are not there today, some men opt for the traditional cut (where *ngwati* was left on the penis) for their sons as described in Chapter 3. As such, general conclusions were avoided.

The study has further shown that circumcision has played a significant role in Kenyan politics since 1992. While this was true, especially in the early 1990s, the study also found out that use of circumcision in politics was a creation of the elite to mobilise mass support and has withered with time due to education, human rights awareness, civic education and the constitutional changes. The study also established that there is a considerable level of poverty in Kiambu and hence the politics of exclusion was only used by the political class for their own gain. Hence, we concluded that cultural aspects were only used by the elite to mobilise the masses and to maintain their political relevance. Otherwise, there is no evidence of enmity between communities. The Kikuyu- Luo ‘differences and enmity’ was a creation of the elite.

In a nutshell, masculinity exists in every society. While masculinity is likened to biological roles, it is largely a social construct and subject to change. Agikuyu masculinity is no longer as macho as it was in the past. In conclusion, hegemonic masculinity as the theoretical tool adopted by this research was very instrumental because its principles which hold that social characters are not fixed but keep transforming formed the core of this study. Moreover, researcher felt that the field of masculinity has a lot about to be studied which will help understand the past, present and the future generations of men.

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b) ORAL INFORMANTS

Name	Approx. Age	Constituency
Tirus Kamanja	78	Gatundu south
Ann Nduta	75	Gatundu south
Serah Nyambura	35	Gatundu south
Milka Murugi	100 (died before study completion)	Gatundu south
Waweru Paul	68	Githunguri
Njuthi Karomo	68	Lari
John Mwathi	70	Lari
Jamleck Kamau	37	Juja
Isaac Kimani	43	Juja
Simon Mwaniki	29	Kikuyu
Ian Waweru	18	Kikuyu
Alice Wambui	50	Lari
Daniel Njoroge	55	Kiambaa
John Gitau	40	Kiambaa
Milka Wanjiku	70	Gatundu South
Mathew Kariuki	65	Ruiru
Mama Mbugua	35	Ruaka
Stephen Gateru	40	Gatundu South
Nelson Ngari	50	Ruiru

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APPENDICES**A1: QUESTION GUIDE****Personal Details**

- a) **Name**
- b) **Marital status**
- c) **Level of education**
- d) **Occupation**
- e) **Age**
- f) **Sub-location**
- g) **Position in society**

1. Did male circumcision take place in your area?
2. What was the importance attached to this practice?
3. How was a boy identified as ready for circumcision?
4. At what age was this done?
5. Were there specific preparations for the initiates before the event?
6. Who performed the procedure on the initiates?
7. Did the person in (6) above need any perceived qualifications?
8. Where did the operation take place?
9. Were these places in (8) above having any particular significance, religious, political or otherwise?
10. Did you interact with uncircumcised men? If yes, what were the perceptions toward them?

11. What equipments were used to circumcise the male initiates?
12. What was the attitude of the missionaries and the colonial government towards male circumcision?
13. How did the education introduced by the missionaries' impact on the practice of male circumcision?
14. Did these changes affect the notion of being a "real Gikuyu man"?
15. Concerning the changes that exist today in the nature and practice of male circumcision, do you think in it has affected the notion of Manhood among the Agikuyu?
16. Would you vote for a leader who has not gone through the process of circumcision?
17. What role do organizations such as churches and schools play in the circumcision of boys in this place?
18. In your opinion do you think that churches/ schools taking role in the circumcision better than the traditional way?
19. What teachings do churches and schools offer to the initiates?
20. What necessitated these organizations to start or engage in the process of male circumcision?
21. In your opinion does the whole process of initiation, accommodating the initiates and teaching in schools and churches make them lesser men?
22. Has this changes affected the Gikuyu notion of masculinity? If yes, how

A2: Interview Schedule

a) For medical practitioners

Name

Age

Level of education

Marital status

Division

1. When was this hospital/medical institution established?
2. Do you carry out male circumcision in this hospital?
3. When did this hospital embrace male circumcision?
4. Do you use anesthesia on the initiates?
5. After circumcision do you accommodate the initiates in the hospital?
6. Does the hospital collaborate with other stakeholders to carry out the circumcision procedure? If yes, Name them
7. How would you compare the traditional and the modern way of male circumcision?
8. In your opinion, do you think circumcising boys in hospital make them lesser men?

b. Young adults

Name

Age

Level of education

Marital status

Division

1. Is male circumcision practiced in this area?
2. What are reasons do people give for practicing it?
3. What preparations are made before the boys are circumcised?
4. Where do you think is appropriate for conducting the practice, church school, home or hospital?
5. What changes have been brought about in the society as a result of changes in circumcision procedures?
6. Do you think undergoing circumcision makes one a good leader?
7. Do you think male circumcision instills discipline and morals in the initiates?

b) Church leaders/ school heads**Name****Age****Level of education****Marital status****Division**

1. Does your institution involve itself in circumcision of boys?
2. When and why did the institution decide to take up this role?
3. Do you collaborate with hospitals or what are other stakeholders?
4. In your opinion is circumcising them in church better than the traditional way?
5. Do you think circumcising boys in churches/ hospitals/ schools make them lesser/stronger men?
6. What kind of teachings or instruction is given to the boys in these institutions?

A3. Observation List

The researcher also used observation to gather more information. Among other things observed were:

- The relationship between men and women in Kiambu
- The roles taken up by both gender and these were corroborated with the traditional roles.
- The conditions, attitudes, influence of the schools, churches and hospitals visited towards circumcision.
- Behavioral attitude of the old generation towards the younger men.