

**RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE OF THE KALENJIN OF KERIO-VALLEY  
CULTURAL COMPLEX, KENYA, 1800-1965**

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF LAW, ARTS, AND SOCIAL  
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AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN HISTORY  
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**SEPTEMBER 2023**

**DECLARATION**

This is my original work and has never been presented in any university anywhere for academic credit. All sources herein quoted or used have been acknowledged by complete referencing.

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## **DEDICATION**

To Dr. Edward Kisiang'ani, for the trust and confidence you had in me.

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<b>A.I.M.....</b>	Africa Inland Mission
<b>AIC.....</b>	African Inland Church
<b>BAR.....</b>	Baringo
<b>BCMS.....</b>	Baptist Church Missionary Society
<b>CMS.....</b>	Church Missionary Society
<b>COG.....</b>	Church of God
<b>COI.....</b>	Commission of Inquiry Report
<b>DC.....</b>	District Commissioner
<b>DyM.....</b>	Dini Ya Musambwa
<b>DyY .....</b>	Dini ya Yomot
<b>DYRMPA...</b>	Dini ya Roho ya Mafuta Pole ya Africa
<b>DAO .....</b>	District Agricultural Officer
<b>ELGM.....</b>	Elgeyo-Marakwet
<b>EMC.....</b>	Elgeyo Marakwet County
<b>FAIM .....</b>	Friends African Industrial Mission
<b>GAS .....</b>	Government African School
<b>KMH.....</b>	Kapsowar Mission Hospital
<b>KMS.....</b>	Kapsowar Mission Station
<b>KNA .....</b>	Kenya National Archives
<b>MHM.....</b>	Mill Hill Mission
<b>NITD .....</b>	National Industrial Training Depot
<b>PAOC .....</b>	Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada
<b>TAMB.....</b>	Tambach
<b>WPC.....</b>	West Pokot County

## OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

**The Kerio-Valley Cultural Complex** - Within the context of this study it refers to the geographical region covered by Elgeyo-Marakwet, Baringo, West Pokot, and Turkana Counties. This region is inhabited by communities with a homogenous religious cultural trait, which composed of the worship of a high God and the rain conceived spirit (*Ilat*).

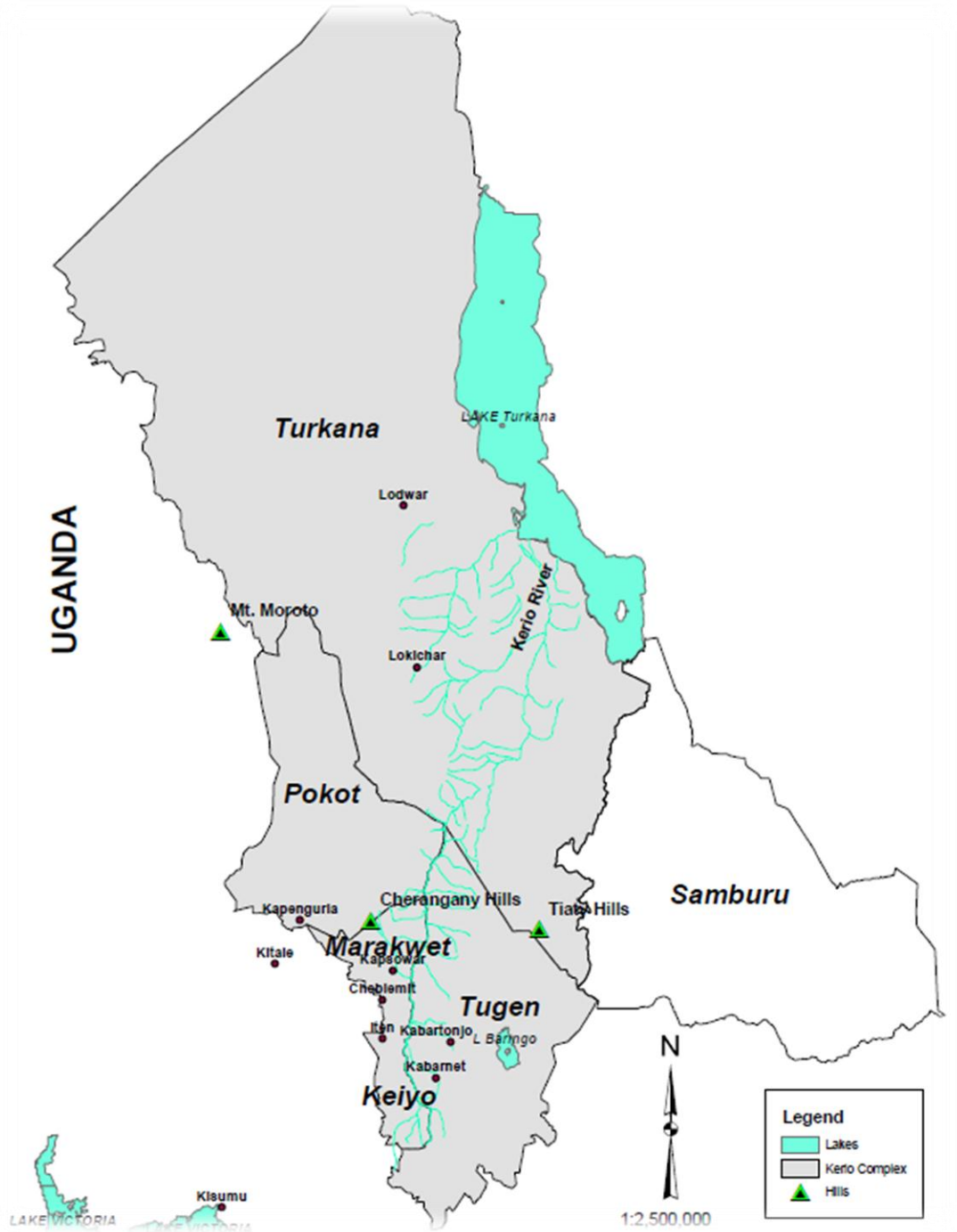
**The Complex** - In this study refers to the four Counties (Turkana, Elgeyo-Marakwet, Baringo and West Pokot) making up the Kerio-Valley Cultural Complex.

**Indigenous Groups/Communities** – As used in this study, it refers to the original inhabitants of the Kerio-Valley particularly, and western Kenya generally, before the coming of the modern inhabitants (Plain Nilotes, River Lake Nilotes, and Highland Nilotes, and the Bantu).

**Modern Inhabitants** – As used in this study, it refers to the ethnic communities which migrated from other parts of East Africa to settle in Western Kenya. They include the Highland Nilotes, River Lake Nilotes, Plain Nilotes and Bantu.

## ABSTRACT

This study explores the religious history of the Kalenjin people living in the Kerio-Valley Cultural Complex of Kenya. It overturns the conventional understanding, in religious studies, which portrays African religions as static and ahistorical entities, by introducing the theoretical dimension of agency. This revisionist interpretation presents the ancestors of the Kalenjin as creative agents who transformed their religion by absorbing ideas from other ethnic groups, in the Kerio-Valley, during interactions and infusing them into their culture. When confronted with new religious ideas, during cultural interactions, the ancestors of the Kalenjin engaged the repertoires of their past, projected hypothetical pathways in time, and adjusted their actions to meet the problems of emerging historical moments. This agentic intervention inevitably led to the fusion of ideas from various temporalities, the past and their present, to formulate syncretism. This study thus speaks to Africa's wider struggle for self-invention and self-definition that is at the center of the decoloniality movement. It is an attempt to demonstrate the African agency in religious change by examining how the Kalenjin navigated through the different religious universes presented to them, during interactions with their neighbours including the autochthonous groups, Ateker, Masaian groups, and later with western Christianity. This study used primary sources of data, especially oral traditions and archival materials, and secondary sources to examine how the Kalenjin used their agentic power to negotiate through the different ways of explaining cosmological meaning in their history.



**Figure 1: Ethnographic Distribution of Communities in the Kerio-Valley,**  
**Source; Kenya, 3GIS Data**

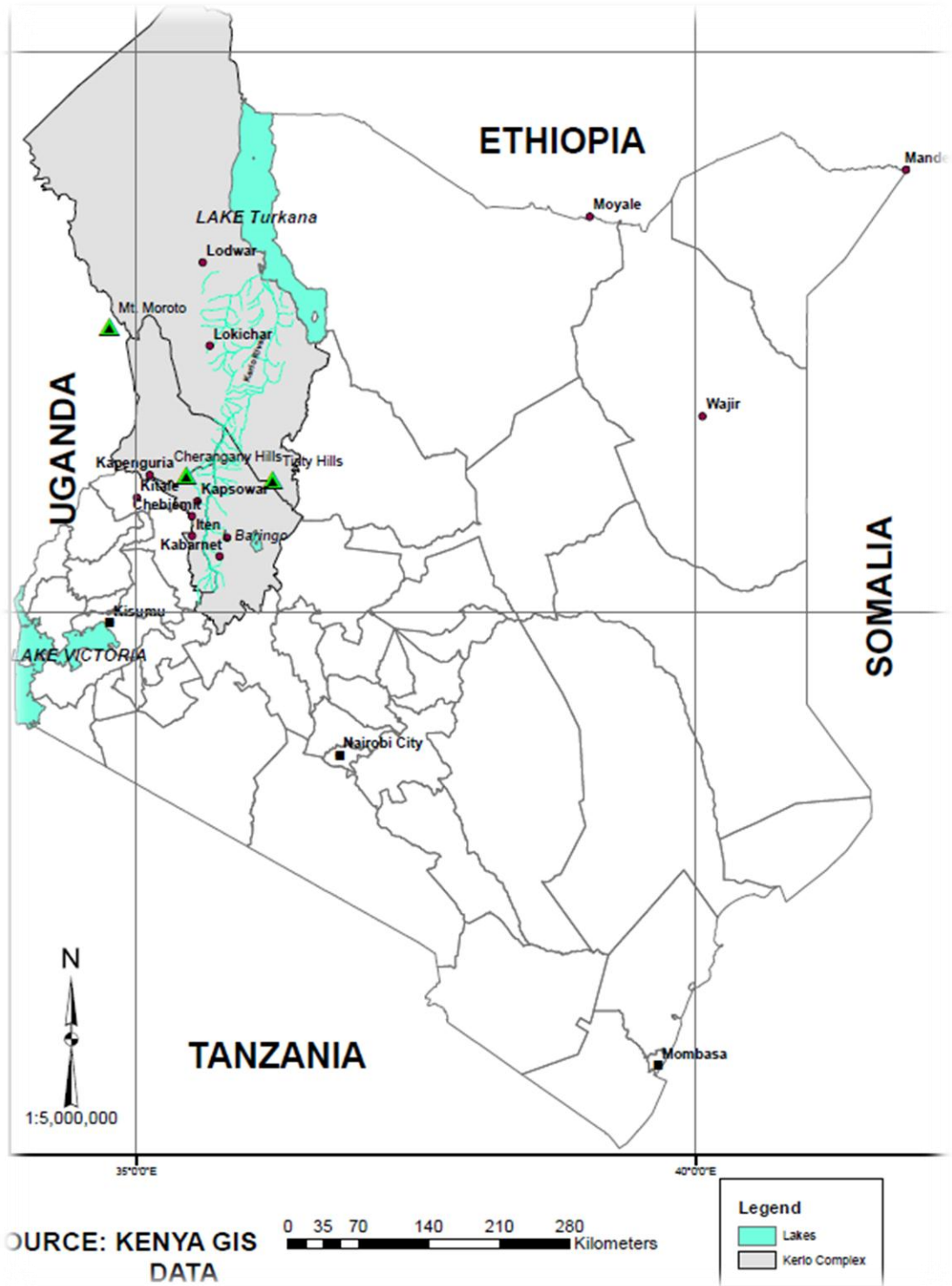


Figure 2: The Location of the Kerio-Valley Complex in Kenya

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the Study

The religion of a people is typically embedded within the matrix of their culture and ethnicity and shares in the general trends of their historical cultural development (Mugambi 1989, 43). Therefore, as part of a culture, religion is a dynamic and flexible entity that is constantly shaped by other spiritual beliefs within its environment. At the heart of this process of evolution is the mutual readjustment of systems of religious thought and the reconciliation of opposing ideas. In this process, some aspects of religious culture are discarded while others are preserved and modified to evolve into new hybrid mixes (Stewart and Shaw 1994, 7).

Efforts by scholars to understand how indigenous people have negotiated these cultural encounters have produced interesting pieces of scholarship. The earliest of these writings were missiological studies and commentaries on 'world' religions, especially Christianity. However, these pioneer studies emphasised the 'conversion' of indigenous people from the 'dark' to the 'light', as they tried to explain the spread of these religions across the globe (Walls 2002, 294). These kinds of analyses were often written by outraged champions of orthodoxy, most often bigoted and impulsively eager to condemn and undermine other cultures than to understand the dynamics involved in the process of religious change (Walls 2002, 294).

In Africa, for instance, these studies painted a panorama of how the continent was mapped out according to spheres of Christian missionary groups who began the 'God-driven' process of converting people from the 'dark' (Sundkler 1987, 75). This

exegesis was chauvinistic and highly paternalistic because it emphasised the overbearing presence of the white missionary while giving little attention to the African initiative to adapt and shape his religious culture (Comaroff and Comaroff 1986; Ajayi and Ayandele 1969). This interpretation came under rapid fire with the rise of Afro-centered scholarship during the decolonisation period. The barrages of criticism have since challenged this conservative understanding of the spread of religion, particularly and culture generally. Presently, aware of the persistence of indigenous tradition during the process of cultural change, historians of religion place more emphasis on the conscious and unconscious synthesis of beliefs of two or more religions that come into interactive contact (Kimambo 1972; Gimode 2003).

The simmering scepticism about perennial stable cultures has since reached boiling point. Separate suppositions by religious scholars, sociologists, and anthropologists have hammered their point home (Stewart and Shaw 1994; Walls 2002; Gimode 2003; and Fraser 2013). Their arguments have coalesced into a theoretical paradigm that emphasises the invention of cultures as they cut through ethnic and racial divides while at the same time condemning conceptual fallacies of ethnic purity, wholesomeness, orthodoxy, and authenticity (Mtuzze 1999, 10). The current trajectory in religious discourses puts more emphasis on the contextualisation of religious concepts as they cut across ethnic and cultural frontiers; a syncretic process that is considered basic not only to the historical development of religion but to the whole predicament of culture as it evolves through time and space (Sundkler 1987, 75).

The foregoing discussion underscores the cardinal point to be borne in mind in analysing Kerio-Valley's religious history, that the spirituality of individual ethnic groups, which constitute its demography, can only be understood in relation to the history of their neighbours and the external cultural intrusion of Christian missionaries. This is because the traditions of the communities that inhabit the Complex exhibit the integration of people of different origins, at different historical moments through assimilation (Dundas 1910; Turpin 1948). For example, within each Kalenjin group, there are 'subsumed elements' of non-Kalenjin people, 'Bantu, Ateker, Oromo, or even Somali' (Kipkorir 2009, 409). The praise songs (*salan/kililyet*) of different clans which constitute the Kalenjin groups, also point to the varied directions from which their founding clansmen came and inevitably point to the ethnic and cultural mix of the society (Kipkorir 1964, 64; Bollig 2013, 291).

It is this degree of interactions between ethnic groups and cultures that has prompted scholars to ring the alarm bell against the study of ethnic groups and cultures in isolation. They have warned that any research in western Kenya or any of its component zones in particular, on a single unit, must be conducted in relation to its context. The basic premise is that the cultural identity of a people is enriched through contact with the traditions and values of other people. Culture shapes and is shaped by interactions with other cultures. Within a cultural complex competing sub-cultures influence and on the contrary are counter-influenced by encounters, which take place 'under equal power dynamics' such that the perceived dominant and subordinate cultures are both affected (Ogot 2005, 105). Therefore, the universal culture cannot be postulated in the abstract by any single culture. It is the syncretic

aftercome of the intercourse of sub-cultures as each tries to affirm its own identity on the cultural stage. Cultural values define themselves when they are brought into contact with each other. In this process, of cultural re-configuration, the best cultural values are those which are consistent with the selection of the most functional social practices and institutions (Burke 2008, 26).

The religious history of the component ethnic groups that constitute the Complex thus cannot make meaning in isolation. It can only be understood within the wider context of the history of the Complex. This is because the history of the Kerio-Valley is not just a collection of histories of ethnic groups. It is a compelling story of encounters, interactions, adaptations, and fusion by which the communities and groups have been constantly altered (Kipkorir 1964, 64; Lamphear 1988, 27). The communities of the Complex have undergone changes and adaptations through contact with other people of divergent cultural and linguistic backgrounds. These interactions left an indelible mark on their customs, spiritual beliefs, economy, and political organisation. The historian of religion, therefore, has no reason not to scratch the historical surface, pointing out those broad contours of social change and posing those vexing questions, like the one Ochieng' asked decades ago; 'how did the land and the people encountered during their migrations and settlement affect the cosmological outlook of the immigrants?' (1977, 12)

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Most of the researches conducted on the communities of Kenya have taken the tribe as the framework to analyse the various aspects of society, such as religion, music, dance, politics, and gender, among others. The outcome of this conceptualisation is

the essentialization of ethnic groups and their cultures, which are portrayed as authentic and unchanging categories. Yet historical enquiries have demonstrated that ethnic groups are fluid entities whose shape keeps changing as a result of interactions with their neighbours and the assimilation of foreign groups. The caging of ethnic groups in tribal containers prevents the historian from analysing the ways in which external forces influence the evolution of various aspects of a community's culture. For example, the Kerio-Valley housed various ethnic groups – Kalenjin, Ateker, and Maasaian. As time passed, these communities interacted through trade, warfare, migrations, and assimilations, and in the process affecting each other's societies. These interactions involved a process of give-and-take in which the Kalenjin adopted selected foreign cultures, which they fused with those indispensable aspects of their religion and discarded moribund practices. This study examines how interactions within the Complex (Kerio-Valley) affected the component unit (Kalenjin). It describes how the Kalenjin navigated through the different ways of looking at the religious universes presented to them during interactions, and in the process creating for themselves, in the words of Ogot and Welbourne, 'a place to feel at home' (1968, 1).

### **1.3 Research Questions**

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) In what ways did the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Kerio-Valley influence the evolution of the religious culture of the Kalenjin between c. 1800 and 1913?

- 2) How did the Kalenjin in the Kerio-Valley respond to the propagation of Christian beliefs and practices in the Complex between c. 1913 and 1945?
- 3) What was the outcome of the encounter and interaction between the indigenous religion of the Kalenjin in the Kerio-Valley and Christianity between c. 1945 and 1965?

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

This study intends to achieve the following objectives:

- 1) To investigate the influence of inter-ethnic interactions in the transformation of the religious experience of the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley cultural Complex between c. 1800 and 1913
- 2) To examine the encounter between the indigenous religious systems of the Kerio-Valley and Christianity from c. 1913 to 1945
- 3) To establish the outcome of the interaction between Christianity and the indigenous religion of the Kalenjin in the Kerio-Valley between c. 1945 and 1965

#### **1.5 Research Premises**

The following premises will guide this study:

- 1) The indigenous religious system of the Kalenjin groups in the Kerio-Valley changed over time, as a result of interactions, into a complex cosmology between c. 1800 and 1913
- 2) The Kalenjin communities of the Kerio-Valley Complex resisted the propagation of Christian doctrines from c. 1913 to 1945

- 3) Western education and other cultural trappings undermined indigenous Kalenjin religion in the Kerio-Valley, which made way for the Christianization of the Complex between c. 1945 to 1965

### **1.6 Justification and Significance of the Study**

This research stems from the fact that religion as an aspect of human consciousness has not been adequately addressed in the history of the Kerio-Valley. Essentially, most of the research on the history of the Kerio-Valley has been centred on understanding other facets of human life, especially cattle rustling, the proliferation of small arms, and economics. The more personal social aspects of the human past that are the subject of this study can be seen as footnotes when analysed against the background of the larger historical portrait. So far, religion has only been used to illuminate historical themes, but it has not been viewed as a subject of historical inquiry in and by itself. Yet religion is a very crucial aspect of the African past and an important subject of historical enquiry. It is because of this reason that I justify this study. It explores an area that has been neglected in the history of the Kerio-Valley.

Lastly, this study stems from my interest in the social history of the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley, which cultivated during my stay in the Kerio Valley. I spent a decade of my life working and living at the very heart of the Marakwet community as a teacher at Chebara Secondary School. During this period, I took a keen interest in reading the basic works which provide an introduction to the culture and history of the Kalenjin. I also spent most of my weekends and evenings collecting oral folklore of the Kalenjin and other aspects of their pre-colonial religious culture. Therefore,

this study is justifiable because it seeks to complete a personal interest and project that I started a long while ago.

### **1.7 The Challenges Encountered During the Study.**

I conducted the fieldwork for this study in the Kerio-Valley in 2020. During my fieldwork I encountered a few challenges. The first, and the main challenge, was language barrier, especially when collecting oral data among the Pokot. Before joining Kenyatta University's Graduate School, I had worked, as a teacher, among the Marakwet for a decade. During this time, I learnt the basics of the Marakwet dialect of the Kalenjin language. This understanding of the Marakwet language enabled me to carry out oral interviews among the Tugen of Aror, the Marakwet, and Keiyo as I could follow the conversation with respondents without major problems. However, I experienced major difficulties of communication in Pokot. The Pokot dialect is far much removed from the other Kalenjin dialects of the Kerio Valley. It is closer to the Ateker languages than it is to the other Kalenjin dialects. To surmount this challenge, I relied mostly on my research assistants and translators to communicate with respondents who were not proficient in Kiswahili.

The second challenge I encountered during my fieldwork was language barrier. Throughout history, the Kerio Valley has been a zone of bloody intercommunity conflicts over livestock. This was not different during the time of my fieldwork. During the entire fieldwork period, there were violent clashes between the Pokot the Tugen of Baringo North and Marakwet. In one of the skirmishes the Pokot attacked a school bus killing the driver, two teachers, and fifteen students. These violent clashes were mainly experienced along the boundary between the Pokot and the

neighbouring Tugen and Marakwet. This intercommunity violence affected the normal lives of the people of the markets and villages along the floor of the Kerio Valley such as Tot, Sangach, Kaben, Chesongoch, Arror, Chepkum, Lukuket, and Murkutwo in Marakwet; and Saimo, Loruk, and Chepkoi among the Tugen. To circumvent the challenge of insecurity along the border areas, I used my former students, at Chebara Secondary School, as my research assistants. Being residents of the Kerio Valley, and accustomed to the phenomenon of conflict, they knew how to maneuver in the midst the mayhem.

## **1.8. Literature Review**

### **1.8.1 The Settlement of the Kerio-Valley**

The migration and settlement of the various ethnic groups of Kenya received much attention, especially during the first three decades after independence. Most of these researchers took it as their primary concern to explain how the diverse people of East Africa moved from their supposed points of origin to their present locations of habitation, in the process evolving into contemporary ethno-cultural units. This attempt to explain the settlement of East Africa began during the colonial period and went hand-in-hand with the linguistic classification of African ethnicities. After independence, this topic was taken over by pioneer African historians. Their major objective was to discount the racist Euro-centric interpretation of African history and to prove to the world that Africans had a history of their own. By the 1980s, a handful of publications in form of books and articles had been produced.

Among the earliest works was Johnston (1913) which examines the migration and settlement of the ethnic groups within the continent of Africa. It was followed

closely by Seligman (1930) and Murdock (1959). Other closely related studies discussed the spread of languages across the continent as a result of the migration of communities. In this category, the Bantu community received the most attention from Greenberg (1955), Guthrie (1965), and Roland Oliver (1966). While the foregoing studies attempt to explain the peopling of the wider African continent, it is the studies by Sutton (1970, 1974, 1976), Gervase (1967), Ehret (1974a, 1974b, 1976), Huntingford (1967, 1974), Cohen (1974), Posnasky (1974), Roland (1967) and Cole (1967) that examine the settlement of East Africa by its modern inhabitants. These studies were further revised and augmented by research by emerging Kenyan historians who examined the migration and settlement of specific linguistic communities. These studies by pioneer African historians debunked the Hamitic myth, which had hitherto dominated the interpretation of African history. In the 1960s and 1970s, authoritative studies on the history of Kenyan ethnolinguistic groups emerged. They include Ogot (1966), Osogo (1966), Were (1967), Mwaniki (1973), Muriuki (1974), Ochieng' (1974), Mwanzi (1976), and Ayot (1979).

On the whole, these studies painted a panorama of pre-colonial East Africa as being a crucible of interactions between people of divergent ethnic and linguistic origins; Bantu, Nilotes, and Cushites. The studies present each migrating group as a dynamic living unit whose continuity depended on its ability to accommodate and assimilate elements from far and wide. The stories and epics of migration are presented as a process by which people of diverse origins were integrated into a single unit to form a tribe (Ogot 2005, 273). Some of these studies further observe that the history of the Kalenjin, Luo, and Abaluyia can be understood better if studied as a continuum

because of their related history of migration and settlement (Were 1967, 167). This study heeds this advice. It examines the history of the migration and settlement of the Kerio-Valley in relation to the history of other ethnic groups of Western Kenya and demonstrate how this inter-ethnic mixture affected the development of religion in the Complex.

On the peopling of the Kalenjin in Western Kenya, which is the primary interest of this study, several scholars have attempted to reconstruct their history. The earliest and the most important are Hollis (1909), Huntingford (1967), Ehret (1971, 1974a, 1974b, 1976), Sutton (1970; 1974; 1976), and Roland (1976). These works have approached the topic of the Kalenjin differently. Some have taken it as a central concern while others have discussed it marginally within the general peopling of East Africa by its modern inhabitants. However, what emerges is that most of them locate the origin of the Kalenjin in the upper Blue Nile region near the Ethiopian highlands. From this area, they entered Kenya from the north before settling on the slopes of Mount Elgon (Ehret 1974, 32). However, few studies have attempted to explain the evolution of specific Kalenjin septs within their current habitats in Western Kenya. The few that have attempted that include Chebet and Dietz (2000), *Kokwob boib Markweta* (2012), Mwanzi (1976), Gulliver (1951) (1988) and Kipkulei (1972). This study uses these works to trace the origins of the various clans that constitute the communities of the Valley and demonstrate how this inter-ethnic variety influenced the evolution of the spirituality of the Kalenjin.

### **1.8.2 Indigenous Religion in the Kerio-Valley**

The earliest writings on African religion emerged during the contact between Africa and outsiders, most of them written by explorers, anthropologists, and administrators. These commentaries on African religion can be deduced from the motley collection of travelogues, diaries, logbooks, ethnographies, official memos, diaries, and other private correspondence of colonial agents. After the establishment of colonial rule, cultural anthropologists spurred by the evolutionary theory penetrated the continent to explore man in his 'primitive' state (Evans-Pritchard 1965). In this erroneous application of the theory of evolution, anthropologists believed that religion evolved gradually from fetishism to animism to polytheism, which in turn developed into monotheism. Western anthropologists believed that a proper historical understanding and interpretation of 'primitive' religions would reveal important information about the origin of religion and the evolution of European societies (Sindima 2019).

Anthropologists sought to outline the progressive development of societies underlying the gradual change from simplicity to complexity. Their field works sought to justify the hypothesis of cultures evolving from simple to complex, from lower to higher, from irrational to rational, and from magic to religion (Lawson & McCauley 1990, 47). The outcome was the production of anthropological works steeped in racist overtones exemplified by Levy-Bruhl (1923), Hopley (1925), and Seligman (1932). The best example of such literature in the Kerio-Valley is Penley (1930), whose title *Superstition amongst the Turkana* betrays the attitude of that period. On the whole, these works disparaged African religions and cultures,

describing them in terms such as animism, fetishism, totemism, magic, and paganism. African religions were also believed to static and ahistorical (p'Bitek 1971a, 3). This racist trend continued unabated until the 1950s, when Africanist studies began to break the hitherto Euro-centered intellectual surface. The new conceptualization of African religion started with Evans-Pritchard (1940,1956, 1965) and Mary Douglas (1963). This revisionist wave of scholarship discounted the psychological, and sociological theories that had previously dominated the study of African religions by introducing the symbolic understanding of religions.

Even with the establishment of history departments in most African universities, historians gave little attention to African religions. Historians concentrated on economics and politics. The concentration on such topics by African intellectuals then was inevitable given the circumstances from which African historical studies emerged and the nature of its source material. The pioneer historical studies, especially those on the migration and settlement of communities, were written on 'the assumption that only political institutions and external trade relations changed in pre-colonial Africa' (Ranger 1972, 85). They discussed religious structures in terms of the supposed static worldview of the people under study, and assumed that any 'religious change that did occur only took place as a result of political change or political exigencies' (Ranger 1972, 85). It is this misconception made it desirable to emphasise the possibility of studies on the history of African religion.

The earliest attempts by Africans and Africanists to study African religion as subject on its own started in the discipline of religious studies as exemplified by the works of Parrinder (1954) and Mbiti (1969). Although seminal, these studies had fundamental

weaknesses from a historian's point of view. For example, the most celebrated of these scholars, Mbiti, 'tells us that African religions have no histories, no founders, no missionaries, no converts and no martyrs' (1969, 1). More than this, African religions' philosophical systems are ahistorical or anti-historical, based on his view of African time. Worse still, he emphasises that 'African religions were not universal, they were tribal' (1969, 2) and that 'one religion could not be propagated to another group, each group has its religious system' (1969, 134). Parrinder's survey of African religion follows the same trend that portrayed African religion as static and timeless (1954).

These works, in many respects, reinforced 'the distorting impression of passive and static African tribal cosmologies.' Therefore, 'instead of discounting the colonial (mis)interpretation of African religion' and inventing new social realities, these works became 'the inventors of tribe writ large' (Ogot 1969, 172). This model of homogenous tribal and intrinsically stable religions dominated the study of African religion before being challenged by African historians. Beginning with the Dar-es-salaam conference of 1970, historians challenged the artificially established tribal boundaries that defined African religions. Using specific case studies, historians show that African religions were multilayered and dynamic, with a long history of contradictions, contestations, and synthesis. At the same time, the African *persona* is portrayed as a creative agent in religious engineering and innovation by adopting and diffusing religious ideas across ethnic and cultural boundaries (Kimambo 1972, 1).

Historical studies stressing the dynamism inherent in African religions began with Kimambo (1972) and increased in the following decades. Most of these researchers,

however, covered the Africans religions of Central and Southern Africa. Few scholars inquired on the religions of the Eastern Africa. In western Kenya, for example, researchers of this nature began with Ogot (1967) and Ogutu (1975), who have examined the evolution of the religion of the Luo, while Mwanzi (1976), in one of his chapters, showed the religious borrowing and dynamism that informed the establishment of the Kipsigis religion. Much later, Gimode (1993; 2003) and Shiyuka (2017) produced researchers with objectives that emphasised the cultural bartering and synthesis of religious ideas in specific ethnolinguistic units of western Kenya. These studies confronted the myth of localised and static African religions. They portrayed that ethnic and cultural identity was not rigid in the pre-colonial period. It constantly shifted as occasioned by vicissitudes of migrations, warfare, trade, and assimilations leading to the emergence of plural religions that showed remarkable adaptability (Ogot 2005, 115). The only challenge is that most of these studies focus mainly on religious change among the Abaluyia, Kipsigis, Nandi, Terik, and Luo. There is no study, to my knowledge, at the time of writing this thesis, which focuses on the systematic analysis of the history of religion of Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this lacuna. It wishes to demonstrate the fluidity of diverse African religious concepts as they conjugated in the Kerio-Valley.

Of all the concepts of indigenous Kalenjin religion, it is the idea of God (*Asis*), the rain or water spirit (*Ilat*) and ancestral spirits (*oii*) that have received considerable attention in the extant literature. The concept of *Asis* is the most discussed, especially by anthropologists and religious scholars. Beech (1911), Huntingford (1927, 1930),

Conant (1966), (Massam 1968), Peristiany (1969, 72), Kipkorir (1976), Kipkorir and Ssenyonga (1980:13), Visser (1989), Kibor (1992, 9) Chepkwony (1997, 101), Chebet and Dietz (2000), Armada (2001), Fish and Fish (2005, 5), Kipkorir (2008, 8), (Sambu 2011, 2007) and Ngeiywo (2018) have all examined this idea from various angles using different theoretical strands. By and large, they have described the nature of the worship of *Asis* among various groups of the Kalenjin. Nonetheless, from a historical point of view, such analysis, however informative, does not express social reality because it obscures change. This study, therefore, attempts to analyse this concept historically.

Historians have also researched the religious concept of *Asis*. The first work to examine the idea of *Asis* historically was Mwanzi (1976, 78). Mwanzi examines the origin and describes the worship of *Asis* among the Kipsigis. His view is that the concept of *Asis* among the Kipsigis originated from the Ogiek before being adopted by the evolving Kipsigis community. However, it was not until the twenty-first century that other historians took over from Mwanzi. This began with Gimode (2003, 148) who dismissed the Ogiek origin of the concept of the Supreme Being and argued in consonance with Ehret's (1974, 142) supposition of the Cushitic origin of the concept of *Asis*. Sambu (2007), on his part, uses comparative linguistics to show that the religious concept of *Asis* is analogous to the Ancient Egyptian goddess *Isis*. With that, he is convinced that the idea of *Asis* is of Ancient Egyptian origin. This study wishes to contribute to this corpus of literature by examining the origin and the nature of the worship of *Asis* in the Kerio-Valley.

Although the concept of *Ilat* had a powerful presence in the religious terrain of the Kalenjin, it has not attracted the scholarly attention it deserves. Few historians have examined the origin and evolution of the worship of *Ilat* among the Kalenjin. Most of the works that have analysed the concept of *Ilat* are from anthropology, religion, and linguistics. Even from this literature, it is only Peristiany (1975) and Kipkorir (2008) who have described the worship of *Ilat* among the Pokot and Marakwet, respectively. This is a void that concerns this study. The study intends to examine the origin of the concept of *Ilat* and describe its transformation over time.

The centrality of ancestral spirits in African religion cannot be gainsaid. They were the ‘closest supernatural beings to humankind’ in indigenous religion (Mbiti 1969, 78). In the study of Kalenjin religion, the concept of ancestral spirits has been examined by several studies, for example, Kipkorir (2008, 11), Peristiany (1969), Kibor (1992, 10) and Fish and Fish (1995, 25). They have shown the manifestation of ancestral spirits. However, this concept has been neglected in historical studies, the only historical study to analyse the religious concept of *oik* among the Kalenjin is Gimode (2003, 146). He has traced the origin and evolution of the idea of *oik* among the Southern Kalenjin (Nandi and Terik). This glaring omission, therefore, leaves a void that this study intends to fill. It seeks to investigate the evolution of the concept of ancestral spirits among Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley.

### **1.8.3 Christianity in the Kerio-Valley**

Christianity has been in Africa for as long as the religion has existed. It was established along the Mediterranean and Red Seas coast and its hinterland, such as Ethiopia, during the Roman period (Mbiti 1969, 229). However, a considerable time

lag was involved before the emergence of literature on African Christianity. The earliest accounts of Christianity in Africa began to appear during the contact between Africa and the outside world, and gained momentum with establishment of missionary activities in Africa. Their importance notwithstanding, these works, in keeping with the trend of those times, celebrated Caucasian agency and were largely hagiography. They told the story of European missionaries heroically penetrating the African 'wildernesses spurred by the Holy Spirit to spread 'good news' to people in the 'dark' (Painter 1966, 14). Grooves (1958), Neil (1964), Warren (1965), and Latourette (1970) represent this interpretation of the encounter between Christianity and African cosmologies.

In western Kenya, for example, Painter (1966) and Bryson (1959) cut this figure, while in the Kerio Valley, the best examples are the works of Young (1944) and Totty (1981). Further analysis of Christian growth in the Kerio-Valley can be gleaned from biographies of leading Missionaries and field reports. On the whole, the pioneering works on Christianity did not subject the spread of Christianity in Africa to proper intellectual scrutiny. Most accounts depict the initiatives and actions of missionaries as dominant or decisive, and inevitably portray the African religious worldviews as passive, dependent, and exploited. They draw contrasts between the 'uplifting' message of the Christian gospel and the 'demoralising' view of the indigenous worldviews against which missionaries and African converts struggled (Grooves 1958). This approach was strongly Eurocentric and overly simplistic. It reduced the historical encounter between African religions and Christianity to the exploits and accomplishments of Western imperial agents. It is against this backdrop

that Ajayi and Ayandele observed that ‘a bitter pill which majority of writers of Christianity in Africa should swallow is that they have not been writing African church history’ (1969, 1). They claimed that hitherto the history of Christianity in Africa had ‘stressed the domineering presence of the missionary while neglecting whatever there was of an African agency’ during this epic encounter. It was out of this concern that from the 1960s there was a gradual shift in focus and theoretical views on the explanation of the Christianization of Africa.

New researchers highlighting Africans’ role during the history of contact with Christianity first appeared in the field of religious philosophy. In affirming the African presence in this encounter, these works do not devalue the hugely significant impact of the European missionary nor minimise the impact of Caucasian dominance, which was buttressed by the colonial power structure. The new works include Parrinder (1954), Mbiti (1969), and Hastings (1979). Much later, Sanneh (1983), Chidester (1992), Hastings (1994), Isichei (1995), and Sundkler (2000) added to this pool. Although these works represent a theoretical shift in the interpretation of the establishment of Christianity in Africa, they are almost exclusive narrative histories of Christianity in Africa. From the ‘historian’s point of view’ they ‘were alarming.’ (Kimambo 1972, 1) They cover the spread of Christianity across the whole continent in one book or a single chapter of a book or in just a few pages! In the process, they gloss over the topic hardly pausing to analyse how Christianity interacted with various African cosmological contexts. The results are purely descriptive histories of Christianity in zero-time fiction. This is an

important lacuna that this study wishes to fill. It examines not only the outcome but the nature and the manner of the Afro-Christian interaction.

While these religious scholars correctly observe that the spread of Christianity in Africa involved the accommodation of African culture, all of them are shallow in examining the nature of give-and-take that characterise cultural contact. Mbiti (1969, 226), for example, examines the synthesis of Christianity and African religions and the development of independent churches in two pages! This simply is the description of synthesised cultural products without identifying and explaining the many and varied processes, facets, and mechanisms through which religious forms were historically integrated, to produce a synthesis, thus highlighting not only what is fused but also the process of fusion itself. This is the primary objective driving this research. Because 'simply identifying a ritual or a religion as syncretic tells us very little about them, and gets us practically nowhere since all religions have multiple origins and are continually reconstructed through the ongoing process of synthesis' (Stewart and Shaw 1994, 7). The metaphors of syncretism and mixing used in these kinds of literatures are very flat, and thus, there is a need to move beyond their limitations, account for causes of change, and specify the mechanisms by which syncretism was engendered. This is what this study endeavors to do.

With the trail being well-blazed, there was a tremendous upsurge in African studies on Christianity. The pattern of these works shows that independent church movements received considerable attention from scholars. Some were attracted to them because of their peculiar nature, while others saw them as distinctively African. In the wake of independence, Africanist scholars interested in nationalism were

impressed by them as a protest phenomenon (Ranger 1987, 31). The most eye-catching pieces of research on this topic were done by Sundkler (1961), Peel (1969), Ballandier (1966), and Freedman (1952). In western Kenya, research interest was directed at religious movements that splintered from missionary churches. Maxon (1986) and Brett (2002) wrote on the cult of Mumboism, which emerged among the Luo and Abagusii, *Dini ya Musambwa* that started among Babukusu before making serious inroads among the Pokot was studied by Kipkorir (1972, 1973), Shimanyula (1978), de Wolf (1983), Wipper (1977), McAuthur (2000) and Lundbey (2013), while Wanakacha (1992) and Nyahela (2015) delved into the rise of the African Church of the Holy Spirit among the Abaluyia.

There were also enquiries conducted on the development of mainstream missionary churches in Kenya. Most of these studies were subsumed in the prevailing theoretical orientation of religious studies that emphasised the role of the Africans in directing and shaping the encounter between Christianity and local religions. Although researchers of this nature abound in western Kenya, especially among the Abaluyia and Luo, it is important to note that the Kerio-Valley has been the least explored. The few that exist came as late as the twenty-first century, for example, Matwetwe (2017), Armada (2001) and Ngeiywo (2017, 2018), who have delved into the encounter between various aspects of Pokot indigenous religion and Christianity. Among the Marakwet, Kibor (1992, 2005) and Eloia (1992), have examined the inception and the growth of the Africa Inland Church. However, being theological studies, they do not focus on how historical forces influence the evolution of religion. Thus, they do not show continuity and changes in African indigenous

religion during its encounter with western Christianity. This void is what this study has attempted to fill.

Historians also played a significant part in the study of Christianity. By the 1960s there were few pioneering historical enquiries on Christianity such as Roland (1952), Ballandier (1965), and Ogot and Welbourne (1966). The rallying cry however came in 1971 during the Dar-es-Salaam conference, whose proceedings were published a year later as a book. The conference emphasised that for historians to correct the hitherto incomplete historical portrait of Africa, there was an urgent need for them to study religion alongside other facets of life because of the ‘centrality of religion on the African experience’ (Kimambo 1972, 1). However, this advice did not augur well within the historical fraternity because it took time before they turned their analytical tools and trenchant minds to the study of religion.

From the 1970s going forward, researchers on the history of Christianity in Africa began to take shape in the historical landscape. Notable among them in Kenya is Odwako (1975), Gilpin (1976), Mbula (1977), Ogutu (1981), Gimode (1993, 2003), Amatsimbi (2009), Shilaro (1992), Karanja (1999), Kavulavu (2014), Gachihi (2014), and Shiyuka (2017). These authors approach the topic of Christianity in different ways; some position it centrally in their work, while others peripherally as single chapters. Others consider how Christianity shaped particular spheres of the African ritual and social world, while some systematically theorise how Christianity interacted with indigenous cosmologies on a more general level.

On the whole, these enquiries question the narrative of the rapid spread of Christianity. They show that despite the glowing picture of heroic triumphs

highlighted in missionary accounts, Christianity in Kenya, especially during the first half of the twentieth century, was not substantial as portrayed. Far from being a popular mass movement, the earliest converts are depicted as marginal individuals who perceived Christianity and the sanctuary of mission stations as opportunities for re-launching their shattered lives (Gimode 2003). Most Africans retained their aboriginal culture and offered resistance to Christianity as they tried to negotiate and reconcile the two opposing ontologies. The role of first converts, catechists, Bible translators, and evangelists is also emphasised. They are presented as principal agents who mediated the transition that led to the growth of distinctively African Christianities, as Africans brought together Christianity and indigeneity to establish cosmological coherence (Strayer 1976, 3). These, therefore, are some of the many books, articles, and chapters that historians have written on Christianity in Kenya generally. They indicate the rich and varied nature of this expanding field of literature. While they identify syncretic religious convergences between Christianity and African religious experiences, their theoretical outlooks have been diverse and not compatible with the theory applied to this study. This study wishes to contribute to this corpus of growing literature by examining the growth of Christianity in the Kerio-Valley using the theory of agency.

### **1.9 Theoretical Framework**

There are so many theories that historians have employed to explain the evolution of the many facets of religions across the world. Most of them have been appropriated from other social science disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, and sociology. Gachihi (2014), for example, has used twin theories, namely, the

modernisation theory and the theory of antialogical action, in her attempt to show the nexus between the Mau Mau nationalistic movement and Christianity in Kenya. Gimode (2003) examines religious change in western Kenya among the southern Abaluyia, Nandi-Terik, and the Luo using two theories. These are the theories of dialectics developed by Hegel and Aseka's triad of human consciousness. The Hegelian dialectics explains how religious ideas interact to produce syncretic higher-order ideas, while Aseka's theory of human consciousness foregrounds the human body as the agent in religious change. Others include Kavulavu (2014), who has used the functionalist theory to explain the process of Christianization of the Idakho of western Kenya and Karani (2017), whose endeavour to analyse the syncretic nature in the evolution of specific rites related to the obsequies of the Tiriki of western Kenya used symbolic interactionism theory. These are examples of theories that have been employed to analyse religion historically.

The theory of human agency will guide this study. It is also referred to as the agency theory. Agency is a theoretical formulation that has been borrowed from sociology. Most social theorists associate agency with selfhood, intentionality, choice, initiative, freedom and creativity. However, the point of disagreement has always been how agency and structure are related in theory (Mische and Emirbayer 1998, 962). Theorists have tried to explain the relationship between agency and structure and have provided suggestions on interpreting the interrelation between these two complementary concepts in social theory. However, in the attempt to demonstrate the interpenetration between agency and structure, many theorists have failed to distinguish agency as an analytical category in its own right with distinctive

theoretical dimensions and temporal variable social manifestations. The result has been the creation of ‘a flat and impoverished conception that when it escapes abstract voluntarism of rational choice theory, it tends to remain so tightly bound to structure that one loses sight of the different ways agency shapes social action’ (Emirbayer 1994, 1411). Because of this concern, I adopted a version of agency theory that demonstrates how the dimensions of agency interpenetrate the diverse forms of temporal structures in society. This version was developed by Mische Ann and Mustafa Emirbayer of the University of Chicago. These authors rely on the works of American Pragmatists and Phenomenologists, particularly the works of George Herbert Mead. The works of Mead offered them, they say, ‘the most compelling tools for overcoming the inadequate conceptions of agency in both rational and norm-oriented theoretical approaches’ (1932, 1). Mead’s (1932) theorisation of temporality enabled them to explain how human actors engage the past and the future in making decisions for their emergent actions.

According to this theory, human agency is conceptualised as a ‘temporally embedded process of social engagement informed by the past (through the process of iteration or habit) but also oriented towards the future (in a projective capacity to imagine alternative possibilities), and towards the present (as the practical-evaluative capacity to contextualise past habits and future projects within contingencies of the moment)’ (Mische and Emirbayer 1998, 962). Therefore, agency is presented as a chordal triad composed of three analytically distinct elements: *iteration*, *projectivity* and *practical-evaluation*. These elements correspond to the temporal orientation of agency, thus allowing us to analyse human actions that are oriented towards the past

and the future but take place in the present. While routine human purpose and action all constitute important dimensions of agency, none in itself captures agency in its complexity unless it is analysed against the interrelatedness of social and temporal human structures.

The first element of human agency is iteration. This element has received the most systematic attention in philosophy and sociological theory (Ortner 1984; Turner 1994). Iteration refers to the selective reactivation of actors of past patterns of thought and action as routinely incorporated in practical activity. Iteration gives stability and order to social universes and helps humans to sustain identities, interactions, and institutions over time. Although human experiences occur in the present, this present is permeated by the conditioning quality of the past, which provides a stabilising influence that enables human agents to sustain identities, meaning, and interaction over time (Mische and Emirbayer 1998, 970).

The primary locus of agency for the dimension of iteration is the schematisation of social experience, manifested in the agent's ability to recall, select, and apply the schemas of actions that were developed through past interactions. These schemas could be corporeal as well as cognitive patterns used in interpreting mental categories, embodied practices, and social organisation (Giddens 1994, 20). The agentic dimension lies in how actors selectively recognise, locate, and implement such schemas in the ongoing situated interactions. Actors retrospectively assimilate new experiences to the old using the 'enveloping' procedure, in which differences are smoothed over through the process of recognition and assimilation. This enables

agents to develop a sense of continuity and order within the temporal evolving human experiences (Alexander 1988, 301).

The second element of the triad of human agency is the *projective* dimension. One key limitation of many contemporary theories of agency is that they tend to restrict the discussion of agency to its iterational dimension (Mische and Emirbayer 1998, 984). However, human actors do not merely repeat past routines. They are also inventors of new possibilities of thought and action. The imaginative engagement of the future is also a crucial component of the effort of human actors. As they respond to challenges and uncertainties of social life, actors' distance themselves from schemas, habits, and traditions that constrain social identities and institutions, thereby making projectivity to be neither radically voluntarist nor narrowly instrumentalist. The formation of projects, in the mind, is therefore an interactive process by which social actors negotiate their paths towards the future receiving their driving impetus from the conflicts and challenges of social life (Dietz and Burns 1992, 180). Through projectivity human agents:

..... carry in the thought the world as it should and fashion our conduct to bring this about. The conception of a different world comes to us always as a result of some specific problem that involves readjustment of the world as it is, not to meet a detailed ideal of a perfect universe but to obviate the present difficulty. Reflective thought [projectivity] does not then carry us to the world that is to be, but puts our thought and endeavour into the very process of evolution (Petras 1969, 129).

The locus of agency in projectivity lies in the hypothesization of experience, as actors attempt to reconfigure received schemas by generating alternative responses to problematic situations they confront in their lives (Petras 1968, 128). Immersed in

the flow of time, agents move beyond themselves into the future and construct changing images of where they think they are going and how they can get there from where they are at present (Schutz 1967, 62).

The final element in the chordal triad of agency is that which responds to the demands and contingencies of the present. This is practical-evaluation. It involves bringing down to earth the agentic projections within real-world circumstances. The primary locus of agency in its practical-evaluative dimension lies in the contextualisation of social experience. The explanation of practical evaluation borrows heavily from the Pragmatists' stress on 'the communicative transactional dimension of agency.' Most recent examples of theories that embrace the critical and dialogic aspects of practical-evaluation are found in the writings of Dewey (1978); Arendt (1984); Mead (1934). These theorists argue that through deliberation with others, or sometimes self-reflexively within themselves about the pragmatic and normative exigencies of lived situations, actors make considered decisions that may challenge received patterns of action from the past. By increasing their capacity for practical-evaluation, human actors strengthen their ability to exercise agency in a mediating fashion enabling them to pursue their projections in a way that challenges and transforms situational contexts of action themselves (Mische and Emirbayer 1998, 996).

This study, therefore, believes that the agentic dimension of historical social action is best captured in its full complexity if it is situated within the flow of time because structural contexts of social action are themselves temporal as well as rational fields. They are multiple overlapping ways of ordering time in which social actors assume

different simultaneous agentic orientations. Since social actors are embedded within many such temporalities at once. They can be said to be oriented towards the past, the future, and the present at any given moment. However, as human actors move within and among these different unfolding contexts, they switch between their temporal orientations and thus can change their relationship to the structure. By examining these changes in agentic relationships temporally, this theory gives us crucial analytical leverage for charting varying degrees of maneuverability, inventiveness, and reflexive choice shown by social actors in relation to the constraining and enabling contexts of historical action.

This study, therefore, contends that the key to understanding the transformation of the religion of the Kalenjin in the Kerio-valley lies in the theorisation of the temporal structured nature of their spiritual universe. As historical agents, the Kalenjin lived simultaneously in their *iterative* past, *projective* future, and the *practical-evaluative* present while adjusting the various temporalities of their empirical spiritual existence to one another in more or less imaginative and reflexive ways. They continuously engaged patterns and repertoires of their past projected hypothetical pathways forward in time and adjusted their actions to meet the exigencies of emerging historical situations. This process inevitably led to the fusion of religious ideas from different temporalities to formulate syncretism.

### **1.10 Research Method and Procedure.**

This study is a product of a research proposal that I developed and successfully defended at Kenyatta University's Department of History Archaeology and Political Studies in June 2020. As is always the custom in research, during the process of

drafting the proposal I surveyed secondary research to contextualize the problem under study. In the process, I collected secondary data for the study. After the proposal was registered by the University I embarked on the collection of primary data. I began with archival research. This took place from June 2020 to December 2020. During this period, I visited archives including the Kenya National Archives (hereinafter KNA), the African Inland Mission (hereinafter AIMA), the Pokot Community Resource Center and Archives at Kapenguria and the Keiyo Community and Resource Center at Tambach. The objective of archival research was to gain a glimpse into the interaction between the Kalenjin and the agents of Western culture and Christianity during the colonial period. In my archival research, I was mainly interested in the annual reports of Mission station heads and British colonial administrators (DCs and PCs) personal correspondences between missionaries and their friends and families, and the constitution of missionary societies. Although the available archival sources yielded substantial information on the contact between the Kalenjin and agents of Western Culture, there were missionary societies whose archives could not be accessed in Kenya. For example, the Bible Churchmen Missionary Society (BCMS) missionaries whose records are archived in Birmingham, Britain, and the MHM Catholics whose archives I could not locate. I, therefore, analysed and interpreted the data that was available.

I started fieldwork in the Kerio Valley in January 2021 and ended in June 2021. I conducted oral interviews among the Keiyo, Marakwet, Tugen, Pokot, Karimojong, and Turkana. I started by piloting my study instruments in Marakwet West and Keiyo North in the first two weeks of January 2021. After that, I assembled a team of

research assistants and took them through the research tools and explained to them how to conduct oral interviews. These research assistants were my former students at Chebara Secondary School, and all of them belonged to and lived among the different Kalenjin groups of the Kerio Valley. The sense of belonging of my research assistants helped me to surmount the challenge of the language barrier, and gain the trust of elders and the community by and large. With the help of my research assistants, we selected informants for interviews through a purposive sampling technique. Other knowledgeable informants were made known to us, during the course of fieldwork, by village elders and chiefs. We recorded all our interviews using smartphone audio recorders. I collected the audio every evening, translated them, and recorded the most important details thematically in my notebook. Throughout the interview period, we interviewed a total of 113 informants. However, having stayed in Kerio Valley for almost a decade of my life, as a teacher, I collected a lot of information through informal oral interviews. Therefore, most of the data that I collected in my formal interviews was not entirely new, some of the stories had been recounted to me many times before in my informal interactions with villagers. This insider experience proved to be very invaluable for this study. I can confess that this study would have taken me much longer to conduct had I not been having firsthand experience of the culture and the geography of the Kerio-Valley.

I began analysing the data collected in June 2021. During the process, I brought the data collected from various sources together and analyzed it thematically as established by my research objectives. In each objective, I cross-referenced information collected from secondary sources, archival sources, and oral interviews.

I treated the concurrence (the corroborative extent) of information from both sources to be the convergence of historical truth. However, where data from some of the sources were contradictory and inconsistent, as is always the case with historical research, I weighed the evidence and assessed the different angles and interpretations to arrive at logical conclusions that could withstand the test of time. I then presented my findings using the historical method by showing causation and consequences of human action. This gave me the trends and patterns in the history of the religious culture of the Kalenjin of the Kerio Valley as presented in this thesis.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THE RELIGIOUS CULTURE OF THE INDIGENOUS INHABITANTS OF THE KERIO-VALLEY BY 1800 C.E**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter examines the religious culture of the indigenous communities of the Kerio-Valley up to 1800 C.E. It wishes to demonstrate that the Kerio-Valley has been inhabited by human beings since the Stone Age period. The Late Stone Age communities were hunter-gatherer groups. In the succeeding centuries, however, other communities including the Southern Cushites, Southern Nilotes, and Eastern Nilotes come from the north and settled alongside the indigenous people. This chapter focuses on the religious life that existed in the Kerio-Valley before the advent of the modern inhabitants. It wishes to demonstrate that the indigenous groups living in the Complex had developed their own religion and culture, which was suited to their semi-arid environment. The ancestors of the Kalenjin encountered this autochthonous religious culture at the time of settlement, and in the subsequent centuries they reshaped their religion to adapt it to the spiritual culture of their hosts. This chapter, therefore, forms a backdrop against which the subsequent chapters will use to demonstrate change in the religion of the Kalenjin. I begin this chapter by describing the emergence of the indigenous groups, followed by the migration and settlement of modern inhabitants and finally I describe their religious culture.

#### **2.2.1 The Early Inhabitants of the Kerio-Valley**

That the Kerio-Valley Cultural Complex has been inhabited since the dawn of human civilization cannot be withsaid. Archaeological excavations in numerous sites within the Complex reveal the presence of human life since the Stone Age period.

Discoveries of fossils and artefacts at Lothagam, Kanapoi, Apeget, Lobo, Koobi Fora, Eliye Springs, Kipsaraman, Chesowanja, and the neighbouring Omo River valley, in Ethiopia, testify to the presence of human civilization in this Complex from a very early date (Robbins 1972; Bower 1991; Ambrose 1982). Although the composition of the social structure of the people of the Stone Age period falls beyond the scope of this study, it is important to paint the larger temporal canvas because help us to demonstrate the religious influence of the indigenous communities on the religion of the modern inhabitants who settled in the Complex in the succeeding centuries.

The Late Stone Age period in East Africa occurred approximately between eleven and three thousand years ago. This period witnessed the emergence of hunter-gatherer communities who are believed to have spoken a 'bushman language' similar to that of the Khoisan of South Africa (Robbins 1972, 364). These human ancestors developed specialized and precise microlithic tools as well as grinding stones and pottery, which enabled them to shift towards intensive exploitation of local food resources through fishing, hunting, and gathering (Robbins 1972, 364; Hromnik 1982, 113). In the Kerio-Valley, for example, archaeological records indicate that the Stone Age communities established congeries of settlements along the shores of Lake Turkana and the upper courses of its major tributaries, Turkwel, Kerio, and Omo Rivers, which gave them proximity to 'exploit riverine and lakeside resources' (Robbins 1972, 363). The bones excavated at Lothagam, by Robbins, attest to the crucial role fishing played in the economic survival of these Stone Age people. Apart

from fishing the Stone Age people also hunted wild animals at watering points along the shores of the brackish lake (Robbins 1972, 363).

The most important industry associated with the Late stone Age period in the Kerio-Valley is pottery. Ceramics that varied widely in design and level of sophistication have been excavated at many sites in the Kerio-Valley. These ceramics have been termed by archaeologists as the Wiltonian culture. Temporally, the Wiltonian culture was widely distributed between seven thousand and one thousand years before the present, while spatially it extended from Lakes Baringo and Bogoria basin in the East (Petek 2015, 3) to Karamoja in Northeastern Uganda (Ferrand 1976, 267). In the Kerio-Valley, these wares were widely distributed in the Lake Turkana basin and along valleys of rivers Kerio, Turkwel, and Omo. The great density of these Wiltonian sites, along with their ceramic diversity and radiocarbon dates, suggests that 'the Lake Turkana basin might have been Stone Age centre for cultural adaptation before communities started fanning out to the surrounding areas' (Robbin 1972, 363). The general distribution pattern of sherds temporally and spatially does indeed suggest the diffusion of a similar culture over a large area, probably due to environmental and economic mode changes in the later periods (Robbin 1972, 363).

At the close of the Upper Stone Age period (between 3000 and 2000 years before the present) the earliest known visitors began to filter into the Kerio-Valley from the North. They are known in the historical record as Southern Cushites. It was at this particular moment that the idea of food production and animal keeping begin to appear in archaeological records of the Kerio-Valley (Bower 1991, 53; Birgitta 1993, 110). For that reason, the introduction of animal keeping and agriculture is credited

to Southern Cushites. The Cushites are believed to have originated from the Horn of Africa before traversing the length and breadth of East Africa and most parts of the interlacustrine region. These visitors were armed with long-horned cattle, sheep, goats, and agricultural skills. For that reason, they are believed to have inaugurated the 'East African Neolithic Savannah pastoralism' characterised by animal keeping and limited agriculture (Robbins and Lynch 1979, 319). The Southern Cushites co-existed with autochthonous Stone Age communities among whom they settled and, in the process, they influenced each other's cultures. In due course, Ehret says, 'the Southern Cushitic tongue became the language of the amalgam population' presumably because of 'the prestige associated with them as introducers of new revolutionary economic sustenance activities based on agriculture and animal husbandry' (1974a, 153). The amalgam communities lived along the Lake Turkana basin and river valleys before starting fanning out at the beginning of the first millennium C.E.

The dispersion of the amalgam of communities from the Lake Turkana basin is believed to have coincided with the long period of desiccation that occurred in East Africa during the first millennium C.E. Paleoenvironmental records indicate that during the first millennium C.E there was gradual desiccation of most parts of East Africa, which resulted in reduced water levels of the lakes in northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia (Bessemers et al 2013; Stager and Johnson 2000; De Cort et al 2013). As the area dried up, the evolving hybrid communities living along the river valleys and the shores of Lake Turkana were hit by a shortage of pasture and game. This environmental adversity forced them to move to the cool and wetter slopes of

the escarpments, hills, and mountains, 'which were undoubtedly a favourable retreat during drier episodes' (Robbins 1972, 364). In the process of occupying the mountains, escarpments and hills, the indigenous groups were separated from each other resulting to ethnic and cultural differentiation. The differentiated entities as time went by concretized to form the varieties of indigenous ethnic entities but unified by a common cultural substratum (Weatherby 2012).

Archaeological records and oral traditions of the modern inhabitants of northeastern Uganda and northwestern Kenya attest to the fact that in the distant past, the region was inhabited by autochthonous people. From the analysis of data, a pattern of a complex social-economic interaction at varying degrees between Stone Age communities and Southern Cushites can be deduced. Some of these communities were committed to livestock keeping and limited agriculture while others were trappers of game and honey collectors (Lamphear 1988, 30; Lamphear 1976, 133; Turpin 1948, 162). The indigenous groups appear to be numerically populous people extending over a vast spatial range, stretching from northeastern Uganda to South Sudan on the Didinga hills, and across much of western and central parts of Kenya. In Kenya, the indigenous groups dominated the Kerio-Valley from and including the slopes of Mount Elgon, the Uasin-Gishu plateau, Cherang'any ranges, Turkana plains, and Tugen hills to as far as the Laikipia plateau and the Mount Kenya region (Wilson 1970, 140; Ehret 1974a, 157; Webster 1972, 31).

By all indications, the autochthonous groups seem to have derived from the same Southern Cushitic and Stone-Age hybrid stratum. Over the ensuing centuries, however, they seem to have differentiated both economically and linguistically.

Some adopted a ‘fringe Cushitic language’ and became agro-pastoralists (Lamphear 1976, 149). The agro-pastoralists constructed pit dwellings or the ‘Sirikwa holes’ on the slopes of mountains and plateaux, while others retained a ‘Khoisan’ speech and maintained a hunter-gatherer lifestyle (Wilson 1970, 142). Others still had a language and culture that adopted aspects from both as Wilson (1970, 142) attests:

Their pottery and artefacts place them as Stone Age people, but their use of polished stone for hammers and cattle horn shaping and their tradition of keeping domestic stock places them apart from hunter and gatherer people. Their pottery designs and composition place them as highly skilled artisans, and their use of talc as an ingredient of pot-clay distinguishes them from modern inhabitants of the area. A word list may put them tentatively as Khoisan-speaking people, though there is the borrowing of [southern] Cushitic words.

What is clear is that these indigenous people were principally Highlanders. Although some such as the Sirikwa appear to have had settlements on the plains, their real homes were on the high slopes of mountains and hills that dot this region (Lamphear 1976, 142; Weatherby 2012, 30). These people appear to have been one widespread community that was known by various generic names by different communities in different areas. They were known variously as the Sirikwa on the Uasin-Gishu plateau, Trans-Nzoia uplands, and the slopes of Mount Elgon (Kipkorir 1964, 66; Webster 1972, 210); the Oropom or Oworopom or Iworopom on the Riwo plains, Turkwel basin and Chemorongit (Karasuk) hills (Weatherby 1972, 210; Wilson 1970, 128; Turpin 1948, 16; Cox 1972, 22; Brasnett 1958, 113); the Siger on mount Assiger in the Turkana plains (Lamphear 1988, 31); the Moiben, Sengwer, and Muttia on the Cherang’any ranges (Dundas 1910, 57; Bollig 2016, 291); and the Kasauria on the Sekerr ranges (Bollig 2016, 291). These autochthonous people were

also known as the Kuliak, a cluster of communities (Tepes/Sor, Ik/Teuso, Nyangeya/Nyang'i) that formed a continuous chain extending the whole range of hills and escarpments in northeastern Uganda from Mount Moroto in the south to Mount Mogilla in the north (Lamphear 1976, 138).

Later on, some of these indigenous communities especially those on the Uasin-Gishu plateau and the slopes of the Elgon such as the Sirikwa, Sengwer, and Moiben imbibed Kalenjin language and culture. However, they were part of the indigenous stratum that spread across the whole of northwestern Kenya and northeastern Uganda. The differentiation in language and economy in each group reflected the degree of interaction with foreigners such as the Southern Cushites and later the Southern Nilotes. From the oral traditions of the modern inhabitants of the Kerio-Valley, these indigenous people seem to have had common a marker which set them apart. They had their women, girls, and infants displaying a single cowry attached to the forelock that rested on the forehead (Wilson 1970, 148; Turpin 1948, 162; Lamphear 1988, 33). The Ateker, Maasai, and Kalenjin refer to the cowry shell as *siger* or *seker*. The modern inhabitants of the Kerio-Valley thus referred to them as the people of the cowry shell, hence the appellatives, Siger, Sekerr, and Sengwer.

### **2.2.2 The Emergence of the Southern Nilotes**

The other people who entered the historical stage in the Kerio-Valley are the Southern Nilotes. The Southern Nilotes are the progenitors of the modern-day Kalenjin. They are also referred to elsewhere in the literature as Highland Nilotes (Ogot 2009, 9; Ehret 1974, 157). The history of the migration and settlement of Southern Nilotes has attracted the attention of several scholars. Using archaeological

and linguistic evidence, scholars have attempted to reconstruct the history of southern Nilotes. While most do not agree on the exact period of their migration to Kenya, there is a general concurrence that around 500 C.E the proto-Southern Nilotes began their movement from their cradleland located around the Ethiopian highlands (Sutton 1986, 21; Ehret 1974, 183; Ogot 2005, 102).

While still in possession of their cradleland, and during their movement into Kenya, the Southern Nilotes came under intense cultural influence from Eastern Cushites (Ehret 1974, 157; Robbins and Lynch 1979, 319). From these contacts, the ancestors of the Southern Nilotes borrowed Cushitic many words, adopted the abhorrence of fish-eating, and began circumcision of boys and clitoridectomy for girls as chief initiatory rites. Their cosmology was also not spared either. They adopted the concept of a high God personified in the sun. The Southern Nilotes named this God *Asis*. Together all the cultural features adopted by Southern Nilotes ‘indicate that the particular Cushites that influenced them were closely related to the Konso, Arbore, and their cognates in the region of southern Ethiopia,’ than the better known Eastern Cushites of Kenya – the Somali, Oromo, Rendille and Borana (Ehret 1974a, 157). What this means is that these Cushitic contacts might have occurred in the region between the Ethiopian highlands and Lake Turkana, before the southward migration and division of Southern Nilotes into smaller ethnic units (Ehret 1974, 157; Robbins and Lynch 1979, 319).

The southern Nilotes entered Kenya during the last quarter of the first millennium of the Christian era. They traversed through the northern part of Kerio-Valley extending their influence westwards to the Karamoja plateau before settling on the slopes of

Mount Elgon (Wilson 1970, 128; Knighton 1999, 122). The portrait that emerges is that this Southern Nilotic advance was a slow and gradual penetration of small groups spread over several centuries apart, as they passed through the Turkana plains before having a significant stop at the slopes of the Elgon (Ehret 1974, 157). The migration of Southern Nilotes into the highlands of western Kenya was not enacted in a vacuum. They entered an area that was already in the process of ethnic and cultural flux, where Stone Age communities and Southern Cushites had interacted for centuries leading to the creation of hybrid multi-ethnic and multilingual communities (Ogot 2005, 105; Lamphear 1988, 33). The Southern Nilotes interacted with, and assimilated some of these indigenous amalgam societies linguistically. The outcome of which was that most of the indigenous communities around the slopes of the Elgon, Cherangany ranges, and Uasin-Gishu plateau - the Sirikwa, Ogiek, Moiben, and Sengwer - adopted the Southern Nilotic speech.

By around 1000 C.E. the vanguard of the Southern Nilotes had established their presence on the slopes of the Mount Elgon area, before spreading gradually into the adjoining Uasin-Gishu plateau and most parts of western Kenya. This slow Southern Nilotic penetration of western Kenya led to the expansion of the Southern Nilotic linguistic sphere in the highlands of western Kenya at the expense of Southern Cushites and indigenous communities. By around 1200 C.E, the vanguard groups of Southern Nilotes had penetrated westward reaching as far as the shores of Lake Victoria (Ogot 2009, 487). They had also reached the plains of central Tanzanian in the form of the ancestors of the present-day Datoga and Barabaig. Other Southern Nilotic sections, the Kitoki, advanced along the south-westerly slopes of Mount

Elgon. However, this westerly movement of Southern Nilotes was checked by the advent of the Bantu into western Kenya. Of all the Southern Nilotic groups who spread westwards towards the Uganda border and the Lake Victoria region, it is only the proto-Nandi and proto-Terik who managed to survive the historical process of Bantuization that was to engulf the region. The Kitoki, Tachoni, Abashieni of Marama, Abanashieni, Abamulembo, and Abatobe of Wanga gave ground linguistically but managed to retain few cultural traits steeped in their Southern Nilotic past (Ogot 2005, 105; Were 1972, 3; Were 1974, 187).

The slow Southern Nilotic penetration and occupation of western Kenya created a loose network of sufficient nodal points, across the length and breadth of the highlands of western Kenya, nevertheless full of interstices occupied by indigenous groups. With time the remaining indigenous hunter-gatherers (Ogiek) communities of forested areas within the Rift Valley and Mount Elgon adopted the Southern Nilotic tongue as their lingua franca (Ehret 1974, 183). This scenario perhaps explains why Mwanzi attributed to the Ogiek the role of introducing the Kalenjin language to the evolving Kipsigis community (1977, 82). This was the portrait of Western Kenya by around 1500 C.E before the much-discussed dispersion of the Kalenjin from the Mount Elgon area.

The greatest controversy in the history of the Kalenjin is that of dispersion. There is no unanimity as to when these dispersions occurred. Scholars such as Huntingford (1953, 1), Peristiany (1939, 1), and Orchardson (1961, 4) believe that this dispersion happened during the eighteenth century, while others such as Were (1967, 47), Ogot (2005, 105), and Matson (1967, 1) locate this event much earlier in time, around the

fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries. Lang'at (1969, 74-76) and Towett (1979, 5-7) say that it occurred around the seventeenth century. A solitary and contrary voice is that of Mwanzi (1977). Mwanzi rejects all possibilities of any migration of the Kalenjin groups, insisting that the Kalenjin emerged out of interactions between and among communities in their areas of habitation. Mwanzi's position inevitably attracted very heavy intellectual artillery from the likes of Tarus (1994, 43), Distefano (1985, 2), Sambu (2011, 17), and Kipkorir (2008, 66-67) who have since challenged his thesis. The wheel has spun full circle, and rightly so. Such that today any outright rejection of migration of communities spatially is considered at best ahistorical. There certainly must have been movements of people in East Africa as oral and linguistic evidence strongly points out.

### **2.2.3 The Invasion of the Eastern Nilotes and Ethnogenesis of the Kalenjin**

Evidence indicates that the evacuation of the ancestors of the Kalenjin from the slopes of Mount Elgon and the Uasin-Gishu area was associated with the advent of Plain Nilotes, and their subsequent ferocious livestock raids (Ochieng 1975, 31; Sutton 1964, 114). This group is also known as Eastern Nilotes. The ancestors of the Eastern Nilotes evolved as one group in the region of southern Ethiopia before breaking into three groups namely the Lotuko cluster, the Karamojong cluster (Ateker), and the Maasaan cluster. This study is interested with the last two because of their lasting impact on the events that were to unfold in the Kerio-Valley in the subsequent centuries (Ochieng 1975, 31). Around 1000 C.E the proto-Ateker moved westwards across the head of Lake Turkana, through southern Sudan and settled on the Karamoja plateau in northern Uganda. In their itinerary, they include sojourns at

Longiro in Sudan, Kotten, and Magos in northern Uganda. In the second half of the seventeenth century the Karamojong groups - the proto-Karimojong, proto-Jie, proto-Dodos, proto-Turkana, and proto-Teso – dispersed to their present homelands, in the process concretizing into distinct the present Ateker ethnic units (Lamphear 1976, 78; Ochieng' 1975, 33). Of these Ateker groups, the proto-Karimojong had the greatest impact on the evolution of the religious experience of the communities in Kerio-Valley.

The Maasian group on their part evolved as an ethnic unit during their brief stay around the north of Lake Turkana at the turn of the first millennium C.E. From here, they moved southwards and established their presence slightly to the south of Lake Turkana, stretching from Samburu County in the east to Karamoja plateau in the west. Around the sixteenth century, they spread onto the plains of western and central Kenya going far south as central Tanzania, in the process they differentiated into distinct ethnic units speaking various dialects of the Maa language – Ilaikiapiak, Ilpurko, Ilkisongo, Ilogolala, Uasin-Gishu (Iloikop) and Samburu. By the second half of the seventeenth century, the Maasai groups had the plains of western Kenya, including the Kerio-Valley firmly in their grip. They commanded ‘the heartland of the Rift-Valley’ but wandered ‘far and wide’ in their livestock raids and thus became a ‘critical factor in regulating not only the movement but also the settlement of other ethnic groups’ (Ochieng 1975, 37).

The spread of the Eastern Nilotes into the plains of western Kenya sounded an alarm bell on the Southern Nilotic and indigenous groups’ dominance of the plains. The coming of Plain Nilotes was by far the most important factor that shaped the

geopolitics of western Kenya in the eighteenth century. These intruders introduced the idea of extensive and bloody raids that were religiously sanctioned and conducted on a large scale. These raids forced the Southern Nilotes to evacuate the plains for the safety of the hills and escarpments (Ehret 1974a, 161; Spear 1976, 35). The indigenous agro-pastoral groups (Sirikwa) also left the plains because their 'pit dwellings' could not guarantee security for their animals against organized raiders (Sutton 1964, 114; Kipkorir 1964, 6). For example, the autochthonous groups scattered from the Uasin-Gishu plateau by the Maasai were absorbed within the evolving Bukusu, Tachoni,<sup>1</sup> and the Kalenjin of Mount Elgon communities.<sup>2</sup> The Tula clan<sup>3</sup> among the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley is also believed to be of Sirikwa etymology (Kipkorir 1964, 66).

The proto-Kalenjin invasion and settlement of the highlands was not a united scheme planned and executed consciously and deliberately by the ancestors of the Kalenjin, as it has been elsewhere depicted (Kokwob Boib Markweta 2012; Chebet and Dietz 2003). What these writers present are nationalistic narratives that present a false kind of unity that never existed in the past. The whole process of settlement on the hills and escarpments was diversified, irregular, and disorganized. Families and clans acted independently and sought the security of the hills at their own times, and in some cases in opposition to each other. A scrutiny of the oral traditions of different Kalenjin clans in the Kerio-Valley shows that there are no histories of the large

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<sup>1</sup> Among the Bukusu, they form the Basilikwa cluster of clans. The Basilikwa cluster of clans has the name Silikwa as their clan praise name. According to Simiyu (1990, 134), the clans which mention Silikwa in their praise are Bakiyabi, Bachemwile, Balwonja, Bakimweyi, Bakitwiika, Bacholo, Basimisi, Bameme, Barnuranua, Bayemba, Babuya, Bakolati, and Babuulo.

<sup>2</sup> Among the Sabaot they were known as the Kapsirikwa clan

<sup>3</sup> The Tula has the Jackal (*cheptibi*) as their totem. Members of this clan are known differently by local names. They are known variously as Kapogong and Kapkomora in Marakwet.

groups or tribes. Instead, there are many histories of clans and families and how they arrived at the hillside settlements (Kipkorir 2008, 67; Kipkorir 2009, 387; Behrend 1985, 189; Bollig 2000, 34).

Following the trepidation of Plain Nilotes, the ancestors of the Kalenjin abandoned the plains for the hills. Some of them settled on the Sekerr ranges, while others sought refuge in the Cherangany and the Tugen hills. The settlement of the ancestors of the Kalenjin in the highlands of the Kerio-Valley was not enacted on empty lands. These hills, scarps, and mountains were inhabited by autochthonous groups for many centuries. The traditions of the Pokot, Marakwet, Keiyo, and Tugen are unanimous that their ancestors met indigenous people during their time of settlement known by various names in different localities - Sengwer, Sirikwa, Muttia, Moiben, Kasauria, Oropom, Kapchengrot, and Kurut (Behrend 1985, 189; Massam 1927, 20; Kipkorir 1964, 6; Dundas 1910, 58). Some of these people are said to have kept livestock and constructed 'pit dwellings' that varied in shape and design from one locality to another. The remains of these dwellings have been located along the Pokot, Keiyo, and Marakwet escarpment on the Uasin-Gishu plateau and Cherangany hills (Noble 1964, 178). These indigenous people served as nuclei around which the proto-Kalenjin concretized to evolve into separate civic territories in the Kerio-Valley. Unfortunately, the cultural significance of these indigenous groups has been minimised, if not muted in the history of the Kalenjin of Kerio-Valley. Although the aura of a single and orthodox Kalenjin ethnicity is amplified in the extant literature, the indigenous core populations have their cultural influences indelibly printed on

the social contours of the religion of the Kalenjin. This will become apparent in later in this chapter.

The ancestors of the present-day Pokot settled on the Sekerr ranges and parts of the Cherang'any hills. They settled alongside indigenous people remembered as Kasauria on the Sekerr ranges and Muttia, Oropom, Sirikwa and Sengwer on the Cherangany ranges. In the following decades, they evolved into distinct social-political units known as Kasauria (on the Sekerr ranges) and Cheptulel and Kurut (on the Cherangany hills) (Bollig 2000, 341; Ochieng 1975, 58). The inhabitants of these three sections were collectively referred to as the Suk in early literature (Peristiany 1959; Beech 1910). They represent the original Pokot group before some of them fanned out to the plains to begin pastoralism in the nineteenth century. The eponym Suk is a miswritten Maasai pejorative which denigrated their non-pastoral lifestyle. It was derived from the word *chok*. *Chock* is a bill hook that was used by Pokot women for tilling the soil. However, during the colonial period, these Kalenjin adopted the name Pokot. A single person is known as a Pochon (Beech 1910, 10). At the beginning of the nineteenth century, sections of the Pokot starting with the Kasauria group from the Sekerr ranges descended from the hills to begin pastoralism on the lowland plains. This led to the ethnic and cultural evolution of the Pokot that separated them from the other Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley. It also led to the dichotomy of the pastoral (plains) and the agro-pastoral (hill) Pokot (Bollig 2006, 22; Dundas 1910, 57).

Other Southern Nilotic refugees settled on the western escarpment of the Rift Valley from the Pokot section of Cheptulel in the north to the region of Metkei in the south.

These groups settled alongside indigenous communities remembered variously as Sirikwa, Moiben, Kapchengrot, and Kurut, in the process evolving into civic territories speaking varying dialects of the Kalenjin language. The four northern autonomous civic clusters, Endo, Markweta, Almo, Borokot, and Kiptani were later, during the colonial period, amalgamated to form the Marakwet ethnic group (Kipkorir 2008, 1-2). However, the name Marakwet is of recent coinage; during the pre-colonial period, these clusters were known by their neighbours as the Chepleng' (Dundas 1910, 62; Kipkorir 2009, 407). The name Markweta was a referent for one of the civic territorial sections of the Chepleng cluster. The intrepid Arab-Swahili traders misapprehended this name as being a representation of the whole Chepleng' group; the name was then adopted by the colonial government and misspelt as Marakwet, and it stuck (Kipkorir 2009, 407).

The civic territorial clusters to the south of the Chebiemit rivulet (Kiptani, Irong', Kapchemutwa, Rokocho, Segu, Mutei, Chang'ach, Mwen, Maan, Metkei, Cheboror and Marichor) were bound together and ethnicized as Keiyo (Massam 1927, 2). The current ethnic rubric Keiyo employed in this analysis did not have meaning before British colonialism. The reifying and hardening of ethnic boundaries in the Kerio-Valley was a result of the British colonial administrative practice that categorized several autonomous communities together to form ethnic groups. As a result of this British practice, a new ethnic consciousness was invented bringing forth a new creature - Keiyo. The name Keiyo is believed to have been given to these territorial groups by the Maasai. The Maasai referred to the Kalenjin living on the escarpment as the *Ilgeyu*, meaning the 'people of the escarpment or cliff' (Kipkorir 2009, 408).

This name was adopted and given wide currency by the British colonial government which used it in the version of *Elgeyo* (Massam 1927, 2). However, the people themselves prefer the short version of the name, Keiyo. This is the name I have adopted in this study.

The other ancestors of the Kalenjin crossed River Kerio, where some of them settled on the Tugen hills while others went as far as Lake Baringo before retracing their footsteps back to the Tugen hills. Others still re-crossed the Kerio River and settled along the western escarpment of the Rift Valley and the Cherang'any ranges. This narrative is in harmony with the traditions of some clans of the Keiyo (Tarus 1994, 43) and Marakwet which emphasize an easterly (*kong'asis*) origin (Kipkorir 2008, 67). The southern Nilotes who sought refuge in the Tugen hills settled alongside Sirikwa and Ogiek groups. They assimilated these indigenous people linguistically and in the ensuing centuries evolved into independent communities. These communities (*porosiek*) recognized the territorial rights of each other. However, the raiding menace of the Maasai, Samburu, Karimojong, Turkana, and later the pastoral Pokot forced them to form a Tugen hills alliance of the neighbourhood. Neighbouring communities thus became *Tugeniu* or comrades in arms, hence the evolution of the name Tugen for the tribe (Kipkulei 1973, 5). The name Tugen as used in historical literature refers to a conglomeration of several Southern Nilotic and indigenous hunter-gatherer groups that speak different dialects of the Kalenjin language living in present Baringo County. They comprise of the Samor, Arror, Endorois, and the Lembus (Kwonyike 2018, 30). This study gives a special focus on the religion of the Tugen section of Arror who inhabited the Tugen hills.

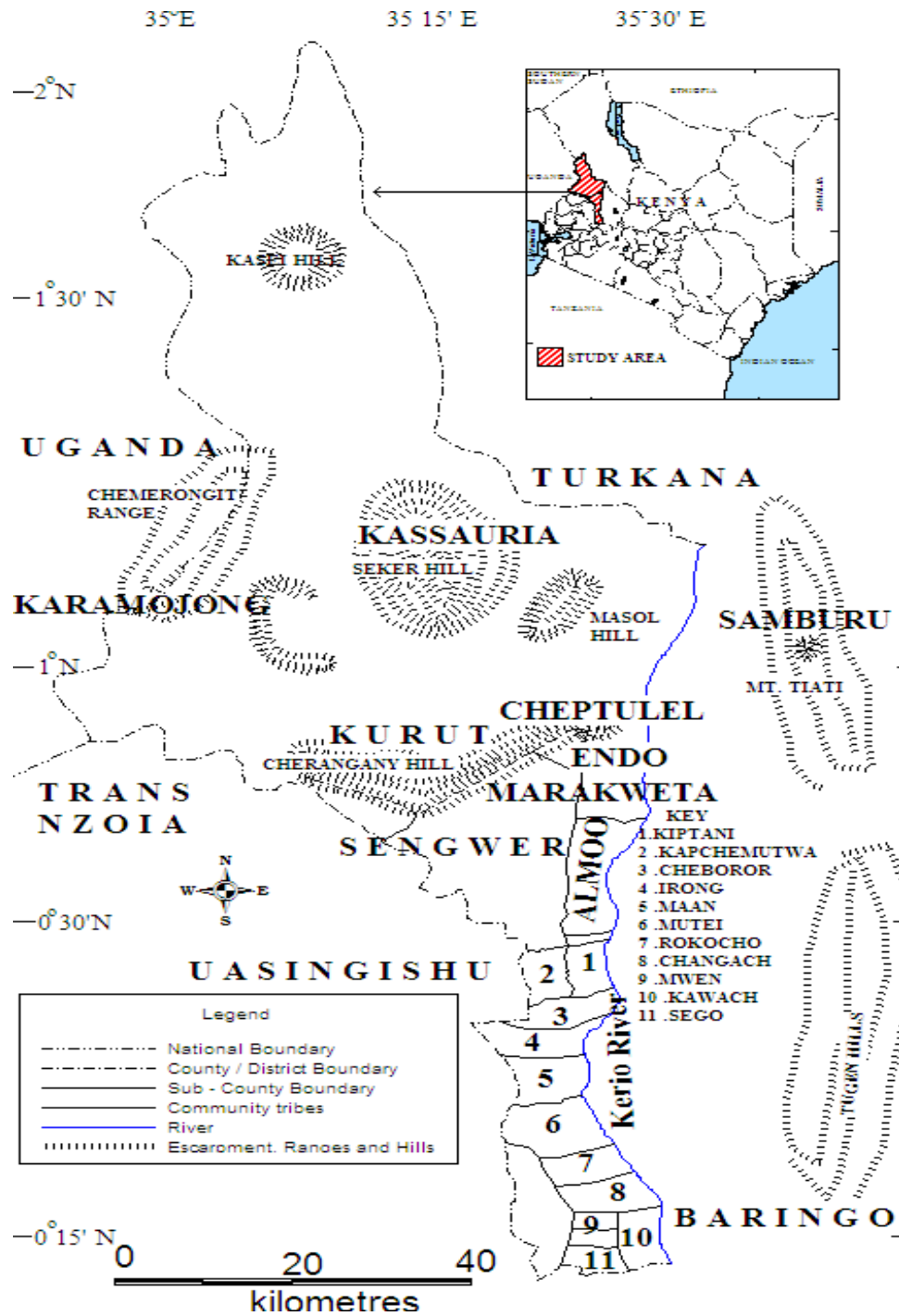


Figure 3: The Kalenjin Clusters in the Kerio-Valley circa 1800, Source: Moi University GIS Laboratory

The evolving Kalenjin communities of the Kerio-Valley absorbed strangers from far and wide. Immigrants from Turkana, Samburu, Karamoja and Laikipia pushed by hunger, wars, expulsions, epidemics, and famine sought refuge among the Kalenjin. All these multiple identities of refugees were subsumed under one single civic territorial identity where they settled (Kipkorir 2009, 395). Here, on the hilly ground they found refuge. Therefore, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the rugged and forested precipices of the Kerio-Valley were the only islands of security in a sea of raiding turmoil. The Iloikop (*Kipwop*) Maasai on the Uasin-Gishu plateau, Karimojong and Turkana (*Kipsire*) from the North and north-west respectively, and the Samburu, Laikipiak, and Purko Maasai from the east were a perennial menace on the plains of the Kerio-Valley. The Kalenjin found themselves besieged in the mountain ranges, hills, and steep escarpments of the Complex. This natural citadel came to serve as the focus of their civilization as they evolved their own unique social, economic, and political identity separate from the other Kalenjin. Slowly they established a new national vocation. Cliff dwellers by misfortune, they became cultivators by necessity; since they could not keep cattle in numbers because of raids, they logically turned to the soil for a livelihood and became nations of expert irrigation farmers (Kipkorir 2009, 386; Chebet and Dietz 2000, 123).

The name Kalenjin is a recent development. It emerged around the 1940s (during the Second World War) from the broadcasts of John Kipsugut arap Chemallan. The name was derived from a gambit employed, by members of the Highland Nilotic groups, to capture the attention of one's interlocutor. For example, before speaking one would say *kaalenchii (kalenjii)*, which means 'I tell you,' or 'I am saying,' before

proceeding to say whatever they wished to pass across (Kipkorir 2008, 61). This name was adopted and given wider currency and rationalization by the emerging Highland Nilotic elite, especially the students of Alliance High School and political brokers, who wished to express their political and cultural commonness. The word was adopted in the version of Kalenjin and used as a referent for the people (Lynch 2011). The name Kalenjin thus expressed the consciousness of a people of their common origin, culture, and nationality. It came to replace the name the 'Nandi-speaking people,' used in colonial records, and 'Highland Nilotes' previously used in scholarly debates (Sambu 2011, 4). In the context of this study, however, the name Kalenjin will be used to refer to Tugen, Pokot, Marakwet, and Keiyo of the Kerio-Valley Complex.

#### **2.2.4 The Emergence of the Pastoral Pokot**

Pokot pastoralism began during the first half of the nineteenth century, before that the people known today as the pastoral Pokot were entirely agro-pastoral people living in Cheptulel and Kurut on the Cherangany ranges and Kasauria on the Sekerr ranges (Beech 1910, 12; Bollig 2000, 348). The adoption of pastoralism began with the Pokot section of Kasauria from Mount Sekerr as embodied in the legend of the Kasauria war leader Merkol (also written as Meriakol). Merkol, as the legend recalls, descended Sekerr ranges at the head of his warriors and roamed the plains occupied by the Karimojong. He adopted the manners of the Karimojong such as the *asapana* initiation, which made his group invincible in war (Peristiany 1951, 189). Because of this Kasauria origin of pastoralism, the pastoral Pokot consider the highest peak of the Sekerr ranges, Mtelo, as their cradle. This geographic feature with time became a

strong focal point of worship and reverence in Pokot religious rituals (Peristiany 1951, 194).

Pastoralism began with sections of the Kasauria Pokot that conducted small-scale raids against the less circumspect sections of other pastoral communities, especially the Samburu. From these raids, they acquired cattle that served as the launching pad for their emergence as pastoralists. However, this fetal pastoral group did not venture onto the plains to the west of Turkwel River and the east of River Kerio. They pastured on the plains of Riwo during the wet season and utilized Mnagei hills as the dry season grazing land (Dietz 1987, 28). In the ensuing decades, there was continuous integration of non-Kasauria Pokot and other alien elements into the fledgling pastoral society. Lineages of Turkana, Ogiek/Dorobo, Karamojong, Dodos, Jie, Samburu, Rendille and Sebei pushed by whatever convulsions that occurred in their homelands to joined the emerging pastoral Pokot group. At the same time, more Pokot kinsmen abandoned the agricultural toil of the rugged hills for the pastoral eldorado of the lowland plains (Barton 1921, 82; Bollig 2000, 341-343; Bollig 2006, 22). With more Pokot lineages and strangers being absorbed into the emerging pastoral society, the ranks of their warriors swelled and their political power waxed. However, in these early years of pastoral evolution, the Pokot movement was limited by their stronger neighbours; the Karimojong who occupied the land to the west of Turkwel River, the Turkana who controlled the northern half of the Kerio-Valley, and the Samburu, who inhabited the plains between River Kerio and Lake Baringo (Dietz 1987, 26-29; Dundas 1910, 58-60).

Around the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the herds of these powerful Eastern Nilotic neighbours, especially the Samburu and Karimojong were afflicted and heavily reduced by rinderpest, pleuro-pneumonia, and sarcoptic mange. These Plain Nilotes were further weakened by drought and famine calamities that ravaged East Africa's pastoralists in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The Pokot retreated to the safe havens of the Sekerr and Cherangany ranges thereby protecting their livestock from animal diseases and drought (Turpin 1948, 161). The consequence of these catastrophes saw the Karimojong occupation of the Turkwel river basin contract to their central areas in Karamoja, thus providing room for the westward expansion of the Pokot. During their westward expansion, the Pokot absorbed desperate groups of Karimojong surviving on hunting and gathering after losing all of their livestock (Turpin 1948, 161).

Having netted the land to the west of the Turkwel basin, the Pokot political ambitions sought new battles while her warriors thirsted for raids and their expanding pastoralism demanded sufficient pasturage. To fulfil these economic and political desires, they turned to the east of the Kerio River where the ample grasslands and fluvial channels of the plains of Baringo beckoned. However, the Pokot had to defeat the Samburu to get them. On the eve of this looming and inevitable altercation, internal troubles synchronized with external problems among the Samburu to swing the advantage to the belligerent Kalenjini. The Pokot thus took advantage of animal epidemics and Maasai civil strife between the Samburu and the Ilaikipiak to drive the Samburu out of the land between River Kerio and Lake Baringo (Dundas 1910, 57; Schneider 1953, 176).

Pokot traditions depict the acquisition of Baringo as a bloody confrontation between their ancestors and the Samburu in which their progenitors emerged victorious. With each passing year, the 'Pokot invasion was like the waves of a rising tide' pushing the Samburu afloat to the shoreline (Barber 1968, 164). Within a few decades, through the twin forces of epidemics and brute military force, the Samburu were vanquished. Some of the defeated Plain Nilotes were absorbed among the Pokot while many others evacuated the Kerio-Valley and pushed farther east to the Leroghi plateau, in the process surrendering the plains of Baringo to the Pokot (Schneider 1953, 176; Bollig 2000, 341). Secure control of Baringo, however, was not guaranteed until the elimination of the Ilaikiapiak Maasai by the Purko-Kisongo Maasai sections under the spiritual inspiration of *laibon* Mbatiany in the second last decade of the nineteenth century (Bernsten 1979, 140).

Pokot folklore presents a heroic picture of how the Samburu were annihilated and cleared out of the Kerio-Valley. However, by all indications this is a patriotic rendering of the actual events. The ideal scenario is that during the process of conquest large numbers of the defeated Plain Nilotes were absorbed by the Kalenjin. Judging from 'the great infusion of Samburu blood' (Dundas 1910, 58) among the pastoral Pokot, there is every likely indication that the element of Samburu assimilation might have been as high as the rate of its displacement.

Great as the military exploits of the expansion of the Pokot were in themselves, greater still they loomed in their cultural consequences in the aftermath. They brought the Pokot into contact with different ethnic groups and opened a window for cultural confrontation, harmonization, and fusion of Kalenjin, Ateker, and Maasaan

religious ideas. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Pokot had emerged as a fully-fledged pastoral group (*pipatich*) covering an expansive territory. They traversed wide areas alternating between dry-season highland camps and wet-season lowland camps (Barton 1921, 58; Dietz 1987, 28). This pastoral mobility took the Pokot away from their central areas of culture on the hills – Sekerr, Kurut, and Cheptulel – and brought them into contact with alien Plain Nilotic cultures that would later have major consequences in the evolution of their religion in the succeeding centuries.

From the foregoing depiction of the violent expansion of the pastoral Pokot, it is tempting to assume that in this Complex warfare was endemic, cattle raid a time-honoured sport, and pillage a valued profession. Of course, this was only one part of life. Otherwise, the relationship between the communities in the Kerio Valley was more complex than this. The Kerio-Valley constituted a galaxy of varied ethnicities, each moving on their orbits but significantly being affected by the other entities of the constellation. The communities kept a careful eye on each other. However, during moments of peace, contacts through trade, and intermarriages resulted in bartering and the fusion of cultural ideologies and religious institutions. These communities also conducted peace rituals that ensured temporary tranquility and sharing of resources. During such moments of peace, they shared common grazing plains and water holes especially along the borders (*serim*). The Pokot western frontiersmen the Kasauria and Kacheripko on the Karimojong border, for example, experienced extensive intermarriages with and assimilated Karamojong lineages. The outcome of this close Ateker contact is that they abandoned Kalenjin circumcision

and adopted the Ateker *asapana* initiation ritual as the badge and emblem of masculine maturity. More than that, they also developed a Pokot argot that was tintured deeply with Karimojong vocabulary (Dundas 1910, 57; Peristiany 1951, 195).

### **2.3 The Religion of the Indigenous Inhabitants of the Kerio Valley**

As I have demonstrated at the beginning of this chapter before the ancestors of the Kalenjin settled in the Kerio-Valley, the area was occupied by indigenous hunter-gatherers and agro-pastoral stone pit-house dwellers. These autochthonous were known variously as the Kasauria, Muttia, Sengwer, Moiben, Sirikwa, Oropom, and Siger. They have been identified to have been powerful ritually, particularly in rainmaking, and their religion was strongly attached to a rainmaking cult. Because of this ability to manipulate the weather, these indigenous people were feared by the ancestors of the modern inhabitants of this region (Powell-Cotton 1904, 322; Lamphear 1988, 33; Behrend 1985, 196; Huntingford 1954, 123; Webster 1973, 36).

Without making categorical claims, this study brings a motley range of sources into dialogue and tentatively concludes that the religious experience of the indigenous inhabitants of the broad area covering northwestern Kenya, northeastern Uganda and parts of Southern Sudan was centred on the belief in a water spirit symbolized by rain. This God was inextricably connected to a rainmaking cult that was controlled by a single clan (Driberg 1932, 607; Laughlin 1970, 119-123; Weatherby 2012, 191). Among most of these indigenous groups, there was close identification of rain or water with the divine personality, and the word for rain or its cognate was used for God. Thorough scrutiny of the religion of remnants of these indigenous people

shows that rain was the common metaphor for God. The proto-Kuliak, for example, had the same name (*war*) for both rain and God (Mbiti 1969, 53; Knighton 1999, 120). The Didinga and the Murle of South Sudan, whose ethnic evolution was contemporaneous with the interaction and absorption of indigenous proto-Kuliak, proto-Lokadhana and proto-Dongotono, have *Tamukujen* for God and *tamu* for rain (Driberg 1922, 222; Driberg 1932, 607).

The Sengwer or Cherangany, a hunter-gatherer group endemic to the eponymous ranges that they have inhabited since Late Stone Age, also have a belief in a water spirit, *Ilat*. The name *ilat* is also used as a metaphor for rain (Kipkorir 2008, 9). The Jie and Karimojong of northeastern Uganda who assimilated a high number of proto-Kuliak and Oropom during their settlement also have a belief in a water spirit, *Ekiye*. *Ekiye* is a supernatural spirit 'associated and revealed in raindrops and muddy water' (Mirzeler 2009, 400). The Tepes or Sor, an indigenous Kuliak group living in Kadam in Uganda venerated a water spirit, *Belgen*. This spirit was believed to reside in rivers on higher slopes of hills and mountains and was responsible for bringing rain (Laughlin 1970, 119; Weatherby 2012, 191).

The remnants of these indigenous people exemplified by the Kuliak cluster (Teuso/Ik, Nyangi/Nyangeya, and Tepes/Sor) and Sengwer appear 'often small and insignificant in themselves but they seem to be broken fragments of a powerful widespread people who occupied an extensive area before the coming of the modern inhabitants of this area' (Macdonald 1899, 240). Probably also, 'in the distant past, all these mountain tribes were related' and shared a common religious belief (Driberg 1932, 607). However, these indigenous people were isolated from each

other by the modern inhabitants who came to occupy the intervening plains (Lamphear 1976, 30, Turpin; Lamphear 1988, 30; Wilson 1970, 170). As a result of that isolation, they fell under the linguistic and religious influences of the numerous intruders, and in the process, they were linguistically absorbed (Driberg 1932, 603; Lamphear 1988, 31; Weatherby 2012, 77).

These indigenous people shared a common religion centred on a belief in a Supreme Being encapsulated in rain. This God was conceived as a masculine water spirit that resided in rivers of high mountains and hills. Even today, a belief of some kind in this water spirit is deeply embedded in the religion of the modern inhabitants of this Complex who absorbed the indigenous groups (Lamphear 1972, 340; Driberg 1932, 222; Mirzeler 2009, 400; Penley 1930, 139). The Turkana, for example, believed in a masculine water spirit (*Ekiye*) that lived in deep pools on rivers. These pools were looked upon with absolute 'religious fear and dread' (Penley 1930, 139).

This study uses the Sengwer, the only remnant of the indigenous people in Complex, to examine the origin and veneration of the water spirit. Among the Sengwer, this water spirit was called *ilat*. The etymology of the name *ilat* as a theonym and a metaphor for rain is not clear. Today the aboriginal Sengwer language and the language of the other indigenous inhabitants of the Kerio-Valley have since disappeared. The Sengwer presently speak varying dialects of the Kalenjin language, some speak Pokot while the majority use Markweta. In the parlance of these Kalenjin septa, rain is *rop* and not *ilat*. So where did the Sengwer get the name *ilat* to signify rain? This question cannot be answered emphatically. However, some hints can be deduced from the language of one of the indigenous groups that dominated

the western edge of the Kerio-Valley called Oropom. The Oropom inhabited the western slopes of the Cherang'any ranges, the northern slopes of Mount Elgon and the Chemorongit ranges (Karasuk hills) from the Late Stone Age period. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the Oropom were broken and scattered by the Karimojong and their language disappeared, it remains unclassified (Weatherby 1972, 210; Wilson 1970, 128; Turpin 1948, 162; Cox 1972, 22; Brasnett 1958, 113).

Wilson J.G, the D.C. of Karamoja in the 1950s, collected a 97-word list from an old lady of Oropom descent. This lady is said to have been captured as a young girl during the Oropom defeat by the Karimojong at the battle of Turkwel at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Wilson's wordlist perhaps brings us close to the etymology of the religious concept, and the theonym *Ilat*. It indicates that the Oropom referent for rain was *lat* and that for water was *lata* (Wilson 1970, 144). This list did not contain the Oropom referent for their God. However, we can surmise with a high degree of probability that having inhabited a cultural Complex in which the indigenous deity was closely linked to rain and water, it is undoubted that the name for their godhead must have been the same as that for water (*lata*), or rain (*lat*), or its cognate (*Ilat*) as it is used today by the Sengwer. Judging from the supposed distribution of the fabled Oropom, they must have formed a continuous cultural block with the Sengwer and Sirikwa on the Trans-Nzoia uplands, Uasin-Gishu plateau, and Cherang'any ranges (Wilson 1970, 140; Webster 1973, 29). This perhaps is the likely origin of the name *ilat* for rain, and *Ilat* for a God encapsulated in rain among the Sengwer.

There were differences in how this rain God was worshipped among the different remnants of the indigenous groups; the Kuliak and the Sengwer (Laughlin 1972, 119,123; Kipkorir 2009, 25). These differences seem to have come from external cultural influences because of the occupation of different cultural environments. However, this study contends that the enduring legacy of the indigenous communities in religious matters was bequeathing the Kerio-Valley with a belief in a water spirit personified in rain called *Ilat*. This God was known by the autochthonous groups as *Ilat*. The systematic worship of this rain God is what I shall refer to hereinafter as the cult of *Ilat*.

That the cult of the rain symbolized God (*Ilat*) was endemic to the Kerio-Valley and predated the arrival of the ancestors of the Kalenjin and the Plain Nilotes is hard to refute. A critical analysis of the cosmology of the southern Kalenjin in Kenya (Nandi, Kipsigis, and Terik) does not reveal any elaborate religious attitude germane to this cult (Gimode 2003, 140; Peristiany 1939, 113; Orchardson 1991, 41). There are also clear pointers to the indigeneity of the cult of *Ilat* in the dry savannah region of north-western Kenya and northeastern Uganda and south-eastern Sudan. These indicators can be deduced from the supposed autochthony of the clan that served as the custodians of the cult of *Ilat*. This clan seems to have been an integral ritual element of the indigenous groups (Lamphear 1988, 34; Lamphear 1992, 30; Lamphear 1993, 91; Barton 1921, 84). This clan was a conspicuous ritual element in the Siger confederacy that inhabited Mount Assiger on the Turkana plains. The Siger dominance of the hills and mountains dotting the southern Turkana plains was rudely interrupted by the Turkana expansionist impulse in the early parts of the nineteenth

century, and as a result sections of Turkana attacks this clan (Kachepkai)<sup>4</sup> were scattered. The refugees from this rainmaking clan are said 'to have gone and established ritual prominence among some of the Kalenjin groups in the Suk (Sekerr and Cherangany) hills, Mount Elgon area and, significantly the Tepes' of north-eastern Uganda' (Lamphear 1988, 34).

An eyewitness among the Pokot at the beginning of the twentieth century, Burton, put it even more bluntly. He reported that the 'Terit (sic) were numerous in Cheptulel where it would seem they formed the original nucleus of the Suk' (1921, 84). My fieldwork among the Sengwer vindicates Burton's observation. It shows that this clan of rainmakers, the Toyoi, is one of the dominant clans. They are still revered among the Sengwer as the caretakers of the cult of *Ilat*. This fact lends credence to the proposition of the indigeneity of the cult of *Ilat* to this Complex. My fieldwork observations indicate that the belief in the water spirit (*Ilat*) is so strong in places that have been mentioned in extant literature to have been formerly inhabited by the indigenous groups before the region was Kalenjinized and Atekerized. In Endo, Cheptulel, Kurut, and on the Sekerr ranges the belief in the spiritual potency of *Ilat* is virtually absolute. This religious belief maintains a fairly strong presence across the areas inhabited by the Marakwet clusters and the Keiyo clusters. However, there is a sense that this belief in *Ilat* diminishes in strength in the southern Keiyo clusters, which border the Nandi, Kipsigis and the Tugen (Lembus) of Eldama Ravine.

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<sup>4</sup> Kachepkai is a section of the rainmaking clan among the Pokot called Terik. The totem of the Kachepkai is rain. Among the other Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley, this rainmaking clan is called Toyoi.

The clan that served as the custodian of the cult of *Ilat* is known as Terik<sup>5</sup> among the Pokot and has two lineages; Soliongot and Ngusur having the totems of thunder and rain respectively (Barton 1921, 91; Bollig 2000, 345). Among the Keiyo, Tugen, and Marakwet this clan is known as Toyoi. It has two lineages having the totems of thunder and rain. The two clans use the same name, Toyoi (Kipkorir 2009, 25; Chebet and Dietz 2000, 36). For the sake of uniformity and to avoid confusion, this study adopts the name Toyoi as the universal appellative for the clan that served as the custodians of the cult of *Ilat* among the autochthonous groups and the Kalenjin.

It is not possible to tell the ethnic etymology of the Toyoi, whether they originated from the southern Cushites or Late Stone Age groups. However, what is apparent is that the Toyoi are indigenous to the Kerio-Valley with very strong links to the autochthonous inhabitants of the Complex (Lamphear 1988, 34; Lamphear 1992, 90; Burton 1921, 91). This clan was also visibly established among the indigenous Ogiek of Kipkurerek, Tinderet, Londiani, Koibatek, and Ravine (Huntingford 1951, 39; Huntingford 1954, 2). This allows us without doubt to link the origin of the cult of *Ilat* to the autochthonous groups of the highlands of western Kenya.

So far there is no academic proposition that explains the origin of the cult of *Ilat* among the Sengwer. There is also no legend that explains the origin of *Ilat* as a divine entity, or is there a person ascribed to be the founder of this cult. Presently the Sengwer believe that the divinity of *Ilat* has been there since time immemorial,

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<sup>5</sup> This should not be confused with the Terik clan found among the other Kalenjin groups of the Kerio-Valley particularly and Kenya generally. Among the Keiyo, Tugen, Marakwet, Kipsigis and Nandi, the Terik clan has the elephant (*belio/beliot*) as its Totem. For more information on the Pokot Terik clan see Bollig (2000:345) and Barton (1921:90). The elephant clan among the Pokot is called Sopian (Bollig 2000:345, Beech 1911:10)

stretching far back beyond memory thereby endowing a timeless permanence to their cosmology. However, this study contends that the cult of *Ilat* emerged and evolved among the indigenous Late Stone Age groups of northwestern Kenya and northeastern Uganda in response to environmental and economic challenges. If we can accept Ehret's (1974b, 14) and Atieno-Odhiambo's (1975, 119) propositions that the mainstay of the religion of the Southern Cushites rested on the belief in a God encapsulated in the sun to be true, then there is little room to doubt that the belief in a rain symbolized God evolved among the embryonic Late Stone Age community. This might have occurred before the differentiation of these autochthonous people into separate ethnolinguistic groupings.

These indigenous communities inhabited an area of little and intermittent rainfall ranging from dry Savannah to semi-arid climatic regimes. The social and economic structures of these people portray a precariously balanced adaptation to a marginal environment in which catastrophic rain failure and droughts are depicted in oral traditions, archival, and paleoenvironmental records to be the leitmotif of the environmental calendar (Lamphear 1988; Bessems, 2013; Stager & De Cort, 2013). This delicate weather situation necessitated the emergence of a people who strategically positioned themselves between the inscrutable forces of the supernatural and the dependent communities. These were people with mystical abilities to influence the sphere that was essential for economic survival in this semi-arid zone, rain, which the indigenous people as ordinary mortals had no direct control of. Therefore, they turned to the people of magical abilities for succour, in which process the Toyoi clan emerged and established an unparalleled reputation as the

'people of rain,' hence the famous referent 'the water clan' (Lamphear 1992, 39). A reputation and spiritual potency that was inextricably linked to a water spirit symbolized in rain, *Ilat*. This water spirit was believed to have control over the most precious resource and the main ingredient for survival in this sun-parched landscape, rain, or simply put water (Kipkorir 2009, 9; Barton 1921, 90).

#### **2.4 The Worship of the *Ilat***

Confronted by the impossibility of practically reconstructing the pristine religious structure of the religion of the indigenous inhabitants of the Kerio-Valley before the settlement of the Kalenjin, this study has heavily relied on the structure of worship among the remnants of the indigenous people. We have relied on the procedure used in worship by the Sengwer and to a lesser extent the Tepes (Sor) (a section of the autochthonous Kuliak inhabiting Mounts Moroto, Napak, and Kadam), and the Teuso/Ik (an indigenous community living on Mount Morungole on Karamoja escarpment in Uganda). What is striking is the similarity in the rituals associated with prayers for rain among these three indigenous communities that have been separated geographically for several centuries. There are minor differences in the organization of worship among these indigenous groups. However, the similar structures of the rituals, especially prayers for rain directed to a water spirit along the banks of montane rivers by elders of a specific rainmaking clan, signify some connections that might have existed between these communities in the distant past. (Wayland 1931, 216; Laughlin 1972, 112; Kipkorir 2009, 9)

The Sengwer are an indigenous hunter-gatherer group endemic to the Cherangany ranges. There are also referred to in some literature as the Cherangany. Cherangany

is a disparaging byname branded on them by the Maasai because of their non-pastoral lifestyle. The Sengwer today are generally regarded by some writers as part of the Kalenjin community and particularly the Marakwet group (Moore 1996, 13; Kipkorir 2008, 1). However, from their oral traditions and those of the Kalenjin of the Complex, the Sengwer emerge as a distinct and ancient indigenous group. While the Kalenjin groups of the Complex have histories of migration from the northwest and especially Mount Elgon from the eighteenth century, the Sengwer do not. They are said to have inhabited the western slopes of the eponymous ranges from the Late Stone Age period. The traditions of the Maasai and the Kalenjin vindicate this claim. They indicate that the Sengwer or Ogiek are aboriginal people who were at one time spread over the highlands of western Kenya (Huntingford 1927, 440).

The Sengwer also have a mythology that legitimizes their claim of autochthony. They say that their ancestor was called Sengwer. He had two sons named Sirikwa, the elder, and Mutia/Mitia. Sirikwa occupied the lowland plains (*soy*) of what is now part of Trans Nzoia and Uasin Gishu counties, while Mutia occupied the highland areas (*mosop*) on the Cherangany ranges. Sirikwa had a son named Chepkoilel, from whose name the plain that Eldoret town sits on was named after. It is said that the male offspring of Sirikwa and Mutia formed the present sub-tribes of Sengwer namely; Kapchebororwa, Kapchepar, Kapumpo, Kaptogom, Kapcherop, Kakisango, Kimarich (Kamosus), Kapsorme (Kapseto), Kapteteke, Kipsirat, Kameng'etiony (Kopoch and Kapkotet), Kaplema and Kamesieu. Each of these sub-tribes had its portion of land running from the Cherangany highlands down to the Uasin-Gishu plains (Sakala O.I, 2020).

This story in all probability does not represent the reality about the origin of the Sengwer, because the above listed names represent the territorial divisions of the Sengwer and not the clans or blood groupings. Huntingford (1927, 1954) and Blackburn (1970) observed the same arrangement among the Ogiek of the Mau Forest. They were also organized into territorial groups, which they referred to as 'hordes.' The Sengwer section of Kapchebororwa, for example, has Sogomo (hawk), Toyoi (thunder/rain), Soti (sun), and Tula (jackal) clans. What this means is that the Kapchebororwa did not descend from one ancestor as the myth supposes. Kapchebororwa was a civic territory, similar to the Kalenjin *pororiet* (Sakala O.I 2020). However, this myth amplifies the Sengwer claim of indigeneity by indicating the connection between the names inscribed on the landscape and the Sengwer people. More importantly, it links the Sengwer to the fabled Mutia and Sirikwa sections of the indigenous people; suggesting that they were all autochthonous inhabitants of the Complex.

Sengwer traditions indicate that their ancestral land encompassed the northern part of Uasin-Gishu County, the western parts of Marakwet, the eastern part of Trans-Nzoia and the southern limits of West Pokot County. In the south, is said to have started from River Kiborom in Uasin-Gishu and extended along River Kapsumbeywet through Ziwa-Sirikwa centre. In the east, the boundary followed the course of River Moiben upwards to encompass parts of the present-day Chebiemit division, the whole of Kapcherop division, and Maron sub-location of Embobut location in Marakwet. Turning to the west it extended to Kamolokon along the boundaries of West Pokot and Marakwet Counties. From this highland area, it dropped to Sebit,

Somor, then to Kongelai-Kacheliba (Land Commission 1934). However, because of encroachment on their ancestral area by other communities during and after the British colonial rule, today the Sengwer are found in scattered pockets in Kapolet forest in Trans-Nzoia County, Talau and Kaipos in West-Pokot County and Kapcherop, Chebororwa, Kimnai, Kapsigoria, and Embobut areas of Elgeyo-Marakwet County (Lynch 2016, 215). It is in this area formerly inhabited by the Sengwer and other indigenous groups more than any other place in the Kerio-Valley that the belief in *Ilat* is visibly etched on the landscape. The fearful respect that is accorded the earthly shrines connected with *Ilat* is immense and palpable.

*Ilat* as conceived by the Sengwer, and probably the other kindred but now extinct groups, was a water spirit that lived inside deep pools of rivers on hills, mountains, and escarpments. The Sengwer treated these pools with awe and fearful dread. This divinity was also believed to be present in lakes, mud, and significantly rain. Rain indeed was the metaphor and the symbol of this God. This God was believed to be an invisible masculine spirit that appeared to specific people. Following human patterns this deity was provided with consorts, given children, and a whole retinue of anthropomorphic attributes. For example, he had 'homes' in deep plunge pools of rivers that drain the Cherangany ranges (O.I, Sakala, 2020).

Inside these riverine homes he owned expansive tracts of forest land and tended to his crops. Inside the 'homes' of *Ilat* was a whole virtual world that resembled the ideal human world of these hunter-gatherer indigenous people; lush green gardens, abundant wild animals, dutiful wives and healthy children. *Ilat* also, occasionally, participated in the world of human beings. For instance, it is said that *Ilat* proposed

to and married virgin girls of the Sengwer. He gave bride price in the form of honey beer and disappeared with them to his underwater abodes (O.I, Chelang'a 2021). Such tales of *Ilat* marrying young girls are commonplace in all the areas inhabited by the Sengwer, Pokot, and Marakwet (The Star 02/8<sup>th</sup>/2016; Standard, 06/18<sup>th</sup>/2016). This deity also appeared to people in person. Most elders recount tales of people who encountered the water spirit particularly when they had infringed social mores. A Sengwer elder narrated how his grandfather met this water spirit in person while taking a shower on the banks of River Mosongo way back in the 1970s. The old man ostensibly had chosen his bath place too close to the home of the water sprite. He only learnt of his mistake when the 'man of waters' appeared to him abruptly. The septuagenarian was warned never again to disturb the peace of the deity (O.I, Chelang'a, 2020). Such stories of people encountering this water spirit in person whether true or manufactured are also found among the other communities of the Complex which absorbed the indigenous groups such as the Turkana, Pokot, Marakwet, Keiyo, and Tugen (Penley 1930, 140).

The role of *Ilat* like deities in other religions across the world was to maintain cosmic balance by providing means of sustenance to the people, especially rain. It was believed that if the Sengwer correctly adhered to all their customs and traditions, *Ilat* brought life to the earth by providing rain. He fertilized soils with rain causing life to sprout, which ensured an abundant supply of food, wild berries, honey, and wild game. However, when the community violated social norms, this attracted his wrath which was made manifest in drought, landslides, and floods. When such

disasters happened the Sengwer were forced to appease the rain God (O.I, Sakala, 2020).

The Cherangany range is a source of many rivers. Some of these rivers - Enow, Embobut, Embolot, Arror, and Embomon - flow eastwards to feed River Kerio. Other Rivers flow westwards including Moiben, Chepkaitet, Chesawen, and Chebororwa. These rivers drain their waters into River Nzoia. In all these major rivers and their tributaries, there were sacred sanctuaries invested with divine aura where the worship of *Ilat* was conducted. Each Sengwer section had a sanctuary on the river that cut across their civic section for the veneration of *Ilat*. For example, the Sengwer sections of Embobut (*Kimala* had their shrines on the Embobut, Embomon, Enow, and Embolot Rivers (O.I, Komen 2020). Those of Kapsigoria worshipped at specific points along the course of River Moiben, while those of Kapyego venerated *Ilat* on rivers Kimworor, Cheptirmet and Arror (O.I, Sakala, 2020). The Sengwer of Kapcherop zone pointed to worship sanctuaries on Rivers, Chepkaitet, Mosongo, Kapterit, and Chesawen (Kiprono O.I 2020). When asked when they began worshipping on these sites. The elders did not have an exact date. However, they were all unanimous that these sacred shrines have been there since time immemorial or *ging*. If this can be accepted as factual, then it testifies to the antiquity, and probably, the autochthony of the cult of *Ilat* to the Complex.

What can be deduced from the Sengwer traditions is that the worship of *Ilat* was mainly conducted during times of community crisis. In most instances, the worship of *Ilat* was done during drought. But it was also conducted when swollen rivers, mudslides, and landslides had swept livestock and people down the cliffs. During

such instances, *Ilat* was propitiated ‘so that these people could be found alive’ (O.I, Katam, 2020). The veneration of *Ilat* was conducted along the river valleys especially around bubbling plunge pools, which were believed to be the ‘homes’ of this God. The worship was the prerogative of the Toyoi clan. When the ritual elders of the Toyoi clan considered that the society was in a crisis, they organized a day that was deemed propitious to placate the riverine spirit. The time for prayer was set several days ahead to allow for the preparation of honey beer, and the procurement of a sheep or goat for sacrifice (O.I, Cheruiyot, 2020).

On the material day for prayer, the ritual elders began the journey to the shrine of *Ilat*. At the cliff overlooking the valley, the ritual elders who did not belong to the Toyoi clan and those of the Toyoi whose firstborn children were not female remained behind. The ritual elders who met the above criteria descended the river valley to the place of worship. At shrine which was located on the banks of the plunge pool, the celebrant of the day ritually spanked the unblemished black sheep on its back while chanting prayers for rain. The animal was then immersed into the pool and left to scramble out of the river. As it shook the water from its bodily fur, the elders chanted prayers for rain. This sheep was then killed and its chyme scattered over the plunge pool (the house of *Ilat*). Its meat was roasted and eaten by all those present. They also drank honey beer. The *mantis* followed by pouring some of the hydromel into the river, while other guards full of honey beer and roasted meat were left on the banks of the river for *Ilat* to take. The elders went back to their homes with the hope that *Ilat* would ‘moisten the land’ (Sakala O.I 2020). The structure of worship for *Ilat* among the Sengwer finds a striking parallel in one

recorded by Wayland among the Teuso/Ik, a Kuliak group, living on Mount Morungole and the Karamoja escarpment in northeastern Uganda (1931, 216). Wayland calls them *Wanderobo*. The excerpt is long; nonetheless, I will quote him verbatim to demonstrate the similarity of worship between the Sengwer and Kuliak.

Perhaps not more than 20 years ago there was among the *Wanderobo* a great rain-maker whose name, Longalesi, is still well known to all the surrounding tribes. His powers were widely admitted, and he was consulted, not only by the *Wanderobo* themselves but also by the Dodotho [Dodos], the Jie, the Karamojong and the Turkana peoples. When the rains were late and the country was suffering more than usual from drought, representatives of the tribes would come in with generous presents of livestock and food..... He, and the various representatives of the suffering tribes, would then partake themselves to a spot called Kalopeto, in a ravine that runs down into the Rift valley, where grows a giant fig tree near a water hole that, it is said, never dries up. A black goat would then be brought and ducked in the water, but not allowed to drown. After this, it would be speared in such a way that the contents of the stomach could be extracted without destroying the receptacle, which would then be filled with water. The procedure then was to hang the goat on the top of the fig tree, while Longalesi called upon *Nakwitt* (God) to send rain. After the rain-maker's beseechings, the goat would be cut down, and as it fell with a thud to the ground, those taking part in the ceremony would rush in, drain out all the water that remained within the body after its fall, and bear it away to a fire already prepared, and cook it. The meat would be eaten by those who took part in the ceremony, and in due course, the rain would fall (Wayland 1931, 216).

Gulliver (1953, 98) acknowledges that the indigenous mountain tribes were known with awe by their neighbours for rainmaking. However, he says that this God was called *Didikwari* and not *Nakwitt* as given by Wayland. Whatever the name for the water spirit was, they all agree that this divinity resided in rivers. Nevertheless, the similarity in structure between the Teuso rainmaking worship, described by Wayland and that of the Sengwer as described above and that of the Tepes as described by

Laughlin (1972, 112) points to the religious connection between these scattered indigenous communities in the distant past. Therefore, this belief in a water spirit that was closely identified with rain was the spiritual mainstay of lives of the autochthonous groups of the northwestern before the introduction of the worship of *Asis* by the ancestors of the Kalenjin, which is our next concern.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that the Kerio-Valley has been inhabited since the Late Stone Age period. Before the coming of the modern inhabitants of the Complex - Kalenjin, Ateker, and Maasai - the Kerio-Valley was under the possession of indigenous inhabitants known as the people of the cowrie shell, the Seker. The presence of these indigenous people is noted in the extant literature. However, their influence on the religious culture of the Kalenjin remains muted in history. Scholars acknowledge that ‘the Sirikwa taught the Kalenjin rituals and iron workings’ (Behrend 1985, 196). However, the specific rituals that the Kalenjin adopted from them are not cited. Previous writers present as if the only contribution of the indigenous inhabitants of the Kerio-Valley was the construction of pit dwellings, or the so-called ‘Sirikwa holes.’ The indigenous people are portrayed as if they only existed in names but never had a religious culture, and if they had a religion, it is presented as if it never impacted the cosmology of the Kalenjin (Kipkorir 2008, 57; Kipkorir 1964, 6).

By contrast, this chapter has brought the autochthonous inhabitants of the Kerio-Valley to the centre of the picture of the religious history of this Complex. Apart from demonstrating the indigeneity of the *Seker* group, it has reconstructed their religion centred on a riverine spirit symbolized in rain (*Ilat*). This religious culture served as the foundation on which Kalenjin settlers would later build their cosmology. This chapter thus provides a background against which to examine the changes in the religious culture of the Kalenjin settlers, which is the concern of the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER THREE: THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE RELIGIOUS THOUGHT OF KALENJIN OF THE KERIO-VALLEY c. 1800 TO 1900**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter examines the historical development of the religion of the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley in the nineteenth century. It describes how the ancestors of the Kalenjin as agents used their previous religious culture to interpret the religious culture of the indigenous people, they encountered in the Kerio-Valley. It goes further to demonstrate the outcome of the interaction between the Kalenjin and Eastern Nilotes in religious matters. In the last case, this chapter examines the religious interaction between the pastoral section of the Pokot and the Ateker and the Maasaan cultures and attempts to reconstruct the syncretic religious aftercome.

In the analysis of the religion of the Kalenjin, this chapter is guided by the theory of agency. Accordingly, it presents the ancestors of the Kalenjin as human agents who mediated the transformation of their religion when they encountered the religious culture of the indigenous communities of the Kerio-Valley. Through the process of agentic iteration, the Kalenjin carried their past religious culture into their interactions with the religious culture of the autochthonous communities. This enabled them to construct homologies between their previous culture and the religious cultures they encountered in the Kerio-Valley. The outcome was the instantiation of a middle path that brought together the two religious cultures to create a synthesis.

### **3.2 The Origin and the Nature of *Asis***

As established in the last chapter, by around the sixteenth century, the ancestors of the Kalenjin had occupied the slopes of Mount Elgon and the Uasin-Gishu plateau before moving to their present habitats. The dispersion of the Kalenjin from the slopes of Mount Elgon led to the formation of the present three distinct groupings of the Kalenjin; the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley (Tugen, Marakwet, Keiyo and Pokot), the Kalenjin of Mount Elgon (Sebei and Sapiny) and the southern Kalenjin (Terik, Nandi and Kipsigis). The coming of the Eastern Nilotes, especially the Maasai and Ateker, and their ferocious raids forced the ancestors of the Kalenjin to evacuate the plains and move to the forested highlands and escarpments for security. The ancestors of the Kalenjin who sought refuge in the highlands of the Kerio-Valley settled alongside indigenous groups. With time they assimilated their hosts linguistically to evolve into hybrid communities that adopted different dialects of the Kalenjin language.

In religious matters, by the time the proto-Kalenjin settled in the Kerio-Valley, they had already acquired the concept of a sky God encapsulated in the sun called *Asis*. This religious concept is the common denominator of the religious experience of all the Kalenjin groups of East Africa. Where did they acquire this concept from? Because it has been contested elsewhere that such central monotheism and emphatic transcendence was not a Nilotic trait historically (p'Bitek 1971, 1; Leinhardt 1961) Typical to the proto Nilotes was a belief in spirits whose vestiges are still manifested as a vague form of ancestor veneration among the Southern and Western Nilotes (Leinhardt 1961).

This religious concept of a God symbolized by the sun is believed to have been adopted from Cushites, with whom the embryonic Southern Nilotic society had a long history of interactive contact in their cradleland. Historical linguistics depict that of all the Nilotic communities of East Africa, the Southern Nilotes seem to have come under a long history of contact with Eastern Cushites (Ehret 1974, 157; Sutton 1974, 33). The ethnogenesis of the Southern Nilotes in their cradleland was contemporaneous with Eastern Cushitic contacts. Also, during their movement and settlement in the highlands of western Kenya they encountered remnants of Southern Cushites with whom they settled and absorbed some of them. It is from these contacts that the Southern Nilotes were influenced religiously. From Cushites, they adopted the idea of a Supreme Being symbolized by the sun and became the main purveyors of this concept of God to other communities of western Kenya, especially the Bantu and then hunter-gatherer indigenous communities (Gimode 2003). Among the Cushites this sun symbolized God was called *Wak* or *Waq* the same name was used to refer to the luminary (Gimode 2003).

The Cushitic influence on the religious culture of the Kalenjin, however, has not been well received by a section of scholars. Mwanzi, for example, has dismissed contribution of Cushites to the religious and technological cultures of the people of western Kenya. Mwanzi contends that the worship of *Asis* among the Kipsigis was homegrown, and was not connected to the Cushites or the 'Hamites' as they were then known. In his view, the worship of *Asis* was introduced to the Kipsigis by the Kipasiso clan of Ogiek etymology. The Ogiek (also called *Dorobo*) is a variant of hunter-gatherer groups endemic to the highlands of western Kenya (1977, 46). The

hypothesis of the Kipasiso origin of the concept of the sun symbolized God among the Kipsigis is not convincing because it does not explain the ubiquity of the same religious phenomena among the diverse and widespread Kalenjin groups of Kenya and by extension the whole of western Kenya during the same historical epoch.

To understand Mwanzi's rejection of Cushitic contribution to the religious affairs of the Kipsigis, and by extension the Kalenjin by and large, we have to examine the context out of which the discipline of history emerged in Africa. Post-colonial African historiography was fundamentally a response to the earlier European distortion of African history. What this means is that Mwanzi and his immediate post-independence cohorts were on an African nationalistic course to counter the misrepresentation of African history, particularly the 'Hamitic myth' (Ogot 2011, 71). The Hamitic myth was an intellectual perspective developed by colonial anthropologists and historians. It was loaded with racist overtones; that Hamites, lighter people with straight long noses, and thin lips were responsible for any superior idea in black Africa. Simply put, this idea reflected the racist European presumption of Caucasian superiority and highlighted Negroid primitivity and innovational dependency. Therefore, it is reasonable to understand the climate of decolonization in which Mwanzi and his colleagues operated. However, Mwanzi overstates his case. Any consideration of Hamites based on cultural superiority is unhelpful to any historian, but at the same time, Cushitic contribution to religious ideas in western Kenya cannot be dismissed. The concept of the Supreme Being associated with the sun and its widespread nature in the highlands of western Kenya in the pre-colonial period should be traced to the influence of Cushites (Ehret 1974,

157; 1976, 37; Ogot 2005, 115). Huntingford perhaps demonstrates the Cushitic contribution to religious matters and offers a fitting conclusion:

In religion, there is some degree of heterogeneity for most of the people of East Africa have ancestor cults associated with a belief in a Supreme Being. The latter is somehow vague among some people but more clearly defined where there is a strong Hamitic (Cushitic) influence (1967, 92).

Be it as it may, the concept of *Asis* as conceived by the ancestors of the Kalenjin meant God. This God was conceived as a self-existent, supreme benefactor, omnipotent, omniscient arbiter of all things, almighty, eternal, and inscrutable (Kipkorir 1973, 14). *Asis* was the spirit of the bright sky whose only symbol was the sun (*asis*). The position of the sun in the firmament thus endowed *Asis* with an emphatic transcendence that made western writers to ascribe remoteness to this God (Visser 1999, 91; Peristiany 1975, 123). However, a critical analysis of the concept of *Asis* shows that this God was not remote and confined to the sky as they portray. *Asis* was everywhere. To understand *Asis*, one has to conceptualize the holistic nature of the Kalenjin universe (Kipkorir 2008, 15). Among the Kalenjin, there was no distinction between sacred and profane, supernatural and natural, religion and politics. Religion and the imprint of *Asis* permeated all aspects of life. It is only when you try to distil the sacred from the secular that everything evaporates and *Asis* is left hanging in the firmament. *Asis* was a boundless entity that enforced moral order and ensured that the community was at peace with itself. *Asis* punished those who violated social norms (*kikire*), even when there was no witness. A study of the

Kalenjin moral constitution ineluctably points to the omnipresent *Asis* as the fountain and enforcer of all values (Kipkorir 1974, 14).

As Kalenjin made the Kerio-Valley home, they refined the concept of *Asis* to fit into their geographical and cultural environment and in the process endowed *Asis* with synonyms. The monikers for God not only underscored the character of this deity but also emphasized the gender attributes of *Asis*. For example, among the Marakwet *Asis* was baptized as *Chebet chebo chematau* meaning *Chebet* the daughter of *Chematau*. This deity was also called *Chemur yim*, which means the woman who crosses the sky. *Asis* was also *Chibo yim* meaning the person of the sky or simply *Chebet* which means the woman of daytime (Kipkorir 2009, 14; Kipkorir 2008, 8). Universally among the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley, *Asis* was known as *Cheptail* meaning the shining or the blameless one. Moreover, as the God who guided warriors in war or raids and led men successfully out of circumcision *Asis* was *Chebopkoiyo* or *Chebomircho*. As the provider of harvest *Asis* was *Chebokimabai*. As the all-knowing God, *Asis* was *Chebokongeni*. This God was also called *chebo Ngolo*, meaning the daughter of *Ngolo* (O.I, Ringoi 2020).

The word *Ngolo* has no meaning in the ordinary Kalenjin language. Most likely it must have been borrowed from their neighbours. Perhaps the challenge is to figure out which neighbouring community donated the name. Mwanzi writing on the Kipsigis contends that the synonym for *Asis* was *Ngolo* or *Ingolo*. The name *Ngolo*, he says is ‘of Bantu Gusii derivation’ that ‘seems to derive from another word “*engoro*” which in Gusii means the God who is above. In turn, ‘*Engoro* derives from the word “*iguru*,” which in Gusii as in many other Bantu societies means above’

(1977, 118). Mwanzi's submission of the Gusii origin of the epithet *Ingolo* or *Ngolo* leaves us with many doubts. It may sound plausible for the Kipsigis who border the Abagusii, but it cannot explain the pervasiveness of the same name among the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley who are not contiguous with Abagusii.

The origin of the theonym *Ngolo* should therefore be sought elsewhere. The appellative *Ngolo/Ingolo* by all possibilities might have been derived from the Maasai word *engolong* which means the sun or day (Huntingford 1927, 417; Sambu 2007, 259). The Ogiek of Eldama Ravine also used a cognate of this word, *ongolo*, to refer to the idea of the sun (Ehret 1971, 171). This Maasai word might have been acquired by the Kalenjin and the Ogiek during their interactions with the Maasai, and rendered by the receiving languages in the short version of *ingolo* or *ongolo* and thence probably to the cognate *ngolo*, as it crossed the linguistic and cultural divide. If that was the case then, the theonym *Chebo Ngolo* would mean the daughter of the sun or the daughter of the day just like the other Kalenjin bynames for their God. This explanation fits well into the Kalenjin metaphor of equating God with the Sun and by extension daytime. The possible Maasai origin of the name *Ngolo* is also supported by the long history of interactions between the Maasai and Kalenjin from which the Kalenjin adopted Maasai clans and religious ideas such as the institution of *orkoiyot* or *laibon* from the Maasai (Mwanzi 1977, 127).

The Kalenjin conceptualized God in feminine terms. The Kalenjin preoccupation with the gender determinative prefix '*chep*' underscored the feminine gender conceptualization of the deity, thereby endowing *Asis* with a personal human nature as opposed to sheer divine power. *Asis* was associated with motherly care,

tenderness, and compassion. This ‘image of God as a mother’ in African religion according to Mbiti ‘comes with the idea of cherishing and nursing’ (1969, 49). The issue of the gender of *Asis*, however, is a matter of serious disagreement in the religious history of the Kalenjin. For example, Kipkorir contends that the ‘Marakwet concept of God is that of a friendly being associated with the sun, *Asis*. He is also called *Chebet-ip Chematau*, which loosely translates to an unseen person by the name *Chebet* the child of *Chematau*. In Marakwet the name *Chebet* can either be male or female but in this instance, the name clearly meant a male being.’ He adds that ‘I came to this conclusion through the mode of address one uses while addressing *Chebet*. A man would say *weu Chebet* and then proceed to specify the request which was the purpose of the address; one does not address a woman as *weu*’ (Kipkorir 2008, 15). However, Kipkorir is belied by his own words. He concludes that ‘Nevertheless the issue of gender is deliberately left vague in the Marakwet idea of God, therefore, God could also be feminine as implied by the alternative description of him/her as *Chebet chebo Chematau*, that is *Chebet* the daughter of *Chematau* which is definitely feminine’ (Kipkorir 2009, 14).

Commenting on the gender of God in the Kerio-Valley, Kibor (2007, 4), Ngeiywo (2005, 76), Elolia (1992, 105), and Matwetwe (2014, 67) all ascribe masculinity to *Asis*. Chepkwony (1995, 162) writing on the Kipsigis concludes that ‘*Asis* is the supreme deity of the Kipsigis and the universal God. *Asis* reigns alone and has no gender. *Asis* is not conceived as male or female. The term *Asis* does not comply with the Kipsigis gender rule where the prefix ‘*chep*’ stands for female and ‘*kip*’ for male.’ Chepkwony for sure is engaging in a self-defeating argument, or maybe he

had forgotten that all the other synonyms of *Asis* – *Cheptailel*, *Chepopkoiyo*, *Chepkelyon Sogol*, and *Cheponomoni* among many others – were emphatically feminine as implied by the prefix ‘*chep*’ (Sambu 2007, 96). The evidence is as clear as daylight that among the Kalenjin generally, and those of the Kerio-Valley specifically, *Asis* was conceived in feminine terms hence the preoccupation with the issue of the daughter of *Ngolo* and *Chematau* and the common prefix ‘*chep*’ in the names of God.

The masculine engendering of *Asis* in scholarship is the product of cultural construction that began with missionaries and popularized by African theologians and religion scholars, especially after independence.<sup>6</sup> The masculinity imposed on *Asis* is part of the wider spectrum of ‘the Judaeo-Christian templates’ that were imported into African religions. This importation began with missionary translation of the Bible and culminated in the works of the pioneering studies of Africans and Africanist religious scholars such as Parrinder (1954), Idowu (1962), and Mbiti (1969) (Shaw 1990, 339). These scholars wished to demonstrate that Africans had a ‘religion’ similar to that of Europeans. To achieve this agenda, they ‘dressed up African deities with Hellenistic robes and paraded them before the Western world to show them that Africans were “civilized” like Europeans’ (p’Bitek 1970, 64). The outcome was that the African concept of God assumed the gender shape of the Christian deity.

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<sup>6</sup> For a better understanding of the “invention of African religion” and the outcome of the Judaeo-Christian influences in the construction of the African concept of the Supreme beings see, for example, p’Bitek (1970), Shaw (1990), Ikenga-Metuh (1982), Green (1996), Horton (1984), Nwoga (1984), Ezeanya (1963).

What is more is that there is a misconception of the idea of the sun (*asis*) and God (*Asis*) in the Kalenjin religion. Scholars mostly from religious studies have come to suspicious conclusions about the relationship between God and the Sun. Kibor (2007, 4), for example, writing on the Marakwet says ‘the supreme deity, the sun, dwells in the sky’ while Chebet and Dietz (2000, 97) concluded that ‘there was an absence of a deity or God among the Keiyo, the supreme being in form of the sun, and the respect accorded to ancestral spirits was the farthest the Keiyo would go in search of a supernatural being to cater for their material needs.’ The conclusion of this study is different. It indicates that the sun was not God, but God was symbolized by the sun. This conceptualization where the sun was considered to be the manifestation of God and the same word or its cognate was used for both is found among most societies of East Africa. For instance, among the Chagga of Tanzania the name *Ruuwa* was used for both. In Ankole, *Kazooba* was used to refer to God and the sun (Mbiti 1969). Closer home among the Luo, *Chieng’* referred to both (Ogutu 1975). However, there is no concrete indication to suggest that the sun was considered to be God or God considered to be the sun however close these two concepts were associated. At best the sun symbolized the aspects of God such as her omniscience, power, endurance, and witness (Mbiti 1969).

### **3.3 The Worship of *Asis***

As established in the last chapter, by the second half of the eighteenth century, the ancestors of the Kalenjin had settled on the hills of the Kerio-Valley and established distinct civic territories. These civic clusters were independent ritual units for the worship of *Asis*. The worship of *Asis* was both a private and public matter. The

public worship of *Asis* was classified into two broad categories; conciliatory worship and thanksgiving worship. This categorization led to remarkable variations in the manner of worship. The conciliatory worship was conducted to propitiate *Asis* to avert dangerous situations that threatened the existence of the entire community such as famine, war, drought, or epidemics while the thanksgiving worship was conducted to celebrate life and crop harvest. The latter was the most pronounced worship of *Asis*. It was conducted at sacred shrines (*kapkoros*) as an annual fanfare activity that coincided with the harvest season of cereal crops (Fish and Fish 2005, 10; Chebet and Dietz 2000, 100).

Each civic territory had a sacred shrine (*kapkoros*) located on a glade of a hill, a spur, or an upper ledge of the escarpment. The shrine was named after the gift or offering (*koros*) to *Asis* hence the referent *kapkoros*, meaning the place of offering. It was the duty of ritual elders to take care of the sanctuary and prepare it for worship. Located above the villages, the *kapkoros* expressed the consciousness of a transcendent reality, of a supernatural presence, which lay at the very heart of the religious lives of the Kalenjin (O.I, Yator, 2020).

The crowning glory of the *kapkoros* was the sacred altar (*kapkorosut*). This altar was erected, by ritual elders on the eve of the day for prayers, using freshly plucked branches of sacred trees such as the African olive or *yemit* (*olea Africana*), bamboo or *ttega* (*arundinaria alpina*), the African pencil cedar or *tarakwa* (*juniperus procera*), fig or *simotwo* (*ficus natalensis*), the thorn apples or *tablobotwo* (*solanum incanum*), the palm or *sosio* and coleus or *ang'urwo* (*coleous barbatus*). These branches were tied together with sacred climbers, especially periploca or *senendet*

(*periploca linearifolia*), collectively called *korosek* to form a solid bunch that was stuck to the ground (Kipkorir 2008, 25; Chebet and Dietz 2000, 100). Owing to pedological, altitudinal, and climatic variations of the Kerio-Valley, plants considered sacred varied. However, the fig tree or *simotwo*, *periploca* or *sinendet*, and thorn apples or *tablobotwo* seem to have established universality.

The altar was constructed to a height of about two to three feet high. The base of this altar around the erected branches was covered by a freshly dug carpet of Kikuyu grass (*pennisetum clandestinum*). One-foot-deep trench was dug around the base of this carpet. The inner wall of this trench was smeared with fresh cow dung, and when it was dry it was plastered with another layer of white clay from a natural salt lick. Around the brim of the trench, a ring of sodom apples was stuck on the plaster of cow dung to represent healthy livestock, while grains of millet and sorghum, representing bumper harvest, were strewn on the grass carpet (O.I, Yator, 2020). On the morning of prayer, this trench was filled with a concoction of water from a natural salt lick, milk from a cow with its first calf, hydromel, and cow urine. Standing by were other guards full of these sacred fluids. They were to be used to replenish the trench in case the level went down. The altar, in its simplistic design, was invested with symbolism both divine and mundane. Situated in the middle of the *kapkoros*, the perceived central point of earthly and transcendental realms, the altar was the manifestation of the presence of the sacred. It was the earthly symbol of divine authority; a place of physical connection between God and humankind. The components that made up this altar thus embodied the multiple ideals and purposes that gave the community its *raison d'être*, which the Kalenjin beseeched *Asis* to give

them in life; livestock, bumper harvest, health, wealth, purity, and fertility of people and stock (O.I, Yator, 2020).

The second item to be constructed was the one-foot-wide arch-shaped gateway (*ormarich*) that provided entrance to the *kapkoros* ground. It too was woven with branches of sacred trees and climbers (*korosiek*). One foot deep and a one-meter-wide trench was dug at the base of the arch. The trench was plastered in the same manner as the trench at the altar and filled with the same liquids. As the worshippers filed through the gate, they were supposed to step into the trench with both feet. As they did so, a virgin boy and girl sprayed their feet using twigs dipped in the concoction to ensure that their legs were completely moistened. The boy stood on the right side and the girl on the left side of the *ormarich*.

The pilgrimage to the *kapkoros* was called *keroot*. It was done early in the morning as the sun rose. All members of the *pororiet* joined the pilgrimage except those considered impure by the customs of the Kalenjin, especially those who had spilt blood (*rumindet*) - women who had freshly given birth, murderers, and women on menstruation. Fighting, quarrels, sexual intercourse, and theft were proscribed on the eve of prayer and the following day. Purity (*tilil*) was strongly emphasized. The congregants entered the *kapkoros* grounds through the *ormarich* led by the chief *mantis* and other ritual elders with an unblemished white sheep. As they entered, they responded to a special song that went in form of a chant, and proceeded to circumambulate the altar four times, before sitting down facing the altar and the rising luminary, on the orders of the celebrant (O.I, Cheboi, 2020).

At the heart of this worship was the priest-in-chief or *poynet ap tum*. Clothed in sacred gear and bathed in sanctity, the priest stood on the right-hand side of the altar facing the people. Sacred too were his paraphernalia, the white flywhisk and ritual guard (*repes/kwomda*). This office of the *mantis* was a highly venerated public position reserved for members of the most senior functional age group who had lived a life of moral rectitude and judicious piety (*lipwop*) (Chebet and Dietz 2000, 99). Entrance to this public office was a kind of spiritual ordination, and to leave it was to lay down a sacred trust.<sup>7</sup> For this reason, the celebrant held this position for life. They were retired only on the grounds of physical incapacitation, senility, or death. During prayers, this holy man was the mediator between *Asis* and the community, literally the religious father of the *pororiet* (O.I, Cheboi, 2020).

With the congregants still in a seated position, the *poynet ap tum* addressed them. The emphasis of his message was on justice, righteousness, and morality. The congregants were told not to hide the property of their neighbours. If, for example, a neighbour's cow strayed into one's compound, they were supposed to return it to its owner. After this 'sermon' the *mantis* picked his ritual gourd and filled it with hydromel. He turned towards the eastern horizon, took a mouth full of the sacred fluid from the gourd and expectorated four times towards the rising luminary. He pauses after each spray to beseech *Asis* for blessings. Addressing *Asis* using synonyms, the *mantis* prayed for peace, plenty, and wealth. He ended by telling God to protect the people by keeping enemies and all problems at bay (O.I, Yator 2020).

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<sup>7</sup> The ritual elders were initiated into priesthood through the rite of *bore*

The celebrant then placed his gourd down, at the base of the altar, and turned to face the congregation. It was now time for the prayer of blessings (*kaberuret*) also known as the *ayebisio*. The *mantis* paced in front of the people, slowly following the rhythm of his voice, and then turned towards the rising sun. In a chant rather than a prayer in the Judaeo-Christian sense, which took an antiphonal litany making the prayer an interactive event, he prayed for prosperity, wealth, health, and fertility, amid a chorus of approval from the crowd which repeated the last verb he uttered. The priest then allowed for a lull in which there was complete silence, before dramatically changing his direction to face the west. With a significant change in his tone and grimace, surly and deep-throated, he drove all evil, by the dismissive gesture of his flywhisk. He motioned all bad things to the west, so that they may set with the sun. Turning to his normal voice, he ended by affirming societal order, stability, and peace. In this last bit, the celebrant raised the tempo of his voice. The crowd equally responded at a high tempo until the final response ended in a powerful crush, creating an impressive and solemn effect (Chebet and Dietz 2000, 47). For example:

The celebrant's chant	response from the worshipers
<i>Emnyoo ee! baibai ole baibai</i>	<i>baibai</i>
<i>Tumi ee! Sere ole Sere</i>	<i>sere</i>
<i>Anyiny ole anyiny</i>	<i>anyiny</i>
<i>Boisiek baibai ole baibai</i>	<i>baibai</i>
<i>Chebiosok sere ole sere</i>	<i>sere</i>
<i>Akwotisiek cho bitos ole bitos</i>	<i>bitos</i>
<i>Ngotuekab murenikab emoni lalang wee lalang</i>	<i>lalang</i>

<i>Sere ole sere</i>	<i>sere</i>
<i>Koima lalang ole lalang</i>	<i>lalang</i>
<i>Njor lalang ole lalang</i>	<i>lalang</i>
<i>Pororioni kim ole kim</i>	<i>kim</i>
<i>King ole king</i>	<i>king</i>
The translation of the prayer is as follows	
Country ee! Happy say happy!	happy
Ceremony ee! Blessed say blessed!	blessed
Sweet say sweet!	sweet
Elders happy say happy!	happy
Women happy say happy!	happy
Our livestock flourish say flourish!	flourish
Our reproduction multiply says multiply!	multiply
Blessed say blessed!	blessed
Front part of the house blessed say blessed!	blessed
Back part of the house blessed say blessed!	blessed
Our land be strong say strong!	strong
Firm say firm!	firm

(Chebet and Dietz 2000, 47)

In this final ‘prayer’ or chant as compared to the Judaeo-Christian prayers, there was no expression of love for God. In most instances, the name of God was rarely mentioned. There was neither confession of human transgressions nor promise by the celebrant of any correction. It was simply a petition for practical help from a known God, and equally the dismissal of problems and evil and affirmation of societal stability and order (Chebet and Dietz 2000, 47; Orchardson 1961, 21; Mwanzi 1976,

55). Mwanzi observed the same among the Kipsigis, and concluded that 'here we have less of a prayer than of an instruction in the values of the society' (1977, 55).

It is this style of worship that was a concern for scholars of western tradition. Peristiany, for example, observed that 'these are incantations and not invocations of deities or spirits' (1951, 102). Peristiany was simply reading African culture through the lens of western Christianity. To understand African acts of worship and by extension the nature of the Supreme Being, one has to reconcile the concepts of transcendence and immanence (Mbiti 1969, 33; Knighton 2000, 8; p'Bitek 1970, 1). Expecting the Kalenjin to mention the name of *Asis* during the prayers which is the hygienic approach to a Judaeo-Christian prayer was to deny *Asis*' immanence. *Asis* then would not have any capacity to participate in the acts of worship at the *kapkoros*. *Asis* transcended spatial limits. He was always around people. *Asis* tasted the sacred concoction in the trench of the altar, smelt the aroma of meat roasted and listened to the pleas of the people. For most of their lives, the Kalenjin placed *Asis* in a transcendental realm, in the sky (*yim/barak*) making her appear *Deus remotus* (*Deus incertus*), but the Kalenjin knew that she was always present around them (Chebet and Dietz 2000, 100). A man, for example, finding himself busy would invariably leave his stock unattended, commanded *Asis*; 'Chebet today it is your turn to look after them' (Kipkorir 1976, 177). The Kalenjin, therefore, even without mentioning the name of the Supreme Being knew that this God was around them, listening during acts of worship at the *kapkoros*.

After the prayer, the congregants rose to their feet at the orders of the *mantis*. They proceeded to move around the altar, four times singing, before filing through the

*ormarich* stepping on the sacred fluid again. This procession was led by ritual elders guiding the white goat. This goat was not supposed to be killed. It was to be kept by one of the ritual elders until it died of natural death. In this *koros* for harvest, the offering to *Asis* was symbolic. It was not killed (O.I, Cheruiyot, 2020).

The situation, however, differed remarkably during the worship of *Asis* to avert a danger that faced the community, for example, an epidemic, pandemic, drought, and the occurrence of a solar eclipse among others. During such a *koros* the *ormarich* was not erected nor were sacred fluids used. Only the central altar was erected. A spotless black sheep was killed by the altar of *Asis*. It was roasted on a ritual fire and the meat was eaten together with honey beer by ritual elders. After which the remains of the animal including bones, stomach chyme, and skin were burnt. The ritual elders led by the *poiyot ap tum* followed up by saying prayers beseeching *Asis* to end the danger facing the community. By how smoke rose, the elders augured the fortunes of the community. If the smoke rose in a single straight column, it was believed *Asis* had listened to their pleas. The elders then went around the altar four times singing songs seeking the protection of *Asis* (Massam 1927; Kipkorir 2008, 26). Examples of such conciliatory *koros* are innumerable in the living memory of the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley. During the terrible drought of 1984, elders remember prayers for rain being conducted in many parts of the Kerio-Valley, for example, at the top of Kipkunur massif in Marakwet, Siroch in Keiyo North, and Kaplunge in Marakwet. More recently, in 2020, a *koros* of this kind was held at Epkee, Keiyo-north, to request *Asis* to end the COVID-19 scourge (Standard 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020).

### **3.4 The Fusion of the Worship of *Ilat* and *Asis***

As established in the last chapter, the proto-Kalenjin migration and settlement on the hills and escarpments of the Complex began on a small scale during the seventeenth century, and gained a steady ascendancy during the eighteenth century. The Kalenjin were running away from the threats of Eastern Nilotes on the plains. As they ascended the highlands, they settled alongside indigenous communities and in the ensuing decades, the hosts adopted the language of the visitors and the Complex was Kalenjinized. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the indigenous people - the people of the cowry shell or *seker/siger* - had vanished from the map as political and linguistic entities. However, as cultural entities, they continued to form a conspicuous part of the religious heritage of both the Ateker and Kalenjin who settled in the Kerio-Valley.

The ancestors of the Kalenjin who were forced by necessities of security to settle in the marginal areas of the Kerio-Valley were believers in a God symbolized by the sun (*Asis*). Their religion, as it appears, was not adapted to the environmental needs of their new area of settlement where rain was at the top of the agenda. The ancestors of the Kalenjin thus might have felt that it was desirable to adopt the religious beliefs and practices of the natives to survive in this marginal area. This is a religious fact that a 'traditional religious system will persist if a new religion fails to assuage the same social and psychological needs of the older religion' (Turaki, 2006, 19). The indigenous groups of this area believed in a God personified in rain (*Ilat*). This God had helped them survive in this marginal area for centuries or even possibly millennia. While these autochthonous groups were overwhelmed and absorbed

linguistically by the Kalenjin invaders, they did not relinquish this belief in the rain God during that process of linguistic assimilation, because of the human need for spiritual stability and context (Stejne 1989, 160; Turaki 2006, 20). For many centuries in this dry savannah area, *Ilat* had earned public trust as the provider of the most sought-after commodity - water. It was this belief in a rain symbolized God that the indigenous people of the Complex passed on to the ancestors of the Kalenjin as they settled in the Kerio-Valley. The new settlers out of the need to survive adopted the concept of *Ilat* and adapted it to their previous religious beliefs.

As the concept of *Ilat* entered the religious terrain of the Kalenjin, it acquired a new meaning. It was combined with the Kalenjin concept of *Asis* to establish a syncretic web of sacred relationships. More than that, the concept of *Ilat* was re-energized and Kalenjinized to grip and hold a massive audience of Southern Nilotic immigrants to the Complex. The new hybrid religion drew upon the previous religious ideas of the autochthonous groups and those of the Kalenjin. Typical of all religious transformations anywhere, this process of synthesis ‘involved devaluation and re-evaluation of religious concepts’, where ‘one form of religious culture diminished in importance and became absorbed with another form, while new religious experiences gave strength to other forms of the sacred’ (Ludwig 1987, 59). In our case, *Asis* assumed prominence in the order of beings while *Ilat* was devalued. Significantly, the concept of *Asis* was strengthened and buttressed with that of *Ilat*. The resultant religion was at basic a combination of the worship of *Ilat* and *Asis* under the aegis of the Kerio-Valley and thus adapted to its environmental needs and proclivities.

The cumulative impact of this religious engineering was both outstanding and permanent. It established an intricate syncretic web of sacred relationships that included inseparable worship of both *Asis* and *Ilat*. At the centre of this web was *Asis* in whose hands were all threads of spiritual power, literally the fountain of religious authority. The indigenous riverine God (*Ilat*) on the other hand, moved down the pecking order of divinities. He was relegated to the role of the ubiquitous vicegerent of *Asis* on earth. Therefore, apart from providing of rain, *Ilat* enforced moral order and social harmony and bridged the gap between the finite Kalenjin worshiper and the infinite transcendent, *Asis* (Huntingford 1954, 146). With time, the Kalenjin added the shrines of *Ilat* to their sacred sanctuaries for worship, and in the process Kalenjinized the worship of *Ilat*. They came to refer to the shrines of *Ilat* as *ka po Ilat*, literally the home of *Ilat*. At these shrines, the Kalenjin joined the indigenous people in venerating *Ilat*. During the course of the nineteenth century, as the two communities fused linguistically, the indigenous shrines of *Ilat* joined the Kalenjin prayer sites (*kapkoros*), as revered sanctuaries for pilgrimage and worship. The outcome was that the worship of *Asis* was combined with the worship of *Ilat* into a liturgy that included the inseparable worship of both divinities (O.I, Ringoi 2020).

It can be surmised that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were early periods of settlement and integration of the Kalenjin in the Complex. Therefore, the interaction was by all means low-key. The nineteenth century, however, seems to be the peak of the encounter and cultural harmonization in the Complex. This is the period when most of the autochthonous groups –Sirikwa, Oropom, Siger, Mutia, Kasauria, and Moiben – vanished as ethnic and linguistic entities. They were absorbed by the

Kalenjin linguistically, and in the process influenced the religion of the Kalenjin. By the close of the nineteenth century, the worship of *Asis* was fully combined with that of *Ilat*. This syncretic feature remained the same up to the twentieth century, to the extent that it became a puzzle to most European writers (see Barton 1921). The concept of *Asis* and *Ilat* were so tightly intertwined that it was difficult for a lay observer to categorically single out the object of veneration during prayers. The divinities of *Ilat* and *Asis* had evolved into two dimensions of the same religious universe. These two dimensions had perfectly dovetailed into each other that at times and in some places, one was ostensibly more real than the other, but not exclusive of the other. Because the invocation of *Asis* automatically necessitated the agency of *Ilat* and the agency of *Ilat* was the practical enforcement of the will of God, *Asis* (O.I, Cheruiyot, 2020).

There was nowhere this double formula worship of *Asis* and *Ilat* was well exhibited in the Kerio-Valley, as in the prayers for rain following a period of drought. During such cases, prayers for rain (*koros ap rop*) were organized at both the *kapkoros* and the shrines of *Ilat* on a river valley. At the *kapkoros* worship a spotless black sheep was killed by the altar of *Asis* as described previously. The ritual elders then said prayers for rain. In this prayer that was directed to *Asis*, *Ilat* was also entreated. He was beseeched to deliver the precious liquid from *Asis*. After the prayer, the participants danced around the altar, *kapkorosut* four times chanting their requests to *Ilat* to bring rain, in this vein:

*Yetech na we chibo kaptoyoi!* (Rescue us you man of waters (*Ilat*))

*Saruech na we!* (Save us you friend)

*Kaai na we sikany kayam kore?* (Why do you let the land go dry?)

*Acha we nukech!* (No please (*Ilat*)! moisten us! (Kipkorir 2008, 25))

The next day, after the *kapkoros* prayer, the ritual elders of the Toyoi clan went to the shrine of *Ilat*, to offer prayers for rain. During this worship, only the ritual elders of the Toyoi clan whose firstborn children were female were allowed to participate. At the banks of a plunge pool, an unblemished black sheep was killed and its stomach contents scattered over the *ka po Ilat*. These elders roasted the meat, ate part of it and left the remaining at the banks of the river for the ‘man of waters’ to partake. The celebrant followed by pouring honey beer into the pool. He then expectorated honey beer four times towards the rising sun, pausing at each interval to beseech *Asis* to provide rain. More importantly, he requested *Ilat* to deliver the precious liquid from God (O.I, Cheboi, 2020).

In some instances, especially among the Pokot, a virgin girl was said to be symbolically sacrificed. The virgin was momentarily immersed into the *ka po Ilat* and then pulled out. This girl was instructed by the *mantis* to sprinkle cow dung or chyme of a sacrificial animal into the pool, after which the celebrant said prayers for rain. In the prayers, both *Asis* and *Ilat* were entreated (Ngeiywo 2018, 77). From the above description, it is evident that the procedure of the veneration of *Ilat*, at the riverside shrines differed from one Kalenjii community to another in the Complex. However, the structure of worship remained the same. It involved double formula

worship of *Asis* and *Ilat* at both the *kapkoros* and *ka po Ilat*. In this worship, the divine supremacy of *Asis* and the agency of *Ilat* was underscored.

There is nowhere the power of *Ilat* as the chief agent of *Asis* and the moral arbiter of the society was elaborately manifested in the Kerio-Valley as in the sacred oath of *muma*. In so doing it exhibited the religious transformation of the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley; a spiritual change which set them apart from their kindred groups, southern Kalenjin (Nandi, Terik and Kipsigis) and the Kalenjin of Mount Elgon (Sabaot and Sebei). *Muma* in Pokot, Marakwet, and Tugen or *mumek* among the Keiyo was a religious ritual connected with a strict and irrevocable sacred oath. It was held by the proto-Kalenjin with great reluctance and fearful respect. If a man was strongly suspected of some serious crimes such as witchcraft or theft but there was no evidence to prove them guilty. They were allowed to take the oath of *muma* to assert their innocence (Orchardson 1971, 26; Massam 1927, 190). *Muma* must have been an integral pillar of Southern Nilotic religiosity and seems to have developed among the proto-Kalenjin before the dispersal and development of the various ethnic categories of the Kalenjin found in Kenya today. However, as the Kalenjin dispersed to diverse geographical and social environmental set-ups in East Africa, the concept of *muma* was altered to reflect the influences of other groups. In the Kerio-Valley, for instance, this concept of *muma* was influenced and transformed by the religious ideas of the indigenous inhabitants of the Complex. The Kalenjin as cultural agents redesigned the oath of *muma* to fit into the newly established syncretic religious web of sacred relationships. By the nineteenth century, the swearing of *muma* among the Kalenjin in this Complex had come to reflect the

double worship of both *Asis* and *Ilat*, underscoring the supremacy of *Asis* and the agency of *Ilat*.

To understand the change that this oath underwent among the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley, I will use the Kipsigis ritual of *mumek* as a foil. Among the Kipsigis, the sacred oath of *mumek* was directed to the intervention of *Asis*, and *Asis* alone, as the arbiter. In a situation, where there was a person accused of say witchcraft or theft yet the community did not have evidence to convict the accused. The suspect was supposed to swear *mumek* to prove their innocence. In such a case, the members of the *pororiet* gathered at a suitable open ground together with the accused and his relatives and any other interested parties (Orchardson 1971, 26). At the oathing ground, two spears were stuck upright into the ground about two feet apart, by the officiating ritual elder. Sometimes, they were crossed and tied together by an especial poisonous creeper. The attendants sat in two rows so that a clear corridor was left leading to the instruments of the oath (Orchardson 1971, 26).

The man to take the oath divested himself of all his vestments and ornaments and was given a newly plucked and peeled wand of the clutia plant or *kurbanyat* (*clutia abyssinica*). As he approached the spears with wands in his hands, the *mantis* questioned him threateningly and allowed him to take his oath statements. However, he was reminded of the consequences of making false oath statements. As the accused drew near the spears and seemed ready to touch them, the *mantis* warned him of the consequences of the oath. Finally, by intimidation and exhortation, the accused was brought to that state that he could not swear falsely. It is reported that some men made false oath statements and walked confidently to strike the spears,

but changed their minds, and dropped the wands, owing to the extraordinary manner in which the *mantis* was able to convince the guilty party of the certainty of the retributive power of *mumek* (Orchardson 1971, 27).

A person who took this oath of *mumek* falsely among the Kipsigis was believed to be subjected to the most terrible generational curse, which affected not only his family but the entire clan. The family and stock died. Among the Kipsigis this ritual of *mumek* was conducted in broad daylight for *Asis* to witness. For the sun was considered to be the eye of God. *Asis* then would provide his retributive justice for those who lied under the oath. In this case, the Kipsigis do not at any moment mention *Ilat* in connection to the oath of *mumek* (Orchardson 1971, 27).

However, the performance of *muma* differed remarkably in the Kerio-Valley. In this Complex, the oath of *muma* was directed to the intervention of both *Asis* and *Ilat*. *Asis* watched, listened to the oath, and made the judgment. She then used *Ilat* as the instrument of justice (Yator, O.I 2020). A case in point is given of a particular village where there had been cases of theft, but the social misfit had gone undetected. Therefore, all the adults of this village (*korok*) were summoned by ritual elders of the *korok*, to undertake the oath of *muma*, for the guilty party to suffer the consequence and the rest to be absolved of the blame. The villagers met at a designated place at midday and were instructed by elders to ‘wash their hands and faces in the same bowl’ the collected dirty water was ‘then used to cook a meal in which each individual in attendance was given a slice on a thin stick the size of a toothpick to eat’ (Kipkorir 2008, 10). As each received the slice of the ritual meal, the presiding ritual elder imprecated the undetected thief saying:

Behold my case *Asis*

If you were responsible for this deed

My you crawl along the roads like ants

May you lose your wit forever and become a fool

May *Ilat* strike your house and stock (Kipkorir 2008, 10).

In this ritual oath, the Kalenjin of the Complex not only recognized the almighty power of *Asis*, but also the agency of *Ilat* as the enforcer of moral order and the will of God. *Ilat* delivered the punishment of *Asis* through floods, diseases, drought, lightning, or any other disaster.

Another scenario is where a village suspected an individual of theft, yet there was no evidence to prove them guilty, the suspected thief was obliged to take the sacred oath of *muma* to assert their innocence. The ritual elders called for an assembly of all adults in the village for the suspect to swear *muma*. The suspect was supposed to hold a whetstone (*liteiywa*) aloft by their right hand and swear before the assembly that:

*Nekochor so nda nekamwa lambach* if I have taken anybody's property, or I am lying

*Kibara Ilat peeit asis kileye* may *Ilat* kill me when the sun is high up (O.I Kilimo, 2020)

The oath of *muma* was conducted during the day when the sun was at its zenith, for the sun was believed to be the eye of God. The Kalenjin believed that God witnessed the proceedings from the sky and then provided retributive justice through the agency *Ilat*. When a suspect had taken the oath of *muma*, no individual was supposed to accuse them again or even express the slightest insinuation of any suspicion of

their innocence. To do so was believed to transfer the curse of *muma* from the accused to the doubter (O.I, Kilimo, 2020).

Although the Kalenjin believed that the consequences of *muma* did not follow immediately, their belief in the potency of this curse was absolute. There is no lack of instances of awful consequences that followed when this oath was taken falsely; innumerable examples of people who took the oath of *muma* with the hope of escaping punishment, in the end, suffered irreparable damage. They ended up suffering through the loss of huts and stock to floods, diseases, landslides, and lightning (Kipkorir 2008, 31). This double worship of the invocation of both *Asis* and *Ilat* during *muma* should be traced to the configuration of Kalenjin religion in the Kerio-Valley, as a result of the fusion of the worship of *Asis* and the autochthonous worship of *Ilat*. Through the assimilation of the indigenous inhabitants, the Kalenjin were influenced to acquire the religious concept of *Ilat*. This deity came to be worshipped alongside *Asis*. By 1900, the double formula of worship reflecting the almighty power of *Asis* and the messengership of *Ilat* was fully crystallized in the cosmology of the Kalenjin that it came to be reflected in their worship as typified in the sacred oath of *muma*.

Perhaps the only controversy in the religion of the Kalenjin is the meaning of the religious idea of *Ilat*. This controversy stems from the fact that the name *Ilat* has two meanings among the Kalenjin of the Complex. In the first meaning, *Ilat* refers to a supernatural riverine spirit that was present in water, mud, and especially rain. The second one was the ordinary meaning where *Ilat* in the parlance of some of the Kalenjin of the Complex (Pokot, Marakwet, and Tugen) directly translates to thunder

and lightning, and for that reason, most scholars commenting on this concept, for example, Barton (1921, 82), Ngeiywo (2018, 76), Peristiany (1975, 44), Visser (1989, 28), Sawe (2003, 13), Sambu (2007, 98), Tarus (1994, 64) have equated this divinity to thunder and lightning. Ngeiywo writing on the Pokot, for example, contends that '*Ilat*, thunder and lightening (sic) god is the god of above.' Tarus also says that 'thunder and lightning also played a major role major role in the Keiyo religious beliefs' (Tarus 1994, 64). The findings of this study are in contrast with the conclusion of these writers theoretically and practically. My field notes on the concept of *Ilat* (the divine entity) show that *Ilat* was a masculine water spirit that was present in water especially rain. The belief is so strong that every locality had, and still has, pools along rivers that are acknowledged with extreme reverence as the shrines of *Ilat*. There was no instance, however, during my field study when my informants pointed to thunder and lightning as the religious conceptualization of *Ilat*.

The connection that exists between the religious concept of *Ilat* and thunder and lightning is most likely to be the product of the direct translation of African religious concepts. What Ben Knighton refers to as the translation of African concepts of religion 'translingually but not transculturally' (Knighton 1999, 120). Most of these writers took the philosophical idea of *Ilat* and framed it in western linguistic categories hence the idea of thunder and lightning. The result of this direct translation was the vaporization the religious meaning inherent in the concept of *Ilat*. To try and translate directly African concepts of religion into Western languages, p'Bitek (1970, 10) has warned is to court trouble because the meaning of spiritual categories in Africa is culture-specific. The meaning of spiritual concepts must be

decoded alongside the culture and the history of the involved group, particularly where the language game is being changed.

The concept of *Ilat*, for example, has an archive of the religious history of the Kerio-Valley behind it if it has to be correctly understood. *Ilat*, the religious concept, as conceived by the indigenous people and later by the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley was neither thunder (*ketil*) nor lightning (*kerial/keliel*) as it is supposed in some literature. *Ilat* was conceived as a masculine water spirit that was present in water, mud, and especially rain. Huntingford correctly observed this when he recorded that ‘*ilet* (sic) was a man [that lived in water]. This is probably an original Dorobo [indigenous people’s] belief, for the Nandi [Kalenjin] *ilet* is thunder that has the form of a bird’ (1954, 146), [Parenthesis mine]. There were instances in the history of the Kalenjin when *Ilat* used thunder (*ketil*) and lightning (*kerial/keliel*) to administer justice against and warn the wicked (Kipkorir 2008, 9). However, these cases were exceptions rather than the normal rule. Even then, in such scenarios, thunder and lightning should not be confused with *Ilat* the divinity. Thunder and lightning here appear as one of the many ways used by *Ilat* to administer justice, very similar to the analogy of the policeman and his gun.

### **3.5 Ancestors Worship in the Kerio-Valley**

Ancestor veneration as a religious concept and practice rests on the belief that the spirits of ancestors are considered part of the family. These spirits have the capacity, at their own will, to intervene in the affairs of the living. Ancestors are believed to operate in a protective capacity, but they could also withhold their favour allowing disasters to befall their descendants for going against tribal customs (Mbiti 1969,

57). The belief in ancestral spirits seems to have been the original religion of the embryonic Nilotic community before differentiating into the three Nilotic clusters, the Western, Eastern, and Southern Nilotes (p'Bitek 1971, 1). By all indications, it seems to have been a rude form of ancestor veneration because it cannot be compared to the level of sophistication and frequency of veneration that was accorded to the ancestors among the Bantu of western Kenya generally, and the Abaluyia specifically (Gimode 1993, 90).

The idea of ancestor worship is a controversial topic in the Kalenjin religion. Some writers have dismissed the existence of ancestor worship in the religion of Kalenjin, while others present it as a later development that was appropriated from their neighbours, especially the Bantu. Gimode (2003, 176), for example, writing on the Nandi and Terik, submits that the religious idea of ancestor veneration 'was an appropriation and not an original Nandi-Terik idea.' Emphatically, Gimode posits that the Nandi and Terik did not have any notion of ancestor veneration before their settlement in western Kenya. For him, the Nandi and Terik adopted the religious idea of ancestor veneration from Bantu Abaluyia and then added fused it with their previous cosmology centred on the worship of *Asis*. In the bulk of his chapter, on the veneration of ancestors, Gimode presents a series of fair and impartially reasoned out historical conclusions that are highly valuable, and contribute a great deal to a detailed knowledge of the history of the ancestor cult in western Kenya. However, his conclusion on the origin of the cult of ancestors among the Nandi and Terik is highly contestable.

Evidence indicates that there existed some kind of belief in the power of ancestors among the proto-Southern Nilotes, before separating and concretizing into different Kalenjin septs. This is supported by the existence of the same root word for the idea of ancestral spirits among the widely distributed Kalenjin groups. Ancestral spirits are known as *oiik* among the Southern Kalenjin (Nandi, Terik, and Kipsigis) (Gimode 2003, 178; Orchardson 1961, 29) and *ooi or oii* among the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley (Keiyo, Tugen, Marakwet, and Pokot) (Kipkorir 2008) and *oyik* among the Kalenjin of Mount Elgon (Sabaot and Sebei) (Goldschmidt 1976, 303). The conclusion that can be drawn from the pervasiveness of the same name for the idea of ancestral spirits, and the respect accorded to ancestors, among the Kalenjin communities that are far removed from each other, is that the Southern Kalenjin could not have been *tabula rasa* of the idea of ancestor worship as Gimode portrays. Perhaps the Nandi and the Terik might have refined the veneration of ancestors as they came into intimate contact with Bantu Abaluyia during the eighteenth and especially the nineteenth century.

In my attempt to examine the nature of ancestor veneration among the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley, I will start by painting a picture of ancestor worship among the Southern Kalenjin and use it as a foil to examine ancestor worship in the Kerio-Valley. The rationale for this is that the Southern Kalenjin had an elaborate and refined system of ancestor veneration as a result of interactions with the Bantu. Therefore, to understand how the Southern Kalenjin refined their previous rudimentary form of ancestor worship and combined it with the worship of *Asis*, we have to examine the structure of worship of ancestors among the Bantu, especially

the Abaluyia. Ancestor veneration was the mainstay of the religion of the Bantu groups of the Lake region generally, and the Abaluyia specifically, before adopting the idea of a sky God symbolized in the sun from Kalenjin later in their history (Gimode 2003, 143). Among the Abaluyia, the worship of ancestors was elaborately performed, at high frequency, at both the family and clan levels. This worship was centred on the homestead ancestral shrine. Every homestead had an ancestral shrine known as *lusambwa* in southern Buluyia and *namwima* in northern Buluyia. It was constructed using a stick of markhamia or *lusiola* (*markhamia lutea*), or ficus or *mutoto* (*ficus natalencis*) tree. The stick was stuck to the ground to a height of about three feet high on the right-hand side of the main door of the house of the principal matron. Four stones, drawn from a running river, were placed around the stick at some distance (Makila 1982, 183; Gimode 2003, 170; Wagner 1972, 450). The ancestral shrine could also be constructed as a small cone-shaped hut whose centre pole was made of the *lusiola* stem. The kingpost acted as the ancestral pole. Four stones were placed around the pole inside the hut. The Abaluyia dedicated this shrine to the spirits of male ancestors of their families and clans. And as a rule, only male animals could be killed at this altar (Gimode 2003, 187).

At this shrine, the Abaluyia conducted daily sunrise and sundown prayers. Other important prayers concerning the family such as prayers for weddings, sickness, circumcision, cleansing, and death were also conducted at the shrine. The eldest male member of the family led prayers. Every morning and evening the family head placed gruel (*bushuma*) on the ancestral stones while requesting the spirits of the departed to protect the family against danger. During major supplications, for

example, that of circumcision, a male spotless animal was killed at the altar by strangulation after which the stomach was opened and inspected for omens. The chyme was smeared on the pole of the shrine and the stones. Its meat was roasted and eaten by all those present. Significantly also, the *mantis* threw pieces of meat in all directions for ancestors to partake. The elders present then took beer using siphons from a clay pot seated between the stones of the ancestral shrine. The beer that spilt to the ground was believed to be consumed by the spirits of ancestors (Gimode 2003, 175; Shiyuka 2017, 39).

It is this religious concept of the ancestral shrine that the Southern Kalenjin adopted from the Bantu, as they refined what appeared to be an inelaborate concept of ancestor veneration in their previous religion. The Terik, the Nandi, and the Kipsigis greatly interacted with and assimilated Bantu clans, and in the process, they imbibed Bantu religious culture. For example, the ethnogenesis of the Kipsigis is a story of the encounter between Southern Nilotes and the Abagusii (Mwanzi 1976). The Nandi on the other hand experienced extensive contact with Bantu Abagusii and Abaluyia during the process of settlement and ethnogenesis (Mwanzi 1976, 80), while the migration, settlement, and evolution of the Terik went hand-in-hand with intense interaction with Abaluyia, especially the Tiriki (Were 1972). The outcome of this interaction was that the Southern Kalenjin refined their conceptualization of ancestor worship from the Bantu. The capstone of this religious change was the adoption of the idea of the homestead ancestral shrine from the Abaluyia (Gimode 2003, 175). The Southern Kalenjin indigenized this shrine as *mabwaita* or *mabwai*. In some cases, it was referred to as the mini altar or *kapkorosut mining* (Fish and

Fish 1995, 46, Gimode 2003, 176). At this shrine just like their Bantu neighbours, the Southern Kalenjin venerated both *Asis* and the spirits of their male ancestors in a syncretic liturgy that Kipkorir confessed ‘was very complicated than that of the other Kalenjin groups’ (Kipkorir 1976, 177).

*Mabwaita* was a term used by the Southern Kalenjin to refer to the family altar. It was a religious idea that in all probabilities was a Bantu derivative. However, during the process of adoption, the Kalenjin might have felt that it was highly desirable to incorporate Nilotic religious concepts into it for the sake of stability during the process of change. They, therefore, employed religious schema already known to them. For that reason, *mabwaita* was erected in the same manner as the main altar at the *kapkoros*. The Kalenjin used braches and climbers of trees that were considered sacred to them. Important also, *mabwaita* was positioned on the eastern side of the front yard of the compound, which was considered to be the most auspicious direction for the Kalenjin. *Mabwaita* was first erected by sticking a large branch of the cabbage tree or fig (*ficus natalencis*) tree to the ground. Then other small branches and foliage of sacred trees were added and tied to it using sacred climbers, especially *sinendet*. At this altar, the Southern Kalenjin offered not only the compulsory daily morning and evening prayers, to *Asis* and ancestors, but also supplications for ceremonies connected with the family such as divination for sickness, initiation, wedding, naming, and cleansing ritual impurity following death, and other forms of ritual disfavours (Fish and Fish 1995, 46).

By the mid of the nineteenth century, the homestead ancestral shrine had become an integral part of the religion of the Southern Kalenjin to the extent that it seemed

indigenous. However, some features betray the Bantu origin of *mabwaita*. This shrine was dedicated to *Asis* and the male ancestors of the clan. For this reason, only male animals were offered as sacrifices at this altar. They could be of any colour, but not spotted or striped. This animal, just like among the Abaluyia was killed by strangulation. The stomach of the animal was opened for divination and its meat was roasted and eaten. Small pieces of meat were thrown in all directions for ancestors to partake (Hollis 1909, xxi; Gimode 2003, 177). The Kalenjin also offered daily sunset and sundown prayers; every ‘morning and evening the family head placed millet or sorghum gruel at the *mabwaita* for the ancestors’ to partake (Huntingford 1944, 3). The celebrant then prayed to *Asis* in supplications which the spirits of clan and family patriarchs were also entreated. Failure to acknowledge ancestors in daily worship and naming of children turned their spirits malevolent (Huntingford 1944, 3). These ill-disposed spirits were known as *misampwanik*; a word that betrays its Luyia etymology. Writing during the first decade of the twentieth century, Hollis attested to the veneration of ancestors among the Nandi. He tells us that, during the dedication of a baby at the *mabwaita*, the infant was washed in the chyme of the sacrificial animal and the *mantis* offered prayers invoking *Asis* and *oik* in this vein; ‘*Asis*, give us health, *Asis* protect us, spirits of the departed protect this child, stomach [of the sacrificed animal] protect this child’ (Hollis 1909: xxi).

The ancestor cult seems to have been so pronounced among the Southern Kalenjin that Huntingford concluded that ‘the active part of the Nandi religion was centred on the cult of the dead rather than a remote and not always friendly sky spirit’ (Huntingford 1944, 12). This observation is highly likely to be untrue considering

how well-established the worship of the sun God, *Asis*, was among the Kalenjin (Sambu 2007, 29; Gimode 2003, 175). However, it signifies the sophistication of the veneration that was accorded to ancestral spirits among the Southern Kalenjin, a situation which differed remarkably in the Kerio-Valley.

There is no evidence, in the extant literature and my field notes of any organized daily worship (at sunset and sundown) dedicated to ancestral spirits among the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley, similar to the one recorded among the Southern Kalenjin. Still, the Kalenjin of the Complex have no memory of any shrine constructed at the homestead for the veneration of their ancestors and *Asis* comparable to the *mabwaita* shrine used by the Southern Kalenjin. The only altar that was constructed by the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley for worship was the altar at the *kapkoros*, and the archway gate (*ormarich*). In the Kerio-Valley, the veneration of ancestors was done occasionally when the need arose, for instance, when a spirit of an ancestor appeared to kin in a dream, before partaking in a ceremonial commensal meal, in funeral rites, or in the naming of a newborn child. In the case where a spirit of a dead relative troubled the living, a sacrifice was conducted to placate that specific spirit and not any other spirit (Kipkorir 2008, 11; Beech 1911, 12; Peristiany 1975, 182).

Another case was during death. When a person died, it was believed that the spirit (*oin*) was separated from the body. This spirit loitered in the nearby bushes until all the necessary mortuary rites established by custom were performed, for it to retire to the spirit world (*kapkikut*). A few months or years after burial, a remembrance ceremony was conducted in honour of the dead man. During this ceremony, an

animal corresponding to the gender of the deceased was killed in honour of their spirit. If all rites were conducted to the satisfaction of the spirit, it retired to join the clan and neighbourhood spirits in the netherworld (*kapkikut*). These spirits rested in *kapkikut* anticipating reincarnation in their progeny through naming. From *kapkikut* they watched over their living kinsmen appearing to them in dreams, warning them of any impending danger (Kipkorir 2008, 44). These benevolent spirits or the *chepkaramu*, literally the good *oii*, coexisted well with their kinsmen expecting libations of milk and beer during ceremonial meals, as overt signs of goodwill from them (Peristiany 1975, 182). Beech observed among the Pokot that:

Before drinking wine, certain ceremonies are observed. An elder is chosen to whom the wine jar is entrusted. This man takes a cup, fills it with wine, and pours some on either side of the threshold of the door, invoking spirits of the dead to keep them safe (Beech 1911, 12)

Ancestor worship in the Kerio-Valley was also demonstrated in child naming. When a child was born, they were given a name corresponding to the season or circumstances of their birth (*kainap musar*). For example, a girl child born at night would be Chepkemoi (Chepkemboi) and a boy child Kipkemoi (Kipkemboi) and so forth. More important than this first name was the ancestral name (*kainap kapkikut*), which was given at the end of the confinement period of the mother in a ceremony called *kotkotisio*. Hydromel was prepared for this ceremony in which local elders of either gender were invited to the mother's hut in its capacity as the ancestral naming centre (*kapkikut*). Inside the hut, at the point where the central pole (*kapteleny*) meets the ground, a long iron rod (*kolombe*), used for boring wood, was hammered to the ground at a right angle (Kipkorir 2008, 44). The celebrant of the occasion attempted

to balance a gourd (*repes*) filled with beer at the tip of the rod. At each trial, he called on the name of a specific clan spirit. For example, he would shout, Lotim come to the *kapkikut*. At each attempt, a name of a different *oin* was called. When the *repes* balanced at the tip of the rod, the congregation shouted *kacham!* This meant that the *oin* had loved the child, and its name was adopted for the child. The baby was mouth sprayed with honey beer and marked on its face three times with white clay (*ng'eny*) (Kipkorir 2008, 44). The spirits of the dead that were not remembered in naming and libations became malevolent and haunted their living kinsmen . These evil spirits were known as *chesawir* or *chesawiloi* (Kipkorir 2008, 44).

The fact that the Kalenjin worshipped the spirits of their ancestors has not been well received by some scholars. There is a tendency to elide ancestor worship in the description of Kalenjin religion. This is conspicuous in the writings of Sambu (2007, 28), Chepkwony (1997) and Fish and Fish (1995). These writers tactfully deny the existence of ancestor worship. This is because in the study of religion, ancestor worship was associated with the so-called 'primitive' or 'archaic' religions, thereby signifying a lower level of civilization. These writers thus wish to portray the Kalenjin as thoroughgoing monotheists who never worshipped their ancestors. Fish and Fish, for instance, have emphatically refuted the idea of ancestors being part of the Kalenjin religion. They say that '*mabwaita* had no connection with *oiik* (the spirits of the dead) or *misampwanik*' (Fish and Fish 1995, 48). Sambu (2007, 28) acknowledges that sacrifices were made to ancestral spirits, but declares categorically that 'no prayers were directed to departed spirits.' For Sambu,

ancestors ‘were not worshipped because the Kalenjin in the East African setting were never ancestor worshippers.’ In denying of the existence of the concept of ancestor worship among the Kalenjin, these scholars took the burden of proof upon their shoulders. However, the responses in their writings, so far, have smack more of passionate Kalenjin chauvinism than cogent and sober intellectual debates backed up with historical evidence.

The tendency to ignore the critical role played by ancestors in the religion of the Kalenjin when it has been explicitly documented by eyewitnesses – colonial anthropologists and administrators - is not simply an oversight, but a polemical endeavour to paint the Kalenjin as superior with the express objective of forcing the narrative of Ancient Egyptian origin. Drawing from available evidence, there is every reason to doubt the Kalenjin Ancient Egyptian origin hypothesis, advanced by Sambu, and the evidence upon which it is based. Most of the clans of the Bantu communities of Western Kenya – the Abakuria, Abagusii, and Abaluyia - also believe they came from *Misiri* (Ayot 1979; Were 1967; Ochieng 1974). Yet nobody has ever identified the spatial location of this fabled *Misiri* on the map. Therefore, the categorical identification of *Misiri* with Ancient Egypt, by Sambu is to force an argument. In the skewed argument of Sambu, anything that does not fit the Egyptian agenda, for example, ancestor veneration is rejected even when evidence points to the contrary.

Sambu proposes a fixed and enduring ‘Kalenjin’ identity deeply rooted in the Ancient Egyptian past. In this history, antiquity confers authenticity upon a Kalenjin identity which he regards as essential and unchanging, some kind of manifest

destiny. This is a typical Kalenjin nationalist history that tends towards a process of retrospective projection, which paints the Kalenjin nation not as a created product of historical change, but as an enduring and constant subject of history. Such history typically involves the exclusion and silencing of certain voices in substitution for a Kalenjin hegemonic mythology. Many foreign elements that were historically absorbed into Kalenjin social fabric over time such as the autochthonous hunter-gatherer, Maasai, Bantu, and Cushites, are not allowed to enforce their religious heritages. This rule of thumb is not tenable. The correct religious history of the Kalenjin is the one that shows the diverse origin of the threads that make up the Kalenjin social fabric and consequently demonstrates their contribution to religious transformation without the stigma of inferiority.

### **3.6 The Interaction between the Pokot and the Ateker c. 1800 to 1900**

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Pokot starting with the Kasauria section from the Sekerr ranges descended from the hills to begin a pastoral lifestyle on the lowland plains. They were followed by many others from Cheptulel and Kurut on the Cherangany ranges. By 1900 the pastoral Pokot had established their own identity on the plains of the Kerio-Valley as breeders of livestock (*pi-pa-tich*), which set them apart from the agro-pastoral hill Pokot or people of flour (*pi-pa-pagh*) (Bollig 2016, 22). By this time, the ideology of animal keeping was deeply soaked into their national psyche, which made it a prescribed social and economic goal to obtain and maintain cattle at all costs. The possession and maintenance of livestock became the very essence of Pokot being. Although the Pokot kept a variety of other animals including sheep, goats, camels, and donkeys; cattle to them had more than

usual utilitarian associations. The ownership of bovines was accompanied by a token of virile qualities, which not only guaranteed prestige but also, served as the medium of establishing and confirming social relations through bride wealth, religious sacrifices, or payment of compensation (Barton 1921, 82-83; Docherty 1957, 31).

The acquisition and maintenance of cattle necessitated the establishment of a gilt-edged security system. By all indications, before the development of pastoralism among the Pokot, there was no elaborate security machine that was capable of conducting large-scale raids and defense similar to that of the Ateker, the Maasai, or the Nandi. The Pokot were thus forced by necessity to style themselves militarily in the form of an enemy who had proven formidable to break. 'Just as one eats the heart of a lion or smears oneself with the fat of a leopard, so the Pokot adopted the initiation and the headdress of an enemy who had shown himself superior in the acquisition of cattle wealth' (Peristiany 1951a, 190). The Ateker *asapana* initiation ceremony and the consequent age-sets were therefore seen as an essential variable in determining the fortunes of cattle raids (Peristiany 1951a, 190).

*Asapana* was a Karimojong rite of passage in which boys in their late teens and early twenties, were supposed to spear an ox in a ritually prescribed manner inside a sacred semi-circle called *akiriket*. They were then smeared with the chyme of the sacrificial beast as a precondition for being endowed with the symbols and privileges of manhood such as possessing a man's accoutrements, wearing the colourful clay headdress (*siolip* and *atoro*), participating in communal rituals and generally acting and speaking like a man (Dyson-Hudson 1963, 363; Lawrance 1953, 249). The initiates were then placed into age sets (*asapantin*). The smallest unit of the Ateker

age-set was the sub-set. Each initiation sub-set was made up of boys initiated within a period of two to five years. They were given a name that was evocative of a special event that occurred during the initiation period. After a decade, several subsets were collapsed into one colour section (*munian*), which was named after the subset with the most members. After two decades, two colour sections were joined together to form a *sapana* set (Dyson-Hudson 1963, 363; Lawrance 1953, 249). In due course, the Pokot adopted and blended this Ateker institution with Kalenjin circumcision and age groups (*pin*) into a complex, ‘coherent and hierarchical political system that was staged’ in major religious rituals (Bollig 2000, 343).

These political and economic influences were, of course, outward manifestations of inner changes that were taking shape, including changes in attitude, values and spiritual ideas. For example, the Pokot acquired the use of the headrest stool (*akicholong*), the lip plug, weapons, sartorial and coiffure tastes, and, arguably, the entire ritual lexicon of the Karimojong. This chapter examines two religious concepts that the Pokot acquired from their neighbours as a result of their pastoral expansion and excursions; the Ateker worship of *akiriket* and the adoption of the Karimojong religious compass. It then proceeds to examine how the Pokot, as human agents, integrated these external ritual concepts into their previous Kalenjin religious universe, thereby formulating syncretism.

### 3.6.1 The Pokot Adoption of the Karimojong Style of Worship

The religious term *akiriket* (plural *ngakiriketa*)<sup>8</sup> among the Karimojong specifically and Ateker groups generally, refers to the sacred semicircular shaped assembly, of all male adults initiated through *asapana*, in which an animal sacrifice was made to a sky God (*Akuju*). When loosely translated the epithet *akiriket* means to join together, to guide, or to lead. It was the sacred ground where the Karimojong came together to be guided by the elders in worshipping *Akuju* (Dyson-Hudson 1990, 36; Gulliver 1958, 900-905). *Akiriket* was the very hub of Karimojong public religious action because all other minor religious rituals were modelled on this spiritual concept. The worship of *akiriket* was held during occasions in which a sacrificial offering was dedicated to *Akuju* such as during *asapana* initiation, marriage ceremonies, prayers for rain, the blessing of warriors before cattle raids, promotion of generation sets, a peacemaking ceremony, cleansing a warrior who had killed an enemy in battle, and prayers to end epidemics (Gulliver 1958, 904; Okello 2019, 213).

Before the Pokot descended from the hills to become a pastoral people, the most significant religious sanctuary for the worship of God, as established before, was the site of *kapkoros*. However, as they adorned new apparels of pastoralism, in the nineteenth century, the worship at the *kapkoros* was gradually discarded to pave way for the worship embodied in the Karimojong *akiriket*. One wonders what overpowering drive gave the new style of worship meaning and significance as it

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<sup>8</sup> While it is agreed by religious scholars that there was no distinction between the secular and the sacred in African culture, among the Pokot and Karimojong *akiriket* (*kirket*) referred to a sacred semi-circular arrangement of adults initiated through *asapana* (*sapana*) where a castrated male animal was dedicated to God. *Kirket* followed a specifically established liturgy. A political meeting of the council of elders, on the other hand, was called *kokwa*. In *kokwa* no animal sacrifice was conducted. It was a meeting meant only for the deliberation of judicial and political matters.

came into vogue. We cannot penetrate the creative impulse of the inner sanctum of the Pokot, as they entered that period of rapid economic transition. However, there are hints that the causes for this religious change may have been partly political and partly economic.

In the process of the Pokot occupation of the open savanna, and the transhumance lifestyle that ensued, we find new political feelings and thinking of men as they entered a new and abrupt period of ethnogenesis. The religious styles that resulted from the Pokot's geographical and cultural shift, from besieged agro-pastoral cliff dwellers to free pastoral open plain nomads, were outward manifestations of such new inner experiences, and life-changing behaviour. The development of pastoralism was accompanied by a sense of new political power and prestige, brought about by the adoption of Karimojong military institutions. For example, as time went by, the Pokot discarded the bow and the arrow, the principal weapon of the hill Kalenjin, and adopted the spear, shield and clay-coloured headdress – the military gear of the invincible Karimojong (Beech 1911, 13; Dundas 1910, 58). With examples to show, they had witnessed the outcome of Ateker organizational tactics and arsenal. Their former adversaries, who had proven indomitable in war such as the Samburu crumbled under the force of this novel experience of Karimojong military power, enabling the Pokot to control land into the infinite. Beyond all the dreams of their former ages, they came to occupy an expansive stretch of land from Upe in Uganda to the fringes of the Leroghi plateau in Samburu County. They also conducted intermittent, yet successful, sorties that took them as far as Laikipia and Suguta valley in Samburu County (Dundas 1910, 59; Bollig 2006, 22). If this rapid

territorial expansion and acquisition of livestock at the expense of their neighbours were the results of superior military tactics and properly executed religious actions, then, the newly acquired Karimojong religious ritual had proven efficacious. The Pokot in all probability flirted with the Karimojong religion, and thus habitually began to behave like the lords of the arid plains even in religious terms, hence the adoption of *akiriket*.

Occupationally, the worship of *akiriket* was suitable for pastoral nomads, unlike the Kalenjin worship, at the *kapkoros* shrines that were permanently and rigidly situated on designated hills within areas of habitation (Chepkwony 1997, 162; Fish and Fish 1995, 23). *Akiriket* was mobile and could be conducted anywhere, as the pastoral communities moved from one area to another, looking for pasture and water for animals. The Pokot had to change their religious style to suit their new mode of production. It appears that changes in the Pokot substructure led to changes in their superstructure. What this means, in Marxist discourse, is that Pokot religion was not an autonomous metaphysical thing that existed without reference to the economic, social, and political realities of their society. As the Pokot gradually turned to pastoralism, it reached that particular point in time where changing material circumstances made centuries of inherited spiritual categories redundant. They, therefore, substituted the Ateker *akiriket* for the Kalenjin religious concept (*kapkoros*) and Kalenjinized the term to *kirket*, in some literature *kerket* (Peristiany 1951a, 194). The *kirket* style of worship came to serve their new mode of economy well. It enabled them to establish a close relationship with their God even when they were on the move.

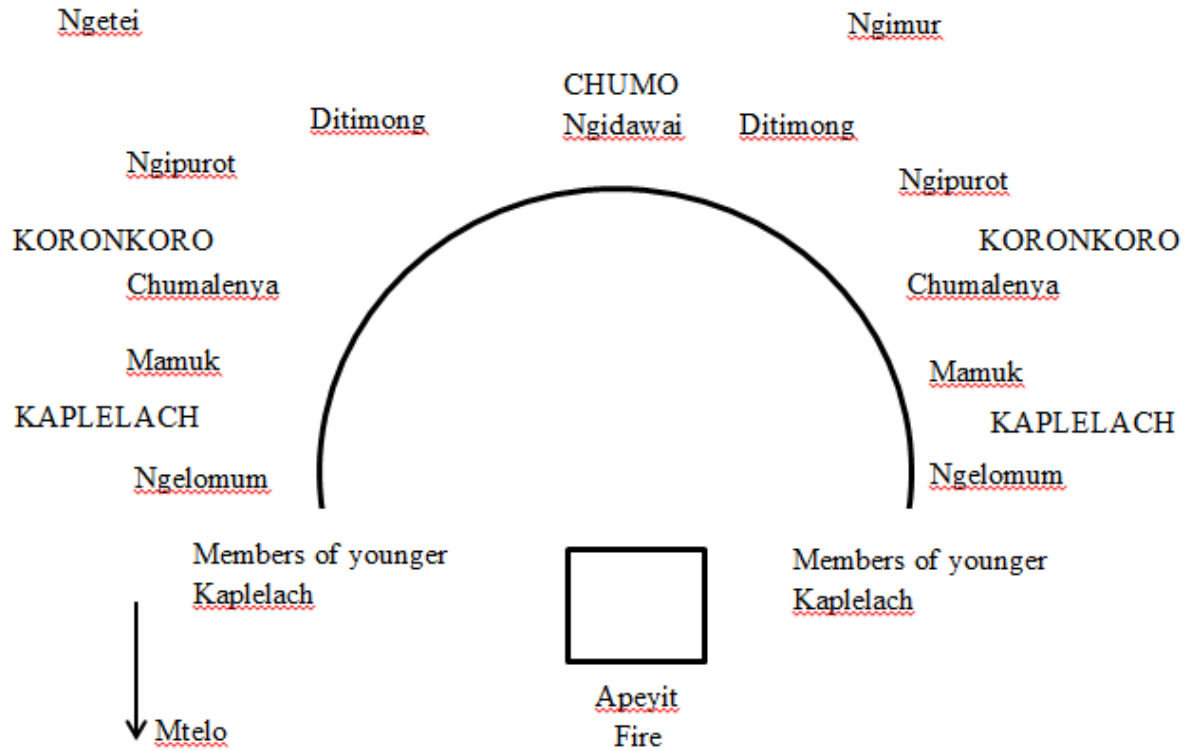
Whatever the reasons for adopting *kirket* were, the Pokot are unanimous that the religious concept of *kirket* was borrowed from the Karimojong. Indeed, there is no meaning of the term *kirket* in the Kalenjin language. Importantly also, the observations made by Peristiany in the middle of the twentieth century indicated that most of the songs used in the *kirket* assembly were still in *ng'akarimojong* - the language of the Karimojong. The Pokot organized the sacred semi-circle worship for several reasons. A *kirket* could be conducted to cleanse a warrior who had killed an enemy in war (*dia*), seal a truce (*mis*) between the Pokot and their neighbours, honour a dead man and discuss issues related to his estate, pray for a sick person, or curse a social deviant (*kiralat*). *Kirket* could be held to pardon and reinstate an adulterous person (*achula*) in the society, pardon a man for a misdemeanour (*sitat*), or strategize for a legal contest (*tatapa*). *Kirket* could, also, be organized to pray for rain following a long period of drought or initiate a young man into adulthood (*sapana*). Moreover, a *kirket* could be held to establish a colour section (*munian*) of a *sapana* set or promote and create a new *sapana* set (Peristiany 1951b, 281; Schneider 1975, 282; Brown 2015, 4). On all these occasions, the basic ritual remained the same. It involved a male animal being killed in a ritually prescribed manner inside a sacred semi-circular assembly, and its carcass cut into pieces without removing the skin. This was followed by haruspication and prayers that related 'to the chief purpose of the assembly' (Schneider 1975, 282).

Each Pokot neighbourhood, sub-section or section organized a *kirket* depending on the religious needs that required divine intervention. Preparations for *kirket* began several days or even weeks before the material day of prayer to allow the preparation

of sour milk, honey beer and the selection of an ox for sacrifice. When everything had been assembled young men with the assistance of a senior elder marked the semi-circle (*kirket*) on the ground in a convenient group of shady trees, using stones or leaves. The *kirket* was marked in a way that it opened toward Mtelo peak, the highest point of the Sekerr ranges. This was the most sacred geographical feature of the Pokot landscape (Bollig 2006, 358; Peristiany 1951a, 192).

In the morning, all men initiated through *sapana* took their positions, sitting on their headrest stools (*akicholong'*) or stones, within a semicircle. The congregants dressed in full ceremonial regalia, which included the colourful feathered headdresses and beads of their respective *sapana* age sets. The seating arrangement followed a strict order of precedence based on the social age of the congregants. The generational set of ritual elders wielded the most religious power, and with it came political influence. These elders, therefore, sat at the apex of the semicircle. They were followed by senior elders, while the juniors occupied the tail ends of the semicircle. The seating arrangement also separated the alternating generational moieties of the Pokot, the leopards (*Ngetei*) and the stones (*Ngimur*), who occupied the opposite halves of the semi-circle (Bollig 2000, 346; Peristiany 1951a, 191). The *kirket* assembly visualized the deeply patriarchal nature of the Pokot gerontocracy because women, children and young men yet to be initiated into adulthood through *sapana* were strictly excluded. If they wished to attend, they had to stay a considerable distance from the sacred ground (Peristiany 1951a, 191). Theoretically, the most senior elder in this gathering was expected to assume superior privilege and *ad hoc* leadership. In reality, however, this man only enjoyed a temporary status of *primus*

*inter pares*. He was often superseded by a talented junior coeval. (Pkiror O.I, 17<sup>th</sup> May 2020).



**Figure 4:** Diagram of a *kirket*. The names ‘*Ngimur*’ and ‘*Ngetei*’ are the two generational moieties. The names in upper case are Kalenjin age-sets while those in lower case are Karimojong-derived *sapana* sets. Adopted and modified from Bollig (2000, 358).

When all participants had taken their position, an ox that had been selected beforehand was brought into the semi-circle. The owner or person who donated this gift for sacrifice to God was expected to kill the beast by spearing. This man moved to the right-hand side of the oxen, and with a single and swift strike of the spear aimed at the chest just behind the shoulder bone, he gave it a fatal blow. The

gathering cheered as the beast tottered in pain and eventually fell to the ground. The elders turned the animal so that it died facing Mtelo, the sacred peak, on the Sekerr ranges. A senior elder then moved forward and made a cavity on the left side of the stomach of the dead ox to facilitate the removal of entrails, which were carefully extracted and placed on the leaves of *sitet*. Having completed his task this elder went back to his position in the *kirket* (Peristiany 1951a, 193)

It was then time for the diviner (*pkwanian*) to inspect the entrails for omens. The *pkwanian* lifted the intestines and laid them over the stomach of the animal. He proceeded to inspect the intestines of the sacrificial animal. Abnormal features on the surface and the inside of the intestines such as tumours and ulcers were interpreted as ominous events that lurked around the country; drought, diseases, famine, or enemy raiders. On the other hand, healthy intestines, full of digested matter and with red blood capillaries augured good fortune for the community. Only if the signs of the stomach were favourable was the worship allowed to go on. Otherwise, another animal, and another, had to be hurriedly procured until favourable signs were detected by the *pkwanian*. The Pokot believed that the intestines of the sacrificial animal possessed an active force, and by his prophetic power, the *Pkwanian* could direct its course. If the signs from the stomach were favourable, then the diviner rose, faced the elders, and reported that ‘the stomach of the animal is good and the country is safe; diseases, enemy warriors, drought and famine all have been driven away’ (Peristiany 1951a, 196). He then proceeded to take his position in the *kirket*.

Meanwhile, blood from internal bleeding caused by the spear wound was collecting inside the void left after the removal of the intestines. A senior elder rose, moved to

the centre of the semi-circle and addressed the gathering. This elder led the gathering in drinking blood that had collected inside the carcass. He stooped facing the gathering and took a mouthful of the sacrificial liquid and proceeded to his seat. This procedure was followed by the other congregants in the order of seniority. Whatever blood was left behind was collected in half calabashes and wooden troughs. It was mixed with sour milk to make a concoction that was used later in the ceremony (Peristiany 1951a, 193, 194).

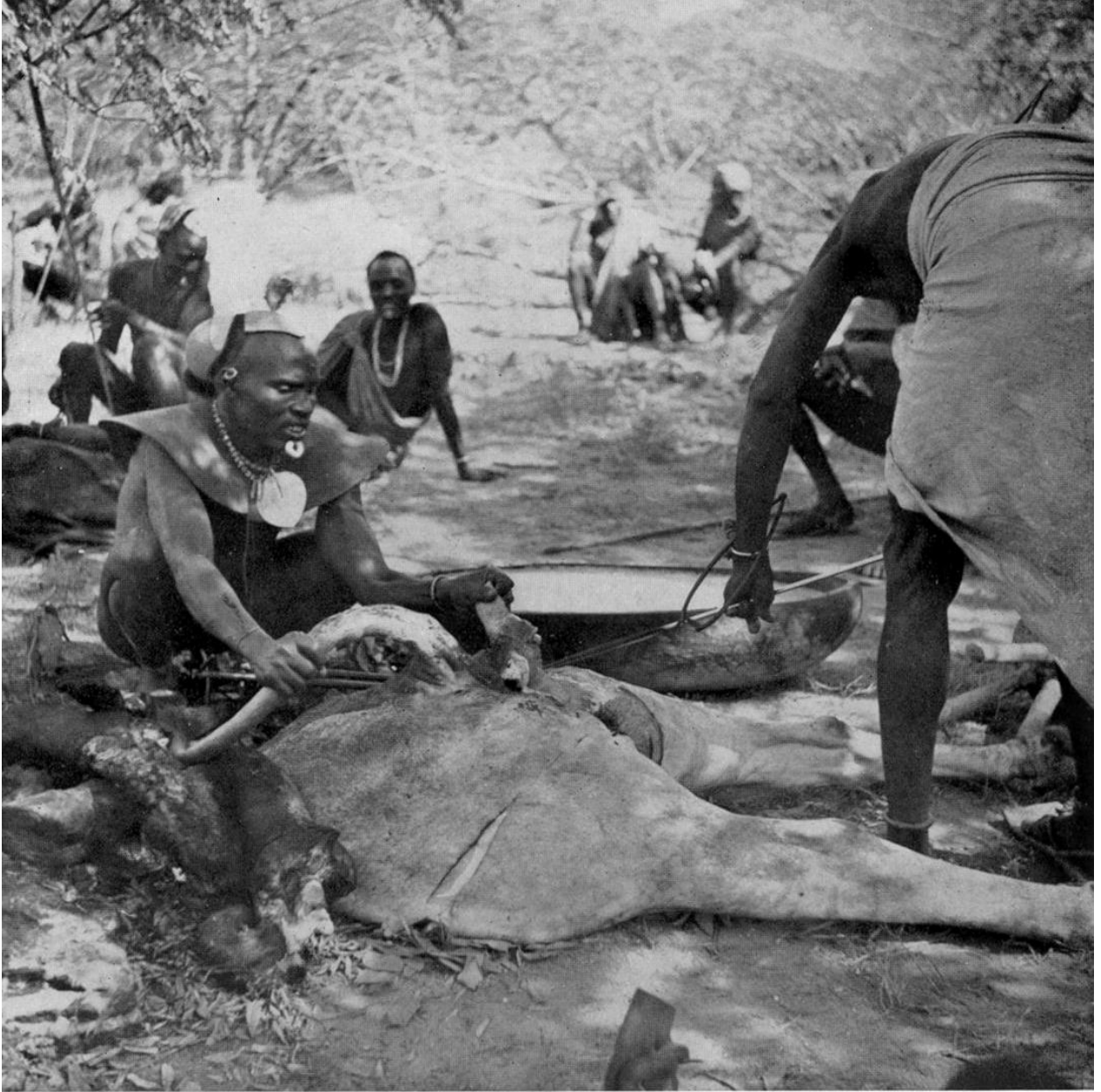
The next procedure was the dismembering of the carcass. This process was customarily done by a member of the most senior *sapana* set. Using his spear, the elder, divided the carcass without removing the skin. First, all hind legs were removed, without being separated, then followed by the front legs, while the body was still intact. These legs were placed at the centre (*kwen*) of the *kirket*, in a ritually special way, such that the hooves faced the elders. The rest of the animal was cut into large pieces that were placed together with the legs for the elders to distribute for roasting, according to custom. Part of the meat, the head and intestines, was given to the section of the community excluded from the event; women, children and the uninitiated. The meat was distributed by age group. The senior age group was given the best and most tender parts of the animal. The only pieces of the ox that remained inside the *kirket* were the stomach and the hind legs which were still connected (Peristiany 1951a, 196).

The next procedure was the opening of the rumen for cleansing of members. An elder of the most senior age set slit the rumen open for extraction of chyme. He took some of it and smeared the sacred tree (under which the elders sat), and then smeared

his upper body, especially the chest and the shoulders, before inviting others to do the same. The congregants in the order of seniority, starting with the elders smeared their bodies and went back to their positions. With the permission of elders, the other members excluded from the *kirket* were allowed to enter the semi-circle for this ritual of ablution. After this, a senior elder who served as the apportioner stepped forward into the *kirket* to distribute meat. Assisted by leaders of each age set, they distributed pieces of roasted meat to the members of their age set. They placed a morsel on the leaves in front of each congregant; when every member had been served, the *pkwanian* was invited to address the gathering and assure them of the safety of the meat. He rose and informed the gathering that they were free to eat and drink because the stomach of the animal was good (O.I, Kamket, 2020).

After the gathering had finished eating, a ritual elder renowned for his oratorical skills stood up to offer prayers. This elder was known as the blesser (*kosoyonin*). Moving gracefully and dramatically from his seat, he paced inside the *kirket* in slow and rhythmic steps chanting prayers. Holding his flywhisk aloft, and in a deep elocutionary voice, he beseeched God for blessings amid a chorus of approval from the crowd, for each sentence he uttered. Spontaneous and dramatic, he prayed for goodness affirming the spiritual harmony of the land. Turning his direction dramatically and with a noticeable change in his voice to surly and deep-throated, he exorcised all evil. By the dismissive gesture of the flywhisk held by his right hand, he motioned to all bad things; evil, curses, raids, drought, famine and bad eyes to go far away from the country (Beech 1911, 24; Dundas 1910, 61; Peristiany 1951a, 190).

This prayer had no fixed text that was memorized. It was extemporaneously devised. Issues were crystallized at the moment of this performative event. The celebrant's emphasis was on the now, the visible worship event unfolding before him and the gathering. This creative style often varied from one *kirket* to another. However, its common feature was a stylistic structure comprising verbal constructions on the principle of repetition, since the chorus from the crowd echoed the last verb and affirmed the command of the *kosoyonin* (Beech 1911, 24). The deep religious attention and concentration that was given to these prayers, which juxtaposed sweetly spoken benediction and the gruffly uttered malediction that the *kirket* affirmed forced the curses, wishes, and hopes of the Pokot to be effective in their own right. The multitude of people 'concentrating and straining their will towards a common end' created 'spiritual harmony in the country, thereby dismissing every evil that threatened it' (Peristiany 1951a, 196).



**Figure 5:** The ritual of separating the hind thighs of the sacrificial ox (*akidungamuro*). Image was taken from Peristiany (1951b, 287).

This prayer was then followed by the ritual of separating the hind thighs of the ox (*akidung amuro*). By custom, it was the role of the eldest congregant to separate the right thigh (*amuro*) from the left thigh (*apsikit*). This elder used his spear to separate the two legs, which were then roasted on the fire for a short moment before being

brought back to the *kirket*. The elder then took the right thigh, which was of ritual importance, extracted a piece of meat from it for eating and passed it to the other elders in order of seniority. Each one used their spear blades to remove a small portion of meat from the thigh taking great care not to tamper with the gland (*ang'ore*). The remaining part of the thigh was given to the eldest member of the *kirket* to take home. The same procedure was repeated for the left leg, *apsikit*, but this time the meat was shared with the junior generational set because it was viewed to be of less ritual significance.<sup>9</sup> After this ritual, the members of the *kirket* consumed the remaining part of the animal accompanied by drinks of sour milk, blood, and honey beer (Brown 2015, 4).

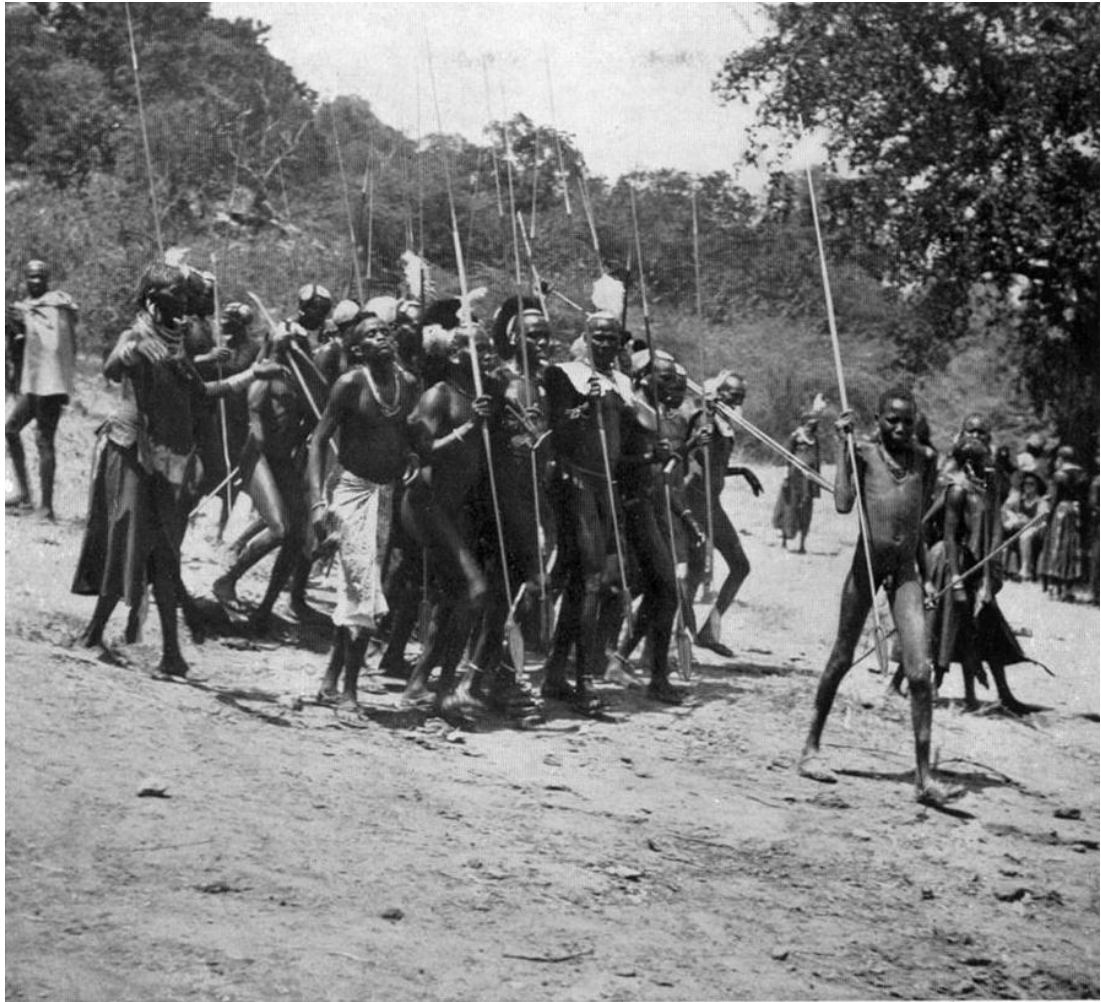
By the time all this was over it was evening. Different age sets then competed in songs and dances to celebrate the occasion. Different *sapana* sets formed solid patterns for the dance. Arranged in full war formation they advanced toward the *kirket* with songs and dances. After a few steps, they stopped, bellowed the battle cry and then moved forward aggressively until they were inside the *kirket*, pointing their spears towards the seated elders. With slow rhythmic steps, they moved backward trampling the ground until they were out of the *kirket*. One dancer occasionally advanced in front of the patterns. Stooped with widely outstretched hands, seized a handful of soil and dramatically threw it into the air. This was the imitation of an elephant. This move was repeated, again and again, with another dancer imitating a giraffe, a lion, or his favourite steer. The excitement had by now reached fever pitch.

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<sup>9</sup> It was noted by some of my oral informants and scholars, for example, (Brown 2015) that in other ceremonies, especially *sapana*, the separation of the thighs (*akidung amuro*) was done the next day after the sacrifice. Others, though, said that it was done as the last ritual on the same day. Whatever the case, the ritual remained the same. The right leg (*amuro*) was accorded special ritual importance compared to the left leg (*apsikit*).

The elders sitting around the *kirket* watched sedately as they enjoyed their beer. This was the climax of the day after which the congregants were allowed to disperse at their own pleasure (Bollig 2000, 358; Peristiany 1951a, 196).

Depending on the reason for holding a *kirket*, there were minor differences in the liturgy of this worship. However, the general outline of the *kirket* remained the same. It was a religious assembly centred on the sacrifice to God of a male animal. Aside from its spiritual value, the *kirket* supplied the Pokot with a renewed sense of *esprit de corps* that made the community into a religious fraternity. The integrative effect, the sense of communion, and belonging to the Pokot nation, and particular age set 'was accentuated by the emotional and physical impact of group dancing as each age-set rhythmically moved together in tight phalanx, miming and singing' (Bollig 2000, 358).



**Figure 6:** *Amurmur* dancers advancing toward the kraal of the initiate before a *sapana kirket*. Picture taken from Peristiany (1951a, 203).

### **3.6.2 The fusion of the Ateker concept of *akiriket* with Kalenjin religious ideas**

The Pokot adopted the *akiriket* as an Ateker religious concept at the crossroads of the Pokot-Karimojong religious worlds during the nineteenth century. From this border zone, it moved eastward through the agency of the fluid pastoral Pokot to encompass the entire Pokot society including those of Baringo. To this end, *kirket* had incorporated into itself certain Kalenjin religious features that rendered it acceptable, thereby transcending its Ateker origins. Human beings ordinarily interpret new

religious forms in the light of their previous cultural framework. The incorporation of exogenous cultural material must initially occur according to existing religious concepts (Fraser 2013, 88; Hasselgrave and Rommen 1992, 1). Therefore, the adoption of *kirket* was not only because of the proximity of the Karimojong and Pokot cultures but also, due to the intelligibility of certain concepts of Ateker religion within the existing Kalenjin spiritual framework. During this historic cultural contact, the Pokot identified and constructed isomorphism between the Karimojong and Pokot religious worldviews. The religious concepts embodied within the *akiriket* had equivalents existing in the Pokot religious thought system with which the incorporation of Ateker values could occur. These similar concepts thus acted as devices for interpretation and evaluation of the ideas that the religion of the Karimojong offered. In addition, they also served as cultural portals through which the new symbols could be received. The difficult question is which indigenous Kalenjin spiritual concepts were generally similar to Karimojong *akiriket* worship such that the Pokot could meaningfully compare and integrate the two. These concepts were the ritual ordering of age groups (*pin*) and the concept of a Supreme Being (*Asis*).

As noted, before, the Pokot acquisition of pastoralism was in tandem with the adoption of Ateker culture, especially *asapana* initiation and age-set organization. Over time they blended this Karimojong age organization set-up and generational moieties with the Kalenjin generation sets (*pin*) into a complex but coherent system (Bollig 2000, 343). It is this incorporation of their former age-group organization – which was very central in their previous Kalenjin spiritual organization at the

*kapkoros* - into the worship of *kirket* that gave the new concept inner meaning and shape as it entered a new cultural and political landscape. In Kalenjin culture, the senior age groups ordinarily formed the grade of ritual elders. Even in the new system of worship, the senior age sets sat at the centre of the *kirket*, symbolically the centre of religious power, which was believed to be very close to God (Bollig 2000, 344; Peristiany 1951a, 190).

These senior men were believed to be strongly related to God from whom their power was believed to originate. The elders understood the wishes of this deity and gained favours on behalf of the masses. Just as in the previous Kalenjin set-up men of the ritual age grade among the Ateker were also regarded as the repositories of tribal morality. The pronouncements of elders had a sacrosanct quality. Speaking ex-cathedra, senior elders had the power to pronounce supernatural sanctions relative to any situation that was inimical to public order. Just like in the period before the Pokot adoption of pastoralism, men of the junior age groups had the duty to listen to and execute the orders given by their seniors. For example, they fetched firewood, tended to the fire and roasted the meat of the sacrificed animal under the supervision of an elder (Peristiany 1951a, 190). By the close of the nineteenth century, sections of the Pokot bordering the Karimojong (Kasauria and Kacheripko) had abandoned Kalenjin circumcision, leaving the Ateker derived *asapana* age-groups to take sole responsibility in the organization of the *kirket* almost as if no transformation had occurred (Barton 1921, 83). However, by this time the Kalenjin age-set system had already accomplished its mission. Their initial participation in the organization of the

*kirket* had carried the Pokot religious establishment to fit into the Karimojong religious structure without causing conflicts between and among the age groups.

If the assimilation of Kalenjin age groups in the *kirket* made sense to the Pokot, as they transformed their worship, the existence of the concept of the Supreme Being in their pre-pastoral religious culture was even more crucial. Their indigenous concept of God enabled them to contextualize the Karimojong idea of God (*Akuju*), as it existed within the structure of the *kirket* worship. This allowed the Pokot to smooth over the differences between the Kalenjin concept of God (*Asis*) and the Ateker concept of *Akuju*, through the agentic process of recognition and assimilation. Among the Karimojong, *akiriket* was a ceremony to dedicate the sacrifice of a male castrated animal to *Akuju*. At the moment of prayer, the ritual elders directed the wishes, fears, and hopes of the community to this sky God (Knighton 1999, 78; Okello 2019, 203). However, as the pastoral Pokot adopted the worship of *kirket* from the Karimojong, they interpreted this new worship in light of their past. They uprooted their indigenous concept of God (*Asis*) from the *kapkoros* and used it as the schema with which to assimilate the Ateker idea of God (*Akuju*), thus enabling the Pokot to make the worship of *kirket* not only acceptable but credible. This, however, was not a direct replacement of religious symbols, because the Kalenjin concept of *Asis* did not replace the Ateker idea of God, *Akuju*.

The picture that can be formed of the transformation of the Pokot idea of God, as hazed over by the mist of time, is that, during the gradual transformation of Pokot religion, the concept of the Supreme Being morphed to the extent that it had acquired the attributes of God of the two entangled cultures. Apart from retaining the Kalenjin

characteristics of *Asis* (the most significant being the witness, or the eye of God), the Pokot idea of God also acquired Ateker attributes of *Akuju*, which means the sky or up. The Pokot gradually came to know *Asis* as the ‘the above’ (*toror*) or just ‘the sky’ (*yim*). This was rendered in the Kalenjin version *Tororot*. The appellative *Tororot*, in some books *Tororut*, is derived from the root word *toror*, which means ‘high or far above’ (Visser 1989, 93) By the close of the nineteenth century, the pastoral Pokot referred to the religious idea of God as *Tororot*, while the agro-pastoral hill Pokot employed both the names, *Asis* or *Tororot*, to refer to the idea of God. The concept of God as *Tororot* in ‘the Kalenjin cluster’ Visser observes, ‘is found only among the Pokot’ (Visser 1989, 93). It represents the gradual evolution or Atekerization of the religion of the Pokot during the nineteenth century. The outcome of this evolution was that the concept of the sky or ‘*Tororot* replaced the metaphor of relating God with the sun’, particularly among the pastoral group (Ehret 1972).

This was the picture that colonial anthropologists encountered at the beginning of the twentieth century when the Pokot religion, especially the concept of God was in flux. Endowed with plurality and subtly shifting meanings and characteristics, this idea of God was evidently a moving target for anthropologists writing in the ‘ethnographic present’ to have a clear snapshot. The problem was further compounded by the fact that like other Africans, the Pokot did not have a written theology. Unperturbed by these red flags, anthropologists proceeded to inaccurately label the Pokot as polytheists, only disagreeing on the exact number of ‘gods.’ The creation of the imaginary Pokot pantheon began with Beech (1911, 19), who set in train a series of

arresting yet inaccurate categorizations of Pokot ‘gods,’ as elaborated in the writings of Barton (1921, 89) and Peristiany (1975, 171). Taking a cue from these early writers, scholars from religious studies including Matwetwe (2017, 67), Ngeiywo (2018, 74), and Sanders (2001, 150), adopted this erroneous description of Pokot religion without question and indeed shared in elaborating on it.

The Pokot were never going to get a fair hearing due to the nature of the writings of colonial anthropologists, Beech, for example, writes that ‘there is nothing delightfully vague than the religious idea of the Suk, like the Athenians of the bible they worship an unknown god, and possibly, it remains for an intelligent and broad-minded missionary to declare him to them’ (1911, 19). Writing in the same frame of mind, Barton reports that ‘the Suk are said to believe in unknown God; that there is a belief seems certain, but it baffles description not only to the European but also amongst themselves’ (Barton 1921, 89). Such comments should not be viewed as neutral and disinterested. They indicate that anthropologists were part of the systematic process by which Europeans imagined and invented the African continent and Africans for purposes of colonization (Mudimbe 1985, 151, Mazrui 2005, 69). For example, the Pokot are presented as being without a systematized religious thought, hence backwards and the ‘broad-minded missionary’ as monotheistic and thus ‘civilized.’

The crux of the argument of these writers is that the Pokot venerated several Gods, *Tororot*, *Asis* and *Ilat*. Barton adds the moon (*arawa*) to the ‘pantheon’ (1921, 89). This study did not find any indication that the moon played any role as a supernatural being among the Pokot. The role of *Ilat* as the agent of *Asis*, however, has been

discussed in chapter two. This part thus aims to shed light on the historical context of the relationship between the names *Asis* and *Tororot*. The central thrust of my argument is to debunk the thesis advanced primarily in anthropology and religious studies that the theonyms *Tororot* and *Asis* existed in a state of separation. As names of God, they reflected aspects of the godhead and represented the climax of the religious fusion of Ateker and Kalenjin characteristics of the deity. To understand the emergence of these names, we have to bear in mind that the cosmology of the Pokot was not static as anthropologists and religious scholars portray it; rather, it was dynamic with a long history of assimilations and syntheses. The existence of the two names to refer to the religious idea of God reflected the dynamism inherent in the religion of the Pokot.

To peddle the doctrine of the dualism of the Pokot concept of God is to grossly oversimplify the complex religious thought of the Pokot. *Asis* and *Tororot* were names used to refer to the transcendental concept of the Supreme Being. However, as religious ideas, they did not exist in the form of unsynthesized duality. The name *Asis* was the pristine proto-Kalenjin name for God when they acquired this concept from Cushites. The proto-Kalenjin generally, and proto-Pokot specifically conceived this deity as the spirit of the bright sky whose only symbol was the sun (*asis*) (Gimode 2003, 170). In turn, the sun in its bright and incandescent shining was the only form under which this God was conceived. The name of the luminary, *asis*, was therefore also used to refer to the concept of God, and the sun was believed to be the eye of this mysterious deity (Kipkorir 1976, 176). During the nineteenth century when the Pokot came under the increased influence of the Karimojong, *Asis* acquired

other names and attributes that not only underscored the position of this Godhead in relation to the mortals on earth, but also the nature of the transformation of the concept of God. The Pokot gradually began to refer to God as ‘the one high above’ or just ‘the sky’ like the Karimojong referent *Akuju*, hence the Pokot appellation *Tororot*. As the religious ideas of the Ateker, especially the *kirket*, took hold among the Pokot, they increasingly styled their culture and worship in the shape of the Karimojong. The outcome of this is that the concept of the deity as *Asis* gradually went out of favour, especially among the pastoral group, but not entirely erased (Visser 1989, 93). The hill Pokot used both the Kalenjin version of *Asis* and the Karimojong idea of *Tororot* to refer to the concept of God. However, the word choice depended on the needs of the petitioner (Peristiany 1975, 171; Visser 1989, 92).

A closer examination of the prayers offered, especially by the hill section of the Pokot shows that the names *Tororot* and *Asis* referred to the same supernatural being, the deity. For the Pokot, both the natural phenomena of the sun (*asis*) and the sky (*yim*) signified the existence of a high God. However, when the Pokot employed any of these names in prayers, the chosen theonym was meant to emphasize the specific attribute of God that was required by the supplicant. Whenever the Pokot referred to the Godhead as *Asis* in prayers, for example, they were emphasizing the role of God as ‘*kong po yim*’ or the ‘eye of above,’ the all-seeing witness (Peristiany 1975, 175). It was ‘mainly in this capacity,’ Peristiany observes, ‘that *Asis* was invoked’ when their stock was stolen or lost. The Pokot would pray; ‘*Asis*, you saw our cattle being stolen. You see everything. The ‘Eye of Above’ punish the thief,

make him return our cattle' (Peristiany 1975, 175). Barton (1921, 89), also, observes that on being reprimanded for misplacing a gun by a European 'a Suk youth lifted his hands in a supplicatory fashion to the sky' requesting God in the capacity of the all-seeing '*Asis*' to give him 'some little thought.' This was also the same reason that the hill Pokot appealed to God in the capacity of *Asis*, the all-seeing witness, during the swearing of *muma*. This deity then as the 'witness' or 'the eye of above,' would punish the undetected miscreant. The Pokot also beseeched the same God in the capacity of *Tororot*. When appealed to in prayers the name *Tororot* emphasized the aspects of God 'that listens' and 'hears' (Peristiany 1975, 175; Visser 1989, 93; Bianco 1996, 28; Sander 2001, 156). What this means in short is that, among the Pokot the Supreme Being was a solitary spirit, and the various names under which this God was known were nothing more than different aspects, that revealed the nature or facets of the character of the Supreme Being.

### **3.6.3 The Pokot Adoption of the Ateker Religious Compass**

By the time the proto-Pokot settled on the Cherang'any and Sekerr ranges, they had developed a religion centred on the veneration of a sun-symbolized God called *Asis*. The term *asis* was also used to refer to the sun. The proto-Kalenjin took the sun as the obvious celestial object with which 'to identify and personify the idea of God' (Fish and Fish 1995, 9). The sun and its incandescent blinding rays and great immensity invited the Pokot to gaze at it both with their eyes and imagination and saw it as the eye of the mysterious sky-centred God, hence the reference *kong' po Asis* (Peristiany 1975, 170).

The sun (*asis*) came to be closely associated with God (*Asis*) and was considered to be the visible emblem of the transcendental idea of God. The rising of the sun early in the morning was considered the presence of a benevolent benefactor. The eastern direction assumed sacred importance associated with the coming of the protector and saviour, literally the direction of the eye of God or *kong'asis*. The religious weight that the proto-Kalenjin accorded the eastern direction meant that during 'the disposal of a dead body in the bush it could be carried to any direction except the east since it was the direction of health, life and prosperity (Orchardson 1961, 140). The east, therefore, came to play an important role in Kalenjin 'lives and ceremonies associated with the spirit world and also those rites connected with birth, marriage, death and even minor ordinary activities such as the slaughter of an animal for food' (Orchardson 1961, 141). Prayers at the *kapkoros* and other *ad hoc* prayers that family heads uttered were conducted early in the morning facing the rising sun, *asis*.

In contrast, the west was conceived as the antithesis of the eastern direction. This was the direction of the decline of the life-giving rays of the sun, the disappearance of the earthly symbol and witness of God. The Kalenjin associated the west with decline and death (Fish and Fish 1995,10). It became an established tradition that the spirits of evil people, problems, and diseases were imprecated and wished a speedy demise in the western direction. However, as the Pokot established cultural contacts with the Ateker, in the nineteenth century, they adopted Karimojong culture. The capstone of these Pokot-Karimojong interactions, in religious matters, as established above, was the acquisition of the Ateker concept of the *akiriket*. The adoption of *akiriket* style of worship, in particular, led to the gradual reorientation of the Pokot

religious compass. Among the Karamojong, *akiriket* was the style of worship in which adult males, initiated through *asapana*, sat in a semi-circular arrangement (*akiriket*) that opened toward Apule. Apule is the supposed point of dispersion of the Karimojong people on the Karamoja plateau in northern Uganda, before they spread to their present areas of habitation, in the process concretizing into the present sections of the Karimojong; the Bokora of Napak District, Matheniko of Moroto District, and Pian of Nakapiripirit District. To the Karimojong, therefore, Apule was considered to be their sacred cradle land (Czuba 2011, 7; Okello 2019, 213).

What appears clear is that the Pokot acquisition of pastoralism was contemporaneous with intense cultural contact with the Karimojong. They interacted with the latter's culture and in due course adopted the religious and political culture of their formidable neighbour. They adopted the Karimojong idea of equating God with the sky, (*Tororot*) and slowly began to erase the concept of associating God with the sun (*Asis*) (Visser 1989, 93). In this period of rapid ethnogenesis, the Pokot gradually lost their pre-pastoral Kalenjin direction of sacred value. Like the Karimojong, the point of origin as they entered the pursuit of pastoralism assumed an unparalleled religious significance. It became, Peristiany says, their 'Mount Olympus' (Peristiany 1951, 193). The eastern direction that formerly played a key role during prayers at the *kapkoros* lost its spiritual value. In the *kirket* worship, the Pokot formed a semi-circle opening towards Mtelo, the highest peak of the Sekerr ranges. The Sekerr massif is the cradle of the Kasauria, the first Pokot group to adopt pastoralism (Bollig 2000, 359). To use the analogy of Islam, the Sekerr ranges became the Mecca of the Pokot and Mtelo peak the Kaaba, the Qibla, the exact point of direction for

prayer. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Pokot had crossed the threshold of ethnogenesis. They now considered themselves religiously speaking not as an agro-pastoral Kalenjin community, but a fully-fledged pastoral group of Kasauria origin from Mount Sekerr, whose highest peak, Mtelo, became the revered point of religious ‘rituals related to prayers, circumcision and burial rites’ (Dundas 1921, 94, 98).

### **3.7 The Kalenjin Adoption of the Institution of the Talai Prophets**

Researchers into pre-colonial African history indicate that the institution of diviners and prophets is old in the religion of African people (Anderson 1991). The Kalenjin like other Africans also believed in ritual experts known for divination and prophecy. Inferences into the culture of the Kalenjin groups generally indicate that this institution was ancient, and might have existed before the differentiation and concretization of the different Kalenjin septs. This observation is supported by the occurrence of the same name or its cognate to refer to these ritual experts among the widely distributed Kalenjin groups of East Africa. Among the Nandi, Kipsigis, Terik and Keiyo they were known as *orkoik* (*orkoiyot*, sing), among the Kalenjin of Mount Elgon (Sebei and Sabaot) they were known as *workoiik* (*workoyindet*, sing) in Marakwet and Tugen they were known as the *orkoik* (*orkoy*, sing) and among the Pokot they were called *werkoy* (*werkoyon*, sing) (Weatherby 1962, 178; Mwanzi 1977, 127, Bollig 2000, 350).

In each of these Kalenjin groups, this ‘indigenous’ institution of prophecy was the preserve of specific clans. For instance, among the Kipsigis, prophecy and divination were the work of the Kipkendek clan while in Nandi it was the preserve of the

Kamwaike and Kapchemuri clans (Huntingford 1953, 38; Mwanzi 1977, 127). Among the Pokot and probably for most of the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley, prophetic power was the preserve of the Soti clan (Peristiany 1975, 206). These ‘indigenous’ ritual experts mostly specialized in one mystical faculty, for example, prophecy, divination, pharmacology, tossing sandals or preventing witchcraft (Peristiany 1975, 204). During the nineteenth century, however, these indigenous prophets were superseded by an immigrant group of powerful ritual experts of Maasai extraction. Around the middle of the nineteenth century, the Maasai, a group that had formerly controlled the plains of western Kenya disintegrated because of internecine civil wars. As a consequence of that, Maasai ritual experts (*oloibon*) sought refuge among the neighbouring Kalenjin groups, including the Kalenjin of Mount Elgon (Weatherby 1962, 207), the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley, and the Nandi. Sections of those refugees of the prophetic clan that were assimilated among the Nandi, moved and settled among the Terik<sup>10</sup> at the close of the nineteenth century (Biegon 2017, 3) while others still went to the Kipsigis (Mwanzi 1977, 127).

The story of the settlement of the Talai clan among the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley is recounted in their clan praise songs (*kililyet/salan*). Their clan tradition tells the movement of the group from the Uasin-Gishu plateau via the Cherangany ranges. Escaping the Maasai civil strife on the Uasin-Gishu plateau, the Talai ascended the Cherangany ranges before dispersing at Kiptaber hill following the infamous rock fall.<sup>11</sup> The waves generated by this dispersal found refuge among the Marakwet,

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<sup>10</sup> Among the Terik clan of the Talai ritual experts was known as the Kapchepsaus,

<sup>11</sup> The story of the rock fall at Kiptaber is recounted in the oral history of the Talai clans in Marakwet (see Kipkorir 1964, 7), Tugen (O.I Ringoi 2020) and Pokot (see Bollig 1990). The story also explains

Sengwer, Pokot, Keiyo, and Tugen (Kipkorir 1964, 6). Even in their new settlements, there was further dispersion of the Talai, most likely because of succession disputes and prophetic rivalry. Such rivalries, very common among progenies of famous prophets in most pastoral communities in East Africa, frequently led to the migration of unsuccessful candidates and their families to try their luck elsewhere (Lamphear 1992, 30; Mwanzi 1977, 31).

The institution of Talai prophets embodies the wave of religious ideas that were exported to the Kalenjin by the refugees of the Maasai civil wars of the nineteenth century (Anderson 1995, 165). Soon after their integration into the Kalenjin society, the Talai began to distinguish themselves from a host of other ritual experts that had previously been the feature of the religious structure of the Kalenjin. With time the Talai established a powerful institution of prophecy that was revered by the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley because of their mystical powers. Unlike the previous ritual experts, the Talai had mystical powers over a wide range of faculties. They were prophets, diviners, healers, medicine men, seers, sorcerers, and witches all rolled into one. It was because of their ability to harm people that they lived apart from the rest of society; only being conducted when need arose (Bianco 1996).

By the second half of the nineteenth century, Talai prophets had established their influence in the religious structure of the Kalenjin groups in the Complex. However, their religious power and level of organization were more pronounced and conspicuous among the Pokot, probably because of their pastoral economy. Among

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why the Talai of the Kerio-Valley changed their clan totem from the lion (*ng'etundo*) to the white-necked pied crow (*chepkrak*). The Talai prophetic groups among Nandi, Kipsigis, and Terik have the lion as their totem.

the Pokot, the Talai prophets exerted a powerful influence over the age-graded military system of the then-evolving pastoral society compared to the other communities. For that reason, I will use the Pokot as a case in point to demonstrate how the Kalenjin adopted the institution of Talai prophets from the Maasai and grafted it into their religious structure. Among the Pokot, the Talai clan of prophets was indigenized as the Cheposait (also known as Kasait) clan whose totem is the white-necked pied crow (*chepkrak*). The Cheposait clan settled among the Pokot around the middle of the nineteenth century. Their clan praise song (*kililyet*) recounts the rock fall at Kiptaber. From here they moved and first settled among the hill Pokot. Some of them were absorbed among the agro-pastoral (hill) Pokot while many of them joined the evolving pastoral society on the plains (Bollig 2002). As the Cheposait prophets settled in Pokot, the Pokot as agents used their past cultural ideas to interpret the Talai ritual institution. The Pokot constructed homologies that enabled them to receive the Cheposait and their prophetic institution into the indigenous portal of *werkoy*, which, as we have seen, existed among the Kalenjin. It was this familiarity that enabled the Talai to recast their role with ease in the Pokot religious landscape (Bollig 2002).

By all indications, the institution of Talai *werkoy* seems to have been established first among the agro-pastoral hill Pokot before they moved to the pastoral Pokot on the plains. I make this conclusion because during the early days of pastoral expansion, the pastoral Pokot relied on the Soti (*Cheptumegha*) prophets for divination and prophecy (Peristiany 1975, 169). However, in the ensuing decades, probably because of their mystical power the Talai *werkoy* soon overshadowed the *Cheptumegha* ritual

experts and took over the control of prophecy and divination. Similar to the establishment of the office of prophets among the other pastoral communities of East Africa, a period of escalation of conflict with neighbouring communities or deadly drought and famine provided powerful stimuli for the integration of the new institution into the Pokot religious landscape (Ngeny 1970, 106).

Facilitating their burgeoning reputation as magical people and underpinning the ascendancy of the new religious institution was the *werkoy's* control over livestock activities (among the pastoral section) and the time for plating (among the agricultural hill Pokot). The *werkoy* used their divination abilities to determine the right moment for the opening of a new initiation period, planting of crops, war or raid against their neighbours, the movement of herds for grazing to dry season camps, and to tell the position of game for hunting during drought. The *werkoy* also decided the right moment for raids and provided charms, to the leader of the mission, to weaken the enemy. When warriors planned for a raid, the commander of the warrior age-grade (*nyakan*) accompanied by a few warriors visited the kraal of the *werkoy* for prophetic advice. They went with gifts of stock and stayed there overnight. The following morning after his sleep, the *werkoy* determined whether it was propitious for the raid. If the decision was in the affirmative, he provided them with instructions on which routes to follow, and how to conduct themselves during the mission. He also provided them with charms to weaken the enemy (Barton 1921, 90; Bollig 1990, 78). If a *werkoy's* divination was successful, they were visited by communities from far and wide. And because of this control over the very essence of the life for the Pokot, the Talai *werkoy* soon created a reputation that quickly

extended throughout the country, such that by the turn of the nineteenth century, a strong monolithic and hierarchical system began to take shape as age-set regiments and local councils (*kokwo*) mustered around powerful centralizing figures of *werkoy* (Peristiany 1975, 179).

The Pokot believed that all male members of the Cheposait clan acquired the faculty of divination and prophecy by inheritance. In theory, this meant that by presumption all male members of the Cheposait lineage were *werkoy*. However, in practice, only a few actualized this role. Therefore, the institution of *werkoy* was a public office with no automatic legitimacy for any one of the contenders of the Cheposait clan (Peristiany 1975, 179). This ambiguity often sparked muted and sometimes open rivalries as progenies of famous *werkoy*, brothers (and half-brothers) contended for the esteemed ritual position. However, in most instances, the sons of powerful *werkoyon* succeeded their parents. The rise of a *werkoyon* to prominence owed much to their charm and charisma. In turn, this was supported by the fulfilment of their prophecies in guiding raids, ‘weakening’ the enemy and the efficacy of their pharmacology (Peristiany 1975, 179). Such powerful *werkoyon* soon established a big audience and their corral (*manyatta*) soon became a hub of military planning. This audience, however, fizzled as soon as their prophecies and pharmacology proved ineffective (O.I, Kasait 2020).

Among the Pokot, unlike their cousins Nandi and the Kipsigis, there was no *werkoyon* whose influence embraced the whole community. In the latter groups of the Kalenjin, the Talai *orkoik* had established a centralized authority over the community with help of an efficient administrative system of subordinates;

provincial leaders (*maotik*) parish leaders (*mestowek*), and village leaders (*alamalyet*) (Mwanzi 1977, 139; Ngeny 1970, 107). Among the Pokot, only the territorial section served as the area of influence of a *werkoyon*. However, it was not uncommon for people to travel long distances from other Pokot sections to visit the kraal of a famous *werkoyon* of another section for divination or medicine (O.I, Kasait, 2020).

To understand how the Pokot aligned the new institution of *werkoy* to their cosmology one has to understand the process of prophetic divination. As the Cheposait prophet recast their role in new religious terrain, their functions were received in the indigenous religious portal of *werkoy*. However, their role was amplified to transcend the boundaries of the former *werkoy*. The Pokot appropriated this Maasai institution of the *werkoy* and positioned it between the transcendent *Tororot* and the ordinary mortals. The *werkoy* thus made the transcendent God (*Tororot*) and *Ilat* immanent by serving as emissaries. They received communication directly from *Tororot* and *Ilat* in their dreams and communicated to the people in the mundane Pokot tongue (Bianco 1996, 28; Peristiany 1975, 202). The *werkoy*, therefore, held ‘a unique position in the Pokot society because they could participate in all the worlds of the Pokot, the world of Gods, the world of personal spirits and the world of man and nature’ (Sander 2001, 180).

In their sleep, the *werkoy* left their bodies for celestial adventures. During these adventures, they encountered cryptic signs provided by *Tororot* or *Ilat*. They also travelled through time and space (into the past and the future). This enabled them to see the plans of enemies and environmental conditions beyond the specific time in

which they lived (O.I, Kasait 2020). At the end of the reverie, the *werkoyon* decoded the cryptic messages from *Tororot* and *Ilat* and revealed what they conveyed to the Pokot. Because of the *werkoy*'s mystical ability to understand the will of *Tororot* and *Ilat*, they soon joined the Toyoi ritual elders as the preferred human emissaries of the *Ilat*. Before the assimilation of the Talai prophets, the worship of *Ilat* was controlled by the Toyoi rainmaking clan. For that reason, only the ritual elders of the Toyoi were allowed to say prayers to this deity. However, with the settlement of the Talai in Pokot, they established a powerful ritual institution that was believed to have direct contact with the supernatural world. The holders of this institution could communicate directly with *Tororot* and *Ilat*. They encountered the will of divinities during their reveries and communicated that to the people. Because of this capacity to participate in the worlds of the living and the supernatural, the Talai *werkoy* soon joined the Toyoi elders as the culturally accepted emissaries of *Ilat*. By 1900, the Talai had superseded Toyoi elders as the caretakers of the cult of *Ilat*. Throughout the twentieth century, whenever appeasement had to be made to *Ilat* in areas where the members of the Talai clan dominated, they were the ones who presided over the worship. This scenario was also witnessed among the Marakwet of Embobut, Sambirir, Kapyego, and Endo as well as the Sengwer of Kapcherop and Lelan (O.I, Butagong, 2020).

### **3.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the evolution of the religious thought of the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley during the nineteenth century. It has demonstrated that the ethnogenesis of the ancestors of the Kalenjin (Southern Nilotes) was

contemporaneous with Cushitic cultural contact. From this contact, the ancestors of the Kalenjin adopted the worship of a Supreme Being encapsulated in the sun called *Asis*. They carried this culture with them and purveyed it to the indigenous communities of the region when they settled in the highlands of western Kenya. Beginning in the late seventeenth century, the ancestors of the Kalenjin started to settle on the hills and escarpments of the Kerio-Valley. They settled alongside the indigenous communities of this Complex and gradually absorbed them linguistically. These indigenous people had a religion centred on the belief in a water spirit called *Ilat*. Therefore, in the process of the assimilation of these autochthonous groups, the ancestors of the Kalenjin adopted the worship of *Ilat* from them and fused it with the Kalenjin worship of *Asis*. The outcome of this religious engineering was the emergence of a complex religion; the double worship of both *Asis* and *Ilat*, in which *Asis* was made the ultimate object of veneration (Supreme Being) and *Ilat* the ubiquitous servant of God. This was the state of religious affairs for all the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley by the time the Pokot took to pastoralism around the mid of the nineteenth century.

The acquisition of pastoralism by the Pokot brought them into contact with Ateker and Maasaian cultures. From these contacts, the Pokot adopted Eastern Nilotic religious values which they combined with their previous Kalenjin religious ideas to formulate a syncretic religion. The Key religious ideas that the Pokot adopted from the Ateker (especially the Karimojong) were *asapana* initiation, the worship style of *kirket*, and the Ateker religious compass. From the interactions with the Maasai came the institution of the great prophets of God (*werkoy nyopo Tororot*). This was the

result of the absorption of the Talai clan from the Uasin-Gishu Maasai. The Pokot assimilated these religious values into their previous religion which was centred on the sun God (*Asis*) and the water spirit (*Ilal*). In this process of religious engineering, the Kalenjin concept of God (*Asis*) was interpreted in the light of the Karimojong concept of God (*Akuju*). The outcome of this is that the Kalenjin concept of God (*Asis*) evolved to assume the attributes of *Akuju*, meaning the high above. The Pokot perception of God as the high above (*Akuju*) was Kalenjinized as *Tororot*. This comes from the root word *toror* meaning the sky. During the gradual Atekerization (evolution) of the concept of God from *Asis* to *Tororot*, the Pokot discarded the metaphor of relating God with the sun. The outcome of these changes is that the direction of the rising and setting of the sun lost its former Kalenjin sacred meaning. The Pokot were forced to adopt the Ateker religious compass. Just like the Karimojong, the point of origin of the Pokot as they became pastoralists - Sekerr ranges - acquired a sacred meaning. It became the cardinal point for the direction of prayers, literally the Mecca.

This chapter was guided by the theory of agency. Accordingly, I have placed the Kalenjin at the forefront of the transformation of their religion as human agents. During moments of cultural contact and interactions, the Kalenjin lived in a temporal structured universe; having a past, present and future. The Kalenjin thus carried the religious culture from the past as embodied in their customs to interpret foreign cultures they encountered in the Kerio-Valley. The Kalenjin used their religion to ascribe meaning to religion of the indigenous people and projected hypothetical pathways forward in time, as they attempted to obviate the challenges presented by

foreign religious cultures. During this agentic intervention the Kalenjin expanded and shifted the meaning and reference that was previously applied to *Ilat* by indigenous people. And then fused this idea of *Ilat* with their own religion centred on the worship of *Asis* to formulate hybridity.

This chapter has also shown how the Pokot as historical agents transformed this hybrid religion even further when they became pure pastoralists. As they became pastoralists, the Pokot gradually discarded their previous Kalenjin religious concept of *kapkoros* and substituted it with the Ateker concept of *kirket*. *Kirket* worship led to the gradual transformation (*Atekerization*) of the Kalenjin idea of the Supreme Being *Asis* to the Ateker concept of *Tororot*, such that by the close of the nineteenth century, the concept of God was endowed with the Kalenjin characteristics of God (the sun) and the Ateker attribute (the sky). More importantly, the Pokot also adopted the Maasai institution of the prophet (*werkoy*). In the new religion, the Pokot viewed the *werkoy* as the intermediaries between human beings and supernatural beings, *Ilat* and *Tororot*. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Talai *werkoy* gradually replaced the Toyoi ritual elders as the caretakers of the cult of *Ilat*. They took charge of the worship of *Ilat* in most areas among the Pokot. This was the state of the religion of the Kalenjin in the Kerio-Valley in the late nineteenth century just before the advent of British colonialism and Christian missionization, which is the concern of the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: THE CONTACT AND CONFRONTATION BETWEEN WESTERN CHRISTIANITY AND KALENJIN CULTURE IN THE KERIO- VALLEY, 1913 TO 1945**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter examines the advent of Christianity in the Kerio-Valley. It begins by giving a brief historical background of the missionary groups which proselytized the Kerio-Valley - the MHM, AIM and BCMS. It then explores the methods employed by these missionary groups to capture the attention of the Kalenjin for purposes of evangelization. It then examines the flipside of this epic encounter, the reaction of the Kalenjin to the Christian cultural invasion. This chapter depicts that the adoption of Christianity by the Kalenjin was not smooth and effortless as it has been depicted elsewhere. It was a fierce confrontation of religious cultures.

This chapter uses the theory of agency as the conceptual tool to explain the cultural interface between the Kalenjin religion and western Christianity. It supposes that the contact between Kalenjin religious culture and Christianity was situated at the iterative and projective dimension of agency. When presented with the challenge of Christianity, the Kalenjin as human agents did not adopt it wholesale without questioning. They critically analyzed the features of the new religion within the ongoing process of interactions and interpreted it in light of their old Kalenjin cultural schema. Immersed in the flow of time the Kalenjin moved beyond their present interactions into the past as they attempted to make meaning of the new culture. They attempted to use their cultural past to make meaning of the new religious culture. This phase of agency manifested itself in the form of a fiery

cultural clash between Christianity and African culture as the Kalenjin negotiated a new religious identity determined by themselves in the going process of interactions.

#### **4.2 The Background to Missionary Activities**

Western Christianity, as we know it in Kenya today, was a product of Euro-American missionary enterprise that started during the nineteenth century. The expansion of Christianity to Africa was a product of a revived commitment by Christians of continental Europe, the British Isle, and America, which was stirred by the exploratory excursions of Dr David Livingstone into the interior of Central Africa in the late nineteenth century. The tales of Livingstone's travels painted a grim picture of endemic poverty among Africans caused by the Arab-Swahili slave raids. Livingstone thus recommended three Cs, Christianity, Commerce, and Civilization as a nostrum for these ills (Oliver 1952).

The Livingstonian fantasies about the regenerative potential of the three Cs immediately struck a responsive code in the Christian community in Britain, which led to the formation of missionary orders for East and Central Africa. The first to arrive was the Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA). It was closely followed by the White Fathers, Holy Ghost Fathers, Church Missionary Society, and the German Lutherans. In East Africa, except for the Buganda Kingdom, which the White Fathers had reached by 1870, all these missionary groups were based along the East African coast, where they operated Freed Slave Centres (Oliver 1952). However, the completion of the Uganda railway line in 1901 solved the logistical nightmare of travelling across the semi-arid thorn brush Nyika plateau behind the coastline. Within a few months of its completion, the railway line provoked a hurly-

burly race among mission groups into the 'unoccupied hinterland' (Spencer 1975, 10). In the first decade of twentieth, a host of missionary groups had established stations in the central and western parts of Kenya (Gachihi 2015, 25).

From the outset of colonial rule, and throughout the colonial period, the courses of Christian mission and that of European colonial expansion not only paralleled each other but also intersected at various points, as each group tried to exploit the other to their advantage. The colonial government regarded missionaries as integral to the process of 'opening up' the dark continent, while missionaries on their part saw nothing wrong in taking advantage of British economic expansion to 'expand the kingdom of God' (Spencer 1975, 10). Therefore, from the outset of the British colonial annexation of Kenya, missionaries became, by default, the main cultural face of the new order. By doing so, they became the primary agents for the advancement of European cultural hegemony in the guise of the 'civilizing mission.' This cohabitation between faith and flag left a very thin line between the primary agenda of missionization - proselytization - and the advocacy of western values. By enjoining themselves in the colonial endeavour, missionaries 'precipitated a co-existence that laid bare the paradoxes and at times the contradictions, between the advocacy of the gospel and the ethos of colonial rule' (Gachihi 2015, 46). Missionaries, Aseka states, 'were used as pawns in the imperialist chess game' as instruments of alienating Africans from their culture 'all in the name of civilization' (1989, 145).

Within the first two decades of the twentieth century, western, and central Kenya were inundated with a bewildering array of missionary groups, including the Church

Missionary Society (CSM), Presbyterian Church of Scotland Mission (CSM), United Methodist Church (UMC), the Evangelische Lutherische mission Gesellschaft zu Leipzig (Lutherans), Holy Ghost Fathers (HGF), Mill Hill Mission (MHM), Missioni Consolata, Friends African Industrial Mission (FAIM), Seventh Day Adventist (SDA), African Inland Mission (AIM), Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC), and a handful of other obscure almost personal protestant missionary groups (Spencer 1975, 10). As the number of missionary groups increased, the fear of pre-emption by rivals became a potent impetus for expansion. Such anxieties gave rise to a chaotic mission scramble analogous in the atmosphere of urgency and panic to the colonial scramble, as each missionary society struggled to secure an adequate recruiting base for its future church (Oliver 1952, 58; Spencer 1975, 10).

Well aware of the bitter conflict that led to a war between Catholics and Protestants in Buganda, in 1892, the British colonial government intervened. Thus between 1907 and 1909, there were a series of meetings among the representatives of mission groups and the government, which culminated in the demarcation of spheres of influence. According to this agreement, every mission was given its area of operation. The meetings also agreed that a 'rival' mission was not supposed to establish a station 'within ten miles' or 'three hours walking distance' from an established mission (Gimode 2003, 130; Gratton 1974, 40). This mission expansion through spheres of influence policy determined the areas of various missionary expressions of Christianity. It was according to this agreement that the majority of the Kalenjin came under the influence of the AIM. In the 1930s the Catholic ended the AIM monopoly by establishing stations among the Kalenjin. In the next section I

want to sketch a historical background of these three missionary groups for a better understanding of their theological predisposition.

#### **4.2.1 The African Inland Mission (AIM)**

The AIM was a Euro-American interdenominational evangelical protestant movement established in 1895 through the efforts of Peter Cameron Scott (1867-1896). Scott was born in Glasgow to a devout Presbyterian family in 1867. However, the same year the family migrated to Philadelphia in the USA. At the age of 20, his health broke down. His doctor advised him to change climates for him to have a quick recovery. For this reason, Scott relocated to Scotland. While in Glasgow, Scott visited his sister's grave, and as he stood by the grave he thought of his death. The possibility of death terrified him to the extent that he knelt and prayed by his sister's grave. He promised God that if he spares him, he will dedicate his life to Christ. Within a few months, his health improved and he returned to the USA. This experience drove him to a deeper commitment to God (Mumo 1997).

Scott developed an interest for missionary work. Therefore, in 1891 in the company of his brother, he went for missionary work in Central Africa under the auspices of the Christian Missionary Alliance (CMA). However, his stay in the Congo was not long, because within a few months his brother died of fever and his health also deteriorated. This forced him to return to the USA with very little achievement to show (Sandgren 1976, 47). On his way home, Scott went via England. While in London, he visited the grave of the great missionary, David Livingstone at Westminster Abbey. At Livingstone's grave, Scott prayed and dedicated himself anew to missionary activity for Africa. He saw a vision of a chain of missionary

stations stretching from the East African Coast to Lake Chad in the interior of Africa (Sandgren 1976, 47).

On his return to the USA, Scott sold this missionary idea to Presbyterians. But they rebuffed him. Therefore, he resorted to establish his missionary society; the Philadelphia Missionary Council (hereinafter PMC) in 1895. PMC was the mother council of AIM. PMC accepted missionaries from all denominations provided that they agreed to its fundamentalist ideals. Despite the hard economic times under which PMC was established, its members were determined to kick-start missionary work. They established a philosophy that they would depend on God only for the supply of all their needs, no appeals were to be made for money and no debts were to be incurred by the mission. This philosophy would later become the undoing of AIM in the field. It was outcompeted by other better-funded missionary groups, especially in the provision of education (Gration 1974).

The pioneer AIM missionaries sailed to East Africa in 1895 from Philadelphia, via New York and Scotland. They included Peter Scott and his sister Margaret Scott, Willis R. Hotchkiss, Miss Minnie Lindberg, Miss Bertha Reckling, Fred W. Kriegler, Lester Severn, and McClellan Wilson. They landed in Zanzibar in October 1895 and proceeded to Mombasa before beginning the journey to the interior. The compelling vision of AIM was to bypass the coastal strip which was occupied by the CMS and the German Lutherans to venture into the interior, hence the name 'Inland.' After a trek of 250 miles, the missionaries settled in Nzau (Nzawi) among the Akamba, where they established their first station. From here they created other stations including Sakai (1896), Kilungu (1896), and Kangundo (1896) (Mumo 1997, 53).

In the same year (1896), Scott succumbed to blackwater fever, which had racked his body for several months and was buried at Nzau. His death left AIM without leadership. Within a year of his death, the whole group was scattered. Most of them returned to the USA, while a few took up positions in the nascent British colonial administration. All AIM stations closed shop except Kangundo where W.R Hotchkiss remained active. Hotchkiss also left the field for home, but later returned to Kenya with the Quakers (FAIM). In 1901 PMC commissioned Charles Hurlbut to take over the leadership of the AIM mission field in East Africa. Hurlbut and his team travelled by the newly completed Uganda railway to Athi-River, from where they connected to Kangundo by foot. Within a short period, Hurlbut and his retinue breathed new life into the defunct stations in Ukambani. However, because of the distance between Kangundo and the Railroad, Hurlbut was forced to look for a new site for the headquarters of AIM. Therefore, in 1903 Kijabe, 70 kilometers northwest of Kangundo, was selected as the new headquarters because of its proximity to the railway line (Mumo 1997, 53).

From Kijabe, AIM expanded into central and western Kenya opening new stations among the Agikuyu of Murang'a, Maasai, Luo, Samburu, and Kalenjin. These new stations include Rimuruti in Laikipia in 1907, Kinyona in 1907, Mbooni in 1908, Nyakach in Kisumu in 1908, Mukaa in Machakos in 1909, Eldama Ravine in 1909, Kapropita in Baringo in 1913, Githumu in Murang'a in 1914, Mulango in Kitui in 1915, Chebisaas in Nandi in 1917, Syapei in Narok in 1917, Kabartonjo in Baringo 1926, Eldoret in Uasin-Gishu in 1930, Kericho in 1931, Kapsowar in Marakwet in 1933, Ogada in Kisumu in 1934, Nginyang' in Baringo 1935, Kessup in Keiyo 1937,

and Kalokol in Turkana 1962 (Omulokoli 1995, 46; Mumo 1997, 53). It was from Kabartonjo, Kapsowar, Nginyang, and Kessup that AIM attempted to missionize the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley.

#### **4.2.2 The Mill Hill Mission**

Different from the protestant AIM which approached the Kerio-Valley from Mombasa, Catholicism came to the Kerio-Valley from Uganda through the efforts of MHM. Unlike the haphazard expansion of the sundry protestant missions in Kenya, Catholic expansion in East Africa was an organized and regulated venture. The creation of new congregations and recruitment of missionaries was approved and superintended by the Vatican (Oliver 1952, 180). The earliest Catholic orders to work in East Africa were the Holy Ghost fathers, at Bagamoyo along the Coast of present-day Tanzania, and the White Fathers in Buganda. These two orders were heavily linked with French colonial interests in East Africa. The Vatican, therefore, decided to create room for a British Catholic order in East Africa, which led to the birth of MHM (Spencer 1975, 37).

The St. Joseph's Society of Mill Hill Mission (MHM) was established in 1866 at St Joseph's College in Mill Hill, a suburb in North London. It was founded by Father, later Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, Herbert Alfred Vaughan (1832-1903). Vaughan was not able find enough Catholic missionary volunteers from England, which forced him to recruit seminarians from Holland. Because of this strategy, the MHM clergy was dominated by Dutch priests, especially in western Kenya (Ogotu 1981). In 1895, the old Nyanza Vicariate that previously included the whole interlacustrine region was divided into two. The French White fathers retained the

region to the west of Kampala, and retained the old name, Nyanza Vicariate. The newcomers, MHM, were given the region to the east of Kampala as the Upper Nile Vicariate. This included western Kenya, eastern Uganda, and southern Sudan (Spencer 1975, 37; Oliver 1952, 182).

M.H.M started activities in East Africa in 1895 under the leadership of Father Henry Manlon. It established its first mission station at Nsambya Hill in Kampala in September 1895. From here MHM expanded eastwards into western Kenya, then known as Kavirondo (Burgman 1990, 56). By 1901 a Ganda catechist, Paulo Kiwalo, was preaching in Kisumu to Goans and Baganda working for the Uganda railway. However, it was not until 1904 that a formal station was established in Kisumu by father Leo Van Bergh. From this toehold, MHM penetrated the hinterland establishing stations at Mumias by Father Van de Kallen in 1904, Mukumu in Kakamega by father Gorgonius Brandsma in 1906, Ojola in 1906, Nakuru by father Luke Plunket in 1908, Nyabururu in Kisii by a Ganda catechist (Michael Butiko) in 1911, Asumbi in South Nyanza in 1913, Aluor in Siaya in 1913, Eregi in Kakamega in 1913, Eldoret by Father Hartman in 1926, Nangina in 1927, Kibabii in 1938, and Chepterit in 1938 (Burgman 1990, 64). It was from the Eldoret station that Catholicism entered the Kerio-Valley. MHM started by sending catechists to preach at the Government African Schools (GAS) Tambach and Kapenguria in the early 1930s before establishing bush schools in Muskut, Kapteren, Kamariny, Elgeyo-Sawmill, and Koptega in Keiyo. In Marakwet the MHM established outposts in Sambirir, Nerkwo, Sangrur, Chebororwa, and Tot (KNA, DC/ELGM/1/2/1, 1932). They also established bush schools at Kituro in Baringo, and Tartar in Mnagei

among the Pokot (KNA, DC/WPKT/1/3/, 1933). These stations became the primary sources of Catholicism in the Complex.

#### **4.2.3 The Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society (BCMS)**

The Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society (BCMS) was missionary group affiliated to the Anglican Church. It was established on 27<sup>th</sup> October 1922 as a result of divisions within the CMS. The schism was brought about by the alleged development of theological liberalism within the CMS. BCMS was formed by the conservative wing of evangelical missionaries who wished to continue working under the original austere theological principals of CMS. Under the leadership of Daniel Bartlett, the BCMS's objective was to open missionaries in areas that had not been penetrated by CMS. The BCMS started its activities in East Africa in 1928 through the efforts of Alfred Barclay Buxton. In 1928 A.B Buxton felt that he was through with missionary work in the Congo, and wished to evangelize the nomadic tribes of the Horn of Africa. Buxton visualized a chain of mission stations across Kenya, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Uganda. To achieve his vision, Buxton approached the BCMS who also wanted to establish mission stations in East Africa. Their interests converged, and thus in 1928 the BCMS established their first mission at Lotome, followed by another one in Marsabit among the Borana. It is from the Lotome station in Karamoja, Uganda, that the BCMS crossed the border to Pokot (Sander 2001).

In 1928 the BCMS requested the DC of West Pokot for permission to establish a mission station in the district. Fortunately, their request coincided with the colonial government's plan to relocate the DCs *boma* from Kongelai-Kacheliba to Kapenguria. The BCMS agreed to purchase the old administration camp. For a price

of 400 sterling pounds, a mission station was acquired. BCMS, however, did not take immediate residence at the mission until 1933 (KNA, DC/WPKT/1/3/AR 1933). In 1935, however, the station was moved from Kongelai-Kacheliba to Nasokol 5 kilometers from the district headquarters in Kapenguria. It was from the Nasokol station that BCMS attempted to missionize the Pokot (KNA, DC/WPKT/1/3/ 1935).

#### **4.3 Christian Missionaries Attitudes Towards Kalenjin Culture.**

The missionaries who came to the Kerio-Valley in the twentieth century had the objective of spreading Christianity. Living in mud grass thatched hovels thousands of miles away from their homes and relatives required a high degree of altruism, self-sacrifice, and commitment. Some of the pioneer missionaries, for example, Cameron Scott paid the ultimate price after succumbing to tropical diseases. The correspondences of pioneer missionaries with their relatives, and their home councils, indeed, are effusive with tales of their courageous initiatives of reclaiming ‘thousands of square miles that belong to the rightful lord of the earth’ (Letter from Dalziel, 8/04/1931, AIM Archives). Their desire to spread the gospel, however, was smudged by ethnocentrism and racist attitudes (Gration 1974, 88).

The missionaries who came to the Complex differed in philosophical and doctrinal dispositions because they belonged to different Christian groups, and from a motley host of nationalities including Americans, Australians, Boers, Englishmen, Dutch, and Scottish men among others. These varied streams of Christianities conflued in the mission field to form a solid phalanx against Kalenjin culture. They viewed Kalenjin culture as ‘dark paganism’ that was to be cleared at all costs. Kalenjin culture was described under disparaging rubrics of ‘heathen,’ ‘degraded,’ ‘satanic’

and 'evil (Letter from Dalziel, 09/06/1928, AIM Archives). To be fair, the Catholics preached against African culture, but they were not pushed by the same enthusiasm that characterised the evangelicals - AIM and the BCMS. For this reason, Kalenjin culture was not vigorously erased in Catholic missionized areas (Elolia 1992, 280).

By adopting this behaviour, the missionaries demonstrated clearly that they were children of their times who thought that it was the duty of the European to raise the Kalenjin from 'darkness' (Letter from Dalziel, 08/04/1931, AIM Archives). This attitude common to the Western missionary of this period reflects both his ethnocentricity and the feeling of racial superiority. For most of the missionary period the Whiteman's image 'suffused with moral earnestness and self-righteousness' summed up the missionary aspect of 'trusteeship' and 'civilizing' mission. In the footsteps of David Livingstone, missionaries embarked on an evangelistic trail with the firm conviction that the 'dark sons of ham' could only be 'won for Christ' once they were redeemed from their 'animist' culture (Kipkorir 2009, 19). In this conviction, the Livingstonian three Cs Christianity, Commerce, and Civilization became the prime focus of the missionaries - the inseparable allies that were wholly good for the Africans. By 'civilizing' Africans, it meant the total erasure of all traces of African culture to create a clean board on the African mind on which to write a new western Christian story. Terms like 'retrogression', 'darkness' and 'degraded' were used to affirm stereotypical images of 'ingrate Africans' obstinately stuck to their 'depraved' culture and unable to appreciate the virtues of a benevolent missionary (Kibor 1992, 52). So condescending was the attitude of missionaries that a pioneer AIM missionary, Allen, speaking of Africans concluded;

‘of course, we are in Africa, we must not expect much from these dark sons of Ham’ (Hearing and doing, III, 1898). It was a common assumption, among some missionaries, that an African was unable to reason or work independently without Caucasian patronage. The African ‘was so stupid and indescribably lazy’ that if he had to ‘set to work, no matter what task is, he must be watched or he will go to sleep or pick jiggers out of his foot’ (Hearing and Doing 1900).

To achieve the agenda of ‘civilization,’ the missionary introduced a version of Christianity that was laced with a very heavy European accent. The latter was not the essence of the Christian gospel. It was ‘an inherited cultural baggage’ that accompanied missionaries from overseas. The consequence of this is that the Kalenjin were forced to adopt western mannerisms for them to become good Christians. To be Christian sound and staunch was to be Victorian pure and proud. In fact, throughout the missionary period, more than any moral commitment, Christianity was measured only by the extent to which Africans had discarded ‘their atrocious tribal customs’ (Ashton 1935, 19)

In adopting this condemnatory attitude towards African culture, missionaries behaved like the Judaizers, of the apostolic age, towards their African neophytes. Instead of accepting them as they were in their cultural contexts, missionaries attempted to shape the Kalenjin after their image. Prospective converts were forced to abandon their indigenous way of life and religion for Christianity, with its western trimmings lock, stock, and barrel. Converts were supposed to go through a period of catechism, during which they were forced to discard ‘pagan’ practices. They were then given new ‘Christian’ names, a new and mysterious God, a new form of

worship, and to crown it all, a new western lifestyle (Kibor 1992, 52, Kipkorir 2009, 19).

In their overzealous attempts to strip the Kalenjin of their culture, missionaries ended up in many respects adopting an attitude that was at variance with the biblical ideal of missionization, which is rooted in the injunction ‘to go and make disciples of all nations’ (Mathew 28: 19-20). The kerygmatic approach to missionization as encapsulated in the epistles of St. Paul is to bring all nations to Christendom, both Jews and Gentiles in their cultural milieus. Contrary to the teaching of the apostles of the Jerusalem church led by St Peter, who believed that the Hebraic world was the territorial and cultural limit of God’s salvific promise, St. Paul’s mission among the Greeks in Asia Minor unequivocally stressed the need for radical cultural pluralism, which emphasized the idea of God’s incarnation in all cultures (Brandon 1972, 73).

In the Gentile mission, St. Paul transcended the narrow Judaic cultural arrogance thus enabling the apostolic mission to breach the Jewish cultural barrier. The Pauline Gentile breakthrough affirmed the cultural pluralist impetus of the gospel by casting a shadow over the claims of God’s cultural favoritism. From the Gentile experience, Christianity encountered the unsettling reality of the seriousness of God’s irrevocable desire to draw all nations and cultures to the sacred. This recognition shattered the brick wall of cultural exclusiveness embodied in the thinking of the Jerusalem church, and let loose the waters of the Christian dam to flow (Brandon 1972, 74).

The stream that flowed from the primitive oriental Christian dam then divided into different brooks. As the waters increased in volume, the courses through which it ran became numerous, and the waters took the varied colours from the cultural soils it traversed, from that of the Greeks, the Romans, and the Barbarians in all their shades including and the Franks, Goths, Visigoths, Slavs and a host of other Teutonic Nordic tribes (Lotourette 1970, 45). In this historic growth of the church in Europe, Christianity was conveyed across multiple cultural systems and languages without these cultures hardening into exclusive pillars of religious truth. Therefore, for western missionaries to come to the Kerio-Valley and hold that their particular expression of Christianity was unique and final, and consequently could not be modified within the context of culture, was one of the most subtle forms of idolatry (Kraemer 1938, 317).

Once in Africa, missionaries from a continent that had significantly altered the face of primitive oriental Christianity proved to be very intolerant of Kalenjin culture. This was paradoxical for a people whose indigenous culture had been warmly embraced by Christianity. The abandoning of the Jewish Sabbath for Sunday, the wedding in white with a veil and the ring, funeral rites, Halloween, Easter eggs, Hot cross buns, and Christmas festivities with its major symbols, the decorated tree and the stocking are some of the cultural artefacts and accoutrements reflecting Christianity's compromises with indigenous European cultures (Mtuze 1999, 24). But how often were these pagan symbols points of contention during the missionization of Kerio-Valley? Therefore, the denial of Kalenjin culture and

religion the right to participate in Christianity reflected the racist interests of missionaries.

For missionaries the western cultural ideas they held were not seen as part of their cultural heritage separate from Christianity. They saw them as unequivocal moral standards to which they sought to elevate the ‘degraded’ Kalenjin (Young 1944, 38). However, the ideal is that their mission, like that of St. Paul, was supposed to be a cross-cultural communication of the message enshrined in the Bible. Their ultimate objective was to present the supra-cultural message of the gospel in terms that were relevant to the cultural schema of the Kalenjin. They were supposed to discard their self-arrogated belief in western culture as the universal and integral component of the Christian message. They were supposed to unscramble the truth of the gospel from the western cultural yoke and firmly anchor it on the structure of the Kalenjin culture and religion. For this to happen it was supposed to involve a deliberate adaptation of the gospel to the religious givens of the Kalenjin. Kalenjin culture just like that of the Gentiles in the Bible had God’s redemptive purpose and it was to be viewed as authentic in respect of its ability to convey the gospel to the people. Yet, it was this pluralism that missionaries found difficult to accept (Kipkorir 2009, 19).

#### **4.4 Methods Used by Missionaries to Proselytize the Kalenjin**

The missionary groups which came to the Kerio-Valley in the twentieth century employed a variety of methods to capture the attention of the Kalenjin. These methods included the translation of the Bible, the provision of formal education and medical services, and the construction of Christian villages. I attempt to examine how these methods were employed in detail.

#### 4.4.1 The Translation of the Bible

Christianity is believed to be a religion of a ‘transcendent divine will that is mediated by a channel of cultural and linguistic variety’ (Sanneh 1989, 23). Christian missionaries of all ages have always found it necessary to translate the Bible for them to communicate the Christian message across multiple cultural and linguistic varieties. The missionaries’ central focus in Bible translation has always been to render the Christian message in culturally and linguistically relevant terms (Waruta 1975). This was also the challenge that confronted the missionaries who came to the Kerio-Valley in the twentieth century. They realized that to communicate the message encapsulated in the Bible to the Kalenjin, they had to reduce it to the local idioms.

What is puzzling is that missionaries never attempted to translate the gospel into any of the Kalenjin dialects spoken in the Kerio-Valley. Having accessed the Complex from Nandi, the AIM and MHM missionaries used the Nandi Bible (*bokut ne tilil*) to evangelize the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley (Kipkorir 2009, 16). In this religious misadventure, missionaries amplified the colonial synecdoche in which Nandi signified Kalenjin and expanded it to the cultural sphere. It was not until the 1950s that ‘missionaries realized that although speaking one language, the Kalenjin communities had quite distinct dialects and minor cultural differences’ (Kipkorir 2009, 16). The methodology of using one dialect to reach out to members of other dialects of the same language umbrella was not unique to the AIM missionaries. It was also witnessed in the policy adopted by missionaries working among the Abaluyia. FAIM, for example, used the Lulogoli bible to proselytize the other

Abaluyia groups within its sphere of influence – the Tiriki, Idakho, Isukha, Bukusu, and Tachoni - while the Kisa, Khayo, Bukusu south, and Marama under the sphere of CMS had to learn the bible in Luwanga dialect (Gimode 2003, 241).

The translation of the Bible from English to the Nandi dialect was not a united scheme by all missionary groups. The Catholics and the protestant AIM conducted independent translations. The translation process itself was a piecemeal and slow exercise, which began with specific gospels, then the entire New Testament, and ultimately the whole Bible. The translation of the bible by AIM began in 1925 through the efforts of Frances Georges, E. McCreary, A.M Anderson, Signe Kirsten, and Marie Hansen assisted by Nandi converts. In 1926 the epistle of Mark was rendered in Nandi, Romans in 1929, and Mathew in 1931. The entire New Testament consisting of books previously translated was published by Stuart M. Bryson with the assistance of a Nandi convert, Samuel Giminyigei in 1932. The entire Bible came out in 1938 (Waruta 1975, 50).

The ultimate goal of the missionaries in the translation of the Bible among the Kalenjin was to render the supra-cultural message of the Bible in culturally relevant terms. In this endeavour, missionaries faced the frontier-crossing challenge of rendering Biblical concepts, spiritual beings, and Jewish cultural artefacts and metaphors in terms that could be intelligible to the Kalenjin without distorting the biblical message. This could only be possible if there was a deliberate attempt on the part of the missionary to adapt the Christian message to the cultural givens of the Kalenjin. This needed some degree of decentralization in which the missionary was supposed to shift the ground of biblical comprehension to the Kalenjin language and

culture, by taking advantage of the common points of religious reference to initiate dialogue. Such familiarity then would enable the Kalenjin to wrestle with the meaning of biblical concepts in his cultural schema.

The preoccupation of the missionary translator was to side-step Kalenjin religious concepts, practices, and rituals that could have served as entry points to the Kalenjin culture, simply because they considered them to be either 'satanic' or 'heathen.' The missionaries believed that such concepts would evoke ideas which they wished to erase. Sanders writing about missionary activities in Pokot with the advantage of hindsight believes that by doing so, missionaries lost the golden opportunity to initiate a friendly dialogue with the Kalenjin culture. He believes that the Christian missionary should have used the Kalenjin concepts of God (*Asis/Tororot*), the prophet (*werkoy*), the concept of sin/impurity (*ng'ogi*), and animal sacrifices to make the gospel in tune with the Kalenjin cosmology (2001, 141).

For the concept of God, missionaries elided the Kalenjin idea of the Supreme Being, *Asis* or *Tororot*. The AIM used the Jewish name Yahweh, which was rendered in Kiswahili as *Jeoba*. The Catholics adopted *Kiptaiyat*, a Nandi word designating the commander of warriors in battle. By sidestepping the indigenous idea of God, 'missionaries lost the opportunity to make Christianity in tune with Kalenjin thought' (Kipkorir 2009, 19). The Kalenjin had an elaborate idea of a Supreme Being that should have provided missionaries with an entry point for introducing the Christian concept of God to them. The alien concept of *Jeoba* and *Kiptaiyat* was a radical departure from what the Kalenjin understood as God. Yet even if *Kiptaiyat* or *Jeoba* was to be accepted as the Supreme Being, could the ubiquitous vicegerent of *Asis* –

*Ilat* - be dispensed abruptly without affecting cosmic harmony? This improvisation by the missionary translator was incongruent with the Kalenjin worldview. The Kalenjin cosmology like that of the other Africans was inseparably connected to their culture into a unified *weltanschauung* in which God was made immanent through natural phenomenon, *orkoy*, and *Ilat* (Chebet and Dietz 2000, 100, Kipkorir 2008, 25).

In the concept of *Jeoba* and *Kiptaiyat* the Kalenjin found a meaningless god. The name *Jeoba* was revolutionary and strange. *Kiptaiyat* was a Kalenjin word, but in the alien language games of Bible translation, it was incomprehensible as a religious concept. The new concepts of *Kiptaiyat* and *Jeoba* thus signified abstract and foreign ideas to the Kalenjin, far away from their villages as the homeland of the missionaries. In his mysterious abode, heaven, this newly invented god was sterilized from all contact with humanity through the culturally recognizable intermediaries – *orkoy* and *Ilat*. For this reason, throughout the missionary period, it was his counterpoise, the devil (*chesawiloi*), who was more active and known by the Kalenjin than this mysterious god. To the devil was attributed the activity of the whole corpus of their culture, their 'atrocious tribal customs and religious rituals' were considered to be the work of his machinations. It was he also, who made it difficult to discipline and convert people. He was responsible for all the crises that occurred in the nascent church (Ashton 1935, 19). The principal target of the Christian missionaries thus was 'to drive away the looming darkness brought about by the devil whose ways and schemes' were 'believed to be rooted in the African traditions' (Elolia 1992, 258).

For the other revolutionary ideas in the translated Bible, missionaries coined new and mysterious words. For example, the concept of the Holy Spirit was adopted by the AIM missionaries as the flickering light (*tamirmir*). The Catholics translated it as the shadow (*antondooy*). Accordingly, for the translated Bible, the Holy Spirit was the flickering light or the Holy shadow! To render the revolutionary idea of wine used in the Holy Communion, missionaries adopted the Kiswahili word *divai*, which was rendered as *dibaik* in Kalenjin. This was done deliberately because missionaries had singled out beer drinking as a ‘pagan’ practice. Therefore, they wanted to disassociate the gospel from the local brew (*maiyo/komen*). To communicate the biblical concept of heaven, the translators came up with the concept of the shining place up there or *barak kipsengwet*. *Sengwet* is the shining quartzite marble stones strewn on hillsides (Kipkorir 2009, 16). This misapplication of Kalenjin concepts and invented ideas, Kipkorir says, made the new religion ‘mysterious and further served to mystify the new faith’ (Kipkorir 2009, 16).

The other significant issue which affected the missionary translation of the Bible was the language barrier. Neither the missionary nor the native assistants were proficient in each other’s language. For that reason, they could not achieve a thorough and accurate translation, which could meet the ‘poetry to poetry, sentence to sentence, and concept to concept’ of the biblical message (Nida 1964, 157). Theirs was a translation based on word for word. Bearing in mind the morphological and syntactical differences between the two languages, the chasm between the original and the translated version can only be imagined. It was for this reason, perhaps, that the Kalenjin Bible has severally undergone revision (Waruta 1975, 50).

#### 4.4.2 The Establishment of Christian Villages

One of the most significant features of the Christian missionization of the Kerio-Valley, especially for the protestant groups, AIM and BCMS, was the establishment of Christian villages. Christian villages were situated at the mission stations. They comprised a school building, an infirmary, and residential cabins for converts, known in the local language colloquially as *logo*. Young converts at the mission were housed in the hostels within the village, while married couples were forced to establish homes around the neighbourhood of the mission. These villages served as ‘crucibles in which the cultural transformation of the wider traditional society was grounded.’ (Kipkorir 2009, 19).

For the AIM, these villages were known by their members as the *nganaseet*, meaning the Christian community. The public, however, referred to them as the people of Chebisaas, hence the referent the Kapchebisaas or just Chebisaas. Chebisaas is an area in Aldai, Nandi South, which was the entrepot of the AIM missionaries in Nandi before they spread to other Kalenjin groups. Therefore, the AIM converts in the Kerio-Valley were closely identified with their cradle, Chebisaas. *Nganaseet* denoted a Christian ghetto. An ‘enclosed cultural enclave’ where all ‘souls won for Christ were congregated’ (Kibor 2005, 120). It was a clustered settlement whose members set themselves culturally apart from the rest of the community. They distinguished themselves from the non-believers (*bi kapsang*) who lived in the environs of a particular Christian village. The most notable examples of Christian villages were located at Kapsowar, Kabartonjo, and Kessup for AIM and Nasokol for the BCMS.

The Kabartonjo Christian village in Baringo, for example, ‘had 30 souls’ in 1935 that Dalziel referred to as ‘my family’ (Dalziel to Campel 19/01/1938, AIM Archives).

The new members of the *nganaseet* were admitted into catechetical classes. This was a period of indoctrination during which African culture was forcibly erased from the converts. Once it was believed that ‘the converts were completely divorced from evil traditional practices’ they were baptized and admitted into fellowship (Kibor 2005). They became Christians or *Chebisaasin*. The Chebisaas eschewed everything material. They were preoccupied with the preparation for the coming down to earth of their newly found saviour, Jesus Christ. They were not concerned with the well-being of their erstwhile social relations and culture. They discarded every aspect of Kalenjin culture. Kalenjin ornamentation, the earrings (*elmerin*), pigtail (*penin*), necklaces (*kasiing*), bracelets (*kabongoi*), the small ear holes pieced by women for the *suman* earrings and *elmerin* earrings for men were forcibly sewn up. The large male Maasai-type ear holes were folded over. The Chebisaas were also proscribed from removing the lower incisors. The Kalenjin removed the lower incisors as a prescription for practical means of forced feeding if one locked their jaws because of contracting tetanus. Traditional forms of song and dance, initiation, and marriage ceremonies (*tum*), the main pillars of the Kalenjin cultural edifice were prohibited. To add to the distinction and insularity of the converts, they adopted Hebraic and European names, then known incorrectly as ‘Christian names.’ In short, the *Chebisasiin* became ‘cultural slaves, a people to be pitied rather than emulated and admired’ (Kipkorir 2009, 19).

By the 1940s, life in these villages, especially for AIM, revolved around the Church ‘elders.’<sup>12</sup> The male Christian family heads constituted a council of elders that set out rules and social behaviour and assigned duties to each member of the villages. They were responsible for enforcing the rigid moral code of the does-and-don’ts that characterised life in the Villages, and in the process, they played a stupendous role than even that of the missionaries in erasing African culture and enforcing Western values. These elders were rule and law unto themselves. They were later-day Judaizers, who in judging situations and circumstances, often behaved like the Pharisees of the Bible. Always pretending to fully understand the law, whether of the nascent Christian church as promoted by European missionaries or of the traditional Kalenjin society, as it was then in the process of flux (Kipkorir 2009, 19).

As time went by, these elders curved out a polity of their own in the Christian community. As long as someone wanted admission to the village, they had to abide by their delicate and uncompromising administration of justice without recourse for appeal. That their rules were sometimes unjust, did not concern them at all. It was only sufficient for them to believe that they were right and anyone who did not see their view was wrong. They perceived themselves as members of the chosen few whom the Whiteman (*chumbek*) had favoured with confidence, and entrusted with the onerous task of leading their fellow ‘natives’ to the secrets and mysterious ways of the Whiteman’s religion and ‘civilization’ (Kipkorir 2009, 19)

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<sup>12</sup> These men were not elders in the standard Kalenjin definition of the term. Most of them belonged to the senior warrior age grade (they were in their 30s and 40s) and not the ritual grade that was considered elders.



**Figure 7:** Unnamed embers of the Kapsowar Mission Christian Village dressed in western clothing: KNA, DC/ELGM, Annual Report 1937

The church elders enjoyed quasi-political recognition by the colonial government because they were exempted from irksome civil chores such as the periodic provision of manual labour, serving as porters for whites, and attending colonial chiefs' meetings or *barazas*. Through their political power, they could demand a girl-hosteller who had been forcibly taken from the Christian village for initiation or marriage to be returned forthwith. If the family of the girl did not comply with the order, the elders were accompanied by an *askari* (native police) to the girl's home to pick her up. If a girl showed the willingness to return to the mission, she was escorted back to the mission village unharmed. A case in point is that of Rhoda

Mengich who was returned to the Kapsowar mission station in 1942 after she had been whisked away by her family (Kibor 1992, 52).

To stay afloat economically the residents of the *nganaseet* had to grow their food. Anyone who wished to be a member of the villages was forced to go through this irksome task of contributing to the economic life of the mission station. It was through this agricultural aspect of the mission that the new crops including turnips, coriander, cabbages, maize, Irish potatoes, beans, and manioc were introduced in the Kerio-Valley. These new crops not only improved food security but also revolutionized the cuisine of the converts. Mr Dalziel of AIM Kabartonjo, for example, introduced maize growing among the Tugen of Kabartonjo (Kandagor 1993, 84).

The senior members of these villages moved out of the central villages to establish outpost schools and dispensaries within the mission field beginning in the late 1930s. These new outposts include Chebara, Endo, Kibuswa, Kapcherop, and Liter in Marakwet. Others were Lelboinet, Koptega, Annin, and Kapsaos in Keiyo and Kapropita, Elkebin, Tenges, and Sacho in Baringo. However, it was not until the late 1950s and the first decade of independence that these villages started to disappear when Christian converts started fanning out to establish homes in the room created by vacating colonial settlers in Uasin-Gishu and Trans-Nzoia. Others converts ventured into business. However, by then the villages had fulfilled their mission. They had isolated a few Christian ‘converts’ from the traditional Kalenjin culture and thus managed to ferment a cultural synthesis that birthed a minority Christian

community, which served as a firm launching pad for a Kalenjin Christianity in the Kerio-Valley.

#### **4.4.3 Missionary Education Work**

From the outset of missionization in Africa, the growth of the nascent church depended on its monopoly of western education more than any other pull factor. This was also true for the Kerio-Valley where the success of the church relied on its possession of the most sought-after commodity. The majority of the early converts came through this channel, such that it is hardly an exaggeration to say that in the Kerio-Valley the church was born in the classroom. The midwife of this revolution was the pioneer missionary, unprepared as he was for his new role as a teacher. These teachers often started with a few boys, and later girls. Soon after graduation, the pupils became their principal assistants manning outstations. This cohort increased gradually over the subsequent years from a small beleaguered band of poorly educated readers to an expanding corps of trained teachers and catechists settling in bush schools in the 1940s and 1950s. In the bush schools as in the mission stations, the schoolhouses served as a classroom but were transformed into a chapel for the daily morning, evening and Sunday services. The leader remained unchanged. He simply switched his roles (Elolia 1992, 150).

The missionary groups which came to the Kerio-Valley, AIM, MHM, and BCMS, had no uniform policy towards African education. Each group had its attitude towards African education. Yet none of these missions saw African education as their primary concern. It was only important for them as long as it aided their primary agenda, evangelization. In comparison to the mission groups that

missionized the Luo and Abaluyia especially FAIM and CMS, the missionary groups in the Kerio-Valley had a cavalier attitude towards education. Most of the missionary schools in the Kerio-Valley rarely went beyond the third grade in contrast with FAIM Kaimosi and CMS Maseno, which offered intermediate classes. The best missionary group in the provision of education by the standards of the Kerio-Valley, AIM, for example, felt that 'ecumenical and social development were a serious threat to evangelization.' The concern of AIM 'was the inner life of converts. Education was only given to Africans in so far as it enabled them to read the word of God.' Further education to them 'was the responsibility of the government' (Letter from Maxwell to Home Council , 17/11/1944, AIM Archives).

AIM established its first school in the Kerio-Valley at Kapropita, six miles east of Kabarnet town, in 1913, through the efforts of Mr Anderson and Stove. The pair constructed a school and living quarters. However, they were replaced a year later by Mr Scouten and Miss Hansen, with nothing tangible to show for their efforts (Kandagor 1993). The DC tried to induce Tugen chiefs and headmen to send their sons for education at the station. The missionaries also visited the homes of the Tugen to plead with parents to allow their sons to attend school. By 1915 the Scoutens were lucky to have gathered more than a dozen boys in the school. The pupils, however, 'were not anxious to be educated and the missionaries' had 'a thankless task, for their attendance was irregular' (KNA/DC/BAR, 1/1, 1915). Kapropita station closed in 1920 because of the Tugen's apathy for education.

The AIM returned to the Complex six years later. This time around they relocated to Kabartonjo in Baringo North. Kabartonjo became the principal missionary centre for

AIM among the Tugen. Kabartonjo was established in 1926 by an Australian couple Ernest and Emmie Dalziel. It had an elementary school that offered classes up to fourth grade. The first teacher was a Nandi convert, Mr Seroney. After a decade of missionization, the AIM missionaries employed their converts to establish outpost stations among the Tugen and Pokot. For example, in 1936 Stefano Kipsang Chepkong'a was commissioned to start a bush school in Sacho, in 1936 the Kapropita bush school was reopened, through the efforts of Joseph Kiptui, and in 1946 the Tenges outstation was established (Kandagor 1993).

Among the Marakwet the process of provision of education followed that of medical work. The first mission station was established in Kapsowar in 1933. In 1934 an elementary school was established at the station with the help of Nandi convert Joel Arap Chemibei as its first teacher. In 1941 AIM established medical outstations dispensaries in Kapcherop (Sengwer) under the care of Mr Chebii Kendagor, Mokoro (Endo) manned by Mr Elijah Kilimo, and Kibuswa (Katkok). In all these dispensaries there was a multipurpose structure used for teaching, treatment, and prayers, and the leader served as the dispenser, preacher, and teacher. In 1948, another bush school under the care of Ezekiel Sangula arap Chebet was opened in Chebara (Elolia 1992 150; Kibor 2005, 115).

Among the Keiyo, the AIM established the Kessup Mission Station in 1937 on a step ledge halfway between the DC's *boma* in Tambach and Iten. Dr. Lee Ashton of Kapsowar Mission Station applied for a plot of land from the DC in 1936, which was granted. In 1937 a missionary couple Edgar and Nancy Bryson moved in to start work. Keiyo converts and students from Kabartonjo and Kapsowar Mission Stations

were transferred to Kessup to serve as the nucleus around which the station was developed. Kessup Mission Station offered elementary education (Sawe 2003). Mr Bryson took care of the education of the boys and his wife taught the girls. The Brysons were replaced by Mr Tom Collins who had left Nginyang outpost in 1946 because of the Pokot resistance. With the help of the first generation of pupils and converts, Kessup opened bush schools in other parts of Keiyo including Kipsaos in Metkei in 1939, Lelboinet in Marichor in 1939, Anin in Irong in 1946, Mwachet in Metkei in 1952, Koptega in Marichor in 1952 (Sawe 2003).

The MHM Catholic's entry into the Kerio-Valley began in the late 1920s. From 1927 MHM Eldoret station was sending priests and catechists to minister to the students of GAS Tambach and GAS Kapenguria. However, in the 1930s they decided to make a permanent move. The Prefect of the Kisumu Vicariate applied for permission from the DCs of Elgeyo-Marakwet, Baringo, and West Pokot for land for the construction of bush schools. This led to the establishment of MHM outstations in the Kerio-Valley. In Keiyo MHM established bush schools at Muskut in Marichor (1938), Kamariny in Irong (1938), Kapteren in Irong (1938), Kaptarakwa in Rokocho (1939), and Elgeyo Saw Mill in Kapchemutwa (1946). In Marakwet the schools were established in Sambirir (1939), Chebororwa among the Sengwer (1939), Sangurur in Kibuswa (1939), Sinon in Kapsowar (1942), Nerkwo (1948), and Tot (1952). In West Pokot, a bush school was started in Tartar (1942). In Baringo, they established a bush school at Kituro (1936). The BCMS working in West Pokot established their only elementary school in Nasokol and outposts in Sigorr and Mwino (KNA, DC/WPKT/1/3, 1936). However, because of the resistance of the Pokot, the BCMS

and the MHM had little impact on education among the Pokot. Pokot resistance will be examined in detail separately in this chapter.

The general arrangement was for bush schools to send pupils to the central missionary schools. Pupils of the central schools successful in their Common Entrance Examination, CEE were admitted to GAS Tambach and GAS Kapenguria, and later GAS Kabarnet for intermediate education. Successful candidates from intermediate schools were admitted to secondary school. Education offered in mission schools was elementary, and learning infrastructure was in some places modest and other places non-existent. The pupils learnt facing a blackboard hanging from the branch of a tree. They recited vowels and the alphabet and mastered the art of letter-making with fingers on heaps of sand or by arranging stone pebbles (Kipkorir 2009, 58). The upper classes were taught inside a mud-walled classroom structure. This building had one side half open to afford light. In some places, for example at Kapsowar, there was no partition between two classes. Pupils in one class were instructed facing the wall at one end and those of the second class faced the other end. One, 'indeed, had to have a strong desire for education to learn under such rudimentary settings' (Kipkorir 2009, 60).

Education offered included reading, writing, arithmetic, a little history, and gardening using Kiswahili as the medium of instruction. Learning was done in the afternoon from 1.30 to 4.30. The bell rang after every half hour for the changeover of subjects. Moreover, girls' education was designed to prepare them for marriage. Missionaries believed that the 'Christian home was the cornerstone of the Christian civilization in Africa', and a 'cultured mother was seen as the foundation of the

home.’ Therefore, the girls’ syllabus included extra-curricular courses that focused on ‘mother craft, dressmaking, spinning, weaving, and home management’ (Kibor 2005, 115). Despite all the efforts made by missionaries, the success of education in the Kerio-Valley was not substantial compared to the Luo and Abaluyia areas. Many factors account for the slow uptake of education among the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley. It includes Kalenjin's resistance to external influences, the pastoral nature of some of them such as the Pokot, but also the refusal of AIM missionaries to accept government education subsidies.

Following the recommendations of the education commission of 1924, which called for the improvement of African education, the government started funding missionary schools. With this outlay of resources, the government began demanding greater efficiency, higher standards of education, and better structures from missionaries. Other missions took this government offer, but the AIM refused completely to accept government support. They claimed that the demands by the government to improve mission education would lead ‘to a slackening of evangelical endeavours.’ For them, ‘education and industrial work were antithetical to real deep work of the lord’ (AIM Constitution, Article IV, 5-6). More importantly, the AIM constitution was against soliciting financial help. It stated that ‘silver and gold belonged to God,’ and that they ‘depended on him to supply every need.’ They, therefore, could ‘not solicit funds directly’ and no debts were to ‘be incurred by missionaries’ (AIM Constitution, Article IV, 5-6).

The other missionary groups working in western Kenya (especially FAIM and CMS), which had accepted government grants improved their school’s infrastructure

and personnel. By the late 1930s the transition of pupils to intermediate schools in these schools was better. Soon it became apparent that in areas of stiff competition, especially among the Agikuyu and Luo, AIM was losing ground to other missions. The education offered by AIM ‘was increasingly becoming inadequate in light of the rising standards throughout the colony.’ AIM was having practically ‘no standing in the protectorate’ in matters of education. In Marakwet, for example, the DC reported that after a decade of work, AIM ‘could not master even 1% of literate Christians (KNA/DC/EGM/ 5/ Annual Report, 1941).’ Writing from the mission central station in Kijabe in 1938, the Field director, Lee Downing, observed that ‘only recently I have come to realize how far we are behind other missions in teacher training. The pupils in our schools failed to pass examinations set by the government which hundreds in other missions pass since they have better native teachers’ (letter from Campbell to Johnstone 21/05/1935).

**Table 1.0.** Statistics of education activities in Tugen North from 1940-1945. Source, AIM archives Nairobi

Period	Schools	Out-Station	Boys	Girls	Average attendance
Jan-June 1940	1	1	55	14	61
July-Dec 1940	1	1	45	25	63
Jan-June 1941	1	1	85	38	100
July-Dec 1941	1	1	80	41	113
Jan-June 1942	1	2	80	37	105
July-Dec 1942	1	2	110	41	130
July-Dec 1943	1	2	105	35	115
Jan-June 1945	1	4	160	79	Not recorded
July-Dec 1945	1	4	178	87	208

**Table 2.0.** Statistics of education work in Marakwet from 1933-1943. Source, AIM archives Nairobi

Period	Schools	Out-Stations	Boys	Girls	Average attendance
Sept-Dec 1933	1	0	30	4	32
Jan-April 1934	1	0	30	6	25
April-Aug 1934	1	0	30	6	24
Sept-Dec 1934	1	0	30	6	24
Jan-April 1938	1	0	31	21	44
May-Aug 1938	1	0	35	21	50
Sept-Dec 1938	1	0	39	21	52
July-Dec 1939	1	0	38	18	44
Jan-June 1940	1	0	20	31	45
July-Dec 1940	1	3	29	16	34
July-Dec 1941	1	3	31	14	34
Jan-June 1942	1	2	44	10	48
July-Dec 1943	1	2	44	11	39
Jan-June 1943	1	2	57	18	63

This realization in the middle of increasing pressure from Africans and the colonial government forced the Field Central Committee (FCC), at Kijabe, to chart its own course. The FCC took a unilateral action hoping that the home council in America would ‘not consider their actions as rebellious’ (Nixon to Davis 31/11/1942, AIM Archives). After much soul-searching, in 1945 the AIM changed its official policy regarding education when the field council adopted the recommendation, which stated, inter alia; to maintain schools to government standards and to establish teacher training schools. It was because of this decision that AIM established a teacher training college at Kapsabet in Nandi. This college produced most of the teachers who taught in the AIM schools in the Kerio-Valley in the late 1940s and 1950s. Among the first crop of Kalenjin, teachers to come out of Kapsabet Teachers College were George Chebii arap Kendagor, William arap Muna, Ezekiel Chebet, James Chepkong'a, and Ishmail Koimur from Marakwet, and Daniel Toroitich arap

Moi from Tugen. It was after this first crop of teachers that education standards began to improve in AIM schools in the Kerio-Valley. From then, pupil transition to higher levels increased. Even then, education standards still lagged behind other regions of western Kenya. The refusal by AIM to accept government funding and the protracted ambivalence towards African education could not be easily reversed (Gration 1973).

On matters of education, the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley had the disadvantage of falling under missions disinclined towards this goal. For example, the best missionary group in the Kerio-Valley in matters education, AIM, could not match some of the worse mission groups working in among the Abaluyia and the Luo (COG and PAOC). The second-best mission group in the Kerio-Valley, MHM, ranked last among missionary groups in the provision of education among the Luo and Abaluyia. In western Kenya, the CMS was in a 'league of its own' in the provision of education (Gimode 2003, 170). CMS had set the bar so high that other missions aspired to reach, and in the process benefited the Abaluyia and the Luo. Therefore, because of AIM's disinterest in education, coupled with the Kalenjin reticence, the Kerio-Valley Kalenjin lagged behind the other communities of western Kenya in literacy levels deep into the post-independence period.

#### **4.4.4 The Missionary Use of Medical Work**

Of all the missionary groups that proselytized the Kerio-Valley, it is the AIM which most employed medical work as a medium for conveying the gospel. They AIM believed that 'in obedience of the Lord's command to heal the sick as well as to preach the gospel, medical work was instituted within the framework of the Africa

Inland Mission as an integral part of its mission.’ The main reason for ‘this branch of the mission’s activity was to propagate the gospel’ of the ‘Lord Jesus Christ,’ and ‘demonstrate the love of God by healing the sick and relieving suffering, and disseminate the knowledge of hygiene throughout the villages’ (AIM Medical Report 1946, AIM Archives). Although all AIM stations provided basic healthcare services, medical work as a tool for spreading the gospel was mainly applied in the Marakwet mission field. Medical care was the primary condition given by the colonial government when it surrendered the Kapsowar premises to AIM in 1932. The surrender agreement provided the AIM to ensure that; a ‘nursing sister to be in continuous residence in the plot, to have resident trained medical practitioner, and be adequately equipped with medical equipment’ (KNA, DC/ELGM/1/3, 1933-1937).

As soon as the facility was purchased from the government, Rev. Reg Reynolds and his wife took residence together with a nursing sister in 1933. The following year a British doctor, Lee Ashton, arrived from the U.K and the hospital<sup>13</sup> started to function. Throughout the missionary period, Kapsowar hospital was served by a succession of British medical practitioners including Dr Lee Ashton (1934 - 1938), Dr Powley (1938 - 1940), and Dr Richardson (1940). From 1941 to 1943, there was no European resident doctor at the hospital because medical workers had gone to serve the Empire in the Second World War. Services resumed in 1943 with the coming of Dr W.B Young and a nursing sister, Miss Banks. The two medical practitioners left in 1949 and were replaced by Dr Phillip Morris. Morris served up to

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<sup>13</sup> During the colonial period Kapsowar Mission hospital was known as the Laurie Walker Memorial Hospital

1953 before passing the button to Dr Stanely Lindsay who served until 1979 (Kibor 2005, 109).

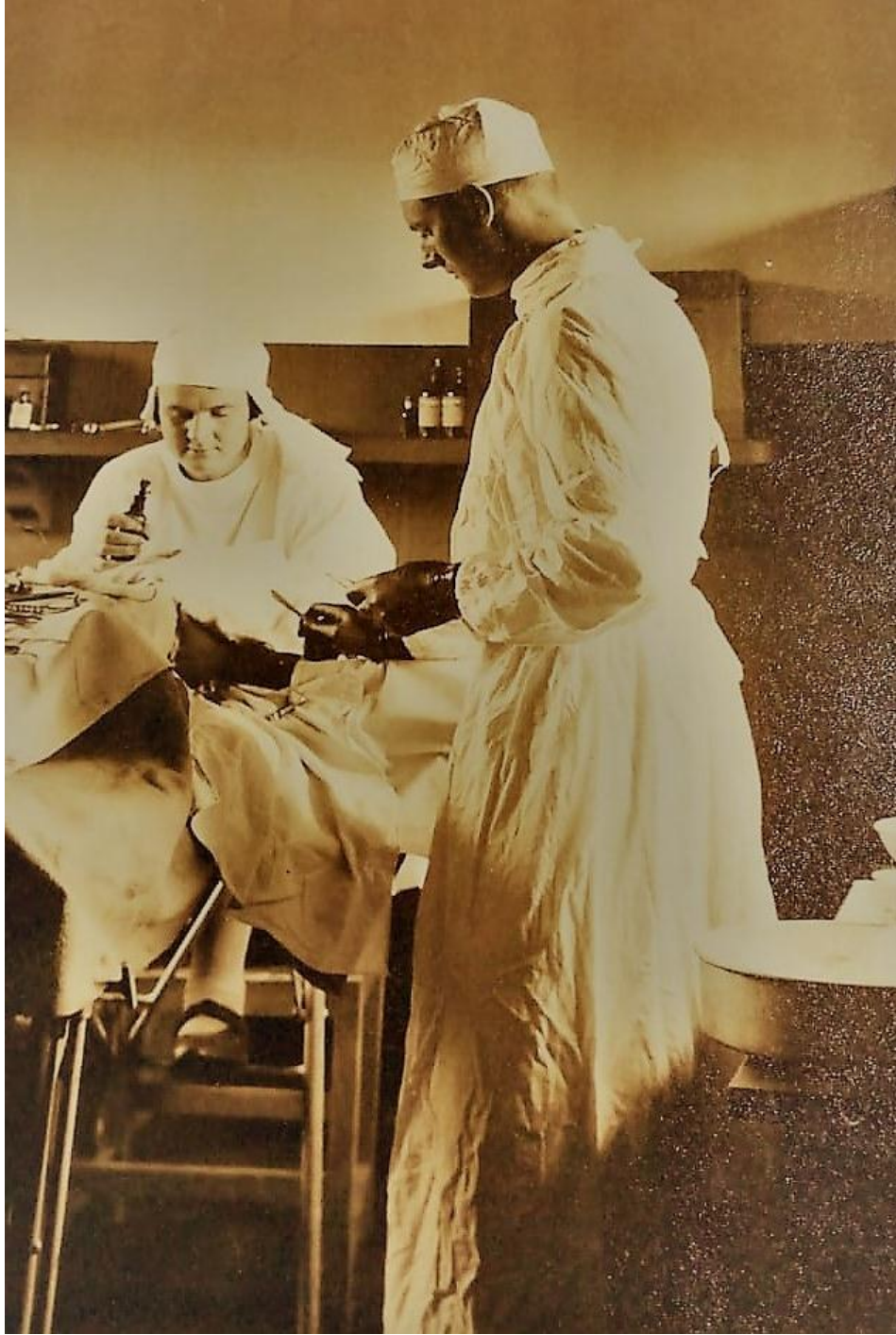
The overarching vision of the pioneer medical workers of AIM at Kapsowar was to use the Marakwet mission field as ‘an ideal setting for community health programme with a well-established hospital at Kapsowar and wide contacts with the countryside through strategically stationed dispensaries’ (Philip Morris, Memorandum, 24/08/1953, AIM Archives). To achieve this objective the missionaries started by selecting a few early converts to whom they offered rudimentary on-job training as midwives, dressers, dispensers, and anesthetists, and thereafter employed them at Kapsowar and in outpost dispensaries. By 1949, there were seven women training as midwives and nurses and five males training as dressers and dispensers. The most notable medical assistants in Marakwet, who came through in this manner were Isaiah Chemwal Cheptoo, Abraham Ng’elech<sup>14</sup>, and Elijah Kilimo (Kipkorir 2009; Kibor 2005, 110). The period between 1933 and 1940 was that of settling and consolidating the hospital. However, from 1941 the mission medical work began to expand by establishing outpost dispensaries in Kapcherop among the Sengwer (1941), Mokoro in Endo (1941), and Kibuswa (Katkok) (1941) in Almo. In each outpost dispensary, a temporary structure was erected that served as a school and a church. The African dispenser, scarcely trained and poorly equipped, carried out three roles in these out-stations; medical care, teaching three Rs and evangelizing (Elolia 1992, 130).

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<sup>14</sup> The father to the late Kenyan historian, Benjamin Kipkorir arap Ng’elech



**Figure 8:** A nursing sister at the Kabartonjo Mission Station (Grace Saunders) in Baringo treating a child as the mother looks. Photo from KNA, DC/BAR, Annual Report 1943



**Figure 9:** A photo of unnamed Medical doctors at the operating theatre of the Kapsowar Mission Hospital. Photo from the KNA, ELGM/1/1 1937.

The central hospital at Kapsowar provided better medical care compared to the outpost dispensaries where treatment was rudimentary. At the outposts, African assistants mainly dealt with dressing ulcerated wounds, removing rotten teeth, and dispensing drugs for simple ailments including headaches, tummy aches, and coughing. Wounds were treated ‘by application of acriflavine solution, Gentian Violet or GV, iodine tincture or occasionally the May Backer sulphide powder, universally known as M&B.’ They also provided cough syrups and linctuses that were dispensed to lactating mothers in small bottles for their babies (Kipkorir 2009, 83).

At the beginning, the Marakwet were reluctant to visit Kapsowar hospital and outpost dispensaries. This reluctance is partly attributed to the missionary attitudes against their culture and partly because of specific sacred customary prohibitions. Marakwet women, for example, refused to visit Kapsowar hospital for maternity services because they believed that it was wrong to be attended to in labour by an uncircumcised nursing sister. This situation left one nursing sister in wonder:

Before I came here one of the leading thoughts impressed upon me was to get near people, think as they think, do as they do. Yet now I could not help thinking to myself what have I in common with them? Circumcision and marriage are the marks of an adult. I am a child in their estimation (Quoted in Kibor 2005, 110).

Missionary medical workers and their African assistants thus had the difficult task of icebreaking. AIM missionaries adopted outreach programs to lessen the tension and bond with the locals. Medical practitioners traversed the faulted landscape of Marakwet visiting villages and hamlets ‘to treat the sick and preach the word of God’ (Kibor 1992, 42). And by 1935 the DC was happy to report that the Kapsowar

Mission Hospital 'is becoming popular with the Marakwet' (KNA, PC/RVP/2/3/1, 1935). Although medical outreach was a common practice by all missionary doctors and nursing sisters who served at Kapsowar, it was Dr. Lindsay who is well remembered for his role in outreach medical services. His itinerary included travelling from Kapsowar to treat people in Ng'echer, a distance of about 30 kilometers. His itinerary included Kisigiria, Baroko, Liter, Tot, Kabetwo, Chepkum, Koitilial, and Kapseu in the valley. He then went up the escarpment to Chebara on the highland before returning to Kapsowar (Dr R.S Lindsay, 1954, AIM archives). Such acts of self-sacrifice did not go unnoticed. The DC in his annual report commended the medical officers of AIM Kapsowar who 'continued to do sterling work in the northern areas (KNA, DC/ELGM, 1956, 24). 'Tribute must be paid to Dr. Lindsay who is a most obviously efficient and hardworking missionary,' he added (KNA, DC/ELGM, 1957, 6).

By the 1950s the effect of medical services was having a gradual but significant effect on the Marakwet. By simply administering shots of western medicine and inoculation of children, many kinds of ailments that had formerly crippled or killed the Marakwet were gradually brought under control. To the Marakwet, these were not just the results of powerful drugs, but signs of powerful spiritual potency. Although the medical care offered by AIM was rudimentary in comparison to modern standards, it nonetheless demonstrated to the Marakwet who went for medical services that the pharmacology of AIM was not only life-saving but also possessed spiritual merit. This was true of a community whose indigenous belief in the healing of diseases and ritual impurities was associated with supernatural powers.

Traditionally among the Marakwet, many specialists cured different types of ailments including the herbalist (*chepkerichin*), the skull surgeons (*ng'omut*), reed blowers (*kipses*), diviners (*chepng'eroi*) and the prophets (*orkoy*). The Marakwet evaluated the performance of these experts in terms of their ability to harness spiritual powers for the good of society. Powerful medical specialists and pharmacologists were believed to get their power directly from *Asis* (Kipkorir 2008, 29).

**Table 3.0:** Table Showing medical activities by AIM in Marakwet from 1933-1943.  
Source: AIM Archives, Nairobi

Period	Patients treated	White staff	Native staff
Sept-Dec 1933	Not recorded	3	1
Jan-April 1934	300	3	1
May-Aug 1934	546	4	3
Sept Dec 1934	810	4	3
Jan-April 1938	2396	4	6
May-August 1938	2562	2	6
Sept-Dec 1938	2191	3	5
July-Dec 1939	5763	4	5
Jan-June 1940	5900	6	8
July-Dec 1940	4461	4	8
Jan-June 1941	4996	1	7
July-Dec 1942	3679	2	6
Jan-June 1943	3690	2	5
July –Dec 1943	2085	2	7

By producing observable positive changes in the empirical world, which was seen as the core logic behind indigenous medical practices, the AIM missionaries and their religion acquired validity in the eyes of the Marakwet. On one occasion in the Endo, Mokoro, medical outpost manned by Elijah Kilimo:

.... a woman had been brought to him in obstructed labour. He did what he had seen Dr Ashton at Kapsowar do. He washed his hands with Dettol water; put one inside the woman and turned the baby

around so that he could pull it out. Miraculously, the baby and the mother survived and the grateful husband gave him a young female goat – a very warm gesture indeed of a husband's appreciation (Young 1959, 59 Quoted in Kipkorir 2009, 83)

This seemingly miraculous power was a motivator for some Marakwet to convert to Christianity. To them, the performance and results of such medical actions were inextricably tied to a powerful supernatural power. They were not just symbols but signs and indexes of greater religious efficacy and a powerful God. Medical healing, therefore, became a key authenticating message conveyed by AIM missionaries. It added a greater persuasive force to their sermons and gave weight to their Christian message. A good number of the early converts at Kapsowar were won over to the new faith through medical work. Isaiah Chemwal Cheptoo, for instance, came for treatment of an ulcerated wound caused by a leopard attack. Kibor Talai, on his part, came for treatment of a poisonous snake bite. They were well received, treated, and taken care of. Upon recovery, they were won over to the new faith and went on to become the foremost Christian converts and church elders at the Kapsowar Christian Village (Kibor 2005).

#### **4.5 The Kalenjin Reaction to Christian Cultural Invasion**

The fact that the missionaries who came to western Kenya generally and the Kerio-Valley specifically came in the spirit of cultural superiority and conquest has been well documented (Knighton 1999; Gimode 2003; Kipkorir 2009). Missionaries condemned every aspect of African culture as evil and heathen. Polygyny and circumcision, especially clitoridectomy received strongest condemnation. Whilst all the missionary groups were united in condemnation of African culture, the MHM

Catholics were known for their liberalism. They never matched the ardor exhibited by the evangelicals, BCMS and especially AIM. The BCMS had a shadowy influence in the Kerio-Valley because of the classic Pokot resistance. For that reason, the fierce battle of cultures I seek to delineate below was between Kalenjin culture and western Christianity embodied in the overscrupulous teachings of AIM.

The Kalenjin in the Kerio-Valley did not take missionary attacks on their culture without a fight. Researchers on the social history of western Kenya indeed attest that of all the ethnic groups of western Kenya, it was the Kalenjin who gave Christianity its strongest opposition (Schneider 1959; Patterson, 1969; Gimode 2003). In the Kerio-Valley, this opposition had a peculiar pattern. The pastoral Pokot proved to be the hardest group to reach out to. During the entire period of missionization, they remained insular, haughty, and uncompromising (Patterson 1969). For that reason, the Pokot cultural resistance will be given special separate attention. The other Kalenjin groups (Tugen, Keiyo, and Marakwet) displayed a similar reaction to Christianity and western culture. They began by resisting, before a few of them, especially the young uninitiated boys and girls were attracted to the mission stations by education, in the process giving missionaries a chance to convert them. The discussion below, therefore, is the intercourse between Christianity embodied in the teachings of AIM and the Tugen, Keiyo and Marakwet cultures. This interaction was manifested in the form of a ferocious cultural clash centred on the Kalenjin customs especially polygamy and circumcision.

#### 4.5.1 Missionary War against Kalenjin Circumcision

One of the areas where a strong battle was waged between African culture and Christianity, in the Kerio-Valley, was on African customs, especially circumcision and polygamy. However, it was on the issue of circumcision that the most brutal and drawn-out war was fought. Even before coming to the Kerio-valley, missionaries coming through other parts of the colony had taken the position that both the male and the female versions of circumcision were ‘pagan’ practices comparable to witchcraft, polygamy, and beer drinking. Circumcision, they believed should be scrapped off because it was ‘not compatible with good Christian living’ (Gration 1974, 123). This was the stance they brought to the Kerio-Valley.

From the beginning, the missionaries coming to the Kerio-Valley seem to have overestimated their abilities, or probably underestimated the task involved in forcing such a drastic measure on a crucial tribal custom. The missionary frontal attack on circumcision did not go down well with the Kalenjin, because it was on this issue more than anything else that they unscabbarded their cultural swords and engaged in an open confrontation with missionaries. The missionaries had insisted that circumcision was satanic. However, when the translated Bible came out, the Kalenjin realized that circumcision had a strong scriptural backing, because even Jesus, the son of God, had been circumcised. Confusion was further caused by the translated Bible when it referred to the act of circumcision as *kamuratanet* and not with the correct Kalenjin word *yatitaet*. The word *kamuratanet* in the Kalenjin lexicon referred 'to the general traditional process of teaching members of the community appropriate behaviour, knowledge, skills, and religion.' *Kamuratanet* was a lifelong

process that was formalized during the corpus of ceremonies (*tum*) that surround circumcision (*yatitaet*) (Chemitei 2018, 12). By adopting the word *kamuratanet* missionaries had by default accepted that the whole cultural structural set-up of Kalenjin teachings and rituals that accompanied circumcision of all genders had a biblical stand. To the European missionary, the word circumcision had meaning only for one gender. The Kalenjin, however, did not have separate words for male and female rites of passage. The word *kamuratanet* thus could have carried a dual connotation in the minds of converts; it could have been (mis)interpreted by the Kalenjin to mean that even female circumcision had biblical backing.

Despite resistance from the Kalenjin, missionaries held their ground. However, ‘on realizing that male circumcision was so critical a tribal custom’ they backed down but insisted that for Christians the operation was to be ‘carried under anesthetics’ at mission hospitals. Accordingly, the first young converts and ‘the sons of the church elders underwent the operation in this way’ (Kipkorir 2009, 19). Yet even this was not easy for the youths. The process of ‘circumcision presented to them the most testing challenge of their young lives,’ that some ‘left the mission stations clandestinely for initiation’ (Morton 1998, 56). This was because, to the Kalenjin, hospital circumcision was unthinkable. It amounted to the desecration of tribal customs (*kikire*), and depersonalized the participants from their kin and *Asis*, leaving them in a state of ritual disfavour (*ng’ogi*). Far from being an isolated rite, as missionaries thought, and that it could be dispensed without ruction, circumcision was the heartbeat of the life Kalenjin. It was the climax of life. The only entrance thought possible to adulthood, and *bona fide* status in the community. It was during

the religious rites surrounding circumcision that an individual was formerly brought into close fellowship with their living kin, ancestors, and *Asis*, and eventually emerged as fully-fledged members of the community (Chebet and Dietz 2000, 59).

The rites surrounding circumcision were the central focus of the life of any Kalenjin. Both men and women had their relevant rites. As boys and girls entered puberty formal preparation for circumcision began and climaxed in the six months long ceremonies that surrounded circumcision. The physical operation on the phallus and the clitoris, which was the focus of missionaries' opposition, was only a minor outward sign of the inner spiritual transformation from childhood to adulthood. Initiation bequeathed Kalenjin men and women a whole set of sacred statuses, and social responsibilities. They were taught how to become responsible citizens who honoured their culture and defended their society. After initiation, after which both men and women were placed into age groups. The age-sets of women, however, were of less significance because they assumed the age groups of their husbands upon marriage (O.I, Cheboi, 2020).

The age groups of men were of enormous importance in the organization and maintenance of warfare and peacetime activities. They were also the symbolic basis of ethnic identity and unity. Every initiated male felt allegiance to his age group came before any other form of affiliation, whether internally or externally derived. It is for this reason that the Kalenjin treated mission-circumcised boys (*kipshiti*) as social pariahs. Writing on the experiences of the late president Arap Moi, who also underwent a hospital operation at Kapsabet, Morton says that it was because of the 'religious significance of the circumcision ceremony that merely served to underline

the sense of isolation felt by Moi and other Christian boys' when they returned home from school. It was this stigma that probably 'made him be a stickler of tradition' in later years and 'ensured that his own children have undergone the full Kalenjin ritual' (Morton 1998, 62).

Christian missionaries had the sketchiest idea of the religious and organizational significance of initiation to the Kalenjin when they declared war on this bastion of Kalenjin culture. Faced with stiff resistance on the male custom, they were willing to budge and allow some amendments. However, on the female version, the missionary attack was full throttle. To them, clitoridectomy was 'a dangerous and barbarous' practice that 'did not have any scriptural support' (Sandgren 1976, 201). To understand the policy of protestant missions on the issue of clitoridectomy, we have to sketch the sequence of events surrounding the female circumcision controversy in the colony. The reason behind this is that the epicentre of the earthquake of the clitoridectomy controversy occurred among the Bantu of central Kenya (especially the Agikuyu) before missionaries started spreading into the Kerio-Valley in the late 1920s.<sup>15</sup>

Right from the onset of missionization, missionaries had expressed their displeasure with all aspects of African circumcision practices, especially the female version. In the areas where clitoridectomy was prevalent including among the Agikuyu, Ameru, Aembu, Akamba, and Maasai missionaries strongly opposed this practice. In the beginning, missionary opposition was not unanimous. Missionary groups generally

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<sup>15</sup> For a better understanding of the female circumcision controversy among the Bantu of Central Kenya see, for example, Sandgren (1989), Karanja (1999), Murray (1976), Presley (1988), Thomas Lynn (2003), Rosenberg and Nottingham (1966), and Gachihi (2014)

preached against it, but no firm measure was taken. The decision was left to the converts; most of whom ignored missionary teachings. Interestingly also, some missionary groups facilitated a 'safer' version of this operation (Sandgren 1976, 205). At the AIM headquarters in Kijabe, for example, 'they employed a circumciser to come periodically to circumcise all girls at the mission who wished to undergo the operation.' Those who wished to undergo the rite traditionally, 'excused themselves' for a while and 'then returned when they had recuperated' to continue with school (Sandgren 1976, 205).

This ambivalent mission attitude prevailed until 1926. This year a group of missionary medical practitioners including a representative from AIM prepared a comprehensive clinical definition of the operation, emphasizing its clinical severity. They were convinced that the operation was unnatural because 'it obstructed childbirth.' The 'scar tissue left by the operation was said to reduce the elasticity of the pelvic muscles which caused difficulty during childbirth' (Sandgren 1976, 204). These revelations fed the already gathering doubts that missionaries had been harbouring about the absence of biblical support for clitoridectomy. The AIM missionaries using this medical report as a basis for their war against clitoridectomy, 'introduced the term mutilation' to describe the operation. Therefore, in 1926 AIM declared clitoridectomy to be incompatible with Christianity, insisting that those wishing to be members of their church and schools had to make a special statement denouncing female circumcision. All the adherents had to affix their signatures or thumbprints to a statement of loyalty, as an act of formal acceptance of this mission policy. Those unwilling to sign were suspended from fellowship and were refused

the Holy Communion. Worse still their children were expelled from school. This policy harmed AIM such that by 1929 AIM churches and schools among the Agikuyu and Maasai were virtually deserted. The clitoridectomy standoff reached a flashpoint in 1929 when Agikuyu conservatives stormed the Kijabe mission station at night. The attackers circumcised a missionary, Ms Hulda Stampf, before killing her (Gration 1974, 147).

Therefore, by the time missionaries entered the Kerio-Valley the official anti-female circumcision policy adopted by Protestant groups was in operation. Among the conservative Kalenjin, this policy turned out to be a very hot issue. More than any African custom, clitoridectomy was the battleground of the ferocious encounter between Kalenjin culture and western Christianity. This was especially for the Marakwet, Keiyo, and Tugen where Christian missionary stations (Kapsowar, Kessup, and Kabartonjo) were established. In the villages that surrounded these stations, the magnifying lenses of Kalenjin cultural resistance focused on the issue of clitoridectomy. Through this lens, the converging rays of African disaffection with missionary misdemeanour penetrated the boundaries of mission fences until the issue burst into flames in the late 1930s (Morton 1998).

In the Kerio-Valley the Kalenjin came into contact with missionaries in 1913 when AIM established the Kapropita mission. It was followed by Kabartonjo in 1926, Kapsowar in 1933 and Kessup in 1937, and many other out-stations later. The Kalenjin were not bothered by these strangers, at first. Missionaries requested the Kalenjin to send their children to the stations for education (Kandagor 1993). The colonial administration emphasized the message by using chiefs to mobilize children

to attend schools. In the beginning, a few youngsters, mostly boys, and later girls were attracted to the mission stations. These neophytes were accommodated in hostels at the stations. However, when these pupils went on holiday their stories aroused the interest of their peers. Their novel style of clothing in khaki shorts further smote the envy of other youths. The consequence of this is that more youngsters sneaked from their homes to the Mission Stations. At first, the parents of these children though bothered by their disappearance never cared much to look for them, because they knew well that when the time comes for initiation, they would recall them. However, this rarely happened because initiation was often done during school holidays, despite the strong criticism from missionaries. When missionaries realized this loophole they banned school holidays altogether, especially for girls, ostensibly to protect them from the 'cruel and filthy initiation rites' (Richardson1947, 14).

The policy of keeping girls in school indefinitely gradually fanned the smouldering embers of Kalenjin resentment against the missionary attitude towards their culture into a conflagration. The flames from this inferno leapt across the villages igniting every inflammable material and wielding Kalenjin families into violent masses of indignation. This furry at times almost led to a full-blown war between villagers and the residents of mission stations, when villagers came to pick up their children. In 1938, at the Kabartonjo mission, for example, there were:

...scenes of real commotion as shouting, bellowing and sobbing, parents of children who had run away from home stood outside the stout wooden fence of the Mission compound, calling the names of their loved ones. Some tried to cajole their offspring to leave; others

brandished whips and threatened to punish them severely if they did not return (Morton 1998, 50)

Throughout the late 1930s, and 1940s Kalenjin employed various tactics to goad their daughters out of the mission stations for circumcision. Angry relatives would first go to the edge of the mission compounds to persuade their daughters to go back home. A few succeeded in their attempts. Unsuccessful parents turned to threats or curses. In one such incident, at the Kapsowar Mission Station, a mother threatened curse her daughter by rubbing 'ashes around her breasts' which the daughter 'suckled and the thighs she sat on.' This was to threaten her to leave the mission (Kibor 2005, 47).

However, very often when 'angry villagers came to the stations' it was hard for the girls to 'resist their threats, curses and other forms of machinations they adopted to force them leave the station to undergo the rites' (Richardson 1947, 14). In circumstances when such 'diplomatic' methods failed to work and faced with missionary obduracy and disinterest from the colonial authority, 'angry villagers armed with bows and arrows' stormed the mission stations 'to demand their daughters' (Kibor 1992, 46). Mission records are replete with incidences of villagers invading the station to pick up their girls. A case in point is that of Christine Kibiwott of Liter mission station in Marakwet.

Christine, a girl from Kasang' village in the Marakwet, was converted to Christianity at the age of 15. Immediately after her conversion, she moved to stay with other converts at Liter AIM outpost station. During the season of circumcision when girls of her age, from her village, were preparing for circumcision she did not participate. The deeply disturbed father went to the mission station to persuade her to join the

other girls, but she refused. On the eve of initiation Christine's brothers and cousins stormed Liter station, armed with bows and arrows, and took her home for the ritual. On realizing that she could not win against armed warriors, Christine decided to cooperate and participate in the overnight singing and dancing. However, when the villagers were tired, drunk, and sleepy, around 4.00 am, she slipped back to the mission station. There she was received by a terrified faithful observing a night vigil praying for her. They celebrated their win over 'the forces of darkness' the moment they saw her. The missionary in charge of the station, Rev. Paul Barnet, however, anticipating a counter-attack from the villagers whisked her across the Kerio River to Kabartonjo station. At the time of the cut, the family discovered that their daughter was missing. Angry villagers stormed Liter station to pick up Christine, but she was nowhere to be found. Therefore, 'they attacked Rev Paul Barnet for his role in aiding her escape.' The missionary was seriously wounded in the face and was rushed to the hospital for treatment. The police arrested three relatives of Christine and charged them with assault. The three were tried and sentenced to five years in prison with hard labour at Tambach (Elolia 1992, 282).

To the Kalenjin, the war to defend their culture and religion did not end with physical confrontation. They engaged the missionary on other fronts. For example, they composed songs to turn public opinion against the missionaries (Elolia 1992, 282; Kandagor 1993, 40). One of the songs was directed to the girls of the Kabartonjo station (Naomi Kimulwon, Elizabeth Kobilu and the other 18 girls). They were the first group to forego clitoridectomy, which by then was a revolutionary act. They were ridiculed in songs, for example:

*Nusu Malaya ee, nusu malaya ee* (half a prostitute ee, half a prostitute ee)

*Naomi nusu Malaya ee, nusu malaya ee* (Naomi is half a prostitute ee, half a prostitute eeh)

*Nusu Malaya eeh, nusu malaya ee* (half a prostitute eeh, half a prostitute eeh)  
(Kandagor 1993, 40).

These converts who were cursed and ridiculed in songs did not repent their actions. Through the support of missionaries and the moral support of each other, they were able to lead quite satisfactory lives, without recourse to their erstwhile traditional relations. However, it was because of this anti-female circumcision stance that missionaries found it difficult to penetrate the Kalenjin community. Among the other communities of western Kenya that did not practice clitoridectomy such as the Abaluyia, Christianity penetrated the society by being embraced by children and the uninitiated adult population, the women. Among the Kalenjin, however, the war against clitoridectomy prevented women from participating in church. Huntingford came to the same conclusion when writing about the Nandi. He noted:

The missionaries seem to have their minds set against circumcision whether male or female. The question of the merits and demerits of the latter is at present beside the point. All that can be said at present is that to get any sort of hold on this tribe all reference to circumcision must be omitted. This might be the reason why no missionary society has been successful in Nandi (As quoted in Langley 1979, 16).

This was also true for the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley. If missionaries wished to have any influence in the Complex, they needed to find a way of accommodating circumcision and try to deal with it gradually, as the DC had prophetically commented when AIM established its mission in the Complex, he said:

This mission can do a useful work provided that it refrains from interfering to much at first with difficult question of circumcision and marriage customs of natives. If it does not, it will be bitterly opposed by tribal elders and we may expect previous history of mission work in Nandi to repeat itself (KNA, PC/RVP/2/3/1 1936).

#### **4.5.2 Missionary Attack on Polygamy and the Kalenjin Reaction**

The question of marriage was one of the most controversial topics during the missionary period in Africa generally and the Kerio-Valley in particular. For the Kalenjin, like for most Africans, the practice of polygamy in the form of polygyny was an integral pillar of their cultural structure, which could not be easily dispensed. Therefore, polygamy posed the greatest challenge to missionaries working in the Kerio-Valley in their endeavours to do away with African culture, as a precondition for conversion.

From the onset of missionary activities in Africa in the mid of the nineteenth century, missionaries had expressed their disapproval of African marriage arrangements, but they did not have a uniform policy of dealing with it. At first, the attitude of the missionaries was ambivalent. Some of the missionaries such as the Anglican Bishop of Natal in South Africa, John Colenso (1814-1883, showed open support for polygamy, but the majority of the missionaries disapproved of it. This mild disapproval of polygamy at the beginning of missionization, in the middle of the nineteenth century, turned into staunch opposition, which hardened into a conviction at the close of the nineteenth century. At this time, missionary societies working in Africa made it their central objective to end polygamy in the church.

The assault on polygyny began as informal discussions within missionary circles before culminating in a series of conferences. The first official missionary forum to

discuss polygamy was the Anglican conference that took place in the Lambeth Palace, the official residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1888. This conference resolved that a Polygamist cannot 'be admitted to baptism, but they can be accepted as candidates and kept under Christian instructions' until they change their sinful ways. The Lambeth conference was followed by a series of interdenominational meetings, which culminated in the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference whose agenda was to 'discuss ways of how to evangelize the non-Christian world.' The Edinburgh conference was held from 14<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1910, at the United Free Church of Scotland Assembly Hall. It was attended by 1300 protestant missionary advocates predominantly from Europe and North America. On the issue of polygamy, the conference concluded that 'polygamy is simply one of the gross evils of heathen society which like habitual murder or slavery must be ended at all costs' (Sanecki 2006, 79).

Following up from there, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 1910, protestant missionaries working in Kenya congregated in Kikuyu to formulate an official policy regarding polygamy in the church. In unanimity, they adopted a declaration that 'no one living in a polygamous marriage shall be baptized' (Report of United Conference, 23rd – 26th July 1918, section IV, 16). AIM officially adopted this declaration in 1919. It was captured in their constitution declaring that 'a baptized person who enters in a polygamous marriage shall be expelled from the church,' and 'a catechumen who enters into a polygamous marriage shall be expelled from class.' It also stated that a polygamist was expected to divorce all his wives except one, before being admitted to the fellowship, and if a man had two or more wives who are believers, only the

first wife may be eligible for baptism' (Central Church Council Minutes, AIM Archives). By adopting this law as the official stance of the church, missionaries made monogamy to be the touchstone of Christianity.

The implication of this was that it excluded virtually the whole married cohort from church participation. It was no coincidence that the first generation of converts was of young men, most of whom were either bachelors or married to one wife (Sawe 2003, 40; Kibor 2005, 112; Elolia 1992, 292). This frontal assault on a custom considered to be the fortress of a patriarchal Kalenjin society ignited a fierce confrontation between the two value systems. From the ultra-conservative disposition of the protagonists, this was conflict that was never going to have an outright winner. It was a heavy-weight contest that would go on forever until one of them was either knocked down or knocked out. The belligerents having been through with shadow boxing, dug in deep for trench warfare. In a bold – and perhaps reckless – attack, missionaries fired the opening salvo, insisting that a proper marriage arrangement was monogamy. It was the imitation of the marriage between Christ and the Church, a marriage based on love and trust between two partners (Ephesians 5: 21-33). However, for the Kalenjin, this was a European concept of romantic individualistic love projected into the scriptures and superimposed on an African culture predicated on a communalistic duty-oriented style of marriage and family relations. Polygamy as a cultural aspect of the Kalenjin was not an 'evil pagan custom' as depicted by missionaries. It was a product of centuries of thinking and philosophy that is the hallmark of all rational beings. Apart from being a manifestation of hegemonic virility in a patriarchal society, as it was being

portrayed, polygamy facilitated men's access to coitus when their wives were in states that were considered impure culturally. For example, among the Kalenjin lactating and pregnant women were not allowed to have sex because it was believed to be inimical to the health and purity of the baby or the foetus. Such cultural inhibitions militated against monogamous marriages. To be monogamous also, was akin to being mono-eyed, literally translated as *kong-akenge*, which came with the cultural implication of a person that was socially and economically challenged (O.I, Kiprono 2020).

The forceful imposition of monogamy on the Kalenjin proved to be a serious disruption in their culture. It poked holes into the hegemonic masculine structured nature of their universe. The Kalenjin, however, were not going to surrender their age-old culture for a typically Western marriage arrangement that did not have explicit backing in the Bible (O.I, Cheseregon 2020). When the translated Bible was made available to them in 1946, Cheseregon says, it became apparent that their marriage arrangements were interestingly similar to those of the Hebrews. The 'life accounts of the Old Testament patriarchs such as Moses, Jacob, Abraham, David, and Solomon,' among many others, had powerful resonance with their cultural ideals. Far from being a condemned practice, there were 'many instances where levirate marriages are celebrated in the Bible,' including in Deuteronomy 24: 50-51; Samuel 12: 7-9; Ruth 4: 1-11; and Genesis 34: 10-12, and so on (O.I, Cheronon 2020). Researches into the issue of marriage in the Bible indeed indicate that the gospel does not provide a firm foundation for limiting marriage to monogamy in the same manner it condemns other social 'evils' such as murder, fornication, adultery, lust,

and divorce (Hastings 1973, 8; Gimode 2003, 266; Adeney 1995, 2; Douglas 2008, 54). Whenever referred to in the New Testament, apostle Timothy advises that only church leaders ‘must be a husband of one wife’ (1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3: 2-4). This injunction, however, falls short of prohibiting polygamy among the other members of the congregation. On the contrary, it shows that Apostle Timothy was aware of Christians living in polygamous marriage arrangements in the Apostolic Church, and probably points to his tacit acceptance that polygamy was a deep-seated Semitic cultural institution that could not be removed with fiat.

For missionaries in the Kerio-Valley to insist on excluding polygamous Kalenjin from the fellowship was not only incongruent with the apostolic ideals but also insincere. The practice of divorcing all but one wife was wrong because these marriages were contracted in good faith and sanctioned by the Kalenjin religious philosophy, before the adoption of western Christian culture. These forced divorces were detrimental to the psychological and economic well-being of the rejected wives and children (O.I, Cherono 2020).

The ‘sinfulness’ attributed to polygamy made the church fail to penetrate the older generation. Most converts came from the younger generation. Later on, especially from the 1960s, even those who had converted to western Christianity reverted to clandestine polygamy while remaining ‘true’ members of the church (Kibor 1992; Kipkorir 2009; Chebet and Dietz 2000). This situation was not unexpected. It was an outcome that few farsighted missionaries had anticipated and warned their colleagues against imposing Western cultural values on Africans perforce in the name of Christianity. An AIM missionary, Hulda Stampf, for example, in a letter to

his colleague warned that ‘to thrust upon Africans rules of conduct that have not grown out of their conviction is likely to breed hypocrites than to unravel perplexities. Each case’ she said, ‘needs not the mechanical application of an infallible formula, but a brotherly counsel of someone familiar with local thought and custom’ (Letter of Stampf to Campbell, 3/05/1927, AIM Archives). Stampf was not alone in this observation. Colin Turnbull also writing on missionary attitudes against polygamy elsewhere noted that ‘the difficulties experienced in the adaptation to the western way of life are not entirely due to the greatness or differences, nor even to the speed with which that adaptation often was made, but rather they are due to the way in which Europeans themselves had tried to guide this adaptation. The African is capable of taking what he wants and needs.....to retain the old, to preserve not only continuity but cohesion. This is a process that has to grow from within, any attempt to impose from outside is bound to be disastrous’ (Turnbull 1962, 249).

Disaster is what this war on polygamy begot. This missionary misadventure proved to be immature and ill-advised. It made the old generation of the Kalenjin unqualified for church. The AIM logbook at Kapsowar has records of many people who attended catechumen classes. However, the average attendance does not correspond to the number of baptisms. The majority of men and women remained at the catechumen level for long periods mainly ‘because of their marital problems.’ For example, between 1932 and 1960 only 80 men from a population of about 9000 had been baptized. Most of them came from the young generation. However, most of them went on to marry for the second time later on in their lives (Kibor 2005, 125).

By the mid of the 1940s, the contest on the issue of polygamy had ended in a stalemate. The Kalenjin refused to surrender their culture, 'in spite of the struggle by missionaries to eradicate it.' Polygamy continued 'underground' and survives to the present millennium (Chebet and Dietz 2000, 142). In the end, it proved to the missionaries that the battle over polygamy was entirely avoidable had they recognized that 'religious dogma is much a function of culture as it is of the revelation behind it' (Kipkorir 2009, 20).

#### **4.5.3 Pokot Resistance to Christianity and Western Culture**

Although the general pattern of the reaction of the Kalenjin to Christianity was slow compared to the receptiveness of other communities of western Kenya, especially Bantu Abaluyia and Nilotic Luo, it was from the Pokot that western Christianity encountered the strongest and the most spirited opposition. From the moment of contact with agents of western civilization, the Pokot took their positions at the cultural defense barricades, and throughout the colonial period they demonstrated stoic composure and discipline to keep western Christianity at bay. They maintained their proud pastoral ideals unbothered by schools and western lifestyle, always 'disinclined to progress,' they desired 'only cows'(KNA, DC/Kacheliba, 1923, 3).

The Pokot obduracy was paradoxical given the fact that they had accepted *Pax-Britannica* without suffering repeated punitive expeditions, which had visited other communities in the Complex. The Turkana, Keiyo, Marakwet, and Tugen had suffered several devastating punitive expeditions sent against them by the British (Anderson 2004, 36; Tarus, 1993, 73). The Pokot at first 'paid their taxes with little hesitation' and readily collaborated with the British during the Anglo-Turkana wars,

where they were rewarded handsomely with livestock booty (Bollig 2006, 28). This initial warm reception of the British by the Pokot seems to have been tactical. Their perception of the colonial power and the reason for collaboration was shaped by the geopolitics of the Kerio-Valley. The Pokot wanted to use the *entente cordiale* established with the British to enhance their political position against their powerful neighbours, especially the Turkana. In comparison with the scourge of Turkana raiders, armed with old French muskets acquired from Ethiopia, the Pokot might have considered the light tribute of sheep and goats to the British a fair deal for protection. Therefore, up to 1910, the colonial yoke seemed to be a light one, except for the sporadic tax collection tours by the colonial officials (Patterson 1959, 26).

Beginning in 1910, the British began formal occupation and colonization of the Pokot by demarcating administrative boundaries, and by 1918 the colonial noose began to choke. The Pokot were divided into two districts. Some of the Pokot were placed in Baringo district administered from Eldama Ravine, before being transferred to Mukutani on the shores of Lake Baringo, and finally to Kabarnet in 1919. The other sections of the Pokot were bounded by West Suk district whose headquarters were at Ng'abotok from 1910. In 1915, the headquarter was transferred to Kongelai-Kacheliba in Uganda Protectorate. It was again transferred to Kapenguria in the Kenya Protectorate in 1929 (Patterson 1959).

In 1918, the District Officer of West Suk, Juxon Barton, demarcated the boundaries of locations, appointed headmen and tasked them with the role of tax collection, maintenance of law and order, and stopping the movement of people across locations. Generally, between 1918 and 1930 the British introduced a raft of

measures that had negative consequences on the Pokot economy and culture. They include taxation, restriction of stock and human movement, forced destocking, and agricultural policies meant to curb soil degradation. Under the weight of these new colonial policies, the pastoral political economy of the Pokot started caving in. With each passing year, the Pokot found themselves staring down the barrel. Previously their livestock had pastured wherever grass abounded, but now they were being fined for crossing internal and international boundaries determined by the British (Dietz 1987). This affront by the British in what the Pokot considered to be their way of life was an impertinence they were not willing to tolerate. It turned what initially had seemed to be a one-way traffic encounter into a genuine contest. More like a poster child of classic African passive resistance, the Pokot hurled a defiant charge (KNA, DC/WPKT/1/3, 1934-1938). They retreated deep into their shells of indigenous culture and religion. Defending from this impregnable cultural citadel, they remained reserved, aloof, and indifferent throughout the colonial period. They at times accepted new ideas, but only after long periods of critical examination and reflection. Otherwise, their 'attitude towards advancement of any kind is viewed with suspicion.' (KNA, DC/WPKT/1/3, 1934).

The Pokot determined cultural resistance was predicated on their satisfaction with their traditional culture and religion, and the feeling that it was superior and the most desirable to God (*Tororot*). Associated with this belief was an attitude that varies from simple indifference to contempt for all people who did not own livestock. The Pokot thus might have seen no need of altering their traditional proven way of life, even at the bidding of the most powerful European power. They possessed a self-

sufficient and highly integrated society, whose political and religious institutions were well adapted to the economic realities of transhumant pastoral people (Peristiany 1975; Schneider 1969). For that reason, they countered British colonial policies and missionary teachings with sullen opposition, which was manifested in passive resistance and at times by active obstructionism and violence. This included the use of cursing against chiefs who attempted to deviate against their culture and public opinion (KNA, DC/WPKT/1/3, 1934-1938).

In the late 1920s, the British introduced economic reforms that forced the Pokot to adopt scientific livestock keeping and agriculture including soil erosion control measures, animal inoculation, and new varieties of crops such as sorghum, bananas, maize, and sweet potatoes. The British believed that these reforms would not only improve the standard of living among the Pokot but also increase their contribution to the colonial economy. Of these reforms, only the maize crop was received favourably, the rest were either ignored or resisted violently (Nangulu 2005, 52). There was strong resistance to animal and human inoculation. For example, a healthcare worker providing smallpox vaccine was 'nearly beaten to death' (KNA, DC/WPKT/AR, 1942). The attitude of the Pokot to new culture, by and large, remained that of 'apparently immutable apathy and indifference from a western point of view.' For them, the 'blessings of *Pax-Brittanica* were not appreciated as much as one might suppose' (KNA, DC/ WPKT/AR, 1930). Their reaction towards any form of 'change in their present way of living whether to their advantage or not is one of complete indifference; they do not wish to cooperate in any policy of rehabilitation..... they just wish to be left alone' (KNA, DC/Baringo, 1/3, 1940).

In 1928 the West Pokot Local Native Council (L.N.C.) granted land and voted money for the construction of the first school in the district, G.A.S. Kapenguria. The Pokot attitude towards the school was characteristically negative. The chiefs gave them permission for the construction of the school, but as usual, they had excuses for not sending their children to the school. For this reason, the pioneer pupils of G.A.S. Kapenguria were children of other ethnic groups who had a favourable inclination toward education. These people had gone to West Pokot as clerks, teachers, and policemen for the colonial government, whilst few others came as traders (Schneider 1959, 65).

In 1931 the first missionary group, the B.C.M.S., set foot in Pokot. They acquired the former government headquarter at Kongelai-Kacheliba when the district headquarters was transferred to Kapenguria in 1929. However, it was not until 1931 that the station started functioning when Mr and Mrs. Housden moved in. This couple was replaced by Mr Totty in 1931. Totty then a bachelor married the assistant of the Houdens, Miss Tarr. The pair remained the principal B.C.M.S. missionaries in West Pokot during the entire period of this study. B.C.M.S. started a boarding school for boys and girls at Kacheliba. However, before they could make any meaningful impact there, the station was transferred to Nasokol near the District headquarters (KNA, PC/RVP/ West Pokot, 1936). The BCMS later established two outpost stations in Mwino and Sigorr in 1936. In 1935 the A.I.M. extended its influence to East Pokot from the Kabartonjo mission, by establishing an outstation at Nginyang under the care of Mr Tom Collins. Nginyang became the only A.I.M. mission station among the Pokot during the period covered by this study. In 1942 the M.H.M.

Kisumu vicariate through the Eldoret prefect, Father J. Van Der Wayde, applied for a piece of land on which they established the Tartar mission station in Kapenguria. Tartar station became the main centre from which Catholicism spread among the Pokot (Patterson 1959).

The Missionary societies despite their diligent efforts to attract the Pokot to the mission stations did not succeed. They carried the favour of Pokot youths to attend schools. However, like the other agents of Western culture before them, they failed utterly. The Pokot, towards education, the DC noted, was 'narrow and cramped by a wrong conservatism which forbids advance' (KNA, DC/WPKT/1/3, 1934). Throughout the Kerio-Valley, missionaries depended on their monopoly of education to attract the Kalenjin for purposes of evangelization. However, the Pokot's disinclination towards education made the missionaries' most effective weapon of proselytization blunt. The Pokot believed that it was useless to send their children to school. Sending children to school took away the much-needed pairs of hands, especially for taking care of small stock. The Pokot youth on their part were not attracted to education. Their aspiration was to be initiated into the age-sets (*asapantin*) and wear the coloured headdresses of honour in the community. They did not have the improper haste of abandoning their indigenous culture, because they did not see anything valuable in western education and Christianity (Schneider 1969, 159).

As late as the 1960s, Schneider (1959, 159) reports that Pokot men proudly wore their goatskins, adorned their coloured clay headdresses, and carried their eight-foot-long spear. Western clothing, tin-roofed houses, and bicycles that excited other

communities of western Kenya meant little to them. These exotic items did not inspire them to go to school to get good jobs to buy them. For this reason, among many others, the mission schools and the government schools drew most of their pupils from outsiders living in Pokot. In the post-war period Mnagei location where the district headquarters (Kapenguria) was situated, had a large population of Africans from other ethnic groups including Nandi, Bukusu, Agikuyu, Akamba, and Sabaot. These settlers 'numbered roughly 1350 which constituted about 25% of the population' of Mnagei (KNA, DC/West Pokot, Annual Report 1948). The majority of the pupils at the M.H.M Tartar station 'were Elgon Masai' (Sabaot) (KNA, DC/West Pokot, 1948). In G.A.S. Kapenguria, in 1938, there were a total of 75 boys and 15 girls, but none of the girls was Pokot (KNA, DC/West Pokot, 1938). Female education among the Pokot, in fact, 'remained nil' during the colonial period due to the strongly held belief that a woman's place is the home and that education would expose girls to immoral behaviour (Patterson 1959, 28). By 1948, G.A.S. Kapenguria had 102 pupils, of whom less than half of them were Pokot (KNA, DC/West Pokot, 1948). The attendance at bush schools also was poor and the D.C. had the arduous task of cajoling parents to send their sons to them. In 1951, a bush school for the B.C.M.S. in one of the most populous Pokot locations in Cheptulel had only ten students whose 'class attendance was irregular' (KNA, DC/West Pokot, 1948, 6).

Statistics indicate that in the post-war period there was increased demand for education in the Kerio-Valley. This increased enthusiasm prompted the expansion of educational institutions and services by the government and missionaries. By 1956

the expansion of schooling infrastructure was noticeable in Pokot, where there were 10 bush schools, three standard IV primary schools, two intermediate schools and one secondary school. However, this expansion of education was not met with increased enthusiasm for schooling from the Pokot (KNA, DC/West Pokot, 1941). Most of these schools were empty because of poor attendance. The outcome of this schooling apathy is that it was rare to get a Pokot pupil who had gone 'past elementary level' of studies. (KNA, DC/West Pokot, 1953).

In the middle of this cultural resistance, however, there were a few Pokot that were won over to the side of the enemy. By 1958, the D.C. reports that Chewoyet Secondary School for the first time took in two Pokot boys and probably a handful thereafter (KNA, DC/West Pokot, 1962). These few Pokot trailblazers went on to take influential positions in the community in the early 1960s. Jacob Pkerio Loriema, for example, became the headmaster of G.A.S Kapenguria, and James Powan, a primary school teacher, was promoted to the position of District Director of Education in 1962. This new indigenous leadership joined the side of the Europeans. However, their attempts to break down the Pokot cultural fortress were met with ruthless counterpower. They found their attempt to arouse interest in education and western Christianity just as futile as those of their predecessors - missionaries and the Colonial government. Despite the efforts of the African District Director of Education, James Powan, many Pokot bush schools were closed down for poor pupil attendance 'and the popular attitude remained unchanged.' School attendance remained low in Pokot compared to other areas in the Kerio-Valley because both

‘teachers and pupils’ were fond of ‘unauthorized vocations and long holidays’ (KNA, DC/West Pokot District, Handing over Report, 1963).

The Pokot resistance to Western cultural incursion stands in stark contrast to the reaction of the other Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley. The Pokot, the British observed, were ‘peculiarly and singularly illogical in their reasoning’ that they proposed ‘to make a study of the psychology of the Suk to understand anything at all of their outlook’ (KNA, DC/WPKT/1/3, 1934). Pokot obduracy was borne of the fact that different from the other Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley, the Pokot had come under the heavy influence of the Karimojong during the nineteenth century. From the Karimojong the Pokot adopted a pastoral-centric religious and political organization which came to seat at the centre of their culture (Peristiany 1959; Bollig 2000). The Pokot resistance to Christianity, therefore, was based on the belief that their livestock-centred civilization was superior to any other culture, including European. Their treatment of missionaries, just like any other people who did not own livestock, was that of contempt, pity, and a naughty feeling of superiority. This might explain why even the doctrinally liberal M.H.M. Catholics were not able to make any conspicuous influence among them (Schneider 1969).

The protestant B.C.M.S and A.I.M further complicated matters with their puritanical brand of Christianity that was heavily laced with Western culture. They disapproved of everything African, Pokot culture was considered at best ‘heathen’ and at worst useless and satanic. They insisted that for a Pokot to be admitted to baptism, they had to stop polygamy, and refrain from circumcision and clitoridectomy, *sapana* initiation, and *kirket* sacrifices. This was something that was unthinkable to the

Pokot because they believed that their culture was sanctioned by *Tororot*, who summoned it to come into being and willed it to continue (O.I, Ng'oriatudo 2020). Western Christianity as presented by missionaries was completely incompatible with their worldview, and there was nothing in it that seemed to appeal to them because their indigenous religion was sufficient. It was for this reason that the Pokot went on with their lives as normal for several decades, unperturbed by the presence of missionaries and other agents of change (O.I, Ngoriatudo 2020).

So reticent were the Pokot that in the 1950s a B.C.M.S. missionary stated that 'he could count with the fingers of one hand' the number of Pokot whom he thought had been converted 'in the 25 years' he had served in the area, despite 'his diligent efforts' (Quoted in Schneider 1959, 60). The majority of these few converts slipped back to their traditional lifestyles soon after conversion. It must have been rare to find a Pokot who had earnestly embarrassed Christianity that when it happened, it caught the eye of the D.C. In 1957 the D.C. reported that the B.C.M.S. after almost 30 years of 'dedicated if not particularly competent work' finally produced a 'bona fide convert' (KNA, DC/ West Pokot, 1957). Pokot attitude remained the same up to the twilight of British colonial rule in the 1960s. They pertinaciously held on to their positions on the cultural barricades, defending every inch of their culture showing very 'little desire for advancement in any direction' (KNA, DC/ Baringo, 1959). By 1962, there was every indication that the tide of this cultural war was swinging to the advantage of the Pokot. The agents of western culture - missionaries and administrators - had lost hope of breaking down Pokot culture. 'In Suk,' the D.C.

ominously concluded that ‘there is little to report, the prevailing resistance to change remains unimpaired’ (KNA, DC/ BAR/AR, 1962).

#### **4.6 The Factors that Assisted the Spread of Christianity**

During the missionization period, there were several layers of forces which were piled on the Kalenjin cultural structure in a differentiated yet efficiently welded fashion to push the Kalenjin towards missionary Christianity. These forces including locust invasions, drought and famine, taxation, wage labour, diseases, and the social aftershocks of the World Wars conspired to lay a siege on the Kalenjin cultural fortress. The heat generated by this siege forced some of the Kalenjin to reconsider their attitude towards missionaries.

In the period between 1918 and 1944, the Kerio-Valley was hit by a series of deadly droughts which combined with locust invasions to a debilitating effect. The oral traditions of the Kalenjin and official colonial records recount droughts occurring in 1918, 1919, 1924, 1926, 1927, 1928, 1930, and 1943-1944. The 1918-1919, 1926-1927, and 1943-1944 famines are remembered to be the most calamitous. The names given to them suggest their severity. The 1918 disaster, for example, was named *kenyitab kibichotit*, or the year of locusts, and the drought of 1943-44 was baptized as *kipl-el-kowo* or famine of skeletons ‘because of the many people who perished and their bones were strewn all over wherever they died for many months’ (Kipkorir 2009, 14).

The effects of these calamities were felt by different Kalenjin groups in varying degrees. The settled agro-pastoral Tugen, Marakwet, and Keiyo were severely hit

compared to the nomadic pastoral Pokot. The former depended on slash-and-burn agriculture augmented with furrow irrigation where they cultivated sorghum and millet. Apart from small arable patches of land, large parts of the escarpment, inhabited by these Kalenjin, were rocky and too steep for any meaningful agriculture. Their farming produced meagre harvests that could hardly sustain them to the next harvest. Therefore, when drought combined with locust invasion visited the Kerio-Valley, it pushed the Kalenjin to the brink of annihilation (Tarus 1994; Morton 1998; Kandagor 1993).

British administration's district annual reports of the 1920s from the Kerio-Valley paint a grim picture of starving people. In 1927, for example, the DC reports that the 'semi-starving' people of Baringo were 'eking out a precarious existence on the borderline of starvation' (KNA, DC/BAR, 1927). As the conditions worsened, the Kalenjin were forced to consider other options for survival. The majority of the young to middle-aged men were pushed out of the reserves to venture into squatterdom and other forms of wage labour on the settler farms. Still, others went to work in the Londiani-Eldoret railway extension. For the majority who remained in the reserves, especially the young and the elderly, the colonial government had to intervene. Porters were dispatched with great logistical difficulties to take relief food to the Keiyo, Marakwet, and Tugen reserves from Eldoret. Families were given rations of maize flour (*posho*) in tins at the district headquarters and missionary stations. In Baringo, the colonial government used Mr. Daniel Dalziel and his AIM Kabartonjo mission team to distribute food to the Tugen. This humanitarian act by missionaries in the face of a more formidable enemy, starvation, wooed young boys

and girls to the mission station. It softened the hearts of those who went to the Kabartonjo Mission Station in search of food. It was probably for this reason that Mr Dalziel is fondly remembered by the Tugen. By the time he had left Kabartonjo Mission Station in 1944, the DC observed that, he had ‘exerted a very good influence on the Kamasia’ and the products of his Kabartonjo station ‘are doing very well at the government schools at Kabarnet and Tambach’ (KNA, DC/BAR 1/4, 1944).

Another factor which for went parallel with drought, locust invasion, and famine in the Kerio-Valley was taxation. Taxation was introduced in Kenya by the colonial government in 1901 when Lord Lansdowne, the then colonial secretary, sanctioned the levying of taxes not exceeding two rupees on every African hut (Ross 1968, 145). In the Kerio-Valley, records indicate that formal taxation started around 1910 when the DC of the then Kerio District<sup>16</sup> journeyed across the district, assisted by Somali and Nubian mercenaries, to establish effective administration. He demarcated locations and appointed headmen and entrusted them with the task of tax collection (Tarus 1994, 135).

Compared to other communities of Western Kenya the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley were little affected by taxation before 1918. Many escaped to construct their huts in the most inaccessible precipices on the escarpments, and thus managed to escape the brunt of the tax hunter. Those who could not escape paid their taxes promptly using livestock. Sheep were mainly used as the currency for tax payment because they were not prized as much as cattle and goats (Tarus 1994, 136). The introduction of

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<sup>16</sup> From 1895 to 1910 Baringo, Elgeyo-Marakwet, West Pokot was administered from Eldama-Ravine as the Kerio District. Eldama Ravine served as a major trading post for IBEACO for more information read Anderson (2004).

poll tax by the colonial government in 1910 to replace hut tax complicated matters for the Kalenjin. This new version of tax provided that every male above 16 years of age was expected to pay tax. From 1910 young men yet to undergo circumcision, and thus by custom not allowed to own stock, were included in the new tax bracket. This cohort had no alternative but to leave the reserve for wage labour on settler farms in Uasin-Gishu, Trans-Nzoia, and Eldama Ravine (Tarus 1994, 137).

Matters were complicated for the Keiyo when their highland grazing land was alienated for European settlement. Following the collapse of the Uasin-Gishu Maasai as a powerful force in the middle of the nineteenth century, the Keiyo took advantage of the political vacuum created on the Uasin-Gishu to occupy the plateau adjacent to the escarpment. By the onset of colonization, the Keiyo had developed an elaborate agro-pastoral lifestyle that utilized the eastern edge of the Uasin-Gishu plateau as their pastureland, albeit with intermittent threats from the Nandi, Karimojong, and Turkana. However, beginning around 1903, the Keiyo grazing land on the Uasin-Gishu was alienated by the British for settler agriculture, the Elgeyo Sawmills, and its subsidiary Moiben Sawmills. The Keiyo resented this colonial incursion into a land they considered rightfully theirs (Tarus 1994, 89).

Therefore, in the period between 1904 and 1919, the Keiyo carried out a series of audacious attacks and stock thefts on settler farms. One of these attacks in 1905 led to the death of a Boer settler, Van Breda. The outcry from the Uasin-Gishu settler community forced the Colonial government to launch retaliatory attacks that led to the capture of the two suspects. This conflict proved to be a microcosm of the explosive interaction between the Keiyo and the British during the early period of

colonial rule, which culminated in the 1919 punitive expedition. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of February 1919, under the leadership of Chesire arap Omonoi, the Keiyo of Koopke supported by those of Sing'ore raided settler farms in Mekenya and Kapchorua and made away with 'over 500 head of cattle and 600 sheep.' Goaded into action by the furry of settlers, the Colonial government launched an expedition against the Keiyo. In a quick counter-attack, the British killed five Keiyo men including the leader of the raid (arap Omonoi) and recovered 551 head of cattle and 1100 sheep and goats, which were distributed to the affected settlers (Tarus 1994, 89).

Once the objective of recovering stock had been achieved, and the settlers placated, the government decided to teach the Keiyo a lesson once and for all. Accordingly, the Kings African Rifles (KAR) mustered at Kaptagat before launching attacks across the narrow strip of the Keiyo reserve from the south to the north. In a brief but very brutal exhibition of might, the British left a trail of destruction and confiscation of livestock from Marichor in the south to Kapchemutwa in Keiyo North. The consequences of opposing the agents of colonialism had been powerfully displayed, and a lesson was well learnt, such that 'up to 1939 the Keiyo never again gave much trouble to the British' (Tarus 1994, 89).

To compound the problems of the Keiyo, in 1923 the southern territories of Marichor, Tumeiyo, and Mutei lost their grazing land to the E.S.M Grogan concession.<sup>17</sup> The net effect of this loss of land for the Keiyo is that it reduced their grazing land. Therefore, when drought and locust visited their land, combined with

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<sup>17</sup> The Grogan Concession was about 64, 000 acres of land leased by the British Colonial government to E.S Grogan for timber harvesting. The concession included parts of southern Keiyo (Metkei) and the southern Uasin-Gishu (Ainabkoi, Timboroa, and Kipkabus). This concession denied the Keiyo people grazing land and access to the Kipkabus salt licks (*ng'enda*).

the effect of confiscation of livestock, and the heat of taxation, the Keiyo economy virtually collapsed. They lost their currency for paying taxes, animals. Just as heavy the burden of taxation was, so was its brutal method of collection. The colonial government used Nubian and Somali mercenaries as tax hunters to ensure that no one escaped the tax dragnet. The presence of these armed Nubians, who were both dreaded and hated by the Kalenjin boded ill, no tax defaulter could risk their presence (Morton 1998).

Beginning around 1918 and increasing in the 1920s Kalenjin men were driven out of the impregnable fortress of the Kerio-Valley by the iniquitous poll tax and its brutal method of collection. Colonial administrative reports indicate that there was an increase in Kalenjin men leaving reserves to seek wage labour on settler farms and railway construction through the course of the 1920s. By 1940, at least 4 in every 10 men were out of the reserve for wage labour or squatterdom (KNA, DC/BAR, 1940). In 1923, for example, 1400 men from Baringo District left their homes for work on settler farms around Eldama Ravine (KNA, DC/BAR/AR, 1923). In Keiyo, the DC reported that 700 to 800 able-bodied men had left the reserve for work on settler farms in 1920. By 1929 an estimate of 1000 people from Baringo were squatting on settler farms (KNA, DC/BAR/AR, 1920-1929). The same scenario was witnessed among the Pokot and Marakwet where young men left their villages for wage labour and squatterdom. However, the number of Pokot men going for wage labour was far less compared to those from other Kalenjin groups. The portrait that can be drawn from the distribution of wage labour is that the Kalenjin never liked working far away from their reserves. They worked on settler farms adjacent to their reserves.

The Keiyo mainly took employment among settler farmers of Uasin-Gishu; the Pokot went to Trans-Nzoia, the Tugen to Eldama Ravine, the Marakwet to Uasin-Gishu and Trans-Nzoia settler farms. When they felt that they had earned enough money to pay taxes and buy a few luxury items, they deserted their jobs and went back to the reserves. Unlike the other communities such as the Agikuyu who migrated permanently, the Kalenjin viewed squatting as a temporary measure to solve a problem. It did not involve the permanent severing of bonds with their ancestral reserves (Tarus 1994; Kipkorir 2009).

The personal experiences of men during work stints had a great bearing on how they responded to Christianity later on. Labour excursions expanded their cultural scopes and widened their worldviews beyond their former villages, which ‘inevitably resulted in breaking down tribal traditions which hitherto had held the tribe together’ (Massam 1927, 131). It also brought the Kalenjin into close touch with settlers and Africans from other ethnic groups of Kenya - the Luo, Abaluyia, Akamba, Agikuyu, and a few Baganda. These foreign people had come as clerks, foremen (*nyapara*), teachers, catechists, tax collectors, and policemen. The majority of them had embraced western education and Christianity, which enabled them to get better-paying jobs that earned them good wages. They were the first Africans in the eyes of the Kalenjin to possess the trappings of Western civilization and modernity such as bedsteads, Dietz lamps, blankets, bicycles, and aluminum utensils. This new lifestyle posed a challenge to the Kalenjin youth forcing some of them to consider their orientation towards the cultural ideas propagated by them (Sawe 2003, 32).

Most of the early converts to Christianity among the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley were inspired to go to school from their experiences on their tours of jobs. Daudi Kilimo arap Koikoi, Elijah Kilimo arap Kileu, Joshua Isyo arap Chebobei and Samson Chelang'a of Marakwet, for example, found inspiration for schooling from their encounters with strangers during their stints as labourers in Uasin-Gishu. Among the Keiyo, the foremost early converts and church elders at Kessup including Samuel Kokoi, Elijah Chemweno, Joshua Cheptum, Paulo Koiser, Job Katam, Laban Leteshaw, Jeremiah Yab, and the brother Daudi Yab were inspired by the ability of other labourers to read and write to seek education. The story of Elijah Chemweno and Jeremiah Yab perhaps serves to typify these encounters. These two worked as labourers on a Boer settler farm on the Uasin-Gishu plateau. On that farm, they meet a Kikuyu foreman (*nyapara*), a Mr Reuben. Mr Reuben was a literate Christian convert who dressed well and lived a modern lifestyle. Every evening Reuben invited them to his place of residence on the farm with the hope of converting them to Christianity. He read them a verse from the scripture before giving a short sermon on a selected topic. The young men are said to have been inspired by Reuben's ability to read and write. For that reason, they left their employment in 1936 and went back home, Lelboinet in Marichor, to plan for their education. The same year, they trekked to the nearest AIM mission in the district, Kapsowar, some 100km, to quench their thirst for education (Sawe 2003, 32).

This thirst for education, by the Kalenjin youth, was a major fillip for Christianity at a time when the church and school were inseparably connected. It had dawned on the youths that their society was evolving, and probably it may never be the same again.

For them to be able to pay taxes and live comfortably in the new economic setup they had to have a job, and to have a good job ‘one had to learn from strangers the mystery of literacy and with it acquire the magic to manipulate events to his advantage’ (Kipkorir 2009, 29). Education guaranteed good-paying jobs and consequently money to pay taxes and purchase luxury accoutrements of western civilization.

It was out of this rising desire for education that the LNCs of Elgeyo-Marakwet and West-Pokot through the influence of the First World War veterans voted for money for the construction of GAS Tambach in 1927, and GAS Kapenguria in 1928 respectively (KNA DC/ELGM/1/1 Annual Report 1927). The LNCs also sponsored native students attending these intermediate schools. Few young men influenced by their work experiences left their homes to attend missions and government schools to quench their thirst for learning. Other pioneer pupils were children of parents who had been exposed to the western lifestyle through their work experiences as squatters, wage labourers, or as the ex-First World War courier corps. By the mid of the 1930s in Baringo and the early 1940s in Keiyo and Marakwet, these pioneer pupils were graduating from their schools and vocational training, especially the NITD. Most of them took jobs in their reserves as untrained teachers, clerks, and artisans. From these engagements, they earned good salaries that enabled them to pay their taxes and afford luxury items. Their success created a domino effect that pulled more youths to schools.

The Kalenjin thus had begun to master the colonial system that had been designed to master and change them. They had come up to the realization that education

presented the only surest avenue for economic advancement within the colonial system. Beginning in the 1940s, therefore, it was the Kalenjin who began clamouring for education and pushing the colonialists and missionaries further than they intended to go (Chebet & Dietz 2000). The district's annual reports of the 1940s and 1950s tell a story of a people pleading with the colonial administration to open schools in their home areas. A case in point is that of ex-World War II soldiers from Kapchemutwa in Keiyo North. They wrote to the DC in this vein:

In our side [sic] we *ex-askari* fought in all fronts so as to achieve freedom and toleration of religion believing that after conquering our enemies we shall come back home and utilize this privilege in whatever way we like.....now we are in need of religion and education than we can explain in this paper.....we are approximately 500 Catholics in this district and the number of our children we have is twice our number [sic]. Our aim is to educate these children as high as possible [sic] (KNA, DC/ELGM/AR,1946).

In Baringo also, there was a push by the Tugen for education. The PC reported that 'the Tuken are on all sides and all barazas crying out for education and teachers', and when 'the government was not swift in the implementation,' they took matters into their own hands. For example, the east Lembus location erected two bush schools which share one AIM outpost' (KNA, PC/RVP 2/51, 1940). Because of this pressure, 'between 1937 and 1946 there was a tremendous surge in the number of pupils attending schools', which forced the LNC to set aside a parcel of land and to vote money for the construction of GAS Kabarnet in 1943 (Kandagor 1994, 69). The school opened in 1944. By and large, in the post-war period, the people of the Kerio-Valley 'were certainly becoming much more desirous of education' (KNA, DC/ELGM, 1/13/ 1944). Although the school attendance population in the Kerio-

Valley could not be compared to the Abaluyia and Luo, it had generally improved from the depressing figures that characterized the initial period of missionization (Kandagor 1994).

The desire for education gave impetus to missionization. Mission schools and catechumen classes swelled. This story has been told before, but there has never been any attempt to ask the question: should this increase in mission school enrolment be equated with the desire by the Kalenjin youth to change their religious orientation? I doubt if this question can be answered in the affirmative without serious reservations. Judging from the high number of catechumen and pupils in mission schools and the few who ‘converted,’ we can safely surmise that the aspirations of the Kalenjin seemed to be discordant with those of the missionaries. The main attraction of the Kalenjin to mission schools was education, while the key concern of missionaries was to change their religious orientation. This, therefore, was a conundrum that required a social transaction formula, focusing on the barter of values and services in the interpersonal relations of reciprocity to be unraveled. The tactical purpose of material offers by missionaries such as education, medical work, and relief food was very clear; reciprocity was expected from the Kalenjin in the form of religious conviction. At the end, like in every transaction, every party was satisfied. Missionaries got a chance to propagate their religion while the Kalenjin youth found a place for education. As to who got the most in this exchange, that will be answered in the next chapter.

#### 4.7 The Factors behind the Slow Kalenjin Response to Christianity

Historical inquiries into the spread of Christianity in Western Kenya indicate that compared to the Bantu Abaluyia and Nilotic Luo, the Kalenjin took long to adopt and to adapt Christianity to their cultures. Still, even among the Kalenjin, the Pokot staged a textbook cultural resistance against Christianity and Western culture. It was not until deep into the post-independence period that western Christianity started to have a meaningful impact on the Pokot.

**Table 4.0:** Table showing numbers of catechumen and converts of the FAIM (Quakers) among the Abaluyia Source, Painter (1966, 79)

Community		Date	Baptized	Catechumen	Total
Maragoli		1917	235	459	644
Bukusu		1919	0	35	35
Isukha		1919	62	166	222
Kabras		1920	11	23	34
Tiriki		1920	23	55	78
Overall			331	688	813

The Abaluyia were missionized by several missionary groups including FAIM, MHM, PAOC, CMS, and COG. By the 1920s records indicate that a good number of Abaluyia had been attracted to mission centres as shown by the table above. The table indicates that FAIM (Quakers) alone had converted 331 Abaluyia by 1920. This can be contrasted with the depressing figures of converts among the Kalenjin. For example, in 1920 there was no convert among the Nandi. Among the Keiyo by 1960 the AIM mission had managed to secure only 40 converts and 150 catechumens against a population of about 20,000 people (Sawe 2003, 35). In Marakwet in the first decade of missionization, 1933-1943, only 13 souls had been baptized (KNA, DC/ELGM, 1/13/ 1944).

**Table 5.0.** Table showing Christian conversation in Marakwet from 1933-1943.

Source, AIM archives Nairobi

Period	Church Members	Catechumen	Baptized people	Sunday Service
July-Dec 1933	7	12	3	36
Jan-April 1934	6	28	0	34
May-August 1934	6	31	0	34
Sept-Dec 1934	7	35	0	36
Jan-April 1938	20	35	0	75
May-August 1938	21	49	0	76
Sept-Dec 1938	21	56	0	78
July-Dec 1939	21	30	0	91
Jan-June 1940	21	30	0	68
July-Dec 1940	17	31	0	103
July-Dec 1941	17	37	0	114
Jan-June 1942	13	34	10	66
July-Dec 1942	13	34	0	70
Jan-June 1943	13	39	0	83

**Table 6.0.** Table showing Christian conversation at the Kabartonjo Mission Station from 1940 – 1945. Source, AIM archives Nairobi.

Period	Members	Catechumen	Baptized	Sunday Service
Jan - June 1940	34	88	4	125
July - Dec 1940	34	88	0	114
Jan - June 1941	43	108	0	125
July - Dec 1941	43	133	4	179
Jan - June 1942	43	119	0	190
July - Dec 1942	49	120	6	190
July – Dec 1943	59	125	10	170
July – Dec 1945	88	238	20	170

These figures beg the question: What could be the reason behind this Kalenjin obduracy? In his attempt to account for the slow reaction of the Nandi and Terik to Christianity, Gimode (2003, 287) foregrounds the effects of the British punitive expeditions, especially during the Nandi resistance, as the motivation behind the negative reaction to Christianity by the Nandi. Juxtaposing the obdurate Southern Kalenjin against the receptive Bantu Abaluyia and the Nilotic Luo, Gimode observed

that by the second decade of the twentieth century the Nandi and the Terik were of all the communities of south-western Kenya yet to be touched by Christianity, because, as he says, ‘the consequences of the resistance left a hostile mindset among the Nandi.’ The ‘net effect was that the presence of whites in British Forts at Kaptumo, Kapture, and Kapsabet and Christian missionaries aroused and sustained more hatred for everything Western.’ The Nandi, therefore, ‘made up for what they had lost in the war by staging a cultural resistance which poured scorn on Western cultural trappings’ (Gimode 2003, 287).

This explanation by Gimode is contestable. Gimode presents as if the Anglo-Nandi confrontation was the only war that the Nandi had fought and lost in their long history. The Nandi had lived in pre-colonial Africa where right was determined by might. Their history is replete with instances of lost battles. For example, before the mid of the nineteenth century, they were defeated severally by their bellicose pastoral neighbours, the Maasai. Yet these military setbacks were never internalized as grudges in the Nandi national psyche. The opposite is true. The Nandi ‘history is illustrative of Maasai impact’ (Sutton 1968, 163). The Nandi came to incorporate Maasai clans into their stock and a variety of other cultural trappings that came to sit at the very core of their political and religious organisation such as the institution of the Talai prophets, *orkoiyot* (Mwanzi 1977, 132).

While the explanation given by Gimode is plausible in explaining the Nandi resistance against Christianity and Western culture in a localized area, it cannot explain the reticence shown by the other Kalenjin groups including the Terik, Kipsigis, Sabaot, and the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley, and the other Nilotic groups

(Maasai, Samburu and Turkana) in general (KNA, PC/RVP/1/3/2, 1937). Some of the Kalenjin, for instance, the Pokot welcomed the British first before staging a classic cultural resistance against Christianity and Western culture. What this means, as I have shown elsewhere, is that the causes of the Nandi cultural resistance, and Kalenjin resistance generally, should be found elsewhere (Shiyuka 2017, 141) and not in the Anglo-Nandi confrontation as Gimode would want us to believe. The explanation for the Kalenjin's insularity and aloofness should be sought in their unique cultural aspects, especially the age-graded male circumcision culture and the pastoral lifestyle with its overriding feature of the Cattle Complex.<sup>18</sup>

Pastoralism has been highlighted by many scholars to be the driving impetus behind the conservatism exhibited by Nilotic communities in East Africa generally including the Dinka, Nuer, Samburu, and Maasai (Butt 1964; Hennings 1951, 166; Evans-Pritchard 1940, 12). Writing on the Nuer and Shilluk of Sudan, Butt (1964, 12) observed that they believed in the superiority of their pastoral culture, and 'considered their country to be the best in the world and everyone inferior to themselves. For this reason, they despise clothing and scorn on European and Arabic culture, and are contemptuous and reserved with foreigners, so that it is difficult to know them.' Generally, there was a particular pattern of conservatism exhibited by pastoral Nilotes which stands out in sharp relief when juxtaposed against the receptivity of the settled Bantu and settled Nilotic groups. Still, even among the Nilotes, the resistance was more pronounced among the pure pastoral groups such as

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<sup>18</sup> For more discussion on the phenomenon of the cattle complex see, for example, Herskovits M.J (1924, 1926), Mair Lucy (1985), and Schneider HK (1975)

the Pokot, Maasai, Samburu, and Dinka compared to the agro-pastoral groups such as the Nandi, Kipsigis and Keiyo (Schneider 1959; Patterson 1969).

Pastoralism and played a major role in the reaction of the Kalenjin to external cultural incursions. Ownership of livestock, especially cattle, apart from being a token of virility, it was the driving impulse of the Kalenjin psyche. Their naming system, their ritual practices, and their measure of economic and aesthetic value were all determined by livestock. Although most of the Kalenjin practised agriculture, and cultivation dominated their economy, they still viewed livestock keeping as a superior and aesthetically pleasing endeavour. Livestock, particularly bovines, literally speaking was the *raison d'être* of the Kalenjin society. It is this centrality of the cattle that made them display a scornful attitude towards all non-cattle-keeping groups and missionaries. This cattle-complex conservatism was marked by a feeling of superiority that made them resist exogenous influences. They were extremely conservative in their aversion to any innovation and foreign influences that took them away from the cow. Their love for cows repulsed foreign influences such that:

On the whole, the khaki shorts and shirts, felt hats, cigarettes, bicycles, and football mean nothing to the Elgeyo and their kindred tribes [Kalenjin], and their cousins the Maasai and Samburu.....those scepters of Western civilization have no meaning for him. He is at one with his environment, a pastoralist with his cattle on the high equatorial pastures of Africa, and because he feels himself a part of his cosmos, his heart is at peace and he is carefree and happy in the way that millions in Europe never know (Hennings 1951, 167) [parenthesis mine].

Ownership of livestock indeed made the Kalenjin to be part of their cosmos. It is for this reason that their political organization centred on age groups emphasized the

acquisition and maintenance of livestock through raiding. The key lesson in the martial curriculum for initiates during seclusion was on how to conduct successful raids (*luk*) for livestock. At the same time, each age group was remembered for its success in raiding neighbours for livestock and the defense of the community's corals (O.I, Kiprono 2020).

The Kalenjin groups had seven to eight age groups namely Kipnyikeu, Nyongi, Maina, Chumo, Sawe, Korongoro, Kipkoimet, and Kaplelach.<sup>19</sup> Each age group lasted for a period of between twelve to fifteen years. The age groups provided the society with five age grades on which war and peacetime activities were organized, that is the uncircumcised youths, the principal warriors, the senior warriors, the judicial elders, and the ritual elders. The formal handing over ceremony of age groups, *sokobei* among the Keiyo, was conducted after approximately twelve years (Massam 1927). This automatically caused each group to move up a grade to the social functions of the group immediately senior to it. This process also opened up a new age group for initiation. The handing-over ceremony led to the retirement of warriors to the position of senior warriors, who mostly confined their activities to advisory roles and support of livestock raids and counter-attacks. The erstwhile initiates became warriors, whose role was to conduct livestock raids and retaliatory attacks. The former senior warriors, on their part, became judicial elders, and the former judicial elders became ritual elders. The essence of life for the Kalenjin, therefore, was to perpetuate this political organization whose key concern was to

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<sup>19</sup> All the other Kalenjin groups of the Kerio-Valley, except the Tugen, have eight age-groups, the Tugen expunged Maina from their cycle after the Maina warrior grade was annihilated by the Keiyo in an abortive raid at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

maintain and increase livestock. This made them resist any attempts to change their orientation, hence their cultural resistance to ‘the lure of civilization (sic) as offered to them through the media of trade, government, mission and colonization’ (Huntingford 1950, 108).

Another factor which conditioned significantly how the Kalenjin interacted with foreign culture was their circumcision or *tum*, and the accompanying sacred teaching on the does-and-don’ts. The interaction of initiated Kalenjin men and women with the community and aliens was determined by the sacred teachings and roles given to them during *tum*. Most young men, Kipkorir (2009, 68) noted, ‘dropped out of mission influence after their circumcision.’ This behaviour remained the same deep into the independence period. The behaviour of the Kalenjin especially men before and after *tum* gave expression and content to the formal status of differentiation established through initiation. It marked the difference from the vastly inferior status of women and children to the full status of ‘manhood’ (O.I, Chesaina 2020)

Circumcision bequeathed Kalenjin men with a whole set of customs, attitudes and social responsibilities to be undertaken by members of established age groups. In the course of the initiation period, it was graphically enforced on the initiates how to relate to women, children, uninitiated, and the established members of Kalenjin age groups. Respect was to be shown to the senior age group members. The age group of ritual elders was to be shown specific respect and honour. More importantly, one was to treat members of his age group (*bakule*) as special brothers. Circumcision thus affected directly and indirectly most areas of social activity. The social groupings, ranking, statuses, and roles which *tum* instituted on the Kalenjin men manifested

themselves in everything, including daily interfamilial interactions. A Kalenjin ‘man,’ for example, was not expected to share a meal with or enjoy the company of ‘children’<sup>20</sup> or *lagok*. Circumcision and age-group membership ensured a higher social status such that the Kalenjin considered circumcised members of other non-Kalenjin ethnic groups and races as a higher order of life compared to women, children, and the uncircumcised men, but still not fit company for members of their age groups (O.I, Kiprono 2021).

It is from the foregoing description of Kalenjin circumcision culture and age-group structure and solidarity that one can comprehend the difficulty with which Christianity encountered in its attempt to penetrate established members of the Kalenjin age groups. The same phenomenon was observed among the Nandi by Huntingford. The Nandi, he states, ‘pride in themselves and their tribe and have contempt for all who are not like themselves.’ Any person who did not belong to their age groups was seen as a lesser mortal. Their ‘first estimate of a European is that of a woman’ (Huntingford 1950, 108). It is for this reason that the bulk of the first Christian converts among the Kalenjin came from the cohort of uncircumcised boys and girls.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have examined the planting of Christianity in the Kerio-Valley. I began by providing a concise historical background of the missionary activities in Kenya generally. The reason for this was to situate events in the Kerio-Valley within

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<sup>20</sup> In Kalenjin parlance, the name children (*lagok*) refer to those who have not undergone male circumcision. They include women, children and other non-Kalenjin groups. Later on, during the missionary period, even those circumcised in hospitals or *kipshiti* were classified as women.

the context of the wider historical picture of rise of the worldwide Christian missionary movement. I then gave a brief history and theological disposition of specific missionary groups that missionized the Kerio-Valley (the AIM, MHM, and BCMS). I have shown that missionary activities started in the Kerio-Valley much later compared to other areas of western Kenya. The first mission group was AIM, which started work in Baringo at Kapropita in 1913. This station was however shut down, in 1920, because of the obduracy of the Tugen. The AIM resumed missionary activities six years later by opening a new mission station at Kabartonjo. The AIM was followed by the MHM and BCMS in the 1930s. These missionary groups employed a variety of methods to attract the Kalenjin for purposes of evangelization including the use of medical services, provision of education, translation of the Bible, and construction of Christian villages. Medical work as a tool of evangelization was mainly used by AIM in Marakwet. However, education was the most important instrument that assisted missionaries to reach out to a wider audience, and because of their near complete monopoly of education they were able to reach out to the Kalenjin youth.

The chapter has also shown that there were a variety of extraneous forces that conspired to give birth to a Christian minority in the Kerio-Valley. These forces emerged from the tumult initiated by the vicissitudes of colonization and natural calamities. They included taxation, drought, locust invasion, and famine which ravaged the Kerio-Valley in the 1920s and 1930s. The heat generated by these events forced the Kalenjin out of the comfort of their reserves to seek wage labour and squatterdom on settler farms for survival. Their tours of work and military duty (for

World War I courier corps) widened their worldviews which made them have a favourable view of education. In a period where education was inextricably tied to the church, this demand for education landed them in the hands of missionaries, in the process a few were attracted by the new religion.

The spread of Christianity in the Kerio-Valley was not as rapid and dramatic as often portrayed in missiological and theological studies. The Kalenjin staged a dogged and systematic resistance to western Christianity right from the onset of missionization. The situation was made worse by the missionaries' stance on African culture. Missionaries came in the spirit of antagonism and conquest. Instead of spreading religion, they were preoccupied with *religiocide*. They failed to understand that their work was a cross-cultural communication of the gospel, which needed them to use the cultural framework of the Kalenjin to communicate the gospel. The Kalenjin strongly resisted this missionary frontal attack on their culture. The resistance to Christianity varied across the Kalenjin groups of the Kerio-Valley. The Pokot staged a classic cultural resistance. Proud, indifferent, and insular they were only concerned with their livestock-centred culture. By the end of the study period, Christianity and Western culture had barely scratched the Pokot cultural surface. The other groups, the Keiyo, Marakwet, and Tugen resisted strongly in the early years of missionization, but by the end of the Second World War, a few of them were captured by the new religion. African resistance to Christianity was staged as a confrontation of cultures over the issue of polygamy and circumcision, especially clitoridectomy. The protagonists were not willing to make concessions, which led to a stalemate that affected the uptake of Christianity among the Kalenjin. The Kalenjin

cultural resistance was a result of the cattle-complex syndrome and the age-graded circumcision culture.

This chapter used the theory of agency as a conceptual tool to explain the interaction between Western Christianity and Kalenjin culture. This agentic interaction manifested itself in the form of a cultural clash. During this cultural clash, the Kalenjin remained reticent and rejected new ideas imposed on them. As human agents, they were developing projects in their minds. Therefore, they could not accept new cultures instantaneously. The agentic role was an interactive process in which the Kalenjin negotiated pathways into the future, after receiving impetus from the challenge posed by Christianity. During the period of the cultural clash, the Kalenjin were adjusting their indigenous religion to fit into the intruding western Christianity. The outcome of this projection was that it led to the fusion of selected aspects of their indigenous culture with Western Christianity to formulate syncretism, which is the concern of our next chapter.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: THE ADOPTION AND DOMESTICATION OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE KERIO-VALLEY c. 1945-1965**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter examines the adoption and adaptation of western Christianity in the Kerio-Valley. It describes how the Kalenjin resolved the conflict between their indigenous culture and western Christianity; a ferocious cultural conflict that was described in the previous chapter. This chapter demonstrates how the Kalenjin, as historical agents, moved beyond this conflict by interpreting Christian ideas and artefacts in the light of their indigenous religious schemas. This interpretation enabled them to tailor western Christian concepts to their cultural landscape. The upshot was the creation of a typical Kalenjin Christianity. The chapter uses the theory of human agency to explain how the Kalenjin acquired and assimilated western Christianity into their culture. This process of agentic intervention is explained by the *practical-evaluation* dimension of agency. *Practical evaluation* is the mediating aspect of agency, which enables the agent to transform situational contexts of action by modifying received patterns of thought. The primary locus of the *practical-evaluative* dimension in this chapter lies in the way the Kalenjin adopted some aspects of Christianity and restructured them to fit into the African religious terrain. This passed for the Kalenjin a Christianity that was neither entirely exotic nor wholly indigenous but essentially hybrid.

### **5.2 Conversion or Conversation? The Kalenjin Adoption of Christianity**

The history of the advent of Christianity in the Kerio-Valley was not a one-sided event as sometimes portrayed by Kibor (1992, 2005), Anderson (1994), and Sawe

(2003). Contrary to the narrow and simplistic narrative of Christian triumph against the 'dark forces of paganism' propagated by ecclesiastical histories, the history of the introduction of Christianity in the Kerio-Valley was a stunning account of a fierce battle of religious cultures. The narratives of triumph paint an imagined portrait of a powerful Christian religion overwhelming and erasing a weak 'heathen and animistic' Kalenjin worldview (Anderson 1994, 14). The chief proponents of this paradigm disseminate a false claim that Christianity never faced any resistance when first introduced to the Kalenjin, and in the cases where it did, it was very feeble. They insist that 'the Kalenjin were monotheists and worshipers of one Supreme God, which made it easier for them to accept the Christian message; the transition to Christianity was not drastic or difficult as in idol worshipping groups of Asia' (Fish and Fish 1995, 3). What missionaries only did, they say, was to sprinkle the embers of the gospel into the tinderbox of 'the atrocious tribal customs and religious rites' of the Kalenjin (Ashton 1935, 19), and the good 'Lord fanned the glow into a blaze.' And from the inferno which ensued, 'the fire burnt with light and warmth' (Anderson 1994, 29). What these accounts do, is depict the Kalenjin as a people living in the dark, then gradually, the benevolent influence of Christian missionaries supposedly converted these 'heathens' into milder habits of 'civilization,' and out of the vigour that missionaries infused in their moribund culture arose 'a truly indigenous church' (Kibor 1992, 98). From a biblical point of view, this is a satisfying panorama that fits neatly into the biblical conceptions about sin, the fall from grace, and redemption. But it is largely false. It grossly oversimplifies the epic

encounter and confrontation between the Kalenjin religion and western Christianity as a zero-sum game where the winner – western Christianity – took it all.

This triumphalist narrative subscribes to the classic paradigm of conversion, whose prototype was the conversion of Saul (to Paul) on his way to Damascus. The classic (passivist) conversion, like the Pauline experience, is portrayed as a sudden and dramatic change caused by external and impersonal forces, which leads to an abrupt negation of the old self and self-affirmation of a new self. The Kalenjin here is conceptualized as a passive recipient of religious change whether he was psychologically predisposed or not. This hypothesis is lopsided. The correct interpretation of the spread of Christianity in the Kerio-valley is the one that foregrounds the Kalenjin as a rational interpreter of exogenous cultures.

The Missionary and British colonial government records indeed attest to the reticence of the Kalenjin (KNA, RVP/2/3/1, 1936). Historical records also indicate that of all the communities of western Kenya, it was the Kalenjin who posed the greatest opposition to Christianity. Records indicate that there was resistance to Christianity right from the onset of missionization, as the Kalenjin religion entered into a conversation with the intruding western Christian culture (Scheinder 1959; Gimode 2003). For example, during the first twenty years of missionization, the AIM and BCMS were forced to close down several stations and out-stations because of Kalenjin resistance. The Kalenjin, the DC reported in 1935, ‘did not appear to take kindly to Mission teachings, and the general effect of the Mission on the progress of the tribe is, I am afraid, almost negligible’ (KNA, RVP/2/3/1, 1935). Although in the later period of missionization there was the convergence of many factors that

eventually led to the weakening of the Kalenjin cultural fortress, leading to a gradual change in the 1940s and 1950s, this however should not be assumed to be an absolute surrender by the Kalenjin culture. The bulk of the community especially the elderly resisted Christianity. The few people who gave missionaries a chance to convert them came from socially marginal cohorts. Statistics show that the largest group of the pioneer converts to Christianity was mostly made up of young uninitiated boys and girls wooed to the missionary station by food, and especially education. A few others came from young men who had been employed off-tribe, widows, and women escaping from uncongenial husbands (Sawe 2003; Kibor 1992). Otherwise, there was very strong ‘opposition to Christianity on the part of the older people’ (KNA, DC /BAR/AR/1/2, 1929).

Kalenjin resistance to western Christianity was based on the fact that no one is ever ‘converted’ from their religious culture, because cultures have to engage in a conversation during the process of change. Religions, Walls says, ‘are not mutually exclusive entities that replace each other during the process of change, but a person’s religious experience has to be taken in itself and within its own setting’ (1990, 145). Therefore, the gradual acceptance of Christian values by the Kalenjin did not erase their religion. Perhaps the most appropriate summary of the encounter between the Kalenjin religion and Christianity is the general description offered by Professor Were (1973). He states that ‘African religion was neither static nor devoid of the capacity to change. It was subjected to a ruthless and systematic onslaught by Christianity and Western civilization which threatened its very foundation and validity, but the former neither yielded fundamentally nor resisted indiscriminately

and therefore managed to survive' (Were 1973, 1). Many aspects of the Kalenjin religion survived because their religion, like that of the other Africans, was not a one-day lifestyle. It was deeply ingrained in their psyche and infused in every facet of their lives, and lived every day through customs, rituals, and practices (Mbiti 1969, 10).

Because of the deeply embedded nature of Kalenjin religion, the majority of Christian converts came to live in two worlds, the real world infused with traditional culture and religion as well as a superficial but prestigious Christian life. Most of the converts attended church every Sunday and 'in spite of doctrinal teachings the people still maintained their traditional customs whether they agreed with biblical faith or not' (Kibor 1992, 112). What followed out of this dilemma was the specific instantiation of the middle path, which brought the two religious worlds in the mind of the convert to formulate syncretism. Instead of the Kalenjin being 'converted' to Christianity as suggested by triumphalist narratives, they indigenized western Christianity. In their minds as cultural agents, the Kalenjin indigenous past and the Christian present engaged in an interactive and endless self-reflecting process of imagination. In this agentic process, the Kalenjin selected indigenous religious concepts and routinely incorporated them into the ongoing process of religious change. Although these experiences took place in the present life of the convert, the present itself was permeated by the conditioning quality of their past. The indigenous past thus served as the stabilizing factor that helped the Kalenjin to sustain their identity during a period of rapid cultural change.

The missionaries, for example, introduced the foreign ideas of *Jehova* and *Kiptaiyat* as the concept for the Supreme Being, a move that was intentionally done to sidestep the indigenous concept of *Asis* or *Tororot*. However, the Kalenjin as agents used their previous schema to give meaning to this new revolutionary concept of God, and with time they indigenized it as *Asis*. By 1965, the previously elided indigenous concept of God, *Asis*, had forced its way into the revised version of the bible (Gimode 2003). However, the concept of *Asis* as known in the Kalenjin Christian community was not entirely indigenous. It had been transformed through the process of agentic recognition and assimilation to acquire attributes of both the Christian and the Kalenjin concepts of God. The new concept of *Asis* had lost the indigenous concept of immanence. It was confined to its mysterious home of heaven (*kipsengwet*). Previously *Asis* was conceived as a transcendent spirit that was made immanent through the activities of *Ilal* and *orkoy*. The Kalenjin converts, therefore, through the agentic process of recognition and assimilation, substituted these indigenous intermediaries with the Christian ideas of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit thereby creating the Holy Trinity. This was a syncretic Holy trinity made up of an indigenous idea of God (*Asis*) and Christian ideas of Jesus and the Holy Ghost. Significantly also, the concept of *Asis* in the Christian community was endowed with a masculine gender typical of the Hebraic characterization of the deity. The former Kalenjin compassionate female godhead, *Chebet* or *Chebo Ngolo* or *Chebo Yim* was forgotten. Nonetheless, despite all these transformations, the thread that gives unity to the centuries of the shifting scenes of the religious drama in the history of the Kalenjin in the Kerio-Valley is the concept of God. Modified during each epoch of

interaction by external cultures – from *Asis* to *Tororot* to *Jehova* to *Kiptaiyat* and back to *Asis*- the idea of the deity provides unity in the plurality and changing aspects of their religious experiences.

The Kalenjin like other Africans did not have a specific compartment in life for religion. In fact, there is no name for religion in Kalenjin language. Religion and the sacred permeated every aspect of life. For that reason, I will examine the religious transformation that occurred in their rites of passage during the Christian period, in order to demonstrate how the Kalenjin as historical agents domesticated Christianity. The rites which I seek to describe are circumcision culture, funeral rites, and wedding ceremonies. The rites of passage that I seek to delineate below will focus on the Marakwet, Keiyo, and Tugen. The Pokot staged a spirited resistance against Christianity, which did not give missionaries time to convert them. Therefore, their adoption of Christianity will be examined under the development of millennialism (*Dini ya Yomot*) later on, in this chapter.

### **5.3 Christianity and Kalenjin Circumcision Culture After 1945**

Before I describe the changes that Christianity introduced to the Kalenjin circumcision culture, I will begin by providing the context in which these changes occurred. It is only then that we can understand the changes which ensued. From the 1940s, it became apparent to missions working in Kenya that they needed to prepare Africans for ecclesiastical leadership. The AIM, for example, under pressure from Africans and the liberal wing of missionaries incorporated all churches created under its auspices in Kenya to form a new denomination, the African Inland Church (hereinafter AIC) in 1942. In 1943 AIC drew its constitution. It became a separate

body from AIM and was duly registered in 1947 (Gration 1974, 228). The structure of the organization of AIC consisted of the Central Church Council (CCC), Regional Church Council (RCC), District Church Council (DCC) and Local Church Council (LCC). The AIC also began ordaining African priests and some of them took leadership in the church councils (Mumo, 1997, 67). In the Kerio-Valley, Africans began taking leadership of the AIC in the 1950s. In Marakwet, for example, the District Church Council (DCC) was established in 1958 with Joshua arap Chebobei as the chairman, Daudi Kisang as the treasurer, and Henry Cheboi as the secretary (Kibor 2005, 122).

It was under this new African leadership that the AIC began to fight for its own identity as a 'truly African indigenous church' (Gration 1974, 263). The records of minutes of the AIC councils paint a picture of the church's desperate attempts to free its soul from the choking embrace of the authoritarian paternalism of the AIM Missionaries (Gration 1974, 263). Paralleling this struggle, and perhaps drawing momentum from it, was the growth of African political nationalism that began after the Second World War, and culminated in the acquisition of independence in 1963. The political independence of Kenya boosted the morale of African church leaders, and probably encouraged them to fight for their right to autonomy in spiritual matters. Soon after independence, the government of Kenya also embarked on an ambitious but deliberate scheme of Africanization (Manners 1962, 6-15). Although primarily referring to the economic sector, the basic concept extended in practice to foreign religious groups working in the country. It was at this particular time that

Africans increasingly 'took over leadership roles in the church,' as missionaries relinquished authority (Gration 1974, 243).

It is from the position of influence, with minimal missionary patronage, that the new African church leadership perhaps began to look at African culture in a clearer and less jaundiced light. And when they did so, they realized that even in their books their clansmen might have had a valid point in their resistance against missionary attacks on their culture, especially male circumcision. Male circumcision was the foremost symbol of Kalenjin identity and ethnic unity. The Kalenjin Church leaders probably saw that it was against their interest to let the society disintegrate about them. They might have felt that it was highly desirable to retain and shore up the coping stones of an institution (*tum*) that symbolized their identity and maintain its foremost symbols, the age groups (*ipnwa*). For that reason, they gradually validated and raised male circumcision from the ignominy that it had been subjected to during the early missionary period. Although male circumcision was not adopted by the church elders as an official church-sanctioned ritual, it was also not condemned by official church policy either. No Christian was also suspended from fellowship or discriminated against for taking part in the traditional ritual. Converts were left with the discretion of choosing which ritual to take their boys, hospital (*kipshiti*) or the indigenous (*kipgaa*). Because of the relaxation of this 'Christian moral code' some of the early AIM converts who had themselves undergone hospital circumcision such as the former president, D.T Moi, had to have their children 'undergo the full Kalenjin ritual' (Morton 1998, 62). Other Christians who had been circumcised in the hospital sued community elders for admission into the membership of the community's age-

groups, for them to have a feeling of belonging. Such individuals were fined a few goats and honey beer, as deemed necessary by elders, after which they had to go through the whole corpus of initiation rituals with other initiates before being admitted into the newest age-group, and thus became *bona fide* members of their respective communities (Elolia 1992, 285).

Apart from a few protestant Christians who stuck to hospital anesthetic circumcision,<sup>21</sup> the majority of the community had their boys go through the traditional ritual. By 1965, as the initiation of the other communities in Kenya was largely disintegrating, the Kalenjin ‘continued to practice the full rite’ in a shortened period that corresponded with the November-December holidays (Welbourne 1968, 213). For the members of the Christian community who participated in this traditional ritual, they went through the established process with the rest of the community but only sprinkled it with Christian concepts, especially during the pre- and post-circumcision period. The rationale was to give traditional circumcision Christian legitimacy that allowed converts to have a feeling of belonging and identity in the community. Otherwise, the whole circumcision procedure followed the Kalenjin syllabus as described by Kipkorir (2008, 35-39), Elolia (1992, 52-66), Chebet and Dietz (2000, 59-64), and Welbourne (1968, 212-232).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> In Marakwet, hospital circumcision was known colloquially as Kaplinsi. This was a corruption of the name of the missionary doctor, Lindsay, who was famous for conducting the operation at Kapsowar Mission Hospital. Oral interview with Rev. Cheron, Kilima Village, on 24/07/2020

<sup>22</sup> The most striking feature is that although the Kalenjin have minor differences in dialect and culture, circumcision seems to be one of the unifying features. The procedure among the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley Valley almost is similar in outline to the descriptions given by Langley (1979, 18-45) for the Nandi and Sambu (2007, 199-203) for the Kipsigis.

Probably the most significant change in the Kalenjin circumcision ritual by the 1960s was in the timing and duration of the rites. Traditionally, the timing of *tum* was determined by ritual elders and was intrinsically bound up with peace, security, and the general wellbeing of the country (*kore*). In the 1960s it came to be governed by the timing and length of the December holidays. During the circumcision period, when schools closed for the December holidays every neighbourhood made preparations for the ceremony. They constructed seclusion lodges (*kaptorus/menjo*) for the initiates and stocked enough grain for the preparation of beer. On the eve of circumcision, Christian families prayed for their youths. For the members of the Protestants churches who chose the traditional ritual, prayers were done at the family level. Among the Catholics, however, some Parish priests blessed circumcision candidates *en masse* on the last Sunday before the day of the ceremony. On the eve of the material day, the ‘Christian’ boys joined the rest of the candidates from ‘non-Christian’ families for the evening rituals and all-night dancing (*cheptilet*) (Elolia 1992, 56). The following morning the boys went for the operation in which the Kalenjin marker of identity was permanently inscribed on their bodies; the prepuce was not severed entirely, it was bundled below the penis glans to form an excrescence, thereby giving the process its metaphorical name, *yatitaet* (Kipkorir 2008, 37). The initiates then went through a period of seclusion under the tutelage of a chosen elder known for his knowledge of culture. While in seclusion, the initiates were instructed on how to behave responsibly as grown-up Kalenjin men. The elaborate ritual that used to characterize the traditional syllabus before the 1940s (previously lasting six months) was edited to fit into a shortened period of six weeks,

because of the demands made on the Kalenjin by formal education.<sup>23</sup> The same reason also made the ritual ceremony to be moved to the December long school holidays; a feature that has remained the same up to the present (Elolia 1992, 52, Welbourne 1968, 213).

On the day of coming out of seclusion, the initiates were given age-group names. The coming out ceremony started at the home of the 'eldest'<sup>24</sup> graduand (*kiboret*) before the rest of the graduands were allowed to disperse to their homes where graduation parties had been prepared in their honour. During the pass-out ceremony for Christian families, the pastor of the local parish was invited to lead the ceremony. The procedure involved reading a verse from the bible, which was followed by a short sermon and speeches from the attendees, which emphasized good behaviour and honour. The graduand was thereafter showered with gifts, after which the gathering enjoyed food and drinks. In the Christian community soft drinks were used. For the rest of the community, however, they held a common festival at the village meeting ground (*kaptum*) where cereal beer (*busaa*) and honey beer (*kipketin*) was the main drink. The merriment was extended into the night and it included singing, dancing, and chanting (Elolia, 1992, 66, Welbourne 1968, 230).

The stand of the church on female circumcision, however, remained the same. Devoid of any biblical backing and facing medical condemnation of posing a health risk to the mother during childbirth, the church found moral and medical justification

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<sup>23</sup> In the 1940s because of pressure from the Colonial administration and missionaries, the LNC pushed for a change in the timing for circumcision from August- October to the long December holidays to accommodate pupils attending GAS schools.

<sup>24</sup> The determination of seniority depended on the social age of the father of the candidate and not the physical age of the candidate.

to oppose it. It was condemned in both the constitution of the church and in church sermons. However, on the ground theory did not match practice (Kibor 2005; Chebet and Dietz 2000; Kipkorir 2009). By 1965, the very few girls to have escaped clitoridectomy were the ‘children of evangelists and dispensers employed by the missions’ and a few girls who escaped to the mission for security (Elolia 1992, 280). Otherwise, the rest of the Kalenjin community circumcised their daughters in preparation for marriage. For the Christian converts living around mission stations such as Kapsowar, Kabartonjo and Kessup, the operation was done in secret because of the disapproval that accompanied it from the church. In such cases, Christians had to send their daughters to their rural homes (*gaa*) on the escarpment (*lagam*) to have the cut during school holidays. Other Christians who missed the cut in their teenage years because of missionary condemnation of the practice joined young girls for circumcision. In the far-flung areas, for instance, in the Kerio-Valley proper where Catholicism dominated and protestant missionary influence was feeble, female circumcision was not a secret. The ceremonies were done openly with full knowledge of the church and the colonial administration. The ceremonies were a communal event characterized by songs, dance, and merriment. Each neighbourhood organised its own ceremony after every six years, and neither the church nor the government was able to discourage it. In some cases, girls who refused to take part in the rites were openly beaten and forced to face the knife (Kibor 2005, 134; Elolia 1993, 140).

#### **5.4 The Agentic Transformation of Funeral Rites 1945 - 1960.**

One aspect of Kalenjin culture that underwent a syncretistic transformation was their mortuary culture. In the pre-colonial past, the Kalenjin of the Complex had well-established obsequies. These rites differed from one section to another. Even within a particular section, there were minor peculiarities in this ritual. Among the Tugen, Marakwet, hill Pokot, and parts of Keiyo, for example, they interred all members who died at home. In some sections of the Keiyo such as those of Marichor and the pastoral Pokot, they buried only the elders who had sired grandchildren through their sons, the rest of the people were designated for bush disposal. Upon the death of an individual, it was the responsibility of the clan to ensure that the body was disposed of according to the rules of the section from which they belonged, for the dead man to have an auspicious entry into the spirit world (*kapkikut*) (Massam 1927; Dundas 1910; Kipkorir 2008, 52). In the case where the deceased was to be buried, a grave of between five to six feet (in some rocky areas it could be shallower than this) was dug inside the livestock kraal. For other sections such as the Marakwet the body was buried at the dumping site of the kitchen refuse for a woman and the dumping site of animal droppings for the man. In both cases, however, the grave was dug by members of the warrior grade of the deceased man's totem. Strong emphasis was put on the positioning of the grave; men were buried on the right-hand side of the compound and women on the left (Elolia 1992, 92; Chebet and Dietz 2000, 72).

The grave was designed in a way that the head would rest pointing towards the eastern direction. For people living on the escarpment, for instance, the Marakwet and parts of Keiyo, the steep gradient of land could not allow them to dig graves

pointing to the eastern direction. In these areas, the graves were positioned on a north-south axis, but during burial, the body was laid to rest in a way that 'the face was directed towards the rising sun' (Elolia, 1992, 92). This was in keeping with the Kalenjin tradition of associating the sun with God, *Asis*. *Asis* was believed to be a spirit of goodness whose only symbol was the sun. The sun and the east, therefore, came to be associated with God and the spirit world. The connection of God with the life-giving rays of the sun gave the eastern direction a paramount significance in the lives of the Kalenjin. It was the only possible direction of entry to the spirit world (*kapkikut*) (Sambu 2007, 222). The corpse was lowered into the grave that was then half filled with earth and the remaining part was covered with stones. Thorns were then strewn over it to protect it from hyenas and wild dogs.

After the burial, which also applied to other methods of disposing of the dead, a goat (*bito karin*) corresponding to the gender of the deceased was killed, in the compound where the death occurred. The chyme from the sheep was thrown around the compound and along the way leading to the grave to cleanse the home of contamination caused by death. The pallbearers stepped into the stomach of that sheep and smeared their hands with the chyme to purify their bodies. A ritual elder mouth sprayed the compound and all those who had come into contact with death, after which everyone was expected to return to their normal lives (Kipkorir 2008, 52; Elolia, 1992, 92).

In sections where burial was not the common lot, the community reserved a particular piece of the forest for the disposal of dead bodies, hence the phrase *kap am chito*, literally the place that eats people. This thicket was customarily set far away

from settled areas and any beaten track. It was a no-go zone for all except those engaged in funeral rites. If one by mistake strayed into the area they had to be cleansed (Massam 1927). This bush was set in any direction except the east. A body that was set for bush disposal was tied with strong bast and stripped tightly to allow the bearer to fix it on the shoulder. The corpse then was taken straight to the bush for disposal. During disposal, the pallbearer ensured that the dead body was laid down according to custom, with a man lying on his right-hand side and a woman on the left, with the head pointing towards the east. For a man who died in combat during raids. His comrades removed all his ornaments and clothes which were taken home to the widow. However, before leaving the comrades made sure that the deceased body was laid on the right-hand side with the head pointing to the east (Massam 1927).

The coming of western Christianity and British colonial rule had a strong impact on Kalenjin mortuary culture. Through the British colonial administration's public health policies, the custom of disposing of corpses in the forest was proscribed in the reserves. Among the pastoral Pokot, however, the practice persisted deep into the post-colonial period. Following Christian missionaries' admonitions and government regulations on health, the Kalenjin gradually adopted the use of coffins for burial. When a Christian died members of her local church went to the deceased man's compound to condole the family. On the day of burial, a requiem mass was held in the compound of the deceased during which Christian hymns were sung, bible verses read, and a sermon said. After the service clan elders of the deceased and the spouse

left the compound to bury the corpse at the designated burial site. This burial as by custom was done in the absence of children and pregnant women.

Yet even with decades of missionary influence, the Kalenjin continued to be guided by the indigenous religious principle of positioning graves. This being that graves for women are dug on the hand-left side of the compound and those for men on the right-hand side of the compound. Significant also but connected to this, is that all graves were set facing the eastern direction. This view of the eastern direction as the direction of health and prosperity was neatly integrated into western Christian beliefs and practices surrounding obsequies that it has become impossible to comprehend its indigenous origin. In keeping with the Kalenjin religious requirement of cleansing the compound by killing an animal, a goat (*bito karin*) was slaughtered at the home of the deceased after burial. Its chyme was used to cleanse the family and the compound from the contamination caused by death. The meat was cooked and eaten by all clansmen present.

On the next day after burial, family members of the deceased had their heads shaven to remove the ritual impurity caused by coming into contact with death (Elolia 1992, 310). More importantly, the entire village where the death occurred observed two days of mourning, and the widow or widower stayed indoors for the whole month until a cleansing ritual was performed on her. This ritual freed her to participate in normal life activities. During this entire period of seclusion, the widow was visited by church members every day to give her moral support (O.I Cheron, 2020).

### **5.5 Kalenjin Culture, Christianity, and Marriage 1945 to 1965**

Of all the life transition events among the Kalenjin, marriage was the most affected by Christianity. The introduction of western Christianity amplified the marriage ceremony and made the wedding to be the most significant life transition event for the Kalenjin Christians. By 1960, marriage had eclipsed circumcision which heretofore had been the heartbeat of the Kalenjin's life. In the pre-Christian days, marriage was not a one-day ceremony. It was a series of ceremonies whose main function was to unite two families and guarantee the siring of children. The climax of this series of ceremonies was the wedding (*katunisio*), which was conducted after the birth of two or more children. Kalenjin marriages occurred immediately after initiation. The suitor after having positively identified a lady, visited their home on a pre-arranged day to seek consent from the father. This visit was known as the fire-making ceremony (*kiralama*). The father and his clansmen inquired about the identity of the visitors (Elolia, 1992, 81; Massam 1927; Kipkorir 2008, 41).

Once it was established that there was no blood relationship, the lady was allowed to follow the groom's party to their home. The woman stayed with his mother-in-law for four days. Upon the completion of the four days, she moved to the hut of his husband for two days. After two days, the lady was supposed to return to their home in the company of two young ladies and four warriors. The purpose of this visit was to take beer from the home of the husband to her natal home. The parents of the lady hosted an all-night party where neighbours, friends, and guests enjoyed beer. The warriors who had accompanied the lady returned the next day, while the girls waited for two days to accompany the lady on her return. If the lady accepted to return to

the husband, the first stage of marriage was said to have been complete hence the phrase *kaip chi korgo*, literally the man has taken a wife. The lady was officially handed the cowhide belt (*legetio*) of her husband's clan upon her return. *Legetio* symbolized the feminine power of creation. It was the foremost symbol of matriarchy (Bianco 1991, 770).

The second phase and the climax of marriage was the wedding (*katunisio*). This was conducted after the birth of several children. It was an expensive affair that required sufficient planning that could take years. Guests from the bride's home, clansmen, friends, and neighbours were usually invited to the occasion. On the eve of the *katunisio*, ritual elders erected a special archway altar (*kapkorosut*) at the entrance to the compound of the parents of the husband. Everybody was to pass through the gate when entering the compound. The first to go through the gate was the bride and groom accompanied by their sponsors, then followed by other members of the community. As they passed through the archway gate, they were mouth sprayed with milk. The couple then proceeded to circumambulate the ceremonial hut four times before entering. As they entered the hut, they were again mouth-sprayed with milk, by the *poyot ap tum*. Inside the hut, the gathering sat around the ceremonial beer pot situated at the centre of the room. The family of the groom sat on the right-hand side (male side) of the hut as one approached from the door. The family of the bride sat on the opposite (female) side. Directed by the *poyot ap tum*, the couple moved around the beer pot four times before kneeling as the crowd chanted and sang. When the singing was over, the *poyot ap tum* mouth sprayed the couple again. He then led the crowd in chanting blessings for the marriage (*ayebisio*). After the prayer, the

crowd started singing as the couple rose to take part in the ritual application of butter to cement relationships (O.I, Chelimo, 2020).

In this ritual, the participants took clarified butter from an ox horn using a small stick and applied it to the forehead of the other; an action that was expected to be reciprocated by the other party. The application was first done by the couple to their sponsors. It was then followed by other members of the family; father-in-law anointing father-in-law, and mother-in-law anointing her counterpart, all in a reciprocal manner. After this, all who had been anointed shouted *bamwai* (those of butter), meaning those whose relationship had been ignited by the anointing of butter (*ba mwaita*). From now thence forth a new relationship of the kindred group was established. The anointers henceforth ceased to use real names when calling the other party. They referred to each other as *Bamwai*. The next procedure was the taking of the ritual beer to cement. All the people inside the hut took a sip of the drink from the ceremonial beer pot using siphons starting with the *pooyot ap tum*, the sponsors, the couple, their parents, and then the rest of the members in that order. After this rite, the marriage was said to be officially consummated, and ritually complete, hence the phrase *kakitun korgo* (Kipkorir 2008, 41).

With the inception of Christianity, missionaries disregarded everything African as satanic and heathen. The implication of this is that the established Kalenjin customary procedure for marriage was discarded by converts. During the early missionary period, whenever a Christian man wished to marry, he would seek the permission of the church elders of that particular mission station. The elders with permission of the European missionary then arranged for him to identify and select a

bride from the girls' hostel. If the overtures of the man were well received by the girl, the elders accompanied the man to the home of the bride to seek formal approval from her parents. However, because most of the girls had been disowned by their parents and deemed to have been lost to the *Kapchebisaas*, consent was almost readily given provided normal customs prescribed by Kalenjin culture (especially avoiding blood relations) were observed. After this, a western wedding was organized in the church to formalize the union (Kipkorir 2009, 28).

As things stabilized in the 1960s the Christian community had come to consider only the fire-making ceremony (*kiralama*) and the church wedding as the only accepted Christian marriage ceremonies. The upshot was the amplification of the significance of *kiralama* ceremony, which previously was only meant to ascertain the degree of relationship between prospective spouses. With missionary influence, *kiralama* was modified amplified and fortified with Christian rituals to become an elaborate church-sanctioned ritual that involved expensive gift-giving. In the Christian community, this ceremony was known by the Nandi referent *koitok*. The schooled converts, however, used the English phrase pre-wedding (O.I, Cheron, 2020).

The Nandi influence on the marriage culture of the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley was not only in the nomenclature change but also in the idea of dowry. In the pre-colonial period the agricultural hill Kalenjin, especially Marakwet, Tugen, and some sections of Keiyo did not give or take dowry as a consideration for marriage. Having been forced by misfortune to leave behind cattle keeping and subsist on irrigation agriculture on the escarpments, they adopted the marriage culture of the aboriginal hunter-gatherer inhabitants of the Complex. Hydromel (*kipketin*) was the only gift

that the man sent to the parents of the bride as a token of appreciation (Dundas 1910; Chebet & Dietz 2000, 69). However, among the Pokot, dowry was exchanged in form of livestock. The number of livestock varied from tens to hundreds depending on the wealth of the husband. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, some of the Keiyo developed an agro-pastoral lifestyle after the disintegration of the Maasai who had formerly restricted them on the escarpment. Animal keeping led to the reintroduction of the culture of dowry in Keiyo. For the majority of the Kalenjin of the Complex, however, the payment of dowry was a by-product of Nandi sub-imperialism that accompanied AIM missionization (Kipkorir 2009, 28).

MHM and AIM Missionaries entered the Kerio-Valley from Nandi. Nandi catechists, Nandi bible, hymn books, and school readings were used to evangelize the Keiyo, Tugen, and Marakwet because the missionaries thought of them as Nandi-speaking people. The outcome of this Nandi cultural sub-imperialism was the whole gamut of Nandi nuptial rites including wedding songs and the offering of four bovines and a calf was sneaked into the culture of the Kalenjin of the Complex, the majority of whom previously did not have the tradition of giving and receiving dowry (Kipkorir 2009, 28). By 1965, four cattle - *teta abai* (a lactating cow with a calf), *eito* (a bull), *kanyiet* (dowry cow) and *roriat* (heifer) - and four sheep were considered by the Christian community as the accepted token for a bride. The Kalenjin as agents of change adopted these Nandi practices and selected ideas from their indigenous nuptial culture and went further to clothe them in Christian dogma. The most conspicuous, for example, involved praying and reading verses from the bible that

were relevant to the specific event under consideration, either marriage or pre-wedding (O.I, Chelimo, 2020).

Kalenjin traditional music that had been previously demonized by missionaries was also adopted and incorporated into church weddings. Through this incorporation of traditional music, Nandi songs as typified by *iani baibai* became synonymous with the Kalenjin church wedding. Other rituals such as the anointing of relatives with butter to cement marriage relationships were adopted but restructured and reassembled by the agency of the Kalenjin to fit into the evolving religion. The application of butter, initially done during the wedding ceremony was taken to the fire-making ceremony (*koitok*), which previously was only meant to ascertain the degree of blood relations. In this new ritual, instead of the reciprocal application of butter on the forehead as it used to be done in the indigenous culture, the relatives exchanged manufactured cooking oil. This was the alternative to the application of butter used in the traditional wedding ritual to establish the relationship of in-laws (*bamwai*). This ritual of exchanging oil was considered so important that even when a church wedding was done, the Kalenjin still believed that until it was done that the marriage was considered consummated and family relations properly established (O.I, Chelimo, 2020).

### **5.6 The Emergence of Messianism in the Kerio-Valley**

To understand the phenomenon of millenarianism in the Kerio-Valley, we must present a snapshot of the emergence of African separatism in Western Kenya, especially among the Abaluyia, because it was from the Abaluyia that currents of messianism under the banner of *Dini ya Musambwa* flowed into the Kerio-Valley in

the 1940s (Wipper 1977, 208). The phenomenon of independent churches in western Kenya began to break the surface of mission Christianity as early as the second decade of the twentieth century. However, as a pervasive and audacious African interpretation of Christianity separatism came into being in the 1930s and especially the 1940s. Many factors converged in the mission field that led to the formation of millenarian churches. These factors ranged from conflicts between indigenous and Western cultures, the struggle for church leadership, and African's desire to appropriate Christianity in a manner that satisfied their spiritual quest. The latter involved the thirst to experience the phenomenon of the Holy Spirit, and its manifestation, glossolalia, which was prohibited in mission churches (Gimode 2003, 268).

Studies indicate that there was an undercurrent of African disaffection with how western Christianity was introduced right from the onset of missionization. After years of veiled resistance to missionary cultural chauvinism, separatist movements began to crop up. The first separatist church in western Kenya was Mumboism inaugurated by Onyango Dunde of Alego in 1912 (Shadle 2002, 29). It was immediately followed by the Nomiyo Luo Church started by Yohana Owalo in 1914 (Opwapo 1981, 70). As a pervasive and bold element, however, independent churches began to emerge in the 1930s among the Abaluyia and Luo. The impetus for separatism is believed to have originated from the translation of the Bible into African languages. Bible translation opened a new dimension to how Africans interpreted and perceived Christianity. When the translated versions of the Bible replaced the missionary as the focal point of reference, the chasm between the

biblical message and that of the messenger, the missionary, widened. Conflict, therefore, became inevitable (Gimode 2003, 299).

In the face of this bewildering situation, Africans began to inquire into the Bible to trace where they had gotten it wrong, and when they did so they concluded that western Christianity as a cultural tool for the advancement of European colonization 'was a catastrophic departure from the Bible' (Gimode 2003, 299). Independent church movements thus sought to show that Christianity was not synonymous with westernization and that a genuine domesticated Christianity that spoke to the cultural context of Africans was, indeed, viable. These separatist churches thus provided an avenue along which Africans examined Christianity anew, interpreted it in their cultural contexts, and appropriated it as their own thereby forging distinctively African Christianities (Wanakacha, 1992, 99).

The Independent churches that emerged in western Kenya included the African Church of the Holy Spirit (ACHS) or *Lyahuka* (1927), and DyM (1943) which splintered from the Friends African Industrial Mission (FAIM) or the Quakers. The others were the African Israel Church Nineveh (AICN) which came out of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC) in 1942, and *Joroho* church of Musanda which splintered from the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1942 (Ogot 1966, 46; Gimode 203, 306). This thesis focuses on DyM which originated from the Quakers because it is from this separatist movement that millenarian ideas entered Pokot (Kipkorir 1973, 24).

DyM directly translates to the religion of the ancestral spirits. It was started by Elijah Masinde in 1943 after he was excommunicated from the Quakers for taking a second

wife. The Quakers particularly and protestant missionaries generally had taken the stance that polygyny was incongruent with a proper Christian life. The doctrine of DyM was via media between African culture and Christianity. It integrated Bukusu religious concepts centred on a sky God, *Wele*, and ancestral spirits, *kimisambwa* (singular *kumusambwa*), with Christian doctrines to formulate syncretism. Polygamy was also accepted. Its conspicuous outward manifestation was its brazen anti-colonial stance. Masinde's followers accosted government employees, refused to honour labour summonses, burned down public buildings, and flagrantly defied government reforms on agriculture. In 1945, for example, Masinde was convicted of assaulting government officers as they delivered a labour summons to his home. For this reason, he was sentenced to serve twelve months in jail but was later transferred to Mathari mental hospital before being released in 1947 (Wipper 1977, 142; Shimanyula 1978, 11). A few months after his release in 1948, DyM organized a demonstration against the British colonial government in Malakisi. The police opened fire on the demonstrators killing eleven people and wounding scores. This event was euphemistically described by the colonial government records as the 'Malakisi riot.' In reality, however, it was a massacre. A week later DyM was declared illegal. After five months of evading capture, Masinde was arrested and deported to Lamu (Wipper 1977, 142). By this time DyM ideas had spread to other neighbouring communities including the Bagisu, the Teso, the Pokot, 'as well as the Turkana' (Kipkorir 1972, 117).

### 5.6.1 The origins of *Dini ya Musambwa* in Pokot

The spread of DyM ideas into Pokot was largely due to the geographical proximity of West Pokot to the Uasin-Gishu and Trans-Nzoia districts. Bukusu workers dominated Uasin-Gishu and particularly Trans-Nzoia, which shares a common boundary with West Pokot. It was from these workers that the Pokot were, to use colonial parlance, 'infected' by DyM teachings (Kipkorir 1972, 119). The activities of DyM among the Pokot started in 1946 when its founder, Lukas Pkech travelled outside his home district to meet Elijah Masinde. Upon his return, he claimed to have received a vision from God and began teaching his newfound religion. Among the Pokot this separatist movement was indigenized as *Dini ya msango* or *Dini ya Yomot*. The latter was the most preferred appellative (Wipper 1977, 209).

By the time Pkech died his religion had captured hundreds of Pokot souls.<sup>25</sup> The rapid spread of this millennial creed was paradoxical given the fact that Christian missionaries working among the Pokot - (BCMS), (AIM), and (MHM) - had failed to make any meaningful impact (Patterson 1969, 24; Schneider 1958, 65). For example, Tom Collins, the AIM missionary at Nginyang' outpost had 'succeeded in converting to Christianity only one Pokot tribesman' in fifteen years of missionary work (Kipkorir 1972, 126). What therefore factors account for the emergence and rapid spread of Pkech's ideas among the Pokot? The aetiology of *Yomot* among the Pokot has been the subject of numerous enquiries ranging from the views of the print media, the British government, to scholarly examinations. The colonial

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<sup>25</sup> I made this conclusion from the last meeting held by Pkech at Nginyang', a day before the Koloa Affray. The witness statement by Collins says that the crowd was estimated to be between 300 to 1000 people, see, for example, KNA DC/BAR/6/1, Tom Collins' Statement on the Seditious meeting held at Nginyang', East Suk.

administration and the media in line with the attitude of that time described the causes of *Yomot* under the rubrics of ‘zealotry,’ ‘atavism,’ ‘bloodthirsty,’ and ‘backwards.’ In turn, the followers of *Yomot* were depicted as ‘dupes of a hysterical fanatic’ whose ‘deceased brain’ was centred on self-aggrandizement (KNA, PC/RVP/1/3/2, 1950). Views of this nature reflected the British government’s tendency to interpret African dissent, especially when manifested religiously as psychological pathology (Mahone 2006, 242). The ‘reason for this was to portray the African public as dupes’ thereby justifying the terror meted on them (MacArthur 2020, 819).

Scholars too put forward factors that account for the rise and rapid spread of *Yomot* activities in Pokot. Kipkorir, for example, highlights the personality of Pkech as the driving force behind the movement. In his view, Pkech used his ‘charisma’ to capitalize on the ‘plight’ of the Pokot. Kipkorir’s depiction of *Yomot* is that of an irrational response where a charismatic agitator stirred up otherwise happy Pokot people with false millennial promises. ‘There is no doubt’, Kipkorir states, ‘Pkech understood the plight of the Pokot people and exploited it to the full’ (1972, 125). Evidence shows that there were social, political, and economic problems among the Pokot from the 1920s onwards (Patterson 1969, 25). This probably may be what Kipkorir was referring to as ‘plight’. However, stereotyping the whole community as gullible distortedly oversimplifies the movement, and sidesteps the crucial question of whether the Pokot had any genuine religious grievances of their own. Poverty and hardship alone cannot convincingly account for the emergence of any religious movement, let alone a long-lasting one like *Yomot*. The worsening economic

conditions of the Pokot during the colonial period might have been a factor, yet can that alone be hoisted as the primary cause, when evidence from Wipper attests that wealth colonial administrators such as chief Lomeri and Lobon and ‘a sub-headman from Korossi’ were active members of the movement (1977, 214). For *Yomot* there was no simple correlation between economic deprivation, ‘plight’, and recruitment as Kipkorir suggests. Instead of exploiting the Pokot with promises of wealth and miraculous cures, ample evidence suggests that Pkech had a deep conviction in his divine mission as the saviour of the Pokot (Lundeby 2013, 137).

Bianco (1996) presents the crisis of mobility as the reason behind the emergence of *Yomot* among the Pokot. She argues that the colonial power restricted the movement of the Pokot through ordinances and the enactment of tribal boundaries. By interpreting songs used by the members of *Yomot*, Bianco is convinced that *Yomot* provided the Pokot with the means to circumvent colonial restrictions and travel metaphysically to ‘the earthly Zion’ (1996, 25). In emphasizing what she calls ‘the songs of mobility’ (1996, 25), Bianco veers off from the religious intentions of *Yomot* and neglects the Christian aspect within the message of *Yomot*. Even if we accept Bianco’s explanation to be true for the sake of debate, we would still expect this millenarian movement to end at independence, or at least exist in an attenuated form. If the restriction of movement that the colonial government inaugurated, was the *raison d’être* of the movement one would expect that Kenya’s independence would signal the end of the movement. However, far from dying out, the movement flourished under a new name, *Mafuta Pole*. What this means is that Bianco’s explanation, which gives primacy to colonial restriction tells only half the story.

In accounting for the aetiology of *Yomot* there has been a good deal of reductionism. Scholars have emphasized one causal factor at the neglect of others. In these explanations, minimal emphasis is given to religion, while some completely elide the religious aspect of the movement. This kind of exegesis essentially obscures the primary religious orientation of the movement. There were many forces of change that occurred in Pokot leading to the emergence of *Yomot*, including the restriction of human and stock movement through the creation of administrative boundaries, proscription of intercommunity cattle raids, taxation, forced destocking measures, and interference in their culture by patronizing Christian missionaries (Patterson 1969, 26). However, these were the undercurrents that ignited the spark of the desire for a millennium. The wellspring of messianic fervour among the Pokot should be found in Pkech's desire to domesticate Christianity, to interpret a foreign religion in a way that it resonated with the Pokot worldview.

### **5.6.2 Lukas Pkolol Pkech and the rise of *Dini ya Yomot***

The life history of Pkech is elaborately captured in the British colonial government's Commission of Inquiry Report of 1950 (hereinafter COIR) and other literatures on DyM including Wipper (1977), Kipkorir (1972), Lundeby (2013) and many others. I will use these sources to recount the major steps in Pkech's life in order to demonstrate his agency in the rise of messianism in Pokot. Lucas Pkech was born around 1915 in Mwino, West Pokot, to Mzee Pkolol. In 1932 Pkech enrolled at Government African School (GAS) Kapenguria for Primary education. While at GAS Kapenguria Pkech converted to Catholicism (KNA, COIR 1950). In 1934 Pkech proceeded to the National Industrial Training Depot (NITD) Kabete, for a

two-year course in tailoring and another two years in blacksmithing. After completing his studies in 1938 he returned to West Pokot where he started farming and business. Around 1943 news reached West Pokot that an African religion was developing among the Bukusu. Probably out of curiosity in 1946 Pkech travelled to Bungoma with a friend, Mr. Tomisio. Upon his return, Pkech reported that he had received a revelation instructing him to be faithful to God. In his vision, the Holy Spirit took him to River Soghpogh near Tartar. At the stream, the Holy Ghost gave him a new name, Arususu, seven songs about eternal life, and various commandments similar to the ones given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Obeying this divine call, Pkech started preaching his new religion around his home area of Keringet, extending to the nearby hamlets (KNA, COIR, 1950). In 1948 the D.C gave Pkech two warnings to stop spreading his subversive creed. However, given his deep conviction in his divine calling, Pkech continued with his teaching. For that reason, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 1948, he and ten of his followers were arrested and convicted for being members of an unlawful sect. They were sentenced to 30 months in jail with hard labour in Nakuru (KNA, COIR 1950).

Pkech completed his prison sentence on the 9<sup>th</sup> of July 1949 and was transferred to the Gilgil labour camp for the last part of his hard labour sentence (KNA, COIR 1950). While at the labor camp Pkech escaped and went back home (West Pokot) via Trans-Nzoia. Along the way, Pkech collected followers from Pokot labourers and squatters working on settler farms in Uasin-Gishu and Trans-Nzoia. In December 1949 Pkech thought that time was ripe to launch a major proselytization campaign. Pkech left his home area of Keringet with 6 disciples and moved eastward toward

Baringo. During this entire period, he lived and prayed in caves and cliffs while his disciples roamed the countryside recruiting new followers (KNA, COIR, 1950).

Beginning in March 1950 Pkech went on a full-blown preaching campaign for his religion in Baringo. He moved with his band collecting followers across the plains of Baringo on his way to a place called Zion. In their religious wandering *Yomot* followers alternated between listening to Pkech, singing, eating, and sleeping. Wealthy followers provided camels and bullocks for food. These animals were killed by spearing, a practice 'derived from the indigenous Pokot custom of sacrificing animals' (Wipper 1977, 210). Pkech and his groups reached Nginyang' on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1950. They encamped at the market singing and dancing the entire day and night (KNA, COIR, 1950). The 'drumming and singing' was not 'the general occurrence and was of so unusual nature in that part of the world', which forced the AIM missionary at Nginyang', Mr. Tom Collins, to go and investigate' (KNA, DC/BAR/6/1/ 1950). He attempted to talk to the leader by the name Arususu but his presence was not welcomed. Tom Collins, therefore, left the scene because of the threats from the crowd, but he felt need to report the group's activities to the D.C., Arthur Simpson, when he visited Nginyang' the following day. The D.C. was on a handing-over tour of the district with his immediate replacement, A.J Stevens. Collins informed them of what had transpired the previous day. The D.C. immediately dispatched two tribal police constables to follow the pilgrims and if possible, arrest the leader, Pkech (KNA, DC/BAR/6/1, 1950). The attempt by the tribal police to arrest Pkech was countered by threats from his followers. They told the police that Pkech cannot be arrested by any man, and that no weapon made by

man would harm him because he was 'the son of God.' It only took the intervention of Pkech otherwise the truculent mob would have been killed the Police officers (KNA, DC/BAR/6/1/ 1950).

The defiant arrogance by the crowd necessitated a security meeting on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April 1950 that involved Assistant Inspector General of Police, Robert Cameron, Assistant Superintendent of Police, George Taylor, the outgoing D.C. Arthur Simpson, and incoming D.C., A.J. Stevens, to discuss the matter. They agreed that with the assistance of the local chiefs Lobon and Eng'eleyo, the situation was to be resolved by arresting Pkech and then disperse his followers. But 'if Pkech escaped he was to be followed and hurried by assistant inspector Cameroon with a party of fifteen African Police until he was caught' (KNA, DC/BAR/6/1/ 1950). This plan however needed the rubbers stamp of the P.C. Thus, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 1950 the Rift Valley Provincial Commissioner, D.L. Morgan and the Senior Superintend of Police K.P. Hadingham, arrived at Nginyang by air and approved the plan before returning to their base in Nakuru. The Kenya Police 'wireless officer was remained at Nginyang' in order to keep headquarters in touch with the general situation' (KNA, DC/BAR/6/1/ 1950). At dawn on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April, the force left Nginyang on two lorries travelling northeast over the rugged terrain through Kito pass and reached Kolloa around mid-afternoon. This party consisted of four Europeans, forty African Police, two chiefs and their five followers, and two drivers, all fifty-three people in total. They stopped at Kolloa when they heard the members of *Yomot* 'singing and dancing among some trees just of the road' (KNA, DC/BAR/6/1/ 1950). On Simpson's orders, the British party 'disembarked from trucks, took a defensive

position in a small clearing facing the band (*Yomot*).’ They loaded their guns, and fixed their bayonets in readiness for any eventuality (KNA, DC/BAR/6/1/ 1950).

Arthur Simpson sent chiefs Lobon and Eng’eleyo with a curt verbal message to Pkech, ordering him to surrender without resistance. Pkech’s reply was equally terse. With what amounted to a declaration of defiance, he gave them a note in broken Swahili to take to their masters, which read; ‘*kwa mabwana salamu msifaniye mimi hizo pika mimi shabaa na risasi* (KNA, DC/BAR/6/1, 1950).’ Kipkorir has dismissed this message as being ‘largely inarticulate and unintelligible’ (1972, 122) and there have been many different interpretations of this note by the KNA, COIR (1950) and Wipper (1977). However, when interpreted contextually, Pkech was simply telling the D.C. to his face, ‘dear sirs do not tell me the nonsense of surrendering, instead shoot me.’ Whatever he meant, the chiefs took the reply to Simpson and added a verbal report (KNA, COIR 1950).

Police reports suggests that the government party did not wish to attack the crowd. Their plan was to withdraw for the night and ‘obtain a further force to cut the Suk off in front’ the following day (KNA, DC/BAR/6/1, 1950). However, before Simpson made his decision known to his team, he went behind the lorry to write a reply to Pkech. As he was in the process of translating his reply from English to Kiswahili, he heard shouts from the police defense line that the *Yomot* were advancing. The Pokot soon emerged from the bushes dancing with their spears as was always the case with Pokot men when approaching ceremonial gatherings and government *baraza* (KNA, DC/BAR/6/1, 1950). Chiefs Lobon and Eng’eleyo rushed forward to request the Pokot to stop the forward push and lay down their spears and shields, but they

refused. A.J. Stevens, being new to this behaviour, interpreted it as aggression and gave the order to shoot twice. However, each instance was countermanded by A. Simpson (KNA, COIR, 1950). Simpson, having served among the Pokot for some time, was familiar with the Pokot behaviour and he assumed that they were advancing to greet him, which Wipper agrees ‘may well have been their intention’ (1977, 214)

What was happening here was a problem of poor communication between the armed antagonistic parties. Neither the government nor the Pokot had any intention of fighting. The D.C. was genuinely committed to arresting Pkech without bloodshed, while Pkech and his followers were on a pilgrimage to a place called Zion and probably did not anticipate meeting a large group of armed opposition (Kipkorir 1973, 29). With inadequate communication, jittery nerves, and armed men any action however insignificant was likely to trigger an altercation. This action was the Pokot forward surge which threw the government party into panic mode, forcing Simpson to finally issue the order to fire. In the ensuing melee that lasted for about five minutes, all the Europeans present except Simpson and one African constable, Kipkoge arap Kibirir, were fatally wounded. On the African side, 29 *Yomot* pilgrims including Pkech perished (KNA, DC/BAR/6/1, 1950)<sup>26</sup>.

The British party positively identified the bodies of Stevens, Cameron, Taylor, arap Kibirir and Pkech. They loaded the corpses into their lorry and drove back to Nginyang’. The Pokot never came to know the whereabouts of Pkech’s body, and in

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<sup>26</sup> The members of Mafuta Pole give a high figure. They state that including those who died of bullet and bayonet injuries later, the total number of fatalities was about 50 people.

the absence of a verifiable official report stories about his ascension to heaven began to circulate. The colonial administration followed with a mopping-up operation, 'to capture and punish the ringleaders and stamp out the embers of Dini ya Msambwa'(KNA, DC/WSUK/1/2/1952). Close associates of Pkech and those who attended his meetings were arrested and given prison sentences (KNA, COIR 1950). Twelve people were sentenced to the hangman's noose. Of these only seven were killed. The rest had their sentences commuted (Lundeby 2013, 139). The Pokot living in Baringo district were given a blanket fine of 5,000 head of cattle and forced labour. In addition, a levy force of thirty Kenya police and forty African police were stationed at Nginyang' to ensure that these demands were met (KNA, COIR 1953). The levy force withdrew in May 1952. After that 'picturesque primitive tribesmen reverted to their uneventful semi-nomadic existence' (KNA, DC/BAR/1/2, 1952).



**Figure 10:** Monuments at the site of the Kolloa massacre. The one on the right was erected by the British government in 1950, while the one on the left was erected by Mafuta Pole in 2005. Photo taken by the author on 30 August 2022.

Despite the colonial government's official persecution, *Yomot* was not exterminated. Contrary to Kipkorir's observation that 'to the current Pokot' Lukas Pkech 'was a leader unto darkness and death' (1972, 117), who 'remains buried in an obscure grave unhonoured and cursed by the Pokot' (Kipkorir 1973, 31), evidence indicates that *Yomot* remained alive in the 1950s. Spreading its doctrines through a clandestine cell system, especially in West and North Pokot, to extent that it became a serious concern for the colonial government and missionaries. Throughout the 1950s, the West Pokot district annual reports paint a picture of a danger that was constantly

lurking under the surface of a seemingly peaceful Pokot. Throughout the 1950s, scores of people were arrested for allegedly taking part in secret *Yomot* activities in remote areas of North Pokot. For example, 'in 1952 a party belonging to *Dini ya Msambwa* was dispersed while on its way to Baringo from Chesera. Its members were arrested and brought to Kapenguria by the local Suk' (KNA, DC/BAR, 1/2, 1952). The same year 'another party consisting of 21 men, 15 women and seven children were arrested by the local headman of Psobai' (KNA, DC/BAR, 1/2, 1952). In 1956 the government 'arrested 293 people in West Pokot,' and in 1957 there were several trials of *Yomot* members in Kapenguria (KNA, DC/WPKT/1/8, 1957). It is this deep-seated nature of the *Yomot* activities that made the DC to remark that, 'every Suk, if not an adherent was at least a sympathizer.' To the Pokot *Yomot* had almost 'become in a sense a way of life' (KNA, DC/WPKT/1/6, 1956). If the District Annual Reports can be believed, *Yomot* remained an active fact of life among the Pokot and the neighbouring Marakwet and Tugen up the time of Kenya's independence in 1963 (KNA, WPKT/1/3/2, 1963).

After Kenya's independence in 1963, the colonial ban imposed on DyM was lifted by the African government, and in 1964 the Bukusu section of DyM led by Elijah Masinde was registered as a religious organization. In Pokot, *Yomot* fugitives resurfaced from their cover (many hiding in Kadam, Uganda), and gathered under the leadership of the former disciple of Pkech, Rosti Lakuny, to form a religious fraternity (Lundeby 2013, 143). By this time, they were still known in official records as DyM and associated with Elijah Masinde's faction. However, when it became apparent to the government of Kenyatta that Masinde's fiery anti-

government politics was not going to end soon, the government banned DyM in 1968 (de Wolf 1983, 270). Because of the historical connections between *Dini ya Yomot* of the Pokot and *Dini ya Musambwa* of Elijah Masinde, the proscription automatically extended to *Yomot*. For that reason, the leader of *Yomot*, Rosti Lakuny, was arrested and jailed twice for leading an illegal organization (Lundeby 2013, 142).

In the 1970s, Rosti was released. He returned home and picked up from where he had left. He gathered the scattered members of *Yomot* and organized them into a formal religious group. It is at this time that they adopted the name *Dini ya Roho ya Mafuta Pole ya Africa* (herein after *Mafuta Pole*) the Religion of the Holy Spirit of the Gentle Anointing Oil of Africa. *Mafuta Pole* tradition has it that Pkech suggested the name to Rosti Lakuny before he died. *Mafuta Pole* remained an illegal organization until 2012 when it was registered by the government. Rosti Lakuny led the organization from its inception to the time of his death in 1997. The leadership then passed to his son and the current leader, Aristi Kapel. The headquarters of *Mafuta Pole*, known locally as *Yerusalemu*, is located in Sook in North Pokot (Lundeby 2013, 142).

### **5.6.3 The Agency of Pkech in the Development of a Syncretic Christology**

Christology is the study of the nature and the working of Jesus Christ. It includes aspects such as incarnation, resurrection, and the relationship between the divine and the human nature of Christ. The conceptualization of the nature of Jesus Christ has been a subject of controversy in the history of Christianity, with varying interpretations leading to various shades of Christology that have characterised the

history of Christianity. These shades of Christology include Arianism, Nestorianism, Ebonism, Docetism, Monophytism (Eutychianism), and Apollinarianism (Trevor-Roper, 1972, 200; Spoerl 1994, 547). Even in the messianic movements that sprang up in different parts of Africa during the colonial period, the nature of Jesus Christ was a major source of controversy. Fueled by the loathing of White colonial domination and frustration with ecclesiastical racism, most of the messianic movements dismissed the idea of a 'pale Christ of the Whites' and substituted it with a black Jesus Christ with whom the personalities of various founders were often conflated (Balandier 1965, 469). This domestication of Jesus Christ is what Schofeleers (1989, 157) calls 'folk Christology'. Examples of these folk messiahs include Simon Kimbangou of the Gunza movement in Belgium Congo (Balandier 1965, 469), William Wade Harris of the Harrist church in the Ivory Coast (Kustenbaunder 2008, 273), Alfayo Odongo Mango of the Joroho sect (Gimode 2003, 322-323), Yohana Owalo of Nomiyo Luo church (Opwapo, 1981, 103), and Simeo Ondeto the founder of the Legio Maria sect in Kenya (Schwartz 2005, 164; Kustenbaunder 2009, 13).

The indigenization of Christ was also exhibited in the *Yomot* movement. From the moment Pkech received his revelation in 1946, he packaged himself as the messiah of his people. His, however, was not the biblical Jesus. As a cultural agent, he developed concepts about the nature of Jesus in the Bible that filtered through the indigenous Pokot religion acquiring new meaning in the process. Pkech mentally constructed a view of the Pokot indigenous religion and used that past to inscribe meaning to the concept of Jesus in the ongoing process of interactions. The upshot

was a syncretic Christology that drew aspects from the Bible and indigenous Pokot religion, especially the indigenous idea of the prophet. Pkech and his band of followers did not consider themselves to be followers of Jesus Christ. When asked about Christ, Pkech told Thomas Collins, the AIM missionary at Nginyang, ‘Oh yes, I know about him. He is the son of Mary and he died’ (Philip 1965, 10, Quoted in Kipkorir 1972, 126). In this revelation and throughout his teachings Pkech did not pay allegiance to Jesus Christ at any moment. He only acknowledged the power of the almighty God and presented himself as the son of this God; a messiah sent to redeem the Pokot from the cruel hand of the British, just as Jesus had done before for the Jews (KNA/BAR/6/1, 1950). Under this conceptualization, Pkech contested the authenticity of Jesus as the saviour of humankind and a deity, in the process dismissing the veracity of the biblical trinity. To him Jesus was the Messiah for Europeans not for the Pokot, as his words to his followers at Nginyang attest:

Who is our enemy? Is it not *Wazungu*? They began by killing us. They teach us bad things. Don’t listen to this white man [Collins], he is our enemy. Haven’t we got a god [sic]? We pray to Jehova, who is Jesus? The *Wazungu* say he is God, but how could he have died? (KNA BAR 6/1, 1950).

In this speech, Pkech acknowledges Jehova as the Supreme Being but contemptuously dismisses the authority of Jesus, in the process creating a vacuum in the biblical trinity that he sought to fill. He did this by creating a storyline that almost mirrored that of Jesus in the Bible. For example, he had disciples (*mitume*), and lived in the open air in the wilderness for two months before emerging for his last mission to Zion. In this mission Pkech ‘surrounded himself with trusted followers and asked

the timid to remain behind’ because ‘he anticipated tension’ – some sort of crucifixion (Lundeby 2013, 137). Emphasizing the Pokot religious concept of prophecy, Pkech foresaw his imminent death when he told his followers that ‘white men were after him and that they would send an aeroplane to spot him.’ When a plane was seen circling the sky of Baringo on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 1950, Pkech’s prophecy was fulfilled, which ‘increased his stature in the eyes of his followers’ (Kipkorir 1972, 123). He also informed his followers that he will die, after which the Pokot will be free (Lundeby 2013, 137).

In this script, Pkech substituted himself for the person of Jesus in the intertextual ritual of the paschal lamb of God, and it was on this basis that Pkech communicated his message to the Pokot. This conceptualization, however, might have had very little meaning or interest to his followers. The Pokot simply developed a shared millennial belief that identified sources of strain in the existing social, economic, and political set-up – colonial and missionary scourge – and envisaged proper cure within the framework of their culture and religion. They constructed a sense of the past and the future in their imagination and used that past to inscribe meaning to the teachings of Pkech. They saw in Pkech and his teaching themes that resonated well with their indigenous religious symbols. The Pokot believed in powerful ritual experts known for divination and prophecy called *werkoy* (Peristiany 1975, 203; Bollig 2006, 35). Thus, for them, a male figure with prophetic power to guide the community to a world of plenty, peace, and stability easily made sense within the framework of Pokot culture and history.

Just like in other African communities, the institution of prophets among the Pokot was ancient (Anderson 1993a; Rigby 1975). Among the Pokot prophetic power was initially the preserve of the Soti (*Cheptumegha*) clan (Peristiany 1975, 206). However, with the absorption of the Talai prophets from the Uasin-Gishu Maasai in the nineteenth century, the Soti diviners seem to have lost their prophetic luster, and their position was taken over by the immigrants. Fleeing Maasai civil wars on the Uasin-Gishu plateau, the Talai ascended into the Cherangany hills before dispersing at Kiptaber hill following the infamous rock fall (Kipkorir 1964, 6). Some of them found refuge among the Marakwet, while others went to Pokot, Keiyo, and Tugen. These ritual experts were known as *oloibon* (often rendered as *laibon*) among the Maasai. The institution of *laibon*, therefore, embodies the intrusion of the broader wave of religious influences that was exported to the Kalenjin groups by the refugees of the Maasai civil strife of the nineteenth century (Anderson, 1995, 165). By the second half of the nineteenth century, the Maasai *laibon* had recast their roles among the Pokot where they were known as *werkoy* (*sing. werkoyon*) (Peristiany 1975, 197).

As they established their presence in Pokot, the Talai *werkoy* distinguished themselves from a host of other lesser ritual experts who had previously been the feature of Pokot religion, including the Soti diviners, the reed blower (*kipses*), sandals readers (*pkwanian*), diviners (*chepng'eroi*), purifier (*parparin*), and the herbalist (*chepsogeyon*). With time, they created a powerful ritual institution that was believed to derive its power directly from God (*Tororot*). For that reason, they were known by the Pokot as the prophets of God (*werkoy nyopo Tororot*) (Ngeiywo 2018,

75). The Pokot believed that the *werkoy* had the preternatural ability to journey through time and space in their dreams. During ‘the course of these nocturnal journeys a *werkoyon* encountered Divinity’s signs and after returning home’ from his reverie he decoded his visions (*ng’oria*) and advised the community on the correct timing for planning raids, planting, sacrificing, and initiation (Bianco 1996, 30).

Similar to the fate of their kin among the other Kalenjin groups (Ellis 1976, 555; Anderson 1993b, 854; Biegon 2017, 2), the Talai *werkoy* in Pokot also faced harassment from the British colonial government. Because of this harassment, the last famous *werkoy*, Arimot, sought refuge in Kadam, Uganda Protectorate, to escape arrest (Patterson 1969, 16). Despite this transmigration, the memories of *werkoy* were never extinguished in the social memory of the Pokot. The ideal prototype of a prophet remained present in their minds; with their eight cyclical age-sets (*pin*) providing a perfect conceptual framework for them to imagine that similar conditions were bound to be repeated, and powerful prophets just like new age-sets would emerge anew (Peristiany 1975, 201). In the eyes of the Pokot, the rise of Pkech and his religion transmuted an ideal condition into reality.

It is within this framework that the Pokot received Pkech’s message. In him, they saw a continuation of a long list of famous *werkoy* – Arimot, Ptura, Parsinian, Akuyale and Pkel, among many others - historical figures that were intimately connected with the Pokot’s struggle for survival (Peristiany 1975, 206). The emergence of the Pokot as fully-fledged pastoralists in the nineteenth century contends that they had to fight for their space on the plains of northwestern Kenya against a backdrop of harassment by manifold enemies - the Karimojong, Turkana,

and Samburu (Bollig 2006, 35). During these moments of trial and uncertainty, it was prophets who held the Pokot together and led them ‘into the world of plenty, health, and happiness’ (Peristiany 1975, 175). It was along this line that Pkech and his credo that promised ‘immunity from sickness, increased fertility, relief from blindness, and death by guns and freedom from European control’ had a powerful echo in the minds of the Pokot (KNA, COIR 1950). Most of his followers thought that the time had come for Pkech to lead them against the British colonial scourge. It was on this basis that they understood his message.

The prophetic image of Pkech was reinforced by his emphasis on the gift of the Holy Spirit. Pkech and his followers were known for spirit possession that made them experience glossolalia during worship. In the climax of their ecstatic singing, the Holy Ghost came down to them ‘in the form of shining lights descending from the sky.’ When these lights came closer, they quickly vanished allowing ‘spirit to descend on the targeted individual’ and causing them to shake, ‘tremble, and speak in tongues’ (Bianco 1996, 31). Similar to the members of *Yomot*, prophetic discourse at the time of divination involved possession. When possessed the prophet spoke in a strange language that ‘involved a mixture of human and divine speech interspersed with apocalyptic images, with words which in themselves appear meaningless or seem unusual in their context, while some resembled animal cries’ (Peristiany 1975, 197). The strange behaviour of the members of *Yomot*, when possessed by the Holy Ghost, mirrored closely the indigenous Pokot way ‘of bridging the distance between humans and divinity’ (Bianco 1996, 28). The practice of spirit possession thus undoubtedly reinforced Pkech’s image as a prophet in the minds of his followers

because ‘like prophets, the possessed embodied things which were fearful and wonderful’ (Bianco 1996, 30).

By declaring himself the ‘son of God’ Pkech implicitly indicated that he perceived himself as the Messiah of the Pokot. This perception was taken up by his followers, during his life and especially after his death at Kolloa. When his body ‘disappeared’ from the scene of the affray, and given the absence of any official report, the Pokot believed that he had ascended to heaven. It is through this belief that Pkech’s death is invoked, in the worship of *Mafuta Pole* where he is ritually presented as the foundational sacrifice of the religion comparable to that of Jesus for the Christian church (O.I, Aristi, 2020).

The massacre at Kolloa thus came to constitute a fusion of two metaphors: the biblical and the indigenous Pokot version. To the followers of *Mafuta Pole*, the sacrifice at Kolloa was salvific. In the person of Pkech God fulfilled the promise to provide them with a messiah of their own, whose death at Kolloa ‘cancelled the violence and brutality’ of the colonial past and ushered in a ‘new era of forgiveness and reconciliation’ (O.I, Aristi, 2020). Consequently, the anniversary of Pkech’s death on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April is celebrated as the holiest *Mafuta Pole* holiday. It has since replaced the Christian Easter holiday thereby giving indigenous signification to the theme of the redemptive death of Christ (O.I, Aristi, 2020). It is this fundamental conceptualization that makes the theology of the *Mafuta Pole* religion to be *Pkechian* and not Christian. The ambiguity that surrounds *Mafuta Pole*’s perception of Jesus Christ makes it a misnomer to consider it a proper Christian church, because it is the

celebration of the death of Jesus on Easter that explicitly brings out the Christology of Jesus as the saviour of humankind.

#### **5.6.4 The Agentic Synthesis Pokot Religion and Christianity in *Mafuta Pole* Ritual.**

It is in the doctrines of the *Mafuta Pole* religion that one can visualize how the Pokot used their agentic reflexive consciousness to inscribe meaning to western Christianity. The Pokot agentic intervention led to the fusion of ideas from two temporalities, the indigenous past and the Christian present, to create a syncretic religion. The hybridity is manifested in the *Mafuta Pole* liturgy. Mafuta Pole conduct their service on Saturday. Before the start of church service, the worshipers enter the church building using two separate doors situated at the back of the church; the men use the male door, on the right side of the hall, while the women use the female door, on the left. The worshippers proceed to sit on pews facing the altar, the women sit on the left side of the building while the men on the right. The two groups are separated by an aisle.<sup>27</sup> This seating arrangement is one of the many concepts that *the Mafuta Pole* adopted from the indigenous Pokot religion (O.I, Ng'oriatudo 2020). Among the Pokot, the left and the right side were strongly gendered. The right side was considered masculine while the left-hand side was deemed feminine. During major rituals and communal gatherings, congregants sat according to their gender. This applied even to mundane aspects such as walking along the road where women were expected to walk on the left side of men. This concept was acquired by the *Mafuta*

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<sup>27</sup> During my fieldwork I observed that the size of the aisle was relative to the size of the church. Small parishes, for example, Sukait in Keringet, have a one-meter aisle, while the headquarter (Yerusalem) has a wide aisle.

*pole* religion and applied to spatial arrangement during worship (O.I, Ng'oriatudo 2020).

The church seating arrangement also followed the age of the congregants. The older members of both genders sat on the front pews close to the podium in their respective sections. The age of the congregants decreased progressively from the front to the back. The youth and young children sat at the back of the church. When asked the elders of *Mafuta Pole* insist that this seating arrangement was given to the founder of the church, Rosti Lakuny, by the Holy Spirit (O.I, Aristi, 2020). While that could not be proved empirically, it is however suspicious. This spatial arrangement was undoubtedly informed by the indigenous Pokot religion, especially the *kirket* worship.

The term *kirket* among the Pokot refers to the sacred semicircular-shaped meeting of all male-initiated adults in which a castrated male animal was sacrificed to a sky God (*Tororot*). The sacrificial animal was killed in a ritually prescribed manner and its carcass was cut into pieces without removing the skin. This was followed by haruspication, eating of the sacrificial meal, and prayers (Bollig 2000, 343). At the *kirket* worship, the seating arrangement followed a strict order of precedence based on the social age of the congregants. The senior generational set of ritual elders sat at the apex of the semicircle close to the sacred tree. They were followed by senior elders, while the juniors occupied the tail ends of the semicircle. Young men yet to be initiated into adulthood stayed on the periphery of the assembly. The elders occupied the sacred spot because it was believed they were closer to God and therefore were able to understand the wishes of *Tororot* (Peristiany 1951, 190). This

indigenous religious gerontocratic conceptualization of spatial organization was adopted, Christianized, and transplanted into the worship of *Mafuta Pole* beliefs. The religious spatial arrangement refers back to the Pokot indigenous *kirket* worship, distilling the Pokot past into a coherent set of religious symbols that connected their indigenous religion and Christianity.

Another significant part of indigenous Pokot religiosity that was incorporated into the *Yomot* religion was the use of song and dance. This element certainly was not borrowed from missionary Christianity, because the missionary groups that proselytized the Pokot – AIM, MHM, and BCMS – emphasized a gentle and dignified tempo of music during worship. For the Pokot, however, singing and dancing was life. Pkech and his followers, therefore, carried their past methods of celebrating life and experiencing the sacred to Christianity. With it they turned western Christianity inside out like a glove, infusing it with Pokot-oriented melodies and rhythms, and added new patterns such as the ring shout, exuberance, and ecstatic seizure. These new seeds planted in the Christian soil produced a new synthesis that coloured and changed the white original. The outcome of this Pokot agentic intervention was the development of a form of worship that expressed the transcendental realities that were the objects of their spiritual quest in a powerful African resonance. This is exemplified by one of the *Yomot* songs:

<i>Enkilyano roho</i>	(Let us believe in the Holy Spirit)
<i>Nyoneno paponyo nyo mito yim</i>	(Come down from our father who lives in the sky)
<i>Enkilyano roho</i>	(Let us believe in the Holy Spirit)
<i>Ngaracha wareku cho mito nguny</i>	(Come and help your children on earth)

*Enkilyano roho*

(Let us believe in the Holy Spirit) (Bianco  
1996, 31)

It is probably because of the deep nature in which music and dance were entrenched in the Pokot culture that Kipkorir (1973, 25) notes, ‘Pkech capitalized on this Pokot love for song and dance’ to render his religion appealing and intelligible to them. *Yomot* were known for singing and dancing. Their songs borrowed significantly from the indigenous Pokot music style. Although the meaning conveyed by these songs was altered to reflect the newly developed hybrid religion, they were still grounded in typically Pokot techniques such as the call-and-response pattern, in which the soloist and chorus alternated. Through this style, the members of *Yomot* exalted *Tororot* and conveyed the hope of a millennium – a time when there would be peace, health, and plenty.

### **5.7 Conclusion**

This chapter examined the interaction between the Kalenjin and Western Christianity in the period between 1945 and 1965. It has shown that during this period, there was a slow resolution of the Kalenjin resistance to Western Christianity that had characterised the early period of missionization, especially among the Keiyo, Pokot, and Tugen. Among these three communities there was a substantial increase in the number of Christian converts. A great number of young people joined catechism classes, mostly because of the desire for education, and in the process, they adopted western Christianity. The expansion of education institutions increased the interaction between the Kalenjin and missionaries. This chapter has shown that the Pokot, different from the other Kalenjin groups, maintained their strong resistance to

Christianity deep into the post-independence period. For the them, the adoption of Christianity occurred under a messianic movement, *Dini ya Yomot*, led by Lukas Pkech.

This chapter has shown that the acquisition of Christianity by the Kalenjin was not a wholesale adoption of a new culture without interpretation. Using the theory of agency, I have shown that the Kalenjin, as cultural agents, used the *practical-evaluative* dimension of agency to interrogate the foreign culture. They used their received patterns of religious thought to interpret and evaluate western Christianity. Immersed in the flow of time, the Kalenjin moved beyond themselves into the future and constructed changing images of their new religion, and how they could get they could reshape it with power of their indigenous cosmology. In this agentic interpretation, the Kalenjin modified Christianity and fitted it into their existing cultural terrain. The outcome was a contextualized Kalenjin Christianity as made manifest in their rites of passage and the *Dini ya Yomot* messianic movement, which emerged among the Pokot.

## **CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter recapitulates the various themes examined in this thesis by explaining the outcome of each research objective. It also provides a conclusion to the study. The conclusion shows the significance of the findings of this research to the study of the history of religion.

### **6.2 Summary**

This thesis has examined the evolution of the religious culture of the Kalenjin groups living in the Kerio-Valley. To achieve this major objective, the study was divided into three minor objectives that correspond to the chapters of this thesis. The first objective whose content forms chapter one and chapter two of this thesis sought to examine the religious culture of the Kalenjin before the advent of British colonialism. However, for a better understanding of the transformation of the religion of the Kalenjin during the pre-colonial period, I gave a pithy history of the peopling of the Complex. This is because the ethnic groups that settled in the Kerio-Valley at different historical epochs, possessed different religious cultures. This multiplicity of religious cultures influenced the evolution of the religion of the Kalenjin.

This study established that the Kerio-Valley has been under habitation since the Late Stone Age period. The Late Stone Age period, was dominated by hunter-gatherer groups who were endemic to the region. These indigenous groups lived along rivers valleys and the shores of Lake Turkana for easy access to food and water. They

possessed the land up to the time the first visitors, Southern Cushites, appeared from the north, at the close of the Stone-Age period. The Southern Cushites co-existed and interacted with the indigenous hunter-gatherer groups, and in the process influenced each other's cultures.

The change of climate during the late paleolithic period led to the slow desiccation of the East African region, resulting in the reduction of the sizes of lakes and the drying up of vegetation on the lowland plains. As a result, the hybrid communities that previously utilized lowland plains retreated to the cool and wet higher altitude areas. A few others exemplified by the ancestors of the present Elmolos remained along the shores of Lake Turkana where they survived on fishing. The groups that sought refuge on the hills with time concretized to form the indigenous groups of the Kerio-Valley. These indigenous groups dominated the Kerio-Valley up to the time the ancestors of the Kalenjin settled in the area. The indigenous groups were divided into two broad groups based on their economy, the agro-pastoralist who constructed stone pit-dwellings (Sirikwa holes) and the hunter-gatherer groups. Both of them, however, were known by the modern inhabitants of the Complex as the Seker, because they had their women display a single cowrie shell attached to the forelock resting on the forehead.

At the beginning of the first millennium C.E, the Southern Nilotes (ancestors of the Kalenjin) entered the Kerio-Valley from the north, and settled on the slopes of Mount Elgon and extending into the Uasin-Gishu plateau. The dominance of the Southern Nilotes on the slopes of Mount Elgon was short-lived. They were forced to evacuate the lowland plains for the highland areas by the ferocious raids of the

intruding Plain Nilotes. They ascended hills and escarpments and settled alongside indigenous groups. In the ensuing centuries, the Kalenjin assimilated the indigenous groups and concretized into independent civic territories. These civic territories were enclosed together in colonial administrative boundaries (Keiyo, Marakwet, Pokot, and Kamasia) and in the process evolved into the modern Kalenjin groups of the Kerio-Valley.

The movement of people into the Kerio-Valley was not just physical addition to the population in the region. This migration and settlement of the Kalenjin initiated contact with other groups, which influenced the evolution of their religious thought system. The first stratum of culture that influenced the evolution of the religion of the Kalenjin was the religion of the indigenous groups, the people of the cowrie shell (*Seke*). The religion of the indigenous people was centred on a water spirit called, *Ilat*. The Kalenjin adopted the worship of *Ilat* and fused it with the Kalenjin worship of *Asis*. The end result was a complex web of sacred relationships in which *Asis* assumed the position of the Supreme Being and *Ilat* was relegated to the position of the dutiful messenger of *Asis*. The role of *Ilat* became that of enforcing the will of *Asis*, especially providing rainfall and punishing wrongdoers. This syncretic religion was manifested in double formula worship in which both *Asis* and *Ilat* were entreated, as seen in the prayers for rain and the swearing of *muma*. This then was the religion of the Kalenjin at the beginning of the nineteenth century before the Pokot descended the hills to pursue a pastoral lifestyle.

The development of Pokot pastoralism brought them into contact with the Ateker groups, especially the Karimojong. The pastoral Pokot established close contacts

with the Karimojong on the border zones during the nineteenth century. With the assimilating influence of a contiguous boundary went that of intercourses - intermarriages, trading, and raiding. These intercourses influenced the transformation of Pokot culture. In religious matters, the Pokot adopted the concept of worship embodied in the *kirket*, *sapana* initiation, and the Karimojong way of conceptualizing the direction of sacred value. The *kirket* worship involved the killing of a castrated male animal in a ritually prescribed manner inside a semi-circle formed by adult males initiated through *sapana*. The *kirket* opened towards Mtelo peak, the highest point of the Sekerr ranges. Through the adoption of the *kirket*, the religious compass of the Pokot was altered completely. Being worshipers of *Asis* previously, the Pokot viewed the eastern direction, the origin of the rising sun to be the direction of sacred value. However, after the acquisition of Karimojong *kirket*, the Pokot direction of sacred value changed. The point of origin as they entered the pursuit of pastoralism acquired religious value. The first group of the Pokot to adopt pastoralism came from Kasauria on the Sekerr ranges. Therefore, the Sekerr ranges and especially its highest peak – Mtelo - assumed religious significance in Pokot rituals of worship, circumcision, and burial rites.

The Pokot also adopted the Karimojong way of conceptualizing the Supreme Being. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the Karimojong concept of relating God with the sky (*Akuju*) had taken hold among the pastoralist group. However, the pastoral Pokot knew this God in the Kalenjin version of *Tororot*. The interaction of the agro-pastoral hill Pokot with the Karimojong culture was rather limited in intensity. Distance from the source of Karimojong culture, the habitation of inaccessible

precipices, and difference in the economic structure contributed to that outcome. This however did not preclude waves of Karimojong cultural influences from penetrating the hills. There was constant admixture between the plain (pastoral) and the hill Pokot (agro-pastoral). Agricultural hill Pokot who acquired livestock through bride price and other means descended the plains and joined their pastoral relatives. At the same time, some of the pastoral Pokot who lost their stock to raids and epidemics sought refuge with their erstwhile relations on the hills. These and other forms of intercourse such as trade, intermarriages, and absorption of refugees facilitated the infiltration of Karimojong culture among the hill Pokot. With time the hill Pokot adopted *sapana* initiation, wearing the clay-coloured headdress, and adopted the worship of *kirket*.

The infiltration of Karimojong culture among the hill Pokot was not as deep as it occurred among the pastoral group. The net outcome was that the concept of God as the sky (*Tororot*) was not fully and universally acclaimed as in the pastoral section. The hill Pokot adopted the Ateker idea of relating God with the sky, *Tororot*. However, due to the weak nature of contact with Ateker culture, the conceptualization of God as *Tororot* did not supplant the previous Kalenjin idea of associating God with the sun, *Asis*. The two ideas of conceiving the Supreme Being existed contemporaneously. The hill Pokot thus referred to the religious idea of the Supreme Being as either *Tororot* or *Asis*. The choice of the name depended on the reason for prayer by the supplicant. Whenever the supplicant wished to emphasize the idea of an all-seeing God, they referred to the deity as *Asis*. However, when the

Pokot invoked the name *Tororot* in prayers they were emphasizing the character of God as one who hears and listens.

Still, the Pokot transformation to pastoralism saw the emergence of a centralizing institution of the diviner-prophet (*werkoi*). This occurred after the assimilation of the Talai (Cheposait/Kasait) clan from the Maasai. The concept of the *werkoi* was not new to the Pokot. The Soti (*Cheptumegha*) clan supplied the Pokot with prophets before the integration of the Cheposait. However, during the nineteenth century the Cheposait clan was assimilated among the Pokot and in due course they eclipsed the Soti in divination and prophecy. By the close of the nineteenth century, the *werkoi* of Cheposait clan had emerged as centralizing figures because of their ritual authority over sanctioning of raids, the timing of initiation, planting, and prayers for rain. With time, the *werkoy* joined *Ilat* as the messengers of *Tororot*. Through their dreams, they communicated directly with God and *Ilat*. Because of this ability to talk directly to *Ilat*, the male members of the Cheposait clan soon joined the Toyoi clan elders as ritual experts during the worship of *Ilat*. By the close of the nineteenth century, the Talai even surpassed the Toyoi elders as the caretakers of the cult of *Ilat* in most of the Kalenjin communities of the Kerio-Valley.

In the second objective, I examined the introduction of Christianity in the Kerio-Valley. Christianity was brought by protestant missionary groups namely the BCMS, AIM, and the Catholic MHM. These missionaries established Central Mission Stations and outposts. They also developed strategies to attract the interest of the indigenes. The foremost of them was the use of education. Others included the use of medical care, the establishment of Christian villages, the translation of the bible into

Kalenjin, and village outreach programs. However, these methods did not influence the Kalenjin to change their religious orientation, especially in the first two decades of missionization. However, as the years wore on many factors combined to pile pressure on the Kalenjin, which then led them to seek the services of missionaries. These factors included the exposure of the Kalenjin to Western culture and education while at work on settler farms, during railway construction, and the First World War. There were also disasters such as the drought and famine and the smallpox epidemic that struck at the very heart of the economic life of the Kalenjin. These factors combined to force some of the Kalenjin to consider their stance on the material offers provided by missionaries. The most affected group was the youth. This cohort went to mission stations for education and food, and in the process, some were won over to the new faith.

The study has established that western Christian missionary came in the spirit of cultural chauvinism and arrogance. The Protestants missionaries (AIM and BCMS) were the most virulent in their attacks on African culture. The MHM Catholics also preached against African culture. But they were liberal in the follow-up. Yet no matter how tolerant the Catholics were, their presentation of Christianity with emphasis on individual salvation was incompatible with the very foundation of Kalenjin culture. Their insistence on individual conversion was in direct conflict with the philosophical underpinnings of the Kalenjin society based on communalism and age-set unity. Christianity thus was seen as a harbinger of social disintegration.

The missionaries' attacks on African culture led to a bitter conflict between Kalenjin culture and western Christianity. This conflict was mainly fought on the issue of

polygamy and circumcision. By and large, African reaction to the missionaries' overtures depended on an individual's relationship to the societal structure. The young uncircumcised boys and girls were mostly eager to convert. The adult population found little attraction in Christianity because that would have meant a sacrifice of polygamy, the privileges of social ceremonies (alcohol), and bonds holding the community together for a meaningless 'salvation.' The situation, however, soon changed when the Kalenjin began to realize the value of the material benefits offered by missionaries, especially education. Among the Tugen, Keiyo, and Marakwet, young boys and girls turned to missions for education as they came to terms with the economic realities of the colonial set-up. They went to mission station in search of education and in the process gave missionaries a chance to convert some of them.

Christian missionary groups had very little success among the Pokot during the entire missionary period. The Pokot remained reserved and insular in the entire period of contact with western culture. They believed that their cattle-centred civilization was superior to other cultures, and were satisfied with their traditional way of life. Therefore, they saw no need of changing it. In their view, sending children to missionary schools was taking away manpower that could be utilized in animal husbandry and other domestic chores. Thus, among the Pokot the domestication of Christianity occurred under the rise of a messianic movement, *Dini ya Yomot*.

The final objective of this study examined the outcome of the interaction between western Christianity and Kalenjin culture. It demonstrated how the Kalenjin

overcame the conflict between their culture and Christianity, by adopting Christian concepts and grafting them into those indispensable aspects of their indigenous culture, especially the rites of passage (circumcision, funeral, and marriage). Far from being a weak religion that was easily swept aside, as portrayed in missiological studies, the Kalenjin religion resisted strongly as it entered into a conversation with the intruding western Christian culture. This negotiation manifested itself in the form of a cultural clash. The outcome of this conversation was the clothing of Kalenjin practices, rituals, and concepts in Christian dogma, which passed for the natives a Kalenjinized Christianity.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

This study has examined a history of the religious experience of the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley. It has advanced the thesis that the religion of the Kalenjin was not a rigid and fixed entity that was perpetuated without change throughout their history. It has argued that during interactions, the Kalenjin as agents used their previous culture to interpret new religious ideas they encountered. During these interactions, they constructed homologies between their religious cultures and various streams of foreign cultures they encountered. This process of agentic intervention led to the restructuring of their religion by assimilating selected values from external sources and fusing them with their former cultures to formulate hybrid religions.

Contrary to the conclusions made by previous studies that treated the Kalenjin and their religion as reified and ahistorical, the findings of this study show that the Kalenjin religion was fluid and dynamic. Previous studies including Sambu (2007, 2009), Ngeiywo (2018), Chebet and Dietz (2000), Sanders (2001), Matwetwe

(2017), and Kipkorir (2008), Fish and Fish (2005) and Chepkwony (1997) present a fixed and enduring Kalenjin religious culture, which they regard as an essential and an unchanging subject of history. This thesis has drawn the veil from the face of this apparently authentic and timeless religious practices of the Kalenjin, by exposing the diverse origins of the elements that make up their religious culture. For example, I have shown that the concepts of *Asis*, *Ilat*, *Tororot*, and *Talai orkoy* are of diverse origins.

At different historical moments, the ancestors of the Kalenjin came into contact with people of diverse cultures – Cushites, indigenous people of the Kerio-Valley (the people of the cowry shell (*Seker*), and Plain Nilotes (Ateker and Maasaian groups). The outcome of these inter-ethnic contacts and interactions is that the Kalenjin borrowed religious ideas from other groups and fused them with their previous religious cultures thereby formulating syncretic and multilayered religions. The so-called ‘indigenous’ religion of the Kalenjin always portrayed as singular and orthodox, in the extant literature, was a product of diverse and varied sources welded together through the agentic intervention of the Kalenjin.

The finding of this study has emphasized the role played by the cultural environment in the agentic construction of the religious culture of the Kalenjin groups. For convenience, the Kalenjin of Kenya can be grouped into three sections according to their environments, videlicet; the Southern Kalenjin (Terik, Nandi and Kipsigis), the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley (Keiyo, Tugen, Pokot, and Marakwet) and the Kalenjin of Mount Elgon (Sabaot and Sebei). Before the dispersion of the Kalenjin from the slopes of Mount Elgon, these three Kalenjin groups possessed a similar religion

centred on the worship of a God symbolized by the sun called (*Asis*) and a rude form of ancestor worship.

Around the fifteenth century, the Kalenjin dispersed from the slopes of Mount Elgon following raids from Plain Nilotes and settled in their present diverse environments. The Southern Kalenjin settled further south on the edge of the Western Kenya Bantu Complex. This Bantuised social environment played a key part in the transformation of the religion the Southern Kalenjin. They were influenced by their Bantu neighbours to refine their conceptualization of ancestor worship and with time they became adepts in ancestor worship. The new syncretic religion of the Southern Kalenjin involved the double worship of both *Asis* and ancestors (*oiik*) at the homestead ancestral shrine (*mabwaita*) (Gimode 2003). However, the concept of *mabwaita* does not feature in the religious culture of the Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley. The *mabwaita* and the refined worship of ancestors is therefore an important maker that separates the Southern Kalenjin from the rest of the Kalenjin in matters of religion.

The Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley on the other hand settled on the eastern edge of Western Kenya on a hilly and faulted landscape formerly inhabited by indigenous hunter-gatherer groups (the *seker*). The ancestors of the Kalenjin absorbed these indigenous groups linguistically but, in the process, they were affected religiously. The Kalenjin were influenced by their hosts to adopt the concept of a riverine deity called *Ilat*. In the ensuing centuries, they combined the two religious cults to create a religion that involved the worship of *Asis*, *Ilat*, and a weak form of ancestor veneration. I say weak ancestor worship because it did not involve daily morning and

evening prayers at the homestead ancestral shrine as was the case for the Southern Kalenjin. The Kalenjin of Kenya can therefore be classified into two religious complexes, namely; the *Asis-oiik* Complex (Southern Kalenjin), and the *Asis-Ilat* Complex (The Kalenjin of the Kerio-Valley). So far, to my knowledge, we do not know how the religion of the Kalenjin of Mount Elgon were influenced by their neighbours in the Mount Elgon Complex. There is therefore an urgent need for a historical inquiry into the religious culture of the Kalenjin of Mount Elgon for us to have a fuller view of the transformation of the religion of the Kalenjin groups of Kenya. Significantly also, for us to have complete picture of the Kerio-Valley, there is need for research on how the other ethnic groups of the Kerio-Valley (Masaian and Ateker groups) were affected by cultural interactions which occurred in the Kerio Valley.

This study also examined the coming of Christianity to the Kerio-Valley. Our findings vindicate historical research on missionization. It shows that Christianity came to the Kerio-Valley in the spirit of imperialism. Western Christian missionaries did not seek to build on indigenous Kalenjin religious culture; instead, they were preoccupied with *religiocide* and *ethnocide*. Missionaries labelled Kalenjin culture as satanic and evil, and the Kalenjin in his indigenous setting was described as ‘heathen’ and ‘depraved.’ For this reason, Christian missionaries established villages to insulate converts from the ‘depraved’ Kalenjin culture. In these villages, they attempted to erase African culture from their converts to create a *tabula rasa* on which to write a new religion. Despite all these attempts, missionaries could not manage to erase indigenous Kalenjin religion from their converts. Rarely was a

Kalenjin 'converted' to Christianity. Contrary to the conclusion made by missiological and theological studies which paint a picture of easy and abrupt change of religious orientation by the Kalenjin.

This thesis has shown that the interaction between the Kalenjin religion and Western Christianity was a conflict of values systems. The cultural clash that characterised the early missionary period has been presented as a period of agentic conversation between Kalenjin culture and western Christianity. During that time, Kalenjin as agents were using their culture to negotiate with western Christianity. This dialogue eventually led to a compromise in which the Kalenjin interpreted Christianity in light of their previous culture. In the new but evolving religion, the Kalenjin restructured their religion by adopting selected Christian values and fitted them into their previous religious portals. Other indispensable aspects of the indigenous culture, especially rites of passage (circumcision, wedding, and funeral rites), which could not be abandoned were adopted into the evolving hybrid religion and clothed in Christian robes. This agentic transformation of culture bequeathed the Kalenjin with a composite religion, which was the product of the accumulation of the most functional religious ideas and institutions in their long history.

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### **List of Key Oral Informants**

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Cheboi Arap Butagong - Kipsero (Marakwet West), interviewed on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

Chelang'a, John, residence – Kaptabuk (Marakwet-West), interviewed on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2020.

Chelimo, Andrew, residence – Kaptabuk (Marakwet-West), interviewed on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2020.

Chemitoi Kemboi, residence - Koisung'ur (Marakwet-West), interviewed on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

Cherono, Joel, residence – Kilima (Marakwet-West), interviewed on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2020.

Cheruiyot, Edwin, residence – Kondabilet (Marakwet-west) interviewed on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2020.

Chesergon, William, residence – Sangach (Marakwet East), interviewed on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

Kamket Ismael, residence – Sigor (West Pokot), interviewed on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2020.

Kapel, Lingura Moshongui - Lelan (West Pokot), interviewed on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2020.

Kasait, Lokori, residence - Churo (East Pokot), interviewed on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

Katam, Abraham, residence - Rokocho (Keiyo-North), interviewed on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2020.

Kibuje Abraham, residence – Kaptiony (Baringo), interviewed on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

Kimwetich Cheboi, residence – Kapcherop (Marakwet-West), interviewed on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

Kinyang, John Lokitari, residence, Sukait (West Pokot), interviewed on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2020.

Kiprono Arap Kiptoi, residence – Kapolet (West Pokot), interviewed on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2020.

Kobilo Chesire (female), residence - Konoo (Baringo), interviewed on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2020.

Komen Reuben, residence - Kaptiony (Baringo), interviewed on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2020.

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Pkiror Abraham, residence - Sigor (West-Pokot) interviewed on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2020.

Ringoi Chelang'a, (Female), residence – Tiati (East Pokot) interviewed on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2020.

Rotich Elias, residence – Stoton (Marakwet West) interviewed on July 7<sup>th</sup> 2020.

Sakala, John, residence - Cheptulon (Marakwet West), interviewed on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

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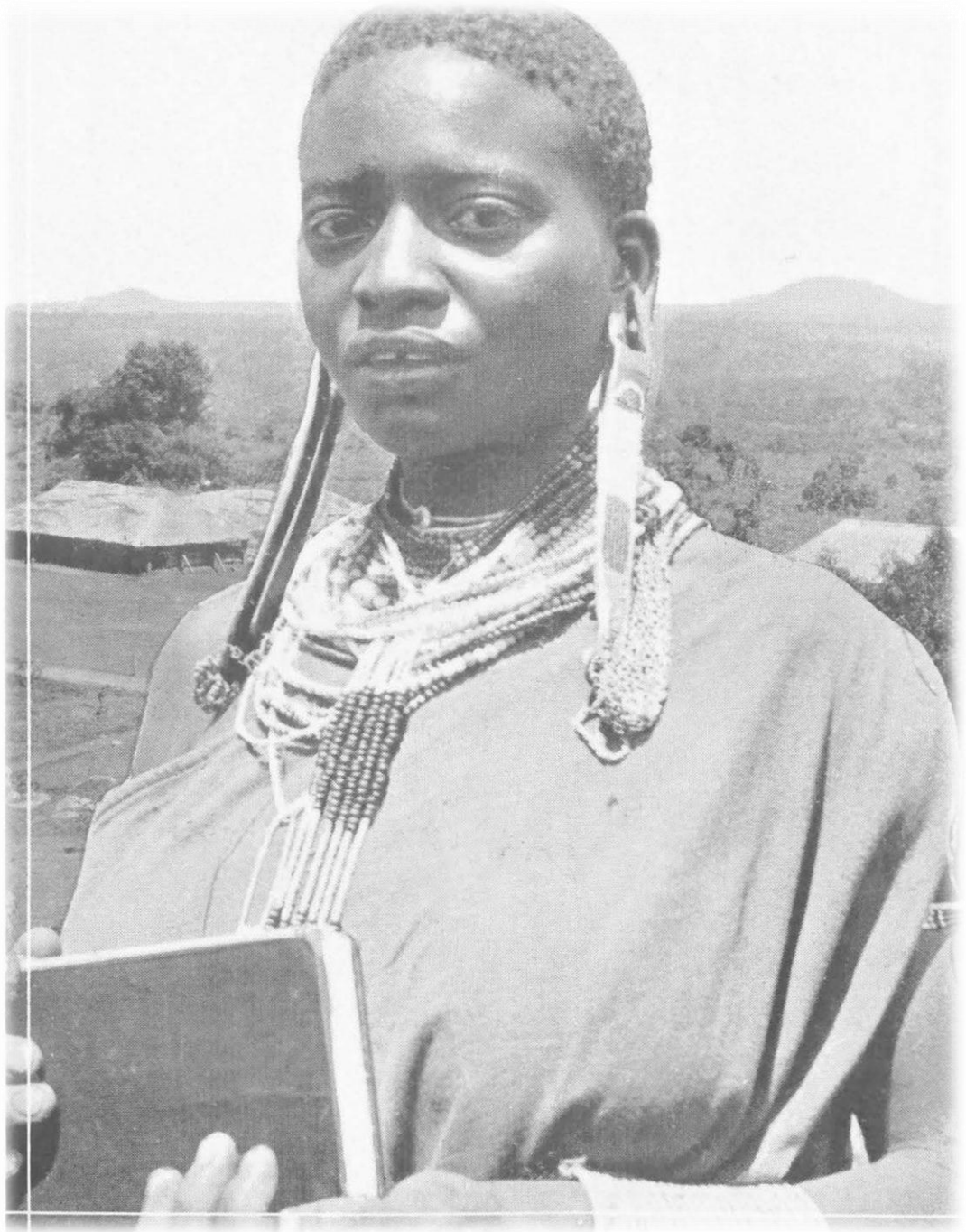
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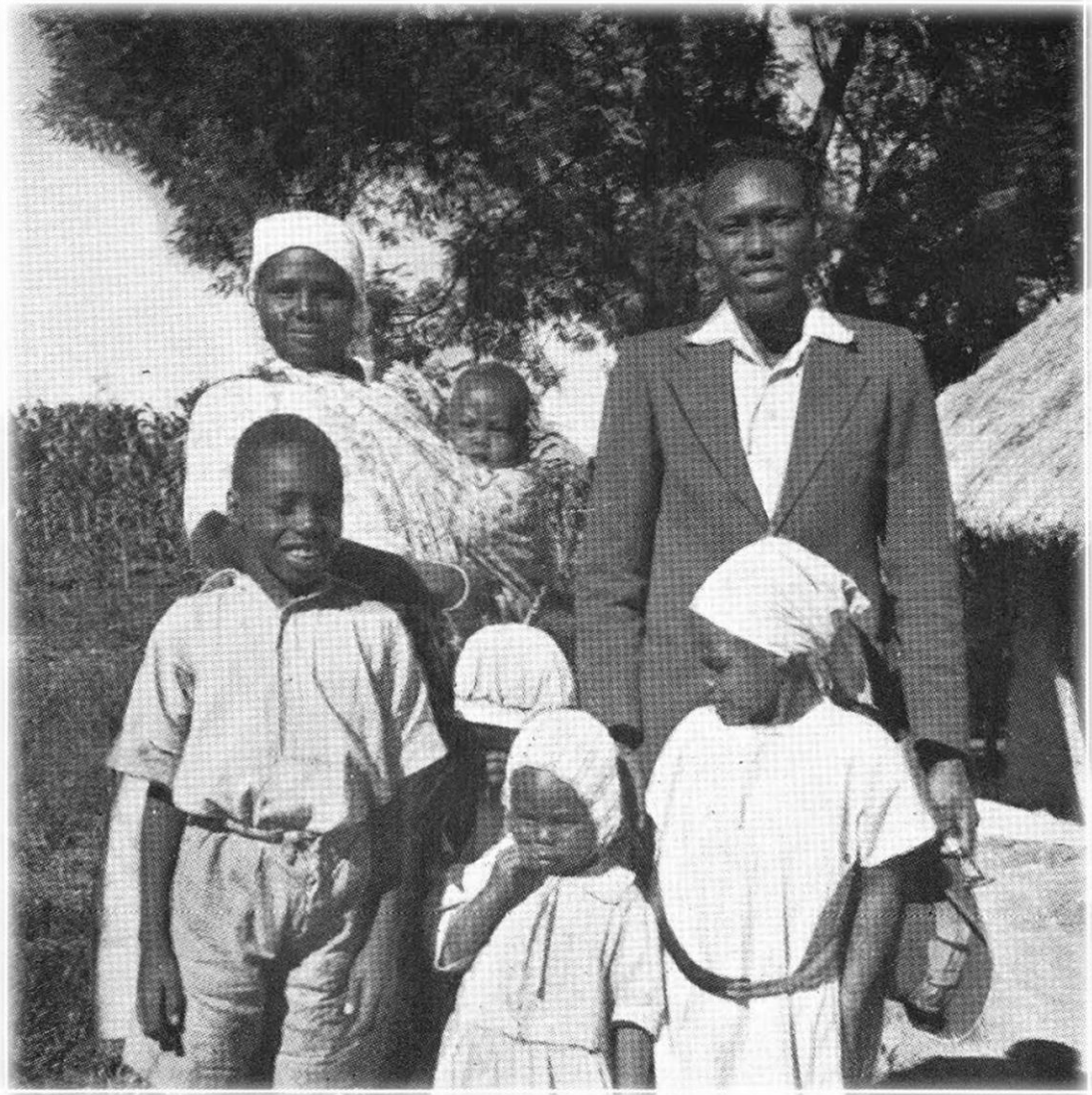
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## APPENDICES

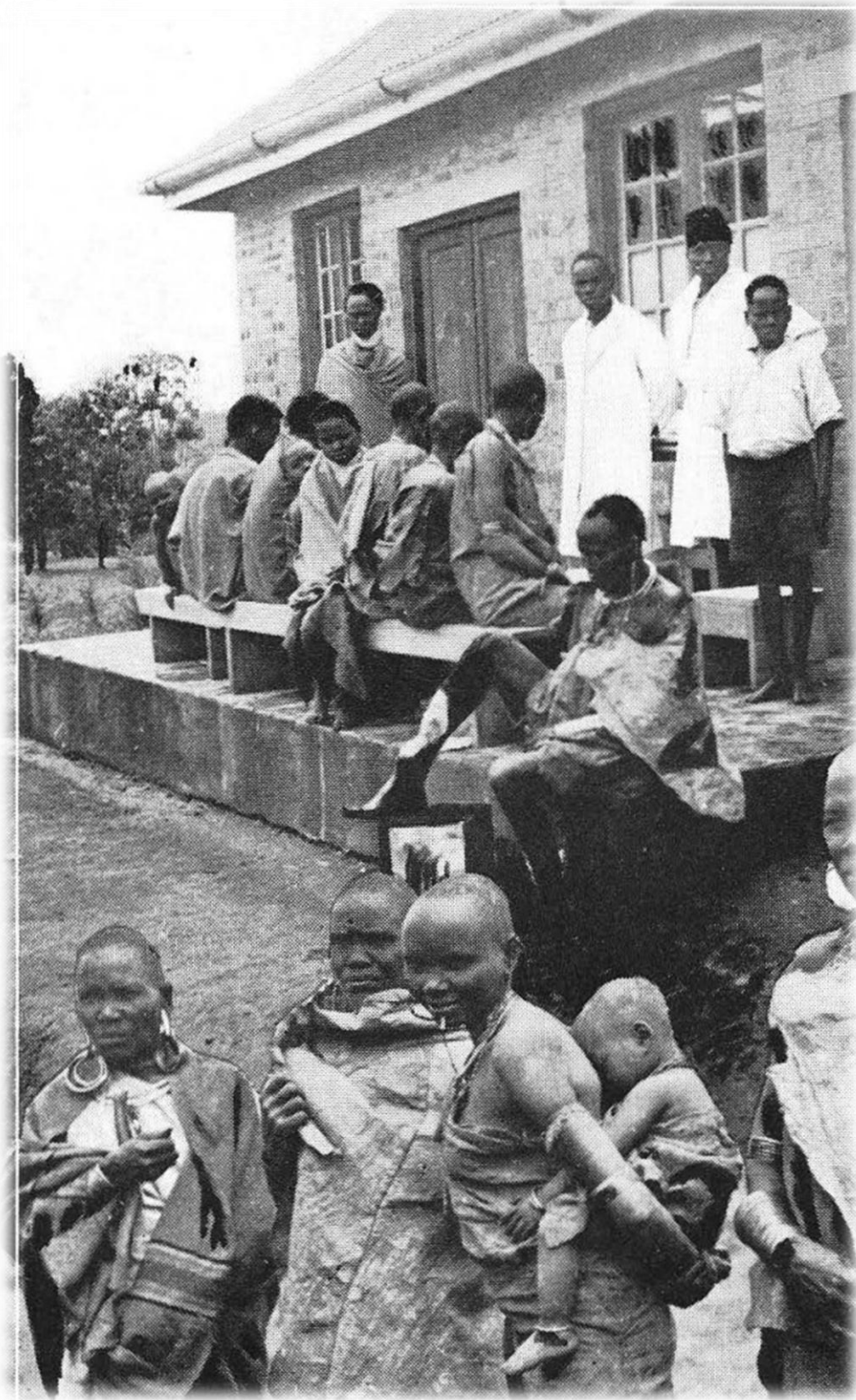
### Appendix 1. Picture Gallery



**Figure 11:** A young convert at the Kabartonjo Mission Station holding the newly translated Nandi New Testament. Picture taken from Miller (1938).



**Figure 12:** Mr Samuel Chiminyigei and his family. Samuel was the principal assistant of Mr. Stuart Bryson during the translation of the Bible to the Nandi language. Picture from Miller (1938)



**Figure 13:** Patients waiting for treatment at the Kapsowar Mission Hospital (Laurie Walker Memorial Hospital) in 1938, Photo from Miller 1938



**Figure 14:** Dr. Ashton Marion with an unnamed wife of an unnamed dispenser at the Kapsowar hospital in 1938. Photo from Miller 1938



**Figure 15:** Ms. Toroitich a dispenser at Kapsowar Mission Hospital. Picture taken from Miller (1938)



**Figure 16:** Women faithful of Mafuta Pole singing as they enter the compound of the Church at Jerusalem in Sook. Photo taken by Talatum Geoffrey on 11 September 2020.



**Figure 17:** The Main entrance to the headquarters of Mafuta Pole church, Yerusalem, in Sook. The writing on the gate reads “ The New Jerusalem a holy place”. Photo taken by Talatum Geoffrey on 11 September 2020.

