

**CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN THE FUNERAL RITES OF
ABATIRICHI OF WESTERN KENYA c. 1850-1960**

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DECLARATION

This is my original work and has never been presented in any other university anywhere for a degree; and all sources herein quoted or used have been acknowledged and indicated by the use of complete references.

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DEDICATION

To my dear mother, Mary Musimbi Sweka, I dedicate this thesis.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACHS- African Church of the Holy Spirit

AIM- African Inland Mission

AICN- African Israel Church Nineveh

CMS- Church Missionary Society

COG- Church of God

FAIM- Friends African Industrial Mission

FGD- Focused Group Discussions

GAS- Government African School

KMS- Kaimosi Mission Station

KNA- Kenya National Archives

MHM- Mill Hill Mission

NMS- Nyang'ori Mission Station

PAOC- Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada

SA- Salvation Army

SDA - The Seventh Day Adventist Church

ABSTRACT

This study is a historical investigation of the development of religious concepts and practices in funeral rituals among the Abatirichi of Western Kenya who belong to the larger Abaluyia community. It has traced the evolution and meaning of the religious concepts and practices in Abatirichi funeral rituals as occasioned by decades of encounters and interaction with external cultural systems. The study has examined a historical transformation of rituals with specific reference to types of burials and post burial rituals. These post-burial rituals included shaving of the hair by close relatives (*ulubego*), cattle drive dances at the funerals of senior men (*shilemba*), grand memorial ceremonies (*khwitsulitsa*), and “carrying” of the shadow-spirit of the deceased to the homes of close relatives and areas they frequented (*khuhira* or *khukalukhitsa shihinini*). This historical enquiry covered approximately a century from A.D 1850 to A.D 1960. It was cast in the mould of the symbolic interactionism theory. This is a theoretical formulation which explains the process of cultural change. This theoretical formulation insists that socially developed symbols by a community play a significant role during the process of interaction, interpretation and assimilation of new concepts when cultural systems come into contact. Subsumed under this theory the study has demonstrated that Abatirichi social symbols helped them to ascribe meaning to new cultural concepts during the process of encounter and interactions. During interactions Abatirichi acquired the best values which were consistent with the selection of the most functional social practices and institutions. Symbolic interactionism, therefore, assisted them in the process of reconstruction, restructuring, and assimilation of new ideas from external cultures which led to the development of a new social reality which was essentially syncretic. This study has emphatically rejected all claims of purity of Abatirichi funeral culture. It has demonstrated that Abatirichi obsequies are not given “wholes” which were handed down from their ancestors without being questioned. But rather, these religious concepts and practices were dynamic social entities which have been shaped, over centuries, by forces both external and internal to Abatirichi. This syncretism of funeral rituals was a function of long processes of interactions with their neighbours that is the Luo, Nandi-Terik and Bantu Abaluyia such as the Abanyole, Abalogooli, Abeisukha, and Abidakho. Additional to this was Western cultural onslaught through Christian missionization. This study established that of all the external cultures, the Nandi-Terik and Western Christianity had the greatest influence in transformation of Abatirichi funeral culture. We have used both primary and secondary sources to demonstrate the evolutionary hybridisation of Abatirichi funeral rituals. Primary sources were acquired from oral interviews, the Kenya National Archives and mission archives at Kaimosi, Erusui and Nyang’ori. Oral interviews were conducted between August 2014 and May 2015 with the help of undergraduate students of History as research assistants. In a nutshell this study was a historical interrogation of the process of inter-cultural encounter and interaction. It emphasised on causality and consequences of human actions in historical phases of encounters and interactions between Abatirichi and their neighbours in South Western Kenya and Western Christian missionization.

1.0 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

The English word ritual has a Latin etymology. It is derived from the roman term *ritualis* which means that which appertains to a *ritus* (rite). In Roman jargon and religious sense it meant a proven way of doing something correctly (Bell 1992:2). However, in its current usage this term has a variety of connotations which vary considerably from one discipline of knowledge to the other. It is this disagreement which explains why this concept has been considered by some scholars as being irreducibly vague. Its vagueness suggests the indefinite shape and the extent of territory that ritual occupies, and the haziness of its boundaries in scholarship (Rappaport 1999:23). Nonetheless, vagueness is not vacuity.

In religious discourses, however, a ritual is a defined set form of carrying out a religious action or ceremony. Rituals are carried out in a patterned, repetitive and formal manner. Through rituals human beings communicate ideas of religious significance through words, actions and symbols (Mbiti 2011:131). Rituals and the religious beliefs of a people are intricately intertwined and yet inseparable. A ritual is an integral part of religion together with belief, myth and symbol (Maldonado & Power 1979:73). However, a ritual as a component of religion is an action. This distinguishes it automatically from other aspects of religion such as beliefs, symbols and myths. Beliefs, myth and symbols emerge as forms of mental content or conceptual blue print which direct, inspire and guide the activity of ritual (Bell 1992:19). Rituals as components of religion enable human beings to relate to the super natural. They

reinforce religious beliefs and enable humans to connect to the sacred. They are important elements because they are carried out in religious solemnity and involve core religious beliefs of a people. Through rituals people not only act and conduct their religion but also communicate it to the younger generations (Mbiti 2011:201).

The very essence of a ritual has been a subject of numerous inquiries. Scholars have expended a great deal of intellectual energy pondering on the nature of ritual and the role it plays in various human affairs. Scholars in various intellectual disciplines including luminaries such as Robert Smith (Lawson & McCauley 1997:40ff), Emile Durkheim (Robert 1986), Jack Goody (1961), Sigmund Freud (Jones 1963:88ff), Bronislaw Malinowski (Firth 1960) and Victor Turner (Mathieu 1991) have made their mark in the study of ritual. However, most of these earlier scholars analysed the concept of ritual through the theoretical lens of Cultural Darwinianism. Robert Smith, for instance, held the view that a proper historical interpretation of a ritual would reveal important information about the origin of religion and the nature of human society. Views such as this outlined the progressive development of societies, underlying the gradual change from allegedly simplicity to complexity. In their explanations tacit normative commitments and prominent metaphors tell the story of culture evolving from simple to complex, from lower to higher, from irrational to rational, from magic to religion. Behind such comparisons lay the misreading of the Darwinian paradigm which seemed to supply the intellectual encouragement behind such invidious accounts of the imagined differences among human societies (Lawson & McCauley 1990:47).

It was not until the 19th century that the concept of ritual first emerged as a formal term of analysis to identify what was believed to be a universal category of human religious experience. This point marked the beginning of the major paradigm shift in the way European culture compared itself to other cultures and religions. For instance, Social Functionalists started to explore the role of ritual action and values to analyse societies. Western scholars came to the realization that it was impossible to understand other human cultures and religions by imposing Western conceptualisation of reality and Western system of values (Bell 1992:14).

A ritual is, therefore, an integral part of a human social- religious system. However, as part of the symbolic cultural system, a ritual is puzzlement. As a form of thought and type of behaviour it seems bizarre. Its formality, its dramatic quality and its sensuality all provide an intriguing contrast to ordinary human behaviour. But it is only in understanding the underlying principle of organizing such systems of interpretation, that can help to clarify the relation of the cognitive systems and symbolic cultural systems encoded in the ritual (Lawson & McCauley 1990:12). A ritual is a religious phenomenon and can only be recognised as such. That is, if it is studied as something religious. To try to comprehend and grasp the essence of such a phenomenon by means of psychology, physiology, sociology, economics or art or any other field of study is to miss the point. It misses the unique and irreducible element of the sacred (Eliade 1963: xiii). In this assertion a ritual as a religious phenomenon is *suigeneris* and can only be grasped if we grant it the unique category of the sacred.

Rituals in various forms are pervasive human features of societies past and present. Such rites include various worship rites like sacraments of organised religions, rites of passage, atonement and purification rites, oath of allegiance to customary norms, dedication ceremonies among others (Setsiba 2010:20). Funeral rituals are categorised as rites of passage. Obsequies as rites of passage serve as a gate-way between the world of the living and the supernatural. They are based on the pneumatological consciousness which posits a contradistinction between the living self and the transcendental spirits. Such that funeral rites are meant to process a human being, upon his death, into a supernatural entity. It is on this thesis that funeral rituals exist. They serve as the conveyor belt between the two orders of being, the living being and the spiritual realm.

Researches on religion have established that funeral rituals are a universal and ubiquitous phenomena in mourning of the dead. Like any other life transforming event human civilisations all over the world have established mourning rituals to facilitate this transition. Human cultures perform funeral rituals depending on the religious meaning they attach to death, and how the living beings are connected to the supernatural (Shisanya 1992:36). Funeral rituals are events full of religious significance. Death was a watershed and transformative moment in life. In almost all cultures death is presented as a start of a very treacherous journey which after several obstacles ought to lead to a blessed rest in the company of the supernatural. Among the ancient Greeks, for instance, dead men could only reach the other world after crossing river *Styx* on a Charon boat for which the deceased paid an *Obolus* as the ferryman's fee. Accordingly, the dead man's relatives would place an *Obolus* on the dead man's mouth before burial

(Maldonado & Power 1979:74). Thus just like every major journey which needs preparation and guides to every single destination, funeral rites were established for such purpose. This explains why societies all over the world took meticulous care to fulfil funeral rituals to avoid causing offense to the dead (Mbiti 1969:149).

Abatirichi, therefore, like all human societies had established funeral rites to help in the transition between the living and the spiritual world. These obsequies were full of religious significance. This study seeks to examine continuity and change in the religious concepts and practices expressed in Abatirichi funeral culture through time and space, against a background of centuries of encounters and interactions with external religious systems in Western Kenya. Historical enquiries in this region have demonstrated that Western Kenya was mega-crucible of intercommunity encounters and interactions during the pre-colonial period. It was graced by communities of divergent origin, from the autochthonous Hunter-Gatherers, to the Cushites, to the early-Bantu, to the Kalenjiin, to the later-day Bantu and the Luo. This zone, therefore, constituted a galaxy of ethnic groups and cultures each moving on their own orbits but significantly affecting and being affected by other entities of the constellation (Sutton 1974:94). These communities kept a watchful eye on each other but would often exchange cultural artefacts both in material and ideas.

Therefore, apart from conflicts over resources the Luo, the Southern Abaluyia clans, and the Kalenjiin underwent a protracted process of cultural interaction which definitely influenced the emergence of a hybrid culture in this region. The Kalenjin adopted agriculture and almost its entire lexicon from their Bantu neighbours, for

example words for “beans”, “gruel”, “flour” and to “weed”. Secondly, the Bantu apparently introduced bananas and the iron hoe to the Kalenjin (Ogot 2005:105). These social and economic influences are just outward manifestations of inner changes which include changes in the attitude values and religious concepts. The Abaluyia for example, introduced into Western Kenya a new “...religious outlook stressing on ancestor veneration and territorial spirits with fixed abodes and shrines” (Ogot 2005:105). These pre-colonial interactions among the people of Western Kenya who possessed varied religious experiences led to the development of a complex yet essentially syncretic cosmological terrain. This ontological outlook is what Gimode has described as “...the Western Kenya religious complex” (Gimode 2003:160).

In fact, in tracing the evolution of indigenous religious practices in the funeral rituals of the Abatirichi, we are actually discussing the interactions of the Bantu speakers, Cushitic speakers, autochthonous Hunters-Gatherers and Nilotic speakers in Western Kenya. These communities were subjected to interactions for centuries. During these encounters and interactions they had to contend with demanding cultures which they had to critically examine and select from them aspects which they fused with their previous beliefs and discarded the outmoded. This process led to a syncretic development of culture generally and religion in particular in Western Kenya (Gimode 2003:160). The Abatirichi who inhabit this region, therefore, present an ideal fertile ground for investigating the syncretising dynamics in the transformation of religious ideas and practices articulated in funeral rituals before the advent of Western Christianity in the 20th century.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The historical fact that Western Kenya has been a theatre of inter-community encounter and interaction during the pre-colonial period cannot be gainsaid. Pioneering studies in this region by scholars like Were (1967a), Ogot (2009), Osogo (1966), and Ehret (1974) among many others have portrayed it as a cauldron of interactions during the pre-colonial period. This zone as mega-highway which allowed the free flow of people of divergent ethnic backgrounds, such as the Hunter-Gatherers, Southern Cushites, Eastern Cushites, Early Bantu, Nilotes (Luo and the Kalenjin) and the later-day Bantu (Ogot 2009). This movement of people allowed the free flow of trade as well as physical and ideological cultural artefacts. In fact, histories of communities which inhabit this region clearly demonstrate that there were no pure ethnic categories. Numerous ethnic groups expanded and contracted gaining and losing part of the population to their neighbours (Sutton 1974:77).

During this process, the cultural frontiers of communities were greatly influenced. This is based on the thesis that ethnicity and cultural identity of the people is enriched and renewed through contacts with values and traditions of other people (Ogot 2005:70). These communities were subjected to centuries of cultural interaction. In the process they had to live alongside a demanding cultural mosaic which they had to critically examine and select the best aspects with which they fused with, those indispensable aspects of their previous culture, and discarded the outmoded (Gimode 2003:160) This cultural interface of inhabitants of Western Kenya who possessed variegated religious experiences led re-negotiation of their cultural identity, which led

to the development of a very complex, yet, hybrid religious cosmology (Gimode 2003:160).

Therefore, the historical enquiry in tracing the transformation of religious concepts articulated funeral rituals of Abatirichi is centered in tracing the general evolution of the spirituality of Abatirichi, in the light of encounters with other cultural groups. Gimode (2003) has already made evident the evolutionary hybridisation of the spirituality of the communities which inhabited this zone, that is, the Luo, Southern Abaluyia (Abatirichi, Abalogooli, Abisukha, Abidakho, Abanyole and Abakisa) and the Kalenjin. Specifically, he has shown the syncretic transformation of the religious terrain of Southern Abaluyia from the ancestor veneration cult, to the incorporation of the Supreme Being cult and the acquisition of Christianity, later during the colonial period. This syncretic development of religion is believed to have been deeply entrenched in Western Kenya during the pre-colonial period before being rudely interrupted by colonialism (Ogot 2005:106). This gradual, but syncretic, development of religion presents another dilemma. What was the general effect of this shift of religious experience of Abatirichi on the religious concepts expressed in their mortuary culture? It is therefore the core objective of this study to examine continuity and change in the religious concepts articulated in the funeral rites of Abatirichi under the light of interface and interaction with external cultural systems.

1.3 Research questions

This study will be guided by the following questions:

1. What constituted the religious practices as articulated in the funeral rites of the Tiriki by the year 1850?
2. How did the neighbours of Abatirichi impact on their religious experience as expressed in their funeral rites from 1850-1902?
3. In what respects did the doctrines introduced by Christian missionaries change the way the Tiriki conceptualised and conducted their religion as expressed in their funeral rituals from c.1902 to c.1930?
4. How did Christianity influence the way Abatirichi conceptualised and conducted their religious concepts as articulated in their funeral rituals from c. 1930 to c. 1960?

1.4 Research objectives

This study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To analyse the religious practices in Abatirichi funeral rituals by the year c.1850
2. To examine the transformation of religious practices in funeral rituals of the Abatirichi in regard to interactions with their neighbours from c. 1850 to c. 1902
3. To investigate the influence of Christian missionary proselytisation on the religious practices in the funeral rituals of the Abatirichi from c.1902 to c.1930
4. To examine the influence of Christianity on the religious concepts expressed in Abatirichi funeral rituals from c.1930 to c1960

1.5 Research premises

This study will be conducted based on the following premises:

1. The ancestors of Abatirichi had a highly developed system of obsequies by c.1850 which were expressed as rites of religious significance.
2. The encounter and interaction between Abatirichi and their Bantu and Nilotic neighbours from c.1850 to c. 1902 greatly influenced religious practices expressed in their funeral rituals
3. The Abatirichi indigenous religion as expressed in funeral rites strongly resisted the religious doctrines introduced by Christianity from c.1902 to c. 1930
4. The accommodation of Christian doctrines by Abatirichi from the 1930s significantly altered the religious practices expressed in their funeral rituals by c.1960.

1.6 Justification and significance of the study

The study of African culture especially religion has been left to the monopoly of social anthropologists for a long period of time (Ogot 2003:149). Essentially, most of the researches in history have been centered on understanding other aspects of society that is politics, economics and gender issues. They are majorly centered on migration and settlement of African communities, the rise of political systems and understanding of the political economy of neo-colonialism (Kimambo 1972: xii).. Indeed, apart from Gimode's works on religion (1993, 2003) very few historical enquiries have been conducted on African religious experiences in the pre-colonial period and during the

contact between African cosmologies and Christianity in the 20th century - especially in Western Kenya. We therefore justify this study because it seeks to exploit this lacuna. It seeks to examine the historical transformation of Tiriki funeral rituals as a major component of African religion.

The Abatirichi inhabit a very unique cultural zone. This region brought the divergent communities which inhabit it into close interactive contact (Were 1967), a contact which facilitated assimilation of clans, cross-fertilisation of ideas, and borrowing of concepts among the people of diverse origins (Gimode 2003:16). The abundance of Kalenjin place-names in Tiriki and Maragoli“...like Losos, Seremi, Jimamoyi and Chepnaywa” testifies to this movement of culture (Gimode 2003:148). This study, therefore, justifies the choice of the Tiriki community because they have peopled this interactive zone for decades. Abatirichi, therefore, provide a suitable example to test our theoretical line of enquiry which is an attempt to demonstrate the hybridisation element in the evolution of Tiriki funeral culture.

Lastly, we justify the choice of 1850 as the starting point of our study. We argue that by this time the Proto-Tiriki had already settled into their present homeland in South Western Kenya (Osogo 1966:56). Their cultural frontiers had already taken shape which could distinguish them as a different cultural group from their Bantu and Nilotic neighbours (Were 1967a:57ff). This study also justifies the choice of the year 1960 because it presents our study with a reasonable time span against which the evolution of religious concepts in Tiriki obsequies can be analysed from a vantage point.

We submit that this study will be significant to policy makers in Kenya generally and particularly among the Tiriki. In these conception policies formulated by all levels of government, especially those related to obsequies, should be customised to meet the cultural demand of the people in order to avoid resistances from the involved people.

1.7 The scope and limitations of the study

In scope this study was defined in three main aspects. Geographically the study was confined to Western Kenya. This region is mainly inhabited by the Southern Abaluyia (Nyore, Logooli, Isukha, Idakho, and Tiriki), Luo clans of Kisumu County (the Korando, the Kapuonja, the Karateng' and the Kajulu), Nandi, and the Terik. This area covers parts of Kakamega, Kisumu and Nandi Counties and the whole of Vihiga County. This study region is represented cartographically on page 26. The rationale for choosing this wide area being that the study was interested in studying the micro-unit (Abatirichi) in relation to its context (Western Kenya).

In content, this study was confined to the study of the historical transformation of religious concepts expressed in funeral rituals among the Tiriki from 1850 to 1960, with specific reference to the types of burials and post burial rituals. That is the ritual shaving of the hair (*khubeka liswi*), the cattle drive dances in the funerals of senior men (*shilemba*), grand memorial ceremonies (*khwitsulitsa*), and the carrying of the spirit-shadow to the homes of the relatives of the deceased and areas they frequented (*khukalukhitsa Shihinini*).

However, in the course of this study we encountered the following limitations. There was language barrier between the researcher and the respondents during interviews. This problem was very acute in the region inhabited by the Nilotic Nandi, Terik and the Luo. We managed to surmount this problem by employing research assistants who are conversant with local tongues.

This study was affected by the problem of locating respondents who were well-versed in the history of the community and Christian missionization in the area. Some of the best respondents had migrated to settlement schemes in Lugari, Trans-Nzoia, and Uasin Gishu. Nonetheless, we overcame this problem by working closely with local leaders who were in a position of identifying knowledgeable informants within their constituencies. Local leaders and some informants referred us to other well informed people both within the study area and in settlement schemes of Lugari, Trans-Nzoia and Uasin-Gishu.

1.8 Literature review

This study is an analysis of the evolution and meaning of religious concepts in funeral rituals among the Tiriki. It takes into position that when human beliefs and practices from one tradition encounter and confront others, it usually actuates a process of give-and-take which results in cultural engineering and renegotiation of the cultural identity of the people. In this part we have surveyed existing literature on religious concepts in funeral rituals and culture generally.

Mbiti (1969) writes on African religions and philosophy. His work suffers from the problem of generalisation because it has summed up all the tremendous diversity of

African religious experiences in a single book. It has also been presented with a static chronology. Our line of enquiry was different because it is historical in nature. And it focuses on funeral rites of a single unit of African society, Abatirichi. This was essential for production of a quality research outcome devoid of generalisations. However, we found his work invaluable in the effort of reconstructing the History of Tiriki funeral culture. We used this work to locate the phenomenon of funeral ritual in religion.

Kimambo (1972) is a collection of essays about the history of religion in Africa. These works have portrayed the pre-eminence of the African *persona* as an innovative force in cultural engineering in the pre-colonial past, by demonstrating the African element in the contact between African religious thought with external religions. Our study differed in scope. It focused on funeral rituals particularly. Still, we vindicate the position of this work that Africa was in a condition of religious flux during the Pre-colonial period, deviating sharply from the Western anthropological stereotype of being culturally static.

Mazrui (1986) has written on the triple heritage of the present African culture; a heritage originating from the African indigenous culture, Islam and Christianity. Mazrui has demonstrated the syncretic growth of the culture of the African continent. This hybrid culture was as a result of interaction between three different cultures in varying degrees in different parts of the continent. Our findings support his thesis that there has been continuous negotiation and re-negotiation of the African cultural identity as a result of interactions with external cultural stimuli which has led to the development of hybrid cultures.

Setsiba (2012) has written a phenomenological study on mourning rituals in contemporary South African townships. Setsiba is chiefly interested in understanding the psychological functions of the ritual of the “after tears” party as a contemporary post burial ritual among the urban folks of South Africa. Our findings support her position that there has been continuous participation of indigenous African culture in funeral rituals throughout the history of Christianity and secularisation in Africa.

Painter (1966) has written the history of the Quaker Christian missionary movement in East Africa under the rubric of the hill of vision. Painter has described the propagation, spread and triumph of Christianity over the inactive African culture from 1902 to 1969. Throughout his work Painter has the Christian triumphalist bent which does not recognise the interrogation of cultures during the process of encounters. Our findings emphatically reject his claim that Abaluyia indigenous religion was easily swept away by Christianity. The true story of the spread of Christianity in Western Kenya was that of negotiation with Abaluyia culture which led to hybridisation.

Ogot (2009) has written on the history of the Luo speaking people of Eastern Africa. This work has captured the intricate process of the migratory movement of the Luo speakers from the Southern Sudan region to all over Eastern Africa. Ogot has portrayed Western Kenya as a mega-theatre of intercommunity encounters and interactions. We have used this work to examine effects of the Luo migrations into Western Kenya on the evolution of religious concepts in funeral rituals among the Abatirichi.

Ogot (2005) is on History as destiny and History as knowledge. These essays are his reflections on the problems of historicity and historiography with a special emphasis on Western Kenya. This work covers various aspects of culture in Western Kenya. Ogot argues that the study of culture in Western Kenya may be more fruitful if scholars explore the dialectical approach to the life of a single system in relation to its context. This is because ethnic identity and culture in this region is constantly negotiated and defined in everyday discourse. We heeded to this advice. Our line of enquiry explored the symbolic interactionism theory to investigate the transformation of Abatirichi funeral rituals in relation to interactions with their neighbours.

Osogo (1966) has written on the history of the Bantu Abaluyia of Western Kenya. His work has portrayed Western Kenya as a Pre-Colonial cauldron of inter-community encounters and interactions between communities of heterogeneous descent. Our study sought to investigate the influence of these interactions on the transformation of Abatirichi obsequies.

Gunter (1970) is an anthropological work on the general culture of the Abaluyia with a great emphasis on the Bukusu and the Logooli. This work suffers from the problem of generalisation. It has summed up the diversity of culture among the Abaluyia in one book which is presented in a chronological frozen form. Our work is different in scope and orientation. It is historical in nature and focuses on the Tiriki obsequies specifically. We have used this data to reconstruct the history of Abatirichi funeral rituals.

Mwanzi (1977) has written on the history of the Kipsigis. He makes evident of how interactions between various Bantu and autochthonous Hunter-Gatherer groups led to the formation of a hybrid Kipsigis society. Mwanzi demonstrates the movement of concepts of heterogeneous origin like religion, rainmaking, cursing, smithing, clitoridectomy among others from one source to the whole community of the Kipsigis. Our study supports his position that social-cultural concepts from one group influence other groups during the process of encounters and interactions.

Were (1967a) in his history of Abaluyia community attempts to solve the conundrum of the peopling of Buluyia by different waves of migrations of clans of Bantu and Nilotic origin. Were does not touch on the funeral rituals of the Abaluyia. However, he depicts Western region as a pre-colonial crucible of inter-community interactions. Our study sought to investigate the outcome of these interactions and demonstrate their possible effect on the evolution of mortuary rites among the Abatirichi.

Shisanya (1991) has written on the impact of Christianity on rituals related to *Lifwa* (death) among the Abanyole. Her work is not historical in nature. However, it has demonstrated the hybridisation element in Abanyole funeral rituals as they came into contact with Western Christian culture. Our enquiry is different in scope and orientation. It is historical in nature as it sought to analyse the metamorphosis of mortuary rites among the Tiriki during the Pre-Colonial and the Colonial period. However, we vindicate her position that funeral rituals were an integral part of indigenous Abaluyia religion centered on the veneration of ancestral spirits.

Kakai (1992) has researched on the transformation of social concepts in the initiation rituals of the Abatachoni from c.1750 to c.1946. He has demonstrated the transformation of social concepts as articulated in the initiation rituals of the Tachoni during their migratory odyssey from Misiri through Sirikwa, Embayi and Mwalie to their present homeland of Ndivisi-Tongareni-Lugari region. Kakai demonstrates the continuous movement of the social concepts in the Tachoni initiation rituals from within and from their neighbours. Our study supports his findings that different cultural systems affect each other during the process of encounters and interactions. This results to the negotiation and renegotiation of the cultural identity of a people.

Shilaro (1991) writes on the encounter and interaction between Abakabras native culture and Western Christianity during the colonial period. She develops an exciting narrative on the account of the development and spread of Christian missionary stations among the Kabras such as the S.D.A, the FAIM and the Catholics. She further describes the impact of Christianity on indigenous Kabras culture. Our findings vindicate her position that there was continuous hybridisation of indigenous culture with Western Christianity throughout the history of the spread of Western Christianity during the colonial period.

Wanakacha (1992) is a research on the Pneumatology of the African Church of the Holy Spirit (ACOHS) among Abakabras. Wanakacha has demonstrated the origin of the pneumatological movement of this *Roho* sect from the indigenous Kabras culture. He further demonstrates the inevitable expression- of this African spiritual energy in Christianity through spirit infilling *glossolalia*. It started from the Quakers in 1927 before spreading to other churches. The expression of Spirit infilling among African

converts led to psychological and especially physical persecution from the FAIM establishment which forced a schism in the church. The *Roho* people formed an independent church. Our findings absolutely support his position that the formation of independent churches like ACOHS was an attempt by Christians to critique Western Christianity as presented by missionaries and to allow the participation of African culture.

Gimode (2003) has researched on the process of syncretisation of religious concepts and practices among the communities of Western Kenya. He has demonstrated how inter-ethnic interactions resulted in bartering of concepts which appertain to ancestor worship (*misambwa*), the worship of the sun God and the veneration of nature spirits. Gimode also demonstrates the effect of Christian missionary culture on indigenous African religious experience. Our study differed in theory. It was an attempt to demonstrate the hybridisation element in the evolution of funeral rituals among the Abatirichi while steeped in the symbolic interactionism theory. However, this work is literally a continuation of Gimode's work. We sought to demonstrate the hybridisation element in the funeral culture of Abatirichi as major component of Abaluyia religion.

Gimode (1993) is a seminal piece of work on religion in Western Kenya with special focus on the religious experience of Avalogoli. Gimode traces the origin and the evolution of Maragoli religion; as informed by interactions with their neighbours, Moslems traders, and Christian missionaries. He demonstrates how Maragoli religion appropriated and accommodated concepts and liturgy from neighbouring communities, Moslems and Christian missionaries. Our line of inquiry was different in scope and theory. It was an attempt to trace the transformation of Tiriki obsequies in historical

phases of inter-cultural encounter and interactions with their neighbours based on the symbolic interaction theory.

Alembi (2003) writes on the construction of *Abanyole* perception on death through oral funeral poetry. His primary concern is to use oral funeral poetry to define death among the *Abanyole*. Alembi, bounds, maps and structures death as presented by oral funeral elegies. Essentially he is responding to one fundamental question. What do the *Abanyole* think and understand about death? Our line of inquiry was different in scope and theory. We sought to trace the evolutionary hybridisation of funeral culture among the Abatirichi.

Alembi (<http://www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol38/alembi.pdf>) writes on the Abanyole dirge of escorting the dead (*Okhukoma* dance). *Okhukoma* literally means escorting someone in *Lunyore*. *Okhukoma* was a lyrical genre of funeral poetry which was performed to morally upright male members of society with at least one male child. It was like a one-act play with four scenes *Okhuchesia*, *Esilemba*, *Okhuhuliana*, and *Likopo*. It was performed by men adorned in battle regalia, and armed with all sorts of traditional weaponry, and accompanied by steers decked with neck bells and jingles. We have used this information to analyse the effect of the neighbours of Abatirichi in the evolution of their funeral rituals.

Sangree (1965) provides a detailed account of various aspects of Abatirichi culture at the mid of the 20th century. His subject ranges from age graded circumcision system (*idumi*) to political organisation and Tiriki religious experience. His work suffers from the main pitfall of anthropology as it is presented in a form of ethnographic

present. Nonetheless, it provides rich information on the ordinary life of Abatirichi in the 1950s. We have used this information to trace the transformation of religious practises in the obsequies of the Abatirichi.

Simani (2005) has collected information on the general culture of Abatirichi and recorded it in form of a book. This literally is an amateur work of anthropology and corollary to it is the frozen sense of chronology. Our study is different because it is historical in nature and focuses only on the funeral rituals as an aspect of the Tiriki culture. Still our findings emphatically discount his position that Bantu Abatirichi did not have a conceptualisation of a high God before the coming of Europeans. Yet we also found out that the concept of “carrying” the shadow-spirit (*khuhira shihinini*) was an established part of Tiriki religion as expressed in their funeral rituals during the Pre-Colonial period contrary to his submission. He argued that this concept of *shihinini* is a late development in Tiriki brought in by confused people. Yet our study absolutely reject his use of the disparaging words “pagan” and “heathen” in reference to Abatirichi indigenous religion.

1.9 Theoretical frame work

A theory is a set of presuppositions which shows the connection between various sets of research variables, which enables the user to develop a conceptual frame work in the cognitive (Willis 2007:64). A theory also provides balance to a research in the turbulence of being tossed hither and thither by the magnitude of data and facts (Gimode 2003:54). However, there is hardly any academic discipline which has developed theories which can emphatically address all the facets of knowledge within

its frontiers (Alembi 2003:32). In such cases scholars have argued for an interdisciplinary approach which borrows theoretical insights from other disciplines (Alembi 2003:32).

This study is an attempt to trace the syncretic evolution of funeral rituals among the Tiriki and their social and religious implications. It is a study on culture. Therefore, it borrows heavily from cultural change theories which explicate the phenomenon of syncretism in the transformation of culture through time and space. One of the theories which explain the process of cultural hybridisation is the syncretising dialectic theory. This theory has been used by Gimode to explain the syncretic dialectic in the evolution of religion in Western Kenya from 1700 to 1950 (Gimode 2003). The syncretising dialectic is based on the fact that "...there are no pure cultural entities because what proceeds from the process of encounter is the process of interaction which is not a passive or a sterile process but one that necessitates the interrogation and appropriation of what is suitable and discarding the moribund" (Gimode 2003:89).

This perspective of the syncretising dialectic is in itself a hybrid formulation composed of two theoretical fibres. These are the Hegelian formulation of the dialectic triad and Aseka's formulation of the triad of consciousness. Under this conception, therefore, when several cultures encounter each other they are acquired by human beings. Men perceive, conceive, and experience the new culture in their triunilaterally constituted bodies (Aseka 2005:76). This is informed by the fact that dialectic contradictions of culture occur within this triune compartmentalised mortal frame. The dialectic contradictions effect a synthesis out of the conflicting strands of culture. The

synthesis is a superior amended version of the combining cultures (Gimode 2003:89). Therefore, this theory of syncretising dialectic explains the hybridisation process during the process of cultural change.

Another formulation which explains hybridisation in the process of cultural change is the symbolic interaction theory. We adopted the symbolic interactionism theory because it is a straight forward formulation which has not been used in cultural studies in Western Kenya. This study is therefore subsumed under a theory of cultural evolution which foregrounds symbolic interaction theory. The symbolic interaction theory is also referred to as the symbolic interactionism theory. This phrase symbolic interactionism emerged from the works of Blumer (1986:3). Symbolic interactionism is a sociological model that seeks to explain the heuristic concept of culture in academic operation and in scientific terms (Baldwin 1986:7).

Symbolic interaction was developed during the early periods of the 20th century as an alternative theory to Structural Functionalism which was criticized by scholars for being static and unable to explain change and progress in society (Strauss 1956:6). Symbolic interactionism emerged from the philosophical school of Pragmatism in America, particularly from the works of George Herbert Mead in the 1920s (Baldwin 1986:6). Mead (1863-1931) was an American philosopher and social scientist who belonged to the Chicago School of Pragmatism. He is best known for his social theories of the mind and the self. Mead also developed a unified theory of society which integrates both Macro and micro social events as they evolve over time (Baldwin 1986:6).

According to Mead symbolic interactionism is based on the thesis that the culture of any community is made up of concepts which are internalised as symbols by the community. These symbols play a significant role in the process of encounter and interactions with external stimuli. The symbols are used to interpret and ascribe meaning to the alien culture during the process of encounters and interactions (Petras 1968:128). In this conception, therefore, "...social interactions is symbolic in nature and that social reality is constructed by the people participating in the process" (Strauss 1952:69).

In his analysis of society and social change, Mead borrowed heavily on theories of biological evolution. However, being a pragmatist Mead did not accept the idealized model of evolution that some social theorists had developed and adopted (Baldwin 1986:124). The idealized view of biological evolution interpreted the fossil record as showing the emergence of organisms of ever increasing complexity and sophistication. This was misinterpreted to suggest that social progress is a natural and automatic consequence of evolution (Baldwin 1986:125).

Mead rejected all these Idealized conceptions of evolution. To him social evolution was not a pre-determined process. It was a slow process of "...reconstruction, assimilating new ideas, rejecting unfounded presuppositions and building of new models" (Baldwin 1986:155). This meant that values define themselves definitely when they are brought into conflict with each other. People act towards new concepts depending on the meaning they attach to those concepts "these meanings are derived from social interactions and modified through interpretation" (Strauss 1952

xiii). Out of this interaction the best values are those which are consistent with the selection of the most functional social practices and institutions (Baldwin 1986:127). In this understanding Mead still retained the Romantic idea that man was an active agent rather than a passive recipient of external stimuli.

Symbolic interaction analyses society by addressing the subjective meaning that people impose on objects, events and behaviours. Subjective meaning is given primacy because it is believed that people behave based on what they believe in and not what is objectively true. Therefore, society and its culture are thought to be constructed through human interpretations. This Interpretation is referred to as “the definition of the situation”. The definition of the situation is what people use to know what is expected of them and what is expected of others in a given situation. Through the definition of the situation people obtain a sense of the statuses and roles of those involved in the situation so that they know how to behave (Petras 1968:128-129).

Mead argued that human beings interpret stimuli individually and give meaning to it individually. But the most important point is that typically human meaning arises during corporate group action (Strauss 1952:84). This is because every group develops its own of significant symbols which are held in common by its members around which group activities are organized. In so far as members act towards and in reference to each other. They take each other’s perspectives towards their own action and thus interpret and asses that activity in communal terms (Petras 1968:35). The group membership is thus a symbolic and not a physical matter and the symbols which arise during the life of the group are in turn internalized by the members and this affects their individual acts.

These symbols, therefore, form the “reflective consciousness” which direct the conduct of the individuals and the corporate group in interpretation of external stimuli (Petras 1968:128). Commenting on the function of the reflective consciousness Petras correctly observed that:

.....we carry in the thought the world as it should and fashion our conduct to bring this about. A conception of a different world comes to us always as a result of some specific problem which 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 does not then carry us on the world that is to be, but puts our own thought and endeavour into the very process of evolution (Petras 1968: 129)

Following this conceptualization, therefore, the transformation of fundamental aspects of Abatirichi religious culture expressed in funeral rituals can be understood through the symbolic functionalism lens. Funeral rituals among the Abatirichi are social constructs which function effectively based on what they believed to be right through symbols created in their cosmology. The gradual evolutionary hybridization of Tiriki religion engendered by interactions with their neighbours and Christian missionization led to a shift in their religious experience. To the veneration of ancestral spirits which was the main stay of their religion, they added the worship of the Supreme Being associated with the sun (*Nyasaye*) a practice they adopted from their Kalenjiin neighbours, Nandi and Terik (Gimode 2003:180ff).

In the sense of symbolic interactionism the Tiriki used their older constructed symbols of their cosmology to interpret the new religious experience. They restructured it and fitted into the old religious order to reflect a new pneumatological reality.

“Gradually the monopoly of ancestor worship began to be shared with that of God leading to essentially a syncretic combination of ancestor worship and Supreme Being cults” (Gimode 2003:189). In the same line the Abatirichi religious concepts articulated in the funeral rituals were expected to be restructured from the older religious symbols to address the new hybridized ontology.

Similarly, the introduction of Christianity initiated another phase of symbolic interactionism. This interaction involved the interpretation of the new Christian religion using the older hybridized symbols. For the Tiriki, the acquisition of Christianity did not involve wholesale acceptance of the alien religion. But rather they adopted certain elements of Christianity and fitted them into their religion. These Christian elements, the Tiriki fractured restated in new terms endowed with different meaning and assembled in a new way that made sense and gave significance to their cultural point of view (Gimode 2003: 260). They accepted those concepts of Christianity which fitted well with the older social symbols and successfully modified them to suit local interests. This led to the development of a religion that was neither wholly indigenous nor wholly Christian but essentially hybrid (Sangree 1965:43). We hypothesise that the religious concepts expressed in the Tiriki funeral culture were also restructured to address this new cosmological change.

This study on the evolution of the religious concepts on Abatirichi funeral rituals is best captured by symbolic interactionism theory. This theory argues that socially acquired symbols play a significant role in the interpretation of and assimilation of new concepts by a group, because they help people to ascribe meaning to new concepts and

ideas. This theory provided our study with wide latitude to accommodate the spectrum of variables we sought to investigate.

1.10 Research Methodology

In this part we shall describe the research design, explain the research instruments, sampling techniques and the ethical considerations we employed. We shall also describe the methods of data collection, methods of data recording, the study locale, research validity, research reliability and methods of data analysis which were employed during the study.

1.10 Research design

This study employed the descriptive research design. This research design was preferred because most of the data which we collected was qualitative in nature which suited this design. We collected, recorded and analysed our data and put in a narrative form to describe the syncretic evolution of funeral culture among the Tiriki.

1.12 Study locale

This study was conducted in the region of Western Kenya. This study zone is inhabited by the Luo clans of Kisumu County (Korando, Karateng, Kajulu, and Kapuonja), Nandi people of Aldai zone (Nandi south), and the Terik (Nilotes), the Abanyole, Abalogooli, Abatirichi, Abisukha, and Abidakho (Abaluyia). The region encompassed Abatirichi people and their immediate neighbours. The region is geographically bounded to the East by the Nandi escarpment and its associated hills and to the West by the Winam gulf of Lake Victoria. The rationale for choosing this wide area is the fact that we are interested in exploring the evolution of religious practices in

funeral rituals among the Abatirichi as engendered by encounters and interactions with their neighbours. The ethnographic distribution of population in the region is shown cartographically below.

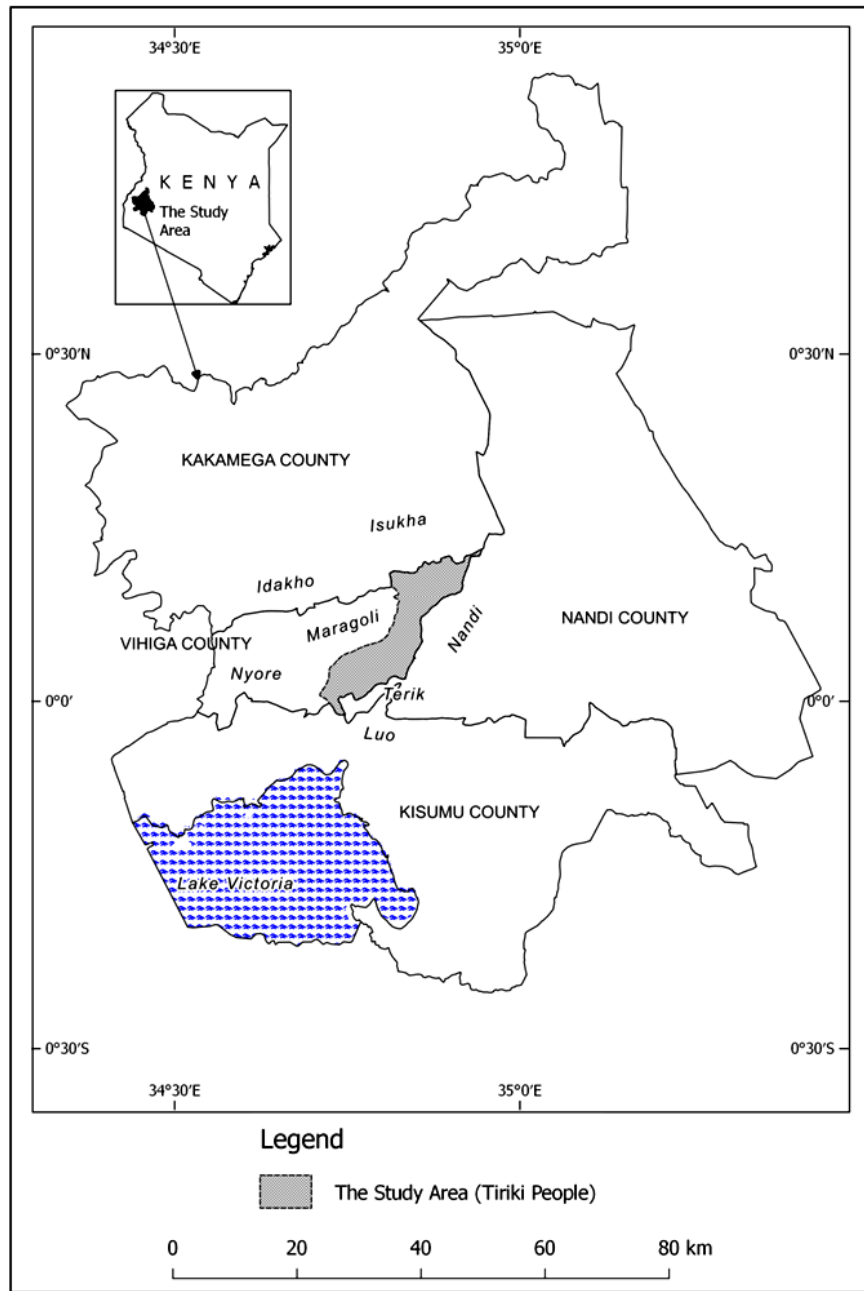


Figure 1.0: Abatirichi and their neighbours (Source: Atlas 1970)

1.13 Sampling techniques

This study employed purposive, snow balling sampling techniques to select our informants. Purposive sampling was preferred because this study required men and women with adequate knowledge of the history of the Tiriki community and the history of Christian missionization in the area. Therefore, not everybody in the area of study qualified to be in the sample. The choice of informants was not informed by age only but rather by the ability of individual to have a good grasp of the history of the Tiriki and Christian missionization in the area. We also used snow balling sampling because some of the informants directed the researcher to other knowledgeable informants about some key issues in their areas of habitation.

1.14 Sample population

This study selected key informants to be subjected to oral interviews from all the communities involved in the study. We interviewed 4 key informants among the Luo, 4 key informants among the Nandi and the Terik, 12 key informants among the other Abaluyia clans (Nyore, Isukha, Idakho, and Logooli) 3 from each of these communities and 10 informants among the Tiriki. In total we interviewed 30 key informants. We also interviewed other minor informants whose data was used to compliment and supplement the information from the key informants.

1.15 Research instruments

This study used interview guide questions as our main study instrument. Oral interviews guide sheet were preferred because they kept the researcher within the

objectives of the study. This is because these questions were expressly developed to realise study objectives.

1.16 Research validity

Research validity is the degree to which research instruments measure what they were intended to measure effectively. A research tool is valid if it is able to measure the expected behaviour. We gauged the validity of our research tools by mounting a pilot programme with the interview guide sheets with four respondents. They elicited expected information from the informants and therefore we deemed them to be valid.

1.17 Research reliability

In research the reliability of assessment tools is the extent to which they are able to produce consistent results if repeated over a number of times. If the instruments are able to produce consistent results they shall be assumed to be reliable. We gauged the reliability of our research instruments by testing them. We used our interview guide sheets to conduct two interviews and then repeated the exercise after a day. The results were consistent. Therefore, we regarded the tools to be valid.

1.18 Data collection

This study used oral interviews to collect data by asking open ended questions to the respondents. Oral interviews were preferred in data collection because they gave the respondents wide latitude to express themselves. This enabled the researcher to gauge the authenticity of the information. Additionally, the researcher was presented with the opportunity to ask auxiliary questions. We enlisted the support of research assistants in data collection especially among the Nandi and Terik and the Luo communities. These

assistants were undergraduate students of Masinde Muliro, Maseno, Moi, and Kisii Universities who were serving their long holidays. We employed eight research assistants; three were working among the Luo, three among the Nandi and Terik and two among the Tiriki and the other Abaluyia groups.

Different informants proved to be very knowledgeable in certain aspects of their community's culture. Some were specialists in indigenous history while some were knowledgeable in the history of Christianity. Moreover, there were some informants who proved to be very knowledgeable on various aspects of their religious history. This category of informants I went to interview them one-on-one, sometimes, with help of a translator, especially, among the Luo, Terik and the Nandi.

This study employed the use of Focus Group Discussions (herein FGD) with the respondents during data collection. We brought together selected informants into one area and subjected them to questioning in order to listen to their responses and how they reacted to each other's contributions. The guided questions for FGD were different from those used to interview individual respondents. The FGDs were established to assist in cross referencing the data we had collected through personal oral interviews. They constituted respondents with knowledge on certain aspects of funeral culture, like those on indigenous funeral culture, *idumi* funeral culture and Christian funeral culture. We had three focus group discussions (herein FGD). The first was held at Mungavo near Seremi on 24th Nov 2014. The second was held at Kaimosi on 7th Dec 2014. The last one was held at Shamakhokho on 4th Jan 2015. The one at Shamakhokho was constituted with the aim of getting information on indigenous funeral culture, while the one at Mungavo was held with the aim of collecting information on *idumi* funeral

culture and the last one at Kaimosi was constituted with the objective of understanding the effect of the development of Christianity on Tiriki funeral culture.

1.19 Data recording

The data collected in the field was recorded through note making and tape recording. Data from oral interviews was collected through tape recording and note making. Note making was used to collect data in archives and from secondary sources. We visited the Kenya National Archives (KNA) and Mission archives at Nyang'ori, Erusui, and Kaimosi Mission stations. The main aim of visiting archives was to collect primary data especially that relating to the Colonial and pre-colonial period. However, we came to the realisation that most mission stations did not have archival information because they had been transferred to the KNA. Thus, the KNA served as the main source of our archival material. Even so, we found out that there was minimal archival material which gave information about the religious culture of Abatirichi during the pre-Christian period, especially with regard to their mortuary culture.

1.20 Data analysis

We analysed our data by establishing the corroborative extent of the information from all sources that is both primary and secondary. The oral data collected was carefully cross-referenced with archival and other secondary sources of information. We carefully sifted, sieved and analysed these data from all sources, against our study objectives, to give it a historical perspective by showing causation and effect in the obsequies of the Tiriki through time and space.

This process enabled us to develop themes and trends from the data we had collected. We thematised our data in order to establish evolutionary patterns. Once we had established the trends and patterns we developed the narrative below to explicate the syncretic evolution of funeral rituals among the Tiriki.

1.21 Ethical considerations in research

In research ethical norms help to gain trust of the public and promote truth and sincerity in the production of knowledge. This study maintained research ethics in the following ways: We sought permission from relevant authorities before commencing our research that is from the Kenyatta university graduate school, the National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) and civil administration in Western Kenya. This was from chiefs and headmen of villages. We have also protected all intellectual property rights by quoting our respondents and secondary sources according to the established rules of scholarship.

1.22 Summary

In this chapter we have described the background to the study problem, formulated study questions, objectives and premises. We have also developed the theoretical formulation guiding our research and outlined how we intend to carry out our study, through our methodology. In the next chapter we seek to describe the establishment of Abatirichi, reconstruct their indigenous religion and religious concepts expressed in their funeral rituals.

2.0 CHAPTER TWO: THE PRISTINE ABATIRICHI RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS EXPRESSED IN THEIR MORTUARY CULTURE BY c.1850

2.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to describe the origin and settlement of Proto-Tiriki and reconstruct their indigenous religion based on ancestor veneration. We intend to demonstrate how this cosmology underpinned Abatirichi funeral rituals related to the types and processes of burials; “carrying” of the shadows of the deceased, ritual shaving of the hair, cattle drive dances and remembrance ceremonies. This chapter will be guided by the symbolic interactionism theory. The objective of reconstructing indigenous Abatirichi religion under this theoretical formulation is to show that Abatirichi had developed religious symbols which guided their obsequies. These symbols were used by Abatirichi to interpret foreign cultural stimuli from their neighbours and Christianity. This chapter, therefore, forms a background upon which we shall demonstrate the evolution of Abatirichi obsequies as occasioned by decades of encounters and interaction with external cultural systems, which we shall examine in our subsequent chapters.

2.2 The establishment of Abatirichi

This part is not an attempt to reconstruct the history of the Tiriki people, because such an endeavour, however desirable it may be, it is a task way beyond the scope of this study. Nonetheless, the history of Proto-Tiriki begins in Misiri about the fourteenth century C.E. From this fabled land the Proto-Tiriki travelled in a southern direction along the Nile river towards Lake Victoria (Were 1974a:56). The exact location and

exact meaning of this fabled Misiri has been a subject of contention in historical discourses. No exact location of this area has been established by scholars. It still remains to the very present a matter of historical conjecture. Were, for instance, argues that the reference to Misiri by traditions of many African groups is an infection by Old Testament stories of Christian scriptures brought in by Missionaries (Were 1974:188). He, however, sites this Misiri to be in the region around Lake Rudolf (Turkana) and Southern Sudan (Were 1974:188). The position of this study is that although the Misiri legends appear to be in the realm of mythology and very hard to locate this does not render them valueless to the historian attempting to reconstruct the history of Western Kenya. These legends are a pervasive phenomenon among the people of East Africa and "...some of them pre-date European arrival in the region" (Kipkorir 2008:416). Indeed, as Ogot submits "...underlying the legendaries of the beginnings of the world there is basis of actual reminiscence by the people" (2009:486). Therefore, the Misiri legends should not just be wished away.

Be that as it may, historical tradition has it that under the leadership of Khoba the Proto-Tiriki travelled along river Nile towards the Lake Victoria region (Were 1974a:56). The primordial Tiriki moved southwards in canoes along the Nile as far as Jinja, where they sojourned for possibly a generation. From Jinja they took an easterly route along the shores of Lake Victoria and settled at Asembo (Were 1967b:3). During their stay at Asembo they met the ancestors of the Terik who had moved to the lake region from Mount Elgon in search of green pasture for their animals (Were 1967b:3). However, at the turn of the 17th century the Luo began to close in on the Nyanza region. The entry of Luo disturbed the delicate balance of power which existed in the region. In

the process the Proto-Tiriki and other Bantu groups and Kalenjin groups were forced to move northwards and eastwards into the Kano plains. In the domino effect of migrations which followed the Proto-Tiriki were pushed out of the coastal areas of Asembo. In their movement Tiriki oral traditions point at brief stays in areas like Alego, Gem, Kisumu and Wekhomo. During this wandering the leadership of the group had passed from Khoba to his son Alulitsi (Were 1967b:3).

Their new leader Alulitsi had three sons Chisienya (Kisienya), Ameyo and Wanga. Alulitsi died and was buried in Wekhomo, during their sojourn in Bunyore. After his death the Abalukhoba experienced a major schism. Wanga and his people went northwards to Imanga where they established the Abashitsetse and other related clans among the Abamuima which later concretized to form the Abawanga kingdom (Osogo 1966:57). Ameyo and his descendants went further east to the land of the Kipsigis. This may be the Bantu group that is being referred to by Mwanzi (1972:64) to have entered Buret from the region of Kaimosi in the west which formed a thread of an evolving hybrid Kipsigis social tapestry.

On the other hand the descendants of Chisienya kindled the ritual fire (*obwali*) and began spreading into Southern Maragoli and present day Tiriki. By the last half of the sixteenth century Southern Maragoli and Tiriki were being inhabited by its present people (Were 1967b:4). The descendants of Chisienya, therefore, formed the nucleus of the Tiriki people. The Tiriki clans which descended from Chisienya are referred to in the local parlance as the original Tiriki (*Tiriki Bagwe*). The Abatirichi clans which trace direct ancestry from Chisienya are Abalukhoba, Abambo, Abalukhombe, Abikhaba and

Abashitsutsa (Were 1967b:2). These clans formed the nucleus upon which immigrants from other communities were integrated into to create the Tiriki nation.

2.3 The Abatirichi Pristine religion of ancestor worship

The Proto-Tiriki who migrated and settled in Western Kenya had an already developed religion. The hub of this ontology was centered on ancestor veneration. It is this belief of the veneration of *misambwa* that is the capstone of Abatirichi's religious heritage which they together with other Abaluyia groups bequeathed the region of Western Kenya (Ogot 2005:105). Ancestor veneration is a very old religious custom among the Bantu. It seems to have developed before the dispersion and movement of the Bantu from their primary areas of dispersion in Central Africa (Huntingford 1967:92).

Among the Abatirichi the ancestor cult involved the worship of the spirits of dead agnatic members of the family lineage and renowned national leaders of the whole Tiriki community. These deceased agnatic ancestors were simply referred to as forefathers (*baguga*) or as ancestral spirits (*misambwa*). The belief of ancestor veneration was based in the pneumatological consciousness which posits that the spirits of the dead ancestors have a continuous influence over the fortunes of the living. The daily welfare of the living was intimately tied up to the beneficent care and remembrance of the ancestors. The ancestors were not believed to be the causes of evil and misfortunes but if angered they could withhold their favour and let disaster strike the society (Mwashi 2014:O.I). The smallest unit of ancestor veneration was at the

family level where ancestors were worshiped at a very high frequency at the homestead ancestral shrine, *ulusambwa* (Libeye 2014: O.I).

The ancestral shrine consisted of two parts. One part was a pole of the *lusiyo* tree (*Markhamia platycalyx*) which served as the king post of the shrine. This tree was recognised by Abatirichi for its great size, toughness and resistance to rotting. This pole of the *lusiyo* tree at the altar was referred to as the branch of the ancestral shrine (*musala gu lusambwa*). This branch was thrust into the ground so that it extended upwards to the roof of the shrine. The second part consisted of three hard but very smooth stones drawn from a running river. The stones were about sixteen inches long. They were referred to as the stones of ancestral spirits (*majina gi misambwa*). These stones were placed at the base of the *lusiyo* king post of the ancestral shrine at a distance of about two feet from the post. They were stuck into the ground for firmness but remained exposed above the ground by about six inches (Libeye: O.I, 2014).

Apparently, the three stones had a special symbolic significance at the shrine. One stood for the deceased agnatic members of the homestead (*baguga*), another stood for the owner of the homestead (*mwene hango*) and the last one stood for the eldest son of the owner of the homestead provided the son was married and had his own children (Sangree 1966:36, Simani 2005:59). Among the Abanyole, Alembi (2003:36) observed that the *lusiyo* branch had very special meaning on the ancestral shrine. To him the sacred *lusiyo* branch struck in the ground connected the deceased members of the family buried on the ancestral land in a holy communion with the living members. This

study established that Abatirichi shared the same religious philosophy (Libeye 2014: O.I).

From the establishment of Abatirichi in Western Kenya up to the 18th century the homestead ancestral altar was dedicated to the worship of agnatic deceased members of the family. Beginning in the 18th century and becoming concrete in the 19th century, the shrines were dedicated to both the worship of ancestors and the Supreme Being (*Nyasaye*). This was after intense interactions between Abatirichi and Nandi-Terik, from whom Abatirichi acquired the Supreme Being cult (Gimode 2003:185).

The Abatirichi did not have an established priesthood for the ancestor cult. Customarily the keeper of the homestead ancestral shrine was the homestead head or the eldest son of the homestead. If the son had not attained the age of officiating at the *lusambwa* the ritual responsibility rested on the closest eldest clansman around, probably the brother of the homestead owner. Such functions were considered to be the rightful province of ritual elders (*basakhulu basaalitsi*). A *mantis* was usually supposed to be a grandfather and a man of good social standing. Elders were preferred because of their character and ability and most importantly they were close to the spirits who were not supposed to be offended. In such instances when the eldest son of the homestead was young and unable to perform rituals, an elderly clansman was requested by the eldest son to officiate at the *lusambwa* on behalf of the family during times of supplications (Shihinjiri 2015: O.I).

Supplications were made at the ancestral shrines in times of stress and trouble or in times of transition and celebration. Specifically, supplications were made during the

grand memorial ceremonies of dead family members (*khwitsulitsa*), weddings, funerals, times of illness, special purification of warriors after battle (*khurulitsa busekhu*) to restore peace between relatives and neighbours, to neutralise contamination which was believed to accompany the birth of twins (*bukhwana*) and any general state of ritual impurity (*luswa*) (Sangree 1966:36). When a special supplication had to be made at the shrine, the homestead head ordered beer to be brewed by the principal wife and a special pure white cockerel (*ingikho ingasitswe*) was selected for the ritual.

The *mantis* in company of other ritual elders of the community slammed the head of the chicken on each of the three ancestral stones while beseeching *baguga* for blessings and protection against the perils of human action and nature. The ritual elder slammed the head of the fowl repeatedly on each of the three stones until it died dropping blood on the stones along its beak. Next the *mantis* placed pieces of eleusine hard gruel (*bushuma*) on the ancestral stones. Finally, he topped the offering with drops of eleusine beer on the ancestral stones. He did this while supplicating ancestral spirits to accept the offering, bless and to protect the family. The wordings of the supplications were not rigid with any fixed formula. They were ephemeral and suited for each occasion. In this sense, the wording of supplication during times of stress and trouble was different from those said during celebratory or placatory rituals. However, the common denominator was that the supplication was simple, direct and repeated at each stone as the *mantis* dropped blood, food or beer (Shihinjiri 2015: O.I).

Similarly, in very serious situations like cleansing of ritual impurity a goat was strangled through suffocation of the nostrils. The stomach was carefully opened to get

the contents for divination. The chyme from the stomach was poured on the ancestral stones and smeared on the ancestral pole at the *lusambwa*. As he did this, the presiding *mantis* would utter words to appease the ancestral spirits like “.... if you *misambwa* are hungry with us here is something for you to eat and be satisfied, let trouble go and drive away evil spirits” (Huntingford 1944a:32). This was in accordance with Abatirichi religious conviction that all ancestors, the primeval ones (*misambwa*) together with their avatars as well as the more recent ones (*baguga*) were the guardians of all taboos. They imposed famine, illness, death, or deformity on their living kin whenever they violated such social norms.

When ritual elders had completed the supplication they cooked meat from the sacrificial animal. Pieces from the cooked animal especially the liver were thrown in various directions for ancestors to eat. As he did this the ritual elder pleaded with *misambwa* to accept and partake in the Holy Communion. Although this food was eaten by insects and wild animals, Abatirichi believed that *misambwa* had accepted the offering. The ritual elders and other male members of the community who came to help the *mantis* perform the ritual ate the remaining meat from the sacrificial chicken. They took beer through special tubes called *tsinzekhe* from an earthen ware pot which was placed between the ancestral stones. As the ritual elders departed for their homes they left a pot with beer at the *lusambwa* for ancestral spirits who dwelt far away (Shipale 2014:O.I). In this worship the invisible world is symbolised or manifested by those visible and concrete phenomena and objects of nature like insects and other wild animals. This is one of the fundamental religious heritages of African people. It is “....very unfortunate that foreign writers through their great ignorance failed to

appreciate this deep religious insight and ridiculed it disparagingly as animism” (Mbiti 1967:57)

The ancestral homestead shrine was the main but not the only gateway to access favours from *misambwa*. A married woman, who had borne several children and had been granted a cooking hearth of her own by the husband’s family, had her own ancestral shrine of the women (*lusambwa lwa bakhali* or *lusambwa lwi isisi*). This shrine consisted of a sacred *lisabakhwa* branch struck on the floor of the matron’s hut close to her cooking hearth. The three stones which served as the cooking hearth were the equivalent to the ancestral stones of the homestead altar. Offering and supplications were made at this shrine in connection with pregnancy, child birth and health of the mother. These rituals were done by elderly women of the lineage. Abatirichi considered offerings at the female altar as addition to, but in no way a substitute for supplications made at the homestead altar by men (Libeye 2014:O.I).

2.4 Types of burial rituals conducted by Abatirichi by C.E 1850

The Abatirichi believed that the physical and the spiritual existence were two dimensions of the same universe. These dimensions dove-tailed into each other to the extent that at times, and in some places, one was apparently more real than the other, but not exclusive of the other. To them the spiritual universe was not an academic proposition; it was an empirical experience which reached its height in acts of worship at ancestral shrines and funeral rituals. Abatirichi interpreted death to mean transition from the living phase to the phase of transcendental spirits. The living beings were, therefore, supposed to maintain a closer relationship with the spirits of the dead during

this time of transition. This was informed by the belief that the spirits of the dead continued to wield considerable influence over the lives of the living (Libeye 2014:O.I).

Therefore, right from the time a person died funeral rituals set in. These rites set the rule on how and who handled the body of the deceased. The positioning of the grave, the time of setting the grave, the time and manner of burying the dead assumed a sacred importance, which went far beyond the mere physical necessity of disposing the corpse. It was a general religious belief that every day life, peace, fecundity of land and animals and prosperity of the family depended on proper mourning of the dead. Funeral rituals were, therefore, an established *sinequanon* of converting the spirit of the dead into sacred being to be worshiped. The size and importance of funeral rituals differed considerably depending on the age, gender, social status and the nature and circumstances surrounding the death of a man. Burials for children, unmarried people, the barren people and those who died under circumstances which Abatirichi considered unnatural were drab affairs with less ceremonial credence. They were only attended by close relatives. However, for a senior person of good social standing, for example, a renowned warrior his funeral was a raucous national affair. His burial ceremony was coloured with pomp, glamour and pageantry to the extent that the normal life of the community was completely suspended to honor such a hero (FDG Shamakhokho 4th Jan 2015).

It was in the funeral of a senior man of good social standing that the Abatirichi religious concepts in funeral rituals were explicitly manifested, because their spirits could soon become *misambwa* to be prayed for by the living. Spirits of unmarried

fellows, witches, sorcerers, barren men and women and those who died under unnatural ways in the eyes of Abatirichi were never considered fit to become super natural entities. Therefore, when a senior man died his death was announced to the community by sudden and very violent outburst of wailing by relatives and neighbours who assembled in his front court yard. If the man was renowned in the clan, horns were sounded and drums beaten to inform the community of this new development. Women moaned death through wailing while placing their hands behind the head while men usually moaned death by hitting the ground and grass tussocks with walking sticks and clubs. Moaning consisted of wailing and elegies punctuated with lamentations. The Members of the deceased family crisscrossed villages wailing. The widow was by custom required to go up to his natal home wailing to inform them of the death of their in-law.

The body of the deceased was expected to lie in state for three days before interment. During the first day the corpse was kept in the living room of his principal wife. The following day the body was transferred outside to the eaves of the house and kept in a specially constructed wooden structure on which the corpse was laid on. On this improvised bed, the body was laid in state for the next two days until the time of burial. The positioning of the corpse at the eaves of the house placed a lot of emphasis on the gender of the deceased. A man was rested in a shadeconstructed on the right side of the door to show masculinity. While a woman's shade was constructed on the left side of the front door of the hut. In both scenarios the corpse was placed with head facing the door side of the hut.

On the first night of mourning a brother of the deceased or any other clan member was supposed to build the ritual fire (*Majenga*), at the front yard of the compound. The ritual fire for a dead man of the homestead was lit on the right hand side of the compound while that of the woman on the left. The emphasis on direction was meant to signify power and influence of the man and in effect showed the patriarchal nature of Tiriki society. The right hand side was associated with masculinity and power. It was the duty of a brother of the deceased to keep the ritual fire burning, day and night, until the day of ritual shaving of the hair. This was done on the third day after burial.

During the last night before burial the grave was dug. The process of grave digging began around 10.00 P.M and went up around 3.00 A.M in the morning. The site and positioning of the grave was determined by senior members of the deceased man's clan. It was a common tradition for the grave to be dug in the "...door way of his hut" in the front yard of the compound (Were 1967a:55). The grave of a polygamous man, however, was always set on the right hand side in front of the principal matron's hut. The other wives would be buried on the left hand side of the hard trodden front yard of their huts. Customarily, all burials were supposed to take place in the land of the deceased, because Abatirichi believed the "...possession of land to be closely linked with ancestor worship" (Painter 1966:15). Abatirichi by custom never buried a man on a land on which no structure was constructed for human habitation. The thrusting of the sacred *lusiyo* branch on the ground for the king post of a hut during construction consecrated land and made it connected to the spirit world. Furthermore, the construction of the homestead ancestral shrine made the land even more religious and

sacred (FGD Shamakhokho 2015 4th Jan 2015). Eliade (1959:157) perhaps best captures this belief. To Abatirichi the land without a living structure was:

.....an unknown space that extends beyond the world.....uncosmicised because it is unconsecrated space, a mere amorphous extent into which orientation has yet been projected and yet in which no structure has arisen for a religious man. This profane space represents absolute non-being. If by any evil chance he strays into it he feels emptied of his outik substance as if were dissolving into chaos.

This belief explains why a hut had to be hurriedly constructed for a man who had died before establishing a homestead. It further explains the reason why all Tiriki men would strive to build a house on a plot of land where they would be buried even if they stayed far away at work in major urban centers like Nairobi, Kisumu, or Mombasa.

The duty of digging the grave rested with adult brothers of the deceased and close clansmen. Women, people with pregnant wives and bachelors were by custom not allowed to dig a grave. However, for a person who had committed suicide or had been struck by lightning, one who had been murdered, one who had drowned, the barren, those with hunchbacks, the epileptic and senior bachelors their clansmen refused to dig their graves. In such circumstances they hired services of strangers. Relatives feared digging the grave because they feared being afflicted with evil powers which had possessed the deceased. These hired grave diggers were remunerated with a cow and a sheep for their services. The sheep was slaughtered and the chyme from its intestines was smeared on their bodies to cleanse them of ritual impurities before they resumed their normal lives. The grave was dug using a special tool called *mulo*. This was small

stick-hoe which was later burnt on the funeral ritual fire or buried in the grave alongside the deceased. The tools for digging the grave were blessed in a special ceremony by blowing beer on them by ritual elders of the clan (FGD Shamakhokho 4th Jan 2015).

The shape of the grave was roughly rectangular or oval in shapes, and its walls were dug vertically to the depth of about five to six feet, sometimes it could be even shallower than this. On the floor of the grave, a special chamber was created at the bottom of the grave to accommodate the corpse. Customarily, there were four men engaged in digging of the grave, whose task was also to lower the body into the grave. These men were rewarded with a ritual fowl for digging of the grave which was killed at the graveside and cooked on the ritual fire. It was eaten at the ritual fire and no food was supposed to be taken away. The gender of the deceased determined the sex of graveside chicken to be offered, for a man a cock was given and for a woman it was a hen.

Researches on practices surrounding funeral rituals among most of the Bantu groups, especially, in Western Kenya suggest that great emphasis was laid on direction in which the grave faced, that is the direction in which the head had to point. Among the Babukusu, for instance, the head had to face the direction believed to be the traditional route by which clan ancestors reached Bukusuland. It was via this route that the spirit was supposed to return to its original homeland to the company of its ancestors (Makila 1982:165). The majority of Abalogoli clans for instance, Abamaabi, Abakirima, Abakizungu, Abamuluga and Abasweta set up the grave facing Mount Elgon in the north which is believed to be the direction of their origin (Wagner 1972:472). In this

assertion, therefore, this study emphatically contends that the pristine Abatirichi did not bury the dead with the head pointing to the east as it came to be done in the later periods of their history.

The setting of graves pointing to the east is a late feature in Tiriki funeral culture which was born out of intense interactions with Nilotic Nandi-Terik people. It can be conjectured with a very high degree of probability that the Pristine Abatirichi buried their dead with the head pointing to the direction from which they entered Tirikiland. This is probably to the west. In this supposition we are corroborated with the case of the Abashitsetse of Wanga. This group is believed to have been one with Abatirichi at some point in their history before migrating northwards to Imanga. The Abashitsetse have a custom of setting up their graves “.....with the head pointing to the south east which was in keeping with the tradition that they originally lived in the country of Tiriki” (Wagner 1972:472). It is, therefore, very probable that Abatirichi interred their dead relatives with the head pointing to the Lake Victoria region, in the west. This is the direction from where they entered their current settlement. By doing this the pristine Abatirichi believed the spirit of the deceased would have a very easy task of locating the company of ancestors.

The burial of a senior man took place in the evening. Abatirichi did not locate the exact time for burial provided it was in the evening. It was traditionally a taboo and a great disrespect to the spirit of the dead man if by any chance he were to be interred early during the day. The burial of a senior man of good social standing was marked by great fanfare, glamour, and pageantry. It was during this day that cattle drives and

dances were conducted to pay homage to the spirit of the dead hero. The whole day was set aside to give the deceased a special send off that befitted his status. Before burial the body of the deceased was carried by the undertakers from the corpse stand on the eaves of the hut. They gave the deceased the final tour of his compound. The cortege strolled up to the gate of the compound. In this gesture the deceased was meant to visit the areas he used to tread. All this was meant to please spirit of the dead (FDG Shamakhokho 4th Jan 2015).

Ordinarily, the deceased was divested of all his vestments, ornaments and talismans and amulets before burial. He was buried stark naked. The undertakers placed the corpse in the grave inside a special sepulchral cavity created at the bottom of the grave. This chamber extended vertically at the bottom of the grave. It was made long and wide enough to accommodate the corpse. The corpse was then placed inside the sepulchral chamber on a bedding of special grass called *shivembe*. The chamber was then covered with a layer of *lusiyo* (*Markhamiplatycalyx*) sticks flush at the bottom of the grave proper. The sticks were then covered by another layer of *shivembe* grass. This grass was supposed to be freshly plucked for this purpose (Simani 2005:59). In the burial chamber the body was laid on one side, with the head resting on one hand as if one was asleep. A man was laid on his right hand side while a woman on his left hand side. By this positioning Abatirichi meant that power and influence was associated with masculinity and the right hand. This was supposed to be maintained even in death. The head was placed facing the direction whence the clan of the deceased was believed to have originally come from. It was also in this direction that the spirit of the deceased was expected to go (FGD Shamakhokho 4th Jan 2015).

The whole burial ceremony was led by a *mantis*. This was a recognised ritual elder of the clan. Before the corpse was covered with dust the *mantis* offered a short propitiatory speech. He beseeched ancestral spirits to accept the dead into their pneumatological realm. Above all he implored the deceased to accept his fate and not to begrudge the living. The *mantis* would stand and address the deceased in this vein:

Ibe lwa wa khurula hanu, ukha kalukha hanu khukhusumbula tawe

Now that you have departed, please accept your fate, please do not trouble us (Simani 2005:59)

Before the grave was filled with soil close relatives of the deceased starting with widow dropped a handful of soil in the grave. As they did this they beseeched the deceased to go in peace and not to trouble the living. For instance, the widow would utter words like “...my husband go in peace” (FGD Shamakhokho 4th Jan 2015). The actual moment of lowering the body into the grave and covering with soil was marked with renewed violent outbreak of wailing, and singing of dirges, and laments. The grave was then filled with soil and pressed hard until it rose in a mound. After sealing the grave properly the *mantis* addressed the deceased and implored the departed soul to accept its fate. Some of the weapons and the ornaments were placed above the grave for a few days after which they would be removed and kept away. If the deceased had given birth to twins during his, lifetime the grave was immediately covered with a carpet of fresh grass stacks. Customarily, it was believed that giving birth to twins exposed an individual to a state of ritual danger of *bukhwana*. An individual lived with this state of impurity throughout their lives and even in death, such that when they were

buried their graves were viewed as constant sources of danger in the homestead. Therefore, the graves were covered with turfs of grass in order to prevent natural calamities, especially thunder and lightning from afflicting the compound.

In the first three days following burial, efforts were made by the family to keep away suspected killers from interfering with the grave. They kept a vigil at the grave to ward off suspected killers. This vigil was born of the fact of Abatirichi belief that there was no natural death. To them every death had a human cause. It was believed the killers might plant evil medicine over the grave or drill a hole in the direction of the head through which they would pour hot water or carry soil from the grave to work magic on it so that the ghost of the deceased would not haunt them. To put off such suspects from fulfilling such evil intentions a strong vigil was maintained by members of the bereaved family until long after the hair shaving ceremony (FGD Shamakhokho 4th Jan 2015).

If a woman had died in pregnancy, she had to be operated on before burial for it was feared that burying her with the foetus would condemn the remaining children and kinsmen to death. In such a case an elderly woman was contracted by the family to dig a grave at the back side of the home for the deceased. This grave was dug at night. Her body was then lowered into the grave without being covered with dust and guarded closely by relatives. A clan specialist (*umiari*) would come to this grave during this night while imitating a howling hyena. She climbed down the grave and operated on the woman separating her from her load, the foetus and the womb, which were buried in a separately prepared grave. Relatives of the deceased who had been keeping vigil from a

distance pretended to scare away the “hyena”. The surgeon was customarily rewarded with a cow and a sheep for her services. She slaughtered the sheep and used its chyme to cleanse herself before returning to her normal life.

In the case of individuals who had died and their corpse could not be traced, for example, those mauled by wild beasts, those who drowned on running currents of a river or those who died far away in battle, Abatirichi had to look for a surrogate corpse for burial. In this case, a stem of a banana was usually adopted as a surrogate corpse. A banana stem was ritually prepared and buried at night in the backyard of the compound. The grave was not allowed to establish a mound protrusion. Another case similar to this was a situation when a dead person regained consciousness. If a grave, of the said person, had already been dug, Abatirichi ritual elders prepared a banana stem to be planted in this grave, for it was considered a great taboo to dig a grave in advance of a person’s demise. Should the said person die eventually, which was inevitable, the same grave planted with a banana was cleared for burial. The ritual elders who undertook the ritual burial of the banana stem, then, slaughtered a sheep for the purpose of purification. Later on supplications were conducted in the homestead ancestral alter to cleanse the ritual impurity which had been cast over the compound (FGD Shamakhokho 4th Jan 2015).

For a woman who had borne children and died at her natal home, before being officially married, her burial procedure was also established by custom. Customarily, the mourning period was conducted in the normal Abatirichi manner as explained above. However, her grave was not set up in front of the house. Her grave was dug in

the front yard of the compound, but on the extreme end on the left hand side of the compound. This was Abatirichi posthumous disapproval of single parenthood. Abatirichi culture insisted that both men and women should establish homes which would grant them a respectful burial.

However, not all burial ceremonies among Abatirichi were accompanied with the glamour and pageantry which graced the burial of an elder of good community standing. There were other special cases where the death and subsequent funeral rituals for deceased had very little significance to the community. These people were considered a curse unto themselves and therefore their spirits had no power to harm the living. Abatirichi had very low opinion of this category of people because their lives did not meet the expected standards established by custom and enforced by ancestral spirits. This group consisted of bachelors and spinsters, barren and lepers, epileptics and physically handicapped like those with hunchbacks, and those who had died under circumstances considered unnatural like drowning, committing suicide and those who had been murdered. The death of this category of individuals was met with feelings of less concern. There was no violent outburst of wailing or melancholic melodies of elegies, while their corpses were not even allowed to lie in state in the compound. They were buried the first night immediately their bodies were discovered. If by any chance they had died inside the hut they were not taken out through the front door. A hole was drilled through the back wall through which they were taken out for burial (Budiya O.I: 2014).

The grave was set up in the banana grove at the back side of the compound. This place was considered very inauspicious to be laid to rest. The grave was dug by strangers who were remunerated with a ruminant animal, preferably a sheep, for their services. These grave diggers were expected to lustrate themselves in cud of this ruminant animal before re-entering their houses. For the case of a burial of a bachelor it was even worse. The corpse of a senior bachelor was pierced with a thorn from a special acacia species shrub called *shikunga*, just under the coccyx where the two buttocks meet. While performing “...this ritual the ritual elder cursed the deceased and disapproved his way of life” (Budiya 2014:O.I). The graves of these categories of people were never filled to form a mound. They were sealed to the point of being level with the ground. Banana stems and leaves were then strewn over to conceal the grave. No other funeral related rituals were conducted in honor of this category of people. Nor were they remembered through naming of young children. Thereafter, the family planned for a day when a lustral ceremony was held at the homestead ancestral shrine to purify the ritual impurity cast over the homestead. The ritual elders beseeched *misambwa* to cleanse the homestead (FGD Shamakhokho 4th Jan 2015).

2.5 The Abatirichi concept of cattle drive dances of mourning the dead or *shilemba*

Cattle drive dances (*shilemba*) was a category of lyrical genre of funeral poetry that was staged in memory of morally upright members of the community, especially, people who were reputed to be valorous warriors and wealthy cattle keepers. This man must have given birth to at least one son. Occasionally, but very rarely, cattle drive dances were performed for a woman who had raised illustrious sons such as formidable warriors. Cattle drive dances were perhaps the most elaborate of all funeral musical

performances among Abatirichi. These cattle drive dances were hinged on the Tiriki conceptualisation of being as a process and not a mere state. For Abatirichi, like most other African communities, death was not an end of human life, but rather, it was an opening to another phase of life. The cattle drive dances were meant to honor the dead and at the same time give him a befitting send off to the unseen world. Mbiti (1969:140) perhaps aptly captures this perception. He submitted:

Death is conceived as a departure and not a complete annihilation of a person. He moves on to join the company of the departed, and the only major change is the decay of the physical body but the spirit moves on to another state of existence.

Based on this pneumatological belief Abatirichi staged shilemba cattle drive dances to honor and praise the spirit of the dead at the same time to give the dead a befitting send off to hereafter. These cattle drive dances were an elaborate musical performance. The performers used costumes, props and make-ups in order to attach significance to and embellish this ritual dance. They adorned leopard skins and head dresses made of Columbus monkey skin (*ikutwa*). They painted themselves with clay and covered themselves profusely with creepers and wore jingle bells at their ankles. No particular pattern of decoration was observed, everybody chose his individual style according to his fancy. The principal performers of this dance like the lead singer costumed himself differently to set him apart from the rest of the performers. The cattle to be driven around were also decked with twigs, creepers, and neck bells which jingled rhythmically as they run during the performance of Cattle drive dances (Budiya 2014:O.I).

Cattle drive dances customarily began early in the morning about seven o'clock on the day of burial and went on for the whole day until the time of burial in the afternoon. On some occasions these dances continued on the next day after burial. Cattle drive dances were equivalent of requiem masses which are conducted by Christians to eulogise the dead. The start of ritual dance was announced in the morning by blowing of the horn. Conscious of the meaning of this communication villagers drive their herds of cattle to a designated arena, usually the sub-community grazing field.

From this assembled point the performance began. Participants danced gently to the rhythm of the songs as they walked on the roads of the village, especially, areas frequented by the deceased. In this gesture performers were “walking” the deceased to bid farewell to the favourite places he used to frequent. Sisters of the deceased ran in front wailing and singing while old men blew horns and shouted war cries. As they ran along the routes of the village, cattle from more homesteads joined the procession. After covering a considerable distance the participants turned and danced while going towards the home of the deceased. When they were about two hundred meters to the home they started trotting, and finally running towards the compound at full speed as if in a battle charge. As they ran cow bells jingled loudly, they blew horns, drummed wildly and uttered war shrills (Libeye 2015: O.I). This wild entry of dancers and cattle to the home of the deceased is what the Tiriki referred to as *shilemba*. Among the Abanyole it was called *esilemba* and *ekeremba* among the Logooli (Gunter 1972:456).

They entered the compound as hundreds of onlookers of both sexes and ages lined up the yard while others perched on trees to get the best view of this reality show.

As the dancers entered the compound, the principal wife of the deceased was supposed to receive the dancers at the gate while holding the spear of her late husband. However, if the widow was guilty of adultery it was believed that she would die on the spot if she dared to welcome the mourners. In this scenario the first born son of the compound would receive the dancers instead of her mother. The cattle and the dancers entered the compound forcefully trampling upon anything that came before them. Nandwa Perhaps correctly captured the reality of this drama, he wrote:

Then they entered the home with great force and treading upon anything before them. All children had to be removed from their way for they could be trodden underfoot. If there were any crops growing in the home they cut them down and destroyed them completely (Nandwa 1976:222-223)

Upon entering the compound the instrumentalists and the lead singer moved to the center of the yard while the rest of the performers danced as they moved the cattle in a circular manner around them for about an hour or two. Usually the length of the performance depended on level of emotions and the greatness of the scene. This cattle drive dance re-enacted the life of the deceased as a herdsman and owner of cattle.

In the meantime the age mates of the deceased were assembling on an adjoining compound or at the back yard of the compound. They dressed themselves as warriors ready for battle. They painted themselves with clay (*inyenyi*) of various colors, adorned themselves with head gears and wore creepers all over their bodies. During this time the last phase of cattle dance was going on in the front yard of the compound. When the warrior-mourners were through with costuming, a horn was blown to signal the end of

shilemba dance. When the yard was cleared of all dancers and cattle the warriors-dancers dashed through the gate into the front yard of the compound (Ayodi 2015:O.I).

The men went wild running in a confused manner, brandishing their spears, swinging their clubs violently in the air while blowing horns wildly. These “warriors” went completely berserk running blindly to all corners of the compound chopping down banana plants and any other available plants. After about an hour of this confused performance a horn was sounded and the warriors regrouped at the center of the yard. In a well choreographed movement they swiftly divided themselves into two groups each lining at the very ends of the yard opposite to each other. These warriors were ready to perform a mock fight to honor the deceased as a formidable warrior. Those carrying shields stood on the front row forming a solid phalanx. While uttering loud war cries both groups charged towards each other. The captains of each group led the pack and stabbed his spear against the shield of their opponents which served as a signal for “war” (FGD Shamakhokho 4th Jan 2015).

For the next few minutes the men engaged in a confused scuffle with spears hitting against shield and club clanging against club in the heat of the “battle”. After about a half an hour of fighting the warriors returned to their initial positions lining on both sides of the yard. After a short period of rest the performance was repeated again. Occasionally, a warrior feigned to have been killed by enemy blow and was carried out by onlookers amid cheers from the watching crowd. This sham fight was known among Abatirichi as *khuhuliana*. Among the Logooli it was called *esifuliana*, among Abanyole

it was *Okhuhuliana* and among the Abatsotso it was referred to as *okhutunguyana* (Wagner 1972:458).

After about one hour of sham fighting the warrior-mourners assembled on one side of the yard and formed one solid column deeply echeloned while they raised their spears and clubs high in the air. They started singing and dancing as they moved slowly across the yard. This last phase of shilemba was slow and very relaxed as the warriors were deeply worn out by the energy draining mock fight of *khuhuliana*. At the center of the yard they laid down their weapons and instruments piling up into a huge heap. They started singing praise and battle songs while dancing around the heap. They would sing and dance up the gate of the compound paying their last respect to their comrade. Then, they danced back to the center of the court yard and picked up their weapons and filed to the back yard of the compound. The mock fighting was only staged after the death of a man who had taken part in fighting to defend his clan and had gained recognition as a warrior by killing enemies. Therefore, this pantomimic performance of fighting re-enacted the life of the deceased as a formidable warrior (FGD Shamakhokho 4th Jan 2015).

2.6 The hair shaving ritual of *olubego*

Hair shaving ceremony was a very important post-burial ritual among Abatirichi. It was on this day that all ritual contamination arising from contact with the dead disappeared. Hair shaving was conducted on the third day after burial. The appellation *olubego* is derived from the verb *khubeka* which literally means “to shave”. However,

in present days the term *olubego* has been used to refer to burial anniversaries which otherwise were known as *khwitsulitsa* during the Pre-Christian era.

In order to perform a proper symbolic ritual cleansing, customary, all people who had come into contact with the deceased person at the time of his death had to have their bodily hair shaved. However, shaving was not the only activity on that day. There were other activities like distribution of property of the deceased, solving the conundrum of the cause of the deceased's death and re-marrying the widows of the deceased, in case he was a man. Early in the morning on the day of hair shaving a goat was sacrificed at the graveside. A goat was killed through suffocation and its meat prepared for those who attended the functions of this day. Meanwhile the widow and her helper (*mudili*) fetched water from a running stream to be used for shaving. This water was carried from the stream in a pot without the normal head ring (*ingara*). The water and the shaving blades were supposed to spend the whole night at the grave side.

Shaving the hair began early in the morning. The widow's helper poured water on an open piece of pot and used the traditional iron blades to shave the hair. Shaving, customarily, began with the chief mourners. That is the widow, the grave diggers and those who buried the corpse and then the rest of the family. The other mourners were shaved according to seniority. Shaving started with older members and the young were the last to be shaved. The hair was collected and disposed of secretly so that sorcerers and witches would not get hold of it.

Later on, in the afternoon, people gathered in the compound of the deceased to witness the pronouncement of the dead man's will. During this occasion relatives, non-

relatives and neighbours of the deceased came forth to state whatever claims they had against the estate of the deceased. It was also at this meeting that widows of child bearing age were assigned future husbands subject to their further concurrence. At such a meeting the eldest clan member of good social standing acted as the chairman of the meeting. This man was depended on to reflect the general feeling of the family and the clan. He also reserved their final veto. The crowd which gathered during that day comprised of a cross-section of debtors, claimants, witnesses and a host of curious onlookers.

At the meeting grants of land made to mature sons by the deceased before his death and his debts were reviewed and accepted or contested and revised. The eldest son of the deceased was generally recognised as the spokesman of pre-mature sons. He was also by custom accorded the responsibility of acting *in loco parentis* until his young siblings achieved maturity. The clan elder responsible for distribution of property acted in accordance to the wishes of the deceased as well as laid down customary procedures and whatever decision was taken during this day of *olubego* was legally binding. In the case of widows who had not reached menopause the gathering, through the chair, inquired on which members of the clan were interested in acquiring them as their own wives.

Sometimes before the meeting a clan brother of the deceased had already made overtures towards the widow which had been received favourably by the young woman. In which case this fact was made public and the liaison approved by the gathering. In other cases preliminary enquiries were made at this meeting and the final approval was

deferred until a later date. It was finalised during the grand memorial ceremony or *khwitsulitsa*. Abatirichi "...believed that the man inheriting the widow(s) had to be a full or a classificatory brother of the deceased, or at least a member of the same sub-clan or *inzu*." (Shipale 2014:O.I). Abatirichi did not look at levirate marriages as increasing personal property by grabbing the property of the deceased. It was a social insurance scheme. It was viewed as taking care of the widow and children of the deceased and at the same time helping the clan to grow through fullest utilization of the widow's child bearing capacity.

After the meeting the ritual fire was extinguished. An elder belonging to the clan of the deceased removed logs from the fire and scooped the entire ash from the front court yard. The ash was dumped at the homestead backyard. The removal of the ritual fire signified the end of mourning and the crowd was allowed to disperse. Clan members were also allowed to leave for their homes (Shipale 2014:O.I).

2.7 Abatirichi concept of "taking back the shadow" or *khuhira shihinini*

The indigenous concept of "taking the shadow" was also referred to as "returning the shadow" (*khukalukhitsashihinini*) (Shipale 2014: O.I). This religious concept expressed in funeral rituals is not restricted to Abatirichi. It is a pervasive ritual practiced among most of the Abaluyia communities of Western Kenya. This religious concept is also found far afield among the Bantu of central Africa (Bockie 1993:113). Nigel who has researched widely among the Dawayo Bantu group of Cameroon noted that "...among the Dawayo the spirit is called *looreyo* upon the death of an individual

the spirit is said to have returned back to the home of close relatives and then brought back to where the skull was buried” (Nigel 1981:157).

At present our knowledge on this indigenous religious concept of the returning the shadow is very meagre. Much of what is thought about it is based on published hearsay, incomplete or spurious data, untested conjectures or unsupported theories. This ritual has been a subject of misconception among various scholars who have commented on the subject, especially, among Abaluyia. Indeed, even some of our Abatirichi informants refuted the fact that this religious practice ever graced their funeral rituals before the advent of Christianity. Some accepted it but cogently argued that this concept was of Logooli origin (M'maiti 2015: O.I).

Shisanya has commented on this ritual of returning the shadow among the Abanyole of Western Kenya. She found out that two months after the burial of a man her widow visited her natal home to take back the shadow of her husband. She was accompanied by her co-wives. This team slept at her natal home for one night and returned the following day. According to Shisanya (1991:176) “the shadow of the husband’s was reflected at their natal home (inform of cattle and children begotten from her brothers marriages) to extend funeral rites there. Nevertheless, the widow was believed to symbolically capture the husband’s shadow from her natal home and take it back to his grave”. This description of the ritual of returning the spirit is quite in harmony with the Tiriki version. However, the symbolic meaning developed from the ritual by Shisanya is different from the conclusion we found out among the Tiriki.

On the other hand, Simani (2005:250) has commented over the concept of returning the spirit among Abatirichi. His submission, however, portrays the utter ignorance that the writer has on the religious belief of the people he was pretending to write about. Simani contents that "... a late kind of belief in the spirit of the deceased (*shihinini*) is creeping in the society even among the Christian community. This ritual is called *khuhira* or *khukalukhitsashihinini*. People have now come up with the belief that the shadow of the deceased must be returned to the place the deceased was living or to the home of close relatives. Pushing his argument to its furthest limit Simani submits that "...it is not within Tiriki customs for *shihinini* to be taken anywhere. What are the factors which determine where the *shihinini* must be taken? Do you have to come back with that *shihinini* or is it left where it was taken?" Simani then concludes that "...the ceremony of returning back the shadow has turned out to be a very expensive entertainment. It is not called for and has no significance".

What is very clear from the above submission is that Simani is portraying his highest degree of ignorance and confusion by pretending to authoritatively comment on something that he is completely *tabula rasa* of its historical background. Comments like these make his work the darkest point of his rather stellar career as an attorney. The religious concept of carrying back the shadow is deeply entrenched in Abatirichi religious experience based on ancestor veneration. In fact, judging from its ubiquitous nature among the Bantu of Western Kenya and the Bantu of the wider interlucustrine region, it is very clear that this religious concept graced Bantu religion as they entered the Lake Victoria region during the second millennium C.E.

It seems very clear that as Abatirichi settled in their present homeland the religious concept of returning the shadow-spirit was a well established sub-set of their overall religious experience based on ancestor veneration. This concept of returning the shadow was based on the ontological belief that the spirit was immortal. After burial but definitely before the final memorial send off ceremony (*khwitsulitsa*) the shadow-spirit continued to live albeit a desolate form of existence. This is because it had not been admitted into the spirit world. The Abatirichi thought of the spirit in anthropomorphic terms. They believed that the spirit had nostalgia of the areas it used to stay and frequent such as the homes of its close relatives. Therefore, the whole essence of returning the shadow was to take the spirit of the deceased person to visit the areas it used to frequent before the ritual of grand memorial ceremony. This ritual of returning the shadow was a process of enabling the deceased to bid farewell to friends, relatives and its favourite places before moving to the spirit world.

This ritual was conducted several months after the death of an adult individual but certainly not before the grand memorial ceremony. The ritual began from the living quarters of the deceased before setting on a journey to the designated house of a relative. In the case of the death of a husband, customarily, the wife would carry the spirit of her husband to her natal home and the homes of other close agnatic relatives like the brothers and sisters. Traditionally, before relatives began the journey the clan ritual elder beseeched the deceased by addressing his spirit. For instance, he would say “so and so today we want to walk you to your brothers Inyangala’s place.” The *mantis* further implored the deceased to accept the offer. The team would then set on the journey to the chosen relative’s home where they were received well in a pre-organised

ceremonial ritual. As team went on with in journey they sang songs of praise to the spirit of dead or just ordinary Bantu elegies to beguile themselves the weariness of the trekking (Khabugui 2015: O.I).

On arrival the hosts in a pre-meditated scheme prayed for their guests. In the prayer which took the form of a chant or incantation, they also addressed the unseen visitor in form of spirit. The *mantis* informed the spirit that they had reached the relative's place and it should feel at home. The team then spent the night at the relatives place before returning the following day. They were given eleusine flour, and a chicken or cock depending on the gender of the deceased. This was the last gift for the spirit of the dead man to take home. While on the return journey members were not allowed to disperse before returning the spirit back to the compound where the deceased was buried. On arrival the spirit-shadow was addressed in a chanting manner. The ritual elder told the spirit that it had been granted its wish and now it had been brought back home. It was requested not to trouble the living (Khabugui 2015: O.I).

2.8 Indigenous post-burial memorial ceremonies (*khwitsulitsa*)

The Abatirichi post-burial ritual of *khwitsulitsa* was conditioned by their ontology. This cosmology explained their very nature of being. For Abatirichi, being was a process and not a mere state. The nature of things was thought of in terms of force or energy represented by the human spirit rather than the physical matter that composed the body. It was believed that a grand memorial ceremony several months after the burial of the deceased was the *sine qua non* of reconciling the spirit of the deceased to its apparent condition. This memorial ceremony was called *khwitsulitsa*.

Khwitsulitsa in Tiriki jargon means to remember someone. This was the last memorial service that was held in honor of spirit of the dead before it accepted to move to the spirit world.

Before the grand memorial ceremony was held, the spirit of the dead was not a *bona fide* member of the ancestral spirits. It lived in a form of purgatory. This was a world that was harsh and full of solitude until several months later or even years when a memorial service was conducted. This memorial ritual enabled the dead man's spirit to be integrated into the community of ancestral spirits. If this ritual was not honoured in time traditionally it was believed that the spirit of the deceased demanded for attention by occasionally unleashing trouble on the family members for neglect. The family would experience incessant problems or dreams with the deceased until the memorial service was performed in honour of the dead man's spirit (Budiya 2014:O.I).

Customarily, it was the family and clan members of the deceased who organised for the day of the memorial ritual service. Once the day was set, the family passed information to all relatives, neighbours and friends. The family prepared eleusine beer, which was to be used for supplications at the homestead ancestral altar and entertainment during the ceremony. The family members usually selected an animal from the fold of the deceased or from family and clan members for the occasion. Customarily, this sacrificial animal was not supposed to have any blemishes and physical deformities. It was supposed to bear only one color. The sex of the animal was determined by the gender of the deceased, a bull for a man and a cow for a woman.

In the evening on the eve of the Memorial Day, the clan ritual elder led supplications at the homestead ancestral shrine. With the help of other ritual elders he sacrificed a cock at the altar. During the prayers he beseeched ancestral spirits to welcome the spirit of the deceased in their midst. He also prayed for the general wellbeing of the society. The ritual elder poured beer on the ancestral stones for spirits to partake. Once they were through with supplications they took beer through siphons from a beer pot placed in the middle of the shrine. Other people took beer from other huts in the compound or in the banana grove at the backyard of the compound. This merriment went on all night accompanied by occasional singing of praise songs in honor of the spirit of the deceased. The age mates of the deceased praised his valour in war and prowess in animal husbandry. They also conducted mock fights while producing loud noises which were believed to please the deceased man's spirit (Shipale 2014 O.I).

On a specially chosen time the sacrificial animal was brought by the grave side and methodologically attended in the process of a ritual. The first animal to be killed for the spirit of the deceased was of particular significance for it established the social status of the deceased in the spirit world. Just like a new born baby before the first ancestral sacrifice had been made to its name and a circumcision novice, the spirit of a recently dead person was like uninitiated man (*musinde*). This animal was slaughtered at the head side of the grave and blood allowed to flow freely uninterfered with (FGD Shamakhokho 4th Jan 2015). The timing for the sacrifice was determined by the gender of the deceased. For a woman, it was sacrificed in the evening of the eve of the memorial ceremony. While for a man it was sacrificed at dawn on the material day of

the memorial service. During this sacrifice, a ritual elder stood on the grave and beseeched the dead man to accept this offering and “sleep” well forever. Traditionally, the meat from this sacrificial animal was shared by all people present and ancestors to whom pieces of meat were thrown in all directions. Part of the meat was cooked and consumed at this celebration, while specific parts of this ritual meat were cut into small pieces and shared among those present to take to their homes. This was symbolic of the deceased sharing his last meal with his clansmen, friends and ancestors.

On the material day a meeting was held under the leadership of the clan ritual elder at the front yard of the compound. The main objective of the meeting was to honor the dead through speeches and to resolve any outstanding issues from the meeting relating to debtors and creditors of the deceased and remarrying of widows. Once all the deliberations were concluded, members dispersed to their homes. There was no other ritual that was performed later on to honor the spirit of the deceased. It was believed to have become a fully fledged ancestral spirit.

2.9 Summary

In this chapter we have described the peopling of Tiriki and reconstructed pristine Abatirichi religion based on the ancestor cult. We have also demonstrated how this religion was expressed in their mortuary culture. The key religious concept which underpinned their obsequies was to honor and appease the spirits of the dead. Furthermore, we have described Abatirichi funeral rituals. Specifically, we have described the types of burials, ritual shaving of hair; cattle drive dances, ritual of “returning” the shadow and grand memorial ceremonies. The objective of

reconstructing pristine Abatirichi religion and mortuary culture was to show that Abatirichi had developed symbols in their culture which were used in symbolic interpretation of foreign culture. These indigenous symbols will enable us to demonstrate the transformation of funeral rituals over time and space as occasioned by centuries of encounters and interactions with external cultural stimuli. In our next chapter we intend to examine the symbolic interaction between this pristine Abatirichi religion and obsequies with external cultures from their neighbours (Nandi, Terik, Luo, and Southern Abaluyia clans).

3.0 CHAPTER THREE: ABATIRICHI CULTURAL INTERCOUSE WITH THEIR NEIGHBOURS DURING THE PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD c.1850-1902

3.1 Introduction

This chapter shall examine the encounter and interaction between Abatirichi and the Nandi and Terik neighbours (Abaluyia, Luo and the Kalenjiin) during the pre-Christian period. We seek to examine in finer details, specifically, the encounter and interactions in the religious sphere and examine the possible effects of these interactions in Abatirichi mortuary culture. We intend to examine the interaction between Abatirichi and their neighbours as guided by the symbolic interactionism theory. During these interactions Abatirichi interrogated the neighbouring communities culture through the religious symbols developed in their culture, key of which was the belief in the veneration of ancestral spirits. The end result was that Abatirichi adopted some religious concepts from the neighbours and fused them to their previous religious concepts to formulate syncretism. The Nandi and the Terik shall be studied together because of their similar cultural systems and patterns of migration. They shall be referred herein as the Nandi-Terik.

3.2.0 Abatirichi encounters and interactions with the Nandi-Terik.

The influence of the Nandi-Terik in the evolution of Abatirichi funeral rituals should be traced from the wider contribution of the Kalenjiin in the evolution of Abatirichi cosmology. The Nandi-Terik belong to the Kalenjiin stock. The enduring mark of this group in the evolution of religion in “Western Kenya Religious Complex” is the introduction of a Supreme Being symbolised by the sun. This religious idea the

Kalenjiin adopted from the Cushites with whom they had very close and intimate interactive contacts (Gimode 2003:163).

The Cushites preceded the Proto-Kalenjiin and the Proto-Maa speakers in Western Kenya. It is also very probable that Cushites had developed contacts with the Nilotes in the general areas of Lake Turkana and Southern Ethiopia. However, of all the pristine Nilotic communities of East Africa the Highland group of Nilotes seem to have come under an especially complex history of Cushitic contacts and interactions (Ehret 1974:150). Apparently, the Cushitic group which seem to have heavily influenced pristine communities in Kenya and Western Kenya in particular are the Oromo. This group has sometimes been pejoratively referred to as the Galla. The Oromo influenced the Proto-Kalenjiin to adopt some of their religious ideas, especially, the cult of the Supreme Being symbolised by sun (Gimode 2003:163).

However, this contribution of Cushites in religious matters has not been fully appreciated, particularly, by historians. Nonetheless, it is the contention of this study that the Supreme Being associated with the sun and its ubiquitous nature in East Africa in the Pre-Christian past should be traced to the ancient Cushitic immigrants who traversed the plains of East Africa from the Horn to as far south as Central Africa. Most scholars, particularly the first generation of historians in East Africa emphatically dismissed Cushitic contribution in the cultural and technological evolution of East Africa. In their rejection they were on a black African intellectual nationalistic cause seeking to destroy the “Hamitic and Nilo-Hamitic myth” and establish “the true African history” (Ogot 2011:71).

The Hamitic myth was an idea developed by colonial anthropologists and historians. It was a theory hedged around with racist overtones. This idea argued that Hamites, a lighter people with thin lips and straighter noses, were responsible for any technological feat, any noble political organisation and any trace of “civilisation” in black Africa (Sutton 1974:95). The Hamitic myth, at its core, reflected the racist European presumptions of the superiority of the Caucasian race and underlined the primitivity and innovational dependency of the Negroid stock (Ogot 2005:160ff). It was against such a racist backdrop that African historians realised that “.....political independence could only have meaning if it was accompanied by historical independence. The academicians and politicians came to the realization that the maintenance and continuity of a society normally necessitates the perpetuation of a historical tradition” (Ochieng’ 1977:13). It is therefore reasonable to understand this climate of decolonisation in which the first generation of historians operated in their attempt to discount this racist myth. However, it is our contention that they took their opposition too far. Clearly any consideration of “Hamites” on the basis of pastoralism or cultural superiority is unhelpful to a historian. At the same time Cushitic contribution in religious matters should not be wished away and jettisoned together with the Hamitic myth in the trash can of history.

Mwanzi (1972:46), for instance, has dismissed Ehret’s thesis of Cushitic creativity and innovation in the technological and cultural frontiers. There could be some elements of truth in Mwanzi’s assertion but this should not mean that Cushites never contributed anything in the technological and cultural evolution of Black Africa. The contribution of Cushites in the cultural evolution of East Africa, especially, on

religious matters in very apparent and real; they bequeathed the Proto- Kalenjiin with the idea of a Supreme Being encapsulated in the sun. This concept would later play a significant role in the evolution of religion in Western Kenya (Gimode 2003:164).

Mwanzi (1972:46ff) supposes that the worship of the Godhead symbolised by the sun (*Asiis*) among the Kipsigis is to be traced to the *Kipasiso* clan of Ogiek origin. Ogiek is a variant of Hunter-Gatherer group which is endemic to East Africa. This assertion of the Kipasiso-Ogiek origin of the sun God is not convincing at all, because it does not explain the pervasiveness of the Sun Cult among all the Kalenjiin groups even those as far north as the Pokot or the entire Western Kenya and the interlucustrine region during the same epoch. Huntingford undoubtedly captures the Cushitic connection with the sun cult in Pre-Christian East Africa. He wrote:

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

What is more is that, Cushitic influences were exerted in a far greater quantity and in different ways on the Highland Nilotes than any other Nilotic grouping (Ehret 1974:151). The mentioned presence of the Oromo around the Lake Turkana region in the late 15th and 16th centuries means that there was close interactive contacts between the Proto-Kalenjiin and the Proto-Oromo (Huntingford 1967:77). Therefore, it is undoubtedly from these people that the Kalenjiin adopted the concept of a deity

symbolised by the sun and henceforth became the main purveyors of this religious idea in Western Kenya (Gimode 2003:164).

The Oromo venerated a supreme being symbolised by the sun called *Wak* or *Waaqa*. This deity was also referred by the name of the sun or *adu*. The worship of *Wak* was characterised by turning to the east and addressing the sun with veneration. *Waaqa* was omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent creator of everything. The Oromo also addressed *Waq* as the Sun with thirty rays (Workineh 2001:22). The idea of conceiving the sun as the symbol and the eye of God is hoary with age in the history of religion. In ancient Egypt, for instance, the sun was the eye of *Re*, which was also the appellation for the sun (Hitti 1966:35). While in Babylon the sun was the eye of *Ashur*. In Northern Europe the sun was the eye of *Odin*, in Oceania it was the eye of *Atea*. Closer home among the Luo, *Chieng*, the sun, was the eye of *Were* (Gimode 2003:166).

The Proto-Highland Nilotes began their movement from their cradle land as early as the 14th century and by the 15th century C.E the forefront of the Nilotic advance had reached as far South as Central Tanzanian plains in the shape of the Tatong or Dadong (Oliver 1967:76). A section of the highland Nilotes, the Proto-Nandi-Terik people, on the other hand had experienced their pastoral excursions in Western Kenya up to the Lake Victoria's littoral north of the Winam gulf which went up to around 1600 C.E (Huntingford 1967:89). By the early decades of the 17th century the Proto-Nandi-Terik people began to ascend the Nandi plateau. It is very apparent that by this time they had acquired the concept of the Supreme Being symbolised by the sun. As they settled on the higher regions of Aldai they refined their religion. Their conceptualisation

of the deity underwent sophistication. They became adepts in the worship of the Supreme Being associated with the sun, *Asiis*, a religious concept that they eventually passed to their Abatirichi neighbours. They had settled in very close proximity to each other and entered into very intense interactions. (Gimode 2003:168)

The term *Asiis* as used by the Kalenjin referred to God. However, the appellation when applied with a definite article it denoted the sun, hence the term *Asista* (Kipkorir 2008:30). *Asiis* as conceived by the Nandi-Terik was a spirit of the bright sky whose only symbol was the sun. Therefore, the sun was the form under which the Kalenjin perceived God. This according to Peristiany “...was a very advanced notion indeed” (Peristiany 1935:215). The sun (*asista*), therefore, was the earthly symbol of *Asiis*. *Asiis* came to be known by other synonyms which underlined the majesty and benevolence of the deity. *Asiis* was conceived as wholly beneficent without any antithesis of evil. The provider and helper of humankind and had none of the attributes of the devil (Orchadson 1971:20). The second commonest name for *Asiis* was *Cheptailil* or *Cheptelil* meaning the holly and blameless one who was also symbolised by the sun. This variant was, however, mostly used among the Kipsigis (Kipkorir 2008:30).

3.2.1 Continuity and change in Abatirichi cosmology after interactions with the Nandi-Terik

Of all the Southern Abaluyia groups Abatirichi seem to have come under very strong influence from the Nandi-Terik people. This is because they migrated and settled alongside the Terik and shared a common border with the Nandi in the region of Aldai

(Were 1967a:24). As matter of fact, of all their neighbours the Nandi-Terik seem to have the greatest influence on their religious culture and social organisation. However, it is undoubtedly from the Terik that most of the Kalenjiin influence seems to have flowed from. This is because they were subjected to very intense interactions as they settled side-by-side, such that it can be surmised with a very high degree of probability that the Nandi interactions reinforced ideas already acquired from the Terik.

From the Nandi-Terik Abatirichi were influenced to acquire the Kalenjiin cosmological concepts centered on the veneration of a Supreme Being encapsulated in the sun, the ritual cursing of *muuma*, Kalenjiin sacred plants and the Kalenjiin religious shrines (*kapkorosi*) which they fused with their older Bantu religion centered on the veneration of ancestral spirits. This led to a syncretic combination of ancestor worship and Supreme Being cults. These spiritual beings were worshiped at both the homestead ancestral shrines and the sub-community religious shrines (*kapkorosi*) and sub-community ritual fire (*obwali*). Out of this encounter and interactions Abatirichi were also influenced to acquire the age graded circumcision system from the Terik. This circumcision culture came to sit at the center of their culture to the extent that political organisation and ethnic identity was defined by *idumi*. It was the heartbeat of Abatirichi culture.

The Tiriki entered into interactions with the Nandi-Terik from as early as the 17th century. During this period interactions seem to be very subtle. Thus the 18th and 19th centuries can be presented to be the prime period of intense cultural intercourse with their Kalenjiin neighbours. By the second half of the 18th century Abatirichi had

developed a concrete idea of a Supreme Being who was symbolised by the sun. To them this God was referred to as *Nyasaye* or *Nyasayi*. However, the term *Nyasaye* was the most preferred. The Tiriki shared the appellation for Supreme Being *Nyasaye* with some of the Central and all the Southern Abaluyia groups like Abaidakho, Abisukha, Abakisa, Abalogooli, Abanyole, Abatsotso and Abawanga (Gimode 2003:190). The Northern Abaluyia groups like and Abakabras, Abatachoni, Babukusu used the sobriquet *Wele* or *Were* to refer to the Supreme Being. This deity was also personified by the sun. The other synonyms for *Nyasaye* were *Imungu* or *Isahi* (Wagner 1970:80). This high God was personified by the sun and also referred by the same word for the sun, *iliuva*. However, this word for the sun (*iliuva*) was rarely used (Gimode 2003:190).

Abatirichi conceived the high God, *Nyasaye*, as a spirit of goodness, powerful, inscrutable and benign. This deity did not have a fixed abode and a definitive symbol except the sun. They in turn associated the sun with light and whiteness whose benevolence was expressed in health prosperity and safety of the people. *Nyasaye* was also believed to be the creator of everything and regulator of balance between humankind and nature. *Nyasaye* was also referred to as the moulder or the owner of the ring, the halo (Gimode 2003:190).

Colonial anthropologists and writers who have commented on the indigenous Tiriki religion have dismissed the fact that they had any conceptualisation of Godhead comparable to the mission Christian God. Sangree (1966:38), for instance, argued that “...perhaps the largest change to traditional [Tiriki] cosmology accompanying conversion to Christianity was the establishment of God.” Pushing his argument to the

limit he further submitted that "...contemporary Tiriki elders both Christian and traditional have no conceptualisation of a high God creator of everything comparable to the mission taught Biblical God or comparable to the Northern Abaluyia God *Wele*". Writing later in the 21st century Simani also, emphatically, submitted that the introduction of Christianity led to the destruction of the ancestor cult, which created a vacuum that was filled with a superior God introduced by Christianity (Simani 2005:675).

Comments like these cannot be blamed because these writers were caught in the anthropological trap of the ethnographic present, thinking and assuming that things have existed as they are. The knowledge of God among Abatirichi specifically and Abaluyia generally is not something that can be subjected to any intellectual debate, because it was an established fact. It is very obvious that Christianity had nothing new to teach Abatirichi on matters of the Supreme Being (Gimode 2003:190). Wagner Gunter, for instance, writing at the third decade of the 20th century noted that Abaluyia had an elaborate knowledge of a Supreme Being known in various names; *Wele* among the Northern Abaluyia and *Nyasaye* in Southern Buluyia. Father Stam who worked in a virgin Nyanza region untouched by Christianity at the beginning of the 20th century certainly provides the most emphatic conclusion to this debate. He noted that "...both the Nilotic (Luo) and the Bantu of Kavirondo (Abaluyia) had a distinct idea about God" (Ogot 2005:89).

The acquisition of the Supreme Being by Abatirichi began in small scale during interactions with the Nandi-Terik in the 17th century, and became fully concretised in

the 18th and 19th centuries. This borrowing of religious ideas led to sweeping changes in the overall structure of Abatirichi ontology. They fused the two concepts with their own genius to develop a syncretic ontology. In the new hybrid cosmology they fused the worship of the ancestral spirits and the Supreme Being cult into a system that included an inseparable worship of both. By 1900 C.E the concepts of ancestor worship and Supreme Being was closely related among Abatirichi that it was completely hard to categorically identify the object of worship (Gimode 2003:196). This feature remained the same into the 20th century. Sangree (1966:197) observed the same in the mid of the 20th century. He noted that when traditional ritual elders were called to perform a cleansing ceremony “....it was quite common for them to beseech not only *misambwa* but also the Christian God, *Nyasaye*”. This was an already established hybridised liturgy during the 18th and 19th centuries which was born out of interactions with the Nandi-Terik. Sangree completely missed the point because the God being addressed here is not the mission introduced God but the indigenous Tiriki Supreme Being, *Nyasaye*.

What Sangree is describing here was a common prayer formula during the 18th and 19th century where *Nyasaye* and ancestral spirits were worshiped simultaneously. On first emerging from his hut in the morning a homestead head would spit towards the rising sun conjuring blessings for his family from *Nyasaye* while invoking names of his agnatic forebears. At sun set a Tiriki a man would also address the sinking luminary and say a prayer in this manner “.....as you set, please sink with all the problems of the day” at the same time invoking ancestral spirits and *Nyasaye* (Libeye 2015:O.I). This actually was top-notch religious syncretism.

The appellation *Nyasaye* is derived from the Kalenjiin verb *sai*, which means to beseech (Gimode 2003:198). In Lutirichi, however, it is *saya or sala*. This certainly has an etymology from the Kalenjiin word for praying, *sai*. Because the typical conclusion of a Nandi-Terik prayer ended with the words *kagesai* which means “I have prayed” (Peristiany 1939:215). The Abatirichi took this Kalenjiin root word *sai* and transformed it into an appellation for their newly acquired concept of the Supreme Being. The Abatirichi religious concept of *Nyasaye*, therefore, meant the one whom prayers were directed to. This being was the absolute and supreme object of worship and veneration (Gimode1993:134).

3.2.2 Abatirichi acquisition of the secret age-grouped circumcision system (*idumi*)

The cultural capstone of Abatirichi interaction with the Nilotic Nandi-Terik was the acquisition of male circumcision culture and its accompanying ceremonies from the Terik. *Idumi*, heretofore, became the hub of Abatirichi culture. Indeed, every other social function and process was conditioned by *idumi* and its attending customs. It is therefore of utmost importance to understand the nature and function of *idumi*. Because this institution to a very large extent conditioned the way the Tiriki responded to external cultural stimuli in the later periods of their history, especially Christianity.

Abatirichi traditions are unanimous that their circumcision culture or *idumi* which bequeathed the community with age groups and age grades was derived from the Terik or *Abarwa*. *Idumi* was handed down to the Proto-Tiriki by a Terik elder named Diligin who allowed a young Tiriki man by the name of Ambulavu Khwa Khoba to be circumcised among his people (Simani 2005:209). This was probably during the 18th

century. For Ambulavu was the son of Khoba II, who was the son of Nanduda, son of Chisienya, son of Alulitsi who was the son of Khoba I who led the Proto-Tiriki immigration from the fabled Misiri to the Nyanza region (Were 1967b:4).

The story begins like a tale in the Romances of Chivalry, for the plot has a damsel and a bond of love. According to the narrative, Khoba II married a Terik woman by the name of Dengu as his second wife. His first wife was called Khayasi. Out of the union with his second wife, Dengu, a boy was born. Ambulavu, as his name went, was flung into the center of the maelstrom of Tiriki history. His life became a national myth that bound disparate entities into a corporate unit called the Tiriki. And the culture he bequeathed his people not only defined their inner selves but also united them as one people. At the moment of his birth the Proto-Terik and Proto-Tiriki people lived in very close proximity. Therefore, when the circumcision period was about Dengu insisted that her son had to be initiated among the Terik. Following her pressure Ambulavu was initiated among the Terik by an elder named Diligin. In the following years when Ambulavu had reached senior age he was trained in the art of circumcision and other intricacies surrounding *idumi*. He was also given the insignias of authority necessary for holding a circumcision of his own. In this gesture the Terik had permitted Ambulavu to hold his own independent circumcision (*shishevo*) among his Abatirichi group. Consequently, *idumi* came to Abatirichi through the house of the second wife of Khoba the son of Nanduda, Dengu. Therefore, Abalukhoba-Badengu clan are known popularly among Abatirichi as the lineage of *idumi* (*inzu yi idumi*). Their pre-eminence in matters related to *idumi* was acknowledged by all Abatirichi. The great initiation chief, Sakwa Khwa M'maitisi, who started the hybridised traditional-Christian circumcision system in

the 1940s, belonged to this lineage. His pedigree as a member of the Abalukhoba-Badengu lineage legitimised his ventures in the eyes of many Abatirichi Christians.

The appellation *idumi* is derived from the Kalenjin word *tum* which in broad terms roughly translates to a ceremony. The word *tum* was then Bantuised by Abatirichi to *idumi*. *Idumi*, therefore, in Abatirichi parlance referred to the whole corpus of ceremonies which accompanied post-puberty male initiation through circumcision. Through the acquisition of *idumi* from the Kalenjin the Abaluyia immigrants were converted into fully fledged members of the Terik group. This Abaluyia group adopted the name Tiriki in favour of Abalukhoba or rather Abachisienya. The word Tiriki, therefore, is a Bantu linguistic rendering of the Kalenjin word Terik. Thus the people are called Abatirichi. By invoking the appellation Terik the Proto-Tiriki people boastfully meant that they were people of Terik circumcision culture (FGD Mungavo 24th Nov 2014).

Youths successfully graduating from *idumi* were initiated into age groups (*makhula*) Abatirichi had nine age-groups each embracing a span of about fifteen years. These age groups were Chiminyigei, Nyonji, Mayina, Chuuma, Sawe, Ngolongolo, Ndalo, Kipkoyimeti (*Ivakale*), Kaplelachi (*matuya*). Sangree (1966:46) came to the conclusion that Abatirichi had seven age- groups. Our study emphatically discounts his findings. In fact, some of the names he applied to the age groups are non-existent while some age-groups are mixed up. It is very probable that Sangree did not get the correct data on the Tiriki age sets because of the secrecy which surrounds Tiriki circumcision, especially, to strangers. What is more, Abatirichi age-set system is cyclical and starts

afresh after about 135 years. Each age-group lasted for about fifteen years and received recruits from three successive initiations. The age-groups provided the society with five age grades on which war and peace time activities were organised. That is the uncircumcised youths, the principal warriors, the senior warriors, the judicial elders, and ritual elders (Simani 2005:114). The table below graphically illustrates the roles that Abatirichi age-grades played when this research was conducted.

Table 1.0: The Function of Tiriki Age groups and Age-grades

Age-group	Year of circumcision	Age-grades (Duty in society)
Chiminyigei	1890, 1897, 1905	All dead
Nyonji	1910, 1911	All dead
Mayina	1920, 1927, 1932	Senile and dead
Chuuma	1935, 1938, 1944	Ritual elders
Sawe	1947, 1952, 1958	
Ngolongolo	1964, 1970, 1975	Judicial elders
Ndalo	1980, 1985, 1990	Senior warriors
Kipkoyimeti (<i>Ivakale</i>)	1995, 2000, 2005	Principal warriors
Kaplelachi (<i>matuya</i>)	2010, 2015, 2020	Still open to circumcision

(Adopted and modified from Simani 2005:114)

The formal handing over ceremony of age-groups was conducted after approximately fifteen years. 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. Therefore, 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 defensive and counter attack support efforts. They were like “...lieutenant generals, major generals and brigadier generals” (Simani 2005:117). The erstwhile initiates succeeded to warrior status for conducting offensive and retaliatory attacks. The former senior warriors on their part became judicial elders and the former judicial elders became rituals elders. The formal change over ceremonies to initiate the installation of new warrior groups was forbidden after the establishment of British colonial rule in Kenya in an effort to contain inter-ethnic hostilities. The cyclical age-sets, however, still continuous to the present; a new age-group is opened for circumcision after about every fifteen years. Furthermore, the graded statuses of the four adult age-grades in traditional terms the warriors, senior warriors, judicial leaders and ritual elders were still being observed by the Tiriki in the mid of the 20th century even though by this time the social roles of each of this group had remarkably changed (Sangree 1962a:14).

The Tiriki initiation customs or *idumi* were far away the most elaborate and extensive ceremonial complex of the community. Young men emerging from *idumi* found themselves in completely different social status and roles from those they had when they entered initiation. There was no counterpart to such a ceremony or abrupt status change in the lives of women. Scores of differences between the social behaviour

of a man before and after *idumi* gave expression and content to the formal status differentiation established through initiation, and marked the difference from the vastly inferior status of women and children to the full status of manhood. In the strictest sense only initiated men into Tiriki age-groups were considered as real members of the community, women and children were merely ethnic appendages. They were Tiriki only by virtue of their husbands and fathers age-group membership (FGD Mungavo 24th Nov 2014). *Idumi*, therefore, bequeathed Tiriki men with a whole set of customs, attitudes and social responsibilities undertaken by members of each age-group. During the course of the entire initiation period it was graphically and forcefully impressed on all the initiates that one must show respect and difference to members of the older age-groups, the ritual elder's age-groups were shown particular respect and honor. A man was also to regard all members of his age group or *bakukwa* even from other Abatirichi sub-communities as special comrades if not brothers (Ayodi O.I 2015).

Abatirichi age group organisation had ramifications which extended far way beyond the military realm. It was of major political significance because it affected directly and indirectly most areas of social activity. The social groupings, ranking and statuses and roles it instituted manifested themselves in everything from the whole community and sub-community groupings to every day inter-familial relationship. Indeed, age-groups supplied the principal political and ritual basis of Abatirichi cooperate action. Thus, the age-groups became the basis of Abatirichi ethnic identity. Every initiated male felt loyalty to this system of organisation came before anything else. Whenever choices where to be made between age groups and other forms of

affiliations either indigenous or introduced, “....age-group structure would always win” (Sangree 1962b:72).

The age groups ensured a higher social status such that Abatirichi considered circumcised members of other ethnic groups as a higher order of life than an uncircumcised man but still not fit company for members of their age-groups. Such people were referred disparagingly as *Jebusabageni*. As a variant *Jebusabageni* was like the appellation barbarians which was employed by Romans on the ethnic groupings living outside the frontiers of the Republic. It is therefore from the foregoing description of the acquisition of *idumi* and its accompanying features, for example age group structure and solidarity, that one can comprehend the difficulty with which Christianity encountered in its attempt to penetrate established members of Abatirichi age groups. This will be discussed in chapter four.

The integration of Nandi-Terik age group structure into the pristine Abatirichi society led to restructuring of social organisation to address this new reality. In the subsequent society the old Bantu clan loyalties which was the basis of social organisation among most of the Abaluyia groups did not just melt away to pave way to the newly acquired social bonds of age set brotherhood. The newly developed society was a syncretic combination of Abatirichi's past Bantu and newly acquired Nilotic heritages. It is this deeply syncretic nature of Abatirichi's social organisation that set them aside as politically discrete yet culturally very similar to other Bantu groups living in Western Kenya collectively referred to as Abaluyia.

The Abatirichi social structure became a hybridised blend of Bantu and Nilotic culture. This social structure was a tapestry made up of three strands woven together into an astonishing tight social fabric. These three social strands were clans, age-sets and sub-communities (*tsibololi*). *Ibololi* (singular) is a Bantu rendition of the Kalenjin word for a sub-community, *bororiet*. The clan organisation was clearly an Abaluyia heritage. Due to increased contacts with the Nandi-Terik, the Abatirichi clan groupings were deprived of most of the political potency they still retained in other Abaluyia groups. Yet in the subsequent hybridised social structure clans managed to retain some of their former Bantu social roles. For instance, they served as the organizational arena under which a large number of significant social relationships like marriage were carried out, and the bulk of the community's cultural traditions preserved. The clans also supplied the underlying framework of ancestor worship cult which formed an integral plank of the indigenous Abatirichi religious experience. In this sense clans retained their special role in the bulk of religious practices surrounding funeral ritual. They took the vanguard role in organizing the setting of the grave, lighting of the ritual fire or *majenga*, carrying of the shadow-spirit (*shihinini*), ritual shaving of the hair (*ulubego*) and burial anniversaries (FGD Mungavo 24th Nov 2014).

3.2.3 The significance of interactions with the Nandi-Terik on Abatirichi mortuary culture

Abatirichi came under intense cultural interactions with the Nandi-Terik, especially, during the 18th and 19th centuries which led to engineering and re-negotiation of their cultural identity. From this interactions Abatirichi were influenced to acquire religious concepts from the latter which they fused with their older Bantu religious

beliefs. From the Kalenjiin, Abatirichi acquired the ontological concept of the veneration of a God symbolised by the sun (*Nyasaye*) with all its sacred attendants like the sacred shrines (*kapkorosi*), the sacred ritual oath of *muuma* and Kalenjiin sacred flora. They fused these new religious concepts with the old Bantu religious beliefs centered on the veneration of ancestral spirits. This fusion led to a hybrid religious experience which was a combination of both ancestor worship and the Supreme Being cults which were venerated at the homestead ancestral shrine, sub-community ritual fires and at the sacred groves. To crown it all, they acquired the age-graded circumcision culture, *idumi*, which came to be at the center of their political and ritual culture, that it became exceedingly difficult to understand the inner spirit which animated Abatirichi souls without understanding the nature of *idumi*.

The acquisition of these new religious concepts hinged on the veneration of a sky-deity encapsulated in the sun, *Nyasaye*, and age-graded circumcision culture led to widespread changes in the conceptualisation of religious concepts and practices surrounding Abatirichi funeral rituals. Through the worship of the new Godhead, *Nyasaye*, and the practising of *idumi* Abatirichi inadvertently fused Kalenjiin beliefs surrounding funeral rituals into their older Bantu mortuary culture, the outcome of which was the syncretisation of Bantu and Kalenjiin religious practices surrounding funeral rituals. For purposes of this study, we have highlighted three concepts which the Abatirichi acquired from the Nandi-Terik which we seek to elaborate. These are the Kalenjiin conceptualisation of direction, the Kalenjiin conceptualisation of maturity and special categories of death and burials related to *idumi*.

3.2.4 Abatirichi acquisition of the Kalenjiin conceptualisation of direction

As the Proto-Nandi-Terik people entered the highland areas of Western Kenya from the lowland plains surrounding Lake Victoria around the 17th century they had already developed a thoroughgoing form of monotheism which was centered on the veneration of a sky-God. They called this Godhead *Asiis*. The Nandi-Terik conceived *Asiis* as the spirit of the bright sky whose only symbol was the sun. The Kalenjiin, therefore, took the sun as the obvious thing with which “...to indentify and personify the idea of God” (Fish and Fish 1995:9). The sun thus came to be closely associated with *Asiis* who was conceived as thoroughly beneficent and benevolent, and the rising of the sun from the east early in the morning came to symbolise health and prosperity of the people. For instance, during the disposal of a dead body into the bush the corpse could be carried to any direction “.....except the East since the east was the direction of health, life and prosperity, the prevailing wind also came from the east” (Orchadson 1971:104). The eastern direction, therefore, came to play an important role in Kalenjiin life and ceremonies “...associated with God and the spirit world and also rites connected with birth, marriage, death and even minor day to day matter as the slaughter of an animal for food” (Orchadson 1971: 25).

Although it is an established historical fact that the Nandi-Terik and Kalenjiin in general did not bury their dead during the pre-Colonial days, a special category of people where, however, interred. These were small babies who had not cut their teeth, men and women who had grandchildren through a son and ritual elders (Fish and Fish 1995:279). Yet in the event that the Nandi-Terik had to bury their dead, the grave was set up in the cow dung heap (*kiptangat*). The grave was set such that when the corpse

was buried the head rested facing the east. This was the direction of the rising sun, the direction of health, life and prosperity (Hollis 1969:71).

On the other hand the Nandi-Terik conceived the west to be a thorough antithesis of the eastern direction. The west was the direction of the decline of the sun's life giving rays. The Kalenjiin, therefore, came to associate the west with decline and death (Fish and Fish 1995:10). Among the Terik-Tiriki, for example, people who had divulged the sacred initiation oaths were subjected to the *chepchusei* curse. In this curse the initiation elders unanimously imprecated the victim and wished his spirit a speedy demise at the bottom of Lake Victoria in the west (FGD Mungavo 24th Nov 2014).

By the close of the 19th century the Tiriki had developed a very clear conceptualisation of a high God personified in the sun, *Nyasaye*, and all other Kalenjiin religious trappings like the sacred groves and sacred flora. To cap it all they acquired a circumcision culture which came to be the defining attribute of their inner souls and separated them from their Southern Bantu Abaluyia cousins. Through the acquisition and integration of Nandi-Terik religious concepts and *idumi* into their hitherto Bantu culture, Abatirichi had by default adopted the Kalenjiin view and the sense of direction. The Tiriki came to conceive *Nyasaye* as a spirit of goodness who was very powerful and benign and with no definitive symbol except the sun. The sun was in turn associated with light and whiteness whose benevolence was expressed in health and prosperity of the people (Gimode 2003:190).

Abatirichi, therefore, came to associate the east and especially the rising sun as a symbol of the beneficent presence of the almighty *Nyasaye*. It became customary for

every homestead head on first emerging from his hut early in the morning to spit towards the rising sun and conjure blessing from *Nyasaye* and his forebears. What is more, circumcision of boys could only be done early in the morning when the life giving rays of the sun had cleared the commanding darkness of the night (Libeye 2014: O.I). Abatirichi also viewed the west in the same light as the Nandi-Terik. The west was viewed as the direction of decline and death. Sorcerers, evil spirits, and those who had contravened the sanctity of *idumi* oaths by revealing them were cursed to the west. The sinking of the sun in the west in the evening was also associated with decline. For instance, in the evening a Tiriki homestead head would face the sinking luminary in the horizon and aver: “*lu hela, hela ni minyakhano cha lelo*” or “as you sink may you sink with all the problems of this day”. In the spirit of this prayer, Abatirichi conceptualised the west as the direction of decline and the dumping site of all troubles and sickness (Ayodi 2015: O.I)

It is the contention of this study that this conceptualisation of direction by the Tiriki should be traced to the Nandi-Terik, whose connection of God with the life giving rays of the rising sun gave the eastern direction a paramount significance in their lives. It is very clear that by the close of the 19th century this Kalenjiin perception of direction was clearly ingrained on Abatirichi psyche that it came to be conspicuously reflected on their obsequies, especially, during burials. During the second half of the 19th century and throughout the 20th and the 21st centuries Abatirichi have come to have a sacred respect for the eastern direction. This is the direction of the rising sun, the earthly symbol of *Nyasaye*. Therefore, when death occurred Abatirichi dug their graves

with the side on which the head would rest pointing towards the direction of the rising sun.

This behaviour was clearly a Kalenjiin acquisition which was a marked contrast with the general Abaluyia custom. The other Abaluyia groups like the Abalogooli, Abanyole, and even those further afield such as the Babukusu set up their graves with the head side pointing to the direction from which their ancestors entered their present homelands. The Abanyole, for instance, dig their graves facing the eastern side which is believed to be the direction with which Anyole, their ancestor, entered Bunyore and he was also buried in the eastern side of Bunyore at Kima. For this reason the graves of “....Abanyole are dug facing the east with the belief that the dead individuals would join the ancestors who preceded them” (Shisanya 1992:16). The majority of Abalogooli clans on the other hand dig up their graves facing the northern direction which is the supposed origin of Andimi and his band of followers of which part of them formed the Logooli nation (Budiya O.I 2014).

For Abatirichi, the Western direction in which they entered their present homeland lost its Bantu religious significance and acquired a Kalenjiin connotation. The west thus became the direction of death and decline. By the 19th century it was a common belief among Abatirichi that if someone was buried with his head pointing to any other direction except the east he would unleash untold misfortune on his family. The buried man could literally finish his lineage. The family would be plagued with nightmares and loss of fortune. A story is told of a man by the name Magomere from East Tiriki at Muhudu who was interred with the head pointing to the western direction.

This happened sometimes during the 20th century. The family was haunted by his ghost. They experienced misfortunes which forced them to disinter the body and give it a proper Abatirichi burial ritual. In which the grave was re-dug with the head side pointing to the east. This grave was given a slight slant such that the sun cuts across the grave as it rises. This view of the eastern direction as the direction of health and prosperity was neatly integrated into the old Bantu beliefs and practices surrounding funeral rituals that it has become completely impossible for a layperson to comprehend its Kalenjiin origin.

3.2.5 The acquisition of *idumi* and its effect on Abatirichi funeral rituals

Abatirichi acquired the age-graded circumcision system during the eighteenth century through a young man by the name of Ambulavu. During the initial days Abatirichi used to circumcise their young men alongside the Terik. They shared circumcision groves and surgeons. But as time went on and population increased the Abatirichi appropriated *idumi* and made it their own. By the nineteenth century this Kalenjiin circumcision culture or *idumi* had become the stem of Tiriki society and the principal structure on which their social organisation rested. It produced age groups and emphasised the rules which guided them.

The circumcision culture which was acquired from the Terik was very complex with an elaborate lexicon and customs regulating every ritual connected with it and the society. Some of these regulations are those connected with the mortuary culture of some special cases of death directly connected to *idumi*. These cases are the burial of initiates who died during *idumi* period, the burial of initiation chiefs and the burial of

mature and uninitiated men. The religious concepts regulating the burial practices of these categories of individuals are undoubtedly a Kalenjiin heritage which was integrated into Bantu mortuary culture. This is because Abatirichi did not practise any form of genital mutilation before intensive and extensive interactions with the Kalenjiin (Ogot 2005:109).

3.2.6 The death and burial of an initiate (*mukhulu*) during seclusion

During the Pre-Colonial period *idumi* was a complex process of physical endurance, intense indoctrination interspersed with sacred and solemn oaths of allegiance to *idumi*. It began on the sacred hill forests. The would-be initiates were stripped naked and given garlands of special sacred climbers to dance with. They did these while holding the garlands above their heads with the left hand. The circumcision neophytes would spend a good part of the evening dancing in public amid merriment and fanfare by the community. They would then spend the night at the homestead of a designated circumcision elder to begin the real physical and psychological process of *idumi*. As the sun pierced the eastern horizon in the morning, a special song of Kalenjiin wording was sounded which seemed to announce the solemn reality of that morning. These young men were taken into the circumcision grove amid song and dance for the real operation (FGD Mungavo 24th Nov 2014).

They entered the circumcision grove as un-circumcised youths but emerged from the valley side forest after circumcision as a special category of people, initiates. Initiates were in phase of liminality which was full of ritual impurity. The initiates had shed blood which made them to be in a state of ritual disfavour. They were not allowed

to be seen by women, children and people not of Tiriki circumcision. The fact that the initiates were not allowed to be seen in public forced them to wear special head gears called *tsingolole* or *ingolole* (singular) during public song and dance extravaganza. The dance was used to reduce the boredom and martial lifestyle of seclusion and ensured community participation during the initiation period.

The state of ritual impurity which initiates had acquired after circumcision accompanied the initiates during the entire circumcision period until the lustral ritual of *khung'aba*. This ritual was conducted during the penultimate stages of *idumi*. During this ritual initiates were anointed with butter from a special gourd by Terik women whom Abatirichi referred to as *bamwai* (Simani 2005:227). Therefore, if by bad luck, an initiate died during the seclusion period it was traditionally believed that *idumi* had killed the young man, therefore nobody was apportioned any blame for his death. In this case the body of the initiate could not be buried in the normal way because he was still in the state of ritual impurity (FGD Mungavo 24th Nov 2014).

His burial was conducted secretly at night by people of Nandi-Terik circumcision culture. Women, children and the non-Tirikiwere completely restricted from participating in the burial process. The grave was marked by a ritual elder in the backyard of the homestead. Young men of warrior grade (*badiri*) would dig the grave. This grave was set facing the eastern direction, just like the Nandi-Terik, which was believed to be the direction of health and prosperity. The corpse of the initiate was lowered in the sepulchral chamber and then filled with dust. This grave was not raised to form a mound above the ground. It was filled to the level of the ground. The site was

strewn with banana stems to disguise the grave. The mother and other female relatives of the initiates were not told of the death of the initiate nor were they allowed to come out and attend the nocturnal burial. The mother was simply told that *idumi* rituals were being conducted in the homestead. In the morning the women folk woke up and found what looked like a grave at the back yard. The home was instructed to stop sending food to the initiate's seclusion base (FGD Mungavo 24th Nov 2014).

The burial of an initiate was conducted at night because the initiate was still in a state of ritual impurity. Therefore, he had to undergo the lustral ritual of *khung'aba* before he could assume normal life and thus be buried in a normal Abatirichi way. It was also to keep the secret of *idumi* from the naked eyes of women and children and non-Tiriki. After burial a day was arranged for mourning the deceased initiate. All initiates and Abatirichi men from the whole sub-community would gather at the compound of the deceased initiate at night. On this very night the party would stage the biggest *idumi* song and dance extravaganza in the compound of the deceased comrade. They sung all kinds of *idumi* songs and dances while moving in a circular motion until about four o'clock in the morning. This was a mourning dance to express sympathy with the family of the deceased and to give the spirit of the deceased a befitting send off. After this ceremony no other mortuary ritual was conducted in the compound to pay homage to the spirit of the departed initiate (Simani 2005:223).

3.2.7 The burial rituals of initiation high priests (*mudiri wu khu m'matsi*)

During the pre-colonial period Abatirichi lived in territorial units called *tsibololi*. Each *ibololi* was an independent social and ritual unit. At the turn of 20th

century Abatirichi and the Terik lived in ten territorial units whose exact size and geographical positioning expanded and reduced as occasioned by the vicissitudes of warfare and migrations (Sangree 1966:83). Each sub-community was autonomous with a sacred grove located on an imposing hill and a circumcision theatre (*kapnyonje*) located in a valley forest traversed with a running stream. This circumcision grove was under the care of a ritual elder. This person as well as being a member of the ritual council which officiated at the sacred forest (*kapkorosi*), he was the Chief Circumciser and the leader of the entire *idumi* sequence in his sub-community. This potentate was thus variously referred to as the elder of the circumcision grove, but also as the first circumciser or just the initiation chief. This was the most powerful man in the whole sub-community whose pre-eminence was completely unchallenged during *idumi* sessions. In fact, in the eyes of ordinary Abatirichi this man was the embodiment of the abstract concept of *idumi*, such that during the actual rituals of *idumi* this *mantis* was looked upon as the final authority in all matters, although most of the rituals were actually conducted by lesser elders (FGD Mungavo 24th Nov 2014).

The initiation chief being the actual entity which typified the abstract concept of *idumi* was customarily in charge of all the sacred objects which were used to administer rituals during various stages of *idumi*. The nature of his responsibility meant that when the initiation chief died his body in the eyes of Abatirichi became a sacred object that was to be protected from coming into contact with women, children and the non-Tiriki people. Customarily, his body was not allowed to lie in state outside the house like ordinary mortals. It was buried hastily the first night of his death. Women, children and non-Tiriki were not allowed to view the body even if they were very close relatives. Still

no one was allowed to cry or shed tears. The corpse of the high priest was buried at night around three to four in the morning. Very secret *idumi* rituals were conducted before the body of this high priest was lowered into the grave. Still his grave was not given a mound protrusion. It was flattened to the ground level (FGD 24th Jan 2014).

The funeral ritual fire set during the funeral of a circumcision chief to keep mourners warm was lit using the sacred *lusuyi*(*Mabaabyssinica*) tree. This tree was used during *idumi* sessions. In the pre-Christian days it was only the members of his age-set who conducted the actual burial. If all members of his age set had died then the next age-group would undertake the burial. What appears very clearly from this burial procedure is that age-group solidarity came to manifest itself strongly in Abatirichi funeral rituals. Each age-group came to cherish and preserve the memory of its own leaders and distinguished warriors. When a man died, men from his age group from the entire sub-community came to organise songs, dances and mock fights to honor his spirit at burial. If the deceased was a distinguished elder or warrior they organised mock fights and cattle drives in a very huge ceremony (Sangree 1962b:72).

Initiation high priests were buried at night in order to conceal the ancient esoteric doctrines regarding *idumi* only known to the senior initiation chiefs thereby perpetuating the mystery that was *idumi*. The nocturnal burial was to obscure the secrets of *idumi* from the naked eyes of ordinary people, and therefore kept it within the confines of *idumi*. That is because *idumi* itself is mystery (Simani 2005:224). This night burial was a male affair. All women were chased from the compound. The Abatirichi who came to mourn were not allowed to sing the ordinary Bantu elegies. They sung

idumi songs even if this death had occurred outside the initiation period. Customarily, it was against Tiriki norms to sing *idumi* songs outside the initiation period. After the initiation potentate had been laid to rest other Bantu ritual surrounding death followed. That is the shaving of the hair, carrying of the spirit-shadow to the homes of closer relatives and burial anniversaries, just as described in chapter three (Shipale 2015:O.I).

After the hair shaving ceremony which signalled the end of the mourning period, initiation elders from the sub-community arranged for a day to go back to the home of the deceased to transfer the *idumi* heirlooms to one of his sons. On this day a goat was killed through suffocation and initiation heirlooms were washed in its chyme so as to make them cool. These paraphernalia were then handed over to one of the sons of the dead initiation high priest preferably the eldest son for safe custody until a handing over ceremony was conducted. In the pre-colonial period all initiation chiefs were buried in the night. Abatirichi initiation chiefs who can be traced to have been buried in such night burials in the 20th century include Shiroko Khwa Shirobere, Muhalia khwa Angatia, Isiaho Khwa Swereri, Masambu Khwa Swereri, Shimoli khwa Shalimba, Ligondi khwa Litwaji, Lwokosi Khwa Lusala, Mukangala Khwa Amutabi, Mukhono Khwa Ingabo, Maragalu khwa M'maitsi and Minyalwa khwa Andere (FGD Mungavo 24th Nov 2014). The Abatirichi word “khwa” is a Bantu rendition of the Nandi-Terik word “Arap” which means the son of somebody.

3.2.8 Abatirichi acquisition of the Kalenjiin concept of ritual purity

The integration of the Nandi-Terik circumcision culture, *idumi*, into Bantu Abatirichi indigenous culture completely altered the way they perceived human

relations and the relations with the super natural entities. That is *misambwa* and *Nyasaye*. By the 19th century the Nandi-Terik circumcision culture came to be seen as the *sine qua non* of personal maturity and ritual purity. The obvious meaning of this conceptualisation was that an uncircumcised man remained a child forever irrespective of his physical stature and age. He could not be allowed to enter into the realm of the supernatural because he was considered to be ritually unclean (Budiya 2014:O.I).

An uncircumcised man, therefore, carried the natural social disadvantages which hindered his participation in normal social life. This man lacked an age-group which gave him identity in the community and established his functions. In this sense a mature uncircumcised man had no social status just like a woman or a child. This man could not address a public function or share a drink or eat with circumcised Tiriki men with established age-groups. He could not bury the dead because he was not officially sanctioned to do so through the *idumi* ritual of receiving *mulo*. An uninitiated man could not also marry or have carnal knowledge of any woman because he was considered very impure. Lastly, this man also carried the dreaded condition of ritual impurity (*luswa*) which could bring ritual risks during *idumi* ceremony to young men of his family undergoing circumcision (Simani 2005:224).

When such a man died Abatirichi classified his death like that of those people who had died under unnatural circumstances, as described in chapter three page 83ff, because it brought a state of ritual impurity which hanged over the family. If by chance his death occurred inside the house he was not taken out through the main front door. A hole was blasted on the wall on the back side of the house. The corpse of this man was

customarily circumcised at the banana grove in the home stead backyard. And like all inauspicious deaths this body was not allowed to stay in state. It was buried immediately after circumcision at the banana plantation in the backyard of the compound at night. The grave was flattened and disguised. It was not allowed to have a mound protrusion (Shipale 2015:O.I).

Abatirichi believed that such a man had to be circumcised before burial in order to appease ancestral spirits. The spirits of uncircumcised people were not welcomed in the realm of ancestral spirits. Besides if an uncircumcised man was buried before being operated on a curse would be cast over the homestead. Strange happenings would occur in this home during the period of *idumi*. For instance, children might be circumcised by spirits. Yet male children born in the homestead could experience genital deformities, for example *lidole*. This is physical deformity where the prepuce is shorter than normal, such that it does not cover the whole penis glans. It was also compulsory to circumcise the corpse in order to indentify it with an age-group which, therefore, would open the door for circumcision for other young men in the family without any negative effects (FGD Mungavo 24th Nov 2014).

The circumciser who operated on the corpse was remunerated very well. He was paid a cow and a sheep for his services. The sheep was killed for the circumciser to cleanse himself and his work tools from the ritual impurity of coming into contact with the unclean corpse. After this the circumciser would never again operate in that capacity in the community. It was the end of his work in this role as a surgeon. On a specific day ritual elders organised for a day to conduct supplication at the ancestral shrine to clear

the cloud of ritual impurity which was cast over the homestead. After this supplication no other ritual was conducted in honor of the spirit of an uncircumcised man (Budiya 2014:O.I).

3.2.9 The Tiriki acquisition of the Kalenjiin concept of maturity

The Proto-Tiriki people conceptualised maturity with one's ability to marry and raise a family. Consequently, a man was considered mature if he had married and produced off-springs from the matrimonial relationship. The setting up of graves among the Proto-Tiriki people was an activity which was conducted by mature people, who had married and at least sired children. By the turn of the 20th century this view was still held among some of the Abaluyia groups. Among the Bukusu, for instance, unmarried people and married people with no children were strictly prohibited from taking part in grave digging and burial activities. This category of people maintained a safe distance from the grave digging and burial process. If an unmarried person defied this significant social code, he was believed to deny himself reproductive potency (Makila 1981:147).

As the Proto-Tiriki entered into their present home-land they came under intense Kalenjiin influence from the Nandi-Terik, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries, which completely overhauled their conceptualisation of a physical and mental maturity. This study submits that it was particularly through the acquisition of *idumi* that the Abatirichi came to conceive physical and mental maturity and childhood as two side of life separated by the life changing phase of *idumi*. It was customarily considered that the rigorous physical and psychological demands of *idumi* converted a person from a

boy into a mature member of society. *Idumi* bequeathed Abatirichi mature men with social responsibilities and attitudes which run the whole spectrum from separation with women and children while eating to markedly different social responsibilities undertaken by members of each age-group (FGD Mungavo 24th Nov 2015).

Abatirichi like the Nandi-Terik came to associate the work of digging graves and burial with the warrior grades. Among the Kalenjiin, for instance, the work of disposing the dead was carried out by a son or near relative of the deceased man's totem. Should neither of these be available the neighbour's son took up his place. The duty, however, "...fell entirely on the warrior class an uncircumcised man was consequently precluded from officiating as a pallbearer or taking place in the actual burying" (Massam 1968:217). An adult male would go alone with the corpse and bury it. An elderly person accompanied him to show how the body would lie in the grave (Fish and Fish 1995:279).

Through intense cultural encounters and interactions between Abatirichi and their Kalenjiin neighbours the Tiriki appropriated this Kalenjiin conceptualisation of physical and mental maturity, such that by the 19th century this belief was deeply etched in the psyche of the Tiriki community. As a matter of fact, Abatirichi considered it improper for any uncircumcised man, however married, to officiate as a grave digger or pall bearer. The role of burying the dead was traditionally considered to be of the principal warrior grade. It was a responsibility which was instituted on the warrior grade through the *idumi* ritual of *mulo* which was conducted during the penultimate stages of *idumi*. Actually, the last address to the initiates during graduation from *idumi* concerned

the issue of *mulo*. *Mulo* was special wooden hoe used for digging graves. It was also used for cursing people. After the initiates had successfully undergone the ritual oath of non divulgence of *idumi* to women, children and non-Tiriki people, during graduation from *idumi*, the officiating ritual elder would address the graduands in the following vein:

Bahindirha mulirhe idumi, You are now fully initiated Tiriki men,

Nunundi kurhikale nu mulo, What is left now is community work,

Mundu nakhutsa mulayaba shirhindwa, From now henceforth you can dig a grave if one dies,

Na mularha mundu mwenoyo, And bury the said person,

Shijirha nunundi muli bandu bahindirha, Because you are mature Tiriki men, (Simani 2005:219)

This situation, however, varies considerably from the other Abaluyia communities. Among the Bukusu, for instance, the digging of graves and burying of the dead is strictly ascribed to married men with children, even though the practice of male circumcision is also practised among them (Makila 1981:). This study emphatically argues that it is because of intensive cultural contacts and interactions with the Nandi-Terik that the Abatirichi came to associate maturity with circumcision. Consequently, they came to ascribe the role of burying the dead with the principal warrior grade just like their Kalenjin neighbours.

3.3.0 Abatirichi cultural interaction with other Abaluyia groups

Abatirichi and other southern Abaluyia belong to Later-day Bantu group. The ancestors of these Bantu speakers entered Western Kenya at the turn of the first millennium C.E, from the side of modern day Uganda. Their migrations began in the period of around 14th century and ended as late as 18th century (Were 1974:187, Oliver 1972:25ff). What is very clear is that dynastic struggles in the interlucustrine polities, overcrowding, tsetse fly menace and the desire for a better country influenced these westerly movements (Were 1967: 188). These later-day Bantu occupied the littoral of the Winam gulf and Lake Victoria's islands. They co-existed with pristine Bantu for a considerable period of time before the emergence of the Luo speakers. Indeed, most of Southern Abaluyia clans have traditions which mention settlements and movements along the coastline of Lake Victoria. They remember sojourning in areas like Got Ramogi, Sere, Ulowa, Urima and Yimbo. In their itinerary they also include names of regions such as Alego, Asembo, Kisumu, Sakwa and Seme (1967:188).

However, the Bantu dominance of the low land plain was cut short by the arrival of the Luo. The entrance of the Luo into the region, which began at the turn of the 15th century C.E, and their raids over centuries forced the Bantu to abandon their congeries of settlements along the Winam coast. In the course of a slow, but steady, occupation of Nyanza by the Luo the Bantu occupants were not exterminated, they were either driven out or subjugated into the Nilotic society. Through military brute force and livestock raids by the Luo the Bantu were forced to move to safer regions (Ogot 2009:497). It is at this moment that the ancestors of the present day Abalogoli, Abatirichi, Abanyole, Abakisa, Abawanga and Abamarama entered their present homeland, pushed from the

Lake region by the Jakapuonja, Jokarateng', Jakorando, and Jakajulu who inhabit Kisumu (Ogot 2009:489).

The process of Proto-Tiriki settlement on the higher grounds of Western Kenya hand-in-was contemporaneous with the settlement of the other Bantu Abaluyia groups such as the Abakisa, Abalogooli and Abanyole. According to Were (1967b:3) the Proto-Tiriki were the first Abaluyia group to ascend into the higher grounds. During their wandering, they found present day Bunyore and Maragoli thinly populated by Hunter-Gatherers groups known by Abaluyia as Ngui. In these movements the Proto-Tiriki were being pursued by the Proto-Nyore and Proto-Logooli. These Bantu pushed the Tiriki eastwards. Eventually the Proto-Tiriki settled on westward edge of a dense tropical timer belt which came to serve as a natural buffer between Abaluyia and the marauding Nandi community.

By the 18th century the Proto-Tiriki had already settled in their present homeland alongside the Logooli and the Nyore to the West and South West, respectively. The Isukha and the Idakho had already settled to the North and North East of Abatirichi (Were 1967a:71). River Yala (*Lukose*) formed the natural frontier between Abatirichi and Isukha-Idakho. However, these cartographic lines are static and seem to misrepresent the high levels of interaction inherent in this region. Yet the truth is that Abatirichi entered into intense interaction with other Abaluyia groups. These interactions attained their prime levels during the 18th and 19th centuries. A period which saw intense cross-fertilisation of ideas, assimilation of clans and borrowing of

cultural concepts which led to establishment of Abatirichi as an essentially hybrid community by the turn of the 20th century (Were 1967a:76).

The Proto-Tiriki had settled in a very strategic position. They were bordered to the east by expansive woodland. This forest was occasionally cleared for settlement and agriculture. As a consequence of this segments from other Abaluyia groups moved eastwards into Tirikiland in search of spacious land for settlement which the forest afforded. A plethora of clans from other Abaluyia groups moved eastwards in the process they were assimilated into the evolving Tiriki society. Mainly because of land hunger, internal feuds, inter-ethnic wars and intermarriages more segments of clans from Idakho, Isukha, Logooli and the Luo and even as far afield as Bunyala and Samia poured into the Tiriki region (FGD Shamakhokho 4th January 2015).

Through miscegenation Abatirichi clans entered into cordial relationship with lineages in other communities. A particular important outcome of these intermarriages was the special relationship that was established between a man and her sister's children (*bihwa*). The uncle and nephew intimate relationship was manifested in the obligations the uncle had towards his sister's daughters at the time of marriage and in certain rites the sister's son had to perform following the death of his uncle. For instance, when a man died it was the role of his sister's son to climb onto the roof of his main hut and remove the protruding stick from the center of the roof (*shisejese*), thereby announcing to all that the owner of the house had died. This relationship often made Abatirichi men to welcome their sister's sons to come and settle near them. They were allowed to clear

forest land (*khurema bugwi*) and settle near the uncles, which led to establishment of new clans in Tiriki (Ayodi 2015:O.I).

By the mid of the 20th century Sangree (1966:4) observed that there were about 100 agnatic exogamous lineage groupings (*tsimbamba* or *tsihiri*) in Tiriki, each with its own genealogy and a history of origin. However, only five of these clans (Abalukhoba, Abikhaba, Abalukhombe, Abamumbo, and Abashitsutsa) trace their origin from the Proto-Tiriki patriarch, Chisienya. The rest were immigrant groups from other Abaluyia groups. These immigrant clans moved into the open area in Tiriki and allowed their sons to be initiated into Abatirichi age-grouped brotherhood and thenceforth attained full status of citizenship. They became Abatirichi. (FGD Shamakhokho 4th Jan 2015).

Each Abaluyia clan once it had been represented in Tiriki by initiated males in age groups for more than a generation came to function fully as a corporate entity of the community. Subsequent migrations regardless of their particular lineage affiliations were just considered as members of the same clan group. This process of immigration and assimilation of other Abaluyia clans into Tiriki continued throughout the 20th century. It eventually reached its peak in the colonial period during the reign of Chief Paulo Amiani Khwa Murambi. During the 1930s and 40s Amiani openly supported the immigration of Abalogooli into Tiriki. Chief Amiani had waned in popularity among the Tiriki because of his anti-*idumi* and anti-beer policies. This forced him to devise a way of increasing the number of Christian converts in Tiriki location in order to counter the influence of traditional Abatirichi. Therefore, Amiani turned to the west because the Logooli had accepted Christianity earlier than the Tiriki (Sangree 1966:148). This factor

among others might explain why today more than half of Abatirichi clans are of Logooli origin.

The clans which migrated from other Abaluyia groups continued to maintain strong relationship with and attachment to groups which they segmented. Indeed, each Tiriki clan forbids sexual relationship with all lineages found in other Abaluyia clans. Abatirichi also extended hospitality to members of their clans irrespective of how distant genealogically they were. This was in keeping with the general Abaluyia religious belief which made someone to feel his welfare was intimately connected with all his agnatic clan ancestors. This connection was maintained daily through supplications at the homestead ancestral altar to agnatic ancestors of his clan.

Abatirichi clans like in other Abaluyia groups had no totemic observances which were followed. The traditional agnatic lineages were the sole charters of clan identity. The only remarkable difference between Abatirichi clans and their sisters in other Abaluyia groups was in the matter of clan lands. In most Abaluyia groups each clan was accorded a certain political and ritual preference in particular geographical area. This land came to be known as the land of that particular clan. Such behaviour among the Tiriki was completely subordinated to the Tiriki-Terik pan-ethnic age-group camaraderie (Sangree 1962a:14).

Therefore, it is historically wrong to regard Abatirichi as a cultural entity of single origin. Abatirichi community and its culture is highly syncretic, a product of migrations, absorptions adaptations and unification. Abatirichi, therefore, are the quintessence and portent of the thread which runs through the ethnic groups of Western

Kenya; differentiated not by absence but by the degree of presence namely heterogeneity.

3.3.1 Transformation of Abatirichi obsequies after interactions with their Bantu neighbours

In matters of cosmology, especially, in the religious concepts expressed in funeral rituals, we submit that the Proto-Tiriki had very little to acquire from their Abaluyia neighbours. This is based on the fact that the native Tiriki religion of ancestor veneration which underpinned the religious practices attendant in their funeral rituals was couched in the same mould with that of their Bantu neighbours. It was steeped in the same symbols. Therefore, there was very little impact on Tiriki obsequies from their Abaluyia neighbours. In fact the movement of influence in obsequies seems to have flowed to the opposite direction.

Indeed, there is convergence of concrete evidence from various researchers on religion in Western Kenya to support our findings. As Bantu groups began to infiltrate the Kavirondo region at the beginning of the second millennium C.E they had already evolved a cosmology centered on the veneration of ancestral spirits. Both the pristine and latter-day Bantus who had settled the littoral north and south of the Winam gulf were adepts in ancestor worship (Gimode 2003:183). Writing on the history of Western Kenya Ogot (2005:105) correctly observed that the coming of the Bantu into western Kenya introduced to the region a religious outlook centered on the veneration of ancestors with fixed abodes and shrines. Huntingford further provides the most fitting corroboration. He opined that in religion “.....most of the Bantu of East Africa had

ancestor cults” (Huntingford 1967:92). Both the Proto-Tiriki and their other Abaluyia cousins venerated their ancestors at the homestead ancestral shrines and at clan level on the clan ritual fires (*obwali*).

Perhaps the most significant difference in religious practices expressed in Abatirichi funeral rituals and other Bantu Abaluyia neighbours was the manner in which they set graves. After very intense close-quarter interactions with the Nandi-Terik Abatirichi acquired the religious concept of the Supreme Being encapsulated in the sun called Nyasaye. This Godhead was closely associated with the sun. Therefore, the rising of the sun and the eastern direction was conceived to be the direction of health, wealth and prosperity. The western direction was the direction of death and decline. It was associated with the sinking and decline of the sun. Through the acquisition of this concept Abatirichi came to set their graves facing the eastern direction.

As more clans entered into Tiriki they came into close interactions with a society that had developed a conceptualisation of a high God whose was closely associated with the sun. These new immigrant communities were confronted with this new reality. And they were forced to adjust their cosmology. For those who had already developed a conceptualisation of a supreme being, this idea was reinforced as a result of close interactive contacts with the Terik during initiation ceremonies. They came to view the eastern direction as the fountain of all good (FGD Shamakhokho 4th Jan 2015).

A comparison of funeral rituals of setting of graves among the clans which cut across Abatirichi and Logooli community for example, can best explicate this phenomenon. Clans like Abadidi, Abashitsungu, Abamaabi, Abasaniaga, Abasaali,

Abasuba and Abashirima among others are found both among the Logooli and the Tiriki. They share common religious practices surrounding funeral rituals like shaving of the hair (*olubego*), returning of the shadow (*khukalukhitsa shihinini*), and grand memorial ceremonies (*khwitsulitsa*) except the manner in which they set their graves. Abatirichi clans set up their graves facing the eastern direction, while their counterparts among the Logooli set up their graves facing the northern direction. These graves are set facing the northern direction because it was believed to be the origin of their eponym, Mulogoli. This would allow the spirits of the dead to easily locate the company of their ancestors. While those in Tiriki dig their graves pointing to the east which is the direction of the rising sun, the earthly symbol of *Nyasaye*. As a matter of fact, it is a common belief among the Tiriki that the acquisition of *idumi* and the manner of setting the graves facing the eastern direction to be the outward manifestation of a complete assimilation of other Abaluyia clans into fully fledged members of the Tiriki nation (Budiya 2014:O.I)

3.4.0 Abatirichi encounter and interaction with the Luo

The Luo of Kenya are members of the River-Lake Nilotes ethnic group together with the Jokal, Podho, Collo, Anywaa, Pari, Acholi, Padhola, Lang'i and Paluo among others. The Luo started to close in on Western Kenya at the close of the 15th century C.E. The history of Luo entry into the Nyanza region is not a united invasion planned and executed by all the clusters which came to make the Luo nation. They entered the western region in clusters which came to bear the names of the leaders who led the migrations that is the Joka-Jok, the Joka-Owiny and the Joka-Omolo. Later they assimilated disparate Bantu groups referred to as the Luo-Abasuba. They entered the

region over a long period which stretched over a century and settled north and south of the Winam Gulf. These Luo settlements straddled the equator, stretching from about $\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ N to 3° S of the equator (Ogot 2009:490-493).

The Luo entered into the lake region which was already in a process of cultural and ethnic flux. Between 500 C.E and 1500 C.E Western Kenya was an ethnically complex region. Southern Cushites, several Bantu groups, Hunter and Gatherers and Highland Nilotes interacted with each other fighting, trading and intermarrying thereby influencing each other's societies. The entrance of the Luo in Western Kenya defined the end of the period in which forces of change would be derived from wide spread population movements in the first millennium C.E. It marked the beginning of the period of ethnic consolidation and development of ethnic consciousness. During this period ethnicity and culture was defined by intense interactions in settled communities (Ogot 2005:103). The arrival of the Luo in the Lake Victorian region began around 1490 C.E with the Joka-Jok. This migration should be viewed as a gradual infiltration of these Nilotes in area formerly settled by Bantu, like Uyoma, Asembo, Seme, Sakwa, Yimbo, Alego, Gem, Ugenya and Kisumu. This whole process took over centuries. It was out of this slow but gradual Luo advance that pushed the ancestors of the present day Abanyole, Abakisa, Abasamia, Abalogooli and Abatirichi to their present homeland. They were pushed from the lowland plains by the Kapuonja, Karateng', Korando and Kajulu Luo clusters which inhabit Kisumu district (Gimode 2003:157).

The Luo who entered the Lake region at the end of the 15th century had already developed a cosmology centered on the veneration of a Supreme Being. The Luo

conceived this deity in terms of Jok. The concept of Jok in Nilotic parlance literally means “God or Spirit” (Ogot 2009:485). This was the pristine Luo conceptualisation of the Supreme Being before their migrations. However, this whole concept of the Luo God underwent transformation. Its evolution was an epiphenomenon of the long process of migration from Sudan through present day Uganda and intense contact and interactions with Bantu and Kalenjin communities in Western Kenya. Ogot aptly captures this entire process. He wrote;

The trek from Tekidi at the foot of Agoro Mountains in Sudan to Got Ramogi in Nyanza had extended over several generations. During this journey they [Luo] encountered various non- Luo groups, some hostile while others friendly. They intermarried with them endured hardships, physical and social and suffered many trials and tribulations. But what sustained them was the new religion and cosmology they had gradually evolved (Ogot 2009:492).

Their God had sustained them throughout the nomadic life. He was thus no longer referred to as Jok but as *Were Nyakalanga*. This was the Luo pristine name used for God in the 16th and 17th centuries as they settled in Western Kenya (Gimode 2003:204). The epithet “Were” was derived from the Luo verb *waro* which means to save. Were, therefore, means the saviour. *Nyakalanga* refers to the infinite one. *Were Nyakalanga* had other names which underscored the divine power and benevolence of the deity. As the healer of diseases Were was referred to as *Hagawa*. As the protector of families and lineages *Were* was called *Dibo*. As the God of health he was called *Ochar*.

He was also referred as *Obongo Were* or *Obongo Nyakalanga* meaning the boundless one (Ogot 2009:494).

The Luo entry into the Lake Victoria region brought them into close interactions with the Bantu, especially, Abaluyia who influenced each other socially, politically and economically. In the process of Luo conquest the Luo assimilated a large portion of the Bantu into their Stock. In fact, the element of assimilation of these Bantu societies into the Luo might have been as high as the rate of its displacement. It is this slow process of cultural evolution that witnessed the transformation of the Luo cosmology to incorporate Bantu religious beliefs such as the veneration of ancestral spirits. This was especially the case of the 17th and 18th centuries when the Luo gradually evolved from Nomadic pastoralism to cultivation and fishing which required sedentism (Ogot 2009:657).

It was at the time of their settlement that Abatirichi entered into intense interactions with the Luo. The level of interactions in the 15th and the 16th centuries may have been low-keyed. But at the turn of the 17th century onwards interactions gradually intensified. Such that the 18th and 19th centuries can be submitted as the prime periods of interactions as the Tiriki settled side by side with the Luo. The Tiriki border the Luo clans of Kajulu and Kapuonja in the South western part of their present homeland in the regions of Imasaana, Igamalenga, Itigoyi, Ichamarakwa and Ishirhakwa. These intense interactions between the Luo and the Abatirichi are indicated by the presence of same words for both in Luo and Tiriki dialects. This is "...indicated for instance by words

for homestead, soil, wooden hoe, maize, sweet potato, beans, and leafy vegetables that are essentially the same” (Ogot 2009:657).

Warfare was a common phenomenon but its effects were leavened by trade, intermarriages and cultural interchanges of various types. Inevitably, these processes caused many often significant changes in the economic, social and political ideas and practices. The region of South Western Tiriki experienced the most intense interactions between the Tiriki, Logooli, Terik and the Luo. The colonisation of Masaana valley by people of Luo Kalenjiin and Abaluyia origin, for instance, typifies the level of interaction that existed between the Luo and the Tiriki. Owing to land hunger and congestion in the lowland plains some sections of Luo clans moved into the expansive and relatively empty lands of Southern Tiriki-Terik for settlement. The Tiriki Abasaniaga-Bakamunala clan, for instance, have a Luo etymology (Gimode 1993:60). At around the 18th century Abasaniaga were hived off from the Luo Kamunara clan. This group settled in Southern Logooli where they were Bantuised before a section of them moved and settled among the Tiriki, Terik and the Nandi. Among the Kalenjiin Nandi-Terik this clan is called the Kapchepkwang (Simani 2005:445). The clan literally traversed the whole of Western Kenya. The researcher belongs to this clan.

3.4.1 Continuity and change in Tiriki obsequies as a result of intense interactions with the Luo

This study submits that in the interactions between the Luo and Abatirichi the Luo had very minimal impact on the religious concepts expressed in Abatirichi funeral rituals. In fact, there is concurrence of evidence stemming from researches already

conducted in this region which corroborates our findings. Most of the influence on mortuary culture seems to have flowed to the opposite direction. The Tiriki religious concepts guiding funeral rituals were centered on the belief in the veneration of ancestral spirits. This belief as we have already demonstrated was the hub of Tiriki religion as they settled in their present homeland.

It appears very clearly that during the migration of the Luo from Sudan their pastoral lifestyle had not favoured the development of ancestor veneration through religious concepts and practices expressed in funeral rituals to any complex level. A people on the move have very little attachment to the dead and the land on which they are buried. It is only in sedentary communities that graves of ancestors attain religious meaning. The Luo entered into a western Kenya a region whose mainstay in religious matters was ancestor veneration. Through centuries of intense interactions with the Bantu the Luo began to develop religious attitude towards the dead. The 18th and the 19th centuries can be submitted to be the prime periods of these interactions (Gimode 2003:213)

Through these interactions the Luo slowly but gradually developed the worship of ancestral spirits. They soon developed an emotional and ideological attachment to land. Before their settlement into the Kavirondo region their “.....attitude towards land had been utilitarian and lacking mysticism and earthly divinities.” Through the acquisition of ancestor veneration this attitude soon changed dramatically. Each family came to be closely related religiously and spiritually to their land such that the body of a Luo who died far away from Luoland must be transported back home for burial on the

ancestral land preferably beside preceding members of his lineage. It became such a strong belief that failure to observe such a religious requirement would offend the spirit of the deceased who became a hounding entity called *Jochiende*. The Luo refined this cult of ancestor worship with their genius in order to fit into an ontological order which recognised both, but establishing God (*Were*) as the ultimate Object of veneration (Gimode 2003:214). In fact, there is urgent need for a historical research to be conducted to establish the net effect of acquisition of the ancestor cult by the Luo from Abaluyia in the religious practices expressed in their mortuary culture. The Luo funeral rituals like the cattle drive dances or *tero buru*, the lighting of the ritual fire or *magenga*, and the smearing of women with clay during the mourning period, the grand memorial ceremonies (*rapar*) and the returning of the dead man's shadow-spirit or *tipo* to the homes of relatives have all the hallmarks of Bantu Abaluyia origin.

What appears clearly to be a Luo impact on Abatirichi mortuary rites is reinforcing of the ideas that the rising sun and the eastern side was the direction of health wealth and prosperity. The Tiriki had already acquired this idea after centuries of interactions with the Nandi-Terik. This concept was established as a principle guiding the setting of their graves. This is the religious idea behind the Abatirichi practice of setting their graves pointing to the eastern direction. During the 18th and 19th centuries the Luo came into increasing contacts with the Nandi-Terik and Abaluyia. These interactions had brought the Luo into a region where the conceptualisation of God was closely associated with the sun. Therefore, they had to alter their conceptualisation of *Were*. The Luo divine concept of *Were* also confronted the Luo reality and they had to adjust; to their divine nomenclature they added *Chieng'* or the sun. An idea already

associated with the Supreme Being among Abatirichi and other communities in the region. The Luo veneration of the sun acquired a liturgy already developed in the region. During the morning and evening service for instance the homestead head would spit towards the rising luminary and conjure blessings for his family (Oduor O.I:2014). The Luo acquisition of this whole concept of associating the eastern direction with prosperity reinforced Abatirichi concept which they had already acquired from the Kalenjiin, of regarding the eastern as the fountain of good.

3.5 Summary

In the foregoing chapter we have examined the process of interaction between Abatirichi and the Nandi-Terik in the light of the symbolic interactionism theory. We have demonstrated that of all their neighbours the Nandi-Terik had the most profound influence on Abatirichi cosmology and culture in general. In the centuries of contact and interaction between the Tiriki and the Nandi-Terik, the former were subjected to a variety of cultural concepts from the latter. The Tiriki interrogated these Kalenjiin religious concepts in the light of cosmological symbols developed in their culture. Out of this symbolic interactionism, Abatirichi adopted the best aspects of culture from the latter which they fused with their previous beliefs to formulate religious syncretism.

We have shown that from the Nandi-Terik, Abatirichi adopted the religious concepts of a supreme being symbolised by the sun (*Nyasaye*), the sacred ritual oathing of *muuma*, sacred religious sites (*kapkorosi*), Kalenjiin sacred plants and the secret age-grouped circumcision system (*idumi*). The integration of these Kalenjiin concepts in Bantu culture led to profound changes in Tiriki mortuary rituals. We have made evident

these changes. They were the Kalenjiin conceptualisation of maturity, Kalenjiin conceptualisation of direction and special burial rituals related to *idumi*. These concepts were integrated in Abatirichi mortuary culture, centered on ancestral spirits veneration. This led to hybridisation of Abatirichi obsequies.

In the contact and interaction between Abatirichi and their Abaluyia neighbours we have demonstrated that these communities were subjected to intense encounters and interactions which led to borrowing of ideas and cross-assimilation of clans. This assimilation of clans led to the establishment of Tiriki as hybrid society by the 20th century. However, in relation to transformation of obsequies in the light of the symbolic interactionism theory, we have demonstrated that there was no influence from the neighbouring Abaluyia clans on Abatirichi funeral culture. This was informed by the fact that both sets of funeral cultures were couched in the same Bantu mould. The common denominator of this Bantu funeral culture was the veneration of ancestral spirits. The religious concepts guiding their obsequies, therefore, bore the same religious symbols and thus they could not influence each other. In fact, our findings have demonstrated that Abatirichi influenced their Abaluyia neighbours in religious matters associated with funeral rituals. This was after the acquisition of *idumi* and Kalenjiin mortuary concepts like setting of graves facing the eastern direction and *idumi* regulated obsequies.

Within the chapter we have also demonstrated that there was an intense interaction between the Luo and Abatirichi. These interactions attained their acme during the 18th and 19th centuries as the Luo settled side-by-side with the Tiriki. During

these interactions there was cross-fertilisation of ideas and assimilation of clans. Clans, for example, the Abamuluga and Abasaniaga-Bakamunala have a Luo etymology. In matters of religious concepts expressed in funeral rituals, in the light of the symbolic interactionism theory, we have shown that Abatirichi interrogated Luo cosmology based on symbols developed in their religion. In this regard, we have shown that the Luo reinforced Abatirichi idea of conceiving the eastern direction as the origin of health, wealth and prosperity, a religious idea that Abatirichi had already adopted from the Nandi-Terik as demonstrated in the previous chapter. This is because by the time of their settlement in Nyanza the Luo had developed a rough conceptualisation of a Supreme Being symbolised by the sun or *Were Nyakalanga*. Otherwise, our findings have demonstrated that greater influence in funeral culture seems to have flowed to the opposite direction, From Abatirichi to the Luo. In our next chapter we intend to examine the contact and interaction between indigenous Tiriki culture and Western culture as presented by Christian missionaries.

4.0 CHAPTER FOUR: THE EARLY CONTACT AND INTERACTION BETWEEN ABATIRICHI CULTURE WITH WEASTERN CHRISTIANITY c. 1902-1930

4.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to examine the initial contact between Abatirichi mortuary culture and religion generally with Christianity from c.1902 to c.1930. We seek to demonstrate the methods used by missionaries to proselytise Abatirichi and the latter's response to Christian missionization. This chapter will be presented as a phase of cultural shock and resistance of Abatirichi to Christian proselytisation. We shall examine the cultural clash experienced during this period under the symbolic interactionism theory. During this period of cultural resistance Abatirichi used cultural symbols embodied in their culture to interrogate and interpret Christianity in light of their culture, such that by the third decade of Christian missionization they were able to appropriate the best values from Christianity and fuse them into the indigenous religious concepts encoded in their mortuary culture to formulate cosmological hybridization.

4.2 A historical background of the spread of Christianity

Christianity as we know it today in Africa is a product of the 19th and 20th centuries Euro-American missionary efforts. This wave of Western Christianity came to Africa at the hey-day of European economic expansionism and colonization of the new lands outside the European continent; particularly in areas which were considered to be primitive and backward (Waruta 1993:111). European colonization of Africa and missionization of its indigenes, therefore, should be viewed as two halves of the same

wall nut. To this assertion the famous British missionary of that period, Dr. David Livingstone, correctly claimed that "... these territories [in Africa] were open to the civilising influences of European commerce and Christianity" (Groves 1964:62-65).

Simply put, the study of Christianity in Africa is more than an exercise in the analysis of religious change of natives. It is part and parcel of the historical anthropology of colonialism and consciousness, culture and power. An anthropology concerned at once with the colonizer and the colonized with structure and agency (Mtuze 1999:10). The study of the spread of Christianity in Africa is, therefore, "...a history of events, not an events history because we explore events within a multidimensional process, an engagement of increasing scale and complexity" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:39). This engagement was an inevitable collision of cultures brought into contact through Western imperial expansionist impulse.

Christianity, therefore, came to Africa with the spirit of conquest and hostility to African religions and cultural heritage. The Christian mission served as the central impulse of European cultural expansionism (Waruta 1993:109). It was the might lever in the European imperial tool box, in which true "civilisation" and Christianity were inseparable allies. Consequently, Western civilisation was epitomized by Christianity. The Christian religion, the school, the technical and industrial training, agricultural skills and commercial enterprises were all believed to be part of the full package meant to turn the "dark continent" into a place of wealth, culture and enlightenment (Gimode 2003:223). Commenting retrospectively on the conduct of missionaries in Africa Prozesky rightly observed that:

Missionaries were as much children of their own times as any westerner who lived during the colonial era. They paternalistically saw many benefits in the whole process of colonialism and acquiring of Western civilisation and therefore often consciously or unconsciously acted as agents of colonial authority (Prozesky 1990:34).

Whether Christian missionaries acted consciously or unconsciously towards the indigenes, by “civilising” them it meant total destruction of African culture and religion in order to create a blank slate on the African mind on which to print a new superior culture and religion (Mtuzze 1999:16). In this “civilising” enterprise missionaries played an especially prominent role. They surpassed all other agents of Western imperialism like merchants, administrators and anthropologists in the execution of deliberate *ethnocide* and *religiocide* in Africa (Gimode 2003:224).

What appears very clearly from the history of Christian missionary proselytisation in Africa is that European cultural ethnocentrism played a dominant role (Prozesky 1990:34). During European conquest and colonialism administrators like Fredrick Lugard sought to build on tribal structures and establishments. But missionaries more frequently saw tribal customs and traditions as obstacles to true evangelism (Lonsdale 1964:144). It therefore became the primary objective of missionaries to distort the African consciousness. Because they believed it was integral to “.... destroy the African self image, and the African *persona* as precondition for reinventing his psyche after the Western pattern” (Gimode 2003:224-225).

A lot of energy was thus wasted on trying to rid Africans of their indigenous culture. They had to be given new “Christian” names, a new God, a new form of

worship, a new culture and to crown it all a new lifestyle. It is no doubt that African neophytes entered the new religion "...as underdogs as putty to be moulded and manipulated by missionaries" (Mtuze 1999:18). Anything pre-Christian in Africa was either harmful or at best very useless. It was condemned in the most scathing manner possible. And an African once converted from his heaven of "heathenism" was ".....considered a sort of *tabula rasa* on which to print a new religious philosophy afresh" (Hastings quoted in (Gimode 2003:225).

The confrontational missionary attitude sketched above stems from the false notion that Christianity itself was pure and orthodox. And that Christianity never assimilated anything either from its Jewish ancestral roots or from neighbouring cultures as its history unfolded (Pato 1998:6). If one considers the vehemence with which early missionaries condemned African culture and religion one would get the wrong impression that Christianity itself was a full blooded religion untainted with cultural contacts. The opposite otherwise is very true. The history of Christianity from its Hebraic birth in Palestine, to the Roman Empire and Barbarian fringes of Europe plainly reveals what missionaries sought to conceal. The evolution of Christianity was that of accommodation and enculturation (Mtuze 1999:10).

The spread of Christianity in the Roman Empire perhaps serves to typify the syncretic nature of its development. Christianity was subjected to ruthless persecution and rejection by the Romans before Christian thought established a rapport with the two prevailing Greco-Roman philosophies of that time, which is Stoicism and Neo-Platonism. In this assertion, therefore, Christianity had to be Romanized before it could

Christianise the Romans (Hitti 1966:77). Both stoicism and Neo-Platonism represented syncretic forms of Oriental and Western thoughts. The founders and leading proponents of these philosophies were Hellenized Semites. Stoicism for example was founded by a Phoenician philosopher, Zeno. The process of reconciling Stoicism and Christianity involved a process of give-and-take (Robinson 1972:53). Its syncretic end result is poignantly inaugurated in Paul's epistles with their "...thesis on human nature and the analysis of the body into earthly or natural and heavenly or spiritual" (Hitti 1966:78).

Neo-Platonism on the other hand emerged from the works another Phoenician, Porphyry, meaning purple clad. His Semitic name, however, was Melik literally meaning king. Neo-Platonism at its kernel endeavoured to reconcile both Aristotle and Plato with Semitic thought (Trevor-Roper 1972:196). It developed the dualistic theory of "idea" and "matter" and made the physical world an emanation of the immanent divinity, the "one" from whom human souls are arisen and with whom they should be reunited. This Neo-Platonic distinction between the world of tangibles that is changeable, transient, and the world of ideas which is stable, eternal, became a feature of the Christian doctrine. It set matter apart from space and "... the body apart from the soul". It eventually made the body the prisoner of the soul from which it seeks to return to God (Hitti 1966:78). It is this syncretism of Stoicism and Neo-Platonism with Christian thought that made Christianity fortunate to attract the most brilliant Hellenistic minds, like Clement, Athanasius, Tertullian, and towering above them all Augustine of Hippo (Hitti 1966:80).

Historical commentaries on the spread of Christianity are further replete with other examples of rituals and ideas which Christianity appropriated while on its great march of expansion and growth. Christmas festivities and its major symbol the Christmas tree, the Easter eggs, hot cross buns and the deityhood of Madonna to mention only a few, are examples of foreign elements perfectly syncretised into Christianity (Pato 1998:6). But how often are these rituals and symbols points of contention? Therefore, the denial of African religion the freedom of expression within Christianity just reflected the racial interests of the dominant class. Lotourette (1970:45) certainly provides the best analogy of the spread of Christianity throughout the world. He wrote:

The stream which flowed from primitive Christianity early divided into different channels. As it increased in volumes the course through which it ran became numerous and its waters took the varied colors from soils it traversed (Quoted in Gimode 2003:111).

In their overzealous attempt to strip Africans of their culture and religion, missionaries ended up in many respects adopting an attitude at variance with biblical thought. The apostolic approach to proselytisation as encapsulated in the epistles of Saint Paul had been to reach out and win people for Christ, both Jews and even Gentiles in their own social milieus (Brandon 1972:73-85). In this sense Saint Paul in emphatic fashion stressed the need of "...radical cultural pluralism which stressed the idea of God's incarnation in all cultures and the need for the church to become inculturated" (Ogot 2003:11). In adopting a condemnatory attitude against African culture

missionaries behaved like latter-day Judaizers towards African converts. Instead of accepting them as they were, missionaries attempted to make them their own images and after their own likeness. The general assumption among missionaries was that Africans were savages and thorough infidels to be civilised. A process in which Africans were supposed to abandon their centuries ways of life and adopt Christianity with all“...its Western trimmings lock, stock and barrel, the outcome of this is that when African’s now look at themselves they realise that they are dressed up in borrowed robes” (Mtuze 1999:55).

In this systematic frontal attacks against African culture and religion, missionaries labelled them under such rubrics as fetishism, animism, witchcraft among others. These descriptions were made with one express objective. To make an African hate his culture and religion which would make it easier for missionaries to “emancipate” him from their depressing satanic outlook. It is therefore, from such a background that was deeply colored in racial bigotry and cultural chauvinism that the missionaries who arrived in Tiriki at the turn of the 20th century came. Most of them were Puritans, narrow minded and thoroughly lacking in theological training. Arthur Chilson one of the founders of Kaimosi mission station for instance described their arrival in Kaimosi as having arrived “...in the kingdom of Satan” among the Tiriki (As quoted in Gimode 2003:230).

4.3 Early contact between Christianity and Abatirichi indigenous culture

The Abatirichi have been in contact with Christianity longer than any other indigenous community in Western Kenya (Sangree 1966:120). FAIM established the

first mission station in Western Kenya at Kaimosi among the Abatirichi in 1902 (Sangree 1966:120). By 1960 Abatirichi had been proselytised by a variety of missionary groups. That is the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC) who established a station at Nyang'ori, the Mill Hill Mission (MHM) based at Erusui, Kaptechi and Ivuyaangu and the Salvation Army (SA). It is very important for the benefit of this study to briefly paint a concise history of each of the missionary groups which operated among the Tiriki.

The Quaker mission was a Pentecostal evangelical movement which was born out of the political and religious turmoil in England during the second half of the 17th century which pitted King Charles I and his supporters, the Nobility and the Gentry and Oliver Cromwell and his model army supported by the merchant class (Rasmussen 1995:1). The man who is considered to be the founder of the Friend's movement is George Fox (1624-1691). The Friends movement formed by George Fox endeavoured to break the monopoly of the Church of England. However, during the course of the 18th century the movement was met with stern opposition and brutal persecution from the Cromwellian regime which forced most of its members to seek religious asylum in other parts of the world (Rasmussen 1995:2). Some of this exiled group went to the USA. It is from this group in the New World that Quakerism was imported into Western Kenya through the efforts of the Friends African Industrial Mission (FAIM) (Painter 1966:2).

FAIM was formed under the initiative of a group of students at the Friend's Bible Institute Cleveland, Ohio. These students had been inspired by the accounts of

Willis R Hotchkiss in his book *Sketches from the Dark Continent*, a book which was a description of Hotchkiss earlier abortive missionary stint in Ukambani in Eastern Kenya under the auspices of African Inland Mission (AIM) led by Cameroon George Scott. FAIM was established with express objective “...of evangelising the heathen” (Rasmussen 1995:21). It represented a fundamentalist Christian group which had recently undergone radical transformation emerging with a deep zeal for missionary evangelisation (Kay 1973:15).

FAIM established its missionary activities among the Abatirichi in 1902 by Willis R Hotchkiss, Edgar T. Hole and Arthur Chilson. The trio arrived in Kisumu in 1902 via the newly completed Kenya-Uganda railway line. From this lake town, they travelled 20 miles east and settled on hilly timber belt which served as a natural border between Abaluyia and the Nandi, but more on the Abaluyia side among Abatirichi. Abatirichi welcomed them but for purely strategic reasons. They needed them as a buffer between them and the fierce warlike cattle raiding Nandi otherwise they had no predisposition towards Christianity (Gimode 2003:234).

With the help of Charles H Hobley, the British provincial commissioner of Kavirondo (Nyanza), FAIM acquired 1000 acres of land for use at Kaimosi. The Kaimosi mission station came to act as the Headquarters of Friends Missionary activities and the principal center of Friend Missionary activities in Buluyia. The Friends were the most active missionary activities among Abatirichi in the first three decades of the 20th century before the mission field was inundated with other missionary groups and African Independent religious Movements. From their

headquarters at Kaimosi FAIM established outposts among other Abaluyia groups in order to control its sphere of influence. It established stations in Vihiga in 1906, Lirhanda 1906, Lugulu in 1912, Malava in 1913 and Chavakali 1922 (Painter 1966:20).

Another missionary group which proselytised Abatirichi albeit indirectly from its base at Nyang'ori among the Terik was the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC). The Nyang'ori mission station was established by Claude Toliver Miller of the apostolic Faith Mission in 1909. The mission was later taken over by PAOC in 1924-25. PAOC immediately commissioned Mr and Mrs Otto Keller to take charge of the only Pentecostal mission station in Western Kenya, a job which the Kellers accomplished faithfully until the death of Otto Keller in 1942, at the age of 54. Keller was buried at the Nyang'ori mission station (Gimode 2003:237).

The Salvation Army (SA) was a late-comer in the mission field of western Kenya generally and Tiriki in particular. It capitalised on differences between Abatirichi and FAIM to establish a foothold in Tiriki (Sangree 1966:134). The most unique feature of the SA was that it did not have white missionaries proselytising Abatirichi. By 1956 the nearest S.A European missionaries were to be found in Kisumu. The SA established its presence among the Tiriki through Africans who had come into contact with its activities while working in major urban centers across the country (Gimode 2003:237). The spread of the Salvation Army activities among the Tiriki is credited to Chief Amiani Khwa Murambi who resigned from the Friends church following an altercation with a Friends missionary foreman, Fred Hoyt. In the decades which followed Amiani

helped in the establishment and the growth of a strong SA congregation among Abatirichi, Logooli and the Nyore.

The last missionary group which operated among Abatirichi is the Mill Hill Mission, a missionary group which propagated a brand of Catholicism. The MHM found its way into Western Kenya through the west from Uganda. The entry of MHM into the region was to heighten contrasting missionary ideologies and approaches to the indigenes of Western Kenya. This provided a base of contrasting the process of syncretisation of Western Christianity and Abatirichi indigenous culture (Gimode 2003:238). A direct consequence of this is that most of the areas proselytised by the Catholics retained most of indigenous culture, especially, religious concepts expressed in mortuary culture and *idumi*. The Roman Catholics could preach against certain aspects of Abatirichi culture, and often did. But they did not seem to be driven by the same demons which pursued the puritans, Quakers. For this reason among many others Abatirichi culture and religion was not vigorously opposed and erased in Catholic areas as compared to the Friends areas of influence. MHM ventured among the Tiriki in the 1930s. It established its bases at Erusui and Kaptechi in East Tiriki, and Ivuyaangu in West Tiriki. These areas have thenceforth remained to be the principal centers of Catholicism in Tiriki. Despite the efforts of MHM to missionize Abatirichi Catholicism maintained a shadowy figure in the community. PAOC and the SA came to command the largest following among Abatirichi.

The missionary societies which worked among Abatirichi came from different denominations, sects and orders, each with its own denominational garb, its own

theology and ritual practices and a strategy of converting the natives. Because of the bewildering array of mission movements in this region, acrimonious rivalry became a common feature which marked their relationship. This rivalry led to the demarcation of spheres of influence on the principle of comity (Shilaro 1991:94). Therefore, between 1907 and 1909 meetings were held among the missionaries to settle this issue. Accordingly, Abidakho, Abisukha, Abalogooli and Abatirichi were placed under the Friends sphere of influence. CMS was to limit itself among the Nilotic Luo, South African and Interim mission (SAIM) popularly referred to as Church of God was to limit itself among the Abanyole, Abakisa and Abamarama and POAC among the Nyang'ori or Terik. This understanding regarding areas of influence was, however, breached following intense rivalry among the missionary societies, especially, in the 1930s. The breaching of this agreement allowed the entry of the MHM, S.A and PAOC to missionize among the Tiriki which was considered a Friends sphere of influence (EYMF Field report, KNA: 1935).

What appears clearly from the history of the distribution of Missionary groups in Western Kenya is that Abatirichi culture came into early contact with Christianity embodied in the Quakerism movement. This was a fundamentalist Christian sect which came to Africa with the express aim of "...evangelising the heathen" (Rasmussen 1995:20). The FAIM missionaries who arrived in Kaimosi in 1902 carried with them the racial bigotry which characterised European missionary activities in Africa during the 19th and the 20th centuries. Their attitude towards Abatirichi whom they hoped to convert was extremely condescending. For example, they believed in "...the divine potency of the gospel of Christ to reach down the lowest depths of African heathenism

and transform it by creating those lower ones a new in the image of God. The awfully degraded African ought to hear the message of God's love" (As quoted Gimode 2003:228).

One of the founders of the Kaimosi mission station Willis R Hotchkiss believed that evangelism had to go hand in hand with industrial training in order save Africans from the corruption which idleness allegedly generated. Hotchkiss thus conceived the role of the church as that of evangelisation of the "heathen" and exertion of continuous Christian influence over Africans so as to teach them the habits of industry and thereby create a self supporting native church. And the best way to achieve this objective, for FAIM, was to set up industrial mission where they would not only preach to Africans but teach them practical skills that would help them earn income and benefit the native church. (Herbert & Beatrice 2002:18).

Through the twin instruments of preaching and industrial mission FAIM hoped to raise Abatirichi from their unstable, lawless and barbaric lifestyle by implanting in them beliefs in Christian attitude and fortify their vacillating character by training them in habits of industry (Kay 1973:63). However, Hotchkiss believed that there could never be any real change in Abatirichi heart "...that was not followed by radical cleansing of social conditions which immediately surrounded them". The social conditions which FAIM missionaries described vituperatively in terms of "...barbarism pure and simple characterised by social anarchy, lawlessness and the consequent inability of character" (Rasmussen 1995:20). In this conception of their mission FAIM was essentially

declaring war on indigenous Abatirichi culture and religion. At the center of this culture was Abatirichi religion, polygamy and the age-graded circumcision culture or *idumi*.

During the process of evangelisation FAIM missionaries had categorically singled out *idumi* for destruction. The Friends felt that until *idumi* was completely destroyed then Christianity could take root among the Tiriki (Sangree 1966:134). With this mind set FAIM had completely missed the point and started completely on a wrong footing. With this objective of introducing radical reforms on indigenous culture, FAIM had thrown in the gauntlet to Abatirichi cultural establishment. This rented beyond repair a society that could have been transformed with fewer ructions. In fact, this initial circumcision impasse between FAIM and Abatirichi proved to be a microcosm of an explosive relationship that would characterise their intercourse during the rest of missionary period. It led to a very intense cosmological conflict that divided the Tiriki community into two antagonistic sectarian camps. That is the traditionalists or *Abeshibala* and the readers or *Abasomi* or the Christians or *Abakristayo*.

Researchers on the history of missionization of Western Kenya have proved that of all the Southern Abaluyia groups Abatirichi were the most reticent to cultural change. They staged a classic cultural resistance against the Quakers from the outset of missionization. With the opening salvo having been fired at the indigenous Abatirichi culture by FAIM missionaries, the war had officially been declared. From the ultra-conservative predisposition of the combatants it was very clear that this was heavy weight contest that would go on forever until someone was either knocked down or knocked out. Both sides having been through with shadow boxing they dug in deep for

trench warfare. Each determined to defend an inch of their position. This ultimately led to a stalemate that lasted for nearly the first two decades of missionization. In a quintessence of classic cultural resistance Abatirichi like a besieged tortoise retreated deep into their shells of age-group membership. Defending from this impregnable edifice, Abatirichi remained conservative, insular, and aloof for the first two decades of Christian missionization. They gave value only to their age-group and ethnic membership. They sometimes accepted new concepts but this was after a lengthy process of deliberation and reflection, because they frowned against diverging from customs regulated by the sanctity of *idumi* oaths and native religion.

Commenting on the factors which led to the slow response of Abatirichi to Christian missionization, Sangree (1966:120) opined that there are two factors propagated by missionaries which could explain Abatirichi resistance to Christianity. The first factor was that Abatirichi were not a “tribe” at all during the pre-Christian times “...but simply a riffraff of outcasts from other Abaluyia groups from the West and the North” In other words this assertion implies that even before European contact Abatirichi were a relatively truculent and disorganised group. The second explanation is that Abatirichi held on “...to their special brand of depraved circumcision rites with an obstinacy characteristic of those who are slow to learn”. It is the contention of this thesis that the first explanation provided by Sangree is very wrong and contrary to historical facts. It presents ethnic groups as fossilised and rigid entities. Yet in truth ethnic groups are fluid entities which are in a constant process of negotiation and re-negotiation of their own identity. They are very dynamic living entities whose continuity depend on their ability to accommodate and assimilate elements from very

far and wide (Ogot 2005:107). On the other hand the first part of his second explanation is very true: that Abatirichi held on their circumcision culture dearly. But whether sticking to ones tradition relentlessly is a character of those who are slow to learn is purely subjective to the writer.

It is the submission of this study that the slow response of Abatirichi and Kalenjiin groups to Christianity is to be traced to the age-graded circumcision culture. *Idumi* was the central nerve of Abatirichi culture. It bequeathed Abatirichi men with a whole set of customs, attitudes, and statuses and social responsibilities all determined by their age grades. Circumcision, therefore, was the basis of ethnic identity and unity. Every initiated male felt allegiance to his age-group came before any other form of affiliation either internal or introduced (Sangree 1962b:72).

While commenting on the Nandi who also staged a very strong cultural resistance against Western culture and Christianity, Gimode strongly argued that it was the effects of the Nandi resistance against colonial rule that could effectively explain the reason behind their slow response to Christianity. Pushing his argument to its limits he submits that by the second decade of the 20th century the Nandi were of all the ethnic groups of Western Kenya to be least touched by Christianity and Western Culture because “.....the consequences of the resistance left a very hostile mind set among the Nandi against whites.” 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. “Indeed, the Nandi made up for what they had lost during the war by staging a cultural resistance that poured scorn on Western cultural

trappings” for example, the use of the ox-drawn plough and boiling of milk (Gimode 2003:287).

Gimode presents as if the Anglo-Nandi confrontation was the only war which the Nandi had fought and lost in their history. As a matter of fact, the Nandi lived in the pre-colonial period where right was determined by might. Their history is replete with instances of lost battles. For example, they had been humbled severally by the bellicose and superior eastern neighbours, the Uasin-Gishu Maasai. Yet these military set-backs were never internalised as grudges in the Nandi psyche. In fact, the opposite is very true. Nandi “...history is illustrative of Maasai impact” (Sutton 1968:163). The Nandi came to incorporate Maasai clans into their stock and assimilated various cultural trappings from the Maasai which came to sit at the very core of their political and religious organisation, for instance, the Orkoiyotship (Mwanzi 1972:132).

Although the explanation by Gimode is plausible in explaining the Nandi resistance to Western culture on a localised area, however, it does not explain the resistance of other Kalenjiin groups against Christianity and Western culture for example the Terik (Gimode 2003:236) and the Marakwet Kalenjiin clusters in the Kerio-Valley Complex (Kipkorir 2008:28). His explanation to Nandi cultural resistance is contestable. With so subtle a gift of thought, with so rich a gift of intellectual awareness which enabled him to disentangle the syncretic development of religion in Western Kenya’s religious complex, from the labyrinth of cultural encounters and interactions, Gimode certainly failed over this issue. The slow response of Kalenjiin communities in general and Abatirichi in particular to Christianity should be traced to

the secret age-graded circumcision culture and its attendant customs which impinged upon those who had gone through it. To be very fair to Gimode he somehow vaguely touches on the chief issue of contention. He submits that AIM missionaries singled out certain aspects of Nandi culture for condemnation. They were opposed to circumcision and polygamy, especially, female circumcision. In his explanation Gimode presents the circumcision issue as secondary to the effects of the Nandi resistance. Therefore, to him, circumcision was an after-issue "...that aggravated an already bad situation" (Gimode 2003:289). Yet this was not the case. Perhaps Huntingford writing on the origins GAS Kapsabet in 1925 gives the most accurate and emphatic reason behind the Nandi in particular and the general Kalenjin cultural resistance to Christianity. He wrote:

Till 1924 the Nandi attitude was said to be hostile to Education of any kind. What happened to frighten them was Christian religion on the grounds that it would interfere with certain of their customs for example circumcision whose importance of which in the tribe cannot be overestimated. 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 in order 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).

For the Abatirichi just like the Nandi-Terik the central issue of contention between FAIM missionaries and them was the secret age-graded circumcision culture or *idumi*. Circumcision was not only of enormous importance to the organisation and

maintenance of both warfare and peace time activities. It was also the principal symbolic basis of ethnic identity and unity. It is not, therefore, surprising that Abatirichi disliked missionaries for their attempts to discourage and block circumcision. The attempt by FAIM missionaries to hit hard on this edifice of indigenous culture put the two groups at loggerheads and set the stage for a very fierce and bruising battle of cultures and cosmologies. It is this battle of cosmologies that we turn to as we explore the spread of Christianity in Tiriki.

4.4 Missionary approach in proselytisation of Abatirichi

What emerges clearly from the outset is that Friends missionaries followed the policy of trying to induce British appointed chiefs to send their sons to learn to read and write and hear the Christian message. Several Abaluyia chiefs certainly encouraged by British authorities sent their own sons to Kaimosi to live and learn. Joseph Ngaira from Idakho is the foremost outstanding Abaluyia who was sent to the mission through such an arrangement. FAIM through the British backed administration induced Abatirichi chiefs Mujera, Isiaho, Isalano and Mushenye to send their sons to learn at Kaimosi (Herbert & Beatrice 2002:14). However, all evidence indicates that Abatirichi leaders were adamant to send their own sons to live and learn among aliens and strangers. This is because the only Tiriki man who is believed to have entered Kaimosi mission station through such an arrangement is Joshua Dungu who was sent to the Kaimosi mission station by his elder brother, headman Mushenye of Tiriki west (Shisanya 2014:O.I).

During the first two decades of Christian missionization Christianity completely failed to appeal to the adult male Tiriki population. Indeed, in the first 25 years of

Christian missionary activities very few people except those excluded from the Tiriki age groups were attracted by mission church membership. The adult male population were overtly proud of their culture “.....very difficult and unresponsive to proselytisation” (KNA, PC/NZA 1/3 1907-1908). In other words the majority of early Christians converts were community outcasts, aliens, women escaping uncongenial husbands and children wooed by food and clothing or sent by their parents to work in mission coffee plantation for money or sometimes to attend school. It is this cohort of the socially marginal who gave missionaries a chance to convert them (Sangree 1962a:19). Although the Abatirichi social structure based on age-graded age-sets rendered itself impregnable to alien culture, it however carried within its bowels the seeds of its own destruction. By insisting on initiated male membership alone into the age-graded social structure the society isolated a great chunk of its population. That is women and children. The tentative manner in which women and children were integrated in the traditional age-graded social structure provided the deepest fault lines in the traditional cultural armour that could be exploited by missionaries to missionize Abatirichi. This will become apparent later in this chapter.

This first generation of Christian converts played a dominant role in the missionary goal of destroying Abatirichi culture and religion as part of their role in the process of missionization. They belonged to the socially marginalized cohort who had nothing to gain by joining the rest of Abatirichi to reject the alien religion and domination. In the newly introduced Western religion and culture these men saw opportunities of better lives as allies of missionaries. Fired up by the new cosmology,

power and social positions this cohort came to play a very dominant role, than even that of European missionaries in the spread of Christianity.

They were very few in number during the first two decades of missionization but they were later joined by Abatirichi of good age-group standing to form a formidable Christian army. They increased gradually over the subsequent years from a small beleaguered band of poorly educated readers to an expanding corps of catechists, teachers and evangelists settling in villages and hamlets. Among the Abatirichi these people were referred to as *Abasomi* or the readers or just the Christians, *Abakristayo*. But the most preferred eponym was *Abasomi*. Like mailed horsemen in medieval Europe, *Abasomi* were *corps d' elite* whose primary objective was to fight and vanquish the traditional establishment and win for Christ converts. Their reward was religious chivalry in eternal salvation (FGD Kaimosi 7th Dec 2014). There are so many people who cut such figures of converts among the Abaluyia like Yohana Amugune of the Logooli and Chief Joseph Mulama of central Buluyia. But probably the best example who epitomised such a personality among the Tiriki was Chief Paulo Amiani Khwa Murambi. For purposes of this study we shall now explore the role played by Chief Amiani Khwa Murambi in the spread of Christianity in Tiriki.

4.5 The role played by Chief Amiani in the spread of Christianity among Abatirichi c. 1924-1946.

Although the rate of Abatirichi conversion to Christianity increased during the third decade of the 20th century when Amiani Khwa Murambi was appointed to be chief of Tiriki location, it still lagged behind that of Isukha, Idakho and Logooli. However,

the conversion of Chief Amiani to Christianity in 1927 marked a new chapter in the history of Christian proselytisation of Abatirichi. Indeed, from the time of Amiani's conversion in 1927 and the remaining years of his chieftaincy Amiani remained the principal Christian leader as well as a temporal chief. Therefore, the account of the spread of Christianity among the Tiriki from the time of Amiani's conversion to Quakerism to the time of his retirement in 1946 can be presented elaborately and economically by being interwoven in the sketch of Amiani's political and religious career as a Christian chief (Sangree 1966:128).

Amiani was born in Tiriki west among the Abadura clan. He was circumcised the traditional way and initiated into the Chiminyigei age-group around 1905. Before his political career Amiani served as a messenger delivering messages to and from Kisumu to the district headquarters in Mumias. In 1911 Amiani was unanimously elected to serve as a headman of Tiriki west in a public Baraza at Gisambayi attended by the Kavirondo P.C John Ainsworth to succeed his cousin Headman Isalano. In 1913 Amiani was made the chief of the newly established Tiriki west location. He served in this position for eleven years before being appointed to serve as the chief of the amalgamated Tiriki location in 1924 (Simani 2005:6).

By this time Amiani was a young man renowned for his great physical stature and forceful manner of executing his decisions. He ruled with vigour and dash. The "...color and forcefulness of Amiani were such that he left an impression of power and legality on the minds of European administrators and Africans of North Nyanza second only to that of paramount chief Mumia." (Simani 2005:6). Indeed, Amiani was the right

Chief for the right people who were rated by the British Administrators as “.....very difficult to handle and thoroughly unattractive lot” (KNA/NN1/1 1909). By the time Amiani was appointed as the chief of Tiriki West, he was illiterate. Thus in 1921 Amiani decided to spend a half a year at Kaimosi mission station to learn how to read and write. However, all this time he remained a traditionalist to the core. He was reputed to have had thirty wives all of whom he kept together in a large compound at his homestead in Gisambayi. The Quakers built a church near his compound at Gisambayi and relentlessly continued to curry his favour. In 1927 their efforts were rewarded when Amiani formally joined the Friends church. Amiani seized the new religion with alacrity and immediately launched a massive campaign against traditional Abatirichi culture. The chief led the war by example. He pensioned all of his wives except one during the decade following his conversion to Christianity (Sangree 1966:128).

Amiani’s actions and policies towards Abatirichi indigenous culture after his conversion to Christianity helped to fan into a full conflagration the smouldering embers of resentment by Abatirichi over mission attitude towards *idumi*. The flames from this inferno leaped across the location igniting inflammable materials and wielding Abatirichi of different age-groups and ranks into a single violent mass of indignation. This led to a full blown traditional-Christian factional split to come into being. The bifurcation of the community came into being earnestly in 1920 when a Tiriki initiated young man was inveigled by missionaries into revealing initiation rituals and oaths during the Friends quarterly meeting at Malava in Kabras. In 1927 more Tiriki initiated men almost certainly with missionary encouragement revealed initiation oaths and

rituals to a Friends quarterly meeting held at Kaimosi which included women, children and non-Abatirichi. It is not very clear whether Amiani was part of this meeting but certainly he supported their actions. This is because immediately after that he ordered the excision of circumcision shrines or *tsikapnyoje* in the location (Sangree 1966:129).

His orders to cut down circumcision groves were carried out in Northern Tiriki where Amiani himself lived and had served as a headman before being made a chief. The political leaders of Tiriki East responding to the universal sense of outrage by circumcision ritual elders and the community refused to dare the supernatural, by raping the sacred groves. Amiani and the Friends wanted to abolish Abatirichi secret circumcision entirely and replace it with adolescent circumcision accompanied by minimum seclusion period and rituals. In this gesture Amiani had touched the Tiriki nation on its raw nerve and completely overestimated his ability to cope with the consequent reaction. Therefore, when the 1927 circumcision period actually began the traditionalists employed terrorist insurgent tactics they had employed in the previous circumcision period of 1920. However, this time round the violence escalated several notches higher. In the weeks which followed Christian converts were severely beaten, a number of Christian girls who worked at Kaimosi mission were thoroughly harassed and sons of Abatirichi Christians who professedly did not want their sons to go through the traditional initiation culture were kidnapped for circumcision. The wave of violence crested in the burning of the homes of two Christian converts who had publicly violated initiation sacred oaths and the burning of a Friends out-post church at Maguji in East Tiriki (Simani 2005:13). The location was literally tottering on the edge of civil war.

The scale of violence forced the North Kavirondo D.C J.F Hannige to rush to the location to restore order. The D.C declared that from 1927, thenceforth, all Christians should be circumcised either at the mission hospital or a shortened ceremony in the open, the decision being entirely at the discretion of the initiate and parents. While the traditionalists were allowed be circumcised according to their native secret customs uninhibited or interfered by missionaries (KNA/D.C/NN/1/9 1927). During the 1927 circumcision period the people of North Tiriki had to turn to the circumcision groves in Nyang'ori among the Terik for their circumcision rituals. However as a result of the DCs edict *tsikapnyonje* which had been cut down under the orders of Amiani were left to rejuvenate and by 1950s they had come into full use again (Ayodi O.I 2015).

The pronouncement by the DC stopped the open violence between Abatirichi Christians and traditionalists. But it never lessened the emotional feelings of righteous wrath Abatirichi circumcised population felt against those who had flagrantly violated initiation oaths by revealing then to women children and the non-Tiriki. Such a betrayal of *idumi* oaths automatically evokes certain supernatural sanctions that bring brings a skin itch disease, loss of fortune and absolute lack of wit. This condition is collectively referred to as *khubenyekha*. Yet it was also within the prerogative of the elders to call upon the supernatural to punish the traitors of *idumi*. Thus in 1927 the ritual elders deemed it propitious, on this occasion, to pronounce a collective curse (*khunyeka*) on the violators of *idumi*. During the 1927 initiation period a meeting was held in one of the circumcision groves where those who had violated circumcision oaths were collectively cursed. The elders singled out Chief Amiani as the prime focus of their wrath because Amiani was the oldest culprit. Amiani was a member of the *Chiminyigei*

age-group which in 1927 was being graded as senior warriors. All the other violators of *idumi* rituals were *Nyonji* then the principal warrior grade or *Mayina* age group which was still open to circumcision. Secondly, Amiani had the political and judicial backing of the British and had misused his power to order the denigration of circumcision shrines and sacred oaths (FGD Kaimosi 7th 2014).

After this initial cursing ritual in the sacred forest, *idumi* ritual elders gathered at the border of Kaimosi mission station. In unison they recited the names of those who had violated *idumi* oaths including that of Chief Amiani and wished their souls a speedy demise at the bottom of Lake Victoria. A public curse of this nature did not carry with it the weight of disease or death, but of complete ostracism of the victim from the society. It was a very serious proclamation of the intention to withhold from the accused the favour and services all Abatirichi of good social standing. In fact, it was a public announcement to the community and the culprit that, thenceforth, the victim was *persona non grata* to all members of the community (Budiya O.I 2014).

Yet Abatirichi converts who were cursed were not able to repent their actions. They found support from FAIM missionaries and through the new Christian beliefs they had come to profess and "...through the British backed political assistance of their fellow outcast Amiani." Plus the moral support of each other they were able to lead quite satisfactory lives without recourse or dependency on their erstwhile traditional relations (Sangree 1966:132). It seems very accurate to conjecture that Amiani's effort to discredit and end *idumi* was motivated by his enthusiastic embrace of the new

religion than from a pre-meditated and well calculated personal vendetta against the indigenous cultural establishment.

This is explained by the fact that all major steps in Amiani's life indicate that he was not a man to do things in halves. For instance, during the inter-war period Amiani had acquired a white horse and then a touring car both of which succumbed to the environment, the former to disease and the later to poor roads. These are just two clear indications of his tendency to be drawn to the dramatic with very little concern about the cost of the consequences (Sangree 1966:133). However, this time round Amiani had clearly underestimated the degree to which ritual elders would react to his violation of *idumi* and overestimated his ability to cope with any objections that he could face. By attacking *idumi*, Amiani had taken the community's culture by the jugular. And the community reacted in a reflex action to save the central nerve of their being, through open violence and invoking the supernatural. This reaction forced Amiani, for once, to be caught by a guilty conscience. Therefore, in 1930 Amiani pleaded for reconciliation and paid a very heavy indemnity before being forgiven and reinstated to his *Chiminyigei* age group (Ayodi: O.I: 2014).

Amiani resigned from the Friends church to join the Salvation Army. The incident which prompted Amiani to switch his religious allegiance is both amusing and revealing of Amiani's selfness. The Quakers were building a church at Munzatsi not very far away from Amiani's compound at Gisambayi and Amiani was contributing the largest portion of the money towards the project. During the roofing of the church an altercation ensued between Amiani and Fred Hoyt, a Friends missionary who for many

years had been in charge of industrial and building programmes at Kaimosi. The dispute was whether four or six cross beams were to be used to roof the Munzatsi Friends church. Amiani favoured six cross beams and reminded the missionary that he was the main sponsor of the project. Hoyt on his part insisted that he knew his job as a builder and that he would hoist the roof with four beams. Hoyt's physique and temper almost matched that of Amiani and the two giants nearly came to blows. The matter was resolved by the D.C at Kakamega who sided with Amiani since he was footing the bill of construction. So the Friends church at Munzatsi was constructed with six cross beams. Thereafter, Amiani switched religious loyalty from the Quakers to the Salvation Army citing Hoyt's insolence as the reason (Sangree 1966:134).

Once Amiani joined the Salvation Army he threw himself into its activities with his usual vigor. He convinced most of his head men, police men and other employees to join the Salvation Army. In the succeeding decade following Amiani's switch to S.A he did much to aid the establishment and the growth of a very strong Salvation Army congregation among Abatirichi, Logooli, Abanyang'ori and Abanyole. Through his sponsorship a large church was constructed at Jimamoyi to serve as the Headquarters of Salvation Army activities in North Nyanza. Amiani traveled far and wide to both participate in Salvation Army training programmes in Nairobi and other towns and to help organise Salvation Army activities in other areas throughout Western Kenya (Sangree 1966: 134).

As a Christian chief Amiani did everything to aid the establishment of strong Christian community. In the 1930s Amiani started handing rulings on the matter of beer

brewing. Using his powers he relieved all Christian women from beer preparation and fined for assault any husband who beat their Christian wives for refusing to brew beer. Customarily, it was a wifely duty to brew beer for the husband whenever he commanded. During the early years of missionization a number of women had been beaten for refusing to prepare beer for their traditional husbands following missionary admonition. This was quite in keeping with Abatirichi tradition that a husband should administer severe, but not crippling, punishment to his wife for breach of traditional duties towards him. This continued until Amiani's intervention. The response of the women to Amiani's ruling was first cautious but when time passed and it was seen that fined husbands turned elsewhere, for beer, a few more women risked and received beatings. Still, Amiani continued to confirm his ruling through similar jural decisions and soon a small group of Christian women gave up brewing of beer for their husbands.

As the situation stabilised among the Christians, wives started recruiting co-wives into the church. Soon the whole Abatirichi womenfolk and their children were flowing into one Pentecostal church or another and a few to Catholicism. This law had a very negative effect on indigenous culture that Abatirichi artists and bards in an extraordinary outburst of intellectual artistic energy composed with unparalleled frankness and fervour songs which chastised the Chief's conduct (FGD Kaimosi 7th Jan 2014). One of those songs went as:

Khali Amiani wa khuchonjola even Amiani has hit us hard

Woo muchonjole let us retaliate

This edict against beer brewing by women and the loose manner in which the Abatirichi womenfolk and children were integrated into the age-groups and age-grades of the society provided the avenue through which Christianity entered Tiriki. It allowed women more participation in church activities because they paid no allegiance to age-groups. They were also freed from the drudgery of beer brewing. Thus, it can be submitted accurately that Christianity ultimately swept the reticent Abatirichi through it being “.....embraced by the principal adult uninitiated ethnic segment – the women and children” (Sangree 1966:136). Amiani’s support of missionary testimony against alcohol and anti-circumcision policies helped to trigger mainstream Christian conversion such that by the time of his retirement in 1946 he had created a firm launching pad for the establishment of Christianity in Tiriki.

4.6 The missionary war against native religious concepts expressed in funeral rituals

As already noted in previous our chapters, ancestor veneration formed the hub of Abatirichi religion as they settled into Western Kenya. It was also the bulwark of the religious concepts which undergirded funeral rituals. Missionaries had come to this realisation that they launched a major assault against this religious phenomenon. Ayodi remembers that missionary societies working among Abatirichi embarked on a concerted campaign to annihilate the ancestor cult. The missionary preached strongly against this belief which they termed pejoratively as animistic and satanic. They physically accompanied converts to their homes to uproot the homestead ancestral shrine *ulusambwa* (Ayodi 2015:O.I). Among the FAIM the campaign started from Kaimosi mission station radiating outward towards into Ibulukhoba and Ibumbo and

other areas surrounding the mission. The efforts by FAIM were spearheaded by Arthur Chilson who led Christian converts into abandoning *ulusambwa* (Merrit 1976:210). Among the Roman Catholics at Kaptechi MHM priest waged a crusade against this religious belief and termed it as absolutely satanic. Led by Catholic priests Abatirichi converts uprooted ancestral shrines in their homes (FGD Kaimosi 7th Dec 2015).

In relation to obsequies as an integral component of Tiriki religion of ancestor veneration, missionaries took issue with its various accompanying practices. Missionaries categorically singled out the indigenous practice of extensive wailing during the course of mourning, the burial of naked corpses, the practise of keeping corpses for several days before burial and the cattle drive dances. They taught strongly against beer drinking regardless of the idea that beer was an integral element in funeral rituals among the Abatirichi. Missionaries, particularly the Quakers, campaigned strongly against intensive weeping, as a sign of mourning the loss of a loved one. Instead they insisted on gentle, dignified and controlled mourning. Abatirichi Christians remember that Missionaries admonished against these native practices. Missionaries categorically refused to officiate in funeral rituals of Christian converts where coffins were not provided for the corpse, or where the corpse was kept for several days before burial as was the general traditional Tiriki practise. They considered these practices as “uncivilised” and unhygienic (Manoa 2015:O.I). Even worse, cattle drive dances (*shilemba*) was labelled as satanic with “.....very harsh and discordant noises which characterised heathendom” (Herbert & Beatrice 2002:18).

This anti-ancestral cult campaign shook Abatirichi indigenous ontology to its tap roots such that by the 1950s the physical manifestation of the ancestor cult in the shape of ancestral shrine was completely destroyed. However, the religious concept underpinning the ancestral cult stressing the omnipotent and omnipresent power of ancestral spirits remained potent, vivid and real. Ancestors were recognised as powerful and ever-present by both Christian and traditional Abatirichi. In fact, the veneration of ancestral spirits manifested itself clearly in Christian rituals surrounding funeral, as late as 1990s, and even to the present millennium. Christians still continued to name children after their ancestors, such that Tiriki-Christian children would have an English-Christian name and a Tiriki ancestral name (*ingulikho*).

4.7 The role of Christian villages in decimation of religious concepts articulated in Abatirichi mortuary culture

The most significant feature of Quaker missionization in Western Kenya was the establishment of Christian villages in mission stations and outposts. The other mission stations which operated among the Tiriki were not strongly characterised by this feature. These villages were the most lethal weapon in the missionary arsenal employed to decimate African culture among the Abaluyia groups within FAIM's sphere of influence (Shilaro 1991:126). The villages were established by those who had been converted to Christianity. Such villages composed of a school building also used for church services and residential houses which were arranged in a linear manner as opposed to the traditional circular arrangement. Hence they acquired the name *laini* or *mulaini* in reference to their linear arrangement. The families which lived in these villages formed a Christian community which lived according to Western Christian

principles. “Heathen practices such as beer drinking, dancing and playing of local music were not tolerated.” They were severely punished for not observing Victorian values like keeping their bodies and houses spotlessly clean (Ogot 2003:15).

Those in the Christian villages were the “civilised” readers or *Abasomi* as opposed to the “uncivilised” living in the dark. These villages were meant to insulate Christian converts against harmful pagan practices of their clansmen. These villages isolated converts from traditional set-up where “...the force and pull of paganism was very strong and Christian teaching became mingled with superstition leading to heresies” (Shilaro 1991:126). In regard to funeral rituals a cemetery was set aside in Christian villages. At the Kaimosi mission station the cemeteries were established at Hamatubwe along the Mulundu-Imaganda road and at Chebuchirwachi near the present Safaricom booster. This cemetery was meant to make converts to carry out their obsequies without influence from traditional culture. In this new mortuary culture extensive wailing was admonished while corpses were wrapped in sheets and clothing before being buried in coffins.

This feature of Christian villages was strongly established among the Logooli, Isukha, Idakho and the Kabras. In fact, among the Logooli it persisted to as late as the 1950s (Gimode 2003:244). What appears very clearly is that Christian villages played a less significant role in the history of mission Christianity among the Tiriki. From the onset of establishment of missions Abatirichi had entered into an antagonistic relationship with missionaries especially FAIM because of the latter’s hard line stand against their circumcision culture. This antagonism escalated into a full blown war

when missionaries inveigled Abatirichi youths to reveal the sacred circumcision oaths. The terrorist tactics employed against Christian converts started earnestly in 1920 and persisted throughout missionary life. These violent skirmishes prevented the establishment of Christian villages in remote areas of Tiriki where their security was not guaranteed. Therefore, Abatirichi remember Kaimosi mission station as FAIM principal Christian village which housed Christian converts within Tiriki.

4.8 Summary

In this chapter we have examined the encounter and interaction between indigenous Abatirichi culture and Christianity. We began by painting a sketch of the history of the development of Christianity in order to show that syncretism is a global phenomenon. We also demonstrated that Christianity entered Africa in a spirit of antagonism and conquest which led to a conflict with indigenous Abatirichi culture. The Tiriki culture which took center stage in this stalemate was religion centered on ancestor worship and the secret circumcision culture (*idumi*). We have demonstrated that missionary anti-*idumi* attitude explains the slow response of Abatirichi to Christianity. Yet we have made evident the methods used by missionary societies to proselytise Abatirichi and their response to Christianity. In line with our theoretical formulation, we have presented this period (1902-1930) as the period of probation and ferment in the symbolic interaction between Christianity and Abatirichi indigenous culture. This period was characterised by cultural shock and resistance by Abatirichi. During this phase of severe identity crisis, the Abatirichi interrogated Christianity using symbols developed in their own culture. This process of symbolic reinterpretation would inevitably lead to maturity when the two cultures would engage in a process of

give-and-take that would eventually lead to hybridisation. And this is what we intend to examine as we explore the syncretisation of Christianity and native Tiriki mortuary culture in our next chapter.

5.0. CHAPTER FIVE: THE HYBRIDIZATION OF INDIGENOUS TIRIKI CULTURE WITH WESTERN CHRISTIANITY c. 1930-1960

5.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to demonstrate the process of the development of a syncretic religion as expressed in the mortuary culture of Abatirichi from 1930-1960. As we have already demonstrated in our previous chapter, Abatirichi interrogation of Christianity began at the outset of the establishment of missionary stations. Therefore, analysing these chapters under the symbolic interactionism theory, we have presented the period between 1902 and 1930 as a phase of intense symbolic cultural interactionism between indigenous Tiriki religion and Christianity which manifested itself in the form of a cultural clash and resistance. This was a period of cultural ferment. Abatirichi interrogated Western Christianity based on symbols developed in their culture. By the 1930s symbolic interaction had reached its maturity. Therefore the period from 1930 to 1960 was characterised by the renegotiation of Abatirichi's religious cultural identity. Abatirichi began to appropriate, what they considered, the best aspects from Christian culture and fused them with their previous beliefs which led to Tirikization of Christianity. This chapter, therefore, seeks to show this development of cultural syncretism as epitomised by the development of independent church movements. This hybridisation of religion inevitably led to the development of hybridised funeral culture, which this chapter also seeks to make evident.

5.2 The syncretising dialectic between indigenous Abatirichi religion and Christianity

The history of the introduction, development and spread of Christianity in Tiriki is a stunning account of a very fierce battle of cultures and cosmologies, contrary to the Christian-triumphalism narrative often deployed by missiologists. This narrative propagates a negative propaganda of a powerful Christian cosmology overwhelming and supplanting a weak Abatirichi ontology. The chief proponents of this narrative disseminate the false idea that Christianity faced no antagonism when first presented to Abatirichi except in those areas where there was formal acceptance of Mohammedanism. The relative “.....openness of the minds of African people made it possible for rapid expansion of the Christian movement” (Painter 1966:11). Painter further opined that by the end of the first decade of the 20th century Abatirichi religion was completely decimated. To him there was no place for the old sacrifices and incantations because their fears had been “....dissolved by the alchemy of love” of Jesus Christ (Painter 1966:11).

However, enquiries into the religious history of Western Kenya paint a very different picture. Indeed, literature attests the endurance of Abatirichi indigenous religion during the colonial and deep into the post colonial period. Research further proves that it was from Abatirichi that Christianity received its greatest resistance despite Kaimosi Mission Station being located among the Tiriki (Sangree 1962a:11). Abatirichi had been heavily influenced by the Nandi-Terik from whom they adopted the age-graded circumcision system which came to occupy the very center of their culture. This ritual circumcision culture and its attendant customs proved to be the greatest

impediment to the spread of Christianity, such that it was not until the end of the second decade of the 20th century that Christianity began to catch up with them.

There was convergence of very many factors which led to spiritual and secular cracks on the traditional Abatirichi cultural armour, especially, by the 1930s. But this should not be confused as an absolute surrender of Abatirichi culture. The triumphalist narrative which depicts an easy success of Christianity is absolutely baseless. It presents Abatirichi as a people who lived in the dark. Slowly, then, the softening influence of Christianity supposedly converted these “primitives” to the milder habits of “civilisation” and out of the vigour that missionaries infused in a moribund culture arose a new and powerful African church. This is a grand and rather satisfying panorama which fits neatly into the biblical pre-conceptions about sin, punishment, the fall from grace and the eventual redemption. But it is largely false. It depicts the encounter and confrontation between Christianity and Abatirichi cosmology in terms of zero-sum games where the winner takes it all. This approach in reporting missionization is completely misguided and should be revisited. The correct conceptualisation of the encounter between Christianity and Abatirichi indigenous culture is that of syncretism.

Statistics show that before the First World War Christians numbered a minor figure of the entire Tiriki population. However, by the close of the 1920s enthusiasm for Western culture was evident among the people as evidenced by the proliferation of schools and churches in the area. Sangree (1966:270) correctly observed that schools started to crop up even in the most conservative northern section of Tiriki dominated by the ultra-reactionary Abambo, Abalukhoba and Abalukhombe clans. This area was

considered as an impregnable fortress of Tiriki culture. By the 1950s Abatirichi were literally scrambling for schooling. The figure below shows the rise in schools in Tiriki by the 1950s.

Table 2.0: The number of primary schools in Tiriki location by 1954

Missionary sponsor	Aided schools	Un-aided schools	Total for each mission
FAIM	9	4	13
Salvation Army	2	6	8
PAOC	6	3	9
M.H.M	2	2	4
Combined Pentecostal missions	1	0	1
Total	20	15	35

(Adopted from Sangree 1966:146)

From the 1930s all the way into the 1950s massive figures of church and school attendance began to appear in Tiriki mission records. Mission records burn with their presence but they are conspicuously silent of their motives. Therefore, the key question is should this influx in school and church attendance be equated with actual conversion and absolute change of religious orientation of natives? This question cannot be answered in the affirmative without serious reservations. In fact the "...first generation of these mission products became rebels, drunkards and religiously indifferent if not

hostile to the church as soon as they got out of its grips” (Waruta1993:117). Gimode actually warns of the distorting image given by statistics of conversions, baptism, confirmations and church attendance. The fact that Abatirichi scrambled for education during the inter-war period should not be confused for them abandoning their culture wholesale. The aspirations of the natives seemed to be very different to those of the missionaries. Just as the missionaries used the school bait to enable them proselytise Abatirichi, they equally used missionaries to get what they needed most from them, education (Gimode 2003:257). FAIM field report correctly captured this situation. It stated that the “...effect of the mission on the native population generally was undoubtedly good. The mission boys were generally better dressed and more intelligent than their heathen brothers”. However, it questioned whether they were better Christians (EAYMF 1918-1919, DC/NN/1/2.KNA)

There was resistance to Christianity from indigenous Abatirichi culture right from the outset of missionization. The very few Abatirichi that were converted to Christianity came from the socially marginal cohorts. This group was subjected to rejection and great ridicule. They were considered as cowards and failures in the standards of the traditional society. Generally, Abatirichi were very antagonistic to their kinsmen who were converted to Christianity. They conducted traditional funeral rituals on Christian converts despite the fact that missionaries had disapproved their native obsequies. The best account of the spread of Christianity in Tiriki is that of hybridisation. Mkhize paints this picture accurately when writing on the spread of religion among the Amakhosa of the Eastern Cape. He maintains that religions have to negotiate and dialogue during the process of encounter and interactions (Mkhize

1999:113). A dialogue that is based on the premise that religions “.....are not mutually exclusive entities which replace each other during the process of religious change, but a person’s or a community’s religious experience has to be taken in itself and within its own setting” (Walls 1990:145).

Therefore, the introduction of Christianity in Tiriki at the turn of the 20th century did not supplant and erase the indigenous cosmology. But rather, Abatirichi adopted the new faith and added it to the stock pile of historically accumulated religious perspectives. Contrary to the portrait painted of easy triumph in some literature Abatirichi religion was never exterminated. As they became converts they interpreted the old religion in the light of the new cosmology. The end result was that they developed a syncretic cosmology which was neither wholly indigenous nor wholly exotic but essentially hybrid.

Perhaps the most appropriate summary of the encounter between Abatirichi indigenous culture and Christianity is the general description provided by Were (1973:1). He opined that African religion was neither static nor devoid of the capacity to change. It was subjected to ruthless and systematic onslaught by Christianity and Western Civilisation. Christianity threatened its very foundation and validity. But the former neither yielded fundamentally nor resisted indiscriminately and therefore managed to survive. This supposition is correct in relation to the religious concepts which surround Abatirichi funeral rituals. They literally stretch from the pre-colonial period through the colonial to the present millennium. The religious concepts expressed in funeral rituals managed to survive by being flexible and very adaptable during the

Christian age. The resilience of this culture was borne of the fact that Tiriki religion was lived and not preached. In fact deeply rooted practices which graced Abatirichi funeral rituals and life in general were thought to be religiously sanctioned.

Abatirichi converts thus adopted those aspects of Christianity which were acceptable to the traditional way of life and successfully modified them to suit their local interests. They selected and adopted certain elements of Christianity which they fractured, restated in new terms endowed with new meaning and assembled in a way that made sense and gave significance to their cultural point of view. Indigenous religion could not be eradicated because it was deeply ingrained in their psyche. It was lived everyday through customs, rituals and practices.

Christian converts, therefore, lived in two worlds; the real world of traditional culture and religion and as well as the superficial but prestigious Christian life. They were Christians in the open but deeper in their hearts remained believers in their traditional religion. They went to church on Sundays but privately continued to venerate their ancestors through rituals especially those surrounding funerals. The outcome of this double life was the inability of one religion to supplant and triumph over the other. What followed was the specific instantiation of a middle path which brought the two worlds in the minds of converts to formulate syncretism. This passed for Abatirichi a Christian religion that was deeply hybrid as a result of combining aspects from the two cultures. The syncretic nature of the Christianity that was passed for Abatirichi was embodied in the independent church movements which cropped up in the mission field

in Western Kenya at around the end of the 1920s and at the turn of the 1930s (Wanakacha 1992:46).

5.3 Independent church movements as the embodiment of religious syncretism

Independent church movements in Western Kenya concretised during the 1930s. These movements were essentially cultural at the same time sociological. At their very core they represented African attempts to critique Christianity as introduced by missionaries. This phenomenon of separatism, however, can be explained by a multiplicity of factors which included domination of the church administration by Whites, conflicts between African customs and Western values, power wrangles among Africans and the desire “.....to adapt the Christian message to the African context” (Ballandier 1965:467). The concrete evidence of the independent movement emerged during the 1930s. However, this was a culmination of a long process of resistance that began as early as the first contact with missionaries. Truly, there had been an undercurrent of Abatirichi dissatisfaction with Christianity as it was delivered by missionaries. This disconnect was exacerbated by the manner in which they attacked and chastised Abatirichi mortuary customs and *idumi* from the time of contact. This initial impasse can be presented as the prophetic rumblings two decades before the thunder clap of a separatism storm that was drawing over the skyline of Kaimosi and other mission stations in the region.

The Abaluyia boldness of interrogating Western Christianity began when the bible was translated into the native Logooli dialect. This opened a totally new dimension in the manner in which they perceived and understood Christianity. The

Abaluyia thus interpreted the new religion afresh in the light of the newly translated scriptures (Samita 1992:99). They “.....asked themselves mundane but thought provoking questions such as: what is Christianity divorced from the bible liturgy and catechism” (Ochieng’ 1977:13). Faced with this bewildering situation, Abaluyia began to inquire into the bible to trace where they had gotten it wrong. They came to the realisation which convinced them that Western Mission Christianity as a European hegemonic tool “....was a catastrophic departure from the bible” (Gimode 2003:299). Missionaries were part and parcel of the colonial enterprise. They were being used European powers as “.....pawns in the imperialist chess game, then as instruments of alienation by wilfully enticing Africans into accepting European ways of life all in the name of “civilisation”” (Aseka 1989:250).

Abaluyia confronted this stark contradiction between the Christian message and the messenger, the missionary. What followed automatically was their response. The most emphatic response to this contradiction was the formation of independent churches. Separatism, therefore, served as an avenue along which Abaluyia examined Christianity afresh. They interpreted it in their own cultural and historical context and eventually appropriated it as their own. During this process of symbolic interaction they chose the best values from the two heritages. The outcome of which was the formation of distinctively African churches very independent from missionary patronage. These churches epitomised and embodied the syncretisation of Christianity and indigenous Abaluyia mortuary culture.

This hybrid religion addressed their existential needs while still hinged on biblical teachings. These independent movements developed common but very peculiar characteristics which set them aside from mission based churches, and so defined their religiosity, key of which was a belief in free expression of the Holy Spirit. This belief established a charismatic pneumatological theology that encouraged a lifestyle like that of the Primitive Church during the Apostolic era. They allowed elements of spirit infilling or *glossolalia*, divine healing and developed distinct modes of dressing. They adorned long robes usually imprinted with luminous crosses and initials of each sect. Plus they wore head gears while men were allowed to wear long beards (Gimode 2005: 300). In mortuary culture these churches fused Christian and Abaluyia culture. This led to the development of syncretic obsequies. Among the independent church movements which operated among the Tiriki were the African Church of the Holy Spirit (ACHS) also called as *Lyahuka* church, the African Israel Church Nineveh (AICN), and later in the 1950s the African Divine Church (ADC) (FGD Kaimosi 7th Nov 2014).

5.4 Recasting Abatirichi funeral rituals under the light of Christianity by 1960

By the mid of the 20th century Sangree (1966:166) reported that Christianity was much more than an alternative and supplement to the traditional religious system. According to him it had succeeded the ancestor cult as the most predominant system of religious organisation. It was very clear that, though, the outward manifestation of the ancestor veneration through supplications at the homestead ancestral altar was over. This indigenous religious concept was not dead. In fact, one aspect of indigenous Abatirichi religion which retained its vitality throughout 20th and up to the 21st century is the concept of ancestor veneration through religious concepts expressed in funeral

rituals. Throughout the 20th century Abatirichi took meticulous care in mortuary rites of their dead, especially the elderly. As Christianity developed in the community on the surface it appeared as if the rituals related to ancestor veneration, especially those expressed in their mortuary rites, had been discarded and replaced with Christianity. But the actual fact was that those old beliefs were vivid and real under the crust of the new cosmology. The religious ideas expressed in funeral rituals had just been modified, re-organised and augmented by Christianity.

The resilience of African religious concepts expressed in funeral rituals is not entirely restricted to Abatirichi. It was an African phenomenon. Writing over the founding of Black America, Lerone (1966: 25) opined that religion in Africa was life “.....every event was charged with religious significance and the climax of life was death. This African attitude towards death survived the Atlantic crossing and took root in the Black American life”. For Abatirichi, the fundamental idea that undergirded the religious concepts expressed in funeral rituals was not to offend the spirits of the dead. If by chance they felt offended they would turn malevolent to haunt the living in the form of evil spirits or *binanyenzo*. However, when Christianity took root in the community this whole concept was re-interpreted and applied in the light of the new religion. By the mid of the 20th century Sangree (1966:169) correctly observed that most of the indigenous religious concepts expressed in Abatirichi obsequies persisted “....though largely clothed in Christian dogma and ritual”.

Abatirichi continued to exercise extreme care in conducting the funeral rituals of their dead, especially, the elderly to avoid offending them. In fact, the grave is still

referred to as *shirhindwa* or the guarded spot. As aboriginal custom dictated, death among the Tiriki, even during the Christian era, was announced by extensive wailing, sobbing and weeping. This wailing had a melodious, but melancholic tinge, interspersed with high pitched shrieks, screams and lamentations. Although missionaries admonished strongly against extensive weeping during funerals, this custom continued unabated, especially, in the Christian community. Wagner (1949:470), for instance, captures such a scene very vividly in a funeral of a Tiriki Christian woman as mourners cried moving around the corpse weeping in the following vein:

Yaa aha Amiru lelo alahunya yaa our sister will decay

Amiru alahunya yahaa our sister will decay

Yaaa aha Abasomi na mulole yaa Christians may you see

Mwana weru owwingi yaa aha (sic)our child is a lifeless heap

If death had occurred inside the house the corpse was left to spend the whole day in the house before it was taken out to the veranda the following day. The pastor of the church which the deceased belonged prayed for the body before it was taken out. If the deceased had met his death outside of the house the body was taken into the house where it was to spend one night. Then it was taken out to the eaves of the house. The pastor prayed for the body as it entered the house and at the time of being taken out. If the deceased had died in a major urban center like Nairobi or Eldoret the body had to spend at least one night in the compound when it was brought home for burial (Shisanya 2014:O.I).

On the first day of mourning members of the local church of the deceased organised and conducted a Christian service at the homestead of the deceased. In this fellowship meeting the widow's attendant or *mudili* was chosen. The Christian faithful of the deceased church hoisted the standard and the flag of their denomination in the compound very close to the casket stand. If the deceased belonged to any other Pentecostal churches except the Quakers, members of the church drummed and sung the whole night throughout the mourning period. This night musical extravaganza was called *mudibo*. During this nocturnal musical merriment traditional war and praise songs and Christian hymns were conducted. On the first day still, elders from the clan of the deceased lit the funeral ritual fire (*majenga*) at the front yard of the compound, just like in the aboriginal days as described in chapter two. During the entire mourning period relatives of the deceased arrived from various parts of the country. They announced their arrival by breaking into very loud cries from a considerable distance to the compound of the deceased. Once they reached the compound they sobbed in deep sorrow as they made their way to the corpse. Family members joined them in viewing the corpse and together they began singing a chosen Christian hymn. Often the hymn expressed profound sorrow and the nature of humans as transient guests in this planet (Khabugui 2015: O.I). For instance:

<i>Mushibala ndimucheni</i>	In this world am a transient guest
<i>Ndakhanyala khuifila</i>	I have finished my race
<i>Shijirha ndi nu bumenyoy</i>	Because I have another life
<i>Bumenyoy bu mwikulu</i>	A celestial form of existence

Njerherhanga, jerherhanga x2 (chorus) Iam returning, Iam returning x2

Wa likhutsa shi lila bao where there will be no death

This new Tiriki-Christian musical art not only gave expression to the divine and supernatural aspirations of Abatirichi Christian converts, but also to those transcendental realities which were the objects of their spiritual quest. The symbolism is intelligent, clear and subtle allowing for the intrusion of no pleasing sentiment or vacant naturalism. All words simplified, all reduced to essentials and all subordinated to the spiritual concept which was being conveyed.

As established by custom clan elders selected a sacrificial animal from the flock of the deceased or procured one from elsewhere. The sex of the animal was determined by the gender of the deceased as established in the native culture described in chapter two. The animal was supposed to be in good conditions without any deformities. A church elder prayed for the animal before it was killed terming it in tacit words such as food for the mourners. But the manner in which the animal was killed plainly revealed what Tiriki Christians sought to conceal, that it was a sacrifice. The piercing of the rumen (*shihu*), for instance, was treated with utmost care and respect, just like in native culture (Musalia 2015:O.I).

On the last night of mourning before burial, a clan elder marked the grave for digging. After this, a church minister offered prayers to bless the undertaking. Throughout the 20th century Christians have continued to be guided with the traditional cardinal rules in digging of graves. That is the graves must be dug at night and in the front yard of the compound of the deceased; unless the death had been caused by

circumstances which Abatirichi considered unnatural like thunder and lightning, drowning and intentional murder. Under such a circumstance the grave was dug in the backyard of the compound. By 1960s and throughout the 20th century Abatirichi could not allow their loved ones to be buried far away from their area of residence in areas such as cemeteries. This constituted a great taboo. If, for instance, a Tiriki man died before establishing a home while at work in an urban center, a hut was hurriedly constructed for him in the compound so that he could be buried in front of that hut. The striking of the sacred *lusiyo* tree in the ground during the construction of a house in the compound consecrated a place making it fit for burial. The FAIM established mission cemeteries in Kaimosi at Hamatubwe near Kaimosi junior primary and at Chebuchirwachi near the present Safaricom booster for burial of missionaries and African converts who died at the station (Manoa 2014:O.I). This was to avoid contamination of Christians with the indigenous “pagan” mortuary culture. However, Abatirichi cannot remember any instance when a Tiriki man was buried in these cemeteries. Such an act to them would constitute a great taboo or *mujiro* (FGD Kaimosi 7th Dec 2014).

During the Christian era the burial chambers that were created at the bottom of graves were eliminated through missionaries’ influence and partly due to regulations passed by the British for reasons of hygiene. By the mid of the 20th century these burial cavities under mission influence had been replaced by European coffins (Wagner 1970:469). Fundamentally Abatirichi Christians continued to keep the native custom of setting graves facing the eastern direction. This was in keeping with the native custom

of regarding the eastern direction and the rising of the sun as the symbol of health, wealth and prosperity.

On the day of burial a requiem mass was conducted in the out of doors of the compound of the deceased. In this mass a sermon, rounds of hymn singing predominated the proceedings. Relatives, friends, neighbours and administrators gave speeches which praised the deceased. This mass in effect served as a substitute to the traditional cattle drive dances which were conducted on this day of burial in Pre-Christian days.

After the mass the coffin of the deceased was draped with white sheets by close relatives of the deceased as they sang Christian elegies. These white sheets represented the love of the family, at the same time they symbolised holiness and expressed the hope of the deceased joining Jesus and the angels in heaven. The deceased was then walked around the compound to bid farewell. This practice was a direct acquisition from the Tiriki indigenous culture described in chapter two. The cortege strolled up to the gate or *shiribwa* as they sang Christian hymns into a crescendo. On the very occasion of burial the church minister read verses from the Christian scripture stressing on themes of resurrection as indicated in the epistles of Saint Paul, such as Corinthians 15: 20-28 or 35-49, or Thessalonians 4: 13-17, or John 11: 25-26 (FGD Kaimosi 7th Dec 2014).

The pastor read one verse from the bible and then allowed a lull in which relatives used to drop soil into the grave just like in the indigenous culture. Thereafter, the grave was filled with soil until it was raised into a mound a mid joyful yet

melancholic singing of the faithful. For Christians who had given birth to twins the grave was covered with grass stacks or *bisinda* so that it did not lie naked and exposed. This was following the traditional belief that the birth of twins brought a state of ritual impurity of *bukhwana*. Therefore, if the grave was left naked it could attract natural calamities, especially, thunder and lightning to strike the home. If a man was a renowned figure in the society a cattle drive dance was conducted soon after burial to honor his spirit. This was a shortened version of the indigenous *shilemba* dance.

Yet in keeping with indigenous customs Abatirichi Christians have continued to be guided by the religious concept guiding the burial of a pregnant woman. By the mid of the 20th century the belief that the burial of a pregnant woman with its foetus would spell doom to the society was still being kept by Abatirichi. They believed it would affect the fertility of the lineage and literally finish it. Deep into the Christian period when a woman died in pregnancy, Abatirichi had to operate on the woman to remove the foetus and womb. This load was then buried in a separate grave.

It was also believed among the Tiriki that every relative was supposed to attend the funeral of a kin. The deceased was thought to single out those who missed burials for haunting. They were haunted because they had showed indifference to the deceased. If a relative due to unavoidable circumstances was not able to attend the funeral, they were expected to visit the grave in person and address the deceased to tell them goodbye. This whole concept was maintained during the Christian period but it was deeply clothed in Christian ritual. By the mid of the 20th century Christians who had missed the funerals of their relatives while at work in urban centers would organise for

some time during leave from work to visit the grave. When they entered the compound they went straight to the grave. At the grave they were joined by the family members of the deceased. Together they sang a funeral hymn and said a prayer at the grave. This was the Christian version of showing respect to a dead relative.

5.5 Hybridisation of *idumi* and the development of syncretism in funeral rituals

As mentioned earlier in chapter four Abatirichi had come under increasing contacts with the Nandi-Terik such that by the 18th century they had acquired a unique style of ritual circumcision. This rite of passage was used to bequeath the community with age sets which were essential for the development of tribal unity and identity. As the Friends missionaries established themselves in Kaimosi they made Tiriki circumcision their special target for extermination on the premise that was uncivilised and unhygienic and morally corrupting (Meritt 1979:205).

This assault on *idumi* led to a cold blood between Quakers and Abatirichi. This conflict came to characterise their relationship for the rest of missionary life. During the first decade of Christian missionization, Abatirichi remained adamant against change. On the issue of circumcision they refused totally to give a hearing to the missionaries. To them it was completely not negotiable (Ayodi 2014 O.I). This cultural clash between missionaries and Abatirichi led to a very serious conflict which we have explained in the previous chapter.

Yet the breakthrough which instituted the Tiriki-Christian *idumi* as an integral part of Tiriki culture came in 1940. This year one of the hereditary initiation chiefs (*mudiriwukhum'matsi*) Sakwa khwa M'maitiwas converted to Christianity through the

Salvation Army. He rebelled against the traditional initiation elders because they refused to sponsor his first born son Lumbede khwa Sakwa to inherit his mantle because he had converted to Christianity. Of equal or even worse consequence was that his younger son Malongo Lisitsi had been kidnapped through the machinations of his mother, Damala Imbuitsi, for circumcision by Christians in 1935. Therefore, in 1940 Sakwa joined the Salvation Army and was baptised as Nuhu. Immediately *Abasomi* proclaimed him as the Christian initiation chief because of his pedigree (FGD Mungavo Nov 2014).

This gave Christians in Tiriki a sense of authenticity and identity with the rest of Abatirichi at the same time remaining Christians. Sakwa belonged to Balukhoba-Badengu clan which was recognised among Abatirichi as the house of *idumi*. He also belonged to the senior *Chiminyigei* age group and had risen to the position of chief initiation elder (*Mushebimukhulundu*). This made Sakwa the mediating factor which synthesised the purely indigenous Tiriki circumcision culture with Western Christianity. He supplied the traditional ritual and legitimacy which helped the Christian converts regain a sense of identity and belonging to the Tiriki fold (Sangree 1966:139).

This Tiriki-Christian circumcision culture was deeply hybrid. In connection to funeral rituals, it established a syncretic culture for people directly connected to it. That is the initiation chiefs, initiates and mature uncircumcised men. The religious concepts and practices expressed in the funeral ritual of an initiation chief is one aspect of indigenous Tiriki funeral culture which underwent an evolutionary hybridisation but was not entirely Christianized. This syncretism was typified by the funeral of the first

Christian-Circumcision chief Nuhu Sakwa in 1958. Sakwa's funeral embodied the hybridisation between the native *idumi* culture and Christianity. The basic tenet behind the rules regulating the funeral rituals of *idumi* chiefs was that they were not ordinary mortals. In the eyes of ordinary Abatirichi they were perceived to be the actual entities which represented the Abstract concept of *idumi*. Thus, even in death Abatirichi Christians came to perceive the bodies of their initiation chiefs through the lens of the old customs. They viewed the corpse of initiation chiefs as sacred to be protected from contact with women, children and non-Tiriki people (FGD Mungavo 24 Nov 2014).

This aspect of indigenous *idumi* culture was strongly emphasised during the Christian era. During the funeral rituals the entire process of burial was supposed to be officiated by Tiriki circumcised church minister of a senior age-group. The whole sequence of pall bearing and burial was also supposed to be conducted by initiated Abatirichi preferably the age-group of the deceased. If all were deceased and senile then the next age-group would take over the role. This practice has continued up to the mid of the 20th century (Bidolo 2014:O.I).

It became evident that during the Christian era the corpse of *idumi* elders was allowed to lie in state for several days unlike the old days when they were buried during the first night. However, in keeping with the native culture the corpse of initiation elders was kept indoors as it lay in state. Women and children were not allowed to get close to the corpse, at the same time crying and wailing was absolutely disallowed. But in keeping with Western Christianity principles a requiem mass was held at the homestead of the deceased. In this mass a relevant verse was read from the bible and a sermon was

given by a church minister. Relatives and friends were given a chance to eulogise the deceased. Thereafter, at the time of burial the scripture was read again. Usually, it was a verse that expressed resurrection and re-uniting the dead with the Lord Jesus Christ. The grave was filled with soil until it rose in mound. After three days other *idumi* elders come at night to bring the mound to the level of the ground. Much later during the last quarter of the 20th century the graves of *idumi* leaders began to be cemented and etched with beautiful epitaphs. After burial other funeral rituals like shaving of the air, returning of spirit and grand memorial ceremonies were conducted to honor the dead initiation chiefs (FGD Mungavo 24th Nov 2014).

Customarily, Tiriki initiates during the *idumi* were considered to be in state of ritual disfavour because of shedding ritual blood during circumcision. Therefore, during the whole of the seclusion period the initiates remained in this state of ritual impurity. They remained in this impure state until they had undergone the cleansing ritual of *khung'aba*. Because of this condition initiates were not allowed to be seen in public by women children and non-Tiriki. If by bad luck an initiate died during seclusion he was supposed to be buried at night because he was still in state of ritual impurity. This whole religious concept expressed in the funeral ritual of initiates was maintained by Abatirichi Christians. However, it was now steeped in a Christian context (Chanzu 2015: O.I).

Among the Christians if an initiate died in seclusion his burial was conducted at night. Once it was confirmed that an initiate had died the father and other male initiated members of the family were informed in order to plan the burial. On this occasion Tiriki

men came at night and dug a grave at backyard of the compound. A church minister offered a prayer before the coffin was lowered to the grave. The grave was then covered with dust and then banana stems were strewn over to disguise the site. During this whole process women and children were not allowed to come and witness the burial. Once the burial was over the men and other initiates returned to the seclusion huts to continue with mourning. On a designated day initiates from various seclusion huts within the sub-community organised for a nocturnal carnival. They met at the home of the deceased initiate. They sang and danced initiation songs to pay homage to the spirit of their comrade until around three in the morning. After this there was no other procedure which was conducted to honor the spirit of the dead initiate (FGD Mungavo 24th Nov 2014).

The other death related to *idumi* whose funeral rituals assumed a hybridised nature in the wake of Christianity was the obsequies of mature uninitiated man or *musoleli*. Even as Christianity established root in the community, Abatirichi maintained the religious idea that every adult man must be circumcised before being buried. The basic religious concept behind this obligatory practice was that ancestral spirits would not allow the spirits of uncircumcised men in their midst. By the 1950s Abatirichi Christians had to circumcise uninitiated mature man before burial as native custom dictated. Once it was established that the deceased was not circumcised the family would arrange for a surgeon to operate on the corpse. The operation would be undertaken at night before burial. To highlight the level of cultural syncretism, the funeral rituals of an uncircumcised man were guided by the native culture regulated by *idumi*, nonetheless, they were sprinkled with Christian rituals. For instance, a verse was

read from the bible, a sermon was given and prayers were offered before burial. Yet in keeping with native traditions the body was interred at the backside of the homestead at night because this death was considered as inauspicious (FGD Mungavo 24th Nov 2014).

5.6 Reconstructing the funeral ritual of cattle-drive dances during the Christian era

Shilemba cattle drive dances accompanied by mock fighting was a category of funeral poetic performances which were staged to honor male upright members in the society, particularly renowned warriors and rich cattle owners. During aboriginal days this dance was the most elaborate of all funeral poetic performances in terms of décor, costuming, accompaniments and choreography. However, as Christianity established its foot hold in the community this ritual was adversely affected. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to submit that of all the funeral rituals under our enquiry *shilemba* was the most affected by the twin forces of Christianity and colonial rule. Gunter (1972:453) correctly observed that by the mid of the 20th century *shilemba* in its original structure in most Abaluyia communities had ceased to exist.

In the aboriginal days *shilemba* played the role of requiem masses in Christian funerals. Abatirichi conducted *shilemba* dances to pay homage to the spirit of a dead hero by driving ones entire wealth in the form of cattle to his homestead. Mock fights were conducted to honor the deceased as valorous warrior. Abatirichi expressed their profound feelings to the deceased through art, music, drama, and dances. However, by

mid of the 20th century this indigenous custom was slowly fading away. There are two factors which explain the decline of shilemba ritual.

First of all Christian missionaries waged war against this indigenous custom especially the FAIM who termed it in pejorative terms such as pagan, satanic and waste of time. In their stead missionaries expected Tiriki Christians to conduct requiem masses in an orderly, quiet and “dignified” manner. The requiem masses, therefore, increasingly came to take over the role of *shilemba*. They would begin as early as 10:00 am and end as late as 4:00 pm such that there was no time to conduct *shilemba* dances. In the mass the traditional war songs and praise songs were substituted with prayers, sermons and hymns (Shisanya 2014:O.I).

The second factor which led to the slow extinction of *Shilemba* was the establishment of the British administration in the Western Kenya. Customarily, *shilemba* was conducted for men recognised for their bravado and defiance against the traditional Abatirichi enemies such as the Nandi and the Logooli. It was a category of funeral ritual associated with cult of the hero and dates back to the time when the community was suffused with the ethics of the heroic age. However, when the British established their control over the Western region they abolished all inter-ethnic skirmishes and cattle raids. This in effect rendered the warrior grade redundant. Therefore, by the mid of the 20th century there were very few Tiriki men who could boast of having actively participated in inter-ethnic conflicts to defend the community. The last group to have participated actively in defending Tiriki sub-communities as warriors was the Chiminyigei group (circumcised in 1890, 1897 and 1905). *Shilemba* dances, therefore,

suffered a major blow because by 1960s there were very few Abatirichi men of active combat experience to be honoured by this ritual dances. This factor weighed down heavily on *shilemba* dances (FGD Kaimosi 7th Jan 2015).

Usually as the old saying goes, old habits die hard. Tiriki Christian Converts even with increasing missionary admonitions still conducted a shortened version of *shilemba* dances after the burial of senior family members. Ordinarily, Christians would conduct a requiem mass at the compound of the deceased and thereafter inter the deceased. After burial relatives, friends, and neighbours of the deceased took their cattle to the compound of the deceased in song and dances. They ran in a confused manner in various directions engaging imaginary enemies in the intervening spaces. They danced and trampled the grave mound until it went flat. In some cases trained bulls were substituted for the age-mates of the deceased to conduct the mock battles. The manner in which this dance was staged resembled the traditional set up. However, during this period it was shortened and lacked the glamour and ebullience of the aboriginal days. This version of *shilemba* is what most Abatirichi associate with aboriginal *shilemba* (FGD Kaimosi 7th Jan 2015).

In cases where the deceased Christian possessed wealth in form of motor vehicles, tractors and posho mills; the movable machines had to be brought into the compound and their engines turned on during burials. Their engines were left throbbing throughout the entire process of burial and a few minutes after burial. This was in keeping with the religious principle guiding *shilemba* namely to honor the dead by driving ones entire wealth in form of cattle during death (Manoa 2015: O.I).

5.7 The post burial ritual of *lubego* during the Christain era

This was a traditional funeral ritual which was conducted on the third day after burial. The ritual of shaving the hair symbolically cleansed all impurities caused by coming into contact with death. It also effectively ended the mourning period and mourners were allowed to go to their homes. This ritual remained resilient even in the face of intense missionization of the Tiriki. It has survived up to the present millennium. However, by 1960s this ritual had been hybridised due to acquisition and incorporation of Christian rituals. Among some Abatirichi Christians the day of *olubego* was interpreted in the light of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. On the third day after burial early in the morning members of the local church, especially, women went to the grave site for hymn singing and prayer. In some cases a few men accompanied them (Khabugui 2015: O.I).

This practise was in the understanding that after the burial of Jesus a team of women led by Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus went to the tomb of Jesus to anoint his body. Most Abatirichi Christians came to believe that on this day the soul of the deceased arose and went to heaven. The women sung hymns which emphasised on the theme of resurrection and thereafter prayed for the soul of the departed to be united with God and Christ in Heaven. The most preferred song was hymn number 81 from the Quaker Logooli hymn book of *dzinyimbo dzio kudzominya Nyasaye* (see the hymn in full in the appendix)

After the grave side singing and prayer, a mass was held in the compound of the deceased whose main aim was to pray for the family. An offering was given by the

faithful to help the members of the bereaved family; after which members of the church dispersed to leave lineage members to begin the hair shaving ritual. On this occasion mourners congregated on the front yard of the compound in close proximity to the grave. Once all those expected were present a church elder or the widow care taker (*mudili*) blessed the occasion through a Christian ritual of a prayer. The prayer asked for God's favour in the task ahead. After this the family members would have their heads clean shaven hence the term *olubego*. The shaving started with the chief mourner that is the widow or widower depending on who had died, and then followed by the other family members in the order of seniority. The shaven hair was collected by an elder for safe disposal unless it fell into the hands of sorcerers and witches (Shisanya 2014:O.I).

Much later during the last quarter of the 20th century the element of using water from the river and traditional blades was substituted for water from the domestic wells and modern razor blades. The razor blades, having been bought, would be kept outside overnight before being used the following day. Still the aspect of clean shaving was minimised, especially, among the youth who found it rather embarrassing to their peers in school. This custom was, therefore, adjusted to just trimming of the hair line. Nonetheless, this ritual has remained resilient to the present millennium (Khabugui O.I: 2015)

After the hair shaving ceremony was over a meeting was held in the compound of the deceased where the relatives of the deceased, friends, neighbours and curious onlookers attended. However, by 1960s this meeting was being attended by mainly neighbours and clan members. This *olubego* meeting was set rolling with a Christian

ritual of a prayer most often by a church elder. Thereafter, the meeting continued in a manner more or less similar to the way it was done in the aboriginal days. Subjects such as creditors, debtors, dowry, and inheritance of the dead man's estate were discussed and settled. After this meeting attendants were free to leave for their homes, because the mourning period was over (Shisanya 2014:O.I).

5.8 Recasting the native ritual of returning the spirit during the Christian era

This Tiriki aboriginal ritual of taking back the shadow of the deceased was based on the religious concept of appeasing the spirit of the dead. Abatirichi believed that the spirit of the dead just like a living being has a nostalgic lust for the areas it used to frequent. This ritual of *khuhira Shihinini* was, therefore, meant to take back the shadow of the deceased to the areas they used to frequent to bid farewell, for instance the brothers house, the in-laws and parents houses. As Abatirichi came under increasing influence of Christianity this whole concept was reorganised and augmented with Christian belief system and rituals.

Just like in the aboriginal days, during the Christian era a team of relatives of the deceased involved in taking back the shadow began from the living room of the house of the deceased. A church elder leading the team began by praying for the undertaking. He requested God to grant them energy to take their beloved to a relative's place. If the relative's place was a stone throw distance the team undertaking this ritual would sing along the road as they made their way to their target home. At the vanguard of the party the window hoisted the portrait of deceased aloft. If the destination was a considerable distance they used a vehicle. The members sung Christian hymns throughout the

journey. Christian prayers were offered when the team reached the designated place and when they returned home to where the deceased was buried. The team spent one night at the relative's place and returned the following morning. They were expected to return the shadow to the compound where the deceased was buried without anyone of them dispersing (Khabugui 2015:O.I).

As the politico-economy of imperialism, through British colonialism captured, Abatirichi peasants into the whirlpool of global capitalism, young Tiriki men left the reserves to seek employment on settler farms and urban centers across the country. They did this in order to raise revenue to pay taxes. This movement of Tiriki labour expanded the range in which the spirit could be returned. On the death of a Tiriki man who lived off the community the shadow was returned back to where he used to live at the work place. It was a common custom by the 1960s to find a party of Abatirichi leaving the rural home of the deceased to take the shadow of dead relative to the former place of work in major urban centers such as Nairobi, Mombasa, Eldoret, Kitale or Kisumu. They would spend a night there and returned up to the compound where the deceased was buried the following day (Musalia 2015:O.I).

5.9 Recasting the post-burial rituals of grand memorial ceremonies or *khwitsulitsa* during the Christian period

Among Abatirichi the grand memorial ceremony was believed to be a prerequisite of establishing the spirit of the deceased in the company of ancestral spirits. Ordinarily, this was the last post burial ritual conducted in honor of the spirit of a dead man. After the establishment of Christianity this ritual came to be popularly referred to

as *lubego* or with the Kiswahili term *makumbusho*. Even after about half a century of Christianity the Tiriki still believed in the religious belief underlying the concept of *khwitsulitsa* which is the veneration of the spirit of the dead and initiating it into the company of ancestors. However, by the 1950s the whole concept of grand memorial services was extremely couched in Christianity. In fact, Sangree (1966:163) eloquently summarised that “.....the religious and magical revolution wrought by the advent of Christianity is neither profound nor so far reaching as it might appear at first blush”.

Generally, several months or even years after burial of a Christian, members of his family and clan would make arrangements with the pastor of the local church for holding a remembrance service. The family members in collaboration with the church drew the programme for the occasion. Friends, relatives, neighbours and lineage members and the church members of the nearby congregations regardless of their denominations were invited to participate. The members who travelled from far to attend the ritual carried food stuffs like bananas, chicken, eleusine and maize flour to help deflate the bill. On the eve of the Memorial Day an animal was selected from the flock of the deceased or procured from the market for the function. It was mandatory for this animal to be in very good physical shape. It was not supposed to be castrated or dehorned or a polled animal. The sex of the animal was determined by the gender of the deceased, cow for a woman and a bull for a man. This animal was carefully prepared and methodologically attended to in the process of a ritual at the graveside (Musalia 2015: O.I).

Some of these ritual procedures were directly acquired from the native culture. During the last quarter of the 20th century the practice of killing the ritual animal at the grave was abandoned following admonition from church ministers. Animals began to be slaughtered elsewhere at the backyard of the compound. The animal was slaughtered in the evening on the eve of the Memorial Day if the ceremony was for a woman or very early in the morning on the material day of the ceremony for a man. Yet during the sacrifice a church minister would be present to pray for the animal. He requested God to bless the animal in terms such as “.....may the stew and vegetables be blessed [sic]” (Gimode 2003:275). The manner in which this animal was killed plainly revealed what Tiriki Christians sought to conceal, that it was a sacrifice.

Part of the meat from this animal was cooked and eaten by everyone present in the memorial. While some special parts of the animals were cut into small pieces which were given to relatives, friends and neighbours to take to their homes. This was a direct acquisition from the native culture. It was the native way of the deceased sharing his last sacrifice with friends and relatives. Although by 1960s the wealth of ritual traditionally employed at post-burial rituals had been abandoned, like supplications at the homestead ancestral altar, but the basic religious concept which guided the Memorial Ceremonies was still maintained (FGD Kaimosi 7th Jan 2015).

The memorial meeting was usually held out of doors near the home of the deceased starting shortly after noon, mostly on Saturdays. This meeting went up to the evening unless dispersed by the equatorial thunderstorms and rains of Western Kenya. During this ceremony it was customary for one preacher from the local parish to give a

sermon and offer prayers and woman song leader from the parish of the deceased led rounds of hymn and song singing. Speeches of the day would be made by representatives of all categories in the praise of the spirit of the deceased more or less similar to the way it was conducted in the traditional days. Thereafter, issues related to debts, credits and inheritance of the estate of the deceased would be discussed and settled. After this members would disperse to their respective homes while clan members remained behind to plan clan matters, while in some cases they cemented the grave and fitted it with an epitaph (FGD Kaimosi 7th Jan 2015).

The most important revolution which occurred on the ritual of grand memorials during the Christian era was nomenclature shift of the ritual from *khwitsulitsa* to *olubego* and fixing of the time for the ritual, in some denominations for instance AICN, ACOHS, Lyahuka and ADC. In relation to the time of conducting *litsukhitsa* during the Pre-Christian days this ritual did not have a specific time for it to be done. Ordinarily, it was conducted after several months or to some even years after the death of a person. But certainly after the main harvest of October when food was in plenty to support the festivities. Nonetheless, during the Christian era a number of Christian denominations, especially, the independent churches established a theology which forced their Tiriki members to conduct Memorial Services exactly after 40 days from the day of burial. The origin of this 40 day regulation is still shrouded in mystery even among the diehard supporters of these sects. But certainly this is not an indigenous Tiriki practice.

Abatirichi Christians argued that the 40 days rule is biblical. They submitted that the bible is replete with instances of 40 days. The number Forty appears so often in

contexts dealing with trials and tribulations. For instance, the trial and temptation of Jesus, Moses went to Mount Sinai for 40 days, during Noah's time the rain pounded for 40 days causing a calamitous deluge. These and so many other 40 days instances in the Christian scriptures made forty days to be symbolic of the biblical period of probation. Abatirichi, therefore, interpreted death and funeral rituals in the light of the bible. More importantly they came to establish a mortuary culture which reflected the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In their new conceptualisation of funeral rituals, Christian believers of independent churches started to conduct the ritual of the grand memorial after 40 days. This new regulation was based on the biblical presentation that Jesus stayed on earth for 40 days after his resurrection before ascending to heaven. It was on the fortieth day that Jesus left his disciples and ascended to heaven. The Abatirichi Christians thus set the *khwitsulitsa* ceremony on this day in order to free the spirit of the deceased and allow it to ascend to the spirit world, heaven, just like that of Jesus (Chanzu 2015:O.I).

The other aspect of change on the ritual of grand memorial ceremonies was its nomenclature. During the pre-colonial days this ritual was referred with a noun *litsukhitsa* or with the verb *khwitsulitsa*, which literally means a remembrance. However, as Christianity took root in Tiriki this ritual came to be known as *olubego*. Otherwise, *olubego* referred to the ritual of shaving hair which was conducted on the third day after burial. In fact, the term *lubego* means to shave. The reason for this nomenclature shift is still a conundrum not only to scholars of religion in the region but also to Christians themselves. In fact, the origin and development of the term *olubego* has been lost in the mist of symbolic interactions and eventual transformation of culture

during Christian missionization. Even most of our resourceful informants on missionary activity in Tiriki Shipale (2015:O.I), Manoa (2014:O.I) and Shisanya (2014:O.I) could not recollect the reason behind the nomenclature shift. However, all of our informants agreed that this change of names was as result of confusion brought in by Christianity. Such that by 1960 the indigenous name of *litsukhitsa* had been abandoned in favour of the misplaced term of *olubego*

5.10 Summary

In the foregoing chapter we have described the process of hybridisation of indigenous Abatirichi religion generally and funeral rituals in particular. We have done this under the frame work of the symbolic interactionism theory. Consequently, we have demonstrated that symbolic interactions between Abatirichi culture and Christianity reached its peak in the 1930s. Therefore, from the 1930s all the way to the 1960s Abatirichi selected the best values from Christianity and fused them with their previous stock pile of historically accumulated religious perspectives. This led to the establishment of a hybrid religion which was consistent with selection of the most functional social concepts and institutions. The outcome of which was a hybrid Tiriki culture, especially religion and *idumi*. This process inevitably led to the hybridisation of mortuary culture, which we have vividly demonstrated. Our next chapter seeks to draw a summary of the whole thesis and make our recommendation to the world of scholarship for further research

6.0 CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter we shall draw a summary of the whole study. Specifically, we shall explain how we tackled our objectives and explain the extent to which these objectives were achieved. We shall also give our conclusion. In this part we shall give our opinion on the functionality of our theory. That is whether the symbolic interactionism theory was useful in explicating the syncretic evolution of religious concepts expressed in Abatirichi funeral culture, and the appropriateness of our study methodology. Lastly, we shall outline our recommendations to scholars and the researchers in the field of history.

6.2 Summary

This study was an attempt to discuss a historical evolution of the religious concepts expressed in the funeral rites of Abatirichi from the pre-colonial period up to very deep in the colonial period, 1960. In order to achieve this general aim, our study was undertaken under four specific objectives.

The first objective of this study sought to reconstruct indigenous Abatirichi religious concepts expressed in their mortuary culture. In order to achieve this objective we have painted a concise history of Abatirichi. We have also described the native Tiriki religion based on ancestor veneration and showed how this religion was expressed in their obsequies. We demonstrated that Abatirichi mortuary culture was strongly hinged on the native religion based on concept of ancestor veneration. The

basic tenet guiding Abatirichi funeral ritual was to placate, appease and honor the spirit of the dead.

Our second objective sought to examine the effect of encounters and interaction between Abatirichi and their neighbours (the Kalenjiin, Luo and southern Abaluyia groups) on their mortuary culture. In the process of achieving this objective we have painted the historical intricate process of the peopling of Western Kenya by migrations of communities of heterogeneous origin. In this chapter we have shown this region graced by migrations communities of heterogeneous background, such as the Hunters-Gatherers whose brief stay was interrupted by the migrations of Cushites in the region. The Cushites were followed by early Bantu speakers, Kalenjiin, latter-day Bantu and then the Luo, respectively. This migration of communities was not just a process of physical addition of population in the region. It initiated a protracted process of encounters and interactions which led to the evolution of the religious experience of the people in the region.

Still, we have shown that these interactions of communities of divergent origin, with different cosmological patterns, led to a shift in the cosmology of Abatirichi. This ultimately affected their funeral culture. The study has further demonstrated that of all the neighbours of Abatirichi, the Nandi-Terik had the most profound effect on Abatirichi religious experience and the religious practices expressed in their funeral culture, followed by the Luo. From the Nandi-Terik they acquired the religious concept of the Supreme Being symbolised by the sun (*Nyasaye*), sacred oathing of *muuma*,

Kalenjiin sacred plants and the age-graded circumcision system (*idumi*). The acquisition of these Kalenjiin social concepts led to hybridisation of Abatirichi funeral rituals.

The acquisition of the sun God, *Nyasaye*, made the Tiriki to set their graves facing the eastern direction, which was the direction of the origin of the earthly symbol of *Nyasaye*. They also acquired religious practices regulating the funeral rituals of people closely related to *idumi*, for instance, the burial of initiation chiefs, initiates and mature uncircumcised man, *musoleli*. Still, the Tiriki also came to believe that maturity was closely associated with circumcision. This meant that the burial procedure was conducted by circumcised men of warrior class. These Kalenjiin concepts were integrated into the old Bantu mortuary beliefs centered on the veneration of ancestral spirits which led to hybridisation of funeral rituals.

This study established that there was negligible influence on Abatirichi cosmology and religious concepts expressed in their funeral rituals from the neighbouring Abaluyia groups, that is, the Isukha, Idakho, Logooli and Abanyole. In fact, the movement of influence seems to have flowed in the opposite direction. Members from the other Abaluyia clans were assimilated into the Tiriki society through the acquisition of the Tiriki-Terik age-graded circumcision culture (*idumi*). Through the acquisition of *idumi* and settlement in Tiriki, assimilated clans from other Abaluyia communities began setting graves facing the eastern direction. These clans also acquired mortuary rites regulated by *idumi*. Fitting our argument in the symbolic interactionism theory, we have submitted that other Abaluyia clans had little impact on Abatirichi obsequies because their obsequies were couched in the same symbolic

mould. Their funeral cultures, therefore, had the same symbols, key of which was the emphasis on the veneration of the spirits of the dead.

Even so, in third chapter, we have demonstrated that there was negligible influence on Abatirichi funeral rituals out of interactions with the Luo. The only possible impact was that the Luo reinforced the idea of the Supreme Being (*Nyasaye*) and the eastern direction as the direction of health and fortune which the Tiriki had already acquired from the Nandi-Terik. Otherwise the bulk of Tiriki funeral rituals were steeped in the indigenous religious concept of ancestor veneration. This idea among other Bantu funeral rituals seemed to have flowed more to the opposite direction.

In our third objective we sought to explain the early influence of Western Christianity on Abatirichi funeral culture from 1902 to 1930. In the process of achieving this objective we gave a concise history of the spread of Christianity. This history meant to emphasise that the growth of Christianity was syncretic as it spread across cultural divides. We have also demonstrated that Christianity as presented by missionaries in Africa came in the spirit of antagonism, hostility and conquest. Christianity was part and parcel of European imperialism. Missionaries regarded everything European as superior, progressive and noble. In fact, this study has established that, the most glaring weakness of Christian missionaries was their treatment of Africans as philosophically and culturally *tabularasa*. This attitude guided the missionaries who came to work among Abatirichi, especially, FAIM.

The study presented the period between 1902 and 1930 as the period of intense symbolic interactionism between Christianity and indigenous Abatirichi culture. In this

period missionaries directly attacked the bulwark of Abatirichi indigenous culture, for instance, circumcision, polygamy and religion. This missionary's attitude towards indigenous culture led to an epic battle of cultures and cosmologies. The conflict was made manifest in the intense rivalry between Tiriki Christian converts and rest of the community who still maintained their traditional culture. A common feature of this period was that Tiriki Christians lived a double life because of identity crisis. This was a period of probation and ferment in which Abatirichi Christians interrogated Christianity using the symbols inherent in their culture, before the development of syncretism of the two cultures in the 1930s.

In our last objective, we have examined the effect of Christianity on indigenous Abatirichi obsequies in the period between 1930 and 1960. We have presented this phase of encounter and interaction as a period of maturation of symbolic interactionism between Christianity and Abatirichi indigenous culture. During this period Abatirichi demonstrated that their culture has historically been fluid. It had diverged sharply from the Western anthropological stereotype of being static. In this period Abatirichi managed to synthesis the best and the most functional practices and institutions from the two cultural heritages, Christianity and traditional Abatirichi culture. This process led to syncretism of the two cultures. It was in this period that the initiation potentate from Mungavo, Sakwa khwa M'maitsi, was converted to the Salvation Army. After his conversion to Christianity he was immediately declared the Tiriki-Christian initiation chief. Nuhu Sakwa, therefore, became the mediating factor that hybridised indigenous circumcision culture and Christianity. This legitimised the ventures of Tiriki Christians. It enabled them to remain Christians at the same time maintaining their belonging to the

community in as far as circumcision was concerned. This religious syncretism concretised with the rise of the independent church movement. These churches were at their core an African critique of Western Christianity as presented by missionaries. After the translation of the bible into one of the local dialects (Logooli) Abatirichi came to the realisation that there were some inconsistencies between the message and the messenger. Independent churches developed a liturgy which incorporated the core of indigenous religion into Christianity.

The development of these independent churches from the 1930s century led to the development of hybrid religious practices in Tiriki funeral rituals. For them the fundamental idea which undergirded the religious concepts expressed in funeral rituals was to appease the spirits of the dead lest they turn into malevolent spiritual beings (*binanyenzo*). However, during the Christian era this whole concept was re-interpreted and applied under the light of Christianity such that by 1960s the indigenous funeral rituals of Abatirichi were hedged around with Christian dogma and rituals.

In a nutshell, this study has demonstrated, in an emphatic fashion, that by 1960s the Abatirichi cosmology generally and the religious concepts expressed in their funeral rituals was stock pile of the most functional religious concepts and practices from centuries of symbolic interactions with external cultural systems which they had come into contact with. This was through interactions with their neighbours like the Nandi-Terik, the Luo and later Christianity.

6.3 Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the process of hybridisation in the historical development of religious concepts and practices expressed in Abatirichi funeral rituals. Our findings have made evident that syncretism informed the historical development of Abatirichi obsequies. It has rejected claims of purity and orthodoxy of Tiriki obsequies. Our findings have shown that Abatirichi selectively adopted aspects from other cosmologies, during the process of interaction, and guarded jealously against the erosion of those indispensable aspects of their funeral culture. They restructured their culture rather than abandoning or adopting new cultures wholesale, because these values and traditions afforded greater meaning to their point of view in life.

A properly conceived research, however, consists of praxis of zipping fact and theory together in a dialectical relationship. Therefore, our study was undertaken under the symbolic interactionism theory. We employed this theoretical formulation as a conceptual instrument within which the assumptions of this study were tested. Symbolic interactionism is based on the thesis that the culture of a community is made up of symbols. These symbols play a significant role in the interpretation of external cultural stimuli. In this case, social interaction is presented as symbolic in nature and social reality is constructed by people participating in the process. Out of these interactions the best values are those which are consistent with the selection of the most functional social culture and institutions. Symbolic interactionism theory guided this study in the process of explaining the process of change in Tiriki funeral culture through time and space. This theory was able to perfectly explicate the process of transformation of religious concepts expressed in funeral culture of Abatirichi. We have shown basing on

this theory that Abatirichi were able to interrogate new culture using the symbols inherent in their religion. The process of which led to recasting of external cultural systems in the light of their previous beliefs, thereby formulating syncretism.

In the process of preparation for this study we developed a means of achieving our aims, which is the methodology. The methodology which we had developed was able to guide us through the study with very minimal difficulties. Indeed, the only major problem which we encountered was on data collection. During the development of our methodology we had anticipated to visit archives of mission stations (at Kaimosi, Nyang'ori, Erusui, and Kaptechi) with the purpose of getting primary material on the history of missionization in Tiriki. However, we came to the realization that there was very little we could get from mission stations because the bulk of material had been transferred to the Kenya National Archives (KNA) for storage.

6.4 Recommendations

Out of the numerous data we have collected and sifted during the entire course of our research we recommend the following. Research needs to be conducted on the religious concepts expressed in the funeral ritual of the Luo to determine the extent of Abaluyia impact on Luo funeral rituals. Luo funeral rituals of cattle drive dances or *TeroBuru*, lighting of ritual fire or *Magenga*, carrying of the spirit of the dead to homes of relatives (*tipo*), grand memorial ceremonies (*rapar*) and returning of the shadow-spirit or *tipo* to the homes of close relatives have all the hallmarks of Bantu origin. Furthermore, there is an urgent need of conducting research on the religious concepts expressed in Nandi-Terik mortuary culture, after intense encounters and interactions

with the Abaluyia. Gimode has demonstrated that from the Abaluyia the Nandi-Terik acquired the ancestor worship cult. There is urgent need to understand how this religious shift among the Nandi-Terik affected their mortuary culture, before the available oral human libraries are lost.

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KNA: DC/NN 1/2 1938

List oral informants

This information is written in the following format: The name of the informant, the Clan of the informant, the area of residence, age of the informant and the date of the interview.

Ayodi Pius khwa Libeye/Abasuba/Erusui/Chebara/94 years/16th Dec 2014

Achieng Margaret / Jauoga/Gem/ Kajulu/66 years/10th August 2014

Adagi Luginu Florence /Abakizungu/Kavudunyi/69 years/3rd February 2015

Amutabi Shirashibi/Abamalava/Eregi-Idakho/82 years/18th November 2014

Chanzu Justus /Ababayi/Hamisi 69 years/14thJan 2015

Bidolo Silas khwa Ingaita/ Abambo/Imagaanda-Ibumbo/ 69 Years/ 9th August 2014

Itembe Antonina /Abitsende/Shinyalu/68 years/19th of January 2015

Khabugui Dorcas /Abakirima/Mbale/79 years/5th February 2015

Khaguli Manoa /Abaswera/Bwanzi/75/ January 29th 2015

Kiprugut Arap Rono/Moi/ Bonjoge/86 years/26th November 2014

Kipsang Munga/ kapsigere/kapsotik-Terik ward/80years/ 24th march 2015

Lukhobi Lichina Noah /Abadura/Irheho/76 years /27th January 2015

M'maitsi Clement Sakwa/ Abalukhoba-Badengu /Mungavo/ 69 years//7th Jan 2015

Mwashi Keya/ Abikhaba/Jivovoli/73 years/24th Nov 2014 Murambi Edward / Abadura
/Mpaka village-Seremi/57 years/16th September 2014

Mwashi Beatrice /Abamalava/Imaganda-Idakho/72 years/10th December 2014

/Abashirima/Kamulukuywa/74 years/Kongoni scheme/10th of September 2014

Shikoliko Seth Musalia/Abashirima/Kamulukuywa/69 years/16th of January 2015

Shipale/Abamaabi/Ibumaabi/Shamakhokho/Approximately 84 years/17th Dec 2014

Shisanya Charles khwa Lusangale/Abalukhoba/Jivovoli/65 years/17th Dec 2014

Targwen Petronila / Kiptapgwei/Seremi/Approximately 87 years/20th November 2014

Ochola Peter /Jokarateng’/ Kajulu / Masaana/73 years/26th August 2014

Oduor Michael/Jakagwa/Gem-Yala/Yala/80 years/16th August 2014 Shikoliko Noah

Ombima obembo/Abamaabi/Bokoyani (South Maragoli)/77 years/10th February 2015

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APPENDICES

A.1: Sample Research Tools

1. Sample field guiding questionnaire for interviews on Objective one: reconstructing the aboriginal Tiriki mortuary culture.

Name..... Clan.....

Residence.....

Place of birth..... Sex age.....

1. Where did the Abatirichi come from?
2. Why did they migrate to this place?
3. Who was the leader of the migrating group?
4. Did they have any association with any other group? If yes briefly describe it.
5. Whom did they encounter in their settlement here?
6. How did they relate to the group they found here?
7. Did the aboriginal Tiriki conduct funeral rituals on their dead members of the community
8. If yes, which are these rituals? Briefly name them
9. Did they bury dead people?
10. If yes, where did they dig the grave for the dead?
11. What was the shape of the grave?
12. Did the bereaved conduct the cattle drives ceremonies (*shilemba*)?
13. If yes describe how and when were they were conducted.
14. Where did this ritual originate from?
15. Did they light the ritual fire upon death?
16. Where was the ritual fire sited?

17. Did they carry the *shihinini*?
18. Did they conduct the ritual shaving of the hair?
19. If yes when was it conducted?
20. Did they conduct the burial anniversaries?
21. If yes briefly describe when and how it was conducted
22. What was symbolic significance each of these rituals?
23. Were these funeral rituals unique to everybody or did they differ with gender, age, cause of death or social status?
24. If unique to age and gender, describe them.

2. Sample interview guide sheet for objective two, establishing the influence of the Abatirichi neighbours on their obsequies

Name..... Clan..... Age.....Place of Birth.....

Sex..... Residence.....

Interaction with other communities

1. Which communities did the Tiriki interact with during the pre-colonial period?
2. How did they interact with these communities?

a. Terik influence

3. How did they interact with the Terik?
4. Are there clans of Terik origin in Tiriki?
5. How did these interactions affect Tiriki Obsequies?
6. Was there addition of any ritual? Briefly name and describe
7. Was there a change in nomenclature in funeral rituals? Which one?
8. Did the acquisition of *idumi* change any funeral rituals in Tiriki? If yes how? briefly describe

a. Interactions with the Nandi

9. How did they interact with the Nandi?
10. If they did, how did it impact on the Tiriki Obsequies?
11. Was there any change in the nomenclature of obsequies?
12. Was there introduction of new funeral rituals?
13. Was there removal of some funeral rituals from the Tiriki Corpus?

a. Interactions with other Abaluyia clans

14. How did the Tiriki interact with their Bantu neighbours i.e. *Logooli, Isukha, Abanyole* and *Idakho*?

- 15. How did this interaction affect the way the Tiriki conducted funeral rituals
- 16. Where did the cattle drive dance of shilemba come from?
- 17. Were there any clans which migrated into Tiriki from other Abaluhya groups? If yes name them.
- 18. Where did these communities come from?
- 19. Did the obsequies of these communities differ from those of the Tiriki and how
- 20. If different, how did it affect the Tiriki Obsequies?
- 21. Was there an addition of a ritual or change of name?

a. Luo influence on Tiriki obsequies

- 22. How did the Tiriki interact with Luo during the colonial period?
- 23. How did these interactions affect funeral rituals among the Tiriki?
- 24. Was there any migration of Luo clans into Tiriki?
- 25. If yes, how did they conduct their rituals?
- 26. How did the migration affect the organisation of the Tiriki funeral rituals

3. Guiding questionnaire for objective three: Contact with Christian missionaries

Name Age Sex.....

Residence.....clan.....Place of birth.....Denomination.....

- 1. Which missionary groups came to Tiriki?
- 2. Where was each of them stationed?
- 3. What was the reaction of the Tiriki to each of them?
- 4. Did they change their religion to accept Christianity?
- 5. Did someone ever die in the mission stations, which one?
- 6. Was there a conflict between converted family members and traditionalists on how to dispose the dead?
- 7. If yes where and how did they conduct funeral rituals?

8. How did early Christian missionary converts conduct their funeral rituals?
9. Did the Tiriki appropriate missionary practices in funeral rituals?
10. If yes which are these rituals?
11. Did the Tiriki abandon some of their funeral rituals?
12. If yes which ones?
13. Did they resist alien funeral rituals?
14. What was the reason why most Tiriki's did not change their funeral rituals?
15. Had most Tiriki converted to Christianity by this time 1930-60?
16. If yes, did they accept Christian funeral rituals in their obsequies?
17. What factors accelerated the acquisition of Christianity?
18. How did the conversion of Nuhu Sakwa affect the spread of Christianity?
19. How did the conversion of Amiani affect the spread of Christianity in Tiriki?
20. Did Tiriki accept Christian funeral rituals after conversion?
21. How did they conduct their funeral rituals?
22. How was Sakwa and Amiani buried? Briefly describe
23. Comparatively how did it vary from aboriginal Tiriki funerals?
24. How did the converts of mission stations conduct their obsequies?
25. Did it vary from one mission group to the other?
26. How did the members of the independent churches conduct their obsequies

APPENDICES

A.2 Abaluyia hymn number 81 from the Quaker hymn book, *dzimyimbo dzia**kuidzominya Nyasaye*

<i>Yesu mwami wu bugaso</i>	Jesus the lord of love
<i>Yivulwa mu lirova</i>	he who was born on earth
<i>Navutswa muvusaliri</i>	and brought up in Godly manner
<i>Ya kudzira avoni</i>	he died for us sinners
<i>Ohenzi wu bubereri</i> (chorus)	lets us all focus on the source of sympathy
<i>O muhenzi bosidza</i>	the world you can see
<i>U singiye umuguti</i>	he has stand firm
<i>Kutwula lwa ya kudza</i>	since the day of his death
<i>Usingiye umuguti</i>	he is has stand firm
<i>Kutula lwa ya kudza</i>	since his death
<i>U singi ye na Nyasaye</i>	he has stood with God
<i>A kulindi liranga</i>	he is watching over us
<i>Yee a kwi wo buguuti</i>	he has become a conqueror
<i>Kutula lwa ya kudza</i>	since the day of his death
<i>Dzingelosi va sigama</i>	all angels knee before him
<i>Vandu va mwidzominya</i>	the world worships him
<i>Kigira nu wu buyanzi</i>	because he is God of love
<i>Kutula lwa ya guuta</i>	ever since he conquered

Mu mihiga ni mihiga for years and years
A veye no vuyanzi he has abundant love
A ku haaniranga vyosi he looks over all of us
Kutula lwa ya kudza since the day of his death

APPENDICES

A.3 Glossary

Abatirichi- a sub-set of the Abaluyia community found in Southern Western Kenya, also referred to as the Tiriki

Asiis – The name given to God by the Kalenjiin during the pre-colonial period, this God was also referred to as **Cheptaillel, Chebonomoni, Chepokimabai** or **Chepopkoiyo**

Bihwa – The intimate name used on nephews by uncles (in singular **Mwihwa**)

Guga- as used in our study it refers to the spirits of close and related dead agnatic members of the lineage

Ibololi – a territorial unit inhabited by a sub community of Abatirichi during the pre-colonial period, it was similar to the Kalenjiin *bororiet*

Idumi- the whole corpus of ceremonies and rituals which accompany male circumcision among Abatirichi

Ingolole – Head gear worn by initiates during seclusion to conceal their faces from women, children and uncircumcised people, in plural they are referred to as **Tsingolole**

Kapnyonje – These is circumcision grove usually they were located along a stream or a river, it was also called **Shibanda**

Kapkorosi – This was a sacred ritual site used for prayers and divination in the pre-colonial period in Tiriki.

Khung'aba – The ritual of cleansing an initiate from the ritual impurities of circumcision in order to integrate him back to the society

Khwitsulitsa- In this study it means the grand memorial ceremonies conducted to honor a dead person among the Tiriki

Lidole – A genital deformity, in men, where the prepuce is too short to cover the whole penis glans

Luswa – The state of ritual impurity

Olubego- as used herein refers to the ritual shaving of the hair by the bereaved family on the third day following burial.

Misambwa – as used in this study refers to benign ancestral spirits or *musambwa*(singular)

Mudiri wu khu m'matsi – initiation high priest who managed a sub-community (*ibololi*) also referred to as *Mwimirhi wi idumi, Musakhulu wi idumi or Mushebi mukhulundu*

Mukhulu – An initiate who still in seclusion

Musinde – A circumcision candidate

Musoleli – an uncircumcised man, either still young or even an adult

Musaalitsi- as used in this study refers to a ritual elder who led religious ceremonies among the Tiriki during the Pre-Christian period

Muuma – The sacred ritual oathing conducted, in most cases, to solve conflicts in the society

Nyasaye – The name given to God by Abatirichi during the pre-colonial period, they also called this Godhead as **Iliuva**

Shilemba – This were cattle drive dances conducted during the burial of men to celebrate their lives as warriors and upright men in Tiriki social standards


Shihinini- as used in this thesis it refers to the spirit of a recent dead

APPENDICES

A4: Research Permit

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT:
MR. SHIYUKA ELVIS KARANI
of KENYATTA UNIVERSITY, 32-30706
Chebiemit, has been permitted to
conduct research in Vihiga County
on the topic: THE EVOLUTION OF
RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES
IN BANTU ABATIRISHI FUNERAL RITUAL
C. 1880 - 1960
for the period ending:
31st December, 2015

Permit No : NACOSTI/P/15/6779/7062
Date Of Issue : 22nd September, 2015
Fee Received :Ksh 1,000




[Signature]
Applicant's Signature

[Signature]
Director General
National Commission for Science, Technology & Innovation

CONDITIONS

- 1. You must report to the County Commissioner and the County Education Officer of the area before embarking on your research. Failure to do that may lead to the cancellation of your permit**
- 2. Government Officers will not be interviewed without prior appointment.**
- 3. No questionnaire will be used unless it has been approved.**
- 4. Excavation, filming and collection of biological specimens are subject to further permission from the relevant Government Ministries.**
- 5. You are required to submit at least two(2) hard copies and one(1) soft copy of your final report.**
- 6. The Government of Kenya reserves the right to modify the conditions of this permit including its cancellation without notice.**

REPUBLIC OF KENYA



National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation

RESEARCH CLEARANCE PERMIT

Serial No. A 6657

CONDITIONS: see back page