

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Central Bantu(Agikuyu, Aembu(Ambeere, Ameru, , Akamba)**

#### **Agikuyu**

The Agikuyu are the largest community in Kenya and the largest group in the African continental context of the North-Eastern Bantu. They form the largest part of the population in Central Kenya, the neighbouring city of Nairobi and are the second largest group in the Rift Valley Province. The Agikuyu are also found all over Kenya, especially in towns, where they live and work as traders, artisans and professionals.

The Agikuyu ancestral and spiritual homeland is in the present central Province. Natural landmarks mark the boundaries of the area. To the north is Kinyaga (Mount Kenya); to the west is the Great escarpment of the Rift valley, which merges to the north with the Nyandarua range, and to the east and south is the Kenyan hills (Ol Donyo Sabuk) and the Ngong hills respectively. The ancestral area is well watered and dissected plateaus of approximately 160 kilometres in length from north to south and 50 kilometres in width from east to west. The area tilts southwards from the mountainous and hilly north to the Mbeere and Kaputiei plains, the direction in which numerous parallel rivers and streams flow into the Thagana (Tana) and Athi rivers, causing deep narrow gorges. As a result, the dominating feature of most Great country topography is that of a trenched and denuded plateau of ridges and valleys. The area has ample rainfall, which averages from 1750 mm in the highlands and 1000 mm in the lower lands per year. This rainfall comes in two rainy seasons per year; the long rains falling between March and May and the short rains falling between mid October and December. The temperature of the area is generally moderate.

#### **The Origin**

As will be seen later in this chapter, the Agikuyu people on entering the Mount Kenya area rapidly and extensively absorbed people of other communities they found in the area and it seems that through this process of mutual assimilation, their earlier history beyond this period became blurred and eventually forgotten in their traditions. What is distantly remembered is that they came from the north and Abaci (Abyssinia) is definitely mentioned as a place of origin. However, other Bantu peoples from Western and Nyanza provinces in their traditions remember association and contacts with the Agikuyu; contacts which took place earlier before these people's entry and sojourn in Mount Elgon, Lake Baringo, Lake Nakuru and Mount Kenya area settlement. On their origin, migration and relations with the Western Bantu and others, Professor William Robert Ochieng has written:

The traditions of the Gusii people indicate that in the distant past they were the same people as the Kuria, the Logoli, the Bukusu, the Suba of south Nyanza, the Kikuyu, the Meru, the Embu, and the Kamba. They further state that on their way south from a country which they call "Misiri", they were together with the Ganda and the Soga. The Ganda and Soga are said to have branched off from the rest of the migrants around Mount Elgon in a south-westerly direction. The Kikuyu, Meru, Embu and Kamba are said to have travelled eastwards toward what is now the

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central highlands of Kenya, while the Bukusu (Kitosh) appear to have remained around Mount Elgon. The remaining clusters — the Gusii, Kuria, Suba and Logoli migrated southward and, following the course of river Nzoia, arrived on the eastern shores of Lake Victoria some fifteen to sixteen generations ago, presumably sometime around A.D. 1520.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Ochieng has further written:

The Gusii themselves speak of Mogusii as the founder of their society and the person whom their tribe was named. They also say that Mogusii's father was called Osogo son of Moluguhia, son of Kigoma, son of Ribiaka, who was son of Kintu (variously called Mundu, or Wantu, or Muntu, apparently according to personal preference). It was Kintu, the Gusii say, who led the migration from "Misiri" to Mount Elgon, and there they appear to have stayed until they were forced to disperse because of droughts and pestilences. Gusii traditions also indicate that Moluguhia, the grandfather of Mogusii, had a number of sons who founded some of the Baluyia sub-tribes or clans, and that among his remembered sons were Osogo and Mogikoyo. Osogo's descendants are said to have founded the Gusii, Kuria, Logoli and several Suba tribes, while the descendants of Mogikoyo became the Kikuyu, the Meru and the Embu tribes — and according to a few elders — the Kamba tribe as well. It is worth pointing out at this stage that these Gusii claims are not to be taken for granted. Linguists like Whiteley and Greenberg, who have studied the Gusii and other Bantu languages, are agreed that the Gusii, Logoli, Kuria, Kikuyu, Embu, Kamba and Meru languages are very closely related.<sup>2</sup>

Professor Were writing on the Maragoli stay in Misiri has written thus:

They lived there with the Arabs, the Kikuyu, the Meru, the Embu, the Baganda, the Basoga and their fellow Abaluyia. Every tribe had its own language.

It is of note that the Abagusii name their sons 'Mogikoyo' and Maragoli name theirs 'M[g]k[y]', in addition to names such as K]mani and Macaria etc. Ag]k[y] have the name 'G]thii', for Abagusii - Kisii, 'Kuria' for the Abakuria who also share names with Ag]k[y] such as M[g]re for their daughters. Also these closely related Bantu people share the age-sets names of Maina (ir[ng]) and Cuma.

### Entry into the Mount Kenya Highlands

The group which came to the foot-hills of Mount Kenya through present M]]r] seems to have come from a place north-west of Mount Kenya. According to Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen's diary dated 26.11.1902 in a conversation with chief Kar]ri wa Gakure in M[rang'a he was told about the origins of the Ag]k[y] and he recorded thus:

I am out of bed and all right today. Karurie came to Fort Hall this afternoon and told me a curious myth regarding the origin of the Kikuyu. He says their ancestors came from near lake Rudolf . .

According to H.S. Kabeca Mwan]ki in his book The Living History of Embu and Mbeere to 1986:

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An equally believed story of Embu origin is that they came from a far away land beyond Meru and settled in the present land. Some specify the place of origin beyond Meru as Tuku or Ethiopia and others Uru. They say that when the first bunch of the Embu came they were in company with the ancestors of the Mbeere.

Taking into consideration that the Ag]k[y[, Aembu, Ambeere and Cuka travelled together as one congerie into the Mount Kenya region, a northern home of origin for the Ag]k[y[ is suggested. Professor Godfrey M[ri]ki in a book titled – A history of the Kikuyu, 1500-1900 has written:

First, a tiny minority of my informants believe that the Kikuyu were descendants of the Baci or Ethiopians; or descendants of the Rendille man who came from Meru and settled at Gathanga; or that the Turkanas and Baci are relatives of the Kikuyu.

The Abaluyia and Abagusii who say that they were in Misiri with the Ag]k[y[, Aembu, Am]]r[ and Akamba also mention Kuru or Akuru in relation to their stay in Misiri. According to A.J. Akell in his book A history of the Sudan from the earliest times to 1821, places with the names Seera, Dongola, Meroe, Kuru and Soba existed before the Birth of Christ. Evidence is, therefore that many Bantu peoples living in present-day Kenya had lived together in the distant years, that is therefore the birth of Christ, in some part of north-eastern Africa, and passed through some parts of Ethiopia (Baci \_ Abyssinia) during their movement to the south. It is interesting to note that the Gurage people of Ethiopia who excel in business and farming look and act in a similar manner like the Ag]k[y[. They also came from the north, which is presumed to have been Meroe (Misiri?) which was defeated by Aksum armies at about A.D. 350. Aksum (Axum) is in the present day Ethiopia. They first settled in Gura in the present Eritrea before spreading to the south. The Ethiopia publication Spectrum Guide had the following to say about the Gurage:

The area of the Gibe River for hundred of years has been the homeland of Ethiopia's most remarkable and industrious people – the Gurage. of mixed Semitic and Hamitic stock, they probably migrated here from further north in the long forgotten past. They have made themselves at home in the southern highlands and have evolved a uniquely vigorous and self reliant economy.

It is probable that the Gurage may have left Meroe (Misiri?) before the Ag]k[y[ congerie through Eritrea and settled in Ethiopia. They are generally referred to as Ag]k[y[ of Ethiopia.

It may appear incomprehensible that the Ag]k[y[, who are believed to have been the dominant community in the group consisting of the Am]]r[, Aembu, Ambeere and Akamba during the migration from Misiri to Mount Kenya area to have 'forgotten' their distant past history almost in total and to have adopted the myth of origin from M[k]r[e wa Gathanga. It is believed the legend served as a focus or symbol of unity, thereby welding together the various disparate elements into one people from heterogeneous origins. The Abaluyia, Am]]r[, Kalenjin and Mijikenda have similarly invoked myths which legitimised the occupation of their present localities during the last few centuries and which strengthened their communal cohesion and identity in order to meet new and in particular external challenges. On this Ochieng W.R. has written:

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These myths are clearly unhelpful in indicating where the "proto-Kikuyu" families came from. Looking critically at their traditions, it would appear that since the beginning of land alienation in Kikuyu land, the Kikuyu elders have "willfully decided to forget" their early traditions.

Dr. L.J. Beecher has suggested that the fact that the Kikuyu have forgotten their early history and concentrated on the creation story, in the heart of Kikuyu land, is explainable by way of "their strong attachment to present tribal lands". And according to Dr. Muriuki, "from 1920 onwards, land became a bone of contention between the government, the Kikuyu and the white community. To the extent that land and their traditions of origin are interrelated, it is crucial to distinguish between the material collection before and after 1920. Much of the latter work whether contributed by Kikuyu or European, was politically inspired".<sup>17</sup>

Inter-community mingling and absorptions experienced by the Agikuyu over a long period of time may have had telling diluting effects on the community's customs and historical lore. Introduction of foreign religions also played a major part by aggressively introducing foreign cultures and values, and discouraging traditional way of life of the people. Colonisation introduced modern education and urbanisation as well as increased interaction with outsiders in central Kenya which also played an important part in blurring Gikuyu communal memory and values.

But the Gikuyu myth of origin in Mbari wa Gathanga remains central to the Gikuyu sense of becoming a separate people and has undoubtedly been used to make a lasting claim on their core living area in the Mount Kenya region. The myth encapsulates the religious belief that Gikuyu country is God's endowment, their inheritance forever. This myth has all the ingredients of myth as described by the late Professor Bronislaw Malinowski:

Studied alive, myth is not an explanation in satisfaction of a scientific interest, but a narrative resurrection of a primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral cravings, social submissions, assertions, even practical requirements. Myth fills in primitive culture an indispensable function, it expresses, codifies beliefs, it safeguards and enforces morality, it vouches for efficiency or ritual, and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a hard-worked active force: it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic character of primitive faith and moral wisdom.

Professor William Robert Ochieng on traditions of the origins of clans, the founders of the various divisions and the acquisition of group totems findings are that they are riddled with myths and at times, confusion. "They should be looked at as an attempt by a simple society at tracing back the origin of their society." He has written thus:

Myths are extremely complex social or cultural realities which we must approach and interpret with intellectual sympathy and caution. They are said to narrate sacred history as well as to relate events which took place very long time ago in other words, myths tell us how, through the deeds of the supernatural being, reality came into existence, be it the whole reality, the cosmos, or only fragments of reality — an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behaviour, an institution.

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According to Agikuyu, Aembu and Ambeere, it is generally agreed that their ancestors originated from the east or north-east of the present Mbeere country. On the basis of the available evidence, it appears that the ancestors of the Agikuyu, Cuka, Aembu/Ambeere entered Mount Kenya area through Igembe and Tigania in around A.D. 1800. This is about 100 years before the proto-Mijikuyu arrived in the area from Mbwa (Manda island) at the Kenya coast. Professor W.R. Ochieng on this has written:

The picture which emerges from Meinertzhagen, Dundas, McGregor and Muriuki accounts is that which would suggest that the proto-Kikuyu immigrated into the Highlands from an area to the north or north-west of Mount Kenya, and entering the Highlands in small family units. Be that as it may, makes it quite clear that "the Kikuyu and Chuka have no traditions of having ever migrated from the Coast, let alone Shungwaya . . . In the event and on the basis of the available evidence, the most that we can deduce is that their ancestors migrated from Meru, and especially Igembe and Tharaka countries, and that this migration was well under way by the 16th century.

### **Migration to Ithanga**

Some Igembe/Tigania groups on their migration route to the Tharaka country are said to have come into contact with the Tikiri (Ndigiri or Ndegere?) or Asi (Athi) who lived to the south-west and north of Mount Kenya who they eventually absorbed.

When the Igembe/Tigania groups were trekking southward, they halted at Matiri in the Ntugi forest between Thingithi and Mutonga rivers. A section of the group settled there and joined the Thagici (Segeju) and the descendants are the Tharaka. Others moved to the confluence of the Mutonga, Maara and Rigitu rivers from where a section broke off moving towards Mount Kenya. The other migrants travelled south-westwards and halted at Igambang'ombe south of the confluence of Thici and Tharia rivers which became an important centre of dispersal. One section crossed Thici river to what is the present Embu. Another group moved up the ridge towards Mount Kenya and settled at Magumoni, thus joining the group that had broken off from the main body of pioneers at the confluence of Mutonga, Maara and Rigitu rivers. These two groups are the ancestors of the Cuka people. The group that crossed the Thici river into Embu advanced to Karurumo and reached Mwene-Ndega sacred grove, near today's Rinyenjes town. Professor Muriuki has written:

According to Cuka traditions, however, the Cuka, Aembu and Tharaka are very closely related. They are said to be descendants of three sisters who migrated from Tigania or Igembe or both places. On leaving Tigania and Igembe, they are said to have settled around the Ntugi forests. The mother of the Tharaka, Cia-Mbandi, was left there and she gave offspring to the Tharaka, while Cia Nthiga (the Eve of the Aembu) and Cia Ngoi (the eve of the Cuka) pressed ahead and settled at Igambang'ombe. Cia Nthiga and Cia Ngoi apparently quarrelled at this stage and the former crossed the Tharia and Thici rivers into modern Embu land, while the latter went up the ridge to settle at Magumoni.

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### **Ithanga Settlement**

From Igambang'ombe, the other group of the immigrants traveled southwards, along Thagana river valley to K]ambere hill where they made a settlement. While on the way to K]ambere hill, one group broke off and settled in the area of Mumoni hills and up to modern K]ndaruma to form the present Mbeere people. The group, which trekked on reached and settled around Ithanga, at the confluence of the Thagana and Th]ka rivers towards the end of A.D. 1700. On their southward migration the group appears to have encountered a large concentration of the Thagic[ along the Thagana river and close to Ithanga. While some of the Thagic[ eventually became the ancestors of some of the Tharaka, Mbeere and Akamba, it is accepted that others became the ancestor of some of the Ag]k[y]. From archaeological evidence and C14 dating, it is indicated that at Gatung'ang'a, a village in Math]ra in Nyeri (Enyer in Maasai )-district which is not far from Ithanga, there had been continuous occupation by a Bantu speaking population for many years, probably several centuries before the arrival of the Ag]k[y]. This Bantu population were no doubt Thagic[ people who had lived in these parts from about the twelfth to the fourteenth century. The encounter must have led to assimilation and culture fusion between the two groups, particularly around the important centre of dispersal at Ithanga and contiguous areas. Some Mbar] (clans) categorically assert that their ancestors migrated from Akamba land or Mbeere and specifically mention Thagic[. As has been seen , the Thagic[ people are now to be found living to the east of Mbeere and in Tharaka. As has already been acknowledged, Mavulia location in Mbeere is traditionally called Thagic[ while Kitui District in Ukambani is traditionally known as Uthaisu. The name Thagic[ is common as a male name among the Ag]k[y] people.

Besides the Thagic[, the Igembe/Tigania groups in their migration came into contact with the Gumba, an Eastern Cushitic-speaking people who are recalled by nearly all the Mount Kenya peoples. They are reputed to have been a race of hunting dwarfs, rather like the pygmies, who lived in roofed-over dug-outs or tunnels. Estimates of their height range from 76.2 centimetres (0.76 metres) to 137.2 centimetres (1.37 metres). The Igembe /Tigania and Thagic[ groups are likely to have initially mingled with the Gumba in the Tharaka and Mbeere areas. Apparently, the former groups gradually displaced or assimilated the Gumba. It is presumed that the process mainly occurred during the gradual migration through Mbeere and the stay at Ithanga and contiguous areas.

### **Settlement in Gaaki and Metumi**

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, at the eastern frontier of Math]ra, which was then relatively peaceful, settlements had reached the outskirts of Iria-in] and Magutu. People from Kony[ and K]r]m[k[y] who had greatly suffered from Maasai raids had reached Ker[a and R]thagati. Gathu-in] and Wam[rogi saltlicks where the Ag]k[y] took their livestock for salt-licks were regular battle grounds. Maasai wars in the 1880s between the Purko and Laikipiak (Wakuavi) enabled the Ag]k[y] to reach R]] R]ir[ river, since the Maasai had suffered great loss of life and battle fatigue. Further settlements to the north did not take place until after the eviction of the Maasai from the Ny]r] plains by the colonial administration in about 1912. The most notable aspect of G]k[y] history at this period was the continued assimilation of the Maasai by the Ag]k[y], quarrels notwithstanding. Maasai and Athi appear to have had an ambivalent relationship with the Ag]k[y]. Both peoples were considered aliens and adversaries on certain occasions and as associates on others and many of them eventually became assimilated by the Ag]k[y]. The Purko and Laikipiak war in 1870s resulted in great numbers of refugees seeking

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shelter among the Ag]k[y] and these were absorbed. In Math]ra, {thaya and Tet[ divisions of Ny]r] district, a large percentage of the population is of Maasai (Wakuavi/{kabi) ancestry. At the close of the nineteenth century, due to the preponderance Maasai influence, Math]ra had almost evolved into a separate sub-group, a process that started during the first half of the eighteenth century. Their extensive assimilation of Ndia immigrants and increased absorption of the Maasai and Athi led them to acquire language characteristics including a distinctive dialect which was different from the language of their Ag]k[y] kinsmen including within the areas of Gaaki. It is probable that the people of Math]ra could have evolved as a sub-group quite distinct both from the Maasai and the Ag]k[y] had not the colonial administration quite soon facilitated greater integration of Math]ra with the rest of G]k[y] country by moving away the Maasai from the adjoining plains. On the early migration and occupation of the rest of Gaaki and parts of Metumi by the Ag]k[y],

Professor M[ri]ki has written:

The migration northwards into {thaya was spearheaded by the Aithiegeni clan which had initially settled around Gikondi. According to tradition, the pioneer settler at Gikondi was a certain Kambaire M[n]ri, who later migrated to Kar]ma together with his four sons — Ngai, Gitene, K]r]mwa and Maigua. This was perhaps at the time of the Cuma generation, that is, about the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth. Further north, Kamoko, who is alleged to have been a herdsman, is said to have been joined by a M[mb]i hunter, Magana, a man who is reputed to have ranged far and wide — from Mathira to Wamagana (named after him) — before settling with Kamoko at Mahiga in the first half of the eighteenth century. Other pioneers spread across the Gura River into Aguthi from Tambaya, but expansion further north was considerably slower, only reaching the vicinity of the north Chania River towards the end of nineteenth century. This slow rate of expansion is explained by the Maasai threat, and is similar to the situation in Mathira. But here, as in Math]ra, extensive intermarriage between the two peoples took place. The two groups were conducting joint raids not only against their own people, but as far away as Ndia and Cuka.<sup>32</sup>

### Migration to Kabete

Migration to Kabete took place between the second half of the eighteenth century and the middle of the nineteenth century (1757-1827) during the K]nyanjui and M[ngai] age groups. Cuma and Ci]ra age groups — Kamau, K]mani or Karanja (1687 to 1721) — did not migrate from Metumi to Kabete as they were either dead or very old. Only a few of the Iregi elders (1727 - 1761) managed to cross Chania river if any.

The first G]k[y] warriors to fight the Maasai in the area of Th]ka during the first half of the nineteenth century belonged to the G]ta[ and Wainaina age groups (1792 to 1827). By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Ag]k[y] had reached the area of Karura river in Nairobi (Nairobi city centre was then known to the Ag]k[y] as K]n[-in], a place where there was a Mw]n[ tree) thrusting towards the nearby Maasai country on the other side of Mbagathi river, the Athi plains and a stretch of land between K]ambaa and Ngeeca. The Ngig] warriors, initiated in 1890, were involved in this thrust towards Maasai country. Professor M[ri]ki has written:

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During 1880s, the Kikuyu were settling in the area between the Karura and Nairobi rivers, and also towards Muguga. The penetration of Karura ridge was spearheaded by Iguku, of Mbari ya Gathagu, and Ndungata, of Mbari ya Muya. However, several people led the advance towards the Nairobi river and Muguga; Gatonye Munene made his Kihingo, a fortified cluster of homesteads (pl. Ihingo), in the 1880s at Muguga and Waiyaki Hinga moved to Mbugici (near Fort Smith) from Karura between 1884 and 1890. Other prominent pioneers who had ihingo at the frontier were Mucene Cege at [th]r[, Muthondu Nduru and Gatama at Kirungii [now Westlands], Mbari ya Wahothi close to Kikuyu station and Kiratu at Limuru.

By 1890 among those who had established ihingo at the frontier were M[[r] M[gwe at M[thaiga, Gatama and K]ari] Ndemengo at the confluence of the Karura and G]tathur[ rivers, Waihumbu and Thair[ at Kogoge, M[g] at Kabete, M[kiri and Waiyaki at Mb[g]ici, Wamagata at K]noo, Ngware at G]tar[ (Kanjerr), Gatonye at M[g]ga, Ngeeca at Ngeeca, Cege and K]rat[ at R[ngai (Kabuk[/Tigoni), K]rat[ at Limuru and Nding'[ri and Nd[ti at Uplands. A few other ihingo were at Korio, and T[r]thi, a Mwathi (Asi), had a home in the forest nearby. His fourth generation descendant, T[r]thi M[ngai, became a member of Kenya's parliament for Lari constituency in the area after independence; the Dorobo family had been G]k[y]-assimilated.

### **Nairobi Settlements**

Dr. Louise Seymour Bazett Leakey in his book *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903* has written that at the time of Waiyaki's exile, the G]k[y] boundary ran from a point a mile (1.6 km) or so southwest of Undir] swamp at G]k[y] Railway Station area in a general east-ward direction to the present position of the city of Nairobi and that:

The plains on which Nairobi Railway Station and the commercial area have been built were not undisputed Gikuyu territory, for the Maasai also sometimes grazed their cattle there. "The Hill" area of Nairobi, however, as well as the suburbs known as Parklands, Muthaiga, Karen and Langata were unquestionably within the Gikuyu country. This is established by the fact that many independent Agikuyu witnesses, who were warriors at the time of Waiyaki's exile, testify to the following facts. There were two fortified villages in the woods near State house known as Kihingo kia Waihumbu and Kihingo kia Ndemengo; there were also two on Museum Hill near Ngara Road (these were known as Kihingo kia Muthondu and Kihingo kia Nyanduru); there was a fortified village in what is now known as "City Park"; there were two more in the region now occupied by the Muthaiga Country Club and Golf Course; another was near what is now the Nairobi cemetery; and another between Karen Blixen House and the Karen Golf Club.<sup>36</sup>

Dr. L.S. B. Leakey has further written:

Penetration to the lands south of the river was slow, and by the time of the Iregi generation, c. 1860, it had reached only as far as the river called the Rui Rwaka. However, during the succeeding years the expansion was continued and by 1887, when the first European entered south Gikuyu, they had extended their occupation of the forest lands to the edge of Maasai country near the Ngong Hills. In 1887, Teleki described the Mbagathi River as the boundary between the Maasai and the Gikuyu, even though there were few Gikuyu in the extreme south, and the line of fortified villages which marked the effective border was then several miles from its banks.

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### **Relations with the Maasai**

The communities within the neighbourhood of the Agikuyu were the Maasai to the east and south and the Akamba to the east of the territory. Both communities were adversaries and friends at the same time to the Agikuyu. These communities carried out raids on one another occasionally and traded with one another most of the time. The Maasai had the notoriety of having spread terror from the shores of lake Turkana (Lake Rudolf) to northern and central Tanzania in the south, and from the banks of Tana (Thagana) river in the east to the shores of lake Victoria in the west. It is said that the Maasai had two overriding passions — cattle and warfare. Cattle were their pride and source of livelihood. The threat of being raided by their neighbours from the plains caused terror to the agriculturist Agikuyu. There was a state of what would have been perpetual war had this not been tempered by other factors which enhanced interdependence and occasional mutual understanding.

The pastoralists needed some of the agricultural produce while the agriculturists needed some animal products. The Maasai were particularly vulnerable to famine due to the vagaries of the weather or livestock epidemics. On occasions when these things affected them, they were heavily dependent upon their agricultural neighbours with whom they had either to trade or else seek refuge to avert starvation to death. If there had been problems in relations beforehand, emissaries were sent to negotiate a peace treaty to facilitate resumption of trading. Peace negotiations were a solemn affair and reaching an agreement on a peace treaty (mnyoro) involved a lengthy and elaborate procedure ending in a religious ceremony during which both parties took a solemn and binding oath. Serious consequences were believed to befall anyone who broke such a solemn oath. That the oath was not to be taken lightly was demonstrated by the fate of a warrior from Kikambuu called Wangai, who was handed over to the Maasai after he had broken a peace treaty in the 1880s. Peaceful coexistence therefore was duly recognised as being of prime importance to the well being of the two communities, sporadic raiding notwithstanding.

### **The British East Africa Company and Changes in Gikuyu Social Values**

In the meantime, the Agikuyu in Kabete were undergoing rapid social change as a result of decades of trade and contacts with the coastal traders. This process was heightened by the operations of the British East Africa Company at Kikawari (Dagoretti) and greater exposure of the people to outside influences at Dagoretti. It is believed the name Dagoretti is derived from the Gikuyu word Ndagirite — 'He has not bought it' — which was the Gikuyu outcry against the Company, and by-extension the European who had acquired land in the area without buying it.

The use of a pro-company group of the Agikuyu led by Kinyanjui wa Gathirimu who was Hall's pointman, was a pointer to the transformation of social and political relations taking place in Kabete. It is worth noting that those who were ready to compromise and accommodate themselves to the changing circumstances were nonentities in the traditional Gikuyu society. It is alleged that Kinyanjui Njiru Gathirimu who was previously Waiyaki's dependant (njaguti-servant) and a distant relative migrated to Kabete after being disowned by his relatives in Kikamba (Kandara, Metumi) for misbehaving. Kinyanjui and his group, in order to promote their social-standing and influence, found it necessary to operate outside traditional structures, and therefore eroded the traditional norms with abandon. The first consideration of collaborators like Kinyanjui wa Gathirimu was economic gain from employment as informers, porters, soldiers of fortune and in

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other manual chores. C.H. Stigand in the book titled "The Land of Zinj (The Land of Black) published in 1913, on Paramount Chief K]nyanjui wrote thus:

The Chief of this corner we pass through is called "Kinanjui" [K]nyanjui. He is the Chief of the Nairobi and Dagoreti Kikuyu, and his village is on the Dagoreti road to the west. His country goes as far as the Chania River, at which place Korori's [Kar]ri country commences. Some of his underchiefs are Msama [M]thama near Lamoru [Limuru], Mturi [M]turi, north of Msama (there is another Mturi near Fort Hall), and Njorugi [N]joroge, north of Escapment station. K]nyanjui is a Chief who was created by the Government, and so has not so much authority with his people as some hereditary Chiefs have. He is said to be generally drunk. He occasionally visits Nairobi dressed as an admiral.

### **Relationship with the Akamba**

By the 1840s G]k[y] country was an important source of ivory and the Akamba were initially the principal ivory buyers, as is suggested by the example of a major Mkamba trader Kivoi Mwenda who told Dr. Krapf in 1849 that he had left his ivory in the Athi country as well as G]k[y] land. The Athi who were expert elephant hunters were an important source of ivory to the G]k[y] who sold them to the Akamba and the Maasai in exchange for goats. A good piece of ivory of about ten feet (3.05 metres) in length could fetch between fifty and a hundred goats when sold to the Akamba and Swahili traders. The Akamba were chiefly middlemen who sold the ivory to the Nyika (Mijikenda) people who in their turn sold the goods to the Mombasa traders. Kivoi's caravans, sometimes of more than five hundred porters and other workers, had direct access to the Mombasa traders; he, therefore, did not need to dispose of his goods to the Wanyika. The governor of Mombasa personally knew him and his village in Kitui was a centre of trading activities between the Akamba and the Ag]k[y] as well as the other Mount Kenya peoples. In addition to the threat posed by the Galla and the Wakuavi en route, the Wanyika were also discouraged by the Akamba from developing an interest in upcountry trading. The Akamba invented stories of fierce pygmies and cannibals inhabiting the interior. Dr. Krapf noted:

I conjecture that these stories have been invented by the Wakamba and caravan leaders, in order to deter the inhabitants of the coast from journeying into the interior, so that their monopoly of the trade with the interior might not be interfered with.

### **Trading with the Coast**

G]k[y] history was radically changed by the events that took place in the last twenty-five years or so of the nineteenth century. Some Ag]k[y] people had probably previously seen Swahili traders in the Akamba villages or travelling with the caravans which passed through G]k[y] country. Very few of them had managed to travel to the coast. The increased contact with the outside world at the close of the nineteenth century was one of the main features which preceded colonisation of G]k[y] country by the white people. The Ag]k[y] found themselves increasingly involved in direct Swahili commercial activity and enterprise, a process that coincided with the decline of the Akamba commercial empire which had reached its nadir by the 1870s. Swahili involvement into the interior trade was immediately followed by the establishment of the Imperial British East Africa Company (hereafter IBEAC), founded by British philanthropists, businessmen and empire builders, which was granted a royal charter in 1888. IBEAC opened the way for the subsequent establishment of British colonial administration from 1895 onwards. The

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advent of the colonial administration saw the entry into Gikuyu land of the administrators, settlers, traders and missionaries with their strange ways of life, demands that were a threat to communal well-being and ideas that shook the very foundation of Gikuyu social values and world view.

By the time the coastal traders started direct trading in the Gikuyu land, the Agikuyu had had long experience in trading activities particularly with the Maasai and the Akamba. They were therefore aware of the increased profits that would accrue from direct trade with the traders from the coast by-passing the Akamba middlemen. The Agikuyu also have a hospitable attitude towards visitors and strangers whom they believe should be treated well. They say a visitor or a stranger (mgeni) is like river water that passes on, a saying that also implies that visitors may bring good fortune. They therefore have a positive and generous disposition towards traders and external trade.

Despite the Agikuyu's positive disposition towards trade and the coastal traders, relations were not as smooth as they should have been. The conduct of some of the coastal caravans caused friction with the Agikuyu. Some of the caravans, for example, failed to pay for goods supplied and some had the propensity to forage for food in Gikuyu cultivated land. The truculence on the part of some Gikuyu warriors often provoked fighting between the foreigners and the Agikuyu sometimes leading to massacres. Thomson heard stories in 1883 of "some bitter lessons, that the traders in several fearful massacres at Ngong and other places had taught the Kikuyu". It is significant that those on and off conflicts did not deter trade between the two groups as in the end each needed the other. Caravans of between 1,200 to 1,500 men often stopped at Ngong and all of them obtained food from the Agikuyu. A number of Swahili caravans reached areas in Gikuyu country never before reached by the coastal caravans. Hohnel recorded that the head of Jumbe Kimemeta's caravan Kijanja, a man from Tanga, even knew the Gikuyu language.

### **Prelude to British Rule**

As has already been seen, before the first European expedition into Gikuyu country, the tribe had been in contact with both Arab and Swahili traders for some time and were selling to them large quantities of food for their porters. The procedure was for the traders to pitch their camping near the north end of the Ngong Hills, close to the source of the Mbagathi River, a place known then as Ngongo Bagas, and then to fire off their guns to let the Agikuyu who were living in the fortified villages in the forest belt know that they wanted to trade. As soon as the gun report were heard, news was communicated by messengers throughout the area and people from all over the southern Gikuyu country would make their way to Ngong taking with them maize, millet, sweet potatoes, and other food stuffs to exchange for beads, copper wire, and cloth. The Gikuyu names for these Arab and Swahili traders were

Thakum, Comba or Makorobai (slave dealers and people who employed paid labour). The Arab and Swahili traders did not themselves dare go into the Gikuyu country to obtain food. Dr. L.S.B.

Leakey on this has written:

On one or two occasions the Arabs and Swahili traders tried to penetrate Gikuyu country, but on each occasion they were attacked, their party more or less annihilated by the Gikuyu warriors,

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and all their possessions stolen. Slave raiders never succeeded in making Gikuyu country a field for their activities.

### **Early Europeans' Perceptions of Gikuyu Political Organisation**

Some early European travellers believed that Gikuyu political organisation had provision for 'chiefs'. However, these were misconceptions about leaders who existed under traditional Gikuyu political organisation in the writings of the early travellers to Gikuyu country. There were no chiefs in the sense of rulers or governors. The fundamental basis of Gikuyu social and political structure was that people ruled themselves through an organised system of committees. The title M[thamaki (Samaki according to von Hohnel) which was erroneously equated to the title of chief did not mean chief at all, for those who held the title had no powers or rights vested in them as individual leaders, but rather could act only in consultation with their colleagues in the committee of leadership (k]ama). A m[thamaki was usually a wise and respected president of a committee, who could persuade those who were with him to take a line of action that he considered to be best, but who could not arbitrarily impose his will upon them. Decisions made by the k]ama were enforced by the warriors as the armed branch of the people's government under supervision of the territorial warriors' m[thamaki. While Teleki and Hohnel's plans for the march through Gikuyu country were being made, the travellers arranged for the purchase of further food supplies, and a big market was organised in a clearing as described below:

Here they found such an immense number of native men — most of them, it is true, laden with food — that our people dared not leave the shelter of the forest, and some of them, including Kijanja, even ran away. Qualla, however, remained calm, and made his way through the crowd, which appeared greatly excited, but when the numbers were increased by fresh swarms of gesticulating natives, he too began to feel alarmed. The young warriors, however, soon restored order, drawing their long knives or swords, and laying them about vigorously, with the flat sides only, but some blood was drawn . . . One native snatched a bundle of beads out of Qualla's hands, another stole the turban from Maktubu's head, but warriors themselves caught and flogged the thieves, compelling them to restore the property taken.<sup>55</sup>

### **Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC)**

IBEAC paved way for the subsequent establishment of British colonial rule from 1895 when the British administration took over from it. Machakos and Dagoretti stations were established in 1889 and 1890 respectively to provide for the caravans on their way to and from Buganda, which was the centre of interest for the company. Lugard who set up both stations had entered into blood brotherhood and made peace treaties with a number of prominent Agikuyu when he established a fort at K]awari]a (Dagoretti) in 1890, including Waiyaki. The fort lacked strong administration capable of controlling the activities of caravans and the ill-disciplined soldiers. None of the company's agents — Wilson, Purkiss or Nelson — was capable of the necessary firmness. The rowdy behaviour and conduct of the ill-disciplined soldiers and Maasai levies provoked the anger of the Agikuyu. Apart from foraging in their shambas (cultivated land) or forcibly taking food, the behaviour of the askari (soldiers) towards local women was wanting. Hall reported that two of his men who were supposed to be herding the company's goats and sheep tried to rape a woman on 25th October 1892. She resisted and one of them shot her and she died two days later. K]nyanjui recounts another episode involving seven Swahili soldiers who

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had been sent on an errand to Machakos and who stole Kamw]ngo's goats. In the fighting that followed five of the coasters were killed.

Drunkenness was a serious problem right from when Lugard was building the fort in 1890. The company, which was having financial problems in 1892, ordered that Fort Smith and Machakos be self-supporting, thereby authorising pillaging. This policy was effected through series of primitive raiding expeditions for food or stocks which dealt the last blow to the G]k[y]-IBEAC relationship. Lugard acknowledged this by observing that:

Owing largely, I believe, to the want of discipline in the passing caravans whose men robbed the crops and otherwise made themselves troublesome, the people became estranged and presently murdered several porters.

Due to the excessive hostility from the Ag]k[y], George Williamson had been forced to evacuate K]awari[a fort for the first time on 30th March, 1891 and for the second time on 13th June, 1891, arriving in Machakos on 19th June, 1891. Purkiss and Erick Smith came back with a strong force towards the end of 1891 and they pitched their camp within Waiyaki's kihingo (fortified village) without his permission where they remained until the new fort, which captain Smith named after himself was completed. The company's relations with the Ag]k[y] were further poisoned by the machinations of G]k[y] collaborators, who made deals with the Company behind their community's back, and the new station's policy of being self-supporting through primitive raiding. As temperatures rose between the people and the company, Waiyaki became worried by events taking place and particularly the stationing of the company's soldiers virtually at his doorstep against his wishes. He became apprehensive that he might be punished, by having his livestock seized, in retaliation for the sins of his fellow G]k[y] warriors who had ransacked and burned down K]awari[a fort. To secure his livestock, he dispatched part of his flocks and herds to an area near M]g]ga under one of his sons, G]thagui, while another lot was sent to the Mbar] ya G]konyo (G]konyo's clan) of Ting'ang'a in G]th]ng]ri under another son, M]nyua, for safety, just in case the Europeans decided to take action against him.

In the meantime, an extraordinarily large force of Maasai warriors invaded the G]k[y] country nearby. Surprisingly Purkiss agreed to help when an appeal was made to him by the Ag]k[y] to help prevent the expected defeat of the Ag]k[y]. Reinforced by the Company's forces which were armed with guns, the Ag]k[y] were able to make a successful counter-attack on 23rd May 1892 that annihilated the invaders who were caught unawares jubilantly celebrating their success at G]camu near M]g]ga. This offer of help worked to improve the relationship between the company and the Ag]k[y], albeit temporarily and Waiyaki's fears proved unwarranted at the time.

The most experienced soldier at Fort Smith was a former slave from Malawi known as Maktubu who had seen service three times with Thomson and one time with Holnel. This is the man the company would send out most of the time to buy or forage for food as he was intelligent and hardworking.

A G]k[y] collaborator known as Kamar] Wamagata who had previously been married to a woman known as Wanjik] Gathura in a marriage which had failed wanted to recover by force the bride price he had paid from R]m]i and K]ari] Gathura at Ting'ang'a, then known to the company as Guruguru. In August 1892, he persuaded Maktubu accompanied by fifteen soldiers and

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several Agikuyu warriors, under the pretext of going to buy food, to go with him to Ting'ang'a. When there, they seized goats by force and a war cry rang out attracting local warriors who outnumbered the invaders, all but a few of whom were killed; Maktubu was one of the men killed. One Abdulla Omar who escaped reported falsely that Maktubu and others had been murdered while buying food. The company administration in retaliation organised and dispatched a large expedition of five companies and levies under MacDonald, Austin, Pringle and Foaker to punish the people of Githung'ri where the Ting'ang'a incident had happened. Waiyaki, who had transferred his livestock to the Githung'ri area, learned of the impending expedition in advance and fearing that his livestock would be seized together with those of the people involved in the battle of Ting'ang'a gave a timely warning to his riika (age mate) Gikonyo Maagi who was at the time harbouring his livestock and who in turn informed other people in Githung'ri. One of the officers in the expedition, Austin, gave an account of what followed thus:

The expedition was disappointing in one respect and that was our failure to capture herds of cattle and flocks of sheep which the Wadorobo were known to possess in large numbers. We secured no cattle and only fifty or sixty goats and sheep. For this we learnt later that we had to thank Waiyaki who had by some means obtained news of the impending punitive expedition and sent out warnings hot-foot to his Wadorobo relatives.<sup>58</sup>

Just after the expedition returned to Fort Smith, Waiyaki, who had been drinking and was definitely drunk, came to the fort and entered Purkiss's room. Purkiss, seeing that he was drunk and knowing what he had done to them tried to eject him out. Waiyaki, in too drunken a state to know what he was doing, drew his sword and resisted Purkiss. After a struggle, Purkiss wrestled the sword from Waiyaki and with it he cut him on the head. He was overpowered and handcuffed to the Fort flagstaff with a chain around his neck as an additional safeguard and in that state spent the night in the fort square.

Major Macdonald account for what happened is as follows:

It appeared that Waiyaki, who was rather drunk, went into Purkiss's room to taunt him with his failure to secure the cattle of the Guruguru. Purkiss, seeing the state he was in, ordered him out of the house, and on Waiyaki becoming still more insolent, pushed him towards the door. Waiyaki at once drew his sword and attacked Purkiss, who was unarmed, and could not get to the weapons he had laid aside on entering his room. An unequal struggle now commenced, and Purkiss grappled with the Kikuyu chief, in an endeavour to deprive him of his sword. The rest of the struggle we had ourselves witnessed.

Waiyaki was tried next day in the presence of seventeen of his brother chiefs, to whom all the evidence was translated. Of the verdict there could be no doubt, nor had Waiyaki any defense to make, except that he was drunk. So we decided to take him away with us to the coast, and deport him permanently from the country, where he had proved such a treacherous enemy, and the cause of so much bloodshed.

. . . Waiyaki, however, never reached the coast, as he died at Kibwezi. It appeared that his skull had been slightly fractured by the sword-cut he received from Purkiss, and this caused complications, which killed him. Strange to say, poor Purkiss died at the same station a few years afterwards — and the graves of the two combatants lie close together.<sup>59</sup>

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Dr. L.S.B. Leakey who interviewed some of Waiyakis' warriors has written:

According to the Gikuyu version, the people were so enraged when they heard that Waiyaki was to be deported for an act not committed deliberately, but while drunk, that they planned an ambush to release him. I have spoken to several old men who were leaders of this plan and who were in the ambush. They all testify that it was Waiyaki himself who, on realising what was about to happen, cursed the warriors and ordered them not to attack.

Considerable violence followed in 1893 and 1894 largely due to the error of judgement made by Purkiss and Macdonald in not pardoning Waiyaki and thereby strengthening his friendship with the Europeans. He had been a friend to the Europeans for a long time and had done a great deal for them. Waiyaki had never been the "treacherous enemy" that Macdonald makes him out to have been. Shortly after this incident Nelson was sent to take charge of Fort Smith and Purkiss was demoted to second in command. After Waiyaki's arrest and death, there was continued warfare between the Agikuyu and the Company forces stationed at Fort Smith through December 1892. In January 1893, the Gikuyu made an all out effort to overrun the Fort and Purkiss despite the presence of about 150 Zanzibari soldiers and armed porters belonging to Martin's caravan was forced to seek help from Ainsworth at Machakos in January. When Sir Gerald Portal arrived at the fort, he found that:

At Kikuyu, the European-in-charge dare not venture 200 yards from his stockade without an armed escort of at least 30 to 50 men with rifles. He is particularly a prisoner with all his people: (and) maintains the company's influence (and) prestige by sending almost daily looting and raiding parties to burn the surrounding villages (and) to seize the crops and cattle for use of the company's caravans (and) troops.

The Agikuyu were hit by serious famine — the Famine of Europe — (Ng'aragu ya r[raya]) and an outbreak of smallpox simultaneously. The Agikuyu suffered very high mortality in some areas. Some of the survivors in southern Gikuyu country (Kabete) took refuge among the relatives they had left behind in Metumi from where they had migrated.

The emergence among the Gikuyu of a pro-company and later pro-government faction had also begun to seriously weaken their resistance and resolve long before natural disasters struck the final blow. The lure of economic rewards also became an important factor, which led to collaboration. The Ahoi or displaced people without their own or clan land, like Kamau Ngengi — later Jomo Kenyatta — for one reason or the other attached themselves to the Christian missions during the Great Famine and thereafter. Many warriors offered their services as porters and Askaris (police/soldiers) to the company and eventually to the government in search of survival.

When the colonial government took over from the company in 1895, no significant change in policy took place. The British government took over from the company and continued to use the same personnel that had served the company and punitive expeditions were regularly mounted in an effort to subdue the Agikuyu and force them to accept British rule. Captain Richard Meinertzhagen who led many punitive expeditions in Metumi, Gaaki and Embu on 7th December, 1902 recorded the following in his diary:

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Now arises the question as to whether political action cannot end these military expeditions. I have approached Hinde who is in political charge and he thinks they require still more punishment. To this I am compelled to agree but I cannot help thinking that he could bring the Tetu people to terms during the next week if he so desired. I suspect that he wants more captured stock to give him sufficient revenue to build his new station here. If that is the case, it is most immoral. So as matters stand the operations are to continue.<sup>62</sup>

In furtherance of punitive expedition and raiding policy, a three-pronged expedition was in February and March 1904 launched under the command of Captain Dickson. Humphrey and Meinertzhagen marched from Mbiri station (M[rang'a) to Thika river with sixty soldiers and 20 Maasai levies and from there they covered Ndia from Kutus to Kabari where they camped. From there, they covered Ndia and G[ch[g] right up to Mount Kenya forest to the north and the Embu border to the east. One of the other two columns passed through M[k[r[e-in] and camped at Icahanya, and the other, consisting of 100 soldiers and 200 Maasai levies, crossed Thagana river by M[r] wa Hi[hu ford and camped at R[thagat]. The two combed Math]ra particularly Kony[ and Iria-in] before joining the other column from Mbiri in Ndia. So heavy were the casualties inflicted upon the Ag]k[y] during this punitive raid that no official dared to report the exact number of the killed. The official report put the number at 400 but Meinertzhagen's estimate of 1,500 is believed to be a modest estimate. Meinertzhagen diary on 6th March, 1904 records:

I sent all our captured stock into Fort Hall and rode in myself, returning to my camp here in the evening. Our total captures were 782 cattle and 2,150 sheep and goats. We killed 796 of the enemy. I met Brancker in Fort Hall. He tells me he captured about 300 cattle and 800 sheep and goats, while Dickson's main camp raked in 602 cattle and 4,500 sheep and goats without firing a shot. There seems to be some doubt whether the later captures are enemy property.

While spears and poisoned arrows were of no avail in the face of superior arms, the Ag]k[y] attempted to defend themselves and their property courageously as is evident from Meinertzhagen's diary dated 4th December, 1902 where he records the G]k[y] attempt to storm the well armed and protected Ny]r] camp:

Our casualties during the night were 4 sodiers and 5 Maasai killed and 11 soldiers and 14 Maasai wounded. Our carriers had one killed and 7 wounded. We found the dead bodies of 38 enemies outside our defences in the morning. I must own I never expected the Wakikuyu to fight like this.

British colonialism was established in the G]k[y] country by use of brutal force which was met with G]k[y] resistance. Captain Meinertzhagen's diary recording of 8/9/1902 at Kihumbu-in] in M[rang'a speaks loud and clear about the overwhelming brutality used by the British:

I have performed a most unpleasant duty today. I made a night march to the village at the edge of the forest where the white settler had been so brutally murdered the day before yesterday. Though the war drums were sounding throughout the night we reached the village and our guides assured me that they were dancing round the mutilated body of a white man. I gave orders that every living thing except children should be killed without mercy. I hated the work and was anxious to get out of it. So as soon as we could see to shoot we closed in. Several of the men tried to break out but were immediately shot. I then assaulted the place before any defense could be prepared. Every soul was either shot or bayoneted.<sup>65</sup>

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Although captain Meinertzhagen was resolute and ruthless in his work as a military officer, he also had foresight and could foresee the likely reaction in future of the Africans they were brutalizing and coercing. He recorded in his diary thus:

In October 1902 some villagers revolted and troops were sent out to punish them. The trouble was attributed to medicinemen so two of them were publicly hanged in Fort Hall which stopped the trouble temporarily; but Kikuyus are ripe for trouble and when they get educated and medicinemen are replaced by political agitators, then there will be a general rising.<sup>66</sup>

Colonel Meinertzhagen, then a captain in the British Army had met and interacted with the Gikuyu leaders including Muthamaki (Community leader) Wambogo. On 6.x.1903 he wrote thus:

In 1949 I again met Wambogo, on 6 April, at Nyeri. I wrote at the time: He was delighted to see me and held my hand for some ten minutes, which touched me deeply. He invited me to his village, offering me a house all to myself and lots of women to wait on me; then he suddenly burst out with political worries which he had clearly been bottling up. "Give us back our old times," he said. "Give us back our land. Remove the Indians with whom we cannot compete; remove our grievances; you have put yourselves in the wrong by creating grievances. You have given us better health and security, which has increased the population, and we can no longer grow sufficient food in our restricted reserves." I asked him if he would prefer to return to paganism, Masai raids, epidemics and insecurity. "Yes," he replied at once. "Willingly. We were better off and much happier; sooner or later there is bound to be a clash, an armed clash, between black and white in Kenya; I want to avoid that."

At the end of his official tour of duty in central Kenya, Meinertzhagen wrote in his diary on 18/3/1904:

I am sorry to leave the Kikuyu for I like them. They are the most intelligent of the African tribes I have met therefore they will be the most progressive under the European guidance and will be more susceptible to subversive activities. They will be one of the first people to demand freedom from European influence and in the end cause a lot of trouble. If the white settlement really takes hold in this country, it is bound to do so at the expense of the Kikuyu who own the best land and I can foresee much trouble.

The book, Kenya Diary (1902 \_ 1906) by Richard Meinertzhagen was first published in 1957. He left Kenya by sea on 28/5/1906 and retired from the British Army at the rank of a colonel.

### **Gikuyu Social, Economic and Political Life**

#### **Land Tenure**

The original pattern of migration and the subsequent system of land acquisition governed the land tenure that emerged. The procedure of individual pioneers striking out on their own led them to exploit the natural resources in their wake along the ridges typical of Gikuyu country in all directions. Available traditions indicate that the vanguard of the pioneers would hunt and trap wild animals, collect wild honey or hung beehives on trees in the forests. Pastoralists and agriculturists followed later. In many cases, place names represent the names of the original pioneers or clan settlements.

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Land in most cases was occupied and finally acquired on a ridge basis, each pioneer in the pioneering group settling along his own ridge or area. In nearly all cases, land acquisition was on the basis of who occupied it first and initial economic activities carried on it. Consequently, people claimed to have acquired their land by trapping animals (kwamba m[tego) or clearing of the virgin forest (kuna k[r]ti). Land could also have been acquired through marriage, as it was customary for in-laws to provide land temporarily where necessary. Land could also be forcibly taken as blood fine payment in lieu of livestock. Land once acquired remained the property of an individual and subsequently of the descendants of the original pioneer. These descendants maintained a strong sense of community and shared values. This formed the birth of the ancestral land and Mbar] (clan) tenure of land rather than communal or individual ownership. Communal rights were restricted to salt-licks, public pathways (nj]ra cia agendi) or firewood collection places. Land acquisition in Kabete was in some cases similar to the situation in Metumi and Gaaki. In some parts of Gat[nd], an area of Kabete (K]ambuu) which neighbours Metumi, for example, clearance of the land was the basis for land ownership. Existence of large concentrations of Athi (Asi) colonies in the rest of the Kabete area led to the adoption of other methods of acquiring land. In these areas, it was necessary to create friendship with the Athi before any land transaction could take place. Once mutual understanding was established, the Athi sold land to the Ag]k[y] or allowed them to occupy it, especially where they were adopted into families by the Ag]k[y].

### Adoption

Before a land transaction took place between a M[g]k[y] and a Mwathi, a ceremony of mutual adoption took place. Within the G]k[y] tribe, any person who stole the property of any member of the tribe, killed or wounded or otherwise harmed such a person, became liable by law to criminal proceedings. If any M[g]k[y], therefore, killed or harmed an adopted Mwathi, or, for that matter, a Mwathi from whom he proposed to purchase land, he would be held responsible in G]k[y] law and would be punished. At the same time a Mwathi, who had laws similar to those of the Ag]k[y] on such matters, bound himself to treat the M[g]k[y] who had adopted him as a brother and fellow tribesman. The ceremony of adoption was followed by the ceremony of showing the land boundaries.

A typical example of land purchase by a M[g]k[y] from a Mwathi is given in Dr. Leakey's book *The Southern Kikuyu in the form of an Elder's story*, a true narration by Mzee Kabet] wa Wawer] thus:

Not long after I had married my second wife the Ndorobo hunter announced that he wished us to start making payments for the land, and he fixed the amount that we were to pay at 700 goats and sheep. Every member of our family began to assemble his contribution and we made up a herd numbering 460 goats and sheep, which we handed over. Then we gave the Ndorobo hunter the Mwati wa Njegeni (virgin ewe for the stinging nettles; or compensation for getting stung when pushing his way through the bushes — see glossary), and he marked out our boundaries. The south-east side of the boundary ran from the Gitathuru River up through the depression where there were some Mukurue trees, and thence to Kandutha. From there the boundary ran straight down to the Gitungiti River. In the north-east our boundary started at the big rocks by the Runguthiu River, so that our boundary in this direction matched with that of the family of wakarugi.

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We were left with a debt of 240 goats and sheep and sixty stall-fattened animals (ngoima) to pay, for we had paid only ten ngoima to start with. After about three planting seasons we paid over these 240 goats and sheep and the sixty ngoima, and completed the deal.

As has already been seen elsewhere, a solemn ceremony of mutual adoption (g[ciar[o na mburi]) preceded purchase of land from a Mwathi. This was a legally binding transaction as they owned the land. Dr. L.S.B. Leakey has testified thus:

The fact that the Wandorobo used their land only for hunting and did not cultivate it does not in the least invalidate their claim that the land was theirs to sell. Nor does it mean that they did not sell the land, or that they merely received compensation for the loss of hunting rights. It would be as unjust to deny that the Wandorobo were the owners of their land as to claim that the moors and deer forests of Scotland do not belong to those who hold title deeds for them.

When the members of a Mwathi family sold their hunting lands to the Ag[k[y[, the senior members of both the Athi and G[k[y[ families had to call in witnesses, and these sales were effected with the knowledge and consent of the Athi leaders. They were not simply casual negotiations by individuals, unrecognised by law from both sides.

### **Social and Political Organisation**

The most fundamental basis of G[k[y[ social and political organisation was the family unit. Many of the most important religious and social ceremonies were invalid if any member of the family was absent. Individuals, therefore, were constantly required to subordinate their own plans to the welfare of the family as a whole. The family unit, which was of the greatest significance to the individual, was the immediate family, that is the members of a single homestead (m[c]), but the greater family (ny[mba) was only slightly less significant. The G[k[y[ family system was an inclusive one, and the classificatory system of relationships meant that everyone was catered for. Dr. L.S.B Leakey has written thus:

In the average Gikuyu homestead, the bonds of friendship and love which linked a man, his wives, and their children were very strong. For example, although from every animal that was slaughtered there were certain joints that belonged by right to the women, and yet others to the men, it was seldom that a father did not give bits of his own portions to his children and his wives. Furthermore the anxiety that a father showed if a child was ill, or that a husband felt if his wife was not well, was just as great among the Gikuyu as among Europeans, even if it was manifested somewhat differently.

The G[k[y[ family was the centre of all religion, and family worship was more important to the Ag[k[y[ than public worship, which was conducted only on very special occasions. It was from the parents that every child learned about God and about the spirits of the departed. Similarly, it was from their families that G[k[y[ children obtained most of their moral education imparted through stories and riddles. Fathers spent much of their evenings talking to their sons, and mothers to their daughters. Girls learned to do agricultural work, to cook and to help their mothers in other domestic chores; they prepared themselves to become future mothers by looking after their small brothers and sisters. Boys learned how to look after livestock, and were prepared for the future defence of the country and for raiding the Maasai for livestock.

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The possession of stock was essential for observance of many customs, from birth ceremonies to initiation, marriage and death and burial rites. Death for the Gikuyu was not the end of all things, but marked the passage of the individual into yet one more stage of life. In the spirit world responsibilities were not discarded, but were if anything, strengthened, especially those towards the family. The living occasionally made animal and other sacrificial offerings to the spirits (ngoma) of the departed relatives which was condemned as an evil practice by foreign religions. The first responsibility of each adult male was to his father and mother and to their children, including his half-brothers and sisters in addition to his responsibilities to the members of his father's homestead. When he was married, he assumed full responsibility for his immediate family — his wife/wives and children. A man also had definite responsibilities towards the family in the wider, extended sense, the nyumba. The responsibilities towards all members of the nyumba and mbari included obligations to assist in paying communal fines, blood fines and marriage payments.

### **The Position of Women and Division of Labour**

Although Gikuyu women had no political rights as such, it is not correct to assume that they had no influence and status in the group. Because by age-long custom women carried heavy loads, casual observers have formed the opinion that they were treated more as beasts of burden than as human beings. Dr. L.S.B. Leakey rejected this impression when he wrote:

The commonly expressed view that the Gikuyu women had to do all the really hard work that was involved in providing a livelihood for themselves and their families is quite false. There was, of course, a recognised division of labour, and it is true that some of the really hard physical work falls to the lot of women, but by no means all of it. The clearing of forest and bush land for cultivation was essentially men's work. Similarly the preparation for cultivation of freshly cleared ground, using nothing but the digging stick, was men's labour, and it was of the hardest type. If the division of labour between the sexes seems, in spite of this, to be unfair, it has to be remembered that all young men had arduous and at times dangerous duties to perform as the protectors of the land, as well as being expected to enrich their families by raiding the Maasai. The older men, too, had public duties which took up much of their time, and had they been responsible for a bigger share of the labours of family life, they would have had to neglect their public duties.

The first or senior wives, in particular, were not mere servants of their masters. All the more important rites and ceremonies in the home were centred round them, and in almost all religious ceremonies conducted by their husbands they were almost equal participants. Their husbands were expected to consult them in all matters which affected the home, and real friendship and companionship was added to the physical side of married life. Moreover, although women did not normally own property, they had considerable say in the disposal of property, and every husband had to consult his wife if he wanted to do anything with the goats and sheep that were kept in her hut, and which were earmarked for use for herself and her children. Dr. S.L.B Leakey has further written:

Even those who became second, third, or later wives of men who already had a first and senior wife were not by any means objects of pity. In many cases girls who had the chance of becoming first wives chose rather the position of a second or third wife, because they loved the man, or because they considered that they would be happier thus. Sex appeal is a curious thing, and there

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is no doubt whatever that many girls found themselves more attracted by men of forty and fifty than by men of their own age, and it would be a serious mistake to think that girls who married men old enough to be their fathers all did so of necessity or because they were coerced.

### G]k[y] Clans

As the legend has it, the ancestors of the G]k[y] people are G]k[y] and his wife M]mbi from M[k]r[e wa Gathanga. It is popularly believed that the two had nine daughters. Actually they were ten or kenda m[iy]ru ('full nine'), which means ten, but for magical reasons which forbid exact counting of either human beings or livestock because it was widely believed that such counting would invite calamity, the Ag]k[y] equivocated on the number. The ten G]k[y] clans are said to be descendants of the ten daughters of G]k[y] and M]mbi. The names of the daughters are given and the names of the clans are given against each daughter's name: The eldest Wanjir[ – Anjir[; Wamb[i – Amb[i; Njeeri – Aceera;

Wanjik[ – Agacik[; Nyambura – Ambura or Ethaga (aithaga), Wairim[ – Airim[ or Agathigia; Wangar[ – Angar[ or Aithekahuno; Waith]ra – Aith]rand[ or Angeci; Wang[i – Ang[i; Wam[y] – Aithiegeni or Aicakam[y] which was formed from the descendants of a girl who became an unmarried mother. While it is debatable whether this is the actual origin of the G]k[y] clans, it is true that all Ag]k[y] trace their descent here, notwithstanding whether the origin of the Ag]k[y] was at the 'primary' dispersal area of Ithanga or M[k]r[e wa Gathanga at Gathuk]-in] in Metumi or not. An individual M]g]k[y] saw himself/herself as belonging to the wider community of Ciana cia M]mbi (the children of M]mbi) but for practical purposes in day to day life, the clan or a segment of it and, of course, riika, or belonging to an age set were of more significant value. Professor M]ri]ki has written:

An individual Kikuyu saw himself as belonging to the wider community of ciana cia or Mbari ya Mumbi (the children of, or descendants of Mumbi). But this wider community of Mbari ya Mumbi was of little practical importance in day to day life, and the clan, or a segment of it, was of more significance. The myth of Mbari ya Mumbi was only relevant when it was vital to foster solidarity and unity within the Kikuyu community. This usually occurred in times of deep internal crisis, or when faced by external threats. A good example is the rallying nationalist songs sung just before and during the Mau Mau upheavals.

The Ag]k[y] tried to retain clan/mbar] solidarity by holding occasional reunions when kinsmen and women from Kabete, Metumi, Gaaki, Ndia and G]c]g] had each clan visit its particular spiritual home at the secondary dispersal area. The last reunion is said to have taken place towards the end of the 1800s. Distance notwithstanding, clansmen were expected to act together particularly on important occasions such as circumcision ceremonies, marriages and payment of blood fines. Mainly because of the population increase and wide dispersal of the people as well as intermixture with neighbouring peoples, distinction between clans and mbari gradually became blurred and, indeed, some Ag]k[y] have claimed to be related to some of the Maasai and Akamba clans or indeed the clans of other communities. For example, the Agacik[ and the Aceera are said to be descendants from the Chagga people of Kilimanjaro. Some clans are common to both the Akamba and the Ag]k[y], which may explain their shared common origin from Thagic]/Thagic] ancestry or to earlier ancestry.

### Mariika (Age-sets)

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The all-embracing and institutionalised mariika (age-set) system that cut across lineage and territorial groupings was more important than all other considerations including the sentimental notion of belonging to Mbar] ya M[mbi or even external threats in uniting the Ag]k[y]. While oral traditions do not give a clear picture of when the G]k[y] began to adopt the mariika system, we have clear evidence that the mariika system was practised by the Ag]k[y] in the seventeenth century. In the G]k[y] age system, the word riika may refer to four different age groups. In its broadest and most general sense, riika means a generation. Professor M[ri]ki on this has written:

I am not concerned here with riika in the sense of age grade, which is a status role commonly ascribed to individuals at a certain age and in many societies. My concern is with riika in the sense of age sets or age groups, which are coeval, corporate groups whose members are recruited through specific criteria. This word is not at all precise, as shown in chapter 5 and this may have been the source of confusion depending upon the context. It may refer to generation (moiety), or to three slightly different kinds of initiation sets, comprising either all the neophytes who underwent circumcision in any one year, or an army embracing several initiation sets, or an army contingent embracing several initiation sets, or an exclusively female initiation set.

The moiety or generation set was charged with the responsibility of running the group affairs at any given time and its term of office began with a hand over ceremony, the Itu]ka. This took place every thirty to forty years, during which one generation handed over to its successor the reigns of power to conduct the political, judicial, and religious functions. The alternating moieties were Mwangi and Maina (Maina was also known as Ir]ng[]) and members were recruited according to first born sons, who in any case were named after them.

The moiety names Maina and Mwangi were only applicable to the living generation; those generations which had died off were given a definite name which encapsulated the most outstanding feature of their period or rule, e.g. Manjiri, Mamba, Tene, Agu, Mand[ti, Cuma, Ci]ra, Mathathi, Ndemi, Iregi, and Maina in that order of seniority. Mwangi, which took over from Maina/Ir]ng[] in 1898, should have transferred power to Ir]ng[] between 1924 and 1932. This it did not do and it has not yet done due to colonial disruption of traditional G]k[y] institutions.

### **Riika (Initiation)**

Riika in its more restricted sense meant an initiation set comprising of boys and girls who had undergone circumcision in the same year. Circumcision was the only criteria for membership in this riika category. Several such initiation sets were grouped together to form a contingent of an army. Such an army contingent or regiment was also a riika and was given its own name. A m[hingo (closed period) when no male was circumcised was regularly imposed after every nine years in Gaaki (four and a half calendar years) and five years in Kabete and parts of Metumi (two and a half calendar years) in order to raise a large number of warrior recruits at a time. Professor M[ri]ki on this has written:

The former system — the Metumi system — was based on a Muhingo (closed period), which lasted for nine imera (seasons) or miaka (years)— four and a half calendar years — during which no initiation of boys took place at all. But it should be noted that initiation took place in the tenth kimera (season) which in effect meant that it took place after five calendar years, since as a rule initiation took place only during the themithu after the mwere (millet) harvest. This was followed

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by annual initiations for the next nine calendar years before the next muhingo was imposed. These nine initiation sets formed one army contingent or regiment set. It is only to be expected that the system in Metumi and Kabete should coincide, Kabete having been so recently occupied that there had not been time for the development of a different pattern. And it was generally agreed by my informant that the first initiation set to be circumcised in Kabete was the Mungai.<sup>85</sup>

After m[hingo, circumcision of both boys and girls took place yearly for five consecutive years before the next m[hingo and all the men would join the same army contingent. Girls, who unlike boys were not subjected to m[hingo, were initiated every year. If their initiation coincided with that of the boys after m[hingo, as a rule they associated themselves with the boy's age group and acquired the same irua (circumcision) riika name as the boys. When initiation was exclusively female circumcision, the girls' age group was given its own specific name, which distinguished it from all the others.

To the Ag[k[y], initiation conferred a new social status. Childhood behaviour values were cast off and the initiated became full members of the community. This was also an opportunity to teach group traditions, religion, folklore, mode of behaviour, taboos, correct sexual behaviour, and duties of adulthood. The age set membership demanded and encouraged cooperation and solidarity. It also provided a strong sense of comradeship and fraternal egalitarianism. Riika mates looked upon each other as brothers and sisters and behaved as such. The spirit of comradeship was so strong among the riika brothers that friends occasionally shared their wives. Routledge observed that:

The festivals and rites associated with both marriage and death hold but a small place in the Gikuyu imagination compared to that greatest of all ceremonies whereby the boy becomes a man and the girl a woman.

As adult members of the community the male initiates became members of the junior warrior group and could now defend the country together with the senior warriors; the remnants of the retired regiment who had not been fully absorbed into the elderly group acted as advisors. In Gaaki and the neighbourhood of Metumi, the promotion of the junior warriors to the status of senior warriors and the simultaneous recruitment of the new initiates to take their place ushered in the closed period m[hingo of nine years. The entire warrior corps formed a reservoir of able-bodied men for performing other public functions. They acted as executive officers to the elders, being entrusted with such activities as policing duties in the markets and during festivals, the arrest of habitual criminals and the calling of public gatherings during which rules and prohibitions were promulgated and other pronouncements made. When necessary, a njaama ya anake (warriors' council) toured the country punishing habitual criminals and other offenders thereby performing governmental operations on behalf of the community at large on instruction of the council of elders. The warriors also performed the more difficult manual tasks such as clearing of virgin land, building of houses, cattle bomas (kraals) and planting bananas, sugarcane and yams. Warriors were popular and their general maintenance was in the hands of all the people, not just their families and lineage groups, in appreciation of their services to the community henceforth regarded as senior elders. As a symbol of their office, senior elders wore earrings (ic[h] cia mat[ or ngocorai) and carried blackened staffs and mataathi or maturanguru leaves tied with a twisted string. The elders were the highest authority in the land, and carried out legislative, executive and judicial functions. Some elders by talent and inclination were

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proficient in judicial or religious affairs and such persons tended to be more influential in those spheres than their comrades.

The most significant function of these councils was the administration of justice, which was carried out through arbitration by a court constituted by the k]ama (council). The primary purpose of the judicial process was to maintain peace and stability in the society. More often than not, it is the disputants who referred the case to the elders for arbitration. Their evidence together with that of any witnesses was then heard. The case was then open to general discussion by those present. Normally the hearing was public and everyone attending could express an opinion on the points raised or any other relevant issue. Allowed in the audience were junior elders and even some of the warriors who wished to be acquainted with the legal procedure and customary law. Finally, a smaller group, Ndundu ya K]ama, the inner consultative council, retired to consider judgement. The ndundu consisted of the senior elders but excluded anyone who had a direct or indirect interest in the case. Before the case could be heard, each litigant produced a goat as the court fees and these were slaughtered and roasted during the k]ama session. The ndundu, having arrived at its decision, the meat was then eaten and judgement was delivered. Appeals were allowed.

### M[thamaki (Spokesman)

A m[thamaki who presided over various social segments and territorial divisions was not formally elected and did not exercise executive authority as he was not equivalent to a chief as understood by Europeans or people in centralised states. His powers were very circumscribed and he acted in accordance with the wishes of his peers who delegated power to him. Chiefs were a creation of the British administration at the beginning of the 20th century.

The Ag]k[y] believed that "[thamaki nduoyag]r[o ig[r], [ciarag[o na m[nd]" — a leader is born not made. From an early age, some of the boys and girls displayed a flair for leadership by asserting themselves and becoming chief organisers of the dances and other activities pertaining to the young people. After initiation, some of them would climb the ladder to the top. Self-assertion, courage, self-confidence and diligence were important attributes of both a warrior and a m[thamaki but the latter also needed wisdom, tact and self-control in addition, especially as they became athamaki through general consensus. Elders from whose ranks a m[thamaki emerged were good in particular fields. Therefore there were in G]k[y] country leaders in such areas as judicial matters (athamaki a ciira or aciiri), others in ceremonial rites (athamaki a k]r]ra) and others became general or political leaders (athamaki a b]r]ri) with no particular responsibility. However, all of them were the prominent personalities in a democratic system and there was nothing hereditary about [thamaki or leadership. Attempts by a few athamaki to act as chiefs landed them and their British sponsors in serious trouble with the Ag]k[y]. Ignoring genuine traditional leaders and their way of going about business democratically was the beginning of administrative problems for the British rulers. A more serious blunder was that nonentities were made chiefs just because they had ingratiated themselves with the British rulers in questionable ways. Kar]ri wa Gakure who was among the first chiefs in British colonial administration of G]k[y]land was the son of a Mwathi who before his appointment was selling red ochre (th]r]ga). During his trading expeditions, he met K]nyanjui who probably later on introduced him to both Hall and Ainsworth whom he paid several visits. By 1898 he had already visited Machakos and Fort Smith and even expressed a wish to have a white man at his Tuthu home. His rogue friend Boyes wrote:

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As time went on Karuri was to become my friend and right hand supporter while I in turn was to have an influence over him and his people which was to raise him to the position of a great chief and myself to supreme power in the country — a virtual king of the Gikuyu.

One of the chiefs, Wang[ wa Makeri, one of Makeri's wives, a Kar[ri agemate was a woman who became a chief simply because Kar[ri spent nights at her house on the way to M[rang'a, the district headquarters. Such chiefs became extremely unpopular, especially because they had to enforce unpopular measures and they exercised their authority by autocratic and high-handed methods. Kar[ri decreed that before the traditional m[hingo could be lifted for boys to be circumcised, any prospective initiate had to pay him a rupee, an idea that other chiefs emulated. Any person who refused to obey the chief and his njaama was beaten, his home burnt and livestock seized and there was nowhere to appeal. McGregor in respect of the period 1906-1907 observed thus:

Under the present arrangements, the njama consist of all the rogues of an enormous district who have the chief's permission to enter. It is an engine of oppression because by means of it, the Government headman can punish any district which does not, as he thinks, listen to him viz, allow his young men to do as they like there. The njama entering a district divide themselves up, and each decides upon the village where he will make his home for the time being. During the time he condescends to remain there, he is like the owner of the village, the owner himself is but his servant, and is condemned to sit up and watch that the fire does not go down while his lordship is sleeping smugly in his bed. If the fire goes down the poor man has to pay a fine of a sheep or is beaten by the whole band in the morning. The women of the village become for the time being the property of the visitor. Every day a sheep has to be killed, and the njama live like kings.

McGregor was not alone in condemning the chiefs and their hangers-on. Dundas also noted that "it has become a heinous crime to dispute the authority of the so-called chief" and that "their authority was only sustained through the fear of the government. At the same time, their chief aim was to enrich themselves and to secure their newly invented authority." One observer said:

They [the chiefs' hangers-on] had no official salary and consequently had to live on the people. Wherever they went they commandeered whatever they fancied — food or livestock. They even ordered girls to sleep with them. They went to the extent of killing people and if anyone protested, their village would suffer.

On chiefs' excesses, an observer has written thus:

The chiefs overreached themselves and took other peoples' wives and property by force to teach them 'kutii sheria' (to obey the law). People had to cultivate in their fields without pay and if they refused they were in trouble. The behaviour of the chiefs and their hangers-on were the [cause of the] first complaints voiced by the early politicians. Quite a number of them were dismissed as a result of this, including court elders who took bribes.

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### **AEMBU AND AMBEERE**

#### **Aembu**

The west Embu highlands merge with the hot, dry semi-arid southern Mbeere plain over a formerly undemarcated zone of separation with Mbeere, several miles wide. Embu is about 540 square kilometres and the main physical feature is Mount Kenya that stands to the north and northwest at an altitude of 5201 metres above sea level. Other notable features are the hill of Kar[e and the forested K[r]m[r] hill near M[k][ri]. Most of Embu land is characterised by ridges and deep valleys except along the Embu-Mbeere border. The altitude of the best agricultural land ranges from about 1220 metres to 2134 metres in areas covered mostly by fertile volcanic soil.

Mbeere is about 1640 square kilometres in area and unlike Embu, Mbeere land is very low. About one third of the land lies to the left bank of the Tana river at between 609 metres and 915 metres. The rest of the area is between 915 metres and 1220 metres. Good productive agricultural land is found mainly on the riverbeds. Most valley slopes and hills in Mbeere are too rocky and stony to be of any use for agriculture. Mbeere is too far away to benefit from rain precipitation upon Mount Kenya and, as a result, rainfall is inadequate and unreliable in most areas although rainfall comes at the same periods as in Embu.

The Embu and Mbeere people are virtually one people with a common history, language and culture and until recently when Mbeere District was created, they lived together in Embu District.

The story of the origin of the Embu is told in various versions, one of which is mythical while the others differ only in details. The myth of origin states that the Embu are descendants of a man called Mwenendega who lived in the small grove known by his name which is located to the south of Runyenje Market. He is said to have got a wife from a stream nearby whom he kidnapped as she bathed. As they were eating meat, the woman snatched meat from Mwenendega who consequently named her Nthara or "snatcher" because of her action. Their first children were a boy called Kembu and a girl called Werimba. Kembu is said to have later impregnated his sister Werimba and the two were chased away from the grove by the parents. They settled elsewhere and founded a home as man and wife near a place called Karungu. Mwenendega and Nthara had more children who also like Kembu and Werimba married and founded homes with their children spreading all over the present Embu land. The offspring of Mwenendega and Nthara were popularly known as the "Children of Kembu", and hence the land they occupied was named Embu.

The other version is that the Embu came from a far away land beyond M]]r] and settled in the present Embu country. Some claim the far away place beyond M]]r] was Ethiopia or a place called Tuku or Uru. Kabeca Mwaniki in his book *The Living History of Embu and Mbeere to 1906* has written:

An equally believed story of Embu origin is that they came from "a far away land beyond Meru" and settled in the present Embu land. Some specify the place of origin beyond Meru as Tuku or Ethiopia and others Uru.

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The Embu say that their ancestors migrated in the company of the ancestors of the present Mbeere people and that they crossed River Th[ci] together at a place called Igambang'ombe or "where cows moo," near the present Ishiara market from where the Mbeere took a southerly direction. The Embu say that they found people called Gumba (pygmy-like hunting dwarfs) with an estimated height of between three and four feet — 0.76 metres to 137.2 metres) whom they fought and chased away, while assimilating the others. Some of the Embu moved into the forest hunting wild animals for food and eventually found trees and rock caves which they used as shelters. There are such caves by the banks of river R[bingac] which are presently used by bee-keepers as temporary homes and workshops for preparing beehives and collecting honey.

The Embu gradually left the forest where they had lived on roots and fruits to grow food in the open country. The Embu people who did not enter the forest after crossing river Th[ci] at Igambang'ombe migrated westwards and settled in places like G[k][r] and Maranga from where they spread out to other parts of Embu and eventually were joined by those who had been living in the forest.

On the crossing of the Embu people into Embu from Igambang'ombe, Professor Godfrey M[ri][ki] in his book *A History of The Kikuyu, 1500 - 1900* has written:

According to Cuka traditions, however, the Cuka, Embu and Tharaka are very closely related. They are said to be descendants of three sisters who immigrated from Tigania or Igembe or both places. On leaving Tigania and Igembe, they are said to have settled around the Ntugi forest. The mother of the Tharaka, Cia-Mbandi, was left there and she gave offspring to the Tharaka, while Cia-Nthiga (the Eve of the Embu) and Cia-Ngoi (the Eve of the Cuka) pressed ahead and settled at Igambang'ombe. Cia-Nthiga and Cia-Ngoi apparently quarrelled at this stage and the former crossed the Tharia and Thuci rivers into modern Embuland, while the latter went up the ridge to settle at Magumoni.

Professor M[ri][ki] has further written thus:

The group that crossed the Th[ci] river into Embu advanced to Karurumo and finally reached Mwene Ndega's sacred grove, near present-day Runyenjes market. The region around Mwene Ndega's grove was the first settlement in Embu, and immigration into the area was spearheaded by Igamuturi and Kina clans. A study of the Igamuturi genealogy indicates that some of their earliest ancestors were born there towards the end of the fifteenth century or very early in the sixteenth century. It was from this region that people dispersed to settle in Gikuuri, Maranga, Kevote, Nvuvoori, Kieni and Nginda. This group finally evolved into the Embu.

### **Ambeere**

The Ambeere people say that they came from Marig[r] or "Banana Grove" beyond M]]r], a place which some of their people call R[kanga] to the east of their homeland. Ambeere claim to have come with the Embu and crossed river Th[ci] together at Igambang'ombe and as a result, the two groups perform ritual sacrifices especially during traditional handovers by moieties (Ndu]ko) at Igambang'ombe. The Ambeere remember the crossing point as the place where sacrificial blessings and advice should be "collected" since they were left here at the time of the crossing. H.S. Kabeca Mwan]ki on the crossing and happenings thereafter has written:

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After crossing, the Embu turned right to modern Embu land while the Mbeere continued straight ahead to "rest" first on Kiambere hill which was chosen for strategy. Only a few people were left here and the rest made an exodus up the Tana river to Ithanga hill by Makuyu which were once again chosen for strategy. Here they settled. They were in clans such as Mbuya and Mururi.<sup>4</sup>

At Ithanga the Mbeere population and livestock greatly increased and they grazed farther and farther from Ithanga until they reached R[ir] river where they were in contact with Kaputiei Maasai. Kabeca Mwan]ki has written:

They picked up the art of circumcision from the Maasai. This is remembered when the Mbeere sing: "Ni Ukavi watuonirie kurua rukiri Mundu arengwa Ruiru . . ." That is, "It is the Maasai who showed us circumcision in early morning, someone has been cut [circumcised] at Ruiru."<sup>5</sup>

After a long period of settlement and prosperity at Ithanga, the Mbeere had a quarrel with the Maasai which ended in a terrible war which drove the Mbeere and their livestock out of Ithanga. That was about 17th century. The experience was so severe that the Mbeere up till today sing to their cattle:

Mwarua Caaru, Mwarua Ndia Ndunge,

Ni wania ugacutha na Ithanga

Ni kuri mwana watigire Ithanga kana ninie ukwendia?

Literally this means:

Mwarua Caaru, Mwarua Ndia ndunge (names of the cows)

You moo looking towards Ithanga inquisitively;

Is there any child you left at Ithanga, or it is me you are selling?

### Ambeere Social and Political Organisation

In an Embu homestead (m[ci]) the father was the overall head; the mother was second in authority and was also responsible, assisted by her daughters for the domestic welfare of the family. The father and sons were responsible for looking after livestock and the primary defence and protection of the family. Grandparents were respected and obeyed by the parents and the children. In case of the death of a father, the eldest adult son took over authority including the role of sharing out of the fathers' wealth among his brothers assisted by the clans elders.

Each individual or family (ny[mba]) belonged to an extended family (sub-clan) and several extended families belonged to a clan (m[v]r]ga). Several sub-clans were members of the two major clans of the Embu – the Irumb] (Gatavi) and Thagana (Ngu). These two main clans formed the tribe. Members of all the clans, after Nduiko or political power handover ceremony belonged to either one of the generation age-sets Kimathi or Nyangi. In Mbeere the Irumb] clan is known as Ndamata and Thagana as M[r]ri.

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Above the authority of the head of the family was the clans council of elders who were selected on the basis of their knowledge of the clan's traditions and property ownership. The clans could make their own rules and execute them among the members. No person could sell clan land without the clan's consent, and clan members paid their clan dues when they performed circumcision and marriage ceremonies. Members of the clan's councils of elders were called Athamaki in Embu and Aciiri in Mbeere. The councils operated from ridge to ridge of habitation.

### **Ambeere Social and Political Organisation**

The Ambeere structure was similar to that of the Aembu except for some details. The father was the overall authority at home and had to be involved in all major decisions on matters concerning his family such as circumcision, marriage, feasts and sharing of his wealth among his sons. The mother was second in authority when the sons were young but when the sons attained maturity her authority passed on to the sons in order of their seniority. The eldest son was accorded the same respect accorded to the father. Due to the relief and topography of Mbeere country, people were organised in villages as opposed to ridges as in Embu and each village had its government consisting of clan leaders, leaders of village warriors and male circumcisers. Above all, the oldest man in the village was given special recognition and was consulted before any decision was made. He was the village guardian and custodian of tribal secrets, laws and traditions.

The village government made laws and regulations about accepted behaviour, education and general conduct in the village and acted as the judiciary. It also made arrangements for the maintenance and supervision of highways in its locality and for the opening or closing of them. This body also regulated food procurement and borrowing during the frequent famines in the area. These village councils are still operating in a very similar form with slight alterations and their members are called Ac]ri. Mbeere clans are still very strongly held together by traditions.

### **Elders Courts of Justice**

Although at times in Embu and Mbeere some people took the law into their hands and avenged themselves as individuals or in groups, there were courts of justice in the land. The established way was to sue the alleged offender before a court of elders who would hear the parties concerned and if they considered the matter to be more serious than they had the authority to settle, they would refer it to a higher council for hearing and determination. The litigants also had the right of appeal if any of them was not satisfied with the first council's ruling. Every person, young or old, was allowed to sit in court and hear the proceedings and air their views but not everyone participated in arriving at the verdict. The decision was made by a "consultation group" of wise men Ndundu who sat aside after both parties had been heard to summarise the evidence and reach a decision. The parties to the litigation then took an oath to abide with the verdict which was bidding for all jointly. The Ndundu would then deliver judgement in an open court. When decisions could not be reached from only hearing evidence, the council would resort to ordeals and oaths.

The most senior court of justice — K]ama k]a Ngome — dealt with criminal matters only and its members were also members of other councils. They sentenced to death witches and dangerous criminals and called upon Njaama ya Ita to execute their decisions. They wore ngome, which was a half-tubular metal ring on the right hand middle finger in Embu and on the right hand little

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finger in Mbeere, as a badge of authority. In addition, the members, carried distinctive staffs of office and also wore ribbon on their heads called Mwange or monkey skin caps. Qualification to membership was old age, generally recognised great wisdom, knowledge of the traditions of the country and surrounding lands, sympathy and courage. One qualified to become a member by invitation and paid a fee which varied from a he-goat or ram, accompanied by much honey beer, to a castrated he-goat and castrated bull and beer. No appeal was allowed after this court's decision.

### **Final Conquest of the Embu**

The Embu people legend has it that British authorities at Fort Hall through Chief Gutu K]bet[ of G]c[g[ took the Embu warrior leader M]gane to Mbiri (Fort Hall) and performed a big display of the whiteman's power to convince M]gane of the futility of the Embu resisting British rule. A letter was written by the British authorities and M]gane, escorted by Chief Gutu, took the letter to Embu where he announced its contents to the Aembu who had gathered in a K]vata dance. The whole dance shouted him down and refused to be ruled by "uncircumcised boys" or anybody else. Gutu and M]gane would have been killed but for the respect the Aembu had for M]gane who had served them well in the past as a brave and wise warrior leader. Kabeca Mwan]ki quotes M]gane telling his people thus: "Embu, you are like leaves from the bush, your obstinate bravery will lead you nowhere, if not into trouble. You have rejected me and my advice, the consequences will not be pleasant."

The warriors waved their swords and spears about and declared him a "traitor." M]gane went home disappointed and desolate, his wise advice having been rejected by his people and he died before his words came true. Emotions had the upperhand over wisdom and prudence.

In or about 1906 an Embu raiding force of warriors left the country to raid the Cuka, leaving the country largely undefended. The whiteman's invasion force led by captain Maycock, who later became to be known as "Njoka", launched a major and well co-ordinated attack on the Embu. Kabeca Mwan]ki has written the following on the invasion:

The invaders came by Riamagiri, Riamakunyi, Riakithaage, Muthiru (near present Nvuvoori), Mwea and Rukanga, near Kathunguri on the Embu/Mbeere border. At Muthiru, the invaders were led by Murigu wa Irimu, the forces at Riamakunyi, Riamagiri and Urumathi were led by Tugura while Gutu wa Kibetu led those at Mwea. The Mbeere leaders were Muthuri, Mutavo and Rumbia.

The warriors who had gone to Cuka found that the Cuka had strengthened their methods of defence by digging trenches lined with sharpened spikes cleverly concealed and also blocking the normal approach to homes. Some warriors were killed in these trenches and ignominious rout was in progress when the bad news from home reached Aembu. By the time they reached Kyeni, the British invading army had swept through all Embu killing many people, burning huts and capturing livestock. To the Aembu it was a devastating tragedy. The Aembu had lost in both the Cuka campaign and at home! They fled and hid themselves with their livestock in Mount Kenya forest, K]r]m]ri, R]vingac] river valley, K]emer, Th]ci river valley and other places in Embu.

Captain Maycock or "Njoka" had first camped at Gatit[[ri near the present K]vut]]ri school. Gatit[[ri was also called K]amataama or a place of taama or "cloth sheets" (meaning tents).

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Maycock then moved to camp at a place now called Ngoir]. Every locality was asked to send a representative to the camp to perform a formal surrender and each delegate sent was made a chief for his area. Mwan]ki Kabeca has written:

People of all varieties were sent by different localities. Ngandori sent Mutero, a great warrior who had taken Mugane's place. Mugane was known by the whitemen but was dead after bewitchment. Murue had already been represented by Kiriamiti, Mwea wa Ithimu represented Kagaari and was introduced to the whiteman by Kiriamiti. Kyeni sent an outcast called Kangoco because they thought if one went to the whitemen, he would be eaten. To their surprise, he was made a Chief over them.

After all surrender procedures had been completed and spears and shields had been collected at Ngo-ir], bwana (Mister) "Njoka" or Maycock moved his camp to Cia-igam[rind[ko or the present M[rind[ko hill. Later in the same year, he built the present Embu town administration headquarters with forced labour recruited from the Aembu. The name for this place originally was "Nthithiar]" or "where M]thithia shrubs grew". At the peace "negotiations", all the Embu chiefs had "agreed" to make roads (in place of their narrow footpaths), to pay hut tax and to obey the whitemen. From then on the Aembu people became British subjects until Kenya became independent in 1963.

### **AMERU**

The Am]]r[ are a Bantu people who live in the area adjoining the northern slopes of mount Kenya. The community consists of the sub-groups of Tigania, Igembe, Igoji, Imenti, M[thamb], Mw]mb], Cuka and Tharaka, the last living on the adjoining eastern plains. The modern history of the M]]r[ spans about three hundred years and no written records are available for the first two hundred years or so. What is available are traditional oral recollections from the memories of the community's oldest men and women, who are no longer living. They gave their accounts when written recording became possible at the beginning of the 20th century. These people claimed that M]]r[ origin was "Misiri". Alfred M. Imanyara has on the name M]]r[ written:

Meru is an old name; it is a name of classical antiquity. From Egyptian history, Thinite King's boats (c. 3200 — 2700 BC) were constructed using Meru wood because the tags on them bear the inscription, 'Meru wood'. The Thinite period was between c. 3200 - 2700 B.C. Hence the revelation of the earliest date of the name, 'Meru' in the Nile basin. Since lower Egypt had no forest, 'Meru wood' must have come from the middle of the Nile section, known in historical records as the 'Island of Meroe'. This implies the syllable, 'roe' ought to be pronounced like the syllable 'ru'. The letter 'u' in 'ru' is pronounced like 'oe' in the word, 'hoe'. The 'Island' is known to have been well wooded even as late as two thousand years ago.<sup>1</sup>

According to Abagusii and Abalogoli peoples' history, the Am]]r[ are descendants of Mogikoyo (M[g]k[y]) who was a half brother to their ancestor Osogo. The Am]]r[ and associated peoples (the Ag]k[y], Aembu, Ambeere and Akamba among others migrated with the Abagusii and Abalogoli to Mount Elgon area from "Misiri". Professor W.R. Ochieng has written:

The traditions of the Gusii people indicate that in the distant past they were the same people as the Kuria, the Logoli, the Bukusu, the Suba of South Nyanza, the Kikuyu, the Meru, the Embu and the Kamba. They further state that on their way South from a country which they call

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"Misiri" they were together with the Ganda and the Soga. The Ganda and the Soga are said to have branched off from the rest of the migrants around Mount Elgon, in a southwesterly direction. The Kikuyu, Meru, Embu and Kamba, are said to have travelled eastwards toward what is now the central highlands of Kenya, while the Bukusu (Kitosh) appear to have remained around Mount Elgon. The remaining clusters — the Gusii, Kuria, Suba and Logoli migrated southwards and following the course of River Nzoia, arrived on the eastern shores of Lake Victoria some fifteen or sixteen generations ago, presumably some time around AD 1520.<sup>2</sup>

Alfred M. Imanyara in his book *The Restatement of Bantu Origin and Meru History* concluded the chapter on the origin of the Am]r] people thus:

Up to now, a broad survey of available evidence to support the Meru people's claim that their ancestors emigrated into their homeland in Kenya from Ethiopia and beyond has been the main concern of this Chapter. On the balance of probability, it can be now concluded that the Meru are some of the Bantu descendants of the ancient Africa's Meroitic Kingdom which was in existence over two thousands years ago and which was located in the Middle Nile basin in Sudan.<sup>3</sup>

The proto-M]r] were part of the Bantu families which travelled together eastwards from Mount Elgon area via Lake Baringo to a settlement at Lake Nakuru (Nakuso) area. The groups consisting of the Ag]k[y], Akamba, Am]r], Aembu/Ambeere were impinged upon by the Maasai early in the sixteenth century in the Nakuru area and forced to move away in a north-easterly direction. Some groups in the meantime hived off to migrate towards the Mount Kilimanjaro area (Akamba) and towards the coast (Am]r] together with some Ag]k[y] and Aembu/Ambeere) as the remaining groups entered the Mount Kenya area through the present Igembe and Tigania areas of M]r] towards the end of the sixteenth century. At the coast, the proto-M]r] were taken into captivity by the Arabs (Nguo Ntune) at their Manda Island settlement.

### **The Mbwa Tradition**

Traditions of all the Am]r] sub-groups other than the Cuka and Tharaka speak of their ancestors as having been a small agricultural community from the Kenyan coast. This proto-M]r] group is said to have lived near the mouth of a great river, recalled as the Mbweeni, on a small island remembered as Mbwa in the Indian Ocean but near enough to the mainland such that people and animals could be seen to the west and north. The land was partially ringed by a low coral reef, that could be crossed on foot within a single day. Alfred M. Imanyara on the Mbwa tradition has written:

The "Mbwa" tradition is Meru people's most popular reminiscence of their past history. This tradition tells of how their ancestors were conquered by "Nguuntune" (Red People) and taken into captivity, in the direction of the rising sun (Maumo ja riuu) to Mbwa.<sup>4</sup>

The Am]r] people in their oral history recall that the island they lived in was an "Island to which one could walk from the mainland at low tide". This is characteristic of Manda Island where at certain times during the day and once at night, the tide would flow swiftly westwards towards the mainland "to eat grass" — "runj] r]gw]ta k[r]a nyaki", the Am]r] would say — leaving an area of relatively dry land (mud sprinkled with tidal pools) between what they referred to as Mbwa and the mainland shore. After a certain period, the water would return flowing rapidly past the island towards the sea. Occasionally, the returning tide would catch and drown wild animals

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including elephants moving between the mainland and the Island. The Islanders would share out the meat and take ivory. This continues to take place in Manda Island to date and there is evidence that Mbwa Island in Mijikanda tradition is Manda Island at the Kenyan north coast. Existing evidence suggests that the place called Mbwa lay on the Island of Manda, part of the Lamu archipelago, off the northern Kenya coast. J.A. Fadiman in the book *Kenya Before 1900* has written:

Further evidence would seem to be provided by tidal patterns in the Manda area. Two-thirds of the Island is surrounded by low reefs, similar to those mentioned in tradition. Northwest of the Island, however, is a narrow channel, the Mkanda, which passes between that section of the Island known as Bwara Matanga and the mainland. Informants have also mentioned the term Mkanda, using it to describe a people (Likanda, Nkanda) who are remembered as living on the mainland opposite Mbwa (thus, across the channel) before migrating to the southeast.

Corroborative data can also be found within oral history of the Pokomo, a people currently living along Kenya's river Tana, just south of the Lamu area. Meru traditions record that two other Islands lay near Mbwa. One of those, known to the Meru as Bua, was inhabited by a group remembered as the Buu. Buu is the current name for a division of the Pokomo. Testimony collected in their area records that five of their clans did indeed live on an Island adjacent to Manda (Lamu Island), during an era corresponding generally to the pre-Meru period on Mbwa.

The second island, remembered by Mijikanda informants as Cuguri, was occupied by a people recalled as Nderi. Nderi is also the name of a Pokomo division, which at one point in their own history, lived adjacent to the Bua. Nderi traditions also recall the island of Bua in this instance as a point where they once separated from other Pokomo peoples. It should also be noted that a third division of the Pokomo peoples, the Dzundza, also retain memories of Manda Island, recalled in their own oral history as an "Island to which one could walk from mainland at low tide".

Further indication that Mijikanda people were in this area together with splinter groups of Agikuyu and Akamba is found in the writing of Robert L. Bunger Jr. on the people who were in the Lamu, Bwara and Pate areas as the Pokomo were settling down on arrival from Shughwaya:

These groups are usually considered the "Core" Pokomo: the Miji Kenda (Giriama, Digo, Duruma, Rabai, Ribe, Jibana, Kambe, Kauma, and Chonyi); the Taita; the Bajun (now considered one of the Swahili peoples); the Kilindini (a Swahili group of Mombasa); and (in part?) the Kamba, Meru and Kikuyu.

The same writer has written the following:

Within the upper Pokomo there are two sub-dialects, one spoken by Subaki of Ndera, Gwano, Kinakomba and Ndura, and another spoken by Subaki and Milalulu. The Munyo Yaya speak Oroma, and the Welwan speak their own language, which is said to be different from and not mutually intelligible with Pokomo, Oroma and Somali . . . Just in a hunch it might be interesting to see if the Kielwan language is related to Meru or Embu.<sup>7</sup>

We further learn from James De Vere Allen that Liongo who is known from the Pate Chronicle to have extended his kingdom until it stretched from Malindi to Pokomoni and had settled a good

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number of Bantu speaking farmers in his kingdom. Allen has written:

They could have included speakers of an ancestral Mijikenda tongue from near Malindi as well as some of the ancestral Pokomo-speaking groups from Pokomoni (remembered as the Buu homeland). And conceivably a few speakers of an ancestral Meru tongue also came to assist in the riverine trade.

From the above, it is reasonably established that Mijikenda people at this point and time were at the coast and settled in Manda Island while others were scattered around the general area. Those on Manda Island were taken into captivity and remained separated from their relatives and fellow travellers, the Agikuyu, Aembu/Ambeere, Akamba, Cuka and Tharaka for a long time.

The Mijikenda call people who took them into slavery Nguo Ntune or Ngirintune, meaning people who wore red clothes or had "red legs", light skinned non-Africans who possibly were Persians (Shirazi) or Arabs. Alfred M. Imanyara has written:

The term "Nguuntune" literally means "Red clothes", but since clothes cannot take people into captivity, the term must have been applied to people who the ancient Meru people considered to have red skin colour. In short, "Nkuuntune", means "Red people" or simply "Reds", it was a term applied to people of Sabeanic origin and, in general, to people of Semitic origin. The Semites, too, applied the name to themselves as evidenced in Axum's King Aezane's (Ezana) text which describes the conquest of Meroe as a reprisal against her (Meroe) because the Cushites of Meroe had repeatedly waged war on the Red People.

### **Escape from Mbwa**

Mijikenda people like would have been with other human beings grew desperate for freedom and requested their masters to set them free. The masters set impossible conditions for the Mijikenda people to fulfil before they could be set free. Tales of miracles which need not to be detailed here are told about this period. However, Mijikenda people organised to escape from the Island which they succeeded in doing and a long migration trekking inland started along the southern bank of Tana river from the coast for several seasons before they left the river trekking northwest.

At the beginning of their flight, the migrants were weak. They had few warriors and armed only with knives and small bows. They had few livestock and roots and seeds as could be carried, and wooden fishhooks they had used in the island. J.A. Fadiman on the Amijikenda escape and migration has written:

Once across the "Red sea", the migrants moved inland along the southern bank for several seasons, and then left the river, turning northwest into what traditions speak of as a "desert". They named this area Maliamkanga or Ngaaruni, both of which carry a linguistic implication of aridity. At this point the community began to call itself Ngaa, a word possibly derived from the thorns (migaa) with which they now surrounded themselves at night; this name was used to refer to the group until its eventual dissolution near Mount Kenya.

### **Meru Occupation of the Mount Kenya Area**

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The original nucleus separated into two sections recalled by tradition as M[k[nga (people of Ngaa) and M[rutu. The two sections together migrated to a point tradition places near Ntug] Hill from where they divided once more. Two or three subsections seem to have separated from M[k[nga and entered Igembe and the northern part of today's Imenti while a section of M[rutu had already separated to remain on the Tharaka plains. A second subsection of M[rutu broke away on the way and became the ancestors of today's M[thamb], Igoji and possibly southern Imenti.

M[thamb] settled in a region adjacent to their current territory, part of which they wrested from the Cuka. The remnants out of the original M[rutu people became the contemporary Mw]mb). By the 1750s, small groups began to enter the lowest parts of the mount Kenya and Nyambene forests, which at the time covered much of Tigania. During this time M]]r[ warriors were only lightly armed with bows and arrows, knives and axes; they had no war clubs, spears or shields.

Evidence available suggests that most of these immigrating communities encountered three non-Bantu groups across the whole of the current M]]r[ territory within the lower fringes of the forest or below. Tradition from all sections record violent contacts with these peoples during the 1730s or early 1740s. They are remembered as tall and muscular bodied, and their faces were similar to those of the M]]r[ but with a narrower nose and thinner lips, and they had "straight" hair. Warriors wore headdresses of Colobus monkey fur, decorated with wisps of ostrich feathers at the tip. Their spears, were short leaf or triangular headed and their shields were small and narrower than those subsequently made by the M]]r[. A small sheath was sewn onto the back of each shield, into which they fitted a knife. Their arrows were leaf-bladed or triangular in shape. All kept large herds of long-horned humped cattle, sheep and goats and lived in scattered bands. The description seems to suggest the Oromo/Boran or Galla/Wardy people.

Available evidence from the traditions of individual clans on the experiences of the M]]r[ people as they advanced into the forested areas of the Tigania plains shows that most of these migrating communities encountered representatives of three non-Bantu language groups scattered in small bands across the lower fringes of the forest, or immediately below its fringes. These have been identified as follows: three groups of Eastern Cushitic speakers; one group of the Highland Nilotic speakers; and the three groups of plain Nilotic speakers. The most powerful of the three non-Bantu peoples were the Eastern Cushitic speaking groups who were known by the M]]r[ sections variously as {kara, }kara, Njuwe, Mwoko, Athamaji, Nguve, Agira, Akara or Igoti.

Existing evidence suggests that these groups were Oromo/Boran in the north and Galla/Wardy in the south. The latter were known to the Am]]r[ as {kala and Mwoko. The M[thamb] recall the {kala as "those who fled our area to join the Boran" and Mw]mb] elders recall that the {kala cattle described by their grandfathers are the same as "those used by the Boran." Imenti elders state that the Agira and Ikara recalled in the traditions of their area appear to have been the same people — the Boran — adding that they used the phrase "Boran-Ikara (Boran - Galla?) to describe themselves. The Igembe also identify Agira, Akala, {kala as Boran, and add that the Boran were related to Mwoko. Evidence from Am]]r[ seems to correspond with what is known of the Galla in other areas. After c. 1500, Oromo-speaking people from southeastern Ethiopia began to migrate to the south and penetrated deep into Kenya. the Boran had moved southward on both sides of the River Tana while other Galla groups may have travelled as far south as Tanzania by the time of M]]r[ occupation of their present country.

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### **Social and Political Organisation**

Mijikenda society was organised to ensure that people's needs for religious expression, law maintenance, security and justice were secured. For security there were Athi (hunters) and warriors, for justice and political management there were the Agambi and Kijama. The Amijikenda people lived in villages of several families. Each family owned a piece of arable land on which they cultivated food crops and kept livestock. At the family level, the father and head of the family resolved disputes; he lived in his own house, which was known as gaaru. If the family head was unable to solve a dispute, he referred the matter to a clan elder who also had his own gaaru. If the dispute could not be resolved at the clan level, it was referred to Gaaru-e-kijama or house of elders.

Several villages fell under the jurisdiction of Gaaru-e-kijama and each person in Mijikenda was identified with a specific gaaru-e-kijama. There was also the Gaaru-e-nthaka, which was the name for the military barracks. The jurisdiction of village (ntijikenda) arbitrators did not extend beyond the village boundaries but these arbitrators were used by gaaru-e-kijama to identify the source of the problem referred to it. Boundaries of the area over which gaaru-e-kijama had jurisdiction were usually fixed to conform with river courses but where there were no rivers, elders fixed administrative boundaries. Where one gaaru-e-kijama area was separated from the other by a 'highway' (gijikenda), the boundary was fixed by means of a fresh strip cut out from the skin of a sacrificial sheep or goat. Elders who had undergone ritual cleansing hung the strip known as rijkenda across the highway as a landmark under which people passed when leaving one gaaru-e-kijama area and entering another. The gaaru-e-kijama as the meeting place house of elders was always built at a higher ground than the rest of the village.

### **AKAMBA**

The Akamba people inhabit the present administrative districts of Machakos, Makueni, Kitui and Mwingi. Machakos district before its division contained the traditional sections of Ulu or the high country in the north and the lower lands of Kikumbulu or Kibwezi in the south. Kitui district contained sections of Kitui, Mwingi and Mumoni. Neighbouring people to the north-west are the Agikuyu and to the north are the Tharaka and Mbeere. All these are related peoples. To the south-west of the traditional Akamba country are the Maasai. To the north and east are the Boran, Galla, the Pokomo and other small nomadic groups known as Boni, Sanye and Aliangulo.

The Akamba consider themselves to be one people. Slight cultural and dialectal differences are recognised between the two traditional geographical areas of Machakos and Kitui. The people of Ulu refer to those of Kitui as Adaisu or Athaisu. Other groups of Akamba numbering hundreds of thousands, live outside Ukamba as Akamba communities in Rabai near Mombasa, Taita-Taveta and Kwale Districts and another group in central Tanzania.

To the south is the railway line from Mombasa to Nairobi with Kikumbulu or Kibwezi remaining as an outside enclave south of the line from Mtito Andei to Kiu. The boundary sweeps north from Kiu in the west towards the line of the Athi River and north-eastwards where it is marked by the Tana River up to the northern tip of the Mumoni range. Most of the population is concentrated in the north-western part of Machakos as the north-east and east of the country is very dry. Until recently, there was no clearly marked boundary between the two areas.

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The Akamba have a common origin and language relationship with the Agikuyu, Aembu/Ambeere, Tharaka, Cuka and Mijikuyu peoples. According to the traditions of the Maragoli as collected by professor G.S. Were and recorded in his two books *West Kenya Historical Texts* and *A History of the Abaluyia of Western Kenya*, the 'Kikuyu clusters', who included the Akamba, were part of the Western Kenya families before they travelled eastwards towards the central highlands at about the end of the fifteenth century. This is also corroborated by the Abagusii who confirm that they and the peoples who are today known as Agikuyu, Aembu/Ambeere, Akamba and Mijikuyu were the same people when they migrated together into the Mount Elgon area of Kenya before these other groups migrated eastwards towards the central highlands. Professor W.R. Ochieng in the book *Kenya Before 1900* has written:

Gusii traditions also indicate that Moluguhia, the grandfather of Mogusii, had a number of sons who founded some of the Baluyia sub-tribes or clans, and that among his remembered sons were Osogo and Mogikoyo. Osogo's descendants are said to have founded the Gusii, Kuria, Logoli and several Suba tribes, while the descendants of Mogikoyo [Mugikuyu] became the Kikuyu, the Meru and the Embu tribes and – according to a few elders – the Kamba tribe as well. It is worth pointing out at this stage that these Gusii claims are not to be taken for granted. Linguists like Whiteley and Greenberg, who have studied the Gusii and other Bantu languages, are agreed that the Gusii, Logoli, Kuria, Kikuyu, Embu, Kamba and Meru languages are very closely related.<sup>1</sup>

It appears that ex-Mount Elgon eastern trekking clusters settled in an area of the Lake Nakuru (Nakuso) where they were impinged upon by the Sigilai Maasai in about A.D. 1625 and forced to move on towards a place north-west of Mount Kenya. The Akamba group headed towards Mt. Kilimanjaro and into Tanzania, with some going to central Tanzania to settle among the Wanyamwezi people while the others returned to what is now Kenya. It appears that the Akamba community was at that time fragmented into small migrating groups shifting locations in the region around Mount Kilimanjaro without permanent attachment to any given location and therefore unable to unify their diffuse settlements. Between 1500 and 1889 or thereabouts, Akamba society went through many transformations at several levels affecting their physical locations, methods of land use and the routine life of the village communities.

Akamba history can be divided into four important phases within a period of four hundred years. The first is the Kilimanjaro (Kilima kya kye – the white mountain) settlement and migration phase; the second phase is the Mbooni settlement in Ukamba; the third phase is the dispersal of the Akamba from Mbooni hills; and the fourth phase is the development and decline of Akamba trading prior to colonial occupation.

### **The Kilimanjaro Phase**

settlements around Kilimanjaro seem to have been established during the first half of the seventeenth century although the evidence is contradictory. Oral traditions indicate that in the second half of sixteen century, the Akamba inhabited the Kilimanjaro plains but these traditions do not give territorial locations or arrangements of the Akamba settlements in the area. It is probably safe to conclude that the Akamba settlements were transitory, continually moving to fresh lands and expanding in the new areas as they shifted location.

As most of the territory was accessible to the Akamba, shifting locations frequently would have been a beneficial strategy of land use for them. A majority of the traditions state that in the plains

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the Akamba were cattle keepers and that to compensate for the inadequate water supply for their cattle, they constructed rainponds. They also engaged in hunting and trapping of small game and collecting fruits and roots to supplement the diet of meat from game and cattle.

### **Mbooni Settlement Phase and the Dispersal**

During the last decade of the sixteenth century, the settlers began to leave the Kilimanjaro plains. Part of the cause forcing this phenomenal migration from the plains was constant raids by the aggressive semi-pastoral Iloikop Maasai otherwise known as Wakuavi.

From Kiima Kya Kyeu plains, the Akamba entered the present Ukambaland by scaling the steep slopes of the Chyulu hills which they found to be rocky and not well supplied with surface water.

They soon left Chyulu hills for a short stay in Kibwezi plains from where they were forced by the long seasonal droughts to move on northward to settle around the towering rock of Nzau for a short period of about thirty years. Agricultural cultivation failed to take root, and since the area did not provide a natural protective shield against possible further Maasai attacks, the majority of the Akamba groups moved on rapidly to Mbooni hills and only some splinter communities remained behind. After about one hundred years, some of the Akamba people returned in large numbers to this southern area to settle.

Mbooni Hills or Il]ma Sya Mbooni which means buffalo hills or hills with buffalo are about forty-eight kilometres in diameter and have a substantially high elevation (between 1500 and 2000 metres above sea level). It was a region of secluded woodlands, thick foliage and forests. It attracted a sizable number of African buffalo and hence the name. These forests offered the Akamba natural fortifications against raids. The soil in Mbooni was and is still more fertile than in many areas of Ukamba, and indeed can rival the ecological potential of the other productive zones of Kenya, such as the central highlands.

In about 1715 some groups of Mbooni people began to move from the hills across the Athi River into central Kitui but this did not reduce the population of Mbooni. Between 1740 and 1780 and particularly in about 1760, heavy migration to the eastern reaches of Ukamba as well as to the north took place. Depletion of soil in the intensively cultivated Mbooni region and a resurgence of pastoralism fuelled the movement. Local feuds and strife between sections of the Akamba community were causes of migration too. The Mbooni period has had lasting effects on Akamba society. K. Jackson (a colonial government officer) has quoted the Kamba saying thus: "Kila umwe e kakelwa kakonanitiye na Mbooni" ("Everyone has a little history connected with Mbooni").

### **Language and Environment**

The Akamba from both Ulu (Machakos) and {thaisu (Kitui) speak one language, but there are considerable differences of vocabulary and construction between the dialects of Machakos and Kitui. There are minor differences between Kitui and Mumoni, on one hand, and between Ulu and Kibwezi, on the other. The phonetic and grammatical characteristics of Akamba language are given by Guthrie and Doke. The latter also gives a bibliography of grammars and dictionaries. The language belongs to Doke's "Northern Bantu" zone and to Guthrie's "zone E, group 50" which includes G]k[y[, Kiambu and K]m]]r[.

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### **Social and Political Organisation**

A homestead (m[sy], pl. m[sy]) was the smallest social unit. A homestead was usually a stockade around the home of each married man, which contained the huts of his wives. Outside the entrance of several family homesteads was a thome, a shaded open space, where men sat and discussed everyday events. Thome was the basic political unit. A thome could have been shared by several joint families and in the political sense referred to a group based on an extended family with possible attached households, which may be of different clan affiliations. In some cases, components homesteads constituting a thome may not be in sight of one another.

The head of the family within the homestead (m[sy]) was vested with authority and, in theory, had control over all members of the group, including adult males with families of their own. The m[sy] council was responsible over land ownership and was the group that carried out vengeance for offences committed against its members if judgement penalties were not paid. It was common for adult men to hive off the m[sy] and set up independent homesteads if they disagreed with the family head.

### **Initiation**

Akamba circumcision or critoridectomy was performed when the initiates were as young as four or five years. To become a full adult member of the tribe, a man or a woman had to undergo two initiation ceremonies — nza]ko ]la nini (the small circumcision) and nza]ko ]la nene (the great circumcision). The candidates for the second nzaiko were generally between eight and twelve years old.

Both boys and girls were taken to a specially erected hut in a thome where they stayed together receiving ritual and practical instructions from instructors. The boys underwent a second operation — a slight cut being made at the base of the glans penis and beer poured into it. There was also a "third circumcision". The participants in the third nza]ko or the "circumcision of the men" were bound by an oath of secrecy. Lindblom speaks of the great difficulty of getting any information on the subject and Hopley learned very little of the true nature of the rite. The ceremonies took place far away from the homestead in special huts near rivers and were performed by men who had already undergone the ceremony.

### **Elders Council**

The Akamba had institutionalised age-grades which had political and ritual functions. These age-grades, however, were not connected with physical circumcision ceremonies as among the Ag]k[y]. The larger political unit called [t[i was the territorial cluster of joint m[sy] under nzama or elders' council. Nzama was and still is formed of atumia (elders) but not all elders took part in its deliberations as there were three categories of elders. The junior-most were the atumia a k]suka who took part in war discussions and were responsible for peace maintenance, carrying out public executions and the disposal of corpses. They paid ten goats or one bullock on entering k]suka eldership.

The top two grades of elders form the nzama, the administrative and judicial council of the [t[i. The nzama is also known as atumia a nzama or atumia ma ithembo with the inner council known

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as nzili. This inner council also conducts ritual ceremonies. Members of k]suka are allowed to attend the rituals but take no part in them.