

*A Critical Analysis of the Factors that Attract African
Women to Conversion to Christian (1900-2000) with
Special Reference to the Anglican Church of Kenya
(ACK) Diocese of Mt Kenya Central*

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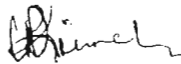
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband Rev. Stephen Kinuthia Nduati and to our daughter Gloria.

DECLARATION

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

REGINA WANJIKU KINUTHIA.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Kinuthia', written in a cursive style.

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ABSTRACT

Many books and articles have been written about the role of women in the Church by both local and foreign authors but I note with special interest, that the factors behind the preponderance of women over men in the Church have not been adequately highlighted. To me this is very important at this moment when we are celebrating 'a demographic shift in the centre of gravity of the Christian world with African Christianity being regarded as potentially the representative Christianity of the twenty-first Century'. The growth of Christianity in Africa as represented by the Church reflects a great disparity. Men dominate in leadership while women dominate in membership. Therefore the study seeks to investigate, examine and critically analyze the reasons for their conversion in order to build a balanced Christianity both in Church membership and leadership.

The study was undertaken in the ACK diocese of Mt. Kenya Central and concentrated mainly on Murang'a district in the period between 1906-2000. Among other things the study was undertaken as a contribution to the emancipation of women in our African Churches.

Chapter one is an introduction to the whole thesis. Included is the statement of the problem, the methodology used to collect data and the literature review. Chapter two examines Gikuyu myth of origin plus the place of women in traditional society. Chapter three investigates the role of women in the development of the ACK Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central with a special interest in the work of the CMS women missionaries and the MU. Chapter four is the major work of the study. Here we look at the dynamics of women converting into Christianity. A sample of four case histories have been analysed giving reasons as to why women embraced Christianity. This is followed successfully by a critical analysis of the specific reasons for women entering Church. It has singled out several reasons: first in the list is the quest for salvation and eternal life, pursuit for peace and search for identity among others. In Chapter five we have analysed our research findings using the feminist theoretical framework of Carolyn Osiek. Chapter six is the

summary and concluding remarks which sums up the main findings of the study. This chapter has concluded that Gikuyu women are attracted to Christianity mainly because of the Gikuyu patriarchal culture and the promise of emancipation preached by the Church. The same chapter has given several recommendations, which if followed can help bring equilibrium in the Church's leadership and membership.

Definition of Terms

Church –In this thesis the term Church is used to refer to the Anglican Church of Kenya-Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central.

Diocese-it is an Anglican Church district for which a bishop is in charge

Conversion-Other terms used in reference to this term are salvation, being born again, revival, renewal, and spiritual experience or knowing Jesus Christ. A person is converted when he/ she has faith in the saving work of Christ.

From the research these terms have been used interchangeably. The preponderance of women over men has been noted among the converted and the non-converted.

Mukurwe wa Gathanga-first settlement of the Gikuyu people

Ngai- Is a Gikuyu term that stands for the Supreme Being or God.

Gikuyu- is the name of the Agikuyu patriarch.

Mutamayu-is the Gikuyu name for olive tree (was considered sacred)

Mukuyu-is the Gikuyu name for fig tree (was considered sacred)

Ahonoki (pl.) muhonoki (sing.)-Those who converted into Christ

Muthomi (sing.) athomi (pl.)- name given to the early Gikuyu converts (into Christianity) which literally means readers.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACK-Anglican Church of Kenya

CPK-Church of the Province of Kenya

FA-Father's Association

MU-Mother's Union

H/D-Heads of Departments

SCOS-Standing Committee of Synod

CMS- Church Missionary Society

EAYM-East Africa Yearly Meetings

PCEA-Presbyterian Church of East Africa

Fig.-Figure

CSM-Church Scotland Mission

HIV-Human Immuno-deficiency Virus

AIDS-Acquired Immuno-deficiency Syndrome

NIV-New International Version

RSV-Revised Standard Version

STDs-Sexually Transmitted Diseases

WMU-Women Missionary Union

NRSV-New Revised Standard Version

ONE

Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

The basic subject of this study is the conversion of women into Christianity, a phenomenon that is exemplified by the preponderance of women over men in the Church membership. There has been a remarkable growth of Christianity among the African population since the beginning of the 19th Century. Hildebrandt notes that seventy-two point six percent of the whole population of South Africa are Christians; while sixty four percent of the people of Ghana are Christians. In Kenya he notes that eighty-point one percent of the population are Christian.¹ This drastic growth of Christianity in Africa has not occurred overnight. According to professor Walls, Christianity in Africa has grown from 10 million in 1900 to about 225 million in 1989. He predicts that if the same trend of growth were to continue, Africa would have a huge proportion of about 334 million Christians by the twenty-first Century.²

The most intriguing phenomenon of African Christianity is its ability to attract more women than men to Church membership. A casual observation reveals that women are attracted to the Church in large numbers than men. As Ayegboyin has noted, women are the main Churchgoers in all the major Christian Churches and they represent a majority in Church membership. She argues that most of the mission Churches in Africa are principally composed of women and girls.³ Scholars like Amoah Elizabeth, Githanji Jane and Mwaura Philomena have quoted figures to support the universal preponderance of women over men in most of the Christian

¹ Jonathan Hildebrandt, *History of the Church in Africa*, Achimota: African Christian Press, 1996 p. 253 (Ghana), 269 (Kenya) and 274 (South Africa).

² Andrew Walls, "Africa in Christian History: Retrospect and Prospect." *Journal of African Christian Thought* Vol.1, no.1, 1998, pp2-15

³ Deji Ayegboyin (Ph. D.) "Women in the Nigerian Baptist Convection: The Pace-Setter for Men in Missions" in Jacob K. Olupona, ed. *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*, New York: Paragon House, 1991 pp139-155

congregations. For example, according to Amoah about seventy-five percent of the Methodist congregations in Ghana are women.⁴ Githanji notes that about sixty-six percent in all the congregations in East Africa are women,⁵ while Mwaura observes that about eighty percent of believers in Kenya are women.⁶ Though their percentages differ they all agree that women represent a majority in Church membership.

This fundamental principle is exemplified in the comparison between the number of women vis-à-vis that of men in the ACK-Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central. More women than men accepted membership of the Church through baptism and confirmation. This is evident from Kahuhia's Baptism Registers (1900-2000),⁷ where it is document that there were 9418 men and 10,881 women baptised, and about 5358 male and 7712 women confirmed. Again there were more women who enrolled into the Mothers' Union (MU) organisation than were men who enrolled in the Fathers' Association (FA). For example, there were 1376 women enrolled into the MU and 223 men enrolled into the FA between 1999-2000.⁸ Also during the annual East African Revival Fellowship, held at St. John's Kahuhia ground in August 2000, there were 1583 women and 487 men in attendance. The mid-week meetings like Church choirs, prayer meetings, and fellowships recorded 80% women attendance in the year 2000. This imbalance is also seen in the formative groups (children and youth) where girls outnumber boys.⁹ This affirms Oduyoye's argument that, "if we consider the frequency of attendance at Churches, mosques and shrines as an indication of peoples dependency on religion, we can describe women in Africa as very religious and demonstrably more religious than men."¹⁰

⁴ Ibid., 140

⁵ Ibid., 140

⁶ Philomena Mwaura. "Empowerment of Women: The Role of the Church" In *Journal of African Christian Thought* Vol. 1, no. 1, 1998, 28-35

⁷ Kahuhia is one of the oldest mission stations, which was begun by the CMS in 1906. This Church has four baptism and confirmation registers, which I accessed and counted the number of men and women baptised and confirmed between 1900-2000.

⁸ Diocesan Ninth Ordinary Session of the Synod Booklet November 2000 p.112 (Unpublished)

⁹ I participated in most of these weekly meetings as part of my research work at Kahuhia, a parish that had three congregations by the year two thousand and the 50 women interviewed for this study confirmed this percentage.

¹⁰ Mercy Amba Oduyoye *Daughters of Anowa, African Women and Patriarchy*, New York: Orbis Books, 1995, p110

Although women outnumber men in Church attendance, it is a different story when it comes to the leadership of the Church. Women are the minority in decision-making bodies like the Church, Parish, Archdeaconry and Diocesan councils. For example men are usually more than women in the diocesan Synod.¹¹ Among the total of two hundred and eighty eight delegates who attended the Diocesan Synod sitting at Kahuhia girls' High School from 20th to 22nd November 2000, only twenty were women. Of the twenty women in attendance, three were Clergy while seventeen were laity. The Diocese has a total of fourteen departments out of which women head only four. In the Standing Committee of the Synod, which is actually the decision making body of the Diocese, seven out of twenty-seven were women. This indeed confirms the words of Musimbi Kanyoro that "even though 80% of the Church membership in Africa is made up of women, not even 5% of the leadership of the Church is women."¹² This is especially true when we look at the disparity that is shown in the training of clergy in the Diocese. It is amazing that despite these differences in the Church leadership, still it is women, and not men, who are the majority in membership.

Different scholars have given different suggestions on why women out-number men in virtually all Churches. Ayegboyin¹³ for example, attributes this phenomenon to the fact that women are weaker than men, they are more easily disturbed and seem to have more problems than men...and therefore, find consolation in religion. Thus, religious worship serves 'as the 'opium' for the women more than men.¹⁴ She also argues "that some women seem to have found in religious organisations an oasis in the midst of the turmoil, spiritual and moral drought that prevails everywhere."¹⁵ Steady Filomena holds the view that women dominate the Church in terms of membership because they "live with constant threat of family illness, death, burglary and economic hardship". According to her, the only consolation for these women is their religion, which

¹¹ A synod is the top most decision-making body in the structural organisation of a Diocese in the Anglican Church.

¹² Musimbi Kanyoro, "Feminist Theology and African Culture" in Wamue Grace and Getui Mary, eds. *Violence Against Women*, Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1996

¹³ Deji Ayegboyin (Ph. D.) "Women in the Nigerian Baptist Convection: The Pace Setter for Men in Missions" in Jacob K. Olupona, ed. *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*, New York: Paragon House, 1991 pp138-158

¹⁴ Ayegboyin, 1991: 139

¹⁵ Ibid., 142

promises salvation and offers comfort. She concludes that, “religious associations offer women an opportunity to enjoy devotions with others who share similar problems.”¹⁶

Adeyemo Gladys, admits that, “women flock to celestial Church because they have a catalogue of problems...which include barrenness, matrimonial problems, infantile mortality, fear of witches, joblessness, ill-luck, failure in business and the like.”¹⁷ While, Townes argues that women convert to Christ because of the uncertainties about the future. In the midst of uncertainties brought about by the collapse of cultural and religious systems that gave meaning and security to them, conversion to Christ serves as a very important function. According to Townes, women are attracted to Christ because He promises them hope, salvation and transformation, all of which points to the liberating promises of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹⁸

While all these suggestions might be universally true, I contend that at least in the case of women in the Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central, there is more to the answer than the psycho-social factors. As we shall see in chapter two, mainly the Gikuyu people dominate this Diocese. Gikuyu is a patriarchal society and its affairs are ordered hierarchically where men are put at the top of the ladder and women at the bottom. Gikuyu women are socialised “into a state of numbness where they live their lives without really determining the cause of it.”¹⁹ Such a socialisation has marginalised women both in the public and private sectors and has made them to depend on men for decision-making and provisions. It is against this background that this study hopes to indicate whether the above theories are valid in the context of the ACK Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central.

¹⁶ Ibid., 141

¹⁷ Ibid., 141

¹⁸ Emillie Townes ed. *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspective on Hope, Salvation and Transformation*, New York: Orbis Books, 1997

¹⁹ Ibid., 5

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The preponderance of women over men in the ACK Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central is the primary concern of this study. More precisely, the factors behind this preponderance in a Church that is so male-dominated in terms of structure and ideology that women are either excluded from its leadership or seriously under represented. In the process, the study will analyse the following factors.

- Is there anything in being female in Gikuyu culture that predisposes women to Church membership?
- What do women find affirming in such a male dominated Church?
- Has the Church deliberately made women a target for conversion into Christianity?
- What could be the theological underpinnings, which have contributed to the preponderance of women over men in Church membership? .

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to do the following:

- To analyse the place and role of women in the Gikuyu traditional culture. This is important because it provides the matrix of women's lives under which they have become members of the Church.
 - To examine the role of women missionaries in the establishment of the ACK Murang'a Diocese.
 - To interview women on factors that attract them to conversion into Christianity and Church membership. This will guide our understanding on why women have responded so positively to the Church's appeal for conversion into Christianity.
 - To provide recommendations on why the Church should learn to include women in its structures and decision-making bodies.
-

1.4 Research Hypotheses

The study hopes to explore the following hypotheses:

- Women convert to Christianity because even in Gikuyu traditional society they were deeply involved in religion.
- Women convert to Christianity because of its promises of emancipation.
- Women convert to Christianity because the Church recruits them.
- Women find Christianity appealing because it gives them power to cope with the uncertainties of life.

1.5 Significance of the Study

There are many reasons that make this study significant:

- Since Christianity is growing very fast in Kenya it is important to identify factors that attract women who comprise about three-quarters of the Christian religion and Church membership. It is hoped that a critical analysis of these factors will shed light on the Church's ministry to women.
- This study will illuminate several issues that Christians could learn from women converts, which would contribute to the development of a holistic ministry in the Church.
- The large number of women converts to Christianity is a great challenge to the Church's patriarchal traditions where God is viewed as male, usually represented by men.
- The large number of women converting to Christianity from different ages, classes and status is significant because if the same trend continues then the future of the Church will depend to a greater extent on the affirmation of the full human dignity of women.
- It is hoped that the study on women's conversion will be a contribution to the growing debate on gender and theology.

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study

Although the Central Province covers the districts of Kirinyaga, Kiambu, Murang'a, Maragua, Nyeri, Nyandarua and Thika,²⁰ the study will focus only on Murang'a district²¹. This delimitation has been done because of the limitation of time and finances allocated for this project. This area is suitable for study because the CMS missionaries who started the Anglican Church arrived as early as 1900. The early Mission Centres started by the missionaries namely Weithaga (1903), Kahuhia (1906) and Gathuki-ini have grown into big Churches, where women are the majority in attendance. Also the ACK Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central has its headquarters in Murang'a town which is the centre of operation of the Church life and activities of Gikuyu women. Lastly the Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central is in a densely populated area with seventy eight thousand Anglicans.²² However, extrapolations will and can be made from the other districts in order to provide a broader perspective on the subject under study. The study will concentrate on the period between 1900-2000.

1.7 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The phenomenon of conversion into Christianity has inspired plenty of literature in an effort to investigate the factors that encourage it and its implication for the Church. It is not possible to review all the arguments and explanations regarding the phenomenon for they come from diverse intellectual positions. Despite various positions it is however, possible to identify certain trends of thought that emerges from this debate. By examining such trends we hope to situate the reasons for the conversion of women into Christianity and how far they might have contributed to their preponderance in the ACK. Having said that, it may be prudent to mention at least a few works that have already paved the way in the effort to understand the phenomenon of conversion into Christianity.

²⁰ See Map 1

²¹ See Map 2

²² This is according to the recent Diocesan census in the Bishop's Charge, 2000.

1.7.1 Literature on the Gikuyu People

Many scholars have written on traditional Gikuyu people.²³ They have revealed that women were deeply involved in social, economic and religious dimensions of the Gikuyu life. For instance, Kenyatta, Muriuki and Wanjohi have given the mythical origin of the Gikuyu people. The myth by Muriuki and Wanjohi trace the origin of the Gikuyu from a historical perspective associating them with Meru, Kamba, Embu and Mbeere people. The Myth by Kenyatta is varied from the other two in that it is legendary. This myth is perhaps the most famous and seeks to give a spiritualised explanation of the place and roles of men and women among the Gikuyu people. Hobley has written on women in the traditional context of the Gikuyu people. They all have agreed that women were deeply involved in social, economic and religious dimensions of the Gikuyu life. All these dimensions composed an integrated culture where no single part was detachable. Hobley for example notes that a Gikuyu woman was perpetually busy. He says “Her inner thoughts and beliefs is a sealed book to the investigators, and one is at first inclined to believe that her influence is not worthy consideration.”²⁴ However this literature does not point out why women participated in the religious dimension.

1.7.2 Literature on the Establishment of the ACK

Several writers have contributed to the literature about the establishment of the ACK. A book by the Church of the Province of Kenya (1994: 116-117) gives the history and growth of the ACK from 1884 to 1994. Karanja (2000:1) traces the history of what he calls ‘a distinctively Gikuyu Anglican Church in Central Kenya’ (1900-1945), while Hooper (2000) narrows it down to Kahuhia one of the two earliest mission station in the Diocese.²⁵ The history of the development of a Christian community in Kahuhia mission centre is very important to this study. The book by Hooper gives us the role of

²³ G. W. Hobley. *Bantu Beliefs and Magic*, London: Frankcass 1967; Jomo Kenyatta. *Facing Mount Kenya* Nairobi: Heinemann, 1968; Godfrey Muriuki. *A History of the Kikuyu, 1500-1900*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1974, S.B. Leakey. *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903 Vol. 1-3*, New York: Academic Press, 1977; J. Macmanners, ed. *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992 and G.J. Wanjohi. *The Wisdom and Philosophy of the Gikuyu Proverbs*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 1997

²⁴ Hobley 1922: 274

the European women missionaries and particularly the role-played by Mrs Margaret Cicely Hooper wife of Handley Hooper the son of Douglas Hooper, the pioneer missionary in the Diocese. Karanja notes further that the Anglican Church of Kenya was established through the efforts of the missionaries and the early African converts, among who were men and women.²⁶ However, the literature says very little to make us understand why women have responded positively to Christianity.

1.7.3 Literature on Women and the Church

The literature on women and the Church is important because our research examines the reasons why women comprise the majority of membership in a Church, which is male-dominated in terms of structure and ideology. The place and roles of women in the Church has been well researched by the 'circle' of African women theologians.²⁷

➤ Mercy Amba Oduyoye

She is the founder member of the circle and has written extensively about women in religion and culture.²⁸ Like Mbiti, Oduyoye has argued that Africans are incurably religious²⁹ and regards religion as one aspect of culture. According to Oduyoye, if we consider the frequency of attendance at the mosques and Churches and shrines as an indication of peoples dependency on religion we can describes women in Africa as very religious, more than men. She then goes on and enumerates convincingly reasons why women are the most ardent and faithful clients, particularly of the shrines. Her basic contention is that God, the divinities and the ancestors are fully involved in the daily life and well being of the African community, where procreation, wealth and health are the indices of the good life that comes from being in harmony with the spirit powers and with the people one encounter in the day to day life. She argues that procreation and the responsibility of bringing up children are firmly lodged with a woman thus, making her the first to run to the shrine for help, especially, if she does

²⁵ Kahuhia was started in 1906 after the establishment of Weithaga in 1903.

²⁶ John Karanja. *Founding an African Faith*, Nairobi: Uzima Press, 2000, p 75

²⁷ The circle of the concerned women theologian has its genesis in Accra Ghana where a group of women theologians met in 1989 and formed the circle. The theme of their convocation was *Arise Daughter*. Here they came up with their first continental volume, which was entitled *The Will to Arise*.

²⁸ *Daughters of Anowa, Beads and Strands, Introducing African Women's Theology and The Will to Arise*

not become pregnant or if the child has a problem. All these issues bring a woman closer to religious gatherings where they believe they can access spirit powers.

Oduyoye views women attendance at the shrines as a coping device which plays into the patriarchal schemes instead of encouraging strategies for transforming attitudes, beliefs and practices. Oduyoye says, “unlike beauty, however, oppression does not lie in the eyes of the beholder, it hugs at the soul of the one who feels it.” She therefore proposes a cultural hermeneutics of suspicion and commitment as “the African woman’s way of taking seriously the issues of oppressive traditions, rituals and norms as changeable. The ability to accept change on these oppressive traditions is the path that leads to the search for women’s full humanity and participation in religion and society.”³⁰ This is argued further by Musimbi Kanyoro who blames African culture for silencing women, discriminating and denying them equal leadership positions.

➤ **Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro**

Kanyoro’s writings emanate from African culture and women. She starts by affirming the African culture as a thread, which strings our beliefs and social set up together and therefore cannot be condemned whole sale. However, she blames culture for silencing many African women and making them unable to experience the liberating promises of God. For instance she evaluate issues related to leadership and notes that “women by virtue of their gender often experience discrimination in terms of denial of equal access to decision making positions in Church and society.”³¹ She argues that discrimination promotes the uneconomical use of women’s talents, and creates low self-esteem and worthlessness.

According to Kanyoro, those women who manage to get in powerful positions in the Church are often disempowered or they are so heavily laden with the cares that the wish to remain in positions of power diminishes. This makes women in the positions of power unable to make an impact on the Church, simply because presence do not

²⁹ John S.Mbiti. *African Religions and Philosophy*, Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1969

³⁰ Mercy Oduyoye. *Introducing African Women's Theology*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001pp13

³¹ Musimbi Kanyoro. “Gods Call to Ministry” in Musimbi, Kanyoro and Nyambura Njoroge, eds. *Groaning in Faith: African in the Household God*, Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1996

mean participation. She notes that women need “power to participate with dignity, the power to name themselves, the power to celebrate true partnership in society and in the ecclesia.”³² This notion of empowering women and particularly the girl child has been given weight in the writings of a South African feminist theologian Musa Dube.

➤ **Musa Dube**

Dube is a prolific author on the Bible and women, being a New Testament scholar. She is primarily concerned with the post colonial reading of the biblical text.³³ First she notes that the connection between the biblical text and western imperialism has had severe implications for reading the biblical text in Africa. This is particularly so in the issues of land, race, power and gender. However, she comments that since Africans have owned the Bible, it is no longer a western book but a post colonial one. In this understanding she “highlights the need for a re-reading of the Bible in which imperialistic strategies are confronted, exposed and arrested by post colonial subjects.”³⁴ She takes both imperialism and patriarchy seriously and shows that we need a postcolonial feminist interpretation of the bible. She affirms with Schussler Fiorenza that “patriarchy cannot be toppled except when the women who form the bottom of the pyramid, ...women become liberated.”³⁵ According to Dube, feminist theologians can confront imperialism as post colonial, by recognising four major things. First, that patriarchal oppression overlaps with but not identical with imperialism. Secondly, recognise patriarchal methods and strategies of subjugation in cultural texts. Thirdly, identify the patterns of resistance it evokes from the subjugated and finally, the use of female gender in colonial discourse as well as explicate how post colonial exposes some women to double or triple oppression.³⁶

According to Dube decolonising feminist biblical practices describe the commitment and the method of reading the bible that resist both patriarchy and imperialistic oppression in order to cultivate a space of liberating interdependence between nations

³² Musimbi Kanyoro and Robin Wendy, eds. *The Power We Celebrate: Women Stories of Faith and Power*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1992

³³ Musa Dube. *Post Colonial Feminist Interpretations of the Bible*, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2000

³⁴ Ibid., 30

³⁵ Ibid., 31

³⁶ Ibid., 43

and gender.³⁷ Dube says that “we must all work together to transform the patriarchal model into one of shared power, power that lifts up and strengthens others, not power that depends on keeping others down.” In her article “Little Girl, Get Up! 5: 1-35,”³⁸ Dube notes that women are seeking for power in the household of God, but they have come to realise that power is in the hands of men, in both the biblical world and contemporary societies. Therefore she says that the empowerment of women in society will be achieved if we also focus on the girl child, and seek to remove all the social constructions that disadvantage her. This idea of empowering the girl child has been developed further by the writings of Nyambura Njoroge, who focuses on a group of the Gikuyu women who struggled and succeeded to shield their daughters against female circumcision.

➤ Nyambura Njoroge

Nyambura has written on the ethics of resistance and transformation.³⁹ She argues that within the authority of the larger Church the Women’s Guild,⁴⁰ has carved out an independent space within which the women have laid the foundations for an African women social ethics, and ethics of resistance and transformation. Women guild began as ‘council of shield’ with a purpose of shielding their girls from female circumcision, a rite of passage among the Gikuyu people. The female circumcision controversy is treated as the foundation of resistance against indignant, and as a transformation of the cultural norm by the Gikuyu Christian women. The practical life of the women’s Guild is considered the building blocks for constructing African Christian ethics of resistance and transformation that reflects women’s perspectives and experiences.

The pioneer Gikuyu Christian women claimed their human dignity by rejecting female circumcision, an oppressive African tradition and in protest the women renounced the Gikuyu patriarchal authority. Women knew that they were the victims of this dehumanising rite and had to struggle for a new vision of African Christian

³⁷ Ibid., 111

³⁸ Nyambura Njoroge and Musa Dube eds. *Talitha Cum! Theologies of African Women*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001 pp 1-23

³⁹ Nyambura Njoroge. *Kiama Kia Ngo: an African Christian Feminist Ethics of Resistance and Transformation*, Accra: Legon Theological Studies, 2000

⁴⁰ Major women’s organisation in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), started by the Gikuyu pioneer Christian women.

womanhood, womanhood not marked by a physical ritual but by a change of heart and values. This new vision was found in the Christian values as women turned to the bible to enlighten their role in their struggle for human dignity and Christian womanhood. In the bible women found that it is biblically correct to circumcise men but not women. Secondly, with self-determination, the pioneer Christian women decided to form a council, *Kiama Kia Ngo*. This council was formed to campaign against female circumcision and to react to the patriarchal system that hindered their new struggles for womanhood by demanding that they had to pass through men in order for their voices to be heard. "This self-determination meant the decision of these women to define themselves as the victims of an oppressive attitude which moved them to speak out against their dehumanisation, and against being defined and spoken off by others."⁴¹ The formation of the council of shield meant that "women were ready to break out of the silence, fear and invisibility that had served to perpetuate the dehumanisation and injustices inflicted on women for such a long time."⁴² Through speaking out women's guild has shown that speaking out is a necessary strategy for breaking barriers in a patriarchal system. Through their campaign women have been included in the ministry and decision making bodies to compliment men in the Church. They have argued against the exclusion of women from the Church decision making bodies simply because they are women. Those involved in the debate refused to have their womanhood equated with or reduced to the biological nature of motherhood. In other words womanhood is not limited to the roles that women perform in a patriarchal society. She argues that the real task remaining for women's guild is to dismantle long internalised biases and attitudes against women in both Christianity and the African way of life. That is, on issues related to marriage, divorce, bride price and violence against women. With the example of women's guild, Nyambura challenges Kenyan women to struggle very hard to transform those cultural beliefs and practices which have conditioned them to an inferior position. This is a very important achievement by Women's Guild among the Gikuyu women of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa. A similar undertaking has been recorded by Isabel Phiri, who argues that women of the Nkhoma synod have struggled for a meaningful life within the Church through women's organisation called *Chigwrizano*.

⁴¹ Nyambura Njoroge 2000, 29

⁴² Ibid., 29

➤ **Isabel Apawo Phiri**

Phiri has written mainly on history and patriarchy.⁴³ She looks at patriarchy “as a father ruled structure where all powers and authority rests in the hands of the male head of the family.”⁴⁴ She asserts that most of our African societies and almost all-African Churches are structured on the basis of patriarchal patterns. The result is hierarchical institutions which are male dominated. Phiri notes that construction of women by patriarchy has influenced the way women and the roles that women can play in the African Church and society are imagined. In African society men formulate culture; women are on the receiving end. Patriarchy has defined women as inferior to men, thereby perpetuating the oppression of women by religion and culture. Aspects of culture that ensures male control of power and authority are upheld by society at the expense of the personhood of women.

She argues that the coming of Christianity even among the matrilineal society like that of *Chewa* meant a transfer of power from women to men. The missionaries introduced additional teaching and practices, which placed women in subordinate positions in society, and reinforced some of the negative cultural elements. All this was legitimised by reference to biblical texts. The result has been that African women have expressed oppression at various levels and in various ways rather than the full liberation, which the gospel of Jesus Christ offers. She contends that rather than being faithful to the gospel, the African Church has too often been dominated and guided by sexist African and Christian attitudes. This has been reinforced by clericalism in the Church, which, together with patriarchy, has excluded women from meaningful participation. By examining structures of the Nkhoma synod, Phiri points out clearly how women status, roles and experiences have been constructed by patriarchy. She argues that through misused biblical teachings, the Church has constructed an oppressing image and role of African women, thus denying them their full humanity, which they hoped to realise in the Church. Women have been silenced from protesting against sexism in the Church through the use of some few Biblical

⁴³ Isabel Phiri, *Women, Presbyterian and Patriarchy: Religious Experience of Chewa in Central Malawi*. Blantyre: Christian Literature Association in Malawi 1997.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 12

passages. They have been denied leadership roles in the Church simply because they are not of the right gender to be used in that capacity.⁴⁵ Phiri notes that, “the Church has rejected some cultural practices of the *Chewa* people, which has as a result liberated women. However, it has imposed its own oppression on them by maintaining a patriarchal theology- which has pushed women to the periphery of Church administration and meaningful participation.”⁴⁶ She challenges the Church to identify and reject elements oppressive to women in the traditional culture.

According to Phiri, Christian women struggle for a meaningful life within the Church through a women organisation, which she calls *Chigwirizano*.⁴⁷ This organisation is a form of self self-expression, an opportunity to do something, but even more so to be somebody. It gives women a feeling of belonging within a male dominated Church. It also provides scope for leadership talent to develop among women. It gave women status in the Church, which they did not have before. They saw themselves as co-workers with the Lord. It strengthened their image as persons in the eyes of God. They started viewing themselves as the daughters of God who had received the spirit of God that was poured on every one. It brought to them the confidence that as women they could do God’s work. It made them to see the scripture in a new way and to see themselves as those who have been sent by God. However, even here women have to be controlled by men. “*Chigwirizano* is regarded with suspicion by the synod which feels that it should be rigidly controlled for fear that it might turn out to be ‘a Church within a Church.’ This is reflected in the introduction of *Mkhalapakati*, a male representative at all *Chigwirizano* meetings. Their present goal is not simply the liberation of women in the Church but a new community of men and women working together in harmony.

Phiri asserts that a wind of self-awareness is blowing among Christian women in Africa. African women are becoming conscious that they have been in the periphery and that they have accepted their sufferings in the Church and society as from God for too long. They have come to a realisation that sexism is a sin. This has made them

⁴⁵ Ibid., 78

⁴⁶ Ibid., 45

⁴⁷ *Chigwirizano* is an organisation of Christian women who are united in their service for the Lord

break their silence and speak out in protest. They have also realised that their strength is in the mobilisation of ecumenical of sisterhood organisations. Through these organisations they are beginning to re-read the bible and discover that what society and Church is today, is not what is intended by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Still on the vital role played by Christian women organisation Esther Mombo has written on the response of women to Quaker Christianity by forming separate groups which developed into women's yearly meetings, which paved a space for participation of women in a patriarchal Church.

➤ **Esther Mombo**

Mombo deals mainly with the issues of history and culture and bases her study on the Abaluyia women in the East Africa Yearly Meetings of Friends (EAYM). In her thesis,⁴⁸ Mombo recaptures the histories of women that have been deliberately hidden and bring them to the fore. She argues that women constitute an important but neglected thread in Church history. Therefore she shifts women from being observers and victims into participants and actors in history. This she achieves by contextualizing her study among the Abaluyia women in the EAYM. She notes with concern that the Abaluyia culture and philosophy based upon the concept of *engoko* (chicken)⁴⁹ prescribed a largely marginal roles of women and in turn was absorbed into and dominated the minds of the thinking of EAYM. EAYM assumed the Abaluyia traditional pattern of clan leadership, which is exclusively male, and therefore, women were sidelined. Quaker Christianity did not free women from the oppression brought by the ideology of *engoko*.

Mombo says that the Abaluyia women experienced and responded to Quaker Christianity by forming separate groups, which developed into women's yearly meeting. From their marginal position women emerged strongly to contribute to the work of the growing Church. They had midweek meetings named Halhamisi (Thursday) or Ijumaa (Friday), after the days of the week. In their meetings women

⁴⁸ Esther Mombo. *A Historical and Cultural analysis of the Position of Abaluyia Women in Kenyan Quaker Christianity 1902-1979*: A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of Edinburgh, 1998

discussed many issues. Among them were marriage and precisely the problems arising from the relationship between men and women in Christian marriages. The discipline of children was also tackled.⁵⁰ Women met for prayers, devotion, evangelism, and to give each other support over the challenges they were facing as pioneer Christians especially on some of the policies of the Church. These prayer groups gave women an opportunity to be in solidarity with each other in the Church. Women meetings were very active and successful in gaining converts to the Church and yet there were little or no attempts to integrate these meetings into the Church structure. Women used their marginal state positively as a state of freedom to express themselves without feeling inhibited by the male presence or a set of structure. They used the meetings to study the bible, a training that was only given to men in order to equip them for Church leadership. The bible study lessons boosted their self-esteem as women and also gave them strength to live their day to day lives which were full of stressful situations. Bible study groups empowered women with leadership skills, which were not being utilised by the main Church. They were able to share with each other in away that they could not in the company of men.

Through these meetings women with leadership skills were encouraged to participate more in public gatherings. During the Second World War (1939-1945), women who faced difficulties of having their husbands away in the army, or away at work, found sharing as a great relief the 'staleness of despondency' which resulted from the increased hardships of war. Songs and prayers are another way in which women express themselves. Women yearly meetings were a silent protest movement by the women because their involvement in EAYM was lacking. This became a space for women to operate through patriarchal structures of EAYM. They found a space to read and expound the bible, express themselves through singing and prayers and solicited funds for their various construction works and particularly the building of a Church at Kakamega and helping girls' schools. The important role played by Christian women's organisation has been well articulated by Mombo, Phiri and

⁴⁹ Engoko ideology permeated the Abaluyia society and was the guiding principle governing all relationships between men and women. Through this ideology the 'basic biological differences' between men and women were converted to justifying inequalities between them (Mombo 1998,117).

⁵⁰ Mombo 1998, 184.

Nyambura. Ruth Muthei James has also evaluated the duties assigned to and performed by women in their various Church-based organisations.

➤ **Ruth Muthei James**

Muthei is a tutorial fellow, department of religious studies, Kenyatta University. In her paper,⁵¹ she acknowledges that “most Churches in Kenya have women organisations such as women’s Guild (PCEA), Mothers’ Union (CPK),⁵² Catholic Women Association (Catholic Church), and Women’s Fellowship (Methodist Church). She analyses the violence that these women experience particularly in the duties assigned to and performed by women and also in their general participation in the Church where they form 80% of the foundation of the pyramids. She discovers that women are denied the performance of certain duties and roles, and are encouraged to take secondary roles like teaching Sunday school, cleaning the Church, ushering in people, arranging flowers, conducting catechism classes and counselling the youth.⁵³ Women also visit the sick, do acts of charity to the needy in the community, raise funds to build and maintain Churches, care for the parish priests and buy furniture for the Church.

Clergy wives are expected to stop working and assist their husbands in the ministry. This is true of the Diocese under study where a clergy’s wife is paid a salary of one thousand Kenya Shillings only on condition that she lives with her husband in the parish. According to Muthei the Church employs two people for a salary of one.

On theological education Muthei notes that there is gender disparity in theological institutions giving women a minimal number. She notes that women encounter discriminative questions as they go through the various interviews by the Church committees, which are composed of mainly men. They find it very difficult to defend their call and the committees find it very difficult to believe them. Those who prove tough and manage to defend their call and join theological colleges experience

⁵¹ Ruth Muthei James “The Church in Africa and Violence against Women” in Grace Wamue and Mary Getui (Eds.): *Violence Against Women*, Acton Publishers, Nairobi: 1996,68-76

⁵² The Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) was originally known as (CPK) Church of the Province of Kenya.

⁵³ Muthei, 69

violence from their male colleagues. The experience of clergywomen in relation to male clergy is quite demeaning. Some of the clergymen find it difficult to relate to women within the circle of the Church ministry, while others simply cannot stand the competition. Others maintain that they cannot work under a woman.

There are many other writings from the circle, which I have no space to review. However, none of these most important circle writings, has dealt directly with conversion of women even if the reasons for it are implicit in all of them.

1.7.4 Literature on Conversion into Christianity

Lewis R. Rambo⁵⁴ gives three dimensions that contribute to conversion: tradition, transformation and transcendence. Tradition puts together the present circumstances, in which people live and ensure connection with the past. Secondly, the dimension of transformation comprises the psychological part of humanity, and lastly the dimension of transcendence refers to the domain of the sacred. These three dimensions are very important to any conversion, particularly to the world religions. But they fail to explain fully why more women than men convert into Christianity in the ACK Mt. Kenya Central Diocese.

Hefner W. Robert⁵⁵ describes the history of religion as one of upward evolution, towards greater reason and deeper ethical awareness. This is an impetus of conversion of women in the Anglican Church Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central. The work of Osiek and Townes will be a great contribution to my research because they have dealt with areas of conversion and particularly that of women. Their work however, is not focused on the women in ACK Mt Kenya Central Diocese a gap that this research hopes to fill.

⁵⁴ Lewis Rambo. *Understanding Religious Conversion*, New Haven :Yale University Press, 1993

⁵⁵ Robert Hefner. *Conversion to Christianity, Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation*, California: University Press, 1985

Townes Emilie⁵⁶ describes conversion from a theological perspective. She describes conversion experience in three themes: - hope, salvation and transformation. She argues that these themes point to the liberating promises of God now and in the future. Perhaps the promise of freedom both now and in the future could be among the reasons why people convert to Christianity.

Osiek Carolyn⁵⁷ notes that an increasing number of believing Church-going women are becoming aware of the injustices done against them by the Church authority. Consequently, the impact of this awareness has produced various categories in reaction. The first group comprises of those who feel marginalised. They take up a kind of peripheral existence within the Church, neither fully in nor fully out. This difficult and a lonely path to pursue. Women here find themselves at the fringes of the Church life because of their level of consciousness. The second class consists of those loyal to the Church tradition. They hold as a starting point the essential goodness and holiness of religious traditions as a revelation and gift from God. They feel that the scriptures and traditions cannot by their very nature be oppressive or unjust since they come from God. Their problem is with the recipients of the revelation. They argue that, it is the human vehicles, which are imperfect, sinful, oppressive and unjust. Women holding this position need to be converted as such a stand has not prompted change. The third category includes the revisionists. To them the traditions that encourage andocentric and patriarchal pattern of dominance and submission are serious but not fatal wounds. They encourage for a re-interpretation of historical data in such a way that our story can be freed from certain kind of unhelpful cultural baggage, which is non-essential to its real message. The task takes the form of going back into the historical sources. The weakness of this alternative lies on the fact that the optimistic assumptions have not made truths. Lastly, is the liberationist group, which advocates a stand on behalf of the disenfranchised and disinherited which its adherents believe to be that of Jesus. They speak of a hermeneutic of suspicion, a critical judgement which begins with the assumption that oppression that is humanly

⁵⁶ Emilie Townes. *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspective on Hope, Salvation and Transformation*, New York: Orbis Books, 1997

⁵⁷ Carolyn Osiek. *Beyond Anger: On Being a Feminist in the Church*, New York: Paulist Press, 1982.

caused must be remedied by human action. Their goal is the transformation of human society through conversion.

Looking at these four categories Osiek has discussed the need for women to undergo actual conversion, which embraces several elements. She talks of structural, personal, moral, intellectual and spiritual elements, as essential for an actual conversion. Structural because the systematic subjection, denigration and oppression of women in the name of the gospel need no documentation in many institutional Churches. Personal because both men and women need to repent and reform the ecclesiastical structures in order to bring them into line with the imperatives of the gospel. Moral, because there must be a change from what is now seen as wrong or sinful, to what is judged to be right. Intellectual, because converts need to recognize that their ignorance and lack of information prevented them from thinking or doing anything different before. Spiritual meant a call to a new way of life, with no suggestion that what went before was wrong; it was simply not adequate. Osiek sees the effect of conversion in transformation. More of Osiek's work is analysed in Chapter Five, in the section on theoretical framework.

1.8 Research Methodology

1.8.1 Research Design

As said earlier, the major task of the study was to investigate and examine the reasons for the preponderance of women over men in the Anglican Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central. Anglican Church was chosen with the assumption that it is among the two main Christian denominations in Murang'a district, the other one being Roman Catholic. The Church has many women among its followers. A case study design of data collection was used. This research design was highly favoured because it enabled us to study women in the Church comprehensively, to draw a deeper elaboration of our observation, and also to select and study our sample intensely in order to formulate conclusions.

1.8.2 Study Area

This study is located in the Central Province that has seven administrative districts (as earlier noted). However, the Anglican Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central occupies two of

these districts namely, Maragua and Murang'a. Anglican Church in this Diocese has seventy eight thousand members.⁵⁸ Since the Diocese covers a wide geographical area I have concentrated my research mainly on Murang'a district that has a population of 348,304 peoples, with 183,634 being females.⁵⁹ This district is important to the Anglican Church because three of its oldest centres, Weithaga (1903), Kahuhia (1906) and Gathuki-ini (1913) are located here. Also it is in this district where we find *Mukurwe wa Gathanga*, a place that is believed mythically to be at the first location of the settlement of the Gikuyu people. Murang'a district is situated on the eastern side of the Aberdare ridges which are the main source of the two main rivers namely, Maragua and Mathioya. It borders the following districts: Kirinyaga on the eastern side, Nyeri on the North, Thika and Maragua in the south and the Aberdare ranges in the west. It is divided into four divisions: Kangema, Mathioya, Kiharu and Kahuro. Climatically, it has two main seasons. The long rains begin from March to August whereas the short rains start from September to December. This accounts for Murang'a being predominantly an agricultural area.

1.8.3 Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling has been used to assess the specified groups. Purposive sampling method has been favoured because the study requires a specific data that can only be provided by interviewing trusted key informants. All the participants considered as having information relevant to the study were approached in the Church, either on a Sunday service or occasionally on a weekday fellowship. Either the Church elder or the priest would introduce us to the women who at least attended the Church more than twice in a week and were reputable for their devotion in Church activities. Modalities that seemed most convenient to both the respondent and the researcher for interviews would be arranged there and then. Some of them preferred to be interviewed immediately.

Fifty informants were interviewed from the whole study area, with about ten from every group. The first category included women converted from Gikuyu traditional religion into Christianity. The second category included those who were converted

⁵⁸ See 1.6

⁵⁹ National Population and Housing Census, Murang'a 1999

from other Churches to the Anglican Church. The third category were those whose conversion came as a result of schooling in the missionary founded Church-schools. Fourthly, were women, taken to Church by their parents when they were infants. All this data enabled us to build a balanced judgement about the reasons for the preponderance of women over men in the ACK.

1.9 Methods of Data Collection

Facts from which inferences for this study has been drawn were in two categories: primary and secondary.

1.9.1 Primary Data

This first phase of data collection involved field research. Several methods were used to generate it. These were oral interviews, formal and informal group discussions in the Church, participant observations and unpublished materials. The interviews were conducted among women in the ACK Diocese.

➤ Oral Interviews

This was the Primary method used for data collection. Face to face method of interviewing was preferred to the questionnaire method because it was found to be more exchanging and enlightening. No questionnaires were given out for this was thought as unnecessary due to financial and time limit. However, we managed to interview our purposed key informants.

➤ Participant Observation

The researcher also managed to participate in Sunday services, weekly and monthly Revival fellowships and a one yearly convention. It is in the Sunday worship and in Revival fellowships that we got an opportunity to listen to women's testimonies on the reasons for converting to Christianity and also Church attendance.

➤ Unpublished Documents

Unpublished documents such as synod and minute books were obtainable in the diocesan office. Baptism, confirmation and membership registers from 1906-2000 were available in St. John's Kahuhia Church.

1.9.2 Secondary Data

➤ Archival Documents

These were accessed mainly from St. John's Church Kahuhia (vicarage and office) and Emmanuel's Church Weithaga's library.

➤ Published Documents

The researcher visited the libraries of the Universities of Kenyatta and Hekima, St Paul's Theological College, Limuru and St. Andrew's college, Kabare. She also had access to the libraries of the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa and Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Applied Theology in Ghana. Available literature on women's conversion into Christianity, role of women in the Church in general and women and traditional religion and culture were consulted. There were other written sources that were derived from the diocesan office. Newspapers, magazines and important articles related to the study were obtained from St. Andrew's Library. Church records pertaining to Baptism, confirmation, and membership registrations were obtained from St. John's Kahuhia Vicarage.

1.9.3 Data Analysis

The data collected is itemised and analysed with regard to the hypotheses and objectives of the study. Primary and secondary data is compared for verification. This is then categorised into chapters of the study.

1.9.4 Problems Related to the Study

We encountered a lot of problems in the course of our study.

- Scarcity of literature. Although the literature showing that women are overwhelmingly the majority in the Churches was available, it was relatively difficult to access published documents relevant to the particular area of our study.
- The Distance covered in the process of conducting interviews in different Churches within Murang'a district demanded a lot of travelling and this was very expensive.
- All the data gathered was in Kikuyu hence needed translation into English and this affected our time schedule.
- The respondents had difficulties in giving their precise reasons for Church attendance and conversion into Christianity. They were suspicious about the intentions of the researcher. Many women did not go beyond Primary education and did not understand the meaning of the research. According to many members matters of faith should not be subjected to such inquiry. Conversion should be experienced and proclaimed. Those with unsaved husbands could not disclose information that may appear to criticise their husbands for fear of domestic violence. Others expected me as a priest to understand why people go to Church. These suspicions and fear wasted a lot of time for the researcher. However, I did collect adequate data for this research work.

1.10 Conclusion

In this chapter we have introduced the aim of the study, citing the statement of the problem and the methodology used to collect the data. The study aimed at investigating and examining the factors and the reasons behind the preponderance of women over men in the Church. It has assessed whether the reasons given by women for their Church attendance are liberating or oppressive. It is hoped that the study will enrich the African theologians towards building a balanced African Christianity and be an eye-opener to the growing debate on gender issues. In chapter two, we shall look at the place and role of women in the Gikuyu traditional society.

TWO

Women in Gikuyu Traditional Society

2.1 Introduction

The factors behind the preponderance of women over men in the ACK Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central cannot be understood fully without an understanding of the Gikuyu cultural context. As Isabel Phiri has stated, “a meaningful search for identity involves digging into past. Knowledge of the past is only useful if it sheds light on the present”⁶⁰. Therefore Gikuyu traditional past is important in this paper because it forms the matrix of women’s lives under which they have gone through conversion experiences. As the past is examined, women gain a better understanding of themselves and are better positioned to reclaim what is positive, and question all that is negative. It is in this light that this chapter aims at analysing the place and roles of women in the Gikuyu traditional culture under four sub-headings: Gikuyu people and their geographical location; Gikuyu myth of origin; Origin of women in the Gikuyu society according to the myth and Women and the Gikuyu rites of passage.

2.2 The Gikuyu People and their Geographical Location

The Gikuyu are the largest ethnic group of the north eastern Bantu who live in Kenya, mainly in Central Province. This province comprises of seven administrative districts namely: Kiambu, Murang’a, Nyeri, Kirinyaga, Nyandarua, Maragua and Thika (see map 1). The first five are the oldest districts, while the rest are the most recent, having been created after independence in 1963. Although it is one of the smallest in size, this Province is among the most populated in Kenya. However, not all Gikuyu people live in the Central Province. In search of employment and better settlements, Gikuyu people have inhabited other Provinces as well, especially Nairobi and the Rift Valley (see map 2).

2.3 The Gikuyu Myth of Origin

The history of the Gikuyu people has been narrated by a number of scholars.⁶¹ This section examines the Gikuyu myth of origin with special reference to the role and place of women. As noted by Milner, “The question of human origins has aroused lively and sometimes bitter controversy over the past two hundred years.”⁶² There are three versions of the Gikuyu myths of origin. The first two are historical descriptions, which are upheld by two prominent scholars Muriuki⁶³ and Wanjohi.⁶⁴ In their separate accounts they give varied historical details of the origin of the Gikuyu people long before their present settlement in the Central Province. However, these myths are less frequently adopted today by many Gikuyu people. The third and the most widely accepted myth of the origin of the Gikuyu people, which continues to have many sincere defenders among men and women is the one recorded by Kenyatta.⁶⁵ This account rejects any historical elements and treats the myth as a religio-cultural picture, which conveys important truths about the status of both males and females among the Gikuyu people. In the myth lies feelings of honour for men and dishonour for women. It is the bedrock on which the philosophy and defence of sexual inequalities between men and women is founded. Put differently, it is in this myth that sexual asymmetry in all aspects of the Gikuyu society has its basis and reasoning.

“In the beginning of things, when mankind started to populate the earth, the man Gikuyu the founder of the tribe, was called by the *Mogai* (the divider of the universe), and was given as his share the land with Ravines, the rivers, the forests, the games and all the gifts that the lord of nature

⁶⁰ Isabel Phiri 1997: 23

⁶¹ See Footnote 23

⁶² Bruce Milne. *Know the Truth*, Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 1982: 92

⁶³ Godfrey Muriuki “A man who had four sons called them at his death bed to apportion his possessions. He had four articles -a herding staff, a quiver of arrows and a bow, a stabbing spear and a digging stick. Depending upon the choices they made, the four sons became the ancestors of the pastoral Masai, the Kamba, the Athi and the agricultural Kikuyu respectively”. This myth is too general and fails to give particular evidences that are important to our study 1997: 46-47

⁶⁴ G. J. Wanjohi “The Gikuyu people have a prior origin in the Igembe and Tigania areas of Meru Districts from where they migrated south to Thagicu or Tharaka around the middle of the fifteenth century. Due to severe climatic conditions and also family quarrels some pioneer Gikuyu people decided to migrate southward in search of better land. This movement brought the migrants to a place called Ithanga at the confluence of the Tana and Thika rivers. However their pioneering spirits did not allow them to settle in Ithanga but led them to trek north-westward until a group of them reached the famous *Mukurwe wa Gathanga* in Murang’a district” 1997:24.

⁶⁵ Jomo Kenyatta 1968: 4-6

(*Mogai*) bestowed on mankind. At the same time *Mogai* made a big mountain which he called Kere-Nyaga (Mt. Kenya), as his resting place when on inspection tour, and as a sign of his wonders. He then took the man Gikuyu to the top of the mountain of mystery, and showed him the beauty of the country that *Mogai* had given him. While still at the top of the mountain, the *Mogai* pointed out to the Gikuyu a spot full of fig trees (Mikoyo), right in the centre of the country.

After the *Mogai* had shown the Gikuyu the panorama of the wonderful land he had been given, he commanded him to descend and establish his homestead on the selected place, which he named *Mokorwe wa Gathanga*. Before he left *Mogai* told Gikuyu whenever he was in need, he should make a sacrifice and raise his hands towards Kere-Nyaga (the mountain of mystery), and the lord of nature will come to his assistance. Gikuyu did as was commanded by the *Mogai*, and when he reached that spot, he found that the *Mogai* had provided him with a beautiful wife whom Gikuyu named *Moombi* (creator or moulder). Both lived happily and had nine daughters and no sons. Gikuyu was very disturbed at not having a male heir. In his despair he called upon the *Mogai* to advise him on the situation. He responded quickly and told Gikuyu not to be perturbed, but to have patience and everything would be done according to his wish. He then commanded him saying:

Go and take one lamb and one kid from your flock. Kill them under the big fig tree near your homestead. Pour the blood and the fat of the two animals on the trunk of the tree. Then you and your family make a big fire under the tree and burn the meat as a sacrifice to me, before me, your benefactor. When you have done this take your wife and daughters and then go to the sacred tree, and there you will find nine handsome young men who are willing to marry your daughters under conditions that will please you and your family.

Gikuyu did as he was directed by *Mogai* and so it happened that when Gikuyu returned to the sacred tree, there he found the promised nine young men who greeted him warmly...he was overwhelmed with joy ...took the nine youths to his homestead and introduced them to his family...Gikuyu told the young men that if they wished to marry his daughters he could give his consent only if they agreed to live in his homestead under a matriarchal system.

The young men agreed to this condition, for they could not resist the beauty of Gikuyu daughters, or the kindness, which the family had shown. This pleased the parents, for they knew that their lack of sons was now going to be recompensed. The daughters, too, were pleased to have male companions, and after a short time all of them were married, and soon established their own family sets. These were joined together under the name of *Mbari ya Moombi* i.e. *Moombi's* family group, in honour of their mother *Moombi*. The nine small families continued to live together, ...each family increased rapidly, and Gikuyu and *Moombi* had many grand and great grand children. When Gikuyu and *Moombi* died, their daughters inherited their moveable and immovable property, which they had shared equally among them.

During the time of mourning ...they continued to live as one group as before. But the number of each individual family group multiplied, it was

found impossible to live together ...was decided that each of the nine daughters should call together all her descendants and form one clan under her own name. Thus the nine principal Gikuyu *Meherega* clans were founded. The names of the main clans are (1) *Aacheera*; (2) *Agachiiko*; (3) *Airimo*; (4) *Amboi*; (5) *Angare*; (6) *Anjiro*; (7) *Angoi*; (8) *Athaga*; (9) *Aitherando*.

After the system of kinship was extended from *Mbari ya Moombi* to several *Mbari*'s and *Meherega*, it was then thought necessary to bring all these groups under one strong bond of kinship...and given the ancestral collective name of *Rorere rwa Mbari ya Moombi*, namely children or the people of *Moombi* or *Moombi*'s tribe. In this, women continued to be the heads of their family groups and clans for some generations.

It is said that while holding superior positions in the community, the women became domineering and ruthless fighters. They also practised polyandry. And, through sexual jealousy, many men were put to death for committing adultery or other minor offences. Beside the capital punishment, the men were subject to all kinds of humiliation and injustice.

Men were indignant at the way women treated them, and in their indignation they planned to revolt against the ruthless women's administration of justice. But as the women were physically stronger than the men of that time, and also better fighters, it was decided that the best time for a successful revolt would be during the time when the majority of women, especially their leaders, were pregnant. The men who were very anxious to overthrow the rule of the opposite sex hailed the decision. At once the men held a secret meeting in which they arranged a suitable date to execute their plan. On the day appointed to carry out the initial stage of the revolt, the men started to act enthusiastically. They embarked on a campaign to induce the women leaders and a majority of their brave followers to have sexual intercourse with them. The women were unfortunately deceived by the flattery of the men, and blindly agreed to their inducements without knowing the wicked plans the men had made to overthrow women's rule.

The men after completing the first act quietly waited for the result. After six moons had elapsed the men then saw clearly that their plans had materialised. At once they organised into groups and finally carried out the revolt without much resistance. For women who were brave were almost paralysed by the condition in which they were. The men triumphed, took over the leadership in the community and became the heads of their families instead of the women. Immediately steps were taken to abolish polyandry and to establish the system of polygamy. The men also decided to change the original name of the tribe as well as the names of clans, which were given under a matriarchal system, to new ones under the patriarchal system. They succeeded in changing the name of the tribe from *Rorere rwa Mbari ya Moombi* to *Rorere rwa Gikuyu* (i.e. Gikuyu Nation or the children of Gikuyu). But when it came to the changing of the clan names, the women were very infuriated and strongly decided against the change, which they looked upon as a sign of ingratitude on the part of the men. The women frankly told the men that if they dared to eliminate the names, which stood as recognition that women were the original founders of the clans system, the women would refuse to bear anymore children. And to start with they

would kill all the male children who were born as a result of the treacherous plan of the revolt.

The men were very much afraid of the women's strong decision, and in order to avoid the conflict, they allowed the original names of the clans to remain unchanged. And the nine main clans in the Gikuyu tribe are still known under the names of the nine Gikuyu daughters who were the founders of the Gikuyu clan system. The proper names of these daughters from which the clan names were derived are: *Wacheera*; *Wanjiko*; *Wairimu*; *Wamboi*; *Wangare*; *Wanjiro*; *Wangoi*; *Mwethaga* or *Warigia* and *Waithera*. These are common women's names in the Gikuyu society nowadays."⁶⁶

2.4 Origin of the Women

This myth of origin is significant in showing the way things are in the Gikuyu society, and especially regarding the position of women. Gikuyu traces their origin to a God who is the creator. *Ngai* is the most frequent title of God in Gikuyu. *Ngai* is perfect, and depended on nothing else to create. This is shown in the words: "in the beginning..."⁶⁷ *Ngai's* glory is seen in a combination of transcendent and immanent natures. *Ngai* is immanent and has his resting-place on top of Mount *Kere-nyaga*. From here he conducts his inspection tours on earth. *Ngai* is approachable through prayers and sacrifices. He answers prayers and keeps all his promises. *Moombi* the first Gikuyu woman was created by *Ngai* and was placed on a spot, which *Gikuyu* named *Mokorwe wa Gathanga*, and which later became their homestead. The name *Moombi* means (creator or moulder). It is on this spot where Gikuyu found *Moombi* when he descended from the mountain-talk with *Ngai*. *Moombi* was a beautiful wife. *Gikuyu* named her *Moombi* and the two lived happily. They then had nine daughters. They later became the matriarchs of Gikuyu society. They had many children and grand children.

The myth about origin shows how human beings relate with God and with each other. For women it affects them in a number of ways. This section below analyses the position of women in the myth and how society uses it.

⁶⁶ Jomo Kenyatta 1968:5-8

2.4.1 Women and Leadership

In the light shed by the Gikuyu myth of origin, women held superior positions in both their households and the community for some generations. They were heads of their family groups and leaders of the community. The society was matriarchal and the young men were allowed to marry the nine daughters of Gikuyu only if they agreed to live in the homestead under matriarchal system. The men consented to this rule and embraced matriarchal system because it served their interests. It is also evident from the naming system of clans that the women were the original founders of the community, which stand even today.

In the myth, we see how transformation from matriarchal to patriarchal system brought resistance to women leadership. The major reason for this transformation is that women were harsh rulers and they committed a lot of injustices against men. However, whatever was condemned, as 'harsh rule of women', men did not correct it. Rather it was reversed and used to justify a social context to that marginalised women, especially in determining positions in Gikuyu society. Patriarchal domination replaced matriarchal rule in Gikuyu culture. This andocentric thinking has made men the norm of humanity and rendered women as second class human beings in Gikuyu society.

The whole question of power struggle and men's desire to dominate women has its origin in this myth. Since then leadership has remained in the hands of men. And any attempt by women to lead is greatly resisted. However, there are still a few exceptional female figures documented in the historical records as having played a leadership role in the Gikuyu society. But, their negative aspects are more amplified. "An example is the legendary *Wangu wa Makeri* who was elevated to a level of a chief during the time of colonialism. She is often quoted as a cruel leader who when conducting her *Baraza* could not sit on a chair, but on a man's back. *Wangu* is said to have been tricked by men into stripping and dancing naked. This made her lose her leadership position."⁶⁸ Though this woman is not part of the myth but her downfall is celebrated today in stories and songs, which are all constructed to remind women that

⁶⁷ Ibid., 4

⁶⁸ Egara Kabaji. *Women in Development*, Eldoret: Zapf Chancery Publishers, 1997

they cannot lead. Since then leadership in Gikuyu society is taken as a male activity associated with masculine characteristics like physical strength though the myth says that women were physically stronger than men of that time and also better fighters.

Another example of a woman leader is Mary Nyanjiru, who in 1922 was so incensed by the arrest of Harry Thuku that she challenged the men to take off their trousers and give them to women if they were not going to press for his release. For Nyanjiru, men could only justify their status as leaders by being at the forefront in the struggle. Unfortunately, the colonialist thought her to be dangerous and shot her dead.⁶⁹

Women however are socialised to serve patriarchy. For instance, the group known as *ndundu ya atumia* (women's advisory council) was composed of charismatic and articulate women who could speak on behalf of those they represented without fear. However, the council dealt only with women issues. This council was more like a magistrate court than an ordinary meeting. With its own rules and regulations the council dealt exclusively with matters concerning women. For instance, they performed initiation of girls, births and other religious duties. They prepared teenage girls for marriage, advised them on how to relate to their husbands, in-laws, visitors and strangers, and how to carry themselves in dignity and respect. This advisory council was responsible for the general welfare of Gikuyu women. To ensure the good behaviour of women they fined those who fought in public, or stole, gossiped, spread scandals, indulged in bad sorcery or any undesirable characteristics demeaning to women and which gave them a bad name. This was the much that women were allowed to do in terms of public leadership among the Gikuyu people.

Immediately men abolished polyandry and replaced it with polygamy, took over leadership in the community, became heads of the family, changed the original name of the tribe from *Rorere rwa Mbari ya Moombi* to *Rorere rwa Mbari ya Gikuyu*. But, were not able to change the names of the clans because women became very hostile and even threatened to kill all the male children born as a result of the treacherous plan. The way this revolution is carried out explains the uncountable cases of violence that we find committed against women. According to Muriuki "this transformation of

the Gikuyu society from a matriarchal to a patriarchal social system took place, perhaps, before the Gikuyu's arrival in their present homeland."⁷⁰

2.4.2 Women and Wealth

The Gikuyu belief concerning women and the ownership of wealth has its basis in the myth of origin. When Gikuyu and *Moombi* died, their daughters inherited all their movable and immovable property. This means that all what *Ngai* had given to Gikuyu in form of land and animals and other household belongings were shared equally among the girls. Women inherited and owned property, until the fateful day of the coup d'etat. Since then, it is male children who inherit their parent's property and not female children.

Gikuyu women had to shoulder the burden of all hard work. Much of their time was spent in harmonising life in the family and society. This included child bearing and nurturing, drawing water, cultivation, planting and harvesting food, preparing food for the family, and doing other hard and odd jobs. Women were the main producers and suppliers of welfare services at the household and community levels. They organised themselves in-groups for economic and social welfare and thus boosted tremendously their families and communities' welfare. As we have seen from the tribal legend '*Mogai* called Gikuyu and gave him as his share the land with ravines, the rivers, the forests, the game and all the gifts that He the Lord of nature bestowed on mankind'. Therefore, the chief occupations among the Gikuyu people were agriculture and the rearing of livestock. However, there was a clear sexual division of labour.

From the homestead, women were directly involved with the work of carrying and cutting grass for thatching and plastering the wall with clay or cow-dung. The entire housework fell within the sphere of women's activities. They cooked food, fetched water, washed utensils and gathered firewood from the forests or bush. They also performed the task of carrying loads on their backs. In cultivating the fields women prepared the ground for sowing seeds. Both men and women shared planting.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 22

⁷⁰ Godfrey Muriuki 1974:110

However, following the principal of the sexual division of labour, there was gender divisions of crops. “Men plant bananas, yams, sweet potato vines, sugar canes, and tobacco. These prestigious crops, which required expert knowledge for their production were grown and distributed by men, while, women planted subsistence crops like maize, various kinds of beans, millet and sweet potato vines,”⁷¹ crops which required less specialised knowledge and were also regarded as inferior. The crops planted by men signified stability and were able to resist bad weather and therefore saved the family during the famine while those planted by women could not resist bad weather.

Trading and marketing was done by both sexes. Women’s involvement in agricultural production and their control of subsistence economy gave them easy access to markets and bartering. The sale of livestock and other prestigious crops, which are the quickest way of earning wealth, belonged to men. Whereas most of the goods acquired from women marketing was either used at the kitchen or put back into the subsistence economy. Men’s profits were mainly for their personal use, such as marrying other wives. The other way that men used to get large amount of wealth was through marriage payments received for their daughters. As a result of the redirection of wealth back to the subsistence and household needs most women were not able to save enough to make them rich. Other responsibilities that fell under the domain of women were harvesting, dress-making, pottery and weaving of baskets, grinding of corn and millet for making gruel and pounding grains in wooden mortars. The brewing of beer was done jointly by men and women.

2.4.3 Women and the Social Context

➤ Female Circumcision

The Gikuyu myth of origin is silent on circumcision as a rite of passage. However, circumcision (*irua*) was the most important way that the Gikuyu people used to introduce their boys and girls to life in the society. This rite of passage was regarded to be very important in the life of an individual woman because of three reasons. First, this practice was accepted as conferring the status of womanhood. Secondly, it marked the passage from childhood to adulthood. Thirdly, the operation meant that one was

⁷¹ Jomo Kenyatta 1968:54

ready to endure continuous childbearing, domesticity, pain, suffering and hardship in married life.

Female circumcision among the Gikuyu has been well articulated by Kenyatta, Kanogo and Nyambura.⁷² In the process different names have been used for it. The three major names are female circumcision, clitoridectomy and female genital mutilation. For the purpose of this study we shall use female circumcision (*irua ria airitu*) because this is the name that is used for this practice in the Gikuyu society. The origin of female circumcision among the Gikuyu people is uncertain. But generally as Koso-Thomas Olayinka has said, the practice “Originated simultaneously in different parts of the world where, in early times, communities felt it necessary to introduce control over the sexual behaviour of women. The early Romans, the early Europeans, the ancients Arabs and other national groups are known to have introduced certain forms of sex barriers which, in some cases, involved clitoridectomy. It is known that such measure was taken to ‘cure’ certain sexual conditions, such as nymphomania, epilepsy and insanity.”⁷³

Dances and songs known as *mambura* (divine services) accompanied female circumcision. A woman or women known as *muruthia* (singular) *aruithia* (plural) performed the operation. The rite was performed slightly before the first menstrual flow, between eleven and thirteen years. When a girl was considered ready for initiation, she was put under a period of seclusion. The girl was secluded from the rest of the community. During this seclusion period their sponsors instruct them in the matters of housework and marital relations. This includes how to sleep with their husbands, when to abstain from sexual intercourse especially during pregnancy and up to the time when the child begins to walk, how to be attractive wives, and how to bring up children.

On the day of operation, girls were taken to a river. They were made to sit on cold water and underwent prolonged washing. This was geared towards making the girls’ clitoris numb in preparation for the actual operation. The girls were then escorted to a

⁷² Nyambura Njoroge 2000: Kanogo 1993 and Jomo Kenyatta 1968

⁷³ Koso-Thomas Olayinka, *Tradition against Health* in Ashworth Georgina ed. 1995: 124

selected field where the women participating in the ceremony formed a circle, in the middle of which the operators stool was placed. Then their sponsors (*atiiri*) sat behind them holding their legs naked and wide apart. When this preparation was finished, a woman specialised known as *moruithia* dashed out of the crowd taking out from her pocket the operating knife (*rwenji*) and cut off the tip of the clitoris of each girl. Then an old woman sprinkled milk mixed with some herbs on the fresh wounds to reduce the pain as well as check on bleeding, and prevent festering or blood poisoning. In a moment, the sponsors covered each girl with a new dress. Then, each of girl was slowly walked to a special hut with songs, dances and festivities which had been prepared in her praise where she nursed to complete recovery.

We can say that female circumcision in essence favoured male domination in patriarchal societies and had detrimental implications for women. Socially, the sponsors emphasised the way the girls were to behave in their new status as mature women. The stories told to the initiate during seclusion are aimed at socialising the young girls as women in the society. These stories usually stressed the girls' behaviour towards their male counterparts in the society and the importance of marriage. The stories glorified the roles of being wives, mothers, and servants of the society, and prepared the girls for sexual activity, which was going to be a characteristic feature of their future lives. Physically, the surgery created a scar, which made childbirth difficult, putting the life of the expectant mother and that of the child in great danger.⁷⁴

➤ Women and Marriage

Marriage is another significant rite of passage that the myth dwells on. According to the myth, Ngai brought *Gikuyu* and *Moombi* together and thus instituted the first marriage in Gikuyu community. There was no payment of bride price. The couple gave birth to nine daughters. When the daughters were of marriage age, there were no men to marry them. This disturbed the family very much. But, later after Gikuyu had offered a sacrifice, God provided nine men who agreed to marry Gikuyu's daughters

⁷⁴ Tabitha Kanogo, "Mission impact on Women in Colonial Kenya" in Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood and Shirley Ardener, eds. *Women in Missions: Past and Present Anthropological and Historical Perceptions*, Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993

under a matriarchal system. There were many grand children born to *Gikuyu* and *Moombi*. Like many other African societies, marriage was very significant in Gikuyu society. "It was a drama in which everyone becomes an actor or an actress and not just a spectator...it is a duty, a requirement from the corporate society, and a rhythm of life in which every one must participate...who does not participate is a curse to the community, he is a rebel and a law/ breaker...not only abnormal but under human. Failure to get married under normal circumstances means that the person concerned has rejected society and society rejects him in return."⁷⁵ Through it a woman acquired full rights to sexual intercourse with her husband. Kenyatta says that, "marriage was an essential part of life cycle and people rarely remained single."⁷⁶ Gikuyu society ensured that women got married and became mothers, but it was the men who initiated marriage contract.

According to the myth, marriage in Gikuyu community was matrilocal. However, with the overthrow of matriarchal system of society, Gikuyu marriages became patrilocal. Here, a prolonged part of a woman's life is located in the husband's residence even though she is not fully integrated into men's clan. In matrilocal marriages women inherited property as we can see from the myth. In patrilocal, it is the sons, rather than wives or daughters, who inherit land and wealth.

However, we notice a contrast in marriage where bride price (*ruracio*) is introduced. This is an amount of money or/and goods that are given by the father of the groom as payment for the bride before marriage. There are several names used for it: bride wealth, bride price and dowry. For the sake of this section we are going to use bride price, for this is its direct equivalent in Gikuyu language. In Gikuyu society the bridegroom's father had to give the bride's parents an agreed amount of wealth. This would include money, cattle, goats, beer and clothing. Only then could the marriage be regarded as complete and he could be allowed to take his wife to his father's home. Bride price ensured the legality of marriage. It was against customary law for a man to keep another man's daughter without paying the necessary bride price.

⁷⁵ John Mbiti 1969: 133

⁷⁶ Jomo Kenyatta 1968: 48

However, bride price is a patriarchal creation, which reinforces the low status of women. The fathers used to value their daughters for the bride price which they would one-day fetch. Bride price depended on the girl's virginity. It was therefore an incentive to parents to guard their daughter's behaviour before marriage. A man, who has paid a bride price, tended to treat his wife or wives as little better than domestic slaves, to be ordered about and even beaten. He could also dismiss his wife/wives, especially if such wives could not bear children. On this, he would expect to receive back the bride price from his wife/wives' parents.

➤ **Women and Childbirth**

One of the aims for marriage was childbearing for the continuation of the family as shown by Kenyatta, Mbiti and Oduyoye. Kenyatta notes that, "the desire to have children at least two girls and two boys is deep-rooted in the hearts of both men and women, and on entering into matrimonial union they regarded the procreation of children as their first and most sacred duty."⁷⁷

The first pregnancy was very important in Gikuyu society because it marked the final seal of marriage and became "a sign of complete integration of the woman into her husbands family and kinship circles."⁷⁸ A pregnant woman was expected to observe several taboos and regulations; it was believed that pregnancy made her ritually impure, and some taboos were to be observed chiefly in order to protect her and the child. A Gikuyu woman was not to have sexual intercourse during pregnancy or even after birth, until her child is able to walk and take something to her father. She was expected to abstain from certain foods. It was a taboo for a house of an expectant mother to have any weapon or iron articles. It was believed that iron articles attract lightning and were dangerous for the mother and the unborn child.

A newborn baby was welcomed with shouts of ululations from those assisting in the delivery. Ululations had the double function of announcing the birth and also sex of the child. Five times for a boy and four shouts of ululations for a girl. After the birth of a child the father cuts four sugar/canes if the child was a girl, or five if the child was a boy. The juice from the sugar cane was given to the mother and the child. The

⁷⁷ Jomo Kenyatta 1968: 133

waste scraps from the sugarcane are placed on the right hand if the child was a boy and on the left hand if the child was a girl. The mother and the child were kept in seclusion for four days if the child was a girl, or for five days if the child was a boy. Traditionally, right was the symbol of a man and left was the symbol for a woman.⁷⁹

Although a fairly even sex distribution of children was appreciated, sons and daughters were not valued equally. Compare the symbolism behind the number of ululations, of the sugar canes and of days that the mother and the child remained in seclusion conveyed the superiority of the boy over the girl child. It was considered a misfortune if only daughters were born to a family. This is evident from the myth, where Gikuyu though a father of nine daughters, was very disturbed when they could not give birth to sons. Gikuyu placed more value on sons than daughters because the sons continue the lineage of the family. Lack of sons meant the end of a family and thus the clan. Sons were valued for the security of the community against wild animals and enemies. Girls were not esteemed highly because they were a potential loss to the lineage into which they were born. They transferred their productive and reproductive powers from their natal homes to their marital homes.

As Mbiti says, twins or triplets were treated with fear or special care. These children were believed to have special powers. Their birth was viewed as something extraordinary, something out of the normal rhythm of things, giving rise to feelings of extreme consequences of unusual powers and hence the need to treat such children with special care or respect. In the Gikuyu society, twins and triplets were abandoned into the deep forests to die. This also applied to children who in their teething process developed the first two teeth from the upper jaw instead of from the lower. However, the twins or triplets were not viewed as intrinsically evil or extraordinary; it is the unusualness of the event of their birth, which made people attribute extreme associations to them.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ John Mbiti 1969: 110

⁷⁹ Ibid., 114

⁸⁰ Ibid., 117

A woman who failed to bear children bore a scar that nothing could ease irrespective of other qualities she possessed. Such a woman was viewed as having become “the dead end of human life, not only for the genealogical line but also for her. This was because when she dies there would be nobody of her own immediate blood to ‘remember’ her, to keep her in the state of personal immortality: she would simply be ‘forgotten.’”⁸¹ As Oduyuye⁸² has noted, marriage locates a woman in a socially validated relationship that enables her to procreate to the advantage of either her matrikin or her affinal kin.

To be barren was a major tragedy for any Gikuyu woman. Barrenness created hostility between a husband and wife and also between the whole family. Among men sterility and impotence were culturally recognised, but they were not seen as a social stigma as in the case of women. Womanhood had no value outside motherhood in Gikuyu traditional society. It is essentially as a mother and in particular a mother of boys that a Gikuyu woman received the highest respect and esteem. Therefore, a marriage without children was incomplete. Ironically, if there were no children in a marriage the blame was borne by the woman and remedy was sought in polygamy⁸³.

➤ **Women and Polygamy**

Polygamy means the state of marriage in which there is one husband and two or more wives.⁸⁴ Polygamy served the philosophical and social needs of the community. Philosophically, marriage and procreation were an aid towards the partial recapture or attainment of the lost immortality. The more the number of wives a man had the more the children he was likely to have, and the more the children, the stronger the power of ‘immortality’ in that family. He who had many descendants had the strongest possible manifestation of immortality, and there were many that would remember him after he died physically.

⁸¹ Ibid., 110

⁸² Mercy Oduyoye 1994: 134

⁸³ Ibid., 134

⁸⁴ John Mbiti, 142

Socially, polygamy served various purposes. Firstly, it justified the belief that a big family brings greater respect for its head in the eyes of the community. Secondly, if the first wife had no children or had only daughters, it followed almost without exception that her husband would marry another wife. Thirdly, polygamy helped prevent or reduce unfaithfulness and prostitution, especially, on the part of the husband. Lastly, polygamy was a good source of cheap labour.⁸⁵ A man's importance was measured as much by the number of his wives as by the number of his cattle. However, women in polygamy suffered because they had to share one man though they were many. This affected the self-esteem of women who viewed themselves as of far less value than their husbands.

2.5. Women and Religion

Firstly, as we have seen from the myth, Gikuyu people trace their origin from a God who is a creator. Gikuyu myth is not unique, there are other creation stories and that of the Jews is one of those, which Christians have embraced. The Gikuyu believe that God (*Ngai*) created the universe with human beings, the animate and inanimate objects. *Ngai* lives in the sky but has temporary homes on earth, situated on the mountains. For instance the Gikuyu believe that Mt. Kenya is *Ngai's* resting-place. There are other small mountains, which are regarded with reverence as dwelling places of God. They also believe that God lives in huge trees like the *Mutamayo* (Olive) and *Mukuyu* (Fig), which are regarded as the sacred dwelling places of *Ngai*.

The Gikuyu people believe that *Ngai* has no genesis or gender. *Ngai* is a distant being who is not seen with ordinary mortal eyes and is both transcendent and immanent. Though *Ngai* takes little interests in individuals in their daily walks of life but during the rites of passage (birth, initiation and marriage) which is a critical moment in life which *Ngai* is invariably called upon to give spiritual assistance.

It is a fact that *Mukorwe wa Gathanga*, the presumed cradle of the Gikuyu people exists at *Gakuyu* near *Gathuki-ini* in Murang'a District. The presence of this tree and the whole surrounding area (which has currently been possessed by the *Mungiki*⁸⁶ cult

⁸⁵ John Mbiti 1969: 142-143

⁸⁶ Mungiki is a socio-political group, which aims at recapturing the Gikuyu traditional life style.

as a sacrificial place), makes the whole myth alive, real and true to many Gikuyu women.

The first woman *Moombi* is pictured as someone placed by God in a very special position. She was allowed to share with God the secrets and mysteries of life through the creative process of birth. The first Gikuyu woman gave birth to nine daughters. God endowed her with strength and ability to nurse, cherish, give warmth and care for them. Through these daughter we have the whole Gikuyu tribe. Therefore, women's involvement with the mysteries of life's beginning is believed to be extremely valuable in the Gikuyu culture. Because of this, life was perceived as sacred and directly linked with God through the woman.

Gikuyu women expressed their religiosity through many ways. Hobley has noted that occasionally, Gikuyu women were initiated into an esoteric religiosity that involved periodic and authentic spirit possession. They would be found in the religious categories of mediums, diviners and seers. Such women benefited the entire society by bringing messages from the super-natural beings. Sometimes, the manifestation of the spirit in these women occurred when they were seized with frenzy and thrown into a state of ecstasy for several days. He observes further that women prophetesses and seers determined to a great extent the site of the Gikuyu shrines.⁸⁷

For instance,

“In a particular locality death would occur of a women prophetess or seer, whose prophecy always came true. After a time the spirit of such a woman would seize another woman in that village. In a state of exaltation she would speak in the name of the prophetess saying, “I cannot stay here, I am called by *Ngai*, and I go to live at a certain tree” (which of course would be specified). According to Gikuyu beliefs, the tree thus designated in such circumstances acquired sanctity. A sacrifice would then be offered with eight elders (four men and four women) saying “we have brought you to the place you so desire.”⁸⁸

A small hut would be built on the spot. Gikuyu women employed rituals to bring desired ends like fertility in the time of barrenness, and protection and favour from the ancestors especially during the time of misfortune. The rituals could be in form of a

⁸⁷ Hobley 1967: 61

chant uttered when preparing a dish, a cleansing ceremony prior to visiting a sacred place, a charm won by the victim, or specified behaviours undertaken to ensure agricultural productivity. The Gikuyu people believed that women's activities controlled some aspects of the supernatural. However, as in many other African societies, Gikuyu women of the childbearing age were not permitted in sacrificial ceremonies conducted in sacred places like shrines, altars, caves, mountains, groves and trees. This is because they were thought to be unclean and people who would easily defile the sacrifice. This thought is closely linked with the menstrual periods and also the inferior status of women in the patriarchal society.

2.6 Conclusion

So far the study has established that Gikuyu women had a place in the traditional myth which pictures Gikuyu society as originally matriarchal and organised around the nine daughters of Gikuyu, until when men revolted against this system and replaced it with a patriarchal one. In the patriarchal system women were actively involved in the cultural, religious, socio-political and economic settings. However we note that in patriarchy, women experience subjugation, oppression, exploitation and control by men. It is not surprising that from infancy, women are socialised and taught to accept their place in patriarchal society. It is against this background, that this thesis analyses the role of women in the ACK Church in the following chapter.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 61

THREE

The Role of Women in the Development of the ACK Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central

3.1 Introduction

The history of the Anglican Church in Kenya has been well documented. This history includes the development of the Church into various Dioceses one of which is the Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central. A book by the Church of the Province of Kenya has smartly documented the history and growth of the ACK from 1884 to 1994.⁸⁹ Karanja has narrowed it to the history of what he calls 'a distinctively Gikuyu Anglican Church in Central Kenya'⁹⁰, while Hooper further narrows it to the history of the development of a Christian community in Kahuhia mission centre⁹¹. In the history of the ACK and its Dioceses, the role of women seem not to have been noted. This chapter therefore looks at the establishment of the Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central with special reference to women.

3.2 The Development of the ACK Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central

The ACK in Kenya has its commencement in the work of John Ludwing Krapf, the first CMS missionary who arrived in Kenya in 1844. On arrival, Krapf and his wife Rosine established the first mission station in Mombasa at Rabai Mpya. Unfortunately in the same year Rosine died together with their child. Rebmann joined Krapf in June 1846. The two gentlemen engaged in evangelistic tours, Krapf to Ukambani and Rebmann to Taita.⁹² It was not until 1851 when they baptised the first Anglican convert, a dying cripple called Mringe, a proof that Christianity was not a fast growing plant during these early beginnings.⁹³

⁸⁹ Church of the Province of Kenya. Rabai to Mumias, Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1994, pp1ff

⁹⁰ John Karanja 2000, pp1ff

⁹¹ Cyril Hooper, Kahuhia, A Life Story Within the Development of a Christian Community in Kenya, 2000 pp1ff

⁹² See Map 2

⁹³ Jonathan Hildebrandt 1996: 122

According to Karanja there were three important factors that facilitated the spread of Christianity from the coast of Kenya to the Central Province. Firstly, the colonial occupation, the establishment of the British East African Protectorate and the building of the Kenya-Uganda railway. Secondly, a series of natural disasters and thirdly, the investigative nature of the Gikuyu people. Seven CMS stations were established in the Central Province in the early twentieth century. These include Kabete 1900, Weithaga 1903, Kahuhia 1906, Kabare 1910, Kigari 1910, Mutira 1911 and Gathukiini 1913.⁹⁴ It is worth noting that three of these stations (Weithaga, Kahuhia and Gathukiini) are in Murang'a district. These three mission stations: Weithaga 1903, Kahuhia 1906 and Gathuki-ini 1913 are the oldest sign of the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central. Weithaga was characterised by the early vigour of its immigrant "converts", but was soon overtaken as an education centre by the more accessible Kahuhia further down the hill. Kahuhia is strategically located right on the main road from Murang'a town to Weithaga.⁹⁵

3.2.1 Church Missionary Society in Kenya

The work of CMS and women has its genesis in the life and role of Mrs Rosine Krapf. Rosine arrived in Mombasa in 1884 in the company of her husband John Ludwig Krapf, the first CMS missionary to Kenya. Rosine and their four-day-old baby girl died and were buried in the coast of Kenya. However, their deaths opened doors to so many other women to come to Kenya through CMS either as missionaries, wives, sisters, mothers or daughters. In this section we shall look at the role played by women missionaries in the ACK and specifically among the Gikuyu women of the Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central.

3.2.2 CMS Women in the Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central

While it is not possible in this section to look at the achievements of all the CMS women in this Diocese, we can at least look at the role played by two women namely, Elizabeth Mary Wells and Mrs Margaret Cicely Witerbotham. Through their work we

⁹⁴ John Karanja, 2000, 10

⁹⁵ See Map 2

can see the role played by women missionaries in the establishment of the Anglican Church in Central Kenya.

Mrs Elizabeth Mary Wells, who held a medical degree, laid the very foundation of the women's work in this Diocese. Elizabeth and her husband Douglas Hooper, were posted to the highlands of Kenya to restart his continuing ministry, first at Kabare and then in Kahuhia in 1908. Elizabeth, who was nicknamed *Mutter*,⁹⁶ developed work with a dispensary and a simple small hospital.

Mrs Margaret Cicely Winterbotham followed Elizabeth. Cicely was betrothed to Handley Moule, the only son of Douglas and his first wife Edith Hooper. With the impending marriage, Cicely was expected to go to Kennaway Hall, the CMS training centre for women, for a year. It was the society's rule that all women, whether married or single, should go through this period of training or orientation. Cicely got married to Handley on 5th September 1915. The young couple arrived at Kahuhia in January 1916.

The CMS had many expectations for Cicely, as with all the other wives of the missionaries. As Byrne says, it was the duty of a missionary wife 'to keep home clean and to discipline herself to bother him as little as possible with the details of running the household so as to leave him free for his ministry.'⁹⁷ This in effect shows that most of the compulsory training that the women missionaries underwent was to prepare them as much as possible to help their husbands to serve. Women were not looked upon as missionaries themselves. "Missionary work was clearly perceived as a task performed by men that women merely supplemented. Missionary was a male noun; it denoted a male actor, male action, male spheres of service."⁹⁸

Kirkwood notes four reasons why male missionaries were encouraged by the societies at home to carry their wives with them to the mission field:

First, and foremost the missionary wives filled the traditional roles as provider of conjugal comfort and as homemakers. Secondly, their presence could be interpreted by the host society as an indicator of peaceful intention and this would make the male missionaries to be received as friends.

⁹⁶ A German word for mother

⁹⁷ Byrne Lavinia 1991:32

⁹⁸ Fiona Bowie 1993: 1

Thirdly, women missionaries were to serve as model of female behaviour, and with their husband demonstrate the merits and virtues of the monogamous family. Lastly, the presence of wives would reduce the risks of sexual temptation to which a single man might be subject.⁹⁹

In other words missionary wives were not only married to the job but also married for the job. All these facts applied to Cicely and the other wives whose husbands were sent by the CMS to Kahuhia.

3.3 Mission Theology

3.3.1 The Roles Played by Women Missionaries

The women missionaries came from a society, which was patriarchal, as noted below. For instance, “Universities for men had been in existence for seven hundred years. Boarding schools for boys had been the regular practice of the upper class for at least three hundred years. Similar schools for girls date, in England, from about 1850. A women’s College at Cambridge (where women were not admitted as full members of the university, until after the Second World War) started in 1870. Not until 1882 did married women obtain complete rights over their own property. Those over thirty years were given the right to vote in parliamentary elections in 1918. In 1928 the age of women voters was made the same as that of men.”¹⁰⁰

Women missionaries were never given the prominence or recognition that could make them somehow ‘real’ in the public domain. This was a great challenge to them as they sought in one way or another to intervene in and, by their way of thinking improve the lives of the indigenous people. They were always reminded that once in the field they “must be careful to recognise the headship of man in ordering the affairs of the kingdom of God.”¹⁰¹ By such words they were denied freedom to exercise their skills in their mission fields.

Women missionaries argued strongly for a more equal treatment by the male missionaries. According to them an equal treatment was important in order to avoid a contradiction in the role of missionaries who were trying to improve the situation of the native women while failing to set a good example of male/ female relations within

⁹⁹ Deborah Kirkwood 1993: 25

¹⁰⁰ Welbourn 1965: 116

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 8

the mission community. They argued that, "it seems only good that the native should see the Christian women missionaries not segregated, not treated as if they must by reason of sex be kept out of authority and responsibility; always subordinate, even the wisest and the ablest ...the women cannot give their best, either in example or precepts, till this opportunity is afforded them."¹⁰² They experienced a lot of difficulties in their work.

➤ **Loneliness**

Like most other women missionaries Cicely suffered loneliness. It was a major step for her to leave behind her very secure home, a close knit family and her mother with whom she had a very close relationship.

➤ **Health**

Secondly, health was a major problem for both women and men, with women often having the additional burden of pregnancies, more likely to end in miscarriage than would have been the case at home, and of rearing young children without the benefits of medical care or family support. They had to travel through isolated areas without roads. For example, eight months after their arrival Cicely gave birth to their first born a son whom they named Cyril. Her son Cyril narrates the circumstances surrounding his birth:

"I was born in one of the houses of one of the district officers in Fort hall (Murang'a town). There was only one ward in the small hospital at this district administrative centre, which was ten miles from Kahuhia. The road was a rough, mud road, down which the rains ran off making gullies across it on steeper slopes...at the time my father had no car and so the journey was done in a mule cart."¹⁰³

Life became very busy for Cicely. In addition to looking after her child and supervising her household, she taught one of the two or three kindergarten classes that were running informally, without following a regular timetable. During the First World War (1914-1918) Cicely left Kahuhia and went to live with a friend at Thogoto an area formerly evangelised by CSM. For the period that she lived in this station she assisted other women missionaries in the women's work and the running of a girls

¹⁰² Strobel 1991: 9

¹⁰³ Cyril Hooper 1999: 5

school at Kikuyu, a mission centre west of Nairobi. While here, she was able to develop her ability to speak Kikuyu, and to share her concerns about the state of the lives of women in Kenya. She was very concerned about girls' education and its impact on any girl who might go through mission schools.

➤ **Stress**

Stress was another problem among the women missionaries. These women often felt torn between duties to their children and to their evangelical work, and suffered the pain of parting with their children, as those who survived infancy were brought up and educated in their country of origin. For instance, Cyril writes, "my mother and father decided that it would be best for my brother and me to be left in England, as my health at Kahuhia had not been that good as they had hoped. My grandmother and aunt with the support of the old family nurse Miss Bartlett, agreed to bring us up in the old family home in Cheltenham."¹⁰⁴ Cicely and her husband had to come back to Kahuhia without the children. Despite these difficulties they embarked on their work among Gikuyu women whom they saw as victims of a patriarchal culture. However, even though they were in subordinate positions in terms of the hierarchy, women missionaries played a very significant role especially among the Gikuyu women.

3.3.2 Aspects Dealing With Women

The first years of Christian establishment in Gikuyu land was with the missionaries like Dr. Elizabeth Hooper and Mrs. Margaret Cicely Handley Hooper, who helped Gikuyu women in many ways. The missionaries used a threefold method to establish the Church. These were education, health and evangelism. Isichei notes that, "both education and health provided an almost incontestable authority to those who brought them once Africans began to appreciate them."¹⁰⁵

➤ **The Nature of Women Education**

The most important contribution of the women missionaries towards raising the status of African women was through education. Women missionaries undertook all the affairs dealing with the girl's school. In the meetings they negotiated with the CMS

¹⁰⁴ Cyril Hooper 1999: 20

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth Isichei 1995: 119

and other societies to include the affairs of women in their agenda, raised funds from their overseas friends to fund these projects, advertised for personnel and prepared the curriculum for the girl's school. All this is evident from the work done by Mrs. Cicely Handly Hooper. Mrs Cicely participated in the major alliance mission conference held at Kikuyu in 1918. At the conference, Cicely got very frustrated because the views held by the CMS missionaries were conservatively tied to English attitudes about women and their place in society. At the end of the conference, it was agreed that the girl's school might be started at Kahuhia provided that the missionary women would not ask for any finance to support this project from the mission funds.

Kahuhia girl's school was conceived but it took another four years to come to life. When Cicely went for leave in England in 1920, she devoted her time to setting up a group of friends and relatives in and around Cheltenham willing to raise funds for the girl's dormitory. One fund raising was the sponsorship of individual girls. A round of tea parties and musical evenings took place where it was possible to share the aim and purpose of the school. By the end of the twelve months that they spent in Britain, a considerable band had been formed who asked to have news of the development of the school and its influence on the girls. In 1922, the work of construction of the girl's school was started. The work of building a new dormitory went to Mr and Mrs Whibley. The building was completed in July 1923 and the first girls came in to start school on 30th August. With the completion of the girl's dormitory and with an increasing number of girls, the selection of suitable candidates from a variety of applicants took up much of Cicely's time between 1922-1925. Beside all this work, Cicely was called on many occasions to deal with some difficult cases in the dispensary.

Apart from soliciting funds for the girl's school Cicely was also involved in looking for women personnel to assist in the affairs of women and girls and also the question of financing them. Cicely approached Miss Ethel Soles to come to Kahuhia to take over both the women's regular sewing classes and help with the girls at school. Miss Ethel Soles agreed and on November 1921 returned with Cicely to Kahuhia. These two women missionaries undertook all the responsibilities of evangelising women through education.

The missionaries' curriculum for women's education included subjects like cleanliness, proper house keeping, and a general aptitude in house craft and child rearing. Women were taught embroidery, sewing dresses and window curtains. They learnt how to cook different types of European food, baking cakes, preparing puddings and soups.

These diverse educational institutions all emphasised domesticity. The missionaries did not understand the attributes of womanhood in African society. They therefore regarded the way Africa women dressed, cooked and ran affairs of their homes as ignorant and backward. According to the missionaries, African women in their ordinary surroundings, were neither capable of becoming Christians nor presiding over homes in which Christianity could flourish."¹⁰⁶ Since the crux of the problem was ignorance and backwardness of African women concerning domestic skills, women were to join the mission stations and be domesticised.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, women were brought to the mission schools where they were trained how to be better Christian wives and mothers, able to build up real Christian homes. Their curriculum, soaked with the patriarchal ideology of Victorian Christianity, focused upon providing education for African women who might become appropriate wives for westernised local men, especially clergy.

Women's education was viewed as crucial to the success of Christianising African society as a whole.¹⁰⁸ The task was taken with certain urgency because, from the missionaries' perspective, African women were part of the problem of spreading the gospel.¹⁰⁹ According to their objectives, a potential African wife needed to adopt new values: self-reliance as distinct from loyalty to the extended family, monogamy, physical and social mobility, familiarity within a modern home and the use of money. What was interesting in their training was that they put every effort to reproduce their gender roles in their trainees. Their desire was to transform African culture to fit their own values and role.

¹⁰⁶ Andrian Hastings 1993: 126

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 128

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 128

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 128

Because the essence of the puzzle was ignorance and backwardness of African women concerning domestic skills, the missionaries found no need to burden them with academic training. Therefore, academic training was given secondary attention, as it was anticipated that the majority of girls would get married as soon as they left the mission. Tabitha Kanogo summarises the sentiments on female education 'no need to trouble girls with any more education than they were already receiving, for it might tempt them to try and enter professions of a higher station than the order of things.'¹¹⁰

However, there was a small minority who were of the opinion that some girls needed an outlet in nursing and teaching for two to three years between school and marriage. This was to be considered on condition that the career-oriented girls would be channelled towards less intrusive careers. That is, those that did not threaten to overlap or spoil male aspirations. Girls who aspired to teaching were trained for kindergarten work for children, a role that was an excellent preparation for the work of bringing up their children, sewing, knitting, house craft and simple nursing.¹¹¹

There were advantages and disadvantages to the type of education given to women over the one given to men. Education brought freedom to African women. Educated women were empowered to make choices. Through education the missionaries struggled to affirm the dignity of African women, who had through generations of contempt, lost their self-respect. Unlike men, who were given industrial training in carpentry, brick-making, masonry and practical construction, which gave them high demands in the job market and became powerful economically, women were taught domestic skills, which confined them more to the private domain. Thus, the missionaries succeeded in marginalising African women from the public sector.

➤ **Women and Health: Mission Hospitals**

The arrival of Christianity in Central Kenya coincided with a series of natural disasters: rinderpests (1898), a drought-induced famine (1898-1900), and small pox

¹¹⁰ Tabitha Kanogo 1993: 110

¹¹¹ Ibid., 165

(1899-1900). Rinderpest decimated Gikuyu cattle and goats while both famine and small pox brought great loss to human life.¹¹² All the major missionary societies operating in the region at this time got involved in the distribution of food and medicines at the relief camps set by the protectorate government. Missionary participation in the relief work both spread their good name and brought them into a closer contact with the local people.

According to Karanja¹¹³ medical treatment served as a good method of evangelism. This is evident from the way all mission stations in Central Kenya set up dispensaries to treat the sick. People travelled long distances to receive medical attention at the mission centres. Those who were seriously ill were detained for closer attention. In-patients had a better opportunity to hear the Gospel than outpatients did. It was not difficult to have faith in the words of these people who were so evidently equipped with a wholly wonderful knowledge and power. Their knowledge in medicine and the power of prayers played a significant part in evangelism because it confronted that of traditional Gikuyu healers.

Culturally, this factor provided more opportunities for women to be in the mission centres than for men. Women have health responsibilities for the whole family. They cared for their husbands, co-wives and their children's health. Through Medical work the women missionaries managed to reach out to more women than men. This was because they were often crippled with physical illnesses much more than men. For instance, in Gikuyu society young girls were prepared for marriage when just entering their teen. These young wives then would become mothers when still very young. As we observed in chapter two, the gender division of labour was not always fair. As a result of the too much work they did women often suffered a lot. They attended the missionary clinics either because of their own health, or that of their children or co-wives (where they were in polygamous marriages). Especially, as we noted in chapter two some rites of passage and cultural attitude towards women greatly affected their health, forcing them to seek health services in the mission hospitals. For instance, female circumcision had detrimental effects, which endangered both the life of the

¹¹² John Karanja 2000, 50

¹¹³ Ibid., 54

mother and that of the child during childbirth. Another example is the multifaceted form of violence that women faced from their husbands who felt justified treating them anyhow, because they had paid the bride price. This violence ranged from physical beatings to even death.

➤ **Women and Evangelism**

As we have seen, the missionaries used education and health more than any other method to evangelise. However, it is worth noting that the spiritual and the intellectual power of the Gospel message preached to the Gikuyu people for the first time played a vital role in conversion. Many Gikuyu people were challenged by the Gospel message to change or be converted from their traditional 'evil' way to Christianity. Though Gikuyu men and women shared the same traditional beliefs, fears and values, women were more challenged by the gospel than men. This is because like most African societies the Gikuyu was/is so male dominated in terms of its structure and thinking that women were/are subordinated to men. Therefore, Christianity was treated overwhelmingly in male terms and greatly affected the place and roles of women in the Church.

Secondly, women were moved by the gospel message of liberation, which insisted that both men and women were equal, free and capable of independent responsibility. In the Gikuyu traditional society women were not viewed to be as important as men. This is evident from the general preference of the boy child over the girl child. Again if a man and a woman were murdered the charges were one hundred sheep and thirty sheep respectively. This is an indication that Gikuyu society did not treat women equally with men. Women had no freedom of choice on the issues that affected them directly. For example they could not be allowed to decide whether to marry or stay single. Marriage was compulsory and the society ensured that every woman got married even if as a second wife. Women had no freedom to decide the number of children that they should bear but had to adhere to the will of the society, where a woman gained her status by being a mother. Thus Gikuyu society denied women freedom. Women by virtue of being females were not allowed to participate in decision making body of the Gikuyu society. They too could not participate in offering sacrifices to God. Perhaps the feeling that women did not matter in the Gikuyu

patriarchal society may have facilitated their desires to become Christians and thus, acquire the promised equality, freedom and participation.

The third reason why the gospel appealed to Gikuyu women with a special intensity is because it promised freedom from the bondage of traditions. For instance, the missionaries and the pioneer Gikuyu women found no biblical support for female circumcision. Only Abraham and his male offspring were commanded to be circumcised and not Sarah. Through evangelism, the missionaries camped against female circumcision and brought in a new concept of womanhood to a Kikuyu woman.

Morally, the missionaries challenged polygamy as a form of marriage, and provided shelter to women who were running away from brutal husbands and unwelcome marriages. They challenged the place of bride price in marriage and the killing of twins or babies who had their first teeth starting to grow through the upper gums. Women were attracted to the power of the gospel, which the missionaries used to challenge these practices.

These early women converts became the founder members of the Mothers' Union in the Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central, which was created in 1984. Mrs. Abishag Njoki Mahiani, wife of the first bishop of this Diocese has contributed quite much to the establishment and growth of the Mothers' Union.¹¹⁴ Since the retirement of Abishag, Mrs. Nelius Gatambo has taken the office of the Mothers' Union chairperson.

3.4 Development of the Church through Women's Organisation

One major way that the Church has developed quickly has been through 'Church women's organisations as indigenous expression of African women's spirituality'¹¹⁵ 'Women's organisations form a significant part of any denomination in the continent

¹¹⁴ See case story 1 in chapter four.

¹¹⁵ Beverly Haddad, "The Mothers Union in South Africa", in Isabel Phiri, ed. *Her Stories: Hidden Stories of Women of Faith in Africa*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2000 pp101-114.

of Africa.’¹¹⁶ One such group is the Mothers’ Union, an Anglican Christian organisation. ‘It was started by Mary Sumner, the wife of George Sumner, the son of bishop C.R. Sumner of the Winchester Diocese in England in 1876’. ‘Mary’s experience of motherhood made her aware of how little preparation and support women received for their vital role as mothers. She wished to enable mothers to fulfil their responsibility for the material and spiritual well being of their children. She started a meeting for women in the parish, with a view of helping them to take the responsibility for the religious upbringing of their children’. The Mothers’ Union motto is taken from Philippians 4: 13 ‘I can do all things through him (Christ) who strengthens me’. Their aim and purpose is to strengthen and preserve marriage and Christian family life.

3.4.1 MU Leadership

The first Kenyan Mothers’ Union members were enrolled on 4th march 1956. This took place at Mwongoiya Church in the Diocese of Mt. Kenya South. Mrs. Gladys Beecher was instrumental in beginning the Mothers’ Union among African women in Kenya. She invited Mrs Fisher the wife of the then archbishop of Canterbury to speak to the Mothers’ Union (European and African Ladies) who gathered at all saints Cathedral, Nairobi. The Mothers’ Union grew from strength to strength through the leadership of Mrs Gladys Beecher, who organised Kenyan and Tanzanian Mothers’ Union members to meet occasionally here in Kenya or in Tanzania. When the Archbishop and his wife retired, the Church of East Africa was divided into the Provinces of Kenya and Tanzania, with Festus Olang’ becoming the first Archbishop of CPK (now ACK).

Mrs Oseri Olang’ became the leader of the Mothers’ Union organisation in Kenya with the help of the other bishop’s wives until their retirement in 1979. Mrs Mary Kuria, wife of the Archbishop Kuria was elected the Provincial leader of the Mothers’ Union organisation. Since then, the Mothers’ Union has continued to grow stronger through prayer, seminars, and bible study meetings, educational teachings, workshops

¹¹⁶ Esther Mombo, “Harahamisi and Jumaa: The Development of The Women’s Meeting in East Africa Yearly Meetings of Friends (Quakers)” by Isabel Phiri, ed. In *Her Stories: Hidden Stories of Women of Faith in Africa*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2000, pp. 59-83.

and conferences. Every year the Provincial Mothers' Union committee organises the Mothers' Union Provincial conference, which is held in one of the Dioceses.

3.4.2 MU Objectives

Foundational to the work of the Mothers' Union as it was constituted was the instructions in and adherence to its five objectives. These are:

- To uphold Christ's teaching on the nature of marriage and to promote its wider understanding.
- To encourage parents to bring up their children in the faith and life of the Church.
- To maintain a worldwide fellowship of Christians united in prayers, worship and service.
- To promote conditions in society favourable to stable family life and the protection of children.
- To help people whose life has met with adversity.

3.4.3 MU Roles in the Development of the Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central

The Mothers' Union department has been assigned with the responsibility of family welfare in the Diocese. This is evident from its main objectives; to strengthen marriage, to encourage mothers bring up children to Christian life and to care for the families met by adversity. The mothers contribute to the growth of the Church through worship, projects and hospitality. The Mothers' Union has been given one Sunday every year by the Diocese where the women conduct morning worship, preach and conduct a jumble sale to promote the work of the MU. Mothers' Union works together with the vicar in charge of their parishes to invite guest speakers who are experts in various fields like medical health, HIV/AIDS, counselling, stewardship and marriage and in other areas of need. Through seminars Christian men, women and children are taught and encouraged.

Every year the MU organises tours for the leaders to learn what others within and outside the Diocese are doing. They have annual festivals from the parish to the diocesan level. In these festivals they compete with various items like drama, folk tunes, set piece and memory verse. The climax is a MU rally, which is usually held in St. James Cathedral. There is a guest speaker and mothers are taught “the spiritual value of wifehood and motherhood, the great responsibility of parents for their children and the power and example of prayer.”¹¹⁷

Every year the first week of the month of October is *taranda* (talent) week. This week is packed with activities that run throughout the week from Monday to Sunday. It is a week of charity, evangelism, management and stewardship. There is a theme prepared by the diocesan MU committee and one week activities sent out to women throughout the Diocese. In this week women visit schools, preach and pray with the pupils and students. They visit the sick at homes and in hospitals and share with them the testimony of the healing power of Christ. They clean their homes and plant flowers around the compound. Families meet together and contribute to the work of God especially paying quarter.

Socially, the MU assists those who are sick or has had tragedies or are needy in the honour of their fifth objective. Women have started various projects within the Diocese. These include MU Kitchen in all parish centres, building vicarages and water tanks. Buying plots and building residential houses, or shops. Others have started nursery, primary day and boarding schools. From the diocesan level MU have built and managed girls’ hostel, have started savings for emergencies to help individuals in the organisation, borrow loans at a low interest rate of between 2-5%.¹¹⁸

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the history of the establishment of the Anglican Church in Kenya and has found that the roles of women have not been noted. Therefore it has briefly shifted and brought to the fore the roles played by CMS missionaries like

¹¹⁷Beverly Haddad 2000, 103

¹¹⁸ Oral Interview with Mrs. Nelius Gatambo the chairlady of the MU organisation in the Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central (04/08/00).

Rosine Krapf, Elizabeth Hooper and Cicely Handley Hooper who worked hand in hand with the Gikuyu women and brought development in the community. This was achieved with a lot of difficulties like loneliness, health and stress. They used a three-fold method to evangelise among the Gikuyu women: education, Health and the gospel messages. Among these first converts were women who became founder members of the Mothers' Union. Through this organisation the Church has developed quickly and has drawn to itself a great following.

FOUR

Dynamics of Women Converting into Christianity

4.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapters we have investigated and examined the factors behind the conversion of women and the reasons for their preponderance over men in the Churches. This we have done through literature review in chapter one. In chapter two we have established that Gikuyu women had a place in the traditional legend which pictures Gikuyu society as originally matriarchal and organised around the nine daughters of Gikuyu, until when men revolted against this system and replaced it with a patriarchal one. In the patriarchal system women were actively involved in the cultural, religious, socio-political and economic settings. However, we note that in patriarchy, women experienced subjugation, oppression, exploitation and control by men. It is not surprising that from infancy women are socialised and taught to accept their place in patriarchy. In chapter three we have examined the history of the establishment of the Anglican Church in Kenya and have found that the roles played by women have not been noted. However, we saw the significant work that was done by women missionaries and the Gikuyu women organisation known as the Mothers' Union. In this chapter we analyse the dynamics of women and conversion. This being the gist of this dissertation, we shall look at conversion- the general and biblical definitions, the missionaries and African view, four case histories of women, reasons behind it and its relationship with the identity of women.

4.2 Conversion

4.2.1 General Conversion

According to the oxford advanced learners dictionary, to convert is to change something from one form or use to another or somebody from something to something else.¹¹⁹ Conversion may refer to a variety of kinds of changes, or turnings. Other terms used in relation to conversion are salvation, born again, revival, renewal, spiritual experience or knowing Jesus. The word conversion has also undergone several

developments. In the past, the word conversion referred to 'the initial turning to a faith or religious organisation'. Recently, however, conversion has been viewed as an ongoing process and nowadays in the study of this phenomenon the stress is on the conversion of the whole individual over an entire lifetime. Such a transformation affects the domain of intellect, morality and emotions, as well as the realm of religious experience. Conversion is a dramatic change of belief, allegiance, outlook and frequently a way of life.

Richardson and Bowden give four different meanings of conversion.

"Conversion means traditional transition. This is the decision of an individual or a group 'to change affiliation from one major religious tradition to another', for example from African traditional religions to Christianity. Such conversion is typical in the missionary context.

Conversion is transition from one denomination to another within a major tradition. Motivation for this type of conversion varies from mere convenience to the conviction that the truth of the gospel is more perfectly embodied within a particular group.

Conversion 'from non-involvement' in religion to 'affiliation with a religious group'. Given the fact that more and more people are being raised within totally secular families, this type is becoming increasingly prominent.

Conversion means intensification, that is the deepening of feelings experienced by individuals who change from nominal or pathetic members of a religious group to ones whose religion is a central part of life. It is perhaps the most numerical of the four kinds of conversions."¹²⁰

4.2.2 Biblical Conversion

In both the Old and the New Testaments the underlying concept of conversion is 'to turn'. The word 'turn' connotes the alteration that is made in people's lives when they 'turn' from an old way of life and to a new and different allegiance. Conversion, therefore, signifies 'a turning away' from sin and 'a returning' to God. In the Scriptures the fundamental nature of the transaction between humankind and God is basic to the notion of conversion.

¹¹⁹ Oxford Dictionary p259

¹²⁰ Allan Richardson and John Bowden, *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, London: SCM Press: 1983

In the Old Testament conversion is directly related to the covenant. People were called, time and again to be a fresh understanding of what it meant to be a person in covenant with God. Those outside the covenant were called upon to discover a filial relationship with God for whom all human beings were created. That relationship destroyed by sin has been re-established in the new covenant.

In the New Testament conversion refers specifically to the call of God in Christ, at first to Jews and later to Gentiles as well. In the Acts of the Apostles, people with vastly different backgrounds came to faith in Christ in different ways and under different circumstances, and all of them shared a common faith. Examples are numerous. An Ethiopian leader who was eager to learn about Christ (Acts 8: 26-40), Saul of Tarsus, already deeply immersed in Judaism and the Jews scriptures, and doubtlessly knowledgeable about the beliefs of those he was persecuting (Acts 9:1-30), a religious officer, worshipping God as best as he knew how (Acts 10:1-48) and a prison keeper, subject to acute stress, making a sudden profession (Acts 16: 16-34). The people all differ; the circumstances differ widely, but all come to faith in Christ. Out of these four examples of conversion we can argue that there is no single stereotyped form which every Christian conversion must fit if it is to be accepted as genuine. But, in every case the outcome was the same. They believed in God and had faith in Christ.

According to the Scriptures, conversion is the work of God. It is through the grace of God that a person can turn from evil to good, from sinful living to godly living. God's saving grace can be neither triggered nor augmented by anything that people do. God did not merely accomplish part of our salvation and leave people to complete the rest through obedience and good works. God's salvation in Christ is free, perfectly complete and to be accepted by faith.

4.3 The Missionaries View on the Conversion of Women

Several writers like Modupe, Bowie and Kanogo¹²¹ have dealt with the views of the missionaries on the conversion of women to Christianity in Africa. In her article,

¹²¹ Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood and Shirley Ardener, eds. *Women and Missions: Past and Present Anthropological and Historical Perceptions*, Oxford: BERG Publishers, 1993

Modupe argues that the missionaries saw conversion as nothing less than restructuring¹²² women from what was familiar to that which was western. She argues that simply converting Africans to Christianity was not enough for the missionaries. This is because they expected physical changes to correspond to the spiritual changes, which took place in the converts.¹²³ These changes included favouring house structures over round huts, wearing a dress instead of goatskin, use of spoons and fork for eating over bare hands.¹²⁴

This whole concept of restructuring the Africa society agrees with the observation of Muthoni Likimani¹²⁵ among the Gikuyu converts of Central Kenya. Likimani observes that converted men were expected to put their skins down and put on clean shirts and clean trousers. Some were taught how to ride bicycles for this was considered more fashionable than walking by foot. Women on the other hand were expected to wash away their traditional facial decorations of ash and other forms of soil put on a dress and tie on a headscarf. Those who had their ears pierced and enlarged for beauty were required to have them sewn. Women were expected to know how to use salt, sugar, sheets and blankets for the cold nights.¹²⁶ Both men and women converts had to have a new name, and none of the Christian followers would use an African name. This was because one was considered a non-believer and primitive if one used an African name. And so African Christian men and women had Jewish or Biblical names, and names after popular English cities, which sounded even more elegant. Therefore the view of the missionaries on conversion among the Gikuyu had to involve a total restructuring of life: new skills of communication like reading and writing, new pattern of clothing, and a new name. All these would then qualify them as Christians and civilised people.

¹²²Labode Modupe, "From heathen Kraal to Christian Home: Anglican Mission Education and African Christian Girls, 1850-1900" in Deborah Kirkwood and Shirley Ardener, eds. *Women and Missions: Past and Present Anthropological and Historical Perceptions*, Oxford: BERG Publishers, 1993

¹²³ Ibid., 126

¹²⁴ Ibid., 127

¹²⁵ Muthoni Likimani is a daughter of Levi and Mariamu Gachanja. Levi was a leading elder and evangelist at kahuhia for many years. He was later ordained priest in the Anglican Church in Central Kenya (Kahuhia a lifestory within the development of a Christian community in Kenya pp59)

¹²⁶ Muthoni Likimani, *They Shall be Chastised*, Nairobi: Literature Bureau, 1991 pp 6, 15

To restructure African society an ideological shift was required which included 'creating African women who would preside over houses in which Christianity would flourish.'¹²⁷ The responsibility of creating such women fell to the hands of CMS women among the Gikuyu people. Cicely and other women in Kahuhia introduced among the Gikuyu women what Modupe calls Victorian ideological¹²⁸ emphasis on the home. Victorian ideology described the 'separation of spheres in which men had responsibility for economic and political life of the society while women were responsible for maintaining the moral tone of the family, and rearing the future generation. This separation was not a foreign concept in the Gikuyu patriarchal society because their daily roles were organised along the gender division of labour. It was in the homes that the values of the Gikuyu society were determined. If the home life of a family was faulty, it became a matter of public concern.

Both male and female missionaries identified the work among African women as very crucial to the success of Christianising the whole Africa society. They were convinced that their efforts would create a family environment in which African Christianity could grow. The task of restructuring women in order to creating a conducive environment for Christianity took on certain urgency because from the missionaries' perspective African women were part of the problem of spreading Christianity.¹²⁹ They had to literally become like the missionary women for their conversion claims to be accepted by the missionaries. They had to dress, cook and speak like them.

Conversion meant a drastic physical relocation¹³⁰ of women converts. The missionaries were particularly protective of girls and women whom they perceived as being especially vulnerable. Therefore they resolved that all female converts be removed from familiar 'pagan' homes to reside within mission compounds

All this is a clear proof that most of the missionaries were very ignorant of the attributes of womanhood in African society. Their construction of femininity or

¹²⁷ Lapode Modupe 1993: 128

¹²⁸ Ibid., 127

¹²⁹ Ibid., 126

womanhood¹³¹ was based on their European experiences and was not inclusive of the non-western constructions of gender, which they encountered in Africa. Because of their ignorance the missionaries characterised African women with stupidity and backwardness.

In order to construct a Victorian household in Africa, the missionaries had to fight some of the most important cultural practices. The most important ones were polygamy, female circumcision and bride price. When these missionaries were confronted with polygamous societies in Africa, they assumed that conversion and monogamy would go hand in hand.¹³² So polygamy and almost every facet of social life bound up with it, was regarded as morally inferior, contradicting Christian doctrines and ethics and offensive to the mores of a civilised society. However, they did not have a lasting solution especially for the polygamous wives and their children who were thrown out simply because they or their husbands accepted to become Christians in the missionaries' definition. Concerning female circumcision among the Gikuyu people the missionaries did not have a replacement to march a practice that was seen to be at the very heart of womanhood.

4.4 The View of Africans on Conversion

According Hastings¹³³ and Kanogo¹³⁴ African women saw the missionaries as completely different from themselves. Among the Gikuyu women this difference was among the many factors that attracted them to Christianity. As Likimani has noted, they saw the missionaries as unique, powerful, superior and kind people who used to help the sick, mix with the villagers, speak local languages; even if you woke them up at midnight with the weirdest problem they could come to your help.¹³⁵ Therefore Africans linked conversion with missionaries who exemplified all the above qualities.

¹³⁰ Tabitha Kanogo "Mission Impact on Women in Colonial Kenya" in Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood and Shirley Ardener, eds. *Women and Missions: Past and Present Anthropological and Historical Perceptions*. Oxford: BERG Publishers, 1993

¹³¹ Fiona Bowie, 127

¹³² Ibid., 145

¹³³ Andrian Hastings, "Were Women a Special Case" 1993:

¹³⁴ Tabitha Kanogo, 1993:169ff

¹³⁵ Muthoni Likimani, *They Shall Be Chastised*, Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1991p 16

Above all, conversion was linked with freedom. This was partly due to the impression that the missionaries communicated in life as well as by formal message, that women were equal, free, and capable of independent responsibility.¹³⁶ Thus, the gospel appealed to women with a special intensity related in a broad way to the issue of female freedom evident in the missionary women's lives. Christianity presented attractive prospects:

"Freedom from the bondage of traditions like female genital mutilation, freedom not to have to abandon your twin children, freedom not to be married to a rich old polygamist, freedom to be valued sufficiently and equally and to be taught in school, freedom to choose your husband, freedom to woo in secret before your father knows, freedom to choose not to marry at all, freedom to live and independent existence as women."¹³⁷

This led many Gikuyu women to accept Christianity. To the majority of them the missionaries had the gospel of freedom and the missionaries' attack on all these areas was certainly, one capable of reverberating in the Africa feminine heart¹³⁸.

Gikuyu women viewed conversion as a symbol of a female fellowship, which liberated and elevated them. It gave those escaping from cruel husbands and a marriage they did not want a sense of belonging. These women who sought refuge in the missionary stations had conversion as the only option to their stations in life. Therefore, African women viewed conversion as freedom.¹³⁹ Because of the desire to experience this freedom, the first converts were often women. The feeling that they did not matter may have accelerated this.

Gikuyu women converted to Christianity because they admired the external changes that the converts underwent. For instance as Hastings has argued, an African woman who converted to Christianity had to be stripped of her traditional attire and jewellery. These were immediately replaced with clothes of some more or less European sort. Those who had their ears pierced and subsequently enlarged for decoration had them sewn up in keeping with the prevailing spirit of Christian modesty.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Adrian Hastings

¹³⁷ Fiona Bowie, 1993: 119

¹³⁸ Adrian Hastings 1993: 111

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 111

For most women, associating with the missions involved more than a religious conversion. According to Kanogo, "it also led to cultural and social transformation".¹⁴¹ Conversion meant rejecting the familiar and well-balanced indigenous life patterns and adopting new socio-cultural and religious structures. Women were caught in a dialectical process, which sought to tear them from their past and to engraft them into new structures with new philosophies of life based on a combination of western culture and Christianity. For instance, they were presented with a new religion, western medicine, literacy, and new ways of dressing, new way of life, new values, different routines and social rhythms among other things. They were set apart from their kinsmen and inducted into these very different patterns of life. All these changes generated unprecedented conflicts and contradictions in the life of women adherents. In this section, we encounter women's living accounts, experiences and interpretations revolving around conversion. This is conveyed in four case histories as below.

4.5 Four Case Histories of Women in the Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central

Whereas the genuineness or otherwise of a conversion experience is difficult to ascertain, the frequency of the claim among women Church members is rather explicitly high. Therefore, the phenomenon of conversion cannot be dismissed without depriving our study an indispensable aspect. Responses from the interviews alone, for example, highlight the premium attached to this aspect. Forty out of the fifty women interviewed mentioned conversion as one of the important reason attracting them to the Church.

Case history 1. The Story of Njoki

The story of Njoki represents those women who were children of the early converts. Njoki was born on 25th May 1926 in Weithaga village of Murang'a district. Her father was a teacher and she was the oldest of five children. Her parents took her to Church immediately after birth. She was baptised as an infant in 1926 and confirmed at the age of twelve. She attended Kahuhia intermediate school. When she was 18 years she became a primary school teacher. She converted to Christianity on 6th August 1951.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 111

¹⁴¹ Tabitha Kanogo 1993: 169

Two factors contributed to Njoki's conversion. Firstly, her father was among the early converts who welcomed the missionaries when they arrived in 1906. Because of this he had access to education and was employed as a teacher in the mission school. Therefore as a *Muthomi* (reader in singular) he had to bring up his children as Christians. Children of the *athomi* (Plural) had nothing to do with Gikuyu traditions like female circumcision. Njoki through her father received an early Christian foundation. For instance, she was baptised as an infant and brought up in the Church-school. Therefore Njoki grew up in an environment where she was expected to take the faith of the parents seriously. Her conversion was not dramatic or sudden but gradual. As we observed in chapter three girls from the mission centres were encouraged to marry Christian boys. Therefore Njoki got married in the Church to a God-fearing man in 1955. Her husband later became a priest and she has supported him all through his ministry to retirement.

Asked why she goes to Church Njoki gives several reasons. First, she loves Jesus Christ as her personal saviour. It is in the Church and mainly in Sunday service that she learns more about Him. She believes that Church attendance is a major way that believers use to demonstrate their love for God. The Church is the best environment for prayers and reading the Word of God. Therefore she visits there at least three times in a week.

Another reason is that being a mother she has the responsibility of taking her children to the Church where they are taught to pray, read and memorise Bible verses. According to Njoki, Church life and particularly activities that take place on Sunday have been very interesting.

Njoki is a strong member of the Mothers' Union, strong women's fellowship in the Anglican Church worldwide. She was enrolled into this fellowship in 1958. Njoki was elevated to a leadership position in the fellowship. As a leader she was actively involved in the enrolment of women into Union membership. There have been other women's programs that she has been actively involved in for instance the talent week that takes place once every year. Explaining her involvement in the talent week, Njoki

says that she led women in exercising their talents in various ways: first, evangelising, particularly women who were not frequently in Church; visiting primary and secondary schools to preach and to counsel children; contributing foodstuff and other basic things to the poor and lastly praying for families.

During her time in the MU office women were able to build a girls' college and to construct a hostel in the diocesan headquarters, which cost them about Kenya shillings 1.2 million. They bought a rental house, a pick-up van for the Diocesan Missionary Association and a farm to allocate to poor people.

However, she has now retired from most of these activities in the Church. She and her husband have started a Christian centre for the aged called St. Ann, which has over 100 aged men and women. They are building a hall and a clinic for the Christian community in their home area. Together with the work of construction, they have introduced a fellowship for retired clergy and their spouses. They call them for seminars and train them on how to support themselves after retirement.

All these activities make it possible for Njoki to attend the Church almost daily. As she waits for other women she memorises Bible portions. So far she has memorised Psalms 121, Matt 28, Jn 17 and Acts 20-28. This is significant because it enables her to be an effective woman leader.

Case history 2. The Story of Ruguru

She was born on 4th February 1934 in Kangema division, Murang'a district and was the second born in a family of eight. Her parents were traditionalists who earned their living through peasant farming. She attended Kangema primary school from 1942, went up to class seven and then got married traditionally to a man called Maina. In 1970, being a mother of four and a wife she went back to school and sat for the primary examination. She passed well and was employed as a primary school untrained teacher in 1971. She later trained in Egoji Teachers' College in Meru district where she graduated in 1981. Since then Ruguru has been in this profession until 1990, when she retired. God has blessed their marriage with seven children.

There are different factors that attracted Ruguru first to Church membership and later converted her into Christianity. First of all her marriage had a lot of problems. Ruguru lived with the constant threat of family illnesses, marital problems and economic hardships. She was married to a drunkard husband who quarrelled and fought her almost every evening after spending the whole day drinking. As a family they were very poor because her husband spent all their fortune on alcohol. He even sold household items like utensils and furniture to get money for drinking. Ruguru hated him very much. She regretted marrying him and pitied herself. This robbed her of peace and her health failed. Life was meaningless and empty. She complained and cried bitterly for her life. Ruguru realised that the only consolation was her religion, which promised salvation and offered comfort. Therefore, she went to Church in search of consolation, which she found in Christ.

At this stage she was invited by a friend to attend a one-week Revival Fellowship meeting. She thoughtfully accepted to go but purposed to be a mere a spectator. A day before the close of the fellowship, a preacher was preaching from Isaiah 43:1 “fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine”(NIV). Ruguru found the message directed specifically to her. She says:

“The realisation that God was with me in every situation and that he loved me humbled me from all my troubles, pains and bitterness. That day I realised how my God cared for me. Through the preacher God promised me salvation and offered me comfort and this was a great consolation to me. I needed him to be my saviour. So I immediately asked him to forgive me. I experienced God’s peace for the first time in my life. I forgave and accepted my husband the way he was. I have never forgotten that day. It was on Wed 7th Jan 1957. After repenting I asked God to save my husband and sure enough, God heard my prayers. Within two years my husband converted to Christianity. He stopped drinking and provided for the children and me. This whole episode made me trust in God in every situation. This is one reason that I started going to Church. It was in the Church that I found my God”

From that time henceforth the informant goes to Church three days in a week for choir practice, fellowship and worship. In the Church she is nourished spiritually especially through singing, prayers and testimonies. As a mother she has the responsibility to her family members to bring them up in a God fearing manner. The Church has served as the best place for this. According to her it is a loss not to go to the Church where she gets every type of blessing. Socially, going to Church helps her to meet with other

people. Through women's fellowship she has learned about living joyfully in the midst of struggles. Being with women in the Church, seminars and conferences held yearly is a treasure beyond compare.

She recounts one incident in 1969 during the Mau Mau insurrection when every Gikuyu was expected to take an oath. She refused to take the oath. She said 'Jesus Christ has come into my heart and taken hatred away. I cannot take the oath to destroy the white man. The Lord Jesus has put love in my heart instead of hatred'. Those who refused to take the oath were either beaten senseless or even killed. Ruguru knew that it was wrong to take this oath for 'I had already taken a senior oath with the blood of Christ'. She pleaded with God to help her not to be killed. God miraculously heard her prayers. However, those who had taken the oath treated her as a traitor and threatened to report her to the government. This was risky for she could have lost her job in the process. But she was convinced that her faith in Christ was more important than the job.

Ruguru goes to Church because she believes that God is a healer. Once, she had a kidney disease and God healed her. Prior to this miraculous healing, she had virtually spent all her money on the treatment of that disease. According to her, Christ is a pillar, a place of refuge, an intercessor, saviour, friend, way, truth and life. He is all in all. This knowledge about God has greatly contributed and sustained her in the Anglican Church. There were no other denominations around and she never went in search of them. She had found what she was looking for in the Anglican Church, that is, a promise of hope and salvation in the midst of her many problems. Ruguru represents the category of those who went to Church in search of fulfilment.

Case history 3. The Story of Nyambura

Nyambura is an example of women brought up in Church mission school. She was born in 1936 at Gathuki-ini in Murang'a district. She was the firstborn in a family of five, one girl and four boys. Though her parents lived near the mission centre, the missionaries did not influence them. Her father was a traditionalist and he never wanted to mix up with an unknown 'foreign ideology'. In fact he regarded African Christians as lost, lazy and poor people, who had no culture, no cattle, no goats or

sheep to look after and therefore could waste time at the mission centre. He could not understand how his own beautiful daughter could be mixed up with the missionaries. However, one fateful day Nyambura in the company of other girls went to collect firewood in the bush. But by bad luck Nyambura slipped, fell and hurt her foot badly. Her painful cries invited many people who ran to see the injured girl. They quickly took her to the mission centre, where a missionary took her, treated her injuries, cleaned her and kept her in their dispensary.

This was the beginning of joining the mission schools. The missionaries liked Nyambura because she was beautiful and intelligent. They gave her a type of food, which she had never eaten before. They started to teach her how to say her prayers and bless the table before meals. When she was much better, they discharged her and gave her gifts like salt, sugar, sheets and blankets to take to her parents. Nyambura's parents were very grateful to the missionaries for helping their daughter and also for the gifts they had sent to them. Since that time Nyambura became a frequent visitor to the mission centre and when a lady missionary asked her whether she would want to join other girls in school, she readily accepted.

In the mission centre Nyambura was introduced to catechism classes in preparation for baptism, which took place after three years. Then before long Nyambura was confirmed and was allowed to participate in the Lord's supper. At the same time, Nyambura learned in Church school until 1959, when she completed her standard eight and was employed as a teacher.

All this time she attended Church because she was in the mission centre. Nyambura loved singing, reciting psalms and reading Bible stories and especially that of Mary the mother of Christ. These activities were among the factors that attracted her to the Church. Together with these Nyambura went to Church in obedience to the teachings of the catechism. Through the catechism she had learnt that Sunday was the most sacred day and had to be set aside by every serious Christian for worship and rest. Nyambura went to Church to fulfil the fourth commandment "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy" (Exodus 20: 8). According to her, going to Church was

fashionable. "After all that's what most people did." Therefore she hated to be seen at home by her friends on Sunday.

Other factors that attracted her to the Church included a desire to search for peace. She believes that "peace can only be found in the Church" amongst the people of Christ. She holds the opinion that women can only find peace in the Church where Christ is the prince of peace. The only place to take her problems is to Christ. She has grown knowing that God the Father of her Saviour Christ is found mostly in the Church. There are so many benefits that Nyambura counts from her Church life. She has been able to socialise with different people. It is in worship that she finds fulfilment particularly in prayer, praise and reading the Word of God.

Nyambura accepted Jesus to be her Lord and Saviour in 1957. She recounts the episode that preceded her conversion as follows:

"In school there was a rule that all the students must attend the five o'clock morning prayers, a tradition that I hated. Filled with the desire to defeat other students in my class work, I would always sneak from prayers immediately after the roll call. However one morning after studying very hard at night, I decided to go through the whole morning worship as a way of relaxation. The Word was read from Matt.11: 28 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest' (NIV). This message challenged me so much that I felt like a sheep, which had gone astray. I realised I needed Jesus to give me rest from fear of failing and to deliver me from the fear of death. My fear was based on a rumour that a star would fall from heaven and crash the earth to dust. This imagination used to terrify and snatch away my happiness. This fear was one dreadful thing that God took away from me when I converted. I received Jesus Christ as my saviour, confessed the sins of anger, hypocrisy, hatred and inability to forgive others and myself. Being in Jesus Christ has enabled me to be content with what God has given me".

Nyambura got married to David Mathara, a former student who was two years ahead of her in the mission school. Though Mathara was a regular Church goer, he was not converted. Nyambura was all that he wanted from the Church. Once he married her he changed completely. Nyambura remembers clearly what happened after her marriage. She says:

"My husband started saying he was too tired when it was time for family Bible study. Then he stopped attending Church and never went to the Church for along time. He didn't attend fellowship and he started avoiding the converts. He denounced Christ in front of the Church elders and had no

respect for my Christianity. He even started telling our children that God did not exist”.

These experiences were very hurting and humiliating for Nyambura and brought her conflicting emotions between bitter disappointment and passionate loyalty to David. He started over-drinking. There was not enough money. He became insensitive to her needs and those of the children and Nyambura was forced to go after him in bars and discos especially at end-months. It was very hard for her to remain an active member of the Church functions and ladies fellowships. She often fought with the girl friends of her husband who tried to stop her from taking him home from the bar rooms. She had a lot of problems that literally left her without peace. Every tiny thing or misunderstanding used to annoy her so much. She hated the drinking habit of her husband. The trial was hard on Nyambura. She was full of fears and worries. She had no peace. She overworked in an attempt to escape the reality of her life situation. She worked even on Sundays as a way of dealing with her frustrations.

It took her many years to discover that this whole thing had changed her focus from Christ to miseries, just like Peter the disciple did when Jesus bid him walk on water (Matt.14: 29-30). It was on a Wednesday when a group of four women from the Mothers' union visited her and preached from Rev. 2: 4-5, which says: “Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first” (NIV).

Therefore, Nyambura repented and received Jesus as her saviour. Today she attends Church more than any other social place in a week. On Wednesday she attends the fellowship; on Thursday she attends the Mothers' Union meetings; on Saturday is choir practice and Sunday she goes for the service. Attending Church is important because it has given her an opportunity to do Theological Education by Extension (TEE). This programme has enabled her to know the Bible and be better equipped as a preacher. Going to Church is part of her life for it has made her tidy and organised. God has also been very faithful to her in her family life.

When her husband stopped drinking he was appointed a senior chief. God enabled them to cope with the challenges of leadership. She is now a mother and her children have grown in the knowledge of God. She attributes all this to the sacrifices of prayers that she has made to God particularly in the Church. According to her, on the judgement day she will not only present herself but her family too. Christ is her Lord and saviour. He helps her persevere in her Christian journey. She believes in Psalms 23: 4 “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil” (NIV). Jesus is to her ‘all in all’. Today she is involved in women’s work. That is, she organises them for enrolment into Mothers’ Union, plans their yearly rallies and leads them into the real search of God through weekly Bible study and fellowship. She feels very happy whenever she is serving God.

Case history 4. The Story of Wambui Mwang’iru

Wambui represent the group of women who were converted from Gikuyu traditional religion. She was born around 1904 in Mukangu, Murang’a district. Though she has never been to school her year of birth can be traced easily because of the events that were going on in Murang’a district at that time. First, she was born shortly before the arrival of the missionaries (1906) and the construction of the Church structure in Kahuhia hill. Secondly, she sang *Gichukia* (Gikuyu traditional dance sang by teenagers) during the First World War (1914-1918). This means that before 1918 she was already a teenager. Again she was circumcised in the year of *Ng’aragu ya kimotho* (famine named after *Kimotho*, a white man remembered for helping Christians to dig a trench in Murang’a town during this time of war). And lastly, she belongs to the age group of *Minyugi* (type of branches) used for decorating teenagers during the war period. Her parents were traditionalists who did not like *githomo* (education). Christianity was associated with education. Christians were referred to as Athomi (readers) instead of ahonoku (converted ones). Wambui was the third of eight children, four sons and four daughters. When she became of age she got married to a man called *Mwang’iru* and was blessed with six sons and four daughters. Her husband died in 1998. She has spent most of her life as a peasant farmer.

As other traditional people, Wambui’s life and that of her parents revolved around worshipping *Ngai Mwene Nyaga*. They said their prayers facing Mt. Kenya whenever

it was necessary to do so. Her father on behalf of the family used to offer sacrifices in the family altar. She remembers that as a young girl she accompanied her father to two villages called *Kavote* and *Gatiru*, where he had gone to offer sacrifice for the rains. And sure enough it rained after some few hours. Through such acts of God her parents had managed to convince her that the Gikuyu God is the true one and not the white man's God.

The pathway to Christianity revealed itself to Wambui after her children came to the age of schooling and demanded to be taken to school. At this stage, Wambui was invited to a parents' meeting in school, and she went reluctantly. The meeting had been convened by a clergyman from Gathuki-ini, one of the mission stations where Christianity had been planted in 1913. During the opening prayers and welcome, the clergyman delivered a very powerful sermon. Wambui says:

“That preacher...that old one...his sermon penetrated my heart. I felt that urge. I felt as if Jesus was just at the door. I still remember his very last words from Revelation 3: 20. “ *Jesus is at the door knocking, open your hearts for Him*” He said the world would end any minute, even just now. Therefore we must be prepared to face him. He will come just like a thief when we are not aware. I had to repent there and then before Christ's Second Coming, which could have taken any time. I repented of my sins and accepted Jesus Christ to be my Lord and saviour.”

She stopped doing ‘the things of the devil’ like brewing and taking beer and attending traditional festivals like female circumcision. While Wambui understood and decided to join the Church, her husband Mwang'iru remained behind because he was afraid of the Mau Mau freedom fighters who were opposed to the white masters and their religion. They viewed African converts and especially men as traitors.

The following reasons made Wambui join the Church: to escape the fire of Hell, to get a new name, and for her children to remain in school. When she joined the Church she was introduced to three-year catechism classes which she attended faithfully and was baptised Anne. From that time on she was declared a *muthomi* (reader) as that was the name for all Christians. As a Christian, Wambui could not allow her daughters to be circumcised for this action could have hindered her from being confirmed. She was later confirmed by Bishop Obadiah Kariuki. From this time henceforth Wambui wanted to be a good Church member. She attended the Church on Sundays, and

fellowships in between the week. She liked the Church very much. That's where they met with the both old and new friends.

Since then Wambui has been very active in the Church. She remembers clearly that when she joined the Church there was an acute demand for new classrooms. Women organised themselves, built two classrooms with mud, cow dung and ash. They also thatched the classrooms with banana barks. They used to work hard so that they could pay salaries to their teachers. They faced a lot of opposition from those who didn't like *githomo* and particularly their own husbands. Wambui and other women went ahead and built houses for the teachers. After the Second World War some men joined them.

Wambui remained in the Church for several reasons: first due to her love of God. She made her decision with God in mind because she feared to offend him and be thrown into Hell on the day of judgement. She attributes to Jesus the stability of her family, education of her children and the strength to live daily without thinking of committing suicide. To her Jesus is a provider, Lord, friend and saviour.

4.6 Other Women's Views Represented in the Case Studies

Njoki represents women who were taken to Church by their parents and therefore found themselves therein. As a daughter of the converts, she grew up in the habit of going to the Church every Sunday. She never had to make a choice whether to be a member of the Church or not. She was given the two sacraments that were compulsory in the Anglican Church. That is, baptism and the Lord's supper. Jesus Christ is her personal saviour. He saved her on 6th August 1951 from sins and the devil, and continually saves her from physical dangers. Since that time he has been her strength, hope, helper, teacher, friend, comforter and refuge. Other forces no longer threaten her because Christ has overcome all for her, giving her a reason to live. Before she was converted she never used to frequent the Church.

Ruguru our second informant attended Church because it promised solution to her 'catalogue' of problems that made her life meaningless and empty. These problems included matrimonial problems such as living with a drunken husband and the

inability to provide food, clothes and education for her children. These difficulties brought regrets and turmoil in her life. She developed a sense of inward disorder, defeat and remorse. She realised that the only consolation was in her Church, which promised salvation and offered comfort.

Nyambura the third informant is a faithful follower of the Church tradition, which requires her to attend Church on Sunday. She learned from the catechism that on Sunday she should attend service. Apart from this, it was in the Church where she met most of her friends. Failure to attend Church for whatever reason was regarded as sinful. It was in going to the Church that she could direct her children in the right way, that is, believing in God. She went to the Church in obedience to God and therefore expected Him to bless her in return. Since the coming of missionaries worshipping God on Sunday has been a good and acceptable routine which must be followed by every Christian.

Wambui our fourth informant attended Church in order to escape the fire of hell after death. According to her Christianity was a better religion than the Gikuyu Traditional Religion. She counted the benefit of being a Christian as follows. Everlasting life after death, a good Christian burial; that is, her body will not be thrown to hyenas as would have happened in traditional Gikuyu society and a new name that signified that she belonged to the intelligent group of the '*athomi*'.

Three out of the four women interviewed had "unsaved" husbands. These men were not only unconverted but did not attend the Church on Sundays. Instead they spent most of their Sundays in the market places, either drinking or talking politics. They came home in the evening drunk either with beer, anger or frustrations. In an attempt to prove their supremacy and assert their position as heads, these husbands would beat them for the most innocuous reasons, such as a 'crying' or 'dirty' baby, perceived dirty plate, a meal he did not feel like eating, and a speck of dust on the table.

During the interview I asked these women how they met their unsaved mates. I have selected only three out of the four explanations given.

Ruguru our second informant recounted:

“We were both ‘lukewarm’ Christians. Our lives were both godly and worldly. We went to Church, but also to discos or on drinking sprees together. When we got married and the children were born I could no longer join him. He started over-drinking and coming home before dawn. There was never enough money. He became insensitive to my needs and those of the children. It was then that I started reading the Bible and praying more seriously. I found consolation in the Church, especially when I accepted Jesus to save me”.

Nyambura remembered quite vividly how she came to be yoked with her husband.

She narrated:

‘I was a strong Christian girl, brought up and educated in the Mission Centre. According to the scriptural counsel I had received from the mission centre I knew it was wrong to marry an unsaved man. But as you know that ‘love is blind’ I convinced myself that he would change after we were married. It was not until after I was pregnant that I realised I had put myself in a trap. My husband no longer had respect for my Christianity. He stopped accompanying me to Church and started drinking heavily. The mistake was very painful, but it has brought me very close to my saviour”.

These women lived with their unsaved husbands and at the same time were very active members in Church functions and fellowships. They learnt that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom (Prov. 9:10). They received wisdom from above to deal with their worries and fears. Most of them shared the glowing truth that God had given them, that is, humility and patience to strive on.

Our four informants could be grouped into two: those who embraced the Revival Fellowship and those who were just ‘good’ Church members (nominal). The Revivalists have embraced a remnant theology where they considered their unattractiveness a virtue and enjoyed being described as separate from the world. Four Sundays in a month they attended the *Wandugu's* (Revival People) fellowship and in the middle of every week they held the same fellowship in the Church. What made this fellowship unattractive was the fact that the People had a tradition that they observed dearly. In their tradition a converted Christian was to be ‘clean’. To be clean meant that members were not wear beard or long hair and ladies would not plait their hair nor dress expensively or modestly. They elevated personal salvation and public confession of sins. Mostly their sermons were of the nature, ‘come out from them’ based on 2 Corinthians 6: 17 (RSV). This meant that they were not involved in social-political and economic affairs of the society. This affected the lives of women very

much because they did not struggle for liberation from all the evil power. They are often despised as “*holier than thou*” group. However, though they suffered ridicule, they endured with courage and hope that soon all this would be over and everything would be restored to wholeness in the Parousia.

4.7 Women’s Conversion and Patriarchy

How do patriarchal structures determine women’s conversion?

Patriarchal societies are those in which the rule of the father is the basic principle of social organisation of the family and of society as a whole. Patriarchy gives the male head of the family sovereign power over his wife (wives), children and servants. The patriarch is also the owner of property passed down through the paternal lineage. Fiona Bowie has stated that, “a largely male-dominated missionary Church encountered a largely male-dominated traditional Africa. Two forms of patriarchy appeared to fit together well enough.”¹⁴² The result of the merger was a largely male-dominated African Church, where women are the majority in membership and men are the majority in leadership. As Oduyoye observes, “the experience of women in the Church in Africa contradicts the Christian claim to promote the worth of every person. Rather it shows how Christianity reinforces the cultural conditioning of compliance and submission and leads to the depersonalisation of women.”¹⁴³ African women have remained dependent on male leadership at home, male exegesis and male theology in the Church; they have accepted male interpretations of the biblical events as universally and historically normal. This patriarchal ordering of affairs in the Church and society has led to violence against women by men. Violence is one major factor that has greatly contributed to women’s conversion.

Violence against women is not a small thing. “Abusing women physically is a reminder of territorial domination and is sometimes accompanied by other forms of human rights abuse such as forced prostitution, rape, or torture. For too many females violence begins even before birth and sometimes ends with the murder of the woman. For example in the Gikuyu society the preference of male over female child is

¹⁴² Fiona Bowie 1993: 110

¹⁴³ Mercy Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands: Reflections of an Africa Woman on Christianity in Africa*, Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002p. 72

reflected in many ways that range from subtle signs and symbols to outright violence throughout life. This is evident in the concept of numbers associated with boys and girls. While the girl child received four ululations the boy received five. The father got four sugar canes if the baby was a girl and five if a boy. A woman should be in seclusion for four days if she bore a girl and five if a boy -all these were various ways used to communicate the seniority of male over female sex. Also the question of sides where left is the side of women and right the side of men is also another way of communicating the unequal status between men and women. Women were socialised into believing that they were inferior to men. These women suffering from an inferiority complex are our Church members, among whom 80% of them are converted.

Fewer girls than boys went to school, because the tyranny of the household took over a girl's life as soon as she could perform the simplest task. Boys were relieved of household work to pursue education in preparation for their careers. Girls between the age of three and seven were expected to be maids of their baby brothers and sisters. Instead of going to school they were expected to stay at home with the baby (-ies), or to assist their mothers to carry to the hospital one of the two or three small babies who needed treatment. Those who were lucky enough to go to primary school had to assist in collecting firewood, fetching water, cooking, washing dishes instead of doing their homework in the evening. Parents gave preference to sons more than daughters in high school education. At this time of economic hardships many girls had to sacrifice their education so that their brothers can study. Therefore, girl's education was limited to the primary or ordinary level, and their roles were to reproduce heirs for the husband's lineage and to care for their household. Girls were seen as responsible for domestic work and childcare, effectively excluding them from the ability to compete with men in the public arena on an equal basis. Even today women as a gender class remains restricted in education, access to property and in the leadership of the patriarchal Church and societal structures. Most of these women who have to depend on their educated husbands, fathers and brothers for survival, are they not our Church members?

Rape is said to be a common way of boys and men expressing their frustrations when they cannot get what they want. Baby girls from the age of several months to women of eighty years old are raped mercilessly every day and are still blamed for it. They are infected with HIV/AIDS and other STD's and some are even murdered in the process, simply because they are women, or they dare to define for themselves what it means to be a woman. A good example is St. Kizito boarding school in Meru, Kenya, where "360 high school boys forced their way to rape 71 of their fellow students. In the process of this mass assault, 19 women were suffocated or trampled to death as they struggled to escape in fear from the boys."¹⁴⁴ Women convert to Christianity in an attempt to find peace from such internal turmoils.

Wife battering is a common practice in Gikuyu society. Traditionally, it was believed that a husband should sometimes demonstrate his love to his wife through beating her. Wife beating is justified by the society because men have paid bride price and therefore own their wives. Because of bride price they are forced into polygamous marriages, are battered, raped and sometimes killed by their so-called 'husbands' or male partners. These are women who testify openly that they are saved, and that they look forward to the Second Coming of Christ. Christ is a waited and must come and take them home, away from their partners who physically and psychologically abuse them.

Many forms of violence against women are directly related to men's unwillingness to distinguish between power and sex. Sex demonstrates power; power is sexy. Subordination is seen as weakness, even when maintained by law, custom, religion, culture and economics. Women must be subordinate to 'the powers of men'- sons, brothers, fathers, uncles, bosses, and priests. Otherwise they face 'sex violence'. The most common reason that puts each woman at risk of violence is just because she is a woman, and therefore 'weak.' Christian women challenge sexism, the entire range of ideologies, structures and institutional practices that uphold and enforce the dominance of men as a group, over women as a group. Women refuse the abuse of power by men as the dominant group.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 52

More often than not, women have buried the violations under a blanket of shame, forbearance and denial. Therefore, majority of them convert into Christianity to seek refuge. Some women blame themselves for not speaking out sooner, even when they had little choice. They decide to keep quiet. GiCathy has stated that 'the strongest prisons are built with walls of silence.' It is only by denial of reality and the choice to keep silent, which enables survival of women in that prison. Women suppress many memories of their own humiliations and violation. They are afraid to name their perpetrators, whether fathers, step fathers, husbands, brothers and boyfriends. Because they are not named, men rapes, men batters, men kill for dowries, men forces children into marriages, men arranges business tours for sex with nine-year-old girls, men stones women for not dressing as the torturers. These victims of violence are the converted women in our Churches. They believe in the words of Apostle Paul that women should be 'silent' in the Church. They do not talk against violence by their male partners, they talk about their joy because Christ has set them free. But are they free? The patriarchal society expects women to focus on the privileges they are given by men, rather than protesting about their control of them.

Sex outside marriage is a crime for a woman, not for a man, and women may be subject to family ostracism, imprisonment, and death if they deviate from that norm. Conception outside the marriage circle makes a woman to be viewed with suspicion and stigmatisation. Such a woman is not seen as a woman of worth as a married woman. She is often ridiculed and regarded as prostitute. The Church is hesitant to baptise their children. Her brothers mistreat her because she is a threat to their land inheritance. Such women are considered to be a curse. Yet, nobody curses the men responsible for these women's plight. This is because men are justified by patriarchy. Where should these frustrated women go for solace? These are our Church members who convert to Christ, the lover of sinners. Men, the father of their unwanted babies remain in the background making more women single mothers and outcasts.

It is the man who decide whether to separate or divorce his wife, or whether she may stay and for how long. When it happens even against the will of the woman the Church does not accept it and tend to blame the woman for it. However, the lifetime commitment binds two people, a man and a woman who take their vows to love and

cherish one another. When marriage fails it is the couple who should be held responsible, not just the woman. The failure of the Church to accept divorce has forced many women to either remain in slavery (still married), or just to separate instead of going through the painful court process which in most cases is headed by men who decide the case in favour of men.

Women carry serious burdens. These range from husbands' beatings, to their daily work for an estimated of 16 hours cooking, fetching water, collecting firewood, farming and looking after children and animals. Their children die of treatable illnesses, hunger and malnutrition. They are the poorest of the poor, yet they are worried about violence in their lives. Battering, mutilation and murder are still pervasive against women around the world. Women of every kind, all over the world, live in the knowledge that there is no safety for them at work, on the street, in the school or at home. Fear of men invades the daily lives of women, frequently capturing mind, emotions and physical space. "Fear is the air we breathe, the water we swim in, as women living in the country of men."¹⁴⁵ These women come to Christ who has promised rest to those who are heavy-laden. For these problems to be solved women must come out of their silence and name the problem, and then begin looking for its cause or causes. For instance, the way the Gikuyu society has conditioned, trained and defined maleness has to a greater extent encouraged contempt for women, an assumption of power over them and a belief that sexual violence is the most viable form of exercising that power. Men are socialised in a way that they intertwine violence against women, sex and economics as pleasurable and powerful. "The manifestation of socialised maleness –that is sex/power- in law, music, films, literature, medicine, education and employment are often claimed to be accidental."¹⁴⁶ However, women are the victims of these accidents. They have no power and therefore they have no jobs. Thus, they are poor and the majority of converts in our congregations.

Women need to bring the pattern of their oppression to the attention of men. All men do not support this cultural conditioning. For example not all men support

¹⁴⁵Mercy Oduyoye 2002: 64

¹⁴⁶Ibid., 64

governmental male control of women. Women have a task to create a world with less violence. That is, less cruelty, discrimination, fear, humiliation and hatred. They should do it non-violently and -whenever possible-with love in their hearts. Women must learn to be brave. Bravery in this sense does not mean endurance, patience, stamina, and the ability to repeat every day tasks every day as based in the Mothers' Union motto " I can do all things through Him who gives me strength" (Phil.4: 13). But rather it means a decisive action, bravery, daring and risk-taking with the help of Christ. To many women, such action seems beyond their means; and is seen as the courage of the powerful (men)...who have given women a specific role as supporters, whose duties are absolutely opposite to the role of the initiator. All these patriarchal structures have greatly contributed to women's conversion.

4.8 Reason for Conversion

The question why women outnumber men in virtually all Church activities let alone attendance, is an important one. Writers have given diverse reasons for this ranging from psychosocial to traditional and spiritual ones. However, women have given various reasons why they go to Church. Their reasons could be tabulated as follows:

Table 2

| Reasons for Church attendance | Out of 50 |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| For salvation and eternal life | 15 |
| For peace of heart | 12 |
| For socialisation | 9 |
| By the recommendation of the family | 6 |
| Other reasons | 8 |

The table shows that there are a variety of reasons that make women attend the Church.

4.8.1 Salvation and Eternal Life

This group comprises the highest percentage. Fifteen of the women interviewed admitted that they knew about Church when they were taken to school. Here they were introduced to catechism classes for baptism and confirmation. Then they

accepted Jesus Christ to be their saviour. As they went through their primary education they were committed to Christ, but lost this commitment either shortly before they got married or between college life and employment. These women made another commitment to Christ either in the revival fellowship or in a Church service and have been faithful Christians since then. In this group still, there are women who joined the ACK from other denominations because on marriage they found their husbands were members of this Church. The Gikuyu traditional culture required that a wife follow the life style of her husband even in spiritual matters. Others in this category converted from traditional life, through the preaching of local evangelists during their pastoral visitation or, through the influence of priests. Asked why they converted, some said that they wanted to live with God forever and others admitted their fear of hell fire. The reason given by the majority women that they come to Church in search of salvation shows their acute need to escape from their oppressive situations in society and not simply their thirst for eternal life. For them to survive the limitations placed upon them by the Gikuyu society because of gender, the easier way is to become spiritual. I agree with Hayes, D. L. who says, "Spirituality is a rock to hang on to when the world is rushing out of control. It is the unseen force that gives you the courage to push when you'd much rather pull. It shows the way when there is no other way. It makes sense out of non-sense and encourages you to have faith for help is just around the corner. With spirituality you rest easy knowing that whatever ails you, troubles you, or gets on your nerve, this too shall pass."¹⁴⁷ This applies to women in the Gikuyu society who like many African women are oppressed in many social dimensions.

4.8.2 Peace of Heart

Twelve of the women interviewed attend the Church because they have found peace of heart. According to these women the central thought of their Church attendance is of a peace that is beyond the unrest of life that they face daily. This unrest comes mainly from their marital life. Women have no peace at home because their husbands are drunkards and mostly, absent from the affairs of their families. Women are

¹⁴⁷ D. L Hayes. "My Hope is in the Lord: Transformation and Salvation in African American Community" in Emillie Townes, ed. *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspective on Hope, Salvation and Transformation*, New York: Orbis Books, 1997.

expected to provide food, clothes, fees and medical care for their children. Because these women do not have any employment apart from farming they struggle a lot. This leaves them mainly without peace. Four out of the twelve women in this category confessed that their husbands were employed in the city and had other wives or concubines in their working places, and thus denying them love and financial support. Unfaithfulness in marriage at this period of the HIV/AIDS pandemic is a great threat to the women's life, which leaves them with a lot of fear. It is in the Church where women find peace through counselling, guidance and encouragement offered particularly in fellowship, seminars and conferences.

4.8.3 Socialisation

Nine out of the fifty women faithful in the ACK attend Church for of social reasons. This is the place where they can meet without being questioned or suspected by anybody. Socially they are not allowed to meet in discos or in political rallies, for the obvious reason that they are meant for men. It is fashionable for people to go to the Church because it is the way for modern people. It is interpreted as primitive for a woman not to attend the Church, particularly on a Sunday. Again going to Church ensures that they will be granted Christian services such as burial, baptism and confirmation to them and their family members

All these are social reasons for Church attendance and can be traced from the traditional Gikuyu culture where women operated effectively in-groups. Women used to organize groups for farming, brewing beer and festivals, all of which have found replacement in the Church. Women form groups for prayers, pastoral visitation, and fellowships where they enrich one another with the Word of God. They visit the sick, help each other during weddings, and welcome the new born in their families. This shows that psychologically women operate as a community within the wider community, that is, the Church. Women have found this sort of company in the Church. The Church has created many social groups where women of all ages and status, can fit well. For example, the Sunday school and merry-go-round plays for the small girls, youth groups for the adolescent, Mothers' Union group, Church choir and fellowship. All these Church groups give them a degree of affirmation.

A major factor that has contributed to women's Church attendance is that the Church, government and Non-governmental organizations have devoted a lot of work to them. A strong wave of gender sensitisation has vigorously created awareness on the rights of women both in the Church and society. In the ACK for instance, the Mothers' Union (MU) has blossomed, and consciously work towards reaching out to other women converting, affirming and drawing them to the Church. As observed by Ayegboyin,¹⁴⁸ this same strategy has been used in Nigeria, where a fellowship of the baptist women has been organised with a consistent focus on mission. This fellowship is called Women Missionary Union (WMU), and is an auxiliary of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. Ayegboyin mentions several strategies which WMU members have used to maintain a lead in the enrolment of membership. Two of them in particular do apply to what the MU group is doing in ACK. First is faithful commitment to the practice of visitation and secondly, commitment to enlistment of members.

Persistent, constant visitation is inaugurated and maintained in the interest of absent women. The practice of women to women visitation has been a very effective way of winning women to the Church. They not only visit their faithful but also those who are not enlisted members. These are visited, evangelised and invited to attend women fellowships. Once they come, they are registered in the MU register and are prepared for enrolment, which is done once per year. Thus, they are made members (full or associate) of this group, a group that serves as the backbone of the ACK Church.

The ACK Church has come up with a programme called 'the agenda 21'.st This is a diocesan programme that involves planting cell groups in order to facilitate Christian maturity in the Church. A cell group is a small group of 10-20 people, usually meeting in a home, for the purpose of spiritual nourishment, growth and outreach. Some Churches call it 'small group Bible study', 'home fellowship' 'outreach' or 'prayers' or 'Church'. Often it includes an in-depth study of the Bible. Fellowship implies a more relaxed meeting, without the use of liturgical or hymnal books. A literate person

¹⁴⁸ Deji Ayegboyin. "Women in the Nigerian Baptist Convention: The pacesetters for Men in Missions," in Olupona K. Jacob, ed. *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*, New York: Paragon House, 1991. P 140

is randomly selected in every group to lead devotions and share a homily, another leads in a chorus and several others pray for various needs. The reasons for the small size is that it is designed to promote relationships and discussions. Each cell group is within a walking distance of every member of the local Church. Women flock in big numbers to these cell groups to pray, evangelise and build relationships. They keep each other active and involved and help one another to be strong, which in turn strengthens the Church in general.

Women's meetings places are important because poor women who cannot afford the Bible and those who do not know how to read and write are given an opportunity to listen to the Word of God being read to them and with them. Women also find time to pray due to many duties outside the Church compound. As for the average prayer time, results show that most women pray for less than five minutes in a day: in the morning, during meals (especially when there are visitors) and before bed time.

The second strategy mentioned by Ayegboyin is the WMU's commitment to enlist as many members as possible for one kind of service or another. This is also practised by the MU where they utilise effectively all the members' potential, bringing the work and the workers together. They recognise, train and use their members varied gifts and talents for the service of Christ. "After all, there is always a place or another for every one in the host of invaluable services which women love to engage in."¹⁴⁹ Women perform a good deal of duties including ushering, leading songs and prayers, performing educative dramas, visiting and speaking to students in schools.

The MU organisation is important in that it creates a space where women share and support one another on the ills of the society. Indeed Mombo calls it a hermeneutical space¹⁵⁰ through which women are renewed and empowered through three major ways:

- Preaching and interpreting the Bible.

Women suspect that men had interpreted the bible before to preserve the status quo, justify their inferior roles in the Church and also to deny them access to position of

¹⁴⁹ Deji Ayegboyin 1991: 143

¹⁵⁰ Esther Mombo 1998: 196-211

power. It is the misuse of the bible that they seek to redress through their hermeneutical space. Instead of rejecting the bible as an instrument of subordination, women use its prophetic tradition for emancipation. This hermeneutical space that the Church has provided has become an avenue for women to seek help and consolation from the burdens of family, community and Church life which they carry daily. They gather in the Church because they expect to hear the good news of liberation from these burdens. By listening to their fellow women, they could interpret the bible readings from a perspective that they can identify with. They found the essence of their freedom because they were not condemned for the ills of the society but instead the issues were treated as the daily temptations faced by women. MU has become a source of power for women to deal with patriarchal society.

➤ Songs and Hymns

Songs correspond to the daily needs in the community. For examples some songs encourage women to bring the burdens of children and family to Jesus who is able to help them with these burdens and promises liberation and power to live day by day. Women freely expressed themselves without feeling embarrassed.

➤ Projects

The hermeneutical space has enabled women to raise funds, which they use for various projects like building schools, supporting girls schools and evangelism. This is especially true in the Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central, where the Mothers' Union raises money to build and run girls' secretarial college and also offer dress-making skills to women.

However, MU serves patriarchal interests. For instance, as Muthei notes, among the common duties performed by the organisations are: visiting the sick; doing acts of charity to the needy in the community; raising funds to build and maintain Churches; caring for the parish priests and buying furniture for the Church. She then argues that women who are involved in these noble services depend on the Church minister to whom they are answerable. They do not make their own decisions without consulting the pastor, who acts as a representative of the Church hierarchy. This is an indication that men control the activities of the Church. The recognition accorded to the roles

that women perform in their organisations is very minimal. For example, even when they raise funds, they do not participate (fully) in the decision on how these funds are to be utilised. In her opinion, Muthei argues that “the control of women affairs by the Church authorities seems to be a method aimed at thwarting any threats that may be posed by their ability to organise themselves into corporate groupings.”¹⁵¹

Muthei continues to argue¹⁵² that women work in the background. For instance, they lay the foundations of various roles, which are later taken by the priests or pastors. That is, women teach Sunday school children until they the children are mature and then the priest takes over. The women prepare the catechumen but do not baptise. They prepare the elements (bread and wine) for the eucharist but do not bless the sacrament. In all these duties the women perform the biggest part of the work but the greatest recognition and credit is accorded to the priests. This shows that MU serves the patriarchal interests.

However, one major difference between the WMU and the MU is that not all women are given equal opportunities to participate in MU. Single Mothers, those who have separated from their husbands and divorcees are not always welcome. This is because the Church still regards them as immoral and unclean. It is only the women who have maintained good conduct according to the standard set by the Gikuyu culture and the Church traditions who are enrolled as members. Those with good social reputation even if they are not married in the Church, are enrolled as associate members.

4.8.4 Recommendation of the Family

Six of all the informants admitted that there was no time that they were not members of the ACK. They argued that they go to the Church because that is where they belong. They have been born and brought up in the Church. They were baptised when they were infants, confirmed when they came to the age of reason, got married in the Church and preferably will die and be buried in the Church. These women have found their family going to Church and so they attend Church unquestionably. To them it is the right thing to do. They are members of the Church by birth. They tithe, give

¹⁵¹ Ruth Muthei 1996: 68

¹⁵² Ibid., 69

offertory, contribute in favour of development projects, sing in the choir and support the Church in all ways because it is their (family) Church. They have arguments such as “I go to Church because my grandfather gave out the piece of land on which the Church is built”, or “My father bought the iron sheets and all the roofing materials and I helped in the building of the walls.” These women are not converted to Christianity. The Church has the responsibility of teaching and encouraging them to convert.

4.8.5 Other Reasons for Conversion

Eight of the women interviewed mentioned other reasons for their conversion.

➤ Fear of the flames of Hell

The parable of Jesus in Luke 16: 19-31 explains the state of the ungodly after this physical life. This teaching from this parable has drawn quite a good number of women to conversion into Christianity. These women held that those who are not converted would burn in Hell forever, like the rich man. Those converted had supposedly escaped from this fire. These women attend Church where they are encouraged to live like Lazarus and not like the Rich man. This is an attempt to escape from the reality of pain now and forever. Verse 25, the rich man in his lifetime received his ‘good things’ while Lazarus received ‘evil things.’ Women too like Lazarus though they receive evil things now will be rewarded with everlasting life in heaven.

Looking at this reason for Church attendance I agree with Osiek¹⁵³ that the call to repent and believe in the Gospel has an element of intimidation. The decision of each of these women to change their form of life has taken the form of rejection of the present in which death is at work. The situation is apparent in the oppression exercised by the socio-cultural and economic conditions in which most Gikuyu women are caught. This brings the desire to be in heaven, a place of freedom, which is meant to be a home for all the dishonoured and humiliated people of the world.

¹⁵³ Carolyn Osiek 1982: 81

➤ **Need to bring up their Children in the Christian ways**

Many men even though they do not attend the Church frequently would still want their children to grow up as Christians. Therefore they do not object to the wives taking the children along with them to the Church. These women felt that it was their duty as parents to bring up their children in the knowledge and fear of God. It is in the Church where children are taught the fear of God and how to approach Him in prayer. Women wanted to bring up children who are morally upright. They felt obliged to take their children to Church, the only place where they could learn Christian morals. To them, “train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.” (Prov. 22:6 NRSV), means a lot. Therefore women convert and engage in Church life because they are convinced that it is the best way for their children. Their genuine love for their children leads them to the Church where they can pray and support them. At home women participate in very many Church activities. For example, they lead the family in devotions, prepare and encourage their children to attend Sunday school, take children for baptism and confirmation classes conduct morning and evening prayers.

➤ **Pastoral Care**

Most women pointed out the indispensability of pastoral care offered by the Church. They singled out guidance and counselling as profoundly crucial in this respect. The study established that pastoral obligations are an integral part in the women’s perception and practice of Church membership. They throng the Church building because they benefit from the guidance and counselling services offered. This is important among the Gikuyu people who as we saw in chapter two depends mainly on agriculture. At this time that the agricultural sector seems to have gone down those who deeped on it for income are experiencing difficulties from many levels. They include loneliness, identity crises, and lack of education and unemployment. Unpredictable weather conditions leading to crop failure in a predominantly agricultural area leave women with dismal hope of economic recovery. This kind of hopelessness leads to a general vulnerability which may reveal among the majority of women, needs and aspirations that become the basic motivation for conversion. Therefore they attend Church that they may receive the hope and the peace promised.

The collapsing of traditional structures and systems that provided explanations about the immediate and ultimate concerns of life provide a need to join a new and promising group. Women join the Church because they expect to be provided with much more freedom and social space. In this very community, they can find shelter, psychological tranquillity, security and solidarity. Equipped with this kind of new association, the Church creates a New World order. It functions like a new existence for the women members. It helps to instil in them a feeling of being away from the harsh and brutalising realities of their former and present existence. In this way they can forge a new notion of self. They develop a sense of importance, shedding their passivity and pursuing certain goals and ambitions. They build a whole support mechanism to reinforce their new values, self-perception, self-growth and self-development. The Church addresses the needs of those involved. Needs can be grouped under various categories. Often the categories overlap. Following now is a discussion of some of these needs and aspirations, which came out clearly from the women interviewed.

➤ **Need for Community Belonging expressed in the Church.**

The Church makes very many attempts to meet the human quest for truth and meaning. Women are in dire need of those constitutive human values, which at certain times in collective as well as individual history seem to be hidden, elusive, broken or very costly. This is especially where they find themselves upset by rapid change, acute stress and fears that are prevalent in contemporary society. The fabric of the Gikuyu traditional society has been destroyed, their life styles have with time undergone transformation and most of them have been disrupted. Families and homes have broken up due to the ongoing socio-cultural, economic and religious forces. Women feel uprooted and lonely. They are craving and yearning for new alliances and social support networks. Obviously then there is need to belong or identify with another person, group, society, or an ideology that seems satisfying or successful. Aware of these aspirations, the Church offers human warmth, care and support. It promotes sharing of purpose and fellowship among individual women giving them a sense of protection and security.

➤ **Search for Solutions**

Women find themselves confronted with complexity and confusion in their daily lives. These difficult experiences like discouragement, fear, unemployment, and sickness often compel them to look for solutions and ultimate meaning. The Church readily provides answers based on a pragmatic theology. That is, theology of success, prosperity and victory in Christ. Therefore, the Church appeals to women to repent of their sins and pray by faith in Jesus and everything will be well. This is perceived as a solution in their search for ultimate meaning.

➤ **Quest for Integrated Life**

Women approach life holistically. Such an approach harmonises the physical with the spiritual, idealistic with the realistic and the individual with the communal. From the study on women's Church attendance there has been seen an expression of the human search for wholeness and an all-encompassing, all embracing harmony in life. Women feel alienated from themselves and others. They feel isolated and in an abandoned state of anonymity. They are harassed, hurt, upset with the state of social institutions and systems such as education among others. They are betrayed and disappointed by their parents or children, lovers or loved ones and spouses. This creates emptiness in their lives and they yearn for an order that can integrate and bring meaning to their distorted worldview, a religious view that can harmonise everything. This they have found in the Church.

➤ **Need for a Vision**

Today's world reflects an interdependence of hostility and conflict, violence and fear of destruction. Women are a high risk and vulnerable group in society facing disasters such as wars, famines and HIV/AIDS. So many African women have lack steady source of income. Others are in deteriorating social conditions. It is hard for those with children to feed, clothe and educate them. They find life quite difficult. Fourteen to sixteen hours a day form the working lot for the majority of women in Kenya. Often this leads to stress, despair, helplessness, hopelessness and powerlessness for most of them, as a result of overworking. Even though they work so hard, lack of sufficient money continues to be an ever-present nightmare. Women are looking for signs of hope. This is expressed in words such as "vision (*kioneki*), awakening (*kwarahuka*), salvation (*uhonokio*), transformation (*ugaruruku*) and hope (*kirigiriro*)." These terms

point to the liberating promises of God now and in the future. The Church promises something in this aspect. A new vision of oneself, humanity, and the world is emphasised. It promises a new beginning of a new age or a new era to members. Counselling sessions are meant to encourage those who have come with the hope of finding emotional, psychological and spiritual solace as a result of hardships in life. From the field research some women overwhelmed by such hardships in their individual, family or general social life consider suicide as an option. Others become depressed and revert to immorality and separation, while others revert to soothsayers for solutions. Going to Church stands as an alternative, offering women another approach to life.

➤ **The Search for Recognition and Appreciation**

In chapter two we noted the multi-faceted disadvantaged positions that women were subjected to in the Gikuyu traditional culture. They were not recognised adequately as individuals. Rather they were first of all identified with their fathers (daughter) and upon marriage they were identified with their husbands (wife) and children (mother). With decay of social tiers and with the modernisation of our Kenyan society the definition of the traditional culture has changed. Lack of recognition of this has left women in a social desert, feeling marginalised. This impaired socialisation leads to very limited meaningful social alternatives. The Church has the means to adequately cultivate each member's self esteem and talents through its programs like fellowships, choir, rallies and general Sunday services.

➤ **The Search for Transcendence**

Through the Church, women express a deeply spiritual need, a God inspired motivation to seek something beyond the obvious, the immediate, the familiar, the controllable and the material. They attempt to find an answer to the ultimate questions of life and to believe in something that can significantly and profoundly change one's life. It reveals a sense of mystery, the unveiling of the unknown. There is concern about what is to come, the *eschaton*. This is best served by the obvious interest in terms like in the 'other world', 'new Heaven', and the coming of the Messiah as emphasised in the East African Revival fellowships. These weekly fellowships seem to offer women openness to this spiritual dimension.

4.9 Conversion and Identity of Women

The Kikuyu people had laws and customs which regulated their social life and behaviour and to which every member was expected to conform. Individuals who failed to observe a particular custom or broke a given law risked bringing shame, and possibly disaster, to themselves, their families and the entire community. Girls were no exception. They had to be orientated by their mother to the domestic role assigned to women in society. When the girls converted to Christianity they were withdrawn from the community to the mission centres, where they became *athomi*, readers or converts. Removed from their familiar surroundings, the girls soon became misfits in their own society. They were not allowed to participate in their various cultural festivals and everyday social activities and this made them increasingly alienated. They were ridiculed and treated as incomplete members of the society because they had not undergone female circumcision, which would have given them identity and belonging. To the Gikuyu society girls converts were seen to symbolise the ultimate assaults.¹⁵⁴ Kenyatta noted that their rejection of the circumcision rite jeopardised an old-age paradigm of the society because the Gikuyu people saw this rite as the culmination of a long process of socialisation, and culture identification, that transformed girls into women.¹⁵⁵

Kanogo notes that the girls who rejected the rites were seen as betrayers of traditional values and thus their status diminished. The whole concept of such girls growing up to become capable women was at stake. The spiritual and personal maturation surrounding the whole process was irreplaceable. An uncircumcised girl never graduated to the status of a woman but remained “*a kirigu*,” a novice in the act of womanhood. This was largely expressed in such terms as “uncircumcised girls stink, they wet their beds and they cannot perform a host of tasks which ordinary women would find easy to execute.”¹⁵⁶ The marriageability of such women and even their physical hygiene became questionable. They were considered inadequate, and no

¹⁵⁴ Tabitha Kanogo 1993: 169

¹⁵⁵ Jomo Kenyatta 1968: 134

¹⁵⁶ Tabitha Kanogo 1993: 172

woman unless a mission convert would want an uncircumcised daughter-in-law. Neither did men outside the mission fold consider marrying such women.¹⁵⁷

According to Gikuyu traditional culture circumcision was the gateway to sexual life. It was a crime for an uncircumcised girl to lose her virginity or even to get pregnant before circumcision. The mothers ensured that their daughters stayed away and did not socialise with men before circumcision. The fact that mission stations had both women and men in their custody led to Christian girls being accused of prostitution. Hence, missions were seen as hotbeds of prostitution.¹⁵⁸

Mission girls were said to be exceptionally lazy and hence unsuitable for the day to day work of village women. From the gender division of labour the Gikuyu women occupied their lives with long hours of the agricultural labour, fetching water and gathering firewood. But it was believed that within the confines of the mission they did not have to undertake tedious tasks, which characterised the lives of the ordinary women in the village.

The girls from the mission were encouraged to marry Christian boys. Such marriages lacked the support of the parents of the couples involved and resulted in protracted conflicts. These conflicts embraced wider social concerns relating to the patriarchal control of women and the circulation of wealth among elders, who were worried about losing bride price once their daughters, became Christians. Again, the presence of the elderly ladies among the mission staff created a fear that girls might not get married. This was a major reason of worry for the Gikuyu society, which saw marriage, and childbearing as the only means by which they could accord women the status of respect and value.

It was also argued that the missionaries arranged Christian marriages, which did take place, thus, denying the converts the rights to choose their partners. The result was said to be marriages, which quickly broke asunder for lack of basis. Such marriages were believed to generate embarrassing social relations between the families thus

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 172

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 173

related. For example, the mothers of mission girls were said to suffer loss of respect as a result of allowing their daughters to embrace the Christian religion, which reduced the social worth of their daughters. Elderly women did not get their due respect from their Christians sons-in-law. Such a predicament was very insulting. Mothers with sons of marrying age were equally worried lest their sons should choose to marry mission girls whom the wider society considered lacking in the values of womanhood.

To the non-Christian men mission girls could only be married for ridicule and exploitation because they did not make good wives. In general therefore, we can say that removing women converts from traditional and cultural values affected them consequently placing them under cultural identity crises. This was because conversion of a girl to the Christian religion resulted in the social alienation of her family and of that into which she married.

4.10 Conclusion

From this chapter we have established that women convert to Christ and attend Church because of various reasons. Culturally women are oppressed. As we saw in chapter two, the Gikuyu myth of origin has contributed a lot to the cultural, social, economic and political oppressions that women experience today. They are marginalised and given inferior status. They are restricted from talking when men are talking or having a conversation, are not taken seriously and their intelligence and capabilities are belittled by men. In their oppressions women have learnt tolerance; they fatalistically accept their roles of bearing children, maintaining, nurturing and serving the whole human community. Their ability to accept these prescribed cultural roles is inspired by religion and this makes life a profoundly religious phenomenon. Women convert to Christianity because of their belief in God as the one who enables them to combine their authentic inner experience of the divine with their effort to harmonize their lives with the divine. With such a view of perception of life Gikuyu traditional culture has played a very important role towards conversion of women into Christianity and their Church attendance. This evident from the reasons for Church attendance, which women gave me when I was conducting my research.

The other reason as we saw in chapter three is the role played by women missionaries in the spread of Christianity among Gikuyu women. Women missionaries were able to reach Gikuyu women in their kitchens and fire-fetching places. Their method was three fold: education, health and the power of the gospel. As we have seen in chapter three those women who became Christians were taught how to become good wives and mothers. They were taught cooking, sweeping, gardening, cleaning and how to nurse children. This domestication of education was expanded in the Church to include cleaning of its building, making tea and arranging flowers, among other things. This type of education drew many women to the Church because it provided a new definition of womanhood and many Gikuyu woman wanted to measure up to this standard. From the Gospel preaching women missionaries taught equality of people before God. This message of liberation, which insisted that both men and women were free, equal and capable of independent responsibility greatly facilitated their desire to become Christians.

Through medical health women missionaries managed to reach out to many Gikuyu women. Gikuyu women being victims of an oppressive culture faced a lot of hardships, which were detrimental to their health. For example the promotion of female circumcision had serious effects on women during childbirth. Physical violence in patriarchal marriages including wife beating by their own husband which could lead to permanent disabilities on women, and so many other forms of violence. Therefore, more women than men visited mission hospitals and were attended by women missionaries. Also first the Gikuyu converts who became founders of MU also played a very important role in recruiting women to Christianity. All these reasons are evident in the case histories of women and also among the fifty women interview.

This chapter has established many women attribute their conversion and Church attendance to their faith in God. The conviction that God has revealed himself to us through his son Jesus Christ has become an answer to many of the Gikuyu women. Therefore, they have responded to the call of God in the Christian faith with single mindedness and unshakable faithfulness. Women respond to the call into consecrated life. This is evident from the desire of many Gikuyu women to maintain a good spiritual life of the home. They organise prayers, guide children to attend catechism

classes in preparation for baptism and confirmation. Prepare their children or Sunday school.

Women participation in the Church's activities in and outside the Church building is a proof that there is no substitute for Church attendance and gathering with fellow believers in corporate Sunday worship. Women are convinced beyond doubt that the Church is God's concept and is basic to the propagation of the Gospel as well as for fellowship and for the operation of the gifts of the spirit. Therefore, women go to Church without fear or shame. They demonstrate to the world where their hearts lie and where their loyalty is directed. They have strong links with Church traditions. Women attend Church in order to share in the fellowship of Christian people. This is another way of demonstrating to the people outside where they belong; it is to find the people inside and with them to be united members of the body of Christ (1Corinthians 12:1ff). They support the work of the preacher /Evangelists. They work together with the minister in order to win many other people to the faith or Christ. Through their participation in giving, singing, testimonies and prayers women create the attitude of eager expectancy in which things really happen from God. They worship and to listen to God. They connect going to Church with hearing a sermon, praying, scripture readings, music, hymns and psalms. There is an offering; there may be sacrament and there ought to be silence. In all these many sided worship women meet God.

FIVE

Women Conversion and Theoretical Frame Work

5.1 Introduction

We have so far explored the place and role of women in the Gikuyu traditional society and affirmed that they are determined by the Gikuyu patriarchal culture. Through their myth of origin we have established that Gikuyu was originally a matriarchal society. The process that led to the overthrow of matriarchy and to the establishment of patriarchy had ultimate significance to the place and the role of women. This process is justified in the myth of origin.¹⁵⁹ Through this myth women were socialised as inferior beings that could derive their status only from men. Further, through sexual division of labour women were made to take inferior roles that hindered them from taking leadership positions in the Gikuyu society. Since then the place of women has been seen as the kitchen thus, paving away for men to take leadership positions both in the public and private domains.

We have also seen how the Christian missionaries made Gikuyu women's position worse by bringing in a form of Christianity, which was blended in a highly patriarchal culture. Thus the missionaries brand of Christianity contributed to the marginalization of women. They were excluded from decision-making positions especially through the form of education that they offered them. We have also seen the reasons given by women for conversion into Christianity in the Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central. Despite their cultural socialisation and the form of education that they have been exposed to the Gikuyu women have converted to Christianity in large numbers as is evident from

their Church attendance. The literature on conversion into Christianity and other world religions has revealed diverse intellectual positions on the factors that encourage it.

5.2 Conversion in Theoretical Framework

So far we have been looking at the reasons for women's conversion and their preponderance over men in the ACK Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central. From our research findings we have found that women convert to Christianity and attend Church for many reasons. Though we have benefited from the work of many writers in this research only Carolyn Osiek have looked at the subject of conversion of women directly. As a result we have analysed the reasons using her feminist theoretical framework which seems to fit the subject.

Carolyn Osiek, the author of *Beyond Anger: On Being a Feminist in the Church*, is a Roman Catholic sister of RSCJ Society. She is an associate editor of the *Bible Today*, *Scripture in the Church* and *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. She is the author of *What are They Saying About The Social Setting of the New Testament* (Paulist Press, 1984). Also she has authored commentaries on Galatians, 1Corinthians, and the Philippians, as well as numerical articles on Biblical studies, Spirituality, Women in the Church and the Social world of early Christianity. Osiek is a feminist, biblical scholar and a believer. My thesis relies on her theoretical framework because of her special interest in women. In her book, *Beyond Anger*, Osiek deals with the subject of conversion and women Church membership in great detail, which is the area of my research.

Osiek's theories follow an inclusive perspective and she notes that the Church lacks a balance in the attendance and leadership of men and women. She argues that this lack of equilibrium is dragging the Church sometimes kicking and screaming, towards new forms of ministry, new roles for its less honoured members and new ways of living out its mission to preach the Gospel.¹⁶⁰ According to Osiek, we all stand accused, some of prejudice and hard-heartedness, some of wilful blindness, others of lack of

¹⁵⁹ Jomo Kenyatta 1969: 4-6

¹⁶⁰ Osiek 1982: 4

courage and allowing pain to turn to bitterness because that is easier.¹⁶¹ She points out that women of different categories like home-makers, young and old mothers, employed and unemployed, all have contributed in one way or another to the development of the Church.

Osiek notes that women particularly those employed as pastoral ministers in parishes after receiving good theological and pastoral training, often find themselves in deteriorating pastoral situations with no power to effect change because those responsible are part of the problem. Their gifts for the ministry go unappreciated because their male authorities are not used to their style and are too threatened to consider change.¹⁶² She also observes that when women are confronted with this reality a crisis develops that make them to react in two different ways:

- The first group becomes frustrated, discouraged, burned out and bitter and they alienate themselves from the Church.
- The second group in spite of their frustrating and painful experiences wishes to remain loyal to the Church. By staying they give an expression to something deep within them, something closely bound up with their sense of their own identity. That is, they are loyal to persons to whom they have committed themselves and therefore are faithful to God. In the process they are loyal to the Church that has incarnated both human and divine relationships for them. The prize of their loyalty is for them a way of the cross.

Osiek's ideas could relevantly be applied to the phenomenon of the preponderance of women over men in the Anglican Church, Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central which has already been pointed out in the previous chapter. These women are aware of the injustices done to them by the Church where they spend considerable time doing various duties. Their conversion is one way towards claiming their own identity in the face of a tradition and community that have not generally been receptive to that journey.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.,4

¹⁶² Ibid.,1

It is evident that the majority of Church going women regardless of their social class, have been and are still being taught by family, the educational system, and the media. Through these channels they are made to believe that the most effective way of expressing themselves in the world is through men. They are convinced that they will never do anything outside the home as well as men do, and that to even try to do so is to risk rejection. Therefore, the attitude of women takes the form of the unconscious assumption that men can out do them in leadership and decision-making positions in the Church.

These women have become acquiescent to the myth of male superiority. This has been perpetuated by the emphasis on the maleness of God, which has established maleness as the norm of humanity created in his image. Therefore, women grow accustomed to the assumption that "God is 'like the other;' a being I cannot identify according to the analogy of my specific personhood."¹⁶³ This is quite a different religious experience from that of men who grow accustomed to the assumption that 'God is like me.'

According to Osiek there is another complication for women Church membership. This is what she calls the maleness of Christ. She argues that the maleness of Christ has incarnated into the male priest who claims to represent Christ presiding over his community. In the name of the maleness of Christ, women have been silenced and demeaned; told that they cannot image God or image God's most human manifestation. The maleness of Christ notwithstanding the contemporary theological anthropology that has tried to correct it has stood and still stands as a barrier between women and God. The mediator has become an obstacle.¹⁶⁴

However, Osiek argues that some women decide to take up a kind of a marginal existence within the Church, neither fully in nor fully out. Though they don't belong yet they lack the clear call or courage to leave. Others hold strongly to the essential goodness and holiness of the religious tradition as a revelation and gift from God. They reason that revelation as contained in the scripture and embodied in the tradition and in competent authority, cannot by its very nature be oppressive or unjust since it

¹⁶³ Ibid., 19

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 20

comes from God. Through these traditions they are able to participate and preserve a sense of belonging that enable them to remain faith Church members.

Osiek further notes another category of women who holds that the patriarchal cast Judeo Christian tradition is due to historical and cultural causes than theological ones. They accept that the andocentric and patriarchal patterns of dominance and submission are serious but not fatal wounds. They argue that Christianity was born into a world that was already formed into these patterns, and that is why understandably, it has expressed itself in the same patterns. According to them what is needed is a re-telling and a re-interpretation of the historical data in such a way that women's story can be freed from unhelpful cultural aspects that are non-essential to its real message. The task takes the form of going back into historical text and learning to read between the lines, interprets one against the background of the other. This form of revision is still going on among women in the Anglican Church.

Osiek advocates a stand on behalf of the women Church members. She challenges the Church to accept the full equality and dignity of one another if it is expecting the kingdom of God promised by Jesus. Labouring to bring it about is the mission of all believers who are called to be complimentary partners in the service of the Gospel. The oppression of women in the Church is humanly caused and must be remedied by human action. That action will not come from the oppressor (male) but from the oppressed (women), whose responsibility it is to acquire the critical perspective, which will enable them to closely analyse their situation without naivety.

As seen in the research findings most women in the Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central maintain a deep faith and ardent commitment to their Church. They strongly believe that the will of God for humanity as revealed in the preaching of Jesus is to create for one another the environment of maximum freedom and dignity. Only then can one freely choose to sacrifice that freedom for the good of others. According to them this means freedom from the world of patriarchal domination in which androcentrism is the norm. It means the ability to claim their own lives and in religious context, to claim their own expression of their experience of God and their rightful place in the

community of the Church. This has not been easy though practised naively in Christian women fellowships and other Church gatherings.

Mostly in these gatherings women concentrate more on the spiritual dimension of conversion. Those who are converted feel that they have nothing to do with the 'world'. They have embraced the 'Revival People' form of conversion, which was introduced among the Gikuyu people around 1937. They claim to be 'heavenly bound' and need not labour for earthly freedom. According to them this world is coming to an end. They live as pilgrims and sojourners in this world, and look forward to "the new heavens and the new earth" where there shall be no oppression of any kind. According to Osiek conversion that will bring transformation must embrace every dimension of human life. She gives five important dimensions in an actual conversion. These are structural, personal, moral, intellectual and spiritual dimensions. She sees the result of an actual conversion as transformation. According to her, women will attain this transformation only if they allow the gospel of Christ to illuminate each of the five dimensions. Let us look at each of them in relationship to the conversion of women and their preponderance in the Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central.

➤ **Structural Conversion**

This form of conversion is needed in the dimension of the Anglican Church where like in many other institutional Churches, the systematic subjection, denigration, and oppression of women in the name of the Gospel need no documentation. The Christian tradition as a whole, both theoretically and practically, has asserted the fundamental equality of men and women before God and their fundamental inequality before each other. This has been accelerated by the Gikuyu traditional culture where men are 'more equal than women and a boy child is to be preferred to a girl child'. This is where even today marriages are being broken simply because women have failed to beget a boy child. According to Osiek sexism and patriarchalism which are in a way the pillars of the Church structures have worked against both men and women in three ways. Dehumanising women institutionally by disqualifying them on the basis of sex from access to the sacred and to leadership. Attempting theological justification of the oppression of patriarchalism, so that it would seem to be perpetuated in the

name of God. Promoting a 'false consciousness,' which permits both the oppressor and the oppressed to blindly accept and internalise their roles.

These three ways have affected both men and women almost equally. For if women are viewed as second class citizenship, men are allowed the illusion that they alone are first class and that this is God's will for humanity and therefore cannot be changed. In this way the Church participates in the structural violence of society against women, a structural violence which implicitly condones and even promotes personal violence against them by casting women as victims of male aggression.

➤ **Personal Conversion**

Here both women and men must repent and reform the ecclesiastical structures. Men who are mostly in powerful positions in the Church must change their way of seeing and doing so as to bring themselves and the institution they control into lines with the imperatives of the Gospel. That is, to consider women who by the very nature of the oppressive structure are denied access to these positions. This is a more sensitive area since those who experience oppression do not like hearing that they too must change. However, the call to conversion is addressed to all, just as the promise of salvation is held out to all.

➤ **Moral Conversion**

Women must acknowledge and turn away from what Osiek is calling the sin of 'passivity of acquiescence' in oppression.¹⁶⁵ However Osiek admits that there are many reasons for such compliance, and not all of them can be blamed on the sexist, or patriarchal structure. For instance, fear of violence, fear of failure and refusal to take responsibility over oneself. Relish of the convenience of being taken care of, selfishness and lack of concern for poor women who suffer most from the oppressive system. Lack of self-confidence, self-respect, self-hatred and mistrust of other women as incompetent or competitors for the privilege of male attention. As a result of the way women have let themselves be socialised by culture, their fundamental tendency to sin is to doubt their own power and to want to turn it over to someone else (usually

male) to manage. Anglican women are challenged to cast off the sinful habits of self-doubt and self-hatred and to take the full responsibility of themselves that will enable them to be equal partners with men in the work of transforming both the Church and society.

➤ **Intellectual Conversion**

This means that they need to see with new eyes and admit into consciousness a radically changed perspective, even though it may be loaded with new difficult and frightening demands. Women must assume their relational power, that is, the power to do what 'we can' in contrast to the established or institutional power that acts only to preserve the status quo. They need to develop clear strategies, which will enable them to empower each other and so work to achieve their goal of a just and equal society.

➤ **Spiritual Conversion**

Women are called to a new way of life. They are challenged to live the spirit of the Gospel, radically, from the roots of the traditions that claims its origin in Jesus the prophet, and from the roots of women's own consciousness of their uniqueness as persons and their common, universal experience as women. Spiritual conversion cuts across all human pride and selfishness, across all the desires that do not have the reign of God for their centre. It challenges women to be converted according to the image of the crucified one and encourages them to forgive those who wrong them and not to take vengeance. The call to spiritual conversion is the courage to allow oneself to remain in a position where more pain is possible. Women as majority Church members are calling the whole Church to a deeper living of the way of Christ and to justice. By the Gospel of Christ and through their experiences and ideals of democracy women are calling the Church to affirm the full human dignity of every person.

➤ **Authentic Conversion**

An authentic conversion experience must contain combined elements of all the above and leads to significantly new ways of seeing one's reality. This new way can be spoken off as transformation. Women Church members should know that they can be transformed into the image of Christ and participate in his process of bringing in the

¹⁶⁵ Carolyn Osiek 1982: 49

reign of God made present in them. They are capable of surpassing the patriarchal role and expectations and are capable of genuine relationship. Osiek's observation is applicable in the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central. Women in this Diocese are aware of the injustices meted against them by the Church where they spend considerable time doing various activities. Their conversion is one way of claiming their identity in the face of a tradition and community that have not generally been receptive to that journey. She challenges women to embrace an authentic conversion, which includes moral, structural, spiritual and personal types. Also she invites the whole Church to a deeper living of the way of Christ that is just and affirming to the full dignity of women.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the reasons for women conversion into Christianity and their preponderance over men in the ACK using the feminist theoretical framework of Osiek. We have found that an increasing number of believing Church-going women are becoming aware of the injustices done against them by the Church authority. Consequently, the impact of this awareness has produced various categories in reaction. They are: the marginalised, loyalists, revisionists and liberationists. Looking at these four categories Osiek has discussed the need for women to undergo actual conversion, which embraces several elements. She talks of personal, structural, moral, intellectual and spiritual elements, as essential for an actual conversion.

SIX

Conclusion and Recommendation

6.1 Introduction

In this paper we have set out to look into the phenomenon of conversion in order to bring out to the fore the reasons for the preponderance of women in the Anglican Church. Concerns that form the objectives of this study, therefore, included first, investigating the factors that attract women to Christianity and secondly, analysing critically these factors to see whether there are certain needs and realities addressed by the Church that are unique to women.

To carry out certain objectives certain assumptions were laid down. Firstly, that women convert to Christianity because even in the Gikuyu traditional society they were deeply involved in religious issues. Secondly that women convert to Christianity because of its promises of emancipation. Thirdly, women convert to Christianity because the Church recruits them and fourthly, women find Christianity appealing because their faith in God gives them power to cope with uncertainties of life.

6.2 Summary and Concluding Remarks

From our research findings analysed in the previous chapters we can conclude that there are far more women than men on average as far as Sunday attendance and other Christian gatherings in and outside Church building is concerned. For instance, there were one thousand five hundred and eighty three women and four hundred and eighty seven men in attendance in the Revival People's Convection at Kahuhia in August 2000 (see photograph 1 and 2 respectively).

The reasons women have given for their Church membership/ attendance include: Quest for salvation and eternal life; Pursuit for peace and answers to problems; Search for transcendence; recognition and appreciation; Aspirations for a new identity; need for a vision concerning husband and children and need for belongingness expressed in the Church as a community.

Women believe that the Bible is the word of God and take it seriously. In obedience to the Word of God in the Bible, they attend Church and other Christian gatherings in order to worship God and to render him homage in the sight of human persons and angels. They are convinced that the Church is the dwelling place of God. According to them the Church is the place where God teaches His people and listens to their prayers. It is in the Church where God holds communion with his people and gives them spiritual help and comfort. Going to Church is a divine commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” (Exodus. 20: 8) Also “...not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some...” (Hebrew 10:25). Women find observance of the Lord’s day very edifying. For them, it is the bright and cheerful day made for human beings, a day of rest for all, a day of doing well to all, a day of happy spiritual worship for all.

Another important factor as reflected in chapter two is the influence of Gikuyu culture towards women Church attendance. In this chapter, we established that from their myth of origin, Gikuyu society was matriarchal. This has since been replaced with a patriarchal system and leadership taken by men. Gikuyu men hold positions of power in all-important institutions both sacred or secular. With this patriarchal syndrome women are kept away from holding decision-making positions and instead are drawn to serve the cultural system and the ideology that upholds it. They are taught to believe that they are inferior to men. This belief is passed from infancy where a girl child is given four ululations of welcome and a boy child five. Also, in preference of boy to girl children, women who are not privileged to bear sons for their families undergo untold sufferings. After puberty, a girl child is “sold into marriage” with a heavy bride price. This makes the girl a slave in her new home and she has to endure all kinds of problems since she was being ‘bought.’ In case of any problem or difficulty, she cannot complain to her husband who owns her or even to her parents who sold her. It is this kind of situation that compels women to go to Church in search of release from bondage.

Blessings alongside problems, difficulties and sufferings of different kinds have been reflected in women’s testimonies as a key factors behind their conversion into

Christianity. The quest to transcend the ills and acquire the favour that Christianity promises, is among the major reasons that have made many women in the ACK Diocese of Mt. Kenya Central be frequent Church attenders.

From the above it is true that women flock to Church because they have a catalogue of problems, which includes barrenness, matrimonial problems, infantile mortality, ill luck and joblessness. They dominate the Church in membership because they live with constant threats of family illnesses, death and economic hardships. These loyal Church-going women find consolation in the Church. It is by converting to Christianity that the Church promises them salvation and eternal life. Through sharing with others with similar problems, women feel comforted and enjoy life as if these problems never existed¹⁶⁶.

The fact that men dominate the Church in leadership is a clear indication that the all-embracing Gikuyu worldview still plays a very important part in the minds of many Christians. Women converts still hold that men should lead and therefore being the majority voters elect them to leadership positions in the Church (see photograph 3 and 4).

Men are the majority in the synods as seen in the Ninth Ordinary Session of Synod of the Diocese of Mount Kenya Central, which met at Kahuhia Girls High School from 20th to 22nd November 2000; the delegates were as shown in table 3 below: -

| SYNOD | Men | Women | Total |
|--------------|-----|-------|-------|
| Delegate | 268 | 20 | 288 |
| Clergy | 97 | 3 | 100 |
| Laity | 171 | 17 | 188 |
| H/D | 10 | 4 | 14 |
| SCOS | 27 | 7 | 34 |

¹⁶⁶ Deji Ayegboyin 1991: 139

Another important factor for the preponderance of women over men in the Anglican Church is that a lot of work has been done to recruit them into Church membership. This is done through the Mothers' Union fellowship that started in 1876 (MU Membership Card). Although the Diocese has started Father's Association, a similar fellowship for men, the number of those enrolled was considerably small. According to the Diocesan Ninth Ordinary Session of Synod booklet, 1376 women enrolled into the MU and only 223 men enrolled into the FA between 1999 and 2000 (Nov. 2000 p.112). This is a clear indication that the Anglican Church is recruiting more women than men.

Women in the Anglican Church find Christianity appealing because it gives them power to cope with the uncertainties of life. Naturally, women are entrusted with the mystery of nurturing life, before and after birth. This mystery makes a mother's life very uncertain. The fact that many mothers are jobless and sometimes they get little or no support from their husbands adds to this mystery. Many women also pointed out that they go to the Church to pray for their husbands and children. This is proof that women are the pillars of household Churches, which if strengthened can strengthen the local congregations.

The reasons for the preponderance of women over men in the Anglican Church can be used positively to improve Church attendance. It is a mistake for any convert into Christianity to imagine that he/she can be a good Christian without the Church, or that one can be a secret Christian. The instinct of a new heart is to acknowledge God before other human beings. The change effected in mature Christian experience compels public confession. If one would propose to keep ones experience of God a secret, such would be going contrary to the very nature of Christian piety (Mark 8: 38, Romans 10: 9f). Then will men and women believers in Jesus Christ and members of his body co-exist as one redeemed community.

6.3. Recommendations

I agree with Kanyoro when she asserts that “the future of the Church depends on the Church of the future accepting and nurturing the gifts of both men and women.”¹⁶⁷ Anglican Church needs to affirm and recruit both men and women into leadership and membership positions. Below I have given some recommendations.

- The Anglican Church needs to affirm women by giving them equal chances in service and leadership positions for we are all equal before the eyes of God. Men and women should therefore be given equal opportunity. Otherwise women might be left harbouring an inferiority complex emanating from cultural influences that sideline them. Currently the diocesan booklet, called *The bishopric vision into the 21st Century*, says on the role of women in the Church:

“The biblical role of women is to help men to serve God effectively. Competition does not arise and where it does, lead to disaster. Number 12:1-15. Miriam was struck with leprosy. Currently, it is noted that there has been a strong wave of gender awareness and many feminine groups have been formed to champion the cause of women. While this is acceptable, proponents of these should accept God’s way of creation, which was “good and complete”. Within the Church setting, guidance of the Holy Spirit should be sought in order to have everything done decently.”¹⁶⁸

Such literal interpretation of some scriptures have been used in many occasion to subjugate women, thus sidelining them from decision making. Such a thought appearing in the bishopric vision is misleading. It is a clear indication that leadership in the Anglican Church is still based on domination and subjugation and not on humble service like that of Christ (Philippians2: 1-11). Such a leadership lacks in vision for it denies the full humanity of women as ‘one in union in Jesus Christ’ (Gal. 3: 28). According to Radford “whatever diminishes or denies the full humanity of women must be presumed not to reflect the authentic nature of things, or to be the message or work of an authentic or a community of redemption.”¹⁶⁹ This idea is not from God because it does not reflect redemption and the message of redemptive community. Such leadership is still founded in the ‘negative principle of the denigration and marginalization of women’s humanity’ and is ignorant of the fact that

¹⁶⁷ Musimbi Kanyoro 1997: 9

¹⁶⁸ 1999: 4-6

women are the backbone of the Church in membership. The Church theology in this fact is already corrupted by sexism. Because of naming males as norms of authentic humanity women are marginalised in the Church. Male humanity is defined as against or above women humanity. Men are seen as ruling class humanity that is above the servant class humanity of women.

Therefore, I recommend that the Anglican Church should be gender sensitive in its preaching of the gospel in order to build a Church without sexism. It must be inclusive of both sexes without marginalizing women as less than full human or elevating male humanity against women humanity as agent of God. It is idolatrous to make males more like God than females. It should reject androcentrism and criticize all other forms of chauvinism. It must critique sanctification of patriarchy and allow it to fall under the biblical denunciations of idolatry and blasphemy. It must not use God to justify social domination and subjugation.

Sound Biblical understanding is very important. The Bible should be read 'with women' and not 'for women' as passive participants. They should be allowed to read, interpret and apply the scriptures in their lives.

- Traditionally the Gikuyu people believed that men are leaders. Culturally they believed that men were superior and women inferior. This belief led to the development of a power structure where women worked and men inherited. This is clearly reflected in the Church where women work hard to raise money for the work of God and men decide on how Church finances should be used. The Church must challenge the tenets of these traditions and oppressive cultures with the liberating power of the Gospel instead of tapping from them.
- The Church must be completely honest in its preaching. It should not evade important issues like the current gender disparity in Church leadership and attendance simply because to face them might cause trouble. It must become fearlessly involved in the world and show where it stands on such a strong subject like social justice.

¹⁶⁹ Ruether Radford 1983: 19

- Its preaching must not be following popular opinion, giving people what they want to hear, but must be the statement of inner convictions, even if these convictions are not what some people want to hear. The Church need not have the double image it has acquired if it has the courage to think and speak.
- The Church must realise that there are greater sins than the sins of the flesh. There can be pride, prejudice and hard-heartedness, wilful blindness; lack of courage and allowing pain to turn to bitterness because that is easier. All these are terrible and deadly sins. There can be an external veneer of respectability with a complete Godlessness underneath it. This is just not enough in Christ's Church.
- The Church must change its language from its seventeenth century English and use contemporary language to contemporary men and women. The Church must make an honest attempt to think out its message in the categories of the 21st century, which it is speaking.
- The Church must not become more and more a gathered community for women but should go out to the millions of men (and women) who have lost touch with it altogether.
- For the Church to give hope the world today it has to use its traditions to inspire but not to oppress women. Christ has the remedy for a human institution and the application of that remedy is the business of the Church.

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Appendices

(i) Key Informants

| Name | Date of Interview | Place of Interview |
|--------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Abishag Njoki Mahiaini | August 23, 2000 | Kiboi |
| Ann Njeri Ngugi | October 9, 2000 | Githunguri |
| Cathrine Wangari Njeru | October 12, 2000 | Kanyenya-ini |
| Eliam Wanjira Maina | October 17, 2000 | Ngutu |
| Elishba Wanjiku Nduati | September. 15, 2000 | Gatuya |
| Elisabeth Njoki Gacii | August 21, 2000 | Gathinja |
| Elizabeth W. Macharia | August 25,2000 | Rwathia |
| Esther Njeri Maina | September 8, 2000 | Kahuhia |
| Eudias Waiyego Mugo | September 24, 2000 | Kahuro |
| Eva Wanjiru Ngugi | October 10, 2000 | Gatumbi |
| Florence Ruguru Maina | August 8, 2000 | Kahuhia |
| Grace Nduta Macharia | August 7, 2000 | Kahuhia |
| Grace Njeri Irungu | September 5, 2000 | Kirogo |
| Grace Njeri Kiriga | August26, 2000 | Gathinja |
| Grace Wambui Maina | October 8, 2000 | Kiairathe |
| Helen Muthoni Kuria | August15, 2000 | Mumbi |
| Helen Wanja Kamau | August 10, 2000 | Nyakihai |
| Hoglas Wangeci Kihu | August 24, 2000 | Gacharaigu |
| Jane Wambui Mwangiru | August 12, 2000 | Mukangu |
| Janet Wanjiru Mwathi | October 20, 2000 | Mukuyu |
| Ruth Nyambura Mathara | August 9,2000 | Gituto |
| Janet Muthoni Njoroge | September 22, 2000 | Mukangu |
| Jemima Wambui Muturi | September 4, 2000 | Kirogo |
| Jennifar Waithira Nduati | September 4, 2000 | Kirogo |
| Jerusha Muthoni Njoya | October 11, 2000 | Kangari |

| | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Joyce Waigwe Makindu | October 18, 2000 | Githiga |
| Joyce Wanjiku Musa | August 16,2000 | Kimatha |
| Leah Waithara Gatunga | August20, 2000 | Gathinja |
| Leah Wangui Thuri | August 20, 2000 | Gathinja |
| Lucy Gituto Maina | October 18, 2000 | Gatang'ara |
| Lucy Njeri Kamau | September 3, 2000 | Kirogo |
| Lydia Wanjiru Gicharu | September 10, 2000 | Nyakihai |
| Margaret K. Kamau | September 5, 2000 | Kirogo |
| Margaret M. Gikonyo | September 6, 2000 | Gathukiini |
| Margaret Njeri Kinyua | August 22, 2000 | Kirogo |
| Margaret W.Githinji | September 24, 2000 | Kahuro |
| Mary W. Kang'ata | September 18,2000 | Gituto |
| Mercy N. Karurua | August 17, 2000 | Gathinja |
| Monica Murugi Irungu | September 3, 2000 | Kirogo |
| Nelius Muthoni Kirugo | September 2, 2000 | Gathinja |
| Nelius W. Gatambo | August 27,2000 | Kongu-ini |
| Nelius Wanjiru Chege | October 16, 2000 | Kari |
| Noadia M. Likimani | October 2, 2000 | Nairobi |
| Peris N. Njuki | August 26, 2000 | Gathinja |
| Prisca W. Gathimba | August16, 2000 | Kimathi |
| Susan Muthoni Kahura | September 5, 2000 | Kambirwa |
| Truphoza W. Muriu | September 9, 2000 | Gituto |
| Virginia K. Nyotta | September 7,2000 | Mukangu |
| Virginia Njeri Thumi | August 20, 2000 | Gathinja |

(ii) Sample and Research Questionnaire

Research instrument

1. General particulars for all informants

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| (i) Name | (iv) Level of schooling |
| (ii) Age | (v) Position in Church |
| (iii) Marital Status | (vi) Occupation |

2. How and when did you know about ACK?

3. How did you become a member of this Church? (Baptism: by whom? What were the requirements for baptism?)

4. What attracted you to this Church and not any other denomination?

5. Did you belong to any other denomination before you joined this Church?

6. How often do you go to Church? (Daily, weekly, monthly)

7. What Church activities are you involved in?

8. What does going to Church do to you?

9. Do you find any difference in your life between now and when you were not a member of this Church?

10. What teachings and practices appealed to you most especially in regards to conversion?

11. Are you converted? (When? and where?)

12. Was it gradual or sudden? Explain the circumstances of your conversion (how?),
Converted from what?

13. How did you know that there is salvation in Christ?

14. What reasons made you to come to Christ? (Influence by the preacher (altar call) attracted by other converts (life style) the scriptures? Is there another reason?

15. Are these the same reasons why you are a Christian today?

16. Who is Christ in your life?

17. What did Christ do to you when you got converted? Any needs met?

18. How do you continue to have these needs met and sustained in Christ? (Prayers, fellowships, worship)

19. What is your role among other converts? (Singing, testifying, teaches)

20. Do you find it affirming?

FIGURE : LOCATION OF STUDY SITES IN MURANGA DISTRICT

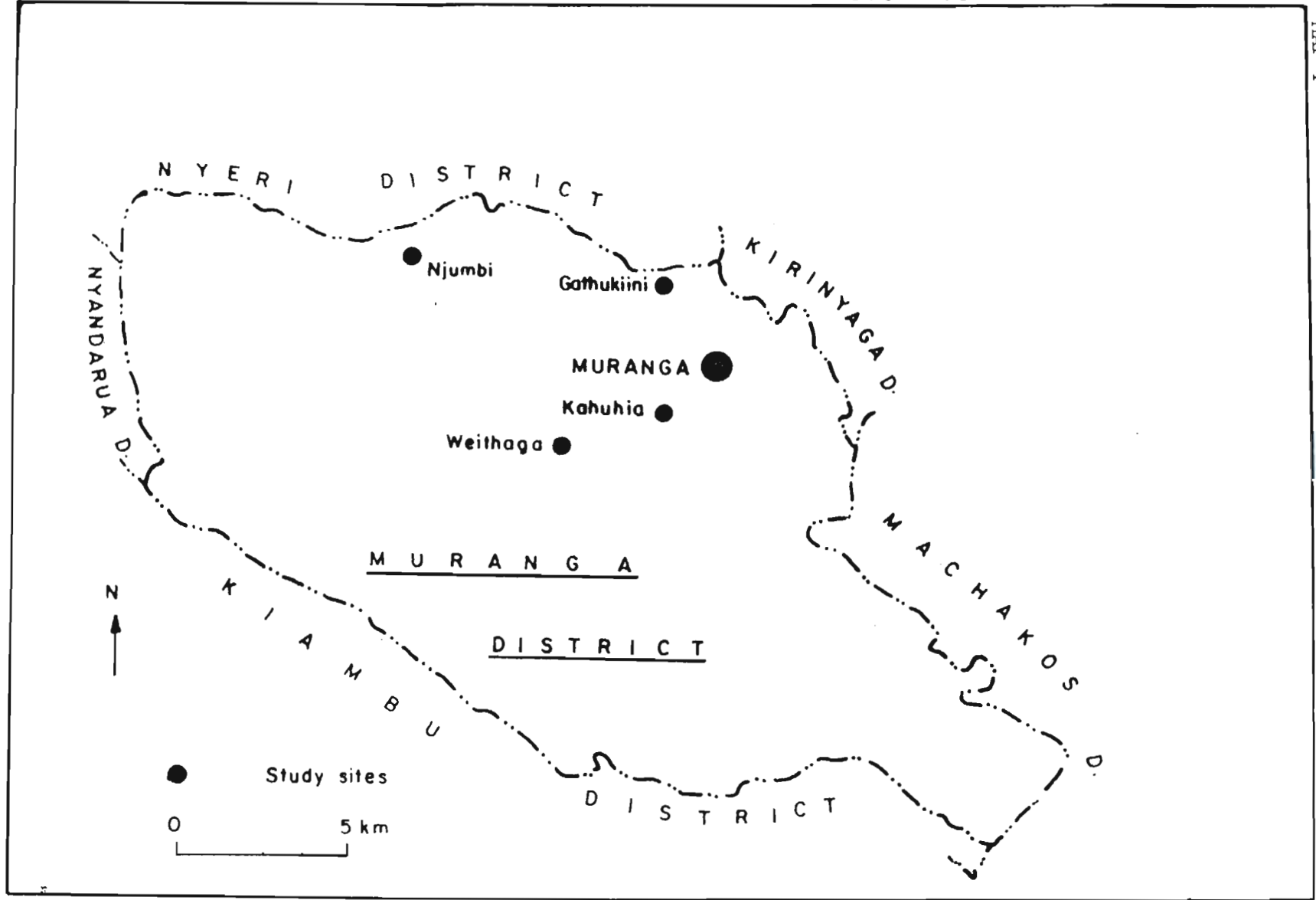
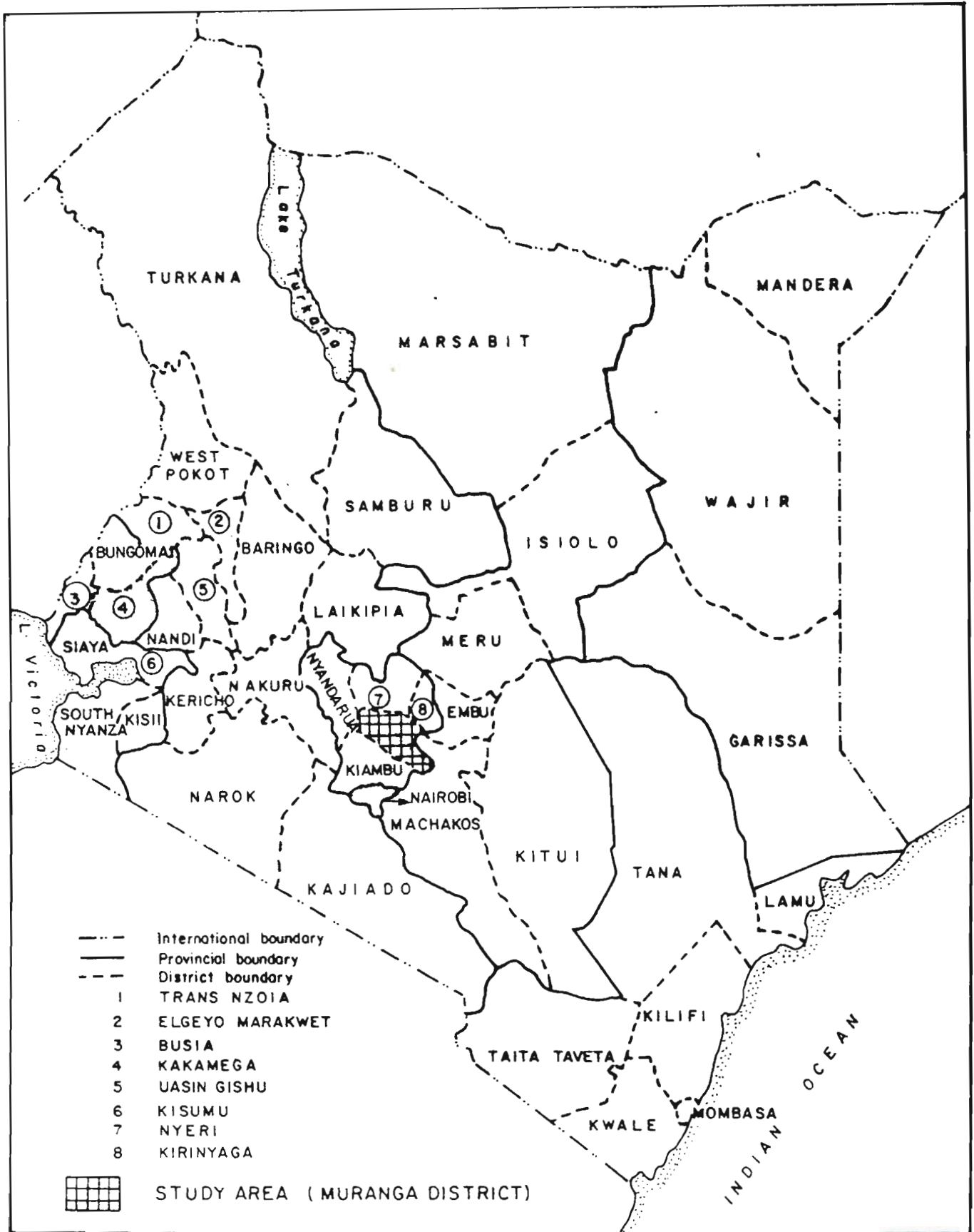


FIGURE LOCATION OF THE STUDY AREA



MAP 2



MURANG'A DISTRICT REVIVAL FELLOWSHIP AT KAHUHIA, AUGUST 2000

Photograph 2.



WOMEN IN THE REVIVAL FELLOWSHIP AT KAHUHIA, AUGUST 2000

PHOTOGRAPHY 3



A.C.K. KAHUHIA PARISH COUNCIL 2000

PHOTOGRAPHY 4



A.C.K. ST. JOHNS KAHUHIA CHURCH COUNCIL 2000

PHOTOGRAPH 5



WEDDING SERVICE AT GATANG'ARA

PHOTOGRAPH 6



SUNDAY SERVICE AT A.C.K. GATANG'ARA 2000