

ABSTRACT

TRANSFORMATION OF THE TRADITIONAL CIRCUMCISION RITE OF PASSAGE FOR MERU BOYS IN KENYA: A CRITICAL RESPONSE TO HIV/AIDS AND GANG FORMATION

by

Jacob M. Kanake

This dissertation explores the understandings, attitudes, and values of Meru people as expressed in regard to traditional Meru education and ritual for adult transition compared to hospital Christian boy circumcision rites. The research sample of 130 “witnesses on the ground” established Meru judgments and aspects of Meru history. The outcome (69.2 percent) confirmed Meru people’s misunderstandings arise from different beliefs concerning the current existing boy’s circumcision rites; 82.3 percent of Meru people value boys’ circumcision (not mere physical operation without counseling) as a means to transition boys into adulthood. Witnesses observed initiates given courage to face life’s crises with maturity by full preparation and responsibilities attached to the circumcision rite. A male traditional circumcision initiation rite is a religious act; it provides courage, and transitions boy from childhood to adulthood. Whereas hospital circumcision encourages Christian faith, general hygiene, and formal education, I saw a link between Meru and Jewish understanding of circumcision—a relational covenant.

Without the benefit of reforming the boys’ rite of passage, Meru risk loss of field circumcision and promoting the hospital rite, which has serious implications, including gang formation due to lack of counseling. Field circumcision also faces challenges from formal education and HIV/AIDS.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled
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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

I was initiated in 1975 to be a man, to become a leader, a husband, and a father in a Meru family. I am an ordained Methodist minister in the Nyambene Synod of the Kenya Methodist Conference, which lies on the eastern slopes of Mount Kenya and within the Nyambene Range of mountains. I grew up in Meru, and I am a minister in Kenya Methodist Conference where I am on leave of absence to pursue theological studies in Wilmore, Kentucky. My recent responsibilities were with churches approximately 340 kilometers from Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya.

The story I share here points to a painful crisis for the Meru people where I was born and where I live and move. The crisis revolves around the prehistoric ritual process by which a boy becomes a man.

One Meru Boy's Dilemma

The challenge Meru Christian families face during circumcision season is without comparison. I come from such a family, and my initiation process was a difficult one. My parents were divided about my circumcision from the moment they realized the time was coming for me. My father favored hospital circumcision, and my mother outwardly accepted the idea of hospital surgery, but she visibly wavered when my father was not at home. My mother strongly wanted me to accept the traditional Meru ritual. With support from her friends and relatives, when her sister visited, the two developed a strategy for me to run away on the evening before the traditional circumcision ritual. I was to go to my aunt's house. The plan was that the next day I could then go for the traditional field ceremony of initiation along with her son, my cousin. At the time of my circumcision, the

arrangements for hospital circumcision were poor because the church in our area was just beginning to arrange for hospital circumcision. Many parents declined to have their children go through this new Christian/hospital circumcision that year. I seized the opportunity and “ran away” in order to participate in the traditional Meru ritual in August 1975.

My father’s mother, my grandmother, was my grandfather’s third of five wives. She was a traditional Meru woman, and I spent much time with her. After his father’s death, my father was always encouraging me to go and help my grandmother. From her I learned about traditional rituals, and I grew up in a compound where the church was a mission, and all boys were initiated into the traditional boyhood groups. I was given a name with each initiation, a Meru boyhood mark of passage from one developmental group to the next, as I will explain later.

In Meru custom, too, parents send their children to the grandparents to learn their traditional practices and ask questions about life. I was in close touch with my grandma and was aware of the traditional circumcision ritual that was important to all Meru families. My father’s family was the only Christian family in the larger extended family. My father’s father, my deceased grandfather, always regarded my father as if he were a leper—always forbidding him to attend family gatherings because he was a Christian. I was very close to my grandmother, after my grandfather’s death, and often accompanied her to traditional rituals and ceremonies.

I completed all of the steps of the traditional rituals and finally graduated and later tutored a number of other initiates. With time, church opposition intensified and forced me to withdraw my allegiance to the traditional rituals in favor of church membership

and circumcision done at a hospital. I capitulated and, like other faithful Christians, began to fight traditional practices from the pulpits where I preached. I was a traveling Methodist pastor, and I openly challenged traditional proponents to desist their practices in favor of church teachings. After I finished training for the ordained ministry and received appointment as a pastor, I became seriously aggressive, even writing several pastoral letters and personally guiding believers against traditional circumcision (see Appendix N). Although I was aware that not all traditional teachings were evil, I devoted little time to think deeply about how often Christians circumcised in the hospital began to seek cultural empowerment through the traditional rites during the burning ritual, *mpithio*.

Meru is a large area and its people share similar cultural traditions with very slight variations. Additionally, different denominations have developed, each having either an aggressive or a passive denial approach toward traditional rites, specifically including boy circumcision. When I tried to learn how each denomination treats its believers and how they prepare boys for their transition into adulthood, I found no uniformity. As a Methodist pastor, I then began a long journey of developing a rite of passage liturgy by including a little of the traditional ritual, and every time I introduced a new idea (from cultural practices), even though the change was minimal, members were pleased and supported the idea.

My observations from more than ten years of serving as a pastor among the Meru people led me to the conviction that unless traditional beliefs that support Christian faith are incorporated into church life, the church may continue to create shallow-rooted, “inch-deep” Christians because their grounded values are deeply rooted in the now taboo

traditional symbols and rituals that appeal to their multigenerational core values. Among the Meru those core values come to the surface when a personal or family or regional crisis occurs; they revert to traditional rituals at crucial points in their lives.

Living and studying in a Western culture has served to remind me of how important rites of passage are. Most Western scholars advise that rites of passage were reinvented to give significance to life transitions because many cultures lack ways of transmitting important ethical values to their young, and the current ways children are trying to become adults do not answer human needs for relationships and communal attachments (Grimes 148). Professor Donald M. Joy's reports on cultural needs awakened my dream and challenged me to help Meru people to reinvent their rites of passages before they are long forgotten and Meru culture disintegrates into moral and spiritual chaos.

The Problem

The greatest hindrance to in-depth Christian faith and vital spirituality among Meru people is their high respect for traditional beliefs, symbols, and rituals, while being passively committed to Christianity. The origin of this state of affairs can be traced back to demands of nineteenth-century missionaries that placed negative value on Meru spiritual hungers. Colonizing administrators can also share the blame as, from time to time, foreign colonialists provoked the situation by asking people to stop their way of life, calling it primitive. They urged that the Meru exchange traditional beliefs for Western education. The Western leaders developed agriculture and medical care to spearhead a Meru civilization built on the vision of Livingstone's Three Cs philosophy.¹

¹David Livingstone was a pioneer missionary and explorer in Africa. He spearheaded the three Cs model: commerce, Christianity, and civilization. David Livingstone was a highly respected European who

Both missionaries and colonialists, knowingly or unknowingly, created tension that continues to widen the rift among the Meru community, creating two parties (Christians and Traditionalists) set in competition to win over the other by any means.

My own observation is that the pattern of rapid church growth in *Igembe, Meru*, where great masses of inch-deep Christians are joining the churches, is disturbing and underscores the urgency of this study. Over the years church members have been disciplined over involvement with traditional culture during a boy's circumcision, but their pattern of attending Sunday service never changed. Christians will attend church services and listen to the sermons but will leave the service and sermons at the church until the following Sunday. Many of these superficial Christians begin, right at the gate of the church after the service, to interact with their own deeper, traditional way of life—until the following Sunday when they meet again for the Christian worship service. This type of intentional and ignorant hypocrisy, especially on the part of Christian parents, affects both the old and young people negatively.

The Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the understandings, attitudes, and values of Meru people toward traditional Meru and Christian hospital circumcision rites.

Research Questions

1. How do Meru people describe the history and the purpose of the traditional Meru circumcision ritual process?

explored Central Africa and his philosophy influenced education, Christianity, and development greatly. He wrote in an oft-cited aphorism, "If you educate a man, you educate one person: if you educate a woman, you educate the whole family." (This is not an original quotation; paraphrase is mine.)

2. How do Meru people describe the history and the purpose of the Christian hospital circumcision ritual process?
3. What aspects of the traditional Meru circumcision ritual process do Meru people value?
4. What aspects of the Christian hospital circumcision ritual process do Meru people value?
5. To what extent do the Meru people regard the circumcision ritual as compatible with biblical teachings and principles?

Introduction

This research focuses on the initiation rite that transitions boys into men among the Meru people of Kenya. Preparation for circumcision and the communal event is an important part of Meru tradition and identity. The event is entered into generally at the onset of puberty. Entry age may vary from ten to thirty years depending on when the community judges that the number of boys ready for the rite justifies scheduling the communal event. The rite graduates both boys and girls from children into adults. Unfortunately, outsiders, unfamiliar with the importance of the rite of passage for Meru children, have condemned the rite as beastly and inhuman without providing any alternative ritual to establish adult identity and status. Even though opposed by outsiders, such as missionaries, the boys' ritual has survived openly. Because official government law now forbids the parallel rite for girls, the girls' ritual has gone underground but is widely observed. Because the girls' ritual is secret and is managed exclusively by women, I have little knowledge about the training or the actual physical aspects of girls' circumcision among the Meru. I shall leave girls' rites of initiation for another researcher.

This project proposed a strategy and the rationale for integrating Christian belief with the prehistoric rite of passage for Meru boys.

Although the Meru community practiced these rituals over centuries, contemporary changes affecting boys' circumcision structure are in need of repair or traditional boys' circumcision is in danger of being relegated into the past. The negative effects suffered by uninitiated adults are numerous and some impact families severely. Meru people need to reinvent their circumcision rite or risk loss of Meru cultural identity. The Web site for the Union of International Associations based at Brussels, Belgium, reports in-depth effects on uninitiated people and declares that lack of such initiation is an urgent global problem:

The absence of rites of passage leads to a serious breakdown in the process of maturing a person. Young people are unable to participate in society in a creative manner because societal structures no longer consider it their responsibility to intentionally establish the necessary marks of passing from one age-related social role to another, such as [,] child to youth, youth to adult, adult to elder. The result is that society has no clear expectation of how people should participate in these roles and therefore individuals do not know what is required by society. (Grimes 91)

In the absence of rites of passage, major human stages of life are left without meaningful rituals and in all cases are deprived of a sense of their place in their cultural history. In the place of rites of initiation and mentoring, rising generations tend to develop their own rituals, often with deadly consequences.

In the following sections of this study, I present contrasting circumcision options to illustrate the kinds of confusion and losses that face Meru identity and culture. Should this trend continue, the cultural instruction between the generations may be lost. Furthermore, the candidates would not be formed communally as Meru men by their shared circumcision experience. Unless some intervention occurs that brings together the

Christian community and the Meru cultural ritual, the boys' traditional initiation program is likely to revert to the underground ritual as the girl initiation has done. The two patterns for circumcision of boys observed in Meru today are the traditional Meru initiation rite and hospital circumcision. In general, a traditional family continues with the traditional rite and Christian families choose hospital circumcision. In the following cases, I assign pseudonyms to the characters and their families.

Traditional Meru Rite of Passage

Mr. and Mrs. *Maigua* hail from *Tuiri* Village of *Mauti* located in the *Nyiriu* Division of Meru-north or Igembe District. With blessings of parents, clan, and community, the couple married on 6 April 1980. They had their first baby boy, on 20 May 1982. Their family, relatives, and community celebrated the arrival of the child-*Nau*² who was named *Mati* in a naming ceremony a few days after his birth. The family children and a few elderly relatives attended the naming ceremony along with children from the entire neighborhood, as is the custom. *Mati* was named for *Maigua*'s father, Mr. *Nthirari Maithia*, whose life has been devoted to defending the natural environment. The name *Mati* means one who protects the natural environment (flora and fauna) from human destruction.

Early Childhood

Mati received parental love and nurture from birth up to age eight years, after which life outside the family circle expanded and became exciting to him. *Mati* began to learn events taking place outside his home by questioning and discussing them with his

²*Nau*—precious Kimeru term/name for a newborn to illustrate its role and importance in the family and the whole community.

parents. Mati's curiosity disturbed and worried his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Maigua, who enjoyed easy control and monopoly in training their son without many challenges. They were custodians of the family knowledge. The small family world began to collapse as their son began questioning and constantly inquiring about far too many adult issues of the outer community. He dared to identify issues prohibited by traditional customs for discussion between children and parents such as sexual relationships, childbirth, and initiations to adulthood such as circumcision and marriage. Meru tradition regards any parent discussing deep relational issues with their children as young as eight as a lack of manners. Children are allowed time to grow as children and to learn the deep issues of life with time according to their physical growth and mental capacity. Lack of openness between Mati and his parents created tension, but Mati needed to find ways to learn what he wanted to know.

Mr. and Mrs. Maigua referred Mati to his grandparents who are the traditional authorities to answer children's questions, to cool their tempers and to neutralize the normal tensions that develop between parents and children. Meru social norms allow grandparents room for flexibility in order to guide and teach their grandchildren about birth and sexual development, circumcision, and marriage. Mati could tap his grandparents' wisdom in exchange for firewood sticks, tobacco snub (powdered tobacco to be taken by sniffing it into the nostrils), or running small errands between grandparents and parents and within the neighborhood. Sometimes Mati's grandparents requested a day of labor on their farm (*mugundene*) in exchange for their storytelling or answering lineage questions. Like other Meru children of his age (seven to thirteen years), Mati was very close to his grandparents and to elderly people in general.

Grandparent's Roles

Mati learned his community's ethos during the evenings after finishing his daily chores. Within Meru cultural context, this part of learning is from listening to his grandparents' stories. Learning is repetitive and dialogical based on a give-and-take form. The grandparents asked Mati to retell the story or to share what he has learned. When the grandparents, the storytellers, sense their audience is getting sleepy, they quickly disperse them to bed. Sometimes the children are bored by their grandparents' stories and sneak out to join other children in other families to listen and to assess the difference, similarity, or greatness compared to their own. This period marks the end of a grandchild's intensive relationship to grandparents, as children enter into another stage in their lives. The next stage allowed Mati to be mentored by his peers in ritualized community rites of instruction several times each week.

Every individual child is free to consult grandparents on gender roles for affirmation of newly found knowledge. Mati's grandparents at that time were very sensitive to Mati's questions about male and female issues and to answering them, sometimes deferring to one another as appropriate. During the peer mentoring, the peer leaders will continue to consult with grandparents as authorities of traditional values and practices.

Boyhood Rites

Boys go through a series of rituals to prepare them for the main initiation rite of circumcision into adulthood. Boys receive rigorous training involving body markings and inflictions of pain to usher them psychologically into the trauma of circumcision pain and the ongoing real world of adult life. Because boys born across a four or five-year span

will be circumcised at the same event, boys go through training and preparation rituals across those years in closely related age groups for boyhood rites.

Meru boyhood rites are made up of three levels: (1) *Murerwa* or *Mungaunga*, (2) *Muriira*, and (3) *Gitile*. Individuals can go through all or some of them before their circumcision rite. *Murerwa* is the entry stage into boyhood, and the rest are undertaken according to chronological age, possibly ages 12-14, 15-16, and 17+ years. A boy in group one, *Murerwa*, such as *Mati*, may be large for his age and may handle the ritual pain of body markings and tattoos well enough that the boys of group two of the boyhood rite may invite him to move up to their group. In this way a precocious younger boy may advance through all three stages of boyhood rites during the four or five years of preparation for circumcision (see Appendixes X and Y).

To become a member of one of these three groups, *Mati* paid a fee and the payment was deposited into the group's account, which is managed by one of the boys in the group. When *Mati* joined *Murerwa* in 1995, he paid less than one-eighth of a dollar (ksh. 5) and a small portion, usually a single snub, of tobacco called *Rutudu rwa mbaki*. During initiation into the each of the boyhood rite groups, every new member receives a new name and instructions in group meetings three times a week until he advances to the next boyhood rite group. The entire teaching and modeling is done by older boys who were rigorously trained by an older generation who had graduated into adulthood through circumcision. When the actual circumcision ritual takes place, not all of the boys will qualify. Those who "face the knife" in the ritual process of becoming men, will be called warriors and are part of a wider age set. Immediately before circumcision many boys will learn from rumors in the community that family concerns or other reasons will keep them

from circumcision this time. The group will then, in its last meeting before the circumcision ritual, negotiate with boys being held over to be advanced to the next group. These boys are glad to pay the initiation fee and be initiated into the next higher group where they will serve as the carryover core to organize the next pre-circumcision boyhood rites. While circumcised boys are in seclusion, those who are carrying over their boyhood group will meet and will elect leaders to begin the boyhood rite process with its frequent instruction meetings. Teaching focuses on moral aspects of daily living that include the “dos and don’ts” of the group. Perhaps this seems to be the first learning that marks the beginning of the ethical, social, and moral code of the community’s dos and don’ts.³ Any violation of the set rules of the boyhood group in the daily activities of life, risks heavy fines in the next group meeting. To maintain high moral standards, meetings are held every three days. To enforce the group’s discipline, all of its members act as watchdogs and report every member’s failures and the extent of those violations during the interval between meetings. Repeated violations of the boyhood group’s code lead to excommunication, higher fines, or physical punishment.

When a member is excommunicated, reinstatement is done only after paying a heavy fine and repairing the damage. With reinstatement one receives another new name to portray a new birth and a new strict adherence to the set rules. Mati worked hard to balance his life between the boyhood group’s teachings, schoolwork, grandparents, and parental discipline at home. His mental capacity was stretched thin, though he found all

³The Meru ethical code appears to follow a dos and don’ts model. Here are examples: Do not void in the presence of children or adults. Do not steal food or anything from anybody. Do not fight aimlessly. Do not share clothing with blood brothers *antu ba Iciarwo*; it is a taboo. Do not look adults directly in their face; it is a lack of manners and demotion into childhood. Do not cry if you face danger. Behave as a man and avoid competing for food with your smaller siblings and your mother. Listen to grown-ups and especially those older than you (see Deut. 26). Perhaps Meru people and Jews are related.

teachings beneficial and worthy of emulating—especially living up to his new name *Thiankanga*, which means one with skills to trap tailed grouse, *nkanga*, and to wear its plumes.

The boyhood rite custom is a highly respected and valued communal rite. When a new member is initiated, children, parents, and neighbors refer to him by his new boyhood name rather than his childhood name. If a boy fails to abide by the teachings of the boyhood group, he risks losing the new name and risks excommunication. These risks create waves of fear that he will be a victim of scorn and humiliation by the community—adults, peer group, and children—and worst of all isolation from his peer group until he is formally restored.

Boys who are going through the boyhood rites are free to participate in social events in a group such as coordinating weeding activities in weeding seasons, building calves' *bomas*, constructing houses, and participating in entertainment dances called *kirugu*. The climax of the boyhood rites is another rite referred to as *nciibi* that any boy may voluntarily join after payment of a set fee. Each boy pays a small fee for each of the preliminary rites so everyone can participate. In Meru culture all types of initiations, whether for youth, or adults, are enhanced with secret reinforcement through administration of confidential oaths: to guard against members telling nonmembers and especially foreigners about the nature of the ritual instructions. Oaths are taken seriously because boys are warned that telling the confidential information could bring death or drastically damage anyone who tells.

Preparation for Circumcision

According to the custom, boys begin at a very early age to experience physical,

emotional, and psychological preparation to instill courage prior to entering the more painful and challenging emotional and physical rite of circumcision. In addition, Mati has developed the feelings that the security of the family and the community depends on men. He has been learning, too, that at puberty he is expected to “face the knife” of circumcision without signs of fear or pain. He knows that if he would fail to face the knife courageously, he would also fail the community test that demands he be a reliable protector and provider.

When Mati turned sixteen years old, his physical body and mental capacity were mature enough to qualify him for initiation. Mati’s family consulted with his extended family and then with the warrior age set—young men circumcised in the previous three rituals. The warrior set is responsible for arranging the initiation events. In April 1997, the leaders from the warrior group and the elders (those beyond warrior status) deliberated for two weeks deciding whether Meru boys from Mati’s boyhood rite group would be allowed to participate in the communal rite of circumcision. Their decisions depended on the number of boys who had reached puberty, favorable weather, the absence of any epidemic, promise of a good crop harvest, and prevailing peace with the neighboring communities. If the warrior leaders and the elders agreed that conditions were favorable, then the circumcision rite was scheduled the following year (August 1998). This yearlong period would give parents adequate time for preparations. Parents typically consult with their sons about who will serve as their sons’ “day-fathers.”⁴

⁴The “day-father” is a favorable family friend approached with a gourd of gruel and gifts to ask his favor in taking the voluntary tutoring role of feeding, cleaning, keeping company, and giving counsel to the initiate during seclusion following circumcision, though the main counseling is done more intensively later. He shares his gruel and gifts with his family or parents and community as he will involve them during his stay at the initiate’s home. He is to act as consultant to the initiate throughout life, and his counsel is to be taken as seriously as that of the “night-father” who is the boy’s birth father.

Parents also will manage to build an extra seclusion hut, if necessary, and plan to have fees ready for the circumciser.⁵ During the preparation period, if some misunderstanding between parents results in the boy's mother returning to her parents or to a brother, the husband's relatives and neighbors may insist that the boy's initiation be postponed until the misunderstanding is solved. Whether the husband remarries or not, the misunderstanding with the boy's mother still must be resolved before the boy moves ahead with the initiation process.

When the decision is reached to schedule the ritual circumcision event, that good news reaches the boys through their parents. Mati, like all other young boys, actively was lobbying his parents to convince them he was ready for circumcision. This persuasion certainly began and went on until the formal announcement was made in July 1998, only one month before the communal circumcision event. During that period, warriors again arranged for the best time for scheduling the event. Arrangements included deciding on who would be the circumciser, providing a home to accommodate him, his meals, fees, and a special team of warriors—*lamale ya mutani*—to accompany and assist in carrying the circumciser's bag, *kiondo kia mutani*, full of knives, vestments, and other sacred ornaments related to his job. The boys normally raise most of the money for fees before formal permission is granted to hold the event. When discussion among the warrior leaders and the elders reach a firm decision and the deal is sealed, the elders formally advise boys to negotiate with the warriors for permission to be circumcised. At this point the elders withdraw to the backyard to signify that the boys are permitted to negotiate with the warrior leaders in order to own the ritual and claim it as their own,

⁵The circumciser is a person who has learned the art of circumcision from his lineage, and his family clan blessed him to continue the family art of circumcision. He inherits the art and the tools for the work.

rather than having parents or elders doing it on their behalf. Because the elders are still nearby, the boys' leaders and the warrior leaders proceed to schedule a time to meet and a field in which to meet to do the actual negotiations.

The meeting between the boyhood leaders and the warrior leaders was scheduled and the boys' formal request presented. The warrior age set asked the boyhood group to present their pleas with tokens of special Miraa twigs⁶ and tobacco and to state the reasons formally to justify their request. Negotiations may take from weeks to months until all demands of the warriors are met. Some of the demands include plenty of special Miraa twigs, *miraa Imiiru*, and raising expenses for food and transportation for the circumcision event. Leaders of boyhood and the whole group demonstrate their commitment to be responsible for these obligation, which assures that they, through their parents, will guarantee the main expenses and the age set accounts. In the next three meetings, the boyhood group presented tobacco and plenty of special Miraa twigs to prove their readiness for circumcision. The boyhood group's request was finally granted and formal arrangements began with the boys building a hut, "*Gaaruu*" (meeting house), at a central point, *kieni kia mburi*, where they would meet every evening with the warriors and the elders to receive intensive counsel and initiation announcements and information (Champion 74).⁷⁸

⁶*Miraa* is a respected bud twig snubbed/harvested from the Miraa plant. Miraa plants are found only in Meru, Ethiopia, and the Middle East (Yemen). Miraa is a respected plant chewed during leisure time. To ask for anything official within Meru culture, Miraa is recognized as legal and binding when granting permission for marriage, case arbitrations, reconciliation, or initiation. Miraa species are classified as *Miraa imitune/miiru*, (red/black attractive color), *Miraa Imieru*, etc., but red/black color is preferred for the most sacred occasions. The botanical name of Miraa is *Cathus edulis*, and it is more commonly known as *quat* among the Somalis, Ethiopians, and Arabs.

⁷Champion observes that Gaaru is a large hut with an impressive circular saloon with berths all around. It is a perfect work of art designed and supervised by elders from start to its completion. It has partitions that occupy different categories of rituals and leadership.

Final Preparation—*Kuriria*

Mati and other boys in his boyhood group began a long journey of preparation singing *kuriria* as they made visits to relatives, friends, and kinfolk to announce the scheduled circumcision ceremony. Family, friends and relatives present gifts to the boys to encourage them to face the knife with the courage of grown men. As time grows closer to launching boys into adulthood, they are challenged to their face by adults to behave responsibly during circumcision. Finally, boys are warned against compromising their integrity by crying during the surgical procedure. The community undertakes responsibility to use all available methods to instill courage and build up the boys' psychological and mental readiness. Generally, as the boys approach, singing *kuriria*, the older women welcome them with ululations, *nkimi*, and they call out encouraging phrases. Mothers use every courteous word to implore their sons to face the knife fearlessly.

When a boy, *mwiji*, meets up with any warrior, he must either run into the field or woods, or, if he cannot leave the scene, he must turn his back because he is sure to be pelted with young corn kernels, which the warrior bites off of the cob and turns into a paste. With that saliva-saturated paste, the warrior then tries to spit on the boy, especially trying to paint his face and clothing until he looks speckled like the tailed grouse, *Nkanga*. Custom allows the warriors to indulge in mild kicking and caning within this period, as a way of building courage, but boyhood candidates can also retaliate against the warriors by shouting abuses and name calling as a way of proving their courage and intention to move on toward manhood.

The entire community starts a thorough preparation by scheduling evening dances arranged to coincide with the full moon for light at night. Everybody is welcome to participate in the dance. Songs are selectively chosen that will instill courage in the boys. The stocks of songs for this communal event have been sung for centuries. The songs use very encouraging descriptive words and phrases in the last few weeks before the actual circumcision. Some songs describe the condition initiates will undergo during seclusion and respect and honor courageous initiates' accord their kinsfolk after fearlessly facing the knife. Other songs attempt to describe lifelong humiliations men face after failing to face the knife.

Circumcision Day

Every aspect of the circumcision event is a ritual activity that involves the presence of diviners and the *Mugwe* respected as the main ritual leader of the Meru people in every region (Bernardi 35).⁹ The special team of warriors, *lamale ya mutani*, ancestral spirits, grandparents, and parents are involved in the entire negotiation period including the circumcision day. Elders gather a day before the circumcision event to cleanse and mark the site with the fresh skin of a sacrificial goat, *mungi*, stretched across two long poles to form a gate through which every boy must pass immediately after circumcision. As the boy, now changed into a man, passes between the poles and through the gate, he will throw his shrub, *muthanguru*, he held carefully in his hand during the surgery as a reminder to stifle the impulse to cry out, to the waiting girls as he continues

⁹Father Bernardi's book has some original Meru traditions though most records are not correct. Perhaps Bernardi was misled by some of his informers. A number of reasons can be deduced: (1) when he was writing, Meru people (Kenyans) were struggling for freedom from colonial masters, and every person of white color was suspect; (2) perhaps the worse deception could be due to the secretive nature that surrounds Meru customs. The author's work needs to be corrected with accurate information about the Meru culture.

on his way to a resting place to wait until everyone is circumcised. The *Mugwe* visits and prays at the site at dawn before the event, while the community diviners and the circumciser do separate exorcisms before the start of the actual circumcision.

On the eve before the circumcision, the boys retire to their homes for final shaving and anointing rituals. The boy's birth mother, using a blade, will hold it with a special fig tree leaf, dip the blade into sheep's fat, and ceremonially shave the boy's hair. The shaving ritual is a formal sign of the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood. Goat fat symbolizes purity and the fig tree leaves are symbols and signs of good will, long life, and fertility. When fresh hair grows out and the new name is assigned at the end of the seclusion, they symbolize a new stage of life. The eve of circumcision concludes with nightlong dancing and ululations until dawn when merriment stops and candidates join their parents for the last prayer called "mocking the birds," *kuruma nyoni*, and for anointing with white dust, *kuringwa iraa*. Early on the morning of his ritual, the boy proudly proves he is courageous and ready for circumcision. His praying is a way of taunting the birds by asserting that he is up before the birds wake up on the day of his circumcision and of becoming a man. This ritual includes insults to the birds such as, "You are an uncircumcised 'boy'! You are a coward! I see you before you see me!" In Meru, birds sing very early in the morning (6:00 a.m.) before people get up from sleep, but boys overtake the bird this time by getting up earlier than the birds. The same courage of defeating the birds will be demonstrated during the circumcision surgery. Mocking of the bird is a way of confirming to the relatives, his family, and his day-father how prepared he is to face the knife.

Both parents, along with any living grandparents, anoint the boy and the tutor

starting with the birth father, birth mother, and then grandparents. White dust, *iraa*, similar to white chalk, is used. All of these family members will individually use the right hand middle finger, “known as anointing finger,” to dip in the white powder and then trace a mark from forehead to the tip of the nose before placing a single white dot in front of each ear. Anointing has three meanings: (1) as a declaration that the officials are free of responsibility in case of the boy’s death either during circumcision (some can bleed to death) or during seclusion (by natural death), (2) as a way of releasing the boy’s body, in case of his death, to the officials, and making them responsible for the disposal of the boy’s body, which parents do willingly because other cultural norms exist that safeguard against intentional killing, and (3) as a way of entrusting the day-father/tutor and the community to give counsel to their son during seclusion and throughout his lifetime. The initiate is being released from parental nurture to the nurture by the greater community and to denote that his identity is forming—he is becoming a man, *muntu wa mwingi* and *Mumeru*, a real mature Meru person.

Anointing and dusting rituals mark the psychological and physical separation of the parents and grandparents from the boy, and the boy from them. They, too, can refer to the parents and grandparents anticipating welcoming their son as an adult after his seclusion—no longer as a parent/child relationship but as adults free to object/disagree or to counsel each other. Furthermore, the transition is a way of saying, “Young man, you are on your own to lead your own life the way you have learned from your parents, your day-father, and the community. Paddle your own canoe. Go your own way, yet we are here to keep you from drowning if you need our help.”

When the anointing is over, the candidate wears a white sheet—a sign of ritual

purity—and is escorted into the circumcision field by warriors from his extended family or that of the neighborhood along with family members, singing and dancing hero songs. In their right hands, each boy carries a thin green ritual shrub with a few leaves and a young bud, *muthanguru*, associated with the circumcision ritual. The green bud is fragile and can break easily and requires great care until the surgery is complete. The boy is supposed to undergo the surgery holding the shrub in his hands. If the boy shows any sign of fear, the fragile shrub's bud is cut off and the shrub, with the missing fragile bud, is taken to his sisters waiting at a distance. The entire occasion is doomed if he cries out or breaks the shrub's bud. Afterward, however, when he successfully completes the ordeal and throws the shrub to his sisters. If the bud is still intact, the girls can run proudly run up and down the field thundering ululations and singing themselves hoarse even on their way home.

The circumcision day event starts very early in the morning and proceeds until the last qualifying boy is circumcised. Women are excluded to the periphery of the field, while men form a human circle in the field. Boys are presented one at a time. Boys have completed ritual washing and then have been seated according to their clans and families in the order of seniority. Elders are very particular about who sits next to each other lest they risk mixing blood within the same brotherhood.¹⁰ When the arrangement is complete, all join in singing a welcoming song to the circumciser, “Do not fear he is coming wearing a Lion's mane (*Wamukira! tuguo uri thirua ya ndu ii*).¹¹ The

¹⁰Brotherhood brothers are people related by blood and having common ancestors. They should not exchange blood, battle together, or intermarry. This practice is biologically justified. Blood brotherhood also formed through mutual adoption by which two groups mingle blood to make them of one blood. They are regarded in the same way as close kinship. Mixing of close degree blood may cause the entire ceremony to be unclean.

surgery begins with the boy whose family has hosted the circumciser, and that boy must be from a ritually sacred family, *mucii jumuoru*.

During the all-day procedure, the circumciser is not allowed to wash or touch anything unclean. To do so could separate the unity and solidarity of the forming age unit, *nthuki*. The circumciser takes short breaks and continues on until the last boy has been circumcised in the late afternoon. Honey fluids and milk are the only traditional ceremonial cleansing agents for cleaning the circumciser's hands and the knife during the whole day of surgery. The circumciser is on strict instructions to observe community customs and beliefs governing the circumcision ritual. He is required to abstain from sexual contact several weeks before the ceremony and during the entire ceremonial period as young men recover from their wounds in seclusion. The circumciser is monitored until the last boy gets out of seclusion after which he is allowed to return to his usual life.

The use of one knife is intended to bind the entire age unit by the covenant of the mingling of their blood. One age set is made up of three age units—*Nding'uri*, *Kobia*, and *Kaberia*—initiated at an interval of five years. An age set refers to a Meru structure that includes approximately fifteen years. An age unit is one that used one knife, one field, and one circumciser at one period. An age set is codified by use of one field, one circumciser, and one site for Gaaru. In case the circumciser dies or becomes incapacitated, another member of the same lineage takes over to complete the set. The spilling of blood also covenants the age set with the ancestors. From circumcision day until the end of seclusion, spilling of any blood is discouraged. This belief helps to create

¹¹Meru people call the Male lion *Nduu* to distinguish it from the lioness; otherwise, lions are generally called *Ngatunyi*.

a sense of unity and identity as one age unit is codified by these beliefs.

Despite lengthy encouragement, admonishment, and warning against showing of any fear or flinching, circumcision is very painful, and some of the boys cry and attempt in vain to run away. Unfortunately the only option is crying because one cannot break through the strong human circle of men made around the circumcision site. When some fearful boy releases a loud cry, men sing and blow horns loudly to cover up the crying so the women and children outside the circle do not hear him. Cowards are held firmly by the warriors until the surgery is over and their shrub's buds are broken off. Mati was successful and emerged a hero, making his family very proud of him.

Seclusion

Mati and other initiates were escorted to separate huts specifically constructed for them near their birth mother's houses. There they remained secluded from the general public including women, teenagers, and parents, until they were healed completely. Initiates and their tutors/day-fathers nurse the wounds with no painkillers or sedatives. If any of them is infected by transmittable disease, then it spreads faster from the initiate to the day-father/tutor. Senior warriors make regular visits to the initiates and startle the initiates to frighten them but then teach them the warrior wisdom, which is the real purpose of their visits.

Today, in communities where the culture is deteriorating, these warriors sometimes beat the initiates, inflicting fresh wounds on their bodies. Besides being inappropriate, the wounds are another possible way of spreading infection. Parents, elders, and provincial leaders detest and condemn this inhumane way of instilling discipline. This inhumane deterioration marks an agenda item I address in the project that

can serve both religious and traditional leaders in contributing strategies to improve warrior teaching and eliminate the inappropriate physical torture with beatings. Families deserve a new, improved ritual liturgy of initiation that they can accept and trust to launch their children into proper adulthood.

When initiates' wounds are healed and tutors/day-fathers are satisfied that enough warrior teaching has been completed, senior age set warrior leaders are informed to prepare the last ritual by contracting the medicine man (*Mugaa wa Ntane, Baine, or Thuuthiu*), another ritualist person, to conduct the "burning ritual" (*mpithio*). Only men attend the occasion, and they include the senior age warriors and a few other men invited as guests of the day-father. In the burning ritual, every means and technique is used to terrify and persuade the initiates to confess any secrets in their previous life in order to avoid being burnt by the smoldering iron bar (*kioro*), which is heated in the fire. A fixed ritual involving the hot iron bar prepares the initiate for making his confession of childhood failures. When the *Mugaa* is convinced all secrets are revealed, he absolves the initiates of all their evil deeds and announces that childhood deeds are now left behind and are replaced by adult learning. The *Baine* (the *Mugaa*) leaves with his team and the invited guests undertake to advise the initiates all night long.

The purpose of the invited guests is that they will summarize and put into proper perspective all of the instructions the initiates have been taught in bits and pieces since the first day of seclusion. Invited guests then fill a Calabash, half of a drinking gourd used here as a container, with *Miraa* twig sticks each of which represents some part of the content of the nightlong lessons. In addition, they place two pieces of tobacco as appreciation for the invitation and the food. The birth mother will receive the Calabash

and all of its contents early in the morning. When she receives the Calabash, she keeps it for about two days so anyone in the community can inspect the Calabash, as every adult in the community has the right to know whether the initiates received enough training. This rite ends childhood and the boyhood life. The initiate acquires a tentative new status with a new name “newly initiated warrior,” *Ntane*.¹² Mati (*Ntane*) at this stage is recognized as a legal member of the community but must wait for his symbolic hair shaving *mbenjo* ritual and official naming.

Naming

The naming ritual is an essential component of Meru culture. Every stage a Meru person undertakes in life qualifies for a new name to describe, among another things, the changes taking place in a participant’s life. Naming starts after birth and goes in all successive stages until death. The naming after circumcision is the most celebrated by the whole community.

Hair Shaving—*Mbenjo*

Immediately after *Kioro/mpithio*, or in some cases after a few days, the initiate is scheduled for a symbolic ritual shaving of the hair. This ritual shaving actually is by gesture only; no hair is actually cut at this time. This shaving ritual occurs at a *Mbenjo* ceremony, which is the climax of the entire initiation ceremony. People from all walks of life attend the ceremony performed in the evening of the last day of seclusion. This is the formal day for *Ntane* to join the community through the act of ritual shaving of the hair. Young married women, *Aciere*, prepare food, and senior warriors bring tobacco. *Ntane*

¹²*Ntane* is a general term used to designate a less informed or inexperienced initiate/s undergoing training through continued counseling. *Ntane* is a derogatory name used only by old adults not children. Mati now is about to lose both his childhood name (Mati) and boyhood name (Thiankanga) to be replaced with *Ntane* for now, but at *Mbenjo* a lasting name will be given.

sits at the doorway with the day-father and Aciere on one side while warriors stay on the opposite side for competition.

The mother and grandmother proceed to “shave” *Ntane* using sheep fat and fig tree leaves (this is only symbolic hair cutting). Suddenly, they are stopped by either men or women and can only continue if the group that shouted first, “Stop touching the precious head of *Ntane*!” was rewarded with food or tobacco. When the men have given away their tobacco and the women have given away the food, the game of interrupting the hair cutting ritual ends. At that time, the mother and some selected women of integrity continue to counsel *Ntane* on issues of morals, dignity, and character from their womanly wisdom, adding to what men have been teaching for over one month during the seclusion, but from a woman’s point of view. Shaving at this stage is a symbolic action, as the new warrior will continue to grow hair until the time of marriage.

Immediately after the ritual shaving ceremony and after the counseling by the women, naming takes place. This naming ritual is led by the night-father or birth father of *Ntane* assisted by the community. I discuss naming and its meaning according to the Meru people in the following section.

Name Giving—*Ritwaa*

In Meru custom, a child’s journey starts with the naming. Children are named after the couple’s parents, brothers, uncles, sisters, father in-law, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, relatives, or friends in alternating sequence. The naming model arranged in this fixed sequence is intended to offer identity and to solidify the family within a given lineage of a certain clan in the community. Names have a lot of meaning. A person’s name comes to be associated with that person’s vocation or skills, so these names become

descriptions for how an individual interacts with the entire creation ecosystem including such aspects as forests, valleys, mountains, rivers, trees, and animals. A name describes the moral life, character, profession, or dignity of the person after whom the child is named.

The birth father and the community have to propose name or names for the initiate-Ntane, but the final decision rests with the initiate/Ntane receiving the name. For infants or toddlers, the parents or community can agree on the name. Names are given as one moves into the next stage of life; therefore, names are of great consequence because they signify, acknowledge, and consecrate an individual's status in the eyes of the entire community. One person typically will receive as many names as necessary to denote the person's ritual stages taken in life. One of those stages of life invested with a new name is the circumcision ritual.

The circumcision ceremony concludes with the giving of a new name to the initiate that replaces the childhood name. The choice of the childhood name is greatly influenced by the family and emphasizes the deep meaning and status within the family. The childhood name carries the child to the next stage of life. To the parents and the core family members, the childhood name is never forgotten, even when one receives other names attached to other initiation stages achieved in life. Names given after childhood represent individuality within the clan and community. As said earlier, community and clan members are involved in helping the father select a name, depending on how the community evaluates the person in question. Names, therefore, tend to classify people representing ethnic groupings. One can easily tell in which area a Kenyan was born by his or her name. Meru men have names that start with "M'm" while Maasai and

Shamburu have “Ole,” and Kalenjin has “Arap,” and so on.

The newly initiated *Ntane* is given a name at the end of the circumcision ceremony, and children recite the name and know the new warrior by that name henceforth. According to Meru tradition adult male names have the prefix “M’m” while most children names have the prefix “Nto.” Adult women names are given after their brother or father’s name. Most of them have the prefix “Mwa/o” plus the person’s name, for instance Mr. M’mutia’s daughter or his sister will be called Mwo-mutia. These women names are achieved after marriage, but when one gives birth, other names are added, “Mother to *Ng’ina wa*” and so on. Giving women names from their parents’ side is proof that one is not sold or owned by the man/husband who married her. She is a free human being with her attachment to her people from where she still has a home if the marriage is unworkable. Mati or *Ntane* receives another name, *M’mungania*¹³ that officially remains although other names can be acquired as one enters into advanced rites. For the warrior age set, the age unit name will remain until another unit is circumcised. The existing unit shares its warrior-hood duties with the next unit until the entire group is complete (i.e. Nding’uri, Kobia and Kaberia units, that form one age set, see appendixes O and Y) and moves to give way to the next age set at colorful ceremony known as *Ntuiko*.¹⁴

Summary on Traditional Circumcision

The Meru rite of circumcision has been a revered and honored ritual since its

¹³*M’mungania* means one who mixes issues or ideas either to his benefit or that of the community. In recent times, this meaning has changed into a negative sense. The name currently refers to one mixing tradition and foreign ideas such as education or Christianity. Mati is actually a schoolboy and a Catholic during school season but rarely goes to church at school break. Naming has come to explain the character or vocation of the bearer instead of the namesake.

¹⁴*Ntuiko* is a ritual ceremony performed only when age set is retiring, giving way to the next age set to take over communal responsibilities. The ceremony is conducted by Mugwe, the Meru spiritual leader.

inception and has continued uninterrupted until the arrival of missionaries and colonial masters into Meru land in the early 1900s. As a result another version of circumcision of boys runs parallel to the traditional rites reported in the case of Mati. In the next section, I describe this alternative ritual circumcision program sometimes known as the hospital Christian rite. These two conflicting programs need to be negotiated to form an integrated urgently important program-curriculum to consolidate the cultural tradition in such a way that Christian values are integrated and Meru traditional prehistoric concepts are given fresh life. The entire Meru culture faces the challenge of health concerns related to “one knife, one field, one blood” tradition by which HIV/AIDS and other diseases can be spread.

Christian Circumcision in the Hospital

Silas Kanuui is the son of Maithia and his wife Maingiru Maithia, a Christian couple since 1975. Their conversion to Christianity was a result of an evangelistic movement that rocked the Meru region between 1969 and 1976 led by young people. They were converted from traditional beliefs and practices learned from grandparents and parents. Kanuui’s parents, in particular, confessed and began to lead unique and devout lives after Christ himself. Maithia and his wife chose to become full members of the Kalima Methodist Church to promote Christian faith and abide by the church beliefs and its teachings (doctrines and dogmas about lifestyle). Kalima Methodist, like other Protestant denominations in Meru, preaches total rejection of traditional beliefs and practices that include traditional circumcision, sacrifices, and worship. Kalima and Tuiru villages are part of Mauti location, Nyiriu division. People of these villages share views and ideas of mutual respect. The Maithia and Maigua families are examples of two

differing belief systems held by the society about Christianity and traditional culture respectively. The conflict of belief systems is represented by the two contrasting cases I present in this chapter. The same conflict is widespread in Meru culture today, as the traditional culture, values, symbols, and rituals powerfully influence Christians.

Parental Teaching

Maithia and his wife Maingiru are blessed with four children, two boys and two girls. As parents, they made sure that their children were baptized and were given Christian names in infancy. Baptism is an initiation into church membership. The Maithias' closely watched over their children and monitored their activities tirelessly. They literally kept their children busy to separate them from their grandparents and other traditional people's influence. This couple knew that their children's free contacts with their traditional grandparents would amount to influences that favored traditional rituals and lead to their rebelling and running away for traditional rites of passage. A child's grandparents in Meru culture exert a strong influence on children in their formative years. The Maithias' would rather have their four children spend more time with the church groups than with their grandparents or their other non-Christian relatives. During their leisure time, the children learned Bible stories, sang Christian hymns, songs, and choruses. In the Christian pattern, the Maithias' children were accustomed to prayers at meals and prayers both morning and evening in their home. Anytime for them was prayer time. These children were neat and were admired throughout the village in terms of how they dressed; their cleanliness, and their habits. Maithia and Maingiru, Kanuui's parents, employed the services of a houseboy and housegirl to care for their children in their absence.

Kanuui was born in 1981 to the zealous Christians who were determined to

maintain their walk with the Lord. When Kanuui reached the age of reason (at pubescence, normally around sixteen years of age), his parents decided to launch him into adulthood through the rite of circumcision. The church encourages Christians to have their sons circumcised in the hospital¹⁵ for many reasons—to avoid painful experiences by treatment with sedatives, to require less time for healing, and to provide an antiseptic environment to avoid contamination that sometimes leads to death. Both the church and the traditional culture ritual recognize the circumcision rite as the best entry of young children into adulthood, though each group does it differently from the other. The Christian practice is a solitary experience for the boy, with the support of his Christian parents. On the other hand, the traditional ritual, as explained earlier, is oriented to a large cohort of peers being ritually transformed into adult men in the presence of the communal participants and only after several years of cohort training based on the wisdom of grandparent consultants.

Preparation

The parents built Kanuui a house to stay in during the healing time, seclusion. The house was furnished with chairs, a table, bed and beddings, clothes rack, charcoal stove, lamp, bookshelf, and music electronics. They provided enough food for the seclusion time plus emergency funds. Maithia negotiated with one of his former students, a youth leader of a neighboring church, to act as “day-father” for his son during seclusion. Maithia, a high school teacher, decided that the best time for Kanuui’s circumcision rite was in the month of August during school vacation. That was

¹⁵Hospital circumcision is slightly different from tradition circumcision in that the foreskin is cut off leaving the penile head or *glans* exposed, while traditional circumcision cuts a small hole on the foreskin and pushes out the penile head through that surgical hole, forcing the skin to lay loose (*Ndigi*) like a collar hanging below the head. *Ndigi* is the tribal mark of Meru circumcised men.

convenient to Maithia, because he could devote more time to helping his wife Maingiru, a professional nurse, to care for their son. August 1998 was carefully agreed upon to coincide with Maingiru's annual vacation and the traditional circumcision season, but Kanuui's rite was to come two weeks earlier than the communal rite. Dr. Mwezi, a private practitioner at a nearby urban center, Kabaa, was contracted to perform the surgery on the morning of 1 August 1998.

Circumcision

To comply with family traditions, Maithia informed his parents and in-laws of Kanuui's initiation two days before the surgery to avoid intrusion from either Kanuui's grandparents or from others in the community over the Maithias' rejection of traditional cultural circumcision rites. Maithia's parents boycotted the Christian circumcision ritual while only his father in-law, another Methodist Christian, showed up. Maithia's father, Kanuui's namesake, was vexed and enraged by the unilateral decision of his son who single-handedly took Kanuui through the hospital surgery instead of arranging for him to follow traditional rites of circumcision. Kailibiu, Maithia's father, severed all relationship with his only son Maithia for violating the traditional, family, and Meru norms. Nevertheless, Maithia would follow Christ rather than men (Acts 4:18-19).

On the day of the circumcision surgery, Maithia hired a Land Rover to take his son, a few of his men friends from Kalima Methodist Church, some school colleagues, and David, the day-father, to Dr. Mwezi's clinic for the surgery. Maingiru was left home to prepare food for Kanuui and the accompanying party that would follow his circumcision. Maingiru invited a few members of her church women's fellowship to assist in cooking and cleaning the homestead. Around 2:00 p.m., the entourage showed

up at home and the initiate was ushered into his new house while the proud father and his guests sat down to enjoy the party.

Seclusion

Kanuui's period of seclusion started upon his arrival from the hospital and ended the following month on 12 September 1998. On that date, Kanuui was expected in school to continue with his second year of high school at Kamandui, a private Christian boarding school. While in seclusion, other hospital circumcised boys (*Irwoe*) made regular visits to Kanuui to share their experiences with the other initiates. A few relatives, especially those favoring the traditional ritual, visited Kanuui's parents' home and some visited Kanuui, but David, the day-father, was Kanuui's guardian and followed strict instructions not to let Kanuui's mind be spoiled by the traditional believing visitors. While healing, Kanuui was encouraged to read the Bible and other books and to listen to sermons from the radio and from tapes.

Graduation

One Sunday afternoon a large group of people assembled to grace the occasion of Kanuui's graduation from childhood into adulthood. These guests included Methodist Pastor Mukengi, congregational leaders, Kalima members, relatives, a member of parliament (MP), an area chief and an assistant chief (civil administration), and other friends. Pastor Mukengi of Muitai Methodist circuit read from Genesis 17 about Abraham's circumcision as a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham and his people. This interpretation suggests that hospital circumcision is like Jewish circumcision, but Meru ritual circumcision does not resemble Jewish circumcision. In his sermon Pastor Mukengi praised Mr. Maithia for defying his relatives and communal

traditions for the sake of his faith and the progress of the church's evangelism. He pointed his congregation away from traditional practices and vowed to discipline members who failed to follow Mr. Maithia's footsteps. The pastor asked the Kalima church to honor Mr. Kanuui by presenting him a Bible and hymnbook to help him grow in his faith, in his deeper fellowship with God, with his youth group, and with the congregation.

His pastor, the church elders, and other Christian-initiated boys advised Kanuui to cut ties with the traditionally circumcised boys, because they have nothing to offer except the outdated traditions long made obsolete by technological development. Each speaker condemned the traditional practice of circumcision and praised Kanuui for listening to the words of his father rather than "the wary voices of dissenters and evil-motivated people." This quotation is from one of the speakers referring to traditional people, including Maithia's parents. The occasion ended with prayers led by the pastor for the family then for Kanuui as he was now declared to be an adult.

Kanuui, without his parents' or church's permission was, however, initiated secretly into traditional counseling at a burning ritual, *mpithio*, about four years later, on 10 September 2002, to the surprise of his parents, church leaders, and the youth group of his Kalima Methodist church. The church disciplinary council was constituted on 12 October 2002, to discipline "errant member, Brother in Christ, Silas Kanuui." When Kanuui was questioned, he responded to the accusations by saying, "I am now a fully initiated Meru man, worthy of respect, dignity, and integrity among my people. You may drop your discipline or go ahead." The members at the meeting felt humiliated and voted to defrock Silas Kanuui for one year. Kanuui continued attending church without benefits

as a member. He was forbidden to share his testimony, provide leadership, or partake of Holy Communion until his reinstatement a year later on 12 September 2003.

Contextual Background

This section describes the conflicts existing between Meru culture and Christianity. The said conflict began immediately when colonialists and a missionary entered Meru country and it continues unresolved. Their entry split the community in the middle. To get a clear picture, this section is divided into two categories: church context and Meru context.

Church Context

Since the coming of Christianity to the Meru in the early 1900s, no open explorative meeting between church leaders and spokespersons for the traditional Meru culture was ever called. The church continues to maintain that everything traditional is primitive, barbaric, and backward. For a Meru to become a Christian, the believer must recant his or her traditional beliefs and practices and acquire a Christian (I.e., Western) name, wear Western dress, and adopt Western mannerisms). The same principles taught by foreign missionaries continue to control the minds of the Ameru (the Meru people) preachers, and they encourage converts or new believers to sever ties with their kinfolk bound in traditional cultural practices. Although many of the core principles of Christian faith and traditional rituals are compatible, and while church teachings vary and a denomination is free to guide its believers, the tendency is that Christians are urged to view all of the Meru traditions negatively.

Furthermore, all denominations in Meru and Meru traditional culture accept boys' circumcision as the best way of launching children into adulthood. Lack of liturgy and a

clear theological approach to circumcision is a challenge that begs for attention. When the early Church in Jerusalem was faced with the same problem, a crisis meeting chaired by Church elders was convened to settle the confusion during its early stages (Acts 15). The central question I face as I wrestle with the Meru culture and its future is whether now is the time to work for a solution to a century-old problem. Given the type of shallow-rooted Christian faith Meru Christians tend to possess, calls for urgent attention to promote practical discipleship among the Meru people. Such deepening Christian experience is unlikely to emerge when the roots of Meru culture have been regarded only as evil and sinful. I speak openly of Christianity within Meru culture as “inch-deep faith” because except when Christians are in worship or otherwise visibly Methodist or of another identity, they revert back to traditional thinking. In times crisis, Meru Christians quickly revert to traditional healing, divination, bloodbrotherhood, or sacrifices and other deeply ingrained practices.

Meru Context

The traditional Meru people have developed an elaborate well-designed informal curriculum followed from birth up to adolescence/puberty, which is considered as the appropriate time for launching children into adulthood. Each stage follows a well-articulated format leading to the next stage and is continued to its very final one. Perhaps traditional practices and spirituality should be studied to explore whether Christian denominations might be well served to develop some concepts and practices that might contribute to the development of a Meru-friendly and inclusive Christianity.

The Meru are a section of the Bantu people found in eastern Kenya along Mount Kenya and the Nyambene ridges (see Appendix V). They draw their livelihood from

agriculture and livestock keeping. Communities among the Meru are structured into three clan groups, *Njiru*, *Njeru*, and *Ntune*, according to the time each clan group left *Mbwa*, “the cradle land.” When Meru reached *Nkubiu* or *Kigairwo*, a decision was made to go into different directions as they exist today to avoid the risk of future enslavement of the entire Meru population (see Appendix W).

In the past, Meru customs, traditions, and practices remained under the supervision of the central government that met often at *Nchiru*, a central location, to review and enforce traditional policies. The Meru people have a very distinct and elaborate system of worship comprised of the high office of *Mugwe*, the spiritual leader, prophets, diviners, medicine men, priests, and, to a limited way, political leaders. Each worship service follows a specific liturgy designed for special occasions: burials, thanksgiving, prayers, and ceremonies like marriage and circumcision.

When alien colonialists and missionaries arrived in Meru, they misunderstood and immediately rejected cultural practices and discouraged them. Missionaries harshly branded all customs as satanic/devil worship, and colonialists maintained that customs, symbols, and rituals were antidevelopment and should be abandoned. The Meru people, in general, became passive to missionary and colonial arrogance based on Western ideology, which was attributed to David Livingstone’s three Cs alleged philosophy. Fear of punishment forced people to follow their master’s orders relegating cultural practices to secretive underground observances. For more than a century now, these traditional practices come alive during communal or individual crises, and there seems no indication that traditional cultural beliefs will die anytime in the near future. Churches, therefore, are uniquely positioned to initiate ways to incorporate, legitimize, and transform aspects

of traditional culture in an enrichment of Christian life and witness as its leaders affirm the ancient traditional rituals that are consistent with biblical and Christian values and beliefs.

The Meru region is a vast area with a population of over 1.3 million (Nki 15),¹⁶ so the project at hand focused on only one part of the Meru: the Meru north, which is also called the Igembe region. Igembe was the focus of this study because it is the region from which I come. Igembe traditional culture is more genuinely and powerfully preserved than any other Meru region, and for that reason Christianity usually has made slow progress in evangelistic growth. Christianity, Islam, and Asian religions, including Buddhism and Hinduism, have been introduced to the Meru people. Though Christianity has grown to almost 70 percent, in many cases having only inch-deep, shallow-rooted faith, traditional African religion still comes second compared to other beliefs (Barret et al. 421). Predominant denominations are Methodist, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, African independent churches, Presbyterian, Anglican, and mushrooming sects. All Christian denominations are held hostage to a visible degree by traditional cultural practices.

Perhaps some of the Christian parents are also not initiated, so their children are victims of circumstances because uninitiated parents cannot, therefore, initiate their children. Parents' lack of initiation can be traced back and blamed on the colonial government, the Meru sub-tribe of Christians, and missionary stereotypes on Meru traditions, which contribute to the psychological shyness of any traditional practice or view anything traditional as backward, primitive, or uncivilized. Perhaps lack of basic

¹⁶Although I quote the figure of 1.3 million people from 1999 census as reported in Joyce Nki's thesis, currently the figure should be higher.

values once taught in traditional culture leads to the current evils facing the people across the world as James E. Wilder observes:

In search of new land, knowledge, and independence, western peoples have come to deplore any indoctrination into the “old ways” preferring to question authority and seek new ways. Traditions, whether intelligent, needed, or simply misunderstood, have suffered disregard as a result. These days few men know when or if they ever successfully made the transition to manhood. Most men are at a loss helping boys make the transition as well. (10)

Where adolescence lacks someone to help in transition, the young men tend to turn to their peer group (other children) for support. Children unfortunately have very little to offer to other children leaving the recipient inadequately prepared for the responsibilities of adult men and for girls, adult women. Today men need rites that help children negotiate the passage from childhood to adulthood and later stages in life. Unfortunately, the Meru have few resources available for offering creative ways of negotiating life stages from a Christian viewpoint.

The Christian churches in Meru have been in existence for more than a hundred years, and from the beginning they have rejected everything rooted in Meru traditional practices as they have maintained early missionary teachings. Mr. A. J. Hopkins wrote one of the earliest detailed reports on how Meru people were evangelized: “The supreme act of surrendering ... to Jesus is an act of separation from the African ... tribal dances, customs ... [and] traditions. The danger is that he must cease to be African ... to become Christian” (2).¹⁷ John W. Gerrard describes Rev. Hopkins as a talented and successful conciliator—*Mwiganithia* who worked hard to establish interdenominational harmony in

¹⁷Rev. Arthur Hopkins was a Methodist Meru district superintendent missionary well respected by both Ameru and whites in Meru. He began his mission work at Ribe in Mombasa, Kenya, in 1918 and worked in Meru twice between 1928 and 1946. Hopkins was an anthropologist with great respect for people’s culture, but he was often overruled by other missionaries.

Meru since his arrival in 1928 to replace Rev. Worthington, the chairman of Kenya Methodist district who had suddenly died (120-21). The early missionaries' principles of evangelism gave birth to two opposing forces in Meru culture that ever since are set on condemning and proselytizing each other. Agreeing, as both do, that male circumcision is an important ritual to move boys into manhood, unfortunately at times they resort to competition at the expense of the welfare of the common people.

During the traditional circumcision of boys, traditionalists' hurt Christians by pressuring their children into traditional circumcision. On the other hand, the boys who escape to undergo circumcision in antiseptic hospitals are scorned and shunned so that they tend to live in cultural isolation in a stigmatized life as adults. Ministers in churches typically use their pulpits to preach against the traditional practices calling them satanic, barbaric, and backward. Sometimes during traditional circumcision, initiation fights break out between the traditionalists and Christians, causing damage to property and loss of lives. The secular government administration watches in disbelief, as acts of mob injustice are committed against Christians.

With the history of unresolved, mistrust between Meru Christians and traditional Meru leaders, the time has come to search for a Meru-based resolution. Meru Methodists, the largest protestant Christian group, have an established reputation for integrity and are credentialed to initiate the search for common ground with traditional leaders. As all Christian groups reflect on their beginnings in Meru land, they have found that alienation was established as missionaries and other commercial immigrants expected to impose a European or Western culture on Meru people. More than one hundred years of hostility simmered between Christians and leaders of traditional Meru boyhood rites.

While the research I am pursuing here is only that of boyhood rituals including traditional Meru male circumcision, additional historical challenges, the Meru face including the now outlawed girls' rituals. Although the Kenyan government outlawed cliterdectomy for Meru girls, an underground ritual is still widely practiced, administered secretly and only by women. The risks of death from septic surgical procedures, which have been part of the history of traditional circumcision of boys, have multiplied as HIV/AIDS threatens the Meru. Furthermore historical evidence confirms that Meru traditional circumcision and boyhood rite provided many advantages over the less structured hospital circumcision and childhood experiences. Also, Meru people have accepted the Methodist beliefs as an important contribution to their lives. Therefore this study rests on a well-documented history that predicts that all will "win" as an antiseptic circumcision ritual for boys is established both among the traditional Meru and the Christian Meru. If that collaboration is accomplished, the future Christian groups may find a way to achieve significant Christian and Meru identity formation for even a wider population of boys.

Assumptions

I am working with the following four assumptions.

First, the research explored answers to most of the questions a majority of Meru people ask in silence. Rank and file Meru across the Igembe district and spanning a wide range of ages will be important witnesses to ways of resolving the challenges facing the hospital circumcision and traditional Meru circumcision approaches to the boys' rituals. I am certain that women influence boys' choice of the mode of circumcision, so they should be consulted to include their perceptions of ways to enhance the cultural benefits

of the rituals.

Second, perhaps in the near future pastors, laity, and hierarchy of all denominations in Meru will eventually support the outcome of this study as a model to help bring integrity between Christians and their historic traditional culture by reconciling the misunderstandings that have lingered between the church and traditions. These conflicting views have existed since the coming of colonialists and the missionaries among the Meru in the nineteenth century.

Third, because the traditional rituals for launching of boys and girls into adult status are elaborate and are associated with the covenantal circumcision involving the entire community through ritual ceremonies, I am offering a sincere way to establish a peaceful and free atmosphere between Christians and the historic traditional culture. In the best possible outcome, a merger process might be negotiated among Christian leaders, civil administrative leaders, and traditional cultural leaders, predictably providing a level playing ground that can lead to enriching traditional and Christian rituals with Meru history and identity anchors as well as empowering the Christians opportunities for witness and opportunities for evangelism through serving the traditional population. Such reconciliation can open the door to the development of profoundly deep Meru Christian faith and close the door on inch-deep faith.

Fourth, the merging of the rites is offered with a goal of dissolving the stigma of “foreign” or even “colonial,” which attaches itself to Christians among the Meru, and opening the way for Christian faith to permeate and transform Meru culture authentically from the inside out.

Definition of Key Terms

In this section, I define key words, names, and phrases that directly relate to the Meru traditional process for boys' initiation into manhood. These definitions place their meanings in context as the project unfolds.

Meru

The name Meru generally refers to a town, the people, and the region, but the people and their *Kimeru* language are also called Ameru, literally, "from Meru." Meru town was established in 1955 by Sir Fredrick Crawford, acting Kenya governor who accepted Njuri-ncheke's request to declare Meru an independent administrative land unit with its headquarters at Meru town (M'imanyara 73; Nki 16). Since 1938, the Meru and Kikuyu people remained under one British administrative officer in the Kikuyu land unit (Lambert, Use of Indigenous Authorities 1). Since the Meru region was carved from the Kikuyu land unit, it remained as a single geopolitical district until July 1992. At that time Meru leaders requested President Daniel Arap Moi for a division of Meru. Meru was carved into three districts (Meru central district was made of Imenti and Mwimbi people; Nithi district was made of Tharaka, Muthambi and Chuka people; and, Meru north district included Tigania and Igembe people). Later in 1997, the Meru region was further divided into four districts by splitting Nithi district into Tharaka and Meru south. Currently Meru consists of six administrative districts with the newest being Igembe, Tigania, and Mwimbi districts.

The etymology of the word Meru is not clear, though popular legends exist that suggest ways to explain its meaning and origin. One theory explains that the name is a corruption of *Miiriga Miiru* or *Njiru* clan or the people around the town of Meru. The explanation is that Europeans misspelled the clan name as Meru. Another theory says the

name is a derivative of the Meru oak, a hardwood tree common in the Meru area. A recent theory with a tribal stereotype is also called the corruption theory and is linked to the adjective term *kuirua*, which means “ripen,” referring to ripe bananas, and the word *meeru* (plural), which denote plenty of ripe bananas in the region. The allegedly ancient mythological theory gets closer to the meaning, because the Meru people were called “family of *mukunga* and *Ngaa*, *karindi ka mukunga na Ngaa*.” *Makunga* and *Ngaa*, a mythical couple, are said to be the mythical parents and ancestors of the Meru people.

According to the history of migration, the Meru people are considered to be Bantu closely related to neighboring Kamba, Embu, and Kikuyu people when considering the evidence from shared similarities in language and traditional practices. Furthermore oral traditions also mention intermarriages between Meru and other tribes like Maasai, Mwoko, Shamburu, and Rendille of Marsabit, all of Cushitic and Nilotic origins, during settlement into the present country. I learned from the memories of elders, interview participants, and historians that Meru migrated from Mbwa.¹⁸

The Meru people today form a single unit despite their slight differences in social institutions, past histories, and varied peculiar dialects. In a deeper sense, Meru evolved seven main dialects that represent past subgroups mentioned in Chapters 4 and 5. The evolved dialects are Ki-Tharaka, Ki-Chuka, Ki-Mwimbi, Ki-Igoji, Ki-Imenti, Ki-Tigania, and Ki-Igembe. The differences in the dialects reflect the varied influences from Maasai, Samburu, Rendille, Turkana, Boran, Somali, Ogiek (Dorobo), and Galla or Oromo (also called Mwoko in kimeru) these were (Nilotic and Cushite people), and other neighboring Bantus that include Kamba, Embu and Gikuyu. Overall Meru exhibits much older Bantu

¹⁸My late grandmother was very instrumental in the teaching of the Mbwa story Writers including Joyce Nki, M’imanyara, and Bernardi, and 99 percent of my respondents narrate the same story.

linguistic characteristics in grammar and phonetic forms than do the neighboring languages such as Ki-Gikuyu, Ki-Embu, and Ki-Kamba, though with great similarities.

Since migration, the Meru people have maintained a very distinct and elaborate system of leadership and worship. Leaders include the high office of Mugwe who is the spiritual leader, and in addition prophets, prophetesses, diviners, medicine men, and priests. The office of Mugwe still exists today, but his duties have decreased drastically. The remaining responsibilities are almost all now relegated into the realm of presiding over traditional Meru special prayers, incantations, and sacrifices to the Meru monotheistic deity. Nearly all Meru traditional worship follows specific liturgies designed for occasions such as burials, thanksgiving, and prayers. Beyond those ceremonies others include marriage, circumcision, initiations, and communal entertainments. Of all Meru practices, male circumcision rituals of preparation and empowerment are complex and carefully regulated programs that extend from five years of preparation to fifteen years of warrior responsibilities throughout Meru culture, male circumcision initiation is the centerpiece of this complicated traditional custom that affects all of initiates' lives. From the actual cutting ritual of circumcision, boys renounce childhood and enter into adult life and responsibilities, severing all close parental links and relating thereafter only as adults.

Circumcision

Meru circumcision is a surgical event that refers to the act of cutting a hole in the top of the foreskin, the loose skin of the penis, through which the penile head is forced, exposing it, allowing the loose folded foreskin to form a collar that lies below the now exposed head, the glans penis. Furthermore, circumcision can be defined as cutting away

the loose skin of the penis, exposing the glans entirely. A specialist performs the surgical operation with the fine art learned from previous surgeons from his lineage. Circumcision for the Meru man is a tribal mark, a covenant, an initiation, the sign of a Meru man's obedience, and provides a sense of Meru identity, fame, and pride. Most of all, the circumcision becomes the community's means of transitioning children into adulthood status, preparing them for personal and communal security provision, marriage, procreation, and admission into the Meru community secrets.

Traditions

The term tradition includes customs, norms, beliefs, or practices that are commonly accepted and performed with the highest degree of respect. These actions consist of handed down customs unique to a particular Meru community and are enforced by use of norms and common language. Traditions form the structural base of a Meru community and are referred to regularly to arbitrate difficult cases or to explain mysteries of nature. Some of the practices are surrounded with a strong fence of taboos and curses that endanger any person who violates them. In summary, traditions are ordinances that define and give Meru community its identity.

Signs and Symbols

Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tienou define sign as “word, object, action, event, pattern, quality, relation, person or concrete particular that serves as a vehicle for a conception of some perceived reality” (232). Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz simply believes it is “something present that stands for something absent” (6) or, according to Hierbert, Shaw, and Tienou, “something that points to something else,” or “a symbol, a subset of a sign” (234). Initiation is a sign and symbol that helps young people to connect

with outside realities to their inner mental worlds (232). To facilitate the understanding and communication of outer and inner realities, objects, words, actions, and songs are used as building blocks.

Evangelism

Evangelism is derived from the New Testament term “evangelist,” evangelist refers to an ambassador representing his sender and acting on the sender’s authority. In this project, “evangelist” refers to someone who is taking the gospel to a new land (*Meru*) as a missionary. The task of delivering the good news can be defined as evangelism. Those who occupy the position of evangelist are set apart to preach the divinely instituted and authorized with the task of presenting the good news to the people. Evangelism refers to an ongoing Christian witness by life and values and intentional leading of people as they are into a saving relation to Jesus. The opportunity, then, is to be Christian and authentically Meru at the same time as culture is transformed by the impact of Christian beliefs and holy living.

Covenant

The word covenant refers to the foundations of Meru social order and social relationships that clarify human relationships and allow Meru individuals to identify their core relationship with their creator, God, *Murungu or Ngai*.¹⁹ In Meru tradition, when any clan, community, or individual enters into a covenant ritual that involves human or animal blood, new friendships bloom. A treaty for peace, coexistence, and collaboration and cooperation is signed in the presence of the ultimate divine power. The concept of covenant, although found in other cultures, is an early biblical concept playing a key role

¹⁹Meru people worship one God with a capital G not a small case g, although He is called many names, such as oldest person or Muntu Umukuru, Kiindaa kinene or one with bigger stomach, kiini kiiru or one who has a black gum, murungu, God, etc. Meru believe in one God; they are monotheistic.

in the Old Testament binding God to fulfill what he purposed to perform for and through his people (Gen. 12:1-3). In Meru culture, covenant, to be legally binding, involves humans to humans and the Divine's presence to consummate and ratify the vows taken by participants (*Mbere ya Murungu na Antu baa bari-aa*).

Muthaka

Muthaka is a term that refers to a Meru male who has been properly initiated into adulthood through traditional education by peers, preparation by warriors, and traditional circumcision performed for a five-year cohort in the open field. The tribal mark of circumcision, *Ndigi*, is proof of Meru identity and confirms the rite of passage to which he submitted as a boy. Initiation allows one to assume the family's and community's responsibility and the status that accompanies it. A Meru man not only has submitted to teaching by peer leaders, then by warriors, during his years of preparation, but he has received the entire traditional teaching about his responsibilities as a Meru man while he was in seclusion. These teachings unlocked him from childhood behavior associated with weakness and inability to make decisions in the face of struggle, responsibilities, and pain. During the moment of suffering, the community believes that a person locked in childhood has no past memory to give him/her strength to endure pain without showing signs of weakness. The traditionally initiated person is endowed with a sense of identity, pride, duty, honor, and courage sufficient for every stage in life.

Kirwoe/Irwoe

Kirwoe is a recent term coined to refer to any boy from a Christian family who is initiated by circumcision performed in a hospital. The traditional Meru people view such a boy as incomplete because he received inadequate preparation before circumcision and

during seclusion, or, if any instruction, it did not follow the traditional format. Such a person is locked in childhood and has no past memory to empower and strengthen decision making during times of struggle. Childhood behavior is associated with weakness and inability to make decisions when one is confronted by any of life's struggles. A wall of silence surrounds church boys' initiation as their parents forbid them to join any of the traditional rites. This taboo results in boys from Christian families being mocked and berated as "half" humans—"Irwoe," meaning people without proper knowledge about life. This humiliation demoralizes Christian children, tempting many of them to sneak away to participate in the traditional "burning ritual," *mpithio*. If they participate in the burning ritual, they are endowed with a sense of pride, duty, honor, and courage at every stage in life. *Irwoe* consist of three categories: those who took the Christian version of counseling only, those who went through informal traditional burning and counseling, and those without either traditional burning or any type of counseling: *Irwoe* have two things in common the hospital circumcision, and lack of *Ndigi*—the tribal mark.

Faith

The term faith refers to unquestionable belief or an individual's decision to affirm and support a certain aspect of truth. In the Bible, theology of faith refers to belief that God exists and Christ is not a mythical person but a real man of flesh and blood who lived among other human beings eating and drinking and pointing sinners to the way of salvation.

Family

In the Meru tradition, family is made up of essentially the father, mother, and children, but it also stretches to include cousins, uncles, and distant relatives. The father or grandparents enforce almost every family decision by use of taboos and social norms, which bind people together.

Methodology

This dissertation is a structured study dedicated to examining a comprehensive history and documentation of the traditional ritual processes of boys' circumcision among the Meru people of the Igembe region. I have collected and analyzed pertinent Meru story material about the male rite of passage and its role in establishing adult identity and cultural authority throughout Meru history. The dissertation research focused on the challenges that face both the traditional Meru boyhood formation and circumcision rituals and the alternative process developed by evangelical Meru Christians. The core challenges were approached in two ways: (1) the project research provided information that may be useful to preserve and perhaps integrate both the rich values of Christian faith and the prehistoric values of cultural formation provided through traditional Meru boyhood rituals and symbols for initiating and launching boys into adulthood and Meru identity; and, (2) the research investigated and recorded perceptions, observations, and judgments of a diverse sample of the Meru people concerning the hospital and field circumcision rites. These Meru "witnesses on the ground" people seemed willing to find a way to rescue their boy circumcision rite and to integrate some of it with Christian teachings. Perhaps Meru people ought to band together to invest common energy in enriching both the traditional rite and the hospital rite with improved mentoring on manhood and fill it with the rich Meru history. I am optimistic that the Meru people will

want to bring together all representatives including traditional Meru leaders, civil administrators, and Meru Christian leaders. Such a group of Meru people could work out ways to develop the universal values respected by traditional Meru culture and by Meru evangelical Christian beliefs, the specific agendas for the dialogue, and an action plan for Meru people. Such an eventuality could hold the promise of establishing a common horizon of Meru identity as well as a foundation for responsible Christian adult faith.

I worked closely with a pilot study group to validate my questionnaire as the core agenda for data collection, as well as my statement of purpose and its research questions. The questionnaire proved solid, but I made important upgrades both in the purpose statement and in the research questions. I then identified a highly diverse and geographically expanded research sample of 130 Meru in the Igembe region from which to collect, organize, and extract the research data. The story lines and the insights of my pilot group and witness on the ground provided the basis for what I refer to as “grounded theory.” The data arose from the people’s memories, understandings, and judgments evoked in responses to the questionnaire. The people’s informal stories, memories, and judgments are the raw material that forms the theory rising from the ground. Those raw materials of the research can be understood as reflecting deeply held values and theological concepts.

The data for this research was collected in Igembe district, one of six Meru region districts. The Igembe region was my choice because I was born and have grown up there and served as a pastor in Igembe. I speak the *Ki-Igembe* (Meru) language and am well grounded and informed in Igembe culture. Furthermore, Igembe people are among the

few Meru regions in which two competing forms of boys' circumcision rite constitute an open rivalry, aiming to win over each other. The Igembe region also has a vast population of what I call inch-deep Christians because their conversion to Christian faith rests on more deeply held reflexive traditional ritual cultural ceremonies.

Although I have grown up in the culture, and know it well, I am consciously able to minimize the potential bias that could interfere with the ability to collect the research data objectively. I followed the purposive sampling method to select the pilot group for my validation study, and again in identifying the diverse 130 witnesses on the ground. I studied grounded theory and adopted that framework because of the sensitivity of the research and the desire to include myself as an active participant and observer to allow my past experience to inform the research. Purposive sampling fit the research purpose and is compatible with the Meru culture which has a long history of decisions by consensus and representative self-governance.

The grounded theory proved an ideal tool to empower the Igembe Meru people to express their deep concerns about their boy circumcision ritual situation and to generate their own ideas about potential local solutions. In preparing to collect data, grounded theory pointed to the need to establish a conversation agenda. Grounded theory guided me as I drafted the open-ended questionnaire to collect the data. Participants completed questionnaires during the field interviews; research assistants also wrote reports of each interview and made audiotape records of the interviews. With these all collected, I applied the observation method with patience. Comparing these data sources, I triangulated them to establish the best and most accurate data and coded it to generate the frequencies that would be tabulated to reveal the findings of the research.

I relied on the SPSS²⁰ instrument to analyze the data, which is reported in Chapter 4. The frequency test yielded the important table distributions that are visible in Chapter 4 and are the source of the interpretation in Chapter 5.

Theological Reflection

This section is a theological reflection on baptism and Meru boys' circumcision rite. I elaborate on baptism's historical and current understanding and draw some inference with the Meru boys' circumcision, which is one of the most challenging issues among Meru churches and theologians today.

Baptism

Like Meru boys' circumcision, baptism continues to divide denominations as it has always done over the centuries. Baptism history, theology, forms, and meaning is a concern for theologians, church leaders, and the people in the church pew. All of these people want to know the most valid form of baptism and whether they were properly baptized. The question of whether one is really baptized stirs something deep inside people who have come to make a personal life decision to be Christians but were baptized at an earlier age. In a similar way some Meru men who were circumcised in the hospital come to disown hospital rites and join the tradition ritual for further counseling, sometimes without the knowledge of their parents or congregations. Such men accuse their parents of initiating them through a non-Meru rite. They often feel that such a rite does not accord them respect in the society and denies them cultural teachings and counseling/mentoring.

²⁰In 1976, Mr. Norman Nie, a Stanford professor, originally designed and wrote the SPSS for social sciences. SPSS is a statistical package that runs on PCs; it is used extensively in research marketing. SPSS software can provide over fifty statistical processes, including regression analysis, correlation, and analysis of variance. Today Norman's SPSS is produced by an international organization based in Chicago. This research used SPSS graduate 14.00 (word) pack.

Today I witness a growing desire across the world to recreate the baptism rite by improving its ritual that might usher in a new way. Some of the young people perhaps are genuinely seeking to understand the mystery of baptism and its practice to better their spirituality. I have also witnessed encouraging openness among denominations to dialogue on the sacrament of baptism. The interest in pulpit sharing and other shared spiritual activities taking place across denominations are good signs of unity that perhaps might close the past existing gaps. Whereas church traditions are questing for dialogue, churches are not anxious to open such dialogue with other non-Christian religions such as Meru culture.

While I reflect on this comparison of baptism to Meru circumcision, I ask myself which is the best way to begin and search the theology of baptism because several approaches exist. We continue to receive an enormous amount of literature that draws a connection of baptism to the origins of the Old Testament covenant, the Jewish washing ritual, the days of the Acts of the Apostles, and the day the Holy Spirit was poured out on new believers (Acts 2). Another sizeable group of believers thinks baptism began with the birth of the New Testament and was promoted by the early Church fathers. Furthermore, other denominations associate baptism with the Great Commission when Jesus commanded the disciples to go and make disciples of all nations by baptizing those who believe the good news in the name of the Trinity (Matt. 28:16-18, paraphrased from (RSV Bible).

I admit every option has been explored. I will tell you a story of Rabbit. A middle-aged red-colored Rabbit went to the dance very late and found the dance going on. It asked the soloist, "Where shall I begin?" The soloist said, "Begin at the beginning."

The answer seems appealing; it is deeply sound but indeed, “Where is the beginning?” this research does not intend to import baptism controversies in its approach. The intention of this research is to establish that Christian baptism can be contextualized following Meru boys’ circumcision ritual. I shall begin with the historical background of the baptism. Later, I compare it with Meru boys’ circumcision rite.

History

The term baptism is neither exhaustively articulated in the Old Testament nor exists clear references, but some passages indirectly assert themselves in baptism.

Theologians connect the following passages with baptism: such as “I will pour my Spirit on your offspring” (Isa. 44:3) is associated with the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2); “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean,” in (Hezekiah 36: 25) and “ritual washings” (Lev.16: 4, 24) is taken to refer to water of ritual baptism that is symbolically associated with cleanliness. Establishing historical background is hardly achievable regarding the Meru boys’ circumcision history, but scattered hints help to patch and bring a coherent story out. In the modern world, baptism is equated to covenant.

Covenant

God graciously made a covenant with Abraham that remained permanently, and all Jewish people who followed the rules entered into the covenant. Abraham did not choose the covenant, but God graciously offered to covenant with Abraham because Abraham was obedient and faithful. All of Abraham’s descendants became included in the covenant. A Jewish covenant was symbolically sealed or closed by shedding of blood through the act of circumcision for every male Jew at the eighth day following birth

(Gen. 17:1-14). Jews circumcised their boys only once and initiated males achieved permanent identity and status provided they remained faithful to the human side of the covenant God gave them. Every Jew within the parameters of God's covenant law became automatic candidates for blessings, but those who did not follow the law disqualified themselves and became alienated. Covenant represents a sign of God with God's people, and God remains their God. To keep law was a matter of strict commitment and faith. Following the theology of early Church fathers, like John Calvin's teachings quoted by Beveridge established a close relationship between covenant and baptism. Calvin would later associate baptism with circumcision:

We have, therefore, a spiritual promise given to the fathers in circumcision, similar to that which is given to us in baptism, since it figured to them both the forgiveness of sins and the mortification of the flesh... the only difference which remains is in the external ceremony, which is the least part of it, the chief part consisting in the promise and the thing signified. Hence we may conclude that everything applicable to circumcision applies also to baptism, except always the difference in the visible ceremony... Hence it is incontrovertible, that baptism has substituted for circumcision, and performs the same office. (Beveridge, 1473).

The circumcision and baptism connection was earlier expressed by Roman Catholic positions, and Calvin later picked it up, expanded it, and permanently entrenched it in Christian practice. Some Protestants practice circumcision as an expression of their faith. Others replace it with baptism. Baptism, therefore, has come to act as a rite of initiation celebrated at confirmation for sacrament when children reach later teenage or early adolescence. Therefore, today baptism makes children part of the new covenant, thereby including them among God's people.

Baptism in the New Testament

Baptism in the New Testament takes a new meaning according to the teachings of the John Baptist, Jesus Christ, Paul and the other disciples. Baptism indeed continued to acquire other definitions as the church entered into a new era.

John the Baptist. In the New Testament John the Baptist introduced another new concept into baptism: “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1: 4; Luke 1:8). Jesus, even though he had no sins, joined John in the river Jordan to be baptized in the same way sinners were doing (Matt. 3:5-6). Perhaps Jesus wanted to promote John’s repentance and forgiveness concepts and point the oncoming generations to that necessity. The repentance and forgiveness concepts in baptism continue to influence Christianity even today. Several verses form the basis for teaching new converts. Luke 3:1-18 insists on true signs of repentance that John taught with authority: the Pharisees asked John, “[I]f you are [not the prophet], what right do you have to baptize?” (John 1:24-26). John said, “I baptize with water but among you stands one whom you do not know” (John 1:26), in apparent reference to Christ. John’s teachings influenced the Jewish masses; they abandoned the old understanding of baptism. Baptism had been stipulated to be done annually as washing or cleansing of sins (Luke 7:29-30).

Jesus. Jesus’ ministry of baptism builds on John’s baptism. John was, therefore, “the forerunner” of Jesus. Jesus also introduced new dimensions into the rite of baptism. John had already announced Jesus’ new concepts before Jesus began his ministry: “[H]e will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with the fire” (Matt. 3:11-17). Perhaps John had not heard this statement from Jesus although I cannot rule out a possibility; they may have talked earlier because they were close maternal relatives (Luke 1:36). Although

John does not explain the source of this statement, he may have received a prophetic insight from God. Jesus preached about attributes of fire on many occasions. According to Jesus, fire tests and purifies; therefore, believers' faith must pass through fire to be tested and purified or they are not fit to be disciples. Jesus also talked about the Holy Spirit saying, "before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). (Acts 2:1-41) records that the Holy Spirit came and filled all the disciples.

Paul. Paul quotes John and Jesus and insists baptism is an outward and inward sign that makes one a member of the church. Although Paul is aware of the physical circumcision, he insists on circumcision of the heart rather than that of the flesh. He asks that Jews not force Christian believers from other cultures into flesh circumcision. Physical circumcision is a Jewish sign and seal of their participation in the old covenant as explained in Genesis 17.

Paul understands baptism as the second covenant that fulfills the old covenant. Jews understood the old covenant to be complete only through physical circumcision. Before Paul's call to be an evangelist to the Gentiles, physical circumcision was a condition for church membership. Jews would not allow uncircumcised people to be Christians. Nevertheless, Paul does not condemn the Jews' understanding of physical circumcision; he affirms that circumcision is an old covenant that can only be complete in Christ (Col. 2:10), the bearer of the second covenant and not by a mere circumcision rite that cannot reform nor regenerate life (Tit. 3:5).

Physical circumcision was the seal of the old covenant, which Jesus went through to fulfill the Jews' custom (Rom. 6:6). Arguably, Christian believers' relationship with Christ can make them inheritors of God's grace. Christians hence can receive Christ's

grace if they sincerely die to the old-self of sin and maintain a continuing good relationship with God. Living in Christ means putting away all types of sins by crucifying and destroying them (I Pet. 3:21). The Christian believers who crucify (repent of) their sins receive baptism to signify their death, burial, and rising with Christ. Baptism that is an outward and inward sign becomes the seal of the second covenant as Jews' circumcision was the seal of the first covenant.

Christians enter into the second (new) covenant by having faith in Christ. Christ is above all powers in heaven and earth, and he can do whatever believers ask him in faith (1 Pet. 3:22). Christ bore humanity's sins on the cross; the cross thus signifies his suffering for humanity. Humans, who accept Christ's teachings and have faith in him, are circumcised in the heart (Col. 2:11; Rom. 2:29). This implies that those who fall outside Christ's grace are uncircumcised both in the heart and the flesh (Col. 13). Some theologians understand Paul to mean flesh circumcision is not complete without spiritual circumcision. Perhaps Paul's teachings have created two opposing poles. Some Christians believe baptism alone is enough; it replaces physical circumcision. Others maintain that both physical and spiritual circumcision do not contradict each other. Furthermore, people with both rites are not better off than those with one.

Paul's teaching is contested by scholars. Some doubt whether the covenant of baptism can replace the circumcision covenant. J. W. Shepherd argues that baptism cannot replace physical circumcision because the baptism rite is available to both genders and the old circumcision covenant was only for males. Shepherd further states, "If the one came in the place of the other, the two could not exist at the same time in the same

person. But all the Jews that had been circumcised on believing in Christ were baptized” (17).

Nevertheless, Jews who believed in Jesus’, John the Baptist’s, and the other disciples’ teachings, agreed to both circumcision and baptism (Luke 7:30; John 3:22-24; 4:1-2). T. W. Brents supports Shepherd, believing that baptism and circumcision cannot produce the same effects on the same person being under the same covenant (345-47).

Whether scholar’s arguments are valid or not, Paul’s teachings border on equality of the two. Paul perhaps intends to bring Christians and Jews into equality in covenant, and elsewhere Paul exhaustively explains such a belief (Rom. 10:12; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28-29). The circumcision of the heart, therefore, describes a new sign of regeneration, a spiritual reality both witnessed in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New Testament. In the New Testament, however, Paul equates baptism, “circumcision of Christ,” with physical circumcision. Paul calls all people despite their culture, race, and color to participate in the new covenant as a community of believers. In God all people are equal, no Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, fat or thin, slave or free, short or tall, but all are united as one community with a common destiny. These people have a common purpose and must unit (Eph. 4:1-6) to fight one common enemy.

In the Western world, physical circumcision perhaps is slowly being replaced by baptism as a sacrament of unity, but people who wish to promote physical circumcision are not barred from spiritual participation; they are also considered as children of the new covenant. The beauty of the second covenant though (baptism) is the inclusion of women into the fullness of God’s calling (Gal. 3:28).

In Jewish culture, physical circumcision was the seal of a covenant; therefore, Paul's argument quickly finds support because the Old Testament covenant is fulfilled in the New Testament covenant signified by baptism in Christ through his suffering, death, and resurrection. In Meru culture, circumcision is not only understood as a covenant; it is also a sign of entrance into adulthood. Circumcision plays a great role in the entire life of Meru people. Without circumcision, Meru children cannot mature into adults; thus, Paul's teaching can only be acceptable by Meru who have received circumcision. Because Paul preaches Christ as "God with us," thus having faith in Christ, full Meru humanity can be realized if the old self, childhood, can die and resurrect as the new self—adulthood—and they then can receive baptism in the godhead—Emmanuel or God with us. Because Paul knew Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day like any other Jew, he did not make any claim that circumcision is a condition for church membership nor did he teach that those who circumcise should stop it for the sake of the gospel. The offer of baptism to replace circumcision is perhaps a new theology that may find supporters as well as opponents. African communities that practice prehistoric circumcision are probably not ready to accept the idea that baptism could replace ritual circumcision.

Church Tradition

The church continues to insist baptism should follow the model of John the Baptist; thus, one should be baptized after repentance. Forgiveness is affirmed after repentance and the candidate is announced to be a new creature. Baptism is permanently entrenched into church canons as a condition for membership. Origen and St. Augustine argues that baptism was a tradition received from the apostles (Robinson 269; Kastens 1997). Very few denominations argue against the baptism rite. The contention is mostly

on the form and not the ritual or institutionalized words. Many denominations accept child baptism and a few insist exclusively on believers' baptism. Several teaching materials were formulated starting with the second century *didache* and later liturgies for catechumens.

Meaning of Baptism

Baptism is commonly regarded as a condition for salvation. It starts with the sinner being immersed in water, thus dying then being lifted from the water, denoting resurrection to new life. During the second century, baptism was taught as a death and resurrection experience: “[B]efore a man bears the name in the son of God he is dead; but when he receives the seal he lays aside his deadness, and obtains life. The seal then, is the water; they descend into the water dead, and they arise alive” (Van De Weyer 23).²¹

Baptism in the early days was done by bishops or presbyters using water, oil, and ointment. Water represents death, oil represents the Holy Spirit, and ointment represents covenant (Donaldson). Even today most orthodox denominations believe that baptism should be done by the ordained priests. That restriction is being abandoned by mushrooming sects. Where non clergy or laypeople happen to baptize other converts, traditions that restrict baptism to clergy only appear to stifle evangelism.

Naming. The day of baptism is celebrated by the candidate, family, friends, and relatives, including the congregation. The candidate for baptism is named by the parents if the candidate is too young or the candidate can announce his or her own name. Most denominations would provide candidates with godfathers and mothers to walk with the

²¹The book titled Shepherd of Hermas was very popular in the second and third centuries; it is used today by several orthodox denominations. The book is about miracles, revelations, and visions revealed to Hermas.

candidate throughout his or her life. After baptism the initiated member is welcomed with love by the leaders who promise to assist in matters of faith. Sometimes the sacrament of Holy Communion is celebrated as means of formalizing the initiation, as much as saying, “you are one of us—welcome to the fellowship and to the means of grace.” I will not attempt to comment on what baptism mode is best or acceptable. The Bible does not specify the best baptism method. I simply list the three most common modes in passing: immersion, sprinkling, and pouring. Perhaps where any of the three modes is excluded, the choice might have been made by a specific community or denomination. All the three modes rest on Bible text descriptions. Donald Macleod holds the same position: “I respect immersion, but I am asking that there should be a place for our mode too. [Perhaps there no specific method of baptism is stressed in the Old or] New Testament on the mode of baptism” (214).²²

Confirmation. Denominations that baptize infants and children have structured rituals for those baptized to affirm baptismal vows following the age of accountability, or confirms into adult status church membership. Confirmation is done after a period of preparation at which initiates are taught denomination doctrines, dogmas, church tradition and liturgy rubrics that include believer’s creed, prayers, commandments, and Bible study as part of denomination’s identity as a means of nurturing their growth in discipleship. The delaying of children from partaking holy communion until confirmation rite has been performed to bring several meanings to the participants; that they have grown ready to

²²I found this information from theology of Revival and Reformation, delivered to the Presbyterian Church in America Convocation on Revival and Reformation useful.

become adult through confirmation—an initiation into adulthood. The participant begins to invest much energy in the church as proof of having grown beyond childhood. I observe a very close relationship between the Meru boys' circumcision rite and church baptism/confirmation.

Basement Theology

Because baptism has come to be associated with the covenant, baptism should be done publicly and done once without possibility of repeating it. Those who have received baptism should enter into the company of the faithful with commitment to safeguarding baptismal vows. Baptism includes water, words of institution, and the seal of the Spirit, therefore, all the baptized are equal and the same (Acts 11:17).

Baptism is similar to Meru boys' circumcision, which is entered at early adolescence or late teens. The prospective candidates should begin education from very early age and reach climax at circumcision and thereafter continue to receive training after circumcision until they graduate with new names and new status after seclusion. The initiates then become official members of the community and join the ranks of the warriorhood. In their new status, they should continue to receive further counsel on moral issues and general life issues from their mentors, age mates, the community elders, and grandparents. Because teaching resembles training before confirmation and baptism, which climax at first reception of the Holy Communion, and because this training is likely to be lost, I am offering this research as one means of rescuing boy circumcision and its ritual before it becomes restricted to the underground I refer here as "basement" of Meru theology. If traditional circumcision counsel slips out of sight, then it is likely only to surface at times of personal human inner crisis. The underground practice and

teachings are referred as basement theology. These teachings include authentic or basic Meru traditions, which Meru people cannot afford to part with.

If Meru boys' circumcision is overtaken by hospital circumcision without proper renegotiation, most of the Meru people will never let field boys' circumcision rest in peace; they will practice it in the underground. The practice here referred to as basement theology would be disturbing because not only would it be extremely hard to retrieve or to follow, but also it would lack community accountability because it would operate in the darkness of the basement out of view even of adults who supported the traditional ritual. Basement theology and its teachers (leaders) all remain in the background where it is difficult to know or understand them. This research is an attempt to rescue some of the most precious Meru teachings by drawing attention to their existing values through the process of contextualization and internalization as further elaborated in the next chapters.

In summary, baptism and confirmation rites are replacing circumcision in modern societies; however, baptism and confirmation church rituals frequently lack depth of significance because they lack visible symbols and the years of preparation that traditional cultures provide when male circumcision is the centerpiece of the transition to adulthood. Perhaps integration of traditional symbols and rituals into Christian rites in Meru culture may provide the foundation for launching fully initiated and maturing adult Christians.

Baptism is an act performed as a "covenant" for those offering infant baptism, while those who baptize after repentance tend to postpone baptism to an age near pubescence. If baptism and confirmation therefore are celebrated at or near pubescence among the Meru, appropriately, it should be celebrated along with the rite of

circumcision, which should culminate after years of preparation. Whereas Meru prepare their boy child for circumcision, Meru Christians should include rite of baptism to unbaptized and confirmation for those baptized as infants to coincide with the circumcision ceremony. Those Christian rituals could be merged with other Meru Christian traditions denoting an act of young adult repentance and entrance into the Meru community and Christian confessional life. If these rituals are merged, they would stand not so much as a condition for salvation but as an evidence of salvation. John Wesley, however, says, “I hold nothing to be (strictly speaking) necessary to salvation, but having this mind, which was in Christ” (Baker 425).

Conclusion

I have established that circumcision of boys is a long-standing biblical practice stretching over centuries, with its medical and cultural implications. Physical cutting of a foreskin is not a condition for acceptance into the family of faith but denotes an act of separation and covenant. It is a rite that includes even young boys from the time of Abraham throughout the generations (Gen. 17:1-13). Children are, therefore, part of God’s covenantal plan. Circumcision is a religious act that impresses on the initiate the spirit of self-sacrifice for the sake of others, even to death. It is also a social function that provides intense, memorable moments, the reality of life, and its requirements for living as a team bound by mingling of blood and the seal of social identity.

Overview of the Dissertation Project

Chapter 2 presents my findings as I searched for foundational historical, biblical, theological concepts and examined other related research and anthropological literature that have a bearing on various aspects of important human ritual processes. These literary

citations provide a means of seeing Meru boyhood rites within the wider perspective of biblical, historical, anthropological, and theological foundations. The findings here form a background for the theological framework for the rite's reintegration, which appears in Chapter 3, and the research completed on the ground by listening to the Meru, reported in Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 3 deals with the theoretical foundation and methodology of the study. That methodological foundation offers detailed definitions of research steps. It elaborates on the purpose and questions that shaped and drove the research for finding the best ways for Meru people to collaborate and to enhance the boyhood rituals for the common good of all Meru. Universally applicable principles and values growing out of Meru culture and evident in biblical, historical, and anthropological structures converge to support the design. A section of Chapter 3 reports on how the study was conceived, researched, and written. My participants and witnesses on the ground within Meru culture today provided grounded theory to enrich the research and provided authoritative documentation of the state of boy circumcision among the Meru of Igembe today.

Chapter 4 presents the analysis of the data. The witnesses provided a summary of findings driven by the research questions including major new findings. This working document for dialogue and design strategies presents concept statements on values, goals, and methods, which can serve both the Christian and the traditional cultural leaders in their deliberations and search for ways of enhancing their boy teaching and rituals.

Chapter 5 interprets the data presented in Chapter 4 and offers the research project findings for the potential use of Meru leaders as supporting documentation for their collaboration in Kenya. I also include reflections on the developmental journey of this

project. I also offer additional agendas and research challenges that remain for future servants of God who may join me in enriching the Christian faith and life of the Meru people and the lives of the people in other traditional cultures.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

Introduction

Chapter 2 consists of a summary of available research on rites of passage and

circumcision of boys in various parts of the world. The second major part of the chapter deals with biblical historical references to the rite of circumcision. Nearly all humans possess kinds of ritual ceremonies performed to mark human developmental stages in life. The main categories of human stages marked are birth, onset of puberty, and transition to adulthood, marriage, and death. In more recent times, school graduation, driver's license, voting in national election, divorce, life-threatening illness, and retirement have taken on ritual significance in modern society. These transitional life-changing experiences are accompanied by stressful moments of heightened social and physiologically charged crises. Humans undergoing physical, social, emotional, and psychological crises need support from parents, friends, relatives, and the community. Over time, these marker events are ritualized and ceremonies emerge, often referred to as rites of passage.

Rites of Passage

Arnold Van Gennep, born in Belgium, is credited with being the first anthropologist to name the emotionally charged ceremonies during life transitions as "rites of passage." According to Van Gennep, a life crisis occurs in three levels, the separation stage, the liminality stage, and the reintegration stage (41-74). During the first stage, several symbolic activities take place, separating the child from the "old self" or from childhood. For the Meru, the separation stage begins when the boy stops sleeping with his parents and turns to his grandparents, the boyhood group, and finally the warrior cohort. Every activity is geared toward separating the boy from his parents' support to becoming self-supporting in life.

Philip Culbertson is aware that the term liminality comes from the Greek root word *Limen*, which means “a seaport or threshold, that which [sic] stands at the boundary between the known and the unknown, the familiar and the unfamiliar” (4), and Edward Wimberly adds that “the term liminality suggests a threshold of perception” (13) that provokes physiological and psychological responses. At this stage, peer teaching in Meru takes the form of beatings or threats accompanied by rigorous training to help the initiate to break with the past activities of childhood and to embrace the newly found knowledge of adult life. For example, those who adopt the ascetic life observe disciplines such as fasting, silence, and subjection to darkness. Novices are introduced to spiritual practice and prepared for instructions in spiritual meaning (Van Gennep 74-75).

Australian Aborigine boys beat their penises with rocks until bruised and bloody. The Aborigine adults, meanwhile, use sharp rocks to knock out one or both of the boys' upper incisor teeth to inflict pain in preparation for education into adulthood, including learning about general duties, adult obligations, and community religious secrets (Elvery, Savage, and Wood 211-19). The final stage of reintegration occurs when the Aboriginal initiate is assumed to have acquired wide knowledge about adult life and tribal secrets that include social, political, and economic involvement. The boy is now accepted as an adult and is brought back to the home/the society. The Aborigines of Australia mark this stage with a ceremony to honor the deity, and the initiate boy's missing tooth is recognized as a mark of the young man's permanent identity as transitioned into adulthood (Van Gennep 74-75).

The Lardil, an Aboriginal subgroup of Queensland, Australia, reintegrated only

boys who endured sub-incision after circumcision (Derrick 227-29).²³ Sub-incised young men were allowed to learn the complex ceremonial language, *Damin*. *Damin* is the secret jargon of the Lardil language taught as part of the male initiation rite after a year of sign language and is spoken along with everyday Lardic (Dixon 34; Hale 159-60).

Meru people mark this integration stage with a ceremony, *mpithio/mbenjo*, which includes symbolic hair cutting, a new name, and a new exclusively male language for the initiate, *Ntane*. Almost every step in Meru rites of passage, also called “life crisis stages,” has some painful ordeal intended to mark a vital stage toward adulthood.

North American Rites of Passage

North America has been described as “new lands” compared to other continents because foreigners discovered and inhabited it beginning in the 1600s. The American “new lands” have 99 percent of their occupants from many parts of the world. The presence of many people groups who immigrated fails to explain the absence of longstanding rites of passage in North America, furthermore, any reason suggested is insufficient to explain why the various ethnic groups in North America have no rites of passage. Each group should have continued with its life-transition ceremonies as every society in the world has its own defined system of welcoming children into adulthood.

Native Americans

²³Mark Abley has good definitions of sub-incision the “cutting of underside of the penis and the urethra slit open lengthwise from the *meatus* to the base exposing the previously nerve-dense urinary tract tissues” (9). Proponents of this beastly men’s body beauty suggests that it enhances sexual pleasure.

Among the tribes of North America, the Native Americans have maintained some traditional rites that transition children into adults as illustrated by a few examples from the Luiseno Indians of southern California:

Ceremonies initiating Luiseno girls into adult life included symbolic ground drawings. Each of the drawings' three concentric rings is broken on the north. The red ring stands for the "*root of existence*" [original emphasis], or spirit. The black ring symbolizes the night sky. The white ring is the Milky Way. (Krupp 2000)

Luiseno Indians partly bury girls in the heated sand at the first menstruation to announce the daughters becoming women. Girls are restricted from eating, licking the sand, or scratching while they receive instructions from older women about women's roles (Margolin 75; Wright 1-18). When Luiseno boys reach puberty, they go through several ordeals that include lying on red ant mounds, receiving long beatings, and doing ceremonial dances involving the drinking of a *toloache* made from thorn apple/*datura* as they prepare to enter manhood. The ceremonies generally involve wild erratic dancing, varied hallucinations, and finally unconsciousness (Armstrong 8). This powerful hallucinogenic, *datura*, makes boys ill, and some die (Hedges, Santa Ysabel Ethnobotany 17). *Datura* ingestion and the resulting deep trance and accompanying hallucinations play an important role in boys' transition to adulthood and in Native American religious practices (17-18). Initiates were prepared for their hallucinatory experience by *shamans*/elders who also interpret the initiates' visions as they recover from the *datura*-induced coma. The *shamans*/elders received the *datura* drug when they were initiated and tutored by the senior elders when they were young (Hedges, "Rock Art Papers" 16).

In all of these ordeals, boys were warned against crying because if they do, they are not ready to become men. While Native Americans celebrate initiations for both boys

and girls, a lot of Indian primal rites that could reinforce cultural values and their worldview is lost or in great need of repair.

Most of the North American ethnic communities, such as blacks, Caucasians, Asians, and Hispanics, have entirely lost or retain only scanty and partial initiations rites. because children must be initiated, new rites have evolved, such as birthdays, driver's license requirement at age sixteen, suffrage at age eighteen, weddings, menopause, retirement, and death (Papachristos 35-44). Perhaps other types of ritual celebrations include festivals, pilgrimages, retreats, worship services, high school graduations, funerals, and retirement parties. In recent past, some religious rites such as baptisms, bar mitzvahs, confirmations, weddings, and funerals have been regarded as rites of passage (Brotsky 51). A. H. Mathias Zahniser observes that "celebrations of every variety almost always display a rite-of-passage structure" to help friends and relatives to make transitions in life (92).

Despite having most of these powerful and plausible Christian adopted rituals, Americans are still borrowing, inventing, or reinventing other rituals. Ronald L. Grimes observes that if people lack inherent traditional rituals, they will almost always continue to adopt or invent new rituals. Grimes cautions that adopted rituals are "new, contrived, self-conscious, and in certain respects plagiarized... comical by virtue of their seriousness, situated differently in its culture, ... [because] they come from different history" (141). Alfonso Ortiz cautions that adopted rituals breed aggressive and competitive initiates instead of "gentle, yielding, without hard-and-fast male egos, people ready to work at tasks usually performed by girls" (9). Zahniser explains how in American culture, baptism and confirmation rituals fail to serve well as rites of passage.

In many traditions those rituals fail because they are administered to prepubescent initiates without enough time for preparation and instruction and without sufficient symbols to initiate candidates genuinely into the Christian community as adults. He proposes suspension of ceremonies that prematurely bring children to adulthood, allowing time for mentors to prepare children for adulthood. Zahniser favors adopting a confirmation program tailored for twelve and thirteen year old children instead of the current “process of head knowledge followed by a thirty-second induction on Sunday morning [that] lack[s] sufficient symbolic and ceremonial depth to do the work.” (101). Perhaps the arguments of William E. Hordern on the relationship between church rituals and the present society is pointing into the real problem of ritual failure:

Christendom is past. That is we no longer live in a culture in which a majority of people accept Christian values.... Christians become a shrinking minority.... [S]ociety has become secular in the sense that it is no longer controlled by the ecclesiastical groups. (233)

The church in America today tends to be unwilling to take the necessary risks of confronting cultural evils and, as a result, is satisfied to maintain its rituals that are made ineffective by its mere preservation of its own “self-welfare.” The consequences of self-protection are hurried rites of baptisms, confirmations, marriages, and funerals that fail “miserably” (Zahniser 101).

Christopher B. Swanson argues that high school graduation has evolved as a ritual to transition young people to adulthood, in the sense that it will provide social and economic advancement. Nevertheless, graduation also fails because not all young people graduate. In 2001, only 68 percent of high school senior students graduated with one-third from public schools failing especially from the minority groups such as Asians, African-Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanic. When three-quarters graduate and

one-quarter fail to graduate, perhaps one wonders how and where they will be transitioned into adulthood if graduation is the main initiation ritual into adulthood for the modern society. Perhaps they may join a gang or remain uninitiated for the rest of their lives. Because graduation from high school is a necessary prerequisite to further education and the securing of a well-paying job, failure to attain graduation reduces likely economic gains, and chances of higher education are grim. School dropouts tend to earn only the minimum wage, yet they want to marry. Under this stressful economic condition, they will likely have children yet be unprepared for parenthood. Should they marry, they tend to have only a thirty-minute ritual. Their marriage and their children will be at risk for lack of proper initiation. Lewis Yablonsky asserts that “[w]hen society does not make adequate preparation, formal or otherwise, for the induction of its adolescents into adult status, the youth will make their own culture for this transition and the gang is the social culture form” (117). When Meru circumcision initiation rite that transition children into adulthood cease to be, children might join gangs in attempt to initiate themselves into adulthood.

Gangs in American Streets

Gang groups exist in every culture. Almost always gangs tend to develop at the time of rapid social change and at a time of economic and political instability when institutions no longer provide needed degrees of social, political, and economic order. In 1600, gangs terrorized London residents with huge damage to property (Pearson 188). “Gang” is defined as a group of persons working toward unlawful or antisocial ends, especially a band of antisocial adolescents or a group of persons having informal and usually close social relations (479).

Gangs form in response to a lack of acceptable rites of passage from childhood to adulthood and amount to attempts to offer alternative rites of passage to adulthood in order to fulfill key elements of rites of passage for their members (Papachristos 35-44).

Liminality and reintegration. Gangs, like any ritual movement, initiate their members in several ways, including confronting an area supposedly “haunted by ghosts,” or “critter wrestling,” and the initiate finally graduates to a full-fledged adult (Nevada Minutes 24). Papachristos observes that gangs provide groups of elders from those who “moved up” earlier. The elders systematically initiate newcomers by beating them, denying them food, by forcing initiates to remain naked during initiation, or by forcing them to steal or stay on a dirty mess. Rituals are performed at a sacred place such as an open field, a community park, or deserted house, under a bridge, or in dark corners (35-44).

Gang initiation requires candidates to die to the old self and resurrect to new status. This new status has a new dress code, a new name, and a team of associates to train them. Their new status has its own tribulations and trials, but members must prove worthy by going through cold or heat into gang hood. Papachristos observes that new initiates are reincorporated into the gang community at the end of initiation and adopt a new way of life, a new community, and a new family (44). Gangs confer powers to new members to exercise over others. The conferred power makes new initiates perceive themselves as grown-ups within their new status (Bloch and Niederhoffer 23).

Gang membership status behaviors include smoking, skipping school, participating in sexual intercourse, taking alcohol, defending young gang members, and making females pregnant in order to move from lower to higher status and ranks. Michael

Carlie concludes, “The lack of availability of socially acceptable rites of passage from childhood to adulthood alone is insufficient as an explanation for the formation of gangs. A lack of legitimate alternative activities may also result in their formation.” Comparing youth crimes in general, Herbert Bloch and Arthur Niederhoffer and Irving Spergel et al. find that “delinquency rates were lower in societies with clearly identifiable and culturally legitimized rites of passage from adolescence to adulthood than in societies without such rites” (Spergel et al. 243). Alternative activities, therefore, are bound to influence youth in their search for a path from childhood into adulthood. American culture offers highly visible athletic rituals every season of the year, especially in athletic games such as football, basketball, soccer, baseball, track, and cross-country races. Research has yet to verify whether young people active in athletic contests are less vulnerable to gang life, but athletic success does not in itself provide young people with meaningful rituals for transitioning into adulthood. Spergel et al’s findings are saddening and seem to indicate that the gang movement is on the rise in America:

No part of the United States of America is without youth gangs. Gangs exist in many large and middle-size cities and are spreading to suburban and smaller communities.... [They] create problems in correctional and school settings [and] are responsible for a disproportionate percentage of serious and violent offenses and are more likely to engage in the sale and distribution of drugs. (243)

Although America is politically stable with strong economic gains compared to most countries of the world, one doubts, however, whether political and economic stability will continue to sustain a nation whose cultural rituals and Christian spirituality is on the decline. Spirituality is in decline in spite of being at the center of many people’s lives, providing peace and tranquility in the past. Lack of inherent cultural rituals and failure of

Christian spirituality perhaps contribute to the rising rate of gang formation experienced in the United States today.

Islamic Rites of Initiation

Muslim boys and girls are mandated to undergo circumcision. They have no choice. For Muslims, initiation is not a covenant or transition to adulthood but a test of courage, obedience, and faith as exemplified in the test of Abraham's faith (Koran 2: 124). Abraham's obedience inspired Mohammed and continues to focus Muslim faith. Although Islam forces boys and girls into circumcision, the Koran—the Islamic Holy Scripture—explicitly mentions only boys' circumcision. The missing mandate for circumcision is surprising because Muslims regard circumcision as a sign to differentiate the believer and unbeliever and as act of alliance (Exod. 12:44)²⁴ and a test of courage (Sukkari 13-17, 21-22):

All your males must be circumcised. You shall have the flesh of your foreskin cut off and it shall be a sign of alliance between me and you, [w]hen they reach their 8th day all your males shall be circumcised from generation to generation. My alliance shall be branded in your flesh as a perpetual alliance. The uncircumcised, the male whose foreskin has not been cut off, this very life shall be cut off. He violated my alliance. (Zwang, La Fonction Erotique 271)²⁵

²⁴Leviticus 12:3 seems to describe the ritual circumcision of males, and the Leviticus verse also speaks of the mother's ritual of purification, but in no case are female infants to be circumcised. Generic references to circumcision would suggest that the cultural focus is on the need for male circumcision. Circumcision for Jewish males is mandatory and should be done on the eighth day after birth. In other passages, circumcision is a prerequisite rite for marrying a Jewish woman and of initiation into life in a Jewish group (Gen. 34:14; Exod. 4:24-26). In all cases the circumcision is explicitly for males. Though never made explicit in Jewish Scriptures, the blood ritual for males has health benefits, especially for the women they will marry, in terms of preventing cervical cancer. On the other hand, because menstruation triggers the long-term "purification" rituals for mature and ovulating women, the male initiation with blood ritual balances out the beginning of male fertility with a painful bloody event.

²⁵Talking of alliance, Doctor Gérard Zwang writes, "After their circumcision, some Africans wear their foreskin around a finger, it is a ring symbolically vulvar, worn on the ring fingers of married civilized persons. It is an alliance that Jehovah has established with the circumcised" (La Fonction Erotique, 271). This quotation relates colorfully how an alliance is formed, but I know of no African community that wears foreskins on their fingers. Circumcision for Africans is mainly a transition to adulthood not a sacrifice or

Khitan Sukkari (40, 97), a Muslim scholar, cites Ibn Hagar, a Koran exegete legendary from the ninth to eleventh centuries documenting that the Jews practiced both boys' and girls' circumcision. Therefore, Sukkari concludes, circumcision is a gracious obligation to every Muslim as provided by Islamic law (40, 97).

Mandatory circumcision. Islamic scholars hold sharply divided positions concerning circumcision today. Conservative scholars strongly argue that Allah hears “only the prayer and pilgrimage of the circumcised” (Sukkari 45). Circumcision brings with it a sense of worthiness, acceptance, and recognition. Uncircumcised people should not offer any testimony, hold public office, or be allowed to kill animals whose meat is eaten by Muslim people (45). Conservative Muslims base their arguments on the Koran 16:120 and *sunnah*—the tradition of Mohammed who is regarded to have been a faithful follower of Abraham’s path. Sukkari argues that if circumcision has no significance, Abraham should not have accepted circumcision at old age. Circumcision is branding of the flesh as a perpetual alliance; Mohammed was circumcised. Furthermore, Mohammed taught that uncircumcised people are impure (Sukkari 47-54; Gaza'iri 28).

Sunnah tradition. The second school of thought held by liberal Muslim scholars is that the Koran is not explicit on circumcision. Circumcision rests more on *sunnah* than on the Koran itself. This school of thought does not believe *sunnah* or simply that a custom practiced at Mohammed’s time should be required of people today because Mohammed did not intend to make the practice mandatory (Senegal 247-50). *Sunnah*, therefore, is a voluntary norm—a “man’s perfection as a purpose,” and believers can be advised to practice it if they wish (Sukkari 46). Although it is desired, it is not a

reverence of God. Perhaps Gerard Zwang misunderstood African rites of circumcision such as saying Genesis 17:9-14 is an alliance instead of a covenant between God and Abraham.

mandatory qualification for being a Muslim. Liberal Muslim scholars argue that every case must be judged on its merits and demerits. They insist Mohammed's ultimate intention was not to search under people's clothes to check whether believers were circumcised or not (55-61).

Circumcision age. Islamic scholars have no unanimous agreement regarding the age at which Muslim believers should be circumcised, nothing comparing to the strict eighth day, considered an essential in Jewish tradition. Different opinions as to the appropriate age for circumcision vary from any time before age ten to puberty. Sukkari supports male circumcision from seven days, forty days, or seven years except in case of inconvenience, but for the girls, he suggests seven years to ten years to help them cope with the procedure (90-95).

Zenie-Ziegler Wedad holds a different opinion. According to her research on female circumcision done in Egypt, she discovered that Egyptian Muslim girls have no definite age of circumcision. The girls' surgery may be done one week after birth, or it can be done at two months, sometimes at seven months, or even at age seven years (33-34). Furthermore, Nawal El-Saadawi found that Egyptian Muslim girls undergo circumcision before the first menstruation or, generally, around seven or eight years (33-34). Sami A. Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh presents a more recent summary on the disagreements within Islam about boys' and girls' circumcision ritual:

As for Muslim, Muslim jurists are not unanimous with respect to the age at which male and female circumcision should be performed. Some say it can be performed at any time, while others say at puberty, [around seven and ten] years of age. Some distinguish between the preferable time and an obligatory time. For some jurists, the preferable time is to circumcise boys at seven days old, inclusive or exclusive of the birth day. Others, however, prefer to avoid this date because it correlates with the Jewish custom. If a Muslim remains uncircumcised until adulthood, circumcision

becomes obligatory at that point, except for those who are foolish or cannot undergo the procedure for health reasons. However, some jurists impose circumcision even if there is a danger of death. Al-Nazawi says that if it is known that circumcision can provoke death in a group, this group [should] be [exempted] from circumcision.²⁶

I see in almost all cultures and religions that promote circumcision initiation, a discussion taking shape on either to improve or discarding some of the ritual practices that seem incompatible with the current life style. Thus Muslim jurists also continue to disagree on circumcision of dead people. Liberals maintain that circumcision can affect the dead person's physical integrity (*hurmah*) and expose the deceased person's private part (*awrah*). On the other hand, other jurists argue circumcision of the dead is useless because the goal of circumcision is to fulfill an act of worship and to be clean for prayers. Therefore, circumcising the dead has neither meaning nor value (Sukkari 78-81). Conservative scholars maintain circumcision of the deceased is necessary and the removed skin should be placed in the shroud. They associate circumcision of the dead with Mohammed's tradition. According to Mohammed, one must do to the dead what is done to those preparing for marriage (78-90).

In the postmodern paradigm, divisions on circumcision seem to invade every culture, including Christian faith-based communities, traditional religions, and Islam. Understandably, what was once to be revered and held in high regard in Islam is seen as unnecessary by modern Islamic scholars. Neither the Koran teaching nor the *sunnah* tradition of Mohammed's teaching on circumcision is any longer held as canonical. Some

²⁶Abu-Sahlieh's recent book Male and Female Circumcision Among Jews, Christians, Muslims is the best world resource on circumcision, at present heavily sought after as a statement of human rights. The book also explores Christian, Muslim, and Jewish, legal, medical, and social views on circumcision. Abu-Sahlieh is a staff legal adviser in charge of Arab Islamic Law at the Swiss Institute of Comparative Law, Lausanne.

scholars, especially doctors and liberal theologians, favor abolishing girls' circumcision as they argue their cases from the same Koran. Perhaps reinventing Islamic practices that are in tune with postmodern culture would curb the uprisings and give people freedom to practice what fits them best.

Circumcision in most societies of the world takes different forms and its meaning varies from one group to another. For instance, Jews understand circumcision as a ritual sign and a covenant with God (Gen. 17:1-14).

Biblical Circumcision

Circumcision is explained extensively in the Bible from Old to New Testaments. I shall begin from the Old Testament and move to the New Testament to indicate how both closely relate to Meru circumcision.

Old Testament

Circumcision for the Hebrews was a sign and a covenantal contract between God and his people, Israel that was sealed between God/YHVH and Abraham (Gen. 17:9-14). The essence of that covenant of circumcision was for the Israelites to recognize God as their father and also to affirm that God would consider the Israelites to be his people on condition of their obedience. Circumcision requiring shedding of blood was a sign to ratify the covenant. When Abraham answered God's call to leave his own birthplace to go to a foreign land, he was not circumcised. His faith in God began before his circumcision. God offered the blood covenant because of Abraham's faithful obedience. God intended for all male Israelites to be circumcised as a condition of keeping the covenant, a relationship that promised they would become "a nation, with blessings, and an inheritance" (Gen. 12:1-3).

Abraham was circumcised on God's command as a condition of the reciprocal covenant. He was an adult, and adult converts to Judaism must be circumcised in that pattern. Abraham circumcised Ishmael at age thirteen on the same day that Abraham was circumcised at age ninety-nine (Gen.17:11-27). Isaac was circumcised on the eighth day after birth (Gen. 21:4), as was Jesus (Luke 2:1-7) and all Jewish boys since. The descendants of Abraham are known as "the circumcision" (Acts 10:45) to this day. The surgical cutting for Jewish circumcision matches the ancient artistic drawings of Egyptian adult men found in Ankh-Mahor Tomb at Sakkara in Egypt (see Appendix M).

Israelites circumcise children on the eighth day after birth and the young boys continue to learn God's commandments, statutes, and judgments from parents and the community throughout life (Deut. 6:1-9). The eighth day condition was sometimes relaxed during critical events such as the exodus from Egypt. Whenever the Israelites ignored the circumcision ritual, they met with God's stern rebuke, and they immediately reinstated the ritual (Exod. 4:25). Joshua accepted only circumcised Israelites into his army (Josh. 5:5). Perhaps the circumcision ritual inspired moral courage in the men, or perhaps God chose to favor Israel in war activities to sustain and honor the covenant sealed by blood. When Joshua required circumcision before men could serve in his army, the Philistines were immediately conquered (Josh. 6:1-3).

New Testament

In the New Testament Gospels, the circumcisions of John the Baptist and Jesus were done on the eighth day according to established Jewish tradition (Luke 1:59; 2:21). Through circumcision John the Baptist and Jesus were given the Jewish identity marker. They would be eligible as adults to transmit Jewish cultural norms, and with this

authority they would be able to lead evangelistic missions that required repentance as a condition for baptism (Luke 3:1-20). While Doctor Luke refers to John the Baptist as an evangelist, a forerunner of Jesus (Luke 3:3), John the Baptist was also a prophet. William MacDonald affirms, “John was a true prophet, an embodied conscience, crying out against sin, and calling for spiritual renewal to Jews and Gentiles” (1377). John, a true Jew by circumcision, was efficient in his evangelism and prophecies such as announcing the coming of Christ because culture accorded all male adults a status of recognition as opposed to “uncircumcised” Gentiles (Eph. 2:11).

Furthermore Paul in Colossians 2:10-15 and Romans 6 emphasized spiritual circumcision or repentance rather than physical circumcision. In the early stages of Christianity, the Jewish concept of circumcision threatened to tear the church in half. The Jerusalem council preempted the potential danger by emphasizing the importance of a change of heart for non-Jewish believers rather than the physical operation of circumcision. “We should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God but we should ask them to abstain from things polluted” (Acts 15:19, 29).

Elsewhere, Paul discouraged Jewish Christians from introducing penile circumcision into the church as a condition for membership. Paul wished people to turn to God as they were, he was concerned about spiritual circumcision and repentance (Cor. 7:18-21). Paul was concerned with genuine response to the gospel, not a physical symbol, which is nothing in itself (Phil. 3:3). Paul, though, was not opposed to the Jewish tradition of circumcision but argued in behalf of the Gentiles. Paul’s support of Timothy’s circumcision before Timothy led a Jewish-dominated congregation confirmed Paul’s respect of the culture. Again Paul never opposed cultural values that promote the

gospel (Acts 16:3). Circumcision, however, is not a condition for faith; hence, no community should force another into circumcision. Faith is beyond the rite. A repentant person is even better than a circumcised sinner. Paul refers to repentance as circumcision of the heart (Col. 1:11; Rom. 2:29; Jer. 4:4). The New Testament attempts to overshadow the Old Testament emphasis on physical circumcision by encouraging uncircumcised and circumcised people to turn to God through repentance. Paul encouraged the repentant people to receive baptism as a marker of obedience to Christ. Baptism, therefore, begins to emerge to replace physical circumcision. Perhaps baptism is an initiation into church membership, which is celebrated when a new person is welcomed into church membership. The baptism celebration should resemble celebrations done by communities that practice physical circumcision.

Circumcision Conflicts

Although the Jewish tradition of circumcising boys early has influenced many Western countries, currently the Western world is divided down the middle with some people defending the circumcision ritual and others discouraging it because of medical reasons. Those who support circumcision believe it should be done for hygienic precautions (Valentine 42). They also claim that circumcision prevents masturbation, cancer, and allows better control at the “plateau” stage during sexual intercourse (Zwang, “La Fonction Erotique” 271-79). Today the issue of male circumcision is riddled with conflict. One set of experts argues for its continuation while other authorities discourage circumcising on medical grounds:

[The] complication rate may be as high as 55 percent for hospital-performed, routine male circumcision, with approximately 10 percent of all circumcisions having to be repeated. These complications may include death, damage to the shaft and damage to the urethra, amputation,

unsightly appearance, urethral fistulas, hemorrhage, infected incision line, phimosis, and infections of the meatus. (Richards 375)

Gérard Zwang estimates that in the United States, 50 percent of newborn boys are circumcised, but the number has reduced considerably from 1975, when the American health commission stated that circumcision has no good hygienic value (“Prepuce et Erotisme” 41). Circumcision has its enthusiasts among Christians, who argue that boys’ circumcision is biblical, has sexual benefits, and also promotes hygiene by preventing AIDS and urinary infections associated with cervical cancer in women, but Zwang, and other Swedish experts deny health claims (La Fonction Erotique 1162). Zwang, a Muslim, quotes some pro-circumcision obstetricians as saying, “Sever at birth the foreskins of future Methodists, Adventists, Catholics, Sectarians of Love, if not good brave Atheists” (1162). In this debate some Christian doctors have been trying to persuade the American health commission to reverse its decision.

In most African cultures, the circumcision rite at pubescence is understood as the transition from childhood to adulthood. It is the beginning of acquiring knowledge and also marks an awakening period to many things that includes relationships with one another and with nature (Mbiti 122). Jomo Kenyatta, the late President of Kenya, argues that circumcision of both sexes unites the community. “Excision and infibulation unite us tightly; they prove our fecundity” (98). Kenyatta’s argument is widely misquoted or understood as promoting female genital mutilation (Claudio and Pelletier, 59), yet on a political note, he used the circumcision practice as a means of establishing tribal identity to defend Africans (*kikuyu*; Kenyans) against Western imperialism:

Jomo Kenyatta offers a fine conclusion: “Circumcision was an important ritual to the tribe. It kept people together, bound the tribe. It was at the core of the social structure, and something that gave meaning to a man's

life. End the custom and the spiritual basis of the tribe's cohesion and integration would be no more. (133)

Edward B. Taylor speaks to the significance of circumcision as a cultural rite. He defines culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (138). Taylor observes that for Africans, circumcision is, therefore, a culture or a “dictionary of knowledge, art, belief, etc” (138).

Islam finds the circumcision of Abraham and Ishmael especially important as establishing the rite in Islam. The detailed record is found in Judeo-Christian Scriptures in Genesis 17:9-14. Raqiya Abdalla argues for circumcision of boys and girls on the ground that prophet the Mohammed supported it and it is stipulated in the Koran: “touch but not destroy ... do not go deep, is enjoyable to women and is preferable for their husbands” (31). Ahmad Shawqi Fangari, a renowned Muslim doctor in support of boy circumcision states that circumcision helps to extend the length of copulation, thanks to the liberation of the *glans* (143). Muslim initiates having gone through circumcision rites are recognized as members of the society. As in the Meru community, circumcised persons are able to perform all social functions including marriage, procreation, leadership, and religious activities. Without circumcision, one is not considered mature, responsible to the self, to society, or to God. Perhaps reintegration of traditional symbols and rituals into Christian rites in Meru culture could provide the foundation for fully initiated and maturing adult Christians.

Circumcision: Global Phenomena

Most of the world’s circumcision rituals involve cutting of the foreskin exposing

the *glans* penis. Cutting of the foreskin is done in many ways. The Meru people cut off a very small part of the foreskin, and while doing so, also scrape the inside of the remaining foreskin so that as it heals it seals the flap above the button hole slit in the remaining skin. The forehead/*glans* is pushed through the slit while the skin is left hanging below the *glans* at the base/*meatus*. The loosely hanging skin, which will now heal as a distinctive Meru flap of skin is called *ndigi*.

The Aborigines of Australia stretched the boy's foreskin several inches and cut it off exposing the *glans*, but later around seventeen years, some men undergo sub-incision (the slating/slicing of the penis open from the *meatus* an inch deep along the urethra; (Charlesworthy et al. 34; Cawte, DJagamara, and Barrett 245-53). The surgical removal of the foreskin has come to be accepted by most Western communities, including the Jews.

Male circumcision appears in many cultures and is critical to the cultural identity of the people. Nowhere is this cultural identity more profoundly expressed than in the ritual circumcision of the young boys who are becoming adult Meru men. Records available indicate that circumcision may be the oldest form of surgery. According to the inscriptions on bas-relief drawings in the Ankh-Mahor Tomb at Sakkara in Egypt (Richards 371-76; Paige 40-48; see Appendix M), which have been dated at about four thousand years before Christ, the Egyptian males are drawn with the mark of circumcision. The drawings of naked adult male warriors display circumcision identical to that common to the Jews and to Western surgical procedures routinely performed for baby boys soon after birth. Egyptians probably acquired the practice from other African tribes (Brigman 337-39). James de Meo believes that circumcision started in East Africa,

sometimes alleged to be the first home of humankind, before 4000 BC (9-13).

Recent archeological evidence suggests that the earliest humans existed in East Africa, in Kenya at Oduvai gorge. If the archeological report and the circumcision information offered by these writers are reliable, then Kenya is obviously one of the East African countries that is an important source of historical information on circumcision rituals. Perhaps the Meru people and their traditional male circumcision are among the first to use male circumcision as a ritual process to mark the transition from boy to man. Laurent Magesa, a renowned African theologian, observed that “the main features of [circumcision] initiation ... are similar throughout Africa” (98). Furthermore, the circumcision ritual in most African communities is a celebration of moral courage as initiates are prepared to face future life crises as Kenyatta observes:

Common Africanness on understanding of circumcision is due to shared religious beliefs, social norms, and other traditional practices as a result of diffusion or because of common origins. Circumcision especially for boys in Africa is cultural, and a religious practice hard to eradicate without affecting the entire social fabric. (115)

During preparation for initiation, Native Americans encouraged the boys at the onset of puberty to withdraw from the home to the wilderness and to wait for visions from the Great Spirit. Fasting while waiting on spiritual discernment marked the occasion. Boys learned that the first animal they saw during this solitary withdrawal would be their personal source of strength and motivation—their “totem.” They would then adorn their shields with the image of the animal to remind them of the animal’s power that they now possess (Kolata 1).

Psychological, anthropological, and psychiatric writers offer various reasons and explanations why the circumcision ritual is a worldwide practice. Some of the main

reasons writers offer are considered religious and cultural by most communities. They include enhanced or diminished sexual performance and pleasure, rite of passage into adulthood, social prestige, communal mark, sacrifice to fertility gods, tests for courage and endurance, reincarnation, and hygienic reasons (Brigman 338; Kitahara 338).

I now turn to describe a concept that supports the research project particularly the emerging definitions and implications of contextualization.

Contextualization: Grounding the Gospel in Meru Culture

In my early years of ministry among the Meru, I struggled to present the gospel to Meru people using all evangelism delivery methods I learned in seminary. Overwhelming masses of Christians joined the churches I served, but to my dismay, their faith kept wavering in times of individual and community crisis. I was disturbed by the lack of Christian maturity when faced with temptations. None seemed able to face temptations boldly even at mention of death:

Justin [Martyr] replies: That is our desire, to be tortured for Our Lord, Jesus Christ, and so to be saved, for that will give us salvation and firm confidence at the more terrible universal tribunal of our lord and savior. And all the martyrs said “Do as you wish; for we are Christians, and we do not sacrifice to idols.” (Lebreton 278)²⁷

I have continued to search for reasons why Meru lack strong faith to stand against temptation up to the point of death. I worry that the lack of indigenized gospel and adaptation to a gospel clothed with the missionary’s culture produces faith without deep roots into the Meru convert’s worldview. This research study is about contextualizing the

²⁷Justin was aware of coming death but still stood for it: “I, too, expect to be persecuted and to be crucified by some of those whom I have named, or by Crescens, that friend of noise and of ostentation” (qtd. in Lebreton). Justin was condemned to death by the prefect, Rusticus, towards A.D. 165, with six companions, Chariton, Charito, Evelpostos, Pæon, Hierax, and Liberianos.

gospel into the Meru culture to the extent that the gospel appeals to Meru feelings and actions that will transform but not obliterate the Meru worldview.

In the process of contextualization, grounded theory provides remarkably effective tools for indigenizing/contextualizing the gospel. As grounded theory is applied faithfully, people are empowered to name and understand their own perceived challenges and problems. The theory moves forward and further empowers a people to find solutions to those indigenous challenges and problems. Grounded theory emerges as people are able to make meaning of their situational problems. The theory becomes a vehicle by which the people construct an expanded and more useful worldview—their sense of reality. That worldview is not forced or imposed on a people but emerges and is owned by the people as problems are seen more clearly. Grounded theory allows everyone in the community to participate in looking for both immediate and long-term lasting solutions. In the African setting where the older people are regarded as living dictionaries, understandings about indigenous art and culture could benefit the community along with the insights coming together among the researchers. Furthermore, grounded theory is an appropriate strategy for contextualizing the gospel because it addresses problems on the ground by using local wisdom and tools available within theological setting. Some writers of contextualization trace conceptualization backward in history to point out the features of this phenomenon in cross-cultural transactions that were characterized by high respect for people in all cultures. Not surprisingly, effective and constructive consequences consistently follow effective contextual work.

The term contextualization is synonymous to some aspects of other concepts such as adaptation, accommodation, indigenization, or enculturation. All speak to human

efforts to “make meaning” of their life experience and their entire environment. These terms attempt to answer questions such as, ‘what is the good news? Who owns the good news? How does the good news affect my worldview?’ Certainly, to contextualize is to interpret what God said through his Son, Jesus the Christ, then the Apostles from the first Jewish cultural context to the New Testament and the Gentiles’ cultural context. The question is always about how the gospel informs the individual person’s experience within a particular environment. The person forms a meaning and finds tools to describe or interpret: a new language, new symbols, and new signs of the new context.

Contextualization is a perennial challenge the church faces in every age. Darrell L. Whiteman observes, “[T]he Gospel and culture relate to one another across geographic space and time” (2). Whiteman further notes that contextualization is an ancient church concept, but its definition began to take its present form in 1970s. Since then, a great deal of literature, thinking, dialogue, and heightened development of the contextualization concept have occurred (6).

I want to offer a brief historical and biblical observation about contextual development in relation to Meru, Kenya culture. I am motivated to dig deeply for ways the gospel can be contextualized among the Meru. My hope of that contextualization finds further support from Peter Schineller who writes, “We have the obligation to search continually for ways in which the good news can be more deeply lived, celebrated and shared” (3).

Generally, contextualization can be defined as any existing phenomenon a person is trying to give a new dimension without changing its original meaning and purpose. Furthermore, contextualization as applied to sharing faith defined as finding a faithful

and appropriate way of transmitting fixed biblical principles cross-culturally, paying close attention to its original meaning but avoiding importing the culture of a cross-cultural bearer of the good news.

Whiteman identifies three main functions contextualization plays in promoting God's kingdom: to preach the Word of God in "word[s] and deed[s]" and planting churches in a local context that appeals to the deepest needs of indigenous people and penetrates to new converts' worldviews to challenge evil practices such as oppressive structures whether economic, social, or political in nature. Oppressive cultural structures tend to draw communities toward evil dealings, but when a community is redirected to discover a better worldview, oppression can open the eyes of the oppressed. Wesley's model of contextualization in nineteenth-century England revived the social, economic, and spiritual life of Britons. Perhaps to rekindle Wesley's revival ideals with the Meru can promote and enhance church growth, resulting in enhanced-depth spirituality. Another potential function of contextualization is to develop locally contextualized good news expressions through local music, prayers, and sermons, adding indigenous flavor to universal Christian traditions (Whiteman 2-4).

Contextualization in the Jewish World

The first contextualization in the New Testament is in the record of John the Baptist, son of Zachariah, a temple priest, and Elizabeth, daughter of Aaron (Luke 1:1-80). John was a prophet, the forerunner who preached the first message of salvation by remission of sins (Luke 1:76-9). The Jews of John's time would condemn his teaching as an apostate diatribe against structured traditional worship. Despite the Jewish leaders' charges against John, John was offering people an opportunity to turn from their sinful

lives through repentance and baptism, thus contextualizing the old way of ritual washing by which the merciful God would redeem Jewish community. Therefore, John appears to be the first to preach a new message of baptism through repentance that earlier existed only as prophecy (Isa. 40:3-5).²⁸

John was able to draw his people (other Jews) around him because he was a recognized adult Jew. He earned that reputation because he had fulfilled all Jewish cultural norms: he was named and circumcised the eighth day and carefully observed the Jewish cultural norms, which helped to account for his winning and appealing personality. Furthermore, being a very devout Jew of simple lifestyle (clothed in camel's hair leather, Luke 7:24-27) and diet (Matt. 3:4) gave an extra advantage to contextualizing his message—to make his message credible within his culture.

Jesus builds his contextual model on John's contextualization model with slight differences. When John died, Jesus had no option except to double the effort. Jesus' contextual teaching was unparalleled and appears a formidable challenge to old Jews' religious practices. He convinced those who listened to him to change their old method of living and to follow him (those who leave their parents for my sake ... will not regret, he would say). The followers of Jesus' way are called disciples (Matt. 10:34-42).

The contextualization model begun by Jesus would not die even after his sudden departure. His disciples inherited the contextual message and went on preaching. That proto-contextualized message lives today. Apart from John's message of repentance (John 4:21-24), Jesus added, "[W]orship in spirit and in truth," and the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:1-4). He also effectively healed all types of sicknesses, raising the dead to life,

²⁸Before John the Baptist, Jews baptism was done every year as the means of cleansing sins (Isa. 1:18). While John emphasized forgiveness, Jesus later emphasized receiving of a new spirit (Ezek. 36:25-6; cf. Acts 2).

offering repentance and forgiveness as he pointed converts away from sinful practice of traditional Jewish religion. Later believers of Jesus' way (or converts and disciples) were nicknamed Christians; a term that means Jesus Christ's followers (Acts 11:26).

At Jesus' time, contextualization was within Jewish culture; it never struggled with new language and new cultural practices. Jesus nevertheless respected Jewish cultural practices that promote salvation of sinners. Jesus was a Jew, born of the family of David, circumcised and named on the eighth day, brought up in Jewish culture who lived within tenets of the Jewish culture that were compatible with his teachings (Luke 2; 3:23-38). Jesus' respect for Jewish culture and his Jewish worldview are illustrated by his interaction with Jewish teachers even at the temple and his attachment to his parents until his death on the cross (Luke 2:46; John 19:26-29).

Jesus knew contextualization is an ongoing work of Christian believers within their own cultural milieu. Some cultural practices can be harnessed to complement the good news. Furthermore, local cultures should be approached with sensitivity. In the next section, I describe what tends to happen when the gospel goes outside Jewish culture to the Gentile world where languages, geographical locations, and cultures are foreign—hence beyond the reach of mono-cultural invaders.

Contextualization in the Greek World

The first-ever mentioned contextual biblical problem began on the day of Pentecost when the Christian church opened its doors to multiple cultures (Acts 2). People from many locations, cultures, and languages witnessed Pentecost. Perhaps the day of Pentecost teach two things: The gospel is universal and God's Spirit (the Holy Spirit) is multilingual. People present at Pentecost under the empowering of the Holy

Spirit understood one other. Beginning from the day of Pentecost, the disciples²⁹ went into the Gentile world to preach the good news clothed in Jewish culture. Before church elders called the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), all the Gentiles who converted to Christianity were to convert first to Jewish culture in order to be authentic Christians. As the Meru experienced when the British missionaries came, Jewish Christians encouraged Gentile converts to cut links with their local cultural practices, worldviews, and music, dressing, and diets (Acts 10:9-15).

The Jerusalem council (Acts 15) gave directives to resolve the contextual problems related to neglecting Jewish culture since God had shown favor and acceptance to Gentiles. The decision endorsed by the council continues with everlasting effects: the counsel noted those turning to God should be accepted as they are, they should not be forced into Jewish culture by circumcision, and believers were not forced to deny their own cultural attachment or ritual, except those with sinful influence. The council's decisions became the stepping-stones as the gospel swept through the entire Roman Empire, into Asia and then into Africa.

Paul became the protagonist of the new contextual order. Soon after his conversion, Paul found himself an apostle to the Gentiles and condemning his own people. Paul metaphorically described himself as a wild olive branch springing from the stock of the patriarchs. That image opened a window for the Gentiles to be counted in the kingdom of God by repentance (Rom. 11:7). Gentiles did not need to adopt a foreign culture. Like Jesus, Paul practiced the best contextual ideals, although sometimes they seemed too radical to Judaism. Andrew F. Wall observes, "Paul's emphatic teaching that

²⁹Disciples refer to Jews who had converted to Christianity; they did not see the difference between their way of life and what Christ came to represent.

since God accepts the heathen as they are, circumcision, food avoidance and ritual washings are not [for] them” (98).

Paul’s gospel message to the Gentiles gradually influenced many of the Greek communities such as the Corinthian society that opened marriage between Christians and non-Christians (1 Cor. 7:14). Paul’s contextual theology followed closely disqualifies cultural imperialism from one group to another. Cultures are influenced by time and place; hence, they differ from each other. God is universal, but worship methods vary according to communities’ perceptions of God. Perhaps when cultures exist at equal levels, the gospel can have a huge opportunity to challenge all cultural evil practices and open new avenues for contextualized Christianity.

Unfortunately during the first and second Christian centuries, Greek philosophy began to influence Christianity, and faith almost fell into mere intellectual exercise. Nevertheless, God raised apologists to defend the church. Greek culture is understood through early Church theologian apologists.

Justin Martyr contextualized his Greek philosophy into theology, making him among the most influential apologists. George T. Purves describes him: “He appears to have been a man of moderate culture. [Justin] was certainly [neither] a genius [nor] an original thinker” (132).³⁰ Justin was, furthermore, a true eclectic who drew inspiration from different systems, especially from Stoicism and Platonism to explain the relationship between Christianity and Greek philosophy. Justin, a platonic philosopher, admires Stoics’ ethics, adopts stoics’ universal theory of conflagration, conflicts

³⁰The quotation is part of Purves’ speech given in 1888 at Princeton’s Stone Lectures page 302; speech was later turned into a book (see works cited).

ekpyrosis and also transforms stoics' concept of the seminal word *logos spermatikos*, but condemns stoics' fatalism and atheism.³¹

Although Justin is sympathetic to Platonism, he discounts its understanding of punishment, which would last only a thousand years, and he adopts the Christian concept of eternal punishment. Justin supports biblical concepts by strongly alleging that Platonism borrowed its theory of formless matter from Moses' creation theory. Justin seems to condemn some Greek philosophy, while contextualizing others into his Christian faith. When Justin's literature is taken as one piece, it seriously explains the points of contacts between the Judaism and Christianity.

In the ancient world, Greek philosophy and Christianity influenced people's lives greatly, but in Justin's view, Christianity, wholly manifest in Jesus Christ, was above human philosophy. In his own words, Justin observed "Our doctrine surpasses all human doctrine because the real Word became Christ who manifested himself for us, [in] body, [in] word and [in] soul." Justin concludes that pagan philosophy is not a serious or profound thing; it lacks action, truth, and life, and cannot be depended on: "Thou art a friend of discourse" (4).³²

Paul's contextual philosophy multiplied the believers, and the gospel spread from one culture to another, challenging and influencing every cultural tenet. In the fifth century, Augustine, the African saint of Algerian descent, observes, "What we now call the Christian religion existed amongst the ancients, and was from the beginning of the

³¹I offer summary of Justin beliefs and teachings to illustrate how contextualization ought to be done. Reader is referred to works of Jules Lebreton in Catholic encyclopedia translated by Stephen William Shackelford for more details.

³²Justin Martyr's work in this section is taken from Jules Lebreton's Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 8 translated by Stephen William Shackelford, (see Works Cited).

human race, until Christ Himself came in the flesh; from which time the already existing true religion began to be styled Christian” (3).³³ This statement taken in the extreme, means ancient religions that were never true should be completely abandoned rather than being contextualized for the benefit of changing people’s lives. On the other hand, taken positively they establish a continuity from the old religion into the new religion—Christianity—by the process of contextualization, so all people can become “new creations” in Christ.

Although old religions were either decontextualized or with some contextualization from the fifth to the seventeenth century, the worst blow happened during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when missionaries left their own countries to Christianize the heathen. Victor Turner observes “[A]ncient religious ideas and practices of the Africans are dying out through contact of white man and his ways” (2). Although missionaries are widely mentioned in this paper, Turner confirms that Christianity did not weaken the Meru or any colonized people’s social structure, but missionaries’ attempt to introduce their foreign lifestyle, trade, politics and ceremonies without any attempt to contextualize local culture caused great damage and violated people. I now turn to briefly examine modernity and especially some of its implications on third world religions.

Colonization and Contextualization

Colonization is not a new concept. Colonization was in practice from antiquity as tribes tried to overpower and rule each another. Although colonization does not exist

³³Further works of St. Augustine can be consulted from <<http://www.spaceandmotion.com/christianity-christian-jesus-christ.html>>. James J. O’Donnell owns this website about Augustine <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/augustine.html>>.

today as such, it does show itself in political ideologies, economics, and advancement of formal western education. Westerners' desire to colonize other tribes was engineered by nineteenth-century scientific knowledge, fed perhaps by Darwinian evolution's "survival of the fittest" theory that perceived Western culture as above other cultures. Science influenced colonialists, anthropologists, and missionaries to spread Western monocultural and monoreligious ideas in third world countries.

Meru people, suspecting the bad intentions of colonialists and missionaries, pushed their political and traditional religious practices underground and adopted Western practices (passively) to save themselves from the noise of the gun. Meru people tell of their past slavery experience under *nguo ntune* "people of red clothes or light skin" at a place called *Mbwa*, the Meru cradle land. Therefore, when imperial colonialists entered Meruland, people of Meru did not form high resistance for fear of gun shots.

When Britons appeared in 1907, Meru welcomed them to open trade and business. Surprisingly, Britons had different motives. They came to rule, to Christianize, to do commerce, and to civilize. They intended to improve people's way of life by introducing Western culture through education, medicine, and Christianity, replacing local cultural practices entirely.³⁴ Britons first ruled through interpreters from neighboring tribes and later recruited local chiefs elected and coached into European leadership model. Chiefs were paid with Western money to act as ears and eyes of the colonial masters. This system of leadership was foreign; Meru people ruled themselves through a consensus system. Missionaries soon introduced Western religion and fully determined to expel Meru demons that inhabited mountains, forests, valleys, and groves.

³⁴Britain ruled Kenya from 1895 when it was declared a British protectorate until 1963 when Kenya became independent. Although Kenya fell under British rule for a long time, the British actually entered Meru in 1907.

Isaac M'eringa, talking to the Nyambene Methodist annual synod meeting in 2001, observes, "Meru people willing to become Christians must throw away local dressing, skin shoes, spears, skin bags [old men], and refrain from all cultural practices to train for church membership." When I interviewed Philip M'mujuri (my father), he confirmed Isaac's sentiments and further adds that "believers were separated from nonbelievers, and especially young boys and girls stayed in boarding schools in order to end the traditional teachings on boyhood and girlhood and to escape traditional circumcision in favor of hospital circumcision preached by missionaries." Furthermore, Henry M'muambia (also interviewed) adds that boys and young warriors adopting Christian faith did not find girls to marry easily as most girls were not Christians. Mrs. Jean Zakayo, an old student also said it was hard for young Meru Christians to find a marriage partner:

When I converted to Christianity in 1948, my parents disowned me and made me an outcast. The village warriors and girls of my age, pronounced a traditional curse on me; they said I should never be married or have children because I disobeyed my parents and slipped out of their hands and agreed with the white men's religion. I prayed that God would give me a Christian husband.³⁵

The struggle faced by the first Meru generation of Christians seem to point to the need of integration of Christianity and the positive Meru traditions or risk the continuing antagonistic views that promote cold or physical war between Meru people. A colonial district officer, Gerald H. Hopkins, in his 1917 report, quotes Worthington, the first United Methodist Missionary to the Meru, lamenting on marriage:

In the ordinary courses of nature, our young male Christians will want to marry. Those upon whom their choice will fall are heathen and as such,

³⁵Jean Zakayo was interviewed twice, in 1986 and 2007; she is a prominent Christian leader.

forbidden to them by the rules of the church and the express injunction of St Paul. (3)³⁶

In Meru culture, marriage is entered after circumcision and successful completion of the warrior-hood period. Meru never approved Western Christian marriage restrictions, but young people accepted them passively and invited their so-called “heathen” (not my word) girlfriends to church before announcing marriage. Isaac M’eringa knew marriage negotiation with heathen parents was not easy. Christian warriors’ marriage was negotiated by heathen relatives; otherwise, the community can disapprove such marriages. Heathen relatives act as a bridge and a promise of security to the parents and for the girls entering into marriage because young men who have become Christians are assumed to be locked into childhood as they lack traditional preparations for adulthood. They were thought to have acquired no knowledge about family, clan, and community affairs.

Ritual Contextualization

In an attempt for Meru people to please their colonial masters, they relegated traditional leadership structure, local religious practices, social practices, economic norms, and informal education underground. They continued, however, to resort to the traditional practices in times of individual or communal crises and in the absence of the colonial masters. Contextualization among the Meru may have to address all of these areas of life, which would entail asking questions such as “What and why did the Meru

³⁶Hopkins was the second Briton administrator who understood the influence of local cultural practices and fully supported local people in retaining and practicing that which did not conflict with his administration.

have such and such practices?” The answers can only be sought from the Meru people themselves. This research project explores only boys’ circumcision.

The Meru often say a child belongs to the community; the whole community brings up a child. The family and communal process of mentoring children begins from birth to adulthood. Children are named in a ritual process and begin to learn *kimeru* language from the parents before mothers get out of seclusion. Around eight years of age, children join grandparents and their peer group, and intensive learning systematically continues until children are ready to enter their circumcision ritual. Before circumcision, intensive preparation includes the use of songs and phrases imploring boys to face circumcision without fear.

When young men are circumcised, initiates enter into seclusion where they are tutored in advanced education about adult life. Receiving a new name marks graduation from seclusion and newly circumcised men join their warrior-hood cohort to continue with further education. Warriors form a security force for the community—a defense team against any external intrusion while elders solve internal matters. Contextualization will mean striving to illumine biblical teachings that relate to Meru ritual processes such as baptism, Holy Communion, ritual supporting songs and psalms, family life education, and circumcision in the Old and New Testaments, especially Paul’s new concept of repentance.

The Christian baptism ritual practiced by Meru Methodists perhaps can explain how contextualization might work among the Meru. When children are born, baptism can be celebrated during the traditional ritual of naming. Village children and a few elders, including the namesake, attend the Meru traditional ritual of naming. Before the child to

be named is brought out of seclusion by the mother, children gather at the home and the mother carrying the infant sits at the middle. A traditional specialist prays asking God to bless the newborn, the naming, the mother, the clan, the community and others ask that God restrain witches against causing ill health to the child. The parents present the child, and the namesake is asked to announce the name of the newborn. Children in appreciation call the child by the new name. Immediately feasting continues as the group asks the parents of the child, using a series of traditional songs to “bring out all the food because it is the arrival of the child that brings us here to celebrate. May the child be blessed and grow like a fig tree spreading its love to all, like fig tree branches giving shade and water to its surroundings.” Yams and sugarcanes are a special diet associated with naming.³⁷ To an outsider such as missionaries and imperialists, the naming process was considered sinful and forbidden. Theologically, one cannot find any obvious reason why the Methodist ritual of infant baptism should not be integrated with the traditional ritual of naming. It would also be appropriate for the Holy Communion ceremony celebrated after the traditional feast of yams and sugarcanes. The festive service could be done at home on a Sunday in the presence of all Christians: children, youth and adults as participants. Meru are warm and welcoming, gatherings are way of life, each gathering with its own ceremonial meaning. Songs and family celebrations can also be profitably contextualized according to biblical teachings.

Meru Culture Contextualization Process

³⁷The naming diet has theological significance. Sugarcane’s sweetness represents love, and the higher ethical and good morals the child is supposed to show to all people: parents, adults, and children alike. Yam presents endurance and patience as one goes through life. These two are original Meru crops that withstand long droughts and are sought after during droughts and at the time of blessings. Almost every Meru ritual uses these are indigenous crop grown for ritual purposes.

In addressing cultural contextualization, Paul G. Hiebert observes that critical theory applied among the Wanana people of Panama by John Geertz and Jacob Loewen is a good method for translating Meru culture under its three categories: exegesis of the culture, exegesis of the Scripture, and critical response (9). Meru Christian leaders can collect Meru traditional beliefs, customs, norms, and taboos, which relate to various events such as circumcision, marriage, naming, arbitration, death, burial, or entertainment and other ceremonies, and make a literary analysis of all. All leaders must agree not to challenge anyone among themselves with reservations or against any belief at the time of gathering the cultural practices. The main purpose of collecting cultural practices is to understand old Meru practices, their meanings, and their effects on those who practice or do not practice them without judgment.

The next step might involve searching biblical passages that relate to traditional beliefs followed by serious Bible studies over a length of time to understand their relevance in relation to other cultures. Perhaps leaders might not have multiple cultural studies but invite those with wide knowledge of other cultures to facilitate discussions. This crucial step should be thoroughly done because Meru people might possess literal and shallow knowledge of the Bible owing to their longtime passive Christianity. This phase of contextualization could be designed to contribute to spiritual growth through grasping of biblical truths. Biblical interpretations from other scholars can also be consulted to expose learners to many ways of developing mental abilities of discerning God's will for them. If Meru do not fully understand how to interpret biblical passages, at this step, the danger is to force biblical meaning into their cultural beliefs, often leading to misunderstanding of the Bible message.

The final stage is to make decisive and informed response in light of the past beliefs and the biblical teachings. This critical stage should not be rushed because as every decision is made, leaders are accountable to all Christians and to the entire community outside the church. Once leaders reach consensus on every decision, then implementation methodology must be sought for enlightening the congregation who will own the decisions and live them among those outside the family of faith.

I am convinced Meru people have better solutions for Meru cultural contextualization than outsiders. They can provide a stronger critique of their culture than anyone else can, and they stand in a better position to evangelize their communities as they reaffirm their cultural identity. They will certainly reject cultural practices that have either fallen into disuse or those inherited from foreigners or forced on them through a yoke of imperialism. Integration of cultures that have deep hidden meanings relating to their new found faith will form part of their Christian faith, making Jesus a Meru elder in solving their moral, ethical, and spiritual problems. When Meru people transform their old cultural beliefs into Christian faith, the gospel will be at home in Meru community.

Syncretism or Incarnation Theology

Syncretism is a by-product of two systems of beliefs woven into one. When Christianity merges with secular philosophy, the outcome could be seen as a syncretism—a merged product of the two. Whiteman, giving much broader definition, warns that failure of the church to contextualize runs a greater risk of planting weak churches with church members turning to syncretistic explanations, favoring non-biblical lifestyles and engaging in magical rituals (Whiteman 5).

To contextualize the gospel is to make it more real, more realistic, and further more applicable to the people in a local context. In the last decade, Meru were struggling with crisis of cultural identity and currently exist within a transitional paradigm. True contextualization is more than welcome. Perhaps a danger can be to assume that all Meru cultural practices can be transformed as part of biblical faith. This thinking is easily provoked by the desire to escape entirely from Western cultural and religious imperialism that includes emphasis on Western dress, promiscuous lifestyles, and all varieties of evangelism, liturgical worship, and church leadership. Anyone undertaking the use of contextualization strategies must not embark on a win or lose mentality. The essential beginning point with contextualization requires seeking to understand one's own culture in light of good news as a first step toward valuing and affirming God's love of people within other cultures.

A contextual project requires highly competent local theologians, not missionaries leading the process. The project calls for people to be aware of their own local biases, willingness to learn and respect local meanings of symbols and signs, local deep hidden meanings, common cultural practices, and timeless transcultural biblical principles.

Cultural practices incompatible with biblical principles must be avoided while encouraging local scriptural hermeneutics crafted within the local worldview, local bias, and historical context.

Jesus can enter any culture without trappings of outside cultural influences. Jesus is the *logos*, the Word made human flesh, and at home in every culture. The scriptural commission is very clear: “Go teach them what I have taught you.” The call is neither to impose cultural biases nor the clever hermeneutics located in worldview but the magnetic story and principles in historical context have universal appeal based in both the Old and New Testaments.

Making Jesus feel at home with Meru ritual processes is inviting him to enter into the Meru cultural milieu, speaking Kimeru, attending Meru gatherings, crying with Meru people at hurting points of their lives, encouraging the sick, and comforting those who mourn. Meru people look with anticipation when Jesus becomes “God with us” to raise some of them to be prophets, preachers, teachers of good news and healers of both physical and spiritual diseases. God with people should be real, tangible, and in all ways part and parcel of their beings. The incarnation theology ought to be witnessed in every culture where Christ enters using the very culture’s vehicles of communication and daily common language. God who entered Jewish culture through Christ can enter Meru culture and influence the Meru people to rise to the potential of their long history and their high calling.

Conclusion

Circumcision is valued as a religious and social function. It is a rite most people cannot live without. I have summarized the cultural, biblical, and historical foundations

of male circumcision.

In Chapter 3, I explore foundational structures by which this project may appeal to contemporary Meru society as it establishes the cultural connection to Meru history and values and to Judeo-Christian values and practices. In Chapter 3, I also describe the use of grounded theory enhanced by documented anecdotal Meru narratives and measurements taken to collect the data. I revisit the research purpose and problem focus and pay attention to details to instruct the Meru people to create a lasting solution to inherent male circumcision tensions between the church leaders and tradition leaders.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the understandings, attitudes, and values of Meru people toward the two existing boys' initiation circumcision rites in Meru today. I explored the hospital and field rites with a view of encouraging Meru people to merge existing boys' rites of circumcision into one for the benefit of promoting in-depth Christian spirituality and preserving one Meru positive cultural ritual that is a central part of identity for Meru culture.

The potential benefits of this research are many, including the promotion of a Meru communal spirit that is on the verge of collapsing, closing the widening gap between the Christian and non-Christian traditional Meru people, the prevention of gang formation among the young men, and the reduction of HIV/AIDS transmission, which is widely spreading in the Meru community. Furthermore, without a shared common liturgy that merges these two rites into one, then the ritual teachings that form responsible Meru adults are likely to be lost and the traditional Meru rites of boyhood peer mentoring leading to circumcision initiation risk being relegated to the Meru mythical past or driven underground as the girls' ritual practice has been, which remains alive but has been declared illegal and has gone underground where it continues today.

In this chapter I document the theoretical foundations and methods I established to guide the research. Based on those foundations, I go on to report how I created a questionnaire to search for wisdom from among the Meru people. I then describe how I used the purposive method to select research assistants to help collect the data. I report in detail how I selected a small sample of five subjects for a pilot study in the data from

“witnesses on the ground” who would test the validity of my questionnaire, my statement of purpose, and my research questions. I report in detail how from those findings I moved forward to select a wider research sample of 130 highly diverse Meru who could speak authoritatively as witnesses on the ground from a wide spectrum of Meru culture. I use “witness” here in the sense of the Greek term “martyr,” which denotes the courage with which a person protects a value to the point of laying down one’s life to defend that value. I report also how my examination of the data from those first five pilot study witnesses pointed to a painful limitation of cultural wisdom that would be represented if my research sample was selected from a single parochial population, so, using the same methodology, I recruited the actual research sample of 130 witnesses on the ground from a highly diverse Meru population who could speak courageously on behalf of the Meru people. In Chapters 4 and 5, I report the data from all of the 130 witnesses and interpret its possible meanings.

Theoretical Framework

Two foundations undergirded the Meru research project. I describe them here and document them to the competent research specialists who have examined the frontiers of sensitive human cultures and have found ways of honoring those who live within them, empowering them to speak for themselves about life where they are at home, using grounded theory.

Grounded Theory

The theoretical framework upon which this research is based is grounded theory. John W. Creswell identifies grounded theory as one of five approaches to qualitative research. Other approaches are biography, phenomenology, case studies, and

ethnography (13). Data collection for these types of methods consists of collecting narratives as the primary means of reading the complex issues under consideration, and so is less amenable to taking “measures” and reducing them to numbers that then are interpreted through statistical analysis.

The concept of grounded theory was first defined in the work of Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss. Bob Dick regards Glaser’s use of grounded theory as a clearly emerging methodology (Glaser 21). Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin explicitly define grounded theory in the following words: “One does not begin with a theory, and then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge” (273). Grounded theory was flexible and conveniently responded to the situation “on the ground” where the project was applied. Grounded theory is admirable because it begins with the situation or the research aim and then moves on as the researcher observes how the subjects (in this case, Meru traditional people and Meru Christians) play and manage their roles. The method used to gather data was mostly note taking from the conversations, one-on-one interviews, pilot study interviews, and the project writer’s observation in an ongoing process until the task was complete (Fraenkel and Wallen 438). In other words, theory helped to expose any important values, beliefs, symbols, and rituals nicely for observation and reflection as grounded theory unfolded in a research project. Some authors suggest that if grounded theory falls short of the research goal, other appropriate theories or a combination of theories can be applied.

“Data” in grounded theory refers to cultural facts and practices that emerge informally through direct contact within the cultural context. Because probes within the cultural context drove grounded theory, it provided a real fit to an urgent situation such as

that within the Meru context. In the words of Barney G. Glaser, theory that emerges from this kind of ethnographic data can help people make sense of their experience and manage their situation better. Hopefully, the Meru people will be able to appeal to their life experiences and find the outcome of this research helpful for them to improve their ways of embracing Meru identity with appropriate symbols and rituals.

Grounded theory for this project worked in this way. I gathered ethnographic data through interactions with the pilot study and interviewed witnesses on the ground in this project drama (Fraenkel and Wallen 457). I compared, coded, and identified the categories (themes) and their properties until the project task emerged. When grounded theory emerged to be reliable, I compared the grounded data to the project theory. Dick summarizes the ways of handling grounded data by explaining several phases: data collection, note taking, coding, categorizing and “memoing” (3). These phases occurred simultaneously and sometimes overlapped from the beginning.

Grounded theory provides a desired framework needed to construct valuable conclusions that can facilitate an integrative reconciliation process for both the Meru traditional people and the Meru Christians as together they spearhead a mission to achieve a common Meru identity for young men through the circumcision ritual process. Beyond that, the “inch-deep” Christians’ plague could potentially move to genuine in-depth or deeply grounded faithful Christians.

Grounded Theory Planks

To work out a project that responded to the current needs for establishing male Meru identity, three planks emerged as I examined grounded theory resources. The research findings presented in Chapter 4 then took shape as a means of addressing the

challenge of ritual male circumcision among the Meru and to provide the healing process needed by both Meru Christians and those who are deeply involved with traditional Meru culture. These planks touched Meru history, the arrival of missionaries, and current struggles faced daily by the church and the traditional people as they struggle to understand each other. These planks formed the backbone of conversations with both the pilot study group and the witnesses on the ground.

Plank one. Deep in Meru culture is the power of Meru history and meaning of the Meru ritual process for turning boys into adults. This plank consists of respecting the origin, basic meaning, and purpose of the male circumcision ritual in Meru. History provides the Meru people and others a way to understand the past and to anticipate the potential ways to respect history by making proposed changes that might offer glimpses of hope and reconciliation among Meru people in the future. Indeed, I examined the memory line of the Meru people as those memories pertain to circumcision. History strengthened the quest and provided documentation about where and how cultural values can be enhanced. Historical sensitivity provides the path for integrating Christian values, beliefs, symbols, and rituals alongside a traditional system struggling to preserve the historical male identity ritual. The proposed merger provides a path to preserve the Meru culture and to bring Christian and traditional rituals parallel in foundational respects.

Plank two. A second plank emerged as I defined the risks that face Meru Christian denominations and Meru traditional culture if both are not transformed through the benefits of core values, beliefs, symbols, and rituals. I identified the starting point of the current Meru challenge with tangible evidence grounded on oral, written, or verbatim messages that enable me to unlock the standoff between Meru Christian practice and

Meru traditional practice. I defined the colonial and missionary negative influence on Meru culture and the negative influence of so-called “hospital circumcision” with its resulting humiliation of Christian Meru men who have received this surgery. I used respected grounded theory in order to understand the uniqueness of the current challenge. The pilot study group and the witnesses on the ground provided a spectrum of authentic and authoritative Meru perspective on the current opportunities and challenges with respect to the Meru male identity ritual. Furthermore, I relied on the historical records of how the gospel was first presented to the Meru people. Historical documentation was gathered from mission reports, colonial administration reports, history books, and oral interviews.

Plank three. The third plank of the ritual merger was the commitment for Christian denominations and congregations among the Meru to create an environment in which Christianity can come to Meru culture with a servant motive to serve the Meru people. If so, then Jesus will be the agent of change to lead in the servant movement as I bring together the evidence and give my priority to using the best resources to transform Meru culture for the common good. This plank accounts for my commitment to read the grounded data/report and sustain my patient performance of the research analysis. Furthermore, I believe out of this section, a theologically sound liturgy for a Meru traditional ritual initiation of Meru boys will be able to emerge. With this prospect, the goal of the research is reached.

Triangulation Method

The research among the Meru reported here followed the triangulation method that includes the interview, written documents, verbal speeches, and observation.

Information triangulated gained mostly from taped records, observation from the respondents, and written resources helped to validate the work. Having a large sample helped to overcome the Meru people's tendency of avoiding their customs and traditions to go into the print; since I anticipated different view points from the respondents their bias was overcome. Although Meru rites are gender sensitive, I included women because mothers' views and their understandings about how the current influences take a toll on the Meru men's rites and cannot be ignored.

Language would form a large barrier especially from people past eighty years old. To overcome the problem, mature assistants were selected (past thirty years of age), and assistants were selected who were married and circumcised in order to reveal competence as they opened conversations about ritual issues. These researchers were born, educated, and worked as adults in Meru; therefore, they were deemed to be experienced in Meru culture and could easily capture the old people's critical thoughts and feelings. Although most of the old people use old language, proverbs, and riddles and encourage use of euphemisms, these researchers were well versed. They knew the language used among men to confuse women about understanding how male rituals are conducted.

Assistant researchers were chosen from both field or traditional and hospital circumcision rites to balance both of the aspects under study. To analyze data, I used SPSS software to generate the data for interpretation. Use of different people to collect, transcribe, and collate the data before generating frequencies for analysis helped me to see and experience what was genuinely happening on the ground so as to interpret the actual situation. All these various methods helped to minimize bias from every side and improved credibility and reliability.

My first challenge was to develop a questionnaire for use in collecting the data for the research.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire instrument design has five sections that open conversations to answer the research questions: (1) How do Meru people understand the purpose of the traditional Meru circumcision ritual process? (2) How do Meru people understand the purpose of the Christian hospital circumcision ritual process? (3) What aspects of the traditional Meru circumcision ritual process do the people value? (4) What aspects of the Christian hospital circumcision ritual process do Meru people value? (5) What aspects of the circumcision ritual processes do the Meru people regard as compatible with biblical teachings and principles (see Appendix B)?

Each of the five sections in the questionnaire was further detailed into short and long questions for respondents' easy understanding and processing. Most sensitive questions that touch ethical issues such as marriage, divorce, religious preference, or the acknowledgement of the number of children, which is a taboo, were discouraged. I reframed and refined wording of any sensitive question to appear inoffensive and friendly to respondents. I gathered information from the respondents in five structured consisting of closed-ended information questions followed by other open-ended questions.

Section # 1 Personal Background

Section # 1 asks for closed-ended questions that cover personal background. The information from these questions seeks to establish the respondent's age, gender, circumcision rite, marital status, individual rites, and rites of their sons, and others.

Section # 2 Education

In section # 2, I collected information by use of closed questions on respondents; Educational background. The data seeks to reveal respondents appropriate level of education and explores whether the level of education has any influence on the Meru ritual development. The data category of education was designated as either formal or informal.

Section # 3 Spirituality

Section # 3 entitled spirituality intended to search for the influence of the respondent's religious beliefs and how such beliefs affect the choice of a Meru boy's mode of circumcision. In this section the views of the respondents were carefully tailored for clarity because by explaining religious views respondents were likely to talk of their own religious practices. In a communal setting, people are not likely to talk about themselves but about others. Hence, listeners can deduce respondents' affiliations and attachments if one is a keen listener. Because I, personally, am Meru and know Meru traditions and history, I know the position taken by most churches and their followers. Indeed churches seemed to be working on getting ritual liturgy for Christian boys' circumcision rite.

Section # 4 Occupation

Section # 4, headed occupation is part of the respondents' report on vocation or work. The second part invites the respondents to explain how a person of his or her profession views the two circumcision options for boys. This second part is also crafted with intention of provoking the respondents to expose their particular beliefs. Most of the

respondents' opinions come very much on the surface when explaining their professional goals rather than other people beliefs.

Section # 5 General Questions

In section # 5 the term general questions essentially carries the real research questions that address objectives and outcomes of this research. The actual findings and conclusions can be found in Chapter 5.

The Population

My research target was in the Igembe district of Kenya, which covers the former Igembe division in Kenya. The Meru region is currently made up of seven administrative districts. Igembe district is one of the seven Meru districts. The current Meru districts cover regions that have the same historical background. The seven regions that have grown each into administrative districts are Igembe, Tigania, Imenti, Mwimbi, Muthambi, Chuka, and Tharaka. Mwimbi, some regions have been renamed thus Imenti today comprise of Imenti north district, Imenti south district, and Meru central districts. Chuka is called Nithi district.³⁸ During emigration from Mbwa, Meru settled on the slopes of Mount Kenya at a place they called Nkubiu,³⁹ but later they separated into seven groups and traveled following the rivers flowing into the lowland from Mt. Kenya forest. The Meru left Nkubiu in seven groups, which have since developed with slightly different dialects and cultures although generally Meru culture has common features in all regions. The seven regions that have grown each into one administrative district are

³⁸On January 2007, Kenya's president, Mwai Kibaki carved three more districts from the old Meru districts. Presently Meru has seven districts: Tharaka, Nithi, Imenti South, Meru Central, Imenti North, Tigania, and Igembe.

³⁹*Nkubiu* may be taken to mean settlement. Later this place came to be known as *kigairwo*, meaning a place where the Meru separated and went into different directions. Today these two names are used interchangeably.

Igembe, Tigania, Imenti, Mwimbi, Muthambi, Chuka, and Tharaka. Since migration, the Meru region has grown to 1.3 million people (Kenya Census 1999). Because this research is about Igembe region, it needs further description the Igembe region.

The Igembe region borders Tigania district to the west, Isiolo district to the northeast, Tharaka district to the south, and Akamba districts to the eastern and south eastern sides. The district lies within latitude 0 degrees 00' and 0 40' in the north and longitudes 37 degrees 50' and 38 degrees (Maua).⁴⁰ The land rises from the Nkubiu and Meru park lowlands to the Nyambene Mountain ridges about 7,500 meters above sea level. The Igembe region is a beautiful land with valleys, forests, and delightful and luxuriant vegetation. The area has a moderate climate throughout the year with the temperature averaging around 60 degrees. About three-quarters of the land is arable, growing coffee, tea leaves, cotton, Miraa, poultry, and livestock. The Nyambene forest and adjacent slopes provide precious hardwood timbers such as Meru oak, Muringa, Mutuati, and Muuru for commercial and local building materials. The lowlands have a variety of wild animals that attract tourists from around the globe.

Igembe is a large district that covers 2,817 square kilometers. It has a population of 469,581 people. It consists of ten administrative divisions, which are further divided into thirty three locations and seventy sub-locations for easy administration and to bring services near to the people (District office).⁴¹ The people who participated in the interview were representative of the whole region where the research findings can reasonably be generalized.

⁴⁰Maua town is the headquarters of Igembe District where official documents were consulted.

⁴¹ Most of Igembe District's statistical reports come from its office at Maua.

The first use of the questionnaire came in the pilot study, which allowed for any needed revisions prior to final data collection

Sample for the Pilot Study

I needed to test the research methodology and my research design, so I recruited a carefully representative group of five Meru witnesses on the ground to provide the first responses to the questionnaire which I then entered into the database for analysis. I was eager to validate both my research method and the viability of the purpose of my study. From that pilot study I revised my purpose statement and all of my research questions. This important first step helped establish an authoritative grounded theory inferred from the Meru witness reports. Because the geographic area under study is large and the population is vast, I used the purposive method to select the sample for interview. I used the purposive selection method because it is flexible and allows the researcher some freedom to act as a participant and observer. I selected the pilot study witnesses through purposive or “theoretical sampling” (Fraenkel and Wallen 103-04) to represent various roles and authoritative perspective and wisdom found across the Meru community.

The purposive/theoretical sampling method process also came alongside my personal reflection and judgments based on my knowledge accumulated over years of pastoral work and firsthand experience with the Meru culture of Igembe. Furthermore, because purposive sampling was the choice, this project demanded uniquely authoritative Meru participants. Also, because of its implications across the Meru cultural context, I exercised my personal discretion in selecting a reliable pilot study population whose results would be generalized to the wider Meru territory (Fraenkel and Wallen 104).⁴²

⁴²Grounded theory allows sample adjustments if more categories emerge from the reports/data to strengthen the theory and further increase the diversity in gainful ways.

The witnesses on the ground that I selected consisted of five Meru men to provide insights from both Meru Christian hospital circumcision practice and Meru traditional field ritual practice. These five witnesses also comprised a spectrum of perspectives beyond that Meru initiation event. Two of the witnesses were physicians. One has closer ties to the traditional culture than with the church, and the other was himself hospital circumcised and remains closely related to the church. Another witness is a clergyman and another is a lay preacher. The final member of the group is a businessman and politician with close ties to both Christian and traditional leaders.

I designed the questionnaire as described and collected the witness interviews. I wrote the memos and summarized each interview comparing the data consistently hoping for a reliable, obvious grounded theory to emerge. I was very observant and interested with the development of the data for this pilot validation study.

The findings led to many decisions and research methods revisions that improved the quality of the data collected from the later research sample. I found that my choice of Meru men who were long-term acquaintances, and with whom I had contact during my earlier ministry, contributed to their deformed responses to the questionnaire. Clearly these five witnesses wanted to please me, even to enlist me in a program that would not form a base of action that would have led to solutions for the Meru crisis of boyhood teaching and of HIV/AIDS threatening to extinguish the Meru identity invested in field circumcision of young men. Furthermore, I could not achieve my desire to see the traditional Meru population and the Christian believers contextualized and in collaboration around common cultural goals for the benefit and survival of Meru culture. Again the conflict I was trying to solve would, instead, be intensified, and not only would

Meru culture be injured. If my research contributed to driving the dominant traditional Meru ritual underground without antiseptic solutions to the HIV dangers, the result could annihilate the coming generations of Meru.

The value of the pilot study is that I learned very much and was able to refine my research methodology because I executed the research process and analyzed and interpreted the pilot data. I was then prepared to recruit a large research population. With my revised and final draft of the research problem, the research purpose, and each of the research questions, I was ready to gather data using my original questionnaire. I immediately took steps to proceed with the dissertation research project.

Participants of the Research Study

With the evidences collected from the pilot study, I moved to identify a large research population of 130 Meru people, representing a wide spectrum of perspectives as witnesses on the ground who could contribute to my identifying the understanding, attitudes, and values of Meru people toward traditional Meru circumcision rites compared to Meru Christian Hospital circumcision rites.

The expanded sample was selected from all corners of the Igembe district. Data from a wider area captures the current trend and understanding of the Meru boys' circumcision rites. Another benefit of the larger area is that respondents would not share with other people likely to be interviewed, thereby jeopardizing the outcome.

The sample of 130 people consisted of those from every level of Meru society. These people were of different religious backgrounds, including non-Christians. The age included those from 20 years old to more than 100 years of age. The percent of the research population who had experienced field circumcision was higher, but hospital

circumcision was also represented. At time of the data collection, more Meru males are being circumcised in the field than are being circumcised in the hospital. Furthermore, the set of witnesses on the ground intentionally included women.

The presence of women in the new sample was deemed appropriate because mothers occupy such a vital role indirectly in determining the final choice of their childrens' ritual. The people selected for the interviews varied in temperaments, age, educational levels, and various gifts, including leadership and business. Interviews were exclusively done by the research assistants. I remained in the background as research director (see Appendix E for my list of qualifications for witnesses on the ground throughout the Igembe region).

Research Assistants

I recruited four research assistants in the Igembe district of Kenya. Each of the research assistants was selected following criteria in Appendixes F and G. As stated earlier, both the respondents and assistants were selected through purposive sampling method because of their knowledge and experience of present boys' initiation rites in Meru. Again, purposive sampling method is flexible; it includes the researcher as an active participant, and also allows the researcher to use his or her past experience in decision making. Both the researcher's and the respondent's experience combined with genuine good-faith data can produce reliable results.

The four assistants on the ground conducted open-ended interviews encouraging respondents to share their judgments and opinions in the conversation. The same questionnaire instruments were used in the pilot study and in the actual research procedures. As I collected responses of the research, witnesses on the ground were being

collected. I was constantly comparing and validating them to each other. This process is a central feature of grounded theory. I acted as the research assistants' trainer and the facilitator. Apart from facilitating behind the scenes, I provided my assistants day-to-day administrative and financial support, along with emotional and moral support.

Sometimes I clarified certain issues over the phone while assistants were in the field. I was consciously aware that my presence in the field could influence the respondents and end up with incorrect data.

Kimeru Data Translation

I collected data in the indigenous Meru language. Kimeru was translated into English by Samuel Muriuki. I assigned official responsibility of translation to someone other than myself to avoid any risk that my bias as a translator might contaminate the data, skewing it toward a particular outcome. Samuel Muriuki is qualified to interpret the data by the following credentials. He has interest in Meru culture. He was born Meru and grew up in Meru. He got his primary and high school education in Meru, Kenya. He is a graduate with communication and salesmanship talents. He has been immersed himself in another culture (currently working in Japan).

When I selected the sample size, appointed the research assistants, and the data interpreter, I was ready to engage the grounded research; I coached the research assistants on how to use the self-designed questionnaire described earlier and moved into the field to collect the data.

Data

In this section I explain the process of data collection, data analysis, and the statistical test or the software for testing the data. The process I followed for data

collection include defining the research problem, selecting the respondents, orientating research assistants, and locating a competent research interpreter of Kimeru to English.

Data Collection

To collect the data, I designed the consent letter, the questionnaire instrument, and the data collection process, coded the data, and applied the software for data analysis. I selected participants for the pilot study, analyzed that experience, and revised the research design based on that validation data. I then completed selection of the 130 witnesses on the ground who provided me with the data for this research project.

Furthermore, I designed a consent letter, which the participants signed to denote their agreement to respond to the interview. The last research steps oriented the research assistants and designed the questionnaire instrument. All of these steps comply with research protocols authorized and approved by Asbury Theological Seminary.

The questionnaire instrument (see Appendixes A and B) consists of closed and open-ended questions following the grounded theory concept. I used the same questionnaire to collect data in both the pilot study and the actual research project. Using the questionnaire I was able to explore the contextual understanding of boys' circumcision history and its purpose among traditional Meru as well as among a cluster of Christian groups. I administered questions to each respondent alone at his or her site of choice. Most respondents preferred to be interviewed in their homes perhaps because of the sensitivity of the research questions, hence to avoid public embarrassment. Because confidentiality was safeguarded by isolating respondents from each other and not exposing them to the greater Meru community, the interviews yielded rich data.

Using this criterion (see Appendix G), I recruited four assistant researchers to

collect the data. Researchers met each evening after a long day's interview to collate the data from the field. I collected data in tapes, DVD, signed forms, and journals written during the interview process to capture the respondents' feelings and resentments through careful observation. As I cleaned the data, I recorded memos of fresh concepts as they appeared each day. Memos I collected helped me during data cleaning, coding, analysis, and interpretation processes. Although researchers struggled with daily problems including walking long distances, failed appointments, family illness, and shortage of money that did not hinder the research to reach its final conclusion.

The largest source of the data came from the interviews. Interview data came from 130 witnesses on the ground at their locations of choice. Most of the interviews took place at home or private offices, I sensed people feel secure in their familiar dwellings. Of these interviews, five were done over the telephone. I collected data between February 2006 and February 2007. On-site interviews required between thirty to forty-five minutes per respondent, while telephone interviews lasted between fifteen to twenty minutes. During the interview the respondents were encouraged to speak about their circumcision rites and that of their sons using nonthreatening language. The witnesses expressed their own perspectives freely.

Field notes and recorded telephone interviews supplemented parts of the information not captured during the tape recorded discussions. Documents including administrative memoranda, church bulletins, national papers, and traditional meetings also provided missing pieces of information.

Data Analysis

The central piece in the research among the Meru was the questionnaire. The data

for analysis was gathered from the questionnaire and many other sources, including recorded tapes, field notes, and observation during the interview process, written and archived documents, and the individual interviews. When the data collection reached saturation, further collection was stopped and the cleaning process begun. The cleaning process consisted of reviewing all of the data sources for a given witness, comparing the notes, the completed questionnaire, and the tape. I deduced from a close examination of these the best construction of what the witnesses intended to convey during the interview. Thereafter, I coded data for analysis. I used quantitative software to assist qualitative data analysis.

When data collection reached a saturation point, I stopped collection of more data and began preparation for the data coding process. Because this research is mainly qualitative, I organized final notes and tapes gathered from respondents. Some of the respondents unable to read or write were assisted by the research assistants to complete the written questionnaire. I carefully transcribed taped voices. Records from interviews and observations were then turned into a digital word processing files for analysis. I invested long hours checking final materials for accuracy before using scientific software called statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) for windows version 14.0 graduate package designed to use numerals to generate detailed frequencies rather than using manual labor.

The frequency tables show the titles, the total number of respondents, and the percent of peoples' responses in each category. The SPSS software was preferred because it analyzes information and produces precise statistical frequencies and graphic displays that are very useful for describing many types of variables/categories. Values are

arranged in ascending order and categories by their frequencies in columns.

Because SPSS software deals conveniently with quantitative experiments, I cleaned the data and thereafter assigned each response a numerical value to generate the data for analysis. Furthermore, I established a codebook with the entire numerical data codes and continued to clean further data entry errors from the database by recoding new variables, correcting the outliers, and checking data trends and distributions. Coding and recoding of new variables that had multiple items followed guidelines in the statistical software—nominal, ordinal, and scale. After inspecting the data codes and convinced every aspect of it was thorough enough, I fed data into SPSS.

Summary

In Chapter 3 I have described the research process I designed and followed in my search for reading the data provided by witnesses on the ground among the Meru about the cultural value attached to maintaining male ritual circumcision as a cultural ritual that has for millennia been a central part of identity within Meru culture. I first summarized the theoretical foundations on which the research rests. I reported on an important pilot study and how the data collected provided the keys to revising my research purpose statement and each of the five research questions, which served so well in the project research and which collected responses from 130 widely diverse Meru representatives. I reported in detail about how the research questions formed the basis of the processing of the carefully weighed responses of each participant and yielded the data. I then reported how the data was sorted and analyzed and how finally I was able to interpret the findings.

In Chapter 4 I will display the data and explain the rich findings in multiple ways. Finally in Chapter 5, I will interpret the data and reflect on possible opportunities the

findings open for serving the Meru people as they make decisions about maintaining a flourishing child-mentoring tradition by which Meru character has long been formed and ways which the values of boy circumcision rituals may be enhanced to protect the young from the devastation of the looming HIV/AIDS threat.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter highlights some of the implications discussed in the previous chapters. Chapter 1 explains the historical background and current practice of Meru boys' initiation rite of circumcision. Chapter 2 confirms through summary of extensive literature that male initiation rites are found in most of the world cultures, nevertheless, only limited research literature addresses the Meru cultural practices, especially the continuing prehistoric Meru boy's circumcision rite. Chapter 3 reports the detailed research design I followed to collect the data and data exploration. Chapter 4 offers an analysis of that important research data, and the implications of those findings are developed in Chapter 5.

The Problem and Purpose Restated

The purpose of this study was to explore the understandings, attitudes, and values of Meru people toward traditional Meru and Christian Hospital circumcision rites. The intention was to find out which of two present circumcision ritual processes Meru people value today and what reasons they assign to the specific ritual they value most. My intended future goals are to provide a basis by which Meru people would be able to enhance the ritual meaning of both rites, bringing them closer to merger into one. To the extent that the prehistoric traditional ritual and the recently developed hospital rite can both incorporate elaborate meaningful preparation for manhood training and focused mentoring of the candidates following the circumcision ceremony, the distinctive Meru identity can be both preserved and enriched. Such contextual enhancement could predictably consolidate respect across the traditional and the denominational

communities, moving beyond mere peaceful coexistence, and opening the door for creating an environment in which the male rite could significantly promote in-depth Christian spirituality. If so, the Meru themselves will have devised a path to preserving the one Meru positive cultural practice that most gives Meru people their unique identity.

Structure of Data Collected

The findings of the field research reported in this chapter are organized following the research questions that collected on the ground responses about Meru attitudes and values regarding both field and hospital circumcision rite histories, values, and purposes. The following questions guided this research: (1) How do Meru people understand the purpose of the traditional Meru circumcision ritual process? (2) How do Meru people understand the purpose of the Christian hospital circumcision ritual process? (3) What aspects of the traditional Meru circumcision ritual process do Meru people value? (4) What aspects of the Christian hospital circumcision ritual process do Meru people value? (5) What aspects of the circumcision processes do Meru people regard as compatible with biblical teachings and principles?

Profile of the Respondents

The following are the data profiles of the respondents gathered as they were interviewed by research assistants following the questionnaire instrument (see Appendix B). The profile data is arranged in five sections: personal background, level of education, religious background, occupation, and general questions. Each section is made up of a cluster of variables. Each of those variables is converted to numerical values to quantify simple questions that were coded to capture the information from each respondent. For example the background section has fourteen variables or simple questions that address

the respondent's actual age, respondent's age at circumcision, respondent's circumcision rite, respondent's gender and marital status, rites of the respondent's circumcised boys, the age of the respondent's uncircumcised boys at which uncircumcised boys will be circumcised, and the preferred rite anticipated for those uncircumcised boys.

Section 1: Personal Background

Of the 130 witnesses, forty-nine or 37.7 percent of the respondents interviewed were between 41 to 60 years old. The second highest number was thirty-six or 27.7 percent who were between 21 to 40 years old. Twenty-three respondents or 17.7 percent were between 61 to 80 years old and only twelve respondent 9.2 percent were between 81 to 100+ years old. The youngest people—under 20 years old—consisted of seven or 5.4 percent, but three respondents or 2.3 percent declined to disclose their ages. Hence, some information for this section was missing:

In summary, the following age factors impacted the participant's responses. Most research participants were between 21 to 60 years old. These people, according to Meru culture, must be circumcised, married, and in a position of community leadership; their information is, therefore, reliable (See Table 4.1).

Table 4.1. Respondents' Ages (N= 130)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Decline	3	2.3	2.3	2.3
	0 – 20 Years	7	5.4	5.4	7.7
	21 - 40 Years	36	27.7	27.7	35.4
	41 - 60 Years	49	37.7	37.7	73.1
	61 - 80 Years	23	17.7	17.7	90.8
	81 - 100+ Years	12	9.2	9.2	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

Circumcision Age

Of the 130, the highest number of respondents, fifty-two or 40 percent was circumcised between 16 to 20 years followed by forty-eight or 36.8 percent respondents who were circumcised between 10 to 15 years old:

In summary, the following circumcision age limit explains the impact participants have in the final outcome of this research the minimum age for Meru boys' circumcision was ten years and the average was sixteen years. In normal circumstance, Meru boys do not grow past twenty years without circumcision. Meru people circumcise boys at adolescence; they do not circumcise young boys. Perhaps at puberty, children are assumed to be mature and ready for circumcision and mentoring for adult responsibility as they enter into adulthood (see Table 4.2 below).

Table 4.2. Respondents' Circumcision Ages (N= 130)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Don't Know	3	2.3	2.3	2.3
	10-15 Years	48	36.9	36.9	39.2
	16-20 Years	52	40.0	40.0	79.2
	21-25 Years	5	3.8	3.8	83.1
	26-30 Years	8	6.2	6.2	89.2
	Not Applicable	14	10.8	10.8	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

Circumcision Rites

The highest frequencies of 103 respondents or 79.2 percent said they were circumcised in the field and only thirteen respondents or 10 percent were circumcised in the hospital, but this question did not apply to fourteen or 10.8 percent of respondents,

who were women. Therefore, the circumcision rites factor impacted respondents' responses.

The majority of respondents were circumcised in the field rather than in the hospital. Respondents' circumcision rites took place between 1924 and 2004 (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3. Respondents' Circumcision Rites

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not Applicable	14	10.8	10.8	10.8
	Field	103	79.2	79.2	90.0
	Hospital	13	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

Respondents' Gender

Of the 130 witnesses, 116 or 89.2 percent were males and fourteen or 10.8 percent were females:

Female respondents are the minority in this research because Meru rites are gender sensitive, thus the research was about male ritual circumcision. Women, however, have indirect roles and influences, which although minimal, are often powerful and cannot be ignored (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4. Respondents' Gender (N=130)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	14	10.8	10.8	10.8
	Male	116	89.2	89.2	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

Marital Status

One hundred and sixteen or 89.2 percent of the respondents were married and three or 2.3 percent were widows. The unmarried were ten or 7.7 percent and only one respondent or .8 percent declined to disclose marital status:

The ten unmarried men were students. Divorce among Meru is perhaps rare and Meru men are unlikely to remain unmarried. Most respondents were parents (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5. Respondents' Marital Status (N= 130)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Decline	1	.8	.8	.8
	Widow	3	2.3	2.3	3.1
	Married	116	89.2	89.2	92.3
	Not Married	10	7.7	7.7	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

Respondents' Perspective on Rites

Of the 130, when asked which rite they could encourage or discourage, seventy-one or 54.6 percent respondents said they would encourage the hospital rite. Thirty-five or 26.9 percent would encourage merging of both rites into one for Meru. Three or 2.3 percent would discourage the hospital rite. One other person declined to answer while another person would discourage using the field rite, which is reported as .8 percent each:

More respondents would encourage the hospital rite than the field rite and gave the following reasons: HIV/AIDS, to promote formal education, to promote faith, and to appear modern. The ground data signs of merging the rites began to appear although this question did not introduce that possibility (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6. Respondent's Perspective on Rites

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Discourage Hospital	3	2.3	2.3	2.3
Encourage Hospital	71	54.6	54.6	56.9
Merge both Rites	35	26.9	26.9	83.8
Decline to Answer	1	.8	.8	84.6
Encourage Field	19	14.6	14.6	99.2
Discourage Field	1	.8	.8	100.0
Total	130	100.0	100.0	

Respondents' Sons' Rites

From the research sample of 130, the highest frequency fifty-five or 42 percent indicates this question was not applicable to them. Thirty-five or 26 percent of respondents had their sons circumcised in the hospital and thirty-one respondents or 23.9 percent had their sons circumcised in the field. Nine or 6.9 percent respondents had some sons circumcised in the hospital and others in the field.

This question was not applicable to 42.3 percent of the respondents because some were not married, others did not have and children, and while many had only very young boys. The number of respondents with sons circumcised in the hospital was higher compared to respondents whose sons were circumcised earlier in the hospital (see Tables 4.3 and 4.7).

Table 4.7. Respondents' Circumcised Sons' Rites (N= 130)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not Applicable	55	42.3	42.3	42.3
	Circumcised in Field	31	23.8	23.8	66.2
	Circumcised in Hospital	35	26.9	26.9	93.1
	Mixed; Hospital/Field	9	6.9	6.9	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

Uncircumcised Sons' Rite

Sixty or 46.2 percent of the 130 respondents said their sons will be circumcised in the hospital. This question did not apply to forty-six or 35.4 percent because most participants did not have sons and others had their sons already circumcised. Only fourteen respondents or 10.8 percent said they will circumcise their sons in the field; 6 people or 4.6 percent respondents declined to answer the question, and, 4 or 3.1 percent said their children will decide the rite they want.

Meru people are beginning to contemplate the thought of allowing a boy freedom to choose his own rite for circumcision. (To conceive such thought is against Meru custom.) The number of boys of respondents favoring the hospital rite continues to increase with time. Parents who themselves were field circumcised are shifting when their now uncircumcised boys. During the respondent's circumcision season, hospital rite was 10 percent at the time of respondents' sons' circumcision the figure rose to 26.5 percent and now the witnesses forecast that at uncircumcised sons' time, it will rise to 46.2 percent. The field rite continues to decrease as a preference, while the hospital rite continues to rise as the circumcision preference (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.8. Respondents' Uncircumcised Sons' Rite (N= 130)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Hospital	60	46.2	46.2	46.2
	Field	14	10.8	10.8	56.9
	Not Applicable	46	35.4	35.4	92.3
	Child to Decide	4	3.1	3.1	95.4
	Decline	6	4.6	4.6	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

Uncircumcised Sons' Age

From the 130 witnesses, sixty-one of respondents or 46.9 percent said their sons will be circumcised after they arrive at the school standard 8 examinations. While this question was not applicable to forty-three respondents or 33.1 percent, seventeen or 13.1 percent of the respondents declined to say when their sons will be circumcised. Only nine or 6.9 percent of respondents said their sons will be circumcised between the common fourteen and seventeen years.

The circumcision age has come down from twenty years to seventeen years and education has begun to influence the circumcision rite. Most respondents said their sons will be circumcised after graduation from primary education and before they go to high school. The numbers that think boys should be circumcised when they reach puberty according to Meru circumcision norms is dwindling and very low (see Table 4.9).

Table 4.9. Respondents' Uncircumcised Sons' Age at Circumcision (N= 130)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid After STD 8	61	46.9	46.9	46.9
Between 14 & 17+ Years	9	6.9	6.9	53.8
Decline	17	13.1	13.1	66.9
Not Applicable	43	33.1	33.1	100.0
Total	130	100.0	100.0	

Section 2: Respondents' Occupations

Of the 130, fifty-five respondents (42.3 percent) were self-employed peasants (agriculture workers). Twenty respondents (15.4 percent) were in private business. Thirteen respondents (10 percent) were pastors. Eleven respondents (10 percent) were teachers. Nine respondents (6.9 percent) were Njuri leaders (the community tradition custodians). Six respondents (4.6 percent) were community volunteer leaders. Four respondents (3.1 percent) were civil government administrative officers at various locations. Two respondents (1.5 percent) were retired. Two respondents (1.5 percent) were evangelists and another two (1.5 percent) were employed statisticians. Of the last two respondents, one (0.8 percent) was a clerk/secretary and the other one (0.8 percent) was a security employee.

The highest frequency distribution confirms the statement that Kenya is highly an agricultural country (Pateman 45). The highest percentage of respondents (57.7 percent) shows that peasants and business people can influence rite practices at the grassroots although they have little or no education (see Table 4.11). Joyce Kebathi

reports that in 2002, Kenya's literacy rate was 74 percent⁴³ (see Table 10).

Table 4. 10. Respondents' Occupations (N= 130)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Employed; Pastor	13	10.0	10.0	10.0
	Self-Employed; Peasant	55	42.3	42.3	52.3
	Community Volunteer; Njuri leader	9	6.9	6.9	59.2
	Employed; Teacher	11	8.5	8.5	67.7
	Employed; Chief	4	3.1	3.1	70.8
	Retired	2	1.5	1.5	72.3
	Employed; Clerk/Secretary	1	.8	.8	73.1
	Self Business	20	15.4	15.4	88.5
	Community leader; Church, Preacher	6	4.6	4.6	93.1
	Employed; Evangelist	2	1.5	1.5	94.6
	Students	4	3.1	3.1	97.7
	Employed Security	1	.8	.8	98.5
	Employed Statistician	2	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

Respondents' Occupation Perspective

When the 130 were asked which rite their occupation supports, forty-seven respondents (36.2 percent) said views of the people in their occupation were divided between the two existing circumcision rites. Furthermore, the second highest frequency distribution indicates twenty-five respondents (19.2 percent) said the question was not applicable in their occupations. While twenty-one respondents (16.2 percent) said their occupations encourage hospital circumcision, sixteen (12.3 percent) said their occupation encourages field circumcision. Another twelve (9.2 percent) said their occupations would

⁴³Kebathi was the director, department of adult education, ministry of gender sports, culture and social services. She reports that before 2003 free primary education was begun only 47 percent of std. pupils enrolled in grade one and along the education line more dropped out joining the illiterate rate, which at that time stood slightly over 4.2 million with women leading with 60 percent.

support the merging of both rites into one and three (2.3 percent) said hospital rite should be discouraged, but six (4.6 percent) were not aware of their occupation's preferences.

The circumcision rite remains an important aspect of Meru culture and it influences people's daily activities and all sectors of life. The existing Meru boys' rite options create division in all sectors of life (see Table 4.11).

Table 4.11. Respondents' Occupations' Perspective on Rites (N = 130)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Encourage Hospital Rite	21	16.2	16.2	16.2
Discourage Hospital Rite	3	2.3	2.3	18.5
Not Applicable	25	19.2	19.2	37.7
Encourage Field Rite	16	12.3	12.3	50.0
Don't Know	6	4.6	4.6	54.6
People Divided; Hospital vs. Field	47	36.2	36.2	90.8
Merge both Rites into One	12	9.2	9.2	100.0
Total	130	100.0	100.0	

Section 3: Respondents' Education Level

Of the 130 respondents primary school graduates were forty-seven (36.2 percent) followed by twenty nine (22.3 percent) respondents without education. Fourteen or 10.8 percent of respondents were college graduates. Twelve (9.2 percent) respondents were graduates and four (3.1 percent) were respondents with no formal education:

Primary graduates and those without any education make up 76 percent of our witnesses. The high school, and college students and graduates form only 38 percent. People with low education exert a lot of influence about Meru boys' rites (see Table

4.12).

Table 4.12. Section 3: Respondents' Education Level (N= 130)

Valid		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
V.	Primary	47	36.2	36.2	36.2
	Secondary	24	18.5	18.5	54.6
	College	14	10.8	10.8	65.4
	Graduate	12	9.2	9.2	74.6
	Other	4	3.1	3.1	77.7
	None	29	22.3	22.3	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

Denomination or Religious Views

Of the sample of 130, the highest frequency column was sixty seven (51.5 percent) who identified themselves as Methodists followed by twenty (15.4 percent). Traditional believers, Catholics, Independent, Holiness, and New Apostolic come third with sixty respondents (4.5 percent) each.

Methodist appears to be the main Protestant denomination largely spread in Meru followed by traditional worshippers. Perhaps Methodist followers command a lot of influence on economy, politics, and social cultural fabric of the Meru people. Furthermore; Meru are notably religious; no Meru live without religious attachments (see Table 4.13).

Table 4.13. Section 4: Respondents' Religious Organization (N=130)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Harvest Christian C.	2	1.5	1.5	1.5
	Methodist	67	51.5	51.5	53.1
	Catholic	6	4.6	4.6	57.7
	Anglican	3	2.3	2.3	60.0
	Pentecost	7	5.4	5.4	65.4
	Independent	6	4.6	4.6	70.0
	Holiness	6	4.6	4.6	74.6
	Kenya Church of Christ	1	.8	.8	75.4
	Tradition	20	15.4	15.4	90.8
	Life Gospel	1	.8	.8	91.5
	Africa Church	1	.8	.8	92.3
	Deliverance Church	1	.8	.8	93.1
	Maximum Salvation Church	1	.8	.8	93.8
	New Apostolic Church	6	4.6	4.6	98.5
	Full Gospel	1	.8	.8	99.2
	SDA Church	1	.8	.8	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

Religious Perspectives

When the 130 were asked their religious ritual's preference, eighty (61.5 percent) of respondents said their religious organization encourages hospital circumcision. In addition, twenty-eight (21.5 percent) said issues of boys' circumcision are the parents' decision:

Although some religious organizations seem to play very little role in boys' rite of circumcision, most religious organizations in Meru exert great influence on the boys' rites. Furthermore, religious organizations support hospital rite and only 10 percent support field rite. Although 21.5 percent said parents decide, and 6.9 percent have no policy, in reality denominations exert a high influence on rites (see Table 4.14).

Table 4.14. Respondents' Religious Organizations' Perspectives on Rites (N= 130)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Encourages Hospital	80	61.5	61.5	61.5
Encourages Field	13	10.0	10.0	71.5
No Policy on Rites	9	6.9	6.9	78.5
Parent's Decision	28	21.5	21.5	100.0
Total	130	100.0	100.0	

Circumcision Rites' Liturgy

When the 130 responded to report whether their denomination has a liturgy for boys' rite, fifty-seven (43.8 percent) said their denominations had temporary programs. The second highest frequency column of fifty (38.5 percent) denied existence of liturgy; only twenty (15.4 percent) that said ritual liturgy exists.

The largest number to report on temporary programs was the Methodists; they were able to articulate their denominational teachings on boys' rites. The cultural impact of the rite suffers from lack of rich teaching of Meru history through reenacting the prehistoric rite and participating in its ritual (see Table 4.15).

Table 4.15. Circumcision Rites' Liturgies (N=130)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid No Liturgy	50	38.5	38.5	38.5
Temporary Programs	57	43.8	43.8	82.3
Liturgy Exists	20	15.4	15.4	97.7
Don't know	3	2.3	2.3	100.0
Total	130	100.0	100.0	

Section 5: General Questions

This section deals with the research questions and explains the history and the purpose rites in both traditional and Christian perspectives. This section detail new findings to be discussed in the next section.

Field Circumcision History

When asked the beginning of Meru circumcision, of the 130, thirty-nine (30 percent) did not know when field circumcision began, but thirty-six (27.7 percent) were aware circumcision began before migration at Mbwa by a woman who did not put the *Ndigi*. The following group, twenty (18.5 percent) said field circumcision began long before settlement at Mbwa. Twenty (15.4 percent) declined to answer and eleven (8.5 percent) said the ritual began after migration by men and they put the *Ndigi*:

The first Meru circumciser was a woman; she did not put *Ndigi*, but performed circumcision as is done in the hospital today. Perhaps she learned the skill from another woman who is long forgotten before Meru settlement at Mbwa. It is a rite of passage that transitioned children from childhood to adulthood. The traditional rite was later begun as men took over to produce warriors and put in the *Ndigi*. Respondents who declined to answer this question reserved their answers perhaps for fear of a curse associated with cultural practice abuse as outsiders exploit the cultural practices and report them to the outside world (see Table 4.16).

Table 4.16. History of Meru Field Circumcision (N= 130)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid At Mbwa by Women; no Ndigi	36	27.7	27.7	27.7
After Migration by Men – Ndigi	11	8.5	8.5	36.2
Don't Know	39	30.0	30.0	66.2
Decline to Answer	20	15.4	15.4	81.5
Began long time ago	24	18.5	18.5	100.0
Total	130	100.0	100.0	

Hospital Circumcision History

When asked when hospital rite was begun, forty-eight of the 130 respondents, (36.9 percent) did not know when hospital circumcision was begun in Meru. Fourteen (31.5 percent) respondents said hospital circumcision is from a foreign culture. Twenty-two (16.9 percent) respondents said hospital circumcision was begun in late 1940s, and nineteen (14.6 percent) said hospital circumcision was begun by the missionaries and later Christians took over.

The “I don't know” frequency column scores higher than others: perhaps history for these respondents is not of interest to them because Christians are certain of winning against the field rite. For non-Christians, a hospital rite is nothing but a disgrace, denoting being overpowered by foreigners. Although the Meru area was fertile ground for Christian conversions, traditions such as field circumcision hindered its growth and diluted its changing power among those who did accept baptism and joined the denominations. Therefore, Christian converts were very few because by 1956 as Bernardi observes (28-29); see Table 4.17.

Table 4.17. History of Meru Hospital Circumcision (N=130)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Missionaries/Meru Christians	19	14.6	14.6	14.6
	Foreign (Whites) Custom	41	31.5	31.5	46.2
	Began late 1940s	22	16.9	16.9	63.1
	Don't Know	48	36.9	36.9	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

The Purpose of Field Circumcision

When asked the purpose of field rite, 107 (82.3 percent) said the purpose of field circumcision is to transition boys from childhood into adulthood and is an important Meru custom as seventeen (13.1 percent) confirmed. Four (3.1 percent) and two (1.5 percent) did not know the answer to the question or intentionally declined to answer: Meru Christians and non-Christians know circumcision rite transitions boys into adulthood. Perhaps to imagine ever stopping the Meru boys' rite of circumcision, be it field or hospital; it plays such a vital role in the whole community (see Table 4.18).

Table 4.18. The Purpose of Meru Field Circumcision Ritual (N= 130)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Meru Custom	17	13.1	13.1	13.1
	Transition to Adulthood	107	82.3	82.3	95.4
	Don't Know	4	3.1	3.1	98.5
	Decline to Answer	2	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

The Purpose of Hospital Circumcision

When asked the purpose of hospital circumcision, forty-eight (36.9 percent) said the purpose of hospital circumcision is to fulfill Abraham’s covenant with God or to maintain cleanliness fifteen (11.5 percent). Fifteen respondents’ (11.5 percent) said hospital circumcision encourages formal education, and strong Christian faith, but thirty-five (26.9 percent) said the purpose is to fulfill Meru customs and the covenant while nine (6.9 percent) declined to answer:

The high frequency indicates that hospital circumcision is closely linked with Jewish practice, but is also thought to encourage education, cleanliness, and Christian faith and Meru cultural practices (see Table 4.19).

Table 4.19. The Purpose of Hospital Circumcision Ritual (N=130)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Meru Custom; (beliefs & practices)	35	26.9	26.9	26.9
	God's Covenant/ Abraham	48	36.9	36.9	63.8
	Covenant/Cleanliness (Avoid Pain & Germs)	15	11.5	11.5	75.4
	To Avoid Cultural Teachings	8	6.2	6.2	81.5
	Encourage Formal Education/ Strong Christian Faith	15	11.5	11.5	93.1
	Decline to Answer	9	6.9	6.9	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

Rites’ Compatibility

When asked if both rites have areas of agreements, eighty-four (64 percent) said

yes, and both rites can be modified and merged into one. Although twenty-five (19.2 percent) declined to answer, another twenty one (16.2 percent) said the two rites should remain separate.

The high frequency column supports modification of both rites before merging them. The higher response rate confirms both rites have similarities and also low response confirms both rites have some flaws, which should be examined critically. Furthermore, respondents who either out of denial or from driving benefits by current ritual conflicts, they said rites should be reviewed and remain separate, but another team declined to make their stand known (see Table 4.20).

Table 4.20. Merging the Hospital and the Field Rites into One Rite (N=130)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not Possible	21	16.2	16.2	16.2
	With Modification	84	64.6	64.6	80.8
	Decline to Answer	25	19.2	19.2	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

Merger Process

When asked how merger should be done, ninety (69.2 percent) respondents’ said all leaders should discuss modification then merge rites into one. Another seventeen (13.1 percent) favored the hospital rite to lead the process, but sixteen (12.3 percent) said both rites should be reformed and exist separately while seven (5.4 percent) declined to answer:

The highest frequency column favored subjecting merger to discussion and to arrive at modifications of the two rituals before merging into one. The categories of

community leaders to participate include civil administration, religious, and traditional consulting together (see Table 4.21).

Table 4.21. Rite's Merger Process Needs Planning (N= 130)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid All Leaders to Discuss Merger	90	69.2	69.2	69.2
Reform Rites Separately	16	12.3	12.3	81.5
Decline to Answer	7	5.4	5.4	86.9
Hospital Overtake Field	17	13.1	13.1	100.0
Total	130	100.0	100.0	

Summary of the Research Questions

Below are the research questions and a summary of the items from the research data that addressed those questions.

Question 1

How do Meru people understand the purpose of the traditional Meru circumcision ritual process?

This question was answered in two ways. The first section dealt with the Meru history of circumcision and the purpose of field circumcision. The second section dealt with the history of hospital circumcision and the purpose that hospital circumcision serves according to the Meru people.

Meru boys’ field circumcision history. In Table 4.16 (p. 146), the highest frequency column indicates most respondents (30 percent) were not able to tell the history of Meru boys’ field circumcision. Perhaps Meru people have poor exposure to

their own history, or the reasons correlate with the Meru illiteracy rate as shown in Table 4.12 (p. 143). The primary graduates were 36.2 percent and 22.3 percent had no education; therefore, the two percentages combined formed 58.5 percent that greatly influenced this response. Nevertheless, 54.7 percent were aware of Meru field circumcision history. Therefore people who do not know field ritual history are a minority (30 percent). Perhaps the people who fall in this “do not know” category were too young to know history. Maybe some respondents feared curse threats associated with the cultural practice of extraction to show to the outside world.

The research question number one dealt with the history of the Meru people and Meru boys’ circumcision history from Mbwa to the present day. Meru were once slaves of *Nguu Ntune* at a place called Mbwa, but later they ran away. The Meru may have begun boy circumcision earlier (18.5 percent) or it was begun at Mbwa by a woman who passed it on to another woman called Ciobaibaya who continued to circumcise even after Mbwa (27.7 percent). Ciobaibaya used the same surgery method as is done today in the hospitals. She cut the entire foreskin off. When Meru migrated from Mbwa to escape enslavement, they settled into their present land neighboring the Maasai people. The Meru invited a Maasai circumciser to perform the surgery, operating on Meru boys putting *Ndigi* like those done in his own tribe. Later Meru men took circumcision over from women (8.5 percent). The first Meru male used the Maasai circumcision method. He was called Ruuju and is celebrated today in songs and riddles.

The purpose of field circumcision ritual. The question about the field rite received the highest frequency distribution of 82.3 percent. Most of the respondents agreed that the circumcision ritual purpose is to transition boys from childhood into

adulthood and to equip boys with courage to defend the community from external forces. Therefore, the boys' ritual is an integral part of Meru customs. The Meru boys' circumcision ritual is valued by every Meru person whether a Christian or non-Christian, employed or not employed (see Tables 4.6 (p. 137); 4.11 (p. 142); and 4.14 (p. 145). A negative talk or even thought on stopping boys' circumcision ritual would be met with resistance because it plays such a vital role in the whole Meru community. Exactly 79.2 percent of respondents reported that Meru boys are circumcised between ten and twenty years old (see Tables 4.2 (p. 134). Circumcision age is delayed to allow boys' time to mature before they enter into adulthood. Nevertheless, some changes are coming as 46.9 percent of the respondents reported that their sons will be circumcised after they graduate from school standard 8 (see Table 4.9 (p. 140).

The Meru people have an informal liturgy that is used during field circumcision season to educate the young initiates as they enter into adulthood roles. The liturgy forms the basis of teaching and counseling/mentoring for the boys to enter into a covenant between themselves (initiates), other initiates, parents, ancestors, and between themselves and the Meru community and with the Meru God.

Initiated adults are responsible for their own property and family, and they serve as the community's security force. Uninitiated boys cannot marry, own property or rise to community leadership. They cannot be entrusted with other people's security, not even their own. They cannot lead prayers or talk to the public.

Question 2

How do Meru people understand the purpose of the hospital-Christian circumcision ritual process?

This question was answered in two sections: section one mainly deals with the history of hospital circumcision and section two deals with the purpose of hospital circumcision according to the Meru community.

History of hospital circumcision. Perhaps most people do not know when hospital circumcision began in Meru because of little or no formal education. Such people were unlikely to talk about the exact date of an event (36.2 percent primary graduates, 22.3 percent no education, thus 58.5 percent would influence this question greatly). Further, 31.5 percent plus 16.9 percent equals 48.4 percent said hospital circumcision is a foreign practice brought by missionaries and colonialists. One respondent observed, “Hospital initiation was begun by whites and its purpose was to help boys to stay in school and avoid diseases. Most of those who underwent the cut were kept at mission centers until they healed.” The hospital circumcision rite was introduced by missionaries in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Then, after that Meru Christians took over the rites. The issue of hospital circumcision is exclusively one for Christians. Non-Christians despise the hospital surgery and those who practice it. The hospital rite is not well accepted like the field rite. Although the Meru area was fertile ground for Christian conversions, but traditions such as field circumcision hindered its growth and likely account for the divided loyalties among many Christians who still value the field circumcision ritual. There were very few converted Christians by 1956 (Bernardi 28).

The purpose of hospital circumcision ritual. A majority of respondents (36.9 percent plus 11.5 percent plus 11.5 percent equals 59.9 percent) said the purpose of hospital circumcision is to fulfill Abraham’s covenant with God. Therefore, Meru understand circumcision as a covenant between peoples, and between people and God.

Although statistical reports confirm the search for the research question number five, the findings connect Jewish and Meru beliefs about circumcision, therefore, these findings open up another dimension for future research.

Also, boy circumcision (26.9 percent plus 6.2 percent equals 33.1 percent) fulfills Meru custom, but modern society believes circumcised boys are cleaner. They like formal education and have strong Christian faith.

Questions 3 and 4

What aspects of the traditional Meru circumcision ritual process do the Meru people value? What other aspects of the Christian hospital circumcision ritual process do Meru people value?

Questions 3 and 4 were answered by assessing what Meru people value in the field and the hospital rites. Thus, 64 percent said both rites have many similar values and that they could allow both to merge into one ritual after extensive modifications. Nevertheless, a few respondents wished to support the status quo. Though they agreed that both rites should be modified they wanted the revisions made separately. These were a minority (19.2 percent and 16.2 percent equals 35.4 percent). Their responses express a desire to accept reforms and affirm both rites are facing changed contexts. In order for them to survive, critical revisions are needed.

Question 5

To what extent do Meru people regard circumcision ritual as compatible with biblical teachings and principles?

The 69.2 percent of the Meru sample favored a baraza-meeting of all leaders to discuss and propose modification before rites can be merged into one. Although some

people may not have favored the idea of merging both rites for their own reasons, they were a minority (12.3 percent plus 13.1 percent equals 25.4 percent). People from both sides were willing to give ritual merger a chance by shelving their reservations. Respondents during the research observed that many aspects were mentioned as compatible when they compared traditional and Christian rites that include naming, counseling/mentoring, celebrations, and education.

Major Findings

The research resulted in the following major findings:

1. The origin of Meru boy's circumcision is not clear, but the first circumciser was a woman. She did not put *Ndigi*. *Ndigi* was a later modification learned the from the Maasai tribe. The Meru men circumciser learned *Ndigi* modification from Maasai men and took circumcision surgery away from Meru women circumcisers.
2. Meru boys undergo the circumcision rite between ten and twenty years of age.
3. Meru field circumcision fulfills two purposes, to transition boys into adulthood and to instill courage after which they (the warriors group) can be responsible for their own property, their family, community security.
4. Hospital circumcision ritual was introduced in Meru by missionaries and colonialists for the purpose of preserving Jewish covenantal belief, encouraging education, and preserving Christian faith. Perhaps it was also for enculturation.
5. The practice of hospital and field circumcision rites have created two opposing subgroups within Meru community. Findings report encouraging and positive sentiments from both proponents of field and hospital rites, which would strengthen former Meru peaceful coexistence by modifying the two rites into one.

6. Meru people seemed to value both rites as means of transitioning boys into adulthood, hence, exists hope of convening a meeting to discuss areas of compatibility to form one rite.

7. If Meru fail to agree on a unified rite, the hospital circumcision rite will slowly overtake the field circumcision rite because of the risk of HIV/AIDS infection through “one knife” field circumcision. If that trend continues, only a merger with a common boyhood training in Meru values, culture, and history can prevent the potential tragic loss of Meru cultural identity.

8. Education is rapidly asserting a strong influence on boys’ rite of circumcision age. Parents reported they prefer to wait to circumcise their sons after standard eight (STD 8) graduations and perhaps before or shortly after entering high school.

Conclusion

Chapter 4 has continued its efforts to understand the problem and to achieve the purpose that guided this research. Here I extend my reporting on the usefulness of grounded theory as the theoretical choice for examining the foundations of male circumcision within Meru culture.

The data collected from all the respondents informed the project analysis and analysis summaries that appear in Chapter 4. The analysis of the research data in this chapter confirms that the time is right for Meru Christians to initiate collaboration with traditional Meru people to find common ground for boyhood rituals both to preserve Meru identity for boys and to deepen Christian identity for candidates. Furthermore, the research evidence affirms that the time is also right for negotiations among Meru themselves. The traditional program is at a tipping point to move toward

incorporating Christian values and practices for hygienic/health reasons and for consolidating the national moral and spiritual sense of identity as Meru people with a common tradition. Because this project is the first of its kind known in my own Meru culture, and because the narratives are of such a sensitive cultural and personal nature, and with such crucial biblical, cultural, and political issues at stake, I determined that the actual names of the people who participated in data process will not be used. I assigned anonymous code identifications instead of names in this chapter and Chapter 5 as is essential to preserve research integrity and to avoid the sensitive objection of “cultural abuse,” which rises from the ground of this field research.

Finally, the major findings in Chapter 4 provide a firm basis for interpretations, conclusions, and identification of further research potentials, which I report in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter further discusses, evaluates, and interprets the data in light of boys' circumcision rites within its historical, biblical, and present contexts as it is understood and practiced by many communities and particularly the Meru people of the Igembe region. The data collected from Meru people narrates the journey toward adulthood. It also illustrates the importance of this project as I encounter the Meru people from the primitive setting to the present time, undergoing unwarranted divisions caused by foreigners who did not respect circumcision as a rite of passage. Furthermore, data interpretation highlights the struggles Christians as well as traditional people face because of inherent conflicts between traditional and Christian convictions about male circumcision in the Meru context. Herein I report an experience of the Meru tradition, signs of a Meru identity crisis, and I describe the various resources needed by Meru and Christian traditions for dialogue. Here, also, I affirm the conflict between modernity and tradition is an ongoing problem. Thus, the purpose of this project was to evaluate Meru people's understandings, attitudes, and values of the boys' rites of passage. The contribution the Meru people "on the ground" made to this research is enormous.

Problem and Purpose Restated

The purpose of this study was to explore the understandings, attitudes, and values of Meru people toward traditional Meru and Christian hospital circumcision rites. The conflict between Meru tradition believers and Meru Christians is an old problem. Christians and Meru traditional believers fight each other during boys' initiation rite of

circumcision. Conflict has been here for a long time and is still ongoing. I, like other born-again evangelicals, cut off from cultural practices, have fueled the struggle by looking down on the traditional believers. I have repented of those earlier judgments and have resolved that the problem should be addressed and resolved so far as is possible. Thus the approach of this research was to access the understandings, attitudes, and values that Meru people place on the Meru boys' rites of circumcision. I pursue this project with a hope of providing resources that can resolve the situation.

The data I have collected goes far in explaining why tensions break out between the traditional and the Christian groups in Meru when Meru traditional leaders set the date of boys' traditional circumcision events. Perhaps the misunderstanding is rooted in the way missionaries began evangelism in Meru with a motive to win pagans to Christ by all means. The same method is practiced by Meru Christians today; they try to win their non-Christian Meru acquaintances to the Christian faith. When traditional Meru sense their Christian Meru brothers', sisters', and relatives' motives are to destroy Meru history and the ritual that has provided Meru identity for thousands of years. It is understandable that they resent the threat of extinguishing Meru traditions, and tensions heighten. Each group tries to win converts from the other group. Accusations are composed into songs that are sometimes sung and shouted against Christians. The songs are intended to apply pressure for the boys from Christian families to come over to join the traditional circumcision ceremony. On the other side, Christians will use sermons from Scripture and will openly challenge the traditional side as being evil, even satanic, in their practices in an effort to keep Christian families and their boys away from the traditional ceremony. Friction between Meru Christians and Meru non-Christians (traditional believers) have

been an ongoing problem for several decades (1907 to 2007+), and it increases now more than ever before. In my research and in listening to Meru people on the ground, they have strongly expressed willingness to address the situation and to search for an amicable solution in which all Meru “win” (64.6 percent).

During collection and analysis of interview data for this research, I noticed that when each side’s attitudes and feelings toward the rites (hospital and field) were opened for conversation one-on-one, people began to engage in respectful and constructive conversation. All the people interviewed were able to express their preferences freely at the time of data collection. Meru people are ready to face each other with mutual respect and to discuss a way out of this quagmire. The present study has further encouraged ways for evaluating both the existing traditional and Christian liturgies for initiating boys into adulthood. Furthermore, I anticipate that these people will soon formulate a unified liturgy that is theologically sound and culturally respectful for initiating boys into adulthood. Such a liturgy will incorporate Christian and traditional values that are compatible and that will address issues of the present life.

I assume that a well-designed liturgy agreed to by both sides can incorporate some or most of the traditional ritual aspects that do not conflict with Christian beliefs and practices. The research data confirms that a liturgy of that type will definitely find acceptance in the minds of Christians and will be respected among Meru traditional people. Perhaps this might be the starting point of minimizing the inherent tension between Meru traditional people and the Meru Christians and to pave the way for future convergence of both practices into one to give Meru people a future and identity.

In the next sections, I explain in detail how the research findings throw light on the oral history of boys' initiation rites, and increasing appreciation of both the traditional Meru beliefs and Christian beliefs and practices as reported by witnesses on the ground. The "findings on the ground" actually have raised some new questions about Meru history and identity which are worth additional research. The reported data, as evident in Chapter 4, documents hopes from both Christian and traditional Meru for revisions in both rituals that preserve the rich Meru history and culture for all Meru boys. A common goal for all Meru is to discover ways of protecting boys from exposure to HIV/AIDS without closing down the effective boyhood training and launching that ritual circumcision has provided from prehistoric times.

Expanding History of Meru Boy's Circumcision Based on Findings

According to the research findings, the Meru boys' circumcision rite is as old as the Meru people. Perhaps it dates back before the arrival and settlement at the Mbwa site. Since the Meru's origin, they have formulated many reasons for practicing boys' circumcision. In the next section I give a brief explanation of Meru peoples' origin and boys' circumcision as reported by the research documentation provided by the witnesses on the ground.

Meru Peoples' Origin

Although some Kenyan historians report that Meru people settled in their present land in AD 1750 (Macharia 14), oral data from my own research witnesses including other Meru elders clearly support an earlier arrival. Witnesses explained four theories about Meru's migration. One theory says that the Meru people migrated from Mbwa, a site near the east coast of East Africa and crossed the river Tana near Bura town north of

the Bura irrigation scheme. Maybe the term Mbwa means place of waters. Another respondent observed that Mbwa means Pwani. Pwani is a Kiswahili word, meaning coast. Therefore, Mbwa might be a Kimeru mispronunciation of the term Pwani. The second theory says that Meru people migrated from the north. This theory also finds support from earlier foreign writers of Meru customs (Bernardi 2). Meru are said to have moved from a place called Mbwa, which “seems to refer to a land beyond an expanse of water that emigrants had to cross” (2). The third theory says the Meru migration began from south Sudan. The Meru then crossed the Red Sea, *Iria Itune*, and entered the present Meru land from the Ethiopian mountains. The fourth oral story says Meru originated from the central African Congo forest along with other Bantu communities, and they migrated to the present Meru land. Perhaps Meru people were part of the Meroe kingdom in southern Sudan that developed and ruled itself independent of a powerful Egyptian kingdom until it was weakened by Egyptian and Roman wars and faded away around the second or third centuries. The Meroetic of Nubia or Napata had developed the technology of iron refining to make spears, knives, hoes, arrows, and axes. The Meru people have practiced the same technology over the centuries. My research respondents said these tools allowed them to develop a mixed farming community, and they exploited tropical forests and the open savannah for hunting. Perhaps migration took place through the Red Sea or by crossing the river Nile in the southern bend. Since some respondents said Meru people came from the right hand direction, *Urio*, they may have entered Kenya from the northeast and traveled down to the Meru area around the Mount Kenya eastern ridges. Because a majority of the witnesses on the ground support the first and third theories and the minority tend to support the second and third theories, one could conclude that the

Meru origin is not fully known. Nevertheless, all witnesses agree that the name of the place from which they originated is called Mbwa. Because most of Meru cultural practices resemble Jewish structure, including boys' circumcision, monotheistic worship, sacrifices, and community leadership, some have speculated that Meru people may be among the lost Jews:

[Meru culture] is also one of the most deeply intriguing, at least from a western point of view, as it contains extremely strong Biblical similarities that suggest to some that they may once have been one of the lost tribes of Israel, and to others that they were once Jewish, in the same way that the Falashim of Ethiopia remain Jewish to the present day. This history includes a good part of both Old and New Testament stories: a baby in a basket of reeds who becomes a leader and a prophet, the massacre of newly born babies by an evil king, an exodus, the parting and crossing of the waters by an entire nation, Aaron's Rod in the form of a magic spear or staff, the leadership of a figure comparable to Moses, references to ancient Egypt. (Ameru, Wikipedia encyclopedia)

Perhaps the Meru people are Jews that came to their present land as one group, or they perhaps came in two groups at different times following different routes. Because the Meru origins remain a mystery, a detailed research is necessary to unlock the puzzle.

Migration from Mbwa. According to respondents, Meru people migrated from Mbwa led by Koomenjue⁴⁴ to escape from their slave masters called *Nguuntune*.⁴⁵ They reached a place called *Nkubiu* and settled there for a long time. Most respondents agree *Nkubiu* is also known as *kigairwo*, a division site where the Meru decided to separate and go into different directions following the rivers flowing down from Mt. Kenya forests.

⁴⁴*Koomenjwe* was a talented Meru leader who led people out of slavery like Moses of Jewish tradition. He had a rod, which he used to beat the Red Sea, *Iria Itune*, for people to cross. Unconfirmed oral data says Meru elders have secretly kept the same rod and pieces of spear they made. These heirlooms are used during some initiation stages into elder-hood.

⁴⁵The term *Nguuntune* as described by the elders has several meanings. It means people of light color or people wearing red colored clothes. Respondents did not all mention or describe these people in any other way except calling them *Nguuntune*. Previous writers have advanced different claims about *Nguuntune*. Some writers say *Nguuntune* were either Arabs or whites. Meru masters may have been foreigners or other Africans.

The Nkubiu site is in the lowland south east of Mt. Kenya. The place had long savannah grass called *Murunguru* that exists today. Most of the research response witnesses said the Nkubiu site in the old days was located at the junction of Tigania, Igembe, Tharaka, and Meru national park (see Appendix W). The Nkubiu site today is probably located at *Nthangatha*, the location of the Tigania East division. Since the Meru migration period, names and boundaries have changed, affecting historical sites. To locate the Nkubiu site, and even mention of the name itself, might trigger tribal wars among the inhabitants of the area (see Appendix W).

My witnesses reported that from *Kigairwo*, Ameru decided to go in different directions to avoid any future slavery. The Imenti people went toward the northwest and northeast, facing Mount Kenya along the river *Kathita*. Igembe and Tigania people (together a single group) went toward the east and northeast along the river *Thangatha* and the river *Uura*. Then the Tharaka people remained along the original site and spread toward the south and southwest in the lowlands. Igoji and Mwimbi people followed the rivers *Maara* and *Thingithu* while the Chuka people followed the *Thuuci* River. The last three groups, Igoji, Mwimbi, and Chuka, went toward the west. Although the Igembe and Tigania people went together, they split later when they reached *Nkinyang'a*. Most of these historical “facts” emerged spontaneously during interviews with my witnesses on the ground in Meru land.

Igembe people

Witnesses reported in detail about how the Igembe and Tigania people settled at *Nkinyang'a*. The group increased in number, and as their security increased, they began to fight the Mwoko, Randille, Maasai, Samburu, Ndorobo, Galla and Turkana—the

original inhabitants of the area they occupied. Because inhabitants were many, the elders decided that to overcome them, the Meru should regroup into two teams. With new age-set groups circumcised and more boys born because of favorable climates, the Meru military strength was far greater than that of other neighbors except the Maasai or Maa-speaking people. The Meru elders sent warriors to survey the land along Micii Mikuru, Mukuiru, and Muthara areas. At the same time, another party left toward *Mutuati* along the *Ngaya* forest through the *Ngukuma* (*Ruumbine* area).

The research witnesses reported about how both teams returned with tree roots as advised by elders. Those who went to the present Tigania brought short roots and those along *Ngaya* came with long roots. The elders advised that people choose the direction they wanted to go but cautioned them that they must realize that the fertility and productivity of the soil is indicated by the length of the tree roots. Roots also indicated amount of rainfall in the area. Those who went toward the west are presently the Tigania people, and those who went toward the east are the Igembe.

History of Field Circumcision Restated

The research witnesses confirmed my grandmother's story; she told me that boys' circumcision among the *Ameru* was begun before the arrival at *Mbwa* and after the migration to the present Meru land. Circumcision was begun mainly as a ritual of transition from childhood into adulthood. According to witnesses, the Meru people seem to have discontinued the circumcision ritual during migration until they settled at *Nkubiu*. The first Meru warrior house, *Gaarua ya Nthaka*, was built at *Nkubiu*. It was called *Mukunga*.⁴⁶ The Meru people were together at *Nkubiu*, but later they separated to go into

⁴⁶ *Mukunga* is the father of the Meru Community who was married to a woman called Ngaa. Even today Meru refer themselves as “*karindi ka Mukunga na Ngaa*,” the community of *Mukunga* and *Ngaa*.

different directions toward Mt. Kenya. *Igembe* and *Tigania* migrated toward the *Nyambene* ridge of mountains along the slopes of Mt. Kenya. They chose the second circumcision site at *Nkinyang'a* and built *Gaar* at *Nturuba* (presently Wesley academy). When *Igembe* and *Tigania* separated at *Nkinyang'a*, the *Igembe* people built a third *Gaar* at *Ntankii*, a current site between *Antubentwe ya kiongo* and *Luciuti* locations of the *Ndoleli* division (see Appendix K). Where the *Meru* built the warriors' house, they also built the *Njuri-ncheke* house, because warriors that graduate from warrior-hood must move to the next status toward eldership.

Njuri-ncheke

Witnesses said when *Meru* elders constitute a new warrior band, the earlier warrior band in the normal circumstance graduates from warrior-hood to *Njuri-ncheke*⁴⁷ or the beginning of eldership. *Njuri-ncheke* appears to be the third stage warriors enter after warrior-hood to learn community secrets and further promote *Ameru's* social norms. This research is about circumcision, and my witnesses went into detail to describe both the ritual and the locations for the mentoring schools for warriors. *Njuri* is another stage after warrior-hood, I shall explain it briefly for consistency. *Njuri* was reconstituted at *Nkubiu*, and the first *Njuri* house was built at *Nkubiu*, also called *Mukunga*. The *Igembe* and *Tigania* people built their second *Njuri* house at *Thuuru* near *Ntuuruba*, and after *Igembe* and *Tigania* separated, *Igembe* built their third *Njuri* house at *Kiamauku* (*Kiromwathi* near *Nkandone*) in *Naathu* location of *Mutuati* division. This complex history is woven by the witnesses on the ground, some of whom were more than hundred years old (see Appendixes L and N).

⁴⁷ *Njuri-ncheke* is a name given to *Meru's* top council of elders. Members of the council are tasked with the responsibilities including formulation of laws and policies to guide the society. *Kiama*, a section of elders moving from warriorhood to *Njuri*, implements policies made by *Njuri-ncheke* council.

Before the Meru left *Kigairwo*, they agreed to keep the *Njuri* council as the final and central Ameru administrative organization that met once a year to discuss the welfare of the entire Meru society and formulate laws. The agreement took place at Kigairwo and site was chosen called *Nchiru* which remains the Njuri Council center even today (see Appendix V and W). *Nchiru* is at the *Uringu* Division in Tigania (see Appendix W). Each section of Meru people had their own Njuri meeting house where decisions were made at the local level. Complex and hard issues were referred to the Greater Njuri-ncheke annual meeting at *Nchiru*.

Most witnesses agreed that Igembe's Njuri-ncheke center was later built at the Miori⁴⁸ location in Igembe southeast division (see Appendix W). The representatives of the entire Igembe Njuri houses met at Miori and sent their few representatives to the annual meeting of the whole Meru Njuri-ncheke council at *Nchiru*. Perhaps Meru people were among the most democratic African societies long before the arrival of foreigners:

The Meru were traditionally governed by elected and hierarchical councils of elders from the clan level right up to the supreme "Njuri-ncheke" council that governed all the seven sections, making Meru perhaps the only pre-colonial democratic nation in sub-Saharan Africa. The Njuri is the only tradition judicial system recognized by the Kenyan state.⁴⁹

Although the Njuri held Meru society together in the period under discussion, today it is nonfunctional in some of Meru society. Njuri is one of the cultural practices missionaries and colonialists fought and dismantled, although Njuri has refused to "die" in some parts of the Meru region such as Igembe.

⁴⁸The Njuri members who met at Miori were representatives of branch houses located in each location or clan/s. *Miori* today is in the Miori location of Igembe East division (see Appendix W).

⁴⁹Of late some of the Meru people have begun to report their traditions such as Njuri in the Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia.

Ciobaibaya: A Woman Circumciser

According to the respondents, Meru people did not practice boys' or girls' circumcision during immigration from Mbwa until they settled in *Nkubiu*-their present location. (Girls' circumcision is a subject for another researcher). During migration circumcision was not possible because of insecurity and a lack of food, and a peaceful time was needed for circumcision wounds to heal. My grandmother's version of the history of circumcision was supported from most the research respondent witnesses and Meru elders⁵⁰ up to the present time. She said long ago, Meru male circumciser was a woman until sometime later when men took over.

Most respondents agreed the first Meru male circumciser was a woman called Ciobaibaya.⁵¹ Respondents seemed unaware when Ciobaibaya began circumcising. She continued to circumcise boys after the Meru settled at the lowlands of their present region. Some elders said *Ratanya* was the last age-set she circumcised, but others said the last age set was *Buantai*. Although respondents seem not to have consensus about when she began her circumcision art, or the last age set she circumcised, they agree Ciobaibaya stopped circumcising men when a more complicated circumcision method of the distinctive surgical procedure called *Ndigi* was introduced.

⁵⁰My grandmother was born around 1890 and died in 1987. She was a most renowned Meru tradition custodian. Her version of the circumcision story was supported by the famous Kithanje from Tigania in 1982 as he spoke to *miathene* students about Meru traditions.

⁵¹From the time the Meru left Mbwa under *komenjue*, they have kept leaders for men and women; most of the referenced women leaders include Ciobaibaya, *Ciobaitubua* and *Ciokalaine*. *Ciobaitubua* belonged to *Ratanya* age set, which was circumcised at the present Meru land. She never circumcised men. The only woman who circumcised men was Ciobaibaya who came along with Meru from Mbwa. *Ciobaitubua* lived at *Kaongo ka Urimba* presently called *kiorimba* in *Mbeu*, Tigania.

Ruuju: Male Circumciser

Most respondents said that the Meru had adopted the Maasai warrior circumcision method of cutting *Ndigi* to make Meru warriors fierce like the Maasai warriors. During the migration, the Meru people encountered fierce and hostile Maasai people who kept forcibly stealing Meru herds of cattle. One day a Maasai warrior was killed. Meru warriors discovered the deceased had been circumcised, but instead of the foreskin being entirely removed, that skin hung loosely at the base of the *glans* and the *meatus*.

My research witnesses reported that the Meru people suspected the Maasai's fierceness was because of the radical form of circumcision. The Meru, therefore, made further plans to discover the Maasai's secrets of circumcision to ascertain whether that was why Maasai were more courageous and dominant than the Meru. The respondents described how the Meru coincidentally caught a Maasai circumciser called Ruuju and forced him to circumcise Meru boys and to tell about the mystery of Maasai male courage. Ruuju offered to perform the operation of circumcision and to teach the initiates how to be courageous like Maasai warriors and to pose a defense against the Maasai invasion. Ruuju circumcised the *Ikanga* age group.⁵²

According to respondents, the location at which the first radical circumcision took place after Mbwa was at a place inhabited by *Nkanga* and *Nkware*, hence, the name “*Maula ja Nkanga*” was assumed to grow millets and other food. One respondent said millet seeds for planting were scarce; fortunately a mad woman was found to have some

⁵²Ikanga means boys who wore hats made of *Nkanga* and *Nkware* feathers. From then on Meru boys continue to wear such feathers when preparing for circumcision. This is the origin of boyhood name, Thiankanga among Igembe and Tigania people. *Nkanga* is a wild bird that resemble tailed grouse mentioned in Chapter 1.

in her bag, which were grown and re-grown until Meru had enough to plant. That explains why the Meru rested there for sometime. That site changed its name to “maula ja nkanga” and is today called Ruuju⁵³ (see Appendix W), named after the Maasai circumciser. The Ikanga age group was the first to have the radical form of circumcision called *Ndigi*. Although the first encounter with the Maasai was not friendly, a good relationship developed, and both communities began to exchange circumcisers—a tradition alive even today as one elder observed during our interview: “A circumciser called *Kiliungu* from Maasai circumcised our age group, ‘*ndinguri* of michubu,’ around 1924, and the first person to be circumcised in my age group was called *M’kabuima* from *Antubangai* clan.”

Most respondents said the story of Ciobaibaya and Ruuju are told among the Meru society today, and in Igembe both are venerated figures, celebrated through songs and riddles. Here is one song sung by women while weeding or threshing millet at a common field or *Itiirine* to honor the influence of the first Meru circumciser: “Ciobaibaya, a strong and courageous woman, is on the wheels driving a truck.” A song to praise the first Maasai circumciser is also sung: “Ruuju ii, ii uui, araruuja ii, oo Ruuju ii, araruuja Ikanga ii, Ruuju, araruuja Ikanga ii” (repeat twice). Even today, these songs and riddles are part of the Meru narratives in which I have participated, even though I did not attach a lot of importance to them at that time. Circumcision is very significant in developing young men’s courage to defend the community and personal property. The next section provides some of the reasons my witnesses on the ground gave for circumcision among the Meru of Kenya.

⁵³Ruuju area is part of the Thangatha location of Tigania East.

The Purpose of Meru Field Circumcision

The Meru boys' field circumcision is as old as the Meru community.

Circumcision was performed primarily to transition the young from childhood to adulthood, as provision of security and for religious reasons.

Transition to Adulthood

Respondents said Meru Male's adulthood begins for a boy when he is circumcised and starts to receive the basic information about the rite of passage. The process of becoming an adult is not achieved in one season of circumcision. It is an ongoing learning that begins with novices, *ntane*, who observe incoming ceremonies and listen to adult warriors and elders talking about features of the rite. When a man witnesses these complex ceremonies and celebrations over a period of time as a spectator, *Ntane* or a learner, a participant, and organizer, he gains deep wisdom and can become a reliable counselor.⁵⁴ Meru people believe mere circumcision does not transform *Ntane*⁵⁵ to an adult overnight, although it marks a rite of passage. The rite indicates a very important transition and moves the initiates into recognized adulthood in the community. Circumcision gives a person power to marry, to achieve positions of leadership, to understand community norms, and to father children in marriage. All of these summaries are derived from witnesses on the ground as they are allowed candidly to speak their memory and their wisdom about the boy circumcision preparation and ritual. Many of the reports go beyond anything published about the Meru ritual processes.

⁵⁴Meru warrior counselors cover a wide area of information including, morality and sexual behavior, attitudes; economy, political boundaries, social norms, and conduct for character building.

⁵⁵*Ntane* is a general name to refer or define a nameless person since circumcision is a small death, initiate is in the state of death/life until when they heal and resurrect to state of humanity and acquire a name given on a day of joining the society. This naming day is rebirth and new adulthood.

Religious Covenant

Respondents said field circumcision is also a traditional religious ritual; it is done “in accordance with the requirements and ordinances of the Meru God—*Murungu* through the works of Mugwe.” If God does not approve of it; it is never done until such a time that God through Mugwe says “Yes,” as one respondent observed. Religiously, an initiate is also empowered to bond with the family and to be a member of the ancestral spirit world. Family bonding includes family secrets, property, and the dos and don'ts. The sharing of one knife, one field, and one circumciser reinforces the bonds a man will enjoy lifelong with his age-set peer group, and also with warriors circumcised before him, with the community elders, with his own male in-laws, and his own father and other male relatives. The circumcised male is obligated to join peers who provide mutual assistance and hospitality to one another even to the extent of dying for the sake of the other.

The male Meru authority system is closely linked with the ability to face the circumcision pain, and with the man's belief in the ritual that bonds his age set through the shedding of blood. Blood is associated with the deep mystical value of establishing social relationships and taking his place in a just society by being ready to sustain sacrificial suffering, death, and resurrection. The term “death” or *bagiiku* respondents said is the term that Kimeru warriors acquire. That concept brings a different meaning of death and resurrection and is bestowed through the naming ritual when warriors achieve adult status and set about to work to prove their warrior-hood.

Circumcision for Courage

According to respondents, initiation achieves another meaning in a later development, perhaps at *Kigairwo*. Respondents further said circumcision with its radical physical mark, called *Ndigi*, identifies one as a brave member of the Meru community. The *Njuri* and *Ndigi* marks are two authentic identification marks to distinguish a Meru from a foreigner and other neighbors.

Apart from being a tribal mark for identity, field circumcision intensified courageous instincts and made Ameru to feel and look like the Maasai with whom they fought. Another respondent said after field circumcision took place, warriors would sometimes prove themselves by stealing cows from neighboring communities for paying their marriage dowry after graduation from warrior-hood.

Respondents were certain the Meru male recognized leadership qualities are unique only to the field circumcised men. Circumcision qualified them to lead the community. After the circumcision initiation ritual, warriors are free to transition into other life stages, including Meru leadership structure that is marked by age sets that gave way to the next stage in the social structure. When warriors concluded their term, they handed over leadership to the incoming age set and went home to marry and produce children for the continuation of the Meru community. Respondents said when warriors were relieved of their community security duties, they married almost all at once, giving birth to children that will form another age set in the near future. Uncircumcised persons were forbidden to have children or own property. Circumcision qualifies a man to serve

the Meru community and allows one to marry, inherit property, or to enter into society's security force.

Security, although a later provision, turned out to be the third main reason for field circumcision following religious and the transition into adulthood, which allows marriage, and leadership. When the Meru first settled in the present-day land, their cattle were stolen by Samburu, Mwoko, Nturubu, Rendille, and Maasai communities, all referred by name as "Uruu" or enemy as my research respondents referred to them. The Meru did very little to defend themselves. They would run away in fear. Only after the radical circumcision procedure, which sculpted the *Ndigi* mark in male flesh, a later modification, were initiates subjected to the essential pain to achieve character marks of perseverance to prove they could withstand painful risks and life struggles sufficient to defend the community from outside threats.

Since Kenya became independent, the government encourages communities to cease fighting among themselves. Because the government took security issues from the people, boys' field circumcision began to lose its security value. But the transition purpose remains intensified and focused today as a rite of passage that allows Meru men to marry, own property, and assume community leadership roles.

Circumcision and Formal Education

According to the research findings documented, formal education is rising quickly to assert itself as the fourth main support of Meru boys' circumcision (see Table 4. 12, p. 143). In recent times, education has begun to influence the decisions about a boys' circumcision rite. Most parents (46.9 percent) said their sons will be circumcised after graduation from primary education just before they go to secondary school. One parent

observed, “Presently, December has become predominantly circumcision time once the boys complete Standard 8 and are proceeding to Form One.” Perhaps in the future boys’ circumcision will be a mandatory requirement before admission to high school.

This discovery is reinforced by the move of Mr. Kithinji, the head teacher of Kiriani High School in Meru south. He reportedly barred twenty uncircumcised students from his school until they were circumcised. Mr. Kithinji’s move has no legal backing from the national ministry of education or in the Kenyan constitution, nevertheless, Mr. Kithinji’s unilateral action found great support from a majority of the Meru people. Although not fully supporting the headmaster’s action, Cyprian Thiakunu, one of the Meru medical doctors observed, “Circumcision is not merely the surgery but the ritual, and a rite of passage, which should not be viewed by the students as punishment. The important ritual of circumcision,” he said, “is meant to leave a positively indelible mark in one’s life history, and must not be stigmatized.”⁵⁶ Joseph Magiri, a Meru journalist, supports Mr. Kithinji:

What is wrong with a man who acts in accordance with his culture? Let him be. Those of us who have grown up in this set up consider it part of our being. To us, it is not just a community thing. It is personal. The principal [head teacher] deserves praise, not condemnation, for thinking outside the box and acting within his powers to give the boys leave of absence to dispense with a socio-cultural requirement. (Joseph Magiri, East African Standard 22 February 2007)

The entire Kiriani saga surprised the government when all students went on strike until Mr. Kithinji was reinstated. No legal action was taken against the head teacher. Perhaps

⁵⁶Benson Kimathi another Meru journalist, brings the version of Head Teacher’s suspension letter to parents, which read, in part, “You sneaked your son in school without reporting to us that the boy was (not circumcised). When such boys are in school, they not only bring a lot of discomfort to the other boys but also cause a lot of psychological torture to your son. ... Please do the needful within two weeks (i.e have him circumcised), and let your son report back to school with you immediately he is well.”

Mr. Kithinji's actions have promoted and elevated circumcision to a higher level in society, making it a mandatory requirement to join high school, thus making male circumcision a prerequisite for formal secondary education. The head teacher's action is likely to influence parents to circumcise their children before they enroll in high school. The Kiriani incident occurred in February 2007, when the research interviews were concluding. Mr. Kithinji was not one of my interviewees. He neither comes from Igembe nor lives in Igembe. Perhaps Mr. Kithinji was not aware this boys' circumcision research was underway. I learned of the Kiriani saga from newspapers, TV, and radio news. The 46.6 percent of parents who said their sons will be circumcised before they attend high school tend to confirm the view that Meru culture has established the expectation that boys will undergo the initiation rite before they enter high school.

More of the boys will be circumcised in the hospital than in the field. Among parents in my research sample, 46.2 percent said they expect to circumcise their sons in the hospital, and only 10.8 percent said they would favor field circumcision. Assuming this same trend will continue uninterrupted, education and hospital circumcision will negatively affect the use of boys' field circumcision (see Table 4.9 p. 140).

History of Boy's Hospital Circumcision Restated

In the previous section, I have explained that Meru people conceive of the field circumcision rite as a tribal mark, a covenant, and, above all, an event marking the end of childhood and entry into adulthood. Respondents affirm that circumcision today is performed by two kinds of events: traditional open field surgery for an entire age-set unit and, in contrast, hospital surgery is scheduled for one boy at a time, arranged by his family. Hospital surgery is favored by most Christian denominations. Here I want to

summarize my interview respondents' commentary about the historical background and purpose of hospital circumcision. This section is also blended with some of the witnesses' awareness of missionary history. Their reports provide a coherent account for the genesis of the circumcision problem and the history of Meru church growth.

Missionaries in Kenya

Ludwig Kraft, a German missionary, was the first Christian missionary in Kenya. He was sent by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1844 to begin work on the Kenyan coast. Kraft was followed by the missionaries from the Methodist church of Great Britain in 1862, the Catholics in 1868, the Presbyterians in 1889, and the AIM or the Scottish mission in 1895. Missionaries contended with Islamic influence established along the east coastal regions for centuries, and the Asian traders of Islamic faith determined to continue with the human slave trade.

Respondents said despite Christian missionaries being the abolitionists and the main recipients of the runaway slaves, Christianity in Meru land did not experience rapid growth along the coast. After almost one hundred years of unsuccessful mission work in the coast, missionaries began investing their energy toward the Meru interior, arriving after colonial administrators, explorers, and traders. The people of the interior were organized under their tribal political and social economic networks. Meru like other African tribes did not allow establishment of mission centers without fights and negotiation, although sometimes colonials overruled the local people. Despite being inwardly aggressive, Meru people appeared quite receptive to missionary intrusion on the surface but remained passive Christians over the years.

Missionaries in Meru

Few of my research respondents were born before missionaries arrived in Meru. They said the first missionaries to reach the Meru region from the coast were the Methodists in 1909. Another respondent said Methodists established a mission center in 1912, at Kaaga. The Roman Catholics arrived in 1910 and built their first church in 1913, at Mujwa. The Presbyterians came in 1923 and established their mission center at Chogoria (Bernardi 29). Each missionary movement was apportioned a mission site by the colonial administration to establish mission centers that would serve as schools and places for the churches. At first Meru mission schools were open to boys only until the 1940s, when girls were included.⁵⁷ Boys and girls were housed in mission school dormitories to guide them safely away from local traditions and parental influences that worked against formal education. My witness testimonies indicated that the missionaries circumcised Meru boys in their hospitals to be turned into adults according to the Meru customs, then to continue with education as warriors.

Respondents said the Methodists and the Catholics followed by the Presbyterian missionaries were the first to forbid their Meru believers from participating in any form of the traditional practices including field circumcision and peer tutoring and counseling, perceiving the ritual as a form of paganism and savagedom. Instead, they favored hospital circumcision to move the Meru people into a “higher form of life” (Kenya National Archives 19).⁵⁸ Igembe, the geographic area of my research, was initially influenced by

⁵⁷Jane Zakayo was among the first Meru girls to board at Kaaga Boarding School in late 1940s.

⁵⁸Reader can get more details in the correspondences between Rev. Reginald T. Worthington, a Methodist missionary, A. E. Chamier, colonial district commissioner, W. Tate, central provincial

the Catholic and the Methodist denominations whereas Presbyterians influenced the present part of Meru central, Meru west, and Meru south. Presbyterians under Dr. Clive Irvine and other Scottish missionaries were more aggressively opposed to both boys' and girls' field initiation rites of circumcision than were the Methodists and the Catholics.⁵⁹

The history of hospital circumcision is therefore, closely linked with the coming of white people in Meru, Kenya. The colonial administration provided security to missionaries who isolated boys from their homes to mission centers where they went to school and slept in the dormitory. When boys became of age, missionary doctors circumcised them in the Western or Jewish circumcision style. The Meru boys' hospital rite of circumcision began in Meru in the early twentieth century with the arrival of colonists and missionaries. Christians adopted the style that continues in Igembe today.

Whites in Igembe

Mutuambuu a renowned Meru prophet born in Mutuati, Igembe was a Meru distinguished prophet, who often prophesied before the coming of foreigners. His prophesy about coming of whites is often recited. He observes:

Kuri antu nkwona bejite bakwina na nyumba; Antu baa bari na mwanki bukarueni nabo bukathirua; na njoka tiuu jijite ikiamite na rugongo bukamiuraa iri na mawega; na kathale kakauma iriene ria Maua; I see people coming who sing by twisting their buttocks; please do not fight these people; they carry fire arms; they shall clear you. Treat them well and you shall live to see generations. I see a long snake surrounding the mountain, do not kill it; it is bringing good tidings, and a reed shall grow in Maua swamp.⁶⁰

commissioner, and John Ainsworth, (chief) native administration. Reports from 1911 to 1940 contain precious Meru cultural practices.

⁵⁹Isaac M'eringa, born perhaps in 1919, was so invested in church history; he was among the first employees of Maua Methodist hospital in the 1930s. and retired later in the 1980s.

⁶⁰Most respondents were aware of Mutuambuu's prophesy; Zakayo Thairija Nkobo said snake refers to tarmac on Meru-Maua-Mutuati road, which is around the Nyambene ridge of mountains. He

Mutuambuu had long died before the arrival of the whites in Meru. When we discussed the arrival of the whites with our witnesses on the ground, prophesy of Mutuambuu is prominent in Meru memory. This same prophesy saved the Meru people from death through white people's gun powder.

Respondents know the first foreigners to reach Meru land were traders and explorers. The first were two Germans followed by an American named William Astor Chanler also pronounced as *Chanile* in Kimeru. Chanler was a most dangerous person. He plundered animals and food despite the Meru elders' good intentions to make peace with him through *giciarwo* alliance. Most of our research respondents were deeply emotional as they spoke of *Chanile* and his actions. As Chanler explain in a geographic journal, how he entered Igembe in 1892 with two other Europeans and sixty Swahili porters from the Kenyan coast carrying his belongings (175; 533-34). Chanler explains how he plundered cattle and heads of millet from Igembe and Tigania people by using a gun.

Britons were the third group of whites to reach Meru. The Britons came officially in 1907 to rule and open schools and mission churches. Mr. Edward Butler Horne, or *Kangangi* as the Meru called him (meaning "one who wanders from place to place with or without good intentions"), was the first British conqueror and later the first British district commissioner in Meru, serving twice.

confirmed a reed had begun to grow in the Maua swamp since 1980 when tarmac began and now is very visible today between kithetu and Kaciongo roads.

The First Igembe Hospital Initiates

The names of the people provided in this section are anonymous to protect their identity. Most of the first Igembe hospital initiates who are still alive contributed to this paper. These witnesses on the ground reported credible information, readily available from respondents who had witnessed the hospital rites' happening. The first hospital rite circumciser in Igembe was a missionary doctor called Dr. Stanley Bell in Maua Methodist mission hospital. Gerrard reports that Dr. Stanley Bell from England served Maua hospital from 1941 to 1950 and 1971 to 1979 (34, 186). Bell performed his first circumcision of Igembe boys between 1947 and 1949. His first initiates I will call Mr. Kindiu of Ratanya age-set from Njia location. Mr. Mirau and Mbau from Maua location, and Kaiyaa from Akachiu location. Respondents said the first hospital initiates in Ithima (Laare) location were Kabii Mituu, Tiberi, Alfane, and Rapo. One of the respondents said these initiate "got many problems from the traditionalists and some even went back to traditional to be accepted by their people."

The other first hospital initiates from Mutuati location include Domisio, kabii kiriuu, Bill Baimu, kaburia Baim, Inazi, and Rrome. Respondent add that "Especially catholic initiates were kept at mission center until they healed; all these initiates belong to Ratanya age group." These were the first initiates in Igembe circumcised within the Meru region. Perhaps other people of the Michubu age groups were circumcised in other hospitals but not in Meru. Dr. Bell credited with the start of a medical teaching (nursing) school in Maua, is said to have taught other Meru male physicians how to perform the hospital rite of circumcision.

All the Catholics and the Protestant Igembe hospital rite initiates belong to the Ratanya age group. Protestant initiates were circumcised at Maua Methodist hospital while Catholic initiates were circumcised in 1948 at Mujwa Catholic Mission a year earlier before the traditional Ratanya age group was field circumcised in 1949. Initially these hospital circumcised men did not receive any cultural ritual counseling because it was considered evil by missionaries. These people were nicknamed *Irwoe*⁶¹ by the field circumcised men and Meru community to describe their status.

The Purpose of Hospital Circumcision

My respondents described how Meru hospital circumcision serves two main purposes: to participate and fulfill Abraham's covenant with God and to graduate Meru boys into adults. The covenant belief was confirmed by 59.9 percent of the research interview respondents. The rite of passage concept was affirmed by 33 percent, and 6.9 percent declined comments on hospital circumcision. The respondents' explanation of the covenant concept appears very similar to that of the Jews with very slight differences. Although most respondents seemed to connect circumcision with the biblical covenant, some other distinctive features seemed to indicate maturing children into adulthood is another way of describing a way to fulfill "covenant" between peer group, family ancestral spirits, and covenant with God.

Some respondents (6.2 percent) said hospital circumcision was for enculturation. "The practice of the whites and Ameru are different. It was a way to lure them into his camp and turn their names to white names, so they brought about circumcision so they could be the same." One wonders why most people did not see the Abrahamic covenantal

⁶¹ For further description of term *Irwoe* or *Kirwoe* (singular) see the key term description section in Chapter 1.

concept as being foreign as well. Although encroachment of foreigners into Meru culture seemed sensitive enough to provoke emotions, respondents did not openly express negative judgment about hospital circumcision because of their perception about its Jewish covenant connections.

Covenant: Biblical View of Circumcision

Whereas biblical circumcision claims its roots in Jewish tradition, it has greatly influenced the Western world for many centuries and, in more recent times, has been associated with baptism as explained in chapter one. According to respondents, Meru also seem to hold the same belief. Circumcision is religiously observed as a covenant close to that of the Jews. Following I discuss biblical connectional links made by respondents.

Covenant. In the Old Testament, the concept of “covenant” involved the idea of sacrifice where blood is a major component. The word covenant, *berith* in Hebrew, is a derivative of the word *barahh*, which means “to cut.” Therefore the Hebrew idiom for establishing a covenant is “to cut a covenant” (Neusner et al. 136; Freedman et al. 288-92). Most respondents said hospital circumcision follows Abraham’s tradition. I describe below their core understanding of the connection.

Circumcision in the Old Testament was begun as a means/symbol of a covenant between God and Abraham and as a sign of God’s confirmation of his promise to the coming generations of offspring, even to include servants and slaves bought with money. Three traditions of circumcision are established by Abraham’s obedience: (1) Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he circumcised himself; (2) Ishmael—the ancestor of the twelve princes who now comprise the nations of Islam—was thirteen years old; and, (3) upon the birth of Isaac, Abraham circumcised him “when he was eight days old” (Gen.

17:1-26; 21:1-5). Circumcision is, therefore, God's token and sign of his covenant with the descendants of Abraham chosen as the people to carry the message of salvation to all of humankind. All uncircumcised Israelites and their servants, whether from their tribe or outsiders, fell outside the covenant of promise as given to Abraham. The purpose of the covenant in the Old Testament was to show a total submission of body, mind, and soul to God and his promises (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4). Perhaps this unconditional physical obedience denotes an inner loving obedience to God that is grounded on faith.

Respondents deeply connected circumcision with Abraham in their understanding of covenant and made various biblical references as mentioned.

Furthermore respondents said Moses met harsh punishment for ignoring the circumcision of his son (Exod. 4:25) and praised Zipporah, Moses' wife, for hurriedly circumcising their son to save her husband from God's wrath because of Moses' neglect of the covenant. The biblical text suggests that Zipporah's action changed God's intent of judgment against Moses. Zipporah, they said, played a key role such as that played by Ciobaibaya-Meru first female male circumciser mentioned earlier. Despite the pain undertaken and attempt to seal the covenant, Moses did not allow any circumcision during the Exodus through the wilderness until his death. Respondents did not wholly blame Moses for his failure to initiate male circumcision during the exodus but hardships encountered in the wilderness such as what Meru faced during migration from Mbwa. Thereafter, Joshua reinstated circumcision again at Gilgal (Josh. 5:5) and incorporated only circumcised men into his army immediately to conquer Palestine. Respondents said Joshua believed only circumcised men had God's favor in war activities (Josh. 6:1-3) like Meru people. Although there were connections made with Jews' understanding of

covenant, respondents did not put emphasis on God's commands of circumcision on the eighth day after birth of every male child (Gen. 17:12).

Even so, for forty years as the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, no ritual circumcision was performed (Josh. 5:7) as it was with Meru people during migration from Mbwa. May be God overlooked the Israelite's neglect of the rite because of the hardships of the journey out of Egypt, because no record of God's anger is reflected during Exodus because of the apparent neglect. Still, the Israelites drifted far from God and actually committed national idolatry at the base of Mount Sinai while Moses was on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments. Perhaps more than circumcision was neglected during that forty-year journey, and failure to obey God even in difficult times may have opened the door to idolatries of all kinds. Perhaps God, during the wandering time, was concerned with Israel's love, obedience, and faith (circumcision of the heart) rather than with physical circumcision. Abraham was chosen on the grounds of his faithful obedience before he was given the sign of circumcision as the immediate and future mark of God's people. Some respondents said Koomenjwe's role during Meru migration have close link with that of Abraham and Moses. Like Israelites reorganized before getting into the land of promise, Meru also reorganized at Kigairwo mentioned earlier. Koomenjwe like Moses, he did not enter the present Meru land; he died during migration.

Faithful obedience. In both the Old and New Testaments, one can interact with the circumcision rite as a Jew and the issue of circumcision in early Christian tradition and theology, though Paul candidly appeals for spiritual circumcision (repentance) rather than the physical circumcision as a sign of a Christian believer. The New Testament

supports the emphasis on repentance, observing that Abraham was justified by his faith and called to leave his own people before undergoing circumcision that was to become his seal of righteousness (Rom. 4:11; cf. Gen. 15:6; 17:10-27). Respondent seemed to embrace both old and new testaments understanding of circumcision but not losing one for the sake of the other. This remind me at the time of Christ, circumcision was in practice, and Jesus was born securely in Jewish tradition and was circumcised and named on the eighth day according to Jewish custom. In Jewish customs, naming and circumcision occurred at the same event (Luke 2:21). Jesus never taught against circumcision, nor did he ask his people to stop the practice.

The circumcision ritual never drew controversy in the ancient Christian world until the time of the Apostle Paul (Acts 15). Some Christian Jews wanted Gentile Christians to be accepted only after their circumcision. The decision of the Jerusalem council emphasized the change of heart for non-Jewish believers rather than the physical operation: “We should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God but we should ask them to abstain from things polluted” (Acts 15:19-20, 28-29; Gal. 2, 3). Respondents seemed to link their circumcision belief concept with that of Jesus when pushed further to explain why tension exists among two Meru groups. In his 1733 sermon, “The Circumcision of the Heart,” Wesley describes the change of the heart as “habitual disposition of the soul..., which directly implies the being cleansed from sin, filthiness both of the flesh and [the] spirit, and by consequence the being endued with those virtues which were also in Christ Jesus” (Baker works 1, 402-03). According to my research respondents, the Meru people combine spiritual and physical circumcision and for them one is not complete without the other. The early missionary teaching about circumcision

obviously included Old and New Testament exposition of biblical instances and theological meanings of circumcision.

HIV/AIDS: Hospital Rite Gains the Ground

When my research respondents were asked which rite they would encourage or discourage; 54.6 percent said they would prefer hospital circumcision over field circumcision and only 2.3 percent would discourage hospital circumcision. Surprisingly only 14.6 percent would encourage field circumcision and .8 percent would discourage field circumcision (see Table 4.6 p. 137). Those who favored the hospital rite against the field rite offered many reasons to qualify their claim.

In recent times, hospital circumcision has acquired other meanings as many respondents observed, “The hospital style is more hygienic given the prevalence of deadly viruses like HIV/AIDS.” Most respondents said that in the hospital rite boys are circumcised in a clean environment and they continue to be treated with antibiotics and dressing until they heal. Furthermore, HIV/AIDS has brought an enormous influence on the circumcision choice because the field circumcision method is a high risk for transmitting the virus through use of “one knife, one field and by one circumciser.” This field circumcision method sends a fearful message to parents because body fluids such as blood are the means of transmitting the HIV disease.

Because circumcision must be completed or “uncircumcised boys will not become adult men of the community and they cannot get married to beget children, lead, or own property,” the only alternative is for them to undergo hospital circumcision. HIV/AIDS was prominently named as the reason why field circumcision will “die” naturally along with its cultural counseling if nothing is done within a few years. Although HIV/AIDS

can be transmitted through other causes, body fluids, including blood, are among the chief causes. In Meru HIV/AIDS is mostly transmitted through heterosexual and other mixing of other body fluids including blood. HIV/AIDS appears to be the worst threat field circumcision has had since its inception. HIV/AIDS is not only a threat to Meru ritual but to the entire Meru community if serious steps are not taken to revise the septic nature of the field ritual. Records from the Meru area confirm the fear of every parent (see Appendix R) that confirm the fear because seven percent of Meru North-Igembe people are victims of HIV/AIDS.

The public is also influenced greatly by the increase of formal education that creates awareness and, to a lesser extent, Christianity. The research witness-respondents' formal education and age correlation was significant at the 0.01 level (see Appendix J) as obviously as one respondent observes "hospital style is more embraced than the traditional one." The hospital ritual has created a false hope for better education and progress. Many parents think hospital circumcised boys manage their studies better. They are not abused by peers during the initiation period or harassed by the warriors. Hospital warriors tend to look with disdain on those circumcised in traditional rites, regarding them as uneducated. They claim that they lack manners, fight parents, and loiter around market places while they, the hospital-circumcised boys are in church and in school.

The field circumcision rite has suffered another setback as the Meru landscape has changed. Public land is consolidated and schools have been built. In some parts of Meru, public lands have been turned into private property and public large social gatherings such as boys' circumcision have fewer locations to use. Most respondents said many

parents now bring the circumciser to their homes. Other respondents said a few parents arrange to have their sons circumcised on school property or along the roadside, so the hospital rite remains at an advantage as it does not require any field for its operation. If the traditional field circumcision rites disappear, the inherent cultural informal liturgy of boyhood age-set learning culminating in the circumcision ritual and the responsibilities of warrior-hood that has existed for centuries will be lost. If so, then the hospital rite without liturgy will take over, relegating the prehistoric Meru history and cultural identity to oblivion.

Although hospital surgery came reluctantly to be accepted among the Meru in the Christian denominations, churches have yet to formulate a theologically sound and culturally viable liturgy that parallels the richness and comprehensiveness of learning associated with traditional age-set boyhood rites and the circumcision transition liturgy. Most respondents (43.8 percent) confirmed their denominations have no liturgy for leading hospital circumcision worship service. They reported that their leaders occasionally make a temporary liturgy often called a “program” that is designed at each occasion for use (see Appendix T). Whereas 38.5 percent said their denominations have no liturgy for boy’s ritual in their denominations, another (2.3 percent) did not know anything about the liturgy.

The field circumcision ritual is different compared to the hospital circumcision ritual as indicated by 15.4 percent who said the field ritual has liturgy. The traditional ritual liturgy is comprehensive, and with its long history, its meaning is planted deeply into people’s minds across generations back to prehistoric times. Traditional people challenge the hospital-circumcised men as lacking *Ndigi*, a Meru traditional physical

mark of circumcision, and they also challenge their lack of proper age-set learning and counseling/mentoring during seclusion. Although Christians rarely accept the challenge, traditional believers argue with tangible evidence—their extensive boyhood training and the circumcision liturgy, which is lacking on the hospital Christian side. Because both groups recognize circumcision as the best way to transition children into adulthood, a lasting solution is perhaps within reach to equip Meru men with an essential and valuable cultural identity.

Christian and Traditional Dialogue

At this moment, Meru young people are at the crossroads caught in the midst of the traditional Meru values and cultural influences imported from other cultures. They find themselves attracted by foreign practices that include substance abuse, juvenile delinquency, and sexually promiscuous lifestyles. Meru people are watching as traditional values are compromised by the loss of effective transmission of moral and civility standards learned for centuries in the boyhood age-set groups. Their children are misusing their sexuality and abusing substances. They are also rebelling against traditional ways of learning Meru values from peers and grandparents. Wilder, writing about the importance of rites of passage for adolescents, concurs about the benefits of such rituals:

The young man needs to be told about his power and shown how to use it well or he will ... pull apart families and friends,... control others,... destroy gods in his life and life of others,... but who should have to go through that much trial and error to learn what generations of men have lived to learn? (20)

I live at a time when humans need rites that help them negotiate life passages from childhood to adulthood and later stages in life. Both Christian and secular thoughtful

parents are woefully disturbed. Their desire is for their children to maintain cultural tenets, but children are caught in a web of conflict and confusion and feel the pull to go against the desires and beliefs of their parents. Young people are torn between forces: the traditional culture with its fixed teachings and values versus the emerging open society with its emphasis on personal choices. Christianity speaks to both and may now emerge as the source of values, symbols, and rituals that can offer fresh hope to the Meru people.

When an entire community is in that web of confusion, the church of Jesus Christ is the most likely effective agency to open conversations that can lead to establishing a ritual that is widely accepted throughout Meru culture and can serve the common good of all. Far from being sectarian, the core of biblical theology is the most effective foundation to work for the common good in an environment such as that found among the Meru, which includes multiple denominations and traditional culture, symbols, and rituals.

In a time of crisis such as threat of disease or of terrorism such as 7 August 1998 in Nairobi, Kenya, many people turn to the church, but in times of peace and tranquility, fewer people are regular and faithful to attend Christian worship services at the church. My own involvement with the church youth groups led to a conclusion that very few faith role models exist in most Christian homes ready to launch young people into adulthood. I have observed that those Meru young people most likely to leave the influence of the church are those without an experience of proper launching into adulthood. Joy quotes a famous philosopher, Joseph Campbell, who has observed cross-culturally that: “if we do not initiate our young into adulthood, they will initiate each other” (9). Campbell’s often quoted aphorism caught my attention and challenged me to offer Meru youth a way out of confusion by providing this research to challenge Meru people to invent a meaningful

and diversified liturgy for launching Meru boys into adulthood. A liturgy integrated with traditional values can help to stabilize Meru boys and turn them toward high values and responsible manhood, thus turning them away from foreign influences that glamorize drugs, immoral behavior, and other acts of lawlessness practiced by some of Meru young people today. Meru people's dilemma is shared across cultures as most of these encroaching seductions come from the same cultures that first sent colonialists, missionaries, and business people to Kenya.

Perhaps Meru's urgent desire is for male circumcision rites anchored to positive cultural practices, Scripture, and to the theology of restraint, which always accompanies a high commitment to and worship of "one God." The Bible is the source of ethics for rightful and healthy living. The Judeo-Christian Bible continues to apply to the ritual process challenge for Meru people. The Bible also serves as the warning about dangers of chaos, death, and destruction for those who fail to pay attention to its directions for life and wellness in this world and the next.

In the proposed dialogue, both Meru groups should adopt the teachings of Jerusalem council that enable Paul to open gentile world to accept the good news. Paul discouraged Corinthian Christians against carrying circumcision into the church. Instead, one should become a Christian as he is:

Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and un-circumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. Let each one of you remain in the same calling in which he was called. (1 Cor. 7:18-21)

Paul in his wisdom is imploring believers to offer a genuine response to the gospel, not on the basis of a physical symbol, which is nothing in itself, and no one should put

confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:3). Paul is against forcing other tribes into circumcision as a condition of faith. He is not asking Jews or other tribes that practice circumcision to abandon it but to place their faith beyond the rite. J. N. K. Mugambi argues that the Jerusalem “ecumenical council refused” and affirmed that conversion should not be identified with acculturation, but in the later centuries missionaries ignored and overlooked that part of New Testament theology of missions especially those who planted the church in Meru, Africa (ix).

Reinventing the Meru Rite of Passage

At the present time Meru boys’ rites of passage have flaws that need to be revised. For instance, my research finds that the Meru worry that the field circumcision septic methods make participants susceptible to HIV/AIDS and other infections. On the other hand, the hospital circumcision method lacks *Ndigi*, proper liturgy, and appropriate teaching and counseling. If Meru culture has to survive in the multicultural global world, it should reinvent its rite of passage which produces strong young men with eagerness for integrity and productivity, to serve it well in a changing context.

The research questionnaire was designed to provoke respondents to think about the future of the Meru community in relation to Meru beliefs and practices. Although research question five drew a lot of responses proposing merging of both rites into one, it also generated a lot of heat with only 16.2 percent of respondents being in denial of the current crisis—they think both rites cannot merge and they do not see any urgency of reforming rites from what they are at present. Whereas 19.2 percent declined to make their views known in public, perhaps due to fear of curses and death threats found in Meru culture for allowing Meru traditions to be exposed publicly. Still, 64.6 percent

spoke out boldly to support a process for merging both rites into one (see Tables 4.20 p. 150; 21 p. 151). They nevertheless, stated that both rites must be modified before they are merged.

When respondents were questioned further about the merger process, most of them (69.2 percent) said a merging process needs advance planning. Some offered the proposal that an urgent Meru leaders meeting convene to discuss the way forward. Most of Meru “witnesses on the ground” agreed that the current boys’ ritual process needs reformation. Only a small number, (12.3 percent) argued for separate reformation while another minor number (13.1 percent), would like the hospital rite to lead the process with the intention of overtaking the traditional rite. I was also surprised that another 5.4 percent declined to state their opinions. I noted also the number of people declining to answer each question grew thinner with time (see Table 4. 21 p. 151).

Although most respondents agreed Meru leaders should convene a meeting to discuss the boys’ ritual merger process, their opinions on who should attend the meeting and what agenda to discuss remains uncertain. Various categories were mentioned: Some people favored the process being led by the government; others favored the process being led by the Christian leaders; another team thought it could be led by traditional leaders. The majority however, were careful to include leadership from all sectors of life, the civil administration and religious and traditional leaders. Those interviewed agreed I should be the convener of the meeting because I conceived the vision. The understanding of all the respondents is to have the process begun immediately because the ritual issue is time sensitive and urgent for the common good of Meru people.

Research Findings Implications

The first Meru circumciser was a woman called Ciobaibaya. She stopped doing circumcision after the Meru learned the improved Maasai method of creating the *Ndigi*. The first male circumciser of Meru men was a Maasai called *Ruuju*, and perhaps the boyhood group he circumcised is called *Ikanga*. He was forced by Meru warriors and elders to circumcise Meru boys and teach them to be courageous like Maasai warriors, whom they called *morani*.

Circumcision is not only a tribal mark but an initiation that graduates children from childhood to adulthood. Without this complex and dramatic ritual of circumcision, Meru boys' growth will stunt at childhood, never graduating them into adulthood. The first day of circumcision marks the beginning of learning male secrets and finally secrets of the community. Failure to grow is failure to assume responsibilities that include procreation and religious leadership. Further research to establish when Meru boys' circumcision began would be worthwhile. This research has established some facts that include reasons for circumcision.

First, in doing this research, I found Meru people are now aware their boys' circumcision rite is being challenged with extinction by external forces. Although Meru people were disappointed about their fast fading culture, they seemed lost as to what to do. Faced with a questionnaire about the conflict between the traditional rite people and the Christian hospital rite people, the witnesses on the ground spontaneously suggested that the two conflicting sides should meet together to discuss how to save both rites from extinction. A majority of the witnesses wanted to take the best and richest parts out of each ritual and merge them into one. As we continued with the questionnaire, some of

their worries and doubts began to clear, and their hope of restoring their culture in such a unique way seemed to dawn on them. Surprisingly no one else ever proposed to discuss merging the two rites since the traditional rite was split one hundred years ago.

Second, another finding was the excessive fear of Meru curses and death threats associated with whoever exposes local cultural practices to foreigners or offers ideas to go into print. I found that fear was an influence, especially to those with little formal education or without any education. Most of those willing to talk about such practices openly are either Christians, well educated, or those who have lived in another culture for some time. Information indicates evidence in the past of Meru people who died of psychological fear when they exposed cultural secrets. The fear of cultural norms perhaps influenced the data to some extent. This finding leads me to propose for future researchers of Meru culture to pay attention to Meru cultural norms that include oaths, curses, and death threats.

Third, Meru circumcision is perhaps as old as the community. It was practiced before migration from Mbwa. After migration the Meru settled and the first site where traditions were reorganized including field circumcision was Nkubiu or Kigairwo.

Fourth, after migration the first Meru warriors' and Njuri-ncheke's houses were built at Nkubiu and as Meru moved new sites were chosen including Nchiru today.

Fifth, at the same site, Meru people decided to go in different directions. The Meru movement into the new lands was facilitated by rivers following into the lowlands.

Sixth, Meru separated because they did not want to anticipate future slavery as a whole community. Meru separated into seven groups that grew into districts today.

Seventh, circumcision and Njuri-ncheke are among the most organized Meru traditional practices.

Eighth, Meru people agree that both field and hospital rites of circumcision need reformation. Most of the needed works, including circumcision methods, have been overtaken by time, making reforming a must do urgent issue.

Ninth, reformation should be discussed by all categories of Meru leaders and they should agree on areas of common interest. Data produced overwhelming support for the merging of both hospital and field rites into one. When respondents were asked if the two rites can be merged into a unified rite, 64.6 percent said “yes with modifications.” Supporters of both rites appear to have reached a burnout stage after decades of misunderstandings and wars. Reconciliation seemed possible given the challenges experienced by both rites.

Tenth, a unified liturgy is urgently needed so Meru cultural beliefs and practices can be harmonized and culture reinvented.

Eleventh, I should be the convener of the meeting to carry this vision to completion. This proposal require wider Meru’s confirmation or process begin in Igembe.

Unexpected Findings

I was surprised to discover the following findings.

First, formal education in Meru is powerfully challenging male field circumcision more than Christianity despite its hundred years of evangelism. The research establishes that the Meru community is influenced by education more than by Christianity, which means with time Meru culture will be replaced by a foreign version of antiseptic circumcision on a path made by education. With the loss of the benefits of traditional

initiation, decreasing preservation of Meru customs will lead to serious disintegration of society because the structured learning of boyhood age-set groups before and after the circumcision ritual have maintained the Meru social order and created a natural harmony.

Second, HIV/AIDS is another main threat to the Meru boys' field circumcision rite and is likely to condemn it into oblivion unless antiseptic methods immediately are put in place. Christianity, with all its historical existence, has not positively influenced boys' field circumcision. The reason is obviously that both rituals have existed side-by-side as mutual adversaries.

Third, if information is not offered urgently, field circumcision will suffer the worst consequences as it may now be in its final months or years. If so, the rich history and learning agenda of the traditional structures will be replaced by default by the hospital circumcision that currently has neither liturgy nor proper counseling. The present Christian communities do not seem to contemplate what effect the loss of male field circumcision would pose to future Meru generations who will become a people without identity.

Contributions to Research Methodology

This research assessed Meru people's understandings, attitudes, and values of boys' rites of passage currently in practice within Igembe or Meru north district and found the following contributions.

First, war between the hospital and field rite believers is as old as the arrival of Christianity in the Meru district. The missionaries established dormitories as "war huts" where the newly circumcised Christian boys in school stayed as a council of learners in mission centers and they were encouraged literally to fight field warriors and sometimes

mimic them. Even uncut boys were asked by missionaries to evangelize field warriors by asking them to join the church. Doing so was against the culture because boys could not talk with warriors as their equals.

Second, both adversaries have realized fighting is unproductive. The witnesses on the ground were amazing, willing to consult and seek lasting solutions to save Meru culture from extinction.

Third, Meru people sense that boys' circumcision, a cultural practice without equal, is being challenged both by formal education and by the risk of HIV/AIDS, which is likely to close field circumcision very soon.

Results from Previous Studies

All previous studies have spoken of field circumcision as a traditional practice sometimes dead or in the process of dying out. None of the previous research evoked conversation about merging both rites into one as a rich tradition with antiseptic procedures in a culture with common ground in terms of goals for young men.

The same old antagonism is expressed by 19.2 percent of the people interviewed. They still think each rite should reform separately. The fear of 16.2 percent and 19.2 percent is justifiable if reformation is carried out in a hurry or with ulterior motives. Genuine willingness of give and take from both Christian and tradition sides is expected to realize positive outcome.

Further findings confirm the judgment of 69.2 percent who think consultation should respectively embrace the differences as strengths for each party and hence strive to find common grounds where both parties can identify and form a united rite. While 64.6 percent of respondent were positive, 16.2 percent did not think merging is a wise

decision (see Table 4.20, p. 150). For better planning and productive results, the respondents answered further questions, and 69.2 percent thought that to minimize the threats posed by the 16.2 percent and the silent group of 19.2 percent, planning should include leaders from civil administration, religious, and traditional leaders (see Table 4.21, p. 151).

Contributions

The research has made several contributions to Meru scholastic work, thus the earlier oral version saying that the Meru separated at Thagichu is now corrected. Thagichu refers to the entire vast area denoting the lowlands of the Nyambene ridge of mountains, or simply the southern side of Mt. Kenya. Maps have shown categorically that the site of separation is Nkubiu, also called Kigairwo. Furthermore, the Meru traditions including Njuri-ncheke, and male field circumcision were reorganized at this particular site before further Meru separations. The Meru second reorganization parallels that of the Israelites at Gilgal (Josh. 5:2-12) under Joshua and Caleb before entering the land of promise.⁶² It is established that the Meru people have another original name “Karindi ka Mukunga na Ngaa” meaning people of Mukunga and Ngaa. The two names were used interchangeably in the past but today the term Meru is perhaps more widely known and used by the young generations. Circumcision according to Meru is not the mere cutting of the foreskin but of importance is the counseling that follows physical circumcision to turn boys into adults. Circumcision is also done on religious grounds and as such, it cannot die

⁶²The Meru event that took place at Kigairwo before they separated into different directions parallels the event of Israelites at Gilgal when people who came from Egypt uncircumcised and those born in the desert were circumcised by Joshua’s command to renew the covenant and equip the male gender with courage to inhabit and claim the land of promise.

but can be reformed to comply with current living standards. Circumcised male adults occupy a place of honor and can be trusted even to speak of Christianity.

Limitations and Generalization of the Research

One limitation of this project is that it has gathered its grounded data from only the Igembe part of the Meru region. The proposed two rites, merger potential and writing of new liturgy may be useful to all of the Meru people, and variations in both traditional culture and in Christian congregational cultures across the larger Meru territory. The findings of the study are assumed to be a fair representative of the current Meru cultural beliefs on circumcision in the whole Meru area and might evoke study in every district; thus, the research could positively influence the entire Meru community. Perhaps the weakest area of this study is any assumption about potential ecological generalization of the research. People from non-Meru may not be able to use the outcome of this study without replicating the “grounded research” process so as to develop a Christian and traditional merger proposal made to meet their cultural and contextual needs.

Another research limitation involved education level of the respondents. Most respondents were of limited or no formal education, which means all their information was necessarily recorded by the research assistants instead of them writing down their judgments and information. Although I compared tapes, summary notes written by my research assistants, plus handwritten questionnaires of those who were able to write, perhaps if all had been able to write on their own, the comparative result might have turned out differently.

A further potential limitation is that the respondents from whom I have collected grounded data may be challenged on their credible representation of the actual ground

perceptions about the full scope of issues surrounding male circumcision. A further limitation with the respondents and research assistants is that they may have provided me data that they believed will please me, thus skewing the true perceptions and judgments about the issue in focus. To overcome the potential limitations, I first deliberately chose respondents from both polar perspectives—traditional and Christian. In addition, I have paid attention to age, experience, Christian faith, traditional beliefs, economic status, social reputation, and educational level to enable project generalization. The data narrative reports collected are known to be a fair and wide representation of the population, and readers will have a sense on reading their reported data about the strength of internal and external validity of the research that undergirds the project.

Because I am, by birth and life experience, an active participant in the research, I have attempted to defuse my bias by keeping a notebook of my raw impressions throughout the research and development phase of the project. In addition I have studied strategies for assuming a nonpartisan position so as not to affect the final research analysis. The respondents, composed of parents, medical doctors, warriors, teachers, business people, students and pastors, were participants because they provided narrative responses to my research probes and drew on their various perspectives in reporting their perceptions. Without the respondents and the assistant researchers, I would have been reduced to relying on personal memory and case studies such as those reported in earlier chapters. The strategy of including authoritative witnesses from within the cultural focus, as done here, is almost always overlooked according to Jack R. Fraenkel and Norman E. Wallen. They say, “One aspect of Generability that is often overlooked in ‘methods’ or ‘treatments’ studies is that which pertains to the teachers, counselors, administrators or

others” who provide grounded narrative “data” in a research project.

I, therefore, assume the results and outcome of the study can be extended to other settings and conditions with minimal adjustments; otherwise, in its present form it cannot be expected to meet even the standards of representing the entire Meru ecological generability.

Further Studies

One item of further research that includes the whole of Meru region is ascertaining the effects of education and HIV/AIDS on male field circumcision. Meanwhile, this research can be generalized with some slight modifications to assess the people’s understanding of rites of passage.

Perhaps interviews should be done separately with Christians and non-Christians and the raw data correlated to single out each groups’ understanding and feelings clearly. The outcome might be generalized to other non-Meru communities.

The prehistoric relationship between Jews and the Meru people of Kenya should be researched further because so many similarities between the two exist in the Meru people’s male rite of field circumcision and Old Testament biblical traditional practices. The Meru and Jewish relational concepts are reinforced by the theory of emigration that suggests that the Meru people of Kenya perhaps migrated from the north. The existing sketchy evidence calls for further clarification.

The Meru lived at Mbwa before migration. I was not able to locate the Mbwa site from data gathered. Further research is needed to learn more about the location called Mbwa.

I only investigated boys' circumcision. Research on girls' circumcision needs to be done as well. Its loss might have implications to Meru girls and the changing Meru family structure.

I would suggest the future researchers into Meru cultural practice should strive to use the purposive method to select sample subjects due to sensitivity of Meru cultural beliefs. A choice of a large number of subjects benefits this research because of cultural sensitivity, conflation of interests between Christianity and traditional values, and the influence of education.

Conclusion

This research presents documented evidence that male circumcision is widely recognized as a rite of passage. Native American, Aborigines of Australia, Africans, and some parts of Asian countries such as Indonesia are among the world people groups that incorporate the cultural circumcision rite. Circumcision, with prehistoric origins, serves humankind as the bridge marker point between childhood and adulthood. Circumcision candidates after a long period of training become mature individuals before God, clan, family, and community. The Judeo-Christian Bible and the Koran are religious Scriptures that clearly identify God as the initiator of the rite of circumcision. The main reason some religious communities such as the Jews and Meru circumcise is to enter in or affirm the ethnic covenant with God or to be recognized as mature people.

Unfortunately in the Western world, some countries, especially those with multiethnic citizens, have not maintained a cultural circumcision rite, and in its place other cultural rituals have emerged, such as drivers' licensing, marriage, or retirement.

Surprisingly, none of these contrived rites have any symbolic bloodletting, purification, or marker point to transition children into adulthood.

Loss of the initiation rites in any culture gives rise to predictable chaos as uninitiated parents who still remain “children” in outlook and knowledge do not know how to initiate their own children into adulthood. The outcome has deadly consequences that include children attempting to initiate children, leading to teenage pregnancy, binge drinking, drug abuse, growing numbers of single parents, family crimes, divorce, and gangs—all resulting from efforts of young people trying to initiate themselves. Perhaps the rising cry from people cross-culturally for families and communities to reinvent rites of initiation is genuine and hard to ignore. For many whose ethnic traditions are being threatened by encroaching secularism and multiculturalism, circumcision rites are receiving focused attention as too important to abandon. These concerns appear among many tribal and ethnic groups, especially among Jews and Muslims. The ritual may have to be modified to meet the rising awareness of the need for antiseptic procedures and the special challenges essential to preserve the ritual power of male circumcision as a cultural marker point between childhood and adulthood. This dissertation project is focused on helping to fulfill part of that dream by offering ways that Meru rituals could be upgraded and improved to serve the purpose as it was in the past—initiating young men into adulthood. For Meru people, the male rite of circumcision provides intense, memorable moments and offers its complex social foundations for living as a team of warriors bound by mingling of blood and the seal of social identity.

APPENDIX A

Consent Letter

Currently Meru people hold different beliefs on boys' circumcision. Some people support traditional circumcision while others oppose it in favor of hospital circumcision. This research will explore Meru leaders' understandings, attitudes, and values on both hospital and traditional boys' circumcision rituals. Perhaps the most viable method according to the findings will be recommended for future implementation. I am aware, as most Meru people are, of a cold war and sometimes open conflicts between those who support either method (hospital or traditional) of initiating boys into adulthood. This misunderstanding has caused a rift between Meru people resulting in fights and loss of property and even in deaths. My intention is (1) to determine whether such conflict still exists, (2) what the Meru leaders are doing to resolve the conflict, or (3) to create a level playing ground.

This research can be a success if the Meru leaders, especially from the Methodist church, can participate in full honesty. The researcher appointed you as one of the leaders because of your status, wisdom, and your position in Meru society. Your sincere ability to answer questions related to this project will contribute to the success of this research. The research is intended to create a positive impact on the future of the Meru people's social identity. I am asking for your permission to discuss this urgent social issue in the Meru community at this time of Meru history. As you engage in conversation and answer open-ended questions, bear in mind there are no right or wrong answers since this appears to be the first research concerning Meru boys' circumcision ritual. You are free to express your past thoughts on the boys' ritual or anything that comes to your memory as you invest yourself in this research. Boys' circumcision became a problem with the coming of foreigners to Meru culture, and since then there are no answers to the problem. A concerted collaborative effort can bring Meru boys' circumcision conflicts to a lasting solution.

I am trusting that you will accept this invitation to be interviewed following your completion of an open-ended questionnaire—a list of questions we will follow during the interview. The interview will consist of questions, conversation, and tape recording.

You may be sure that the information collected from you will be handled with respect to discovery. Nothing shall be released to the public without your permission. After the interview, the narratives/data analysis shall be coded to safeguard your privacy according to the law. Research data shall remain in a private locked file for sometime, and thereafter it will be destroyed. You will be free to access your information in that time frame if you need it.

These narratives require complete honesty, and as a result of your in-depth thinking, you might be reminded of your previous negative experiences, knowledge, or maltreatment. Such thoughts might arouse some deep-seated memories and affect you psychologically, mentally, emotionally, or physically. In the event that you are affected, you are advised to seek help at a free mental referral center near you or visit the Website: <http://www.freedomfromfear.org/> or <http://www.freedomfromfear.org/refroom.asp> where you will do self assessment and get some free mental help.

Once again, please be aware your participation in this project is voluntary and your decision to answer or not to answer any question will be respected. Our relationship will not be affected by your decision.

If you have any question concerning this research, reach me at 651-644-2405; jkanake@asburyseminary.edu, or Professor Donald M. Joy the research adviser/mentor at 859-858-3817. For further information, you can talk to Dr. Leslie Andrews, Dean of Doctor of Ministry Asbury Theological Seminary.

This memorandum is prepared by Jacob Kanake here referred to as the Researcher and approved by Professor Donald M. Joy on behalf of the Research committee.

Statement of consent:

I have read and understood this agreement. My questions have been answered and I have received all clarifications I requested. I consent to participate in this study.

Signature of the participant _____

Date_____

Signature of the investigator _____

Date_____

Signature of the researcher_____

Date_____

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire

This open-ended questionnaire is divided into sections that include personal background, education, profession, and general questions. Participants are encouraged to engage with each section faithfully to assist the researcher into making an impartial conclusion. It is anticipated 90% of participants would be men, but a limited number of women (10%) will be included because their influence at a family level on boys' circumcision rite cannot be underrated.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

1. What is your name or names?
2. How old are you?
3. Are you a male or female?
4. If you are a male, are you circumcised, if yes,
5. What rite did you follow, hospital or Meru traditional circumcision?
6. How old were you at the time of circumcision?
7. Why were you circumcised at that age?
8. What is your marital status?
9. If married, how many children do you have?
10. If you have boys, are they circumcised?
11. If yes, what rite did you follow?
12. If your boys are not circumcised, explain why.
13. If they will be circumcised later, tell at what age it will occur.
14. Tell which rite you will choose for them.

EDUCATION BACKGROUND

What is your highest level of school education?

- Where did you go for your primary school education
- Where did go for secondary or high school education.
- Where did you go for college/university education?
- Other (specify)

SPIRITUAL BACKGROUND

What is your spiritual background, a Christian, traditionalist or other?

1. What is the name of your preferred denomination/religious organization?
2. What is the position of your religious organization concerning
 - Boys' Hospital circumcision
 - Boys' Traditional circumcision
 - Which of these rites does your religious organization favor?
 - Why does your organization favor that rite and not the other?
 - Does your religious organization have a liturgy for their preferred boy's circumcision rite?
 - Please describe your organization's circumcision rite briefly

PROFESSION

1. What is your profession (if any)?
2. Does your profession encourage or discourage hospital or Meru traditional circumcision of boys?

- If yes, why?
- If no, why not?

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. Please, give a brief history of Meru boys' hospital and traditional circumcision.
2. What is the purpose of circumcision according to Meru cultural beliefs?
3. What is the purpose of circumcision according to your religious beliefs?
4. According to your perspective, which of the rituals should be allowed to continue and which should discontinue?
5. Given that both rituals have existed side by side for a long time and those who practice either of the rites are not willing to give up, can you enumerate some ways in which both can agree to merge and form one rite for the benefit of Meru community identity past fading?
6. If you are given an opportunity to develop or to improve an existing boy's circumcision liturgy for your religious organization, what would you include?

Thank you for your time, your wisdom, and all your effort put into this research.

God bless you abundantly.

Jacob M. Kanake.

APPENDIX C

The Proposed Budget

<u>Item</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Amount in \$</u>	<u>Total</u>
Participants	100		
Investigators	5		
Statistician	1		
Tape recorders	5		
Note books	100		
Pens	20		
Pencils	20		
Rubbers	20		
Battery Packets 100/4	25		
Secretary	1		
Emails	20		
Telephone calls	20		
Air mails	10		
Air ticket round trip	1		

Expenditure

1. Each participant will be paid incentive of \$2 ;	100 x \$2-----	200
2. Each research Asst. to be paid \$1 Transport;	\$1 x100-----	100
3. Each investigator receives \$100 for 20 interviews; (5x100)	-----	500
4. Statistician receives	\$80-----	80
5. Secretary (type all records and send attachments,	\$50-----	50
6. Tape recorders each at \$20	\$20x5-----	100
7. Batteries; 10 dozen at (10) people for each dozen \$4x10	-----	40
8. Tapes Sony HF 90 minutes each at	\$2 x 100-----	200
9. notebooks, pens, pencils, and rubbers, etc-----		20
10. E-mails, attachments, and air mails-----		20
11. Telephone calls	20 x \$5-----	100
12. Miscellaneous-----		50
13. Air ticket and out of pocket-----		3500
14. Total-----		5040

APPENDIX D

Pilot Study

The pilot study group was selected consisting of five Meru men to provide insights from both Meru Christian circumcision practice and Meru traditional ritual practice, as well as from a spectrum of perspectives beyond. Two were physicians. One has closer ties to the traditional culture than with the church, and the other was himself hospital circumcised and remains closely related to the church. Another panelist was a clergyman and another was a lay preacher. The final member of the group was a businessman and politician with close ties to both Christian and traditional leaders. The panel consisted of the following members: Stephen Renta, Dr. Cypriano Mwibua, Geoffrey Renta, Rev. Dancan Laci, and Dr. Benji Laau.

Stephen Renta was born in 1928. He went through traditional Meru cultural preparation from childhood to adulthood culminating in his circumcision in 1944. He is a 1948 graduate of Kauga high school. He is a professional elementary and middle school teacher/principal until his retirement in 2000, when he was promoted to District Education Officer (DEO). For many years, Stephen served in several church responsibilities that included national conference men's director, synod standing committee member, congregation chair, itinerant lay preacher, mission and rural development chair, and other positions. He is married to Mrs. Remu Kaini, a professional community nurse (RN). Stephen and Kaini have five grown children, three girls and two boys. Their children are well educated and hold good positions in non-governmental organizations and civil service. Their three girls are not circumcised, but the boys had hospital surgery circumcision. The family has many grandchildren.

Asyppriano Mwibwua is a general doctor in private practice after resigning from a government position as Provincial Medical Officer of Health (PMOH). He is a graduate of the University of Nairobi, one of Kenya's prestigious institutions of higher learning and is also a recipient of many academic and public honors. He is a passive or non-practicing Roman Catholic and an active promoter of traditional Meru cultural rituals. Mwibwua was born in 1950 to typical Meru parents, ingrained into Meru traditions and culture, and had field circumcision in 1969. He has a lot of leadership influence to his age unit *kaberia* and his entire age set *lubetta*.

Mwibwua is married to Karemua a therapist-doctor, who is also Catholic, and who is a circumcised woman. The couple is blessed with four children, three girls and a boy. Their children are at the moment ready for initiation, and the family is confused about which way to follow, hospital circumcision or traditional circumcision, which may expose the children to the widespread HIV/AIDS virus within the Meru area.

Geoffrey Renta was born in 1926 and participated in most of the Meru initiation preparations. His parents were not Christians, so they prepared their son in all the traditional ways. Apart from circumcision in 1949, he participated in other adult rituals. He belongs to the first age unit, *nding`uri*, of the Ratanya age set. He is a 1940 middle school graduate with wide experience in public and private services. He was a CEO of a large tea corporation, former, *Kalimikuu*, Mauria city major, and currently a prominent farmer and businessman. Renta joined the church while in middle school but did not become serious with his faith until his late sixties when the church began to note his

commitment and he was elected as church leader, mission and evangelism coordinator, and a lay preacher—a position he has since he resigned and took retirement. He is married with grown children: five girls and three boys. Two of his girls were secretly circumcised at puberty while the other three girls did not undergo circumcision since Renta's mother, who favored girls' circumcision, had died. One of the three boys was stolen and circumcised in the traditional way while the other two had hospital circumcision. Most of his grandchildren have no traditional teaching. Among these grandchildren, the girls are not circumcised, while the boys have undergone hospital surgery. Renta's wife Susan is a promoter of the church teachings against traditional views and, by extension, is opposed to Meru cultural beliefs and practices.

Dancan Laci was born in 1950 to a Meru traditional family and brought up under strict Meru discipline. He went through boyhood circumcision according to Meru customs in 1966, the *kobia* unit or the second group of *lubetta* age set. He took his elementary, middle, high school, and college education in the Meru area. Dancan is a trained nurse and middle school teacher. He was a school principal for eighteen years before taking up pastoral studies. He went to United Theological College in central Kenya for his undergraduate education, then for graduate study in Lardic-Australian School of World Missions. Dancan is an ordained Methodist minister with wide church experience as education director, mission coordinator, Bible school tutor, annual conference secretary, annual conference youth department chair, and pastor for fifteen years in Meru. Dancan is married to Linki. They have five grown children—three girls and two boys. Both boys received mixed initiation rites during their transition from childhood to adulthood. One son received hospital surgery, and the other son took Meru traditional circumcision because of his grandparents' influence. The daughters were not circumcised, and two evidently are in peaceful marriages, but one suffers marital trauma. Kaimenti, the firstborn daughter is married to a highly learned man whose parents are unhappy that he married a "girl," meaning an uncircumcised woman. Furthermore, when his parents find opportunity, they scorn Kaimenti and humiliate her in the presence of her husband and her children as lacking "know-how" or "life's knowledge" because they regard her as still locked in childhood status. The other two girls are married to Christian men from Christian families; hence, their lives are presumed not to be suffering similar humiliation.

Benji Laci was born in 1965 to a strict Christian family. He did most of his school education in Meru and finally joined the University of Nairobi to train for general medicine and postgraduate work in surgery. He had minimal contact with his grandparents, peer group, and community except during congregational gatherings and when school was in session. He emerged as very active and an admirable children Sunday school teacher and, after his hospital surgery circumcision, served as a strong youth leader over the years. Benji works in Matua mission hospital as a prominent surgeon. Benji is a church leader and soccer club coordinator of a team largely consisting of hospital employees and the surrounding community. He is married with three children, all boys. His children are 17, 16, and 14 years, in various boarding schools in the country. His first son and perhaps the second born, or even third born, are due for circumcision, but Benji instead has said they will be circumcised when they reach grade twelve, for he stresses their education rather than physical circumcision before they finish grade twelve.

APPENDIX E

“Witnesses on the Ground” Selection Categories

The following criteria were used to select the respondents for the interview process. All witnesses were Igembe people by birth and have lived and worked within Igembe most of their lives. A limit of one witness per family was interviewed to minimize the possibility of replication and undue influence.

1. Five young men between 15 and 25 years were interviewed; two of the men were circumcised in the hospital and who did not go through kioro-mpithio openly or secretly. Three did not go through any traditional kioro (meaning they were real *Irwoe*).
2. Five Njuri-ncheke men about 70-100 years old who were not Christianized.
3. Ten Methodist men leaders of 30 to 100 years old with two pastors. Two had uncircumcised children (both boys and girls). Three had circumcised their sons' in the hospital, and three had both hospital and field circumcised sons. These leaders were of different professions including teachers, farmers and business men.
4. Five married women about 40 to 100 years old. Of these three were circumcised and traditionally counseled. They were mothers whose sons were circumcised both in hospital and in the field. Two had young boys not yet circumcised. Mother's circumcision rite was not reported. All women were Christians, professionals, community leaders, or church leaders.
5. Five men were community leaders such as chiefs, age group leaders, managers, self-help group leaders. Their religious background and circumcision were not reported.

Therefore, all interviewed respondents fell under one of the categories explained above.

APPENDIX F

Research Assistants' Characteristics

The candidates' qualities include data on circumcision ritual, religion, age, education and community leadership.

Circumcision: must be male candidates circumcised either in the hospital or in the field. Those circumcised in the hospital are assumed not to have received any traditional counseling whereas the field candidates should be fully initiated traditionally.

Religion/age: All candidates should be Methodist Christians with proven leadership qualities. They should be over 35 years old, married, and educated up to high school level or beyond.

Leadership: Community leadership position was an added advantage. The candidates should, where possible, have lived and received education in the Meru region, or have at least received three quarters of their education and lived and lived three quarters of their lives in the Meru region especially in Igembe, the area under study. Where possible, the parents of the candidates should be Methodist Christians, and the family of candidates (wives and children) should also be Methodists living in the Meru region. Employed candidates should be willing to undertake the research assistant work during their vacation or from among those working half-time or unemployed.

Gender issue: Gender is an issue in this research. The circumcision ritual in Meru is gender driven and each gender does its own ritual separately, with few areas of compatibility. Furthermore assistants should be men only. Recruiting only men as assistants will minimize respondents as men emphasize their role and portray themselves as having positions of power and superior knowledge of the ritual as compared to those interviewing them.

APPENDIX G

Research Assistants' Qualifications

The following people qualified as research assistants:

Dancan Muriu from Kangete area, Josa Ngiti from Laare area, Abram Tonga from Mutuati area, Miria Mitii from Kiegoi area, and Johana Mitiu from Maua area. Miria Mitii was the team coordinator. The entire Igembe region was covered. I coached the qualified research assistants on the questionnaire instrument and the interview process over several days and commissioned them to begin the data collection.

Names and Status

1. **Miria Mitii** (also the coordinator)

Age: 36

Rite: Hospital, and not counseled

Faith: Methodist, a leader and lay preacher

Parent's faith: committed Methodists

Marital: married and has three kids,

Education: edu. High school in Meru

Work: self-employed

2. **Dancan Muriu**

AGE: 44

Rite: field and counseled

Marital: married with 2 kids; a boy and girl

Faith: Methodist

Parent's faith: traditional Meru

Education: educated to high school in Meru

Work: civil servant (communications office)

3. **Josa Ngiti**

Age: 50

Rite: field

Marital: married with 4 kids three girls and 1 boy

Faith: Methodist, community leader

Parent's faith: traditional Meru believers

Education: educated up to high school in Meru, college graduate

Work: civil servant (population development) works in Meru

4. **Abram Tonga**

Age: 38

Rite: field

Marital: married, 4 kids 2 boys & 2 girls

Faith: Methodist, leader

Parent's faith: committed Methodists

Education: educated to high school in Meru and college graduate

Work: self-employed in Meru

5. **Johana Mitiu**

AGE: 45 years old.

Rite: hospital circumcision and no traditional counseling

Marital: Married with three children; 2 girls and 1 boy.

Work: Employed by government as adult education teacher.

Faith: Methodist (nominal)

Parent's faith: Methodists

Education: High school and college graduate.

Resident: He was educated in Meru up to

high school and works in the district

APPENDIX H

Research Assistants' Introduction Letter

Jacob M. Kanake
Asbury Theological Seminary
204N Lexington Ave. Wilmore,
KY 40390

27th September 2006.

To Whom It May Concern:

RE: Appointment and Introduction

By this letter, I appoint **Miria Mitii** , **Josa Ngiti**, **Johana Mitiu**, **Abram Tonga**, and **Dancan Murii** to serve as research assistants for the research entitled

**TRANSFORMATION OF THE TRADITIONAL CIRCUMCISION RITE OF
PASSAGE FOR MERU BOYS IN KENYA: A CRITICAL RESPONSE TO
HIV/AIDS AND GANG FORMATION**

on my behalf. I introduce them for the purpose of collecting the necessary data, which they will send to me. These men are fully prepared and equipped with all the necessary equipment, rules, and regulations guiding the research as approved by the doctoral committee at Asbury Theological School.

I request all in authority and those in possession of any information, data, and documents related to the said research, to allow them access to the information for accomplishing the said project.

If you have any further concern or clarification, you can contact me at ntoitha@hotmail.com Tel. 651-644-2405; or Dr Leslie Andrews the Dean of the Doctor of Ministry Program, Asbury Seminary (see letter attached).

Blessings

Yours truly,

JKanake

Jacob M Kanake

APPENDIX I

Witnesses on the Ground

The following people acted as the Team of 135 witnesses on the ground.

Pastor Kaberia	Philip M'munyuri.
Jason Kubai	Joshua Kithela
Samuel Kailutha M'lichoro	Patrick Kinyua.
Hezekiah kibiri M'birithu	Ibrahim M'kiambati
zakayo M'maruru	Peter Ehabu M'ntoncuu
Eunice Karimi	Muthomi Mutuma
M'kubania Njilu	Erastus Muthine
Isaya Baariu	John Mwirigi
Eunice kinya	Mwikamba Lithara
Damaris	Fredrick Koome
Kiangi M'thibutu	Mwirigi Muriungi
aibi Baikirima	Isaack kaluma
Stephen Gitonga	Stanely M'munyuri
Joshua Ndumba	Joseph Murungi
Joseph Maoka	John Mwakiria
Misheck Mung'athia	Gladys Gikunda
John Makutha	Martin Kaura
ohn Kobia M'Kiruba	Stanely M'Inyingi
Douglas Mugambi	M'alunga Tharinga
Leornand Koomu	Mithika Kinyua Jacob
Stanely Mwithalii	Daniel Muriungi M'maroo
Francis Gitonga	Patrick Muthine
John Mukaria Lithara	Naman Mwambia
Stanely Mutia	David M'kailanya
Joseph Miriti Kanamba	Kabaya Ndevi
Pastor William Mugambi Mwito	George Kaberia
Duncan Mwenda	wambia M'mwambia
Gilbert Thitura	Silas Maroo
James Kimathi katheru	Julius Kubai
M'lingera Geoffrey	Joshua kalung'e
Julius M'lingera kobia	Jeremiah Maore
Samuel Meeme M'kirichia	M'mauta M'lisoro
Johana Ntika	David Kungutia Munyuri
Kirema M'mirianga	Stephen meeme
Haron Gitonga	Samuel Micubu
Charles Baithiuki	Richard Muriungi
M'mauta M'mubwika	Luka M'maroo
Domisiano Kaura	Joshua Gaituyu M'mucheke
Andrew Muthee	Joseph Karwamba

Benson Simba Moare
 Felix Mwirigi
 Stanley Muroki
 Samuel Mwithalii
 M'mugambi Baithiria
 Andrew Mutia
 Samuel Nkunja
 Cyprian Kalunge
 David Mungeria
 Tabitha Kanyiru
 Stanley Maore
 Rev. Felix Aramba
 Joseph M'ananga
 Lucy Kibita
 Festus M'Mugambi M'aburuki
 Isaac M'ananga
 Jasto Mati Maore
 Rev. Mwenda J. Mungania
 Reuben
 James Kalunge
 Ezekiel Mwambia
 Francis Mutuma
 KAINDIO MAUTA
 Muroekamba Ciokalaine M'barungu
 Julius Miriti Ethabu
 Rev. James kaumbura Kareria
 Joyce Nki
 Muriuki kaindio
 M'ruciaka wa Nkwele
 Zipporah Kaaki

Mary Akou Mailu
 Ibrahim Gitonga
 Stephen Ungu
 Joseph Mithika M'ekotha
 Wilson M'erimba
 Julius kubai
 Joshua Munyua
 Johana Kubai
 Kinyua Timothy
 Thomas
 Silas baariu
 Ibrahim mbaabu Isaya
 Stanely kirianguu
 Martha Kaloki
 Paulina Ngiyo
 M'kaura
 Geoffrey Kaindio
 Peter kinoti
 Peter Kaimathiri
 Stephen Gituma Guantai
 Miriam Kaimuri
 Ruth mutune
 Rev. Eve Karambu Mugambi
 Rev. Grace Gichuru
 Mugambi George
 Rev. David Gichuru
 Mwenda Kirimi
 Jean Zakayo
 Isaac M'ringa
 George M ugambi

APPENDIX J

Correlation Table

Correlations

		Respondent's Age	Respondent's Education Level
Respondent's Age	Pearson Correlation	1	.402(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	130	130
Respondent's Education Level	Pearson Correlation	.402(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	130	130

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

APPENDIX K

Njuri-ncheke Headquarters at Nchiru

Njuri-ncheke house at Nchiru Headquarters. This house was constructed in oval design to march with Meru traditional house's design (round shapes). Although it is not exactly as a Meru house; it served the purpose of meetings. Initially this house was constructed by politicians with a political agenda, and Njuri-ncheke resented and met outside.

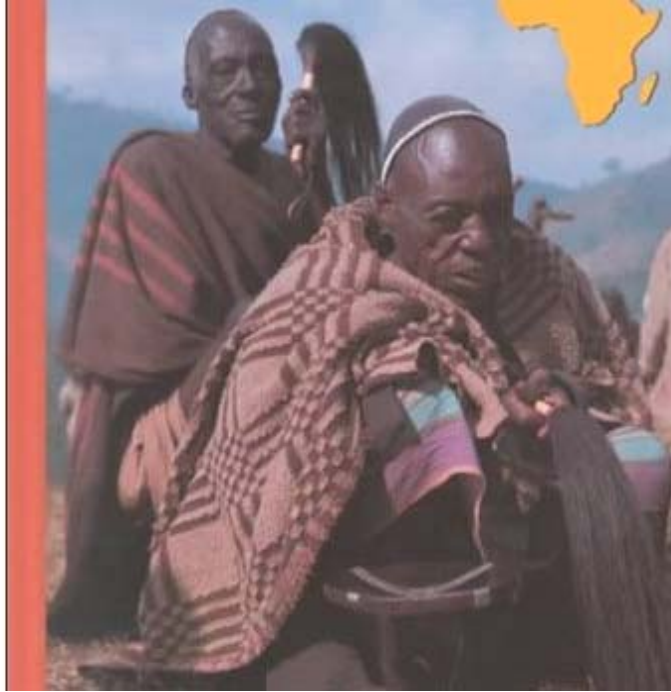


Njuri-ncheke House at Nchiru, in Tigania District.
There has not been any formal Njuri-ncheke meeting in this site in recent years.

Source: Kenya Museums

APPENDIX L

Meru Njuri-ncheke Elders

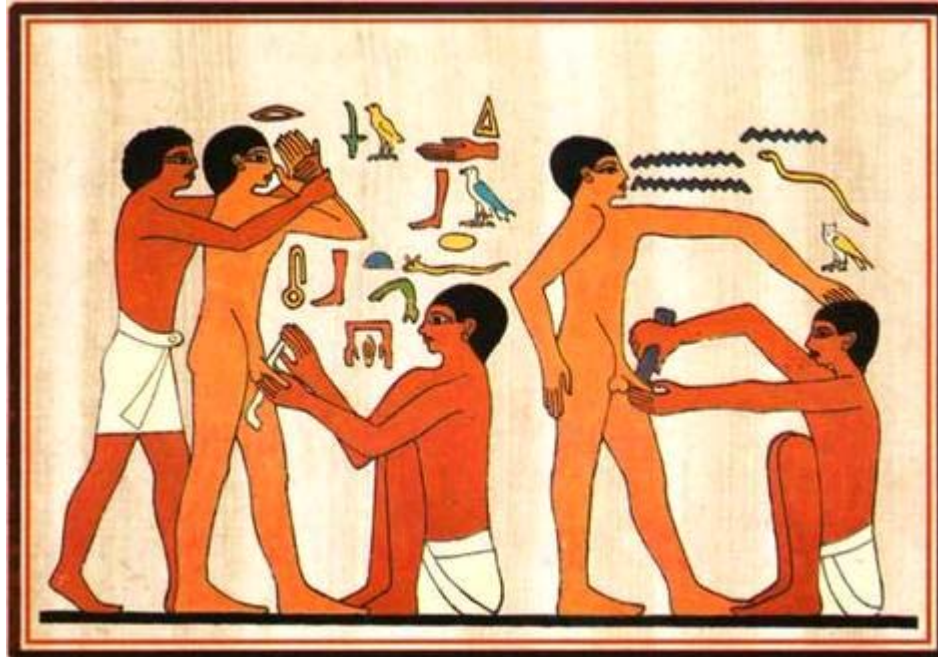


These Meru Njuri-ncheke elders (Mr. Baikiriene and Mr. Mbiko) Graduated from Njuri and moved to Uariki, the last stage of Meru elder-hood. Uariki stage is portrayed by acquisition of goat-skin handbag, flywhisk, three legged stool, and head-guard; *Nciia*. These regalia can only be acquired after graduation in the final Meru's initiation stage. The traditional regalia are equivalent of PhD in Western formal education.

APPENDIX M

Oldest Circumcision Artwork from Egypt

Oldest Circumcision reported in Egypt during the sixth dynasty



This is the oldest documentary evidence for circumcision from ancient Egypt. The artwork was discovered in Ankh-Mahor Tomb at Sakkara of sixth dynasty 2345 – 2118 BCE.

Source: Wikipedia Encyclopedia.

APPENDIX N

Pictures



Murwoekamba Ciokalaine M'barungu

This former colonial A/Chief was one of interviewees,

She was over 100 years old.



Ciokalaine (as often known, though she favors all her names) although blind and advanced in age, she offered very helpful information about Meru boys' circumcision.

Source: Photos taken and used with Ciokalaine's permission.

APPENDIX O

Igembe Fixed Age Sets

The following are names of male and female Igembe fixed age sets, which repeat after fifteen years.

MEN'S AGE SETS

1. KINYUU
2. MUTIIRA
3. MBAINE
4. NTANGI
5. LUBETTA
6. MIRITI
7. BUANTAI
8. GICHUNGE
9. KIRIAMUNYAA
10. ITHALII
11. MICHUBU
12. RATANYA

WOMENN AGE- SETS

1. NKIROTE
2. MUKUBU
3. THIRIBUA
4. NKIRINATHI
5. NCORORO
6. NKOYAI
7. NKOROI
8. NCULUBI
9. THIRINDI
10. NCENCENGA
11. NCABANI
12. NTAL

APPENDIX P

Pastoral Letters

Letter 1

Laare Circuit Maua
P. O. Box 382
12 January, 1995

Officer Commanding Station
Maua Police Station

Dear Sir,

Kidnapped Son on 29/11/95—1/12/95

I write to raise a concern over the above issue. In the past weeks, cases of kidnapped boys are on the rise and are reaching an alarming rate. I wish to remind you such cases have been reported in the news papers. The Kenya Daily Nation paper reported one such case on 23/11/95, on page 33. I am aware of a case involving one of our Christian members. I thank God those kidnappers were apprehended and are in your custody. We plead with your office to enforce the law and deal with these kidnappers accordingly.

My office is concerned and has further advised all Christians concerning the boys' field initiations and other circumcision activities that do not comply with our Christian practices. I have attached a copy of the letter written to Christians dated 11th November 1995, page 2. I am concerned that such barbaric actions are taking place at this point in time. Furthermore such primitive actions occasionally affect our committed members. One of the affected members is Mr. Harrison Mugambi, son of Silas Ntomariu.

Specifically, I want to thank chief of Akiriagondvu location (Silas Muriuki) for assisting us to have those men arrested: Moses J. Mung'atha, M'ananga, and Kithia M'ananga. I am also aware the Meru north district development committee (DDC) last year recommended boys' circumcision to be done after standard eight education graduation. As a circuit we support this schedule and our Christians are advised accordingly.

God bless you.

Yours,

Revered Jacob Kanake
Superintendent Minister
C.C.

Akiriang'ondvu location
Nyambene Synod Bishop
District Commissioner, Meru North

LETTER 2

MCK laare circuit
P.O box 382 Maua
15 November, 1995

To Leaders and Members
Mck laare circuit in
Ntonyiri and Ndoleli divisions

Re: Pastoral Letter **4th Quarter 1995**

This letter comes from the desk of Laare Circuit Superintendent Minister's office. I write this letter after much thought, deep prayers, and a wide consultation. In this letter I will address five pastoral ministry issues for your careful and faithful consideration.

First: Maintain Your Christian Faith

I advise all the Laare circuit Christians to cut links with Meru tradition practices and become genuine and faithful Christian followers (Galatians 5:19-21). I beg you to stop seeking any kind of physical, psychological, spiritual or emotional help from the Meru tradition false prophets, reliance on witchcraft, diviners, seers, and Meru tradition fortune tellers. These practices contradict your Christian faith. You cannot serve two masters—your Meru traditional practices and Christian doctrines and dogma. Like Joshua told Israelites, decide today whom you will serve (Joshua 24: 15-27).

Second: Circumcision

Recently many of the Meru parents have set the month of December as the time for field circumcision for their boys. Even those not supposed to be circumcised have been included by force. Whereas, traditional Meru boys' circumcision practice is most crude and unsanitary, I plead with all the Methodist Christians to desist from such weird practices and offer your sons dignified hospital circumcision. If those who love the traditional field circumcision practice force your children to such unchristian practices against your will, please report to my office for immediate action. Furthermore I advise you not to circumcise children who have not graduated from 8th grade, because it is important to put more emphasis on education than on the physical circumcision. All Christians should neither participate in field circumcision nor circumcise their sons in the open fields or any traditional settings. Parents who do so are not showing love for their sons hence are contravening their children's baptism vows.

Further take note, no Christian should be given miraa or join to sing bad and abusive traditional circumcision songs. Exercise uttermost care and love of your body and soul as you immerse yourself in God's love. I advise all leaders not to permit field circumcision to take place in any of the public schools that fall under the Methodist church's sponsorship. At this age of HIV/AIDS, blood that spills on the ground can cause sickness. You should prevent your silverware, plates, cooking pots and water containers from being used in the field circumcision functions. Doing so can also make you and

your property spiritually unclean, and perhaps that might lead to disciplinary actions taken against you. You are aware also that girls' circumcision is not allowed at all. Those who participate in girls' circumcision risk being under church discipline. Mere participation in any traditional event disqualifies one to church membership.

Third: As Far as Possible, Stay in Peace with All People

It is a Christian golden rule to exercise peace and strive to work for peace despite the prevailing circumstances. As a church we should strive to love even those who are unlovable. I advise leaders to watch out for those among us who fuel strife or mislead others to false beliefs. Members who do not work for peace but instead work for chaos should take an alternative: either leave the church, or reform. Those willing to disqualify themselves from church membership and the means of grace should make that decision and inform the office through leaders to avoid tarnishing the church image. Let no Christian member interfere with the traditional people and afterward come to ask for our help. As far as is practicable, let us stay in peace with all people (Cor 16-18; Rom 13:19). May every bit of your property be used profitably to educate and feed your family; do not waste your time doing anything like reckless talking, stealing, lying or corruption lest you be judged harshly according to set procedures (1 Cor 6:11). Bear in mind it is a shame for Christians to seek help from Njuri-ncheke or traditional groups; all Christians should seek help from other Christian groups.

Fourth: Watch Out Corruption

I am aware some of our Christians are suspect of theft and corruption. I remind you God does not like a cheating heart. God teaches that love of money is perhaps a source of all evil that includes cheating, and stealing, (1 Tim 6: 10). We ought to love God first and He will meet all of our desires (Mt. 6: 33). All things belong to God. We should strive to help others as God helps us. So, what is your heart measure when you choose between God and money! Take care you are not like the rich fool (Luke 12; 13-21). If we seek for a good wealth and dignified character, God is our source of hope.

Fifth: Schedule for Teaching

I ask the church leaders to meet during Christian Education Sunday to teach members the contents of this 1995 annual letter. (See Standing Order 61.)

Have a wonderful time as you await the celebration of the birth of our Lord and savior Jesus the Christ. May you also take time to plan for the year 1996.

I wish you God's Blessings.

Jacob Kanake
Superintendent Minister

CC:

- District Officer
- All Chiefs and Sub –Chiefs
- Nyambene synod bishop

LETTER 3

Laare Circuit Maua

P. O. Box 382

25th August 1997.

The District Officer
Laare Division
PO Laare
Dear Madam/Sir

RE: KIDNAPPING OF A CHILD

This is to inform you that a form one student called Paul Mutua of Chugu Secondary school has been kidnapped by Gitonga Kaberia, Mutura Mboyo and Joel Mboyo and currently is at Mung'athia M'Ituiba to undergo field circumcision traditional counseling. This is against Paul's will, his parent's will, and the Church teachings. These kidnapers are asking for a ransom of Kenya shillings 2,500 total to release this boy. We are disappointed that fully accredited church members have been kidnapped and we all condemn this act.

The same matter has been reported to the area chief in vain. We seek your urgent support and attention to this issue since the parents and other church members feel very humiliated and embarrassed. We also look forward to the safe release of this boy and to see justice upon the culprits.

With regards

Rev. Jacob Kanake
Superintendent Minister
Laare Circuit.

Cc:
District Commissioner Nyambene
Officer In-charge of a Police Post
Officer In-charge of a Station
Nyambene Synod Bishop
Nyambene District Criminal Investigating Officer

APPENDIX Q
Asbury Permission Letter
(HARD COPY TO BE ATTACHED)

APPENDIX R

Igembe District HIV/AIDS Records


APPENDIX S

Igembe District Education Records

APPENDIX T

Temporary (Liturgical) Program

Documents use with permission from the family'



MR. & MRS. DANIEL MURIUNGI
Invite you,

.....
to witness pass out of their son Willy Kirimi on
23/12/2006 at their home starting at **1.00p.m.**


Our Guest Speakers will be:-

<u>NAME</u>	<u>TOPIC</u>
1. Rev. James Kaumbura	- Explain traditional rituals then hospital rituals, which ritual should be retained. Give reasons.
2. Rev. Joshua Kalunge	- Health and Drug abuse
3. Mr. Robert Kobia	- Culture and Social life
4. Mr. Jasto Mati	- Education, ICT and Time management

The Guest Preacher:-
Rev. John Koskei

Master of Ceremony:-
Ev. Stanley Karuti

Vote of thanks
Mr. Francis Nkunja - Chairman Limbuku



PASSOUT PROGRAMME ON 23RD DECEMBER 2006

TIME	ACTIVITY	ACTION
1.00 PM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Pass out procession ❖ Prayers 	Rev. John Koskei
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Handing over the initiate to the parent - Minister - Church - Youth. 	Concern people
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Sermon 	Rev. John Koskei
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Refreshment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr Josesh Kobia - Mr Jusuf Nkunja - Servers
3.00 PM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Guest speakers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rev. James Kambura - Rev. Joshua Kalunge - Mr. Jasto Mati - Mr Robert Kobia
4.00 PM	<p>Self Introduction well being taken video coverage as follows:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mr. Sadrack Michubu, Francis Muliuki, Mr. Mwakaria, Patrick Ntongai and other youth group. 2. MCK Laare Circuit staff and group leaders. 3. All church leaders from all churches who are present. 4. All ministers and pastors from various churches. 5. Political/administration leaders 6. Other visitors from various areas who are present and they would like to greet the people. 	Master of Ceremony will invite people in the order indicated.
5.00 PM	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Vote of Thank 2. Closing Prayer 3. People leave at their own pleasure time 	<p>Mr Francis Nkunja Chairman - Limbuku</p> <p>Rev. Koskei</p>

Programmer drawn by:

Family of Mr & Mrs Daniel Muriungi

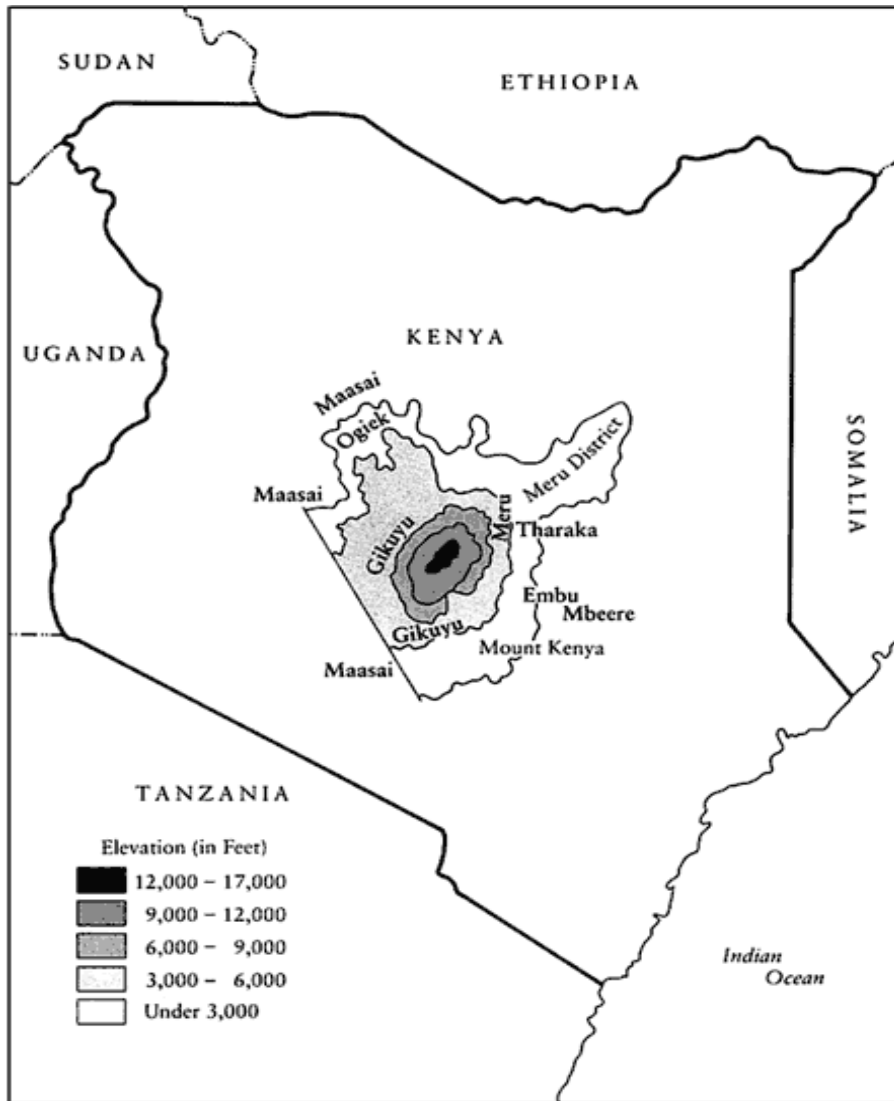
We wish you all a Merry X-Mass and a happy new year 2007

God bless you all and thank you for your prayers and support you have given us.

Source: Information used with Daniel's family permission

APPENDIX U

Kenya Map.

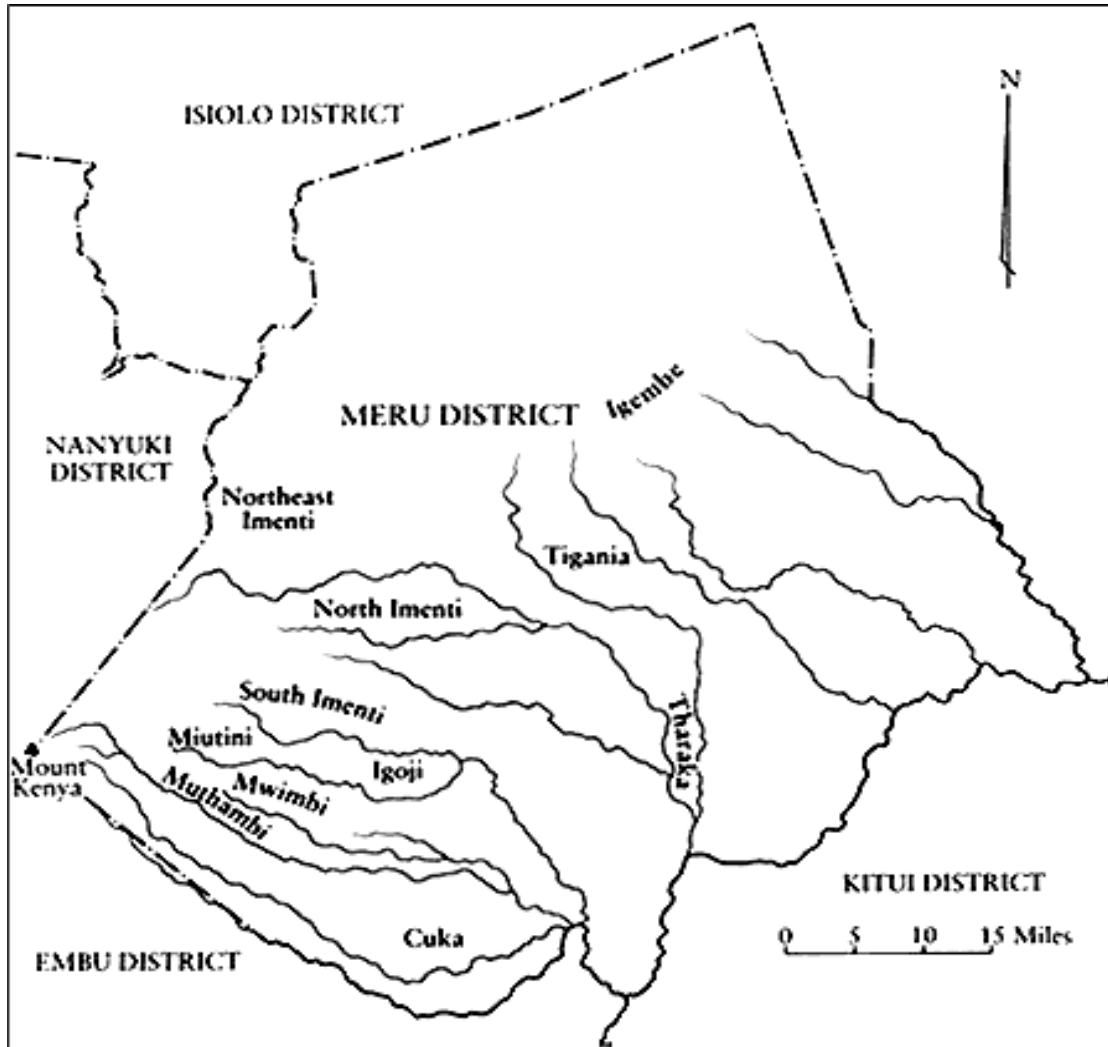


This map shows Mt. Kenya at the center (black color) and areas surrounding it include the Meru district on the eastern side.

Source: Central Bureau Statistics. Kenya census, 1999.

APPENDIX V

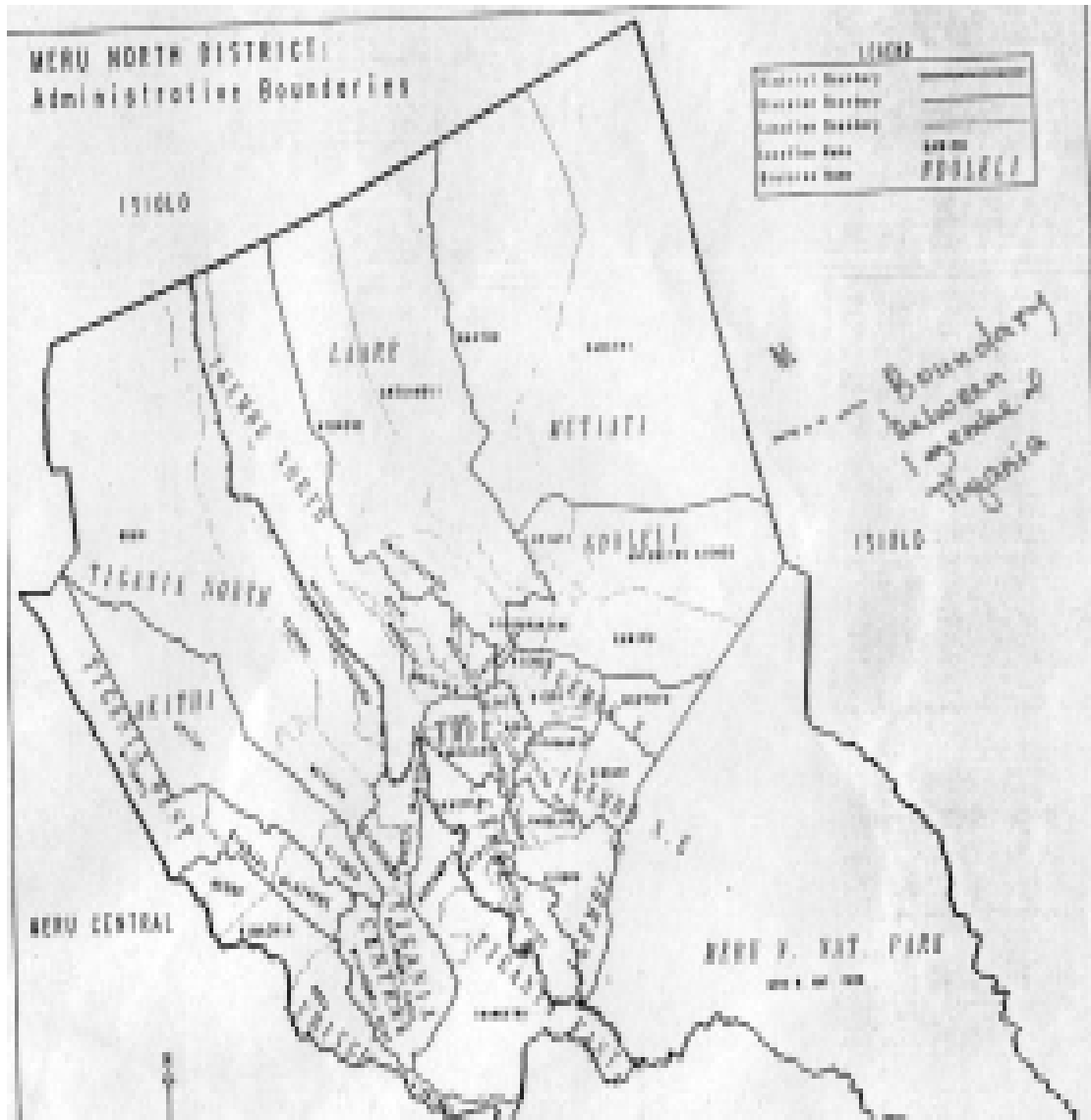
Meru District Map



These regions formed greater Meru district before 1992 but today they have grown into 7 districts: Chuka district, Tharaka district, Meru South district, Meru central district, Meru north district, Tigania, and Igembe district.

Source: Thomas xi. *The greater Meru (District before 1992) region*

APPENDIX W
Igembe District Map



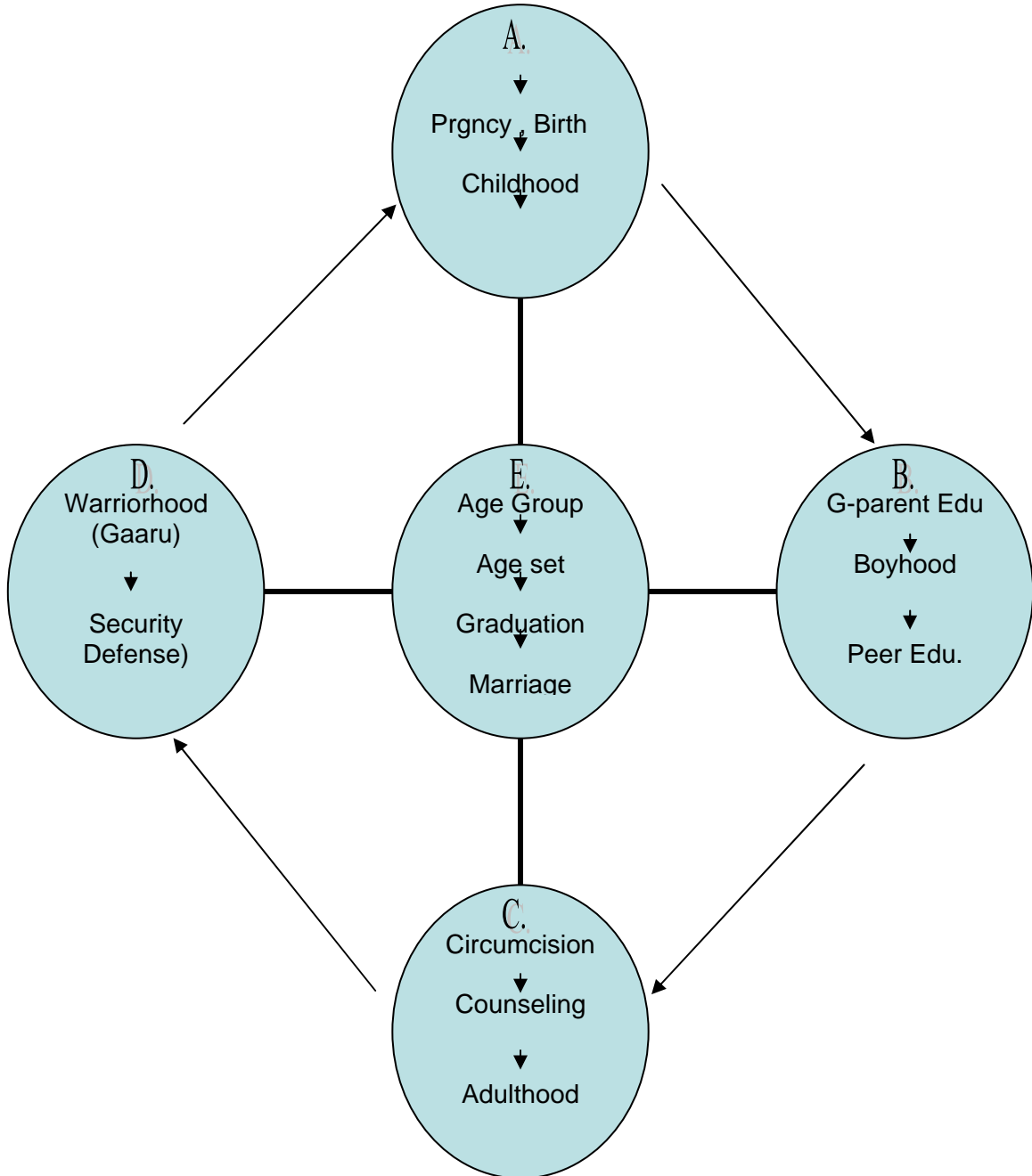
This map combines Tigania and Igembe districts because Nthiru is in Uringu division of Tigania. See Nchiru and Kigairwo marked in Red

Source: 1999 Kenya Census.

APPENDIX X

Meru Boys' Life Cycle

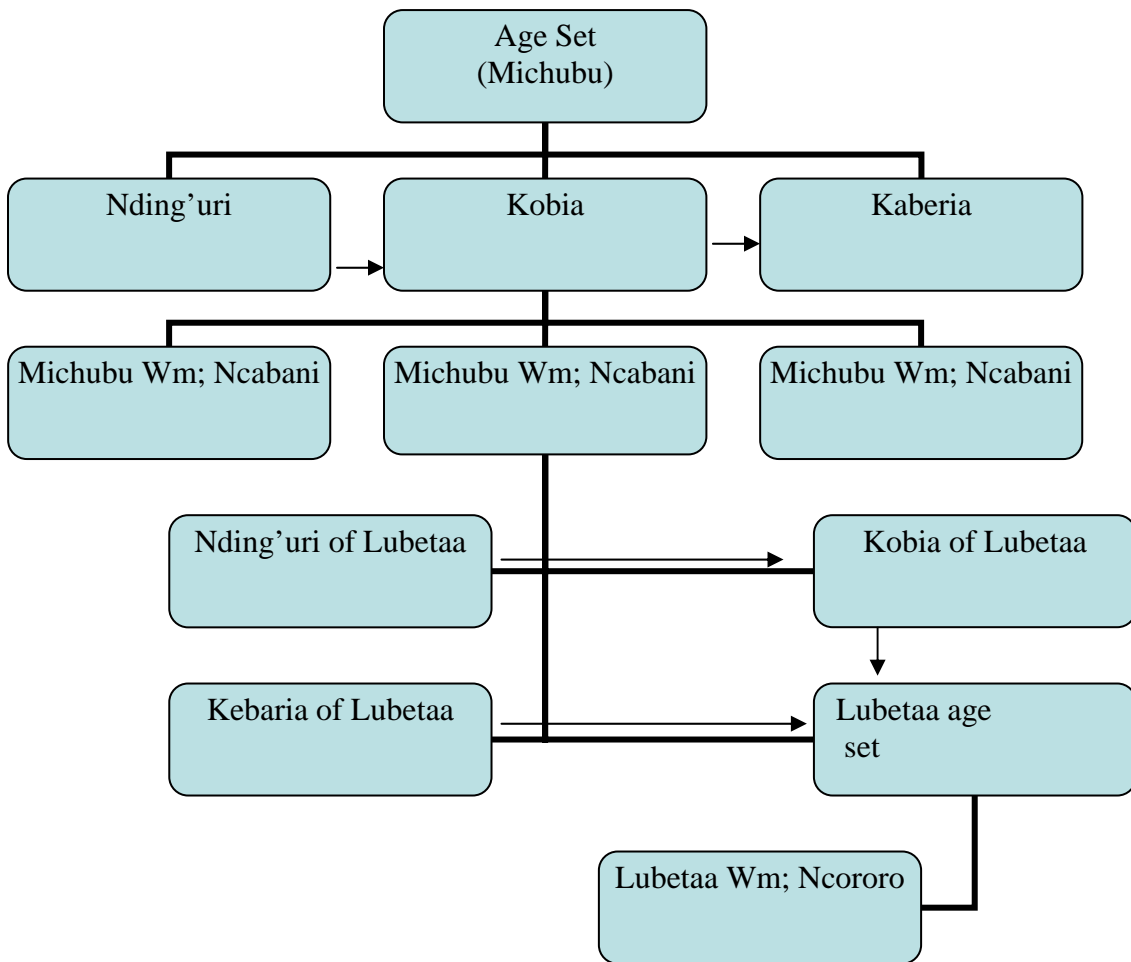
The Diagram Depicts the Life Cycle of a Meru Boy Child.



APPENDIX Y

Meru Age Set Structure

Take for example Michubu Age set is made of Ndinguri, Kobia and Kaberia age groups. Michubu age set women are called Ncabani. Michubu sons form Lubetaa age set. Lubetaa also has three age groups; Ndinguri, Kobia, and Kaberia. Women of lubetaa form Ncororo age set. An age group is formed after every five years. Women also correspond to men age sets. Although women age sets carry different name from that of men; they take age group name as the same as that of their husbands.



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