

*NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY*

*MENTORING: The Role of the Mutiri in Traditional Kikuyu  
Society With Implication for Mentoring in Presbyterian Church  
of East Africa St. Andrew's Church*

*BY  
NYAMATHA WANJIRU NJIRAINI*

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**NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY**

**MENTORING: THE ROLE OF THE *MUTHIRI* IN TRADITIONAL KIKUYU  
SOCIETY WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR MENTORING IN  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF EAST AFRICA  
ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH**

**BY**

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**A Thesis submitted to the Graduate School in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Divinity (Christian Education)**

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MENTORING: THE ROLE OF THE *MUTIIRI* IN TRADITIONAL KIKUYU  
SOCIETY WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR MENTORING IN  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF EAST AFRICA  
ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH

I declare that this is my original work and has not been  
submitted to any other College or University for academic credit

The views presented herein are not necessarily those of the Nairobi Evangelical  
Graduate School of Theology or the Examiners

(Signed)



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Nyamatha Wanjiru Njiraini

July 10, 2004

## ABSTRACT

St. Andrew's Church, Nairobi has identified a need to provide guidance to teenagers and is in the process of designing a mentoring program. The literature available on mentoring has been written mostly in the West. African traditions similar to mentoring have remained largely unexplored. The purpose of this study was to explore the role of the *mutiiri* in Kikuyu traditional society, with a view to discovering mentoring principles that would be transferable to a modern urban context, specifically, St. Andrews Church.

The seven participants interviewed in the study were drawn from bordering locations in Thika and Gatundu. The data collected from the interviews were analyzed using qualitative methods of open, axial, and selective coding. The theory that emerged from the data was that the *atiiri* were both educators and nurses. They shared their educational role with the parents and the peers of their charges. Their effectiveness as educators depended on their charges' willingness to commit and adhere to the value system of traditional Kikuyu society. Initiates receptive to external influences such as Christianity and Western education were less committed.

After the integration of literature it was recommended that the mentoring program at St. Andrew's Church should be community based and community-wide. It should be associated with important events in the lives of the mentorees and should encourage team work among mentors, parents and the community. The selection of mentors should take into consideration the character of the mentors, the possibility of role conflict, and the willingness of the mentorees, which would affect the effectiveness of the program.



To the teens of St. Andrews Church, Nairobi

May you grow  
in  
Wisdom and Stature  
and  
in Favour  
with  
God and Men  
Luke 2:52 NIV

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This task would not have been possible without the assistance and encouragement from, God Almighty who gave wisdom. Thank you for answering me in my distress when ideas were not flowing and my body was tired.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Rachel Kessler commenting on rites of passage wrote, “Traditional cultures taught us that adolescence is a particularly important point in the spiritual life cycle. Virtually every preindustrial culture provided rites of initiation. .... Without such rites, today’s teenagers have created their own badges for adulthood – from driver’s licenses... to the dangerous rituals of binge drinking, first baby or first jail sentence.”<sup>1</sup> She said, “Most of our youth today have no opportunity to be guided by responsible adults through the adolescent journey.”<sup>2</sup>

It is the recognition of the need for adult guidance in the lives of adolescents that a youth mentoring program was initiated at Presbyterian Church of East Africa (P.C.E.A.) St. Andrew’s Church, Nairobi in 1999. Those selected as mentors in the St. Andrews, were supposedly “responsible adults.”<sup>3</sup> Despite such careful selection of mentors the mentoring program failed. It is possible the program failed because the role of the mentor was ambiguous or that the program was not well integrated into the Church’s “culture.” Whatever the reason for the failure, the effort would undoubtedly have benefited from insights gained through history both in Africa and elsewhere.

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel Kessler, “Initiation: Saying Good-Bye to Childhood,” *Educational Leadership* 67, no. 4 (Dec. 1999/Jan. 2000), 30-31.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

As stated by Kessler, “Virtually every preindustrial culture provided rites of initiation....”<sup>4</sup> This stands true for the Kikuyu community, of which the researcher is a part. One of the main actors in the life of every initiate during circumcision was the *mutiiri*, who acted as the initiate’s sponsor. The role of *mutiiri* especially during the time of the initiates’ seclusion suggests similarities with those called mentors in the modern day. The *mutiiri* in Kikuyu traditional society, therefore, offers a contextual model for mentoring in Africa though in a different generation.

The researcher’s aim was to bring out the tried and tested wisdom in the mentoring of the traditional Kikuyu community, in the person of the *mutiiri*. Those insights that were transferable to the modern day were then recommended for use in the renewed efforts to the mentoring program at St. Andrew’s Church, Nairobi, where an average of 200 teenagers seek spiritual and moral guidance.

### *Problem Statement*

As mentioned in the previous section, St. Andrew’s Church, Nairobi, attempted to prepare teenagers for adulthood through a mentorship program that failed. Other Churches such as Nairobi Baptist Church and Nairobi Chapel have partnered in developing mentoring programs for their youth. Connie Kivuti, of Emerging Young Leaders, an organization that has started many mentoring programs in Kenya admitted that much of the literature on mentoring is not indigenous, that is, little or no literature on mentoring has originated in Africa.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, many of the mentoring efforts in the Churches mentioned above are limited to using Scripture and non-African materials in developing their programs.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>5</sup> Connie Kivuti, interview by author, Nairobi, 8<sup>th</sup> January 2004.

One of the shortcomings of this approach has been lack of contextualization and a poverty caused by the ignorance of African wisdom that resulted from centuries of practices similar to what we today call mentoring. Just as Western literature takes pride in citing the example of Mentor and his charge Telemakhos from Greek mythology, so Africans can take pride in using examples of mentoring from their past.<sup>6</sup>

### *Purpose of study*

The purpose of this study was to understand the role of the *mutiiri* within the Kikuyu community with a view to discovering mentoring principles that were transferable to a modern urban context, with specific reference to St. Andrew's Church.

### *Significance of Study*

The research proposed an innovative perspective to the field of mentoring by highlighting how one ethnic group in Africa trained its children to take on adult roles. The mentoring principles that emerged were useful in making recommendations for use in the design of the mentoring program at St. Andrew's Church. The research will also be instructive to those already running mentoring programs worldwide.

### *Research Questions*

The main question answered by the research was: What was the role of the *mutiiri* in the traditional Kikuyu society? The sub questions that will help in answering this central question include,

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<sup>6</sup> Laurent A. Daloz, *Effective Teaching and Mentoring – Realizing the Transformational Power of Adult Learning Experiences* (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1986), ix.

- a. Who was chosen as a *mutiiri*?
- b. What tasks was the *mutiiri* expected to carry out?
- c. How was the effectiveness of a *mutiiri* determined?
- d. What lessons can be drawn for mentoring of teenagers in St. Andrew's Church?

### *Limitations and Delimitations*

Practices of the *Agikuyu* varied according to the “sub-tribe” or geographical location.<sup>7</sup> The study therefore was limited to participants living in the border areas of Thika and Gatundu districts, within the Gathaite, Mbogoro and Ndarugu areas as they were likely to be of the same sub-tribe and were in the same general geographical area.

Due to time restrictions, the achievement of theoretical saturation and cost of the research the number of participants interviewed was limited to seven. Theoretical saturation was key in determining when the number of participants was sufficient for the research's purposes.

### *Definition of Terms*

*Mutiiri* – This term refers to the sponsor or supporter of an initiate of the Kikuyu community at the circumcision ceremony. The plural of *mutiiri* is *atiiri*.

*Mugikuyu* – A member of the Kikuyu community. The whole community is referred to as the *Agikuyu*.

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<sup>7</sup> Stanley Gathigira, , *Mtikarĩre ya Agikũyũ*, (Karatina, Nyeri: Scholar's Publication, 1933), 54.



Mentor – In this study the term will be used to refer to a person who guides and counsels.<sup>8</sup>

Mentoree – Refers to a person under a mentor's guidance

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<sup>8</sup> Adapted from Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary.

## CHAPTER TWO

### RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Qualitative and quantitative methods of research differ in many ways. It was important for the researcher to understand the essential ways in which the two methodological paradigms differed in order to choose the appropriate method for doing this research. Highlighted below are some of the characteristics of the qualitative design selected as the method for use in this research.

#### *Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Design*

A qualitative research design has several basic assumptions that have to do with the nature of reality, the nature of knowledge and the nature of truth.<sup>1</sup> John Creswell gave the basic assumptions of qualitative research as “the multiple nature of reality, the close relationship of the researcher to that being researched, the value-laden aspect of inquiry, the personal approach to writing the narrative, and the emerging inductive methodology of the process of research.”<sup>2</sup>

Unlike quantitative research, which emphasizes “objectivity” through distance between the researcher and what is being researched, qualitative research encourages the researcher to have a close relationship with the research participants.<sup>3</sup> Another

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<sup>1</sup> Phil Francis Carspecken, *Critical Ethnography in Educational Research* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 1.

<sup>2</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications Inc., 1998), 73.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

difference between qualitative research and quantitative research is that the former is dynamic and elements such as the research questions, and the methods used in collecting data may evolve in the course of research. Quantitative research is more rigid.<sup>4</sup> Qualitative research allows researchers to analyze data as soon as it is collected in order to allow them to readjust their research design to focus on the right issues during the next field visit. Creswell called this a “process... of... emerging design... [in which] a researcher begins... with general questions and refines them as the study proceeds.”<sup>5</sup>

Another element of the dynamism of qualitative research is in the methods of sampling. Rather than aim at representativeness of a population sample, researchers like bloodhounds, “sniff the air” – their data - looking for a specific “smell” that will guide them as to which trail to follow. Researchers use their judgement to decide which person would provide insights that would advance the study. This approach is called “purposeful sampling.”<sup>6</sup> For this reason, in qualitative research, after choosing the group to be studied the researcher does not define a population sample, but determines the number of people that will constitute the sample depending upon theoretical saturation.

The method of choice in the study of the role of the *mutiiri* in traditional Kikuyu society was the qualitative method. The nature of the central research question lent itself to qualitative research. The objective of understanding a part of the culture of an ethnic group gave the study an anthropological slant, while the purpose

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<sup>4</sup> Carspecken, 28.

<sup>5</sup> Creswell, 78.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 118.

of informing present-day mentoring practices necessitated a grounded theory approach.

### *The Role of Literature Review*

One of the key assumptions of the qualitative paradigm of research is that the process of investigation is inductive. Theory emerges from field data and the researcher's role is to follow the trail that emerges through data collection and analysis. Hence, the role of the literature review in qualitative research is to compare and contrast the findings of the study.<sup>7</sup> It serves as an analytic tool as well as a means of validating the research findings, thus its placement after the section where findings are reported.

### *Research Sample*

The group of participants was made up, “of individuals who witnessed or participated in events of potential significance.”<sup>8</sup> These participants were those who had been under the care of *atiiri* and witnessed firsthand how they worked in traditional Kikuyu society. In order to limit the variations in practices participants were selected from neighbouring locations in Thika and Gatundu districts.

Time limitations and the achievement of theoretical saturation restricted the number of participants to seven. When the researcher began to hear the same information repeated at the interviews and validation had already been provided, it was

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<sup>7</sup> John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, California, 2003), 31.

<sup>8</sup> Meredith D. Gall, Walter R. Borg and Joyce P. Gall, *Educational Research – An Introduction*, (White Plains, New York: Longman Publishers USA, 1996), 654.



determined that there was no need to include new participants as they were unlikely to reveal any new insights.

### *Data collection*

The inductive nature of the qualitative research process favoured the use of open-ended interviews as the chief method of data collection as they would allow participants to open “initially unsuspected features of... [the] situation and... [to provide] opportunities for developing new primary concepts from... [the] field experience.”<sup>9</sup> An example of an unexpected insight revealed through open interviewing was that of negative effect of Christianity and Western Education on the work of the *mutiiri*.

The focus of qualitative research on the perspective of participants and the meanings they attach to their experiences also favoured the choice of the use of interviews.<sup>10</sup> These interviews were useful for “gain[ing] an intimate view of... relationships, and events from the perspective of one who has experienced them him- or herself...”<sup>11</sup> In this study, the views expressed by participants were particular to each of them as they had all had different experiences during their initiation with their *atiiri*. The researcher was unable to obtain interviews with former *atiiri* as many were either senile, dead or had not maintained relationships with their charges. All those who were interviewed were all above sixty years of age.

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<sup>9</sup> Gall, Borg and Gall, 654.

<sup>10</sup> Creswell, 16.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Bogdan and Steven J. Taylor, *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1975), 7.

The “intimate views” referred to above were obtained through, “intimate conversations... personal stories and experiences as told to... [the] researcher.”<sup>12</sup> The most appropriate method, then, for generating such conversations was informal conversational interviews.<sup>13</sup> This method of interviewing is similar to the unstructured interview method which is useful for getting information that is “highly personal and potentially threatening in nature”<sup>14</sup> as was the case with the information sought in this study. The information was “highly personal because of its direct association with circumcision. The unstructured interviews also allowed the participants to be interviewed more than once.<sup>15</sup> The researcher conducted follow-up interviews for three of the participants, which enabled her to probe further into the salient issues in the study.

An interview guide was used in conducting interviews. The guide contained a mixture of structured questions and an outline of issues and topics to be covered. It was not however used rigidly, but was used to ensure that all the important issues were covered. Once a question had been asked, the researcher used the participant’s response as a guide to further probing, thereby obtaining more in-depth responses. Rather than use the interview guide as a separate approach, it was used to supplement the unstructured or informal conversational interviews, which had a weakness in their openness to bias by the researcher<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1990), 280.

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Isaac, and William B. Michael, *Handbook on Research and Evaluation for Educational and the Behavioral Sciences* (San Diego, CA: EdITS Publisher, 1979), 96.

<sup>15</sup> Patton, 281.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 282.

By using the interview guide the researcher was able to seek the same basic information from the various participants while allowing freedom for each of them to be spontaneous and converse freely within the subject area.<sup>17</sup> The researcher was also enabled to cover the issues of interest in a systematic and comprehensive way.<sup>18</sup> In order to capture all the information communicated during the interviews, a tape recorder was used.

### *Validation*

Triangulation using a mix of purposeful samples served as a means of validation of information gathered from participants.<sup>19</sup> The views of participants holding variant views were compared and contrasted. For example, one participant who had been under the influence of Christianity and Western education, differed in her perspective of the role of the *mutiiri*. Her views were compared and contrasted with those of others held a differing view on the role of the *mutiiri*.

The validation process also involved applying the emerging theory to some of experiences of participants in the study to verify whether they fitted. Elements of the theory that fitted with only a few of the experiences were eliminated. The theory and findings also were presented to some of the research participants who verified that these were an accurate representation of their views.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>20</sup> Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications Inc., 1998), 159.

Once data had been collected through tape recorded interviews, these were transcribed. Transcriptions and interview notes provided the raw material for the process of analysis, which is described below.

Data analysis was a “free flowing and creative [process in which] ... [the analyst move[d] ... back and forth between types of coding, using analytic techniques and procedures freely...”<sup>21</sup> The analytic techniques used included, open, axial and selective coding, asking questions, memos, and comparisons.

### Open Coding

Open coding is "the process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions... discovered in data."<sup>22</sup> In this study, open coding involved “labelling of event[s], object[s], or action[s]/interaction[s] that... [the] researcher... [identified] as being significant in the data.”<sup>23</sup> The purpose of such labelling was "to enable the researcher to group [those ideas that were] similar... under a common heading or classification."<sup>24</sup> The categories that were developed were not simply descriptive, but had "the potential to explain and predict"<sup>25</sup> so that the researcher was able to recall the properties of any idea based on which category it belonged to as well as to categorize new ideas. Some of the categories were also found to have subcategories each of which had their own properties and dimensions.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 113.



The process of open coding involved line-by-line analysis in which phrases and words were subjected to scrutiny in order to develop categories. Sentences and paragraphs were analyzed in order to code them according to already discovered categories. Then, the researcher went through the entire transcription asking how it differed from those that had been coded earlier.<sup>26</sup> Some of the themes that emerged with regard to the tasks that the *mutiiri* carried out were proper behaviour,<sup>27</sup> and warning against misbehaviour<sup>28</sup>.

### Asking Questions in Analysis

Asking questions helped the researcher to get “a grasp of the meaning of events or happenings that... otherwise [seemed] obscure. For example, it was difficult to understand the phenomenon referred to as *iceera*<sup>29</sup> that participants classified as a negative behaviour. This classification was difficult for the researcher to understand as it does not capture the common meaning of the word which is visiting.

Asking questions was instructive in making decisions on whom to interview next. The researcher asked two of the participants to clarify the meaning *iceera* during follow-up interviews. This emphasized the processes of data collection and data analysis go hand in hand in qualitative research.

Analysis also involved asking questions in order to "generate ideas or ways of looking at data."<sup>30</sup> Sometimes these questions were raised by those with whom the researcher discussed the data. One such person asked the researcher whether boys

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>27</sup> *mītugo*.

<sup>28</sup> *waganu*.

<sup>29</sup> Visiting.

<sup>30</sup> Strauss and Corbin, 90.

sleeping with the goats in their father's hut may have suggested bestiality. This question helped the researcher look beyond the description of outward behaviour to its motivation and to break away from the usual way of thinking.

### Axial coding

As mentioned above axial coding does not necessarily follow open coding, but it does need some categories to have been developed.<sup>31</sup> In this research it involved relating the categories to their subcategories in order "to form more precise and complete explanations about phenomena."<sup>32</sup> The distinguishing feature of axial coding is that it takes place "along the axis of... [the] category, relating subcategories to each other and to their respective categories and relating the categories to each other."<sup>33</sup>

The questions asked during axial coding were, "why, how come, where, when, how and with what results... [in order to] uncover relationships among categories."<sup>34</sup> These questions enabled the researcher to understand both the structure and the process of the phenomenon of the *mutiiri* and his/her role in the society. Axial coding, therefore, helped restructuring what had been fragmented through open coding.<sup>35</sup> Through axial coding the themes of proper behaviour and warning against misbehaviour were grouped together under a larger category, curriculum.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 124.

## Memos

Memos are “written records of analysis.”<sup>36</sup> The researcher used these to record thoughts on the data as they came. During the early stages the memos were “awkward and simple.”<sup>37</sup> The memos recorded during axial coding reflected the researcher’s ideas on the interaction between categories. In one memo read, “The practice of the *mutiiri* changed over time with the older generation giving greater priority or importance to the *mutiiri* than those with Church influence. Compare Christian/Church influence vs. Importance of the *mutiiri*.”

## Selective Coding

Selective coding is “the process of integrating and refining categories”<sup>38</sup> thus forming a theory. Selective coding involved choosing a central category that was able “to pull other categories together to form an explanatory whole.”<sup>39</sup>

The criteria for choosing the central category were those given by Strauss and Corbin; namely, its centrality in relation to all other categories, its frequent appearance in the data, its emergence from the logical and consistent relating of categories, its level of abstraction being sufficient for the development of more general theory, the development of the concept through integration of other concepts thus making the theory deeper and more explanatory, and its ability to explain variation.<sup>40</sup> The central category in this study was that the *mutiiri* was a teacher. Using diagrams, this central

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 147.

category was related to other categories. The final diagram, Figure 1 on page , aided the development of the theory.

After identifying the central category it was necessary to refine the emerging theory. This refinement involved "reviewing the scheme for internal consistency and for gaps in logic, filling in poorly developed categories and trimming excessive ones, and validating the scheme."<sup>41</sup> Once the theory had been refined, the findings of the research were compared with literature on mentoring then recommendations were made for mentoring in St. Andrew's Church and for further research.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 156.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The researcher used open, axial and selective coding to analyze the data obtained through interviews from seven participants who hailed from the border areas of both Thika and Gatundu districts. The three male and three female participants, were aged above sixty years. All admitted to having gone through the traditional Kikuyu initiation rites. In addition, all acknowledged they had been under the care of a *mutiiri*. Three participants even named their *atiiri*.

#### *Theory*

The data reveals that the *atiiri* were both educators and nurses. They shared their educational role with the parents and the peers of their charges. Their effectiveness as educators depended on their charges' willingness to commit and adhere to the value system of traditional Kikuyu society. Initiates receptive to external influences such as Christianity and Western education were less committed.

The work of the *atiiri* took place with the complex backdrop of Kikuyu tradition, as is illustrated in the Figure 1 below. The figure gives a summary of the main categories that emerged from the data and was the basis of the discussion of the research findings.

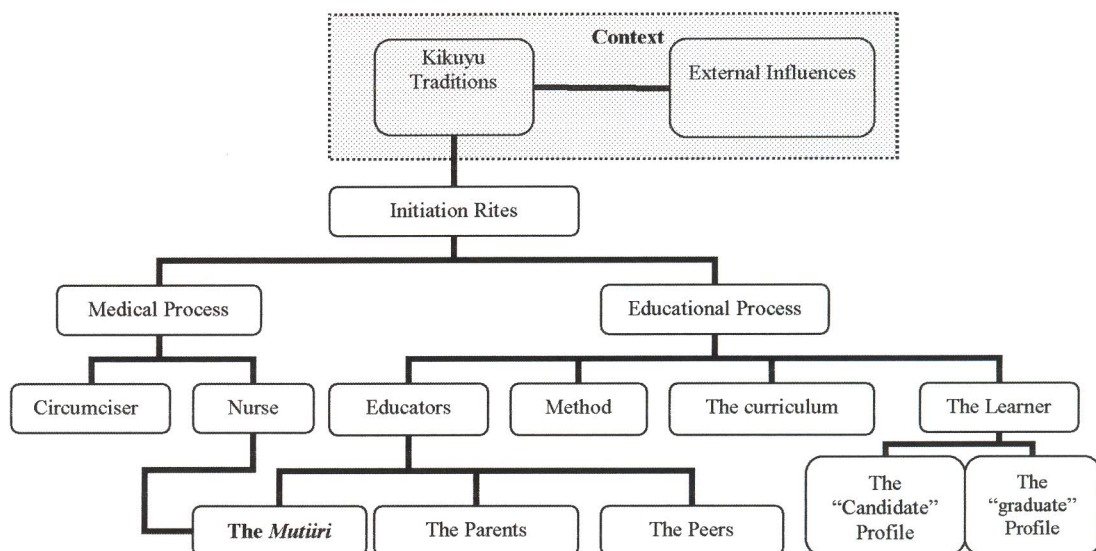


Figure 1: The position of the *mutiiri* within traditional Kikuyu Society

### *Context*

The traditions of the *Agikuyu* evolved over time. A participant in her late seventies commented, “Even we were told some of [these cultural] things by our mother because we did not find that deep Kikuyu culture, no. We found that it was ending.”<sup>1</sup> The traditional society also was affected by external influences including Christianity and Western education. These external influences will be discussed in relation to how they affected the effectiveness of the *mutiiri*. As illustrated above, the immediate context in which the *mutiiri* functioned was that of the initiation rites related to circumcision.

### Kikuyu Traditions

Two words used by the participants, *uthingu* and *mitugo*, captured the essence of the values of the *Agikuyu*. Although used interchangeably, *mitugo* generally

<sup>1</sup>Ona ithũĩ nĩ maitũ watũheaga mamwe tondũ ona ithũĩ tũtiakorire gĩkũyũ kũ Kiriku, ca. Twakorire gĩgĩũka gĩgĩthiraga, gĩgĩthiraga.

referred to behaviour, while *uthingu* seemed to refer to a positive but abstract quality of a person's overall character and could be translated as "uprightness" or "morality" as illustrated in the following quotation. When asked to define *uthingu*, one of the female participants said,

It is the speech, there was a saying that "one should fetch firewood for his/her<sup>2</sup> mouth," that is, using speech that has *mitugo*. And without pecking at people [gossiping/offending]. And who will not have behaviours that show no respect, such as eating sugarcane along the paths. Who will show respect to the men and women who are of the same age with her parents. If a woman comes to see his/her mother with a need that she wants them to resolve, the children are told, "Go to your mother's... to your step mother's house or go and collect firewood." They were not allowed to be present when such things were being discussed.... And if a child was heard talking about them [private conversations of his/her step-mothers] you will have to state where you got that information from. You will be beaten.<sup>3</sup>

Another participant hinted at a Kikuyu "moral" code, *mitugo*, when he said,

"The work of the *mutiiri* was to teach that initiate *mitugo*. He was to teach you *mitugo* or that when a person becomes mature he is to be taught the *mitugo* of the *Agikuyu*. The initiate was also to be taught not to misbehave and he was also to be taught not to go visiting alot (with emphasis) because visiting [without specific reason] was disliked very very, very, very much."<sup>4</sup>

The comment suggested two meanings of *mitugo*: The first use of *mitugo* referred to the broader of the two meanings, the definitive behaviour, and way of life of the *Agikuyu* which would constitute a "moral" code. The narrower meaning of *mitugo* as behaviour was illustrated in the references to the specific behaviour that an

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<sup>2</sup> In the Kikuyu language all verbs are gender neutral therefore necessitating the use of s/he or him/her in the English translations.

<sup>3</sup> Ni mwaririe, kwahũthĩrirwo kiugo "mũndũ nĩagĩrĩrwo kunĩra kanua ngũ." Nĩ kwaria mĩario ãna mũtugo. Na ategũkayakayia andũ. Na ategwĩka mũtugo ũtarĩ wa gĩfio wa kũrĩania igwa nakũu barabara. Wa kũhe athuri aña marĩ a rika rĩmwe na ithe, na atumia a ?? ãmwe na nyina gĩfio. Wakorwo nĩ mũtumia waroka ena bata ekwenda mathondeke. Ciana icio cikerwo "Umai mũthũĩ kwa nyũkwa... kwa maitũgwo mũkũrũ, kana mũthũĩ mũkoine ngu." Matingĩkorwo hau gũkiario... Na ũngĩaria ciao-rĩ nĩ ũriuga ndeto icio ũrufite kũ. Nĩũkũhũrwo...

<sup>4</sup> Wira wa mũtiiri warĩ afĩrĩrĩ. Arute mũndũ ũcio mũtugo. Akũrute mũtugo kana afĩ mũndũ ekũgimara rĩ nĩarutwo mũtugo ya ũgĩkũyũ. Na arutwo mũtugo kana afĩ mũndũ ekũgimara rĩ nĩarutwo mũtugo ya ũgĩkũyũ. Na arutwo ningĩ kwaga gwĩka waganu. Na arutwo ningĩ kwaga gũceera mũno tondũ iceera nĩrĩo rĩa thũragwo mũno mũno mũno mũno.



individual displayed. The latter will be discussed further in the section on “curriculum.” The connection between *uthingu* and *mitugo* was evident in that both refer to behaviour. All behaviour that was considered ideal to the *Agikuyu* constituted *uthingu*, thus corresponding with the English term “uprightness” meaning moral correctness.<sup>5</sup>

### *Initiation Rites*

The *Agikuyu* perceived that every individual went through two basic phases in life, namely, childhood and adulthood. “The circumcision ceremony was the period for coming out of childhood and into maturity [or adulthood],”<sup>6</sup> said one female participant. Circumcision, therefore, provided the *atiiri* with the point of entry into their charges lives as well as creating the teachable moment in the initiates’ lives. Initiation into adulthood consisted of two processes, one medical the other educational. The only individual who had responsibilities in both of these processes was the *mutiiri*

### The Medical Process

The medical process involved the actual circumcision and nursing of the initiates. The word *mutiiri* literally means “one who props up.” The role of the *atiiri* was to prop up the initiate during their circumcision “so that he would not fall [due to the pain].”<sup>7</sup> A female participant explained the *mutiiri*’s related duties in the following way,

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Webster’s Seventh Collegiate Dictionary.

<sup>6</sup> Tondũ irua rĩarĩ ġĩcunġĩ kĩmwe ġĩakuma wanainĩ ġĩkinya ũġimainĩ.

<sup>7</sup> Nĩgetha ndakae kũgwa.



At that time when the initiate was sick, just the way you can see that a person is sick, the sick person is not the one who takes charge of his or her own care, this is done by another, who takes care of him or her. Likewise, because at this time the initiate is sick, he or she is taken care of by his or her *mutiiri* [literally, supporter], he or she is taken care of, finding out whether he or she is healing or whether the wound is healing, or if there is any problem that has arisen. And you know very well that they did not have hospitals.<sup>8</sup>

### The Educational Process

The most intense period of the educational process started at circumcision and ended at marriage. Besides the *mutiiri*, peers and parents also were involved in the educational process. The role of the *mutiiri* centred on the period of initiation, while those of the parents and peers took place after this period. The role of the parents and peers will be discussed as they intersected with that of the *atiiri*.

### *The Mutiiri*

During the seven days of recuperation after circumcision, the initiates remained in a central location variously referred to as the designate “homes,”<sup>9</sup> “houses”<sup>10</sup> or *kiganda*, which in modern Kikuyu means a factory. Along with nursing duties, “The work of the *mutiiri* was to teach that initiate proper behaviour... when a person becomes mature he is to be taught the habit of the *Agikuyu*.”<sup>11</sup> In the words of another participant “if it was counsel, [the *mutiiri*] would give to him or her [the initiate] the

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<sup>8</sup>Hĩndĩ ĩyo emũrwaru ona ũria ũngiona mũndũ arũarĩte rĩ, tiwe wĩrũmbũyagia, arũmbũyagio nĩ ungĩ, akamũmenyagaĩrĩra. Nake hĩndĩ ĩyo tondũ mwana ũcio nĩ mũrwaru, akamenyererwo nĩ ũcio mũmũtiiri, akamenyererwo, ona akamenywo kana nĩ arahona kana kirona nĩ kĩrathĩ gĩkĩhonaga, kana kwĩna thĩna ũrĩkũ ũkĩte. Na nĩũũ wega matiarĩ na thibitarĩ.

<sup>9</sup> Mĩcĩ.

<sup>10</sup> Manyũmba.

<sup>11</sup>Wira wa mũtiiri waĩ afĩrĩrĩ. Arute mũndũ ũcio mũtugo... kana afi mũndũ ekũgimara rĩ nĩ arutwo mũtugo ya ũgĩkũyũ.

proper behaviour...”<sup>12</sup> Another said, “There were no teachers at that time. The teacher would be your *mutiiri*.”<sup>13</sup> Following on the same idea he later stated, “There was no [formal] education in those days. Education was the [instruction] about life that a person was taught [by the *mutiiri*].”<sup>14</sup>

The work of the *mutiiri* began when the initiate’s parent handed over the initiate to him at the beginning of the circumcision period and ended when seven-day ceremony ended. However, even after this period had ended the *mutiiri* could be called upon to correct their initiate if they were seen to be losing the way. In one joint interview the two participants highlighted the delegated duty *mutiiri* had of taking his charge through the important transition from childhood to adulthood. The conversation proceeded as follows,

Participant 1: ... [The *mutiiri*] was to counsel him or her telling him or her “now you have left this stage and you have entered into?””

Participant 2: “You have entered this other one.”

Participant 1: You have entered this other one...<sup>15</sup>

As is evident from the preceding discussion a majority of the participants agreed that the *mutiiri* shouldered the greater burden in the education of the initiate. One participant, however, argued that the main teachers were the parents, specifically, the mother for the girls and the father for the boys. On the role of mothers she said,

“It was the mother who took charge of her [the initiate] and took her through all that concerned adulthood. In my perspective the *mutiiri* had finished her

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<sup>12</sup> Akorwo no kīrira ūcio nīekūmūhe mītugo.

<sup>13</sup> Rīu gūtiakīrī arimū hīndī īyo. Arimū nī mūtiiri waku.

<sup>14</sup> Hīndī īyo gūtiarī gīthomo, kīu tikīo gīthomo mūndū arutagwo kīa mūtūrīre.

<sup>15</sup> Participant 1: ... nīarīmūtaraga amwīre ”Rīu nīwouma stanji īno wathū kī?

Participant 2: Wathū īno īngī.

Participant 1: Wathū īno īngī...

work [nursing the initiate to health]. The women [mothers of girls] are the ones who had the greatest responsibility.”<sup>16</sup>

She went further to say “Again the *mutiiri* did not have work because there was a lot of uprightness.”<sup>17</sup> This participant’s different perspective gives strength to the view that there were several educators of the young members of the society, among them, the *mutiiri*, the parents, and peers.

The different perspective of this participant was later explained. When asked how she remembered her *mutiiri*. She said,

“I remember her because as I have told you, I went for initiation when I was grown up and it was not my wish because for one, I had gotten to know about Christianity previously. On the other side, my father and mother would not release me. But I was praying that the day [of initiation] would come so that we would be through and I could go to church. So everything [concerning the *mutiiri*] was forgotten at that moment.”<sup>18</sup>

Her admission underscored the effect of the “external influences” on the educational role of the *mutiiri*. Christianity eroded the worth of the traditional initiation rites in the eyes of this participant. She continued, “I was shepherded by my brothers and sisters in Christ because becoming a Christian made me have *uthingu* [uprightness] and *mitugo* [proper behaviour]. My mother would not have taught me *uthingu* because becoming a Christian made me to have *uthingu* and *mitugo*.”<sup>19</sup> The

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<sup>16</sup>Nĩ nyina wamuoyaga akamũtwara ũgimainĩ wothe, wothe, wothe, wothe, ƿĩ. Mũtiiri ngu ona akinyagia wĩra o hau mmm. Atumia marĩ na njukumu nene.

<sup>17</sup>Ningĩ ona mũtiiri ndangĩagiire na wĩra tondũ wa rĩrĩ, kwarĩ na ũthingu mũingĩ mũno, ũthingu...

<sup>18</sup>Nĩ ũcio ndimũririkanaga tondũ wa rĩrĩ, ndakwĩra nĩ ndathire ndĩ mũndũ mũgima, na ndwarĩ wendo wakwa. Tondũ ũndũ ũmwe nĩndamenyete Ukristiano nagũkũ mbere. Kũria itangĩohorĩrwo nĩ maitũ na baba. No ndakĩhoyaga mũthanya ũcio ũkinye tumanwo nao nĩ thĩ kanitha. Rĩu ũhoro ũcio wariganĩre oro hau.

<sup>19</sup>Nĩndakĩriithagio nĩ arĩ na aithe a ithe witũ tondũ kũhonoka nĩgũgũtũma ngĩe na ũthingu na mũtugo. ũthingu ndingĩakĩrutirwo nĩ maitũ ƿ, tondũ kũhonoka nĩgũgũgĩtũma ngĩe na ũthingu, na ngĩe na mũtugo.



values, *mitugo* and *uthingu* had previously been cited as summarizing the Kikuyu value system, were now being taught outside the context of Kikuyu traditions. Therefore, this participant recognized some continuity between the traditional and Christianity. However the continuity was not powerful enough to keep her in the Kikuyu way of life. Her break with tradition and entry into the Church and her insistence that her mother could not teach her *uthingu*, here meaning holiness, suggests that Christianity provided an alternative value system. Additionally her reference to “brothers and sisters in Christ” suggests an alternative community of which she became a part. Another male participant in his early seventies stated that those *Agikuyu* who joined the Church or the Western schools were openly challenged to make a break with the traditional practices, which may explain the female participant’s perspective.

Evidence from other participants, however, suggests that the parents did not advise their children on the same issues that the *atiiri* did. The following is a brief excerpt of an interview with the one male participant.

Participant: This *mutiiri* would tell the initiate things that he or she could not be told by his or her mother or father, but the *mutiiri* could tell him or her issues that were secret. Because one’s mother or father could not tell him or her.

Interviewer: And why was it decided that the parents could not do it?

Participant: It is because one might, these are bad words which would be seen as shameful when a child was told them by his father, while there were other people. It was shameful. So for the father or the mother to counsel one it was like showing their nakedness.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Participant 3: Mūtiiri ūyū rī nī ekūhe mūndū maūndū maṛia atangīheo nī nyina, kana aheo nī ithe no ūyū nīekumuhe ūhoro wī hitho. Tondū nyina ndaṛihota kūmūhe na ithe ndaṛihota  
Interviewer: Na ūhoro ūcio wonirwo afia afi aciari matingīhota?

Participant 3: Nī tondū wahota, nī ciugo njūru cīkwoneka ci thoni mwana athī kūheo ūhoro nī ithe, na haṛi andū angī. Nī thoni. ūguo ithe kūmūtara rī na nyina nī ta kūmwonia njaga.



The specifics of the instruction that the *atiiri* gave their charges will be dealt with in the section on the curriculum.

### The Choosing of the *Mutiiri*.

The characteristics that made a person suitable to serve as a *mutiiri* were trustworthiness, lack of malice and sincerity.

One who was selected as a *mutiiri* of any individual was a person who did not have malice; a person who would take care of the individual, because at that time the initiate is like a cripple; who would ensure that the initiate is comfortable.... Now if it is known that when this person looks after that initiate he or she is sincere.<sup>21</sup>

These were desirable qualities of a prospective *mutiiri* because of the sensitivity of the task of caring for the genital wounds of circumcision, which could make or break a person's manhood or womanhood. The ability of the *atiiri* to teach *mitugo* depended on the same qualities as well as on the maturity and the character of the individuals.

One participant said, "The *atiiri* were selected by the parents of the child. They would say "so-and-so is the right person."<sup>22</sup> Upon completion of his or her duties the *mutiiri* would become a second parent to the charge and be constantly invited to attend important feasts in the home of the biological parents of the charge, thus the need for them to be well known to the family.

The *atiiri* usually were members of the extended family. Those for boys were *anake* meaning unmarried, circumcised young men while those of the girls were married women who were in the *kang'ei* stage. The *kang'ei* included those married women who did not have any circumcised children. Once one of the children was

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<sup>21</sup>Mūtiiri wa mūndũ athuragwo mūndũ ũria ũtari kīūnūhu, na mūndũ ũria ũngĩmenyerera mūndu, tondũ hĩndi ĩyo nĩ ta mūndũ kionje.... Rĩu agaġikorwo nĩ mundu wĩ oĩo aĩ arora mūndũ ũcio nĩ wa ma.

<sup>22</sup>Atiiri macaragio nĩ aciari, nĩ aciari a mwana. Mekuga "ng'ania nĩwe waġĩĩire."

circumcised, the woman became a *nyakinyua*. Among other possible reasons for the restriction of selection to these groups was the need for physical strength in the *atiiri*.

A female participant said,

The jobs that were difficult were to be done by the *kang'ei* because they were strong and they were available... There were some things [drinks] called *inage* – porridge was made [traditionally] and mixed - then she [the *mutiiri*] would run after the charge [to force him or her to drink the *kinage*]... So you see an old person would not manage [to do such a job]. It was young married women who were chosen. And these women would be the same ones to give the drink to the young men [who were to be circumcised] even if they were not their *atiiri*... She might be beaten with a stick if it is by those boys, but even if she cried, she would not stop doing what she was doing.<sup>23</sup>

Another participant emphasized the need for physical strength by narrating how the initiates would climb on the shoulders of their *atiiri* to dance.

Along with the above characteristics, whether or not a person was chosen as a *mutiiri* “depended on whether a person was respected.”<sup>24</sup> Such respect was evident in the way the individual was perceived by others. Take the example given by one participant,

Even... there could have been a person, who would have wanted to be the *mutiiri* for that child because he or she belongs to their extended family, but the parents [of the initiate] would refuse, they would refuse. They would ask, “where does he or she think he is going, being so forward, supposing that he will take our child, and lead him where?” but he... or the child would refuse him saying “that one will not be my *mutiiri*.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Mawīra marīa marī maritū marī ma kang'ei tondū nīo marī na hinya. Na nīo meho... Kūrīnyamū ciakundanagio cietagwo inage. ūcūrū ūgakio ukaringio, na nīegūtūhania na ūcio eguthī gūtiira tondū kwainagwo ūmūthī gūkirokwo irua rūcio. Na agīkamūkundia kīu gītagwo kīnagerī, nīekūgiana nake, muno. ŋiwamenya mundu mukuru ndangihota. Gwathuragwo ahiki. Na ahiki acio no o makundagia ona anake onakorwo tio meguthī kūmatiira-rī... Na ahota gūcathūrwo akorwo nī imwana icio, no ona anqīrīra ndangītiga gūika ūguo areka.

<sup>24</sup> Rīu nīgwathiaga na gūfio kwa mūdū.

<sup>25</sup> Ona ningī-rī... kūrī mūdū ūngīendire nīekwenda eeh...nīekwenda gūtiira mwana ucio tondū nī wa famīrī ciao no aciari makarega mmm? Nīmekūrega. Tondū mekūria afīrīrī "eroretie kū afī nī mwana witū nake ekuoya ati ekūmūrora kū?" No nīe.... Kana mwana amūrege. Auge "Nī ūcio tiwe ūkūndira."

Respect was built through having good character or being “a peaceful person”<sup>26</sup> as well as by doing a good job when chosen as a *mutiiri*. In the words of one participant, “If one was respectable, there is no year when he or she would not be a *mutiiri*. But if one became hated, he or she would never be a *mutiiri* again. If one became hated, hated by the children and by the parents.”<sup>27</sup> In contrast to this perspective of “once a good *mutiiri* always a *mutiiri*” one participant said, “Now the one who supported that one would not support another [in the same family]... Because if it reached that stage [of having a habitual *mutiiri*] it may cease to be supporting and become... that you should follow the law of so-and-so.”<sup>28</sup>

The process of selecting the *atiiri* was so critical that, when asked how the effectiveness of a *mutiiri* was determined, one male participant responded, “The parents chose him/her, when they agreed [to have him/her as the *mutiiri*] they had marked [his/her work and given a pass].”<sup>29</sup> The *atiiri* were deemed as successful by virtue of their selection.

### *The “Candidate’s” Profile*

The word candidate is used to refer to the initiate prior to their circumcision. During this time the “candidate” was referred to as a “child”<sup>30</sup> and was perceived as

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<sup>26</sup> Mūhoreri.

<sup>27</sup> Angikorwo nīarafīka, ndaṛī mwaka ataṛītanaga no angīmeneka ndaḡicoka ho. Angīmeneka, ameneke nī ciana na ameneke nī aciari.

<sup>28</sup> Rīu ūcio watirire ūcio-rī, ūcio rīu ndegūtira ūngī... Tondū wakinya hau nīūgūtūika ti ūtirani ūtūike... aṫī rīu ūrūmagīrīra watho wa ng’ania.

<sup>29</sup> Aciari mamūthurire mefikīra nīmamaka.

<sup>30</sup> Mwana.



being ignorant and ill-mannered. *Ihii*, uncircumcised boys, were known to play pranks on people such as,

Digging holes... he might dig holes and put thorns in them. Or because men... would light a fire while they were herding, the boy would look for thorns and put them in the leaves [that the men would sit on]. When the man would go to sit down, he would be pricked [by the thorns].<sup>31</sup>

Boys also were known to have a foul odour because of sleeping with the goats in their father's hut.

Girls on the other hand, were not as ill-mannered as boys. "A girl aged between five and eight years would begin to imitate what she saw being done.... They would play *mbira* and drive the *tiri* [a makeshift toy "car"]."<sup>32</sup> Girls had the duty of peeling [cooking] bananas and potatoes and chopping up green vegetables, when they were available. [This duty was for] those who were a bit older."<sup>33</sup>

A child was considered ready for initiation when signs of adolescence began to show, for the girls when the breasts began to grow and for the boys when beards began to grow. One participant pointed out that the boys were usually much older than the girls with whom they shared the initiation rites. When such signs began to show, the child or the parents would decide that it was time to go for initiation.

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<sup>31</sup> ...nakwenja marima, eeh, ahota kwenja marima ekire miiqua. Kana mũthuri tondũ ma. megũikara nĩmakagia mwaki makĩrĩithia-rĩ, kahĩĩ nĩgekũrĩra miiqua kaige mahuti hau mahutiĩ. Mũthuri agĩthĩ gũikarĩra agathecwo.

<sup>32</sup> Akorwo nĩ kairĩtu gakinyia ta mĩaka tuge hihi ĩtano, ĩtandato, mũgwonja, ĩnana-rĩ, gakambĩrĩria kũruta mawĩra ũrĩa marona makĩrutwo.... aaa kũhũra mbira, gũtũarithia tiri.

<sup>33</sup> Riu ciana cia airĩtu wĩra wao warĩ wa kũũwa marigũ, kũũwa waru, na gũkera nyeni rĩrĩa kwĩ nyeni. Arĩa manenaneneha.



*The “Graduate’s” Profile*

The term “graduate” is here used to refer to the individual who had come out of or “graduated” from the circumcision rites of passage. These graduates were expected to display appropriate adult behaviour and to take on new duties. Upon the completion of the initiation rites, the *atiiri* would hand their charges over to their respective parents, the girls to their mothers, the boys to their fathers. The parents then had the responsibility of reinforcing their children’s new position and responsibilities. A girl who had graduated could now be told by her mother, “go and collect firewood, go and cultivate [or weed], go and collect sweet potato vines [for the animals]...”<sup>34</sup> A boys also was expected to leave his father’s hut, and move to a hut where he and other young men would sleep.

The graduates were expected to join others of the same sex who had been initiated in previous ceremonies and who were still unmarried. The group of girls was called “*airitu a muhando*” which literally meant “a new planting of grown-up girls,” or “*airitu a muruo*,” meaning “grown-up girls of the circumcision.” The young men were called “*njamba cia ita*,” meaning warriors. A young man, “in order to join them [the older graduates], he must do such things as oiling himself, bathing and dressing properly...”<sup>35</sup> Along with teaching cleanliness, the young men would also sometimes form “cooperatives” called “*ngwatio*” that would enable them to work on various farms as a group rather than individually. If a group of young men was seen to be going astray, they were reprimanded by the elders of the village.

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<sup>34</sup> Thĩ ũkoine ngũ, thĩ ũkarĩme, thĩ ũgatwe nĩrĩyo...

<sup>35</sup> Na anake aĩa marĩ kabere, na rĩu nĩgetha atonye kũrĩo-rĩ, no mũhaka eke maũndũ ma kwĩhaka magũta, magũthamba, gũkĩra gakuo wega...

Graduates also were discouraged from keeping company with uncircumcised “children.” A girl would be told,

You should stop keeping company with these children and stop playing with them because you are now grown up. If they insulted you, what would you say they insulted you over? For a young woman to be insulted by a child who had not gone for circumcision was considered poison.<sup>36</sup>

Young men would go as far as beating boys who came near them, mainly because the boys had a bad odour as well as to emphasize their distinctiveness as “men.”

Graduate girls were not allowed to travel about the locality as they pleased.

One participant said,

She could not sleep over at other people’s houses, she could not just visit, unless she went to her grandmother’s or her aunt’s, and she had to obtain prior permission [from her parents] to sleep over. There was no clique of young women, who would say come from here and go for a [casual] visit to Gathaite. Because if she went visiting [without permission], she would be beaten no matter what. They [girls] were to help their mother.<sup>37</sup>

These young men and women were also to have “fear of one another.”<sup>38</sup> One female participant said that the reason for this fear of the opposite sex was that “when they [young men and women] continue to become more familiar with one another, they cease to be cautious of one another, they do not differentiate between the young man and the young woman, they are like two young men.”<sup>39</sup> Such familiarity was

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<sup>36</sup> Na ūtige iceera rīa twana tūrīkū? Na ūtige ithako rīa ciana ici, we nīūrāgimarire. Tondū mangīkūrūma-rī wouga makūrūmīra kī? Tondū mūrītu kūrūmwo nī kana gatathīite iruanī kūngīarī poisonī biu biu.

<sup>37</sup> Ndanḡārarire kwene, ndanḡā ceerire, nonga athiire kwa cūwe, kana gwa tatawe, na ath īī na rūtha rwa kūrara. Gūtiarī kīmuruto kīa airītu, ati moimire gūkū mathū gūceera Gathaite. To ndū athī guceera kūu, no arīhūrwo onanḡikorwo arī kī. Maikaraga marī a gūteithia nyina.

<sup>38</sup> Metiganīre.

<sup>39</sup> ūguo mathū makīmenyanaga, makīmenyanaga, nīmathira gūitiganīra, nī maga gūtua nī t a mwanake kana ta mūrītu, tarī airītu erī kana anake erī.

equated to immorality as was exemplified in a story that one of the participants narrated,

We got to see a woman... a young unmarried woman somewhere near, to the north, they [she and a young man] were standing there, the young man with bicycle like this, and she was standing on the other side [of the road] and he on this side. They were being passed by older [married] men and by anyone. The fame [of that incident] spread, that [people] had witnessed a young man and woman standing at the road together. Because such behaviour never existed, that a young man and woman should walk together. It was a great, great taboo.<sup>40</sup>

The young men and women were expected to adhere to the Kikuyu values of uprightness and proper behaviour. The deterrents that existed to keep these young people in check included physical beatings by parents and peers, isolation of young men who were known to fondle girls' breasts, marriage of unwed mothers to men who already had many wives, and charging of a nine-goat-fine to a young man who impregnated a girl.

### *The Curriculum*

In order for the “candidates” to attain the “graduate” profile, they were instructed by their *atiiri* using “lecture” method and proverbs. The *atiiri* would enumerate the negative behaviours of childhood, which were explained under “candidate’s” profile, and tell their charges to stop engaging in them. As the first person to interact with initiates upon their circumcision, the *atiiri* would emphasize the

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<sup>40</sup> Twaḡiire kwona mūtumia... mūirītu na haha rūḡūrū marūganūite hau, mwanake ena mūb ira ūguo, na mūirītu akarūgama bandi irīa nake mwanake bandi īno. Mahītūkagwo hau nī athuri na ana... na oo mūndū wothe. Na ngumo īyo yathire, kwonekete marūngiyī bara mwanake na mūirīt u. Tondū kwarī ihinda rīa mbere kwoneka ūguo. Tondū ḡūtīarī mūtugo .... afī mwanake na mūirīt u matwarane. Kwarī mūgiro mūnene mūno mūno mūno.



transition that was in progress by saying, “now you have left this stage and entered into... and entered this other one.”<sup>41</sup>

The *atiiri* would paint a picture in the initiate’s mind of how they were expected to behave in adulthood, emphasizing the Kikuyu values of *uthingu* and *mitugo*. As mentioned in the section on the graduate, the girls were instructed not to be seen in the company of boys, and both sexes were encouraged to maintain their virginity. The importance of virginity was impressed upon the girls. In one joint interview, a husband and wife explained to the researcher how after the consummation of their marriage, a girl’s virginity, or lack of, it was made known to her parents and her parents-in-law. After her husband had given a report to his parents about his bride’s virginity, the bride was given beer to take to her parents. “If the beer was scooped out and found to have goat droppings... the girl was a virgin. If it had charcoal, she used to sleep around.”<sup>42</sup> The *mutiiri* “would not want his/her charge to face any embarrassment”<sup>43</sup> such as that of being found not to be a virgin. The *atiiri*, therefore, would instruct their charges carefully. In the instance that a girl became pregnant or was discovered to have been sexually immoral she was called “*mwari wa ngiurio no*” meaning that she could go wherever she pleased and no one would ask her or she would be called “*kiera kia njiraini*” a phrase meaning that she was “loose” like a shrub by the road that could be partaken of by anyone who pleased. One participant said, “*kiera kia njiraini* was known, she was the one who refused to hear the counsel

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<sup>41</sup> Rĩu nĩwouma stanji ĩno wathũ kĩ?... wathũ ĩno ĩngĩ.

<sup>42</sup> Njohi rĩrĩa ĩrĩtahio, yoima mbimbi... nĩ mũirĩtu ũarĩ mũirĩtu gathirange. Yekĩrwo maka ra ararĩ mũirĩtu ũarĩ mũrũri.

<sup>43</sup> Ndagĩenda mwana ucio wake acambe.



that was given there [during the rites of circumcision].”<sup>44</sup> In the final analysis therefore, the choice to listen to the counsel of the *mutiiri* was seen to be in the hands of the charge.

If any graduate showed ignorance in any matter that the *mutiiri* was to have given instruction, people would ask, “Who was your *mutiiri* [that you don’t know something so basic]?”<sup>45</sup> The *mutiiri*, therefore, was expected to have a good grasp on the important issues about Kikuyu culture that the initiate had to learn in order to be a respectable adult.

### *Summary of Findings*

The data presented and analyzed in this chapter allowed for the making of the following statements to answer the study’s research questions stated in chapter one. The following discussion deals with each question in turn. The question on the lessons to be drawn for mentoring in St. Andrew’s Church will be answered in chapter five.

#### What was the Role of the *Mutiiri* in the Traditional Kikuyu Society?

The *atiiri* had two principle roles during the circumcision ceremony and its related rites – to be nurses and teachers. As teachers, the *atiiri* counselled their charges concerning the acceptable way of life and behaviour of a *Mugikuyu* adult. They also emphasized the significance of their charges transition from childhood to adulthood.

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<sup>44</sup> Kiere kia njirainĩ-rĩ kiarĩ kimenye, kĩa kĩagire kũigua mataro harĩa.

<sup>45</sup> Kai watirirwo no?

### Who was Chosen as a *Mutiiri*?

The *atiiri* were trustworthy, sincere members of the extended family, who had a proven track record. They also had to be physically strong, a characteristic that was associated with unmarried young men and married women who had young children.

### What Tasks was the *Mutiiri* Expected to Carry Out?

In line with the roles highlighted above the *atiiri* propped up their charges during the physical operation and acted as nurses during the time of recuperation after circumcision. This was important as there were no hospitals at the time. They also instructed their charges not to engage in childish behaviour and to uphold the values of the Kikuyu society. The *mutiiri*'s task was to ensure that the "candidate" acquired the "graduate" profile.

### How was the Effectiveness of a *Mutiiri* Determined?

The effectiveness of the *atiiri* was seen to be predetermined in their selection. The *atiiri* were carefully chosen, since a bad job could have resulted in permanent infertility in the initiate. The effectiveness of the *atiiri* in their educational role was evaluated through their charges' ability to perform their adult roles adequately.

The effectiveness of the *atiiri* also depended on willingness of their charges to heed their counsel. In instances where the charges' commitment to the traditional Kikuyu way of life was compromise by external influences such as Christianity or Western education, then the counsel of *atiiri* was not heard or heeded. The *atiiri* in this case were relegated to serve merely as nurses.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### LITERATURE INTEGRATION

A legitimate role of literature review in qualitative research, as discussed in the research methods and procedures chapter, is to compare and contrast the findings of a study with published literature. The roles of the *atiiri* in the traditional Kikuyu community as described in the previous chapter are here compared with literature on Kikuyu traditions, practices of other traditional societies, modern mentoring practices and the teaching of Scripture. These comparisons refined the principles to be recommended to designers of the proposed mentoring program at St. Andrew's Church, Nairobi. The key points of comparison were the context, curriculum, and the mentor.

The context, dealt with issues regarding the backdrop in which the mentoring took place including the key assumptions that led to or affected the design of mentoring. Some of the factors discussed were those that though obvious in the traditional Kikuyu society are today unclear. These factors included timing, community considerations, and the problems of merging African traditions and Christianity.

The discussion on the curriculum for mentoring followed on from the conclusions of the previous section on the context. The gap resulting from the collapse of African traditions created an opportunity for mentoring to teach a curriculum similar to that of the *Agikuyu*. This traditional Kikuyu curriculum therefore was compared with those found in Scripture.

The roles of the *atiiri* then were compared with those of comparable persons in Scripture, and Jewish-Christian history. Issues relating to the mentors such as their character, teamwork, process of selection, character and, effectiveness were then discussed.

### *Context*

The culturally ingrained practice of initiation of the young into adulthood was not unique to the *Agikuyu* but was widely practiced in Africa and the world<sup>1</sup> The philosophy behind the initiation rites was an understanding that children needed a distinct passage into adulthood and “schooling” in order to become full members of the community.<sup>2</sup> This “schooling” was part of what Pierre Erny called “ritual pedagogy.”<sup>3</sup> Among the *Agikuyu* “schooling” was necessitated by the fact that “children were ignorant” as was pointed out by research participants.

The ignorance of the *Kikuyu* children was “removed” during the initiation rites. The removal was symbolized in a ceremony called *kurutwo urimu*<sup>4</sup> meaning “to have one’s foolishness removed.” This ceremony was performed on the second day of the circumcision rites and involved the removal of necklaces and anklets from the boy and girl initiates respectively.<sup>5</sup> “The act of removing these necklets and anklets

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<sup>1</sup> Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, ed. J. Kariuki (Heinmann Educational Books: Nairobi, 1938), 73; Michael Cole and Sheila R. Cole, *The Development of Children* (New York: W. H. Freeman and Company Worth Publishers, 1996), 633.

<sup>2</sup> Jens Finke, *Jens Finke’s Traditional Music and Cultures of Kenya* [database on-line] (n.p.: Jens Finke, 2000-2003, accessed 20 June 2003); available from <http://www.bluegecko.org/kenya/tribes/kikuyu/circumcision.htm>; Internet.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Erny, *The Child and His Environment in Black Africa: An Essay on Traditional Education*, ed., G. J. Wanjohi (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1981), 16.

<sup>4</sup> L.S.B. Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903* (New York, USA: Academic Press, Vol. II, 1977), 632.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*



symbolized the removal from each candidate of the foolishness, *urimu*, that was an attribute of childishness.”<sup>6</sup>

Biblical teaching in Proverbs agrees with the view of children as ignorant: “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child...”<sup>7</sup> and that “A child left to himself disgraces his mother.”<sup>8</sup> Scripture therefore recommends, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.”<sup>9</sup> This training was what the *Agikuyu* attempted to achieve through their rites of passage.

In modern society, formal education emphasizes the need to prepare youth for roles in the professional arena, while the Church and other religious organizations emphasize the moral and spiritual arenas. In contrast in both ancient Israelite and African societies such fragmentation did not exist. “Hebraic education was to cultivate and instil a sense of being Jewish... There was no distinction between morality, religion, national consciousness and patriotism.”<sup>10</sup> The “unified” nature of education no doubt made it easier for the youth in those days to resolve their identity crises and abide by the communal values.

One of the challenges for Christian mentors working in the modern fragmented world is that of helping their charges to “unify their world.” Such unification would be enhanced by two conditions. The first is the association of mentors with a sponsoring community, as the *atiiri* were. The second is the embedded of the mentoring program into the community’s fabric, just as initiation rites were. The

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Prov. 22:15 NIV (New International Version).

<sup>8</sup> Prov. 29:15 NIV.

<sup>9</sup> Prov. 22:6 NIV.

<sup>10</sup> D. N. Sifuna and J. E. Otiende, *An Introductory History of Education* (Nairobi: Nairobi University Press, 1994), 42.

mentorees would then be able to see the association of the instruction they are given with real life in the community. The mentorees would also be enabled to see life as a united whole as they answered key questions in their lives with the help of their mentors in a communal context.

As will be seen later in the discussion, initiation rites formed the core of many traditional cultures and their disappearance led to the collapse of the cultures.<sup>11</sup> This collapse is testimony to the instructional and communal-structuring capabilities of the traditional initiation rites and the potential if they are adapted to a modern Christian setting.

### Timing

The onset of puberty often marked the time of initiation among the *Agikuyu*. Leakey emphasized that initiation before the onset of puberty was critical for girls and not for boys.<sup>12</sup> Among other groups such as the Arapesh of New Guinea, a girl's first menses was the marker for initiation to take place.<sup>13</sup> Among the Kipsigis initiation took place when the period of puberty had passed.<sup>14</sup> These and other traditional cultures attributed social significance and value to the biological occurrence of puberty. Even today, "Both men and women tend to look back to their first sign of sexual maturity as the threshold of adulthood."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Margaret Mead, *Male and Female: A Study of the Sexes in a Changing World* (New York: Dell Publishing Co. Inc., 1949), 110.

<sup>12</sup> Leakey, 582.

<sup>13</sup> Cole and Cole, 633.

<sup>14</sup> Ian Q. Orchardson, *The Kipsigis* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1961), 58.

<sup>15</sup> Donald Joy, *Bonding: Relationships in the Image of God* (Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1985), 151.

Habermas classified events that occurred “for virtually all at unexpected times”<sup>16</sup> as “Milestone Makers.” The onset of puberty is a “Milestone Marker” for teenagers, which provides what educationalists call a “teachable moment.” This is a time when a person is more receptive to instruction or guidance, usually, which is related to their current experiences. Whether knowingly or not “uneducated” peoples like the *Agikuyu* exploited such moments through ritual pedagogy.

The Bar and Bat Mitzvah of Jewish tradition refer to the girl’s and boy’s attainment of religious and legal maturity, respectively.<sup>17</sup> Girls celebrate the occasion at the age of twelve years plus one day, while boys celebrate it at thirteen years and one day.<sup>18</sup> Until this occasion, “a father was responsible for the deeds of his son.”<sup>19</sup> This age was set with consideration for “the time of physical maturity for boys.”<sup>20</sup> To mark the youth’s new responsibilities, the girl or boy may be asked to do the day’s reading from the Prophets. In this way the community recognized the transition into adulthood.

In contrast, modern children “just grow into adult years.”<sup>21</sup> “Without... [traditional initiation] rites, today’s [American] teenagers have created their own badges of adulthood – from driver’s licenses, proms, and graduation ceremonies to

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<sup>16</sup> Ronald T. Habermas, *Teaching for Reconciliation: Foundations and Practice of Christian Education Ministry* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 197.

<sup>17</sup> Encyclopaedia Judaica (1971), s.v. “Bar Mitzvah.”

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Nĩ mũndũ akũre mĩakainĩ ya ũgima.

dangerous rituals of binge drinking, first baby or first jail sentence.”<sup>22</sup> African teenagers no doubt have their similar badges of adulthood.

These modern trends highlight a need among teenagers for rites of passage. One example of modern rites is the Rites of Passage (ROPES) program at Nairobi Chapel which has been associated with graduation from primary school, which occurs at age thirteen or fourteen.<sup>23</sup> These rites are likely to have greater value to the mentorees if they are directly associated with more personal events in the life of the youth such as the first menses for girls or a particular birthday. The sensitivity of a girl’s first menses makes it a potent teachable moment as the girl wrestles to understand the changes she is going through.

Puberty also creates a teachable moment in parents of teenagers who are often perplexed by the sudden changes in behaviour in their teens.<sup>24</sup> The reclaimed rites of passage therefore should seek to involve parents in the mentoring programs for their children. As was pointed out in the findings, parents looked forward to having their first child circumcised as it led to their entering into a different status in the community.<sup>25</sup>

### Community-wide Mentoring

A characteristic of the Kikuyu and similar traditional practices of initiation was that they were “community-wide.” No member of the community would be considered an adult without passing through the rites of passage. Provision therefore

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<sup>22</sup> Kessler, 30.

<sup>23</sup> Leona M. English, *Mentoring in Religious Education* (Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1998), 5.

<sup>24</sup> Habermas, 197.

<sup>25</sup> Leakey, 258.



was made within the structure of the Kikuyu community for each member to pass through the initiation process and to have one *mutiiri* for boys or two *atiiri* for girls.<sup>26</sup> The egalitarian one-to-one pairing of *atiiri* to their charges stands out as a great accomplishment for a whole community by modern mentoring standards.

In Scripture one community-wide practice was that of baptism for all joining the Church in the New Testament. The basis of baptism was the candidate's repentance and acceptance of the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>27</sup> Baptism and initiation as described in the findings were similar in that both marked the "entrance" of the candidate into a community. However, they differ in that while initiation was compulsory for all, baptism was dependent on the individual's convictions. Another difference between the two is that the instruction given at baptism dealt with matters of the faith and morality, while instruction at initiation dealt with broader matters of life, such as adulthood and its responsibilities such as marriage. The two rites have enough merit in themselves to warrant their being separate events in churches that have both events.

One of the other forms of instruction in scripture that could be compared with that or the *mutiiri* is that given to persons being prepared for specific duties for example, Moses and Joshua<sup>28</sup>, Elijah and Elisha<sup>29</sup>, Paul and Timothy<sup>30</sup>, and Jesus and the twelve disciples.<sup>31</sup> One significant difference between these examples and that of the *mutiiri* is their somewhat elitist nature.

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<sup>26</sup> Leakey, 607.

<sup>27</sup> Acts 2:35-38 NIV.

<sup>28</sup> Num. 11:28, 27:18-21 NIV; Deut. 34:9 NIV.

<sup>29</sup> 1 Kings 19:10 NIV.; 2 Kings 2:9 NIV.

<sup>30</sup> Acts 16:1-3 NIV.

<sup>31</sup> Mark 6:7 NIV.

Adopting community-wide mentoring has several benefits. Firstly, such mentoring ingrains mentoring in the culture. Secondly, the effect of basing the work of the mentors in the community would be to create a sense of accountability as they would be representatives of the community to transmit its values. In addition, the community would have the right to evaluate mentorees conduct against some set standards. In a church setting, such accountability and evaluation would be likely to lead to a rise in the levels of morality. Finally, community-based mentoring would also be more effective in the long-term than isolated one-on-one mentoring.

#### African Traditions vs. Christianity

Some, like the lady participant who abandoned Kikuyu culture to join the Church, would argue that the instruction during the rites of passage was pagan or surpassed by what was taught in the Church. Leakey wrote that the Kikuyu rites involved a “sacrifice” of sexual intercourse that was performed in the presence of the initiates.<sup>32</sup> No such practice was revealed by findings of the study. This may be because such practices were later regarded as “shameful” or because with the passage time and influence of Christianity and Western civilization they had died. Whatever the case, these “shameful” practices coupled with the “barbaric” nature of circumcision let to the condemnation *in-toto* of initiation rites.

Finke pointed out that “Christian missionaries and other Westerners... looked down on circumcision.”<sup>33</sup> Their condemnation resulted in the “destruction of the society ... and with it the loss not only of one or two ‘barbaric’ practices, but the loss

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<sup>32</sup> Leakey, 629.

<sup>33</sup> Finke, <http://www.blucgecko.org/kenya/tribes/kikuyu/circumcision.htm>.

of the values, traditions, music and structures of the entire society.”<sup>34</sup> Margaret Mead concurred with this point, “An initiatory culture... is a social institution of very great strength, so interwoven with every other aspect of the culture that usually when the initiatory system breaks – as it does before mission influences, for instance – the whole cultural system collapses also.”<sup>35</sup> This explains why participants in the research said, “Uprightness was more valued in those days that it is in this time of Christianity.”<sup>36</sup> Even more tragic was the fact that Western values, which were not necessarily Christian, replaced the traditional ones especially for those *Agikuyu* who did not join the Church. The un-churched section of the community eventually lost even the little that was positive in traditional culture as they became westernized.

The Church in Africa must thus continue to wrestle with the questions that our fathers did: Was Christianity incompatible with the whole of African culture? The key assumption of this study is that there were elements that are redeemable for use by the Church.

### *The Gap*

As traditional cultures disintegrated, the youth lacked proper instruction in matters relating to general adult life, male and female roles, and sexuality. Sexuality is currently taught to youth in formal education, without respect to any value system or the individual youth’s stage of development. The assumption of this teaching is that children are able to apply the knowledge received to their personal experiences

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Mead, 110.

<sup>36</sup> ũthingu warĩ kiene hĩndĩ ĩyo, tiga řiu hĩndĩ ya ũkristiano.

without need for personal guidance. As one participant put it the assumption today is that, “someone just grows into the years of adulthood.”<sup>37</sup>

To fill the instructional gap highlighted above, many youth “depend... on television for their clues as to how to respond to the world.”<sup>38</sup> The youth who “desire leaders”<sup>39</sup> and models to imitate, find them in musicians, television characters, sports and movie stars.<sup>40</sup> They also desire to be recognized as adults, thus reinforcing their need for models.<sup>41</sup> An effective mentoring program would be one that seeks to meet the desires of teenagers. Such a program benefits from reclaimed instructional and symbolic aspects of the traditional initiation rites.

### *The Curriculum*

One of the research participants explained that in Kikuyu tradition the mother often instructed her daughter on how to treat and to submit to her husband, warning her against greed, and teaching her to cook. The *atiiri* would deal with matters of communally acceptable behaviour and the more delicate matters of sexuality.

The book of Proverbs suggests a curriculum covering a broad range of life issues such as one’s relationship with God,<sup>42</sup> characteristics of a good wife,<sup>43</sup> good

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<sup>37</sup> Nĩ mũndũ akũre mĩakainĩ ya ũgima.

<sup>38</sup> Habermas, 206.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Joseph Choun Jr., “Teaching Youth” in *The Christian Educator’s Handbook on Teaching*, ed. Kenneth O. Gangel and Howard G. Hendricks (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1988), 134.

<sup>42</sup> Prov. 1:7 NIV.

<sup>43</sup> Prov. 31:10-31NIV.



governance<sup>44</sup> and avoidance of seductive women<sup>45</sup> among others. The Torah read to all Israelites who could understand contains another Biblical curriculum.<sup>46</sup> The book of Deuteronomy alone contains guidelines on worship, clean and unclean foods, tithes, cancellation of debts, treatment of the poor, festivals, justice, war, taking a wife, and treatment children.

The similarity between the Biblical and the Kikuyu curriculum was that they both dealt with everyday issues. Today the teaching of these practical issues is left to chance or to people who may not have a personal interest in the youth.

### *The Mentor*

As mentioned previously initiation was common among many African tribes. Among the Meru<sup>47</sup>, Gusii,<sup>48</sup> Maasai,<sup>49</sup> and the Nandi,<sup>50</sup> supporters similar to the *atiiri* participated in the initiation rites. The role of the *mutiiri* that provided a useful basis of comparison in mentoring was that of teaching their charges.

A significant difference between the practice of the *Agikuyu* and that in Scripture is that, in the latter, the parents had the chief responsibility of preparing their children for life.<sup>51</sup> Only one participant in the study held the view that parents were

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<sup>44</sup> Prov. 31:1-9 NIV.

<sup>45</sup> Prov. 7:1-27 NIV.

<sup>46</sup> Neh. 8:3 NIV.

<sup>47</sup> Finke, <http://www.bluegecko.org/kenya/tribes/meru/lifestages.htm#initiation>.

<sup>48</sup> Finke, <http://www.bluegecko.org/kenya/tribes/gusii/initiation>.

<sup>49</sup> Telipit ole Saitoti, *My life as a Maasai Warrior – Circumcision in*, <http://www.bluegecko.org/kenya/tribes/maasai/articles-saitoti.htm>.

<sup>50</sup> Myrtle S. Langley, *The Nandi of Kenya – Life Crisis Rituals in a Period of Change* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1979), 20.

<sup>51</sup> Deut. 6:4-5 NIV.

the main educators of a child. In Scripture, the community of God's people served as reinforcement to the teaching of the parents. No individuals had oversight over the children of other community members.

The New Testament practice of baptism evolved over time so that in the time of Augustine, baptismal candidates were expected to have sponsor.<sup>52</sup> "The practice originated not in infant baptism, but in the custom of requiring an adult pagan who offered himself for the rite to be accompanied by a Christian known to the bishop, who could vouch for the applicant and undertake his supervision..."<sup>53</sup> The intent of the Church was to ensure that no insincere persons were baptized and that once baptized they were well disciplined. The sponsors were therefore in some sense a similar to the *atiiri* in that they instructed the applicants.

Jesus portrays how rabbis in the New Testament times took on students and mentored them. The rabbis taught the Torah to their disciples by commenting on it and through debates with their contemporaries on a wide range of issues mentioned in the Torah. Again, not every Jew enjoyed the privilege of being under a rabbi. Those who received such training were those who showed great promise. An example is Paul did so that he was trained by Gamaliel.<sup>54</sup>

One quality that the parents, sponsor at baptism, and the rabbi had in common was that they had greater knowledge or experience than their charges in a specific domain. These relationships fit the definition of mentoring which is, "a relational process between mentor, who knows or has experienced something and transfers that something (resources of wisdom, information, experience, confidence, insight,

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<sup>52</sup> <http://www.1911encyclopedia.org>; internet; accessed 20 June 2003, s.v. "sponsor."

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Acts 22:3 NIV; David Bivin, Jesus' Education in *Jerusalem Perspective* 2, no. 3 (1998): 1.

relationships, status, etc.) to a mentoree, at an appropriate time and manner, so that it facilitates development or empowerment.”<sup>55</sup> These older people in the Church are an enormous untapped resource within the Church of older people. Rather than being exploited for their wisdom, they are now being relegated into retirement on every front.

### Team Work

One valuable principle that could be borrowed from Kikuyu tradition is that of avoiding habitual or popular mentors who support and guide large numbers of mentorees. One research participant explained the reason for the avoidance as the risk of transmission of the “law according to a certain individual” rather than the communal norm. Howard Hendricks agreed with this principle, “Too much of any one person no matter how good that person is, can be a bad thing. It is my judgement that if you give me complete control of any one individual, I will develop a first-class pervert.”<sup>56</sup>

When the community recognizes this danger it should put in place structures that allow almost any qualified person to serve as a mentor while restricting how often one may serve. Additionally, a low mentor to mentoree ratio would necessitate the recruitment of many mentors. As was seen in the previous chapter, the instruction by the *mutiiri* centred life and character issues, rather than skills.

A second valuable principle recognized by the *Agikuyu* was that the *mutiiri* could not do it all. There were other influencers of the initiates such as their parents,

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<sup>55</sup> Paul D. Stanley and J. Robert Clinton, *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships you Need to Succeed in Life* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 1992), 40.

<sup>56</sup> Bryn Hughes, *Discipling, Coaching, Mentoring: Discovering the Hallmarks of Jesus' Discipling* (Eastbourne, England: Kingsway Publications, 2003), 36.



peers and the other community members. These influencers were allowed to play their part in the life of the charge. This principle will ensure that we do not expect mentors to do it all.

### Who should choose the mentor?

The process of choosing supporters of initiates has not been discussed in much detail in the available literature on African traditions. Several factors need to be considered in answering the question of who should choose the mentor. These include who initiates the mentoring relationship, and what the goal of mentoring is.

Some young people seek out mentors for themselves or mentors may look for people to mentor, or in other cases organizations such as *Emerging Young Leaders* may play the middleman role.<sup>57</sup> One of the strengths of these methods which is also their weakness is that the relationship between mentors and mentorees can exist without a communal base. This independence could lead to lack of accountability or mentoring for its own sake.

In the traditional Kikuyu society, a sense of accountability was created through parents choosing the *atiiri* for their children. Parents chose the *atiiri* not merely for their own satisfaction but with the expectations of the community in mind. This selection process also gave the *atiiri* authority to be more directive with their charges as they had been sanctioned by the community. Such directive counsel was especially important as definite values were being transmitted. A similar directive style is found in Scripture and is needed where younger charges such as those in their early teenage years are involved. These need to be “train[ed] in the way...” [they] should go...”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Emerging Young Leaders, Mentoring Mums in Africa.*

<sup>58</sup> Prov. 22:6 NIV.



In situations such as that in St. Andrew's, where accountability is crucial, the choice of mentors should involve key persons such as the mentorees, their parents, and key community leaders. A communal selection process would place the mentoring relationships on a platform for view by all community members, thereby creating accountability.

### Shame and Honour

The *atiiri* were given specific duties that could not be left either to chance or to the parents. Sensitive and “shameful” issues such as those concerning sex were taboo for parents to discuss with their children because as one participant said, they would be “exposing their nakedness.”<sup>59</sup> In spite of the dominance of Western thought and education that encourages parents to teach their children about sex, many African parents are unable to do so because they are dominated by a “shame-honour” mentality.

In modern mentoring the issue would be referred to as role conflict.<sup>60</sup> This refers to situations where a person holds another role in the mentoree's life and its responsibilities conflict with those of mentoring. An example would be that of the workplace where persons “cannot mentor... [their] immediate subordinates.”<sup>61</sup>

### Character

Trustworthiness was a key requirement for being chosen as a *mutiiri*. Hughes identified ingredients in character of a trustworthy person as consistency, congruency,

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<sup>59</sup> kuonia njaga.

<sup>60</sup> Hughes, 60.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

integrity, supportiveness, reliability, and competence. He stated that authority figures were no longer trusted on the mere basis of their position, they had to earn it.<sup>62</sup>

Those desiring to mentor the present generation of youth must recognize this truth and evaluate themselves. The persons chosen as mentors also should be those who exemplify the values upheld by the community which they represent. For example, it would make no sense to select a successful business man who is an atheist as a mentor in a Christian setting.

### *Effectiveness*

One of the most fascinating findings of this study was that the effectiveness of the *atiiri* was dependent on their charge's commitment to sponsoring community. Likewise in mentoring, the mentorees must take "responsibility for the... [growth] process as well as mutual responsibility for the outcomes."<sup>63</sup> " In the end, the... [mentoree] is responsible for their own long-term decisions..."<sup>64</sup> For such a sense of responsibility to be cultivated in the mentoree, the "prescriptiveness" that was suggested earlier must be complemented by their empowerment to make decisions for themselves.<sup>65</sup> Those involved in designing a mentoring program should take into consideration the external sources of influence on the prospective mentorees and try to project how these would affect the effectiveness of the mentors.

As mentioned previously, one of the chief influences on today's youth is the media. Program designers should consider how to help the mentorees to avoid the

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 63.

negative the effects of media. Mentorees should also be required to show commitment to the process and to pledge to guard against all competing influences.

Hughes put it this way, “potential... [mentorees] should already be exhibiting... [the] qualities of hunger and passion before we offer to give them our best. Are they showing signs of proactivity, self-discipline and a proven track record of change?”<sup>66</sup> The mentors should not bear the whole burden of making the process succeed. The sponsoring community can contribute to helping mentorees take greater responsibility by keeping them accountable for their own actions and failures rather than blaming parents, media, modern culture, or other such scape-goats.

Another key to the effectiveness of the *mutiiri* lay in the care taken in choosing them. Similarly, the effectiveness of the mentor can be predicted by their track record. Mentors “have to have a proven track record of faithfulness.”<sup>67</sup> Communal goals were the measuring rod against which effectiveness was determined. For the *Agikuyu* the goal was to produce a responsible, well adjusted adult. A community based mentoring program must likewise have clear goals. The community members would then be able to evaluate the mentors against the goals.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 63.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was “to understand the role of the *mutiiri* within the Kikuyu community with a view to discovering mentoring principles that were transferable to a modern urban context, with specific reference to St. Andrew’s Church.” This chapter presents a summary of the findings that enhanced an understanding of the role of the *mutiiri*. Secondly mentoring principles that emerged are recommended for the mentoring program at St. Andrew’s Church. Finally recommendations for further research are suggested.

#### *Conclusions*

The circumcision ceremony that marked the transition from childhood to adulthood necessitated the selection of a *mutiiri*. The role of the *mutiiri* was to provide medical attention and teach societal norms and values to the charge. The effectiveness of the *atiiri* as educators depended on how well they had been selected and on the commitment of the initiate to the traditional Kikuyu way of life. When an initiate adhered to an alternative support and value system such as Christianity or Western education, the *mutiiri* became irrelevant as an educator and could only serve as a “nurse.” Parents and peers also participated in the educational process and reinforced the teachings of the *atiiri*.



*Implications for the Mentoring Ministry at St. Andrew's Church*

Paul Hiebert, a renowned anthropologist said, "Initiation rites, marking the transition from childhood to adulthood are widespread around the world."<sup>1</sup> He then asked, "Do young people in societies with initiation rites have less stormy and awkward adolescent periods than do Americans [who do not have such rites]?"<sup>2</sup> The same question could be asked in other modern cultures. The perspective of the researcher is that modern mentoring practices modelled after traditional initiation rites can have a positive influence on teenagers today.

The following principles are suggested for mentoring at St. Andrew's Church,

1. Clear goals: The mentoring program must have clear goals that would define the key role of the mentor. In deciding on the goals the program designers take into account the Scripture's teachings on the nature of children.
2. Community based mentoring: The designers should aim at making mentoring an inseparable part of the "culture" of St. Andrew's Church thereby providing for accountability, sustainability, and communal ownership.
3. Community-wide: The mentoring program should be designed to allow all eligible candidates to participate.
4. Timing: For community-wide mentoring to take place there should be a connection to a universal life event. If the target group is teenagers, the onset of puberty would form an ideal entry point for the mentors.
5. Team work: The mentors should not be seen as miracle workers. The mentoring program should be structured to allow mentors to receive support from one another as well as from parents and other members of the community.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1983), 164.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

6. Curriculum: Mentors need not repeat what is taught in Sunday School. Their responsibility should be to fill the gap that was left by the disappearance of initiation rites and to help the mentorees to “unify” their world.
7. Role conflict: Care should be taken to ensure that those chosen as mentors do not have interests that conflict those of the mentoring program. It would therefore be wise to have mentors whose charges are of the same sex.
8. Character: The mentors must have character that is consistent with communal values and who are able to make the sacrifices demanded by the task of mentoring because, “Real growth in... [mentorees] requires availability [of the mentors] for the long haul.”<sup>3</sup>
9. Effectiveness: Mentorees must be willing to commit to the values upheld by the mentoring community.

#### *Recommendations for Further Research*

The following recommendations were made for further research. Firstly, the researcher recommends a study comparing an existing rites of passage program with traditional Kikuyu mentoring practices. Second, a study into the perceptions of members of St. Andrew’s Church of the place of African rites of passage in modern society. Thirdly, an investigation into the badges of adulthood created by Nairobi youth would be instructive to mentoring efforts in the churches. Finally, the researcher would recommend that further studies be done on the mentoring practices of other ethnic communities in Kenya.

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<sup>3</sup> Hughes, 68.

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## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE ROLE OF THE *MUTIIRI* IN THE TRADITIONAL KIKUYU SOCIETY

1. What was the name of your mutiiri? (Identity)
2. Why was he/she chosen as your mutiirii? (characteristics)
3. Who chose him/her? (selection)
4. What things did he/she do for you? (actions)
5. What advice did he/she give you? (advice)
6. How did his/her advice affect your thoughts or actions? (effect on participant)
7. What kind of relationship did you have with your mutiiri? (Relationship)
8. What sort of thoughts come to mind when you think of your mutiiri? (perception)
9. Do you remember a particular time when you were with your *mutiiri* and what you did and said?
10. Was there a time after the event of the initiation rites that the *mutiiri* was expected to be with his/her charge

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