



**JJEOSHS**

ISSN: 2618-1517

Jumuga Journal of Education,  
Oral Studies, and Human Sciences (JJEOSHS)

[editor@jumugajournal.org](mailto:editor@jumugajournal.org)

<http://www.jumugajournal.org>

Volume 3, No. 1, 2020

## **Tiri Concept and its Huge Significance in Africa's Religio-Culture: A reflection on the Gikuyu Beliefs and Practices Related to the Sacredness of Land**

**Grace Wamue-Ngare**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5969-5052>

**Kenyatta University**

### **Abstract**

The article sets out to document the European interruption on Gikuyu beliefs and practices that are related to the soil (*tiri*). It highlights the Gikuyu worldview, their interconnectedness with land and the spiritual significance attached to it. It sets out on the premise that besides all colonial maneuvers, the inference with beliefs on *tiri* heightened Gikuyu anger, thereby increasing their resilience to fight the Europeans out of Kenya. It argues that the Gikuyu, being at the core of the liberation struggle from colonialism, interference with beliefs, customs, and rituals related to land and its social, economic, cultural and religious significance, was a strong catalyst in the Mau Mau struggle. In its methodology and design, it utilizes oral interviews, written documents, and archival records to give a critical analysis of Gikuyu religio-cultural beliefs and attitudes towards land/ *tiri*. The article analyzes the Gikuyu myth of creation and how that influenced land acquisition, tenure, utilization, beliefs and rituals, observing that land was considered sacred especially its tangible concept *tiri* (soil). The Gikuyu viewed *tiri* as a sacred gift from *Ngai* that united the un-born, the living, the departed (dead), members of the community. *Tiri* was physically, economically, socially, and spiritually important as ancestors were buried in it, a phenomenon that maintained the metaphysical and unbroken link between the dead and the living. The article took the concept *tiri* and not necessarily land, to demonstrate how the interruption of beliefs and practices, of a people who are so attached to their land, caused a major revolt that climaxed with the Mau Mau struggle (1952-60). It concludes that *tiri* acted as a central unifying factor for liberation movements that inspired uMkonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation) that waged guerrilla war against the apartheid regime, among others in Africa.

**Key Words:** Liberation movements in Africa, Gikuyu, *Tiri*, Land, Beliefs, Practices, Land Utilization, Significance of land.

## Introduction

Since pre-colonial times, land has always been critically important to the well-being of the Gikuyu, who continuously maintain great emotional and psychological investment in it, especially *tiri*, its tangible part (Kenyatta 1938, Gathogo 2001, Kang'ethe 1981, Overton 1988, Wakhungu, Huggins and Nyukuri. 2008, Okoth-Ogendo 1991). Land is perceived to represent a principal link with the ancestors and an important and perceptible liaison of the ethnic group (Mugo, 1982, Karangi 2005). It was the depth of this attachment that caused land to rival political independence as the prime focus of Gikuyu nationalism. Land remains the Gikuyu's principal physical supporter as majority obtains their livelihood directly or indirectly from it. As Kenyatta (1938) puts it Gikuyu also obtain spiritual satisfaction from *tiri*.

European conquest of Gikuyuland in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century created a precarious gap on the economic, physical, social, and spiritual set-up of the Gikuyu people (Shanguhya and Koster (2014; Lonsdale 1992). The Gikuyu were the first ethnic group in Kenya to experience a radical agricultural revolution pertaining to tenure and utilization. In addition, they also had the first and greatest exposure to European civilization that propelled them to a cash-crop economy, labeled "modernity" (Furedi, 1971; Toulson, (1976) Stringer 2014, Ikin 2005). Notwithstanding the positive aspects of this "civilization" subsequently useful to the Gikuyu especially after independence, the disruption did not commensurate the negative repercussions caused by European missionaries, settlers and administrators. The most painful being land tenure and utilization along with other customs and practices (Kenya Colony and Protectorate (1929); (1930); (1948); (1956); (1958); (1960).

European occupation of Gikuyuland is said to have been foreseen by a Gikuyu seer, Mugo wa Kibiru. In his words, paraphrased by Kenyatta (1938), he notes:

In a low and sad voice, he said that strangers would come to Gikuyuland from out of the big water, the colour of their body would resemble that of a small light-coloured frog (kiengere) which lives in water; their dress would resemble the wings of butterflies; that these strangers would carry magical sticks which would produce fire.

Referring to Kenya-Uganda railway "the iron snake with as many legs as a centipede", which would precede the "strangers", the Seer warned the Gikuyu, a great famine as a warning sign. Ironically, he cautioned against taking arms, a futile exercise that would annihilate the Gikuyu. Counteracting 'magic sticks which spit deadly fire (guns) with Gikuyu bows and arrows was fruitless. Strangely, Mugo advised the Gikuyu to establish friendly relations with the coming strangers and desist from warrior-like behaviour of fighting back. He however instructed the Gikuyu to treat the Europeans with courtesy mingled with fear and suspicion and not bring them close to their homesteads. Describing them as people full of evil deeds, Mugo prophesied that these strangers would not hesitate to covet Gikuyu homeland and finally take it.

Oral history portrays Gikuyu as a people who believed in prophecy (Leakey 1977, Karangi 2013, Harneit-Sievers 2002). Having been warned against fighting back, the Gikuyu became certain that the words of the Seer would be fulfilled, and hence they had no alternative except to "wait and see" the unfolding scenario.

According to Leakey (1953), around 1880, the predicted danger started to manifest. Four major disasters had ravaged Gikuyuland in a sequence of Small-pox epidemic, Rinderpest outbreak, an intense drought and famine, and a devastating locust invasion. To the agriculturalists, whose only means of livelihood was farming, these were serious disasters, enough to validate the Seer's prophecy. Meanwhile, caravans with white people started passing through the Gikuyuland Southern District en route Uganda. Observably, majority seemed uninterested with Gikuyuland; but as it later dawned on the Gikuyu, the passersby were simply surveying their future residential homes. At first, they seemed to be in a hurry passing to and fro East to West, and hence appeared

harmless (O.I Karauni 1987). This “unsettling, disinterested behaviour” hoodwinked the Gikuyu to let them be, after all *mugeni ni rui* (a visitor is like a flowing river) who would just come and go. Visitors to date are given high class hospitality for they bring blessings. Under certain rights of tenure as either *muhoi* (beggar) *muthami* (immigrant) or *muciarwa* (adoption), hospitality would be extended to a place to cultivate (Lacey, Weiler & Peel) 2014).

In the early European context, the Gikuyu ironically sympathized with the wandering strangers who seemed lonely and in need of friends. The Gikuyu people believed that since *Ngai* (God), had given them a good share of land, the same God must have also given everybody else theirs, which, as they thought, was equally of value to its owners. Such beliefs obscured them from foreseeing Europeans’ intention on their land, and unfortunately allowed the strangers to have temporary tent dwellings, considering them *ahoi* (O.I Kariuki 1987).

According to the Kikuyu customs, *muhoi* was a man who made an application to and got permission from the *Githaka* owners to cultivate a piece of garden, albeit without any land rights, except for cultivation. In ratification of such agreement, a *muhoi* provided the owners with a none refundable *njohi* (beer) as a deposit or payment. By mutual consent such *muhoi*, often made the beer a voluntary annual affair, but nonetheless, not a condition to continued rights of cultivation. No *muhoi* could be evicted from his garden except under certain conditions laid down by the *muramati of the githaka* (trustee) and only with consent of the owners’ and the Council of Elders (*Kiama*).

The Gikuyu assumed the *ahoi* system while bestowing user rights to the Europeans and assumed the latter would forfeit it once the owners’ needed it back, claiming only standing crops. It may not be very clear whether Europeans had surveyed Gikuyu land customs, as they actually came with beer and started giving elders (O.I Kariuki 1987). Capitalizing also on Gikuyu’s hospitality subsequently tricking African chiefs with minor peanuts and false treaties, they took temporary lands meanwhile looking for more permanent dwellings (Shanguhya and Koster, 2014, Overton 1988).

As Juvenilis Gitau (0.1, 1987) observed, Gikuyuland looked fertile and suitable for any crops, a factor that attracted European settlers and hence claimed that, “they could relief the Gikuyu off famine by teaching them how to grow better crops”. Subsuming this duty, and equating Gikuyu land tenure and utilization systems with backwardness, and claiming that it was not viable for any meaningful agriculture, they literally overhauled the production system. Gikuyu were instructed to de-stock and avoid inter-cropping (Leakey 1952, Haugerud 1989, Okoth-Ogendo, 1991).

The Europeans’ vision for Africa was self-bound and their claim of civilizing Africa thereby saving them from barbarism, a fallacy aimed at conquest (Barnett, and Njama (1966). With this, a re-organization of the African social structure, farming, and the system of land tenure was inevitable. Reorganization of capital and co-operative methods was to be applied on Gikuyus’ farms for optimum production. As such, possessing Gikuyu lands and intensifying agriculture, became a strong justification for land alienation (Kaggia, 1975), Harberson, ((1971a); 1973b).

## Land Alienation

The completion of the Kenya-Uganda railway opened the “Kenya highlands” as a valuable place for European settlement. Money was urgently needed to pay for the railway and so the Policy of “White Settlement” was initiated. Settlement schemes were haphazardly encouraged by the foreign office with an aim to open way for economic development (Maloba 2017, Constantine 2005 Overton 1988). Most of the Settlers were attracted by the railway for they could market their produce more easily. European missionaries on the other hand, were seen by the government as, living examples to the benighted Africans of the Christian life and Christian civilization (ibid.). By

1899, other settlers including some from Australia and New Zealand, and all looking for places to settle, increased. Majority headed inland along the railway and began taking over Gikuyu lands, which looked un-occupied and un-cultivated. Perceived as wasteland, and available for Settlers' occupation, Gikuyu production systems were ignored. Though the land looked bear, to the Gikuyu, it was not waste-land. Kenyatta (1938) argues that, although to the Europeans this land may have appeared as wasteland, to the Gikuyu, every inch of their territory was useful in some way or another." Kanja (0.1, 1987) noted that unoccupied vacant land was left so deliberately for grazing and other social purposes while the rest was preserved as forests for firewood and building wood. Unfortunately, Gikuyus' interests on arable land coincided with Europeans' desire for tea and coffee, subsequently pushing the former to the drier segments of Ndeiya and Karai as well as forested wet cold areas of Lari, all in current Kiambu County. This compromised the ecological patterns that Gikuyu used in the land utilization, a move that increased soil erosion.

European land occupation in Gikuyuland ignored the indigenous *githaka* structure, whereby each *mbari* (lineage) had a distinct form of ownership over a given portion of land. In addition, Europeans took advantage of the *ahoi* system and using peanuts they gave to Gikuyu chiefs, grabbed whatever they assumed was freehold, which unfortunately, was the most fertile. Ironically, though the *ahoi* system only gave temporary user rights for non-perennial crops, they not only bestowed themselves title deeds, but also planted permanent crops; coffee and tea. By so doing, the Gikuyu lost claim to the lands and could be evicted at the Will of the Crown; under the Crown Land Ordinance (Furedi (1971 Shiraz, 2006).

In reference to Kiambu, Rosberg and Nottingham (1966) observe that

The densely populated Kiambu District ... was here that the Policy of land alienation had its deepest political and economic effects. By mid-1904 large numbers of Settlers had been allocated land in the area, and by 1905 some 11,000 Kiambu Kikuyu had lost 60,000 acres. The remaining alternative was to take the Gikuyu as squatters to provide cheap labour for the Settlers. Other families lost more land in Limuru, Chura, and Kikuyu areas. After the establishment of the settler farms and ranches, the Gikuyu lost much of their land, freedom, and even some of their well-established ways of life. They either became squatters in the farms or were restricted to the reserves. The life of a squatter was not easy. Ngugi (0.1, 12 1-87), a former squatter lamented that: Squatters were permitted to farm on small plots or gardens where they grew only enough food to live on but provided labour for the Europeans. In addition to the small plots allocated, they would be paid six to eight shillings per month. They had to work for long hours from seven in the morning to five in the evening.

Squatter life was uncertain and miserable with neither medical nor recreational facilities, and more dehumanizing and humiliating, a squatter's child was exposed to no facilities of advancement thereby subjected to vicious cycle for "squatter-hood". According to Ngugi (0.1, 1987), even crops grown by the squatters on their small plots were sold to the Europeans at a miserable price fixed by the latter. Squatters had to live with these set rules and conditions, at first, keeping minimal livestock, but later wiped out (Kanogo 1987).

The Gikuyu realized with bitterness that the strangers they had given hospitality to had planned to plunder and subjugate them by brute force thereby fulfilling Mugo's Prophecy. By 1906, due land pressure for European settlement, "Kikuyu Reserves" were established, a move that confined the Gikuyu together in pockets where restriction was possible. Gikuyu Reserves and the Squatters living in European Farms were to provide cheap labour. As Mary Wambui (0.1, 2-1-87) lamented, "The Reserve was like a prison or unfenced detention camp where with neither freedom of movement nor cultivation". It was a just a factory for cheap labour to the European farmers thereby establishing inequalities between Europeans and Africans.

Barnett and Njama (1966, 32) argue that, Lord Delamere, a leading settler spokesman made this clear in his appeal to the labour commission of 1912 that “land reserved for the Gikuyu be cut so as to prevent them from having enough for a self-supporting production”. That way, he noted, Africans would be obliged to labor for Europeans.

Destocking also affected the Gikuyu who previously kept many goats and cows for social, physical, economical, and spiritual lives. Restriction had dire consequences, mostly reversing the Gikuyu to the “*ahoi*” in their own land. Kenyatta (1938: 37) laments that, “the Gikuyu lost most of their lands through their magnanimity, for the Gikuyu country was never wholly conquered by force of arms, but the people were put under the ruthless domination of European imperialism through the insidious trickery of hypocritical treaties.”

The Gikuyu were made to understand that might is right and that the Europeans had actually come to stay. They disrespected all the rights of land tenure held by the Gikuyu. They also introduced taxation as a means of enforcing the Gikuyu to work for them. With the imposition of the tax, and the incursion of the low wages, the Gikuyu were left without a choice other than to work for the Settlers (Barnett and Njama (1966). Besides working as squatters, the remaining entered the urban centres as unskilled laborers. Ngugi (0.1, 1987) an ex-squatter said that,

In return for a nominal wage of eight to ten shillings per thirty-day work ticket, and the right to pasture a few animals and cultivate a small garden, a squatter was also usually bound under a three-year contract to work for seventy days a year for the owner. He continued to argue that, “all unemployed male members of his family aged sixteen and above were equally bound while women and children were obliged to work whenever called upon.

The worker’s freedom of movement was greatly impeded by the fact that written permission from the manager was normally required if one wished to leave the area to visit friends, relatives, or even to pay tax ( Fibaek & Green 2019)

A significant proportion of these external workers were peasants whose families had previously lost land through alienation to the Settlers. In most cases, laborers were employed on land held by Europeans which would, under other circumstances, have been theirs through inheritance. This bitterness affected the Gikuyu so much that they would sing songs to portray the state of affairs. Such a song was recited by Wanjiku. (0.1), Wanjiru (0.1) and Njeri (0.1), (1987) and collaborated by Kahengeri, (n.d) that,

*Njurie murimo uria, kai kwoneka atia,  
Aca no muthungu i. uratunyana ng’undu.  
Muthungu bururi uyu urutite naku?  
Ruraya ni ng’undu-i, na Kenya ni  
ng’undu.  
Niahitwo i, niahitwo i, atanaruma kindu.*

*What is happening across the ridge?  
It is the European stealing our lands.  
Europeans where did you get these lands  
from?  
Europe is land, and Kenya is land. -  
Withhold him from grabbing anything.*

Barnett and Njama (1966) note that “alienation then becomes a very appropriate term, for it contains the double meaning or connotation of transference of ownership and losing something which, nevertheless remains in existence over-against one.” It left most families in Gikuyuland landless and homeless.

### **European Interruption with Gikuyu Land Tenure System**

With the European invasion of Gikuyuland, a matter that continued to give the latter grave concern was the question of the security of their tenure in the “Reserves”. Under the Gikuyu system of tenure, land was held by families or individuals who originally acquired rights by first cultivation and boundaries well laid out and known by all owners. European occupation came with the

disruption of the *Githaka* system and the traditional family and individual holdings of land. At this time, the Gikuyu land tenure was based on the *githaka* system that was a unit of land controlled by a *mbari* or sub-clan. By 1921 all land in the native reserve was owned by the Crown and no title deeds issued. All the Gikuyu in the reserves became tenants at the Will of the Crown. This issue affected the Gikuyu totally until they started to plead with the colonial government.

Their special request among many was to be issued with title deeds for the whole Kikuyu Reserve, which would secure them and their families' unquestionable possession of their lands (Routledge, (1970). They also insisted that a copy of these title deeds be supplied to the Headmen of each location to be kept on behalf of the *Githaka* holders of that location. In the memorandum Presented to the Members to the East Africa Commission (Nov. 1924, 6) by Kikuyu Central Association (KCA) they requested to be fully informed of all areas within or on the borders of the Reserve.

As custom demanded, elders had to sub-divide any land in the *githaka* of any *mbari* and to notify the changes of boundaries at any sub-division. It was not the duty of foreigners as the Europeans had assumed. The Gikuyu also resisted the compulsory exchange of the *githaka* holdings of the very productive areas, some taking it as a curse to abandon their mother lands Gitau (0.1, 1986). To them, all land was the property of the Africans and no part was to be taken away without the consent of the owners. Land was an integral part of the political, social, economic, and religious characteristics of the African society as a whole. The system of land tenure therefore involved all the institutions and lives of the entire community.

Land was viewed as the most important gift from God, and had no fixed price as it was never conceived as a property for sale. It existed for the purpose of sustaining the life of all, provided that no one hoarded it for sale or commercial speculation. On the contrary, European concept was commercialized where land was to be measured, mapped, plotted, sub-divided, demarcated, consolidated, and sold in a market. It was a speculation of a monopolistic commercial ownership, a real demonstration of capitalism, totally alien to the Gikuyu. Most important, as per custom, land could neither be sold to "foreigners" [athami, ahoi, aciarwa] nor would they control it. Making important decisions related to ownership was only reserved to *Githaka* owners (Middleton, Kershaw (1972).

By according written title deeds to the land, and specifically to themselves and not for the Gikuyu, Europeans ignored customs of land tenure as they instituted the capitalistic and monopolistic displaced of the *mbari* holdings. A new method of individual and private ownership of land was introduced into Gikuyuland. By relegating and distributing the Gikuyu to the reserves, urban centres, and as squatters, they created a stratum of landless people. With the interference with the system of land tenure, Gikuyu nationalism began to grow.

### **European Interference on Gikuyu Beliefs on *Tiri***

European instigated colonialism and land alienation altered the physical, economic, social, and spiritual lifestyle, of the Gikuyu conditioning their involvement in the nationalist movement (Barnett and Njama 1966, Anderson 2005; Elkins 2010,). Observably, the interruption of Gikuyu beliefs especially those held about *tiri* served as the climax. The establishment of Colonial rule coincided with the rise of Christian missions, who were committed to conversion and strict measures to eradicate slavery, sickness, and what they referred to as ignorance. According to them, the Gikuyu people dwelt in the domains of Satan and needed conversion and salvation both necessary for civilization and economic development. Pagan and heathen ways of life were deemed detrimental to economic advancement. As such, the success in Gikuyu conversion lay in cutting all links with traditional heritage. European administrators and Settlers left this hard work to the –

missionaries, who had to undertake the hard work of ‘civilizing’ and ‘Christianizing’ the Africans (Church of Scotland (1953). The missionaries had to work in collaboration with the Settlers as they were one (Githige (1982). Kariuki (O.I 1986) noted that “during the colonial times, there was no *muthungu kana mubia* (that is, there was no difference between the Settlers and the Missionary).

Missionaries penetration into the Gikuyuland was to “win souls for Christ” thereby replace their beliefs with Christianity (Church of Scotland Mission Kikuyu 1923, Karangi 2005, Mufaka 2007). Through evangelization, they challenged and banned all indigenous beliefs and practices. The very nature of missionary work meant automatic involvement in the Protectorate land issues. They too required land for mission stations and industrial activities (Church Missionary Society 1952). Sorrenson (1968, 257) says that, ‘*missionaries took up land alongside Settlers, under the same land regulations, and adopted the same methods of cultivation*’. They also needed land for building hospitals and schools thus selecting stations in the midst of populous Districts, sometimes engaging in highly commercialized farming to raise money for expansion.

Led by the Scottish Missionary leader, Rev. Thomas Watson, they ‘bought’ land at Thogoto in 1895(Karanja, 2009). However, Kariuki (1986) noted that “the Church of the Scotland Mission took Chief Waiyaki’s land at Thogoto after he had been killed rendering his family [as] squatters.” As noted by Sorrenson (1968), missionaries were not only competing with one another for people but also for land. Like the Settlers, the missionaries were convinced that Gikuyuland was fit and free for European settlement. Sorrenson (1968, 260) puts it that, “when the 1902 Crown Lands Ordinance came into force the missions obtained land on the same conditions as ordinary Settlers. This opened the way for the acquisition of considerable mission estates at a time when the missionary scramble for territory in the Kikuyu country was at its peak”. From 1899 to 1907, the Holy Ghost Fathers, Church Missionary Society, Africa Inland Mission, Gospel Missionary Society and Catholic Fathers had opened stations at Kiambu within a radius of twenty-five miles from Nairobi (Sorrenson (1968). All these missions were established in the middle of the most populated areas where they were sure to get followers and ample land for farming.

Missionaries vehemently preached against certain rituals and ceremonies especially those related to *tiri* referring to them as heathen. Many of the cultural-religious customs of the Gikuyu especially those related to *tiri* were disregarded. For instance, rituals for rain in the times of drought were banned, besides ceremonial dances during rites of passage. Churches replaced the shrines, altering Gikuyu worship with changes such as ten per cent of the harvest on a monthly basis and weekly contributions on Sundays. Churches, pastors, replaced shrines and *ago na arathi* respectively as communal oriented sacrifices after harvest also transformed to individual –focused giving. Much as missionaries coerced the Gikuyu claiming that *Ngai no uria wa tene* (Ngai and God was one and the same), churches were built and hence associated with Civilization and Westernization thereby portraying their religiosity as superior (Kibicho 1972, Gathogo 2017). As was noted by one of my interviewees (Wanjiku 0.1, 1987), Gikuyu started feeling oppressed by the new religious model.

Missionaries also changed the rites of passage and associated rituals. For instance, at the birth of a child, the placenta and umbilical cord had to ritually be buried with *tiri* marked fertility and signified a symbolic union between the living and the dead (referred to by the missionaries as Ngoma (devil). This ritual, according to the Gikuyu sheltered a child from evil spirits guaranteeing not just its growth but family continuity. By transforming birth rituals especially literally throwing away the after-birth as waste, the birth of a child became meaningless, and not even the sacrament of baptism seemed to secure such a child from evil spirits. Thanksgiving rituals and ceremonies performed after eight days in the church could never fully replace the Gikuyu equivalent of *kumagaria mwana* (which literally means to escort the child). The ceremony was performed to entwine the child with the world of the spirits and to show its future dependency on *tiri*.

Missionaries held a paternalistic attitude based on an egoistic and ignorant attitude of Gikuyu culture and beliefs (Bennett, (1920). Kamuyu-wa-Kang'ethe (1981:233ff) argues that, "...the missionaries appealed to the moral conscience of the few Gikuyu they had converted into Christianity to accept that female circumcision and the mambura rituals were evil. They nevertheless did this under the veil of paternalism and ignorance."

None however, upset the missionaries like the initiation ceremony, which both held a rigorous campaign either for or against it. Missionaries vehemently preached against it during church services by discouraging and forbidding early converts from practicing it. Diehards were subsequently subjected to ex-communication from the churches and the schools. They banned female circumcision and instructed that boys be circumcised in hospitals. The Europeans equated in particular the dances and songs performed during such rites like circumcision and marriage. To them, it was one of the clearest marks of savagery leading to sexual lust and immorality Kibicho (1972, He noted that the words of the songs accompanying some of the dances act as an incentive to immorality judged by civilized standards (Karangi, 2013; Borona, 2017).

In Gikuyu's views, trying to stop circumcision was the synonymous with delinking the Gikuyu from *Ngai*. The usage of *tiri* in the circumcision ritual, which was done in welcoming the initiates back home, was a bond to unite the dead and the living. It was also done to get 'rid of evil spirits for *tiri* was believed to have some sacred powers. These rituals could not be performed with circumcision for one gender. It was in this act of making the initiate jump over a set handful of *tiri* that Gikuyu beliefs were revealed. *Tiri* in that ritual and many others united the living and the dead through whom social harmony was maintained (Kenyatta 1938).

The Missionary teaching about *tiri* (dust) during interment of the dead that man comes from dust and to dust returns confused the Gikuyu (Genesis 3, 17-19). In their religiosity, death was a continuation of life to the world of the spirits (*Ngoma*), where one continued to exist even after, as long as he was remembered here on earth. This was done through naming system. On the other hand, working for food was not a curse, it was a blessing from *Ngai* bestowed to Gikuyu and Muumbi from the beginning. Missionary belief about death and toiling as a punishment from God due to man's sins was a rather disturbing belief to the Gikuyu. To them, the only deaths that came as a punishment were based on witchcraft, curses etc., which could be prevented through ritual cleansing. Good people died after old age and were buried with *tiri* thereby completing an ontological union between the living and the dead. Such would constantly be appeased through libations, which missionaries saw as veneration of the dead.

As far as the missionaries could observe, Gikuyu life, almost in its entirety was regulated by their traditional code of law known as *migirow* (taboos). The Europeans referred to *Ngai* as a very indefinite being and their idea of the afterlife as equally vague. They were also regarded as devil worshippers for the Europeans confused the practice of pouring libations to the dead with devil worshipping. The European God could not fit into the 'pagan' ways of the Gikuyu, some of which were poor methods of farming and fragmented holdings. The Europeans hospitals and western medicine also substituted rituals that used *tiri* such as rubbing a child with its mixture and other herbs to treat measles. Such was anti civilization and progress both economically and spiritually. The first converts had to fight a tough battle abandoning their practices and adapting not just a western lifestyle but also religion. Some got mixed up in syncretism but missionaries became very strict.

## Conclusion

The article began by documenting the European interruption on Gikuyu beliefs and practices related to soil (*tiri*). It set out to highlight the Gikuyu worldview, their relationship to land

and the beliefs attached to it. In its findings, it has noted that besides all colonial maneuvers, inference with beliefs on *tiri* served as a strong catalyst for the colonial struggle among the Gikuyu people.

It has also noted that be they administrators, settlers or missionaries, European invasion in Gikuyuland interfered with a sacred bond where *tiri* (land) was believed to bind the unborn, the living, and the dead with *Ngai*. This was comparable to an untimely breaking of the umbilical cord before a child was born. *Tiri* to the Gikuyu was a 'mother', a source of life and thus, interference with it caused a psycho-social death that went beyond economic distraction. The article also notes that breaking this bond through land alienation and foreign worship was synonymous with annihilation of the Gikuyu. It notes that European invasion of Gikuyuland thus created a spiritual hunger that could not be satisfied by foreign rituals performed in foreign shrines to a foreign God, who justified physical, economic and spiritual oppression. In addition, converting the Gikuyu to *ahoi* in their own land, and disrupting the unifier, *tiri* called for a rebellion in the culmination of the Mau Mau struggle. It was obvious, as noted above that the Gikuyu could not continue tolerating a religion that introduced a living God as one who punished evildoers, yet never punished colonial oppressors, the alternative to revolt was justified.

From the above analysis, we have noted that creating a spiritual vacuum among people who are inclined to their own religiosity, no matter how remote that may seem to outsiders, can raise critical political consciousness. It is not surprising then that *Ithaka na Wiyathi* (land and freedom), and *ngakua ngiruiru tiri witu* (I will die fighting for our soil/land) became the motivational slogans for Mau Mau fighters. In conclusion, we have noted that the physical death, rather than the spiritual death, became a matter of choice to the Gikuyu as the mere interference with core belief systems revolving around *tiri* was intolerable. Certainly, land concern is an African concern, as evidenced by the indigenous reactions, in recent history, by Kenyans, Zimbabweans and South Africans among others. Owing to its religio-spiritual significance among African societies, it is prudent for African governments, in the twenty-first century, to handle it culturally, legally, and indeed carefully and sensitively.

## References

- Anderson, D. (2005) *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire*. New York: W. W. Norton
- Bennett, G. (1920) *Kenya, A Political History: The Colonial Period*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.
- Barnett, D. L. and K. Njama (1966) *Mau Mau from Within: Autobiography and Analysis of Kenya's Peasant Revolt* (London: MacGibbon and Kee).
- Borona, G.K. (2017). Investigating people-forest relationships around Central Kenya's Nyandarua Forest Reserve: Understanding their sustainability through knowledge systems. PhD thesis. University of British Columbia.
- Church of Scotland (1953) Foreign Mission Committee. *The Mau Mau and the Church*. Edinburgh. Church Missionary Society.
- Church of Scotland Mission Kikuyu (1923) *Semi-Jubilee Book of the Church of Scotland Mission, Kenya Colony 1898—1932*, Edinburgh. Blackwood and Sons.
- Church Missionary Society (1952) *Mau Mau: What Is It? What Lies Behind It?* London: Church Missionary Society.
- Constantine S. (2005) *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy 1914-1940*. Frank Cass England 2005
- Elkins, C. 2010 *Imperial Reckoning: The untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya*.

London: Henry Holt and Company.

- Maria F. & E. Green (2019) Labour Control and the Establishment of Profitable Settler Agriculture in Colonial Kenya, c. 1920–45 Published online <https://doi.org/10.1080/20780389.2019.1581058>
- Furedi, F (1971). The Genesis of African Communities in Settled Areas of Kenya. Seminar Paper, - 1971/72. University of Nairobi. (1973) The Growth of Popular Protest in White Highlands. London. Paper, School of Oriented and African Studies.
- Gathogo, J. (2017). The Continuity of Indigenous Rituals in African Ecclesiology: A Kenyan Experience from a Historical Perspective, STJ, (3)1, pp.115-137.
- Gathogo, J. (2001). *Truth About African Hospitality: Is there Hope for Africa?* Mombasa: Salt.
- Githige, R. M. (1982) *The Mission—State Relationship in Colonial Kenya: A Summary in a Journal of Religion in Africa*. Nairobi, Kenyatta University Publication.
- Harberson, J. W. (1973) *Nation—building in Kenya: The Role of Land Reform*. Evanston: North-Western University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1971) Land Reforms and Politics in Kenya. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2.
- Harneit-Sievers A. (2002) *A place in the world: new local historiographies in Africa and South Asia*. Brill. Leiden.
- Haugerud A. (1989) *The Culture of Politics in Modern Kenya*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ikin, C. (2005) *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya*. Henry Holt and Company. New York
- Kaggia, B. M. (1975) *Roots of Freedom. 1921—1936*. Nairobi. East African Publishing House.
- Kahengeri, G. (n.d) Nyimbo cia Wiyathi wa Kirinyaga. Nairobi. Kenya Writers Series.
- Kang'ethe, Kamuyu-wa (1981) "The Role of the Agikuyu Religion and Culture in the Development of Kenya Religio-Political Movement, 1900-1950 With Particular Reference of God and The Rite of Initiation. Nairobi: University of Nairobi, Ph.D. Thesis.
- Kanogo, T, (1987) *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau 1905-1963*. Kenya. Heinemann.
- Kenya Colony and Protectorate (1929) Committee on Land Tenure in Kikuyu Province Report. Nairobi. Government Printer.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1930) Committee on Land Tenure in Kikuyu Province Report. Nairobi. Government Printer.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1948) The Agrarian Problem in Kenya. Nairobi. Government Printer.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1956) African Land Development Board. African Land Development in Kenya 1946 — 1955, Nairobi. Ministry of Agriculture.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1958) Working Party on African Land Report. Nairobi, Government Printer.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1960) The Origin and Growth of Mau Mau; A Historical Survey. Sessional Paper No. 5. Nairobi. Government Printer.
- Kenyatta (1938) Facing Mount Kenya. London. Secker and Warburg.
- Karangi, M.M. (2005) *The Sacred Mugumo Tree: Revisiting The Roots of Gĩkũyũ*

- Cosmology and Worship: A Case Study of the Gĩkũyũ of Kirinyaga District in Kenya. PhD thesis. School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London)
- Karang, M.M. 2013. *Revisiting the roots of an African shrine: The sacred Mũgumo tree: An investigation of the religion and politics of the Gĩkũyũ people in Kenya*. Lambert Academic Publishing.
- Karanja, J. 2009. *The Missionary Movement in Colonial Kenya: The Foundation of Africa Inland Church*. Cuvillier Verlag.
- Kibicho, S. G. (1972) "The Kikuyu Conception of God, Its Continuity into the Christian Era, and the Question it Raises for the Christian idea of Revelation." Nashville, Tennessee. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis
- Kikuyu Association (1924). A Memorandum Presented to the Members of the East Africa Commission November 1924. *Kenya National Archives*, File No. C50533/543/38086/38.
- Lacey, G., Weiler, B. and Peel, V. Berman Bruce J. (2014) "Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Modernity: The Paradox of Mau Mau", *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, (25)1, pp.1-12.
- Leakey, L, S.B. (1953) *Mau Mau and the Kikuyu*. London, Methuen.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1954) *Defeating Mau Mau*. London, Methuen.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1977) *The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903*, Vol.1. London, Academic Press Incorporation.
- Lonsdale, J. (1992) "The Moral Economy of Mau Mau: Wealth, Poverty, and Civic Virtue in Kikuyu Political Thought." In *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa; Violence and Ethnicity* (Edited by Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, pp.315–504. James Currey. London
- Maloba W. O. (2017) *Kenyatta and Britain: An Account of Political Transformation, 1929-1963* Palgrave Macmillan
- Middleton, J. & G. Kershaw (1972) *The Kikuyu and Kamba of Kenya*. London, International African Institute.
- Mufaka K. (2007) "Scottish Missionaries and the Circumcision Controversy in Kenya, 1900–1960," *International Review of Scottish Studies*, 28 (2003), 47–58.
- Mugo, E. N. (1982) *Kikuyu People. A Brief Outline of Their Customs and Traditions*. Nairobi, Kenya Literature Bureau.
- Okoth-Ogendo, H.W.O. 1991. *Tenants of the Crown: Evolution of Agrarian Law and Institutions in Kenya*. African Centre for Technology Studies. Nairobi: ACTS Press.
- Overton, J. 1988 The Origins of the Kikuyu Land Problem: Land Alienation and Land Use in Kiambu, Kenya, 1895-1920. *African Studies Review* Vol. 31, No. 2, pp. 109-126.
- Rosberg and Nottingham (1966) *The Myth of Mau Mau Nationalism in Kenya*. Nairobi, East African Publishing House.
- Routledge, W. S. (1970) *With a Pre-Historic People. The Akikuyu of a British East Africa*. London, Frank Cass.
- Shanguhya M & M.M. Koster (2014) Land and Conflict in Kenya's Rift Valley: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives. In: Falola T., Mbah E.M. (eds). *Contemporary Africa. African Histories and Modernities*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137444134\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137444134_9)

- Shiraz D. (2006) *Never Be Silent: Publishing and Imperialism 1884-1963*. London: African Books Collective.
- Sorrenson, M. P. K. (1968) *Origins of European Settlement in Kenya*. London, Oxford University Press.
- Stringer K. W. (2014) "A Household Divided": A Fragmented Religious Identity, Resistance and the Mungiki movement among the Kikuyu in Post-colonial Kenya." Unpublished M.A. Dissertation: Ohio State University.
- Toulson, T. (1976). "Europeans and the Kikuyu to 1910: a study of resistance, collaboration and conquest (T). University of British Columbia." Retrieved from <https://open.library.ubc.ca/collections/ubctheses/831/items/1.0058350>
- Wakhungu, J., W. Huggins and E. Nyukuri (2008) "Land Tenure and Violent Conflict in Kenya." *African Centre for Technology Studies*. Available online at: <http://www.acts.or.ke/reports/> Related Resource.