

Female Circumcision Controversy among the Gikuyu of Central Kenya, 1929 to 1931: The Underlying Factors

Ng'ang'a A. Wambui¹, Dr. P. Waweru² and Dr. J. Karega³

¹MA student, Laikipia University, P. O. Box 1100-20300, Nyahururu, Kenya. Email address:
annwambuigikonyo@gmail.com

^{2,3} Senior Lecturer, School of Humanities and Development Studies, Department of Public Affairs and Environmental Studies, Laikipia University.
P. O. Box 1100-20300. Nyahururu, Kenya.

Abstract

Female circumcision has been subjected to scholarly scrutiny, criticism and interpretation from local and international scholars. Studies focusing on female circumcision controversy abound in fields of demography, sociology, gender, policy and medicine but there are few such studies in history. It is this historiographical gap in African sexuality that this study intended to address for the period spanning 1929 to 2010. Female circumcision in most African communities was highly regarded as it conferred social status to the initiates. The practice has remained rampant among the Kisii, the Maasai and the Somali while among the Kikuyu this practice has declined to a level that it no longer attracts attention. The study sought to determine causes of the female circumcision controversy and thus explain factors responsible for its decline among the Kikuyu of Central Kenya after 1931. The study utilized structural functionalism and feminist theories in examining the cause and effect of this phenomenon. This being a historical study, it used *ex-post facto* as its research design. A sample of 36 informants was selected through purposive and snow ball sampling methods. Data was collected through a sample question schedule and analyzed through content analysis. The study provided a historical analysis of female circumcision among the Gikuyu from pre-colonial to the time of the female circumcision controversy of 1929 to 1931. The historical and anthropological data generated has enormously contributed to African historiography and will enhance knowledge of values and attitudes associated with female circumcision. This will benefit policy makers in government and human rights crusaders in addressing issues related to female circumcision in other parts of Kenya.

Keywords: Clitoridectomy, Female Circumcision

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Female circumcision is one of the most controversial cultural rites in Kenya. While there exists a lot of literature on this practice, some dating back to the early colonial period, many of these studies have been carried out by Christian missions, feminists, gender activists, human and women rights defenders, medical doctors, state functionaries and women leaders with each group coming up with its perspective on the ritual. These studies, to be sure, have elicited a lot of debates on the pros and cons of female circumcision that have widened our knowledge on the dynamics of the practice. While this study takes cognizance of the role of these studies in our general understanding of the cultural oppression of women and the need for their empowerment, it is important to note that there has been inadequate historical research on the changing patterns of this rite of passage, and especially the impact of colonialism and modernity on the practice. For instance, there is little on the persistence of the rite among the Maasai, Abagusii, Samburu, Somali and the Abakuria. Equally, little has been written on the reasons for its gradual decline among other communities in Kenya such as the Gikuyu, Meru and Embu. In order to fill these gaps, this study has focused on the trends that this cultural rite has taken in space and time. It has done so by examining the contours of continuity and change in respect to this rite among the Gikuyu of Central Kenya. This is a community in whose pre-colonial cultural milieu the rite had a central place in preparing girls for adulthood. The coming of Christian missions and the colonial state, and their spirited attempt to forcefully stamp out the practice among the Gikuyu, elicited serious resistance in 1929 which has caught the imagination of nationalist historians. However, the impact of colonialism, Christianity and modernity and especially the role of formal education and modern lifestyles on this rite is still a yawning gap. This is the lacuna that this study has attempted to fill hence make a contribution to the historiography of Kenya.

1.2 Literature Review

Gikuyu myth of origin provides that Muranga is considered to be the tribe's ancestral and spiritual home¹. However, though the area around Mukurue wa Gathanga was a significant one in

¹ Cagnolo, p. 16

the evolution of the Gikuyu, it cannot be regarded as the cradle of the Gikuyu. Research has provided evidence which traces the bantu speaking group from its rise in the present day Nigeria and Cameroon around 2000BC. The group later migrated and spread to South Africa and East Africa along the coast and then eastwards towards Mt Kenya before ultimately closing the mountain to settle on western slopes (Muranga) as the Agikuyu².

This historical version seems to agree with their myth of origin. Gikuyu, according to myth of origin, came down from the mountain. Historically it has been established that they crossed the mountain from the east to get to their current home³. It is from this perspective that the myth of Gikuyu and Mumbi and Mukurwe wa Gathanga and that God was responsible for settling them there should be considered. Muriuki explains that the myth acted “as a focus or symbol of unity welding together the various disparate elements into one people”⁴, one monolithic people called the Gikuyu emerged. The myth also legitimized Gikuyu claims to the ownership of land, since, according to them, their present homeland was bestowed upon their mythical ancestors by providence⁵.

The Kikuyu people represent a fusion of many different ethnic elements. Some of their words and cultural traits were borrowed, at various stages of contact from the plain Nilotc speakers such as the Dorobo, the Athi and the Maasai. Many were also acquired from the Eastern Cushitic speaking peoples. The most important of the traits are circumcision and cliteridectomy as the major initiation rites and the age-set system (*riika*)⁶.

1.3Theoretical Framework

The study was based on the theory of structural functionalism first proposed by Emile Durkheim which postulates that various aspects of social behavior exist to maintain society’s social structure. According to structural functionalists the various parts of the society form the

² Ibid, p. 16

³ Muriuki, p. 47

⁴ Ibid, p. 47

⁵ Ibid, p. 62

⁶ Ibid, p. 62

institutions of a society that serve specific functions in that society⁷. Consequently, the active participation of women in the female circumcision controversy was an expression of self preservation as the elimination of the practice threatened the process through which they became part of the society⁸. Structural functionalism could thus explain its persistence in other cultures as the practice could be a major determinant of how women perceive their place in the society⁹. Members of the society begun to view the practice as an important component of their identity and well being.

2. Research Methodology

This study adopted the '*ex post facto*' research design¹⁰. This design is deemed ideal in the sense that the respondents have already developed some opinion in regard to factors contributing to decline in female circumcision in their community. The researcher in this type of investigation depends on available data about past events over which he/she has limited control¹¹. The study was conducted among the Kikuyu community of Central Kenya. It was conducted in the traditional Kikuyu districts of Kiambu, Muranga and Nyeri. It was also carried out among migrant Kikuyu who moved to settler farms in Laikipia, Nyandarua and Nakuru following the establishment of African reserves¹² and finally settled in those areas after independence. In this study purposive and snow ball sampling was be employed. The core interviewees were identified through purposive sampling and involved who included former administrators and elderly Kikuyu men and women. Snowball technique was applied to identify other potential informants¹³. Primary data collected included archival records retrieved from Kenya National Archives in Nairobi. Data from the archives was corroborated with oral interviews collected

⁷ Pedersen, p. 647-689

⁸ Kenyatta, p. 130-154

⁹ Tammary, *et al.*, p. 54

¹⁰ Cohen, *et al.*, p. 1-16

¹¹ Shama, p. 64

¹² Kanogo, p. 51-65

using in depth interviews. Data collected was organized into themes and analysed through content analysis¹⁴.

3. Results and Findings

3.1 Female Circumcision among the Gikuyu to 1895

Prior to the coming of Europeans, initiation of girls was regarded in great esteem among the Kikuyu. Muriuki notes that “it was looked upon as a deciding factor in giving a girl the status of womanhood in the Kikuyu community..... the moral code of the tribe was bound up with this custom that symbolized the unification of the whole tribal organization”¹⁵. This was the underlying reason why female circumcision was seen as critical in the life of the Kikuyu people as was the case with most other traditional African communities like the Embu and the Maasai. Kenyatta profoundly states that, female circumcision among the Kikuyu “defined one’s rights and responsibilities and could therefore ruin a woman’s standing if not performed¹⁶. Missionary groups and the colonial government thus failed to appreciate the significance and meanings attached by the society to this rite of passage. This resulted in contestation between the government and missionaries on one hand and African leaders on the other that culminated in heated controversy between 1929 and 1931.

Female circumcision among the Gikuyu took place before menstruation. The girl’s parents looked for the appearance of tiny teats called *tuthetha ndugu*¹⁷. The girls parents identified a sponsor. The sponsor examined her to gauge her suitability for circumcision. She also gave her instruction of how to go about the initiation ceremony. She taught the girl to show etiquette, self discipline, self control and to bear pain in silence to show maturity as a woman¹⁸. Sexual intercourse and menstruation before or during initiation was a taboo among the kikuyu. In

¹³ Kathuri, p.52

¹⁴ Kombo, *et al.*, p120

¹⁵ Muriuki, p. 110-135

¹⁶ Kenyatta, p. 130-154

¹⁷ Leakey, p.607

¹⁸Cagnolo, p. 84-114

case she had broken any of these prohibitions a purification ceremony was done to prepare her for circumcision¹⁹. Female circumcision thus helped to check teenage sex.

Circumcision ceremonies were held at the homestead of a Gikuyu who qualified according to their custom to hold the title of *mūruithia* (a circumcisor, or one who sponsors a circumcision ceremony). However, the details of steps required of a man who wished to become a *mūruithia* explains why only a small proportion of Kikuyu elders ever tried to become a *mūruithia*. The time, trouble, and cost involved in qualifying as a *mūruithia* were a great deterrent. Most men were content to board their children out for initiation with some man who was already qualified as a *mūruithia*²⁰. This position was however held in high esteem.

Preparations for initiation were meticulous and carried out with precision. Both the host (*mūruithia*) and the parents to the initiation candidates had to make various sacrifices to appease their God and their ancestors. The services of a medicine man were liberally employed. The initiation candidates were involved in a dance which was known as *matuumo* that marked the commencing of circumcision ceremonies. On this day the medicine man purified the homestead and set up charms to protect it from all influences of evil²¹. For the Gikuyu people, for so important an event as female circumcision, most thorough preparation and careful precautions were essential, so that nothing would mar the happy issue of the ceremony or prejudice the attitude of the spirits, who, if any due observance were neglected, could make their evil influence felt²².

The parents further invited relatives to consult them as to whether there was some taboo in the family that might prevent the child from being initiated that would require cleansing²³. Similar rituals would be performed to inform the father's age mates and members of the father's lineage (*mbari*) of the forthcoming initiation ceremony. After these ceremonies had been performed, the parents slaughtered a sacrificial goat, '*mburi ya hako*' (the goat for appeasement)

¹⁹Kenyatta,p. 136.

²⁰ Leakey, p.603

²¹ Leakey, p.608

²² Cagnolo, p. 86.

²³ Leakey, p.591

to appease the ancestors and ‘*Ngai*’. In so doing they presented their child to the ancestor and ‘*Ngai*’ for blessings and good keeping.

The girls were operated by a female operator. The profession of *mūruithia* in the sense of operator was one which was very limited indeed and was mainly restricted to certain families. Any person, whether a member of these families or of some other family, who wished to enter the profession, had to become an apprentice to the masters for at least seven years, and pay a fee of 30 ordinary goats and sheep and several stall-fattened animals before he was entitled to start practicing on his/her own²⁴. The profession was a well paying one, because in one season an operator would perhaps perform 400 or 500 operations, and for each one she received a fee of a piece of iron or a goat skin from the parent of the candidate. The operator later sold for things which he/she required or battered them for sheep and goats²⁵. This has at times been blamed for perpetuation of the custom of female circumcision as the operators sometimes feared losing their lucrative source of wealth.

Gikuyu mainly practiced Type I circumcision, (clitoridectomy) where all or part of the clitoris was removed²⁶. The missionaries, however, had a contradicting opinion on the nature of the operation. To them the cutting was less extensive but was still severe mutilation²⁷. Boulanger, unlike Kenyatta, provides that though the major form that consisted of the removal of the entire clitoris and labia minora and part of the labia majora was seldom practiced in most districts, it was nevertheless common in Fort Hall (Murang'a) district²⁸. To the Kikuyu Nationalists the operation was minor and had limited effects on the health of the girl.

In Kikuyu community female circumcision, performed ceremonially and in public, was a major event in a girl’s life, her initiation into adulthood, and was deeply embedded in Kikuyu tradition. According to Kikuyu belief, uncircumcised girl could not conceive. If she did, she had to procure an abortion since her child would be regarded with horror.²⁹. The life of the girls was

²⁴Leakey, p.621

²⁵Ibid, p.621

²⁶Ibid, p. 130-154.

²⁷CSM, p. 2

²⁸Boulanger, p. 64

²⁹Trench, p.77-81

based on work, to cultivate her father's field while she waited for a suitor. The girl had no claims of her own, the commands of her father or brother were law to her, and they were the sole arbiters of her future capital in the shape of livestock, which would be received when she married³⁰.

To the Gikuyu, initiation rituals dramatized the symbolic 'death' of childhood and the 'birth' of adulthood. Initiation was not a private concern but a public and communal rite. It conferred social status upon the initiates. It stood for the whole values embodied in the age-class system promoting the social moral and religious well being of the community. It was the visible and outward sign of adhering to the tribal culture.

To the Gikuyu, circumcision was an important institution that played a central role in the affairs of the community. Apart from inculcating societal norms and values, it also created new bonds and some form of identification with the society and societal values and symbols. Those initiated at the same time formed age-sets (*riika*) that had an integrative role in a society that was uncentralized and highly egalitarian. The age sets also served as a useful guide in the attempt to establish a framework of chronology for the history of the Gikuyu as they were a series of dynasties with names of which important happenings in the tribal history may be associated³¹.

3.2 Social Organisation of the Gikuyu

Gikuyu society was patriarchal, uncentralised and egalitarian. Each family (*Nyumba*) headed by the father was regarded as an independent unit with regard to social and administrative matters. Several families with common ancestry formed the *mbari*. *Mbari* affairs were coordinated by a *mbari* council comprising of heads of families. Muriuki states that "it was the *mariika* system that contributed most to the bond that linked up all the Gikuyu and made them feel they were a single people"³². An attack by missionaries on the initiation rite that formed the basis for the *riika* system met with a lot of opposition from the Gikuyu traditionalists.

The age-set (*riika*) was based on the initiation rite for both boys and girls. The age set

³⁰Cagnolo, p. 84-114

³¹Ibid, p.134

³²Muriuki, p.116

system formed the basis of the political system and social organization of the Gikuyu society. It was also a means by which the individuals personality and self identity could be developed and recognized. While the descent (kinship) was the primary factor governing social relationship, the age-set system acted as a bridge which enabled individuals to become members of a wider community that surpassed the kinship or territorial relations. The kinship system only included those people related by blood. The age-group system, on the other hand comprised all those people bound together through initiation.³³. An attempt by missionaries to abolish female circumcision was seen as an affront to a basic pillar of the Gikuyu traditions.

3.3 Gikuyu Dance and Song

Among the Gikuyu, dances were an essential and significant part of many ceremonies. Each division of the community had its own special dances. The dances of the children and adolescents were a form of training for the ceremonial dances of the initiation period. There were special dances, too for those in actual training for initiation important in the passing of knowledge to the initiates. There were dances too for the novices after they had been initiated, but before they entered to full adult status³⁴. Pre-initiation dances were meant to prepare the candidates for life they would lead as adult warriors and maidens. The traditional songs and dances were occasions of great merriment, bringing all men down to the level of each other as humans, state titles aside. During the initiation process, song and dance formed an ensemble of ceremonies that raised it to the level of sacrificial act which could not be disregarded³⁵. An attempt by missionaries to have circumcision that was devoid of the *matuumo dances* and *mambura* rituals faced enormous opposition from the Gikuyu.

3.4 Gikuyu and Religion

The Gikuyu concept of Ngai was monotheistic. The Gikuyu converts to Christianity continued to believe that the Ngai they worshipped in Christianity was the same Ngai who was

³³ Boulanger, p. 1

³⁴ Leakey, p. 418

³⁵ Boulanger, p. 3

worshipped by their forefathers. The Gikuyu thus saw no contradictions in establishing a similar relationship with Christianity. Though the Gikuyu saw no contradiction in embracing Christianity, the missionaries and the colonialists were apprehensive in accepting Gikuyu monotheism and the whole range of Gikuyu beliefs and practices. It is in this background that the missionaries carried out a systematic campaign against the Gikuyu religious and cultural beliefs and practices. The missionaries demanded that their converts should abandon their religion and culture. The Gikuyu read mischief in this. The campaign ultimately led to the female circumcision controversy in 1929.

Majority of traditional African societies believed that there was life after death and that death continued to impact on those alive and continued to do so to future generations. This concept gave these communities coherence, a deep sense of history and tradition. It also deeply influenced their day-to-day religious, social and political life. It was widely accepted that each group had a common ancestry from whom the ethnic group derived its possessions and status. The ancestors were believed to have formed the basic pattern of life for all time which could be modified or adopted but could not be entirely altered lest the ancestors became offended³⁶. The call by missionaries, especially the church of Scotland Mission at Thogoto for Christian converts to renounce their religion and culture was un-acceptable by christian converts with traditional inclinations. This formed the cause of discontent in the church in the early 20th century.

3.5 Gikuyu Land Tenure System

Among the Gikuyu land tenure was governed mainly by the initial process of its acquisition. Land initially belonged to an individual or a small group of closely related people (*mbari*) land³⁷. Members of the *mbari* had a right to utilize the land. The sale of clan land was considered as redeemable. Non clan members, the *ahoi*, were at times given occupational rights. Following the arrival of colonialists the Gikuyu gave some of them land to build and cultivate hoping they would soon, go away. This was in keeping with their traditional land tenure practice as they mistook the colonialists to be “*ahoi*”. Many Gikuyu lost their land through the

³⁶ Muriuki, p. 135

³⁷ Muriuki, p. 75

exploitation of *ahoi* system by the white man. Others lost their land through Gikuyu barter system. The white settlers also at times carried out punitive expeditions that made the Gikuyu to flee from their land retreating into the forests, mission stations and into any other place they could find refuge. The missionaries also alienated land for the establishment of mission stations and schools. The Gikuyu became tenants(*ahoi*) in their own land reducing them to slaves and subjecting them to forced labour causing great resentment.

Agikuyu land tenure was interrelated with their religion and their kinship system. Its disruption by the colonialists triggered off militancy among the Gikuyu in the 1920's and throughout the thirties up to the fifties. Female circumcision controversy among the Gikuyu speakers in 1929 was a form of resistance to the alienation of Gikuyu land by colonialists. Among other resistance groups, this controversy was one of the strongest show of resistance and defiance towards emancipation of Africans from colonial servitude. Scarcity of land in the reserves and taxation coupled with increase in population forced many Africans to voluntarily migrate to European farms.

Though women did not have land ownership rights they nevertheless had a strong attachment to land³⁸. Mervyn W.H. Beech, District officer in Kiambu District central province in 1912, after extensive fieldwork, provided a detailed analysis of Kikuyu land tenure with special reference to the position of women³⁹. To demonstrate the critical position that women held in matters of land tenure he quoted St. J. Orde-Brown, the Assistant DC for Chuka⁴⁰,

women have a “life-interest” in the land, accruing to them from their rights to cultivate. Any negotiation of land, would require.....endless settlements to make as regards women and children, and a Kikuyu woman can be exceedingly obstinate over the rights”.

The participation of women in the 1929 to 1931 female circumcision controversy may be construed as an expression of solidarity in resisting colonial imperialism.

³⁸ Audrey, p. 36

³⁹ Mervyn, p. 64

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 64

3.6 Gikuyu System of Governance

Democratic justice and social order were paramount in the Gikuyu society. The Gikuyu democratic form of government was reflected in the social organization of the society. There existed several national and local administrative and judicial councils. The National council consisted of the elders of the ruling moiety who were heads of their respective village councils. There also existed another council of women (Ndundi ya Atumia). This council dealt with all matters concerning circumcision of girls, birth, and other religious matters⁴¹. It also dealt with social, educational, and judicial matters related to women's rights.

Traditionally the age-set system was divided into two moieties. One is born into a moiety and remains in that moiety for the rest of one's life. Gikuyu sons were born into the Moiety of their grandfather. The two Agikuyu moieties were symbolically known as Maina or Irungu and Mwangi. Each Moiety ruled for one generation of approximately thirty years. It handed over leadership to the other moiety in a ceremony called "ituaka". According to Kenyatta, Mwangi was the first generation that overthrew the despotic and authoritarian leadership of the King of the Agikuyu. The second generation was called *Irungu* or *Maina* and was responsible for building the traditions of democracy in the community. After the overthrow of the Agikuyu King, the *Ituika* ceremony was started. It became a symbol and a constant reminder that despotic leadership was not allowed among the Agikuyu. Kenyatta provides that this (*ituika*) was due between 1925 and 1928. The 1929 *kirore* declaration elicited strong resistance from the Gikuyu traditionalist as it was tantamount to reintroduction of despotic rule, an attempt by the colonialists to replace the Agikuyu democratic government with the British authoritarian rule.

Colonialists sought to disorganize the Gikuyu society, first, through appointment of chiefs to replace the traditional athamaki. They further sought to replace the warrior group with the Askaris. Administratively the traditional councils (*ciama*) were replaced by LNCs. With the installation of Local Native Councils (LNCs) in 1925 the "*Irungu* or *Maina* generation whose turn it was to take over the government from the *Mwangi* generation felt that they had been

⁴¹ Kenyatta, p. 108

denied their right to take over as the ruling moiety⁴². In addition, a substantial amount of their land had already been taken by the colonialists thus dislocating among other things the Gikuyu Kinship system⁴³.

3.7 Establishment of Local Native Councils

Local native council (LNCs) were established in 1924 under the Native Authority (Amendment) Ordinance. They were in charge of governance in their areas of jurisdiction. The LNCs were headed by District commissioners and were constituted through election and nomination .While most LNCs served to improve the welfare of their constituents they were often abused by the government to advance the emancipation of local Africans. Boulanger notes that, from 1925, LNCs were increasingly under pressure from the colonial government to take a stand against female circumcision. This was finally realized in 1926 when the LNCs in every district except Nyeri, passed a resolution banning the ‘major’ form of the operation. By 1925, the Gikuyu political system and its administrative units were virtually replaced by the colonial political structure causing a lot of discontent among the Gikuyu. The activities of LNCs succeeded in eroding the authority of native institutions and this played a significant role in the eventual decline in female circumcision.

3.8 Colonial Government Policy on Female Circumcision

Initially, the British officials wished not to interfere with this rite as long as it did not affect the smooth running of the colonial administration and the settlers’ labour force. Their interest was to bring about the disorganization of the Gikuyu society, hoping that female circumcision would die a natural death⁴⁴. While most of the participants in the female circumcision controversy seemed to agree on its grave consequences on female reproduction and sexuality a proposal to introduce a general legislative prohibition aroused apprehension. The House of Commons was also divided on this matter and failed to take a decisive stand on this

⁴² Kenyatta, p. 183

⁴³ Ibid, p. 78

⁴⁴ Penderson, p. 647-689

matter. It was feared that any form of legislation against the practice could lead to unrest from natives⁴⁵.

Murray notes that, by 1925, missionaries had put pressure on the colonial government to take a stand and support their campaign to end female circumcision. In 1926 the missionaries registered some slight victory when “LNC’S in Kikuyu land passed by-laws banning all forms of the operation except the least drastic, clitoridectomy”⁴⁶. This however did not satisfy the missionaries. The reluctance by the government to put legislation that outrightly criminalized female circumcision coupled with agitation from KCA that sought to safeguard against dilution of the community's cultural values culminated in the *Kirore* declaration of 1929 by the missionaries. This showed the churches determination to fight the practice.

Government view towards Female Circumcision can only be described as luke warm and exhibited an indifferent approach. A Conference of Governors of the East African Dependencies resolved that female circumcision should be left to continue but governments should encourage the concerned groups to restrict the operation to “the less drastic form” which, according to them, was also the more ancient one⁴⁷. However, little was done to enforce it. It was not until April 1929 that the first prosecution took place under the resolution and two women were fined Ksh 30 each for performing the major operation. In spite of this conviction, no one was pleased and there was much indignation on one side at the conviction and on the other at the lightness of the sentence⁴⁸. In the 1929 to 1931 female circumcision controversy the government consistently adhered to its position of strict neutrality. They were hesitant to support him (Arthur) openly as it was felt that this would invite a lot of rebellion from the Africans especially from the Kikuyu. Their worries were confirmed when KCA took up the matter and made it a political agenda. The missionary activities resulted in desertion and disruption of the activities of the Presbyterian

⁴⁵ Trench, p.77-81

⁴⁶ Murray, p. 94

⁴⁷ CSM, p. 22

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 22

Churches⁴⁹. The government never wished to antagonize locals as this could engender a political confrontation. This indifference on the part of the government only served to aggravate the situation as the missionaries were left fight the rite on their own while African converts to Christianity were left vulnerable to attack by the anti abolitionists.

3.9 Resistance to Colonial Imperialism

Colonial administration in Kenya was established in 1895 when the British established the East African Protectorate. Administrators, settlers, traders and missionaries poured into the Kikuyu country and introduced a new way of life to the locals. The reaction of Gikuyu people to the newcomers was a product of their previous encounters with *swahili* caravans that had previously reached into the Kikuyu land. The caravans were notorious for their failure to pay for supplies and were despised for their tendency to forage for food in the Kikuyu *shambas* with impunity⁵⁰. As a result the Kikuyu came to look upon all newcomers with the greatest suspicion and fear, while the white man saw hostility and treasury written on every Kikuyu face⁵¹.

The British administrators, like their predecessors in the IEBC, continued assaulting the indigenous people mounting several punitive expeditions in an effort to subdue the Kikuyu to accepting British rule⁵². Eventually, Kikuyu resistance was weakened by a series of natural disasters that weakened the Kikuyu leaving them vulnerable to conquer by the British. There was very high mortality and estimates range from 50 to 95 percent of the population. It was the effects of these disasters that account for the ‘apparently empty land which was alienated for European settlement in 1902-3⁵³. Gradually the Kikuyu learnt to conform with and even accept British rule, but theirs remained a bitter lesson, one never to be forgotten

⁴⁹Kenyatta, p. 184

⁵⁰Muriuki, p. 138

⁵¹Ibid, p.142

⁵²Ibid, p.155

⁵³Ibid, p.156

The immediate concern for the colonial administrators was to establish a viable administration. There was no visible traditional authority with which to work. The administrative officers established chiefs in a previously chief less society. The chiefs and their loyal lieutenants disregarded tradition harassing all, especially girls⁵⁴. Consequently the chiefs became extremely unpopular. They thus became the political and emotional target of the anti-colonialist activity. The chief was both a reminder of the colonial oppressor and also of the fact that the popularly accepted traditional system of governance had been discarded.

By the end of the 19th century the Europeans had brought in considerable impact on Africans, specifically the Kikuyu with whom they closely interacted. Colonialists initially painted a positive picture in commerce, Christianity and civilization. However, these objectives came to a halt after the establishment of colonies. The Colonialists then concentrated on economic, social, political control, domination and exploitation which took centre stage⁵⁵. The capitalist economic policies introduced by the settlers impacted negatively on the Kikuyu way of life. Kikuyus were basically subsistence farmers and land alienation deprived the community the only source of livelihood. The sustenance of practices such as female circumcision that required a large outlay was imperiled⁵⁶.

Audrey notes that under mounting pressure from the settlers, Governor Northey issued labour circular No. 1 on 23 Oct 1919 that formally introduced forced labour in Kenya⁵⁷. Forced labour was one of the evils that shook the social foundation of the Gikuyu society. Families, lineages and clans were separated. This made the Gikuyu kinship system unworkable. The position of the man as leader of the homestead was imperiled⁵⁸. In most cases he worked in town and on plantations while his family was in reserves. The traditional councils of elders were no longer workable since some of them had moved to the plantations while, even in the reserves, the authority of the elders was undermined by the imposition of the newly created leadership of

⁵⁴ Muriuki, p. 156

⁵⁵ Kiwanuka, p.16

⁵⁶Mugo, O.I. 4/3/2017

⁵⁷ Audrey, p. 36

⁵⁸ Wakengethe, p. 182

chiefs, headmen, askaris and the Local Native Councils. The government used the recently created chiefs to enforce these rules. Given that chiefs were uncommon in the traditional Kikuyu society it made them unpopular with the Kikuyus. The chiefs exploited the weak Kikuyus who could not give bribes. Women and girls were exploited sexually and other forms of cruel treatment⁵⁹. This caused great resentment.

3.10 Missionary Activities

Systematic teaching against female circumcision by missionaries was begun in 1906. At first the campaign took the form of Christian Moral Education carried out both in church and in the schools. The missionaries would teach against female circumcision and ‘mambura’ rituals during church services; they would discourage and forbid church members from practicing it and would temporarily excommunicate members who allowed their girls to be circumcised; and in schools, they would expel girls who were circumcised. In that year, Dr. J. W. Arthur assumed control of the Kikuyu Hospital. He had ample opportunity, in maternity and gynecological work, of observing the effects of the female circumcision. He tried in those early years to show the married Christian men and women that female circumcision was not necessary for child bearing and pointed to the cases of uncircumcised African mothers who, in Kikuyu Hospital, had given successful births, specifically, women from Nyasaland and Kilimanjaro⁶⁰.

By 1912, the teaching had begun to have an effect on the minds of the married Christian men and their wives and also on the young unmarried men and women in attendance at the mission. In June 1914 two girls were circumcised in Kikuyu Mission Hospital under conditions which had been purged of their “customary impurities”, i.e. that the operation should not be performed in public, no dances and the girls supporters (sponsors) had to be Christian women. They were to be operated on by usual Kikuyu woman circumciser. This was done and in the following year two more girls followed their example). In 1915, a similar experiment was made at Tumutumu in the presence of Dr Philip where a traditional circumciser was asked to

⁵⁹ Kenyatta, p. 160

⁶⁰ Boulanger, p. 8

circumcise three mission girls⁶¹. Dr Philip found the operation so brutal that he refused to sanction it being repeated. This initial attempt at medicalisation of female circumcision was abandoned⁶².

In July 1916 the African Church Committee, decided that female circumcision be forbidden within the Church and the Church Laws of 1915 were amended thus a girl who had been baptized and had made a public profession, or who is a mission boarder or a child of Christian parents, could not be circumcised. The laws further stated that Christian Catechumens be taught that female circumcision was contrary to the principles of Christianity⁶³. Between 1921-1922 several churches, namely the church of Scotland Mission, Africa Inland Mission and the Gospel Missionary Society took a bold step towards this end. They affirmed that they would be excommunicating their members who condoned female circumcision. They also called for support from the colonial government in fighting female circumcision. To them the laws had not been contested and their enforcement had achieved some measure of success without attracting open protest before 1929. To the missionaries the campaign against female circumcision had exhibited early signs of success. The 1929 protest thus came as a shock to the proponents of abolishment of female circumcision.

Arthur took over as the leader of Scotland Mission at Kikuyu from 1911 to 1937. Initially he was highly respected by Africans but unpopular with the colonial administrators. He won the hearts of the Africans when he openly protested against conscription of Africans especially those who were of his mission to fight alongside the British troops during the First World War. He also brought together other missionaries through the Alliance of Protestant Missions to fight forced labour and other abuses meted to Africans in settler farms⁶⁴. As their (Africans) representative to the Legislative Council, Arthur championed for the rights of Africans especially their right to education from basic to tertiary levels. By mid 1920s he had gained high popularity among the Kikuyu. His popularity was, however, short lived as later events would reveal. People who had

⁶¹ Boulanger, p. 63

⁶² CSM, p. 9

⁶³ Ibid, p. 11

⁶⁴ Murray, p. 15

previously adored him would now vilify him. This was following his resolve to fight and uproot the culture of female circumcision among his followers. As a medical doctor he knew the obvious danger that female circumcision caused to women especially during child birth and thus could not tolerate it and went ahead to condemn it as barbaric⁶⁵.

In March 1929 the protestant Church required its adherents to sign a declaration renouncing this rite of passage. The church called for suspension of Christians caught participating in female circumcision. This declaration that later came to be known as the *Kirore* pledge caused upheavals in KCA. It led to rapid decline in church membership that provided a major impetus for initiation of Independent schools and churches that would accommodate the traditions of the Gikuyu. While documenting imperial concerns and women's affairs in Kenya between 1910 to 1950 Lynn M. Thomas notes that young men and women resulted to singing the *Muthirigu*, a dance-song which chastised missionaries, government officers and African administrators for corrupting custom⁶⁶

The missionaries held Kikuyu female circumcision in very low regard. They looked down upon the circumcised women. They perceived them as backward and favoured those who agreed not to circumcise their daughters. The later thus enjoyed education and other privileges in missionary schools and churches. This caused resentment as the educated young uncircumcised girls were placed in positions of responsibility in complete disregard to traditional hierarchy of authority. The missionaries were particularly incensed by the ceremonies (*mambura*) that accompanied the circumcision rites⁶⁷. To the Gikuyu, however, circumcision did not just signify the surgical operation i.e. the cutting of the clitoris. It did hold a deeper meaning and significance that could only be identified by the members of that community. The missionaries however saw it differently. They saw the risks that resulted with female mutilation. This is what inspired them to start a campaign against female circumcision spearheaded by the Church of Scotland.⁶⁸

The Gikuyu female circumcision was seen by missionaries as more extreme and immoral. According to them, the circumcised boys and girls were made witnesses of crude exhibition of

⁶⁵ Ibid,p. 45

⁶⁶ Lynn p.121-145

⁶⁷ Ibid, p.3

⁶⁸ KNA/MKS/OB/13/1 Mwigwithania Kikuyu News paper.

marital relationships during the post circumcision ceremonies⁶⁹. To them this would promote immoral behaviour among the youth. Missionaries underrated the strong bond between initiation and attendant ceremonies as to cause social instability. Missionaries made little attempt to understand the Kikuyu sexual morality. Female circumcision and attendant ceremonies were interpreted to mean that the kikuyu had no moral value attached to sexuality, a misconception.

The missionaries cited known cases of the abolition of circumcision practises. In one such cases, it was alleged that, between 1815 and 1830, constant fighting caused by the invasion of the low country plains in south East Africa by Manukosi, the Ngoni general, led to the disappearance of circumcision among the people's invaded. They also cited the case among the Zulus where male circumcision was abolished in the first half of the 19th century. It was their opinion that even among the Gikuyu, a number of girls had foregone the custom and up to 1929 suffered no undue persecution and their non compliance with tradition caused no widespread manifestation of opposition.⁷⁰

The Kiambu circumcision case of April 1929 may be described, literally, as the ‘straw that broke the camel’s back’. In this case, a girl, aged about 15, and an adherent of GMS, Kambui, was seized and forcibly circumcised. The Magistrate found that the charge of grievous hurt could not be upheld but fined the two women circumcisers Sh30 each because they had exceeded the bylaws of the LNC. This decision produced consternation in the hearts of many African Christians and was disheartening to the missionaries who had been working for freedom of choice in the matter⁷¹. The ensuing controversy caused a fervent within the tribe and gave the KCA the support of the majority of the older non-christian members⁷². Mission church attendance and interest declined as KCA established AICs. The decline continued into the 1940’s and in some cases the church went as far as lifting the ban on excommunication to those who had refused to sign the Thogoto Declaration. Female circumcision took a central position in every conflict. It assumed a pivotal position when it came to expressing the Africans resistance to

⁶⁹ CSM, p. 6

⁷⁰ CSM, p. 4

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 38

⁷² Ibid, p. 40

colonial domination. The resistance to abolishment of female circumcision can therefore be viewed as an expression of Africans to self determination.

3.11Kenyatta and KCA

In his early years as a student at Kikuyu Mission Centre, Kenyatta is said to have won favour from the missionaries. This is so because he was competent in education and a good orator. This, according to Arthur, his principal, placed him at an advantage as a candidate for theological training. Kenyatta however, did not take up training for priesthood as proposed by Arthur but enrolled at the London School of Economics. Kenyatta and other educated elites vehemently opposed Arthur's attempt to condemn African customary practices on the basis of religion .Their argument was based on the fact that they had found in scriptures customs that were similar to the African rites and, according to them, they were blessed by God. They hit back strongly taking advantage of this situation to score a political goal. Led by the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), a stiff opposition was launched against the church in the 1930s⁷³. They formed the Kikuyu Independent Schools Association (KISA) and opened various AICs in Kikuyu country. The AICs were closely associated with KISA and tolerated female circumcision and many other African cultural practices that included polygamy⁷⁴. Though the AICs had a right to demand for religious freedom and rejection of cultural imperialism, they however also denied freedom of choice to girls and women between accepting or rejecting female circumcision.

4. Discussion

The female circumcision controversy, it can be argued, was connected to the increasing agitation by the Kikuyu and African nationalists against alienation and subjugation of their rights. Among other issues, their grievances included land alienation, the Kipande (Registration of Natives Ordinance), heavy taxation, forced labour of women and girls and other abuses meted on women by African employees. Women had been found to take an active role in this political activism as witnessed during the Harry Thuku disturbances in the 1920s. In a show of solidarity,

⁷³Kamunya, O.I. 3/04/2017

⁷⁴Kenyatta, p. 148

young men took it upon themselves that it was their duty to protect their women. While they may appear nationalistic, it was a veiled attempt to serve their chauvinistic interest. Their worry was that if women left the ‘protective environment’ of the reserve, they would abandon their culture and disregard male authority. Kikuyu women on the other hand were more than willing to join their male counterparts in resisting ban on female circumcision which they considered as an affront to their culture. Protests in Kenya and England played a significant role in bringing the abuses to an end and by 1928 their condition of work had improved⁷⁵.

Kikuyu women were not passive but took an active role in agitating for their rights. During the crisis over female circumcision KCA promoted its campaign for land through agitation of the integrity of Kikuyu custom (that is female circumcision) with the integrity of the territory. In the agitation towards legitimate Kikuyu land rights by the KCA, women’s key position in the land tenure system was implicitly recognized in the struggle to combat land alienation. As Kenyatta alludes, “Someone without a wife was not given land by his father for if he was given (land) who would cultivate it”. This clearly demonstrated that Kikuyu women had a big stake in matters of land tenure .Their support for and participation in the female circumcision crisis could as well be explained as a way of expressing dissatisfaction with land alienation by the colonialists.

The female circumcision controversy may be viewed as a case of cultural imperialism. Though the attempt by Arthur to stop female circumcision was well intended, he shared a common perspective with the other missionaries. The missionaries failed to consider the significance of social and religious practices such as dowry, polygamy, beliefs in ancestral spirits, traditional festivals and female circumcision. They only saw these as non-Christian and primitive and thus incompatible with Christian teachings and values. African nationalists sought for answers from the Bible. They were amazed to find that the *Ibuku ria Ngai* (the book of God as the Bible is translated in Gikuyu) contained instances that included practices such as circumcision and polygamy.

On this evidence the Africans asked for further enlightenment from his missionary

⁷⁵ Audrey, p. 313

teacher. The missionaries could not provide answers to these pertinent issues that the Africans were raising. Without a satisfactory answer from the missionaries, Africans arrived at the conclusion, that, missionaries had sinister motives. They concluded that missionaries were fighting female circumcision as a measure to reduce the number of Africans for political reasons. They further concluded that missionaries were fighting female circumcision in order to distort the African social order⁷⁶. As a result Africans viewed the missionaries as “an agent of the settler”. Africans therefore went out to establish AICs with a dual mandate to serve as religious bodies and for political agitation⁷⁷.

The Kikuyus also were victims of and were held captive as prisoners of a rite. Among the Kikuyu, uncircumcised women were considered unclean, impure and childish. They were derogatively “referred to as ‘Kirigu’ in Kikuyu (thing or object of little value)”⁷⁸. In Kenya early eradication attempts were resisted with men taking a leading position. The nationalist movement, mainly dominated by males, capitalized on this opportunity and mobilised their followers to fight colonialism. The most glowing evidence of men’s dominant role in female circumcision in central Kenya manifested where married and previously uncircumcised women were forced mostly by their husband’s to circumcise. In this emerging trend migrant husbands forced their wives to circumcise, supposedly, to reduce sexual rust and sexual activity. In the area a new religious sect thaai (that later metamorphosed into Mungiki) that emerged in the 1930s advocated for a return to the African tradition arguing that female circumcision would make women to be faithful and prevent prostitution. The followers of AICs took up the church teachings without question. The church teachings were in tandem with the principles of the African nationalist. They failed to consider the health dangers associated with female circumcision.

The female circumcision controversy had far reaching consequences on the issue of national security and peoples freedom. On one hand the Kikuyu converts wished to exercise religious freedom free from any conditions. On the other hand the colonial government had

⁷⁶Nthamburi, p.18.

⁷⁷ Wanjiru, O.I. 13/4/2017

⁷⁸ Ahlberg *et al.*, Pg, 42

become very oppressive to the natives and ripe for resistance. The controversy was thus an expression for religious and political freedom and as a way of resisting oppression by the colonialists. In some instances violence was adopted to enforce compliance among Africans and at times to punish the Europeans. Some of the AICs that emerged exhibited a characteristic militant approach. The *Thaai* sect, which started in 1931, provides a good example of AICs with a near militant approach. This sect enforced female circumcision practice on all Kikuyu women and elicited great fear among community. It forcefully administered traditional beer and tobacco in an effort to reclaim cultural identity.. In the 1980, the *Thaai* sect resurfaced but under a new tag, *Mungiki*. It advocated for the forceful execution of female circumcision on all women and sought to have the community revert to its traditional culture .The group was outlawed in 2000 as its activities were seen as a threat to national security. The group was responsible for the resurgence of incidences of female circumcision in the 1980s.

The government position was clearly illustrated by its attitude towards Dr Arthur, the member representing native interests on Executive Council. Dr Arthur was made to resign from the executive council in November 1929 when the government took the view that the impression he created among natives, that in advocating for the total prohibition of female circumcision, he was acting as the emissary of Government. It therefore considered that he should dissociate himself from Government. In so doing it sought to disassociate itself from the activities of the missionaries. The policy of the government was not to attempt complete prohibition, but to endeavour to get the people to see the evils of the operation, particularly in its severest form. According to this report any attempt at total suppression would be bitterly resisted and the ceremony, probably in an increasingly severe form, would continue to be carried out in secret ⁷⁹. The government decision not to antagonize the locals was only meant to serve their selfish interest. Political agitation by locals had started taking shape from the early 1920s and they wished not to antagonize them further.

The female circumcision controversy was a manifestation of opposition to ecclesiastical authority. During the period from 1923 onwards, the Missions experienced difficulties in their

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 66

work as a result of subversive activities of the Young Kikuyu Association.⁸⁰ It was rumoured that missionaries were government spies and that out-schools' sites were placed strategically prior to the Missions selling the lands to European settlers⁸¹. It was now evident that the missionaries and the imperialist were viewed by the Africans as the two sides of the same coin. African Nationalists therefore sought to reject missionary work with the same vigour as they rejected the colonial administration. KCA laid special emphasis on female circumcision and demanded compliance with the custom on the part of every Gikuyu girl⁸².

5. Conclusion

It can be concluded that the 1929 female circumcision crisis was an expression of a desire by the Africans towards freedom and self determination .They desired both religious and political freedom. Africans desired to practice a religion that also took into consideration their culture and preserved their identity. This explains the genesis of the AICs. Freedom fighters therefore capitalised on this situation to gain political mileage. While the missionaries condemned the practice as evil, they lacked religious basis to condemn it and only used medical grounds to fight the rite. This failed to satisfy the African concerns for according to them circumcision regardless of whether male or female was sanctioned in the Holy Book. The AICs sought to establish a religion that would accommodate their culture. The female circumcision question was therefore used to express their resistance to colonialism. Kenyatta and other freedom fighters took advantage of the situation to advance their cause for political freedom.

It can be concluded that neither the missionary nor the Africans had female circumcision itself at heart during the controversy. Female circumcision was consequently not dealt with decisively. Though the practice has greatly diminished among the Gikuyu it remains prevalent among other tribes like the Kisii and the Maasai. To eliminate female circumcision it is important to look at its medical and health implications. Treating it as a religious or political issue this may only serve to escalate the issue, at times, only serving to send it underground .While Arthur had sound medical reasons in opposing female circumcision his use of religion to fight female

⁸⁰ CSM, p. 28

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 29

⁸² Ibid, p. 31

circumcision was counterproductive. Kenyatta on the other hand used the rite as a political tool to fight colonialism. The church and the government however both have an important role to play in the eradication of female circumcision. The history of female circumcision in Kenya therefore provides vital lessons in the fight against the rite that has continued to be prevalent in some Kenyan communities like the Kisii and the Maasai.

The opinion of traditional Gikuyu people on female circumcision was mainly shaped by their loyalty to tradition. Uncircumcised girls were often ostracized. The possibility of one family member contradicting tradition, it was feared, could spread to the entire extended family. By getting circumcised the person was accepted by her social group (age set). In the traditional Gikuyu community female circumcision was seen as essential initiation to adulthood⁸³. During the ceremony and recuperation, the girls were instructed on how to take care of their future husband and resultant family. The teaching focused on girls becoming women through considering circumcision as a requirement to enter the marriage institution. Marriage and producing children in most traditional communities was a very important responsibility for women and in this case the girl had to get circumcised to get married.

Female circumcision was believed to impair desire for women to have sex as it made it painful and removed pleasure. With female circumcision, it was assumed, a woman would remain faithful to her husband. It was believed that it also ensured less early pregnancies among the teenagers. Female circumcision was based on medical misinformation. There was a misconception that with female circumcision the process of giving birth would be easy and that she could even do it on her own.

The campaign against female circumcision is a good example of forced culture change. The missionaries, the settlers and the colonial administrators tried to use every form of authority available to them to force the Gikuyu to change the basic values which were enshrined in the initiation rite. This was the reason why the change was greatly resisted. Change had to be gradual and not drastic. The study has established that female circumcision was a socially accepted norm and deviation could not be tolerated. Members of the community therefore had a significant

⁸³ Cagnolo, p. 85

influence on the continuation/discontinuation of this rite.

The Gikuyu society was hierarchical in nature⁸⁴. In order for the individual to be part of this hierarchy, he or she had to go through the rite of initiation. After initiation, people qualified to move up the ladder along the hierarchical structure of the Gikuyu society. After initiation the girl could qualify to be married⁸⁵ and have her own plot of land to cultivate; she qualified to be a member of the council of women after paying the necessary fees and she could participate in public religious ceremonies after she had reached the appropriate age. Empowering women and girls by giving them access to education and employment, this has played a tremendous role in the fight against female circumcision.

A compelling reason for continuation of female circumcision was social stigma for the uncircumcised girls. Female circumcision was deeply entrenched in tradition and passed on from generation to generation. In combating female circumcision there is need for a participatory approach that would engage all, both male and female and people of all ages for change of behaviour to be realised. Improved knowledge would modify attitude and behaviour among members of the community to embrace measures towards end to female circumcision.

6. Recommendations

This study on female circumcision controversy among the Gikuyu of Central Kenya has established the underlying factors responsible for this controversy between 1929 and 1931. On the basis of the findings generated the study makes the following recommendations. First, more research needs to be done in the field of female circumcision among other tribes in the country. There is also need to evaluate the role of ARP as an intervention to encourage the abandonment of female circumcision among other tribes in the country.

⁸⁴ Muriuki, p. 110-135

⁸⁵ Kenyatta, p. 127

References

Primary Sources

Archival Documents

KNA/MKS/OB/13/1/ Diocese of Mombasa North Highlands Deanery to DC Kiambu February 2nd 1951

Secondary Sources

Ahlberg, M., Njau, W., Kiiru, K. and Krantz, I. (2000). Gender masked or self inflicted pain: female circumcision, eradication and persistence in Central Kenya. *African Sociological Review*, Vol. 4, No. 1 pp. 35-54

Audrey, W. (1989). Kikuyu Women and Harry Thuku Disturbance; Some Uniformities of Female Militancy. Retrieved November 20th, 2017 from <http://www.jstor.org>

Boulanger, S (2008). *A puppet on a string: The manipulation and nationalization of the female body in the female circumcision crisis of colonial Kenya*. Retrieved November 20th, 2015 from <http://www.journals.cortland.edu>

Cagnolo, C.I.M.C. (2006). *The Agikuyu: Their customs, traditions and folklore*, ed. Fr. H. Wambugu, J. M. Ngarariga and P. M. Kariuki, Nairobi: Wisdom Graphics Place.

CSM, (1931). *Memorandum Prepared by the Kikuyu Mission Council on Female Circumcision* Nairobi

Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education*. London: Routledge Falmer

Joshua, M. S. (2008). *The Church and the 1929 Female Genital Mutilation Contestation in Kenya, with special reference to the Scottish Presbyterian Church and the Kikuyu community*. Retrieved January 25th, 2017 from <http://pdfs.semanticscholar.org>

Kanogo T. (1987). *Squatters and the roots of Mau Mau 1905-1963*, Nairobi: East Africa Publishers,

Kathuri, N.J. & D.A Pals (1993). *Introduction to educational research*. Njoro, Kenya: Egerton University Press.

Kenyatta, J. (1978). *Facing mount Kenya: The traditional life of the Gikuyu*. Nairobi: Heinemann Kenya.

- Kiwanuka, S. (1973). *From colonialism to Independence ; A Reappraisal of Colonial Policies and African Reaction* Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.
- Kombo, K. D. and Tromp, L. A. D. (2006). Proposal and Thesis Writing: An Introduction. Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa.
- Leakey, L.S.B., *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903; Volume 1*. London: Academic Press
- Lynn, M. T. (1998). Imperial concerns and women's affairs': State efforts to regulate clitoridectomy and eradicate abortion in meru, kenya, 1910-1950, *The journal of African History*, Vol.39, 01 121-145.
- Mervyn, W. H. B. (1918). Kikuyu system of land tenure. *African affairs*, Vol. XVII, Issue LXVI. Retrieved January 5th, 2018 from <http://www.jstor.org>
- Muriuki, G. (1974). *A history of the Kikuyu 1500-1900*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.
- Murray, J. (1974). The Kikuyu female circumcision controversy, with special reference to the Church Missionary Society's sphere of influence. PhD dissertation. Los Angeles: UCLA, UMI Library.
- Nthamburi, Z. (1991). *From mission to church: a Handbook of Christianity in East Africa*. Nairobi: Uzima Press.
- Pendersen, S. (1991). *National Bodies, Unspeakable Acts: The sexual Politics of Colonial Policy Making*, The Journal of Modern History, Volume 63, Issue 4, 1991, p. 647-689. Retrieved January 25th, 2017 from <http://www.jstor.org>
- Shama, B.A. (1983). *Research methods in social sciences*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Limited.
- Tammary, E., Steven, V. W, & Paul, E. (2011). The socio-cultural symbolic nexus in the perpetuation of female genital cutting: a critical review of existing discourse. *Journal of Afrika Focus* vol 24, (2) page 54. Retrieved January 15th, 2017 from <http://lirias.kuleuven.be/>
- Trench, C. C. (1993) *Men Who Ruled Kenya: The Kenya Administration, 1892-1963*. London: I.B. Tauris & Company Limited.
- Wanjiru, K. (1977). The Role of the Agikuyu Traditional Customs, Beliefs, and Practices, and the Teachings of the Missionaries in the Development of Independent Movement among the Agikuyu with particular reference to the Gospel Missionary Society in Githunguri Division, 1902-1952. Nairobi: Kenyatta University College.

APPENDIX I
LIST OF INFORMANTS

S. No.	NAME	RESIDENCE	AGE IN YEARS	INTERVIEW DATE
1	John Kamunya	Laikipia		9/7/2017
2	Teresia Wanjiru Njoroge	Nyandarua		13/7/2017
3	Michael Mugo	Kiambu		4/07/2017
4	Johnson H. Muigana	Laikipia		4/7/2017
5	Esther Wambui Macharia	Nyandarua		13/7/2017
6	Joyce Njeri	Muranga		15/7/ 2017
7	Joseph Maina	Nyandarua		13/07/2017
8	Loise Wanjiku Wandung'u	Nyandarua		13/7/2017
9	Sammy Kahuthu	Nyandarua		13/7/2017
10	Beatrice Wanjiru Ndegwa	Nyandarua		13/7/2017

APPENDIX II

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

GUIDING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR RESPONDENTS

NAME.....SEX(M/F)

OCCUPATION:.....

PLACE OF RESIDENCE:.....DATE OF INTERVIEW:.....

A Sample questions to be administered to informants during data collection?

- 1 Was there a cultural or religious basis for female circumcision?
- 2 What were the perceived benefits/advantages of female circumcision to the community, the family and to the girl initiate? - focus on female socialization.

3 Are you aware of any problems associated with female circumcision (nature of the problem(s), consequences, - focus on social impact and avoid detail on medical complications)?

4 In your view has there been change in this community regarding attitudes and practices related to female circumcision?

5 Are there any changes in the female circumcision ceremony with regard to the aspects listed below;

- Time (or season) when it takes place and number of girls involved?
- Type of circumcision undertaken?
- Age of girls circumcised?
- Decision-making power (the girl, mother, father, other relatives or clan)?
- Level of secrecy/knowledge of girls prior to circumcision?
- Implication for a girl failing to comply?
- Persons responsible for passing on their education/information?
- Gifts provided to initiates?
- Rights, duties and social expectations of the initiates?
- People who perform female circumcision?

6 What factors have brought about changes or encouraged resistance to change?

- Christianity/church/voice of the church
- Education-school-literacy in family
- Specific anti-FGM programs implemented by government/NGOs
- Campaign by key personalities in the community eg women leaders,local administration
- Media campaigns and coverage
- Intermarriage with groups who do not practice female circumcision.
- Women's empowerment
- Urbanisation
- Illegal status of female circumcision/ government legislation
- introduction of alternative rites of passage?
- Medicalisation of female circumcision?

7 How effective are laws in reducing the practice of female circumcision?

8 Are you aware of any prosecution nationally; locally?