

THE MERU RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND
PRACTICES WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE
TO THEIR SACRIFICIAL RITES: A CASE
STUDY OF THE ISEMBE SUB-ETHNIC GROUP

By

JANE NJERI CHEGE (MRS)

THIS THESIS HAS BEEN APPROVED FOR
THE DEGREE OF M.A. BY
AND A COPY MAY BE
UNIVERSITY LIBRARY.

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI
LIBRARY

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN
THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

November, 1985

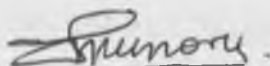
UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI LIBRARY



0100457 1

D E C L A R A T I O N

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



Jane Njeri Chege

This thesis has been submitted for
examination with our approval as
University supervisors

PROFESSOR SAMUEL KIBICHO

Signed

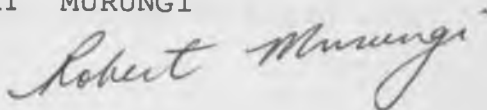


Date

29/10/85

PROFESSOR ROBERT MURUNGI

Signed




Date

26/11/85

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

My deep and sincere thanks go to my supervisors, Professor Samuel Kibicho and Professor Robert Murungi for their untiring counsel, constructive criticism, patient supervision and understanding. I am also deeply indebted to all my informants and all other persons who assisted me in one way or another in my field study. In particular, I cannot forget the help and co-operation I received from my informants Joseph M'Tuaruchiu and M'Lithara Kamanja and the Chiefs of Njia, Mutuati and Akachiu locations. My deep appreciation and gratitude also go to my husband Chege for his untiring encouragement, understanding and concern. His persistent challenge gave me the spirit to struggle on and work harder.



<u>TABLE OF CONTENTS</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Declaration	ii
Acknowledgement	iii
Abstract	ix
 <u>CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.</u>	
(a) Background information on the Igembe	1
(b) The objectives and significance of the study	3
(c) Literature Review	7
(d) Methodology	15
(e) Research problems experienced	19
(f) Definition of some of the terms used	23
 <u>CHAPTER II: INTRODUCTION TO SOME MAJOR FEATURES OF IGEMBE RELIGION</u>	
(a) Salient features of Igembe religion	38
(b) Belief in God and Spirits	39
(c) Rites of passage	40
(d) Judicial-political rites	50
(e) Religious specialists	67
 <u>CHAPTER III: GENERAL FEATURES IN IGEMBE SACRIFICIAL RITES AND CEREMONIES</u>	
(a) The notion of sacrifice	73
(b) Animals and materials of	104

<u>CHAPTER III ..Cont.</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
(c) Officiants and participants in sacrificial ceremonies	119
<u>(d)</u> Sex and its significance in sacrificial rites	125
(e) Places where sacrificial rites were carried out	131
<u>CHAPTER IV: SACRIFICIAL RITES RELATED TO</u> THE RITES OF PASSAGE	145
(a) Sacrificial rites related to birth	145
<u>(b)</u> Sacrificial rites related to circumcision	169
(c) Sacrificial rites related to marriage	189
* <u>(d)</u> Sacrificial rites related to death	196
<u>CHAPTER V: OTHER TYPES OF SACRIFICIAL RITES</u>	209
(a) Sacrifices offered directly to God	209
(i) Sacrificial rites related to "Kwona Ngai" (To See God)	209
(ii) Sacrificial rite when a person drowned or fell in water	217
<u>(iii)</u> Sacrifice for rain	220
(iv) Planting sacrifice	227
(v) Sacrifice to protect food from insects	229

	<u>PAGE</u>
<u>CHAPTER V: ..Cont.</u>	
(vi) Havest sacrifice	234
(vii) Sacrifice for prevention of epidemic (<u>Kuingira Murimu na Ngeere</u>)	235
(viii) Sacrificial rite when there was an epidemic affecting oniy children (<u>Kuendia ana rujiine</u>)	238
(ix) sacrificial rite when there was an epidemic affecting the whole community	242
(x) Sacrificial ceremony to protect the community from enemy attack. (<u>Kuingira maitha</u>)	247
(xi) Sacrificial rite after desecration of of a shrine	249
(b) (b) Sacrifices offered to Spirits (<u>nkoma</u>)	252
(i) sacrifices to spirits of the ancestors	252
(ii) sacrifices to other categories of spirits	254
<u>CONCLUSION</u>	262
BIBLIOGRAPHY	277
ORAL INFORMANTS	290

	<u>PAGE</u>
GLOSSARY	297
APPENDIX i - Botanical names	303
APPENDIX II - A communal prayer offered to God in Igembe	305
APPENDIX III - Questionnaire	306
APPENDIX IV - More information on main Informants	315
 <u>MAP</u>	
1. Map of Igembe division	316

ILLUSTRATIONS.

1. Entrance to Iombe Shrine: Dwelling huts for the people who work at the Soda ash and Salt Lick Industry
2. Entrance to Iombe Shrine: Place where Cow dung and milk were smeared on the rocky walls by all those going to perform a religious ritual.
3. Inside Iombe Shrine: The place where pieces of skin of the Sacrificial animal were hung.
4. Inside Iombe shrine: At the bottom of the rocky basin where salt lick and soda ash were/are found.

A B S T R A C T

The main aim of this study is to investigate the Igembe religious beliefs and practices with particular emphasis on the Igembe sacrificial rites and ceremonies. Igembe religion is part and parcel of their whole cultural life. Therefore, relevant aspects of the Igembe culture particularly those that give us a background to the understanding of the Igembe sacrificial rites and ceremonies have been described.

Chapter II examines some of these relevant major features of the Igembe religion trying to show how they are related to the Igembe sacrificial rites and ceremonies. Features such as belief in God and Spirits, rites of passage, Judicial-political rites and religious specialists have been briefly described. The study has shown that the Igembe sacrificial rites and ceremonies penetrate into the social and judicial-political life of the people.

Chapter III has described and critically analyzed some general features in Igembe sacrificial rites and ceremonies. While discussing the notion of sacrifice among the Igembe, the chapter addresses itself to the question of whether the Igembe worshipped their ancestors because they offered prayers and sacrifices to them. One unique finding in this chapter as regards the notion of sacrifice among the Igembe is that the animal or

material of sacrifice did not necessarily have to be killed or destroyed in order for it to constitute a sacrifice. Anything which was presented to God for a particular purpose was regarded as a sacrifice. Thus, the presentation of a child to God during a sacrificial rite was regarded as part of the sacrifice.

The qualifications of officiants and participants in sacrificial rites and ceremonies among the Igembe are also examined in chapter III. The symbolic meaning of the animals and materials used in Igembe sacrificial rites have also been analyzed. The places where the sacrificial rites and ceremonies were carried out and the meaning and importance attached to them have also been described and analysed. Another important finding in this chapter is that natural phenomena such as mountains, hills, lakes, rivers, geographical depressions and big rocks were looked at as manifestations of the power of God. They therefore, occupied an important place in relation to communal sacrificial rites and ceremonies.

Chapter IV describes and analyses the meaning and purpose of all the sacrificial rites and ceremonies which accompanied all the important rites of passage in an individual's life-span, namely; birth, circumcision marriage and death. The study has shown that although these were important social rites, they were also religious rites. Prayers and sacrifices accompanied them.

The Igembe felt that for those important social rites to be successful and effective they had to get the blessings of God and the spirits of the ancestors.

Chapter V examines other sacrificial rites and ceremonies which are not related to the rites of passage. It first examines the sacrificial rites which were offered directly to God and then examines those that were offered to spirits. We learn a lot about the Igembe concept of God and spirits and their interpretation of nature in this chapter. All communal sacrificial rites were directed to God who was looked at as the Supreme power controlling the world, and as the Dispenser of blessings. Most family sacrificial rites were directed to the spirits of the ancestors in their capacity as the invisible members of their respective families and custodians of the morals and customs of the community. One important finding in this chapter is that the Igembe gave a religious interpretation to forces of nature. Therefore, natural happenings related to forces of nature, such as thunder, lightning and rain, draught and floods, were looked at as being directly under God's control. Thus there were sacrificial rites (directed to God) related to these happenings.

In the conclusion, the important findings of the study have been highlighted. One such finding is that in relation to the meaning and purpose of sacrifice among the Igembe, the central idea in all but one of the sacrificial rites is communion with God or with the spirits of the ancestors. However, every sacrificial rite had its particular purpose and meaning and such ideas as propitiation, substitution, thanks-giving and prevention are to be found in different Igembe sacrificial rites and ceremonies.

One finding which I regard as unique in this study is in relation to the important role that sexual intercourse played in Igembe sacrificial rites and ceremonies. A lot of significance and meaning was attached to sexual intercourse because of the central role ^{it} in plays in reproduction. There were obligatory ritual sexual contacts for some people and obligatory abstention for others related to the different sacrificial rites and ceremonies.

C H A P T E R I

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE IGEMBE

This study is based on the Igembe sub-ethnic group. The Igembe are one of the nine sub-ethnic groups that form the Meru ethnic group. The Igembe live in the Igembe division of Meru district. The nine sub-ethnic groups of the Meru are: Igembe, Tigania, Imenti, Igoji, Miutini, Muthambi, Mwimbi, Chuka and Tharaka. Although these sub-ethnic groups are related, each has a slightly different traditional culture and dialect. The Meru speak a language called Kimeru and the Igembe speak a Kimeru dialect called Kiiembe.

^ The Meru live in the Eastern Province of Kenya, in the area adjoining Mt. Kenya and extending to the north eastern slopes of Mount Kenya. The Igembe live on the northern-most section of Meru district. Igembe division lies between latitude 0° and 0.17° N. and between longitude 37.8° and 38.3° E!¹ To the North and East, the Igembe division borders Isiolo district which is occupied by the Borana. To the South, it borders Tharaka and to the West the Tigania, both sub-ethnic groups of the Meru.

The Igembe division is situated at an altitude of between 500 and 2,500 meters above sea level, the highest area being the Nyambene hills which are

located on the north western part of the division. It has an annual mean temperature of about 24°C^2 .

There are two rainy seasons in this division, the long rains falling from March to May and the short rains from October to December. The Igembe are predominantly subsistence farmers. In areas of higher altitude where there is adequate and reliable rainfall, tea, coffee, maize and beans, are grown. In addition to maize and beans, cotton is grown in the areas of low altitude which do not get very heavy rainfall.

According to the 1979 census, the Igembe number 171,597 and have a population density of about 66 per square kilometre. The lower areas of the division are sparsely populated with an average density of less than 6 per square kilometre.³ However, this is one of the places where the wild-life population is high and the Meru National Park is situated there.

Administratively, Igembe division is divided into seven locations namely: Maua, Akachiu Mutuati, Ithima, Njia and the newly created locations of Kiegoi and Antubetwe Kiongo. Maua Urban centre is the administrative centre of the division.

THE OBJECTIVES AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study is to describe the different sacrificial rites among the traditional Igembe people and to analyse the nature, function and meaning of these sacrificial rites. The study will investigate how the different types of sacrifices were carried out, to whom they were offered, what was offered and the purpose of each sacrificial rite.

Many of the beliefs and practices that we deal with in this study are not held by all the contemporary members of Igembe community. One might ask the question why one should study religious beliefs and practices that are not strictly adhered to by all the contemporary members of the Igembe community. There are three important reasons for this study.

First, the study preserves in writing some of the Igembe traditional beliefs and practices for the sake of the uninformed young generation and the future generations. Like other ethnic groups in Kenya, the Igembe people have been exposed to other foreign cultures and religious beliefs and practices. Part of the effect of this exposure has been the 'conditioning' of the Igembe peoples (just like other African peoples) into despising and forgetting their traditional culture and slavish aping of

these other foreign cultures and religious beliefs and practices⁴. As result of this, the Igembe traditional beliefs and practices are slowly fading away. It is therefore important to study these traditional beliefs and practices from the members of the older generation who are well informed before they all pass away from the face of the earth.

The second reason is that there is need to be correctly informed about African peoples' beliefs and practices. This is very important in the light of the old and still prevalent biased attitude of many contemporary Africans towards their traditional religions. Many contemporary Africans for instance, have been taught to believe that Africans had no knowledge of God prior to the coming of the white-man and that they worshipped idols or their ancestors and that they were animists.⁵ This study will help to correct such wrong views in relation to the Igembe beliefs and practices.

Third, the writer hopes that this study will contribute to the on-going effort by African scholars to present the African beliefs and practices as objectively as possible. This is because African religions have been misunderstood and misrepresented by some scholars.⁶ As Parrinder has correctly warned us, "It is probably true to say that African religion has been more misunderstood and has suffered more at the hands of the early writers than any other

part of African life. Unhappily old misconceptions linger with us still"⁷

A brief look at the different phases through which the study of African religion has gone will confirm the point that African religions have been misinterpreted and misunderstood. The study of African traditional religions can be divided into two general phases. The first phase is represented by the 19th Century western anthropologists and early travellers and missionaries who came to Africa .

Anthropologists like Tylor, Spencer, Marret, Otto, Frazer and Durkheim⁸ coined terms like totemism, ancestor worship, animism, animatism terms that they used to describe the so called "primitive religions". These terms as Mbiti points out are "inadequate, derogatory and prejudicial"⁹.

The early travellers and missionaries to Africa were anxious to prove the superiority of Christianity. Most of them particularly the travellers never spent much time to study scientifically the religion of the peoples about whom they wrote. As Benjamin Ray points out "usually based on inaccurate information and cultural prejudice, early travellers' accounts made African religions appear to be a morass of bizarre beliefs and practices."¹⁰.

The second phase is represented by African scholars and some modern western anthropologists. These scholars have reacted against the above earlier negativism towards African religions. They have called for a re-evaluation of what the earlier writers had written and a scientific approach towards African religions.

Although the African scholars like Danquah, Mbiti, Sawyerr, Idowu and Kenyatta have made important contributions to the study of African religions, they have been criticized for having studied African religions with a Christian influence¹¹. Okot p'Bitek who has been very critical of these other African scholars' christian influence has been criticized for over-reacting and rejecting views and concepts which are truly African simply because they resemble Christian concepts.¹²

It is the hope of this writer that noting the above pitfalls in the study of African traditional religions, this study on the "Igembe religious beliefs and practices, with particular reference to their sacrificial rites", will be as objective as possible.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

There is not much that has been written on the traditional Meru culture and religious beliefs and practices. Particularly on the Igembe sub-ethnic group, the literature is very scarce. Very few works are relevant to the subject of sacrifice. However, we can get a few points here and there on beliefs and practices related to sacrifice even in other works which do not deal with the subject of sacrifice. The works this writer has found useful on the subject of sacrifice are studies by J.N. Baikiao, E. Njiru, W.H. Laughton, B.I.M.C. Bernardi and Daniel Nyaga.

In an attempt to show how Christianity can be indigenized in order for it to be relevant and have meaning to its believers and practioners, Baikiao¹³ has carried out a detailed study of some Meru traditional beliefs and practices. Basing his study on oral information from Meru, Baikiao has raised important points related to the topic of sacrifice particularly in relation to the meaning of the names of God and the significance of the sacred places.

In his study of indigenous education in Meru Njiru¹⁴ has also dealt with some religious aspects of traditional Meru Community. His description of the different religious rites that accompanied

the circumcision ceremony gives us some insights into the sacrificial rites that were related to the circumcision ceremony. One of the major weaknesses of Njiru's work is that he seems to be very much influenced by the Bible stories (or his informants were influenced by christianity) such that he is at pains to relate the Meru to the Israelites and Egyptians. He does not give proper documentation or a representative sample of the informants who gave him the information from which he drew some important conclusions. For example, at one point, Njiru points out that the Meru borrowed the art of circumcision from the Egyptians "who had adopted the practice from Abraham the father of mankind"¹⁵. The traditional Meru never regarded Abraham as the father of mankind.

Laughton¹⁶ has written a brief account of the Meru rites of passage and social organization. He raises useful ideas in his treatment of the Meru religious beliefs. However, his work is characterized by biases as he draws erroneous conclusions without giving us the Meru practices that make him come to such conclusions. This comes out very clearly in his treatment of the Meru concept of God where he states that the Meru view God as "a power principle" and an "impersonal reality"¹⁷.

Bernadi¹⁸ has studied the nature and functions of the Mugwe in Meru community and has clearly shown that, the functions and beliefs associated with the Mugwe and his office vary from one sub-ethnic group to another. He has actually carried out research in relation to Mugwe in all the Meru sub-ethnic groups. His work has been found very useful for the present study in view of the fact that the Mugwe occupied a very central role in some sacrificial rites in Igembe traditional community.

In his unpublished Kimeru manuscript "Mikarire na mituurire ya Amiru" (Traditions and customs of the Meru), Nyaga¹⁹ describes some important religious beliefs and practices that surrounded the Meru rites of passage.

A number of other scholars have carried out studies on one aspect or another of the Meru traditional culture. The writer found these to be less useful. Mary Holdings²⁰ has carried out a study of the traditional institutions of both men and women in Meru. In his Kiswahili manuscript "Asili ya Wameru na Tabia zao", Filipi M'Inoti²¹ has given an account of the origin and customs of the Meru. In his study dealing with Agriculture

in Meru, F.E. Bernard²² has touched on some cultural aspects of pre-colonial Meru. H.E. Lambert who was a colonial administrator in Meru carried out a study of the indigenous authorities in Meru trying to show how these could be used in the colonial administrative system²³.

All the above works deal with the whole of Meru ethnic group. The main weakness of these works that deal with the whole of Meru ethnic group is that, the writers (except Bernardi) have not carried out thorough research among all the Meru sub-ethnic groups. As a result, some of the conclusions they come up with are only valid to the particular sub-ethnic group or groups among whom they carried out their research. Yet they have presented such conclusions as applying to the whole of Meru.

Studies on various cultural aspects of particular sub-ethnic groups in Meru have been carried out by G.St.J.Orde-Brown, H.L.C. Gurney, J.W.W. Champion, E.R. Shackleton, J. Mahner, H.S.K. Mwaniki and Lowenthal Richard. Orde-Brown has written a brief study of the pre-colonial history of the Chuka, whom he regards as remnants of Bushmen and Hottentont Stock,²⁴. He has also given us a brief description of the circumcision ceremonies among the Chuka²⁵ and Mwimbi,²⁶. Gurney has given a brief account of the religion of the Mwimbi and an account of their migration and settlement in their present homeland²⁷.

Champion²⁸ has written a brief account of the history and culture of the pre-colonial Tharaka while Shackleton²⁹ looks at the Atharaka relationship with an extinct group of people whom he calls the Njuwe and who he says were absorbed by the Tharaka through intermarriage. Mahner³⁰ has written a preliminary research paper on some pre-colonial history and cultural aspects of the Tigania. Mwaniki³¹ has made a detailed study of the history of the pre-colonial Chuka. He looks at their myths and accounts of origin migration and settlement and their relationship with their neighbours. Lowenthal³² has studied the age-organization of the Tharaka.

Basing his study on Nithi division of Meru, Greeley Edward³³ has described and analysed the traditional factors that have contributed to the acceptability of family planning among the Meru of Nithi division. He analyses the indigenous system of child rearing and spacing and the limitations of family size as they were maintained through some religious beliefs, norms and values. These included taboos and the value and pride of a large family and the practice of polygamy. Bernard K. Njeru,³⁴ basing his study on the Igoji sub-ethnic group and Salome P.K. Mwabia³⁵ basing her study on the whole of Meru ethnic group have also studied the traditional beliefs and practices that helped to maintain low levels of overall birth rates.

Detailed studies related to the pre-colonial military systems of the Meru have been carried out by J.A. Fadiman and Mwaniki. Fadiman has based his study on the sub-ethnic groups that live on the north eastern slopes of Mount Kenya namely: Chuka, Muthambi, Miutini, Igoji, Mwimbi and Imenti. He shows how ecological factors and pre-colonial religious beliefs and practices affected their traditional warfare.³⁶ Basing his study on the Chuka sub-ethnic group, Mwaniki has some useful information on their warfare. He looks at their offensive and defensive systems and the impact of these on the society.³⁷ In his study of the Embu and Mbeere, Mwaniki has touched on the relationship of these groups with the pre-colonial Chuka.³⁸

Wider works dealing with other ethnic groups in Kenya and touching on some aspects of pre-colonial Meru culture have been carried out by Lambert, Orde-Brown and John Middleton. In his wider study of the Kikuyu, Embu, Kamba and Meru, Lambert has touched on social and political functions of the Meru age-organizations in his book, Kikuyu Social and Political Institutions³⁹. He also deals with aspects of Meru Culture in his book, The Systems of Land Tenure in Kikuyu Land Unit⁴⁰ and also in a collection of his private papers⁴¹ in the University of Nairobi Library.

In his wider work dealing with the central tribes of North Eastern Bantu, Middleton⁴² has a small section dealing with the political and social organization of the Meru. In his The Vanishing Tribes of Kenya⁴³, Orde-Brown looks at the pre-colonial cultural aspects of the Chuka, Igoji, Miutini, Muthambi, Tharaka, Mbeere, Embu, Gichugu and Ndia whom he treats as the "vanishing tribes".

The topic that seems to have generated a lot of debate and study among scholars is that relating to the origin, migration and settlement of the Meru of Kenya. We are not going into the details of the debate because that is outside our scope of study. Let it suffice here to note that scholars like, C.W. Hobley⁴⁴, E.B. Horne⁴⁵, Lambert⁴⁶, G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville⁴⁷, B. MacIntosh⁴⁸, J.A. Fadiman⁴⁹, J.F. Munro⁵⁰, Charles William Hobley⁵¹, H.L.C. Gurney⁵², W.R. Ochieng⁵³, E. Njiru⁵⁴, and A.M. M'Imanyara⁵⁵ have all addressed themselves to this issue.

Besides the above works, on the Meru, there are a number of unpublished research papers written by undergraduate students and based on one aspect or another of the Meru sub-ethnic groups in the University of Nairobi, Religious Studies Departmental archives. Joseph Kinyua⁵⁶ has written on the history of the Njuri in Meru. Mboroki⁵⁷ looks at the relationship between the Tigania, Imenti and

the Maasai in pre-colonial days. Studies of traditional Meru marriage, courtship and divorce have been carried out by Anon,⁵⁸ Rosemary Kinoti⁵⁹, Kubbrai⁶⁰ and J.M. Njau⁶¹. Initiation ceremonies among the Igembe and Tigania have been studied by Gabriel Kobia⁶² and Thiane Aruyaru⁶³ respectively. Muthuri⁶⁴ has a paper on Meru death rites while Florence Mukindia⁶⁵ has looked at how the nthenge oath was administered among the Tigania. J.G. Muriungi⁶⁶ has a paper dealing with a prophetess in Meru.

There are other papers presented in the department of Philosophy and Religious Studies in Makerere University, dealing with one aspect or another of the Meru traditional culture. P.C.P.Mbero⁶⁷ has written a paper on sacrifice among the Meru. Traditional Meru marriage customs have been studied by S. Mwithiha⁶⁸ and M. Muturi⁶⁹. J.M. Njau has two papers, one dealing with the Meru death rite⁷⁰, and the other dealing with Meru prayers, sacrifices and rituals⁷¹. In his analysis of the background that led to the formation of the African Church of the Holy spirit, in Meru L.Ndege⁷² has touched on the traditional religious beliefs and practices of the Meru. W. Muthuri⁷³ has also given us some useful information on some Meru traditional customs in his analysis of the use of alcohol among the Meru in traditional and modern societies.

In the interpretation of the nature, meaning, and purpose of sacrifices in Igembe community, this writer found the works of John Mbiti, E.E. Evans-Pritchard, J.O. Awolalu, Jomo Kenyatta and Harry Sawyerr quite useful, although they are not based on the Meru. Mbiti⁷⁴ has analysed the general purpose of sacrifice and has also raised the different theories that have been propounded by scholars on sacrifice. Awolalu⁷⁵ has analysed the nature, function and meaning of sacrifice among the Yoruba. He has also discussed the theories of scholars like E.O. James, E.B. Tylor, Van der Leeuw, F.B. Jevons and E.A Westermorck on the meaning and purpose of sacrifice in general.

Evans-Pritchard⁷⁶ has analysed the nature and meaning of sacrifice among the Nuer. In his book, Theories of Primitive Religion,⁷⁷ he has also highlighted Roberston Smith's theory of the nature and meaning of sacrifice among the primitive Aborigines of Australia. Jomo Kenyatta's⁷⁸ ideas on Gikuyu sacrifice and Harry Sawyerr's⁷⁹ ideas on sacrifice in Africa have also been used in this study in an attempt to see how applicable they are to the Igembe case.

METHODOLOGY.

The study is mainly based on field research carried out among the Igembe sub-ethnic group.

The writer chose the Igembe area for study, because having lived among them for about sixteen years, she is well informed on the geography of the area, the culture and language of the people.

The writer conducted oral interviews with different persons in Igembe community. The interviews were carried out in Kimeru. The interviews were partly structured and partly unstructured. A questionnaire which had open ended questions was used. However the informants could discuss issues which did not strictly fall under questions contained in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was only used to guide the writer on the important points to look for during the interview. It was not sent out to people and no research assistants were used. Where there was no objection to tape-recording from an informant or group of informants the oral interviews were tape-recorded. Where there was an objection, the interviews were written down.

The field research was carried out during the months of February, March and April, 1982 and between April and August, 1983. During this period, the writer interviewed a total of fifty-four men and women in Igembe. Initially, the writer approached some individuals who acted as contact informants. In areas where the writer was not familiar with many people, she used the administrative officials like chiefs and assistant chiefs who arranged interviews with the elders and women in their areas. These are the elders and

women whom the administrative officials thought were most knowledgeable in the traditional culture of the Igembe.

Two methods of interviewing informants were used. In the first method, the writer interviewed people in groups of between two and six. This method had the advantage of guarding against misinterpretation or misrepresentation of ideas by one informant due to lack of knowledge on a particular subject under discussion or due to forgetfulness. There was also the advantage of noting individual informants who seemed to be more knowledgeable and more open than other informants in a particular group. These were interviewed separately later. These group interviews turned out to be lively discussions where informants argued out with one another over the subject under discussion reminding one another the points one had left out and trying to correct where one informant had gone wrong.

The group interview method however had one drawback. Since the Igembe have some information that they regard as secret depending on whom the information was being given to, the elders in group interviews were hesitant to give some information or discuss some issues for fear that the other elders would blame them for revealing

the 'secrets of the Meru'. This was particularly clear while discussing the issue of the Meru origin, migration and settlement where the elders feared that the researcher would write the details down and therefore reveal to the whole world the secrets of their migration and settlement. Though the elders were willing to tell the myth of origin of the Meru, they did not want the issue of the people they met on their migration route or the people they found in their present homeland discussed.

The second method, of interviewing individual informants, had the advantage of establishing a more cordial relationship between the researcher and the informant. Though there was the fear of revealing the 'secrets of the Meru, some individual elders were willing to give more details in some issues that the writer found difficult to get from group interviews.

The writer also got some information from informal discussions with some Igembe elders. The writer noted that some elders were more free, open and very willing to discuss their traditional culture in an informal way when they were not aware that the researcher was looking for the information for educational purposes. Particularly over a bottle of beer, some Igembe elders and young

persons would give a lot of information on their traditional culture. The disadvantage with this method is that the researcher would not get the names of all those who participated in the discussion and she would only pick the bits of information she found relevant to her study and the ones she would remember later.

The people mainly interviewed were old members (of both sexes) of the Igembe community who are better informed than the young on traditional Meru religion and culture. However, there are some issues that are known even by the young particularly in relation to the rites of passage since some of them underwent some of these rites in the traditional way. The advantage with the young people is that on matters about which they were knowledgeable they were willing to discuss issues freely without the inhibition found in the older ones when they talked to a young person. They were more understanding.

RESEARCH PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED.

One of the major problems that the researcher had to overcome was that of establishing an atmosphere free of suspicion. There was need clearly to inform the informants concerning the identity of the researcher and the aim of her research. Some elders suspected that I was not

sincere concerning the stated aims of my research. With some groups, particularly in areas where the researcher was not known, it was not possible to clear the air of suspicion and although they discussed some issues, they were not willing to give many details.

Suspicion on the part of some of the informants also made them reluctant to have their oral interviews tape-recorded. This made it a little difficult for the writer to register all the points raised in a discussion because she had to write and listen at the same time. However, after going through the written interviews later, the writer was able to identify those points which needed further clarification, and she arranged other interviews for this purpose.

The question of age and sex of the writer also presented a problem with some informants particularly the old male members of the community. In Igembe, there is some information that is not supposed to be divulged to women and worst of all to a young woman. Informants who regarded the researcher as their 'daughter' because they belonged to the same circumcision age group with the parents of the writer, could not discuss some issues particularly those related in any way to sex. Therefore, the writer had to be very careful in choosing the type of questions

to ask different informants. Those informants who regarded themselves as grandparents of the writer were free in discussing issue in relation to sex.

Another problem encountered was in relation to communication. Since the research was to cover the whole of the Igembe sub-ethnic group, the writer found it appropriate to interview informants from at least every location in Igembe division. This was in order to find out whether the beliefs and practices varied with the different locations. However, the means of communication to some locations is very poor as there are no public vehicles that go there. Therefore, the researcher had either to walk if the distance was not very long or hire a land rover.

The problem of getting interpretation of symbolism and the significance of some practices, objects, animals and plants was only partially overcome. Most elders could not tell reasons as to why some things were done the way they were done or why some beliefs were held. To them, all they knew was that, that is what their forefathers did and believed in. Only a few elders could give interpretation of the symbolism of some practices and reasons for holding some beliefs. In some cases, interpreting the symbolism would have meant the elders divulging the secrets they had

taken oaths never to divulge. Therefore, in some cases the elders would not give the meaning of the symbolism behind some practices even when they knew it.

There was also the problem of guarding against misinterpretation and mispresentation of ideas by some informants due to influence of other foreign religions and culture. It was important to know the background of an informant so that in areas where the writer felt that the particular informant was influenced by other foreign interpretations, she would check his views with other informants. Particularly in issues regarding belief in God and spirits, some informants would tell the writer what they thought would please her because they felt that being a Christian, she would not appreciate some of the Igembe traditional beliefs and practices. They would therefore, go ahead to give their own value judgements which were influenced by the biases that have been preached to the Christian converts in relation to traditional beliefs and practices. To avoid this problem, the writer explained to the informants clearly that she valued and respected the traditional beliefs and practices of the people and that, she was interested in getting the true picture of the traditional beliefs and practices.

DEFINITION OF SOME OF THE TERMS USED

The need to explain exactly what we mean by some of of the words used in this study arises because the translation of some Igembe concepts into English make them lose their exact meaning.

Mugiro - In this study, the term Mugiro has been translated to mean both taboo and ritual uncleanness. In using the word taboo, the writer simply refers to a ritual, ethical or social prohibition. Mugiro as taboo can be defined as a social, ethical or ritual prohibition, the breach of which was believed to bring a state of ill-health or ill-fortune to the person who had breached the prohibition(s) or to a third party. Unlike the Gikuyu who normally use the term Mugiro to refer to the social, ethical and ritual prohibitions and the term thahu to refer to the ritual uncleanness or defilement as explained above, the Igembe use the term Mugiro to refer to both the prohibitions (taboos) and the ritual uncleanness and state of ill-health or ill-fortune that follow the breach of the prohibitions. Therefore, the writer has put in brackets the words "taboo" or "ritual uncleanness" as the case may be to indicate which of these two senses of the word Mugiro is meant.

Kii - The ritual uncleanness that resulted from a person's contact with a dead relative. When a family member died, the parents of the deceased

(if not married) or the living spouse, were said to have automatically contacted kii. However, if a person who was not a member of the family of the deceased person touched him/her (the deceased), he/she was said to have breached a mugiro (taboo). Therefore, he/she did not get kii but mugiro. This was regarded as a more serious state of ritual uncleanness as it could automatically lead to a state of ill health if a purification ceremony was not carried out. The purification ceremony that cleansed the kii was different from the purification ceremony that was called for in the case of ritual uncleanness that followed the breach of the prohibition to touch a dead body.

Gaaru - In Igembe, gaaru were houses or barracks that were built for communal use by specific classes or sets of the age groups of men. The boys who were to be circumcised in one period lived communally in a house or barrack for a period of one month before they were circumcised. This particular barrack was referred to as gaaru ya ijiji (barrack for uncircumcised boys). After circumcision, the boys lived in seclusion in huts until their wounds healed. After seclusion the boys had to join one of the barracks that had been built for the circumcised men (nthaka). These were referred to as gaaru ya nthaka (circumcised men's barrack). The houses where the clan council (Kiama) and

Njuri council members met and where they carried out their initiation rites were referred to as gaaru. Thus, there was gaaru ya Kiama (barrack for the clan council) and gaaru ya Njuri (barrack for the Njuri council). Each of the above barracks was set aside for use by a specific group of people. This specific group of people used the gaaru communally. However, there were some houses also referred to as gaaru that were not built for communal use by a specific group of people. Every elder in Igembe community had his house where he slept and where other elders could visit him. Women were not allowed to sleep in the elder's gaaru. This house was referred to as gaaru ya Mukuru (elder's house).

Mugambi (muambi) - In Igembe, a mugambi or muambi is a person who had the skills to hear and arbitrate in disputes without prejudice or favour, wisely and skillfully. Although disputes were settled by different juridical - political councils in Igembe, there were persons in these councils who showed exemplary talents as arbitrators. Because of this gift, these persons emerged as the spokesmen of their groups and communities. A Mugambi therefore, is any person who had the qualities of hearing disputes and settling them wisely, skillfully and justly. He was a wise speaker and arbitrator.

Muthea (muthega) - Anything that was believed to have a curative or protective power. This did not only

include the herbs and magical elements and ingredients used by a medicine man; it also included elements or parts of a sacrificial animal that were believed to possess and symbolize God's protective and curative power. Today, this term is used to mean medicine.

Mambura - Sacred ceremonies that were full of joy, singing and dancing. Rites connected with physical birth, ritual birth, circumcision and marriage were generally referred to as mambura. Usually in Igembe when mambura rites and ceremonies were over they were sealed with a ritual sexual intercourse which was also referred to as mambura. The spiritual blessings that were believed to accompany the mambura were also referred to as mambura. Thus a ceremony whereby the community rejoiced because of the birth of a child and ritually incorporated the child into the community of the living was referred to as mambura while the blessings that were believed to accompany such a ceremony were referred to as mambura ya mwana (ceremonial ritual blessings from the birth of child). The word mambura is both singular and plural.

Ritual sexual intercourse - In this study, ritual sexual intercourse refers to all sexual acts which formed a necessary component of a religious rite, and were believed to have a religious meaning.

Sacrifice - In this study, the word sacrifice is used to refer to all acts of consecrating and offering of any object, animal or human being to God or to any supernatural being that is believed to control the fortunes or wellbeing of a person or persons. Also the consecrating of a human being or animal and presenting this to God or any category of spirits, for a particular purpose is regarded among the Igembe as a sacrifice even when no killing is involved.

Virgin girl and Virgin boy - These terms are used to refer to all boys and girls who took a leading role in a sacrificial rite. The children who were chosen to lead in sacrificial rites were believed not to have engaged in any sexual intercourse. Besides being virgins, these had to be young children of between six and eight years old.

FOOT NOTES CHAPTER 1

1. National Atlas of Kenya, 3rd. ed. 1970, published by Survey of Kenya, pp 5 - 7.
2. Ibid. p. 2
3. Kenya Population Census, 1979, Vol.1, Central Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, July 1981.
4. For a detailed study of how this conditioning has taken place in Africa, see Kihumbu Thairu, The African Civilization, Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1975.
5. For a detailed study of some of these theories see E.E.Evans - Pritchard; Theories of Primitive Religion, London: Oxford University Press, 1965.
6. For a detailed study of how African religions have been misrepresented see, Okot p'Bitek, African Religions in Western scholarship, Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, n.d.
7. Geoffrey Parrinder. African Traditional Religion, London: Sheldon press, 1962, p.13
8. See Evans-Pritchard op.cit.
8. J.S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, London: Heinemann, 1969, p.7.
10. B.C. Ray, African Religions, symbol, Ritual and Community, New Jersey: Prentice - Hall Inc. Englewood Cliff, 1976, p.3

- 29
11. Ibid. p.5 ; Okot p'Bitek, op.cit. p. 41; Malcom J. Mcveigh; "Who speaks for African Traditional Religion," in African Thought and Practice. The Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya, Vol.1. No. 2, 1974, Nairobi; East Africa Literature Bureau, p. 78.
 12. Samuel Kibicho, "Why Teach or Study ATR in Modern Africa?" in Orientation, The Journal of Religious Studies in Kenya, Vol.1. No.1,1975
 13. J.N. Baikiao; "Towards Africanisation of Christianity. "An approach to the Evangelization of the Meru of Kenya in light of their tribal anthropology and post Vatican Council II Magisterium"Ph.D. Thesis, Urbaniana Pontifical University, Roma, 1977.
 14. Eliferet Njiru, "Indigenous education as practised by the Ameru with special reference to circumcision ceremonies (TCA)" M.A. Thesis, University of Nairobi, 1981.
 15. Ibid. p. 81.
 16. W.H. Laughton; The Meru, Peoples of Kenya series No.10, Nairobi; Ndia Kuu Press, 1944.
 17. Ibid. pp 16 ff.
 18. B.I.M.C. Bernardi, The Mugwe, A Failing Prophet, A Study of A Religious And Public Dignitary of the Meru of Kenya, London: Oxford University press, 1959.

19. Daniel Nyaga, "Mikarire na Mituurire ya Amiru, Iuku Ria Mbere" (Traditions and Customs of the Meru Part I) Unpublished manuscript, Meru Museum .
20. E. Mary Holdings, "Some Preliminary notes on Meru age grade" Man 42, 31, 1942, pp. 58-65
21. Pilipo M'Inoti, "Asili ya Wameru na tabia zao" (The origin of the Meru and their Customs) type-written manuscript 49 pages, Meru Methodist Mission, North Imenti.
22. F.E. Bernard, "East of Mount Kenya Meru Agriculture in Transition, "unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1968.
23. H.E. Lambert, The Use of Indigenous Authorities in Tribal Administration, Studies of the Meru of Kenya, communication of the school of African Studies, University of Cape Town, N.S. No.16, 1947.
24. G. St. Orde-Brown - "Mount Kenya and its peoples. Some notes on the Chuka Tribe", African Affairs. Journal of the Royal African Society, Vol. 15, No. 59. (1916) pp. 225.
25. _____, "circumcision ceremonies in Chuka, Man, Vol. 15, No.39, 1915, pp.65-68.
26. _____ ; "circumcision ceremonies among the Amwimbe" Man, vol.13. No. 79, 1913, pp. 137 - 140.

27. H.L.C. Gurney; "The Mwimbi", Appendix VI in
E.R.T. Dutton, Kenya Mountain, London, 1929.
28. J.W.W. Champion; "The Atharaka" Journal of Royal
Anthropological Institute, 42, 1912,
pp. 201 - 202
29. E.R. Shackleton; "The Njuwe " Man, xxx, 143, 1930,
pp. 201 - 202.
30. J. Mahner; "The Insider and the Outsider in
Tigania, Meru", Preliminary research paper,
Institute of Development Studies, Cultural
Division, University of Nairobi n.d.
31. H.S.K. Mwaniki; "A pre-colonial History of the
Chuka of Mount Kenya, C.1400 - 1908" Ph.D
Dissertation, Dalhousie University, 1982.
32. Richard Lowenthal; "The Structural Dynamics of
Tharaka Age - organization", paper presented
at a Research Seminar Institute of African
Studies, University of Nairobi, Nairobi
Institute for African Studies Research
Seminar No.24, n.d.
33. Edward H. Greeley; "Accelerating family planning
acceptance on the eastern slopes of
Mount Kenya. A report from a coffee
growing area in Southern Meru", paper
presented at the East African Universities
Social Science Conference, Nairobi, 1975,
"Men and fertility regulations in Southern Meru.
A Case Study from the Kenya Highlands", Ph.D
Dissertation, The Catholic University of
America, 1977 (Washington D.C.).

34. Bernard K. Njeru; "The Igoji clan of Meru, Central Kenya", Cultural Source Materials for Population Planning in East Africa Vol.3. (ed) Malnos, Nairobi. East Africa Publishing House, 1973, pp.68-78.
35. Salome P.K. Mwambia; "The Meru of Central Kenya" in Malnos (Ed.) op.cit. pp. 60 67.
36. J.A. Fadiman, "Traditional warfare among the Meru of Mount Kenya", Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1973 and "Mountain Warriors, the Pre-Colonial Meru of Mt. Kenya," (S.L.) Ohio University Centre for International Studies, 1976.
37. H.S.K. Mwaniki; "The Chuka Struggle for Survival in the Traditional days of 1908" Mila, biannual newsletter of the Institute of African Studies, University of Nairobi, Vol.3, No.2, 1972, pp.13-21.
38. —————; The Living History of The Embu And Mbeere To 1906, Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1973.
39. H.E. Lambert; Kikuyu Social and Political Institutions, London: Oxford University Press, 1956.
40. —————; The Systems of Land Tenure in the Kikuyu Land Unit, Communication of the school of African Studies, University of Cape Town, N.S., No.22, 1950.

41. H.E. Lambert; "Lamberts private papers", University of Nairobi Library.
42. John Middleton; "The Central tribes of North East Bantu" Ethnographic Survey of Africa, Part V. East Central Africa (Ed.), D. Ford, London, 1953.
43. Orde-Brown; The Vanishing Tribes of Kenya, London, 1925
44. C.W. Hobley; Ethnology of Akamba and other East African Tribes, London: Frank Coss and Co., Ltd., 1971.
45. E.B. Horne; "How the Meru Came to their present Country", in Meru Political record book, 1908 - 1920, Kenya National Archives, PC/C.P./1/9 pp. 83 - 87.
46. Lambert, op.cit. Chapter III, "History of the tribal occupation of the Land".
47. G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville; "The Coast 1498-1940", History of East Africa Vol.1. Chapter V, (Eds.) Oliver R. and Matthew, London Oxford, 1963, p.130.
48. B. MacIntosh; "The Eastern Bantu Peoples" Zamani. A Survey of East African History (Eds.) B.A. Ogot and J.A. Kieran, Nairobi, East Africa Publishing House, 1968, pp.198-215.
49. J.A. Fadiman, "The Meru peoples" Kenya Before 1900 (ED) B.A. Ogot, Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1976, pp.139-173.

50. J.F. Munro; "Migrations of the Bantu Speaking Peoples of the Eastern Kenya Highlands: A Reappraisal" Journal of African History, Vol.VIII, 1967, pp. 25-28.
51. Charles William Hobley; Kenya From Chartered Company to Crown Colony, London, 1929, p.142.
52. H.L.C. Gurney; op.cit p. 204.
53. W.R. Ochieng; "The Gusii before 1900" Kenya Before 1900 (ED.) B.A. Ogot, op.cit. pp. 84-105; Eastern Kenya and its invaders, Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1975, pp.36-41.
54. E. Njiru, op. cit. p.66
55. A.M. Muntu' Imanyara; "The History of Meru From Meroe To Kenya, B.C. 800-1965 A.D," Unpublished manuscript in owner's possession.
56. Joseph Kinyua; "History of the Njuri in Meru 1910-1963", B.A. dissertation, University of Nairobi, 1971.
57. J. Mboroki; "The Imenti-Tigania-Masai relationship in pre-colonial period", Religious Studies Departmental archives, University of Nairobi, 1972.
58. J. Anon; "Marriage and Divorce among the Tigania of Meru" B.A. dissertation, Religious Studies Departmental archives, University of Nairobi, n.d.
59. Rosemary Kinoti, "Courtship and Marriage in Miiriga Mieru," B.A. dissertation, Religious Studies Departmental archives, University of Nairobi, 1973.

60. W. Kubbai; "Marriage and divorce among the Tigania sub-tribe of Kenya", B.A. dissertation, Religious Studies Departmental archives, University of Nairobi, n.d.
61. J.M. Njau; "The marriage institution among the Meru of Kenya", Makerere University, Kampala, 1972 in Religious Studies Departmental archives, University of Nairobi.
62. Gabriel Kobia; "Initiation among the Igembe" B.A. dissertation, Religious Studies Departmental archives, University of Nairobi, 1973.
63. Thiaine Aruyaru; "Male circumcision among the Tigania community", B.A. dissertation, Religious Studies Departmental archives, University of Nairobi, 1975.
64. W.C. Muthuri; "Death among the Meru", B.A. dissertation, Religious Studies Departmental archives, University of Nairobi, n.d.
65. Florence Mukindia; "The arbitration of the nthenge oath among the northern Meru, Tigania, "B.A. dissertation, Religious Studies Departmental archives, University of Nairobi, n.d.
66. J.G. Muriungi; " A woman prophet in Meru," B.A. dissertation, Religious Studies, Departmental archives, University of Nairobi, 1973

67. P.C.P. Mberu; "Sacrifice among the Ameru of Kenya", B.A. dissertation, Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, Makerere University, n.d.
68. S. Mwithiha; "A critical evaluation of the Bride-price system among the Meru people of Kenya", in occasional Research papers in African Religions and Philosophies, Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, Makerere University, Kampala, February, 1975, Vo.28.
69. M. Muturi; "Traditional Meru marriage customs," in occasional Research papers in African Religions and Philosophies, Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, Makerere University, Kampala, July, 1974, Vol.21.
70. J.M. Njau; "Death among the Meru of Kenya in occasional Research papers in African Traditional Religions and Philosophies. Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, Makerere University, November, 1971, Vol.3
71. ———; "Prayer, Sacrifice and Rituals. The Meru of Kenya" in occasional Research papers in African Traditional Religions, and Philosophies, Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, Makerere University, July, 1971, Vol.I
72. L. Ndege "An account of the Historical background leading to the formation of the African church of the Holy Spirit in Meru, Kenya," in occasional Research papers in African Religions and Philosophies, Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, Makerere University, Kampala, January, 1975, Vol.27.

73. W. Muthuri; "The use of alcohol among the Meru people in Traditional and Modern Society, in Occasional Research papers in African Religions and Philosophies, Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, Makerere University, Kampala, August, 1974, Vol. 22.
74. Mbiti, op.cit.
75. J.O. Awolalu", Yoruba Beliefs And Sacrificial Rites, London: Longman, 1979.
76. E.E. Evans-Pritchard; Nuer Religion, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956.
77. Evans-pritchard; Theories of Primitve Religion, op. cit.
78. J. Kenyatta; Facing Mount Kenya, (First published in 1936 by Secker and Waburg), Nairobi: Heinemann, 7th edition, 1977.
79. Harry Sawyerr, "Sacrifice" In Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs, (Eds.) Kwesi A. Dickson and Paul Ellingword, London: Lutterworth Press, 1969.

C H A P T E R II

AN INTRODUCTION TO SOME MAJOR FEATURES OF THE IGEMBE RELIGION

Many scholars of African religions agree that sociologically speaking, African religion is an important ingredient of the African culture.¹ They agree that religion in Africa is so much interwoven with the other cultural aspects that for a proper understanding of the African religion, one cannot study the religion without taking into account its cultural context. Because religion in Africa had not been institutionalized as a separate department from other cultural institutions, no African word that I know of can fully translate the English word "religion". There is no word in Meru language that can fully translate the English word 'religion'. Jomo Kenyatta's attempt to translate the English term 'religion' with the Gikuyu word igongona is inadequate because, as he points out, the term simply refers to sacrifices or rituals and ceremonies.² In Gikuyu (African) religion, sacrifices, rituals and ceremonies were no more than some aspect of the religion.

However, the fact that African religions are so much interwoven with the other cultural aspects does not entail that every cultural phenomenon in Africa was religious. We can clearly distinguish the religious aspects, although we have to deal with them within the

full cultural context. Accordingly, in studying the Igembe religious beliefs and practices, we cannot help but touch on other cultural facets. Since a study of all the Igembe cultural aspects would require writing volumes of books, in this chapter, we shall confine ourselves to mentioning rather briefly only some salient features of the Igembe religion that will help us to understand the Igembe sacrificial beliefs and practices.

A. SOME SALIENT FEATURES OF THE IGEMBE RELIGION

A survey of the Igembe religion reveals at least six salient features:-

- (i) Belief in God.
- (ii) Belief in spirits.
- (iii) Rites and ceremonies - In Igembe, these include, sacrificial rites, rites of passage, juridical - political rites, purification rites, ritual cursing and blessing rites, rites of establishing blood brotherhood relationship, rites of ending feuds and oathing rites.
- (iv) Magical and Medicinal practices.
- (v) Sacred social and ceremonial laws and prohibitions - This feature includes all the do's and dont's associated with the different religious rites, sacred places, sacred persons, sacred animals, sacred objects, sacred times and all the other socio-religious taboos.

(iv) Religious specialists.

Out of the above features, we shall only highlight briefly, belief in God and spirits, the rites of passage, juridical - political and religious organizations and religious specialists because these will give us a background for understanding of the Igembe sacrificial beliefs and practices.

B. BELIEF IN GOD AND SPIRITS

Since this study deals with the Igembe sacrificial rites, we shall be touching on aspects of Igembe belief in God and spirits. This is because the sacrifices were directed to these supernatural beings. In this chapter, we shall confine ourselves only to introducing the nature of God and spirits by looking at the names and some attributes of God, and by noting the different categories of spirits.

(i) BELIEF IN GOD

According to Igembe traditional beliefs, there was a supreme being who was the creator of the world and to whom prayers and sacrifices were offered. This supreme being had many names and attributes. A look at the meaning of these names reveals that the Igembe (Meru) did not view God as "a power principle" or an "impersonal reality" as Laughton claims.³ God among the Igembe was a personal being who, although omnipresent,

had localized dwelling places.⁴



The Igembe were monotheists, and had several variants for the name God. Their chief names of God were Ngai and Murungu. The name Ngai is also used to refer to rain. According to Baikiao, the name Ngai is "attributed to God because rain, which is also called Mbura is considered traditionally a phenomenon that belongs to God alone and over which only God had jurisdiction. The name depicts God in His bounty sending blessings and good things to his children the 'humanity'.⁵ Samuel Kibicho, writing on the concept of God among the Gikuyu who are closely related to the Meru, notes that, the name Ngai is derived from the infinitive kugaya which means to divide or distribute. The Igembe also use the same verb to denote dividing or distributing, but they pronounce and spell it as kuaya. Kibicho notes that this term signifies that "as the Creator, Sustainer and Ruler of all, God is the ultimate Giver or Distributor of all things and talents to all men, who are his children as he wills".⁶

The writer failed to get the meaning of the name Murungu from the informants. However, it is an old name of God which the Igembe share with some other Bantu communities.⁷ Kibicho notes that the name "signifies the attribute of incomparable greatness and power or omnipotence".⁸

"Kini Kiiru is another name used to refer to God. In Igembe Kini is a person's mouth roof. Kiiru is derived from the term wiiru which means blackness. Therefore, etymologically, the term "kini kiiru means black mouth roof. Kini Kiiru is used to refer to God in a metaphorical sense. In this sense, the blue sky is seen as part of the mouth of God. The sun is regarded as his teeth. The blackness of God's mouth is analogous to the dark clouds that bring rain. The term, therefore, refers to God's residence in the sky and his being the blesser of the community with rain which comes from heaven.⁹ As Baikiao has correctly pointed, out, "God is seen as smiling often to people from the great heaven and rain is His blessings, that is God's spittle of benediction".¹⁰

Barikiba is another name used by the Igembe to refer to God. The term means, "the great one" and connotes "God's omnipotence".¹¹

The Igembe also referred to God as Muntu umukuru which means, "the oldest one". This connotes God's eternity. He is (was) also referred to as Kiumbi, which means, "creator". This means that the Igembe viewed God as the creator and origin of all that is.¹²

God was also referred to as Mugwe. Mugwe used to be the name of the supreme leader of the Igembe.

However, the Igembe note that the proper Mugwe is God for he is the supreme leader and provider of all including the human Mugwe. The term Mugwe is associated with dispensing of blessings and goodness. That is the reason why in times of crisis when women were going to give their cereal offerings to God, they went singing that they were going to the Mugwe, "Tweta kwa Mugwe". This means that they were going to approach the supreme dispenser of blessings and goodness.¹³

The attributes that the Igembe used to describe God reveal to us why they believed in him and worshipped him. They believed that God was merciful and treated them as his children. That is the reason why, while praying, they referred to him as Baaba (father) and "Mutethia" (helper).¹⁴ They also believed that he was all powerful and could give according to his will, whatever human beings prayed for. Therefore, they referred to him as "Mwene inya" which means "owner of strength". They also referred to him as "Munoru" which means "the fat one". This metaphorically referred to God's abundant blessings that he gave to the community.¹⁵

The Igembe also believed that their God was a just God who would not indulge in favouritism. Therefore, whoever prayed to him was sure that God would treat his prayer with just consideration. Therefore, they

referred to him as "Ntiriuthu" which means "one who has no enmity". They referred to him as one who has no child he regards as phlegmatic i.e. to be despised) (we uti mwana uri mamira). This means that God, unlike man, does not treat any human being as a human being would treat a dirty child with a chronic running nose. He treats all his children the same way. Thus, God was also referred to as the equalizer of the poor and the rich-Muringaniri wa nkia na itonga.¹⁶

Besides being powerful, the Igembe also believed that God was omniscient, that is he was infinitely knowing. For example, they have a proverb which says that God does not eat thick porridge made from maize or millet flour - Ngai atiriyaa nkima¹⁷ The Igembe believe that when a person has eaten the thick porridge (nkima) he/she becomes dozy, thus affecting his/her mind's power to be alert. By saying that God does not eat thick porridge, the Igembe meant that God was ever alert, seeing and knowing whatever happened in human society. Therefore, God was not a fool and nobody could fool him for he knew each and everything that individual members of the community did. That is why the Igembe turned to oaths and curses in their final attempt to dispense justice. For they realized that unless the culprit confessed, no human being could tell for certain who had done wrong to the other or to the community. Through cursing or administration of oaths, the matter was given to God who saw in secret and who knew what men did not know and who would administer justice in meting out punishment to the evil doer.

The Igembe conception of God outlined above indicates why they offered prayers and sacrifices to him.

God was considered the supreme dispenser of blessings and protector of the community. As such when the community was threatened with danger, or when they needed his blessings, they turned to him. He was also regarded as the chief executor of justice, for he punished evil doers and the weak were sure that he would always fight their cause when they were victims of wrong doers. Those who were punished by God had also to offer prayers and sacrifices to him so that he could forgive them.

The Igembe did not believe in polytheism - that is the existence of many gods. The names of God we have looked at all refer to one being. Hence, they believed in monotheism. No name of God had a plural¹⁸. God was not believed to have other beings who were sharing his power. He was a unique being. There were no divinities or intermediaries in Igembe cosmological beliefs. It is, therefore, true to say that Paul Radin's division of monotheism and explicit monotheism - and his assertion that "we have to deny the existence among any primitive peoples of anything except monolatry"¹⁹ - is not applicable to the Igembe. The Igembe never believed in, nor worshipped, other gods besides Ngai.

(ii) BELIEF IN SPIRITS

The Igembe believed that, besides God, there were other spiritual beings which were regarded as supernatural in the sense that, they could do what natural human beings could not do. For example, these spirits could see what living human beings could not see and they could bring misfortune or ill-health to a living human being. These spirits were however, not regarded as gods. God was a being in his own category.

There were two broad categories of spirits in Igembe cosmological view. By looking at these two categories, we see that the Igembe put God in a unique class as none of these spirits had all the attributes of God that we have sketched above. The following are the two categories of spirits:

(a) Good spirits - This category of spirits consisted of the good spirits of the ancestors (nkoma cia ba juju) and other good spirits that were never human at any one time.

b. (Spirits of the ancestors- nkoma cia ba juju- The Igembe believed that, when one died, one would be transformed into a spirit and inhabit the world of the ancestors. The spirits of the ancestors were regarded as human beings who, unlike the living in flesh and blood, inhabited an invisible world. However, such spirits were not believed to be utterly removed from the visible world,

for they were believed to reveal themselves occasionally to the living members of their families. After death, one became a spiritual being and was believed to retain all of one's structure of physical features except that one would now be invisible.²⁰

The Igembe believed that in their spiritual state, the spirits of the ancestors could see and hear what the living human beings could not see or hear. They were believed to be more powerful than the living. Therefore, they acted as the custodians of the Igembe customs and guardians of the morality. Spirits of the ancestors were believed to punish those members of their respective families who failed to keep the accepted customs and traditions of the Igembe. In most cases, the spirits of the ancestors dealt only with their particular families. Hence, on his death bed, a parent or grand-parent cautioned his family members to conform to accepted customs because as he claimed, after death, his eyes, like the eyes of preceding ancestors, would never slumber nor sleep. (Ndakua mboleletie, nkoma cia juju itimamaa).²¹ This literally means I die looking, the spirits of the ancestor's never sleep.

The spirits of the ancestors were supposed to be treated with the same respect and care as they were being treated when they were living. As such, in day-to-day family life, the head of the family had to give

them food and libations. This was done by throwing bits of food on the ground and pouring part of the drinks before one tasted them.

In all family ceremonies and rites, the spirits of the ancestors were believed to be present. They had thus to be given part of what the living were feasting on. When the spirits of the ancestors were neglected or angered by the living members of the family, they punished the family by bringing any kind of misfortune or sickness.²² When such a thing happened, the spirits of the ancestors had to be propitiated by slaughtering sheep or goats, brewing honey beer or giving cereals as offering to them.²³ The spirits of the ancestors normally did not punish a whole community. Accordingly there were no communal prayers or sacrifices directed to the spirits of the ancestors in order to propitiate them.²⁴

(ii) Non-ancestral good spirits (nkoma) - the origin of this category of spirits is not very clear. However, they were associated with the sacred places where the community offered God prayers and sacrifices. They were not thought of as having been human beings before they became spirits. They were regarded as God's messengers. As such when they caused injury to a person - either by drowning him in the water, throwing him in the water or beating him up - the person would

believe that he had wronged God. A person who desecrated God's shrine - either by failing to do the things that were supposed to be done or by doing things that were prohibited at a sacred shrine - was punished by these spirits. When such a thing happened, prayers and sacrifices were offered to the supreme being and these spirits were believed to be present in the ceremony.²⁵ The sacrifice was offered to God and not to these spirits because they were believed to be God's messengers and therefore, to have acted on his behalf.

(b) Bad spirits - The Igembe believed that these were evil spirits because they brought evil to some members of the community for no reason at all. This category of spirits consisted of spirits of dead evil men such as sorcerers, murderers or other notorious criminals who were put to death by the community and, therefore, received no decent burial, and other non-human spirits whose origin is not clear. These evil spirits were not associated with the worthy ancestors. They were not given food and libations nor were they treated with respect like the spirits of the ancestors. It was believed that at times these evil spirits could beat or stone a person. When this happened, sacrifices were given to them in order to assuage them and prevent them from mistreating the victim again.²⁶

C. RITES OF PASSAGE

Among the Igembe, there were rites of passage which every individual in the community had to undergo. These rites of passage were considered very important for the social, religious and political development of the individual. A study of the significance of the most important rites of passage namely: birth, circumcision, marriage and death, will help us in understanding the Igembe sacrificial rites. This is because these rites were important occasions for the individual and the community to offer sacrifices to God and the spirits of the ancestors.

(a) BIRTH

Birth was a very important rite of passage because it introduced the individual into the community of the living. The Igembe believed that God is the one who provided them with children. A child was, therefore, regarded as God's gift and blessing to its parents and the community at large. Because of this, the Igembe believed that God was directly involved in providing a child. Hence, we find that there were many taboos
 mother, and those who came
 in contact with the newly-born child after birth were
 supposed to observe.²⁷

When a woman realized that she was pregnant, she had to stop engaging in sexual intercourse, for the Igembe

believed that the act of sexual intercourse caused ritual uncleanness to the child in the womb.²⁸ The expectant mother was believed to be in contact with the power of creation. As such, ritual cleanliness had to be maintained.²⁹ Greeley also observes that among the Meru, "The sperm of the man was believed to be very dangerous to the health of the mother and baby, the child would probably die."³⁰

The midwife who helped the mother at delivery was to be an upright and kind woman. She had also to be past child-bearing age, for she was then believed to be ritually clean, having stopped to have sexual intercourse. She could be trusted not to engage in sexual intercourse for a period of about two weeks from the time the child was born to the day the mother and father of the child would have their first sexual contact after the birth of the child.

The father of the child was not to have sexual intercourse with any other woman after the birth of the child until after he had the ritual sexual intercourse with the mother of the new born child.³¹ This first sexual contact was considered a ritual sexual intercourse because it had a religious significance behind it. Through it the child's parents were believed to receive the blessings of the new-born child.

The prohibition of sexual intercourse for those who helped the mother at delivery and for the child's father was due to the belief that the blessings of the new-born child had to be received only by its parents. God's blessings, as we shall see in our next chapter, were received through a ritual sexual intercourse by those who were supposed to receive them. If these other persons, who had been in contact with God's blessings (baby), had sexual intercourse, then they would have taken the blessings of the new born child - as a result of which the child would suffer. It was believed that those who breached this taboo of abstaining from sexual intercourse would also be punished by God for doing what was prohibited.³²

For the first three days after delivery if the child was a girl or four days in case the child was a boy, the child and its mother were regarded as being in a sacred state.³³ The mother and child had, therefore, to stay in seclusion. During this period, the houses and compound in the mother's homestead were not supposed to be swept and the mother was not supposed to wash.³⁴ This is because it was believed that God's blessings were still with the mother and the home, and by washing or sweeping, one symbolically swept away the blessings.³⁵ This was referred to as kuthambia mambura ya mwana (to wash away the sacred ceremony and the blessings that come with the child's birth).

During this period of seclusion, the fire in the mother's house was not supposed to be extinguished. The non-stop burning fire symbolized continuity of life. It was also feared that by getting fire from other homes, one might bring evil from these homes.³⁶ It was on the day that this sacred period ended that there were prayers and sacrifice offered to God and the spirits of the ancestors. The house and compound of the mother were swept and the rubbish thrown away at the family shrine called kiara.³⁷ The child's mother was shaved on this day to symbolise the end of her sacred period and the beginning of normal life. This day was known as muthenya jwa kuthamba mambura³⁸ (the day of washing the sacred ceremony or period full of blessings).

(b) CIRCUMCISION (NTAANO)

Circumcision was regarded as the most important rite of passage in Igembe. For a proper understanding of the sacrificial rites that were associated with circumcision, we need to know the significance that the Igembe attached to this rite. Circumcision was a conditio sine qua non of being a true Mumeru. An uncircumcised person regardless of his/her age was regarded as immature and a child and, therefore, not a "full member" of the Igembe community. He/she could not, therefore, be told the secrets of the adults. The one great importance of circumcision was that it promoted

the individual from childhood to adulthood.³⁹

Circumcision introduced the individual into the active life of the community. It was after circumcision that the male members of the community were given the mandate to protect the community from enemy attacks and also to go on raids for their community. After circumcision, all the newly circumcised male members of the community became warriors.

* Circumcision also gave the individual the mandate to procreate. In Igembe, it was a terrible mugiro (taboo) for an uncircumcised girl to become pregnant or for an uncircumcised boy to father a child. It was believed that a child that was a product of an uncircumcised person or persons could defile the land such that the land would be barren, there would be no rain and no food. This situation could only be rectified by cleansing the land through a cleansing rite and by offering a sacrifice to God.⁴⁰ In most cases abortion - which was done by giving some herbs to the pregnant girl - was tried. If it failed, the child had either to be sold in a distant land after birth or be killed. The girl and the land had to be cleansed with the blood of a sheep after abortion or birth of such a child to avoid calamities.⁴¹

The reports of early colonial administrators in Meru show that child murder and abortion were problems they felt they had to deal with in Meru. To curb the problem of abortion and child murder, the early administrators embarked on a propaganda aimed at getting the Meru to agree to have initiation for girls and boys at an earlier age.⁴² Therefore, the girls were circumcised before puberty and the risk of getting pregnant before one was circumcised was avoided.

* Another significance of circumcision is that it opened the way for an individual to get married and to be initiated into the different juridical - political governing councils which are discussed on pages 67-72 of this chapter. Circumcision also established a bond of relationship between the individual and the spirits of the ancestors. The Igembe believed that by pouring the circumcision blood on the ground, the individual initiated formed a bond of relationship with the ancestors who had themselves undergone the ceremony.⁴³

Circumcision also established a bond of relationship between all the initiates who were circumcised during the same period and who formed an age set. Persons who sat next to one another when being circumcised were joined by the circumcision blood and they became like brothers. The mixing of the blood from the two on the circumcision knife was regarded as a covenant and the

two were henceforth supposed to treat one another like brothers.⁴⁴

Circumcision also had a great significance to the parents of the initiate. The circumcision of the first born child had the effect of promoting the social status of its parents. They now joined elderhood and the child's father was allowed to take an active role in communal religious rites and ceremonies.⁴⁵ For the mother of the initiate, the circumcision of her first child marked the end of her procreating life. She was not supposed to cohabit with her husband except during the time that custom obliged her to have a ritual sexual intercourse.⁴⁶

Because of the great importance that was attached to circumcision, many religious rites accompanied it. The aim was to bring God and the spirits of the ancestors into the social drama so that they could bless the occasion and make all the necessary undertakings related to circumcision a success. To mark the great transition from childhood to adulthood, there were symbolic acts that had a religious connotation that were undertaken by the initiates. For example, during the period of preparation for circumcision, every boy to be circumcised killed a mole (mpuko). The mole was a very symbolic animal in Igembe. As we shall see when studying the death rite, in Igembe the mole had a symbolic connection

with death. After killing the mole, the boys got sticks from a sacred tree called muthongiru. The skin of the mole was put on the upper end of the stick. The stick was henceforth referred to as ithiri (mathiri pl.)⁴⁷ The ithiri was regarded as a symbol of the boy's childhood.⁴⁸ It was after getting the mathiri that the boys started the period referred to as kuriria. This was the period when the uncircumcised boys, carrying their mathiri, visited their relatives' homes to announce that they were about to become adults. They were given presents by their relatives.

Immediately after a boy's foreskin was cut by the circumciser, the boy ran out through the circle of men that surrounded those being circumcised and threw his ithiri at a spot in the circumcision field where the mathiri were supposed to be thrown.⁴⁹ This symbolized that he had now become an adult for as we have already pointed out, the ithiri was the symbol of the boy's childhood. By throwing away the mole's skin - that symbolized death - the boy symbolically marked his spiritual death to the state of childhood, and birth into adulthood.

The cutting of the foreskin or clitoris was also taken as a sign to mark the great transition from childhood to ^{woman} ~~man~~ hood.

(c) MARRIAGE (KUGURANA OR KUIKITHANIA)

Like circumcision, marriage among the Igembe was a social and religious ceremony. Marriage was not an individual's affair. It was the concern of those to be married and the society and in particular the two families concerned and their clans.⁵⁰ Because of the great importance attached to marriage by the Igembe, prayers and sacrifices were offered to God and the spirits of the ancestors so that they could bless the marriage and make it a success. There were prohibitions (migiro) in relation to marriage which prevented marriage between some individuals. The Igembe believed that the spirits of the ancestors who were considered the custodians of Igembe customs and traditions could never bless a marriage if it involved breach of one of these migiro (taboos).⁵¹

* Among these migiro (taboos) was the prohibition of marriage between members of the same clan. Members of the same clan were believed to have originated from the same ancestor. Therefore, they all had a blood relationship. A man was not supposed to marry a daughter of his circumcision age mate. This is because members of the same age group were also said to be related because of the circumcision blood that was mixed because they used the same circumcision knife. Members of the same circumcision age group regarded the children of the other members of their

group as "their children". Therefore, it was similar to getting married to one's daughter if an elder got married to his age-mate's daughter.

Members of families, clans, sub-ethnic groups or ethnic groups that had established a blood brotherhood relationship (gichiaro) were also prohibited from intermarrying. This was because of the covenant blood that they shared when establishing the relationship. This covenant blood was believed to make the two parties "brothers and sisters".⁵²

If a parent left a curse that members of his family should never intermarry with another particular family, the members of these two particular families could not intermarry for they were sure that the parental curse would affect their marriage such that it would never be a success.

The Igembe believed that some families were of bad omen. If one married a girl from such a family, it was believed that he would face misfortune or death within a short time, either after marriage or during the engagement period. Such families were called ngirani. The word ngirani is derived from the verb kugiria, which means to prevent or to bar. Girls from such families were said to be exceptionally beautiful. Marriage between a man and a girl of such

a family was believed to succeed only if the man was a member of another ngirani family or if the girl was married as a second or third wife, but not as the first wife.⁵³

According to M'Imanyara, the ngirani families evolved as a result of

misfortunes experienced by young men proposing marriage to a girl from such a clan for the first time. If one of the young men tried to court a girl from a certain family and before marriage materialised the young man died or had an accident to the extent of being physically disabled, from that moment the girl was under observation. If other young men tried to court her and they had evil end, young men were barred from marrying from such a family. This was the genesis of development of the ngirani.⁵⁴

If one observed all the above taboos (migiyo) then the members of the community could actively participate in one's marriage ceremony, for they were sure that even the spirits of the ancestors were not against the marriage. It is, however, only in a marriage between a man and his first wife that there was a marriage ceremony whereby prayers and sacrifices were offered to God and the spirits of the ancestors. There was a lot of pomp and ceremony. Other marriages took place without much pomp and ceremony on the wedding day. There was a lot of significance placed on the first marriage. The bride had to be a virgin. A man could not marry a divorced woman as a first wife.⁵⁵

The main objective of marriage among the Igembe was procreation. A childless person in Igembe community was a miserable man or woman. One felt that one had been deprived of the most precious gift in the world. The importance of procreation lay in the belief that everybody who had been born had a duty to give birth because by so doing, one would repay "God's debt" (irandu ria Ngai).⁵⁶ This means that it was a God given duty for every individual in the community to participate in procreation. If a person had been blessed by God with the power to procreate, this particular person had to repay God's debt by putting into use this power. God gave a person this power so that he/she can put it into use.

The Igembe believed that whoever was not given the power to procreate must have done something wrong that made God withdraw that power from him or her.⁵⁷ A man or woman who was of marriage age but never procreated was referred to as a Muumbi or Mbura tuu (somebody who had come up with nothing). When such a person died, nobody was supposed to mourn him/her because he/she had left nobody behind as his/her product.

Another significance of procreation was the fact that one had children to remember one and give one libation and offering when one died and joined the

world of the ancestors. Ndege notes that among the Meru, there is a saying that "people marry so as to reproduce themselves". He goes on to point out that this saying stresses on the importance of belief in a personal immortality "As one has produced children one is sure of 'living on' after his physical death as long as his children continue to exist and reproduce themselves".⁵⁸ Mwitthiha also expresses the same point of view concerning personal immortality when he notes that the Meru say that kumiña gikuu ni guciara which means that death can only be overcome through procreation.⁵⁹

Because of the belief that in marriage God would be involved in the life of the couple (in the sense that he is the only one who could give them the great blessing of procreation and protect their children from evil) the Igembe offered prayers and sacrifices to him, so that he could bless the marriage ceremony. The spirits of the ancestors were also involved in the marriage drama. This is because, as we have already noted, they were regarded as the invisible members of the family. We have also noted that in relation to the concept of "personal immortality", the spirits of the ancestors had to rejoice because of the marriage ceremony for through it, they were to be "reproduced" and, therefore, assured of being continually remembered in the world of the living.

(d) DEATH (GIKUU)

Death was the last ~~right~~^{rite} of passage in an individual's life. For a better understanding of the sacrificial rite that was associated with death, we need first to understand the Igembe attitude towards death. The Igembe peoples' attitude towards death depends on the age and status of the deceased in the community. Their treatment of the deceased depended very much on his or her age and status.

Although the Igembe were aware that death was a universal phenomenon that every person had to face, they also believed that the death of a person who still had the power to procreate was unnatural. It was only the death of an old person who had grand-children that was taken as natural. Such a grand-parent was not even said to have died, it was said that he/she had become old (nigukura arakurire) or he/she had gone home (niaraanire). These old members of the community were believed to have joined the world of the ancestors.⁶⁰

Because of the fact that the death of a productive (in the sense of procreation) person was not considered natural, there were many explanations offered as possible causes of the death of a particular person. These might include witchcraft by a sorcerer, failure to keep the rules that governed gichiaro

(blood brotherhood relationship), the effect of an oath taken by the deceased or a relative - in the past or present - while he knew he was not telling the truth, or the breaking of a taboo (mugiro).⁶¹ When a person was believed to have died because of any of the above causes, there were no prayers or sacrifices offered after the death of the person.

Prayers and sacrifices were offered only when God was directly associated with the death of a person. The living members of the community had to approach God to beg for forgiveness because it was believed that God could never cause death of a person unless this particular person or his/her relative had done wrong to God.⁶² By taking away one of the members of the community, God would be expressing his displeasure. God was believed to be directly associated with death when a person was struck by lightning or even when a house was burnt by lightning, or when a person drowned in water or was killed by the good spirits that lived in sacred places by being thrown into the water or thrown on rocks to die.⁶³

Death of a young person in Igembe community was regarded as unfortunate and a great blow to the individual and the community. It was even more miserable in case of a person who died childless for he/she had left behind no child to partially

reincarnate him/her through naming children after him/her. It was because of their power to procreate that we find the Igembe never buried a person who was not a grand-parent. It was believed that by burying such a person, the community would be burying the power to procreate. It was believed that this would have bad repercussions on the family of the deceased and the community.⁶⁴ Such a person was, therefore, thrown in the bush to be eaten by hyenas.

The practice of burying a grand-parent had another significance which can be understood by looking at the Igembe myth of the origin of death. This myth also explains the reason why the old members of the community were buried at the family shrine called kiara and not at any other place.

According to this myth, long time ago, the sun sent the mole (mpuko) to go and tell people that when they died or got sick, they would lie at the kiara. By so doing, they would rise the following day feeling strong and healthy.

On its way to take the message to the people, the mole met the hyena. The mole told the hyena what the sun had told him. On realizing that he would miss his food if people stopped dying the hyena suggested to the mole that he should tell people that the sun had

said that when they die, they should die completely and never rise. The hyena threatened to eat the mole if he gave the right message from the sun to the people. Out of fear, the mole told the people the version of the message he had been given by the hyena. Henceforth, man lost his gift of living eternally. The Igembe go on to point out that it is because of the mistake the mole made that the mole and the sun became great enemies, such that even to this day when the mole is exposed to the sun, it must die.⁶⁵

According to this myth, the kiara symbolized life and continuity of life to the Igembe. Those who were buried there were not believed to have died. They were believed to rise to the world of the ancestors. This explains the reason why there was an elaborate ceremony following the death of a grand-parent, while there was no such a thing following the death of a potentially productive person. This also explains the reason why spirits of the ancestors in Igembe community are referred to as nkoma cia ba juju (spirits of the grand-parents). This also explains the reason why there was no mourning when an aged person died and why the death of such a person was not associated with the ritual uncleanness (kii) that was associated with death. In the case of all the other deaths, the parents of the deceased or the marriage partner in the case of a married person and all those who touched the deceased

person contracted a ritual uncleanness (kii) that had to be cleansed through a cleansing ceremony.⁶⁶

D. JURIDICAL -POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Every individual in Igembe community had to undergo all the rites of passage we have described above. There were other rites that initiated the individual into the different governing councils and religious organizations in Igembe community. These rites were, however, not compulsory for every individual in the community. They were mostly undertaken by the male members of the community. A study of these juridical-political councils and religious organizations would help us to understand the Igembe sacrificial rites. This is because in communal sacrificial rites, there were some particular functions that were to be carried out by those who had been initiated into particular councils and particular grades of the councils. The councils we are going to look at briefly in this section are the Lamale, Kiama kia mwiria and Njuri councils. We shall also look at the significance of the waariki association.

The word lamale has no literal translation. The lamale council was a council of young circumcised warriors (nthaka). Only a few of the nthaka (warriors) were selected for initiation into lamale.

The main function of this council was to act as the go-between between the elders and the nthaka (warriors). When the elders wanted to communicate anything to the nthaka (warriors), they had to talk to the members of the lamale council and vice versa.⁶⁷

The word kiama means a council. Kiama kia mwiria was the clan council. Sometimes it was simply referred to as kiama. A man was allowed to be initiated into his clan's kiama after getting married. The clan council dealt with social - political and judicial problems that faced the members of its particular clan. It was also the responsibility of the elders of the clan council to kill any member of their clan who had been sentenced to death by the njuri council. Such were the sorcerers or notorious thieves and murderers. Moreover, only those who had been initiated into the clan council could sit and decide on the course of action to be taken when a calamity affected their clan. In case of clan communal sacrifice, it is the elders of the clan council who would decide which member of their clan would provide the sacrificial animal.⁶⁸

The word Njuri also has no literal translation. Njuri council was not a clan council. It incorporated elders from the different clans in Igembe. It was not compulsory for all members of Igembe community to be

initiated into Njuri. Meru traditions point out that the Njuri association is a relatively recent institution that has managed to supersede the traditional councils of elders.⁶⁹ Njiru points out that Njuri was formed after the Meru crossed Mbwa, which according to him was in Egypt.⁷⁰ Baikiao, however, notes that Njuri was founded in the 16th Century through a revolution of the nthaka (warriors) from Mutuati in Tigania Division.⁷¹ This agrees with the writer's research findings.⁷² Baikiao has even given a detailed account of councils of elders that were superseded by Njuri association.⁷³

Although the Njuri institution is a recent development among the Meru, by the time the Europeans came to Meru, it had become one of the strongest political and judicial institution in Meru.⁷⁴

The Njuri council dealt with settling disputes particularly those that concerned persons from different clans, making laws and setting fines and punishment for different crimes. In matters where God had to be approached as the supreme administer of justice, it was the responsibility of the Njuri to organize communal cursing ceremonies or oaths. It was the Njuri members who knew how to treat a he-goat or an ewe that was to be used in a cursing or oathing ceremony. There were some details of oaths and curses that were known only by members of a particular grade of Njuri.⁷⁵

In Igembe, there were three grades of Njuri. Njurincheke (which literally means the thin or slim Njuri) was the first grade that a new initiate joined. A few of Njurincheke initiates were selected by their clan members to be initiated into the next grade that was known as Njuri impingere (which literally means, the barred Njuri). A few elders were selected from the second grade so that they could be initiated into the last and most powerful grade of Njuri - Njuri impere (which means the Njuri that has been sifted or sieved).⁷⁶ Before any individual was initiated into any of the above grades of Njuri, he was given some secrets and had to take an oath to the effect that he would never reveal those secrets. It is because of these oaths that the initiates took and the secrets that were given to them, that the members of the different councils and grades were entrusted with the particular judicial and religious responsibilities they had in the community.⁷⁷

Waariki was an association of elders who were past child bearing age. The first step towards initiation into Waariki started when an individual elder had his first born circumcised. The elder who could afford organized a ceremony whereby he invited his age-mates, relatives and friends, to come and rejoice with him since his children had matured. The maturing of the children was referred

to as gukuria which means to cause to grow or mature.

The elders who had been initiated into waariki went to the initiate's homestead to pray for him, his children and wife or wives, that God would bless them. During this ceremony that lasted for almost a week, the elders formally and informally, thanked God and the spirits of the ancestors for the protection they had offered to the initiate's children.⁷⁸ Every time this new waariki elder had any of his children circumcised, he had to invite the other waariki elders to come and rejoice with him. The circumcision of the last born made one a full member of waariki.

Initiation into waariki had only a religious significance. It did not give the individual any judicial or political power or responsibilities. Because of their age, the waariki elders were considered the best persons to lead in communal religious ceremonies like prayers and sacrifices. Because of their age, wisdom and the fact that they were past child bearing age, the waariki elders were considered as ritually more "holy" (batheru) than other members of the community. Wives of waariki elders were also the ones who led in religious ceremonies where women participated actively.

Every waariki elder was given a meu (fly whisk) that was a symbol of waariki. Another sign of waariki was the sign of the cross that was made (using ochre) on the head of a waariki elder and his wife or wives when the elder was initiated into waariki. Henceforth whenever the waariki elder or his wife or wives participated in a religious ceremony, they had to have this sign of the cross on their heads. This sign of the cross was referred to as icubi kia waariki. (The writer failed to get the literal translation of the word icubi). Other persons who were not waariki members applied ochre on their shaven heads in such a way that it formed one thick line across the head, from the forehead to the back of the head.⁷⁹

Women also had their own organization called Kiama gia aka (Council of women). This organization was seen at work during the time when a certain calamity like drought or pestilence struck the community. It is the women who took the responsibility to go and see the prophet (Kiroria or Mwaria na Ngai) so that he/she could communicate with God and find out the cause of the problem and its remedy. If it was pointed out that the calamity had struck the whole community due to one individual who had done wrong to God, the Kiama gia aka took the responsibility of asking this particular individual or individuals to give the sheep that would be exchanged for the

sacrificial sheep that would propitiate God. If an individual failed to heed the request of the women, they cursed him by some of them defecating on his homestead. This was taken as a very serious curse.⁸⁰

When an outbreak of an epidemic affecting the children occurred, this council of women took the responsibility of organizing the ceremony of kuendia ana rujiine (to take children to the river).

There is however very little that is known about the women council. How an individual was initiated into this council remains a secret of the members of this council. Lambert notes that this women organization had various grades and each grade had its executive leaders.⁸¹

E. RELIGIOUS SPECIALISTS

In Igembe community, there were some individuals who performed some particular religious functions and can be said to have been specialists due to their specialized office and knowledge and skills in matters that were not common knowledge to everybody in the community. A study of the beliefs associated with the traditional medicine man, the prophet and the Mugwe will help us to understand the role they played in sacrificial ceremonies and why they played these roles.

(a) THE MEDICINE MAN (MUAA)

In Igembe community, the medicine man played a very central role in relation to sacrifice, because it is only he and in particular the diviner -medicine man who could tell when an individual needed to offer a sacrifice. The Igembe believed that the medicine man's power came from God. However, a medicine man was taught the art of medicine. One had also to inherit the power of being a medicine man from a relative who was a medicine man. After being initiated as a medicine man, it was believed that the medicine man was given divine guidance.⁸² It was because of the teaching he had received and the divine guidance that, the medicine man was believed to know and see what other ordinary human beings could not know or see. It is this power that he used to diagnose the causes of sickness and other misfortunes and to give prescriptions for their cure!

As Idowu has rightly pointed out, with particular reference to Africa, "we cannot discuss magic and medicine with understanding however, except as seen in the light of religion. This is especially so as here we are discussing it as an element in the structure of a religion."⁸³ In Igembe community, the medicine man was considered as playing a religious role because health and disease were explained in religious terms.

A happy, healthy and prosperous man was said to be in good terms with God and the spirits of the ancestors. He was thought to have divine blessings. Misfortunes and ill-health were thought of as having a supernatural origin. They, therefore, needed a religious approach. In Igembe community, it is not only the medicine which the medicine man provided that was believed to bring about a cure. It was believed that a sacrifice or a cleansing ceremony could also bring about a cure depending on what the diviner-medicine man had said was the cause of a particular sickness.⁸⁴ As we shall see when we come to deal with the different sacrificial rites, some parts of the sacrificial animal and other sacred articles were also regarded as medicine (muthea).

It is because of the above relationship between health, disease and religion that, for a proper understanding of the Igembe sacrificial rites, we need to know something about the medicine man. The importance of the medicine man in sacrifice lay in his role of diagnosing the causes of sickness and other misfortunes and giving prescriptions for their cure.

In Igembe community, natural causes were believed to be behind minor sicknesses. Such sicknesses were, therefore, treated at home by use of traditionally known herbs. It is only when sickness failed to respond to natural treatment or when it was sudden and serious that the services of a medicine man were required in order for him to find out what had caused the sickness.⁸⁵

The Igembe believed that sickness could be caused by an individual breaking a taboo (mugiro). In this case, the medicine man had to cleanse the patient from the evil of mugiro through a purification rite. A person could also become sick, if he was bewitched by a sorcerer. The medicine man was believed to have greater power that could counteract the evil power of sorcery. If an individual or any of his relatives took an oath while he knew that he was not sincere or he failed to keep the promise of the oath, it was believed that this oath would cause sickness or death to the individual or any member of his extended family. The medicine man directed that individual on what to do so that he could annul the effect of the oath.⁸⁶

The Igembe believed that sickness could also be caused by spirits of the ancestors (nkoma cia ba juju). This happened when the living members of their families neglected them or failed to do what they (spirits) had

directed them to do. For example, if a person failed to please his parents or grand-parents by taking proper care of them when they were alive, when they died, they could bring sickness or other misfortunes to this particular person. In this case the medicine man directed the individual to mend his relationship with his ancestors by offering a sacrifice to them. A curse was believed to cause sickness. In this case the medicine man had to organize a ceremony where the cursed person or his family could have the effect of the curse annulled by being given blessings by whoever had cursed him or by his representative(s).⁸⁷

In some cases, God was directly associated with sickness. This was the case, for example, when a diviner -medicine man told a person that the cause of his sickness or that of the members of his family was the presence of "the power of God at his homestead". The medicine man expressed this by saying that Ngai iri mucii which literally means that "God is in the homestead". Such sickness could only be cured by offering a sacrifice to God and correcting the wrong done because it was believed that God could only bring sickness to an individual's homestead if something wrong had been done to him.⁸⁸

Because there were many possible causes of sickness as we have already outlined, it is only the diviner -

medicine man who could tell which among all the possible causes was the real cause of an individual's sickness. It is also the diviner - medicine man who was supposed to know the best treatment for each case. In most cases, the diviner - medicine man dealt with individual or family problems. It is only on very few occasions, for example, like the time he was asked whether a raid would be successful, that the diviner - medicine man dealt with communal problems. The person who dealt with communal problems was the prophet.

(b) PROPHET (KIRORIA OR MWARIA NA NGAI)

Mbiti claims that, in the strict biblical sense of the word, there are no prophets in Africa. He attributes this primarily to the lack of a long dimension of future in the African concept of time. He points out that in Africa, there are only diviners, seers and mediums.⁸⁹ If, however, we look at the literal definition of prophet as "a person who speaks for God or for a god or as though he is under divine guidance, one who feels that he is divinely inspired",⁹⁰ then we see that there were persons in Igembe community who fitted the above definition.

The Igembe had a very clear distinction between a diviner, a seer and a prophet. Divination was a specialized branch of the medical practice. Although a prophet could be a diviner and a seer or fortune-

teller at the same time, it was clear to the Igembe that he had another greater power than that of a mere diviner, seer or fortune teller. They could also tell when he was divining or fortune -telling and when he was prophesying. Not all diviners were prophets but all prophets were also diviners.⁹¹

A diviner never claimed to speak to God. He used his divining counters called mbugu or the entrails of a he-goat to divine. A prophet claimed - and the Igembe believed - that he communicated directly with God. That is the reason why he was referred to as Mwaria na Ngai (a person who speaks with God). When prophesying, the prophet did not need to use the divining counters. Instead, he got his messages from God during his sleep or when he was in a trance.⁹²

Unlike a diviner or any other ordinary medicine man, the prophet had to experience a personal call from God. Bernardi describes how one of the prophets he came across in Igembe during his research claimed to have received his call:-

...M'Linjiru describes how he was not nominated to inherit this power by his father nor did he automatically succeed to the profession at his father's death or retirement. He experienced a personal call long after his father's death which came to him directly from God in a dream. Following this came his 'investiture' also directly from God, this time in form of a spell of madness.⁹³

The Igembe believed that a prophet was not taught how to prophesy by anybody. He had to receive this gift from God.

We have already alluded to the fact that the prophet dealt with communal problems. He could, for example, foretell the coming of a disaster like an epidemic or an enemy attack. He would advise the members of his community on what to do in order to avert the danger. Unlike an ordinary diviner, the prophet had a central role in relation to most communal religious ceremonies. For example, Bernardi notes that M'Linjiru's power was

especially invoked for blessing seeds, fields and harvests. He may also be asked to offer sacrifices of sheep and goats for the same reason. To ensure the fertility of the fields he is to bless, he distributes portions of the sacrifices which will be placed on trees or on posts in the fields. On all these occasions, which occur periodically during the year, he is visited by the Igembe women who go to him in a procession singing prayers and carrying offerings of every kind of food....94

Another difference between a prophet and a diviner is that the prophet did not have to be consulted by the people always in order for him to give his prophecy or message. He gave his prophecy when he received it from God. Again, unlike the diviner or any other medicine man, the prophet never asked for any payment for his prophecy.

Like the old Testament prophets, we find that prophets in Igembe community also foretold what would happen in the distant future. For example, M'Ithiria who belonged to buantai age grade foretold the coming of the white-man in Igembe. He prophesied that Nguuntune (red clothes - meaning white-man) would come through a place called Kamuciere. He asked his people to welcome them but warned that they should never allow the white-man to separate them from Njaambene (Nyambene hills). He prophesied about the construction of Maua-Meru road and coming of vehicles which he described as a "big python stepped on by an elephant whose head (python's) would disappear at Maua". (Ndatu ikinyi ni njogu ikeya mwanka Maua)⁹⁵

From the above analysis of the notion of prophet in Igembe, it is very clear that although a prophet also acted as a diviner, the Igembe made a distinction between a simple diviner and one who had the power to prophesy. It is due to his ability to communicate with God and the belief that he could tell God's will, that the prophet was approached by members of the community when there were calamities. It was for this reason that he was given a leading role in sacrificial ceremonies.

(c) THE MUGWE

Due to the difficulties experienced in getting an English word that would define the Mugwe adequately, it is necessary first, to give a descriptive as opposed to a literal definition of the term "Mugwe". The origin of the office of the Mugwe is related to the Meru myth of origin from a place called Mbwa where they had been enslaved by a light coloured people whom they referred to as Nguuntune (red clothes). The Igembe point out that the family of the Mugwe is the family of the man called Gaita, who offered himself for sacrifice so that the Meru could cross the sea they called Iria itune (red sea) in order to escape from Nguutune. Thus, the clan of the Mugwe in Igembe has to be the clan of Antubaita, that is the clan that was founded by Gaita and his descendants.⁹⁶

In Igembe, the family of the Mugwe is called Laithi. This is a family that was respected (and feared) for its power to curse. It was believed that if a member of Laithi family cursed a tree, the tree dried up immediately.⁹⁷ The family of the Mugwe also had a special place in Igembe religion because it is one of their ancestors who accepted to be offered as a sacrifice to God so that the Meru could escape from their slavery. That is the reason why the Igembe believed that as God had blessed the Meru at Mbwa

through Gaita, so would he bless the community through his descendant the Mugwe. The central function of the Mugwe in Igembe community was to bless the community and take lead in some sacrificial ceremonies.⁹⁸

In Igembe, the office of the Mugwe was hereditary. The reigning Mugwe prepared one of his sons or close relative to take over the office after his retirement. The Mugwe started being prepared for his office at an early age. Care was taken in choosing the Mugwe, for he had to be a person who had been born normally and with no deformities. The Mugwe had to be free from any physical or moral blemish. The reigning Mugwe taught him how to observe the Igembe customs strictly. As a young person, he was not allowed to play around with other boys for fear that he might be hurt and get a scar.⁹⁹

Among the Igembe, the taking over of power of one Mugwe from another Mugwe was closely connected with the taking over of power by one age group from another. Power in Igembe alternated between two ~~moeties~~ ^{moieties}, one called Ntangi and the other Mbaine.¹⁰⁰ Every age group that was taking over power had to 'crown' their Mugwe ceremoniously. The person who was 'crowned' by the new age group had to be the same person who had been prepared for the office of the Mugwe by the retiring Mugwe.¹⁰¹

The age group that was taking over power had to make an official gown for its Mugwe. The gown (nquu) was made from pieces of he-goat skin. The goat skins had to be given by all the different gaaru (elder's or retiring warrior's barracks) in Igembe. Representative elders from every barrack had to take their he-goats' skins to the central place where the gown was made. The gown was made by getting small pieces from every skin that had been presented by the elder's barracks. This symbolized the unity of the Igembe as a community. It also symbolized the fact that the Mugwe was to represent and lead all the members of the new ruling generation from all the corners of Igembe.¹⁰²

The gown of the Mugwe was made at a place called Thunguma in Akachiu Location by the elders who were taking over power under the direction of representatives of the retiring elders. Members of the community from all parts of Igembe came to witness the investiture of the new Mugwe. This was done at a place called Kiani kia Nquu (field of the gown) in Maua Location where Antubochui Primary School today stands. The Mugwe was publicly invested with his gown of office by representatives of the elders who were taking over power. The gown was the symbol of Mugwe's power. The Mugwe was also given a gourd full of pure honey. This symbolized that the new ruling generation had given him

the responsibility to bless the whole community. The Mugwe blessed the crowd that had come to witness his investiture . He did this by sipping mouthfuls of the honey that had been mixed with water and spraying it out on the people. Henceforth the new Mugwe took lead in all the sacrificial ceremonies that were associated with the handing over (ntuiko) ceremony.¹⁰³ These ceremonies are discussed in chapter 4.

Though the Mugwe was regarded as the leader of the whole of Igembe community, his leadership was only honorary. His role was to give advice but not to command. He had no officials under him who ruled the different sections of Igembe for him. He was only regarded as a leader whom the members of the ruling generation consulted for advice in relation to important social, political or religious events.¹⁰⁴

The Mugwe had no army that served under him. He never led in battles or ordered people to go to fight. However, when the decision to raid another community or to protect the community from attack was taken by the Igembe elders, the Mugwe gave his blessings to the warriors.¹⁰⁵

As we have already noted, there were councils of elders in every village who dealt with the socio-political and judicial problems of their particular

communities. These councils were not directly under the Mugwe and they took their decisions independently. The Mugwe was a member of these councils and even of the most senior Njuri grade that met at Miori (in Maua Location) to make laws. However, the Mugwe did not dictate what went on in these councils. His advice was however sought for at times and when he passed his judgement, all agreed with him, not because they feared him as a king, but because they respected him because of his experience, age and wisdom and because of the fact that, by his own nature, the Mugwe was supposed to be a just and blameless person.¹⁰⁶

According to Baikiao, the Mugwe acted as the main priest of the whole community. He notes that the greatest degree of priestly power in the community was found in the Mugwe.¹⁰⁷ However, we cannot regard the Mugwe as a mere priest because his duties were wider than those of a priest. As we have already noted, besides taking a leading role in some religious ceremonies, the Mugwe was also regarded as a chief adjudicator or arbitrator and a political leader of the whole of Igembe. If a person failed to agree with the decision of the judicial council in his area, he could appeal to the Mugwe who was regarded as the final court of appeal in Igembe community.¹⁰⁸

The Mugwe's political and judicial powers in the community are also symbolized by the gown that was given to him. As we have already noted, the gown was made of pieces of he-goat skins that had been contributed by every village gaaru (elder's barrack) in Igembe to symbolize the fact that the Mugwe was to lead all the members of the new ruling generation in Igembe. The gown, made from he-goat skins, also symbolized the fact that the Mugwe was regarded as an arbitrator or judge (Mugambi). In Igembe community, the he-goat was also a symbol of a Mugambi.¹⁰⁹

In considering the priestly functions of the Mugwe, we have also to bear in mind that the concept of priesthood in Igembe is very different from the Christian, Muslim or Jewish concepts. There were no persons in Igembe community whose occupation was priesthood. There was no formal training for priesthood. Any elder in the community who met the requirements of leading in sacrifice as discussed in Chapter III, could take lead in family or communal religious ceremonies. As Baikiao has rightly pointed out, "priesthood in Meru was distributed among the father of the family, elders and Mugwe. The women and children had priestly powers even if in diminished degrees. The greatest degree of priestly powers was in the Mugwe."¹¹⁰

According to Bernardi, the Mugwe should be regarded as a prophet, that is "a leader with both religious and political powers rather than a priest."¹¹¹ Though the writer agrees with Bernardi's view that the Mugwe had both religious and political powers, it would be wrong to refer to the Mugwe as a prophet. We have already described the functions and office of the prophet in Igembe community. We noted that in Igembe a prophet was believed to have been appointed directly by God and that he spoke with God. Although the Mugwe performed some functions similar to those of the prophet, such as leading in religious ceremonies, the Mugwe never claimed to be God's spokesman or to have any prophetic powers. Unlike the prophet, the power of Mugwe was hereditary and he was appointed by his predecessor and not directly by God.¹¹² Unlike the Imenti Mugwe, the Igembe Mugwe never claimed to have the power to go into a trance.¹¹³

According to Njiru and Muntu Imanyara, the Mugwe was the divine King of the Meru. Muntu Imanyara, tries to relate the origin of the Agwe (Pl. of Mugwe) with the divine Kings of Zagwe dynasty in Ethiopia.¹¹⁴ However, according to most of the writer's informants on the Igembe Mugwe,¹¹⁵ the Mugwe can only be regarded as a King in the sense that he was the only man who was regarded by all the members of the Igembe community as their leader. However, as we have already noted,

this leadership was just honorary and the Mugwe acted more as an adviser than a commander or ruler. As Bernardi has rightly noted, in his own family,

the Mugwe appears as an ordinary man. He does not surround himself with grandeur, there is no overt indication of his peculiar and exalted position. He is certainly no king, he is without Court and without protocol.¹¹⁶

As we have already noted, the Igembe Mugwe never claimed to have any divine origin. The name "Mugwe" was used to refer to God because, as we have already noted, God was regarded as the most supreme leader of the whole community and the supreme dispenser of blessings and goodness. On earth, the human Mugwe was regarded as the leader of the whole of Igembe community. Through him (human Mugwe) God dispensed his blessings and goodness to the community. Mugwe's blessings to the community therefore originated from God. Therefore God was not referred to as Mugwe because the human Mugwe was believed to be an incarnation of God but because in Igembe community as Baikiao rightly observes, the human Mugwe was believed to be "a visible symbol of God's presence among the people in goodness, providence and even justice".¹¹⁷ Therefore, the Igembe Mugwe cannot be said to have been a divine being.

In view of the above problem of defining the Mugwe, one comes to the conclusion that there is no single word in English that is adequate to define

the Mugwe. It is appropriate to emphasize again that the Mugwe was a religious and a political leader of the Igembe. Among today's leaders, the leader who is most analogous to the Mugwe is the pope of the Roman Catholic Church. However, we must emphasize that this is just an analogy as there are some aspects of the Mugwe that are not similar to those of the Pope.

When looking at the role of the Mugwe in sacrificial ceremonies, we have to bear in mind that he played a central role because of his descent from Gaita and because he had been selected due to his outstanding qualities. He had to have the qualities of righteousness and meekness. He had to be a man who was slow in anger. The Mugwe also played a central role in sacrificial ceremonies because he had been trained and brought up as a just person and he was a person who was supposed to have no physical or moral blemish. He had to walk blamelessly in the community. As such, it was believed that in leading the community in prayers and sacrifices to the supreme being, God would hear the cry of the community because of the blameless nature of the Mugwe. Therefore, God would dispense his blessings to the community through the Mugwe.

FOOT NOTES CHAPTER II

1. cf. J.S. Mbiti, African Religion and Philosophy,
London: Heinemann, 1967, p.1;
- E.W. Smith (Ed), African Ideas of God, London;
Edinburg House Press, 1966 (3rd
edition), pp. 14 - 15;
- J.N. Baikiao, "Towards Africanisation of
Christianity. An approach to the
evangelization of the Meru of Kenya
in the light of their tribal
anthropology and post Vatican Council II
Magisterium", Ph.D. dissertation,
Urbaniane Pontifical University,
Rome, 1977, p. 12;
- T.O. Ranger and Isaria Kimambo (Eds), The Historical
Study of African Religion, London:
Heinemann, 1972, p. 1.
2. Jomo Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, Nairobi
Heinemann, 1978, (First published in
1938 by Martin Secker and Werburg Ltd,)
p.233.

3. W.H. Laughton; The Meru, peoples of Kenya series no. 10, Nairobi: Ndia Kuu Press, 1944, p. 16 ff.
4. M'tuaruchiu, Joseph, interviewed (at Muutine, Njia Location on 30th June, 1983.
5. Baikiao, op.cit. p. 167.
6. Samuel G. Kibicho; "The Continuity of the African Conception of God into and through Christianity with the Kikuyu Conception of "Ngai" as a case study", in Utamaduni: A Journal of African Studies in Religion, vol.1 No.1, Nairobi: Kenyatta University College Press, October, 1980, p.10.
7. Smith, op.cit.p.3.
8. Kibicho, op.cit. p.10.
9. M'tuaruchiu, Joseph, op.cit.
10. Baikiao, op.cit. p.164.
11. M'amanja, Samuel, interviewed at Kawiru, Maua Location, on 3rd March, 1982.

12. M'tuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit.
13. Kaluma, Asunta, interviewed at Amungenti, Akachiu location on 18th July 1983.
14. Kabutu M'alame, M'maroo Baituuru and Kamincha M'kubania, interviewed at Kangeta, Njia location on 24th June 1984.
15. M'amanja, M'kaibiria, interviewed at Mutuati, Mutuati location, on 20th July 1983.
16. M'tuaruchiu, Joseph, op.cit.
17. Ibid.; J.M. Njau; "prayer sacrifice and rituals. The Meru of Kenya" In Occasional Research Papers in African Traditional Regions and Philosophies, department of Religious Studies and philosophy, Makerere University, July 1971, Vol.1. p.8
18. Baikiao, op.cit. p- 167.
19. Paul Radin; Monotheism Among Primitive Peoples, London: Allen and Unwin, 1984, pp. 50ff.
20. M'amanja, Samuel, op.cit.

21. M'tuaruchiu, Joseph, interviewed on 14th July 1983, op.cit.
22. Ibid.
23. For the difference between this rite and a similar rite directed to God, see Chapter III.
24. Mbero, Peter, interviewed at Maua, Maua location on 29th May, 1983.
25. Kaluma, Asunta, op.cit.; Kaibiria Nculubi, M'tuaruchiu Kamanja and Nkirina Mwambia, interviewed at lombe, Mutuati location on 3rd August 1983.
26. Mbero, Peter, op.cit.; M'tuaruchiu, Joseph, interviewed on 14th July 1983 op.cit.
27. Kaluma, Asunta, op.cit.
28. The reason behind this ritual uncleanness will be made clear when we look at the Igembe beliefs in relation to sexual intercourse in Chapter III.
29. Kaluma, Asunta, op.cit.

30. Edward Greeley; "Men and fertility regulations in Southern Meru. A case Study from the Kenya Highlands" Ph.D. dissertation, the Catholic University of America, 1977, (Washington D.C.) p. 54.
31. M'tuaruchiu Joseph, interviewed on 14th July 1983, op.cit., Kaluma, Asunta, op.cit.
32. M'mubwika M'mauta and M'munoru wa M'achiuki, interviewed at Kanuni, Akachiu location, on 31st May, 1983.
33. Kanampiu, John, interviewed at Kawiru, Maua location, on 16th May, 1983; Mbero, Peter op.cit.
34. Daniel Nyaga; "Mikarire na Mituurire ya Amiiru: Iuku ria Mbere" (Traditions and Customs of the Meru: Part 1) Unpublished Manuscript, Meru Museum, p.8; Kailibi M'mutunyi, interviewed at Kawiru, Maua location, on 10th May, 1983.
35. Mbero, Peter, Op.cit.
36. Ibid.
37. The significance of this practice is discussed in Chapter III.

38. Nyaga, Op.cit. pp. 8-9; Kaluma Asunta, op.cit.
39. Mbero, Peter, op.cit.
40. Kabutu M'alainę, interviewed at Kangeta, Njia location, on 22nd June, 1983.
41. Ibid.; Kaluma, Asunta, op.cit.
42. H.E. Lambert; Meru District Annual Report, 1939, Kenya National Archives, pp. 71-72.
43. Nyaga, op.cit. p.17; Mbero, Peter, op.cit. interviewed on 31st July 1983.
44. Ibid.
45. L. Ndege; "An account of the historical background leading to the formation of the African Church of the Holy Spirit in Meru, Kenya" in Occasional Research Papers in African Religions and Philosophies, Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, Makerere University, Kampala, January, 1975, Vol. 27. pp. 9-13.
46. Lambert, op.cit. p.87, Kabutu M'alainę, op.cit; M'tuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit.

47. Kamanja M'lithara and M'nchebere Samuel
interviewed at Muringene, Njia location,
on 14th June, 1983.
48. Mbero, Peter, op.cit. interviewed on 31st July 1983.
49. Ibid.
50. Michuki, Samuel, interviewed at Kawiru, Maua
location on 28th February, 1982.
51. M'tuaruchiu, Joseph, op.cit.
52. Kabutu M'alaine, op.cit.; Kamanja M'lithara and
Mwambia M'angichia, interviewed at
Muringene, Njia location on 30th May,
1983.
53. Muiti, Christine, interviewed at Maua, Maua
location, on 16th June, 1983; Mbero,
Peter, op.cit. interviewed on 31st
July, 1983.
54. A.M. M'Imanyara; "The history of the Meru from
Meroe to Kenya B.C. 800 - 1965 A.D.",
Type-written Manuscript in owner's
possession, 208 pages, p. 164.
55. Mbero, Peter, op.cit. interviewed on 31st July,
1983.

56. Ibid.
57. Kabutu M'alaine, op.cit.
58. Ndege, op.cit. p.9.
59. S. Mwitthiha; "A critical evaluation of the bride price system among the Meru people of Kenya" in Occasional Research Papers in African Religion and Philosophies, Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, Makerere University, Kampala, February, 1975, vol.28- p.2.
60. M'tuaruchiu, Joseph, op.cit.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid; Kanampiu, John, op.cit.
63. Mbero, Peter, op.cit. interviewed on 31st July 1983.
64. M'imanyara, op.cit. p.187; Mtuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit.
65. Mbero, Peter, op.cit. interviewed on 27th March, 1982.
66. Kabutu M'alaine, op.cit.; M'tuaruchiu, Joseph, Op.cit.

67. Kamanja M'lithara, M'tuaruchiu Joseph, M'abwima Karani, interviewed at Muringene, Njia location on 26th May, 1983.
68. Ibid.
69. B.I.M.C. Bernardi; The Mugwe, A Failing Prophet, A Study of a Religious and Public Dignitary of the Meru of Kenya, London: Oxford University Press, 1959, pp.24-25; Nyaga, op.cit. p.61.
70. Njiru, op.cit. p.76.
71. Baikiao, op.cit. pp.101-105.
72. Nyaga, op.cit. p.61; Kamanja M'lithara and others,² interviewed on 26th May, 1983, op.cit.
73. Baikiao, op.cit. pp.101-105.
74. H.E. Lambert; The Use of Indigenous Authorities in Tribal Administration: Studies of Meru in Kenya, communication of the school of African Studies, University of Cape Town, N.S., No.16, 1947; Meru District Annual Reports 1933 and 1941, Kenya National Archives, passim.
75. Kamanja M'lithara and others, interviewe on 26th May, 1983, op.cit.

76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.; Kabutu M'alaine and others, interviewed on 24th June, 1983. op.cit.
78. Tharamba M'amencu, interviewed at Kaurine, Maua location, on 10th March, 1982; M'amanja Samuel, op.cit.; Kamanja M'lithara and others, interviewed on 26th May 1983, op.cit.
79. Ibid.
80. Kaluma, Asunta, op.cit.
81. Ibid.; Lambert, Meru District Annual Report 1939, p.78.
82. Mbero, Peter, op.cit. interviewed on 29th May, 1983.
83. E.B. Idowu; African Traditional Religion, A Definition, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1973, p.89.
84. Kabutu, M'alaine, op.cit.
85. Ibid.
86. Kamanja M'lithara and others, interviewed on 26th May, 1983, op.cit.

87. M'mubwika M'manta, Kabuali M'etiri, Kanina M'mauta and Njilu, M'nkubania, interviewed at Kanuni, Akachiu location, on 15th June, 1983.
88. Kamanja M'lithara and M'nchebere Samuel, interviewed at Muringene, Njia location, on 14th June, 1983.
89. Mbiti, op.cit. p. 190.
90. The Webster Dictionary.
91. M'mubwika M'mauta and others, interviewed on 15th June, 1983, op.cit.; Kamanja M'lithara and others, interviewed on 26th May, 1983, op.cit.; M'amanja, Samuel, op.cit.; M'amanja Mbaabu, M'mugambi M'Ithiria, Kaumbuthu Daniel, interviewed at Kiegoi, Kiegoi location, on 4th August 1983.
92. Ibid.
93. Bernardi, op.cit. p.132.
94. Ibid. pp. 133-134.
95. Ibid. p. 34; M'tuaruchiu, Joseph, op.cit.

96. Kamanja M'lithara and others, interviewed on 14th June 1983, op.cit.
97. Kabutu M'alaine and others, interviewed on 7th July, 1983, op.cit.
98. Ibid., Kamanja M'lithara and others interviewed on 14th June, 1983, op.cit.
99. Kabutu M'alaine op.cit.; Mbero Peter, op.cit.
100. A more detailed description of how the two parties alternated is given in chapter IV.
101. Kabutu M'alaine, op.cit. Kamanja M'lithara and others interviewed on 14th June, 1983, op.cit.
102. Kamanja M'lithara and others, interviewed on 26th May, 1983, op.cit.
103. Ibid. For a description of Ntuiko ceremony, see: pp. 169-181 below.
104. Ibid., M'mubwika Mnauta and others, interviewed on 15th June, 1983, op.cit.; M'amanja Mbaabu and others, interviewed on 4th August, 1983, op.cit.; Kabutu M'alaine

and others, interviewed on 7th July,
1983, op.cit.

105. Ibid.
106. Ibid.
107. Baikiao, op.cit. p.158.
108. Kamanja M'lithara and others, interviewed on
26th May, 1983, op.cit.
109. For the reasons why the he-goat symbolized the
Mugambi see chapter IV.
110. Baikiao, op.cit. p.158.
111. Bernardi, op.cit. p.140.
112. Kamanja M'lithara and others, interviewed on
26th May, 1983, op.cit.; M'mubwika
M'manta and others, interviewed on 15th
June, 1983, op.cit.
113. Bernardi, op.cit. p.132.
114. Njiru, op.cit. p.12; M'Imanyara, op.cit.p.17.
115. Kamanja M'lithara and others, interviewed on 26th
May, 1983, op.cit. Kabutu M'alaine and
others interviewed on 7th July, 1983,
op.cit.; M'mubwika M'mauta and others
interviewed on 15th June 1983 op.cit.
116. Bernardi, op.cit. p.161.
117. Baikiao, op.cit. p.160.

CHAPTER III

GENERAL FEATURES IN IGEMBE SACRIFICIAL RITES AND CEREMONIES

Before we go into the details of the different sacrificial rites and ceremonies in Igembe, we shall first deal with the general characteristics that appear in almost all Igembe sacrificial rites. This will help us to avoid the problem of repetition. Before we look at these characteristics, however, we need to analyse the term sacrifice as applied specifically to the Igembe. In analysing this term, we shall find ourselves involved with the issue of worship.

THE NOTION OF SACRIFICE

In the English language, the word "sacrifice" has a secular and a religious connotation. Awolalu points out that in a non-religious sense, the word sacrifice means "forgoing for a particular cause, that which is precious, denying oneself certain benefits and advantages for a particular purpose"¹. In Igembe, the word that can be translated to mean sacrifice in the above non-religious sense is gucieyana (to give oneself). However, the term gucieyana is never used in a religious sense in Igembe. The only word in Igembe that can be translated to mean sacrifice in the religious sense is igongoana. Igongoana was never used in a secular sense. Before we look at the meaning of this term in Igembe, we shall first

look at other religious senses of sacrifice that other scholars have proposed, in order to see whether any of such senses is applicable to the idea of sacrifice among the Igembe.

Mbiti makes a distinction between sacrifice and offerings in these words:-

'Sacrifices' refer to cases where animal life is destroyed in order to present the animal, in part or in whole, to God, supernatural beings, spirits or the living-dead. 'Offerings' refer to the remaining cases which do not involve the killing of an animal, being chiefly the presentation of foodstuffs and other items.²

Unlike Mbiti the Igembe do not distinguish between sacrifice and offerings. This is because in most sacrificial rites, it is not only animal life that was offered. Foodstuffs and other items were also offered, and they were considered as part of the sacrifice. The presentation of the animal and the foodstuffs had the same basic significance among the Igembe.³ More applicable to the Igembe case is the following definition from the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics:

A sacrifice is a rite in the course of which something is forfeited or destroyed, its object being to establish relations between a source of spiritual strength and one in need of such strength for the benefit of the latter.⁴

However, this definition is not comprehensive enough to cover the extension of sacrifice among the

the Igembe. First, it sees the object of sacrifice as only a need for spiritual strength for the one offering the sacrifice. As we shall see in the following two chapters, though this purpose of sacrifice was present in most sacrificial ceremonies, in some sacrificial rites, the object was not to get spiritual strength but to thank the source of spiritual strength, for the benefits that had been bestowed to the one offering the sacrifice. Secondly, there is another sense of the word 'sacrifice' that is not catered for by the above definition. This is the sense whereby something was consecrated and offered to God without actually being forfeited or destroyed.

Awolalu' presentation of two ways in which sacrifice can be looked at is more comprehensive and applicable to the Igembe case than the definition of the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics. Awolalu notes:

In one sense, one can say that sacrifice is an act of making an offering (of animal or vegetable life, of food, drink or of any object) to a deity or spiritual being. In another sense, sacrifice can be seen as something consecrated and offered to God or divinity. In other words, an offering of any kind laid on an altar or otherwise presented to a deity or divinities for definite purposes is a sacrifice.⁵

According to the above definitions of sacrifice by Awolalu and Mbiti, anything that is offered to God or other spiritual beings is regarded as a sacrifice. This raises an issue that has been debated by many scholars of African religions. The question can be put as follows: Since sacrifice is seen as one element of worship, does that mean that Africans worshipped these other spiritual powers to whom they offered their sacrifices? To answer this question adequately is not an easy matter. This is mainly because the terms "worship", "prayer" and "sacrifice" are vaguely applied especially when in practice, they are applied in relation to God and other spiritual powers in Africa. The terms "worship", "prayer" and "sacrifice" can be applied in a religious sense and also in a purely secular sense.

The problem becomes more difficult in the Igembe case where we find that the practice of offering prayers and sacrifices to God has some similarities with the practice of offering prayers and sacrifices to spirits. ~~To enable one to~~ To distinguish the two acts, I would suggest that we look more closely at the attitude and beliefs of the participants in practices that can be termed as worship. Before we look at these attitudes and beliefs among the Igembe, we shall look at some arguments that have been propounded by some scholars in relation to the question of whether Africans worshipped other

supernatural beings besides God, in order to see how relevant these arguments are to the Igembe case.

According to Idowu, the practice of people honouring other spiritual beings (particularly their ancestors) apart from God is a universal one. He, however, notes that there has been a kind of discrimination with regard to African religions because some scholars refer to this practice as worship. He points out that "Those who set up the cult of ancestors inside churches are careful, not to use the term 'worship', they choose 'veneration' instead".⁶ Other scholars like Mbiti,⁷ Cullen Young,⁸ Smith⁹ and Kenyatta¹⁰ maintain that, although there is a religious significance in the African practice of honouring their dead, this cannot be referred to as worship.

J.H. Driberg, however, is of the opinion that the African practice of honouring their dead has no religious significance. According to him it is "nothing more than a projection of (the African's) social behaviour.... For no African prays to his dead grandfather any more than he prays to his living father..."¹¹

According to Smith, if the essence of Religion is "a sense of dependence upon supersensible powers

who are able and willing to help",¹² then we cannot dismiss the practice of Africans having communion with the spirits of their ancestors, as purely secular. He notes that it is only a narrow definition of Religion that can do that.

In the case of the Igembe, although there is an aspect of extension of secular practice to the world of spirits, we cannot dismiss their practice of giving food, libation and 'sacrifices' to the spirits of their ancestors as purely secular as Driberg does. This point can be understood more clearly by looking at the role of parents in the community and what happens to this role after the parents have passed away. In this regard, we shall quote Idowu at length because what he says about the role of parents is very true even in Igembe case.

According to Idowu, the duty of the parents and grandparents while on earth was to

ensure domestic peace and the well-being of the community, to distribute favours, to exercise discipline or enforce penalties, to be guardians of community ethics and prevent anything that might cause disruption. In Africa, it is the general belief that a living father or a living mother, by virtue of his fatherhood or her motherhood, is endowed with the power to bless or curse an offspring effectively. That is why every passage of life and every undertaking by the offspring require parental blessing. It is believed that parental dissatisfaction or displeasure may upset an undertaking or cause it to fail. It is no wonder then, that it is believed

that such power in a father or a mother who has passed into the ancestral world has become infinitely enhanced and continues to be actively effective accordingly.¹³

In Igembe, the spirits of the ancestors, were believed to be more powerful than the living human beings. In their spiritual nature, they could see and know what the living members of the community could not see or know. As such they were believed to execute the duties they were supposed to execute on earth even more effectively. Because of this enhanced power, their dealings with the living members of the community cannot be looked at as purely secular.

There was a difference in practice and attitude between the practice of giving food or slaughtering an animal to a parent and that of giving food and drink to spirits of the ancestors. For example, when a person slaughtered a sheep or goat for his parents either in order to show respect and concern for a parent or in order to reconcile oneself to a parent after a serious disagreement, the meat from the slaughtered animal could be eaten by any member of the family or even outsiders. In such a case, there was a kind of casualness and lack of ceremony.¹⁴

In case of an animal offered to the spirits of the ancestors, only family members and the person who

had come to advise the family on how to carry out the sacrifice could taste the meat.

There was also a prohibition of sexual intercourse for all those who had tasted sacrificial meat, except for the person on whose behalf the sacrifice had been made and his wife or the parents, if the person on whose behalf the sacrifice had been made, was not married.¹⁵

There was also a difference in approach when one slaughtered an animal for a living parent or grandparent and when one 'slaughtered' one for the spirits of his ancestors. In the former case, one was aware that he was talking to a human being. Therefore, the talk was casual. In the latter case, one was aware that he was not talking to a living human being, he was dealing with a spirit. There was, therefore, a mood of reverence and seriousness.¹⁶ Just as in a rite of sacrifice that was offered to God, all the remains of the sacrificial animal, in case of sacrifice offered to spirits of the ancestors had to be burnt to ashes. There was no burning of the remains when one slaughtered an animal for his living parent or grandparent. All this emphasises the fact that the Igembe did not view their practice of slaughtering and offering food and libations to the spirits of the ancestors as purely a secular practice. It does not mean that the Igembe

worshipped their ancestors in the same way they worshipped God.

The fact that the Igembe did not view their practice of slaughtering or giving food and libations to their ancestral spirits as purely a secular practice does not however mean that the Igembe had no distinction between sacrifice offered to God and one that was offered to the spirits of the ancestors. As we have already noted, the Igembe had a very clear distinction between God and other spiritual powers. God was believed to be supreme and to be the provider of good things to the whole community. The spirits were approached in matters where they were believed to be directly involved. They were not supreme.¹⁷

The Igembe made a very clear distinction between sacrifice offered to God and one offered to spirits. The Igembe note that when they offered an animal as a sacrifice to the spirits (nkoma), the life of the animal was never offered to them.¹⁸ One of the writer's informants emphasized that God was the sole giver of life. As such, life could only be offered to him. The spirits of the ancestors were only offered meat, fat, honey and blood.¹⁹ That is the reason why sacrifices offered to spirits were referred to as kuthinjira nkoma,

which means 'to slaughter for the spirits', while the one offered directly to God was referred to as kuoroa ngeere ya Ngai, which means to kill sheep of God.²⁰

A literal analysis of the terms used to describe sacrifices offered to spirits and those offered to God clearly shows that in case of sacrifice offered to the spirits, the Igembe emphasized on slaughtering, hence the use of the word kuthinjira which means to slaughter. In the case of sacrifice offered to God, the word kuoroa (to kill) was used and this emphasized the giving of life. It is also clear that in the case of sacrifice offered to God, the words used convey the message that the sacrificed sheep belonged to God - Ngeere ya Ngai - God's sheep. In the case of sacrifice offered to the spirits the sacrificial animal was not referred to as theirs. It was simply said that the sheep was slaughtered for the spirits - Kuthinjira nkoma.

The above idea of killing 'sheep of God' shows that the Igembe believe that God is the originator of all that is. He is the provider of the whole community so that what the community offered to him is what he (God) had blessed the community with. This is the same idea we get among the Nuer when Evans - Pritchard writes that among the Nuer the sacrificial victim is always

his (God's) in a yet more general religious sense which extends beyond, and is not derived from the sacrificial situation, in the sense, that is, that everything belongs to him. In giving a beast to God man without doubt loses something but God to whom it belongs anyhow, gains nothing Thus, Nuer do not complain when a beast is killed by lightning or sickness for God has a right to take his own ...21

An analysis of the above facts reveals that, although the Igembe used the same term Igongoana (sacrifice) to refer to sacrifices offered to God and sacrifices offered to the spirits, they had a distinction between the two in their attitude and in the way they referred to the victim of sacrifice.

Although as we have already noted, by sacrificing to the spirits this did not mean that the Igembe were worshipping these spirits, we shall use the term sacrifice to refer to both sacrifices offered to God and those offered to the spirits, for lack of a better word. But we must always bear in mind that the Igembe made a distinction between the two. The Igembe never worshipped their ancestors, they only had communion with them.

As Kenyatta notes with regard to the Gikuyu, the term "guthaithaya Ngai" which may clearly be translated "To beseech Ngai" or "To worship Ngai" was never used in connection with ancestral spirits.²²

In the same way, the Igembe used the term Kuthathaya Ngai only when referring to worship of God. This term was never used in connection with spirits²³. The best term we can use to refer to the practice of honouring spirits of the ancestors is veneration or communion with ancestors but not worship.

B. ANIMALS AND MATERIALS OF SACRIFICE AND THEIR SYMBOLIC MEANING

In Igembe, except on very few occasions - and because of some definite reasons - the sacrificial animal was the sheep. The particular type of sheep that was offered as sacrifice was a ram. In Igembe, the name for sheep is Ngondu. If it is a ram, it is referred to as nturume and if it is a young mature ewe it was referred to as mwati. The young mature ewe (mwati) among the Igembe was a symbol of fertility. It was therefore killed for sacrifice on very rare occasions. This happened only when an issue in fertility was involved in the sacrificial rite or when the person on whose behalf the sacrifice was being made was a female.²⁴ When a sheep of any sex was set aside for God, it was referred to as Ngeere ya Ngai.

This sheep that was offered as sacrifice to God had to be strictly of one colour and without any blemish. The colour most preferred was black, a colour we have already noted was regarded as sacred to God. A brown sheep could also be sacrificed.²⁵

Among the Igembe, the sheep was a very symbolic animal. Baikiao's observation about the symbolic nature of this sheep agrees with the writer's research findings. Baikiao correctly notes that,

The Meru find no fault with the sheep's character. It is so meek, so simple, obedient, patient, undisturbing without malice and likes associating with other sheep. It reflects the attributes of God's goodness, peacefulness peaceful society....26

In communal sacrifices that were offered to God, the principle of faultlessness and holiness (Utheru) was used in getting the sacrificial sheep. The person to provide the sheep for sacrifice had to meet the requirements of this principle. Care was taken to make sure that the sheep had been in the possession of the owner in the right way. It had to be one which he had either inherited from his fore-fathers or a product of one that he had inherited or one which he had legally bought. A sheep that had been stolen could never be offered as a sacrifice.²⁷

In the case of sacrifice offered to spirits of the ancestors or to appease evil spirits, there was no strictness in choosing the sacrificial animal. It did not necessarily have to be of one colour and without blemish. Since, this category of sacrifice was offered only by family units, the head of the family had to provide the sacrificial animal. This means that the character of the owner

of the sacrificial animal, in the case of sacrifices offered to spirits, was not a serious issue.

The way the sacrificial animal was treated before and during the sacrifice also followed a general pattern. The animal that was offered to God had to be consecrated first. This was done by having it sprayed with pure honey which had been mixed with clean water. All sacrificial animals were killed through suffocation. Kikuyu grass (kilenchu) was put in all its openings. Kikuyu grass was used in most ceremonies where ritual blessings were involved. It was therefore associated with blessings.²⁸ Njau notes that the Kikuyu grass was used in suffocating the sacrificial animal because "if one cuts grass it grows again., So also will the sacrifice give growth and life".²⁹ The mouth of the sacrificial animal was put in a hole where some pure honey had been poured. Honey was also associated with blessings. It was also said to have the property of coolness.³⁰

After killing the sacrificial animal, it was placed on leaves commonly referred to as mathinjiro. These were branches and leaves from Maroo (cassia didymobotrya) Mugumo (fig tree) and Muthongiru (unidentified). Muroo (sing. of Maroo) is a small tree or a large shrub with spikes of yellow flowers that grows in areas where there is water. Baikiao notes

that this shrub was regarded as sacred because,

the maroo by nature grow by the sacred ponds or erimba. They are always green, being therefore a sign of life and blessings of living. They depict the same youthfulness of spirit to the persons who respect the places of God.³¹

The Mugumo was regarded as a sacred tree by the Igembe because of its huge size and the fact that it is evergreen. It symbolizes a good, healthy, strong life and blessings.³² According to Mwaniki, the Mugumo tree is sacred to the Meru because it saved them when they were escaping from captivity in Mbwa, as one variation of the migration story goes. Mwaniki points out that the Meru used the roots of this tree to cross the sea but he does not explain how they used this root.³³

The sacrificial animal was laid on the branches and leaves of the above sacred trees, on its right side facing the sacred njaambene (Nyambene hills). It was skinned and roasted. After eating either part or the whole of the sacrificial animal, its remains (bones, hooves and sometimes the skin and any left over meat) were all burnt to ashes. Dogs and other domestic animals were not supposed to eat the remains of a sacrificial animal. It is only the parts that had been set aside for God or spirits that could be eaten by wild animals.³⁴

C. OFFICIANTS AND PARTICIPANTS IN SACRIFICIAL CEREMONIES.

The principle of seniority and holiness (utheru) was also applied in selecting officiants in a sacrificial ceremony. The head of the extended family and one of his wives officiated in all family sacrificial rites. An elder was also invited to give advice on how a particular sacrificial rite was to be carried out.³⁵ In all communal sacrificial rites, those who took active part were specially chosen from specific clans. These were clans that were referred to as 'ceremonial or sacrificial clans' (Miiriga ya magongoana). The Igembe believed that when a member of any of the clans referred to as Magongoana clans took lead in a sacrificial rite, God would be more well disposed to the community. He would heed to their requests.³⁶

The significance of these Magongoana clans in sacrificial ceremonies can be understood only if we look at the Meru myth of origin. These clans are related to the three heroes - Gaita or Murorwa, Muthetu and Kiuna - who had offered themselves to be sacrificed so that the Meru could escape from Mbwa where they had been enslaved. A diviner was to use the entrails of whoever was sacrificed to find out whether it was safe for the Meru to escape from Mbwa.

According to the story, Muthetu (which means soil) was used as the earth on which Gaita (which means one who has completely denied himself or offered himself) was to sleep on while his stomach was to be opened up. Kiuna (which means loins) girded his loins in readiness just in case Gaita's and Muthetu's entrails showed that it was not safe for the Meru to escape, then he would be the one to be sacrificed. The three had offered themselves to be sacrificed so that God would lead the Meru out of their enslavement. It is the entrails of the sacrificed person that would show the diviner whether God had given the Meru the go ahead to escape from Mbwa.³⁷ As the story goes, Gaita's entrails showed good signs and after his stomach was sown and thus closed up he regained his normal health and did not die.

The particular clans that are known as Magongoana clans in Igembe are, Antubaita (which means people of Gaita) Antubangai (people of God) Amuthetu (people of Muthetu) Akiuna (people of Kiuna) Antubochiu Ntoamuo, Ntoamutwa, Ntobalingi and Athimba (Thimba is a sacred wild animal that resembles a sheep and is said to be friendly to sheep and goats as it can graze together with them. In Igembe, sometimes the prophet directed that people sacrifice a Thimba instead of a sheep).³⁸

All the above magongoana clans belong to either Njiru or Ntune cluster of clans in Igembe. In Igembe, every clan belongs to one of the three major clans: Njiru, Ntune and Njeru. Njiru clan is composed of all the clans that are said to have been the first to leave Mbwa. They left at night when it was dark, hence their name Njiru, which means black or dark. The Ntune followed at dawn when the sky looks a bit red due to the rays of the rising sun, hence their name Ntune which means the reds. The Njeru were the last to leave Mbwa and they left during the day light, hence their name Njeru which means white or light.³⁹

There is no oral evidence in Igembe to support Muntu Imanyara's claim that these three major clans are related to the Meru myth of creation. According to Muntu Imanyara, the Meru oral tradition identify three main lines of descent: black, red and white. He goes on to point out that the Meru claim to be descendants of Muntu who was the first human being to be created by God and who was created at night. Muntu was thus created with a dark skin the colour to represent the night he was created. Muntu became the original ancestor of the black race. He goes on to point out that the original ancestor of 'yellow' race, whom he refers to as the reds, was created

at dawn when the colour of the sun was red. The original ancestor of the white people was created during the day.⁴⁰ Muntu Imanyara's attempt to get a creation myth among the Meru is fruitless as they have no such a myth. The writer failed to get any such a myth among the Igembe.

Being a member of the magongoana clans was a necessary, but not sufficient, qualification for one to officiate in a communal sacrificial rite. There were other qualifications that one had to satisfy. First, one had to be an elder and if he was to be the leader of the sacrificial rite, he had to be past child-bearing age. Although the elders took some young people with them when going to offer a sacrifice, these were only apprentices. Baikiao correctly points out that "Meru priesthood is not juridical, the power of priesthood is distributed among the people in various degrees and is based on the concept of holiness. The aged therefore as sacred persons had more powers of priesthood."⁴¹

Besides the age factor, the elder chosen to lead in a sacrificial rite had to be endowed with benevolence, sympathy, kindness and spotless reputation in the society. He had to be one who would never engage in any anti-social activities. He had also to be one who was believed to be favoured by

God through the many blessings of fortunes bestowed on him. In particular his first born son had to be alive.⁴² He had also to be a person who had been born the 'right way'. This means that he would not have been breech-delivered. He had to be a person whose upper teeth did not come out before the lower teeth. He had also to be a person who had been born with all normal parts of the body, not having more or less than the normal number of fingers and toes. In short, he had to be a person born without any deformities.⁴³

The Igembe believed that deformities or abnormalities at birth were a sign that God was not happy with the parents of the child because of a wrong they had done or they were a sign that there was a ritual uncleanness associated with the birth of the child. Hence such a child was not ritually spotless and therefore could not take active role in a communal sacrificial rite.⁴⁴

A person who had been a product of a union between uncircumcised parents or a circumcised and uncircumcised person, could not lead or take active role in a communal sacrifice, even if he met all the other qualifications.⁴⁵

In communal sacrificial ceremonies, women offered cereals and other food stuffs particularly finger millet (ugimbi) which was a symbol of fertility. After giving their offerings, they left the elders to carry out the killing of the sacrificial animal as women were not supposed to taste meat that had been offered in a communal sacrificial rite.⁴⁶

All the elders who took part in a sacrificial ceremony or a ritual blessing ceremony had to have clean shaven heads and wear a crown on them made of a sacrificial sheep's skin (Muunqi jwa ngeere). They also put on a sacrificial cape (thara) and held a black stick (murai jumwiru) that had been made from the sacred Muruau tree. This stick that was of the colour sacred to God (black) was a symbol of peace. It could not be used to hit livestock or anybody.

Women participating in a communal sacrificial ceremony had to put on a headlace of black beads (mukathi jumwiru), hold the black stick (murai jumwiru) and apply ochre on their clean shaven heads. When children took active part in a sacrificial ceremony, they also had to hold the black stick (murai jumwiru), have their heads clean shaven and the girl had to have black headlace (mukathi jumwiru). The children who took part in a sacrificial ceremony had also to meet all the above requirements of holiness (utheru)

and right birth.⁴⁷

D. SEX AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN SACRIFICIAL RITES

Another thing that features in sacrificial rites has to do with the notion of sexual intercourse. There are two aspects of this notion: the prohibition of sexual intercourse and the compulsory ritual sexual intercourse. Those who took active part in communal sacrificial rites were required by custom to abstain from sexual intercourse for four days before the sacrificial ceremony and three days after the ceremony. In family sacrificial rites, if the sacrifice was necessitated by some problems like illness in a family, those who participated in the ceremony had to abstain from sexual contact until the problems had been solved. If the sacrifice was meant to cleanse the evil that had befallen the family, then the evil would be passed on to the family of whoever had sexual intercourse during the abstention period after participating in the sacrificial rite.⁴⁸ If the Sacrifice was one of asking for blessings, then the person(s) on whose behalf the sacrifice was offered or in case of children or unmarried persons, the parents of such person had to have a ritual sexual intercourse on the night of the sacrifice.⁴⁹

While studying the Gikuyu (who are related to the Meru and whose religious beliefs and practices

have many similar aspects with those of the Meru), Leakey failed to get the meaning and purpose behind these ceremonial sex acts. He surmises that,

The nature of these sacrifices and powers to which they are offered is quite obscure and it is probable that the original significance has been completely lost. One cannot help suspecting that it was the relic of an ancient fertility cult, but if this is the case, it is no longer known.⁵⁰

He goes on to point out that

The whole conception of the meaning of these ceremonial sex acts of sacrifice for the Kikuyu was that of a purification rite and yet it was called a sacrifice showing that it had in the past had a different meaning and had been in the nature of an act of worship of some deity that had been superceded by Ngai.⁵¹

Leakey's explanation fails to give us the meaning and role of ritual sexual intercourse among the Kikuyu.

In Meru traditional society, sex was viewed as very sacred and there was a lot of significance attached to it. It was believed that it was through sexual intercourse that God's work of 'creating' new human life was accomplished. Therefore, sexual intercourse was taken as God's instrument of bringing forth blessings to the living human beings, because the Igembe believed that a child was the highest and most important blessing in life. Through sexual intercourse, the blessings of a child were passed to the parents. Therefore, through sexual intercourse, two human beings came in contact with God's 'creation power'.⁵²

Using the above reasoning, the Igembe believed that other blessings also could be received through the sex act. When a sacrifice was offered in order to ask for blessings from God or the spirits of the ancestor, the Igembe believed that these were granted and the sexual intercourse that sealed the sacrificial ceremony was meant to make the ones offering the sacrifice receive the blessings. They had to make the blessings theirs. That is the reason why all those who had tasted the sacrificial meat were barred from having sexual intercourse before those on whose behalf of the sacrifice had been made. It was believed that if they had sexual intercourse they would thereby take the blessings that did not rightly belong to them because the sacrifice had not been made on their behalf. Through the sacrificial animal, the sacrificer established communion with God and made his requests. Those who ate the sacrificial animal were believed to participate in this communion. Through the sexual act, God was believed to pass on the blessings requested to those who had offered the sacrifice.⁵³

When the aim of the ritual sexual intercourse was to receive blessings, this was referred to as a sacrifice (igongoana). However, it is not only in relation to a sacrificial ceremony that blessings were believed to be received through the sexual act.

When a person had been cursed by another person, a parent or the community, or when a family was facing misfortunes due to the effect of a curse and wished to have the curse nullified, a ceremony was performed whereby the person or persons cursed or affected by the curse were given blessings by the one who had cursed or his/her representative.

The blessings that would annul the curse were given through the one giving the blessings spraying his/her saliva on the cursed person(s) and on the skin and one limb of a sheep that had been killed for the ceremony. This was referred to as kuewa mata which literally means, to be given saliva. Those supposed to receive the blessings were to eat the meat from the consecrated limb of the sheep and then to have sexual intercourse that very night while sleeping on the consecrated skin of the sheep that had been killed. If it is a family that was affected by the curse, the head of that family and his senior wife had to have the ritual sexual intercourse in order to receive the blessings.

The Igembe believed that, it is God who made a curse effective. When a person or persons who had been wronged was/were reconciled with the cursed person, then God would also remove the curse. Therefore,

as the person or the community blessed the cursed person or persons so also would God. The cursed person or the head of a cursed family had to take the blessings through the sexual act.⁵⁴ The head of a cursed family took the blessings on behalf of all the members of his family.

Sexual intercourse could also be used as a kind of oath. If a person swore never to do something or swore that he had not done something that the community thought he had done, he would be asked to take an oath and curse himself through sexual intercourse. A curse or an oath through sexual intercourse was taken as a very serious oath because the individual was cursing himself and all his seeds (children) that they may all be unproductive. If for example a sorcerer declared before the Njuri Council that he/she would never again practise sorcery, part of the oath taking ritual required that the sorcerer and his or her spouse had sexual intercourse (supervised by one Njuri elder) during which time he/she swore that he/she would never repeat the evil practice.⁵⁵

The Igembe believed that in the same way that blessings were received through sexual contact, so could evil be received through sexual intercourse. When a person was believed to have contacted some ritual uncleanness either through breaking some taboos, having

been in contact with a dead person, or through the death of one's child or a spouse, he/she was supposed to have a purification sexual intercourse with a person who was not related to him/her before he/she had any sexual contact with the spouse. The belief was that since this other person was not related to the one who had the ritual uncleanness (either through marriage or blood relationship), the ritual uncleanness could have no effect on him/her. However if the ritually unclean person had sexual intercourse with the spouse before this ritual cleansing the uncleanness and its evil effect would pass to the spouse.⁵⁶

The belief that blessings and ritual uncleanness and its evil effect could be passed to another person through sexual intercourse explains the reason why those participating in communal sacrificial rites were barred from having sexual intercourse four days before the ceremony and three days after the ceremony. People who were to present themselves to God on behalf of the community had to be clean and free from any ritual impurity. They were to be holy persons (antu batheru). That is why communal sacrificial ceremonies were led by an old man past child bearing age or a boy and a girl who were believed not to have engaged in any sexual intercourse but who were also of good character. These were considered to be

undefiled. Since the blessings that accompanied the communal sacrificial rite were communal blessings, the individual elders who participated in the sacrificial ceremony were barred from any sexual contact for three days after the sacrifice so that they might not take for themselves the blessings that belonged to the whole community.⁵⁷

E. PLACES WHERE SACRIFICIAL RITES WERE CARRIED OUT

The place where a sacrificial rite was carried out was determined by the nature and type of the sacrificial rite. Family sacrificial rites were carried out mainly at the family shrine called Kiara. This was a place on the right side (facing the entrance to the homestead) of the homestead where the dung of cattle, sheep and goats were kept in a heap after sweeping. In Igembe, the Kiara was regarded as a symbol of life and fertility.⁵⁸ Whatever was buried there symbolized death to one state of life and re-birth to another state of life.

We have already noted that, the aged members of the Igembe community were buried at the Kiara. We have also seen the relationship between the Kiara and the Meru myth of origin of death (Chapter II). Those who were buried at the Kiara were believed to have joined the world of the ancestors.

When a child was born, the placenta and the umbilical cord were buried at the Kiara. By burying the birth remains at the Kiara, the Igembe were offering silent prayers that the mother's womb should remain fertile. The burying of the placenta and the umbilical cord which were the signs of the mother's connection with the new born baby symbolized the union of this new born child with the spirits of the ancestors.⁵⁹ It symbolized death of the child from its inactive state in its mother's womb and birth into the community of the living and the ancestors. When a child was shaved for the first time after birth, the hair was buried at the Kiara. This symbolized the birth of the child into the clan of its ancestors. Every woman's monthly menstrual blood clots had to be buried at the Kiara. The menstrual flow was taken as a symbol of woman's fertility. Therefore, it was buried at the Kiara so that the woman would continue to be fertile. Washing of the menstrual blood was believed to symbolize the washing away of fertility. By washing the menstrual blood, one was believed to pray for her infertility.⁶⁰

The Kiara occupied a very central role in Igembe family religious rites. It symbolized the presence of the spirits of the ancestors and the continuity of the family. Since the spirits of the ancestors were believed to be present in every family religious rite,

family sacrificial rites were carried out at the Kiara where the ancestors had been buried. It was a symbol of their presence in the family.

There were, however, other family sacrificial rites that did not take place at the Kiara. If, for example, a family member had been struck by lightning or if flood had destroyed a person's property or piece of land or when a person drowned in a river or a pond, the sacrificial rite was carried out where the calamity had struck.⁶¹

Every locality had its sacred groves, hills, ponds or rivers where local communal sacrificial rites were carried out. In Igembe, some groves, water places and hills were believed to be God's special 'dwelling places'. It is in these places that communal sacrifices were offered to God.' Since water, like rain, was considered as a very important blessing of God to the community and a symbol of life, some places where there was water were associated with God. God was believed to be the sole provider of water.⁶²

In Mutuati and Antubetwe locations of Igembe, most sacrificial ceremonies were carried out at Tamani where there is a water pond which was the only source of water in the two locations. Other sacrificial rites were carried out on a hill called

believed in three Gods; they were only referring to his chief residential places.⁶⁶ A look at the significance of these three places will show us why the Igembe viewed them as the chief 'dwelling places of God'.

Iombe is situated in Mutuati location. It is the only place in Igembe where salt lick (muonyo) and soda ash (igati) are found. Ira, (white diatomite soda) that was used in most religious ceremonies was/is also found there. Iombe is a fascinating place where there was a geographical depression that brought about a very distinctive geographical feature in the place. No other place in Igembe has such features. It is at the bottom of this depression that the saline earth and water out of which the soda ash and salt lick are made is found. Being a place where their livestock got salt lick and human beings got the soda ash, the Igembe regarded Iombe as a symbol of life. The distinctive features of this place also revealed to the Igembe that, this is a place where God's power had been at work. That is the reason why the place was associated with God.⁶⁷

The Igembe never visited Mt. Kenya (Kirimara) because it is too far from their area. However, the mountain had significant symbolism in Igembe and Meru religion. Baikiao notes that

since it is the mountain of light, a sign of which is seen even before sunrise as it reflects the first rays of the sun, it assumes a symbol of light in Meru... The life giving water (rivers) flow perennially from her breasts and bosom nourishing the whole of Meru; Mount Kenya is the good mother of the Meru people.⁶⁸

Nyambene hills are the highest hills in Igembe division. They are situated between longitude 0.15'N and latitude 38.00'E and they are 2513 metres above sea level.⁶⁹ Sacrificial rites were carried out at the place where there is a small permanent lake on top of the hill. Communal sacrificial rites were offered here. Baikiao correctly notes that

In Meru traditions, Njaambene (deriving from njaamba, nyamba, nchamba, meaning masculine) represents Meru manhood. He is not beautiful or decorated as the Keremara, but when rain clouds gather over him, then throughout Meru powerful and heavy peals of thunder (the warriors voice) are heard, accompanied by lightning (likened to the warrior's sword) which sweeps the Meru heavens this way and that originating from Njaambene. Rain then pours in Meru blessing the people with crops and milk and honey.... Njaambene is the male organ on earth, he must make the Heaven produce many blessings for mankind.⁷⁰

The writer's informants agreed with Baikiao's observation that Njaambene is associated with manhood.

FOOT NOTES, CHAPTER III

1. J.O. Awolalu; Yoruba Beliefs And Sacrificial Rites,
London: Longman, 1979, p.134.
2. J.S. Mbiti; African Religions And Philosophy,
London: Heinemann, 1969, p.58.
3. Mbero, Peter, interviewed at Maua, Maua location,
on 29th May, 1983.
4. Encyclopaedia Of Religion And Ethics, Vol.II, p.1.
5. Awolalu, op.cit. p.136.
6. E.B. Idowu; African Traditional Religion, A
Definition, London: S.C.M. Press Ltd.,
1973, p.180.
7. Mbiti, op.cit. p.9.
8. T. Cullen Young; "The Idea of God in Northern
Nyasaland (Malawi)" in E.W. Smith
(ed) African Ideas of God, London:
Edinburgh House, 1950, p.39.
9. E.W. Smith; op.cit. pp.25-26 (Introduction).
10. J. Kenyatta; Facing Mount Kenya, Nairobi:
Heinemann, 7th edition, 1977, p.232.

11. Quoted in Idowu, op.cit. p.181.
12. Smith, op.cit. p.26.
13. Idowu, op.cit. pp.184-185.
14. M'mubwika M'mauta, Kabuali M'etiri, Mwomboko
M'eliungu, interviewed at Kanuni
Akachiu location, on 20th June, 1983.
15. Ibid.
16. Kamanja M'lithara and Mwambia M'agichia, interviewed
at Muringeene, Njia location, on 30th
May, 1983.
17. M'mubwika M'mauta and others, op.cit.
18. Mbero peter op.cit. M'tuaruchiu Joseph, interviewed
at Maua, Maua location, on 14th July 1983.
19. Ithiabuali M'aboro, interviewed at Kaurine, Maua
location, on 1st March 1982.
20. M'tuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit.; Mbero Peter, op.cit.
21. E.E. Evans-Pritchard; Nuer Religion, Oxford:
Oxford University Press, 1956, p.277.
22. Kenyatta, op.cit.

23. Kamanja M'lithara, M'tuaruchiu Joseph, M'abwima Karani, interviewed at Muringene Njia location, on 26th May, 1983; Ithiabuali M'aboro, op.cit.
24. Baikiao, Jomo Ngunyura, interviewed at Maua, Maua location, on 1st August 1983; Kabutu M'alaine, Baituuru M'moroo, M'kubania Kamincha, interviewed at Kangeta, Njia location, on 24th June, 1983.
25. Baikiao; Jomo Ngunyura op.cit.
26. J.N. Baikiao; "Towards Africanisation of Christianity An Approach to the evangelization of the Meru of Kenya in Light of their tribal anthropology and Post Vatican Council II Magisterium" Ph.D. Thesis, Urbaniana Pontifical University, Roma, 1977, p.135.
27. Ibid.
28. J.M. Njau; "Prayer, Sacrifice and Rituals. The Meru of Kenya", in Occasional Research Papers in African Traditional /Religion, Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, Makerere University, July, 1971, vol.1. p.2.

30. M'tuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit.
31. Baikiao, op.cit. p.141.
32. M'tuaruchiu, Joseph, op.cit.
33. H.S.K. Mwaniki; "A precolonial History of the Chuka of Mount Kenya, C. 1400-1908", Ph.D. Dissertation, Dulhousie University, 1982, pp.55-56.
34. . Kabutu M'alaine, interviewed at Kangeta, Njia location, on 22nd June, 1983.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.; M'tuaruchiu, Joseph, op.cit.
37. Kamanja M'lithara and others, interviewed on 26th May, 1983, op.cit., M'mubwika M'mauta and others, op.cit.
38. Kabutu M'alaine and others interviewed on 7th July, 1983, op.cit.
39. Kamanja M'lithara and others interviewed on 20th May, 1983, op.cit., Kabutu M'alaine and others, interviewed on 7th July, 1983, op.cit., M'mubwika M'mauta and others, op.cit.

40. A.M. M'Imanyara; "The History Of Meru from Meroe to Kenya. B.C. 800-1965 A.D." Manuscript in owner's possession, p.141.
41. Baikiao, op.cit. p.121.
42. Miichuki Samuel, interviewed at Kawiru, Maua location, on 28th February, 1982.
43. Ibid.; Kailibi M'mutunyi, interviewed at Kawiru Maua location, on 10th May, 1983.
44. Ibid.; Kamanja M'lithara and others, interviewed on 20th May, 1983, op.cit., Kaluma Asunta, interviewed at Amungenti, Akachiu location, on 18th July, 1983.
45. M'tuaruchiu, Joseph, op.cit., Kaluma Asunta, op.cit.
46. Ibid.
47. Baikiao, op.cit. p.121; M'mubwika M'mauta and others, op.cit.
48. Miichuki Samuel, op.cit.
49. M'mubwika M'mauta and others, op.cit.; M'tuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit.

50. L.S.B. Leakey; The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903,
London:Academic Press, 1977
Vol.III. p.1102.
51. Ibid. p.1103.
52. Mbero, Peter, op.cit.; M'tuaruchiu, Joseph,
op.cit.
53. M'mubwika M'mauta and others, op.cit.
54. Ibid.
55. Miichuki Samuel, op.cit.
56. Kaluma Asunta, op.cit.
57. Kamanja M'lithara and others, interviewed on
26th May, 1983, op.cit.
58. Mbero Peter, op.cit.
59. Ibid.
60. Miichuki, Samuel, op.cit, Kaluma Asunta, op.cit.
61. Kanampiu, John, interviewed at Kawiru, Maua
location on 16th May, 1983.
62. Ndatu M'enanga, M'anjoroo, Kachiuki Baitumbiri,

Thirari Baimanyara, interviewed at Mutuati, Mutuati location on 29th July, 1983.

63. M'achiuki M'lairingi, interviewed at Mutuati, Mutuati location, on 3rd August, 1983, M'amanja M'Kailibi, interviewed at Mutuati, Mutuati location, on 20th July, 1983. These elders refused to take the researcher to this hill claiming that it is a holy place where a woman who had no intention of worshipping there could not go.
64. Ithiabuli M'aboro, op.cit.
65. M'amanja M'Kailibi op.cit., Kamanja M'lithara and others, interviewed on 26th May, 1983, op.cit., M'mubwika M'mauta and others, op.cit.
66. M'tuaruchiu, Joseph, interviewed on 14th July, 1983, op.cit.
67. Ibid., Nculubi Kaibiria, Kamanja M'tuaruchiu, Mwambia Nkirina, interviewed at Iombe, Mutuati location on 3rd August 1983.

68. Baikiao, op.cit. pp.130-131.
69. National Atlas of Kenya, 3rd ed. 1970,
published by Survey of Kenya, p.7.
70. Baikiao, op.cit. pp.132-133.
71. M'tuaruchiu, Joseph, op.cit., Kamanja M'lithara
and others, op.cit. interviewed on
26th.May, 1983.

C H A P T E R I V

SACRIFICIAL RITES RELATED TO THE RITES OF PASSAGE

In Chapter two, we noted that the four main rites of passage in Igembe were very important in an individual's life-span. Although they were social events, they were also religious in the sense that God and the spirits of the ancestors were brought into the picture. This is because the Igembe believed that all important social events could not succeed without the blessings of God and the spirits of the ancestors.¹ Prayers and sacrifices were therefore, offered to them so that they could make the event successful.

Generally, the sacrificial rites which related to the rites of passage fall under two categories. There are those sacrifices that were offered as normal components of the particular rite of passage. Since one aim of the different rites of passage was to mark a change in the individual's social status, these sacrificial rites strengthened and confirmed the change. To borrow Evans-Pritchard's phrases the importance of such a sacrificial rite lay in "the fact that it sacriizes the social event and new relationships brought about by it. It solemnizes the change of status or relationship giving it religious validation."²

The other category includes all those

sacrificial rites which were offered when there was a problem in an individual's life, connected with a particular rite of passage. The aim of these sacrificial rites was to avert calamity and atone for the offences that had brought about the calamity. These sacrificial rites were supposed to re-establish the good relationship between man and God or man and spirits of the ancestors that had been marred by the wrong act committed by man.

To be systematic, we shall look at the sacrificial rites that are related to each major rite of passage - namely, birth, circumcision, marriage and death - then point out under which category each sacrificial rite falls.

A. SACRIFICIAL RITES RELATED TO BIRTH

(i) THANKSGIVING SACRIFICE AFTER THE BIRTH OF A CHILD.

After the successful birth of a child, the newborn baby did not automatically become a member of the community. It had to be incorporated into the human community socially and religiously.

The ceremony of socially and religiously incorporating the new born child into the community of the living was carried out on the day the mother and child ended their seclusion. On this day, old women and children came into the child's home. They ate,

hedges

rejoiced and offered prayers for the well being and proper growth of the child. The child was socially incorporated into the community by being taken out of the house in which it was born. The child's mother gave a young girl the child. It was then held by the joyous old women and children.³ The child's mother also came out.

On the eve of this day, a sheep was offered as a sacrifice to God. The main aim of this sacrificial rite was to thank God because of the gift (child) he had given to the child's parents and the community and to pray to him to guide and protect this child.⁴ Although prayers were offered directly to God, when we look at the way the sacrificial animal was distributed, we would come to the conclusion that the sacrifice was offered only to the spirits of the ancestors.

In all sacrificial rites that were performed on family basis, pieces of fat from the sacrificial animal, honey and finger millet were put in sixteen stems of castor oil plant (igina) as offerings for the spirits of the ancestors. The head of the family and one of his wives planted four of these at the door of the house of the mother of the person on whose behalf the sacrifice was being offered. Two stems were planted on either side of the door, four at the kiara, four at the entrance of the homestead and the other four at the place where

the family fetched water.⁵ The rest of the meat was eaten by those offering the sacrifice. In most family sacrificial rites no parts of the sacrificial animal were set aside for God.

However, although in practice it looks as though family sacrifices were offered to the spirits of the ancestors, the Igembe maintain that the culminating point of reference in such sacrificial rites was God. The spirits of the ancestors were partakers of the sacrificial meat in their capacity as the invisible members of the family.⁶

In these family sacrificial rites, bones and all the remains were burnt to ashes. The burning of bones and all the remains from the sacrificial animal had some significance. The rising smoke from the remains of the sacrificial animal was regarded as a kind of communication between man and God. The life of the sacrificial animal and the smoke go to the sky (God's dwelling place) as conveyance of people's prayers. God sends down his blessings to those offering the sacrifice. The Igembe believed that whenever communal sacrificial rites were offered to God, some rain had to fall after the sacrifice if God had accepted the sacrifice. This rain was regarded as a sign of God's blessings that come down from the sky. The Igembe regarded the rain symbolically as God's spittle.⁷ This is because,

to them, spitting was sometimes a symbol of blessings. When an elder, old woman or a parent spat on his/her chest or on the air facing the sky, this was taken as a way of blessing whoever he/she wished to bless at that time.

(ii) SACRIFICE TO INCORPORATE A CHILD INTO THE CLAN

The sacrificial rite that incorporated the child into the community of the living and one that incorporated the child into its father's clan, fall in the category of sacrificial rites that were offered to sacralize a social event. A child did not automatically become a member of its father's clan. It had to socially and religiously be incorporated into its father's clan. The ceremony of incorporating the child into its father's clan took place between the period after the seclusion of the child and the mother and three years. Some clans in Igembe carried out the ceremony a few days after the end of seclusion period for the mother and child, while others waited until the child was about two or three years old. This ceremony was referred to as kua mwana mburi (to give the child a goat).

The type of sacrificial animal for this ceremony depended on the sex of the child. If the child was a boy, a he-goat (nthenge) was sacrificed. If the child was a girl an ewe (mwati) was sacrificed.⁸

In Igembe traditional community, the he-goat symbolized the male in the sense that men are the ones who were supposed to act as arbitrators, law makers and judges. One who performed these functions was referred to as a Mugambi. One Kimeru proverb explains the reason why the he-goat was associated with the male members of the community. The proverb says:- Mugambi ni ta nthenge, wona tubuli kienine umenye ni kuoboba kwayo (an arbitrator- judge is like a he-goat; when you see young goats in the field, you know that they are the products of its noise). This means that a Mugambi makes a lot of noise when discussing judicial matters, just like a he-goat makes a lot of noise when it is mating. The product of a Mugambi's noise is peace and stability in the society, a product that is good and acceptable to all. In the same way, the product of a he-goat's noise when it is mating is the young goats which are a blessing to the community since they are part of its wealth.⁹

In this sacrificial ceremony of incorporating the child into its father's clan, the he-goat was sacrificed to symbolize the fact that an arbitrator - judge and a law maker had been born into the clan.

As we have already noted in Chapter II every clan had its clan council (kiama) consisting of the male members of the clan who looked into the judicial matters affecting the members of their clan. The ewe, which was a symbol of fertility, meekness

and continuity was sacrificed in case the child was a girl because it was also a symbol of the woman who increases life through procreation.¹⁰

The ceremony of incorporating the child into the clan was taken as a 'second birth'. There was a re-enactment of the birth drama where the child had to stay in seclusion in its mother's house for three days in case of a girl or four days in case of a boy. When the child was first put in seclusion, women emitted ululations to signify the 'birth' of a child just as was done after the physical birth of the child. The child was taken out of seclusion on the third day, in case of a girl, or fourth, in case of a boy. The whole ceremony took seven days in case of a girl, or eight days in case of a boy.¹¹

★ On the day the child's seclusion period came to an end, there were many symbolic events that marked the birth of the child into the clan. The most important symbolic event was the shaving of the hair with which the child had been born. This was the first time this hair was shaved. The shaving was done by a woman past child bearing age. The shaving was done by use of a traditional shaving blade (kirunya) that was held with the leaves of the sacred mugumo tree. The water used for shaving had been consecrated by putting honey and finger-millet in it. The water had to be fetched very early in the morning by a young virgin girl and a

134

young virgin boy who had earlier been anointed with white diatomite powder (ira). White diatomite powder symbolized that the children were undertaking a religious mission. The white diatomite powder also symbolized that the ceremony was one of joy because white was a symbol of joy among the Igembe.¹²

The shaving of the hair with which the child had been born - which was a symbol of the child's attachment to his/her mother - was a sign that the child had now symbolically been 'separated' from its mother. Before this symbolic separation, any ritual uncleanness that affected the mother was believed to also affect the child. If such a child died, only its mother would carry it to the bush. Nobody else could touch it for it 'belonged' to its mother.¹³

After the child was symbolically 'separated' from its mother, it was symbolically joined to the wider community of its mother, father and the clan. This was done by putting a symbolic thread round the child's neck as a necklace. This thread that had been made from a piece of bark of Mugumo tree and hair from the tail of a giraffe (nchangi or lenjwa) was a symbol of the umbilical cord that joined the child to its father, mother and the clan. It symbolized the unity of the four.¹⁴

The father of the child first put two cowrie shells (ithai) from his headlace and the ear that

had earlier on been cut from the animal that would be offered as a sacrifice through the thread. He passed the thread to the child's mother. The child's mother put her two cowrie shells (besides the ear of the sacrificial animal) and then she put the ear that had earlier on been cut from a sheep or goat that belonged to a member of the father's clan. The thread was then tied round the child's neck.

The cowrie shells from the father's headlace represented the father, the ear from the sacrificial animal represented the child since it was to be offered on behalf of the child. The cowrie shells from the mother's necklace represented the mother while the ear from the sheep that belonged to a member of the clan represented the clan. Henceforth, the child was regarded as a full member of his/her father's clan. In case anybody murdered such a child, the members of the clan had a right to claim full compensation that was required for a person who had been murdered, from the clan of whoever had murdered such a child. Before this ceremony, such a child could not be fully compensated because it did not belong to the clan.¹⁵

Another ritual was also performed in order to join the child to its parents and the spirits of its ancestors. This was done through a ceremony in which part of the child's hair was burned and the child's father and mother breathed in the smell

(ukucia munyinko) of the burning hair. The hair was put on the fire inside the mother's house. The child's parents stood round the fire place, they both held the skin that the child had sat on while being shaved and covered themselves with it in such a way that the smell from the burning hair was prevented from escaping. The remaining hair was buried at the kiara to symbolize the joining of the child to the spirits of his/her ancestors.¹⁶

So far, what we have seen is the symbolic birth of a child into the clan through the wishes of human beings. As we have already noted, the Igembe believed that no human undertaking could succeed without God's blessings. In this case then, God had to put his final seal on the whole ceremony of birth of the child into the clan. He had to give his blessings. Therefore, a sacrifice was offered to him on the same evening that the child was symbolically born into the clan.

Before the sacrificial animal was killed through suffocation, it was consecrated by spraying honey on it and anointing its forehead with white diatomite powder (ira). The sacrificial animal was made to go round the child (gukumbuka mwana) four times. While this was happening, the child's father uttered prayers to God requesting that the sheep may make the child a good person. He requested God to bless the child with many children, cows and goats.

Tiiri. It was believed that there are God's pots (nyungu cia Ngai) on this hill. No explanation is given as to how the 'pots' got there. The sacrificial meat was put in these 'pots' ⁶³ Nankenge and Iria ria Ririau (lake of ririau) in Akachiu location were other local sacred places where there was water. ⁶⁴ In Maua location, there is a place called Miarene where there is a sacred grove where some local communal sacrificial rites were carried out.

There were other sacrificial rites that were carried out either in a common field or along the paths. For example, some communal sacrificial rites related to circumcision were carried out at the circumcision field (itiiri). Every locality had its own itiiri. Thanks-giving ~~harvest~~ sacrificial rites were carried out along communal paths that led to and out of the fields. Sacrificial rites for prevention of epidemics and to keep away enemies were also carried out along the main paths. ⁶⁵

Besides the above local sacred places, there were three areas that were regarded by the Igembe as chief 'dwelling' places of God'. When people were praying to God, they beseeched him referring to him as God of Iombe (Ngai ye Iombe), God of Nyambene hills (Ngai ee Njaambene), and God of Mt Kenya (Ngai ee Kirimara). This however does not mean that the Igembe

(Mburi iji irokuethia mwana umwega, ugie na kitharimo
kia twana, ng'ombe na mburi)¹⁷

Only the child and its parents tasted the meat from the sacrificial animal on the day of the the sacrifice. This is because the sacrifice was really theirs and they had to take the blessings that accompanied the sacrifice alone.¹⁸ We have already noted that the Igembe believed that God's blessings could be received through a ritual sexual intercourse. On the eve of the sacrifice the father and mother of the child had a ritual sexual intercourse. Before this ritual sexual intercourse, the child's father could not taste the meat from the sacrificial animal. This means that, although the mother symbolically gave the child to the father (symbolized by the meat from the sacrificial animal), this did not mean that the father had taken the procreating power of the child's mother. He therefore, gave her finger millet showing that he wished her to continue to be more and more fertile.¹⁹

Except the child's parents, all those who tasted the sacrificial meat were barred from having any sexual intercourse until after the seventh (in case of a girl) or eighth (in case of a boy) day of the ceremony, when the ceremony was concluded.²⁰

(iii) SACRIFICE WHEN THERE WAS BIRTH OF
AN ABNORMAL CHILD

The above sacrificial ceremonies related to the birth rite were offered in circumstances of joy and jubiliation. The sacrificial rite that accompanied the birth of an abnormal child was one that was surrounded with fear, seriousness and repentance on the part of those offering the sacrifice. This is because the birth of an abnormal child was taken as a sign that God, who was believed to be the sole provider of children was not pleased with the family of the new-born child.²¹

Since the birth of a deformed child or a child with other abnormalities was taken as a sign that all was not well with the family, the father of the new-born child had to act promptly to propitiate God. When he was informed of the birth of such a child, he sprayed honey on one of his rams that had to be black in colour. This was a way of consecrating it. If the father did not have a ram that was black in colour and without blemish, he consecrated an ewe so that if it gave birth to a ram without a blemish, this would be offered to God as a sacrifice. If after consecrating the ewe, he bought the right ram for sacrifice, this ram had to symbolically be born by the consecrated ewe. This was done by making the ram pass between the legs of the ewe from the side of the ewe's head. When the head of the ram emerged from the back of the ewe, it was sprayed with honey.²²

The birth of an abnormal child was one that caused fear among the family members that God would go on punishing them. The prompt action of consecrating the animal and offering prayers to God and beseeching him not to do more harm to the family was supposed to show God that the family was repentant and willing to offer him a propitiatory sacrifice. The sacrifice could only be carried out after the family had been informed what it was that they had done which had displeased God. Therefore, a diviner had to be consulted so that he could tell what it was that had displeased God, and the remedy.²³

The sacrifice was offered when the child's mother was strong enough or ritually clean to participate in the sacrificial ceremony. As long as the mother was bleeding as a result of giving birth, she was regarded as ritually unclean.²⁴

Before the family offered the sacrifice, God had to show that he was willing to accept the sacrifice. Therefore, on the evening before the day of the sacrifice, an open container of honey (kiempe kia naicu) was kept overnight at the Kiara. If on the following morning it was noted that bees (njuki) and ants (^{Muthwa} nthingiri) were feasting on the honey, this was taken as a sign that God had accepted that the child's parents could offer the sacrifice to him. When the bees tasted the honey, it was said that God's elders from above (akuru ba Ngai ba iguru)

had tasted the honey. When the ants tasted the honey, it was said that God's elders from below (akuru ba Ngai ba nthi) had tasted the honey. If the above insects and in particular the bees failed to feast on the honey, a diviner had to be consulted to tell the reason why this happened.²⁵

The writer's informants did not give a clear reason as to why both 'God's elders' from above and below symbolized by the bees and the ants respectively had to taste the honey before the sacrifice could be offered. However, we can get a probable answer by looking at some Igembe related beliefs.

The Igembe believed that God could directly punish a family because either one of its members had wronged God directly (for example by killing a sacred animal) or wronged the spirits of the ancestors or even a living human being who had no way of avenging. God who was regarded as the chief justice could punish an individual directly on behalf of the wronged spirits of the ancestors or person.²⁶ In this case then, the spirits of the above might probably represent the good spirits associated with God, those that acted as his messengers and those from below might be representing the spirits of the ancestors. This is the reason why one had to contact the diviner who had to tell the wrong that had been done and its remedy before one proceed to offer the sacrifice to God.

Early in the morning, the sacrificial animal was consecrated by spraying honey on it. It was killed through suffocation. Its head was cut off and the rest of the body was divided into two equal halves. The right side was put on the right side of the homestead as God's part. This had to be outside the entrance to the homestead. The left side was to be eaten by the members of the family offering the sacrifice. Before the left side was roasted and eaten, the child's parents put honey and fat (mathunya) from the sacrificial animal in stems of castor oil plant and planted them following the pattern we have described on page 211 . The planting of the igina symbolized that the parents had invited the good spirits and spirits of the ancestors to come and be part of the sacrificing family.²⁷

There were other abnormalities associated with birth that were not viewed as direct punishment from God. They were thought to have occurred because of ritual uncleanness (migiro). For example, when a child was born feet first, a medicine man had to be called in to cleanse the ritual uncleanness that had caused such an occurrence. The sheep that was killed when abnormalities at birth were associated with ritual uncleanness was not said to be a sacrificial sheep; it was a sheep for cleansing the ritual uncleanness (Ngondu ya kuruta mugiro).²⁸

The birth of twins was also believed to be caused by ritual uncleanness on the side of the mother. This ritual uncleanness had to be symbolically cleansed before the mother and father of the twins could resume normal sexual relationship. Part of this ritual cleansing required the twins' mother to cut their finger nails and some hair on their forehead, at the centre, back and both sides of the head. This hair was mixed with the nails and some milk that had been squeezed from the mother's breast, and some finger-millet. The twins' mother prayed to God beseeching him to protect her from this uncleanness (mpanga) of twins. She also begged God to bring up the twins for her. The medicine man took the mixture of hair, finger-nail clippings, milk and finger-millet that symbolized the mpanga and threw it very far away.²⁹ It was after this symbolic cleansing that the twins' mother had a purification sexual intercourse with another man who was not related to her in any way. It was believed that her uncleanness was thereby transferred to this man and since he was not related to her in any way, the uncleanness could not affect him.³⁰

A miscarriage was thought to be very serious for it brought bad repercussions to the whole land. The blood of the miscarriage was believed to defile the woman and the land. This kind of defilement could only be cleansed by killing a sheep and cleansing the land with its blood and chyme. The woman who had

miscarried had also to be washed with the sheep's blood and chyme by an old woman past child bearing age. The old woman helped to cleanse the woman who had miscarried because it was believed that since she could no longer give birth the uncleanness of miscarriage could not affect her. It was believed that failure to cleanse the land would have made it unproductive and there would be lack of rain. In this case the whole community had to offer a sacrifice to God.³¹

Although we have pointed out that in case of birth abnormalities due to ritual uncleanness, God was not directly brought into the picture, a closer look at the Igembe practice reveals that even in this case God was indirectly involved. This is the idea we get when we look at the Igembe beliefs in relation to miscarriage. Since God is the one who was believed to be the sole provider of rain and land fertility, he is the one who was responsible for withholding them. That is the reason why a sacrifice had to be offered to him whenever this happened. Therefore, even in a case of ritual uncleanness, God was concerned that the right rituals of cleansing be undertaken. Failure to do this made him punish the members of the community.

Among the Igembe, as long as everthing at birth went on

normally, there was no cause for worry. When things did not follow the normal order of events this caused concern as it was a sign that somebody had done something wrong. The problem could only be caused by a wrong act on the side of Man. God could not interfere with the normal flow of human life unless there was something very serious the living human beings had done.

The sacrifice that followed the birth of a child and the birth of a child into the clan of its father had communion with God and spirits of the ancestors and thanks-giving as the main purposes. The sacrifice that followed birth of an abnormal child had propitiation as the main purpose. By propitiating God, the family prayed to God not to bring more calamities. Therefore, the sacrifice also was a preventive one.

B. SACRIFICIAL RITES RELATED TO CIRCUMCISION.

As we have already noted, the rites associated with birth introduced the individual into the family and the clan. The sacrificial rites related to birth were therefore carried out on family basis. Circumcision rites introduced the individual into the wider community. As we have already noted in Chapter II, after circumcision, one was regarded as an adult with responsibilities that extended to the community level. Therefore, circumcision was as

much a communal affair as it was a family affair. As such, we find that although there were family sacrifices related to circumcision, most of the sacrificial rites related to circumcision were communal. In this section, we shall first deal with the sacrificial rites that were carried out on family basis, then look at those that were carried out on communal basis.

- (a) FAMILY SACRIFICIAL RITES ASSOCIATED WITH CIRCUMCISION.
- (i) SACRIFICIAL RITE WHEN A CHILD WAS SAID TO HAVE BEEN CIRCUMCISED BY GOD OR SPIRITS.

Among the Igembe, if a child was born without the foreskin or clitoris, it was believed that such a child had been circumcised by God. When such a child was born, the father of the child was informed. He had to consecrate a sheep just as was done when a child was born with some abnormalities. The sacrifice was to be carried out later but this had to be before the child was circumcised. When such a child reached the right age to be circumcised, he was circumcised just like other initiates by a human circumciser.³²

The animal that was to be sacrificed when a child was said to have been circumcised by God was a black ram without any blemish. The procedure followed when a child had been born with some abnormalities was followed in this sacrificial rite.

However, one half of the sacrificial animal was not set aside for God in this case.

The reason behind this sacrificial rite was that it was not normal for a child to be born without the foreskin, clitoris or part of them. Since God is the one who was responsible for formation of a child's features, he was said to have been responsible for bringing about the abnormality.

Therefore, it was believed that he had a reason for so doing. The reasoning behind this sacrifice was that since a circumciser was given a present when he circumcised a person, God who had acted as a circumciser had to be given the gift of a sheep as a thanks-giving sacrifice. The spirits of the ancestors were invited to take part in the sacrificial rite in their capacity as the invisible members of the family offering the sacrifice.³³

The Igembe also believed that the spirit world carried out circumcision ceremonies just like the living human beings. For example, if it rained while the sun was also shining at the same time, it was said that the spirits were having their circumcision ceremonies (Ni nkoma iqutana)³⁴. In this case, however, the Igembe never specified which category of spirits was circumcising. Generally, spirits of the ancestors were referred to as nkoma cia ba juju. In this case, the Igembe talked of nkoma (spirits)

circumcising which implies that other types of spirits besides the spirits of the ancestors were involved. The Igembe believed that these spirits could circumcise a living human being. It was said that at times people heard circumcision songs being sung and when they looked around, they could not see the people who were singing. Therefore, it was said that these were the spirits who were circumcising a living human being. It was believed that later the living human beings would find one of the boys who had been circumcised by these spirits. This was symbolized by a boy lacking a foreskin while he had one before and had been born with it.³⁵

The father of the child who had been circumcised by spirits had to offer a sacrifice. This sacrifice was offered in the same way as the one offered when a child was said to have been circumcised by God. This sacrifice was offered to God and the spirits who circumcised the child. This is because God was thought to be the supreme being who enabled whatever had taken place to have taken place. It was believed that the spirits could have acted on God's behalf.³⁶ Therefore, the sacrificial rite had God as the culminating point of reference.

(ii) SACRIFICIAL RITE IN RELATION TO THE
CIRCUMCISION OF THE FIRST BORN CHILD
(NGEERE YA MIKOLO)

Before every first born child of a man³⁷ was circumcised the child's father had to offer a sacrifice on the eve of the circumcision rite. This sacrifice had to be offered regardless of whether the first born was a male or female. The animal to be sacrificed in this occasion was a ram. There was no requirement on the colour of the sacrificial animal.

This sacrificial animal was referred to as Ngeere ya mikolo (sheep for small long strips of SHEEP'S SKIN). This is because its skin was cut into long strips that were tied on the neck of every child belonging to the father of the child to be circumcised. These strips were worn in order of age, the first born being the first to have the strip put on him.³⁸

This sacrificial rite was carried out at the Kiara. The first gash of blood from the sacrificial animal was left to pour on the ground as a libation to the spirits of the ancestors. The rest of the meat was eaten by all members of the family and the elders who had come to advise the child's parents. The child's parents were to have a ritual sexual intercourse on the night of the sacrifice and the second day after their child's circumcision. This was done in order to receive the blessings that

accompanied the ceremony. All the other persons who tasted the sacrificial meat were barred from sexual intercourse for three days after the sacrifice. The homestead was not swept until the third day after the sacrifice when all the bones and remains of the sacrificial animal were burnt to ashes.³⁹

The significance of the sacrifice of Ngeere ya mikolo can only be understood if we look at the importance of the first born. The first born of a man or woman was regarded with love and respect being the first product of a parent. He/she was taken as the first indicator that God had blessed the parents with the power to procreate. The first born was, therefore, regarded as the "gate to parenthood" (Murango jwa uciari).⁴⁰

As the birth of the first born signified the entrance of its parents to parenthood, so also did the circumcision of the first born signify the entrance of its father to elderhood. A man who did not have any of his children circumcised could not be regarded as an elder. Also, he could not be initiated into the waariki. A ruling generation handed over power to a younger generation only when the members of the younger generation were preparing to have their first borns circumcised.⁴¹

The circumcision of the first born also marked the entrance of his/her mother into another stage of life for it marked the end of her participation in

procreation. Once a woman had a mature child who was circumcised, she was regarded as having reached her past child bearing age. The duty of bearing children was taken over by the circumcised child, The mother of the circumcised person automatically took the responsibility of carrying out the religious duties that were supposed to be carried out by women who were past child bearing age.⁴²

An analysis of this sacrifice of Ngeere ya mikolo reveals that the sacrifice was one of thanksgiving. God was thanked for the gift of procreation and for blessing the parents with the maturity of the first born. The sacrifice was also to thank God for all the children because as we have already noted, they all participated and put the mikolo around their necks. The spirits of the ancestors who were regarded as the guardians of their respective families had to be thanked. They also rejoiced with the members of the family because of this great achievement. Therefore, they were invited to participate in the ceremony and were offered part of the sacrificial meal. The sacrificial rite was also one of joy and communion between God, spirits of the ancestors and the living members of the family.

b. COMMUNAL SACRIFICIAL RITES ASSOCIATED WITH CIRCUMCISION IN GENERAL

(i) NGEERE YA KIENI (SHEEP FOR CIRCUMCISION FIELD)

The Igembe believed that if a circumcision ceremony was to take place successfully, all the evil forces that might harm any of the initiates or all the initiates had to be overcome. Before any circumcision ceremony took place, a diviner or a prophet had to be consulted in order to tell if it was proper to have the ceremony at that time and period. If any of the supernatural powers - either God or spirits of the age grade ancestors - had been wronged, or if there was any other problem that could hinder the smooth running of the ceremony, this particular problem had first to be rectified.

Because God was viewed as the supreme power who could control all evils, no communal circumcision ceremony could take place without the community first offering a sacrifice to him so that he could bless the ceremony and protect them from all kinds of evil. This sacrifice was offered at the circumcision field (itiiri) on the eve of boys' circumcision. In case of girls' circumcision, there was no communal sacrificial rite because their circumcision ceremony was not performed on communal basis. The girls' parents offered honey and finger millet to

God and the spirits of the ancestors and prayed for their blessings and protection. This was done at the place where the girls' circumcision was to take place.

The sacrificial animal during this occasion was a ram black in colour and without blemish. The sacrifice was carried out by a selected number of elders. These were those elders that were trusted that they could abstain from sexual activities during the stipulated period before the sacrifice and after the sacrifice. Before they killed the sheep, the leading elder holding a gourd of honey led the other elders round the circumcision field (itiiri) spraying honey and praying to God. After killing the sheep, its skin was cut into strips that were used to make an arch-way at the entrance of the itiiri. All the boys to be circumcised had to pass through this arch.⁴⁴

The following morning, two elders who had participated in the sacrificial ceremony stood at both sides of the posts that held the skin from the sacrificial animal and sprayed honey on the incoming boys who were going to be circumcised. This was a way of blessing the boys.

Besides the above sacrificial rite, a sacrifice had to be offered if anything went wrong in the course of the ceremony. For example, if one of the boys to be circumcised fell in the field, this

was taken as a bad sign and a sacrifice had to be offered to God before the initiates left the field.⁴⁵

In this sacrificial rite, although there were no parts of the sacrificial animal that were set aside for God, it was said that the sacrifice was offered to God. This is because the life of the sacrificial animal and the smoke from the burning bones and remains was said to go to God. The Igembe believed that after the sacrifice, God provided his protective power that would neutralize any evil power that could hinder the smooth running of the ceremony. This clearly reveals that the Igembe viewed God as the most powerful being whose power could be relied on to overcome all evil powers.

(ii) SACRIFICIAL RITES ASSOCIATED WITH THE CEREMONY OF HANDING OVER POWER (NTUIKO).

In order to understand the meaning behind the ntuiko sacrificial rites, we need to have an understanding of the Igembe governmental system or ruling system and how this is related to circumcision. The sacrificial rites we have underlined as ntuiko sacrifices are all those sacrificial ceremonies that are related to the Igembe ceremony of handing over power from one ruling generation to the next. Other names used for these series of ceremonies in Igembe community are Muranu jwa gukuura Gaaru (ceremony for pulling down the house of the warriors or warriors'

barrack) or Muranu jwa gutuma nguu (ceremony for making gown). The highlights of the ceremony were the pulling down of the barracks of the old warriors who were now retiring to become elders and making of the gown for the new Mugwe.

In chapter two, we noted that there were two moeties that were ruling in Igembe, These were called Ntangi and Mbaine. In Imenti section of the Meru, these were known as Kiruka and Ntiba. A child belonged to his fathers' moety but the child and father could not be in power at the same time. Members of one moety handed over power to the children of those who had handed over power to them. When one moety took over power, its members started having their children circumcised while the children of the members of the Moety that had handed over to them acted as their circumcision 'fathers'. This means that as the senior warriors, they took care and advised the new initiates. These Senior Warriors are the ones who were responsible for the education of the initiates.⁴⁶

Every circumcision age-grade was composed of three age sets. These were ndinguri, Kobia and Kaberia. The ndinguri circumcision age set was the first to be circumcised after which there was a period of between five and seven years before Kobia, the next age set was circumcised. Kaberia

age set which was the last age set to be circumcised was circumcised after a period of between five and seven years. It was after the circumcision of all the three age sets that the ntuiko ceremony took place. A period of seven years had to elapse after the circumcision of Kaberia and the beginning of the ntuiko ceremony. A diagram showing the two Moeties and the names of the different age grades will help us to understand this power process in a better way. The list starts with the oldest generation that is said to have left Mbwa.

NTANGI (KIRUKA)

MBAINA (NTIBA)

Ntangiri

Nkuthuku

Ntangi

Mbaine

Mukuruma (Miriti)

Kuruku (Buantai)

Mutirra (Ichunge)

Rikinyugu (Kiramunya)

Thaali

Micubu

Ratanya

Lubetaa

Miriti

Buantai

Ichunge

Kiramunya

Ithalii

Micubu

Ratanya

Lubetaa

Miriti⁴⁷

According to oral traditions, members of Ntangiri and Nkuthuku were not circumcised. Ntangi, which was the first generation age grade to be circumcised handed over power to Mbaine.⁴⁸ Mbaine handed over

power to Mukuruma (Miriti) who were the children of Ntangi. Mukuruma handed over power to Kuruku (Buantai) who were the children of Mbaine and so on. One ruling age grade handed over power to the next age grade after all their children had been circumcised so that the new ruling age grade could become elders and start circumcising their children.

The ceremonies associated with taking over power from one generation to another took a long period. The preparation and finalising of the ntuiko ceremony could even take one year. Before any age grade that was preparing to take over power had any ceremony, their representatives had to go to Njaambene (Nyambene hills) to offer a sacrifice to God. Bernardi notes that the sacrifice of a Ntigiri (donkey) marked the opening of the ntuiko ceremony.⁴⁹ However, according to this writer's informants, this Ntigiri sacrifice was the last to take place.⁵⁰

The purpose of the sacrifice at Njaambene was to inform God that the old generation was about to retire and the new generation was to take over power, and to seek his guidance and blessings during this important period of handing over and taking over power. The procession to the top of Njaambene took three days. According to Njiru,

On the first day the elders climb the mountain half way and spend the night there sacrificing. On the second day,

they climb up to the vicinity of crater lake located on top of Mt. Nyambene. They spend another night there sacrificing and invoking the ancestral spirits. The elders pour libation in various parts of the forest but not near the lake. On the third day the elders solemnly proceed towards lake Nyambene...8 elders take active part.51

The group of elders that went to offer this sacrifice included representatives of both the elders who were about to take over power and the retiring ones. The retiring elders advised the new elders on how to carry out the sacrifice. Before the sacrificial sheep was killed at the top of the hill next to the lake, the elders poured some honey into the lake. Usually, the lake is covered by leaves. When the honey was poured on the lake, the leaves started clearing. This happened because of the waves of the disturbed still lake water. This was taken as a sign that God had accepted the group of elders and had allowed them to proceed and offer him their sacrifice.⁵²

The sacrificial animal which was a ram black in colour and without blemish was killed following the procedure we have already noted for killing sacrificial animals. While consecrating the sheep by spraying honey on it, the sheep was as usual expected to shudder four times. It was claimed that every time the sheep shuddered, the spirits emitted ululations.⁵³ Before the sheep was killed,

the leading elder informed God in prayer why the elders were offering the sacrifice to him. The prayer followed the same pattern of prayer that was used in communal sacrifices.⁵⁴ He prayed that the reign of the new generation be marked with peace and prosperity.

When the sheep was killed, fat and honey were put in igina (stems of castor oil plant). These were planted around the lake as offering to the good spirits that live at the lake. Pieces of meat were cut from every joint of the sacrificial animal. These were put in small pieces of bamboo shafts (mirangi). The ingredients in the Mirangi were referred to as Muthega (medicine). This Muthega was to be used later in planting the trees that would represent the new ruling generation. The ingredients put in Mirangi symbolized God's blessings and protective power because they were part of the sacrifice to God. They therefore acted as a power to protect the new ruling age group (symbolized by the new age grade trees that would be planted to represent the new age group) from all kinds of evil.⁵⁵ It was in this sense that the ingredients were referred to as Muthega (medicine) because just as medicine cures or protects a person from sickness, so would this Muthega protect the new ruling age group.

The job of asking for God's blessings during the whole ntuiko ceremony having been accomplished, the

elders proceeded to make the gown (nguu) for their new Mugwe who would be proclaimed publicly as we have already pointed out in Chapter II. However, before the Mugwe's gown was made, sacrifices were offered to God in every location by the retiring warriors. Every warrior's barrack in a location had to offer its own sacrifice and all the members of the age group that would take over power had to participate. The aim of this sacrifice was to pray to God to make every particular retiring warrior an elder. The skin of the black sacrificial ram was cut into strips called Muungi that every elder had to put round his head. This Muungi symbolized entering into elderhood. Before putting on the Muungi, every new elder also took part of the sacrificial sheep's skin to his wife (wives). This symbolized that the wives, as their husbands, were also members of the ruling generation.⁵⁶ However, this was just the beginning of entering elderhood. The final seal of elderhood was the circumcision of a person's child.

The gown of the Mugwe was made with goat skins that had been donated by every gaaru (warriors barrack) of the retiring elders. The details of making the gown are a secret that the participating elders were to keep.⁵⁷ On the day that the Mugwe was publicly installed and proclaimed, the elders offered a sacrifice at Kiani Kia Nguu the place where

170

the investiture took place which included putting on him his official gown and publicly proclaiming him the new Mugwe.

The purpose of the sacrifice at Kiani Kia Nguu was to beseech God to bless the proceedings of the day - that is the investiture of the new Mugwe - to bless the new Mugwe and to allow the new elders to retire from warriorhood so that they could start circumcising their children. The prayer during this occasion thus went as follows:-

Murungu Baaba,
Kieni Kii ni Kia nthuki nkuru,
Tigietu ntwinka,
Batui twakwira tugukura,
Ng'ambe ni cia nthaka,
Akuru ni ba nthaka,
Ekuru na twana iba nthaka.

Murungu twitikiirie
Tutane ana betu na thiiri,
Niukwona thaara cietu
Niukwona mituro yetu imiru,
Twa Kwira tugukura,,
Twatigira kieni nthaka.⁵⁸

This means

Oh God our father,
This field belongs to the old age group,
It does not belong to us alone,

We declare to you that we are now aged,
 The cows are in the hands of warriors,
 The elders are in the hands of warriors,
 Women and children are in the hands of warriors,
 Our God allow us to circumcise our children in
 peace,
 You can see our ceremonial dress,
 You can see our staffs that are black in colour,
 We declare to you that we have grown old
 We leave the field to the warriors.

b. CEREMONY OF UPROOTING THE SACRED TREE OF THE
 RETIRING AGE GROUP.

After the public investiture and proclamation of the new Mugwe, a ceremony of uprooting the trees that had been planted by the retiring age group when they took over power was performed. A sacrifice had also to be offered during this ceremony. Unlike the other ntuiko sacrificial rites we have described above, this sacrifice was offered to God and the spirits of the age groups. Since the dead members of the community were believed to join the world of the ancestors, it was believed that these continued to be members of their particular circumcision age groups. This means that if one belonged to the Ntangi moety, he continued being a member of that moety even in the ancestral world. Every moety, therefore, had its ancestral spirits who were believed to be the guardians

of their respective ruling generations. They were, therefore, believed to take part in the ceremony of handing and taking over power.⁵⁹

As members of their respective moeties, the age group spirits were believed to be the guardians of the age group trees. As such, in order to retire and allow the age grade tree of the retiring age grade to be uprooted, the spirits had to be given a sacrifice. The blood and chyme from the sacrificial ram were poured on the roots of the trees to be uprooted as libation and food to these guardian spirits. This had to be done by a boy who was a grandson of one of the retiring elders. This means that the spirits had to be given libation by a member of their own moety.⁶⁰ The young boy also threw finger millet and mixture of fresh honey and milk at the base of every tree that was to be uprooted.⁶¹ The uprooted trees were burnt to ashes.

The particular trees that were uprooted during this ceremony are the Mitunguu (*Vernonia holsti*) trees. After the elders uprooted these trees, young seedlings of the same Mitunguu trees had to be planted near the place where the old ones had been uprooted. These new trees represented the new ruling generation. The Muthega (Medicine) from the sacrifice at Njaambene, that had been kept in the bamboo shafts was first poured into the holes where the trees were to be planted, before the trees were planted.

The digging sticks that were used to uproot the trees had been obtained from the sacred Muthongiru, Muroo and Mugumo trees. The Mugwe, using a hoof from the sacrificial animal first made a symbolic digging. When doing that, he offered a prayer to God saying:-

Ti nthuki twakura

Ni Muti tugukura

Twakura Muti yuu na Kaere Kailu

Nthuki irotura.⁶²

This means:-

It is not the age-group we are uprooting

It is the tree we uproot,

We uproot this tree with a black sheep,

May the age group live on.

This prayer by the Mugwe reveals the Igembe attitude towards the ntuiko ceremony. The aim of the ntuiko was not to 'finish' the old age groups, it was simply to have the old age group retire peacefully and give room to the younger age group to run the affairs of the community. It was not a kind of coup d'e'tat where there was to be enmity between the retiring age group and the ruling age group. In fact, the elders of the retiring age group still continued to be respected and consulted for advice by the elders of the new ruling age group.

C. CEREMONY OF PULLING DOWN THE WARRIOR'S BARRACKS
(MUURANU YWA GUKURA GAARU).

After uprooting the old age grade's trees the gaaru (warriors barracks) that had been built by the retiring warriors who had now become elders had to be pulled down. Every village had its own warriors' barrack. Therefore, the ceremony of pulling down warriors' barrack was performed in every village where a warriors' barrack was built. The pulling down of the warriors barracks symbolized that the new elders had retired from warriorhood.

According to Njiru, this ceremony of pulling down the gaaru took seven days.⁶³ It ended with the uprooting of the central post of the gaaru and the burning of its remains. The elders who were informants of the writer on this issue were not willing to give the details of exactly what happened during these days.⁶⁴ They however, noted that the retiring warriors poured libations and invoked blessings and co-operation of the spirits of their age group. Although prayers and libations were directed to the spirits of the age group, God was viewed as the final seal of the whole ceremony. That is the reason why on the dawn of the seventh day, a black sheep was offered as sacrifice to God. The sacrifice was regarded as a Communion kind of sacrifice where God, spirits of the age group and the retiring warriors shared the sacrificial animal.⁶⁵

Before the central post of the gaaru was uprooted, honey beer was poured at the foot of the post as libation to the spirits of the particular age group who were thus requested to leave the post. These spirits were believed to be the guardians of the gaaru and since its occupants were retiring they had also to retire and leave the gaaru.⁶⁶

After uprooting the central post of the gaaru all its remains were burnt. Before the fire was extinguished every retiring warrior who was an occupant of the particular gaaru took a piece of the burning wood and went to his home with it, without looking back. He took the wood to his personal gaaru at his home.⁶⁷ The idea behind not looking back after leaving the gaaru was to symbolize that the individual had retired from warriorhood and did not wish to turn back to become a warrior once again.

However, this did not mean that the retiring warrior was shelving all communal responsibilities. He had to carry the communal spirit with him to his elders' gaaru. Thus, he had to carry the same communal responsibility as an elder. This was symbolized by the carrying of the burning wood from the destroyed warriors' barracks to the elder's

personal gaaru. It showed that the life of the retiring warriors was not extinct, it had to continue burning but in a different sphere of activity, that of elderhood.⁶⁸

In the above sacrificial rites that were associated with the ntuiko ceremony, the Igembe were not contented with offering only one sacrifice to God that would cover all the different activities of the ceremony. Although at the very beginning they requested God's blessings during the whole ntuiko ceremony, they also felt that every important event of the ceremony had to have his blessings, hence the many sacrificial rites we have already outlined. The sacrifice of the ram and the strict emphasis that it had to be black and without blemish shows that in all these different events of the ceremony, it is God who was viewed as the supreme provider of what the sacrificing community requested from Him. Although, as we have seen in some occasions, parts of the sacrificial animal were offered to spirits of the age groups, the sacrifice was mainly directed to God. The spirits were given part of the sacrifice simply because they were interested and believed to be participating in what the human beings were doing. Therefore, as the invisible members of the sacrificing community, they were invited to commune with the living and with God.

(iii) SACRIFICIAL CEREMONY BEFORE THE CIRCUMCISION
OF THE NDIINGURI CIRCUMCISION AGE SET

After the ntuiko ceremony, the elders who had taken over power went ahead with the preparations for the circumcision of their children. Before the first group of boys who were to form the ndinguri age set were allowed to start their kuriria (period when the boys to be initiated visited their relatives' homes singing and being given presents) they had to go to the sacred place called Miarene in Maua location, where a sacrifice was offered to God on their behalf. This is an area in the northern section of Igembe division where Miare trees grow in plenty. These are trees of the palm family. They grow very tall, they have smooth stems that have no branches, instead, they have a mass of large leaves at the top. The inside of the stems are soft.

Before the day the boys were taken to Miarene, eight elders went there first and offered a sacrifice to God. The whole of the sacrificial animal was eaten by these elders after getting some pieces of its meat that would be used by the boys. The bones and the remains except the skin of the sacrificial animal were burnt to ashes in a sacrificial bonfire. The skin of

100

the sacrificial animal was used to make an arch through which the boys would pass to get to the place where they were to cut the Miare. The aim of this sacrifice was to inform God that boys would go to cut the Miare sticks and to request for his protection, guidance and blessings. It was also to request God to bless the new age group that was in the process of being formed and pray for its smooth growth.⁶⁹

The boys were taken to Miarene by nthaka (warriors) and elders. As the boys passed through the arch that had been made by the elders the previous day (using the skin of the sacrificial animal) they were sprayed with honey by two elders. This was a way of blessing them. While there at Miarene the boys were given some secrets and Muthega (medicine). The writer's informants were not willing to describe the contents of the 'medicine' but they pointed out that at least some parts of the sacrificial animal were included. The 'medicine' was to strengthen and protect the boys from all evils.⁷⁰ Since they were to be the root of a new circumcision age grade they were to be protected from all evil forces that might have wanted to destroy the new age grade and hinder its smooth growth and development.

The boys cut young Miare trees and made sticks (Miuruo) out of them. On their way home, they were met by young married women (aciere) and uncircumcised girls (nkenye) who took the sticks from the boys. The writer was also not able to get the significance of this ceremony and the Miare sticks from the informants. We might probably guess the significance of the Miare sticks and what they stand for in this ceremony by looking at the features of the Miare trees. The Miare trees with their smooth hard stem that has not branches probably symbolized the birth of an age grade that was in the process of being formed. The cutting of the Miare probably symbolized the separation of the old age grade from the new age grade. That is probably the reason why those who form the ndinguri age set which was the root of the whole age grade had to cut the Miare, while the other two age sets Kobia and Kaberia were not required to cut the Miare. The smooth brancheless Miare trees symbolized the fact that the three age sets were united and formed one age group. Thus after the circumcision of the three age sets, the Ndinguri of the next age grade had to cut its Miare.

(iv) THE SACRIFICE OF THE 'NTIGIRI' (DONKEY)

After the circumcision of the Ndinguri boys, a sacrifice was offered to God. The aim of this sacrifice was to 'separate' the new age set from the old warriors

However, Bernardi's explanation is not plausible because it leaves a lot of questions unanswered. Why did the Meru use the word ntindiri originally to refer to the sacrificial bull? Bernardi says the bull was called ntindiri because it was set aside for sacred use and was therefore holy. Why weren't the other animals set aside for sacred use referred to as ntindiri? What is the relationship between the sacrificial bull and the aged men and women? How or what circumstances changed the original word from ntindiri to ntigiri? Until the above questions are answered, we cannot explain clearly the origin of the word ntindiri and the reason why the sacrificial bull was called ntigiri instead of ndegwa (bull).

It seems that much of what went on during this ceremony of eating the ntigiri is surrounded with a lot of secrets such that the writer was not able to get the full meaning and purpose of the sacrifice of the ntigiri (bull)

C. SACRIFICIAL RITES RELATED TO MARRIAGE

Marriage, as we have already noted, was a very important institution in Igembe community. There were many religious rituals and ceremonies that accompanied it. The aim of these religious rituals and ceremonies was to put the present and the future of the new couple in God's care.

who belonged to a different age grade. We have already noted that the sons of the elders who had retired were still in the barracks (gaaru) as warriors. The new initiates had to join these old warriors in the gaaru. There was need therefore, to religiously and symbolically separate the two circumcision age groups.⁷¹

The sacrificial animal for this ceremony was a bull. This bull was not referred to as a ndegwa, the normal Kimeru name for a bull. Instead, it was referred to as a ntigiri the Kimeru word for donkey.⁷² No elder was able to offer the writer an explanation as to why the bull was referred to as ntigiri and why it was offered instead of the normal ram that was the sacrificial animal. However, the informants pointed out that the eating of the bull was not just another feast, it was a sacrifice.⁷³

Bernardi has tried to give us a possible origin of this term ntigiri. According to him, this term ntigiri derives from a corruption of the word ntindiri a word used for aged men and women. He notes:-

If the original term for the sacrificial bull was ntindiri, then the extension of the term used for aged men and women who are distinguished for their sacred character becomes significant. The bull for the sacrifice is ntindiri, not because of its old age but because it has been set aside for a sacred use and is therefore holy. The colour of the animal must always be black, a colour sacred to God.⁷⁴

One of these important religious ceremonies that were associated with marriage was the sacrificial rite that was carried out on the wedding day. For an understanding of the significance of this rite, we need to bear in mind the Igembe view of sexual intercourse and its central role in marriage.

As we have already noted elsewhere in this study, the Igembe viewed sex as sacred. This is because it was believed that through sexual intercourse, one could get blessings or curses. It was through sexual intercourse that a couple got the blessings of a new born child. Therefore, sexual intercourse played a very central role in marriage and in determining the kind of marriage ceremony one would have.

It was only when a man was getting married for the first time that a wedding ceremony involving a sacrifice to God and the spirits of the ancestors was performed. The wedding ceremony, however, depended on whether the bride was still a virgin. On the day before her wedding, the bride had to reveal whether she was a virgin or not. Fear of bad repercussions due to the Mugiro (ritual uncleanness) that was believed would otherwise get the bride made the girl tell the truth to her young married women relatives who questioned her. If she was not a virgin, the bridegroom would just come for her in the evening of the wedding day

without a big ceremony that involved a sacrifice to God.⁷⁵

The wedding day sacrificial ceremony could only be undertaken if the bride was a virgin because it was believed that for it to be acceptable to God the bride had to be ritually clean and undefiled. The bride was considered ritually unclean if she had engaged in the sexual act before her wedding day. The writer's informants however, could not give an explanation as to why the bridegroom was not considered ritually unclean if he had engaged in sexual intercourse before his wedding day.⁷⁶

The climax of the wedding ceremony was the consummation of the marriage through a ritual sexual intercourse on the night of the fifth day (some writers say fourth day)⁷⁷ after the sacrificial rite. This was the couple's sexual union. But it was also regarded as ritual sexual intercourse because it had a religious significance. Through this ritual sexual intercourse, the new couple was believed to receive all the blessings that had been requested from God on their behalf. The ritual sexual intercourse was also believed to change the status of the bride from a girl (Mwari) to a woman (mwekuru). The Igembe argued that if the bride had engaged in sexual intercourse before her wedding, there was no point of having the ritual sexual intercourse because she was a woman and not a girl.⁷⁸

Girls who were promiscuous and roamed about with warriors usually ended up being married as second, third or fourth wives. If the bride was still a virgin, a sacrificial sheep was killed at her home early in the morning of her wedding day. At the bridegroom's home, the bridegroom's parents offered honey and finger millet to God and to the spirits of the ancestors. This was done very early in the morning at the site where the hut for the bride and bridegroom would be built later in the day. The bridegroom's parents offered prayers to God and the spirits of the ancestors requesting them to grant the new couple a good life, (utuuro bubwega) and to bless and protect the site where the hut was to be built from all kinds of evil.⁷⁹

The bride's parents also offered honey, finger-millet, blood and fat from the sacrificial animal, to God and to the spirits of the ancestors. Since the sacrificial animal was offered on behalf of the couple the fat chest (rutua) was roasted and eaten by the bride and the bridegroom. All those who ate the sacrificial meat had to abstain from sexual intercourse for five days. The parents of the bride and the bridegroom had also to abstain from sexual intercourse. Since the bride and the bridegroom were now mature and had the right to engage in sexual relationship, their parents could not receive the blessings on their behalf (through ritual sexual intercourse). 80

The bride was given some part of the fat from the sacrificial animal to take to her new home. The fat was put in a new gourd that had never been used before. The bride was to apply the melted fat all over her body using her hands, for the first five days of her marriage until the day the marriage was consummated.⁸¹ The bride was also given a gourd containing honey and finger millet that her parents had used to bless her and the bridegroom, before they left for their new home. ~~X~~ Spraying the honey and the finger millet on the bride and the bridegroom symbolized that the bride's parents were blessing the couple and praying that they be granted a sweet life (like honey), a marriage life that had no problems, and that they be as fertile as the finger millet that bears a lot of grain.⁸²

The gourds containing the fat and the one containing honey and finger millet were kept under the bed of the bride and the bridegroom in their new hut. ~~X~~ The Kikuyu grass that the bride's parents held while offering prayers to God to bless the bride and the bridegroom was also kept on the bed. These items were all symbols of the couples' blessings. ~~X~~ To protect the couple from any kind of evil before the marriage was consummated, firewood from trees known as Miriiru was used in the couple's hut. ~~X~~ The firewood of this tree produces a very sweet smell.

This sweet smell symbolized the goodness the bride and the bridegroom desired to be blessed with in their marriage. It was also believed to have the power to expel evil and any person with evil intentions.⁸³

Although we have pointed out that the spirits of the ancestors were given fat and blood from the sacrificial animal, the sacrificial rite had God as the culminating point of reference. God was regarded as the supreme protector and blesser of the community and the individuals in that community.

An analysis of the prayers that were offered on the wedding day also indicate that God was the culminating point of reference in this sacrificial ceremony. Before the bride and the bridegroom left for their home, the bride's parents offered an elaborate prayer to God. The bride's father while holding the hands of the bride and bridegroom led in prayers while all those who were present answered 'Thaai' which means we 'beseech thee' after every request.

The prayer went as follows:

Father - Murungu Baaba ndakwerencha, utethie
twana tutu twetu twite na njira injega.

other people- Thaai

Father - Bukorogitara kana bwona kathiki kana
kabiti njirene.

193
other people - Thaa

Father - Murungu jubutethie Ouria jwantetherie na juratethia baaba na juju.

other people - Thaa

Father - Burotura buri gintu kimwe, bugwatene ja nguu na mwiri.

other people - Thaa

Father - Burociara twiiji na tukenye.

other people - Thaa

Father - Na butumenyagire bubwega tui achiari tontu ibui tutegete na ibui kiewa gietu.

other people - Thaa

Father - Buung'anie nturume na miati.

other people - Thaa

Father - Murungu jurobutharima, jorotharima ngombe na mburi na muunda na into bienu bionthe

other people - Thaa. ⁸⁴

This means.

Father - Oh God our father, I beseech you help these our children so that they may follow the right path.

other people - We beseech you.

Father - Let them not be misled or experience any evil on their way.

other people - We beseech you.

Father - May God help you as the helped me, my father and grandparents.

other people - We beseech you.

Father - May you live as one thing united like
the dress and the body

other people- We beseech you.

Father - May you give birth to boys and girls.

other people- We beseech you.

Father - And be taking care of us as parents
because we are looking to you for you
are our gift.

other people- We beseech you.

Father - May God bless you, may he bless your
cows and goats and farm and all your
property.

other people- We beseech you.

The mention of only God and the use of the term
'Thaai' which, as we pointed out in chapter II was
only used in reference to God, all indicates that
although the spirits of the ancestors were offered
the sacrificial meat, the ultimate being who would
bless the marriage of the couple was God.

D. SACRIFICIAL RITE RELATED TO DEATH

Being the last rite of passage, death had
only one sacrificial rite. However, it is only the
old members of the community, those who had become
grandparents, who had this rite carried out on their
behalf.

The burial practice for a female grandparent was the same as that of a male grandparent. When a grandparent died, he was kept in the house of his oldest son for two days. On the second day after death a sheep was killed. The colour of the sheep for this occasion did not matter. The fat from the sacrificial ram was melted. All the children and grand children of the deceased smeared him with oil in stripes from head to foot. This was done four times if the deceased was a male and three if a female.⁸⁵

After anointing the grandparent, some fat from the sacrificial animal was used to cover his ears and face. He was covered with the skin from the sacrificial animal and buried at the Kiara. The deceased was made to lie on the right side if he was a male or left if a female. More fat was poured in the grave. Honey and finger millet were also thrown into the grave. The eldest son of the deceased sprinkled him with water saying uroita kuraa (May you go to a place where there is plenty of rain)⁸⁶. After the burial of a grandparent the sacrificial animal was eaten by the members of the family.

The Igembe burial practice indicates that they believed that the dead grandparent joined another world. The fact that there was no mourning and the burying of the dead with foodstuffs, all indicate that the Igembe believed that this was not the end of 'life' for the deceased grandparent.

The purpose of the above sacrificial rite was to give a warm send-off to the deceased. The spirits of the ancestors and the living members of the family of the deceased were believed to communally eat the sacrificial animal. This was taken as a kind of communion with the ancestors who were supposed to welcome the new ancestor to their fold.⁸⁷ It is because of this reason that an agemate of the children of the deceased person whose parents were still alive and an agemate of the deceased could not eat the sacrificial meat. It was believed that a person who had his/her parents still living would be wishing the death of his parents by participating in such a communion. An agemate of the deceased person would also be calling for his/her own death by communing with the spirits of his agemate.⁸⁸

The death of a grandparent was not viewed with great sorrow because it was felt that the grandparent had fulfilled his duty on earth. Njau gives us a song that was sung in Imenti during the burial of a grandparent. An analysis of the symbolism in this song reveals that the Igembe viewed the death of a grandparent as a 'transfer' of a whole person - a person who had lived his whole life on earth - to another world. The song went as follows:-

Juju Mugumo jugukukai
 Kiujuju Mugumo jugukukai
 Njuni tumuthike
 Mugambi wa Takira agukuka
 Kiambati Mbuiiri agukukai⁸⁹.

This means

Grandfather the fig tree has fallen
 Great grandfather the fig tree has fallen
 Come let us bury him
 Arbitrator (or judge) of Takira has fallen.

The capture of enemy, giver of milk has fallen. By referring to the deceased grandparent as a Mugumo tree, this stressed the sacredness of the deceased. The 'Mugumo' had not broken (Kunika) but it had been uprooted (gukura), meaning that, nothing had been left behind. This means that the deceased had left nothing undone in the world of living human beings. He/she had fulfilled his/her whole life's duty. So there was nothing to mourn about. There was only satisfaction that another ancestor had been 'born'.

The above analysis of the meaning attached to Igembe burial rites raises a big question. Does it mean that only grandparents and great grandparents were believed to join the world of the ancestors? If so, what happened to other dead members of the community?

We have already noted three strong points that would indicate that only grandparents were believed to

join the world of ancestors. First, we have seen that the spirits of the ancestors were referred to as nkoma cia ba juju which literally means spirits of the grandparents. The symbolism of the Kiara and its relationship to the Igembe myth of origin of death also indicate that those who were buried there were believed to rise to the world of the ancestors. Only grandparents were buried at the Kiara. We have also noted that the burial rite of a grandparent was accompanied by a sacrificial rite whose purpose was to give the deceased a warm send off (to the world of ancestors) and to request the spirits of the ancestors to receive him amicably. Since this was done only to grandparents then this means that only grandparents joined the world of ancestors.

However, a close analysis of Igembe beliefs and practices leaves us with some doubts as to whether it is only grandparents who were believed to join the world of ancestors. While praying to the spirits of the ancestors, the head of the family did not only mention the names of the deceased members of the community who died while they were grandparents. He mentioned the names of his dead father, mother and grandparents. However there was no mention of a person who had died unmarried or childless.⁹⁰

The Igembe also believed that the spirits of the ancestors who visited members of their families in dreams were not only the spirits of the grandparents. One would even be visited by a spirit of any of his close relatives who had died while he/she had children. In propitiating their angered spirits, the Igembe did not propitiate only the spirits of their grandparents.⁹¹ All this indicates that although there was no sacrificial rite at the burial of a parent who had died while he/she was not yet a grandparent, they were believed to join the world of the ancestors and to continue to play a central role among the living members of their families. However, since these people had died while they were still productive, there could be no rejoicing as their death was viewed as premature, unfortunate and uncalled for.

The Igembe practice of burying their dead grandparents with foodstuffs like fingermillet and fat has a little similarity with the Egyptian practice of burying their dead with foodstuffs and other articles. However, any attempt to relate the Igembe practice and that of the Egyptians and claiming a common historical origin of the Meru and the Egyptians, as M'Imanyara does must be supported by evidence from field research. M'Imanyara propounds a theory that the Meru burial rites and the ideas surrounding them are similar to the Egyptian burial rites and thus must have had a common origin. In the case of the

When any venerable elder died, he was supposed to be buried in a pyramidal structure not merely as a matter of respect but as his last altar to God. His participation in the sacrifices was said to have ended on the surface of the earth and the seven sticks of Meru altar were said to have been laid down all in respect to the construction of the pyramid and its star directly above its apex. This mysterious star is deemed to be responsible for the fastest communication with the chaste ancestral mystics.⁹²

M'Imanyara's theory is difficult to verify because he has not given us his informants or the source of the ideas he puts forward. The writer's informants found this idea of the pyramid and a star-that is "deemed to be responsible for the fastest communication with the chaste ancestral mystics"⁹³ to be foreign to the Igembe section of the Meru. There was no relationship whatsoever between the stars or any particular star and the spirits of the ancestors in Igembe world view.⁹⁴

FOOTNOTES ON CHAPTER IV

1. M'Tuaruchiu Joseph, interviewed at Maua, Maua location, on 30th June, 1983
2. E.E.Evan-Pritchard; Nuer Religion, London: Oxford University press, 1956, p.199.
3. Kaluma Asunta, interviewed at Amungenti, Akachiu location on 18th July, 1983.
4. M'Tuaruchiu Joseph, interview op.cit.
5. Ibid; Kanampiu John, interviewed at Kawiru, Maua location, on 16th May, 1983.
6. Ibid.
7. Ngunyura Baikiao, interviewed at Maua, Maua location, on 1st August, 1983.
8. Kabutu M'Alaine, interviewed at Kangeta, Njia location, on 22nd June, 1983.
9. Ngunyura Baikiao, op.cit.
10. Ibid.
11. M'Tuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit.
12. Ibid.
13. M'Mubwika M'Mauta, M'Etiri wa Kabuali, M'Eliungu Mwomboko, interviewed at Kanuni, Akachiu location, on 20th June, 1983
14. Kamanja M'Lithara, M'Tuaruchiu Joseph,, M'Abwima Karani, interviewed at Muringenere, Njia location, on 26th May, 1983.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid; Mbero Peter, interviewed at Maua, Maua location, on 29th May, 1983.

17. M'Tuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit.
18. Kabutu M'Alaine, interviewed at Kangeta, Njia
location, on 22nd June, 1983
19. Ibid; M'Mubwika M'Mauta and others, op.ci.t
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid; Kamanja M'Lithara and others, op.cit.
22. M'Mubwika M'Mauta and others, op.cit.
23. Kaluma Asunta, op.cit.
24. Ibid.
25. M'Mubwika M'Mauta and others, op.cit.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Kaluma Asunta, op.cit.
29. M'Tuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit.
30. Kaluma Asunta, op.cit.
31. Ibid.
32. M'Mubwika M'Mauta, MiAchiuki M'Munoru interviewed
at Kanuni, Akachiu location on 31st May,
1983.
33. Kanampiu John, op.cit.
35. Ibid; J.M. Njau, "Death Among the Meru of Kenya"
in Occasional Research Papers in African
Traditional Religions and Philosophies, Dept. of Religio
Studies and Philosophy, Makerere University,
November, 1971, Vol.3 p.9
36. Kanampiu John, op. cit.
37. This does not refer to the first born of every
woman in a polygamous marriage. It had to be the
first born child of the man, (father) who was the
head of the nuclear family

38. M'Amanja Samuel, interviewed on 27th February, 1982, op.cit. Michuki Samuel interviewed at Kawiru, Maua location, on 28th February, 1982; Tharamba M'Amencu, interviewed at Kaurine, Maua location, on 10th March, 1982.
39. Ibid.
40. Mbero Peter, op.cit.
41. Kabutu M'Alaine, op.cit, Kailibi M'Mutunyi interviewed at Kawiru, Maua location, on 10th May, 1983.
42. Ibid.
43. M'Mubwika M'Mauta and others, interviewed on 31st May, 1983, op.cit.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. M'Tuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit.
47. Ibid.
48. The Meru claim that they borrowed the art of circumcision from the Maasai. By the time they left Mbwa, they did not practice the art of circumcision. This information was gathered from: Kamanja M'Lithara and others, op.cit, M'Mubwika M'Mauta and others, interviewed on 20th June, 1983, op.cit; Kabutu M'Alaine, Baituru M'Maroo, M'Kubania Kamincha, interviewed at Kangeta, Akachiu location on 24th June, 1983; Ndatu M'Enganga, M'Anjoroo, Kachiuki Baitumbiri, Thirari Baimanyara, interviewed at Mutuati, Mutuati location on 29th July, 1983 and H.S.K. Mwaniki "A pre-colonial History of the Chuka of Mount Kenya, C.1400-1908", Ph.D. dissertation,

49. B.I.M.C. Bernardi; The Mugwe, A Failing Prophet:
A Study of A Religious And Public
Dignitary of the Meru of Kenya, London:
Oxford University press, 1959, p.91.
50. Kamanja M'Lithara and others, op.cit; Ndatu
M'Enganga and others, op.cit.
51. E. Njau, "Indigenous Education as Practised by
the Ameru with Special Reference to
Circumcision Ceremonies", M.A. Thesis,
University of Nairobi, 1981.
52. Kailibi M'Mutunyi, op.cit.; Kanampiu John, op.cit.
53. Ibid.
54. See Appendix I.
55. P.CP. Mbero, "Sacrifice Among the Meru of Kenya",
A paper presented in _____
the Department of Religious Studies and
Philosophy, Makerere University, 1974,
p.17
56. Njiru, op.cit. p. 153; M'Tuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit.
57. M'Tuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit; M'Mubwika M'Mauta, and
others, interviewed on 20th June, 1983,
op.cit.
58. Njiru, op.cit. p. 162.
59. M'Tuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit.
60. Ibid.
61. Njiru, op.cit. p.167.
62. Ibid, p. 167.
63. Ibid. p. 1173.

64. M'Tuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit; Kabutu M'Alaine and others, interviewed on 24th June, 1983, op.cit; Ndatu M'Enganga and others, op.cit.; M'Mubwika M'Mauta and others, op.cit.
65. Ibid.
66. Mbero Peter, op.cit.
67. P.C.P. Mbero, op.cit. p.17.
68. Ibid.
69. Kamanja M'Lithara and others, op.cit.
70. Ibid, Kabutu M'Alaine, Baituuru M'Maroo, M'Kubania Kimincha, interviewed at Kangeta, Njia location on 7th July, 1983.
71. Kabutu M'Alaine, op.cit.
72. Kabutu M'Alaine and others interviewed on 7th July, 1983, op.cit.
73. Ibid; Ndatu M'Enganga and others, op.cit.
74. Bernardi, op.cit. pp.91-92.
75. Kaluma Asunta, op.cit.; Kamanja M'Lithara and others, interviewed on 26th May, 1983, op.cit.
76. Ibid.
77. D. Nyaga; "Mikarire Na Mituurire ya Amiru. Iuku Ria Mbere" (Traditions and Customs of the Meru. Part I.) unpublished manuscript, Meru Meusium, p.18.; A.M. M'Imanyara; "The History of Meru from Meroe to Kenya B.C. 800 - 1965 A.D." Type-written Manuscript in owners possession, p.174.

78. Kaluma Asunta, op.cit; M'Tuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit.
79. Ibid.
80. M'Mubwika M'Mauta and others interviewed on
20th June, 1983, op.cit.
81. Kanampiu John, op.cit.; Kabutu M'Alaine, op.cit.;
M'Tuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit.
82. Nyaga, op.cit. p.98; Kaluma Asunta, op.cit.
83. Nyaga, op.cit. p.96.
84. Ibid. p.96.
85. M'Tuaruchiu Joseph, op..cit.
86. Ibid; J.N. Baikiao, "Towards Africanisation of
Christianity. An Approach to the
Evangelization of The Meru of Kenya in Light
of their Tribal Anthropology and Post
Vatican Council II Magisterium", Ph.D.
Thesis, Urbaniana Pontifical University,
Roma, 1977, p.111.
87. M'Tuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit.
88. Kamanja M'Lithara, Mwambia M'Angichia, interviewed
at Muringene, Njia location on 30th June,
1983.
89. J.M. Njau, op.cit. p. 14.
90. M'Amanja Samuel, op.cit; Tharamba M'Amencu, op.cit.
91. Ibid.
92. M'Imanyara, op.cit. p.187.
93. Ibid.
94. Mbero Peter, interviewed on 7th October, 1983,op.cit.,
Kamanja M'Lithara, M'Tuaruchiu Joseph,
M'Nchebere Samuel, interviewed at
Muringene, Njia location on 2nd October,
1983.

C H A P T E R V

OTHER TYPES OF SACRIFICIAL RITES

In the last chapter, we looked at the sacrificial rites related to the rites of passage. We noted that these rites took place at particular stages in an individual's lifespan. The sacrificial rites which we are going to study in this chapter are those that were undertaken when need arose. This means that there were no set periods when these rites were to be performed. Except for those sacrificial rites related to planting and harvesting, all the other sacrificial rites considered in this chapter took place when a problem arose. Sacrificial rites related to planting and harvesting are also the only ones that took place annually, that is, at a given time or period in the agricultural cycle of the community.

The sacrificial rites considered in this chapter can be classified into two categories:- those that were offered directly to God and those that were offered to other supernatural beings where God was only indirectly involved.

A. SACRIFICES OFFERED DIRECTLY TO GOD

(i) SACRIFICIAL RITES RELATED TO "KWONA NGAI" (TO SEE GOD)

The sacrificial rites that are related to the idea of "Seeing God" were offered on a family basis.

In order to understand what the Igembe meant by

saying that somebody had "Seen God", we need to understand the Igembe view of nature and its relationship to God.

According to the Igembe, all was well when things and events took their natural or normal order. When something unnatural or abnormal took place, this raised a lot of suspicion and fear arose among the members of the community.¹ God was believed to be the one who establishes the natural and normal order of things. When something abnormal happened, this was associated with his direct intervention.

The Igembe believed that God could communicate his displeasure to a certain family or the whole community through signs and through his messengers. Because all the abnormal and unnatural happenings were interpreted as God's message that all was not well, any individual who experienced them had to offer a sacrifice to God.² These happenings symbolized God's power and by being near this power or experiencing its activity, one was said to have "Seen God". "Seeing God" then is a figurative expression meaning that the individual had experienced an abnormal happening that was interpreted to be as the result of God's intervention, or as God's means of conveying some special message to those concerned.

One was said to have "Seen God" if his/her child was born deformed or without the normal human body features or when one witnessed destruction by lightning at a close distance and was hurt or not hurt.³ If a person was killed by lightning, the members of his/her family had to offer a sacrifice because this was interpreted as having "Seen God". Even when lightning destroyed a house, livestock or part of one's land the owner was said to have "Seen God". In Igembe, lightning was thought of as "God's Sword" (ruciu rwa Ngai). The thunder was interpreted as movement of God's warriors in battle. When thunder and lightning struck, this was seen as God's direct activity.⁴

The idea of an individual experiencing God's power was also expressed in another figurative way; Ngai iri Mucii - which means "God is at home". This means that God's power was in somebody's home. This happened when any of the animals regarded as God's messengers came to somebody's home. When a python (ndatu) was seen at somebody's home, it was sprayed with honey and given some milk.⁵

A colobus monkey (nkoroi) was also regarded as God's messenger when it visited somebody's home. In Igembe, colobus monkeys are associated with the sacred places for they usually live in forests, for instance the forest of Njaambene (Nyambene hills). When a

212

lone colobus monkey was sighted within people's homesteads, this was thought to be abnormal. It was therefore thought to have come to bring a message from God.⁶

Any other dangerous animal like a lion that came to people's homesteads during the day and did no harm to anybody or any livestock was also taken as a messenger of God.⁷ When sickness in a home was directly associated with God, the diviner told the head of the family that Ngai iri Mucii (God is at home). If a tree uprooted itself from the roots without having its stem broken this was also said to be a manifestation of God's power.⁸

When any of the above happenings took place, prompt action on the side of the family head was required. The head of the family and his senior wife had to spray honey and throw finger millet at the area where the happening that was interpreted as manifestation of God's power took place. If it was in the homestead, they would go round the homestead spraying honey and throwing fingermillet. This was an offering to God. Its purpose was to inform God that the family had received the message and was willing to offer a sacrifice to him. By offering honey and fingermillet to God, the head of the family was also appealing to him not to cause more harm to the family. Honey was also sprayed on the animal

that would be sacrificed later. This was a sign that, it had been consecrated and set aside for God.⁹

After offering honey and finger millet to God, the head of the family went to see a diviner (Kiroria) or a prophet (Kiroria or Mwaria na Ngai) who would tell him what wrong any of the member's of his family might have done to anger God and all what he had to do in order to appease God. Usually one of the things he was required to do was to offer a black unblemished ram to God as a sacrifice.

On the eve of the sacrifice, all the members of the family in order of seniority had to spray honey on the animal that was to be offered to God. This was a way of consecrating the sacrificial animal. The whole exercise was led by an elder who was known to be an expert in these kinds of sacrifices and who had been called in to advise the family on how to carry out the sacrifice.¹⁰

The following morning, the whole procedure of spraying the sheep with honey would be repeated. The sheep would be suffocated by closing all its openings with Kikuyu grass and dipping its mouth in a hole in which honey had been put. After suffocating, the sheep's neck was cut and its blood put in two calabashes. The sheep was skinned and its stomach contents removed. The carcass was

then cut into two equal halves, cutting it lengthwise from the neck to the tail. The head was not split into two. The skin was divided into two equal halves. The right half of the sacrificial animal was kept aside as God's part"¹¹.

Half of the blood from the sacrificial animal was poured in the hole that had been used to suffocate the animal, as offering to God. The head of the family prayed to God appealing to him that, because of the sheep's blood that had poured to let no other blood pour. He prayed:

Itu Murungu baba,
Niuntu bwa tharike iji etika
Ukareka ingi itika.¹²

Which means

Please God the Father,
because of this blood that has poured
(or been shed),
let no other blood pour.

From this prayer, we may conclude that the sheep's life was to act as a substitute for the lives of the members of the family.

Although the sacrificial rites associated with God's direct punishment to a family were offered directly to God, the spirits of the ancestors were believed to take part in the sacrifice. This is because, as the invisible members of the family,

they had (together with the living members of their family) to propitiate God who had expressed his anger with the family.¹³

The spirits of the ancestors were given honey and fat from the sacrificial animal. The honey and the fat were put in sixteen castor plant stems (igina). These were grouped in four and planted at the following places:-

- (a) the place where the family fetched water.
- (b) at the entrance of the homestead.
- (c) at the entrance of the house of the mother of whoever had experienced "'God's power' either through destruction or sickness, or the mother who had given birth to an abnormal child.
- (d) at the place where the parents of the head of the family were buried.

Half of the blood of the sacrificial animal was also poured at the Kiara as libation to the spirits of the ancestors.¹⁴

All the members of the family and the elder(s) who had come to advise the family ate the left half of the sacrificial animal. It was eaten within the homestead. All the remains and the left half of the skin of the sacrificial animal were burnt to ashes in a sacrificial bonfire. Honey was sprayed on the ashes. The right half of the sacrificial

animal was kept outside the homestead on the right side of the homestead. This was God's portion of the offering.¹⁵

If that night honey that had been put in the igina and the right side of the sacrificial animal were not eaten by bees and wild animals respectively, this was taken as a sign that God had rejected the sacrifice. The head of the family had once again to go to the diviner who would tell him what the problem was. Another sheep had to be offered as a sacrifice to God.

On inquiring whether the Igembe expected God to eat his share of the sacrifice, the informants thought the question to be rather naive. It was pointed out that the animals that ate the sacrificial meat were simply God's representatives. If God did not accept the sacrifice, he could not send his representatives to eat the meat. It was further pointed out that what mattered was the disposition of the sacrificing community, the meat was being offered to God not animals.¹⁶

In case of a tree that had uprooted itself, blood and chyme from the sacrificial animals were poured at the foot of the tree before it was completely removed. This was libation for the spirits (nkoma) that were believed to have uprooted the tree. Another tree of the same kind had to be planted at

the same spot on the same day, to replace the uprooted one. The informants gave no reason why this was done.¹⁷

(ii) SACRIFICIAL RITE WHEN A PERSON DROWNED OR FELL IN THE WATER.

We have already noted that water places occupied a central role in Igembe religious beliefs and practices in the sense that some of these places where water was found were regarded as sacred places. We have also noted that, in some sacrificial rites, parts of the sacrificial animal were left at the water places. Water as a sustainer of life, was regarded as a symbol of God's blessing of life to the community. Some areas that had water were, therefore, believed to be occupied by good spirits who acted as God's messengers. Therefore, when a person fell or drowned in the water, this was taken as the working of God through his messengers.¹⁸

When a person fell or drowned in water, prompt action was taken to appease God. The father and mother of the drowned person or the person who had fallen into the river took honey and finger millet and threw them into the water as offerings to God and the good spirits. The spirits were believed to have actually thrown the person into the water. In so doing, they had acted on God's behalf.¹⁹

When a person had drowned in a river or a pond where water was fetched by members of the community,

water could no longer be fetched from that source until a sacrifice had been offered to God and the person removed from the water.

The sacrificial animal during this occasion was a ram if the affected person was a male or an ewe if the affected person was a female. It had to be black and unblemished²⁰. Before the sacrificial animal was killed, the person who had fallen into the water or one who had drowned had to be removed from the water with the sheep. The sheep was put into the water and held together with the dead person who was pulled to the shore or the river bank. The dead man had to remain in the river until the sheep was brought. The drowned person was placed at a distance of about twenty yards from the water.

The sacrificial animal was killed through the normal way of suffocating it. Half of its blood was poured into the hole that was used to suffocate it. The rest of the blood was poured into the water. The fat from the sacrificial animals was also melted and poured into the water along with chyme and some honey. These were taken as offerings to God and the good spirits which he had used as his messengers. Honey and fat were put in igina and planted around the water or along the river banks.²¹

The whole of the sacrificial animal was eaten by elders who had offered the sacrifice and the

person who had fallen into the water if he had not drowned. The sacrifice was meant to propitiate God who had showed his anger by taking one member of the community. When suffocating the sacrificial animal, the leading elder prayed:- itu ukoroga ungi²² (please never take another person). This implies that the sacrificial animal was to appease God and its life was to act as a substitute for the life of any other member of the community.

The sacrificial animal was also supposed to cleanse the members of the community who fetched water at that particular place, of all the evil that might have led to the drowning of one of them. Although the sacrificial animal was given by the members of the family of the drowned person, the sacrifice had a bearing on the community because water was a communal thing; the dead had drowned in water that was used by the community.

The skin, head and hooves from the sacrificial animal were used as symbols that would cleanse the community. The skin and hooves were used to construct an arch on the path that led to the water just near the place where the sacrifice was carried out. The head was buried under this arch such that everybody who went to fetch water or take animals to drink water had to pass under the arch and step on the buried head.²³

(ii) SACRIFICE FOR RAIN

Among the Igembe, rain was an important symbol of God's blessings to the whole community. In the same way that old members of the community spat on their family members or other people in the community as a sign of blessing them, so was God believed to spit on the whole community. Rain then was regarded as God's spittle of benediction.²⁴

Failure of rain was directly associated with God for he is the only one who controlled it. The spirits of the ancestors had no control over rain. When draught threatened the community, this was taken as a sign that one or more of the members of the community had done wrong to God. A prophet, (Mwaria na Ngai or Kiroria) had to be consulted so that he could tell what the problem was. The prophet was believed to have a direct communication with God. Therefore, it was believed that God would tell him what it was that had made him withhold rain.²⁵

When draught threatened the community, the women were the first to take action. Singing their makira (supplication) songs, they would visit a prophet who after communicating with God would tell them what it was that had angered God.²⁶ There were many things any member of the community could have done or failed to do that were believed to cause God's wrath .

In chapter III, we noted that failure to cleanse the land after a miscarriage or birth of a child who was a product of an uncircumcised person could cause God to withhold rain. If somebody killed a person who was related to him/her through blood-brotherhood relationship (gichiaro), it was believed that God would intervene on behalf of the dead person as a result of which he (God) would punish the whole community by making their land barren and withholding rain. This mostly happened in cases where clans or whole sub-ethnic groups had established blood brotherhood relationship with another clan or sub-ethnic group or ethnic group.²⁶

An individual could also cause God to punish the whole community if he/she killed any of the animals regarded as God's messengers.²⁷ These were for example a python (ndatu) a colobus monkey (nkoroi) or any other animal that the prophet had forewarned that it would pass through people's land and homesteads. This lone animal was referred to as Muciere wa Ngai (God's young married woman). This did not mean that the Igembe regarded the animal as God's wife. It only meant that it was God's messenger. In the same way that a husband sent his young wife to take a message to somebody so did God send these animals as his messengers.²⁸ If a person killed any of the above animals and failed to offer a sacrifice to God, this could make God withhold rain.

When the women were told what the problem was and they knew the person who had done wrong, they went to the home of this particular individual demanding that he give a sheep that could be exchanged with the right sheep that would be sacrificed. Having anointed their heads with red ochre (ndao or nondo), which is the colour of "decision, definitiveness and seriousness",²⁹ the women visited the culprit's home singing:-

Nuu uri mbere ekio, nuu?
 Kiama gia aka ni ikua!
 Nuu uri nyume ekio, nuu?
 Kiama gia aka ni ikua!

Who is in front of it, who?
 Women's council is everybody!
 Who is behind it, who?
 Women's council is everybody!³⁰

An analysis of the above song shows that the women viewed their role as that of implementing justice. They saw this as their communal responsibility. That is the reason why they claimed that women's council is everybody.

We have already noted that the different councils in Igembe had implementation of justice as their major role. Since the wrong doing of this particular individual had caused the suffering of the whole community, the women took it upon themselves to see to it that he paid for the wrong he had done. The songs the women sang while going to ask a member of the magongoana clans the right sheep that would be sacrificed had a very different

tone. They were songs to supplicate God and also to praise the man who had given or who would give them the sheep.³¹

If the drought affected a small section of Igembe, the sacrifice was carried out at the local sacred places or even along one of the main paths. However, if the drought was very serious and affected a big section of the Igembe community, or if sacrifices carried out on local basis did not yield good results, the sacrifice was carried out on Nyambene hills (Njaambene) the most sacred place in Igembe. The sacrifice was carried out by eight elders. Prayers for rain, fertility of both human beings and livestock and for peace and stability in the community were offered directly to God.³²

If it failed to rain after sacrifice had been offered at Njaambene, this raised a lot of fear and concern among the members of the community. Once again, a prophet had to be contacted to explain what the problem was. Another sacrifice had to be offered and this time the procession had to be led by a young girl and boy who were believed not to have engaged in any sexual intercourse.³³ Before the sacrificial animal was killed, the children, together with the sacrificial animal, were consecrated by spraying them with honey.

The inclusion of the children in the sacrificial ceremony was regarded as part of the sacrifice among

the Igembe. That is the reason why the children had to be consecrated just like the sacrificial animal. Like the sacrificial animal, the children were offered to God to propitiate him. However, the children were not slaughtered like the sacrificial animal.³⁴

In order to understand the symbolism of such an act, we need to refer back to the Igembe notion of sacrifice. The Igembe viewed God as the Supreme being. As such whatever was offered to him had to be ritually clean. We have already noted that the principle of holiness (utheru) was very central in Igembe sacrificial practices. The sheep was sacrificed to God because it was a symbol of meekness and peace. The children were also regarded as symbols of peace, meekness and innocence. They were regarded as holy (batheru), ritually clean and undefiled. Because of their innocence, they were regarded as holier than the elders. Therefore, by including them in their sacrificial rite, the Igembe were using the most innocent and holy human beings in their community to approach God. Because of their holiness and innocence, the Igembe hoped that for the sake of the children, God would hear their prayer.³⁵

A look at some Igembe social practices will also help us to understand the symbolism behind the inclusion of children in a sacrificial rite. In

Igembe community, if a person was begged to do or not to do something that was regarded with seriousness, and all attempts failed to convince this person, the person was begged by being given a child. For example, on her wedding day, the bride was given many presents as a way of begging her to enter her new homestead. However, she kept on moving slowly and then she would stop. When the bridegroom's family exhausted all presents they had kept for the bride, they gave her a child. This automatically made her enter the homestead and her hut. Although the child did not legally and wholly belong to the bride, after this, they established a very cordial relationship, and the bride viewed and treated him/her as her 'child'. Giving her a child symbolized that the bridegroom's family had nothing else that was of better value to give her than the child. The bride had to accept the child because a child was viewed as the highest gift one can be given in life.³⁶

By symbolically offering a child or children to God, the community was expressing its inner feelings, The community was showing God that they were very sorry for the wrong they had done and begging God to hear their prayers, at least for the sake of the innocent children (who were also suffering because of the punishment). A child was the highest gift the community could offer to God. It was higher than the spotless sacrificial animal. There was nothing else left in the community that they could offer to

God that was of greater value to them than the children. Therefore, although the children were not killed, symbolically, they represented the feelings and emotions of the community in the sacrificial rite. Since the Igembe did not practise human sacrifice (in the sense of killing) the children were left to live.

Children who had been symbolically offered to God were treated in a special manner in the community. Whenever there was a communal sacrificial ceremony where children had to take part, it was these same children who were chosen. These children had to be members of the clans that offered sacrifices (magongoana clans). If they grew up as people of good character, the members of the community would ask them to officiate in communal sacrifices. When they became elders, they were also requested to give the sheep that could be used in communal sacrificial ceremonies. However, this does not necessarily mean that the only persons who could officiate in communal sacrificial rites or who could give the community a sheep that would be used for sacrifice has to be only those persons who had been offered (dedicated) to God when they were young. These were preferred, but others too could do these things.³⁷

When the sacrificial animal was slaughtered, the elders and the children ate the meat. The children were anointed on the head and forehead with the fat

from the sacrificial animal. One of the writer's informants pointed out that at such serious occasions, the elders put the sheep in the lake at the top of Njaambene and left. It was not killed. This shows that they offered the whole sheep to God as a sacrifice.³⁸

(iv) PLANTING SACRIFICE.

Planting time was another occasion in Igembe when the community offered a sacrifice directly to God. This was a thanks-giving sacrifice to God for having granted rain to the community. The sacrifice was also offered to God as a form of supplication to him to protect the crops and bless the community with a good harvest.³⁹ The sacrifice was offered when the rain fell and before planting. Since these planting sacrifices were organized on a local basis, the sacrifices were carried out on main paths or at any of the local sacred places.

The women asked for the sacrificial sheep from a member of the clans that gave sheep for sacrifice. They handed it over to the elders. After suffocating the sheep and piercing its neck, the blood that gushed out was made to pour on the earth. When this was happening, the leading elder said "Tukuthambia nthi itu Ngai"⁴⁰ (we cleanse the earth oh God). This implies that, besides thanks-giving and praying for fertility and protection of crops, the purpose of

this sacrifice was also to cleanse the earth of any defilement that might hinder the proper growth of crops. It was a precaution against failure of the crops due to the 'sins' of one or more persons who might have defiled the land either wittingly or unwittingly. Land could be defiled by blood of abortion or miscarriage, shedding blood or killing a relative or a blood brotherhood (gichiaro) relative, and by birth of a child whose parent(s) was (were) uncircumcised if these were not immediately accompanied by a cleansing ritual.

The elders ate the whole of the sacrificial animal and the remains including the bones were burnt to ashes. The skin of the sacrificial animal was cut into small strips (tuthiana). These were given to the women who tied them on the baskets (itheti or ciondo) that they would use when planting. Planting took place the following day after the sacrifice.

In every clan, there was an old woman past child-bearing age who was supposed to plant seeds first. The old women having put a lace of black beads on her clean-shaven head and accompanied by a young virgin girl would go out very early in the morning to plant. The girl was the first to plant. They would plant using sticks (miro) from

a sacred tree called muilu. The planting by the old woman and the young girl was not just a social undertaking. It was a religious undertaking that was supposed to ensure that the first planting was done by a holy and undefiled person (muntu umutheru). The land that had been cleansed by the sacrifice had to be planted first by an undefiled person.⁴¹

V. SACRIFICE TO PROTECT FOOD FROM INSECTS.

This sacrifice was carried out when the crops were growing in the gardens if they had started being eaten and spoilt by insects (iinyo). The Igembe believed that when their crops were being spoilt by insects, an evil power called mpanga was behind it. The insects were symbols of that power. Therefore, this power had to be driven away or thrown away symbolically. Since this evil was not associated with the spirits (nkoma), the sacrifice was not offered to them. The sacrifice was offered to God who was requested to save the crops from destruction by this mpanga.

The informants gave three different ways of carrying out this sacrifice. In all the three variations of this sacrifice, all the members of the community were not supposed to work on their gardens until on the third day after the sacrificial ceremony. The sacrificial sheep was provided by the families that gave sheep for the communal sacrifices.

In the first variation of this rite a medicine man was called in order to carry out the magical part of the rite. This he did by getting some insects from the gardens, putting his 'magical powder' on them, and then putting them into the intestines of the sacrificial animal. The intestines had first to be removed and part of the chyme removed. The medicine man then carried the insects that were inside the intestines to the border of the sacrificing community and another community and threw them across the border. This symbolized the throwing away of the evil that was causing the destruction of crops.⁴²

In order to prevent the evil that had symbolically been thrown away from coming back or if there was any that was left behind from continuing to destroy the crops, all the raw fat from the sacrificial animal was divided into small pieces and put in castor plant stems (igina) which were then planted in the gardens of the sacrificing community. Every family in the sacrificing community had to have one castor plant stem planted in their gardens. This was referred to as Muthea. It represented God's protective power that the community had requested when they offered the sheep to him.⁴³

As long as the fat from the sacrificial animal was planted in the gardens (put in castor plant stems),

no member of the community could work in the gardens. This is because of God's protective power that was symbolized by the fat from the sacrificial animal. The presence of the fat indicated that the gardens were in a sacred state.⁴⁴ On the third day after the sacrifice, all the fat from the sacrificial animal was removed and replaced with fat from a he-goat. The skin of the he-goat was divided into small pieces which were given to the members of the community to tie on one end of their digging sticks (miroo).

The killing of the he-goat was not regarded as sacrifice. The he-goat was said to provide a curative power (Kiorio) that would cool the power of the Muthea.⁴⁵ It is like lighting a fire (that has power to burn and destroy) and using water to put it off. The fire in this case would destroy or burn the destructive power and the water would be the Kiorio because it puts off this fire.

The second variation of the ceremony of protecting crops from insects was purely a 'magical' one. There was no sacrificial animal involved. The rite was performed by some members of the Ntoamuo clan who were given a he-goat as payment. The man from Ntoamuo clan got a grasshopper. He gave it some magical powder referred to as Muthea because it was

regarded as a medicine. He asked members of the community that had invited him to catch some of the insects that were spoiling their crops from the gardens. He put some of these insects into the mouth of a grasshopper and then released it. The grasshopper was believed to take away all the evil.⁴⁶

The third variation of the above ceremony did not involve the killings of a sacrificial animal. However, it was still regarded as a sacrifice because the sheep that was involved in the ceremony was said to be offered to God. This ceremony was referred to as gukumbukia ngeere Muunda (to have a sheep go round the garden). It involved taking of an ewe round the land of the clan or territory that had organized the ceremony.

An elder, dressed in his ceremonial vestment and holding the ceremonial black stick led a young boy and a young girl (believed not to have engaged in any sexual intercourse). The children had their heads clean shaven and anointed with oil. Their foreheads had been anointed with ira (white diatomite powder). The sheep was also anointed with ira on its forehead. The sheep, which was held by the young girl came last in the procession. The sheep had to be a black ewe and without blemish. As he went round the gardens, the elder offered prayers to God informing him the purpose of their

mission. He said:-"Itu Murungu, twaingira nchai iria ciumbite kureta thina ⁴⁷ (please God, we are fighting the evil that had brought these problems). When the procession went back home, the sheep was set free. On the third day after this ceremony, the elder and the children had to be the first to work in the gardens.

In this third variation of the ceremony of protecting crops from insects, the community was beseeching God to remove the evil that was causing their crops not to grow well. God being the main provider of food and fertility of the land was the only one who could remove the evil. The presence of the evil that was destroying the crops was not thought of as a punishment from God.⁴⁸ That is the reason why the community felt that a bloody sacrifice was not necessary. A bloody sacrifice would only take place if the crops were completely spoilt.⁴⁹ The community felt it sufficient to offer the ewe and the children to God to request him to remove the evil from their midst. Therefore, the sacrifice had no element of propitiation. The community just turned to God who they believed to be their helper and protector to protect their crops from this evil. The writer failed to get what the Igembe believed to be the origin of this evil. The informants simply stated that the evil was in the insects.

They did not believe that the insects were sent by God or spirits.

(VI) HARVEST SACRIFICE:

As we have already noted, the Igembe believed that it was God who provided them with food. The crops were believed to grow well because of his power and protection. God was the one who blessed the community with a good harvest. Therefore, before tasting the new crops, God had to be thanked for his blessings. The sacrifice that was offered had the purpose of beseeching God to bless the food so that it would have no evil that could harm the members of the community when they ate the food.⁵⁰

A black, blemishless ram was offered on a main path that was used by members of the community while moving to and from their gardens. The elders ate the whole of the sacrificial animal. Its bones and remains were burnt to ashes in a sacrificial bonfire. Its skin was divided into small pieces (tuthiana) which the women tied on the baskets they would use when harvesting their crops. The sacrifice was offered when the crops were about to get ripe so that the children and birds might not taste the food first before God was thanked through the sacrifice.⁵¹

When harvest time came, everybody had to leave bits of whatever he/she had harvested on a path at a place where there was a big tree, a sacred tree or a rock. Whatever one left at this place had to be the best. If for example one had harvested maize, he/she got some of the biggest maize cobs that he/she had harvested and left them besides the path as his/her offering to God. By so doing, the Igembe said that they had harvested for God's store before they harvested for their stores.⁵²

The Igembe were aware that, the foodstuff they said they had offered to God was eaten by rats, moles and other wild animals. However, they said that these were God's creatures and had been sent by God. By eating what had been offered to God, they acted as his representatives.

(VII) SACRIFICE FOR PREVENTION OF EPIDEMIC
(KURINGIRA MURIMU NA NGEERE)

The outbreak of an epidemic affected the whole community. According to Igembe beliefs, spirits (nkoma) did not cause problems that affected a whole community. Spirits were concerned more with individuals and families. When there was an outbreak of an epidemic, the Igembe turned to God for help and protection.⁵³

The Igembe believed that at times God would warn them of an impending outbreak of epidemic through the

prophet (mwaria na Ngai). The prophet told the community the direction through which the outbreak would come. He also advised them on the precautions to take. This kind of revelation was usually followed by a sacrifice that was offered to God to request him to protect the community from the epidemic. The sacrifice was not meant as an atonement for the "Sin" or "Sins" the community had committed because the outbreak of such an epidemic was not associated with 'sin' on the side of the community.⁵⁴ That was the reason why God had to warn them so that they could take precautionary measures to prevent the epidemic from entering their land.

A black, spotless ram was killed at the border of the sacrificing community and the neighbouring community, in the direction the prophet had pointed out the epidemic would come. The whole of the sacrificial animal except the legs and their hooves, the head and the skin, was eaten by the sacrificing elders. These were used to make a barrier to prevent the epidemic from passing into their territory. This barrier was made by burying the legs and head of the sacrificial animal at the border of the sacrificing community and neighbouring community. These were buried on the main path (highway) that led to and from this neighbouring territory. The skin was used to make an arch above the buried head and legs. The blood and chyme of the sacrificial

animal were poured under the arch such that all those who passed through this arch had to step on them and the buried head and legs of the sacrificial animal.⁵⁵

The aim of the barrier that was made with parts of the sacrificial animal was to cleanse the evil of the epidemic from all those who passed through it. Usually, when such a sacrifice took place, the epidemic was believed to have broken in the neighbouring community. Therefore, if any member of that community passed through this barrier with the evil of the epidemic, this evil would be cleansed there. This means that he/she would not pass the evil into the community that had offered the sacrifice. If any member of the sacrificing community visited the neighbouring community and contacted the evil of the epidemic, this evil would be cleansed at the barrier.⁵⁶

The parts of the sacrificial animal that had been used to make the barrier symbolized God's protective power. The chyme of sheep was believed to have a very strong cleansing power.⁵⁷ It was used in all cleansing rituals even those that were not meant to be sacrificial rituals. The writer failed to get the reason why this was the case among the Igembe.

(VIII) SACRIFICIAL RITE WHEN THERE WAS AN EPIDEMIC
AFFECTING ONLY CHILDREN (KUENDIA ANA RUJIINE)

There were three sacrificial animals that were involved in this ceremony of praying for the protection of children from a ravaging epidemic. The first sacrificial animal was an ewe that led the children to the river (water) where they were to be symbolically cleansed of the evil of the epidemic. Together with the child who was to lead the procession to the river, these were regarded as non-bloody sacrifices to God.⁵⁸

An analysis of the prayer that the father of the child who was to take the children to the river (kuendia ana ruujine) offered to God on the eve of the ceremony clearly reveals that the child and the ewe were regarded as offerings to God. While consecrating the ewe and the child by spraying honey on them, the child's father prayed thus:-

Murungu wa ba baaba, jukia naicu,
 Murungu wa nthuki yetu, jukia naicu.
 Twagutegurira mwati juu na kaana kaa.
 Ndagucokeria nkatho na ndakuomba na
 kaana kaa wampere.
 Twebekie nduara iji itu Murungu baaba..⁵⁹

God of our fathers, take honey.
 God of our generation, take honey.
 We offer this ewe and this child to you.
 I give thanks and pray you with this child
 that you gave to me.
 Remove this epidemic from us, please God
 our father....

This prayer clearly reveals that, God was offered honey, the ewe, and the child so that he could

remove the epidemic from the midst of the community.

The second sacrificial animal was a black ram without blemish. Its life was offered to God as a substitute for the life of the members of the community.⁶⁰ This sheep was sacrificed on the day the children were taken to the river. It was offered near the river on the main path that led to and from the river. The meat from this sacrificial animal was eaten by the elders while its skin was used to erect an arch across the path. The children and their mothers passed through this arch while coming from the river to be cleansed. The arch symbolized God's power that would take away the evil of the epidemic from the children.⁶¹

The purpose of the third sacrificial animal was to ritually cleanse the community of any evil of the epidemic that might have been left within people's homesteads. This evil was symbolized by the faeces of the sick children. Therefore, from the day the children were taken to the river to be cleansed, up to the third day when this third sacrificial animal was killed, all the waste matter of the sick children was put in leaves and kept aside in the house. On the day the third sacrificial animal was killed, women took this waste matter and flies and took them to the elders. The elders put these in the intestines

of the sacrificial animal. An elder who was past child bearing age threw away the intestines that contained the faeces and flies across the border of the sacrificing community and a neighbouring community. This symbolized the throwing away of all the evil of the epidemic. The elder was not to look back after throwing away the "evil". On arrival at the place of sacrifice, he cleansed himself by washing with the blood and chyme of the sacrificial animal.⁶²

Besides the offering of sheep, women also offered finger millet to God. On the day the children were to be taken to the river, the women, led by those who were past child bearing age, went to the home of the elder who would take them to the river. They went carrying finger millet. The elder sprayed them with honey and anointed them with ira (white diatomite powder) before the procession started to the river. On arrival at the river, the sheep was submerged into the water four times. Each time it was supposed to shudder once and the women emitted ululations and threw their offerings of finger millet into the water. It was after this that the children were washed in the water as a sign of cleansing them from the evil of the epidemic. The evil was believed to have been carried away by the water.⁶³

After the children were cleansed at the river, they were also protected from getting another attack from the evil of the epidemic. This was done by putting Milelema (*Basalla alba*) around the neck of every child. The mulelema (sing) was a symbol of blessings among the Igembe.⁶⁴ These milelema had been put on the neck of the ewe that took the children to the river the previous evening before it was consecrated. The milelema, therefore, symbolized God's protective power and blessings that were passed to the children through the sacrificial ewe.

Other symbolic items that were used to protect the children from another attack by the evil of the epidemic were ntongu (fruits of *solanun in canum*). Many ntongu were kept at the place where the arch had been erected using the skin of the sacrificial animal. Before passing that arch, every woman took two ntongu, pierced them with a stick and made a hole through them, then she put the Mulelema through this hole and tied the Mulelema with the ntongu around the neck of her child.⁶⁵ The ntongu was a symbolic fruit among the Igembe. The informants agree with Baikiao's interpretation that,

The ntongu are a sign of beautiful and indestructible life. The ntongu produced by Mutongu in great numbers and very beautiful indeed are never eaten by any animal. So they survive the evils of life and are therefore a sign of survival integrity and unendangered beauty of living.⁶⁶

By putting the ntongu round the necks of the children, the Igembe hoped that just like the ntongu survive the evils of life so would their children.

(ix) SACRIFICIAL RITE WHEN THERE WAS AN EPIDEMIC AFFECTING THE WHOLE COMMUNITY.

In this sacrificial ceremony, two sacrificial animals were offered to God. One was the ewe which was to carry away symbolically the evil of the epidemic. The second sacrificial animal was offered to God in order to commune with him and beseech him to save the community from being exterminated by the ravaging epidemic.⁶⁷

The first sacrificial animal was killed very early in the morning at a central field where the community used to meet for other social activities like dancing and settling of disputes. The sheep was killed at one of the paths leading to and from this field. Two stems of Mutunguu tree were planted on both sides of the path. The sheep that was killed through suffocation by putting Kikuyu grass in all its openings and dipping its mouth in a hole, was placed at the middle of those two stems. It was not pierced as its blood was not to be shed. It was then covered with the leaves of the sacred trees of milui, Miroo and milelema.⁶⁸

After offering the first sacrificial ewe, the members of the community together with their livestock, would assemble at the field where the sacrifice had taken place. To enter the field they had to use a different path from the one where the sheep had been killed. This is because this sheep was symbolically to cleanse them of the evil of the epidemic. But before the cleansing, there is another rite that had to be performed at the field.

Two elders, followed by a young virgin girl, a young virgin boy and a sacrificial sheep went round the assembled community and their livestock. The elders sprayed honey on the assembled community and offered prayers to God beseeching him to remove the epidemic from the community. The elders, the two children and the sacrificial animal went round the assembled community and their livestock. The elders sprayed honey on the assembled community and offered prayers to God beseeching him to remove the epidemic from the community. The elders, the two children and the sacrificial animal went round the assembled people four times. After this, everybody, together with the livestock, left the field through the path where the first sacrificial animal that was to carry away symbolically the evils of the epidemic was killed and left. Everybody stepped on it.⁶⁹

The stepping on the sacrificial animal symbolized passing of the evil of the epidemic to this animal. Every woman with a household took leaves from any of the sacred trees that had covered the dead sacrificial animal. These were hanged at the entrance of their houses. These plants that were ever green symbolized "life and blessings of living". In this rite, they also symbolized the renewal of the life of the household through the sacrifice and the symbolic removal of the epidemic that was taking the life of the members of the household.⁷⁰

Some of the informants noted that the ceremony did not end with the act of stepping on the sacrificial animal. They pointed out that the child holding the sheep and the two elders, led the procession to the river where the community was to be cleansed by the water. The sheep was first submerged in the water four times while the women emitted ululations and offered finger millet to God. The leading elders also offered honey to God. They threw the finger millet and sprayed the honey into the water. People and children washed in the water below the place where they had submerged the sheep. Their animals drank the water below the place where people were washing.⁷¹

After the symbolic cleansing at the river, there was a symbolic fighting of the evil of the epidemic.

This was done at the same field where the first sacrificial animal had been offered. All the people and their livestock once again assembled at the field. Four strong warriors holding swords, clubs and spears, ran round the assembled members of the community, yelling and shouting at the top of their voices as they normally did while preparing to go to war. At the same time, the two elders and the young boy and girl holding the sacrificial animal went round the people on the opposite direction from that of the warriors. When they met with the warriors, each group turned back on the opposite direction. This was done seven times after which everybody dispersed except the elders who were left to sacrifice the sheep which had been used in this ceremony.⁷²

The above acts of going round the assembled community and shouting and yelling as if preparing to go to war were symbolic acts that were meant to scare off the evil of the epidemic. The acts symbolized that the community was protected by warriors. At the same time, they symbolized that the community was protected by God⁷³. It was believed that, after such symbolic fighting of the epidemic, no evil of the epidemic would dare 'attack' such a well protected community.

Another variation of the above ceremony of praying for the removal of epidemic from the community

had the donkey (ntiiri) as the animal to carry away symbolically the evil of the epidemic instead of the ewe. In this variation, two elders went round the assembled community (at the field) spraying honey on them and offering prayers to God on their behalf. A young boy, holding the rope that was tied around the donkey's neck, followed while the girl came last holding rope that was tied around the sheep's neck. The donkey was believed to carry symbolically all the evil of the epidemic from the community. The sacrificial sheep came last in the procession in order to bless the people. The donkey was not killed after this ceremony. It could not be offered as a sacrifice to God because a donkey was never a sacrificial animal among the Igembe.⁷⁴

An analysis of the above three sacrificial ceremonies related to protection of the community from an epidemic reveals that the Igembe did not associate an outbreak of an epidemic with either God or spirits of the ancestors. An epidemic was not seen as a punishment from either God or spirits of the ancestors. However, the Igembe believed that only God could protect them from this evil of epidemics. The evil of epidemics was thought to have been brought by the wind.⁷⁵

The fact that the Igembe turned to God when there was an epidemic or a threat of an outbreak of an epidemic in their community shows that the

Igembe viewed God to be more powerful than this evil. He had the power to remove the evil of the epidemic from the community. It also shows that the Igembe viewed God as one who was merciful and good, that is the reason why they believed that in times of crisis they could always rely on him for protection. God was even willing to warn the community of the danger of an impending outbreak of an epidemic. He was, therefore, interested in the welfare of the community. Therefore, Laughton is wrong when he asserts that, among the Meru, God "is not associated with any idea of truth, beauty or goodness."⁷⁶

(X) SACRIFICIAL CEREMONY TO PROTECT THE COMMUNITY
FROM ENEMY ATTACK (KURINGIRA MAITHA)

The Igembe believed that God's interest in the welfare of the community did not end only with provision of food and health to the community. God also protected the community from enemy attacks. Therefore, the Igembe believed that at times, God would warn them of an impending attack from enemies through his spokesman the prophet (Kiroria or Mwaria na Ngai).

When a particular community was warned that an enemy would attack them, they offered prayers and sacrifices to God so that he could protect the community from this attack. All members of that particular community that had been forwarned by the prophet

and their livestock assembled at one of their fields where they used to meet for other communal, social and religious functions. Two elders sprayed honey on the assembled members of the community as a way of blessing them. A young virgin boy, holding a female donkey (Munojwe jwa ntiiri) led the procession round the assembled members of the community. A young virgin girl, holding an ewe followed him. The donkey had its head covered with a basket. This was to symbolize and magically effect the way the enemies would not see the members of the community and their livestock.⁷⁷

After this ceremony, the elders went and sacrificed the ram that had been used in the procession of going round the assembled members of the community. This sacrifice was carried out at the border of the sacrificing community in the direction from which the community had been warned that the enemies would come. The head and legs of the sacrificial animal were buried across one of the main paths leading to and from the neighbouring territory. This symbolized God's protective power that would prevent the enemies from passing that point. It was believed that if the enemies passed that point their power would be made weak and they would not do any serious harm to the members of this community that had offered the sacrifice.

They would not take away their livestock because they would not see them since they had been magically prevented from seeing them.⁷⁸

(XI) SACRIFICIAL RITE AFTER DESECRATION OF A SHRINE.

We noted in Chapter III that, the Igembe had sacred places where they offered their sacrifices directly to God. Everything that was around the sacred places was associated with God. For that reason, there were rules that had to be observed when one visited such sacred places. For example, sacred trees were not to be cut for simple social purposes. The animals and birds that lived in these sacred places were not to be molested. If one did any of the forbidden things at the sacred places either wittingly or unwittingly, sacrifice had to be offered to God on his behalf because this was regarded as desecrating the sacred shrine.⁷⁹

Taking an example of the Iombe Shrine where we said there was/is an industry of soda ash (igati) and salt lick (Muonyo), there were some rituals that an individual had to perform before entering the shrine. About a kilometre before one got to the religious site, every person who was visiting iombe for the first time had to throw a stone at a place where there is a heap of stones. At the entrance of the shrine, there is a place where milk was poured

as offering to God. At this same place, every person going to iombe for the first time had to smear cow dung on the rocky wall. This was referred to as Kuthinga nyumba ya Ngai (to plaster - by use of cow dung - God's house).

When one went down the slopy rocks, to the flat area where the salt lake is, one was not supposed to go round the lake. If one went round clockwise, then he/she had to make sure that he/she went back anti-clockwise and vice versa. No reason was given for this prohibition. The informants simply stated that, that is the way their ancestors had taught them.⁸⁰ There were and still are some monkeys that live in the sacred place. These were not to be molested as they were referred to as God's elders (akuru ba Ngai).

Before one could start working for the first time at the small soda ash industry, he/she had to be ritually born by one of the women who live and work there. In this ceremony of ritual 'birth' one had to take an oath that he/she would not steal the salt lick (muonyo) or soda ash (igati) from other people. Even visitors would not dare steal at the sacred shrine for fear that God would punish them for that. It was believed that failure to follow the above rules and procedures would have made the victim be attacked by the good spirits that live in this shrine. These good spirits

were referred to as twana twa Ngai (God's children). This means that, they were God's messengers and acted on his behalf. These good spirits would literally beat the culprit or make him/her drown in the salt lake.⁸¹

One of the informants narrated how, when she went to Iombe for the first time to get salt lick for cattle, blows from an invisible source rained on her. She was thoroughly beaten and she knew that these were the spirits (nkoma) that were beating her. According to her, this was a sign that she had done wrong to God. A diviner was later contacted by her husband and a sacrifice offered to God to propitiate him.⁸²

When one faced any kind of misfortune at the sacred place, this was taken to mean that the person had done something that angered God. As such, a sacrifice had to be offered directly to God in order to propitiate him. Honey, finger millet and fat from the sacrificial animal were also offered to the good spirits at the shrine. This is because, they had acted on God's behalf. However, the sacrifice was said to be offered to God and not solely to these spirits. The sheep that was sacrificed was referred to as Ngeere-ya-Ngai (sheep of God) and not ngeere-ya-nkoma (sheep for spirits). Prayers for forgiveness were offered

directly to God and there was no mention of spirits in the prayers.⁸³ The meat from the sacrificial animal was eaten by the elders who were offering the sacrifice. Its bones and remains were burnt to ashes. A piece of skin from the sacrificial animal was tied on the top of one rock at the entrance of the shrine. This piece of skin was called Muungi.

B. SACRIFICES OFFERED TO SPIRITS (NKOMA)

(i) SACRIFICES TO SPIRITS OF THE ANCESTORS

When there was sickness or persistent misfortunes in a home and the diviner pointed out that the cause of the sickness or other misfortunes was an angry spirit of the ancestors (nkoma cia ba juju), the head of that family had to offer a sacrifice to propitiate the angry spirit or spirits. The sacrificial animal in this occasion was a sheep. However, its colour did not matter. The sacrifice was offered in the homestead and all the members of the family had to participate and share the meat from the sacrificial animal.⁸⁴

On the eve of the sacrifice, the head of the family and his senior wife put honey in stems of castor oil plant (igina). These were planted at the entrance to the homestead, at the Kiara, at the place where parents of the head of the family had been buried, at the door of the house of the mother of the sick person or persons and inside the house at the place where firewood was kept

(thei). Four igina were planted at every one of the above places. The honey was taken as offering to the spirits of the ancestors who had to take the honey, as a sign that they would accept the sacrifice. If the bees failed to taste the honey, this was taken to mean that the spirits of the ancestors had rejected the offering. A diviner had to find out the reasons as to why they had rejected the offering and remedy before the sacrifice was carried out.⁸⁵

The sheep was killed through suffocating it by closing all its openings with Kikuyu grass and dipping its mouth in a hole in which had been put honey. All of its blood was poured on the ground as libation to the ancestors. Pieces of meat from every joint and fat from the sacrificial animal were also put in igina or thrown around the homestead as offerings to the spirits of the ancestors. When giving the offerings the head of the family called by name, all his dead ancestors that he knew of and told them to take the offering of honey, meat and fat. He also called upon the spirits of his ancestors that he did not know personally. He begged them all to accept his offerings and remove the evil that they had brought to his family.⁸⁶

Because most of the misfortunes that befell a single person or (single) family were considered to be as a result of an offended spirit or spirits, it would appear that in every day life of the individual, the presence of the spirits of the ancestors was much more felt than the presence of God. However this is just an appearance since as we have already noted, there were many other occasions when sacrifices and prayers were offered to God. This means that God's presence in the daily life of the people was also felt. Even in sacrificial rites and other rites like cursing, oathing, ritual blessing and establishment of blood brotherhood (gichiaro) rites, where God was not directly involved, the presence of God was assumed. This is because even in the re-establishment of a good relationship between the spirits of the ancestors and the living members of their families, God was believed to be a witness because ultimately he is the one who would remove the sufferings from the family.⁸⁷ As Baikiao has rightly pointed out, "Every ritual has God (even without mentioning him) as the culminating point of reference, the blessings and the curses ultimately depended on God for execution".⁸⁸

(ii) SACRIFICES OFFERED TO OTHER CATEGORIES OF SPIRITS.

In Chapter Two, we noted that in Igembe world view, there were good spirits and bad spirits. Some

spirits of the ancestors were believed to be bad. We noted that spirits of people who had died bad deaths, and those of evil people like murderers, sorcerers and notorious criminals, were bad spirits. The spirits of these evil people were believed to end in "weird places, swamps, crevices, and ndwaarene inthuku (terrible crevices). Their destiny was unfortunate and these were not associated with the worthy ancestors."⁸⁹

The Igembe believed that if one did not do anything wrong to offend the good spirits (the spirits of the good ancestors and other good spirits that were not ancestral spirits), these could not do any harm to him/her. When one experienced misfortunes from these good spirits, he had to offer a sacrifice to propitiate them because he/she was sure that he had wronged them.⁹⁰ We should however note that, when one was molested by good spirits at the sacred places, the ultimate recipient of the sacrifice was God and not spirits. This is because, as we have already noted, these were believed to be God's messengers.

The bad spirits were however believed to molest human beings for apparently no reason at all. The Igembe believed that if these bad spirits made a habit of shouting at night near somebody's homestead or in somebody's piece of land, one person 'would die in that family'.⁹¹

These bad spirits were also believed to be very mischievous. As Baikiao points out:

Continuously they made strange noises, laughing hoarsely, quarelling, crying and such other things. They were said to be in great multitudes. For that reason sheep and fat and millet would at times be sacrificed, being poured into the strange ponds or lakes to appease the spirits especially if they had mistreated a person... The manner of sacrifices and words were very unlike the sacrifices and prayers offered to the divinity.⁹²

The attitude towards these spirits and their dwelling places was very different from the attitude towards good spirits. Good spirits were not feared but respected. The evil spirits were feared and hated their dwelling places were also abhorred. If one tampers with these abhorred places, he/she is molested by these evil spirits.⁹³

When sheep, fat and finger millet were offered to these bad spirits, they were not beseeched in prayer like the spirits of the ancestors. They were simply told to take the offerings and stop causing more harm. This is the same way one would give something to a ruthless and hated person just to protect himself from being harmed by him. Since these bad spirits were causing unnecessary harm to individuals they were given the sacrifice in order to stop molesting people and to keep them off. The sacrifice was not a sign of respect of love. Nor was there an attitude of being apologetic on the part of the one offering the sacrifice.⁹⁴

FOOT NOTES

1. P.C.P. Mbero, "Sacrifice Among the Meru of Kenya", paper presented in the Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, Makerere University, n.d. p. 4
2. M'Tuaruchiu Joseph, interviewed at Muutine, Njia Location, on June 30th 1983.
3. Kanampiu John interviewed at Kawiru, Maua location, on 16th May, 1983
4. J.M. Njau, "Death Among The Meru of Kenya" in Ocassional Research Papers in African Traditional Religions and Philosophies, Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, Makerere University, November, 1971, Vol.3, pp 4-5; M'Tuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit.
5. M'Amanja Samuel, interviewed at Kawiru, Maua location on 27th February, 1982; Tharamba M"Amencu, interviewd at Kaurine, Maua location on 10th March, 1982; Mbero Peter, interviewed at Maua, Maua location on 29th May, 1983.
6. Ibid.
7. Mbero Peter, op. cit.
8. Kanampiu John, op. cit.
9. M'Tuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit
10. Kanampiu John, op.cit.
11. Ibid; Kaluma Asunta, interviewed at Amungenti, Akachiu location, on 18th July, 1983.
12. M"Tuauruchiu Joseph, op.cit.

13. Ibid.
14. Ibid. Kanampiu John, op.cit.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Kanampiu John, op.cit.
18. Kabutu M'Alaine, M'Maroo, M'Kubania Kamincha,
interviewed at Kangeta, Njia Location,
on 24th June, 1983
19. Kaluma Asunta, op.cit.
20. Kabutu M'Alaine and others, opccit.
21. Kanampiu John, op.cit.; Kaluma Asunta, op.cit.
22. Ndatu M'Enganga, M'Anjoroo, Kachiuki Baiturubiri,
Thirari Baimanyara, interviewed at Mutuati,
Mutuati location on 29th July, 1983.
23. Ibid.
24. J.N. Baikiao, "Towards Africanisation of
Christianity. An approach to the Evangeli-
zation of the Meru of Kenya in Light of Their
Tribal Anthropology And Post Vatican Council II
Magisterium;" Ph.D. Dissertation, Urbaniane
Pontifical University, Roma 1977, p.169;
M'Tuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit.
25. Mbero Peter, op.cit.
26. Kabutu M'Alaine and others, op.cit; M'Tuaruchiu
Joseph, op.cit.
27. M'Amanja Samuel, op.cit., interviewed on 1st March,
1982.
28. Kamanja M'Lithara, Mwambia M'Angichia, interviewed
at Muringene Njia location on 30th May, 1983
29. Baikiao, op.cit. p.148

30. Kaluma Asunta, op.cit.
31. Ibid.
32. Kamanja M'Lithara and others, op.cit.
33. B.I.M.C. Bernardi, The Mugwe, A Failing Prophet;
A Study of A Religious And Public
Dignitary of The Meru of Kenya, London:
Oxford University press, 1959, p. 114;
M'Amanja Samuel, op.cit.
34. M'Amanja Samuel, op.cit.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid; M'Tuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit.
37. Ibid.
38. M'Tuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit.
39. Kamanja M'Lithara and others, op.cit.
40. Mbero, "Sacrifice among the Meru of Kenya", op.cit;
p.14.
41. Kamanja M'Lithara and others, op.cit.; Kailibi
M'Mutungu, interviewed at Kawiru, Maua
location on 10th May, 1983.
42. Kabutu M'Alaine and others, op.cit. interviewed
on 7th July, 1983.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid
46. Kamanja M'Lithara and others, op. cit.
47. M'Amanja Samuel, op.cit.
48. Ibid.
49. Kanampiu John, op.cit.
50. Kailibi M'Mutungu, op.cit.
51. Ibid.

52. Kamanja M'Lithara and others, op.cit.
53. Tharamba M'Amencu, interviewed at Kaurine,,
Maua location on 10th March, 1982.
54. Ibid.
55. Kamanja M'Lithara and others, op.cit; M'Tuaruchiu
Joseph, op.cit; Ndatu M'Enganga and
others, op.cit.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Kamanja M'Lithara, M'Tuaruchiu Joseph, M'Abwima
Karani, interviewed at Muringene, Njia
location, on 26th May, 1983
59. Ibid.
60. M'Tuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit.
61. Kamanja M'Lithara and others, interviewed on
26th May, 1983, op.cit.
62. Ibid.
63. Kailibi M'Mutunyi, op.cit.
64. Baikiao, op.cit. p. 139; Kailibi M'Mutunyi, op.cit.
65. Kamanja M'Lithara and others interviewed on
26th May, 1983, op.cit.
66. Ibid, Baikiao, op.cit. p.140
67. Ndatu M'Enganga and others, op.cit.
68. Mbero; "Sacrifice Among the Ameru of Kenya",
op.cit. p.2.
69. M'Tuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit.
70. Mbero, "Sacrifice Among the Ameru of Kenya",
op.cit. p.2
71. Kailibi M'Mutunyi, op.cit.

72. Ibid; Mbero Peter, op.cit.
73. Ibid.
74. Kailibi M'Mutunyi, op.cit.
75. Ibid.
76. W.H. Laughton, The Meru, Nairobi, 1944, Peoples of Kenya, No.10. p.17.
77. Ndatu M'Enganga and others, op.cit.
78. Kanampiu John, op.cit.
79. Mbero Peter, op.cit.
80. M'Achiuki M'Lairingi, interviewed at Iombe, Mutuati location, on 3rd August, 1983.
81. Kaibiria Nculubi, Kamanja M'Tuatuchiu, Mwambia Nkirina, interviewed at Iombe, Mutuati location on 3rd August, 1983.
82. M'Ameru Kiilu, interviewed at Amungenti, Akachiu location on 3rd August, 1983.
83. Kaibiria Nculubi and others, op.cit.
84. Ithabuari M'Aboro, interviewed at Kaurine, Maua location on 1st March, 1982.
85. M'Mubwika M'Mauta, M'Achiuki M'Munoru, interviewed at Kanuni, Akachiu location, on 31st May, 1983.
86. Ibid.
87. M'Tuaruchiu Joseph, op.cit.; Mbero Peter, op.cit.
88. Baikiao, op.cit. p. 122
89. Ibid, p. 262.
90. Kaluma Asunta, op.cit; Njau, op.cit, p.110
91. Kaluma Asunta,op.cit.
92. Baikiao, op.cit pp. 165-166
93. Njau, op.cit. p.9
94. Kaluma Asunta, op.cit.

C O N C L U S I O N

This study set out to describe the different types of sacrificial rites and to investigate the meaning, purpose and nature of each sacrificial rite and the general meaning and nature of sacrifice among the Igembe.

The study has shown that the Igembe offered many sacrifices directly to God. Sacrifices were offered directly to God during the rites of passage ceremonies, when rain failed to fall at the expected time, before planting, after planting and during harvest, when one was struck by lightning or when a piece of land had been seriously eroded by flood, before going to battle and when there was an outbreak of epidemic or a threat of an outbreak of epidemic or war. Sacrifices were also offered directly to God when there was sickness and the diviner-medicineman pointed out that the cause of the sickness was God. Sacrifices were also offered directly to spirits of the ancestors when sickness or misfortune in a family was believed to be caused by the spirits of the ancestors. In all family sacrificial rites, the spirits of the ancestors were believed to be partakers of the sacrificial meal in their capacity as the invisible members of the family. The spirits of the age groups were also believed to be partakers of the sacrificial meal in the ceremonies of handing over and taking over power

(ntuiko) in their capacity as the invisible members of their respective age groups.

A look at the many occasions when sacrifices were offered directly to God disproves the thesis that has been put across by some scholars¹ that the Africans offered sacrifices directly to God on very few occasions and that most of the times the Africans were concerned with spirits of the ancestors.

The study has also shown that the Igembe did not only turn to God when all other powers failed. The Igembe knew mainly by consulting the diviner-doctor who knew what problem or occasion required the community or family to offer sacrifices directly to God or to the spirits of the ancestors or to placate the evil spirits. The diviner - doctor might also find out through his divination that the cause of the problem was the evil power of sorcery, a curse or breaking of a taboo. In this case, no sacrifice was needed. Therefore, the Igembe could solve their problems either by offering prayers and sacrifices to God or to the spirits or by use of mystical powers.² They did not start off by using one power and when it failed turn to the other power. Therefore, Smith's thesis that Africans worshipped God rarely and when they did this it was as a last resort after all other powers had failed is not applicable to the Igembe case.

Smith notes that there are three strands or levels of worship in African religion which he calls dynamism, spiritism and theism. He defines dynamism as belief in an impersonal, pervasive power or energy and practices associated with it and spiritism as belief in spirits. Theism is belief in God and practices associated with it. According to him, dynamism is the lowest level.³ He goes on to point out that Africans try to satisfy their needs first through dynamism and then spiritism. He goes on to point out that

Africans sooner or later reach the frontier line beyond which neither dynamism nor spiritism can satisfy their needs. They do not meet all the facts, nor adequately solve the problems of life. That is where God comes in.⁴

Although we have noted that belief in God, spirits and mystical powers existed in Igembe cosmological view, God was not approached only when these other powers failed.

A look at the different types of sacrificial rites also indicate that the Igembe did not only turn to God during the time of serious crises as Kenyatta notes.⁵ We have seen that the Igembe offered sacrifices to God before planting, before and after harvest, after birth of a child and during circumcision and marriage ceremonies. In all these cases there were no crises. The Igembe were simply thanking God and asking for his blessings.

As regards the meaning and purpose of sacrifice among the Igembe, we have noted that one or more of the ideas of communion, propitiation, substitution, thanks-giving and prevention were present in the different sacrificial rites. However, the idea of communion is present in all but one of the Igembe sacrificial rites. An analysis of the different types of sacrifices in Igembe will reveal this.

All the sacrificial rites related to the rites of passage and which were offered when there was no particular problem in the community can be classified as thanks-giving and communion. Their main aim was to thank God for having blessed the individual and the community with the occasion. They also had the aim of seeking to commune or establish fellowship with God or spirits of the ancestors, so that they could be "participants" in the human drama and offer their blessings and protection. These sacrificial rites were also preventive in the sense that they had the purpose of requesting God and the spirits of the ancestors to protect the individual(s) involved in the ceremony from all kinds of evil. The harvest sacrifice was also a thanks-giving and communion sacrifice.

Although the sacrificial rites that were performed before planting, when food was being destroyed by insects, when there was fear of

outbreak of an epidemic or enemy attack can be classified as preventive, they also had communion with God as one of their purposes. Through the life of the sacrificial animal, it was believed that communication and communion would be established with God who was believed to be present to hear what the community desired from him.

All the sacrificial rites that were performed when there was a problem in human society and were, therefore, intended to avert a calamity and atone for the offences that were thought would bring the calamity had the purpose of propitiating God or the spirits of the ancestors. These rites also had the purpose of establishing communion with God or spirits of the ancestors after propitiating them. Therefore, even in cases where man had wronged God or spirits of the ancestors, the ultimate purpose of the sacrifice was to commune with God or spirits of the ancestors. That is the reason why those making the sacrifice had to eat the sacrificial meat as a way of sharing with God or spirits of the ancestors. In the case of sacrifices offered to evil spirits the individual or community did not wish to have any communion with them. Therefore, the members of the community never ate meat offered to evil spirits. The whole of the sacrificial animal was offered to them.

By having communion with God or spirits of the ancestors, the Igembe believed that they were sharing with God or spirits of the ancestors. Through this sharing they believed that they would receive blessings from God or the spirits of the ancestors. In their social practice, the Igembe had a similar idea of sharing with other members of the community as a sign of unity or fellowship and also as a way of establishing fellowship or reconciliation between two persons or two groups of people.

In Igembe, when a person wronged a parent or parents and he wished to be reconciled with his parent(s), he slaughtered a fat ram and invited his parents and a few other elders. The person who had wronged his parent(s) explained the reason for slaughtering the ram or goat and he begged for forgiveness from the parent(s). He stated that he wanted to be reconciled to his parent(s). The parent(s) gave their blessings to the son who had wronged them by spitting on the chest and face of the son (sign of blessing) and they announced that they had pardoned him. The same thing happened if a person had been cursed by another person or the community. In the case of a curse, the cursed person had to eat (alone) the right arm of the slaughtered animal and to sleep on its skin that night. The part of the animal he ate and the skin had earlier on been spat on by the person who had cursed him or his representatives or the

representatives of the community that had cursed him. Spitting on the meat and the skin symbolized that they had blessed the cursed person. If the cursed person was married, he had to have a ritual sexual intercourse that night in order to receive the blessings. If he was not married his parents had to do it on his behalf.⁶

In the same way, when one wronged God or spirits of the ancestors, he offered a sacrificial animal to them and it was believed that through the sharing and the community expressing its feeling of remorse and need for fellowship and reconciliation, God or spirits of the ancestors would grant the needs of the individual or community and give them their blessings.

However, by sharing the sacrificial meal, the Igembe did not think that God literally and physically partook of the meat from the sacrificial animal the way the living human beings would do. We have already noted that the wild animals and insects which ate the parts set aside for God were believed to be his messengers. Roberston Smith's observation that in primitive societies by eating the sacrificial animal the clansmen were partaking in a sacred communion with their god⁷ (that is they were feeding together with their god) is not applicable to the Igembe case.

For the Igembe the sacrificial animal was not regarded as being intrinsically divine as Roberston Smith points out. Furthermore, it was not regarded as a totem and the god of the clan. The sacrificial animal was regarded as sacred after it had been consecrated and set aside for sacrifice. The worshippers were not believed to feed together with God on the victim.

Evans-Pritchard's observation on the Nuer sacrifice with regards to the communion theory is also not applicable to the Igembe case. According to him, in a sacrificial rite what goes to God is the life of the animal. He goes on to point out that

It would be to extend the communion theory beyond legitimate bounds to say that his taking - not consuming - the life and man's eating of the flesh constitute a communion.⁸

In the Igembe case, God's taking of the life and man's eating of the flesh constituted a communion because the Igembe believed that although God did not physically partake the meat, his 'representatives' partook the sacrificial meal. Therefore, those sacrificing believed to be communing with God.

Furthermore, Evans-Pritchard's observation that the eating of the sacrificial animal is not a sacramental meal but "an act of family or kin which

moreover falls outside the sacrificial rite"⁹ is not applicable to the Igembe case. As we have already noted, those who ate the sacrificial meal were thought of as having gained some spiritual strength. That is the reason why there were prohibitions of sexual intercourse for those who officiated in communal sacrificial rites and prescription of compulsory sexual intercourse for the people on whose behalf a family sacrifice had been made or their parents. Therefore, the eating of the sacrificial meal was not just a social event. As we have already noted, not everybody was allowed to eat the sacrificial meat as would have been the case if the meat was not from a sacrificial animal.

Therefore, we can conclude that in the Igembe case, communion meant the mystical and physical sharing of the sacrificial animal with God or spirits of the ancestors. Through the sharing, fellowship was established between God and members of the community or members of the community and spirits of the ancestors or between God, spirits of the ancestors and the living members of the community. Through the life of the sacrificial animal communication was established with God thus bringing God and man mystically together. In this way, it was believed that God was present in a special way to hear what the community desired from him. Through the offering of meat from the sacrificial animal, the spirits of

the ancestors were also believed to be present in a special way to hear what the living desired from them.

In the Igembe case, the basic principle of sacrifice is that of giving of a gift to God or spirits of the ancestors. The human beings had to share the gift with God or spirits of the ancestors so that through the sharing communion would be established. The gift served the purpose of strengthening the good relationship between God and man or spirits of the ancestors and man and re-establishing this good relationship when it had been marred by wrong act(s) by man.

The principle of bribery which has been advocated by some scholars¹⁰ is not present in the Igembe case. If the principle was to bribe there would be no need of sharing the sacrificial animal with God or spirits of the ancestors. In any case as we pointed out in Chapter II, the Igembe believed that one could not fool God. Therefore, one cannot bribe God so that he acts favourably. God will act favourably towards the living human beings when they request him. That is the reason why the gift theory interpretation is more applicable to the Igembe case. This is because the gift was taken as a symbol of the inner attitude of the one offering the sacrifice. It expressed outwardly what the one offering the sacrifice

was feeling. In the case of thanks-giving sacrifice, the sacrificial offerings expressed the feeling of gratitude on the part of the community or the individual offering the sacrifice. One cannot think of bribing God in order to thank him.

Another important finding of the study is in relation to sexual intercourse and the central role it occupied in sacrificial rites. Besides the purpose of satisfying the physiological sexual desires of man and woman sexual intercourse had a religious function and meaning among the Igembe. It was regarded as sacred, for through it the individual could receive God's blessings. When misused the sex act could also turn out to be a source of receiving curses or ritual uncleanness. It was because of this fact that sex occupied a central role not only in sacrificial rites and ceremonies but also in other religious rites like those relating to curses, oathing and ritual blessings.

The blessings that were believed to accompany a sacrificial rite or a ritual blessing ceremony were received by the individual or individuals concerned through the sexual act. The same thing happened in the ceremony of annulling the bad effects of a curse or an oath.

Serious oaths were also taken by one swearing while having sexual intercourse. By so doing one was invoking on himself the curse that he should

become unproductive (and his family) if he broke the oath. If an old woman or a parent cursed a person by showing him her private parts, this was taken as a very serious curse because it meant that the woman was cursing the person to be unproductive.

The study has brought out the fact that sexual intercourse occupied such a central role in Igembe religious rites and ceremonies because of its central role in reproduction. The Igembe attached very great importance to reproduction. The survival and strength of the individual, the family, the clan and the tribe depended very much on reproduction. Therefore, sexual intercourse was sacred for through it the community and the individual received the gift of life. Since every individual and the community desired this gift of life, the community saw to it that sex was not misused. By using sexual intercourse in oaths and curses the community exploited the desire of individuals to live and reproduce to establish peace, harmony and justice in society. Fear of missing this gift of reproduction and therefore life made individuals fear to misuse sex.

The significance and the role of sex in other religious rites besides sacrifice is one that needs more detailed study. There are also many other aspects of the Igembe religious heritage which require a lot more detailed studies than have been done.

These include the Igembe concept of God and spirits, purification rites and ceremonies, oaths, curses, ritual blessings, ceremonies and the role and beliefs associated with the different religious specialists.

FOOTNOTES ON CONCLUSION.

1. Some of these scholars are, H. Sawyerr,
 "sacrifice" in Biblical Revelation
 and African Beliefs (Eds) Kwesi A. Dickson
 and Paul Ellingword, London: Lutterworth
 Press, 1969, pp.66-63, J.V. Taylor,
 The Primal Vision, London: SCM Press Ltd.,
 1963, p.80; E.W. Smith (ed), African Ideas
 of God, London: Edinburg house, 1950, pp.16ff.
2. This can be defined as a hidden religious power
 that cannot be explained as either God's power or
 power of spirits. For example the evil power of
 Sorcery, the Medicineman's power of counterracting
 the evil power of sorcery or the power of an evil eye.
3. E.W. Smith, op.cit. p. 16
4. Ibid. p. 29
5. Jomo Kenyatta; Facing Mount Kenya, Nairobi: Heinemann
 Educational Book, 1978, p.239
6. M'Mubwika M'Mauta and M'Munoru wa M'Achiuki, interviewed
 at Kanuni, Akachiu location, on 31st May, 1983;
 M'Tuamwari Ibrahim, Kanake Meeme, M'Mauta Muriungi,
 Kanjooro Thirindi and M'Nchebere Thirindi, interviewed
 at Karichu, Antubetwe Kiongo location, on 21st July, 1983
7. Quoted in E.E.Evans-Pritchard; Theories of Primitive
 Religion, London: Od oxford University Press, 1965,
 p.52.

8. E.E. Evans-Pritchard; Nuer Religion, London:
Oxford University press, 1956, p.274.
9. Ibid. p. 274
10. E.B. Tylor; Religion in Primitive Culture,
New York: Harper, Vol,2, 1958, pp.461 ff.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

1. Awolalu Omosade J.; Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites, London: Longman, 1979.
2. Bernardi, B.I.M.C.; The Mugwe, A Failing Prophet, A Study of the Religious and Public Dignitary of the Meru of Kenya, London: Oxford University Press, 1959.
3. Danquah, J.B.; The Akan Doctrine of God, London, 1944
4. Dutton, E.R.T.† Kenya Mountain, London, 1929.
5. Evans-Pritchard, E.E.; Theories of Primitive Religion, London: Oxford University Press, 1954.
6. _____; Nuer Religion, London: Oxford University Press, 1956.
7. Forde, D. (Ed.) African Worlds, London: Oxford University press, 1954.
8. _____; Ethnographic Survey of Africa Part V, East Central Africa, London 1953.
9. Hobley, C.W.† Ethnology of Akamba and other East African Tribes; London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1971.
10. _____; Kenya From Chartered Company to Crown Colony, London, 1929.
11. Odowu, E.B.; African Traditional Religion: A Definition, London: SCM Press, 1973.
12. _____; Olodumare God in Yoruba Beliefs, London: Longman, 1962.

13. Kenyatta, J.; Facing Mount Kenya, London: Secker and Warburg, 1938.
14. Lambert, H.E.; The Use of Indigenous Authorities In Tribal Administration. Studies of The Meru in Kenya, Communication of the School of African Studies, University of Cape Town, N.S. No.16, 1947.
15. _____; Kikuyu Social and Political Institutions, London: Oxford, 1956.
16. _____; The Systems of Land Tenure in The Kikuyu Land Unit, Communication of the School of African Studies, University of Cape Town, N.S. No. 22, 1950.
17. Laughton, W.H.; The Meru, Peoples of Kenya series No.10 Nairobi: Ndia Kuu Press, 1944.
18. Leakey, L.S.B.; The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903, Vol.III, London: Academic Press, 1977.
19. Malnos Angela; Cultural Source Materials For Population Planning in East Africa, Vol. III, Nairobi: East Africa Publishing House, 1973.
20. Mbiti, J.S.; African Religions and Philosophy, London: Heinemann, 1962.
21. _____; Concepts of God In Africa, London: S.P.C.K. 1970.
22. Ochieng, W.R.: Eastern Kenya And its Invaders, Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1975.
23. Ogot B.A. & Kieran (Eds); Zamani.:A Survey of East African History, Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968.

24. Ogot B.A. (Ed.); Kenya Before 1900, Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1968.
25. Oliver, R. and Mathew (Eds.); History of East Africa Vol.1, London: Oxford, 1963.
26. Orde-Brown, G.St. J., The Vanishing Tribes of Kenya, London, 1927.
27. Parrinder, G.; African Traditional Religion, London: Sheldon Press, 1962.
28. P'Bitek Okot; African Religions in Western Scholarship, Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, (n.d.).
29. Radin Paul Monotheism Among Primitive People, Allen and Unwin, 1924.
30. Ray, B.C.; African Religions Symbol, Ritual and Community, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., Englewood Cliffs, 1976.
31. Sawyerr Harry: Creative Evangelism, London: Lutter Worth Press, 1968.
32. Smith, E.W. (Ed); African Ideas of God, London: Edinburgh House, 1950.
33. Taylor, J.V.; The Primal Vision, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1963.
34. Tylor, E.B.: Religion in Primitive Culture, New York: Harper, Vol. 2, 1958.

UNPUBLISHED SOURCES

1. Baikiao, J.N.; "Towards Africanisation of Christianity
An approach to the Evangelization of the
Meru of Kenya in Light of Their Tribal
Anthropology And Post Vatican Council II
Magisterium" Ph.D. Thesis, Urbaniana
Pontifical University, Roma, 1977.
2. Bernard, F.E.; "East Of Mount Kenya, Meru Agriculture
In Transition", Unpublished Ph.D.
Dissertation, University of Wisconsin,
1968.
3. Fadiman, J.A.; "Traditional Warfare Among the Meru
Mt. Kenya" Ph.D. Dissertation, University
of Wisconsin, 1973.
4. _____; "Mountain Warriors, The Pre-Colonial
Meru Of Mt. Kenya", (CS.L.) Ohio
University Centre for International
Studies, 1976.
5. _____; "Early History Of the Meru of Mt.
Kenya", (CS.L. S.N.), 1973.
6. Greeley Edward, "Accelerating Family Planning
Acceptance On the Eastern Slopes of

Mt. Kenya. A Report From a Coffee-growing Area in Southern Meru", Paper Presented at the East African Universities Social Science Conference, Nairobi, 1975.

7. _____; "Meru and Fertility Regulations in Southern Meru, A Case Study from the Kenya Highlands", Ph.D. Dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 1977. (Washington D.C.).
8. Kibicho S.G., "The Kikuyu Conception of God, Its Continuity Into the Christian Era, and the Question It Raises for the Christian Idea of Revelation", Ph.D. Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, Tennessee, 1972.
9. Kinyua, Joseph, "A History Of the Njuri In Meru 1910-63" B.A. Dissertation, University of Nairobi, 1971.
10. Lowenthal Richard; "The Structural Dynamics of Tharaka Age-organization", Paper Presented at a Research Seminar, Institute of African Studies University of Nairobi, Nairobi Institute for African Studies Research Seminar No. 24.

11. Mahner, J.; "The Insider and the Outsider In Tigania Meru", Preliminary Research Paper, Institute of Development Studies, Cultural Division, University of Nairobi, 1970.
12. Mbero, P.C.P; "Sacrifice Among the Ameru of Kenya" B.A. Dissertation, Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, Makerere University, n.d.
13. M'Inoti Filipino; "Asili ya Wameru na Tabia Zao" (The Origin of the Meru and Their Customs), type written manuscript, 42 pages, Kiswahili language, Meru Methodist Mission, North Imenti.
14. Muntu Imanyara, A.M.; "The History of Meru From Meroe To Kenya, B.C. 800-1965 A.D.", Unpublished Manuscript in Owner's Possession.
15. Mwaniki, H.S.K.; "A Pre-colonial History of the Chuka of Mount Kenya, C 1400 - 1908", Ph.D. Dissertation, Dal housie University, 1982.

16. Njiru Eliferet; "Indigenous Education as Practised by the Ameru With Special Reference to Circumcision Ceremonies", M.A. Thesis, University of Nairobi, 1981.

17. Nyaga Daniel; "Mikarire Na Mituurire ya Amiru, Iuku Ria Mbere" (Traditions and Customs of the Meru, Part 1) unpublished Manuscript, Meru Museum.

J O U R N A L S

1. African Affairs; Journal of the Royal African Society, Vol.15, No.59 (1916) pp.225-333.
2. Africa, 30, (1960) pp. 20-23.
3. African Thought and Practice. The Journal of the Philosophical Association Of Kenya, Vol. 1 No. 2, 1974, Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.
4. Journal of African History, vol.111, 1967, pp. 25 - 28.
5. Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute, 42, 1912, pp. 201 -202.
6. Man, vol.13, No. 79, 1913 pp. 137 - 140
7. Man vol.15 No. 39, 1915 pp. 65 - 68.
8. Man XXX, 143, 1930, pp. 201 -202.
9. Man 42, 31, 1942, pp. 58 - 65.
10. Man 64, 9, 1964, pp. 17 - 18.
11. Mila a biannual Newsletter of the Institute of African Studies, University of Nairobi, vol.3, No.2, 1972, pp.13 - 21.

12. Occasional Research Papers in African Religions and Philosophies, Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, Makerere University, Kampala, vol.1. 1971; vol.3, 1971; vol.2, 1974; vol.22, 1974; vol. 27, 1975.
13. Orientation. The Journal of Religious Studies in Kenya, vol. 1, No. 1 June 1973.
14. Utamaduni, A Journal of African Studies in Religion, vol. 1, No. 1, Nairobi: Kenyatta University College Press, October 1980.

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

1. Anon; "Marriage and Divorce Among the Tigania of Meru". B.A. Dissertation, Religious Studies departmental Archives, University of Nairobi, n.d.
2. Aru yaru Thiane; "Male circumcision Among the Tigania Community," B.A. Dissertation Religious Studies Departmental Archives, University of Nairobi, 1975.
3. Kinoti Rose Mary; "Courtship and Marriage in Miriga Mieru" B.A. Dissertation, Religious Studies Departmental Archives, University of Nairobi, 1973.
4. Kobia Gabriel; "Initiation Among the Igembe" B.A. Dissertation, Religious Studies Departmental Archives, University of Nairobi, 1973.
5. Mboroki; "The Imenti - Tigania - Masai Relationship In Pre-colonial Period, Religious Studies Departmental Archives, University of Nairobi, 1972.
6. Meru Political Record Book, 1908 - 1920, Kenya National Archives.

7. Meru District Annual Reports 1925-1936, Kenya National Archives.
8. Meru District Annual Reports 1933 and 1941, Kenya National Archives.
9. Meru District Annual Report 1939, Kenya National Archives.
10. Mukindia Florence "The Arbitration of the Nthenge Oath Among the Northern Meru Tigania", B.A. Dissertation Religious Studies Departmental Archives, University of Nairobi, n.d.
11. Murungi, J.C.; "A Woman Prophet In Meru" B.A. Dissertation, Religious Studies Departmental Archives, University of Nairobi, 1973.
12. Muthuri; "Death Among the Meru" B.A. Dissertation, Religious Studies Departmental Archives, University of Nairobi, n.d.
13. Njau J.M.; "The Marriage Institution Among the Meru of Kenya", Paper presented in Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Makerere University, 1972 in Religious Studies Departmental archives, University of Nairobi.

ORAL INFORMANTS*

1. Asunta Kaluma, interviewed at Akachiu location, on 18th July 1983.
2. Baikiao Jomo Ngunyura interviewed at Maua, Maua location, on 1st August 1983.
3. Baimanyara wa Thirari, interviewed at Mutuati, location, on 29th July 1983.
4. Baimunya wa Baitumbiri^{ti}, interviewed at Theera, Antubetwe Kiongo location, on 4th March 1982.
5. Baitumbiri wa Kachiuki, interviewed at Mutuati, Mutuati location on 29th July 1983.
6. Christine Muiti, interviewed at Maua, Maua location on 16th June 1983.
7. Ciokararu wa Kailibi, interviewed at Kaurine, Maua location, on 2nd and 5th March 1982.
8. Daniel Kaumbuthu, interviewed at Kiegoi, Kiegoi location, on 4th August 1983.

* For detailed information on the main informants see Appendix III.

9. Gladys Ncororo, interviewed at Maua, Maua location on 16th June 1983.
10. Ibrahim M'Tuamwari, interviewed at Karichu, Antubetwe Kiongo location on 21st July 1983.
11. Jeniffer Kalai, interviewed at Kawiru, Maua location on 11th May 1983.
12. John Kanampiu, interviewed at Kawiru, Maua location, on 16th May 1983.
13. John Kamencu, interviewed at Kaurine, Maua location on 2nd March 1982.
14. Joseph M'Tuaruchiu, interviewed at Kangeta Njia location on 20th and 26th May and 30th June, 2nd October 1983.
15. Kamincha M'kubania, interviewed at Kangeta Njia location, on 24th June and 7th July 1983.
16. Karani M'Abwina, interviewed at Muringene Njia location on 20th, 26th, 31st May and 15th June 1983.
17. Kathia M'Muceke, interviewed at Kawiru Maua location, on 12th May 1983.

18. Kiilu M'Ameru, interviewed at Amungenti, Akachiu location, on 15th May 1983.
19. M'Aboro Ithabuari, interviewed at Kaurine, Maua location, on 1st March 1982.
20. M'Alaine Kanutu, interviewed at Kangeta, Njia location, on 22nd, 24th June and 7th July 1983.
21. M'Amencu Tharamba, interviewed at Kaurine, Maua location on 10th March, 1982.
22. M'Angichia Mwambia, interviewed at Muringene, Njia location on 30th May 1983.
23. M'Anjooro interviewed at Mutuati, Mutuati location on 29th July 1983.
24. Mariamu Kathata, interviewed at Kaurine, Maua location on 11th March 1982.
25. Mariamu Kathei, interviewed at Kawiru, Maua location on 1st and 3rd March 1982.
26. Mbaabu M'Amanja, interviewed at Kiegoi, Kiegoi location on 4th August 1983.

27. Meme wa Kanake, interviewed at Karichu Antubetwe Kiongo location, on 21st July 1983.
28. Meeme wa Kailibi, interviewed at Athiru Runjine, Maua location, on 9th March 1982.
29. M'Eliungu Mwomboko, interviewed at Kanuni Akachiu location, on 20th June, 1983.
30. M'Eng'ang'a Ndatu, interviewed at Mutuati, Mutuati location on 29th July 1983.
31. M'Eringo M'Mauta, interviewed at Kiegoi, Kiegoi location, on 2nd August 1983.
32. M'Etari wa M'mwambia, interviewed at Muuru, Maua location on 12th March 1982.
33. M'Etiri wa Kabuali, interviewed at Karuri, Akachiu location, on 15th 20th, June 1983.
34. M'Imaria wa Maria, interviewed at Kaurine, Maua location, on 4th and 6th March, 1982.
35. M'Ithiria M'Mugambi, interviewed at Kiegoi, Kiegoi location, on 4th August 1983.

36. M'Kailibi M'Amanja, interviewed at Mutuati, Mutuati location on 20th July 1983.
37. M'Kiambati wa Kiambati, interviewed at Kanuni, Akachiu location on 21st May 1983.
38. M'Lairingi M'Achiuki, interviewed at Iombe, Mutuati location, on 3rd August 1983.
39. m'Lithara Kamanja, interviewed at Muringene, Njia location on 20th, 26th, 30th may and 14th June and 2nd October 1983.
40. M'Maroo Baituuru, interviewed at Kangeta Njia location on 24th June and 7th July 1983.
41. M'Mauta wa M'Mubwika , interviewed at Kanuni, Akachiu location, on 15th, 2nd and 20th June 1983
42. M'Mauta wa Kanina, interviewed at Kanuni, Akachiu location, on 15th June, 1985.
43. M'Munoru wa M'Achiuki, interviewed at Kanuni, Akachiu location on 31st May, 1983.
44. M'Mutungu wa Kailibi, interviewed at Kawiru, Maua location on 10th May 1983.

45. M'Akubania Njiilu, interviewed at Kanuni, Akachiu location, on 15th June 1983.
46. M'Tuaruchiu Kamanja, interviewed at Iombe, Mutuati location, on 3rd August 1983.
47. Muriungi wa M'Mauta, interviewed at Karichu, Antubetwe Kiongo location, on 21st July 1983.
48. Naulubi Kaibiria, interviewed at Iombe, Mutuati location, on 3rd August 1983.
50. Peter Mbero, interviewed at Maua, Maua location on 27th March 1982, 29th May, 4th 31st July and 7th October 1983.
51. Samuel M'Ncebere, interviewed at Muringene Njia location, on 14th June, and 2nd October, 1983.
52. Samuel M'Amanja interviewed at Kawiru Maua location on 1st ,3rd March and 27th February 1982.
53. Samuel Michuki, interviewed at Kawiru, Maua location on 28th February, 1982.

54. Stephen Michuki, interviewed at Athiru
Runjine Maua location, on 6th March, 1982.

55. Thirindi Kanjooro, interviewed at Karichu,
Antubetwe Kiongo location on 21st July 1983.

56. Thirindi M'ncebere, interviewed at Karichu,
Antubetwe Kiongo location on 21st July 1983.

G L O S S A R Y

- Aciere (Muciere - sing.) - Young married women.
 Akuru (Mukuru - sing.) - Old men or elders.
 Ana (Mwana - sing.) - Children
 Ba - of
 Bagwatene - holding one another; united.
 Barikiba - Name of God
 Batheru (Umutheru - sing.) - clean, pure or holy persons.
 Ciondo (Kiondo - sing .) - baskets.
 Gaaru - a house or harrack used communally by
 different age sets; an elders' personal
 house.
 Gichiaro - blood brotherhood relationship.
 Gikuu - death
 Guciara - to give birth; to produce.
 Gukuka - to be uprooted
 Gukuria - to make grow; to mature
 Gukuura - to uproot.
 Gutana - to circumcise
 Gutuma - to make, to mend.
 Igati - Soda ash
 Igina - stem of castor oil plant
 Igongoana - sacrifice
 Iguru - up; heaven.
 Iinyo (kiinyo - sing.) - insects.
 Ijiji - Uncircumcised boys
 Imwe - One
 Ira - white diatomite powder

- Irandu - credit
 Iri - It is
 Itheti (Kitheti- (sing.) - baskets.
 Itiiri - Circumcision field.
 Itonga - A rich man
 Itu - please
 Itumo - spear
 Kaana - a child
 Kaberia - One of the circumcision age sets.
 Kiama - clan
 Kiani - field
 Kiara - An area on the right side of an elders
 homestead where rubbish and cow dung
 were thrown
 Kienine - at the field.
 Kii - ritual uncleanness associated with death
 Kini kiiru - Name of God.
 Kinda - A big stomach
 Kinene - Something big.
 Kiroria - a diviner or prophet.
 Kirunya - traditional shaving blade.
 Kitharimo - blessings.
 Kithiana - a piece of strip of a goat's or sheep's
 skin which was tied for ritual purposes on
 one finger or on the arm.
 Kiumbi - creator
 Kobia - One of the circumcision age sets.
 Kua - to give
 Kuaya - to divide, to share.

- Kuendia - to take
- Kuewa - to be given
- Kuingira - to close in order to protect, put in an enclosure, to close inside, to protect somebody or something from evil.
- Kunika - to break, to be broken.
- Kuraa - a place where it rains.
- Kureta - to bring.
- Kuruta - to remove
- Kuthambia - to wash
- Kuthinja - to slaughter.
- Kuthukia - to spoil.
- Kwona - to see
- Lamale - Council of circumcised warriors.
- Lenjwa - giraffe
- Magongoana - (pl.) sacrifices.
- Maitha - enemy
- Makira - supplication songs.
- Mambura - ceremonies.
- Mimira - Mucus
- Mbaine - One of the two ruling Moety in Igembe
- Mbura - rain
- Mburi - goat.
- Mikolo - small long strips of animals's skin
- Mirangi - bamboo shafts.
- Mpanga - a type of evil
- Mpuko - Mole
- Muciere - a young married woman.
- Mucii - home, homestead.

- Mugiro - (i) taboo, prohibition (ii) The illhealth or misfortune which follow the breaking of a taboo
- Mugwe - The highest political, religious leader of the Igembe.
- Mukathi - necklace
- Mukuru - elder, old man.
- Munoru - Name of a person derived from kunora which means to be fat.
- Muntu - a person.
- Munyinko - sweet smell.
- Muonyo - salt lick.
- Murimu - disease.
- Muringaniri- One who joins, or brings together.
- Muro - digging stick.
- Murungu - Name of God.
- Muthea - protective power, medicine.
- Muunda - Garden or piece of land.
- Muungi - A long strip cut from a sacrificial animal's skin and tied on the head.
- Mutani - circumciser.
- Mutoro - A stick or staff
- Mwaria - one who speaks with
- Mwari - daughter; heifer.
- Na - and
- Naicu - honey.
- Nchaamba - a brave person; a masculine person.
- Nchai - evil.
- Nchangi - giraffe.

- Ndatu - python
- Nduara - hide, skin of an animal.
- Ndwarene inthuku - terrible crevices.
- Ngai - God
- Ngeere - sheep
- Ng'i - a fly
- Ng'ombe - a cow
- Ng'ondu - sheep
- Nguu - dress
- ni - is
- Njaamba - see nchamba
- Njaambene - Nyambene hills.
- Njuki - bees
- Njuri - One of the elders councils'
- Nkanya - beauty.
- Nkenye - uncircumcised girls.
- Nkia - a poor person.
- Nkoma - spirits
- Nkoroi - Colobus Monkey
- Ntangi - One of the two ruling Moety in Igembe
- Nthaka - Warriors; circumcised young men.
- Nthenge - a he-goat
- Nthi - earth, world.
- Nthuki - age group, age set.
- Ntiiri - Donkey
- Ntindiri - old woman.
- Ntuiko - the ceremony of handing over power from one ruling generation to the next.

Nyumba	- house
Ruciu	- knife, dagger
Ruujine	- water place
Rwa	- of
Ta	- like
Thaai	- Beseech thee.
Thina	- problems, poverty.
Tubuli	- small or young goats.
Tukuthambia-	we have washed.
Twana	- Children.
Ukoroya	- Never take
Ukucia	- to pull, to breath in
Umukuru	- An old person.
Ungi	- Another one.
Uroita	- May you go.
Utheru	- holiness, cleanliness
Utuuro	- dwelling place, residential place, livelihood.
wa	- of
we	-you
ya	- like or of.

A P P E N D I X IBOTANICAL NAMES

For identification of some of the plants and herbs, I consulted L.S. B. Leakey's Botanical appendix in his book, The Southern Kikuyu Before 1903, Vol.III. I tried to get the Kikuyu names of some of the herbs and trees. Unfortunately I could not identify some herbs and trees because I failed to get them. In this appendix, I will give the Kimeru name of the herbs or trees, its Kikuyu translation and the identification as stipulated by Leakey

<u>KIMERU NAME</u>	<u>KIKUYU NAME</u>	<u>FAMILY</u>
Maroo (Muroo - singl)	Mwiru	Caesalpinaceae (cassia didymobetria Fres.)-p. 1308
Mugumo	Mugumo	Mora Ceae (Ficus natalensis (miq.) Hochst.) (Ficus thoningii Blume) p.1329
Ntongu	Ndongu (mutongu)	- Solanaceae (Solanum Incanuml.) P. 1343.
Mulelema	Murerema	Basellaceae (Basella albal.)

Miare	-	Unidentified	(belongs to palm family
Milui	-	Unidentified	
Miriru	-	Unidentified	
Mitunguu	-	Unidentified	
Muilu	-	Unidentified	
Muthongiru	-	Unidentified	

APPENDIX IIA COMMUNAL PRAYER OFFERED TO GOD IN ISEMBE

This prayer gives a general pattern of communal prayers in Isembbe

Leading elder	- Thai Thai Murungu,
Others	- Thai
Leading elder	- Utue irio
Others	- Thai
Leading elder	- Utue ana babaingi,
Others	- Thai
Leading elder	- Utue nthaka iri na inya
Others	- Thai
Leading elder	- Utue ng'ombe, ng'ondu na mburi
Others	- Thai
Leading elder	- Utuebelelie nchai,
Others	- Thai
Leading elder	- Ndakwelenka kinya ni mbure o,
Others	- Thai

TRANSLATION

Leading elder	- Beseech God,
Others	- We beseech you
Leading elder	- give us food,
Others	- We beseech you
Leading elder	- give us many children,
Others	- We beseech you
Leading elder	- give us strong warriors,
Others	- We beseech you
Leading elder	- give us cows, sheep and goats
Others	- We beseech you.
Leading elder	- protect us from sicknesses (diseases)
Others	- We beseech you.
Leading elder	- I beseech that I may also be blessed with them,
Others	- We beseech you.

APPENDIX IIIQUESTIONNAIREA. MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT

1. Where did the Meru come from?
2. Why did they migrate from their original homeland?
3. Who were their leaders before and after migration?
4. Which group(s) of people did they encounter enroute to Meru?
5. Who are the people they met in their present settlement area and what was their relationship?
6. What problems did they encounter on the way?
7. How did the different groups (clans) of Igembe settle in Igembe?

B. rites of PassageBIRTH

1. How was a pregnant woman prepared for her role as a mother?
2. Who helped as Midwife during birth?
3. What were the prohibitions connected with pregnancy and birth?
4. What happened after a child was born?
5. When did the child get a name?
6. Where did actual birth take place?
7. What was the significance and symbolic meaning of whatever was done during and after birth?

NKILIO

1. At what age did one have to be initiated into NKILIO?
2. Who initiated the individual?
3. How was one initiated?
4. What was the importance of Nkilio?
5. What were the different stages of Nkilio?

CIRCUMCISION.

1. At what age was one circumcised?
2. How was the whole ceremony carried out?
3. How were the initiates protected from any kind of evil?
4. What was the significance of circumcision?
5. What status and responsibilities did circumcision confer on the individual?
6. How were the different age grades formed in Igembe?
7. How was power handed over from one generation to another?
8. After how long was this takeover ceremony performed?
9. What special powers did the circumciser have?
10. How did the circumciser prepare himself for the ceremony?

MARRIAGE

1. How were boys and girls prepared for marriage?
2. What were the different ways of choosing a marriage partner?
3. What were the good qualities looked for?

4. What were the different stages of the marriage ceremony?
5. What prohibitions were there in relation to courtship and marriage?
6. What were the items required for bridgewealth?
7. What was the role and significance of bridewealth?
8. What was the importance of polygamy to individual and the Community?
9. What factors (reasons) caused divorce?
10. What happened to a person who lost his/her marriage partner?
11. Was there marriage between two women?
12. What was the significance of marriage?
13. What privileges, duties and responsibilities did marriage confer on the individual?
14. Was the question of virginity before marriage important?

DEATH

1. How was a small child, an uncircumcized boy or girl, a young unmarried person, a young married person, a childless person, old person past child-bearing age buried?
2. What was thought to be the destiny of each of the above souls?
3. Was there ritual uncleanness connected with the different categories of dead people?
4. What were believed to be the causes of death?
5. Do the Meru have a myth on origin of death?

C. COUNCILS

A
↑

KIAMA KIA LAMALE, KIAMA COUNCIL, NJURI AND WAARIKI.

1. What qualifications were required for one to join the above councils?
2. What did one have to pay in order to be initiated?
3. What were the different grades of each type of Council?
4. How was one initiated into the different Councils?
5. What was the function of each Council?

D. MYSTICAL POWERS.MEDICINE MEN.

1. How did one become a medicine man?
2. Where did the medicine man get his powers from?
3. What were the qualifications required for one to become a medicine man?
4. What was the role of medicine man in Igembe Society?
5. How did the medicine man go about his function of detecting the courses of illness or misfortune, curing and preventing these misfortunes or illness?

PROPHETS.

1. What is the difference between a medicine man and a prophet?
2. Where did the prophet get his power from?
3. Who qualified to become a prophet?
4. What role did a prophet play in Society?
5. How did a prophet go about his work?

MUGWE.

1. Who was the Mugwe?
2. How was one chosen to be a Mugwe?
3. How did the institution of Mugwe originate?
4. What was the role of the Mugwe?
5. How was he initiated into his Office?
6. What powers did the Mugwe have?
7. What was peculiar about the left hand of the Mugwe?

SORCERY AND WITCHCRAFT

1. How did one become a sorcerer?
2. What powers were sorcerers believed to possess?
3. What was done to a person believed to be a sorcerer?
4. How did a sorcerer harm another person?

CURSES

1. What was believed to be the effect of a curse?
2. Why was a person cursed?
3. Where there are ritual blessings and curses?
4. Where did the power to make a curse effective come from?
5. Was there a way of removing a curse?

OATHS.

1. What were the different types of oaths?
2. How was each type administered?

3. What made the power of each type of oath effective?
4. Who administered the different types of oaths?
5. How could one be saved from death, misfortune or illhealth if it was realized that he knowingly cheated when he took an oath?

TABOOS.

1. What were the different types of taboos in Igembe?
2. What was the effect of breaking a taboo?
3. How was one cleansed from the evil that befell the individual after breaking a taboo?

GICHIARO

1. What is Gichiaro?
2. How was the gichiaro relationship established?
3. What would happen to a person who broke the rules associated with Gichiaro?
4. What groups of people did the Igembe have Gichiaro relationship with?

BELIEF IN GOD AND SPIRITS

BELIEF IN GOD.

1. What were the names of God?
2. What were his attributes?
3. Which is God's abode?
4. Does God have associates?
5. Who were regarded as God's messengers?

6. If one encountered such messengers, what was he supposed to do?
7. Why do the Meru use the term Ngai to refer to both God and rain?
8. What is the nature of God?
9. Was God believed to punish evil doers? How?
10. How did evil come into the world?
11. Does God have control over evil?
12. How could a person or community anger God?
13. What did the individual or community do to please God after wronging him?
14. What is the relationship between God and ancestral spirit?
15. When did people pray to God and why?

BELIEF IN SPIRITS.

1. What were the different types of spirits?
2. What was believed to be origin of earth type of spirit?
3. What was the role of these spirits in the world?
4. What was believed to be the nature of these spirits?

BELIEF IN ANCESTRAL SPIRITS

1. Who qualified to become an ancestor?
2. What was the relationship between spirits of ancestors and living human beings?
3. What could a living human being do in order to anger the spirits of the ancestors?

4. How did ancestral spirits punish individuals or the community?
5. How were they appeased?
6. Where were spirits of the ancestors believed to live?
7. Was there a difference between the worship of God and ancestor veneration?

SACRIFICES.

THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF SACRIFICE

1. Sacrifice when rain failed
2. Harvest sacrifice.
3. Planting ceremony sacrifice
4. Sacrifice for crop protection
5. Sacrifice when there was sickness in a home.
6. Sacrifice when there was sickness in a home.
7. Sacrifice for preventing sickness.
8. Sacrifice in relation to birth rite.
9. Sacrifice in relation to initiation rite.
10. Sacrifice in relation to death rite.
11. Sacrifice relation to marriage rite.
12. Other types of Sacrifice.

FOR EACH TYPE OF SACRIFICE.

1. Why was it offered?
2. To whom was the sacrifice offered?
3. What was the procedure of carrying out the sacrifice?

4. Who officiated and what qualifications were required?
5. Who acted as the congregation?
6. What materials and victims were sacrificed?
7. How were they treated?
8. Symbolic meaning of each material and victim of sacrifice
9. Symbolic meaning of some acts of sacrificial ceremony
10. How were those who officiated supposed to prepare themselves for the sacrificial ceremony?
11. What were the taboos they had to avoid in preparation for sacrifice, during and after the sacrificial ceremony?
12. Why were the particular people chosen to officiate in each sacrificial ceremony chosen?
13. Where was each type of sacrifice carried out and why was it carried out at that particular place.

APPENDIX IV - MORE INFORMATION ON MAIN INFORMANTS

Joseph M'Tuaruchiu - Aged about 55 years. He is a member of Kaberia age set of the Micubu age group. Presently he is a preacher and lay leader attached to the Methodist Church in Igembe. He is however, very well informed about Igembe religious beliefs and sacrifices. He belongs to the clans that offered sacrifices to God in Igembe (Magongoana Clans) and has taken leading part in sacrificial rites both as a young boy and as an elder.

Ndatu M'Eng'ang'a - Aged about 75 years. He is a member of Kobia age set of the Ithalii age group. He is a member of the Igembe Njuri Council and a Waariki elder. He has been initiated into all the three grades of the Njuri. He has taken active roles in many religious Ceremonies.

M'Alaine Kabutu - Aged about 75 years. He is a member of Kobia age set of the Ithalii age group. He is a Waariki elder and has been initiated into all the three grades of the Njuri Council. On many occasions in the past and also present he has taken a leading role in traditional Igembe religious Ceremonies. He

He acts as an adviser of the Members of the younger generation in his location Njia.

M'Kubania Kamincha - Aged about 65 years. He is a Member of Igembe Njuri Council and a Waariki elder. He is a member of Nchinguri age set of the Micubu age group. He has taken active roles in many traditional religious festivals.

M'Lithara Kamanja - Aged about 65 years. He is a member of the Ndinguri age set of the Micubu age group. He is the Chairman of the Igembe Njuri Council and has been initiated into all the three grades of the Njuri Council. He has taken active roles in many religious rites and ceremonies both in the past and present.

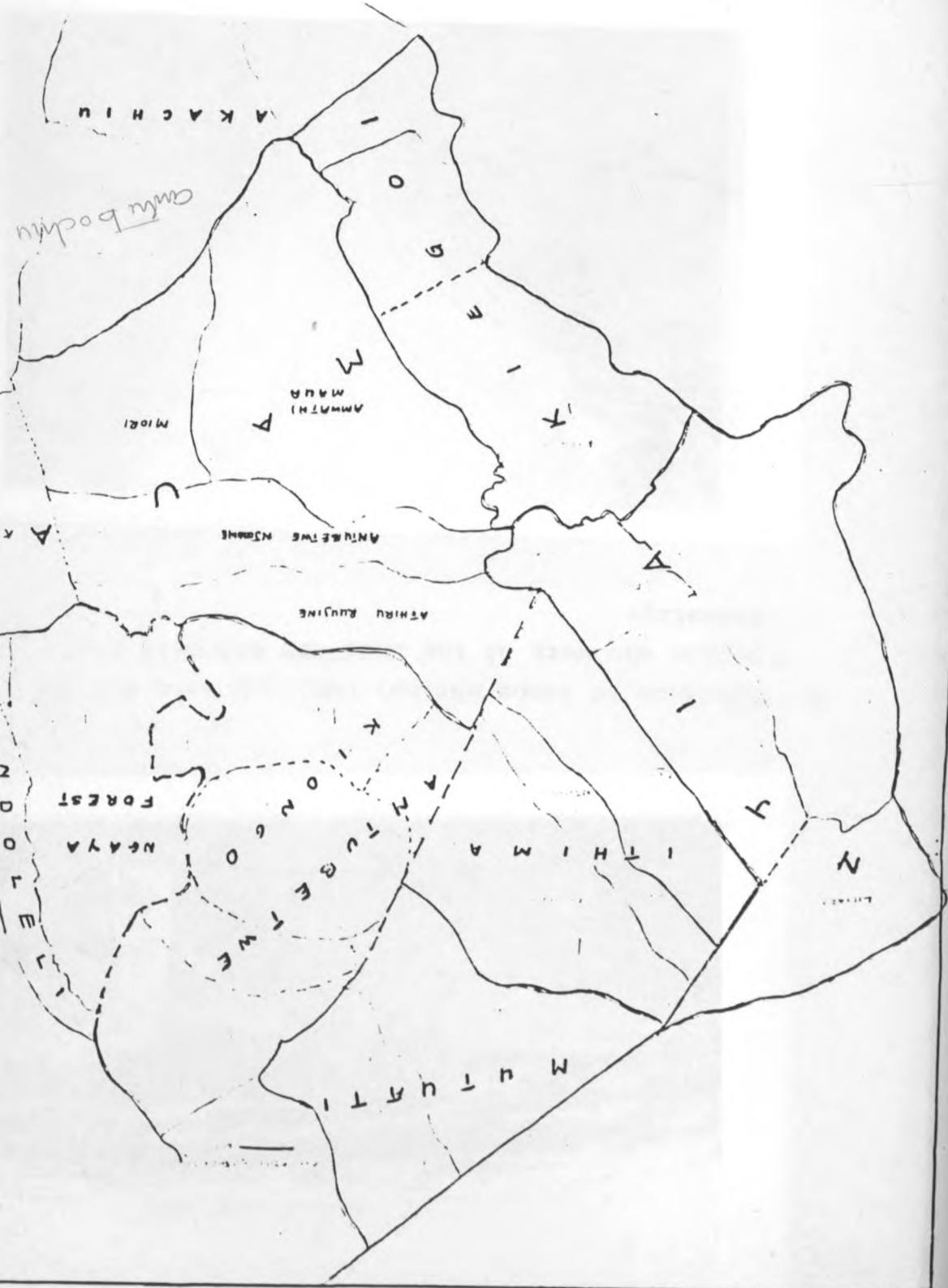
M'Mauta M'Mubwika - Aged about 54 years. He is a member of Kaberia age set of the Micubu age group. He is also a member of the Igembe Njuri Council and a full Waariki elder.

Peter Mbero - Aged 35 years. He is a member of the Lubetaa age group. He is quite knowledgeable on Igembe religious beliefs and practices having

participated in some of the ceremonies when he was young. He started having keen interest in Igembe religious beliefs and practices in 1973 when he was an undergraduate student at Makerere University. He has ever since been carrying out research on traditional Igembe religious beliefs and practices.

Asunta Kaluma - Aged about 60 years. She has taken active part in religious ceremonies in which women were required to take an active role. She is a member of the Women Council.

IGEMBE DIVISION





1. Entrance to Iombe Shrine: Dwelling huts for the people who work at the Soda ash and salt lick Industry.



2. Entrance to Iombe Shrine: Place where cow dung and milk were smeared on the rocky walls by all those going to perform a religious ritual.



3. Inside Iombe Shrine: The place where pieces of skin of the sacrificial animal were hung.



4. Inside Iombe Shrine: At the bottom of the rocky basin where salt lick and soda ash were/are found.