

SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENT:  
TWO CASE STUDIES FROM EASTERN KENYA

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By

Enos Hudson Nthia Njeru

A Thesis submitted in part fulfilment for the  
Degree of Master of Arts in the University of  
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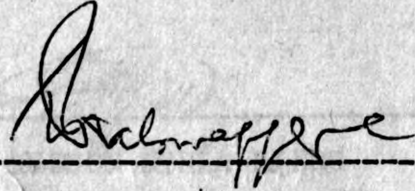
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PROF. T.B. KABWEGYERE



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DR. GEORGE MKANGI

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



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ENOS HUDSON NTHIA NJERU



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This study involves identification of the various rural problems in two areas of Embu District. The impact of such problems is then seen in relation to human organization and response, and whether such problems do or do not influence the organizational values or the social structure itself, is a central question of this study.

The thesis therefore is not an account of the various belief systems and practices dealt with here. Rather, it is an attempt to examine the supportive role they play in the making of the social structure, for the societies in question. The reader thus may find that some events considered here lack indepth of detail, which would otherwise make a superfluously big volume.

Although most of the thesis is written in historical past rather than historical present, this is not in any way meant to suggest that the material presented serves to glorify the past experiences of the people in question. In fact some of such experiences have continued to persist and still need considerable attention.

Finally, the author wishes to draw the attention of the readers to the contribution of the extensive research carried out in Mberere Division, one of the areas dealt with in this thesis, by Prof. David Brokensha of University of California, Santa Barbara - Department of Anthropology.

In this connection, the author, in addition to the continuing communication, has at various times between 1970 and 1977 worked as research assistant to Prof. Brokensha, thus benefiting from his anthropological methodology, findings and ideas, all of which are sincerely recognized as being intrinsically contained in this piece of work.

E.H.N. Njeru

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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My thanks are due also to the University of Nairobi for sponsoring me and providing the research grant. The Department of Sociology, and its Chairman, Prof. P.M. Mbithi, in particular, deserve my gratitude for both academic and administrative assistance in the course of my post-graduate studies and the fieldwork itself.



More thanks, in connection with the fieldwork, go to the Office of the President for the Research Clearance.

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E.H.N.N.

ABSTRACTSOCIAL STRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENT: TWO CASE STUDIES FROM  
EASTERN KENYA

The study assumes that social structure, seen in terms of role allocation, differentiation and relations, is to a large extent influenced by various environmental factors, with a particular emphasis on the physical.

The interest in the topic of this study arises out of the need to understand people's ways of life and needs in different environmental settings, the knowledge of which would facilitate relevant planning for such people.

The site selection for the study was based on ecological differences, where the two sites, in contrast, i.e. Kianjokoma and Mavuria, both in Embu district, represented, respectively, areas combining high rainfall reliability, high altitude and high agricultural potential with tea as major cash crop in the case of Kianjokoma; and low rainfall reliability, low altitude and low agricultural potential with cotton as the major cash crop in the case of Mavuria.

The environmental problems in both areas were identified and examined, on a comparative basis, in relation to their influence on social relations. How do people in their organizational behaviour respond to such problems? and does role allocation and differentiation show

any relationship to the immediate environment? were important questions in the theme of the study.

The data were collected mainly through consultations with key informants most of whom were old people with knowledge of both their past and present, and also specialists in various indigenous fields of knowledge and practice. Participant observation and examination of the written and oral literature of the Embu and Mbeere were also utilized.

The conclusion was that physical environmental factors play an important part in influencing the social structural relations, in terms of role structure, values acquired, and behaviour. Where the scarcity of natural resources, for example, led to the constraints of food and water supply, this, in case of food shortages, led to geographical mobility - thus interfering with the division of labour in the household. The water shortages gave rise to the problem of water management which meant seasonal authority and status for some people, at particular times, depending on how they participated in the distribution of such scarce resources. The diviner and rainmaker were usually called upon to explain and treat such situations that led to natural catastrophes.

The quality of the physical environment attracted European Settlement to Embu as opposed to Mbere, and this eventually and differentially influenced and modified the

indigenous people's response to their immediate environment. The result was that status inversion occurred first, and faster, among the Embu as opposed to the Mbeere where the traditional value custodians continued to retain their social status and recognition up until recently before giving in to modern Western status definition criteria and associated values. Other socio-historical factors were also seen to be important in explaining the respective cultural values.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### A. THE PROBLEM

This introductory chapter deals with three aspects, namely: the problem; justification of the topic of study; and selected literature which also relates to the theoretical basis of the study.

To begin with, is the problem, with its salient aspects briefly presented as follows:

- (a) To examine the various types of physical environmental problems that face people in given environments. Examples of such physical phenomena are shortages of rainfall, leading to droughts, famines, pasture shortages, etc.
  
- (b) To find out how people explain and respond to such phenomena, values attached to them and the ultimate effect on the role allocation patterns. Attention will be paid to the importance and prestige associated with various roles, with an aim to assessing the extent to which values developed in a

given environment reflect certain aspects of social structure.

It is in this context that sociological environmentalists (Lewis, 1959; Tax, 1953) and social anthropologists (Leinhardt, 1969; Turnbull, 1965) have often argued that social relations are to a very large extent influenced by physical environments. As a result, adaptation to various ecological conditions is a necessary outcome. This adaptation may further be facilitated by technological advance and control over nature. In societies where technological advance and control over nature is minimal, other social mechanisms may develop which evidence man's response to the impact of physical environmental variations.

A year of late rains, for example, ruining the harvests and causing famine, may mean unrest and consequent dispersal of a whole community, in search of other alternatives to solve the problem of food shortage. Such movement is what I have referred to as geographical mobility, by which I mean the spatial movement from one area to another, which may vary from one day to several weeks of absence or even a whole season before going back or returning to the original area. In some cases

it could be permanent. It is here assumed that such movements as seasonal migrations, in addition to reflecting food shortages and other problems that face people in given environments, could also have significant effects, say on family structure and role allocation.

To begin with, and just to mention one or two of the many possible consequences, it would interfere with the existing social relations and roles. An example here would be a mother's absence from home for some time, in quest for food. Such a mother's absence from home may mean the husband having to play some of his wife's roles. The structure of the family may also be affected by long absences of adult males or household heads. This argument may be examined in relation to harsh physical conditions as would be found in the drier areas of Kenya and elsewhere, where some males may be moving from one area to another, looking after their cattle, especially in dry seasons when pasture shortages are likely to occur. The case of the Gwembe Tonga of Zambezi Valley, quoted later (see p. 32) is a good example of a recurrent hunger area with low rainfalls, erratic floods and insect pests being among the factors which in any year might bring about hunger to some neighbourhoods or at times to all of them. In one of such occurrences,

this led to periodical labour migrations of the adult males and during their absence their wives cultivated the fields and provided for the family subsistence (Bernard, R.H. and Pelto, P.J.,1972:43).

What do people do when they are faced with hazards such as severe droughts, that are attributable to ecological factors? Does an acute water shortage, for example, make more and more people turn to the traditional gods or the traditional religious activities, or what solutions do people revert to? There could also be some certain social and sacred activities or ceremonies that do prevail at certain times of the year. In such cases, such activities could be reinforcing some roles while de-emphasizing others at the same time. In addition, the activities referred to may be supporting some belief systems or to the contrary some belief systems may develop to justify the indulgence in some particular activities, or as psychological mechanisms to support a meaningful and satisfactory existence under certain conditions.

In the above case if it so happens that many people turn to the traditional religious activities it could be argued that at such particular times, or even throughout the entire lives of some social groups, the role of the traditional



religious authorities gains in importance. A rainmaker, for example, may find himself more often consulted at particular times than is normally the case, or he may be more important in one ecological zone than he is in a different zone. When many think of the rainmaker as the person who is more likely to help them at some particular times, this would tend to reinforce the importance of the rainmaker relative to modern authorities. In other words, when and why does the rainmaker etc., become more or less important and with what degree of consistency?

The relationship of the members of a family and the roles allocated to each may be diverted from the normal day to day expectations subsequent upon an ecological problem or requirement. Either the man or the wife might have to change his/her pattern of role expectations. The wife, for example, may have to act, for some time, as the household head, or the man may have to do the duties of the wife for some time. Children's roles may also differ depending on ecological conditions, and it might also hold true, for some social groups, that the household or family authority structure bears and displays some degree of relationship to the particular group's concept of environmental expectations.

Thus in cases of regularly anticipated ecological problems, the structuring of the societies in question may develop responsive mechanisms toward their environment. Such behaviour, adapted to the natural setting may be reflected, for example, in kinship, neighbourhood and hospitality patterns and even territorial complementarity of scarce resources. The traditional social insurance systems such as the famed nomads' reciprocity, communal rights to limited resources such as salt licks, watering places, livestock routes, etc., have all evolved to sustain the survival of both the social and economic systems in such adverse environments. The social status or ranking criteria for such nomadic groups may differ considerably from those of the rich highland agriculturalists.

Sometimes the lack of understanding and limited awareness of a people's felt needs, way of life and the concomitant social structuring, has led to the identification of the wrong developmental strategies and factors to be mobilized, internal to certain areas, resulting often in failures in the intended goal achievement. Societies in different environments would therefore need to be evaluated in their own settings, if possible, to find out to what extent their social structures are moulded by such environments and whether generalizations,

involving two or more societies can safely be made without running into serious difficulties among which could be wrongly biased statements and fallacies. If, on such understanding, generalizations are not possible, then common yardsticks for, say, what type of projects and/or techniques are needed for development, social or economic, to benefit such groups are not commonly applicable.

Awareness therefore, of the ecological impact on social structures, thus leading to increased understanding of environmental stresses and their impingement on people's social and economic organization would facilitate the characterization of societies into more helpful categories. Such categories can then be used as developmental targets and this might help overcome some of the problems arising due to the placing of all societies or a group of them under general or broad categories with the assumption that a given developmental strategy (or categorization for other purposes) will apply equally to all of them.

#### B. JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

In the attempt to justify the topic of this study, it is worth noting that, in the field of development; the attention of Kenya government has increasingly shifted toward the development of the

rural areas, and especially the areas that are potentially marginal (Republic of Kenya: Development Plan 1979-1983, Part I:14).

In this connection, and for a relevant approach, therefore, choice and implementation of technology (generally taken to include those aspects of material culture e.g. machines and various types of equipment for agricultural and other practices, that people use in order to maximize the returns of their social and economic activities in a given environment) becomes a very important question. This choice and implementation of technology also faces the challenge of the physical and social environments. The physical environment presents constraints that require certain types of technology. But even then, people must be involved. We are well aware, in this connection, that development without the people's acceptance and support is unlikely to be successful, an aspect that has already been reflected in Kenya's spirit of self-help and participation (which the national spirit of Harambee is all about). This leads us to ask the type of incentives to be considered and the people's motivational characteristics to be tapped.

Social institutions are therefore a very important area, in this regard and need to be studied.

We need to know the level of interaction between the people and their environments. How, for example, do the environments which certain peoples live in affect their organizational and other activity patterns? And how would we successfully utilize such knowledge in order to maximize the people's involvement in and receptivity of developmental strategies?

By studying social institutions one gets a closer insight into the knowledge of various constraints, minimization of which would reduce the degree to which such factors or constraints limit the viability of selected technological and developmental strategies among given rural groups. This study then is an attempt to contribute to the above stated need and is intended to focus on social structure and given environmental settings.

This research being initially interested in the relationship between environment and social structure, inevitably addresses itself and contributes to the already stated need for an organizational awareness of rural human societies. It may point out to the difficulties encountered in the absence of such awareness, by scholars, developers, administrative agencies and any other bodies which may endeavour to undertake some project or type of

involvement for which they hope to come out with genuinely positive results.

It is therefore hoped that such a study will be useful for rural developmental purposes, given the fact that for many rural societies their cognitive awareness and definition of situations in particular environments have not yet been fully exploited. Such limited understanding would put constraints on the variety of parameters that are identifiable for the examination of the relevant problem areas when dealing with particular social groups. It has been noted, for example, that in some cases where development authorities identify some projects which they think necessary for the people, the local groups in question, to the contrary, may identify their own, which compete with those of the former. The local people may even have beliefs that support their own activities as opposed to those of the development authorities. The local groups too may identify their own leaders whom they consider more credible than government officials. The leadership and status criteria employed by local groups, if understood, therefore, would help the external agencies as they could even be incorporated in the chosen strategy implementation efforts, to enlist greater cooperation with the target groups.

Further, as regards the need for this research, it does not arise from any implication that similar studies have not been carried out before, either in East Africa or the rest of Africa. To say this, one would be overlooking the relevance of such anthropological studies as those conducted by Evans-Pritchard (1940) on the Nuer, Thayer Scudder on the Gwembe Tonga of Zambezi Valley, Philip Gulliver (1955) on the Turkana and the Jie of Northern Kenya and North-eastern Uganda, respectively, Derrick Stenning (1959) on the Pastoral Fulani among the Savannah nomads, to mention a few. Rather, the need arises from the very recognition that similar studies, especially in East Africa, have been conducted but on a smaller scale than would be necessary for adequate understanding of the East African peoples and their adaptation to their environments.

The problem area in question therefore requires further exploration, to cover spatially, the areas that have so far not been either dealt with at all, or need further information on what is already known. Thus the attempt to carry out this research in the ecological areas referred to in this thesis, caters for the effort to study what has not been studied and contributes to what is already existing pool of knowledge on the East African

societies.

In summary, then, the following are the basic arguments presented to justify my interest in and the need for such a study.

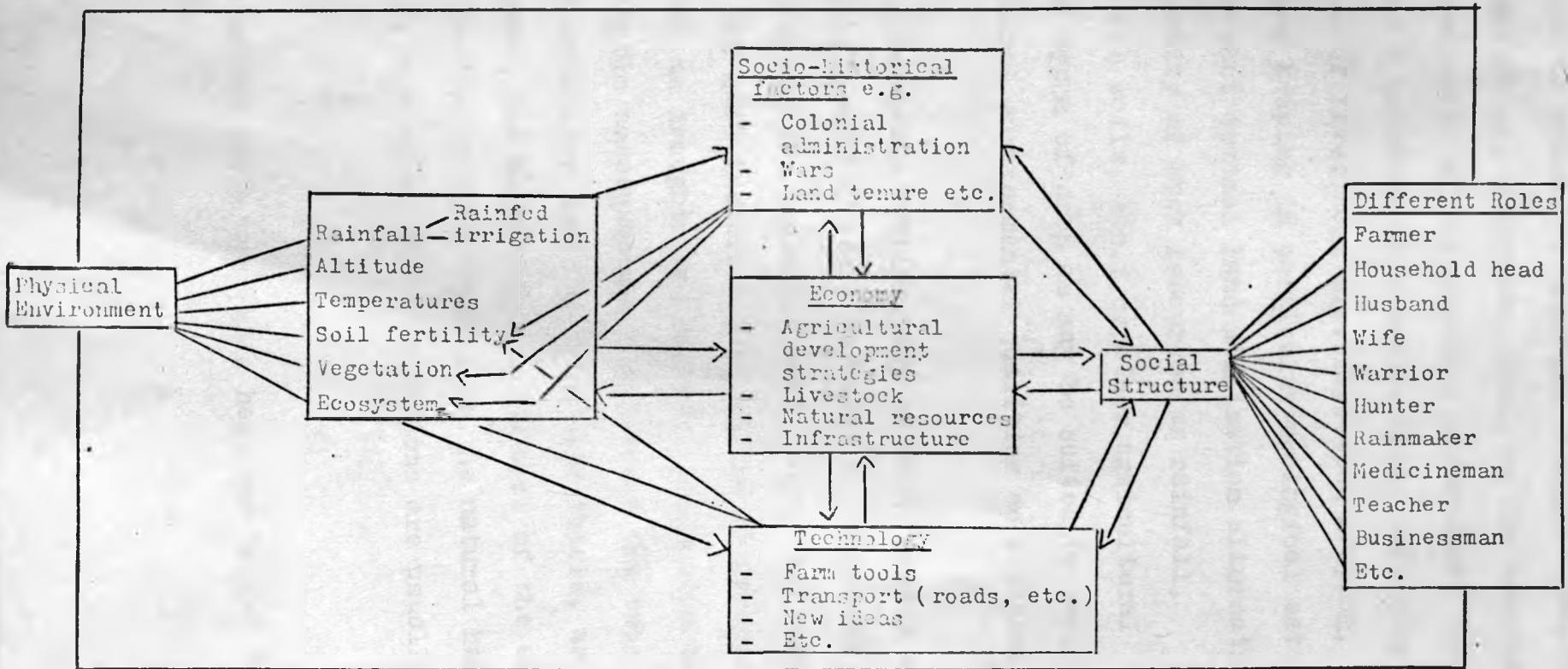
- (1) Developmental strategies often employ a common yardstick or application of approach to societies from different environments. This study will in one way or another reveal that such generalizations should be avoided as they create the problem of overlooking the people's priorities. Understanding of the people's perception of role priorities would indicate, for example, which of the traditional authorities one would consult to gain ease of entry into a community and also enlist a greater likelihood of cooperation from the people.
- (2) The understanding of the role allocation in different environments and the criteria for so doing would also facilitate the administration of development projects as it reduces leadership problems, in addition to making room for greater cooperation from the target communities.




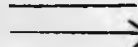
- (3) The study, generally, will also add to what is already known or written on the given rural societies, a knowledge that would be useful for both teaching and developmental purposes.
- (4) It is also Kenya Government's policy at the moment, as indicated in the latest Development Plans, to pay increased attention to development of the rural areas, especially those that have lagged behind so far e.g. those with low agricultural and economic potentials, the arid and semi-arid areas, etc. Bearing in mind that planning for such people requires some reasonable knowledge of them, their ways of life and needs, one would see some point of value in this type of study.
- (5) A further reason for choosing the topic of this study is that in the face of the changing environments it would do justice to the future generations to seek, record and store for them what once was as opposed to what now is and what will be. For those interested in studying trends of social change with regard to values, etc. this could at one time in future, provide a starting point. I happen to come from Mbere (one of the

areas chosen for the study) where commitment to such a study would be more fascinating to me as some of the aspects to be studied here are not yet in records or, if they are, they appear in distorted ways. The essence of the study, however, could similarly be of relevance to the other area and bearing in mind that the two are ecologically different, it would be interesting to find out whether such differences do or do not influence certain aspects of social structure. The relationship in question is summarized in the following model: (see page 15).

The Model below diagrammatically presents my view of the relationship between Environment and Social Structure



Key:

 indicate components of  
 indicate the impact of

## Brief Explanation of the Model

Physical environment is broken down to such characteristics as rainfall, altitude, temperatures, soil fertility, vegetation, ecosystem, etc., as its components. These characteristics of the physical environment then may, either in a combined or singular form, influence economic modes of livelihood e.g. livestock keeping, where livestock keeping in particular ecological settings is one of the most optimal land utilization alternatives, given the scarcity of such resources as rainfall, pasture, fertile soils, etc.; or other agricultural practices and types of crop as may be suited to various kinds of physical environmental qualities as outlined above.

While adequate availability of such factors as rainfall, fertile soils, etc., may mean an abundance of agricultural harvests, including cash crops, the reverse i.e. shortage of the same factors may spell the occurrence of such phenomena as droughts and famines, to mention two of the many possible consequences. In case of the two geographical locations dealt with in this thesis, as we shall see later, the Mbeere experience more of the adverse effects of the limitations imposed by the natural habitat, as opposed to Embu where such limitations are usually less pronounced.

The social structure which has been broken down to

various roles, then is seen in its attempt to respond to the environmental setting as a whole, as the habitant population interacts with both the natural and social environments in their attempts to take advantage of the various alternatives open to them, given the existing levels of technological knowledge and practices and the people's awareness of their physical-environmental requirements.

It is also recognized that some aspects of the physical environment such as vegetation, ecosystem and soil fertility, for example, may be influenced by the economy, technological innovations, and socio-historical factors. A pertinent point here has to do with the coming of the Europeans, in Embu district, who, due to the foreseeable economic prospects, chose to be interested in one part of the district while ignoring other parts of the same district. Consequently the area in question, having attracted the attention and intervention of the colonial settlers and administrators, first, had its original vegetative cover cleared out, to be replaced by what has now become modern farming of tea and other cash crops.

Secondly, while modern technological practices were adopted in this area, the soil fertility was also changed or improved by use of modern fertilizers. Relating this to the social structure, it is arguable that the increased penetration of the area by colonial influence and the

resultant interaction between the colonial settlers, administrators, missionaries and the local population, led to either outright prohibition or disregard of the indigenous practices - religious or otherwise. Such measures, in effect, gradually minimized the importance of these practices in the traditional sector. This led to the deliberate erosion of the values that these practices stood for, and of the functions of the various social statuses that such values served to reinforce.

The concomitant creation of new values, achievement motivation, and status assessment criteria, with the Embu coming first and the Mbeere lagging behind in many ways, caused differential development in social status definitions in the two geographical locations.

The reverse of this argument may also be true in the sense that the existing social structure has a way of responding to both socio-historical and technological innovations, and also the economy in general. In this connection, the values held by a certain social group may either act as incentives to or serve to discourage the introduction of new ideas.

This begins from the very fact that even before a group of people begin to experience external influence, they always have their own organizational goals and values. They also have their leaders, occupying different social positions and playing various roles the execution of which

earns them the social prestige and statuses that they enjoy among their fellow members of society. It is in this connection that we find, for example, in chapter One that people evaluate the usefulness of new ideas or technological traits before they adopt them, given the particular people's needs and understanding of their own environment i.e. their definition of the local situation.

Where the decision is difficult to make, the people have their various leaders to consult. Some of these leaders command very high social credibility among their fellow members of society, and if they decide that an innovation is undesirable and accordingly advise their client population, then the introduction and adoption of the new idea becomes a very difficult exercise.

For the interests of this study, however, it should be noted that although a balanced attempt has been made to point out, in the model, the possible directions of influence of the various variables vis-a-vis one another, the emphasis in the actual presentation of the findings in this thesis has been largely in terms of the impact of physical-environmental variables on the social structure.

This was deemed necessary in order to limit the number of variables which were to be dealt with in detail, as it would have been much more difficult if all the causal linkages shown in the model were looked into in a balanced

depth of detail in one study. The influence of factors other than the physical-environmental, however, were not completely ignored, as the reader will notice, since they do come in quite significantly in the rest of the thesis.

### C. LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to the variety of meanings and connotations that have been attached to the two terms - 'social structure' and 'environment' - an attempt is made here to define them. Social structure will be examined in relation to the following concepts: social status, social mobility, geographical mobility, socialization and time, each of which will be defined as it comes in. Briefly, however, these concepts will be used to examine the extent to which the development, meaning and conception of various roles undertaken are related to the environmental settings which the actors live in. To begin with, a wide variety of literature exists in which the term 'social structure' has been variously employed, more generally in some cases to refer to social organization, and more specifically in others, to refer to the analytical division, patterning and relationship of roles in a social system.



Robert K. Merton has contributed profusely, to the meaning and understanding of 'social structure', as exemplified by the quotation below. Although the quotation is borrowed from his discussion of the concept of 'formal organization', its use here is justified, in the sense that a formal organization is also a social organization. It is recognized as a fact, however, that not all social organizations are formal. But given the above argument (that a formal organization is also social) it is true, then, that social structures occur in both formal and informal settings. Merton, therefore, discussing the social structural aspects of formal organizations, argues that:

"a formal rationally organized social structure involves clearly defined patterns of activity in which ideally, every series of action is functionally related to the purposes of the organization. In such an organization there is integrated a series of offices, of hierarchized statuses, in which inhere a number of obligations and privileges closely defined by limited and specific rules. Each of these rules contains an area of imputed competence and responsibility". (1)

Merton's usage and meaning of the term is further clarified in his discussion of an item subjected to functional analysis with regard to the social structure of the Ciricahua Apache, a North American tribe, where he says:

"....thus the description of the Hopi rain ceremonials, for example, entails more than the actions seemingly oriented toward the intervention of the gods in meteorological phenomena. It involves the report of the persons who are variously involved in this pattern of behaviour. And the description of the participants (and onlookers) is in structural terms, that is, in terms of locating these people in their connected social statuses". (2)

Here it is evident that the social statuses and interrelations of those engaging in the behaviour under scrutiny are important parameters in the analysis of the social structure. Each status-occupant (social status being taken to describe one's position in a social group or society, relative to leadership and other aspects of role participation internal to the particular society or community that places the individual performants in some socially esteemed and recognized positions) has his role to play in relation to others in any given social structure. The allocation of different or various roles to members of a social group may form what would be called role-structure. Each player of a given role is expected to behave in conformity with the expectations attached to his role. It is in this perspective that he is seen as the status-occupant. He is thus the incumbent of a given social position and holder of the social status accruing from his performance or behaviour in

conformity with the expectations associated with the given role.

We may say, for instance, that the role-set played by a man or father in a household, leads him to the status of a household head. In this case, being a household head means much to the members of that household, for he is charged with a clear pattern of responsibility with its associated roles. And it is from the execution of such roles and the related expectations that the household head also derives his power - which has been defined as "the observed and expected, and sometimes predictable capacity for imposing one's will in a social action, even against the resistance of others taking part in the action" (Merton, 1968:372).

The structure of a social group, then, is the positioning of and allocation of roles to various members of that group, with functional and normative expectations and obligations attached to each role. Each member is thus expected to play a part in the day to day activities of such a social group. The respect, recognition and prestige accorded each member due to the nature of the role he plays gives him his social status. Thus the medicine-man, household head, and the rain-maker, all have social statuses according to the roles

they play in that society.

Important in the definition of social structure is the concept of 'role differentiation'.

Marion J. Levy, Jr., on the concept of the analytic structure of role differentiation, defined it as:

"The structure of the distribution of the members of the system among the various positions and activities distinguished in the system, and hence the differential arrangement of the members of the system". (3)

Another, though rather general, attempt to define social structure has been made by Fairchild, who defines it as the:

"established pattern of internal organization of any social group. It involves the character of the sum total of the relationships which exist between the members of the group with each other and with the group itself". (4)

He further and more specifically defines it as:

"the division of social groups into part-groups and ultimately into individual members or persons, often differing from each other in role and status". (5)

This view is apparently supported by Galeski, who contends that:

"any definition of social structure must depend, first and foremost, on the differentiation of the individual groups and categories which make up the society under consideration.... ..such differentiation is an indispensable element in every attempt at such a definition". (6)

The above view is carried further by Merton in his theory of social structure, with a breakdown into smaller units of analysis, which he calls 'role-sets' and 'social status'. According to him:

"the theory of role-sets begins with an image of how social status is organised in the social structure"

and social status here is used:

"to refer to a position in a social system, with its distinctive array of designated rights and obligations..the related concept of social role refers to the behaviour of the status-occupants that is oriented toward the patterned expectations of others (who accord the rights and exact obligations)". (7)

On the 'role-set theory', Merton continues to argue, a primary concept is that it involves not a single associated role, but an array of roles. And he argues that it is this feature of social

structure that gives rise to the concept of 'role set': that complement of social relationships in which persons are involved simply because they occupy a particular social status.

"Thus a person in the status of a medical student plays not only the role of the student vis-a-vis the correlative status of his teachers, but also an array of other roles relating him diversely to others in the system: other students, physicians, social workers...and the like". (8)

Similarly the status of a school teacher has its distinctive role-set relating the teacher diversely to pupils, headmaster, education officer, school committee, etc. The same situation also holds true for individual members of a social group.

The 'role-set' concept should, however, be distinguished from that of 'multiple roles', the latter term which refers not to the complex of roles associated with a single social status but to the various social statuses (often in different institutional spheres) in which people find themselves. One person, for example, might have the diverse statuses of a physician, husband, father, church elder, etc. This complement of distinct statuses of a person, each with its own role-set, has been referred to as a 'status-set' (Merton, 1968:42).

The second major part is that of environment. The term environment here is used to refer to the physical environment. Physical environment includes what would otherwise be called ecology and its relevant aspects, in relation to human behaviour and activities. The combined effect of such physical characteristics as rainfall, altitude, temperature, soils, vegetation and topography may produce conditions that may in effect, lead to other consequences. In case of drought, for example, consequent upon a severe rainfall shortage, certain social relations may be interfered with and some social roles may be weakened while others may rise in importance, so that who becomes less or more important is to some extent influenced by environmental requirements.

Although the major focus is on the physical environment we cannot afford to ignore the possibility of certain social structural aspects being explained by the impact of the social environment. There may be problems of social origin that play a part in the making of a social structure, influencing say, the importance attached to positions or social statuses occupied by the members of a particular social group.

Events like wars, for example, could exert much influence on the role allocation and status definition, as people have to define, develop and socially support ways of guarding themselves against their enemies. Thus while some roles may be considered less significant in this particular case, the role of a traditional warrior may be rated much higher than that of a school teacher. Other socio-historical factors such as the colonial or government administrative intervention might also make some difference as they may bring in new prestige goals and values worth striving for, which in turn, may influence the organizational patterns.

The relationship between the two concepts has been viewed by various scholars from a number of theoretical perspectives. One such theoretical orientation has been the environmental school of thought, which maintains that social structures are a response to particular ecological situations.

Some sociological environmentalists such as Oscar Lewis (1959) and Sol Tax (1953) see man's grasp and harnessing of technology as the basic cause of social and economic advance. In this case the increased social division of labour, leading to social and economic complexity are seen as springing from increased technological innovation. This



postulate, taking technology as an important intervening factor, more or less finds its parallel in Schnore's argument that:

"The environment is viewed as a set of limiting conditions, which may be narrow or broad, depending upon the technological devices and modes of organization that prevail in a given population". (9)

These views try to enhance the role of technological advance in promoting social change. According to Duncan, however, the claim that technological advance has rendered man increasingly independent of his environment, an argument that may implicitly be inferred from Schnore's theory above, may be misleading. For Duncan has stated that:

"A way of life and its setting comprise an interdependent unity. Either is regarded as extrinsic to the other only at the point of overlooking the interrelations on which depends the stability of the system as a whole". (10) .

This latter view contends that there is a two-way relationship between man and his environment and that the impact of the environment will be reflected in the organizational attributes of the former.

Important too are some theories of social change that deal with technology as it relates to social structures in given environments. One such theory is the Innovation Theory, spearheaded by Everett Rogers and Lionberger, which stipulates that technological advance follows a social advance. This social advance has to do with the particular society's evaluation of the easy and convenient adaptability of a given technological trait in a given environment. The new idea is thus adopted if it can be adapted with relative ease, advantage convenience of applicability and lack of complexity to the situation of the adopting unit (Rogers, 1962).

What all this indicates is the fact that technology cannot viably operate in a vacuum, i.e. independent of the people's understanding of their own environment, to which the social structure is adjusted and to which it might need to further readjust in case of introduction of a new technology. Thus if the technology to be introduced requires, among other things, the acceptance of a new organizational value or status symbol by the target group, then the utility of the new trait has to be seen in the context of the recipient group's environmental setting.

Another useful theory relating innovative behaviour to the people's cognitive definition of the situation is the symbolic communication theory, developed by Frank and Ruth Young (1966, 1970). The point of emphasis here is the fact that all innovative behaviour of any social unit be it at the farm household or the community level - is a result of a collective awareness and interpretation of the change situation. All reality in this respect is patterned into cognitions, values, beliefs and behavioural norms and taboos to give a collective consensus for the behaviour and to define the parameters for allowable innovativeness. In this framework a peasant farmer, for instance, is not conceived as pathetic and helpless. Rather he is viewed as living in a dynamic and fluid environment, one which is full of complex values and belief systems, all oriented to enabling him to take an adjustment action under varying stress conditions. People's perception of reality, as we have seen, is reflected in the social structure. In case of new ideas an attempt is made either to integrate the new values into the original system or to make room for adjustments in the original system itself in order to cope with the newly changed situation of beliefs, values and activities.

The question of value here, touches on an aspect of Everett Hagen's theory of status withdrawal, a psychological orientation toward development and innovation. With all its pros and cons this theory has one element that can pertinently be of use here, if the argument is based on its socializational aspects - inculcating the socially desired values in the minds of the people (from youth to maturity).

Hagen illustrated his theory with case studies of Columbia, Japan, Burma, etc., and also with some situations of Black Americans. He was concerned with adaptation - through innovativeness and transmission of values from one generation to another in given situations - and it was for this that he coined the concept of 'status withdrawal', which means:

"disregard for one's role in society or disregard for one's beliefs and aspirations. It is painful to be disregarded, argues Hagen. People without a role in society become alienated and frustrated. Groups without a status or forced to accept a status much below their expectations lose their purpose for existence and become discontented with the established order". (11)

He picked cases of weaknesses in men, which were exploited by their wives, in the sense that the women resenting the weaknesses of their husbands

who had lost statuses, tried best to instill in the minds of their sons, an anguished desire to be better off than their failing fathers. Thus the mothers taught their sons such values as self-reliance and proving their worth to others and not to be like their predecessors: This value building system was to ensure continued success and positive adaptation to the particular environments in their time, on the part of the sons as they grew up. This diffusion of values just to mention briefly, was also examined by David McClelland in his "The Achieving Society". He and his associates analysed ethnographic accounts of numerous cultures in order to find out the distribution of the 'need to achieve'. This they did through examination of contents of folk tales, children's stories, etc. which they found to be quite rich in the values that were then desirable and at the same time playing down the less desirable values. Even among many modern societies one would expect that both the socially prized values and the anti-social ones would often be reflected in the people's non-material culture.

By studying folk culture therefore one gets very close to the social structure of the group in question. The proverbs used, stories and legends, beliefs and demands of social ambition would all be

drawing attention to the people's experience in given environments. And the roles regarded as more or less important than others keep coming up in the contents, while more direct relationships would come from the instructions of adults to the children or elders to the young people. This belief and value built-up system could also be referred to, for particular social groups, as their 'conscious model' (what people see as their own situation) as opposed to the unconscious or the observer's model (as observed by the outsider). The conscious model is the 'home-made' and immediate, culturally produced model in which are embedded the values that reflect the social structure of the group in question. The observed model represents what the outsider thinks of the target group, which might be a misrepresentation of the latter's reality.

#### Empirical Cases

Studies illustrating the interrelations of human communities and their environments, some of which are quoted here, have also been conducted by a good number of scholars. Michelson, in this connection, has observed that:

"social groups adapt to much more than supply of food and shelter. The structure of family groups, for example, may make functional adaptations to varying stress conditions". (12)

An interesting case is that of the Kariba Dam construction which appears to have combined both political will and economic necessity, but nevertheless means a changed situation for the recipient group in question. This took place during the resettlement of the Gwembe Tonga in 1962 to create room for the dam. This, to begin with, brought problems of adaptation to the new environment, leading in effect to other problems such as hunger, labour migrations, etc., which forced the colonial government to pay compensations to the native population. Increased innovation e.g. new methods of fishing in the newly created lake, however, led to greater productivity which for a time caused an economic boom.

Further repercussions of this colonial intervention which could be seen through its impact on the traditional values show how the people in question had to change in order to cope with the new environment. The Gwembe Tonga, in their adverse physical environment had limited economic alternatives and livestock keeping was one of the most popular

ones. Since domestic animals were highly valued, many social values revolved around them and the functions they fulfilled. The importance attached to bridewealth, for example, was seen in terms of the number of stock paid for the bride. After the economic boom referred to above, the more wealth that followed was invested in buying of more livestock from the surrounding areas. This increased stock ownership, in addition to the increase in availability of other resources, led to inflation of the bridewealth. In monetary terms the rate of bridewealth rose from £ 30 to £ 42 (Bernard, R.H. and Pelto, P.J., 1972:51).

The economic boom too caused increased labour demands by parents, which put pressure on the role of children, especially the adolescent sons who were then required to help in herding, farm clearing, ploughing, etc. This was a clear case of increased conflicting role demands on the part of the children. Many work parties were also often required to help overcome labour shortage and for this function women were called upon for much work in brewing of beer to be drunk by the work parties, a factor that served to dramatize and reinforce the role of women in family labour organization. Thus the very factor of the introduction of the Kariba Dam, the consequent shifting of the Gwembe Tonga from their original area,



and the changes involved, all had extended effects on the men's social status as opposed to that of their women. The men's social image had already been played down by the colonial administrators who forced them to move out of their original area, despite the men's unsuccessful resistance. This effect is summarized below:

"even though men might seem more prosperous in 1962 than in 1956 in terms of stock, equipment, size of homestead, and general type of expenditure, they seemed to have lost status within their family units. Some changes in status were perhaps inevitable when their efforts to halt resettlement (which they had tried to resist through a forlorn confrontation with the government) had revealed them as powerless". (13)

This is yet another case in which the power base of the Gwembe Tonga males (defense masters) was undermined by forceful introduction of a new technology and political power, a case that is not unique to the Gwembe Tonga but has also, in a number of cases, applied to other areas as we shall see later.

Environments with which people interact - whether physical or social - are thus seen to influence their activities and organization. It is in this context that Gulliver, who has carried

out extensive studies on the Jie and Turkana of East Africa, observes that:

"there is such a notably harsh and difficult environment that its effect on social life is all pervasive, inescapable both for the people themselves and for the observer of their lives and activities...To a certain extent any study of the Turkana is also an ecological study". (14)

From his studies he concludes that for a proper understanding of any facet of the Turkana social organization, it is necessary to begin with an appreciation of the environmental limitations rigorously imposed on all social activities. The ways of life of such people as the Jie and Turkana have been greatly modified by their respective physical environments, due to the limitations imposed on the livelihood activities. Settled agriculture, for example, is difficult for both groups. The best alternative for them is livestock keeping which in turn has its implications for the people's way of life. To begin with, in these dry regions stock must be herded in areas where there are both pasturage and water. This of necessity has led to the nomadic movements, which are an adaptive response to the environments in question. The nomadic movements by such groups are therefore largely the result of conventionalized attempts to

maximize the supply of scarce resources (pasture and water).

When looking at the social interactional patterns and the allocation of roles among the family members, say, among the Jie of North Eastern Uganda, the impact of ecological factors is clearly reflected. Here a man and his brothers are placed in the same house as a family group and the head of a house is the eldest living brother, who is succeeded at death by the next eldest brother, and so on, down to the last survivor. The family herd is commonly owned and cared for, although there are more specific ownership rights when it comes to the actual use of the livestock. In such a precarious environment, with limited alternatives, the Jie cannot afford to be extravagant with livestock, a factor which reinforces the role and authority of the head of the house. Thus the overall authority, especially as regards the disposal of livestock, is vested almost entirely in one man (the head). As Gulliver tells us:

"the ultimate authority of the head of a house is absolute, both over his younger brothers and all their children. He has certain ritual powers, and flagrant flouting of his decisions is believed to put a man in danger of automatic, supernatural punishment". (15)

In this case, we note that religious norms have evolved supporting the role, status and authority of the head of a house, to ensure greater economy in the disposal of livestock which is the only major property that one can possibly own in their type of environment.

The Turkana of Northern Kenya, occupy an even worse environment than the Jie. Although the Turkana have more land available for moving about than the Jie, the ecological problems force them to move much more widely than would otherwise be necessary. This is seen in Gulliver's comparison of the settlement and spatial mobility patterns of the Jie and Turkana extended family groups. He tells us that:

"unlike the Jie, however, the Turkana extended family is neither a residential nor an economic and pastoral grouping. Over the years members move in different nomadic courses....". (16)

Here we observe, in addition, that the extended family is an essential or functional aspect of the family structure, which is yet another indirect influence of the ecological factors, since different animals e.g. cattle, goats, sheep and camels have different pasture requirements, the extended family system is required so that there are enough people

to divide into several sections, each to move with a particular type of animals.

The influence of ecology, through pastoral economic requirements, may also be reflected in the case of entry of an outsider into an extended family group.

"occasionally a poor and unrelated man, even a complete pauper, may become permanently attached to a family, acting as herdsman in return for food and shelter....A man with his nuclear family cannot achieve complete independence until he has sufficient labour to manage all the duties of nomadic pastoral life". (17)

This implies some essential flexibility in the family structure to allow for more labour supply which is a crucial factor.

From this fact of environment allowing mainly livestock keeping, coupled with the need (for practical purposes) to keep large family stock together, a strong relationship is seen to exist between environment and social relations. This is the more so for people like the Turkana for whom food, clothing and material apparatus are usually obtained from the herds. For them animals seem to provide the major source of wealth and store of

value. Gulliver himself has observed that for Turkana:

"all important social relations are expressed in one way or another in terms of reciprocal rights in stock and through reciprocal obligations to assist one another in stock affairs". (18)

The importance of livestock among the Turkana also makes the head of a nuclear family a very important man. He has the say over the use of family herds e.g. for social purposes such as marriage, ritual, gifts, etc. His death requires a great purificatory ceremony to rid the family and their herds of the taint of death.

Such a ceremony involves great feasting for the whole of the extended family members, friends and neighbours. It is open to all others among the Turkana. The ceremony is repeated following one wet season or so, and is compulsory for all family heads and other males not involved in herding at that particular time. This kind of ceremony symbolizes the solidarity among the Turkana who may be scattered all over, but come together to give themselves courage against their adverse environment. It also serves to strengthen the roles of and respect for various

authorities. There are other instances of corporate action which occur e.g. when a person is seriously ill or in ritual danger. In such cases the threat is thought to extend to all members of his house and the prescription of a diviner must be sought, an act which signifies the role of the diviner among the Turkana.

All this indicates that there is always some inevitable necessity for various societies to adapt themselves, structurally and otherwise, to the environments they may find themselves occupying or having to occupy. Supporting this viewpoint, Edgar Winans, quoting Philip Gulliver in his 'The Family Herds' (1955) writes that the latter:

"gives good evidence that the Turkana represent the penetration of a lowland environment through the assumption of pure pastoralism by people of Jie derivation who in their original upland habitat possess a mixed economy based on horticulture supplemented by herding". (19)

and as a logical conclusion from this he asserts that the Turkana society:

"represents an adaptive shift from this mixed economy to pastoralism under rigorous environmental circumstances where the factors of water distribution, the availability of graze and the threat of raids appear as crucial variables in the structure of households and the development of inter-household relations". (20)

Thus, on economic adjustment, the Turkana separated from the Jie to become nearly pure pastoralists. This argument, however, is not meant to confine itself to upholding the view that societies only have the physical environment to face and thus adapt to. As argued earlier on, there may be other challenges, and it is in this context that Goldschmidt, while discussing the Hehe of Central Tanzania has argued that:

"While the environment is treated as an independent variable, environment is not itself limited to the physical...but includes also the social context in which a people operates, and that context can be quite unstable through time". (21)

He goes on to tell us that:

"the kind of ecological adaptation the Hehe have made has varied in accordance with the character of their neighbours as these have varied in the century of history in Central Tanganyika". (22)



This shows that the organization of the Hehe tribe could not have continued to exist in disregard of their neighbours, for if it meant invading or being invaded by a neighbouring group, they had to organize themselves for or against that possibility.

Thus, as Goldschmidt argued, the social context is just as important as the physical. Even the Arusha, who originally were sedentary agriculturalists occupying the southwestern slopes and peripheral lowlands of Mount Meru in northern Tanzania, where the rainfall was good and reliable with fertile volcanic soils, were forced, by colonial intervention, to take on a different lifestyle. This became necessary when in 1950s the colonial government used the area in question as a forest reserve and the Arusha were pushed out into the less favourable lands with poor and unreliable rainfall, long hot dry seasons and poor soils, and they eventually had to revert to livestock rearing, which in turn came to have a strong impact on their social structure and values. Since then, for them, domestic livestock have always had a significance in their social and ritual affairs beyond their numerical and economic importance (Gray, Robert F., and Gulliver, P.H., 1971:197). Care and economy of the livestock,

which they very much came to depend on, became quite important. This gave a positive impact on the authority of compound heads who made sure that the animals were reasonably treated and utilized; and very much like the Jie:

"The Arusha lay very great emphasis on the strong persisting authority of the father, as head of the compound family, over those sons who are married and occupying their separate but heteronomous homesteads". (23)

In this case the Arusha were apparently interacting with the physical environment but the original cause of the change to the new environment was the colonial intervention.

Environment should not be taken as dominating man, as man too does change the environment, where possible, to suit his demands, just like the Arusha found themselves thrown out into a different environment, not by natural conditions but by man. Thus, for cultural and social structural relations we should also look elsewhere for a balance of explanations, to human behaviour, which should be sought between both environmental necessity and sociological explanations.

Lienhardt, discussing the intractable environments facing the Bedouin and the Eskimo,

has noted that physical factors alone do not absolutely determine the details of culture. Illustrating this point he has quoted Daryll Forde on his comparative studies of many dissimilar societies vis-a-vis their environment as saying that:

"Between the desires and needs of man, and everything in nature that can be utilized by him, beliefs, ideas and customs interpose...we are never concerned with 'man' but with human society and its organized groups". (24)

This view recognizes and gives preferent attention to the effort, plasticity and freedom of human will and imagination over environmental determination where environment would be taken as dominating man.

On further examination of the relationship between ecological settings, social structure and relations, we have the case of two neighbouring groups but with different lifestyles. These are the Mbuti pygmies of Ituri forest (a rain forest running across the equator from the fringes of the Saharan desert in the north, into Kivu mountains in the south) who have an originally strong hunting and gathering culture, an adaptive response to their environment; and their neighbours are the village cultivators on the lower slopes. For the

Mbuti, the forest is a source of game, vegetable foods and honey, but for the villages it is an inherent source of problems.

As Turnbull tells us, the structure of the Mbuti society pivots around a powerful forest-oriented system of values (Turnbull, Colin M., 1965:16). He tells us that:

"The forest is more than mere environment for the Mbuti. It is a living conscious thing, both natural and supernatural, something that has to be depended upon, respected, obeyed and loved". (25)

For them the materials for making of shelter, clothing and all other necessary items of material culture come from the forest. But this is not the case for the village cultivators who, though surrounded by the same forest on all sides, neither live in the forest nor by it, but only despite it. They have to fight not only the forest itself but also creatures that live in it, viz.: elephants (destroying plantations); leopards (preying on the few goats and chickens the villagers manage to raise); baboons (eating the ripening fruits) and the Mbuti themselves who, in addition to stealing the fruits, have a tendency to steal, from the villagers, even the items they have no intentions to make use of. On how the forest influences the

social organization of these two groups Turnbull tells us that:

"the forest achieves the establishment of two virtually irreconcilable systems of values. It further determines for Mbuti and villagers, a certain degree of nomadism, and it tends to fragment large populations into small relatively isolated bands or villages. For Mbuti the forest merely indicates natural boundaries, such as valleys, ridges, rivers, caves and so forth, within which a band can conveniently roam at will throughout the years, economically self-sufficient. But for the villagers the forest announces, at the end of every three years or so, that the village must pack up and move. The move will inevitably bring the village into renewed conflict with the forest, and may well bring it into conflict with a neighbouring village which has also been forced to move". (26)

The villagers, unlike the Mbuti foresters, have a superior technology and instead of giving in to the natural and supernatural (represented, for the Mbuti, by the forest) and respecting the supernatural in the sense that the Mbuti do, oppose it with fear, mistrust and occasional hate. They people the forest with evil spirits and fill their lives with magic witchcraft and a belief in sorcery (ibid., p. 21).

Despite this degree of realistic and non-realistic conflict, however, there is some level

of interaction between the two. With their experience in the forest the Mbuti are masters in curative activities with medicine from wild plants. They have effective remedies for minor psychological disorders and injuries, hence their help is constantly sought by the villagers who are not as well versed in forest lore. But the Mbuti themselves have little need for preventive activities and curative magic, unlike the villagers. This is because there are no common killer illnesses among the Mbuti whose life expectancy is said to be quite good after adolescence. Even when the Mbuti infant, after birth, gets a vine bracelet or bell tied to it and a small piece of wood or two fixed to the vine, there is more of symbolism than protection to it, for the vine and wood are meant to convey to the child the health and strength of the forest. There is no apparent concern for any supernatural dangers, thus no precautionary measures taken.

There is therefore, between the villagers and the Mbuti, a significant difference in attitude toward magic or curative activities and protection in general. Protection for the villagers is thought to be necessary against unknown dangers. Thus a village mother and child will both have, according to how wealthy the family is, a number of potions

to drink (which have medical significance) and diverse charms to wear.

### Insecurity, Protection and Time

The question of protection needs further attention for it is through it that much of the values the villagers (referred to above) have against their environment is seen, and this as we shall see later, has also applied to the groups studied for this paper. The Mbuti very often steal from the villagers who may also be stealing among themselves. This being commonly anticipated, the villagers have quite a number of magical cures against theft, that are believed to prevent it by curing the situation that might give rise to this antisocial act. It is for witchcraft that the villagers are much feared by the Mbuti who look at witchcraft and sorcery as something belonging essentially to the village world. The witchcraft among the villagers is essentially a mechanism for social control, being a concept employed usefully to bring to light hidden sources of dispute and to publicly shame trouble-makers. It also drives the thieving Mbuti back to the forest.

But among the Mbuti themselves theft is not a part of their behaviour toward each other; and they have nothing that the villagers can

steal from them. Thus there is no immediate situation that they feel the need to protect themselves against, hence witchcraft and the related activities and beliefs are rare among the Mbuti. As a result, one of their main characteristics is to think in terms of the present; and this takes us to the concept of time.

One might wonder as to what prompts some people and not others to think either in terms of past, present or future. We have seen that the Mbuti hardly see themselves in a future context, hence their little interest in protective activities. And this is because they seldom face or anticipate real danger. But the villagers are very time-conscious. They know the past, they see the present, and think of the future. They have not forgotten the past thefts by the Mbuti who might steal again any time in future. They have not forgotten the illnesses they might face. They have not forgotten the destructive elements, socially, economically or otherwise that surround them. All this creates a strong sense of the future in their minds. It gives them a higher level of psychological insecurity, further giving rise to their symbolic dressing with magic charms, and existence of experts in various protective fields. With this it is easy to perceive, in this context, the relationship between the time



factor, social structure and environment.

Let us take, for instance, the theoretical interrelationship between human experience, time and distance. It may be familiar experience that when a young man is walking along with his favourite girlfriend, time may seem to be passing very fast and a given distance travelled may seem too short. More adverse conditions, on the other hand, with quarrels and so on, may make the distance seem too long and the hours pass too slowly, just as they do for a first offender in a 'cell'.

This is meant to demonstrate that the conscious and local experience is very important in one's definition of the situation in which he operates. It must be sought and recognized, failure to which causes misunderstanding. Such misunderstanding is exemplified by the now almost obsolete and commonplace European ethnocentric generalization that primitive peoples "have no sense of time" or have no tools for measuring time and distance. This is not necessarily true. In fact to a Mbeere old man, his own shadow is a more useful and practical tool for measuring time than a clock would be to him, and the period circumcision is due to take place is a more realistic measure of time than a calendar.

The concept of time therefore is not easily generalizable to different situations, as many might have made it appear. Radcliffe-Brown, in this connection, has argued that "the time factor in social structure is by no means uniform in its incidence", (Meyer Fortes, 1963:54); and as Kabwegyere has similarly put it, "time is not a homogeneous commodity" (Kabwegyere, 1974:2). In his conceptual analysis of 'time' the latter looks at it from four different facets, viz.: quantitative time, historical time, social time and planning time; and he wonders to what extent in the current planning era in East Africa, for example, the planner, who mainly deals with quantitative time, has assessed whether his 'time' "coincides with the mutational cycle of social phenomena", if he intends to come out with some success. The point made here is that there has to be some degree of conceptual equivalence if uniformity of success in transmission of a new idea or innovation is to be attained.

Noting, therefore, that time is differentially conceived by different cultures in different environments and modes of life, Kabwegyere has further argued, or at least implied, that in literate cultures there is a predominance in use of quantitative time e.g. use of clocks, calendars and calendar-year

plans, as opposed to the less literate cultures where the use of social time is more prevalent, so that adulthood, for example, is not marked by 18 years but by circumcision or some other social rites of passage.

Where the ceremony of circumcision, for example is important, it marks a time when the public image of the relevant ritual expert, or the circumciser, is at its best and may eclipse out of the scene as soon as the material time elapses. And the rainmaker gets the opportunity to come in at the time of an impending drought, where the drought counts as a major indicator of time. These two and others could be mentioned as people differently positioned in different social structures and their statuses may vary with different times. Thus different social structures if studied at certain times only may not be fully understood, as some important social roles may be in obscurity at the particular times of study, only to come back to light at another, time, as the case may be in different environments.

At other times some members of a society may, for some reason or other, not be present. In such cases these individuals, who may be household heads or incumbents of other social positions are not there to play their roles; and if, at such times,

one were to conduct a study among such people he would miss the particular individuals. Thus while looking at the importance of the time factor in the context of the West African Ashanti's dwelling group, Radcliffe-Brown has noted that:

"Not only do dwelling groups vary in composition at a given time, but their membership fluctuates from month to month as people move too and fro for farming or trade". (27)

The time factor therefore is an important parameter for consideration while trying to understand better the livelihood and structure of different social groups.

Footnotes to Chapter One

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## CHAPTER TWO

### SITE SELECTION, HYPOTHESES AND METHODOLOGY

#### (A) SITE

(i) Selection: The siting for this research was based on an ecological transect through areas of differing ecological potentials and problems, all selected from Embu District. The Integrated Rural Survey (IRS) 1974-1978 (Basic Report: Central Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Finance and Planning) has classified areas of rural Kenya into different agro-ecological zones, which I found useful in identifying the various ecological zones of Embu District. These agro-ecological zones, for Embu, run from the Lower Cotton Zone through Upper Cotton Zone, Coffee Zone to the Tea Zone around the slopes of Mount Kenya.

My ecological transect was a cross-section through all these zones running from the Lower Cotton Zone to the Tea Zone. I, however, did not study all the areas falling on the cross-section, for although picking several representative points, from the lowest to the highest, on this line would have been more desirable to give a picture of gradual changes with altitude, this was not possible within the given limits of both time and funding. I, therefore, chose to deal with the two extreme

locations, the Lower Cotton Zone and the Tea Zone, which give a good ecological contrast and equally serve the purpose of the study on a comparative basis.

My site selection was thus based, mainly on physical environmental characteristics. Taking the physical environment to consist of such characteristics as rainfall, temperatures, altitude, soils, vegetation and topography the areas chosen were differentiated according to whether they are more or less favoured, in terms of the above characteristics. The two areas chosen were Kianjokoma and Mavuria, and taking the rainfall characteristic, for example, the two areas represent sections of more rainfall reliability and less rainfall reliability, respectively.

Kianjokoma is a sub-location of Kagaari Location in Runyenjes Division, formerly Embu Division with a few boundary changes, which politically is the Embu North constituency. And Mavuria is a location in Gachoka Division, formerly Mbere Division with a few boundary changes, which politically is the Embu South constituency. Using the agro-ecological classification, Kianjokoma is in the Tea Zone, with tea as a major cash crop while Mavuria is in the Lower Cotton Zone with cotton as the major cash crop. Kianjokoma lies further north, along the slopes of Mount Kenya while Mavuria lies further south



being bordered by the rivers Tana in the east and Thiba in the south, the two rivers of which separate it from Kitui District.

The areas selected therefore have different agricultural and economic potentials plus physical conditions, all of which were expected to variously influence the people's activities in their respective environments and which may account for differences in ways of life and social organizations. In choosing the two locations from the same district, was also an attempt to deal with areas of ethnic homogeneity to minimize, as much as possible, the chances of any differences arising due to ethnic heterogeneity, an issue to which further effort was given to establish, in the actual field work.

Making allowances for the historical events and the related changes, presence or absence of particular traits in one ecological locale and not in another (or in both) were examined in relation to its environmental context with a view to explaining to what extent the variations may or may not be related to the ecological variations.

Without denying the possibility that there could be many factors influencing, say, the importance associated with a particular role in a certain social

group, it was an assumption of this research, however, that since the two areas to be dealt with have different agricultural and economic potentials plus physical conditions, such differences would variously influence and hence explain the people's mode of adaptation to their respective environments.

As recognized above, factors other than the physical ones are known to have made some impact on the organization of the societies in question in various ways. One such factor is the colonial intervention and administration which penetrated the two areas with differential impact, as it is well known that, in addition to other strategic reasons, the whiteman was better attracted to the more agriculturally attractive parts of the country. The colonial intervention, especially with regards to the introduction of cash crops, and the related interests, administrative and otherwise, had various effects e.g. on the economic organization, religious beliefs, communication facilities, land tenure systems, etc. These factors other than the purely ecological ones would seem to be isolated from the latter although argued out logically they might turn out to be indirect consequences of the physical endowments. And their influence on the social structure would in the final analysis be easily attributable

to the physical environmental influences.

Under this section will also be the examination of the physical characteristics that prevail in the two areas. These physical characteristics include rainfall, altitude, temperatures, soils, vegetation and topography.

(ii) Physical Aspects

(1) Rainfall: The average annual rainfall for Mavuria is between 12"-30" while that of Kianyokoma would be estimated at between 50"-70". Kabeca has quoted a few areas around and including Kianyokoma as receiving "between 40" and 75" annually".<sup>1</sup> In Mbere Division (in which Mavuria is located), the incidence of rainfall and probability of receiving over 300 mm. (12") per season increases as one moves from east to west i.e. from lowest to highest altitude. Mbita sub-location which is one of the better areas of Mavuria, writes Hunt, "gets between 300-400 mm.(12-16") of rainfall with a high probability of poor rain".<sup>2</sup> The rainfall here is thus erratic and cannot be relied upon for predicting agricultural harvests. Some periods of the year such as August-October are very dry and yearly acute water shortages are common.

For Kianjokoma, along the slopes of Mount Kenya, water shortages are rare. One old man there told me "...it is always raining. I wish I had a piece of land in Mbere to live on" where there is more sunshine and less cold.

(2) Altitude: For Mavuria most of the area lies between 2,000-4,000 ft. above sea level and most of Kianjokoma lies between 6,000-7,000 ft. above sea level.

To relate the two factors (altitude and rainfall), the table below shows how in Embu District the rainfall decreases in both the amount and unreliability with the decreasing altitude both eastwards and southwards. Although the figures have not been done for Kianjokoma the trend here shows clearly that the situation would be much better for Kianjokoma than for Mavuria (see Kiritiri, Kiambere and Meka Sisal-Kirima in the table).

Elevation and Rainfall Reliability in a Few Areas  
in Embu

Station	Elevation (ft.)	Yearly Average	Number of Years Recorded	Number of Years with Less than 30"
Embu Institute of Agri- culture	4,750	54.11	10	0 in 10 yrs.
C.C.M. Rumbia Siakago	4,000	52.61	8	0 in 8 yrs.
Kanyuam- bora	3,700	51.13	9	1 in 9 yrs.
Kiritiri	3,700	38.72	10	4 in 10 yrs.
B.A.T. Ena	3,650	50.59	10	1 in 10 yrs.
Kiambere	3,450	36.95	8	3 in 8 yrs.
Meka Sisal Kirima	3,400	37.98	5	1 in 5 yrs.
Ishiarara	2,750	37.86	10	4 in 10 yrs.

Source: Mbere: Special Rural Development Programme by Eastern Province Planning Team, December 1969.

(3) Temperatures: For Mavuria temperatures are often as high as 80°F., with very low humidity.

According to Mbere S.R.D.P. report,

"it is believed that maximum temperatures reaches between 22 and 30 degrees centigrade (71.6-86°F) for most of the year, and that most parts of the area have an average of 7-9 hours of sunshine daily". (3)

For Kianyokoma, on the other hand, the temperatures are tempered by the forest surrounding and are usually much less than for Mavuria. Around Kianjokoma it is usually cold in the mornings and evenings with three or four hours of sunshine in good weather. At the highest, the temperatures reach between 50°F - 70°F.

(4) Soils: Much of Mavuria, apart from a few areas of good loam and clay soils, has soils that are mainly sandy, allowing a high capillary action and therefore dry up fast. In terms of productivity the area is 'low-potential' and some parts are 'marginal' and only fit for livestock keeping. Kianjokoma is a high potential area with promising rainfall and water retaining soils but because of its high altitude the most popular cash crop happens to be tea, some coffee and a bit of pyrethrum. One would expect the area, being around the slopes of Mount Kenya to have received a share of the fertile volcanic soils during the earlier though now extinct volcanic activities and other physical processes.

(5) Vegetation: For Kianjokoma vegetation is difficult to describe because it is not there. What I mean here is that much of the area is already open farmland due to the high density of population. Where it appears, one sees tall trees and their

undergrowth most of which are influenced by the cool forest climate and do not seem to be drought resistant.

For Mavuria, on the other hand, and most of Mberere due to lower population densities and soil productivity large tracts of land are uncultivated and the vegetation is easily describable. Bushes and shrubs are commonly found. According to Hunt's classification of ecological zones, based on the reports by Eastern Province Planning Team: the western half of Mberere plus the area around Kiritiri (Central Mberere) is Combretum Savanna and Combretum Acacia. The eastern Mberere is mainly Acacia Commiphora (Diana Hunt, 1974:6). All these vegetation types are typical of semi-arid areas, a characteristic also implied in the other aspects discussed above. Further south towards rivers Thiba and Tana is a preponderance of fleshy leaved plants such as the euphorbia and others that easily reproduce through vegetative propagation.

(6) Topography: The area around Kianjokoma is characterized by even, almost steep-sided slopes covered with many though small-scale tea plantations, with scattered coffee farms. Between these slopes are several streams and a few rivers flowing from Mount Kenya.

Mavuria and other parts of Mberé are characterized by rugged topography sloping gradually/gently eastwards towards river Tana and southwards towards river Thiba. This ruggedness of topography is enhanced by the low water resistance of the sandy soils, coupled with the patternless overgrazing of livestock. The consequent view is that of many gulleys and isolated weathering and erosion-resistant rock and soil outcrops that are left outstanding on the bare white earth where differential erosion has been excessive.

(iii) Settlement and Population

For Mavuria one finds that people do not live together either in large villages or separate households but dispersed collections of homesteads or scattered homesteads often tied together by family and kinship basis. Thus the families owning the land holdings on which they have built their homesteads cultivate their home gardens around. But they are likely to own individual cultivated patches elsewhere, which may be a number of miles away from their area of residence.

For the area around Kianjokoma there is no question of scattered homesteads. The land there is more fertile and allows continuous farming of a single piece of land without having to shift from



one to another and this allows a more permanent development of one single piece of land. In addition the population is much dense, not to mention the fact that land demarcation has long taken place, allowing individual families to live where they own land and not necessarily where their kin live. Hence one finds individual families living on well-marked land parcels which are often all cultivated and visibly utilized unlike in Mbere where such land may not be in conspicuous usage.

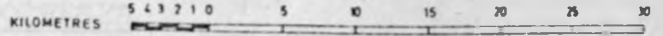
On population, the 1969 census showed that the areas around Kianjokoma have a population density of well over 200 persons per square mile. For Mavuria, on the other hand, the population density is much lower. A set of seven constituent sub-locations in Mavuria show an average population density of 28 persons per square mile as shown by the August 1969 Population Census Provisional results - for the Mbere SRDP pilot project areas, which included Mavuria location (see table below):

Mavuria Location - Population 1969

Sub-location	Population	Area Sq.km.	Population Density/ Sq.km.
Mbita	3623	53.2	68
Kithunthiri	2647	42.6	62
Kirima	3412	68.7	50
Mavuria	2715	91.7	30
Kiambere	2690	150.4	18
Gichiche	1846	97.8	19
Riachina	784	129.6	6
Totals	17717	634.0	28

The population map of Embu District that follows shows the location of Mavuria and Kianjokoma and respective populations.

# EMBU DISTRICT



Mt. Kenya

Kianjokoma

- DISTRICT BOUNDARY
- DIVISION BOUNDARY
- LOCATION BOUNDARY
- SUB-LOCATION BOUNDARY AND NUMBER



- URBAN CENTRE
- ▲ RURAL CENTRE
- MARKET CENTRE
- LOCAL CENTRE

100 PEOPLE



Mavuria

Source: Physical Planning Department, Eastern Province, Embu, 1978.

(B) WORKING HYPOTHESES

The aim of this research was to examine the relationship between physical environmental factors and social structure. In this respect specific aspects of social structures of the given social groups were examined with reference to the environments they live in. The following guiding hypotheses were used, all of which are derived from the argument that there exists a strong relationship between given environments and the social structures of the people inhabiting the particular ecological regions:

- (1) The influence of the physical environmental factors on the division of labour tends to be much more discernible in difficult or harsh environments than in less adverse ones. This, if true may lead to:
  - (i) Greater centralization of authority in terms of the number of persons responsible for making decisions pertaining to the use and disposal of family or other corporate group-owned property.

- (ii) The need to observe strictly certain rituals especially if it is believed that failure to participate in a ritual surrounding the health or fertility of people or livestock or even the availability of certain resources, may bring about bad omen or death. Thus the most valued objects tend to be the focus of rituals.
- (2) Geographical mobility (which may disrupt the performance of some of the household roles) is closely associated with the occurrence of such problems as droughts, famines, etc.
- (3) The type of economic activities a certain ecological setting encourages and the related roles e.g. keeping of livestock, herding, bee-keeping, etc. influence the prestige and ranking given to certain social statuses.
- (4) Environmental situations do influence the definition of various rites of passage and status changes e.g. from adolescence to adulthood, etc.

- (5) In harsh environments, as opposed to the less difficult ones, there tends to be less dependence on modern values, educational and otherwise, and this leads to the view that in such physically less favoured environments there is a greater reliability on and use of traditional values and expertise.

(C) METHODOLOGY

(i) Sample Selection

It is not always possible for the researcher to use random or probability sampling, depending on the aim/nature of the study and the availability of a sampling frame (a list of the total group whose representatives can be selected under the assumption that a given set of answers can be drawn from them without any outstanding misrepresentation of the total population). With random sampling it is also assumed that each randomly selected member will be able to answer as many questions as any other member, as they all should possess a fairly even knowledgeability on the subject, if they are to be equally true representatives of the sample. With this kind of situation applying, the use of a questionnaire would be an appropriate tool for drawing information from the respondents.

One major weakness of using random sampling here stems from its very nature that gives it its strength. The strength being that once you have randomly selected your respondents you can make generalizations about the sample, which is taken to represent the total population. This sample would have to come from an available frame of reference bearing the names of the people who can fairly answer the given set of questions (mainly on the questionnaire) without too many 'don't knows' and 'no answers'. But for this type of study the above assumptions did not apply, since it was not expected that, among the respondents who could have randomly been selected, there would be an even distribution of knowledge on the relevant investigation topics.

The major sampling technique used, therefore, was 'snowball sampling'. This meant asking the members of society in each area to choose other members they thought were knowledgeable, on certain criteria. If on ideas relating to local leadership for example, I got some of the leaders first, and these in turn suggested others on their own judgement i.e. using the opinion of the members of the target population to get others, and so on, till in the end I got to some specific people whom I went to see, as key informants.

Another method used for selecting informants was 'theoretical sampling'. This type of sampling works under the assumption that the researcher knows some people who would possibly give the appropriate information on certain issues e.g. to know something about medicinemen I tried a few, some of whom are very famous. Old people, who are also likely to have seen and known more than the younger ones were very useful.

But even talking of the sample size and selection in the case of this research as it turned out, is highly unrealistic, in the sense that although I specifically talked to 25 people from Mavuria and 20 from Kianjokoma, the numbers did not seem to be of any particular importance. None knew enough on every topic of my interest, thus forming a sample with unequal knowledgeability and expertise in various aspects. What I mean is that, for example, in the case of medicine-men and their practice, not everybody is a medicine-man and therefore not just anybody would have this knowledge.



(ii) Data Collection

This research by its very nature required long discussions with informants as it dealt mainly with traditional rural experience and expertise and non-material aspects of culture. The study thus involved identification of indigenous experts and those knowledgeable in certain aspects and with experience of the chosen environments. The effects of famines or even droughts for example, on the family role-structure or even temporary out-migration, could be obtained from a few well informed members of society who are also likely to have lived longer in these areas. There are also things that old women know better than old men and vice versa. And there are times when different environments allow certain types of activities and ceremonies and not others. Who knows more about this? Observations and discussions were very handy research tools in this regard. I lived among the people of Mavuria and Kianjokoma, respectively, for at least three months in each case, mixing fully with the people and helping with such tasks as picking up tea leaves in Kianjokoma or cotton in Mavuria. This gave time to discuss various issues without having to sit down for a discussion during working hours.

The contents of folk-tales, proverbs, etc. were seen to emphasize or de-emphasize the various tasks that children were expected or not expected to undertake, or even praise the various traditional powers and beliefs, the essence of which seemed to be functional to environmental requirements in the given settings.

We have already seen, while discussing the sample selection, that the nature of the study did not allow a technique that would necessitate the use of a questionnaire. My major data collecting techniques, therefore, were participant observation and discussions, mainly with some knowledgeable old men and women on selected topics. The folk-tales and proverbs, for example, were mainly from old men and women, respectively. I also used written literature (geographical, socio-historical and also other information from Embu Planning Offices) available for the area.

Footnotes to Chapter Two

(For full citations see Bibliography)

1. Mwaniki, H.S.K., 1973:2.
2. Hunt, Diana, M., 1974:6.
3. SRDP. 1969:3.

## CHAPTER THREE

### SOCIAL STRUCTURE, SOCIAL LIFE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

As is already stated in the first two chapters of this paper, it was the assumption of this research that since the two areas selected for the study are ecologically different, the social structures, institutions and value systems in each case, were going to differ mainly depending on ecological differences. The field investigations, as will be seen later, however, showed that this was not always the case. The two peoples, though differing in one aspect or another, have a lot in common, both culturally and otherwise, despite their different physical environments.

This being the case I found it necessary to look back into the original settlement history of the Embu and Mbeere people, which strengthens, first, the evidence of a common cultural background. In addition, it gives a brief exploration of the early inter-group activities which facilitated much of cultural exchange between the Embu and Mbeere, even after the two had occupied different ecological settings. This in turn serves to explain the basis of this commonality in the various cultural aspects, so that any differences would then

be explained by ecological or other factors.

This introductory part of this chapter therefore, serves to give us a starting point as it shows how the two groups came to occupy the ecological settings in question and the type of relationship that existed between them in the early times.

(A) Embu and Mbeere: The Original Settlement History

There are many versions of the origin of the Embu and Mbeere people which were related to me in both the two areas of study, some of which appeared not too convincing while others appeared quite credible. Most of them, however, indicated that the two peoples came from the same place or direction and thus shared a common origin. While some say that both the Embu and Mbeere people have always been there since time immemorial, others have it that they came from such places as Meru, Chuka, Abyssinia, from beyond Mount Kenya, etc. My earlier study on land adjudication in Mbere which touched slightly on the question of land acquisition in the remote past (prior to adjudication) gives a contradictory evidence to the version which has it that these people have always been

there from time immemorial. According to the study referred to, they are said to have come from somewhere and secured land ownership as they came. (Njeru, E.H.N., 1976:38-43).

As regards the other versions, some of my informants could only say that they came from such and such a place, but could not tell much on how they had come in. In most cases, however, the two peoples were said to have come from outside the now Embu District. One of the versions, having established that these people all came from outside but through Mbere, as related below, went ahead to explain how these people spread and got divided among themselves, a division that still lingers to some extent, though being increasingly stripped of its formerly strong impact by the changing economic, socio-historical and political factors.

It is believed that the people who originally inhabited Mbere were descendants of a man called Mbeere, after whom the area is named. The word 'mbere' means 'first'. Mbere was thus the first area to be settled or occupied and Mbeere was the first man to settle in the area. From here the people then dispersed to other areas.

There is also another version relating the population movements from this area to others, which assumes an initial presence of people in Mbere, and from here goes on to explain how they moved to other areas. Here it is said that at the time of building the Fort Jesus in Mombasa (according to historical texts the fort seems to have been built between 1593-1598) a group of Europeans (the Portuguese) came into Mbere and swept a very large number of people and drove them towards the coast as labour force to go and build the fort. They took everybody they came across as they went round, scaring any possible resistance with their 'firewood-like instruments which cracked the noise of a breaking piece of firewood' (these were their guns). Their leader was locally nicknamed 'muna ruku', meaning 'breaker of a piece of firewood'. These Europeans were called Ruura (a name derived from the Mbeere word Kiura, meaning 'frog', as the Europeans, to Mbeere people, looked as though they were fresh from water, like the frogs). As the Mbeere were pushed towards Mombasa, many of them are said to have died on the way while the weaklings or those with poor health were abandoned to die en route. Some, however, managed to escape from the Portuguese' hands and disappeared into the bush.

Those who got lost on the way, i.e. the escapes, joined by those who had been deliberately thrown out on sickness grounds but lucky to recover, all assembled into one group. On so doing they found that they represented twelve clans. Their problem then was how to find their way back to Mbere. Among them was a medicineman who had mysteriously freed himself from the Portuguese in order to save his people, although he refused to take the journey back with them. When people asked this mundu-mugo (medicineman) what to do, he promised to be always taking care of their interests though they would not be seeing him.

The medicineman prescribed that the twelve clans, throughout their journey back to Mbere, should be led by a boy and a girl together. He, however, forbade and warned that should these two youngsters fall in love at any time, their leadership should be abandoned immediately, lest the people would face hardships. After the two fallen leaders ceased to hold their leading position, he said, they should also not any longer proceed with the journey among the rest, to avoid the misfortunes that the medicineman had predicted. They had to be left at that particular spot, to become man and wife.



It is said that after the twelve clans began their journey, they passed behind and by the slopes of Mount Kenya and that by the time they discovered that they were completely lost, they had already reached Nairobi area. From here they then turned towards Kilimambogo the area around which they knew as Kianjavi (because the Mbeere food crop called niavi did very well there). This is the area also called Ndonyo-Sabuk. Kianjavi until very recently has been very famous to and popular among Mbeere people as they used to go there for employment mainly as farm labourers (shamba boys) in the pre-independence period. The whole of this area was called Ithanga, the name which is most closely associated with the early movement or dispersal of Mbeere people to other areas. By the time these people had reached Ithanga, they had lost very many people en route through the inevitable process of the two leaders becoming lovers and being left on the way as husband and wife. Thus only two clans managed to reach Ithanga. The two were known as Ifunu and Gamumu.

The process of the various clans having to lose either a boy or a girl had become very discouraging and unbearable. It was in this connection that a conflict developed when one of the two remaining clans, the Gamumu, refused to

donate their daughter for leadership, although the Iguna clan, too, were reluctant to part with their son. The remaining people, by age and sex, were such that the two clans, Gamumu and Iguna could only produce a girl and a boy, respectively, as other possible choices had already been exhausted and the selection could not even work vice versa for the two clans.

This dilemma developed into a major conflict that forced the Mbeere people to disperse out of the Ithanga area in a great disagreement. From here they crossed the Tana River in various factions as they forded the river at various Mariuko (fords) e.g. iriuko ria Mbandi (the ford of Mbandi); iriuko ria Kambuya (the ford of Mbuya); iriuko ria Gacugu (the ford of Gacugu), etc. These names, given to the various factions which crossed the river at various fords (which were also named after the respective groups), were later used to identify Mbeere clans. Other groups crossed the Tana and continued into the area now called Embu North, in search for better farming areas, and at the same time trying to be as far away as possible from the region of disagreement. An example here is the group of Ngui which settled near the present St. Paul High School (Kevote) in Embu North, at Kibogi though they later went back to Mbere via Kiburu near Ishiara. Some people

moved as far as Chuka (which now forms part of Meru District). Some evidence on the truth of this movement is also borne out by my earlier research on land adjudication in Mbere, which showed that many people from Embu North and even other parts of Central Province came, at the time of adjudication, to Mbere to claim descentance among some families so that they could get land. This indicated that they must have been closely related or lived together with some Mbere people at one time in the past (Njeru, E.H.N., 1978:13).

Other claims evidencing a common origin between the Embu and Mbeere people have been made by Mwaniki who supports strongly the prominence of the Mbeere people in the migration history of Embu and Mbeere. According to him the people who later came to be regarded as the Embu and Mbeere are said to have come either from or through the Ithanga origin, while the whole of the Embu population (which includes Mbeere) increased itself by adding elements of the Chuka and Kamba as a result of intermarriages and adoptions (Mwaniki, H.S.K., 1973:15-25).

At Ithanga, the place of dispersion, it is also known that among those who stayed in Mbere or went to Embu, there were groups led by people or individuals named as Kabete, Nderi, and Mwala, just to

mention a few names that I could gather. From Kabete then were born the Gikuyu gia Kabete (the Kikuyu of Kabete); from Nderi the Gikuyu kia Nderi (the Kikuyu of Nderi - these are the Nyeri people); and from Mwala the Ikamba ria Mwala (the Kamba of Machakos). The Ndia people of Kirinyaga District are also believed to have shared the same origin. It should, however, be stressed that not all but some of the people living in these geographical regions are believed to originate in Mbere.

(B) . The Rise of Conflict Between Embu and Mbeere

There used to be common activity grounds for Embu and Mbeere people after the movements dealt with above had already taken place. One such ground was around Kevote. These common activity grounds were called Ivaaro (venues used by Embu and Mbeere leaders as they met to discuss matters regarding peace and security between the two groups). Here the boys from Embu and Mbere also met and practised fighting techniques as they were to be future warriors. They would practise with swords, clubs, spears, etc. all pretending that they were fighting an enemy.

Unfortunately during one of their practice sessions a son of a Mbeere man called Mbogo wa Kamangu was killed by a lad from Embu. In retaliation

Mbogo wa Kamangu advised the Mbeere lads to slash with swords, as many Embu lads as possible, when they met next, an act that provoked the Embu people into hitting back.

But direct warfare between the Embu and Mbeere could not take place because both tribes had taken oath of allegiance prohibiting any warfare between them. The Embu, however, found their way out by hiring, among Meru people, a group called Mwithi to come and invade Mbere. The Meru, as they invaded Mbere, are said to have encountered a very strong defense from the Mbeere who, like the Akamba, were very adept in arrow poisoning and skilful arrow shooting, with clubs and swords when the use of arrows was not necessary. The Meru group, however, caused a lot of damage and stole Mbeere cattle. This incident until very recently has been kept alive through a song that was normally sang in an uncircumcised boys' traditional dance called Mubobo. This dance was to prepare boys for body oiling using oil extracted from the fat of a young fat bull (which had to be red in colour, just like the colour of the blood shed during the fight in question). All this was designed to remember the 'Mwithi' fight and bloodshed.

Afterwards this song played a significant part in raising the morale of the warriors as it was always sang whenever a fight with an enemy was expected. The song went as follows:

"Mwithi uria urakurire nganatha  
(njaga) ciari Gakindu ciari  
mirongo-ee-ina-ii Mwithi wa  
ngo'-oo-mbe i-uyu".

This translates like this:

"The Mwithi who destroyed 40  
cattle bomas at Gakindu...The  
Mwithi of cattle".

But Mbogo wa Kamangu was as yet unsatisfied and therefore not ready to give up at this point. He knew well that the Embu were not friends with the Gikuyu of Ndia (in Kirinyaga District), a fact on which he was to capitalize for further revenge. In effect he advised the Embu warriors that he would lead and show them where to catch the Ndia warriors unawares. He likewise and deceitfully promised the Ndia warriors that he would lead them at a suitable time to find the Embu warriors unprepared. Thus he knew he had simultaneously tricked the two dual enemies into fighting one another without advance battle planning. When they met, Mbogo wa Kamangu disappeared, and the two groups fought a very disappointing battle as they both lost heavily.

Since then an enmity developed between the Embu and Mbeere people and even when its actual impact faded with time, it still lingered as unrealistic conflict. There are, of course, other causes of conflict between these two groups e.g. the stealing of foodstuffs from Embu by the Mbeere during famines, stealing of livestock from Mbeere by the Embu, etc. Isolated cases of this conflict can hitherto be detected from speeches of the people from either Embu or Mbeere when they want to despise one another.

The infamous character referred to above is remembered even today. When one tries to antagonize two groups or people or provoke them into fighting one another he is often and sarcastically asked "Ni uri Mbogo wa Kamangu?" meaning "Are you Mbogo wa Kamangu?" This sarcastic remark also applies if one suspects that you want to be cunning and mislead him into conflict with another person. It is also used metaphorically by old people in their advisory speeches or by anybody advising another against evil thoughts.

Having seen this much on the population of Embu and Mbeere we shall go on to examine what later became the dominant modes of livelihood for the two areas, and how such lifestyles relate to the systems of role-structure among the peoples in question. The reader will note (and this is for the purpose

of convenience, to avoid having to keep on referring to 'the people of Mavuria' and 'those of Kianjokoma') that throughout the rest of this thesis, those people living in Mavuria are referred to as the Mbeere while those in Kianjokoma are referred to as the Embu.

The dominant modes of livelihood, which reflect the impact of the environment on social roles and relationships can easily be seen through the examination of three major activity areas viz.: farming, livestock care and defence, as will be shown below.

(C) Farming

It is important when one is talking of the physical environmental limitations, to try and find out what type of problems are encountered by farmers in one physical region and not in another and what this means in terms of the division of labour in that particular community.

Facts on physical environmental potentialities of the two areas i.e. Kianjokoma and Mavuria have already been given when dealing with the site. The facts show that Kianjokoma is a high potential agricultural zone which encourages a cash crop



economy of only a few cash crops of which the most favourable is tea. The second one is coffee in the lower altitude areas of the zone. Most of the land is utilized mainly for these cash crops and because of the high density of population and the need to grow these crops on a larger scale, this hardly leaves the Kianjokoma people with any land for other crops. Thus there is no room for such other crops like hybrid maize which was tried in 1960s and found suitable for the area before it was overtaken by tea planting which began in about 1962.

Old people in Kianjokoma, however, gave me their experience of having, for a long period, before the coming of Europeans (known to have come to Embu by the year 1898), planted such crops as bulrush millet. This type of millet was until very recently the commonest staple food crop for the Mbeere. The only difference was that the crop took almost two seasons to get ready for harvesting in the cold high rainfall and highland Kianjokoma as compared to only a single season in the low rainfall and low altitude Mavuria. Thus when one talks of the millet cultivation and the practices it involved, this applies equally for both the people of Mavuria and Kianjokoma. But after some

time, as indicated above, the colonial administration, basing their judgement on soil and climatic potentials, interfered with millet cultivation in one area rather than the other.

What is implied here is the fact that in these early days the Mbeere and Embu, had similar experience in millet planting and because of poor climate and quality of land in Mbeere, the Mbeere continued to have a longer experience with the cultivation of the crop even after the Embu were turning to cash crop economy in late 1950s.

Due to the various stages involved in millet cultivation, viz. planting, weeding, guarding against wild animals and scaring away the birds, harvesting and thrashing, millet was a high labour-demanding crop. This necessitated communal labour groups especially for weeding, harvesting and thrashing. This need for communal labour meant that one had to maintain very good social relations and a strong sense of reciprocity. If you never turned up when called upon for such communal work sessions, called WiFa, you would be treated likewise when it was your turn to call for help.

While scaring away of the millet-eating birds could be done by men or women, it was mainly

the work of young boys and girls, and it never involved wira. But due to the low level of technology e.g. weeding by use of hoes, using a knife to harvest into woven baskets, one millet comb after another till the whole farm was cleared, and thrashing it (this was done by pouring the harvested millet combs on a dried cow dung-smearred and dustless piece of ground, where it was threshed up with six or seven-foot long wooden frails until all the grains came off. It was then collected and winnowed for storage in the very skilfully constructed grain stores, miruru which had its expert makers) there was much to be done. Wira was therefore needed. For weeding it would be both men and women, but harvesting and thrashing were done exclusively by women. During wira sessions babies were looked after by the smaller children and old women who did not have the energy to do the work. The wira involved great feasting with a lot of food and local brew called Marwa, made from fermented millet.

It was very important that people ate enough and had something remaining to be carried home by the women to their children whom they had left at home. Without enough eating and drinking to their fill, the people went home complaining and would be reluctant or even refuse to come again. They would even compose songs about such a mean host,

which made life in public difficult for him. Everybody thus made an effort to treat people generously and avoid such public humiliation. Such communal work sessions played an important role in bringing people together thus strengthening social relations. They kept people aware of who was good to people and who was not, among various neighbourhoods, as those involved in one wira ranged from relatives to close friends and friends of friends. The public humiliations communicated through the wira songs as we shall see later, conveyed the values that people considered functional to their cooperative 'harambee' (group) spirit in times of various activities and problems. Praising of heroic participation in tribal wars and other sectors of social life was also taken up in the themes of such songs.

Farming, however, had quite a number of problems associated with it. Shifting cultivation was a common practice in both Kianjokoma and Mavuria but was more common in Mavuria where the soil fertility was lower and one spot could not be cultivated for long without having to shift for a new piece of land. This shifting cultivation was also encouraged by the land tenure system at the time, until it began to slow down in the late 1950s (between 1959-62) in Kianjokoma when land adjudication is said to have

taken place there. But in Mavuria and most of Mbere this mode of farming persisted till the beginning of 1970 when land adjudication began to be talked of. This system of shifting cultivation here still continues though in a smaller scale as it decreases with the introduction of new methods of farming (with fertilizers) and increasing individualization of land use rights following the land adjudication.

Due to the existence of large expanses of uncultivated bush, there was the problem of food crop-eating animals like antelopes, bucks, hares, porcupines, etc. This raised the need for skilful people in wooden fencing who left no space for such nocturnal crop eaters so that if the animals passed through the fence they left a clear and squeezed entrance at which they would be trapped by skilful trappers. With population growth most of the Embu land was fully cleared for permanent farming and such animals have disappeared but not so in Mbere where population is still low and much land unused.

It has been a common practice in Mavuria to have farms several miles (as many as between 3-10 miles) away from home, after exhausting the nearest land, and in search of more fertile pieces of land.

This means that the husbands (household heads) cannot always stay and walk daily from home to the farms as they have to increase the work-hours per day by not having to daily travel the long distances to and from the farms. They also have to stay at the farms and scare away the nocturnal crop eaters plus those other animals like monkeys which can come in the morning just before people arrive at the farm, from home. There were ways of fighting monkeys which made hunters a very essential crop-defence group. The major method of dealing with monkeys apart from chasing them away, was as follows: whenever they became too troublesome a meeting was convened and a day fixed when the hunters would sound horns for the exercise. The area the monkeys occupied would then be surrounded by the hunters armed with bows and arrows, as some got in to scare out the monkeys which were shot dead as they came out, trying to escape. If it was in the dry season the surrounded bush would be set on fire. All other animals surrounded would also be shot as they came out, and this was a good source of edible animal meat.

This practice of distant farms and household heads living at the farms, meant women being left at homes acting for household heads and taking the problems they could not solve to their husbands as

they travel almost daily to the farm, to work. The practice is however dying out fast as it is being overtaken by the land use rights stated before affecting shifting cultivation, which limit the arbitrary movements either for farming or settlement.

One major problem related to farming that has always confronted the Mbeere rather than the Embu is that of food shortages. Despite all the efforts to counteract the effect of wild animals, rainfall shortages coupled with high temperatures and poor soils, make the famines more common and worse in Mbere than in Embu. The Mbeere have experienced quite a number of these famines and in several cases are said to have exhausted their only drought resistant root crops of sweet potatoes and cassava, not to mention their livestock which they are always ready to sell in times of such difficulties. In this connection a rural development study on Mbere reported that:

"As late as middle sixties both the short and long rains failed to a large extent and the people were saved by selling their goats and sheep at slash prices and being fed by the government". (1)

Two of such famines are named after these root crops. According to existing records the 'Famine

of Sweet Potatoes', Yura ria Ngwaci, occurred in 1893 while the 'Famine of Cassava', Yura ria Mianga, occurred in 1943.

Apart from rainfall shortages other common causes of famines were locusts and tribal wars which could equally affect both the Embu and Mbeere. When the famines affected both the Embu and Mbeere it was even worse for the Mbeere as the Embu came to fight Mbeere so that they could take the latter's cattle for meat. And when the famines affected Mbeere alone, which was more common, there were other consequences. These in effect serve to show us how the famines affected the division of labour and social relations among the Mbeere. When such famines occurred:

- (1) Many Mbeere women went to Embu and Kikuyuland where they provided casual labour in return for food crops especially maize and beans.
- (2) Men went out of Mbere to work as farm labourers for long periods (usually for as long as the famines persisted) especially for the Kikuyu and sent food to their wives at home, from time to time.



(3) Some Mbeere men who went to Kikuyuland stayed permanently and forgot their families in Mbere. Famines therefore caused marriage instability.

(4) Others who went (but this was much later - during the colonial era) to Kianjavi - Donyo Sabuk area, where they worked as 'shamba boys' for the white settlers, could only come home occasionally to see their wives and also bring them both food and money.

(5) It became a common practice for the Mbeere especially the young children to eat many types of wild fruits (although some of these were also eaten under normal circumstances). When some of these became poisonous the people had already discovered other wild tree fruits, barks or roots that could cure fruit poisoning. It is for this that some individuals grew to be famous for this specialized knowledge on such treatment, for which they received payments, mainly in kind. Some of these experts later developed to be medicinemen and at times practised witchcraft.

All the above related movements lead to what I have referred to as geographical mobility (see Chapter One, p. 2). The overall effect, in this connection, was that in case of men's absences the women either temporarily became the household heads or permanently acted so where the husband never returned, or vice versa when women went out, as the men were forced to take over some of the women's roles and responsibilities including milking and cooking for the children if they had no girls or adolescent boys to do so.

Just before the women or men brought the food stuffs from Kikuyuland and other places, and when one finished eating whatever they had in store, a member of the family approached other women for a temporary food loan. It was thus common for a woman to go to another and borrow, say, maize, measured in a given size of half-calabash and she would pay back the same amount when she got her own food. This was a very popular and effective indigenous insurance system against famines, that operated through reciprocity.

It is also easy to see, while looking at further effects of famines, in terms of social role development, the beginning of the growth of famous

herbalists and tree-fruit experts whose role it was to cure wild-tree or wild-fruit poisoning. Afterwards some of these individuals developed to be medicinemen and witchdoctors in their own society.

(D) Livestock Care

While looking at the ecological potentials of the two geographical areas of study, in Chapter Two, it was made clear that the economic modes of livelihood pursued, had to differ in one way or another. Thus due mainly to the physical environmental factors (the non-physical ones are specified where they apply), the reasons given, some of which are briefly stated in this section, show that keeping of large numbers of livestock has for a long time been necessary and feasible in one area (Mavuria) and not in the other (Kianjokoma).

In dealing with livestock ownership and care-take system, one is essentially dealing with social structure. It becomes meaningful when one looks at the authority structure over use and disposal of livestock, and associated values. As we shall shortly see, this is more so among the Mbeere where large numbers of indigenous cattle have and are still being kept as the physical factors are more favourable for such a mode of economy than any other one. This

should be contrasted with the case of Kianjokoma, among the Embu, where, for reasons given below, a similar mode of economy has not been possible.

The people of Embu did not have as many cattle as those of Mbere, as the former were busy with agricultural crop farming and later, due to population pressure and consequent shortage of land, plus suitable high altitude climate for graded cattle in the case of Kianjokoma, the people of this area have taken to graded cattle keeping. Most people have between 1-5 dairy cattle from which they get and sell milk. Such animals are not seen as a major source of livelihood as is the case for the Mbeere. Each person in Kianjokoma takes care of his own cows in a small fixed piece of land which he owns by a land title deed, and there is no corporate activity between two or more households, involving livestock.

For Mavuria this is not the case. The land is not suitable for cash crop economy (apart from cotton which was recently introduced but now on the increase) unlike that of Kianjokoma which is good for tea and coffee. The type of climate the Mbeere experience plus sparsity of population gives ample room for livestock keeping. Thus when comparing the whole of Embu (includes Kianjokoma) and Mbere

(includes Mavuria) divisions, Embu is seen as a high potential agricultural area while most of Mbere is a marginal productivity area. Thus most of this area (which covers Mavuria), apart from its north-western corner that lies on the outermost slopes of Mount Kenya:

".....southwards and eastwards there is a marked decrease in rainfall, soil fertility and density of population, accompanied by an increase in pastoral herding at the expense of cultivation". (2)

This shows how a mode of livelihood encouraging a certain kind of economic activity may be an influence of environmental conditions, where the mode of livelihood itself represents an adaptive response to the environment, and since economy in use of livestock is highly encouraged, with the household head in charge, the authority such a household head commands over the use and disposal of such livestock is seen as an indirect influence of the environment. A similar point on the authority of the father as the head of the compound family among the Arusha of Tanzania has been made by Gulliver and Gray (Gulliver, P.H. and Gray, R.F., 1964:210).

Even the type of settlements here indicate the suitability of this mode of life. Walking around most of Mavuria Location, therefore, one finds clusters of houses and households which may (the clusters of households) extend in a circular area to a radius of one or two miles in some cases. In other cases single or dispersed clusters of households may be located as much as one or two miles away from each other. This applies for areas within close proximity of Kiritiri town but ceases to be the case as we move towards the Tana River which separates Kitui District from Mavuria Location (of Embu District). Here a large expanse of uncultivated bush up to the river prevails, with the exception of a few homesteads whose owners went to settle there recently in order to cope with the problem of water shortage.

Such clusters of homesteads have existed for a long time as they began at the time of the original settlement. Various descendants of one ancestor, members of single clans or even different but allied clans (belonging to the same moiety) found the need to live together for purposes of corporate activity e.g. herding in turns so that one person is not in the bush herding full-time, settling disputes, or forming inter-clan alliances by two or more different clans to secure territory from another clan.

Corporate activity in livestock herding encourages extended family system while large families were and still are an advantage, to reduce the burden, on one person, of always looking after the livestock. Sometimes when goats are too many, they need to graze separately from cattle and more than one herdsman at a go are needed. These facts are also exemplified by the cases quoted from Gulliver (see pp. 39-43), of the Jie and Turkana, where even a stranger, to the Turkana is very much welcome to get attached to a family as long as he is ready to act as a herdsman (Gulliver, P.H., 1955:127).

Cattle or livestock keeping therefore has been and is still a very important practice and it has, until very recently, played a very significant function in the people's social life and status building. A man's wealth was measured in terms of the number of cattle, goats and sheep he owned. This was before the introduction of money economy although even when it came, money was little valued. In those days, due to the need to have more cattle, a father had a very dominating choice of where his daughters married, to avoid poor in-laws (who could not afford enough cattle for bride wealth). Thus nobody wanted their daughters to marry poor people, and girls were strictly warned against this by

their parents. They had therefore to try and marry to a family of their parents' choice or at least with the parents' approval. It was common for young men going for courtship and if their fathers had no cattle, to go into other persons' cattle bomas and step on cow dung just before they went to see their girlfriends. This made them appear as if they had been dealing with cattle, making the girls think that those boys' fathers had cattle.

The value of livestock was also reflected in the arrangement of the buildings in the compound and where different people (boys, girls, mother) slept. In the mother's sleeping hut the girls bedside was put to the left and on this side of the hut were built the cattle boma and the goats' hut. They were built so close that there would be no path cutting across between the girls' sleeping side and the animals. The belief was that livestock should not be separated from girls. If there were paths, then there was probability of evil men e.g. witches or other bad omen-carrying individuals cutting between the two, which might have been very unfortunate for the girls were considered to command the reproductive potential and owners of cattle and goats (which they fetched from bride wealth when they got married). If these ill-willed people passed in between, then the following were the expected possible consequences:



- (1) girls marrying poor people (without cattle);
- (2) girls not getting married;
- (3) immature births by girls after marriage;
- (4) death of livestock brought after marriage (bride wealth);
- (5) no blessings to make the girls' parents get rich from the productivity of such livestock (3 cows and their husband, a bull; 5 goats and 1 ram) brought as bride-wealth.

Livestock more than anything else was thus an important store of value. Its further symbolic value was displayed in animal slaughtering, as the sharing of the meat was meaningful in the sense that different parts of a cow's meat were distributed according to the roles and societal expectations of different people and sexes, e.g. the skin was given to the old men as they were the skins or heads and advisers of homesteads. The stomach and intestines went to the women who represented the reproductive side, and the heart and lungs went to the boys and young men who needed strong hearts and able lungs for later determination and running in warfare activities. More on the central value of livestock is also reflected by the fact that among some families it was a taboo to collect cow dung before the livestock

were taken out grazing, and it still holds for some, today. The belief here is that contravening this observation might attract cattle deaths or some other related bad omen that might extend to members of the family. These as we saw in the early pages of the first chapter are values and beliefs that people develop to justify their meaningful existence in their environments as they perceive them. Those discussed here support keeping and ownership of large herds of cattle.

Livestock ownership still puts the head of household in a very central position and helps consolidate his authority. Even when a man has several wives and many sons, all have to get his authority for whatever they want to do with say, a cow, unless they have openly rebelled against him (for wives). If sons do rebel against their father, they will have no cattle or goats to pay for bride wealth when they marry. The oldest man in the family, usually the grandfather, gives advice against bad behaviour and household quarrels involving livestock, lest the animals die. His advice is taken seriously. He also doctors livestock illnesses, using wild plants (e.g. herbs) against minor cattle diseases. Whether this works effectively or not is not known but it is believed that with their knowledge of tree medicines the old men are

good at treating poor animal health. The old men also advise on the essence of bush burning during the dry periods, to kill ticks and other pests.

More problems involving livestock care which also greatly influence the role allocation patterns and consequent social relations come out more conspicuously in the dry seasons when people have to organize themselves into extended family or clan groups, in joint ventures to find ways of watering their animals. In this we also see how the physical environment, through droughts (which are more common among the ~~Mbeere~~ than among the *Embu* ) impinges on the social structure.

During the dry periods livestock-care patterns change as the nearby sources of water dry up. Such periods occur mainly between August and November of most years and can be more serious when there have been consecutive years of low rainfall. Very often such water shortages, also leading to pasture shortages coincide with food shortages.

At the very beginning of the dry seasons people walk along the seasonal streams looking for points at which they could dig up wells for water.

Such wells do not belong to one person. They often belong to a number of households whose members do the work collectively. Where such water-well points persist for long periods they could be owned by certain clans whose members commonly own and use them. The wells could also be owned by individuals, assisted by members of their families to dig up the water. The owner of such a well enjoys public respect as people have to come and ask him for water, for both livestock and household uses. They also talk highly of him if he is generous with the water. The same case applies to groups where the wells are group-owned. The owner-group select their representatives who stay at the well to guard the water not to be stolen. The water is guarded during the day but also at nights when people start stealing water at night.

It is, however, very necessary that such individuals or water-owner groups should be generous with the water because their wells may dry up earlier forcing them to go asking for water from others who may have found alternative and may be longer lasting sources. This problem of water shortage therefore reinforces the development of the values of reciprocity, generosity and collective group functions so that these are periods of amending the degenerated social relations otherwise some people would go starving

without water. It is in a similar context that Edgar Winans, examining the Turkana in their environmental circumstances, sees the factors of water distribution and availability and even the threat of raids, when it comes to defence, as crucial variables in the structure of households and the development of inter-household relations (Winans, E.V., 1965:174). When the normal sources of water dry up, therefore, the remaining nearby water sources appear as claimed though seasonal property, and basis for cooperation and social recognition for the particular individuals or groups, but ceases to be important as soon as the situation recovers and people forget the problem.

If the drought is prolonged and all such water sources dry up, people form into groups based mainly on kinship ties and go to near the Tana and Thiba river banks where they build temporary kraals for their livestock. The animals stay there till the end of the drought when they are brought back. In the old days when tribal wars were common, the strong warrior group of young men went to stay and look after the cattle. This had the disadvantage of reducing the able warriors left to defend those who remained. Those who went could not go with the women and had therefore to do the milking, usually a role for women among

the Mbeere. The women often went there taking food to the herdsmen and also to fetch water from the river, for domestic use. Such trips would take whole days as they meant walking to and from the river, a distance of about ten miles, which reduced the time women had for their activities. Even today people still take their cattle temporarily to such places but anybody (males) even the old men can go and take care of the cattle since there are no more tribal wars.

Keeping of large herds of cattle today, is becoming increasingly difficult due to the money economy where selling of livestock is required to pay for school fees. There is also an impending sense of individualization of land use rights as said earlier. The attitude to possess large numbers, however, still persists among many Mbeere people. This remains so even after one is forced to sell all his cattle by financial requirements (e.g. for fees) and after some people prohibit others' livestock grazing on their own pieces of land. But looking after the cattle will continue to be a problem to the parents as the children whose role it has always been to do so, have gone to school.

(E) Defence

It is through the defence system that we see how the Embu and Mbeere organized themselves against their enemies, and who played which roles in connection with the defence activities and other problems that arose as a result of the inter-tribal confrontations in question. We saw earlier that the physical environment allowed keeping of large animal stocks as the best alternative for the Mbeere, while the Embu were better at the production of food crops.

The fact that the Mbeere kept large numbers of livestock made them a centre of interest for frequent Masai and Chuka invasions. In addition, the Mbeere who often experienced food shortages, would at times, especially during the severe famine periods, be forced to go stealing foodstuffs from the Embu. When the Embu decided to invade the Mbeere, for revenge, they also came with intentions to steal some of the latter's cattle. Such circumstances and others, dealt with here, made skilful warfare a very important art among the Mbeere who had to defend their cattle against the cattle raiders and other enemies, who at times also included the Embu.

Thus the Embu and Mbeere from time to time, before the coming of whites, had warfare activities against one another, especially when the Embu wanted to take the Mbeere cattle by force. In most cases the Embu were defeated by the Mbeere who were very good at long-distance shooting, with bows and arrows, as compared to the Embu who mainly used clubs, swords, spears and shields which the Mbeere also had for fighting at close quarters but which they found to be inferior to the use of arrows. The common warfare between these two groups did not necessarily mean that they were enemies. In fact there were times when they formed alliances to fight the invading Chuka, Kikuyu, Kamba and Masai.

The Masai and Chuka are said to have come to steal the Mbeere cattle. The Kikuyu did not seem to have very good reasons for invading the Mbeere as they were not much interested in Mbeere cattle. It is said that they used to come for beautiful girls and also test themselves against the militarily strong Mbeere. The Akamba were not very much interested in taking cattle but mainly stole foodstuffs after which they destroyed the food stores such as the Miruru (millet stores). The Akamba from whom the Mbeere had borrowed the art of arrow making and shooting were extraordinarily better shooters than the Mbeere who usually ran away whenever the Kamba attacked.



Those elders who were usually sent to Uvariri, whether from Embu or Mberere, were respected elders with a clean social image, and along with the elders went the people's sacrifice agents (who were often among the councils of elders) who were ritually clean and could not contaminate the potency of the advice and medicine they got from Uvariri. The 'Njama ya Ita', too, was a famous class of senior warriors with a long warring experience.

Most of the old men and women I talked to saw the following as the major effects of the tribal wars:

- (1) Destruction and stealing of food crops, which led to famines, especially in Mberere when the previous seasons' harvests had not been good so that there was nothing already in store.
- (2) People very often, even those who were not fighting, e.g. women, found themselves having to spend much of their time in hiding places. This caused late planting which in turn caused food shortages among both the Embu and Mbeere, but more especially among the latter where rainfall was more erratic and

attacks for cattle stealing more common.

- (3) There was also overconsumption by the heavily eating but economically unproductive group of young men who spent most of their time in the bush training for defence.
- (4) Women who needed time for weeding spent much time preparing and sending food to feed the army.

Tribal warfare therefore increased the chances of inadequate food supplies, consequences of which have been seen earlier in relation to the occurrence of famines. They also caused the need to have some members of the societies in question spared specifically to play the role of defence which would otherwise have been unnecessary without the threats of such raids. This practice of warfare in Embu was suppressed by the Europeans who are known to have come here as early as 1898 and by 1907 had camped at the present Embu town.

It was for defence purposes that some of the various skills dealt with here were developed and, as will be clarified, the skills placed certain individuals very high in terms of social prestige. We are here talking not only of defence against

human but also animal danger. Defence against wild animals also contributed in a big way towards the people's skills in handling invasions by men. Wild animals, as indicated before, were very common in both Embu and Mbere. They ate mainly domestic animals and even human beings at times. For defence and detection against these two threats of human raids and predatory wild animals, people had developed a technique of building 'all-wooden' huts, built of thin pieces of stick and making a wooden wall six inches or so thick, such that many small holes were left and one could see through the wall. This structure facilitated long distance hearing and also some sighting without necessarily having to come out. Any noise was therefore detected before the enemies (animals inclusive) came too near or did too much damage before counteraction, while people were indoors.

Such construction types were thus adapted to the reality of the environments surrounded by danger of wild animal attack and tribal enemies. The type of buildings referred to, however, required a lot of tree cutting and carrying and were not easily built by one person. The wira was again very important in this case, and a group of about 20 men could build such a hut in one day.

Hunting of wild animals which was more common among the Mbeere as compared to the Embu, also played a vital role as it was through it that people learnt to be skilful long-distance arrow shooters. This was a very necessary art in warfare and the best hunter or shooter who was also brave and always shot dead an antelope or some other animal, was always respected by both his fellow hunters and other members of society who must have heard of him. He was nicknamed Mwathi (one who never misses the target). Many folk tales had the name of 'Mwathi' coming in quite often with his heroic deeds against animals and mysterious beings. A 'mwathi' in such stories would marry any beautiful girl of his choice and this was also true in concrete cases among the Mbeere.

Other men had grown famous for preparing effective arrow poisons that would kill instantly. Such men had very good knowledge of poisonous trees and what type of concoctions made strong arrow poisons for use by both hunters and warriors.

These people, who prepared arrow poisons, were mainly old men who received rewards in form of goats, chicken and other items they chose in payment for their products. They also knew what scale of measurement was suitable for what type

of animals and human beings (in case of wars). With their long experience and knowledge of trees and herbs, they knew which ones were harmful or not and how they could be used for curative medicines to treat injuries, snake-bites (snakes were and are still very common in Mbeere whose climate is warmer than that of Embu) and other illnesses, in place of modern medicine which was not available by then. Such skills had therefore been developed (most of them still being valuable even today) by the Mbeere to cope with their wild environment, and the Embu were the best clients for the Mbeere experts in this medical field.

Hunting was additionally important for the Mbeere who greatly valued their livestock numbers, as explained before, and ate meat from the wild animals they killed rather than slaughtering domestic ones. The necessity to hunt also made significant the role of a blacksmith, who made the arrow heads, used for both hunting and warfare, plus other war implements such as spear heads, swords, etc. As clearly summarized in the conclusion (pp. 207-216) all these fields of expertise that have already been discussed, and those to follow, should be seen as important aspects of social structure, facilitating the people's adaptation to their both physical and social environments among the Embu and Mbeere.

### Footnotes to Chapter Three

(For full citations see Bibliography)

1. S.R.D.P., 1969:6.

2. Ibid., p. 2.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RELIGION, BELIEFS AND VALUES

In the preceding chapter we have seen how people interacted and divided the various tasks among themselves, given certain physical and social environmental conditions, such as famines, pasture shortages, and cattle raids, to mention a few.

This chapter continues to look at such people's value systems and the extent of the environmental influences, whether physical or social, and how certain individuals again, gained influential social positions by dint of the roles they played as leading custodians of such values. Here it will also be seen that even the social environment, exemplified by the coming and activities of the Europeans, in this case, can play a decisive part in the erosion of a people's traditional values.

Some of the important values were manifest in the various ceremonies that were held or gone through by an individual from birth through maturity to old age. Such ceremonies reflected values that played a vital role in the prescription of normative behaviour and at the same time cementing social relations. Other values were conveyed by the various

religious beliefs and practices (which make up this chapter) that made up the traditional modes of worship.

These prevailed among both the Embu and Mbeere in the absence of the interferences of the colonial era, which brought with it the Christian religion. The effect of the Christian religion, however, was comparatively differential in its penetration of both Embu and Mbeere. This effect could easily be attributable to physical factors for, although such colonial interferences were man-caused, it was the climatically more suitable Embu region that attracted the settlement of whites, as opposed to Mbeere which had no attraction to them. As one recent study showed, it was due to lack of water, poor soil, hot climate and prevalence of mosquitoes that the colonial government never really bothered about Mbeere.

Thus the British officers are only known to have paid occasional visits to the area. Even the Anglican Missionaries who established themselves at Nyangwa near Kiritiri in the 1930s, never effectively penetrated the area, in the sense that their religion was never solely adhered to by their local following. Such followers, as will be seen later, were even more confused than before and what followed was a



dual system of worship - partly traditional and partly Western. The study observed, in this connection, that:

"....by and large Mbere very much remained outside both the colonial and the missionary orbits". (1)

This situation meant that the traditional government institutions persisted less interfered with in Mbere than in Embu. It is therefore, as argued below, easy to see why the traditional institutions were stronger in one area than the other, and how this relates to the environment. In the first place, there were no good prospects for any cash-crop farming in Mbere. This meant that the colonial government was reluctant to implement the development of infrastructure. They therefore had no rural access roads, since there was no promising economy to be tapped. Up until recently one would only find single but 'not all-weather' roads which the colonial administration used as they went either to collect taxes or to get a good view of the wildlife, as tourists.

In terms of accessibility, the Mbeere were therefore remote from the colonial government supervision and control. This in effect, delayed penetration into the Mbeere rural life and activities

as opposed to Embu where the colonial government had vested interests, in agricultural cash crops and forest development at Kianjokoma. The ultimate effect was a delayed and differential erosion of traditional values between the Embu and Mbeere. The status inversion, or simply the disregard of the leading traditional value custodians therefore, came earlier and faster among the Embu as compared to the Mbeere among whom such traditional authorities remained influentially active for a longer time.

The fact that the physical environment was harder for the Mbeere than the Embu, causing such problems as droughts, leading to famines, pasture shortages, etc., also meant that the Mbeere were more prone to turning more strongly to traditional religious authorities, as they sought solutions. But the differential access of the colonial administration, coupled with the missionary efforts to eradicate what they saw as 'primitive behaviour', meant that such people whom I have referred to in this paper as traditional religious experts, fell out of the public participation - in terms of the services they rendered and the social esteem they enjoyed - earlier and faster among the Embu.

The existence of such indigenous institutions in both areas, prior to the introduction of the

colonial government, however, also serves to show that there never existed anything like an administrative vacuum before then. This government which seemed to operate with such an assumption, did not seem to fully realize the essence of such functions as the Kaurugo, the oath; Kiviu, licking the panga; Ugo, traditional medicine; Muthega or Urogi, witchcraft and sorcery; and even the social credibility commanded by the various authorities involved in such practices. They were of the opinion that most of these functions were dirty and made every effort to discourage them.

A brief description of all these is given below, to show what the colonial administration and the missionaries, representing a change of social environment, found and tried to change. These, as they existed in both areas despite the physical environmental differences, also weaken the argument giving primacy to physical environment over other factors.

(A) 'Urogi' or 'Muthega' - Witchcraft and Sorcery

On the notion of the supernatural control, Turnbull introduces witchcraft as a substance, visible and touchable. And on the two concepts, of witchcraft and sorcery, he has argued that the possession of similar powers is common, but whereas

in witchcraft the powers depend upon the existence of the witchcraft substance in the body of the witch, and are controlled by that substance, the powers of the sorcerer come to him or her through the extension of will power and are therefore controllable by the individual. Thus a witch acts as such when forced to do so by the substance and is not directly responsible for his acts. A sorcerer on the other hand, acts as such when he wishes to, and is therefore directly answerable for his actions. His behaviour is arbitrary, for whatever purpose he chooses (Turnbull, C.M., 1965:55).

The Embu and Mbeere however, do not have two distinct words, as for Turnbull above, for witchcraft and sorcery, but draw the difference between destructive and constructive practices of the art. There are some particular individuals, the arosi, or witchdoctors, whose actions are considered very anti-social as they bewitch and cause deaths of others, for sheer malice. They are unlike Turnbull's type, held completely responsible for their actions and are not excused, hence there were punitive and socially approved measures designed to correct or even eliminate them, which were also deterrent to those contemplating to take to the practice in future. There are other individuals who are equally feared but without a definite name - they could be

called benevolent witchdoctors. But these are not considered anti-social although they have a similar knowledge of witchcraft.

The benevolent witches or witchdoctors are, instead of being apprehended, used as people's consultants when one has been bewitched, for counteractive treatment. They have knowledge and powers to neutralize witchcraft. This knowledge in effect, however, means that they can also be used to bewitch somebody on request. If you stole another man's cow or some other property, for example, the owner could go to such a person and ask him to bewitch you, for revenge. This was very useful as it kept people fearful and disciplined, without too much of stealing as one never knew what action the owner of the stolen property would decide to take. It is, however, less feared today.

Both these types of witchdoctors were also believed to have other types of magic powers and could, for example, turn upside down, a half-calabashful of Marwa (local brew from fermented millet) without pouring and put it back, and could similarly turn human beings temporarily into animals or strings into snakes and make them bite people. The Mbeere up until today, explain many snake-bites in this way.

Before they began to exercise the powers of witchcraft and magic, their possessors tested them against a fig tree called Mumbu, a tree usually associated with evil spirits. The witches to be, bewitched the tree in the same way as they would bewitch human beings. If the tree dried up, they knew they would be successful in the practice and vice versa if it did not dry up. After it dried up the witches knew they would be able to do malicious damage and the benevolent ones in turn would continue to help members of society by bewitching, on request, the destructive individuals. Those with other magical powers in turn also knew they could successfully perform magical wonders and threats just to display their powers and how dangerous they could be in case of need.

In the absence of modern courts of law there were also other alternative institutions for settling social conflicts and reducing other social problems like thefts, divorces, etc. and many of these institutions were believed to have supernatural effects. Two examples of these are Kaurugo, the oath, and Kiviu, licking the panga. These were the same for both Embu and Mbeere.

(B) 'Kaurugo' - The Oath

The major circumstances warranting the use of oath were such ones as:

- (a) possession of witchcraft so that one should not bewitch again.
- (b) theft - not to steal again.
- (c) divorce - for both sides of divorce partners and relatives not to harm one another in any way.
- (d) other serious cases of conflict between two people or groups.

The function of oath involved a goat being produced by the culprit or suspect, which would be slaughtered. Its blood would be mixed with soil - to claim back the dead body of the culprit if he lied - as soil was believed to be the mother of people, who go back to it after death to meet their ancestors (within the earth/soil). The mixture of the goat's blood and soil was then seasoned with other dirty substances of respected elders plus herbal concoctions made by famous traditional herbalists, etc. It was therefore made to look as intimidating as possible. At the time it was being

taken, various chants and superfluously horrible historical episodes were cited including their weird consequences. In the end, and just before swallowing, the oath by the culprit, the whole affair sounded so fatal that few had courage to face it if they were not sure that they said and stood for the truth.

The function was led by a council of elders greatly respected for their wisdom in traditional affairs, oratory in public speeches and some of them with some spiritual powers, especially those who led the solemn incarnations uttered to call upon the evil spirits to destroy whoever committed a similar offence after the ceremony. If one went against the oath, very unfortunate circumstances would fall upon him. This danger ranged from the death of the person himself or members of his family, deadly snake bites, a painful life of problems and failures on the part of the offender. There was no way of escaping these wraths once somebody took the oath wrongly unless one went immediately to other persons who had powers of neutralizing the effect of the oath.

Oathing has now been abolished, although many Mbeere people are known to be taking it behind the scene. The Embu had given it up by the time of



independence in 1963 while the Mbeere kept it strongly alive till 1970s when it was formally abolished by the government, although this was the time they needed it most and were very much prepared to use it for solving land disputes, once Mbere was declared a land adjudication area in 1970. The Mbeere considered the oath and still consider it more effective than other methods of serious hatred or dispute settlement such as formal land settlement committees, for example, which they can cheat more easily and less fearfully than they can do with the oath.

(C) 'Kiviu' - The Licking of the Panga

For this function a special panga is usually kept by one of the elders - a veteran keeper of traditional values who is also expected to be able to invoke the intervention of supernatural powers at the time of the event.

The event of licking the panga is considered relatively less important or junior to that of the oath taking, as the former solves lesser offences especially those common among women such as:

- (1) Stealing honey from an old man's honey-pot.
- (2) Stealing other smaller things including chicken and also money.
- (3) Character defamation and false suspicion against opponents, etc.

At the material time of the event the two dispute partisans meet in front of the elder-keeper of the panga who also hears the dispute discussed by the two partisans in the presence of the interested members of the public (mainly residents of the same village). After this the elder in charge burns the panga red-hot after which he equips it with solemn incarnations, as it continues to burn, calling upon the evil spirits to burn the tongue of the lying dispute partisan. When he is ready, the two are required to lick the panga, each in turn as it is fresh from the fire. While licking the panga each person says "may this panga burn me if what I have said is not true". It is believed that after one or two days the tongue of the one who told lies and is therefore guilty, is seriously scorched and she can only drink and not eat. The innocent one gets scorched very slightly and is said to be able to eat the following day. This then proves that the one who was highly scorched was at fault and is forced to pay for the imputed damages.

This licking of the panga was therefore commonly used for solving and preventing minor crimes among women. It is still very common among both the Embu and Mbeere, although its use is increasingly being considered outdated especially by the women who want to get away with such minor crimes. This attitude is greater among the Embu women who told me "we hear that the Mbeere women lick the panga for nothing" meaning they do so for very minor disputes.

Such changes of attitude toward the function of kiviu mean that some women refuse to have it on grounds that they are already advanced past that stage and instead demand to be taken to the court of law where they know they can win due to lack of circumstantial evidence, especially against the old women who trust the kiviu more than the court of law.

The oath function also seems to suffer the same fate. The old men know that it is easier to win at the court of law rather than through the oath which was and is still believed to always trap the guilty person, in one way or another, unless he gets it neutralized in time, as explained earlier.

The weakening of all these three items: 'Urogi' or 'Muthega', 'Kaurugo', and 'Kiviu' as

social control mechanisms, whose adjudicators represented important roles and figures in social structure, are seen very much as a consequence of the colonial intervention which brought about the modern law courts and discouraged if not abolished the indigenous practices.

(D) Further Specialization

The foregoing discussions have shown that there were many social and natural problems encountered by both the Embu and Mbeere. There were, for example, the invaders such as the Masai, Kikuyu, Kamba and Chuka, who attacked the Embu and Mbeere for various reasons. There was also the problem of witchcraft especially among the Mbeere, for which they were and are still to some extent feared by the Embu. Even among themselves the Mbeere bewitched one another, especially brothers whose father was a rich cattle owner so that the one who managed to survive could inherit his father's cattle. There were food shortages, also more serious among the Mbeere due to low rainfall, and at times occurrence of serious droughts.

And for illnesses there was no modern medicine. All these problems raised a great sense of insecurity and need for protection, further giving rise to

specialization in various remedial fields. The major specialists, in this connection were such people as medicinemen, benevolent witchdoctors, rainmakers and diviners.

(i) Medicineman: In the case of a serious illness it was usually thought that such an illness was not for nothing and could not cure itself without the help of a medicineman, who would be consulted immediately for treatment. People had a very great trust in his ability to cure illnesses and even if a person died after having been taken to and treated by a medicineman, the medicineman was not held to blame.

The medicineman also ensured the safety of babies. It was necessary after a baby was born that the local midwife had to have very good and clean conduct. If she engaged, at these early stages of childbirth, in unclean activities such as adultery, the baby would fall sick and if it died the midwife would be blamed by both the mother and public. This also served as a way of keeping women faithful to their husbands when the were away from their homesteads, lat as the midwives had to pay frequent visits to the baby mothers and stay with them for the first day or so in case any problems arose.

To save a baby from dying, if the midwife committed the offence above or others of similar nature of seriousness, a medicineman was called upon to come and conduct the treatment. He would be paid as he wished or get a gift of his choice. After the treatment the medicineman often left the baby with some type of amulets, with protective powers, worn around the neck. These were symbols of security for the infant.

After a few days of birth all babies were to be taken to a medicineman who specialized in a baby-protective treatment called Rwambiro, which also left the baby with more magic potions to immunize it against illnesses. Thus while for the Mbuti foresters, dealt with in the literature review, the presence of such amulets symbolized their confidence in and strength of the forest, for the Mbeere, and Embu in some cases, they symbolized fear of the environment and attempts to bring it under control. These values in traditional medical treatment were developed to give people the courage in handling the problems of illness and others, in the absence of modern medicine and limited encounter with modern religious values. The values, however, have been getting less and less adhered to with the increasing government involvement in both colonial and post-colonial eras.

If a bad happening e.g. a death in the family occurred, it was often suspected that somebody among the members of a homestead had committed some crime or other unknown offence and the homestead head called a medicineman to come and bless the family and perform the ritual purification called Gutavikua.

The ceremony of Gutavikua was meant to clear both the homestead head and those under him of more wraths that might fall upon them in future and also treat them for those that might have already affected them. Medicinemen also treated various other illnesses and misfortunes for which they received payments, mainly in kind, with an increasing tendency to take money today.

As indicated earlier there are, today, fewer medicinemen in Embu (mainly because the Europeans and their Christian religion interfered earlier and were more involved and biased for Embu region) than in Mbere where the practice seems to be stronger and more successful. One medicineman in Mavuria told me that he gets at least two clients per every three or so days and can make as much as K.shs. 1,000.00 in a day especially when his cured clients come to report their recovery or progress after a few days of treatment. He usually takes a small sum of money

at the time of treatment and tells them to go home and come back to pay him when they recover and adds: "if you fail to come back I know how to get you!".

This warning type of advice makes his clients fear him and they always come back with handsome payments after recovery. Many of his clients are from distant areas such as Kikuyuland and Akamba mainly from Kitui district, as he told me. He is a highly respected man, locally and commands the respect of the local chief and administrators and wealthy businessmen, despite the fact that he is illiterate.

(ii) Diviner: These are people who were expected to have the ability to tell what was likely to happen in the near future as they foresaw the signs of what would happen. They could, for example, tell that soon either the Mbeere or Embu were going to be invaded by Chuka or Kikuyu or when a rainfall shortage was going to occur in both Embu and Mbere and cause famine. They were also said to have ideas on impending locust invasions. In case of problems like too frequent invasions by other tribes, serious rainfall shortages or too many deaths when the people went to war, the diviners explained the possible offences people might have



made against nature and how these could be solved—mainly through sacrifice.

When people were warned of, say, famines, they knew it was time to preserve heavy stocks of food to avoid starving when the famines came. Some of these food stores were mainly the ones the Mbeere fought to defend against the strong arrow-shooting, Kitui Akamba.

Kianjokoma people still remember one very famous diviner, people's counsellor and medicineman called Gacogo. Although he lived outside the area he was the major personality consulted by everybody for advice. He tackled all matters ranging from sacrifice to the gods and treatment of sacred groves for defence against natural catastrophes and human danger. To see Gacogo, one had to be taken there by the ruling Kiama, council of elders and he had to go naked so that he did not go with anything that might pollute Gacogo's powers. Going naked symbolized innocence and possession of nothing (as you went with nothing for something from Gacogo).

For consultations regarding security of people and prescriptions to offset the already committed offences, a man having been to Gacogo's would make

a lot of beer and call other people, to whom he would tell the preaching of Gacogo who was known to care equally for the good of everybody. In Mavuria there was one such famous diviner and medicineman from around an ant-hill called Kangoyo near Ngiori who was executed by 'Kiama kia Ngome' (see p.177-8) for treason as he conspired with the Ukavi, the Masai, to invade and kill Mbeere, after which his home and family disappeared mysteriously.

(iii) Rainmaker: After the diviner had explained the foreseeable problems explained above, the rainmaker tried his best to correct the situation. He would be visited by representatives of the strong elders' council or clan leaders who sought advice on how to avert such dangers, to whom he outlined the steps to be taken. He often performed his treatment for the correction of the situation in question, at home, and advised people to go to the sacred groves, led by a famous medicineman, and offer sacrifice to the gods they had offended. Such sacred grounds were called Ithama where the gods were or are thought to live. The Ithama had tall trees and thick undisturbed vegetation because nobody was expected to cut trees there, lest more problems came again.

Quite often the diviners in their diagnoses of the problems said that such sacred areas had been

disturbed, causing offences to the gods, consequent upon which the gods refused with their water and even allowed the people to be frequently invaded and defeated by enemies. Here one can clearly see how the people, especially of Mbere, where droughts were more common, explained such droughts and how this made such authorities as the diviner and rainmaker important figures in the people's religious activities. The fact that water shortages are physical environmental problems and that such indigenous figures as the diviner, rainmaker, etc. become well placed social participants due to the roles they play in the attempt to solve such problems, gives us a clear relationship of social structure and environment.

The rainmakers too would say that there were some ill-omened women who caused rainfall shortages if they planted first. They often gave prescriptions as to who should be allowed or given the chance to plant before others (a woman who had gone beyond the child-bearing age, expected to have no sexual offences) so that the rains would come properly and the season would be good. Such women were considered superior to others and were expected to have very high moral virtues.

Before planting, in Mbere, some people are still interested seriously in checking whether such women have planted before they start doing so. These women usually begin planting so early that it would be rare to find anybody having planted before them. One such woman in Mavuria told me that she always plants early and: "I do not intend to be blamed by the public for failing to plant in time". She seems to have a good estimate of the rainfall pattern, especially as to when it begins and how long the seeds can stay in the soil without going bad before the rains.

This practice is no longer strictly adhered to but the women in question have continued to play their roles and act as if there were no changes. Those of their age too still believe in the essence of the role these women play.

(iv) Benevolent Witchdoctor: These people, the good-natured witchdoctors, are believed to have the same knowledge and similar powers to those of the malevolent witchdoctors, only that the former are less malicious. They are usually not biased against anybody and are there to help all those in need of their services.

Such people used to be very important when tribal warfare was common, as they exercised their powers to defend people against the Masai, Kikuyu, Akamba and Chuka. In such cases they would be consulted by Njama ya Ita (leaders and advisers of warfare) on how to defeat the enemy, for which they offered protective treatment and magic. After this a leading warrior would be told how to use his weapons (once they had been equipped with magic potency) when the enemy came.

An example of this was when, during one of such battles as the Kikuyu had invaded the Mbeere, a leading warrior had been advised to throw a 'magically treated club' as far away as possible over the heads of the enemy warriors. All those covered by the club were killed with forlorn resistance and the rest, having never seen such a defeat, withdrew and ran away. This is very much remembered, by both Embu and Mbeere, as the tragedy of 'Gikuyu kia Mborokuro' in which the Kikuyu suffered a great defeat by the Mbeere in the period just before the Europeans came to Embu.

Most of the experts in this type of protective field were a group of people called Uvariri in Mbeere, living around the slopes of Kiang'ombe Hill in Embu East. They existed and still exist to serve

both the Embu and Mbeere. At the time of the tribal raids even the Kikuyu, Masai and Kamba could have consulted them, if they knew where they lived, except that they would have had to give extraordinarily great payments to convince the Uvariri people, who were akin to both Mbeere and Embu, to act against those they had the obligation to defend. The 'Uvariri' were the people, who at the time of the original population of most of Embu and Mbeere, dealt with at the beginning of chapter three, were left and stayed where they still live, to become the greatest keepers and protectors of traditional knowledge and beliefs.

The 'Uvariri' people are less commonly visited today, but some people still secretly go there for consultation on matters regarding inter-clan cooperation, land ownership and other aspects of traditional wisdom, including politics. If, today, any member of Embu or Mbeere community goes there, he is regarded with great suspicion by members of the public.

The influence of all the above discussed types of specialists, on the whole, has increasingly been weakened by modern values. But in the dry seasons of the 1960s, however, some group from Mavuria is known to have gone to Uvariri for consultation on

rainfall shortage and some are still going there, though secretly, for reasons related to the ones mentioned above.

Ranking of these individual specialists according to who was or is more popular than others, however, was not possible mainly for two reasons. In the first place most people argued, and this was obviously quite reasonable, that most of the specialists were equally important since none of them played the roles of the others. Secondly none of them had their services always engaged since the problems they tackled occurred at certain and different times, although the individual experts also remained important public figures at other times.

It was, however, clear that most of these indigenous experts were more active among the Mbeere rather than among the Embu, depending on the frequency of occurrence of the various problems of both natural/physical or social environmental origins. This is the more so when one finds that many of these specialists e.g. medicinemen, command a higher social credibility among the people of Mavuria in Mbere, than among those of Kianjokoma in Embu, where modern religions have a greater level of penetration.

Although the presence of more religious sects in one area than another does not necessarily imply a greater degree of religiosity, it was found that for the few people in Mavuria who have seriously taken to the modern religions, there were only two major churches, namely the Catholic and Anglican, usually located at distances of not less than three or so miles from the nearest church, with occasional followers of Seventh Day and Pentecostal Churches.

But in Kianjokoma, on the other hand, one found at the time of my research, nine religious sects, namely: the Catholic, Anglican, Seventh Day, Independent, Jeshu la Wakofu, Pentecostal, Gospel, Salvation Army, and Holy Spirit Churches. Surprisingly enough, all these churches were located at distances of less than a mile each, from the nearest one, and they were heavily thronged by congregations. And this, from what I gathered from my informants and my own observations, led me to conclude that around Kianjokoma there was less need to believe in the potency and frequent consultation of the traditional religious authorities.

The presence therefore, of so many modern religious sects within close proximity of one another in this area, reduces the popularity of traditional



religious personalities. This is more likely to be the case, given the argument that - although both modern and traditional religions ideally serve a similar purpose of giving people courage and patience against the evils of life - the modern religions draw people away from the indigenous belief systems, which are said to indicate 'backwardness' or at least so regarded.

This differential growth of modern religious activity in the two areas, Kianjokoma and Mavuria, as shown earlier, can be traced back to the colonial administrative and missionary involvement. In the post-colonial era, therefore, the trend of this modern religious growth can still be seen as a legacy of the colonial influence. This being the case, it can be argued that the higher level of traditional religious involvement among the Mbeere, among whom the medicineman, the rainmaker, the diviner, etc., still retain their social prestige by virtue of the roles they play (thus filling important positions in social structure), represents an indirect influence of the physical environment - through colonial influence (social environment) - on social structure.

#### Footnote

1. Mbere Special Rural Development Programme - Eastern Province Planning Team, December 1969, p. 7.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SOCIALIZATION

This is a major value transmission process. Socialization for the purpose of this study will be defined as a type of socio-psychological process helping to mould personality (through internalization of values) from youth to maturity, in the image of the socially prescribed roles and behaviour that is adaptive to a particular society and response to its environment. This process could take the form of informal education or training and other traditional social institutions. The contents of folk-lore, folk-tales and various social control mechanisms and the values they convey, represent important aspects of socialization. Examination of these therefore, for a given or given societies, often reflect the importance attached to given practices and roles, the essence of which according to the theme of this study is expected to be related to environmental requirements.

Socialization is thus a major process of societal value-building systems. In this connection it was/is to ensure the observation of such values by members of society, as they grew up, that the various methods of socialization dealt with here were and some of them still are important, with regard

to the given environments.

The major contribution of this chapter, among others, is to give a contrast in the findings as it shows that, despite the very clear ecological differences between the two physical areas of study, no profound differences were found in the non-material cultural activities.

To show this, it was found necessary to give, as examples, and briefly outline a few cultural institutions which are common among both the Embu and Mbeere. Such institutions, as major value transmission channels, also show how the nature of the environment influences social activities. In this case, and since the physical environment appears to have made no pronounced differences, we are talking of the social environment in the absence of the modern economic, educational and administrative systems.

For the purpose of showing how some of the values in question are transmitted, among the Embu and Mbeere, seven socio-cultural institutions, all coming under ceremonial activity, were identified. These at the same time also pinpoint various aspects of social structure as they bring out the roles played by the various members of society and

the importance of such role-assignments in social organization where such organization was necessary in the absence of the modern ways of life (social environment).

In addition to the ceremonies, other values were examined through folk-tales and proverbs as will be seen below.

(A) Ceremonies .

The various ceremonies that people went through at different stages from birth to maturity represented, for both Embu and Mbeere, very important stages of social mobility - herein regarded as the movement of people from one social status to another with regard to what is considered as good criteria for the attainment of certain statuses in a particular society. If the physical environments exerted significant influences on the patterns followed in these ceremonies and the expectations emphasized as the end results of the functions, then the similarities found were unexpected.

The classification of people into various social status groups worked mainly through ascription rather than achievement, for both groups. It is only after the introduction of colonial rule, as

indicated earlier, that things began to differ, with the Embu losing the traditionalism conveyed by these ceremonies earlier than the Mbeere. This means the prestige accorded the leaders of various ceremonies lost meaning first, among the Embu as an influence of the colonial environment. This, in our interest, serves to show that it was not the physical environment but rather the socio-historical background that was more influential, since most of these ceremonies had carried similar weights in both ecological settings before the coming of Europeans, who came with the more achievement-oriented rather than ascription-oriented social mobility criteria.

✓ The movement from one social group and status to another, before the colonial era, was marked by various rites of passage which were covered ceremoniously. The use of ceremonies was therefore very important in introducing and welcoming the change of role from another, for all members of the population in both cases (Embu and Mbeere), in order to accordingly change the expectations on the part of the actor. It is important to note that, in addition to their general purpose and meaning, all these ceremonies had their leaders as experts who were traditionally respected for the special roles they played. But their influential positions declined in the wake of the colonial era, affecting the Embu

more than the Mbeere, the latter among whom the colonial involvement was less active.

Since we cannot have a social structure without having various roles, such as those being played by the various leaders of the ceremonial functions dealt with here, being undertaken, and also have values to cement these role relations, all these ceremonies were seen to have played a very important part as channels of communication and reinforcement of the particular values. The understanding of the contents and actual procedures of such functions was therefore quite contributive to the understanding of the social structural relations among the Embu and Mbeere.

Thus when talking of such a ceremony as circumcision or any of the others as dealt with here, one is inevitably dealing with social structure. This is because while dealing with such ceremonial functions, and as Merton has similarly argued:

"...the description of the participants (and onlookers) should be viewed in structural terms, that is in terms of locating these people in their connected social statuses".

(Merton, 1968:56)

The seven ceremonized social institutions as they followed one another in practice, and what they meant, were as follows:

(i) 'Guciarwa' - Childbirth

It was a very important occasion when an additional member had been born into society. As soon as the baby was born and proper care taken by the experienced local midwife, the latter announced whether it was baby boy or girl. For a boy the village women who had gathered around to come and see what was born, made seven streams of vocal ululations, and for a girl, they made five of such ululations. This symbolized the superior position of men over women.

Before the end of the first three days a banana would be borrowed or taken without borrowing, from a neighbour's banana tree and given to the baby to eat (although it would not at this stage be actually able to eat). Borrowing or taking a banana from a neighbour's farm symbolized reciprocity and good neighbour relations which was thought necessary so that when the child grew up she/he would not forget others, in case of borrowing. But taking without the owner's permission symbolized expectations that there could be famines and the

child, like anybody else, could pick and eat a neighbour's fruit without being considered a thief.

For the whole week women were busy happily entertaining and helping the baby's mother, as they discussed child-bearing experiences among themselves, drunk the gruel and enjoyed the gifts brought by the friends and relatives of the mother.

Socially, this women-gathering encouraged cordial relations and group morale among village women, which was needed for women group activities such as millet thrashing. Socially, and following the introduction of modern maternity hospital services, which started with the colonial era, the traditional midwife has lost her significant role and the consequent prestige she enjoyed among the women. This is only one of the many cases showing how the change of environment (social) from traditional through colonial to modern times, has contributed to the displacement of traditional experts who formerly held important social positions, in the traditional definition. And to be more specific here, it also indicates that the change was not due to the physical but socio-historical factors.



(ii) 'Kuuma nyomba' or 'Kuumagarua' - Coming  
Out of the House

This took place any time after the first three days or so. If it were a boy, two gourds full of gruel and two half-calabashes full of cooked green vegetables were brought for him. This signified the fact that a man should be a great eater without fear of eating - if he could clear two gourds of gruel and two half calabashes of green vegetables, both of which were popular foods. Of course it was not the baby who ate all this, as some three young boys were invited to do it on his behalf, and the following was what happened.

- (1) The three boys had to provide arrows and string a bow for the baby boy - because the grown up boy would need a bow and arrows in later life for fighting.
- (2) The three boys competed in eating the food and drunk the gruel very gluttonously - to teach the baby boy (all this was symbolic behaviour) that when it grew up the world would be rough for a man - in warfare, eating (no eating by yourself but commonly from one container with other men), etc.

(3) The babyboy would be taken to the gate together with his bow and arrows. This is what was called 'kuumagarua' being taken out, indicating that the boy had later to spend most of his life time outdoors, if he became a hunter, and also when fighting. He was then taken back by mother who carried the bows and arrows for him and kept them for him.

(4) Finally the parents of the boy produced a goat which was eaten by the people. This signified the fact that the boy would be welcome in later life to eat the goats during ceremonial activities and dispute settlements (as fines were paid in terms of goats if one offended the public or a member of the public).

For a girl it was the same except that the food and gruel were eaten and drunk calmly as the women were not supposed to be greedy in any way. Two girls had been called upon who ate and drunk. When the baby girl was taken out to the gate, it was to go back with a small bundle of firewood, instead of bow and arrows as for the boy, which was collected for her by the two girls. This was a preliminary orientation toward feminine roles of

which collecting firewood was quite important.

The whole of this ceremony is mainly a symbolic preparation for a rough environment, on the part of the male participants. Provision of bows and arrows symbolically represents the importance of the roles of warrior and hunter. It was argued earlier in this paper, that the Mbeere needed to have more skilled hunters or shooters and warriors for defence against the predatory animal invasion and frequent Masai raids on their cattle (which the drier physical conditions encouraged the Mbeere to raise as opposed to the Embu whose better physical environment made them better food-crop agriculturalists). If it were only the physical environmental factors (which differ for the two peoples) influencing the roles e.g. that of a hunter and the supportive values emphasized in this function, then we should not be having their counterparts (similar roles and values emphasized by a similar ceremony) among the Embu, where the physical environment was/is less adverse.

But we found in chapter three that the enemies of Mbeere where stock-theft raids were common, had quite often to fight the Embu before they made their way to Mberc. Therefore, the Embu too, needed to

build a strong defence structure where the role of the outstanding warrior led to his esteemed social position. The importance of this warrior-role here could be seen as an influence of the social, rather than the physical environment. Arrows we found, were not common among the Embu but among the Mbeere hunters and warrior arrow-shooters who had borrowed the art from the neighbouring Akamba. The importance of the role of a hunter and use of arrows among the Embu, as implied in this ceremony, could therefore very easily have been borrowed from the Mbeere who often used the bows and arrows against the former, when the two clashed. This is quite likely as a form of cultural diffusion of values and recognition of the superior use of bows and arrows over other war implements, through such conflicting encounters as were common among the Embu, Mbeere and the Akamba.

(iii) 'Gutonywa Matu' - Ear Piercing

By this time the boy was grown up, almost ready for circumcision. This ceremony precedes that of circumcision to indicate that the boy is ready for circumcision. For the piercing of the ears there is a special ritual elder who organizes it and performs the operation. A small hole is made through both earlobes after which smoothly carved

pieces of stick are put through the holes and are changed with bigger ones till the earlobes recover, and the holes are big enough to accommodate various types of earlobe decorations.

While this ceremony is on, a big fire is lit in the compound and is never allowed to go off. It must burn for the four days of the ceremony, even after the ceremonial goat has been eaten. Goats are not allowed to come near the big fire as they may lick the ashes. If they do, they violate the mambura (the ceremony) and the only measure of correction is to immediately slaughter and eat such a goat.

If the candidate boy has been rude to his seniors (circumcised boys and other elder men) he gets a big and blunt piece of stick for his ears at the first time, which gives him a lot of pain. This served to warn the younger boys not to be rude to their seniors. After this ceremony the young man awaits circumcision and is completely out of his mother's care. A hut could be built for him and he began sitting outside, with his father and other men where he learnt things about men and how they would behave as grown-ups. This is also the time for learning wise sayings, proverbs and other ways of expressing oneself and public

behaviour. The ceremony was the same for girls although less celebrated. The girls continued to learn from their mothers and other women till they got married.

In both cases among the Embu and Mbeere this ceremony had its leaders, the most important two being the one who physically performed the operation, and the ritual elder representing religious side of the function. The two played a very essential role of opening the gates for the initiates, into the circumcision age group where the circumciser takes the authority. One cannot therefore fully appreciate the importance attached to the role of the circumciser in isolation from the roles of both the technical ear-lobe operator and the religious leader of the function.

Since this type of ceremony was also, like the preceding one of 'kuumagarua', commonly found among both Embu and Mbeere, and without any differences either in the procedures followed or in the prestigious image of the particular experts involved, the impact of the physical environment was taken to be absent, giving priority to the common cultural background.

(iv) 'Irua' - Circumcision

It was not easy for a young man to get consent, from his father, to be circumcised. He had to badger his father every now and then, doing great deeds like throwing heavy clubs over tall trees, breaking strong pieces of stick and doing all sorts of feats, to prove that he deserved a change of status. Very often he had to ask his grandfather to be his spokesman. For girls this permit was not as difficult to obtain, as they had to be circumcised before they experienced their first menstrual process - if this occurred before circumcision it was considered to be a very serious mugiro (taboo) and no young and unmarried man could marry that girl. She had to marry an old man who would often be having another wife or wives.

Once the father's permit was obtained, for the boy, he was given a coro (a long sounding horn made from wood or animal horn) which he moved round blowing to announce the occasion on the eve of the circumcision day. During this period, before the morning of the material day all the newly circumcised boys came and spent the whole night moving about in the company of the initiate to-be, handling him very roughly, pinching him and doing

him all sorts of mistreatment to show him that the adulthood status he was about to acquire would be rough. All this time the candidate was naked and exposed to all, as he was symbolically going to be rid of the youthful behaviour. They had a goat which they finally slaughtered and ate with the circumciser who was with them all throughout the night. Very early in the morning the boy got circumcised, when his male organ was already benumbed due to cold, to avoid too much pain.

At the time of the operation the boy had to pretend that it was not painful, to prove manly. If he had been rude before, pepper was put on the cut, by the newly circumcised boys around, and he still was not expected to cry. If he did, it was really shameful, consequent upon which he would find it difficult to get a wife in future, as girls said, "who would marry that coward anyway!". Crying was just as bad for girls.

Those men or women who wanted to learn how to be future circumcisers, to take over when the old ones retired, trained on the job, as they watched the expert circumciser do the operation. Very often the apprentices were the experts' sons, daughters or relatives. They usually got assignments to do the operations when there were too many



candidates, but this was after they were expected to have learnt enough and would be supervised on their inaugural operations.

After the operation the initiate was left to one man, Mutirani (the supervisor) who cared for him throughout the time of convalescence. In this period he was also taught, by the supervisor, all the bad and good things of life. It was a very intensive teaching as preparation for responsible adulthood. This was the end of all the childish behaviour of the uncircumcised.

The supervisor taught him how to know and respect girls, which was not allowed before circumcision. He also clarified to him the essence of abiding by the demands of his societal values so as not to ashame both the supervisor and the boy's parents. The relationship that developed between the initiate, his supervisor and both sides of the families who might have been completely unrelated, by kinship or otherwise, put them all together very much like people of one descent for the rest of their lives.

The circumcision ceremony was therefore a very important social function. Throughout the day and night preceding the operation there was a

lot of tireless cooking of food and preparation and drinking of the local beer called Marwa (prepared from fermented millet). The cooking was done by women and drinking by everybody. There was freedom to sing and talk obscene language which was not usually allowed under normal circumstances. All this drinking and freedom of expression with everybody welcome, as good will was needed from all for the safety of the initiate, also served to reinforce social solidarity. People had the chance to resolve their differences, and the built-up tensions in social relations were let out throughout this period of such ceremonies which took place mainly in the dry season when there was no much farm work. Circumcision therefore served to boost the collective morale and to educate the individual initiates to fit in society in a manner that is by far unmet by today's circumcision in hospitals which does not incorporate into it the indigenous values and teaching.

When the Europeans came they abolished the circumcision of females and demanded the circumcision of boys in hospitals, as seen above. This to begin with was not acceptable to the indigenous population. Those who had it in hospitals were, until very recently, regarded as uncircumcised and regarded as social outcasts. Those who accepted Christianity,

which forbid girls' circumcision, circumcised their daughters at night without the knowledge of the church, not decided whether to abandon tradition completely or follow Christianity. The Embu took to Christian religion earlier and faster than the Mbeere, stopped circumcising their girls and began taking boys to hospital. Later they put on the eyes of the Europeans and began to view the Mbeere as primitive, a mentality that has hitherto not faded out completely.

The Mbeere are still having girls circumcised (for all those who have not seriously taken to Christian religion, especially the generation now beyond 40 years old), and boys circumcised not in hospitals but at home. The ceremonies, however, lack their old traditional value and fervour and one can imagine them completely dying out soon before the end of this century, due in part, to the formal control being exerted. To hold or conduct such ceremonies, including the preparation of beer to be drunk by the attendants, one has to have permit from the Chief.

In this ceremony of circumcision what comes out clearly is the fact that the event is a preparatory stage for adult life, roles and expectations. The roles of the 'muruthia' as the circumciser, in

the adult-making, and that of the 'mutirani' (singular) or 'atirani' (plural), as the supervisors who cared for the initiates during convalescence and taught them adult responsibility so as to fit into their own societies, appear as very crucial social functions.

Physical environmental factors again, have no direct influence here, and what brings about the differences are socio-historical factors, seen through colonial intervention which influenced the Embu more than the Mbeere, as the Europeans evaded Mbeere which they 'found' physically hostile for them.

The ultimate effect was that with the abolition of the circumcision of girls, the female circumcisers lost their status and the male circumcisers too lost theirs later, when circumcision was abolished in the villages where the services of the traditional experts are engaged. All this affected the Embu first although it gradually came to Mbeere. This is how the socio-historical factors differently influenced the loss of status of traditional circumcisers between the Embu and Mbeere. The physical environmental aspects though, seem to have contributed to this, in the sense that the Europeans were biased against what they saw as 'hostile'

climate in Mbere, which they avoided. As a result they did more in the erosion of traditional values among the Embu as compared to the Mbeere.

(v) 'Kwenjwa' - Shaving

The initiate by this time has never shaved since circumcision. The ceremony of shaving is led by a female elder who also does the cutting of the hair in front of the other old men and women. A goat is slaughtered for the occasion and after this the parents of the young man with all their children are asked to sit on the traditional bed (of the parent-couple) with the eldest son who is now undergoing the ceremony, nearest to them. The meat is then brought to them by the leading elder woman in a half-calabash.

The woman bringing the meat pretends, on her way to the mother's sleeping hut where the family is, to be a fool and not to know the way as she takes the meat to all places like the cattle boma, granary, millet store cover, etc. All this time attempts to correct her are being made by the other elders until finally she gets the right way and takes the meat to the family in the hut. The rest of the meat is eaten outside by the people, while the meat in the half-calabash must be eaten inside.

Having the old hair that was there even before circumcision is what symbolically makes the elder woman (acting on behalf of the initiate) miss the way as it chains her. Once the meat is eaten this chain is removed by shaving all the hair with a very sharp knife. Once he has been shaved, the candidate is then a free man as indicated by the now shining (free or hairless) head. Even the mother is shaved as an indication that she has then become an important woman. While she was being shaved a cow's skin or more recently a calico sheet would be spread over and she sat on it so that the important woman's hair does not fall to the ground.

After shaving, for girls, the girl was given her own bed called Kiriri, in the mother's sleeping hut which (the kiriri) would be destroyed after she got married. The ceremony of shaving was regarded so important that we still hear a wise saying about it saying: "Njovi ni iruithagia nwa ndienjaga" meaning "beer circumcises but does not shave". This is meant to say that even if one is circumcised he/she has not gone through shaving and therefore the beer taken during circumcision ceremony could not stand for both. This saying is also used as a warning that beer is dangerous and can mislead you before you are shaved - to become more of a man.

Don't take too much beer, it fulfils some functions but not all.

This ceremony represents the importance attached to the prestigious role played by the traditional female elder in charge, in pronouncing the graduation of a youth from a less responsible position of a newly circumcised person to the more responsible and full adult status marked by the following ceremony of 'gutagarara' which also allowed one to get married. Since the ceremony of 'kwenjwa' was in all aspects similar among both the Embu and Mbeere, despite the different physical settings, the physical environmental factors cannot be said to have had a significant impact. More important were the time and socio-historical factors since the practice and essence of the event, with the participants in it, persisted till the coming of the Europeans which had similar effects to those seen earlier on the other social functions already dealt with.

(vi) 'Gutagarara' - Stepping Over

This ceremony follows circumcision and is meant to be the seniormost step to initiate a young man or girl into adulthood. The word 'gutagarara' means 'to step over'. The occasion

therefore is meant to 'ceremoniously step over goat'.

The ceremony took place soon after convalescence. On the material day two small children, a boy and a girl, respectively representing an old man and woman, would be present. Children are preferred to adults because they are innocent i.e. without unclean deeds about them. They also symbolically represent the lifespan of innocent people from youth to old age, between which comes this ceremony as the candidate is on the way through maturity to old age. These children are called ciana cia kuthii nyomba (the children to go into the house)..

The two 'children to go into the house' are then smeared with oil from castor oil seeds after which they are instructed to go into the house and sleep under the traditional bed, uriri. While so doing they are asked questions, the answers to which they are taught in advance. The major question is: "Mambura ni mari?" - "when is the ceremony to take place?" and they answer "Ma auke ya kirimu" - on the fools' day after tomorrow".

After this the Muthuri, old man (represented by the boy) is given a hornful of honey beer which he drinks - old men, who are bee-hive keepers are



known to like honey beer. The Mwongia, old woman (represented by the girl) in turn, is given a half-calabashful of Marwa (local brew from fermented millet) which the old women who are cultivators of millet are said to like. The two elders (the children) are then smeared with the same oil, and a great feasting follows after which a goat is slaughtered, blessed by the ritual elders and eaten to clear up for the second and final stage.

During the second stage the initiates for whom the ceremony was meant (a group of young men and girls may be undergoing the ceremony at the same time - as you hear people of the same age group, both men and women saying in friendly terms that 'we stepped over the goat together', which denotes equality) are decorated, together with their mothers and fathers. They are then taken out of the compound through the main gate. Throughout the rest of the ceremony the small boy is in company of men while the girl is accompanied by women as they all follow the initiates out through the main gate.

Once the initiates are outside the compound and before they are brought back to the compound, a live goat is stood in the middle of the gate's entrance. The candidates are then asked, facing the home/compound, to walk over the goat for the

first time, after which the same goat is transferred to the entrance of nyomba, the hut, where the small children had slept under the traditional bed, uriri. The candidates enter into this nyomba walking backwards (i.e. with their backs facing the hut's entrance) but stepping over the goat, for the second and last time, after which the ceremony is over. Entering their parents' huts backwards signifies the fact that the initiates do not go in to stay as they are from then quite free to leave their parents.

This ceremony gives the freedom to marry and before one went through it, for both boys and girls, they were not allowed to marry as they had not attained a fully recognized adult status. The ceremony meant that they had stepped over all the restrictions imposed on young people before this stage.

This ceremony was the last stage of promotion to full adult status among both the Embu and Mbeere. This being the case the ritual leaders of the ceremony commanded a very high social prestige as they organized and led the topmost of the traditional ceremonies which everybody, indiscriminately, had to eventually go through, unlike the case of promotion into the 'kiama' which was selective. Since, despite the ecological differences, the ceremony like the

others was held among both the Embu and Mbeere, without variations either in nature or significance, it does not appear to relate its aims to physical environment. Its essence was more related to the social environmental requirements where in the absence of the modern values and modes of livelihood, such rites of passage were important for clearly marking the attainment of full adulthood and the associated rights of a grown-up, such as getting married.

Like the others, already discussed this event began to lose its meaning, leading to the decline in status of its traditional leaders, once the colonial era came in. And the weaker penetration of the colonial interests into the Mbeere rural life and activities, made the Mbeere retain the practice much longer after the Embu had dropped it out.

(vii) 'Kiama' - Council of Elders

This was a ruling council of respected and able elders which produced elders to supervise such functions as oath-taking and other modes of dispute settlement. The recruits for later participation in the Kiama, as these elders retired, could be selected from among the young men who had gone through

the ceremonies of circumcision and 'gutagarara'. It took a recruit a long time before he qualified to be a full participant among the elders. At the time of being recruited into the 'Kiama' one had to pay a goat to the 'kiama' which then allowed him to choose his adviser among its council-elders, whom he regularly visited with gifts of beer, honey, etc.

When it was time to declare him an active member for full participation he was already beyond middle age and he was awarded a power-stick which symbolized his newly acquired power and status. A goat, which he produced, was needed for this occasion. In the same ceremony he was also awarded a three-legged stool which he carried with him all the time for sitting on whenever the elders were settling disputes, as it required long hours of sitting, from one place to another, as the 'kiama' was usually quite engaged. This elders' council was called Kiama kia Ruru and consisted mainly of clan elders.

If a member of the 'Kiama kia Ruru' became exceptionally good in his performance, measured in terms of oratory and skill in designing solutions, among other council elders, he was promoted to join yet another more senior elders' council called Kiama kia Ngome which consisted of representative

members of different clans from both Embu and Mbeere. This senior district-wide operating council handled more serious problems such as murder, serious and recidivist thefts, and witchcraft. This was the highest one could go in both Embu and Mbeere traditional administrative set-up.

Thus, in the absence of modern courts of law, among both the Embu and Mbeere the role of the 'kiama' elders was very essential in social administration and recruitment of successors to the 'kiama' elders when they retired. The fact that there was an exchange of meetings and co-operation among the Mbeere and Embu members of the seniormost elders' council, 'Kiama kia ngome' shows that it was possible that there was a lot in common, socially, among both groups. This in effect, means that cultural similarities and organizational procedures commonly found among the Embu and Mbeere, could be a result of such contacts, despite the different physical settings.

On this basis it can be inferred that similarities in social organization can co-exist between two societies occupying different ecological settings, giving priority therefore to the influence of cultural or socio-historical factors over the physical environmental ones.

Eventually however, the high social ranking and influence of such traditional administrative council elders, has tremendously been weakened over time by the administrative interferences from both the colonial to the post-colonial times.

(B) Stories, Proverbs and Riddles

It was assumed in this study that social structure, seen in terms of role allocation, differentiation and relations, is to a large extent influenced by various environmental factors, with particular emphasis on the physical. It was, in this context, expected that people's experience in their environment would influence their non-material culture so that if, for example, the contents of stories, proverbs and riddles were examined, they would indicate this relationship.

If this were to be so, then the various aspects of social structure e.g. some of the important roles played by individual members of the societies in question would come up, say in stories, with the values attached to them either being emphasized or de-emphasized, depending on the nature of the environment. And since the two areas, taken for the study, differed in physical characteristics, the two peoples of Mavuria and Kianjokoma, respectively, were

expected to develop stories, proverbs and riddles that would in some way be different, as they would be depicting experiences that bear influence of different environments.

The findings, based on these three items of oral literature (stories, riddles and proverbs) will be dealt with first, and then some general observations made, to see whether or not, the influence of the environment is represented. The contents of these items will be briefly taken, each at a time.

(i) 'Ngano' - Stories

The stories one gets among the Embu and Mbeere are generally about all types of experiences in the people's everyday life, as they cover different activities and associated values. The values stressed are such ones as hospitality, reciprocity and those others having to do with kinship, marriage, wealth, wild life and hunting, natural problems like famines, human threats such as tribal invasions, etc.

The stories were told to children by mothers and old women (grandmothers) in the evenings. The practical importance of such timing of tale telling was that the women were busy working in the farms in

day time, and were therefore not available. And at times due to the low level of farm technology exemplified by the traditional and time consuming hoe weeding they could not be left with any free time during the day. Some farms as explained earlier (see pp. 97-99) were located at long distances from homesteads, especially in Mavuria, and the women spent a good portion of their time walking to and from the farms and arrived home late. Cooking was therefore delayed and story-telling served the dual purpose of entertaining the children while they also waited for the food to get cooked.

But the major reason given for telling stories in the evenings was the belief that if the tales were told during the day cattle would get lost in the bush. This might have been drawing attention to the value of livestock and experiences in livestock care among the Mbeere but the idea was contradicted when the same meaning was found among the Embu. It is, of course, known from practical reasoning that tale-telling in the day time would encourage laziness. Evenings, in addition, were also more suitable because all children would be back from day-time activities such as herding and would not miss this important opportunity and time of socialization.



On the whole, story-telling among both the Embu and Mbeere played a very important role in the making of society. It was, just like the riddles and proverbs, a very important channel of informal education, mainly for children, where formal education had not been introduced. To begin with, in such stories, the non-desirable values and individual social deviants as story characters, were discredited or addressed in very derogatory terms. This trained obedience and desirable character in children as they grew to take up important societal roles. This way of dealing with societal values seems to agree with Everett Hagen's theory of status withdrawal where the socially negative values were discredited by parents and tale-tellers, to make the children aim at better and more socially acceptable achievements. Only that there was no indication of these children being trained to meet different values and expectations among both the people of Mavuria or those of Kianjokoma, despite different physical environments.

Obedience and desirable character in children were encouraged when for example, during the tale-telling, and if a child was sent somewhere to fetch something (children usually ran errands) while a tale was on, the teller stopped and resumed when the child came back. This greatly impressed that particular

child and others and they would not be reluctant to run errands at such times. The stories also trained memories in children, to remember and in good sequence, many things. This sequential remembering was a very important skill and power in an environment without any other way of information storage prior to modern school system, which equally affected both the Embu and Mbeere. Historical events were remembered by being talked about as some of them came up in such stories and discussions in form of legends, through which the children learnt their past as they grew up.

Other themes often coming up in the stories were such ones as those to do with courage against hardships e.g. wars, encounters with wild animals in both herding and hunting. But we saw earlier on that the Mbeere experienced more of these hardships than the Embu. The question here then is, why should the themes of the tales be the same for both the Embu and Mbeere despite the different physical environments? If it is true that the Mbeere actually had more of these real hardships than the Embu, then the answer would be more of the diffusion of ideas and cultural values rather than the physical environment whose impact is apparently absent in the themes of these tales. Some folk-tales also drew sensitivity to the fear of supernatural powers as the religious

authorities (through whom such powers were communicated) did a lot of good for the society, in real life. These religious authorities again could have been expected to be more important and common in the tales among the Mbeere rather than the Embu as the former had the experience of more hardships brought about by the physical conditions.

One of the stories quoted below, and commonly taken from both Mavuria and Kianjokoma, clearly shows lack of specific relationship to physical environment. The tale is entitled: "An Animals' Meeting" and went as follows:

"It became so dry that the surface water dried up and the animals went thirsty. One day they convened a meeting and agreed to commonly dig up a bore-hole where they would be drawing water. But the hare did not turn up for the work and the animals passed a resolution that he would never drink water from that well. Various animals were selected to guard the water in turns.

First it was the lion. The hare then came to drink the water disguising himself with a black substance which he had smeared on himself, to become as black as a pot. The lion, at the end of his turn, went home and reported that only a pot-coloured animal came and stole water. They all knew it was the hare. The next day the hyena was put in charge and told to catch anybody he saw drinking the water, including that pot-black animal. The hyena soon found a bunch of grass moving to and from the well. He later reported to the animals that this time it was nobody but a bunch of grass that took the water, so .....

....there was nothing for him to have caught. And the animals knew the hare had stolen the water again.

After many unsuccessful attempts to catch the hare, the tortoise offered to take the guard. He smeared himself, all over his body, with a sticky substance which would hold firmly. The hare as usual came to drink the water but this time he even laughed, without any attempts to disguise himself, to see that it was the tortoise on guard. He drank the water and also decided to take his time washing. He was rude to the tortoise who asked, what the hare was doing, and instead of answering, the hare gave a kick to the tortoise. But his foot got stuck. He kicked again with the other foot and it too got stuck. He tried a blow and both hands in turn got stuck, and so was the head as the hare tried to fight off with all parts of his body. Finally he gave up and was carried home, to the other animals, by the tortoise.

The animals were very happy as they sentenced the clever hare to death. They however, decided to release him as he promised to be good and never break the law or try to cheat the other animals again. But he later committed more and more crimes and when the animals eventually caught him, they covered him all over with dry banana fibres and set him on fire to burn alive".

From this fable, a number of points can be inferred. To begin with, we see the people's collective will and spirit being represented by the animals' coming together and agreeing that the uncooperative hare should not take the water. The strength of the collective morale is also implied by the animals' collectively digging up the well.

The execution of the hare through being wrapped with dry banana fibres and set on fire symbolically represents the ruthless manner in which among both the Embu and Mbeere the recidivist criminals such as the witchdoctors who could not give up their evil practices, were dealt with by the topmost council of elders, 'Kiama kia Ngome'. This is not surprising, given the fact that, as we saw earlier, there were no major differences in social administration between the two peoples (Embu and Mbeere) prior to the coming of Europeans as the two had very much in common. Even this powerful council of elders, 'Kiama kia Ngome' had representatives from both Embu and Mbere.

But the whole fable is about the problem of water shortage and related activities, where all animals together, dig up the water, after which some take the role of guarding it against the non-owners. Others act as animals' representative council to decide on the fate of the offenders, the hare in this case. Here the well appears as corporate or group-owned property. The major argument to be made, in this connection, with the development of this fable, is that if the physical environment were the dominant variable, the fable would only have been made among the Mbeere where serious water shortages were and still to some

extent, a common problem raising similar social confrontations and role relations. Since most of the tales narrated to me were common in both places, the major explanation of these similarities is the original and common cultural background.

(ii) 'Ndai' - Riddles

Most of these were useful in the development of fast thinking and skilful public talking among children. The children would be given difficult problems to solve quickly through riddles. If a child could not give the correct answer, after several faulty attempts, he gave up. When giving up the child had to surrender (theoretically) a large herd of cattle belonging to a rich man, which was accepted by the riddle teller, who in turn gave the solution to the defeated child.

While giving up, the child would tell the riddle giver this: "Oca ng'ombe cia ukavi", "take the cattle of Ukavi", the Masai who were believed to have large herds of cattle, and the riddle giver would accept the stock saying "irovua mburi na ng'ombe-i..." meaning "let me benefit from the good and large herd of goats and cattle...". After accepting the cattle the riddle giver wished very bad luck to the Ukavi,

the Masai who often raided the Mbeere cattle thus practically recovering their cattle which had been theoretically taken from them. This in a way shows how the people psychologically boosted their morale, through such riddles, against the attacks by Masai cattle raiders.

But why were the riddles, their contents and the mode of telling them similar among both the Embu and Mbeere? The answer could either be the common cultural background, already discussed, or the diffusion of these riddles from one area into the other. When the large herds of stock owned and the prestige derived from such property ownership comes in, and since this would have been expected among the Mbeere where such large herds of livestock were more common, rather than the Embu, this could be explained by the known contacts between the two. It is known that very often the Embu raided the Mbeere cattle. They also fought the Masai while the latter were on their way to Mbere for cattle raiding and this gives the Embu, just like the Mbeere, enough basis to include cattle affairs and the Masai in their non-material culture.

All other contents of the riddles which dealt with the various and prestigious roles played by warriors, blacksmiths, medicinemen, good hunters,

etc. including the purpose of entertainment and general wisdom, were found to be similar in both areas. From this it was concluded that the contents of such riddles did not have much to do with any one of the particular physical environments.

(iii) 'Nthimo' - Proverbs

The proverbs which in many ways reflected the general wisdom of the people, mainly warned the young people against anti-social acts and behaviour when they grew up. Although the children were told and taught the meaning of proverbs, they also learnt more as proverbial language was used in normal everyday life talks. But among grown-ups there were no attempts to interpret the proverbs as they were used in speeches especially among elders when they held meetings or conducted cases.

The use of proverbs was an essential requirement for the traditional public leaders. They had to properly use many proverbs in their oratory speeches if one were to sustain his position among, say, a council of clan elders. Examination of the contents of the proverbs collected among both groups showed no difference between those of the Embu and those of the Mbeere despite their different physical locations. It was, instead, found that among both groups, there



were many proverbs which very often implied the significance attached to various social events thus reinforcing the value and prestige attached to the roles of various traditional experts involved. An example here is the proverb saying:

"Mwia na kivici akenaga kiarua"

meaning

'he who steals with an uncircumcised boy becomes happy only after the boy gets circumcised":

This proverb signifies the fact that grown-ups have no confidence to share secrets with boys. It is circumcision that matures the boys up. As most of the proverbs were quite flexible in use, this one could also mean that an enemy is only safe and happy after eliminating the opponent. Whatever the use, and according to the interpretation of the elders consulted, this proverb draws our attention to the inevitable role fulfilled by circumcision among the Embu and Mbeere. Consequently this points out the importance, in society, of all those variously involved in the ceremony e.g. the circumciser, the supervisor as medical care-taker and teacher of traditional values and normative societal expectations, on the part of the initiate, etc.

Since the proverb, like many others, occurs in both settings and in a similar context, it cannot be said to bear any relationship to the physical environment.

From the material dealt with in this section, and due to the absence of variations with the different physical environmental factors, there was enough reason to conclude that the cultural factors had a stronger influence than the physical environmental. This in effect means that if the Mbeere occupied a harsher environment than the Embu, then the physical environment has not been harsh enough to offset the influence of the cultural background, or the diffusion of cultural values.

## CHAPTER SIX

### TIME, SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

The Embu and Mbeere must have been time-conscious even before the coming of the Europeans who thought that these people did not have a clear pattern of knowing their times. When the Mbeere, for example, developed the idea of using ashes as a preservative - before the introduction of modern preservatives - against the seed-destroying insects like weevils, they must have had a clear notion of time. They knew that the food crops had to be kept for as long as possible because they never knew when the season would be good again or when they would experience another famine. Ashes were also used to keep bee-hives clear of nthigiriri, the small black ants which usually chase away the bees - bees usually take some time before they occupy a bee-hive, so the hives need to be preserved before bees come in.

The hours of the day were divided according to the people's activities. The day was thus divided into simple major common-activity patterns, as compared to the modern hour-pattern, as shown on the following page.

Indigenous Timing Depending on Activities Undertaken

<u>Indigenous Time</u>	<u>Modern Quantitative Time</u>	<u>Type of Activity</u>
'Ruorari'	4.00 - 5.00 a.m.	None. Cock crowing continues.
'Rukiiri' (Sunrise)	5.00 - 6.30 a.m.	Heavy breakfast and going to the farms.
'Gwakia'	9.00 - 10.00 a.m. 10.00 - 11.00 a.m.	Milking of cows Cattle go out grazing.
'Muthenya gati' (shadows in the middle of the legs)	12.00 noon	Break in the farm.
'Kibwai'	5.00 - 5.30 p.m.	People begin coming back from farms.
'Kibwai'	5.30 - 6.30 p.m.	Cattle come home and milked. Cooking begins. Story-telling soon begins for children entertainment.
'Utuku gati'	12.00 midnight	Average sleeping time. Children slightly earlier but adults can go beyond.

The modern quantitative times (in hours) are approximations and according to indigenous timing they were not regarded as important and did not exist since the traditional times were divided into major activity sessions.

Instead of using dates, as for today, and giving names to the days, the people counted the days before or the days to come. They talked in terms of past, present and future, so that for the past they counted: igoro (yesterday), ico (the day before yesterday), icoori (the day preceding that before yesterday), after which they said the number of days gone e.g. 'matuku ana mathiru' (four days ago). Present was umunthi. The future was counted in terms of ruyu (tomorrow), auke (the day after tomorrow), athatu (three days from today) and so on. If they wanted to keep a date they counted the days from the 'present', when the date was made. One could even tie knots on a string and the knots would be removed or untied as each day passed till finally one knot remained for the material day.

Months, which the indigenous people called moons, were measured in terms of the phases of the moon. This begins with the crescent-shaped moon appearing in the west, which comes up and shifts gradual

till it appears as though it starts to rise in the east. In the east it then begins to get late and late into the night till one day it is found in the sky by next daylight, after which it finally disappears. One old woman told me that the time covered by their one moon looked longer than the present month. Today such people are at a loss because they cannot follow the modern months and nobody follows theirs, so they depend on asking to know what time of the year it is.

The years were divided into two seasons per year, depending on the crops grown, i.e. Kimera kia mwere (the season of millet), during the short rains and Kimera kia Nthoroko (the season of cowpeas), during the long rains. The two seasons seem to coincide with some calendar months (see below):

(1) Millet Season

<u>Local Month</u>	<u>Calendar Month</u>	<u>Activity</u>
'Mwinamo' _____	September _____	Millet planting
'Ruthanthatu' _____	October _____	Planting. Weeding starts
'Kaa' _____	November _____	Weeding and scaring birds
'Kiaa' _____	December _____	Scaring birds
'Kaurugura' _____	January _____	Harvesting starts
'Murugura' _____	February _____	Harvesting ends

(2) Cow-Peas Season

<u>Local Month</u>	<u>Calendar Month</u>	<u>Activity</u>
'Mugaa' _____	March _____	Planting cow peas and Maize
'Kivu' _____	April _____	Planting continues
'Muniaro' _____	May _____	Weeding
'Mburambiru' _____	June _____	Weeding and harvesting
'Kathano' _____	July _____	Harvesting
'Muthano' _____	August _____	Preparing for next season

The indigenous names are not equivalents but only coincidences of the modern months. Mugaa for example, does not mean the same as 'March' it meant the 'end' of whatever was being done during the month of Murugura (which precedes it). The

timing by the indigenous people was therefore functional, i.e. depending on the activities and other things they did.

More important for our purposes, in this connection, were the events through which the people in question marked times and changes from one status to another e.g. births of age groups marked in relation to whether they were born during the millet or cowpeas season preceding or following any other great event like a locust invasion which they can easily describe; and when they underwent a certain ceremony like circumcision, etc. which gave them a change of status.

It was common for a man, especially among the Mbeere who experienced famines more frequently than the Embu to remember that he was born during the famine of say, Gatanthoni (a name made of two words, gata, meaning 'which throws away' and nthoni meaning 'shyness', therefore 'gatanthoni' meant the famine which had no shyness). This was a famine so serious among the Mbeere that everybody became shameless as they searched for food. They would have worked for any amount of food. Even the girls this time were not, as it usually was, ashamed of eating the little they got in front of men, and greedily too. During this famine the Kikuyu took a lot of Mbeere women who



went there to look for food and never came back as they could not believe that the famine would end. Many social values that helped the smooth running of the Mbeere society were abused during this famine as many people committed shameless crimes. Some people even stole others' cattle and sold it to the Kikuyu in return for food. This famine is therefore greatly remembered.

In relation to this method of timing and according to Kabwegyere's typology of time (see p. 54) the Embu and Mbeere would be said to have employed the use of 'historical time' which, according to him, is perceived in terms of the trichotomy of human destiny i.e. in terms of the past, present, and future; as well as 'social time' which is a modification by man's experience, of historical time and what he makes out of it. This could be exemplified by use and definition, by man, of such social phenomena as rites of passage or initiation. As Kabwegyere says, in some countries,

"...a person becomes a man after initiation or after he has married or after he has killed a lion... This may even define the status of a person".

(Kabwegyere, 1974:2)

Formerly we saw the role the social gatherings during such events as the ones referred to above, e.g. circumcision and other rites of passage played in cementing the social relationships. That of circumcision, for example, which took place in the dry season between the end of the cowpeas and the beginning of the millet seasons, brought to focus the social importance of the circumcizers and the inevitable role they played in the promotion of members of society from youths to adults.

Other personalities like the ritual elders of the Kiama, too, who performed the purification to avoid any misfortunes in the ceremony were involved and usually came to focus at such times. The times such functions take place are therefore functional to the revitalization of the roles played by such people and the prestige accorded them.

Other important activities influenced by the environmental problems at particular times, are such ones as herding or patterns of livestock care which in turn influence the people's organizational arrangements. During the dry seasons, as clearly pointed out earlier, the Mbeere took their herds of cattle to distant areas where they would find

enough water and pasture for the animals. The Masai cattle raiders were aware of such times and planned their invasions accordingly. They knew that the Mbeere would divide themselves into two groups as they had to have women and some men remaining at home while some men went to near the river banks with the cattle, for the rest of the dry season. The Masai therefore expected the Mbeere to be weak. But when they attacked they found that this was not the case. The Mbeere were aware that the Ukavi, Masai might come raiding, and increased their army. They took a strong team of young warriors with them while they recruited more into the army at home. Warriorhood by this time was a very predominant occupation.

Later the Ukavi (Masai), having discovered that the Mbeere were usually alert, to make counter-attacks, during the dry seasons (when there was also little to do in the farms) tricked the Mbeere by changing the timing of their invasions and instead came when the Mbeere were busy planting. After a few destructive attacks by the 'Ukavi', the Mbeere also changed their warfare practice sessions to coincide with planting and later weeding periods too. This also became the time of warrior selection so that they were always ready to meet the 'Ukavi'.

During such times therefore, the Njama ya Ita (leader-warriors) who also trained the recruits) were very active, planning for any likely attacks by 'Ukavi' and others, placing young warriors at strategic points, recruiting more and giving orders to the women as to what type of foods they should prepare and take to the warriors. The benevolent witchdoctors at such times too were often consulted as their advice and treatment equipped the warriors with protective magic against enemies and made it easy to defeat the enemies without many casualties among the Embu and Mbeere. When the invasions were too strong the Mbeere warriors called upon those others from Embu to come and help and the Embu willingly came as the enemy might extend to them after beating the Mbeere.

Among both Embu and Mbeere there were other activities like traditional dances at night, and entertainment songs which took place during particular times of seasons. These songs very often acted as social control mechanisms by including in derogatory terms, the names of boys, girls, men or women who engaged in deviant behaviour. This was an indirect way of punishing them and deterring others from taking to such unpopular behaviour. All this reinforced the values supporting the social structure in question.

Each age group had its particular type of dances and songs for both sexes together, at different times (as seen in the table in the following page) so that one did not just mix with any group, as it was quite clear as to who would dance which dance.

All these dances just as other events dealt with before, e.g. circumcision, warfare/battles, etc. had their distinguished leaders who commanded high social prestige at the particular times when their events took place, but who otherwise quite often remained silent and forgotten, just like the rainmaker did during times of good rainfall, till next time when the problems they had expertise in solving reoccurred. They would then be called upon to give solutions, so that their roles came back to social limelight. And this led to what I referred to as seasonal authority and prestige, where the consistency of the prestige thereby accorded varied with the particular times.

Times of Traditional Dances and Farm Activities

<u>Name of Season</u>	<u>Farm Activity</u>	<u>Approx. Month</u>	<u>Name of Dance</u>	<u>People Involved</u>
Millet	Planting	Sept./Oct.	1. 'Gitukia'	Adults
			2. 'Muthigi'	Circumcised boys (they learnt warfare techniques here)
Millet	Harvesting	Jan./Feb.	'Mugari'	Adults and young people
Cowpeas	Planting	March/June	1. 'Mwinjiro'	Adults
	Weeding		2. 'Kiboia'	Adolescent children
	Harvesting		3. 'Ngucu'	Adolescent children

Even the wild animal-movement patterns seemed to have had an impact on the division of labour. In Mberere, for example, large uncultivated bushes were common. And during the dry periods there were both shortages of water and fresh vegetation even for smaller animals like antelopes. This forced the wild animals including rhinos, elephants, lions, etc. to move much more widely in search of food and often killed people as they came into contact with them. The people could not easily believe that this animal danger was for nothing. To find out the cause of it they sent their representatives, the members of the 'Kiama', to go and seek explanation from the diviner who, in addition to telling them what more might happen in future, gave various explanations. One such explanation would be some member of the Mbeere society having stolen from Embu, which resulted in that very person or a member of his family being killed and sometimes being eaten by a lion. Another common reason given was cutting trees from enshrined grounds by some members of society and failing to offer sacrifice to appease the gods.

Some other people, as individuals, went to see medicinemen to be treated for immunization against attacks by such animals or even snake-bites. After the diviner had given explanations as to what caused

rainfall shortages, he told people what to do in case of such problems and if he was not able to perform the rain-making craft he advised people to go and see a rain-maker. Thus the rainmaker came in next, once the diviner had diagnosed the problem, and on consultation he (the rainmaker) gave prescriptions which were to be acted upon immediately by the members of the 'Kiama'.

All these consultations gave the authorities involved, including the people's representatives e.g. those on the 'Kiama' more social prestige.

As some old men in Kianjokoma told me there once was one drought, so serious that it extended from Mbere to Embu, and both tribes had no alternative other than to go and see Ireri wa Irugi - a famous diviner and rainmaker who also prophesied things. Ireri wa Irugi took the ritual elders leading the delegation to a deep water point called 'Ndia ya Kabwe' on Thuchi River, bordering Embu and Meru. Here he threw a young ram, which the ritual elders had carried with them on request by Ireri wa Irugi, into the water. When it came out he knew it was going to rain and he told the elders to go home quickly and wait for the rain which soon fell heavily.



All these examples show that studying social structure or role-allocation patterns at different times does not always come out with the same type of roles and consequent statuses outshining the others. What roles are considered more important and given priority of respect therefore may vary with the times, depending on the problems experienced at the particular times by particular societies. These particular times therefore influence the image a student of social structure would have of particular societies at some particular times, while at other times he would find a different emphasis of role requirements and performances.

### CONCLUSION

An attempt is made in this last section to summarize briefly, the contents of the whole presentation followed by a few implications and recommendations, all based on the findings of the study.

It was the assumption of this research project that the social relations of particular societies are to a very large extent influenced by their respective environments, with a particular emphasis on the effect of the physical environment.

In some cases it was found that physical environment is quite important in influencing the people's activities and behaviour among themselves, which eventually influence the nature of social structural relations, in terms of role-structure among the members of the particular societies.

Yet in other cases it was found that the quality of the physical environment itself has its own attractions to other external factors that help to modify the indigenous people's response to their immediate environment. This is exemplified by the case of the colonial government and settlement which was better attracted to the Embu

region rather than Mbere, consequent upon which they created a disparity in the strength and essence of the indigenous cultural institutions. The various dispute settlement systems e.g. oaths, and fear of traditional religious powers died earlier and faster among the Embu than among the Mbeere. The prohibition of indigenous ceremonies and rites of passage that were being performed in the traditional styles and led by traditional experts was also effected, first, among the Embu as the Mbeere were under remote control, in terms of proximity. This in effect meant that such events ceased to fulfil their function, first, among the Embu rather than the Mbeere.

As a result the Mbeere got less of the colonial government development efforts, including education, land tenure system, water supply, and communication facilities. All this seemed to have slowed down the rate at which the adoption of new values occurred among the Mbeere, whose traditional government institutions, as argued earlier, continued to operate intact, until recently. Clan elders among the Embu, for example, have no active role to play, but are a force to reckon with among the Mbeere where land adjudication disputes have not completely come to an end, with the clan leaders and elders playing a predominant role in

the settlement of such disputes that arise.

In terms of physical limitations, we have seen that there were various problems that faced the Mbeere, rather than the Embu, more frequently. The type of physical conditions the Mbeere experienced encouraged keeping of large herds of indigenous rather than graded cattle, as the latter cannot easily resist the problem of dry and hot climate, at times with acute water and pasture shortages which in effect, require wide movements of such animals in search of these requirements. People and their families, in such cases, have to divide themselves in the dry periods so that some remain at home while others move with the herds to 'near the river banks', where these resources, water and pasture, are more readily available. This is something similar to what Derrick Stenning called the 'split-household' and 'split-herd', which until very recently has also been very common among the Mbeere. It is still practised by some people; and it means a man living at a distant farm location or some other area with livestock (especially goats) while the rest of his family live at the home area (Stenning, Derrick, J., 1959:6).

In the case of food shortages other people have to go to distant places like Embu and Kikuyu

lands to look for foodstuffs. All these problems were seen to encourage the development of such values as generosity, hospitality and reciprocity just to mention a few, among the neighbours themselves, as it is difficult to be self-sufficient when all these movements have to be made, often at the same time, which is impossible for one person. As Porter observed,

"A community has its institutional and technical means of coping with risk"

e.g. developing surpluses, sharing out risks, dispersal of fields, timing harvests, cattle deals, raiding the neighbouring territory, etc. (Porter, P.W., 1965:412).

There were also problems of wild animals, due to low population density allowing large expanses of uncultivated bush, attacking both people and livestock; and tribal invasions also causing danger to both livestock and human beings. All these caused a feeling of insecurity and raised the need for warriors, skilled shooters, and various other specialists in different fields. The water or bore-hole owners or their representatives during water shortages, for example, were socially

recognized leaders who played important roles in the distribution of the locally available water, before it was time to go to the distant water sources - rivers.

The diviners and rainmakers in their turn solved the problem of water shortage and explained such other problems as the animal and tribal invasions and prescribed what people should do to avert such catastrophes. The benevolent witchdoctors like those from the famous place called 'Uvariri' and local ones, equipped people with protective magic to beat their enemies. Here the local leaders like members of elders' councils had an important role to play as they visited the religious authorities for the particular consultations.

The medicinemen treated all sorts of illnesses, in the absence of modern medicine, thus giving people courage to live in their difficult environment, just as the administration of oath, licking the panga, and various other methods of punishing criminals, took the place of modern justice and courts of law.

As indicated earlier, some of these problems like droughts, which led to water and food shortages, etc., did not always occur, and those of the above

mentioned authorities who made a name out of their expertise in solving such seasonal problems, were not always being consulted and were, therefore, less powerful during successive periods of good life, without such problems, when nobody needed their services. These are the people said to have had seasonal authority and status, due to this inconsistency of one's involvement in social life. There were also other functions of social life like circumcision which made the circumciser a prominent public figure at the particular times; and traditional dances which similarly and temporarily promoted the social statuses of their respective leaders and organizers.

Apart from their temporary status promotions on the part of the respective leaders or experts, many of these social functions played very indispensable roles in socializing the members of society to fit into their own society. This explains the essence of the various rites of passage. To take circumcision, for example, its traditional nature has been replaced with the modern hospital system. How does this compensate for the adaptive value inculcation system that the ceremony or each of the various rites of passage stood for, in order to make sure that the people fit into their own society?

The mode of tale-telling, riddles, proverbs, etc., and the values they emphasized e.g. greatness of feat, physical strength, and respect for the various sacred values and figures, kinship, reciprocity, etc., and those other values that they de-emphasized, seemed to present the various members of society as adaptive participants in their environments, both physical and social.

It was, however, found that most of the folk-tales, riddles and proverbs, were the same among both the Embu and Mbeere. Since the physical environments taken for the study were different, these were also expected to be different, if the only explanatory variable were the physical environment. The similarity, therefore, must be explained by factors other than the physical environment. This could have been due to cultural diffusion from the very early stages of original migrations which placed the Embu and Mbeere where they now live. Such migrations showed that the Embu and Mbeere originally were the same people before they separated due to disagreement. In addition, the old people of Kianjokoma also said that before the introduction of tea and coffee they planted millet, just like the Mbeere, and they seemed to have practised the millet culture-with all its involvements of harvesting, thrashing and



collective work-session parties, etc. - in a similar way to that of the Mbeere. Common activity grounds for traditional dances, warfare activities and other meetings between the Embu and Mbeere, including those of the 'Kiama kia Ngome' which represented both, are all well known. All these together provided good contacts for diffusion of cultural values, in spite of the physical environmental differences.

This shows that cultures in different environments, can flourish and resemble one another in spite of the different physical environments. Physical environment, therefore, is just one of the several factors but not always the most important factor influencing a people's culture, which may have acquired some of its traits from contact with other peoples. This cultural diffusion of values and practices among the Embu and Mbeere who were neighbours, even assuming that many of them don't share a common origin, could therefore have occurred when they met and mixed from time to time to assist one another in tribal warfare against the 'Ukavi' or Kikuyu, etc. or at the time they shared common practice grounds and the major dispute settlements that were organized by the senior council of elders forming the 'Kiama kia Ngome' which operated among both the Embu and Mbeere.

The delayed rejection of the traditional practices, belief systems and traditional religious authorities among the Mbeere as compared to the Embu could also be explained socio-historically by the greater penetration of the Western interference and value systems, rather than the constraints of the physical setting; the strength of this argument being borne out by the fact that the social structural relations and values for both the Embu and Mbeere were not left at par, to develop uninterfered with. It is arguable, however, that since it was initially the physical environmental characteristics that drew the Westerners into the Embu region, this initial influence of the physical environment should be given prior consideration.

Eventually therefore, and with the relatively little involvement of the colonial administration in Mber, this disparity in change of values and the consequent differential conceptualization of the various social roles and activities that such values were related to, among the Embu and Mbeere, would seem to be largely a result of the physical environmental influence.

The general observation, however, is that while the influence of the physical environment cannot be discounted, the cultural factors played

an important part in the explanation of the similarities in the various social structural characteristics found among the Embu and Mbeere. From this it was further concluded that while, for comparative purposes, Mavuria as compared to Kianjokoma, had been selected as a physically 'harsh' environment, and taking account of the diffusion of values and the disparities later brought about by the differential involvement of the colonial government together with the missionary activities, the existence of such similarities suggested that the environment was not harsh enough to offset the influence of the other factors.

Finally the information gathered from this study has, in the author's view, produced quite a number of significant implications, against which a few recommendations have been suggested:

To begin with, we have seen that in particular circumstances, especially in the less suitable ecological settings where there may be problems of water, food or other resource limitations, some particular personalities may have their roles and consequent statuses appreciating or depreciating (going high or low) depending on particular times and the activities involved. Such knowledge is

very useful as it would help us select, among such rural societies, the appropriate people's representatives to involve say, in development projects and when, so that at each of these particular times we involve the people who command better social credibility and therefore have majority backing them. Timing therefore has important implications for effective planning in East Africa, and elsewhere, where different social groups experience different environmental constraints at different times, especially in the marginal areas.

Secondly, different socio-historical eras have different social status and prestige awarding criteria. In the pre-colonial era, for both the Embu and Mbeere, for example, the strongman in physical feat, the warrior, the benevolent witch-doctor, and medicineman ranked very high, socially. But now, through the colonial and in the post-colonial era, all these indigenous notables have undergone some kind of status inversion so that the high status now does not vary with the greatness of feat, etc., but with education and wealth, not only in terms of cattle owned, but also in terms of money and other material resources. But this change has not been common among all age groups. In Mbeere, for example, and with the differential penetration of Western values, most of the people

up to and beyond 50 years of age or so, who also have most of the illiterate population amongst them, still believe that a medicineman, for instance, can help a lot.

But the younger generations who have had some degree of modern Western education and values do not usually believe in the effectiveness of such traditional authorities. The whole thing then looks like two worlds of the same population, and there may be some others in between who do not take either of the sides - traditional or modern. If one were to plan for such people, therefore, such knowledge should be sought very clearly, for this type of differentiation is very important to bear in mind as uniformity of wants will be difficult to establish among all these groups as long as they do not form a homogeneous social unit.

Thirdly, it appears that disparity in economic modes of livelihood puts societies in different environments out of par with each other, thereby differentiating their requirements. In this regard while the Mbeere together with the Embu are often regarded as the 'Embu', this is practically a fallacious categorization. A simple example illustrates this statement: while the Kianjokoma people may want better prices for their tea, those

of Mavuria may not even want better prices for their cotton, but instead give priority to regular water supplies for their cattle and domestic usage. The former are much more advanced in many respects and a chosen development project can hardly be equally meaningful and profitable to the two together. It may even fail in one area and succeed in the other, depending on the response of the target population and what they see as their prior needs.

And finally though not exhaustively, the changes brought about by the colonial government and Western educational and belief systems had important and often negative effects on the indigenous social institutions, as the values supporting the latter were played down. This brought about the end of circumcision of girls. That of boys is normally allowed to take place in hospitals, and not at homes where traditional experts and teachers are involved. Such youths of today, then, have no opportunities to undergo the traditional procedures of training, and therefore miss their cultural essence which trains them to fit into their society.

The ultimate effect was a levelling out of the traditional social mobility procedures, replacing

them with modern ones where the traditional authorities were left displaced and alienated, in the sense that their contribution was either ignored or deliberately discouraged. All this raises such questions as: when does one really become an adult, without undergoing some of these rites of passage; and where do different responsibilities begin or end? Role changes and adulthood status therefore become ambiguous, especially for those who have not been able to adapt themselves to the modern values.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

Some of these recommendations are not directly related to the purpose and topic of this study, but since they were come across in the course of the exercise, their fascinating nature inspires the author to draw the attention to them, of scholars, administrators and development agencies alike, for appropriate consideration:

- (1) Reliable underground water points which are owned either by individuals or clans are very important sources of water for the Mbeere in the dry periods when seasonal streams and other surface water points dry up. It is during such times, and this may

apply to other societies as well, that the particular individuals or the representatives (spokesmen) of the clans owning such water sources gain in public recognition, as they command the control over ownership of crucial resources for survival of both the people and livestock.

At such times such people participate very actively in rural decision-making among their fellow neighbours or those they represent. These people should be seen as the actual and credible people's representatives and should be carefully identified as stepping-stones for effective support of given development projects by the target communities. Without prior consultation with these individuals and depending on what they see as their prior needs or even without fully understanding what they stand to gain, which they can 'learn better' from such individuals rather than from government officials, the people may be reluctant to accept and support such projects.

- (2) Another way of dealing with the people referred to above, the opinion leaders, especially where they are not cooperative,



is to minimize their influence. This could be done not by scaring them off but by improving the regularity and volume of modern water supplies by the government. When water is no longer a problem, the social credibility enjoyed by such people will easily be overshadowed, once the locus of their influence (i.e. the management of water distribution) is weakened. They therefore, especially where they are not interested, will not have effective influence to retard development efforts.

Increased and regular water availability will also serve to reduce the geographical mobility in search of water. Thus the rural people in question, especially the women, will be available for longer times, especially in the dry periods, to participate in development activities or at least be available to attend public meetings where they would get ideas that can benefit them or improve their willingness to cooperate with government officials and other extension agents.

(3) Geographical mobility was seen to have negative consequences on the division of labour as the household absences it entails interfere with the various role-fulfilments. In this connection, strengthening of cash crop, e.g. cotton in Mbere, or other viable modes of economy within given physical environmental constraints in the marginally productive rural areas, is seen as an effective way of curbing regular geographical mobility. Thus, with the introduction of improved agricultural methods or improvement of those already existing and better prices as incentives, there will be enough money to buy foodstuffs from other areas in times of food shortages, and also to meet other financial requirements of the rural peoples, without having to go to the towns or other more productive rural areas to seek employment, whether temporary or permanent.

(4) It seems that with limited modern medical facilities where not everybody is able to get adequate attention from the doctors, many people, especially the older generations, turn to traditional doctors or medicinemen, who are more readily accessible and available. This in effect reinforces the social standing

of the traditional medicinemen, who are known to be poor contributors to the acceptance of modern medical treatment.

One solution here, will be the building of more hospitals or expansion of the existing local ones to handle more patients and also deal with more serious illnesses without the patients' having to travel long distances to the district hospitals. To these people the long distances matter, financially, almost as much as the illnesses themselves. Better services and easier accessibility of modern medical attention will reduce the number going to the traditional medicinemen and this will, in effect, reduce this traditional medical-belief mentality and perhaps improve the existing low level of hospital attendance, especially among the older generations.

Some people have psychological illnesses which are difficult to cure by modern medicine, as the illnesses involve attitudes of mind and particular beliefs, in some cases. For this I would suggest that the existing traditional medicinemen should be recognized and invited to the grassroots development

committee sittings. If this is possible, their presence in such development discussions will make their clients think that their problems have been catered for. A few of their approaches to psychological cases and what they see as causes of such illnesses can also be learnt from such medicinemen.

If such medicinemen would be cooperative then their approaches could be incorporated in the modern medical knowledge and treatment, which could help the doctors to improvise more effective methods of handling such psychological illnesses instead of leaving them to the expertise of the indigenous medicinemen. More research should therefore be carried out in this field of traditional medicines and medical practice, as it seems potentially fruitful among rural societies.

- (5) Indigenous methods of socialization were very important in the maintenance of particular aspects of social structure. The values upheld, for example, by the various ceremonies and rites of passage, and also those contained in folk tales, riddles, proverbs and legends, played an important role in training youths through to old age, to fit into their society.

This role has not been adequately compensated for by the modern Western-oriented educational system, which seems to have created a dual value system, between traditional and modern-Western.

The change from traditional to modern values therefore, should not be allowed to be so sudden but gradual, so as not to continue creating a dual allegiance of values which in effect will create social misfits. The current educational system should thus improvise a comprehensive plan to incorporate into it, the above referred to traditional norms and values and what they meant in terms of social structural relations for given East African societies. This in addition would help to avoid overproduction of white-collar job mentality among our youths. Detailed research in this field too, and subsequent storage of indigenous cultures will also be an asset for the future generations.

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AppendixPROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN DATA COLLECTION

Perhaps these should not be taken as real problems as such, but rather, notes on the experience in the field and also of requirements and conditions influencing the quality of the research and findings. In this connection a camera could have been very necessary, to take photographs e.g. of vegetation, topography, respected elders and other notable indigenous personalities, etc. in both ecological settings which would have given the two areas a visually better contrast.

Recording equipment too, would have helped to tape conversations, songs, tales, etc. both to save time and more important, to facilitate the calculation, say, of how often certain items and ideas came up in the folk-tales and other verbal performances. All these, coupled with the fact that no questionnaire was used due to the very nature of the study as explained before, are factors to be taken into account, that have rendered the quantification of the findings difficult, consequent upon which the data appears mainly in a qualitative rather than quantitative form.

Travelling, in both areas, was not always as convenient as one would have liked to have it. To begin with I had to walk around during the night as some of the

people to be dealt with were either busy or not available during the day time. I also had to do a lot of walking when means of transport were not available. In Mavuria one had to walk longer distances than in Kianjokoma due to greater scarcity of homesteads and greater scarcity of transport means as the area is much poorer than Kianjokoma so that less people in Mavuria can afford to buy 'matatus' (the most popular means of transport in the district). Financially, even when 'matatus' were available there was still some problem of obtaining receipts as most of the 'matatus' do not provide such receipts to their passengers. This was a problem with the University Finance Section which refused to accept accountability for money spent without receipts being produced, consequent upon which I ended up losing my money which I had actually spent.

Regarding accommodation, it was not always possible to sleep in towns where lodging receipts were easily available. While at Kianjokoma I joined a Vicar's family among whom I lived for most of the period spent in the area. In such cases, and on ethical grounds, one would have thought it rather discouraging to ask one's hosts to sign documents involving the amount of money one spent while in their household. This would tend to make such generous hosts feel discouraged and more reluctant to welcome other researchers in future.

There were also problems of social rapport, in the sense that cooperation from the people was not all that immediate. One had to take time explaining to people that he had not been sent by the government to come and study them so that something they might not be ready to accept could be introduced to them. Some wondered why it was somebody from Mberere and not from Embu who had been sent to them (as they believed it was a matter of being sent rather than of being interested). They would only be patient to hear that once their ways of life and problems were known it was always easier for the government to plan on how to help them. Although they wanted to know specifically how they would benefit from such a study, they were not hostile and finally agreed to give the required information. What this meant, however, was that time was spent discussing irrelevant things before coming to the topic of interest. But even while on the topic many informants could not talk without digressing. One had to be cautious when bringing them to the topic, lest they took offense or became impatient. This is one major oral methodological weakness when there are no brief or even closed-ended questions which need short answers rather than discussions which are also more time-consuming. There is the advantage, however, of revealing more than the researcher knew and included for asking on the investigation topics, except that one had to do a lot of sifting of the relevant information from superfluity in the discussions.

Another problem in that of payments to the informants. One finds himself, in one way or another, having to spend something on them, e.g. buying some soft drink when you meet at the shopping centre or canteen. You could also be asked by an old woman to buy her some salt or tobacco snuff, the latter two of which were common cases. But there were some excessive cases where some informants demanded cash payments before they agreed to give information. In one of the two areas one old man seemed to have made a trade out of research consultations, and moved to some secluded hut where wishing researchers consulted him on payment. He sounded quite resourceful, with self-pride, and after paying him not less than Kenyan Shs. 50.00 which was negotiable, to be higher or lower, you could stay with him and discuss to your satisfaction. He could also allow you to look at his books which he had got somebody to write for him, on topics he had considered to be most popular among researchers with whom he seemed to have had a long and wide experience.

Finally, was the problem of translation. There were many narratives and other discussions all of which were in vernacular and had therefore to be translated into English. For this I tried as much as possible, in such translations, to hit at the same meaning and convey the effect intended by the narrators.