

THE AGĪKŪYŪ, THE BIBLE AND COLONIAL CONSTRUCTS: TOWARDS AN
ORDINARY AFRICAN READERS' HERMENEUTICS.

by

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ABSTRACT

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Recognising the paradigm shift in African biblical studies where the image of a “decontextualized and non-ideological” scientific Bible reader is slowly being replaced with one of a “contextualized and ideological” reader, this research seeks to explore and understand the role of the “ordinary readers” in the development of biblical interpretation in colonial Kenya. It seeks to understand whether the semi-illiterate and illiterate can engage the Bible as capable hermeneuts.

The study uses postcolonial criticism to recover and reconstruct the historical encounters of the Agĩkũyũ with the Bible. It reveals that ordinary African readers actively and creatively engaged biblical texts in the moment of colonial transformation using several reading strategies and reading resources. Despite the colonial hegemonic positioning, these Africans hybridised readings from the Bible through retrieval and incorporation of the defunct pre-colonial past; creating interstices that became sites for assimilation, questioning and resistance.

The study proposes an African hermeneutic theory that accepts both scholarly readers and the ordinary readers with respect to biblical interpretation as constitutive of a community of readers positioned in a particular sociocultural milieu. It invites the socially engaged scholars to commit to: reading the Bible from the experienced reality of societal margins; reading communally with each other; and to read critically. The metaphor *Sokoni* (at the marketplace) is proposed as the starting point in which both the “ordinary” readers and scholarly readers can engage the Bible through the language of the African theatre and storytelling.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*“The past is never dead; it is not even past.”*¹

Part I

1.1a Overall Primary Aim and Secondary Aim

The primary focus of this research is to explore and understand to what extent “ordinary readers” participated in the development of biblical interpretation in colonial Kenya. In this study, the term “ordinary readers” is used to refer specifically first to the literate African readers who remain poor and marginalised. In this category I include peasants and the unskilled labourers living both in the rural and urban areas of the African societies. Secondly, the term includes the illiterate and semi-literate African Bible readers.² Even though these categories of ordinary readers form the main bulk of the African Christian churches, they are usually assumed “passive” and their readings and interpretations not taken seriously. This study will show that even though these readers lack formal training in biblical scholarship therefore approaching the Bible pre-critically, they have unique and logical ways of interpreting biblical texts.³ The results of this research will be used to determine and explore the possibility of an African hermeneutic theory that accepts both scholarly readers and the ordinary readers as capable hermeneuts.

Connected to this quest is the secondary aim to investigate and understand the origins of biblical hermeneutics in colonial Kenya and how it might have been appropriated and modified either to maintain control over the African people or to inform resistance against colonialism. I am of the opinion, however, that to

¹ William Faulkner as quoted by James Cone in “Looking Back, Going Forward: Black Theology as Public Theology”, in Dwight N. Hopkins, ed., *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James H. Cone’s Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1999), 255.

² See also Gerald West’s definition of the “ordinary readers” in his book *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible* (Peiternaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2003), 77.

³ I follow Gerald West who uses the term “pre-critical” to refer to a reading by a reader of the Bible who does not the technical training of a biblical scholar. *The Academy of the Poor*, 73-74.

understand this process one must also address the question of the discourses of colonialism. By discourses of colonialism, I mean understanding the representation and categorisation of the African identities produced and reproduced by various colonial rules, systems and procedures in order to create and separate the Africans as “Other”. The Christian missionary enterprise was not excluded in this process.

Therefore, to understand colonial relationships one needs to analyse words and images as they were used and applied in the historical transformation of the colonial society. Such an analysis reveals not just the individual or social groups but also a historical consciousness at work.⁴ For this reason, the place of language, culture and the individual within the political and economic realities of the colony have to remain at the fore front for a fuller comprehension of the evolution of biblical interpretation in colonial Kenya. In this connection, I shall use the Agĩkũyũ⁵ and their encounter with the Bible in the Kenya colony under the British Protectorate spanning from the 1900s and culminating in the brutal peasants’ uprising in the 1950s.

1.1b Motivation for this Research

At this point, I want to narrate two episodes that have motivated this research. In 1995, immediately following graduation from theological college, I began attending a Bible study group that was meeting in a local congregation through the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (P.C.E.A) programme Theological Education by Extension (T.E.E). This programme is designed for the laity who wish to do a

⁴ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Writers in Politics: A Re-Engagement with Issues of Literature and Society*, revised and enlarged edition (Oxford: James Currey, 1997), 3-8.

⁵ In this research I use Agĩkũyũ (as opposed to the commonly used term Kikuyu) to refer to the community that lives in the central part of Kenya stretching from Mt. Kenya in the north to Nairobi in the south; and Gĩkũyũ to refer to the land or country the community occupies as well as the language of the community. The term “Kikuyu” will only be used if included in citations and quotations. I will discuss later how this particular community became the centre of interest in missionaries endeavour. One of the missionaries whom we shall use in this regard, Rev. L. J. Beecher, (in his booklet “The Kikuyu”), concluded that this particular community was amongst the most discussed and least understood in Kenya. In fact, Europeans found it easier to acquire the Agĩkũyũ’s land than the community’s language, see Beecher, “The Kikuyu”, ii.

systematic Bible study. It serves as an introduction to basic theological concepts. On this particular day, the members were discussing the Apostles Creed. After about twenty minutes into the discussion, one of the Bible study members turned to me, being the only trained theologian in their midst and asked a question relating to the meaning of the Gĩkũyũ rendering of the phrase in the Creed “He descended unto Hell”. The Gĩkũyũ translation reads *agĩkũrũka kwa ngoma*⁶. The member was interested in the meaning of descending to *kwa ngoma*. I told the group that I thought the descending to *kwa ngoma* may have been derived from the English rendering of the Greek term “Hades” (which was first used by early Christians to translate the Hebrew *Sheol*) to refer to “Hell” as an abode of the wicked. This seemed to satisfy the enquiry and the questioning ended.

However, the question was to be raised again in 1998 (By now I was serving as an ordained church minister in Gĩthũngũri, Kenya). This happened at a different forum from an elderly man who was seeking to be reinstated into the Christian fellowship. On this particular day, I was having a routine follow-up meeting with all the catechumens who had satisfied the church requirements before being accepted as full members within the Presbyterian communion. I asked the group to recite the Apostles Creed as it was required. After the recitation, I engaged the group in a Bible discussion based on the Gĩkũyũ translation of Matthew 16:13-20. Towards the end of the discussion, the elderly man who had been silent in most part of the discussion asked me to help him understand what *kwa ngoma* meant as used in the Gĩkũyũ translation of the Apostles Creed and of the Matthew 16:18. I used the same tactic that I had used several years back to answer the question, but the man seemed unsatisfied

⁶ P.C.E.A., *Mbuku ya Mahoya ma Kũhoithia Kĩrĩndĩ: Gĩcigo kĩa Mbere* (Nairobi: P.C.E.A., 1966), i; See also P.C.E.A., *Mbuku ya Mahoya Gĩcigo gĩa Kerĩ*, revised edition (Nairobi: Jitegemea Publishers, 1975), 187. The 1984 third revised edition of the book of common order in Gĩkũyũ maintains the same translation.

with the answer. In his understanding *kwa ngoma* had a specific indigenous meaning within the Agĩkũyũ worldview other than the one I was trying to impose upon him from my reading of the Gĩkũyũ translations. In the process I had to admit my inability to engage constructively since I had limited knowledge of the point he was trying to raise. This seemed to surprise him, to which he probed further whether the Gĩkũyũ Bible is part of what is taught at the theological college which I answered in the negative. I ended the discussion with a promise to enquire more from my older colleagues to see if they could offer a better answer.

That particular discussion raised several issues. First, through my theological training I never used the Gĩkũyũ translation of the Bible since it was not part of the Bible versions required. The versions accessible to me were the English Revised Version and the *Novum Testamentum Graece* used by those of us who had interest in the biblical Greek language. I had long assumed that that the Gĩkũyũ translation was the perfect rendering of these two Bible versions. This assumption was challenged by my inability to offer an adequate answer to an ordinary reader who was eager to use his knowledge of the Gĩkũyũ indigenous worldview in dialogue with biblical interpretation. The second issue that this encounter raised is that while the Christian activity of the Bible Translation has made great strides in offering the Africans the Bible in the languages of their ancestors, hardly have theological schools in Africa seen it worthy to include the translated texts (which most ordinary readers use) in the biblical studies curriculum. What this translates to is the inadequacy of biblical hermeneutics to offer critical tools that students of theology can employ when they encounter the untrained ordinary readers in their daily wrestling with the translated texts. Theological schools, as such, disregard untrained, illiterate or semi-literate

readers as important conversation partners in the development of biblical hermeneutics.

The third issue builds on the other two issues raised above. Until after the encounter with the catechumens narrated above, I had never paid attention to the translation of “Hades” in Matthew 16:18 to *kwa ngoma*. A casual reference indicated that the Hebrew *Sheol* referred to the “abode of the dead” but not the “abode of the wicked”. My first reaction after this discovery was that *kwa Ngoma* may have been the correct rendering since it referred to an abode of the dead – in this case abode of ancestors (*ngoma*). But after giving it more consideration, the problem of that translation became clearer. The Gĩkũyũ New Testament translators were not using the term *kwa Ngoma* innocently. They were using it within the context as used mainly in Revelation and Matthew 16:18 as an abode of the wicked. The consequence of this was that the indigenous *Ngoma* (ancestors) had been transformed in the act of translation to stand for the “wicked” or “demons” or “devils”. It dawned on me that what the elderly man in our group was pointing to, though inadvertently, was the possibility of Bible translation being tainted by the translators’ doctrinal or ideological bias as they liberally transformed indigenous words and idioms to fit in such ideological or doctrinal mould. These revelations triggered in me an urgent desire to research further these possibilities.

1.1c Presumptions

The situations discussed point to some of my presumptions. The first of which is that the question of biblical hermeneutics is yet to be settled, particularly in the formerly colonised territories. The study assumes that the illiterate and semi-literate Africans, as ordinary readers, were actively and creatively involved in the new and developing critical interpretive tradition. Secondly, the acts of biblical interpretation

and of Bible translation in colonial Kenya were also exercises in power and control. My third presupposition is that biblical language played a central role in both the shaping of and challenging discourses of colonialism. I also presume that at a practical level, the acts of biblical interpretation were grounded in profound and insoluble contradictions. Sharp dichotomisation of the sacred or ideal and the secular or actual operated in the missionaries' thinking and behaviour. In this case, I am of the opinion that the colonial Church⁷ held ambivalent views of the relationship between mission work, the society in general, and the political or materialistic attitudes evident among the *évolués*, in this case the *Athomi*⁸. I am also of the opinion that discourses developed and used in colonial Kenya continue to impact current biblical scholarship and hermeneutics in modern Kenya.

Although this research will highlight some “negative” aspects of the colonial experience, it suffices to acknowledge that imperialism delivered benefits to the Africans living in the Kenyan colony such as liberal ideas, vibrant health system, national self-consciousness, and technological goods among others. Missionaries, particularly those among the pioneer group, endured a lot and some sacrificed their own lives in their mission quests.⁹

⁷ Distinction will be from here on made between pioneer missionaries who foresaw the introduction of Christianity in the “dark” Continent and the colonial Church which I use generically to refer to the colonial missionaries who while building on the first group were part of the larger colonial population in support of the British Empire as it established itself in East Africa. The completion of the Uganda railway line in 1903 saw an outpouring of missionaries into interior Kenya with the Nyanza area becoming a popular destination. By 1907 Kenya was teeming with missionaries through Church Missionary Society (C.M.S), African Inland Mission (A.I.M), Church of Scotland Mission (C.S.M), Gospel Mission Society (G.M.S), Seventh Day Adventist Mission, Friends of Africa Mission and other independent groups.

⁸ This was the name given to those who went to school where reading and writing took place. According to Wanyoike, the term later took new meaning to refer to “any proselytized Kikuyu”. The new understanding applied to all who converted to foreign religions, irrespective of whether they knew how to read or not. See E. N. Wanyoike, *An African Pastor* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1974), 29.

⁹ See in particular J. Ludwig Krapf, *Travels, Researches, and the Missionary Labours, during an Eighteen Years' Residence in Eastern Africa: Together with Journeys to Jagga, Usambara, Ukambani, Shoa, Abessinia, and Khartum; and a Coasting Voyage from Mombaz to Cape Delgado* (London: Trubner and Co., 1860), 156-157.

1.1d Importance of this research

While much research and writing have been done on the history of Christian mission and the development of Christianity and theology in Kenya, the research literature in biblical studies and hermeneutics pays little attention to the processes and consequences of colonisation for biblical interpretation and uses of scripture in Kenya. In postcolonial Kenya, where the Bible has widely been accepted as the supreme rule of faith, ethics and morality, few indigenous biblical scholars have engaged in critical biblical scholarship which interrogates the relationship between the Bible and colonialism regarding the issues of language, class, gender, ideology and human subjectivity. Among the many trained theologians, few are biblical scholars. As Gerald West has observed of African theologians, it is also true of the Kenya biblical academy that only a handful of Kenyan biblical scholars consciously reflect on methodology and theory.¹⁰

In addition, the postcolonial context, just as the colonial context, remains a site where the Bible has the potential of becoming both a solution and a problem, both an oppressor and liberator.¹¹ In Kenya, the Bible is now widely accepted as an African book and a beloved text, however, its potency as a destructive force cannot be ignored.¹² The Bible as literature remains a powerful tool in which a given ideology can be passed on and be received as the norm in daily practices.¹³ Moreover, the postcolonial context in which the Bible operates is still contestable and ambiguous.

¹⁰ Gerald West, "African Biblical Hermeneutics and Bible Translation", in Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole and Ernst R. Wendland, eds., *Interacting with Scriptures in Africa* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2005), 4.

¹¹ On this potentiality I follow Gerald West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Contexts*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), 52.

¹² Gerald West "African Biblical Hermeneutics and Bible Translation", 3.

¹³ On the debate on the biblical texts and ideology see Itumeleng J. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989); Gerald West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation*, 1995; Sandra Schneiders, Sandra M. *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as sacred Scripture*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1999; a rebuttal by Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A model for Theological Interpretation*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 62-96.

Kenya is a divided nation: one side is constituted by a rich elite minority and the other by the poor, peasant working classes. The poor and disenfranchised continue bearing the blunt force of violence, exploitation, cultural subjugation, politically instigated “tribal” hatred, and abject poverty, while the elite and the rich continue with their accumulation of wealth.¹⁴ The postcolonial situation in Kenya demands a new critical tradition in biblical studies and hermeneutics that follow colonial resistant literature to affirm the right of people once again to seize the initiative of history. I am of the opinion that such a critical edge in Kenyan biblical scholarship that is able to harness the true creative power of the African people is yet to be developed. This study builds on the new methodological and theoretical approach in African biblical studies which has been laid out through the able minds of Gerald West, Musa Dube, Itumeleng J. Mosala and Aloo O. Mojola, among others postcolonial biblical critics.

1.1e Re-Defining Hermeneutics

Gerald West has observed that considerable amount of literature focus on the significant role the Bible has played in the formation of African Christianity. Unfortunately, West adds, such literature has created the impression that the encounter between the Bible and Africa has flowed in one direction only: from the Bible to Africa.¹⁵ This formulation assumes Africa to be an object upon which the Bible acts. Careful historical analysis has however revealed another scenario where

¹⁴ A recent example is the news item that reported the Kenyan police use of teargas and violence in an attempt to break a sit-in staged by displaced women (from north Rift Valley Internal Displaced People’s camps) camping outside the Kenyan Parliament Building in order to seek audience with President Mwai Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga who seemed to have forgotten these victims. The women were victims of post-election violence resulting from the disputed 2007 presidential poll results. The violence led to the death of over 1,000 people leaving over 300,000 people displaced from their homes and property worth millions destroyed in the violence that raged for close to two months. Ironically, not far away from this episode which was never given headline coverage, Members of Parliament, who had direct responsibility in the violence, were rewarding themselves by shooting down a proposal to tax their huge allowances. Thursday, 27th November 2008, The East African Standard online edition <http://www.eastandard.net/pictures/?#thumb>.

¹⁵ Gerald West, “Mapping African Biblical Interpretation” in Mary N. Getui, Tinyiko Maluleke and Justin Ukong, eds., *Interpreting the New Testament in Africa* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2001), 83.

Africa is no longer seen as an object to be acted upon. Instead, Africa emerges as an actor that has impacted the Bible through creative and sometimes subversive interpretations and constructions offered by the illiterate and semi-literate Africans as this research will show.

It follows then that there is need for an interpretive history of the encounter between the illiterate and semi-literate Africans and the Bible. The analysis has to consider seriously the reception of the Bible in Africa as distinct but related to Christianity.¹⁶ If we bear in mind that the encounter involves literates, semi-literates and illiterates, the analysis then will also have to redefine hermeneutics. This is because Africans have a wide range of interpretative strategies in their engagement with biblical texts. It follows that the task of interpretation and the meaning of understanding will be different and even elusive from the traditional way of seeing hermeneutics as the science of interpretation.¹⁷

The term hermeneutics owes its origin from the Greek ἐρμηνεύω, to “interpret” or to “explain”; ἡ ἐρμηνευτική, that is, the “hermeneutical art”, and hence “hermeneutics”, which translates to the science or art of interpretation. The traditional understanding sees biblical hermeneutics as “the science of interpreting the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.”¹⁸ According to Richard Palmer, the term hermeneutics in antiquity carried three basic notions: “to express” or “to say”; “to explain”; “to translate”.¹⁹ In this case, hermeneutics begins and aims to establish “the principles, methods, and rules which are needful to unfold the sense of what is

¹⁶ West, “Mapping African Biblical Interpretation”, 85.

¹⁷ As advocated in texts such as Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testament* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1883), 17; Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 8.

¹⁸ Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 18.

¹⁹ Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 13.

written.”²⁰ And the task of interpretation is to “make something that is unfamiliar, distant, and obscure in meaning into something real, near and intelligible.”²¹ Besides defining principles and methods, hermeneutics also exemplify and illustrates them, making hermeneutics both a science and an art. Milton S. Terry’s understanding of hermeneutics represents the scientific guild of hermeneuts who accept interpretation and application of the Bible as a must to “rest upon a sound and self-evidencing science of hermeneutics.”²² In order for one to be “a capable and correct interpreter of the Holy Scriptures”, one must have “a variety of qualifications, both natural and acquired.”²³ From this definition, illiterate and semi-literate readers that this research envisions are technically excluded from doing biblical hermeneutics. Nonetheless, postcolonial theory offers us an alternative understanding of hermeneutics.

According to Fernando F. Segovia, in the last two decades, biblical hermeneutics has witnessed “a veritable process of liberation and decolonization” from the “long-dominant construct of the scientific reader” to the “construct of the real reader”.²⁴ The former “universal, objective and impartial reader” has been replaced with “the local, perspectival and interested reader”.²⁵ This postcolonial model of hermeneutics follows two separate but related approaches in the interpretation of biblical texts. In the first approach, postcolonial theory takes seriously the understanding that biblical texts can actively shape and transform the perceptions, understanding, and actions of readers and the reading community.²⁶ As such postcolonial critics raise new questions concerning the historical and literary

²⁰ Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 19.

²¹ Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 14; Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 19.

²² Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 22.

²³ Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 151.

²⁴ Fernando F. Segovia, “Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies: Toward a Postcolonial Optic” in R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed. *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 34-35.

²⁵ Segovia, “Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies”, 34.

²⁶ Segovia, “Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies”, 37; Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 31.

contexts of biblical texts, expanding “the moral imagination of the interpretive process.”²⁷ Their main agenda is to investigate how the cultural production and literary imagination of the Hebrew people and early Christians may have been shaped by the socio-political domination of successive empires.²⁸ Postcolonial criticism brings to the fore the reality of the empire and how this reality helped define and shape the collective memory, the literary production and redaction of biblical texts, and the canonization process of the Bible.

The second approach takes hermeneutics as the study of the processes of the operative conditions in which ordinary readers transform biblical texts. This approach takes seriously the reality of imperial tradition of the West and the use of the Bible to justify empire-building which has always been accompanied by a prominent socio-religious dimension. But even with the overwhelming religious and colonial socio-political realities, postcolonial theory asserts that the colonised did not accept biblical interpretations of the colonisers with “absolute and undisturbed passivity”.²⁹ It is in this latter perspective that I am interested. This is because the perspective accepts (instead of dismissing) the illiterate and semi-literate African readers as active contributors in the interpretive process.³⁰ The perspective also opens up the possibility of engaging the trained hermeneuts within the interpretive community for a particular commitment and particular interpretative interests.³¹

²⁷ Kwok Pui-Lan, “Making the Connections: Postcolonial Studies and Feminist Biblical Interpretation” in R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 46.

²⁸ The empires include Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome.

²⁹ Segovia, “Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies”, 40; West, “Mapping African Biblical Interpretation”, 83-89.

³⁰ Gerald West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context*, Second edition (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 23.

³¹ West *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation*, 23.

1.1f Chapter Outline

Chapter 2 begins by situating the use of biblical language in the larger colonial context. In this chapter I explore what I refer to as identifiable principles of legitimation that use biblical language to create binary opposites as constitutive elements in representation and constructions of colonial identities. Chapter 3 begins by challenging the assumption that creation of binary opposites was homogeneous and totalising. The chapter offers an alternative in reading colonial texts using Homi Bhabha rationale of ambivalence and instability in colonial discourses. Due to the ambivalent nature of colonialism and the resilient indigenous African cultural and religious ideas, oppositional hermeneutics became possible. This idea is further developed in chapter 4 where I discuss the Bible translation and then in chapter 5 and 6 where I look closely at the emergence of resistance hermeneutics. In chapter 7 using the Mau-Mau as a case study, I explore the radical reading and interpretation of biblical texts by the fighting men and women. I also interrogate Fanon's psychoanalysis to explore the impact of biblical language in the African psyche and the place of the East Africa Revival movement in the ensuing developments.³² In Chapter 8, I propose an African hermeneutic theory that accepts both scholarly readers and the ordinary readers with respect to biblical interpretation as involved in the act of reading constituting a community of readers within their particular sociocultural milieu. It calls the socially engaged scholars to commit to read the Bible from the experienced reality of societal margins; read communally with each other; and to read critically. The metaphor *Sokoni* (at the marketplace) is proposed as the starting point in which both the "ordinary" readers and socially engaged scholars can

³² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin Books, 1963), 200-250 and *Black Skin, White Masks* [*Peau noire, masques blancs*, translated from the French by Richard Philcox] (New York: Grove Press, (1952) 2008); See also Homi Bhabha, "Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition" in Williams, Patrick and Laura Chrisman, eds. *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A reader* (Harlow, England: Pearson Education, 1994), 112-123.

engage the Bible through the language of the African theatre and storytelling as hermeneutical tools. In the same chapter, using the postcolonial practice and reading strategy I re-examine Matthew 16:13-28. I argue that Jesus' declaration to Peter in Matthew 16:13-28 must be understood in light of Matthean use of Σκάνδαλον (Matthew 16:23; 18:7), Σκάνδαλίση (Matthew 18:6), and Σκάνδαλίζει (Matthew 18:8.) τὴν ἐκκλησίαν (Matthew 16:18.)

Part II

1.2.1 Literature review

The development of biblical studies and hermeneutics in Africa is a recent phenomenon.³³ This is despite the fact that the Bible was known to the Africans as early as the second and third century, mainly in the North African cities of Carthage, Hippo and Alexandria. The first African biblical exponents included Clement, Origen, Cyprian, Tertullian and Augustine. However, despite vigorous biblical activities, the use of the Bible in Africa remained elitist and confined only to the Latinised minority largely disconnected from the local population.³⁴ Even though the Greek Bible had been translated into Coptic, Ethiopic and Nubian languages, serious biblical studies were lacking.³⁵

The emergence of formal biblical interpretation in modern Africa is linked by Tinyiko S. Maluleke to John William's *Hebrewism of West Africa* published in 1930 drawing linguistic parallelism between the Ashanti and Hebrew language as a vilification of African traditions and religion.³⁶ The first critical work in African biblical studies, however, evolved through the work of Harry Sawyer, Kwesi Dickson, Byang Kato, Leonidas Kalugila, Kofi Appiah-Kubi, John Mbiti, Daniel Wambutda, Charles Nyamiti, and more recently Johnson Kĩmũhu among others.³⁷

³³ This is apart from Fourah Bay which had theological studies since 1874. See John Parratt, "African Theology and Biblical Hermeneutics", *African Theological Journal* Vol. 12, 2 (1983), 92-93.

³⁴ For an in-depth coverage of biblical appropriation during these early days before colonialism in Africa, see R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 13-41; Maureen A. Tilley, *The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

³⁵ Coptic, Ethiopic and Nubian versions translated from the Greek New Testament are among the witnesses used by textual critics in the reconstruction of a critical version of the ancient Greek New Testament. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 68ff.

³⁶ Tinyiko S. Maluleke "African Christianity, the Bible, and Theology" in Gosnell L. O. R. Yorke and Peter M. Renju, *Bible Translation & African Languages* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2004), 166.

³⁷ Harry Sawyer, *Creative Evangelism* (Lutterworth, 1968); Kwesi Dickson, *The History and Religion of Israel* (Longman, 1968), *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs* (Lutterworth, 1969); Byang Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (1975); Leonidas Kalugila, *The Wise King: Studies in Royal Wisdom as Divine Revelation in the Old Testament and its Environment* (CWK Gleerup, 1980); Kofi Appiah-Kubi,

In Kenya, John Mbiti pioneered the idea of integrating the biblical world with that of the traditional African world through African theology.³⁸ His work formed the catalyst of what was later popularised as “inculturation theology”. The purpose of this model is to consciously and explicitly subject biblical texts to a socio-cultural analysis and comparatively relate it to African socio-cultural perspectives. Using comparative studies of the biblical world and the world of Africa, Mbiti drew similarities between the two cultures which revealed that African cultures were closer to the biblical world than the patronising western cultures. African religion(s), culture and metaphors became the hermeneutical keys through which the text could be engaged. For example, in *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background*, Mbiti focused on the question of eschatology relating the New Testament insights to African concepts.³⁹

Other theologians such as Zablon N’thamburi and Douglas Waruta among others have followed Mbiti in their argument that contextualisation or inculturation through cultural hermeneutics bridges the gap between biblical meaning and the contemporary cultural setting.⁴⁰ The two acknowledge the pitfalls of simplistic Biblicism and argue that biblical interpretation must be done within the African context(s). They rightly argue that it is the culture which should determine our priorities in any attempt to re-read the Bible within the African context. However, the

“Jesus Christ: Some Christological Aspects from African Perspectives”, in *African and Asian Contributions to Contemporary Theology* (Ecumenical Institute, 1977); John Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background* (SPCK, 1978); Daniel Wambutda, *Old Testament History and Religion* (1978); Charles Nyamiti, *Christ as our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective* (1984); Johnson Kĩmũhu, *Leviticus: The Priestly Laws and Prohibitions from the Perspective of Ancient Near East and Africa* (Peter Lang, 2008). See John Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 46-63 for a short review of the development and emergence biblical studies in Africa.

³⁸ John S. Mbiti, “The Biblical Basis in Present Trends of African Theology”, *African Theological Journal*. Volume 7, 1 (1978), 72.

³⁹ Mbiti, “The Biblical Basis in Present Trends of African Theology”, 59-60; See also Kwesi Dickson, “Towards a *Theologia Africana*” in M. E. Glasswell and E. W. Fasholé-Luke, eds., *New Testament Christianity for Africa and the World* (London: S.P.C.K, 1974) ,204.

⁴⁰ Hannah W. Kĩnoti and John M. Waliggo, eds., *The Bible in African Christianity: Essays in Biblical Theology* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1997), 42.

two, like most Kenyan theologians, assume that the Bible is a historical document, which just needs purging of certain cultural artefacts for it to take hold in African society. This begs the question about the historicity of the Bible as far as its content is concerned. N'thamburi and Waruta also assume that if we go back to history and examine biblical texts in their historical circumstances we will be able to understand the language and purpose of the authors. From what we now know through historical-critical approaches about the time difference and our uncertainty concerning the authorship of many biblical texts and original audiences, is this possible?⁴¹

My critique does not negate the fact that the African approach to the Bible as evidenced in Mbiti and others has a unique characteristic of its own. What Mbiti and others articulate serves as a critique and to a greater measure a rejection of Western biblical hermeneutics that have silenced Africans for years. It is a defiance and interruption of the patronising and hegemonic Western approaches. However, those who call for inculturation or cultural hermeneutics need to recognise that cultures were not just sites for colonial suppression and oppression but also vital tools for resistance.⁴² Since the impact of colonialism on culture was intimately related to economic processes, politics and race there is need to re-examine how these realities affected the Africans' understanding of the Bible. Equally problematic is the cultural hermeneutics' uncritical acceptance of the Bible as the unquestionable Word of God.⁴³ Contextualisation negates different preoccupations and contexts of the Bible as well as those of the interpreters as Johnson Kimũhu has ably demonstrated.

⁴¹ This debate has been widened by many biblical scholars who recognise the theoretical validity of a variety of interpretive methods and approaches.

⁴² Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2005), 26.

⁴³ As we shall see in the chapter 8, Mosala argues that such a position represents an ideological captivity to the hermeneutical principles of a theology of oppression. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*, 16-20.

Johnson Kĩmũhu, one of the best Old Testament scholars in Kenya and a disciple of historical critical methods, shows clearly why biblical scholars must pay close attention to different preoccupations and contexts of the Bible. He has meticulously analysed Leviticus 18 using historical criticism but locating it within the scope of African culture. His book *Leviticus: The Priestly Laws and Prohibitions from the Perspective of Ancient Near East and Africa* examines biblical texts, ancient Near Eastern texts, and oral traditions from Africa. Kĩmũhu examines in detail the history of the development of ancient laws in general and family laws in particular. He reviews the question of incest from anthropological, sociological and exegetical perspectives. Besides offering exegetical interpretation of Leviticus 18, Kĩmũhu analyses the scholarly literature on incest and family laws in Egyptian, Ugaritic, Hittite and Canaanite literature. He contextualises the study of the biblical Hebrew legal system by relating some issues in Leviticus 18 to Gĩkũyũ cultural traditions with special emphasis on how certain key terms expressing taboos have been translated in the Gĩkũyũ translation of the Old Testament. He further looks at the problems posed with regard to the interpretation and translation of difficult biblical concepts into African languages. The inadequacy of Kĩmũhu's methodology in engaging contemporary issues and hermeneutics is evident in his final chapter where he attempts to highlight the importance of culture in both the translation of the Bible and its interpretation. The chapter, as with proponents of inculturation, idealises and accepts the pre-colonial culture as "expressive of the collective essence of a pristine traditional community" which could be easily recovered using the acquired historical-critical tools.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ See Kimuhu, *Leviticus*, 384; See also Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In my Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 56; See also a review of his book in by Knut Holter, School of Mission and Theology, Norway, http://www.mhs.no/article_802.shtml.

Musimbi Kanyoro, on the other hand, succeeds in showing how the elements of split self-identity and cultural consciousness impinge upon biblical interpretation. She offers an alternative approach to the African women's correlation of culture and demands of the gospel through a rereading of the book of Ruth.⁴⁵ Kanyoro's work first serves as a critique to the "inculturation" group which is overwhelmingly male dominated and uses patriarchal as well as patronising parameters that ignore or reinforce stereotypes against women. Attention to cultural attitudes and practices expose African women's vulnerability, particularly in areas where harmful practices and traditions are perpetuated.⁴⁶ Kanyoro insists that scholars cannot afford to have the old authority simply replaced by new authority. Her approach to biblical texts, though greatly influenced by Feminist and Womanist approaches, uniquely draws from African women's experience. Kanyoro uses culture as an analytical tool and as a paradigm for a gender-sensitive hermeneutics as well as a means of seeking justice and the liberation of women in Africa.⁴⁷

Moving beyond inculturation and mere contextualisation, Kanyoro urges the use of gender analysis as the entry point into cultural hermeneutics. In this case, women are allowed to name the oppressive aspects of African cultures by telling their stories (individually and collectively) of dehumanising cultural practices.⁴⁸ The purpose of storytelling is to help the reader as well as the interpreter to make connections between faith and action where experience and reflections intersect.⁴⁹ When these stories are told collectively, they begin to shape into "a body of

⁴⁵ Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2002), 13; See also Kimuhu's concluding remarks, *Leviticus*, 384.

⁴⁶ Kanyoro, *Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics*, 15.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴⁹ Kanyoro, *Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics*, 23.

experiences” and “expressions that free and strengthens”.⁵⁰ What is most empowering about Kanyoro’s approach is the inclusion of the ordinary readers (in this case illiterate women) as capable hermeneuts. Kanyoro reminds us that the decision to include illiterate communities “is an issue of justice, not simply a choice”.⁵¹ She also argues that “the culture of the reader in Africa has more influence on the way the biblical text is understood and used in communities than in the historical culture of the text.”⁵² Therefore, the hermeneut must have the knowledge of the nuances of the culture into which the Bible is read. This requires that the experience of rural communities and of women be included in the meaning of the texts of the Bible. Kanyoro, however, while implicitly critiquing the Bible, treads softly on the fact that the Bible may also be a problematic text that perpetuates oppression in many instances.

The point of this discussion, as shown by Kanyoro, is that Kenyan scholars’ uncritical use of the Bible in postcolonial Kenya avoided their responsibility to critically analyse dominant presuppositions such as colonial and cultural hermeneutics. It is imperative for biblical scholarship in Kenya to engage in a closer examination of ideologies and biases that form the basis of any interpretation. There is need for a new way of engaging the Bible that is less prescriptive but which is interested in analytical description of the reality of African biblical interpretation.⁵³ Just like Mosala challenged South African black theologians to re-discover the black working class and poor peasant culture in order to find for itself a hermeneutical starting point, so also must the Kenyan biblical academy reconnect with Fanon’s

⁵⁰ Kanyoro, *Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics*, 24.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 31

⁵² *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵³ Gerald West argues that African biblical hermeneutics is still an elusive term and that it is in the process of being defined. West, “African Biblical Hermeneutics and Bible Translation”, 3.

“Wretched of the Earth”.⁵⁴ Hermeneutics should not be something removed from history and culture.⁵⁵ It must also be accountable to the marginalised and not just to the academia.

1.2.2 Biblical Historical Criticism and Postcolonial Contexts

Historical criticism has helped to demonstrate that the Bible is made up of a multiplicity of varying and sometimes contradictory traditions as a result of a long history over which they were produced and variety of situations that produced such traditions. I find literary and textual criticisms to be most helpful in postcolonial interrogation of colonial texts and discourses. However, whereas the historical-critical method is still necessary, just like inculturation, this method can never be sufficient in hermeneutical questions that arise from both the colonial and postcolonial situations in Africa for several reasons. In the first place, historical criticism fails in its inability to speak to practical issues of life to which the Bible directly speaks. Historical criticism while offering very important tools to engage within biblical studies seems disconnected to the questions of faith and practice.⁵⁶

Secondly, biblical studies in the West begin with the study of the “original” texts whether Greek or Hebrew. Some scholars claim that the New Testament is linguistically closer to the Western mind since English and Greek languages are closely connected. J. H. Moulton made clear how this connection became possible. He wrote that “the New Testament appears in the dress of our own family.”⁵⁷ That is to

⁵⁴ Mosala argues for a hermeneutics that uses materialistic-hermeneutics as its starting point. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*, 26; See also Gerald West in R.S. Sugirtharajah, ed. *Vernacular Hermeneutics: The Bible and Postcolonialism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 40-41; Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin Books, 1963).

⁵⁵ James Cone, “Looking Back, Going Forward: Black Theology as Public Theology”, 251.

⁵⁶ This inadequacy is well reflected in Johnson Kĩmũhu’s work cited above.

⁵⁷ J. H. Moulton, *An Introduction to the Study of New Testament Greek* (London: The Epworth Press, 1930), 2.

say the two languages are members of the Indo-Germanic family.⁵⁸ According to Moulton, these languages are related in light of unity of structure and vocabulary. Moulton concluded that the connection between English and Greek later saw the development of historical criticism in biblical studies whose main aim was to draw historical distinction between the text and contemporary society.⁵⁹

Biblical studies in Kenya and Africa in general cannot claim such a connection since transference of thought as the one claimed by Moulton above could never have happened for several reasons. In the first place, there has been little or no substantive research on linguistic or historical connection between biblical Hebrew and biblical Greek and African languages. African languages developed independently of biblical languages. In most cases, these languages were spoken rather than written while biblical languages were received in form of texts in which they were preserved. Secondly, the Bible came to most parts of Africa as a given text translated by the missionaries into different African languages.⁶⁰ The missionaries had first to reduce the African languages into written forms before embarking on the translation process. To the Agĩkũyũ or any other Africans this given text became *Ibuku rĩa Ngai* (God's Book).⁶¹ We cannot also ignore the ideological purpose (discussed in depth in chapter 4) behind the translation process since missionaries were part of the colonising agency. This means, at least in my opinion, that biblical scholarship in Kenya must begin elsewhere, before employing historical critical methods.

Postcolonial theory and historical consciousness provide clues for the development of a useful framework for studying the way biblical language was used

⁵⁸ These include Indian, Iranian, Armenian, Italic, Keltic, Germanic and Slavonic branches.

⁵⁹ See also Hendrikus Boers, *What is New Testament Theology? The Rise of Criticism and the Problem of a Theology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 16-17.

⁶⁰ This point shall be discussed in detail in chapter four.

⁶¹ To some the Bible was referred to as *Mbuku ya mwene Nyaga* (The Book of the Owner of Brightness.) See Peter Ndegwa Magana's letter to the editor in *Muigwithania wa Andu na Bururi wa Gikuyu*, Vol. 1, no. 10 (March 1929), 15.

within the Gĩkũyũ country in Kenya as a means of control and resistance. I will use the two coupled with other useful tools such as anthropology and psychoanalysis in my investigation.

1.2.3 Methodology

1.2.3a Postcolonial Criticism

In my opinion, postcolonial criticism offers the best theoretical and methodological tool to help analyse and interpret archival materials and colonial texts. Postcolonialism, though a much contested term⁶², in biblical studies is defined as “scrutinizing and exposing colonial domination and power as they are embodied in biblical texts and in interpretations, and as searching for alternative hermeneutics while thus overturning and dismantling colonial perspectives.”⁶³ In addition, as Fernando Segovia shows, postcolonial studies take seriously the reality of the empire, of imperialism and colonisation, as “an omnipresent, inescapable and overwhelming reality in the world.”⁶⁴ Since colonisation was not just about soldiers and cannons but also about forms, images and imaginings, postcolonial inquiry is helpful in investigating the issues of empire, nation, ethnicity, migration, human subjectivity, race and language.⁶⁵

⁶² Sugirtharajah explores the multiplicity of meanings of the term “Postcolonialism” and how it relates to other academic fields such as post-modernism and post-structuralism. See R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *The Postcolonial Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 93. See also Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 7-90; John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 6-36.

⁶³ Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Bible*, 16. Broadly, postcolonialism is defined by Young as a “self-conscious political philosophy” receiving its first positive role at the Bandung Conference of 1955 where 29 mostly newly independent states in Africa and Asia initiated what became to be referred to as the ‘non-aligned’ movement as a third way of perceiving political, economic, and cultural global priorities. It received its militant version in Havana in 1966 at the great Tricontinental Conference as a global alliance resisting the continuing imperialism of the West. See Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 16-18.

⁶⁴ Fernando F. Segovia, “Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies Toward a Postcolonial Optic”, 56.

⁶⁵ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), 6; Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Bible*, 16.

As a concept “postcolonialism” though problematic helps bring together a number of issues, even conflicting ones.⁶⁶ First among these can be located in the term “colonialism”. Whenever the term is invoked, it draws immediate reaction from both sides of the aisle.⁶⁷ There are those from the former colonies who see today’s indictment of colonialism as a brand of “cheap, demagogic and outmoded rhetoric”.⁶⁸ The term conjures an image of people’s inability to take responsibility of their problems. This group from the formerly colonised countries looks at the African inglorious past as paralleled to modern day African failed state of affairs. In other words, rather than deal with their own failures, in self-defence the formerly colonised people resort to apportioning blame to others for their problems. On their part, people from the former colonising world see ingratitude. The group juxtaposes blessings of civilisation that Europe brought to Africa against modern day African return of ingratitude. They are quick to remind that the postmodern powers repudiate colonial missteps and in order to make up for these missteps, new relationships of equality between once-colonised and colonisers have been established.

Nonetheless, without merely apportioning blame and self-righteousness, there is a real need to investigate this rather complex relationship that developed with all of its totalising discourses. The primacy and even the complete centrality of colonialism was so totalising in its form, attitudes and gestures, that it virtually shut out any innovation or alternatives within the colony. Rather than accept colonialism as simply

⁶⁶ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Writers in Politics: A Re-engagement with Issues of Literature and Society*, Revised edition (Oxford: James Curry, 1997), xii.

⁶⁷ When using the term colonialism, I am aware of the fact that legacies of colonialism are varied and multiple even as they obviously share some important features. European colonialism was not a monolithic operation; rather right from its inception, it deployed diverse strategies and methods of control and of representation. For further discussion on this important observation see Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 7-22; See also Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, (Translated by Howard Greenfeld from *Portrait du Colonisé precede du Portrait du Colonisateur*, 1957, Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), ix.

⁶⁸ Chinua Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays 1965-1987* (New York: Heinemann, 1988), 46.

a divine project undertaken for the glory of God and an extension of the rule of law, through postcolonial inquiry we are able to understand that colonialism and all its manifestations both in intentions and acts was an integral part of capitalist development.⁶⁹ Colonialism as wa Thiong'o and Aimé Césaire remind us is a practise and not a theory. It is a historical process and not a metaphysical idea; a relationship of power at the economic, political and cultural levels.⁷⁰

Besides the domination of physical space, the other important aspect of colonialism was in its ability to persuade the colonised people to internalise colonial logic and speak its language. In the commonly known process of “colonising the mind”, the colonised succumbed by accepting the lower ranking in the colonial order while assimilating the values and assumptions of the colonisers.⁷¹ Colonialism suggested certain ways of seeing reality and specific modes of understanding that reality. In the end it offered explanation as to the place of the colonised in the colonial world which in almost all cases was a subservient position while rendering the coloniser as superior in all ways. It is in this subtle dynamic that led to the internalisation of certain expectations about human relationships that colonialism was effectively devastating. Through language, colonialism took upon itself the power of describing, naming, defining, and representing the colonised. Since language, as wa Thiong'o has offered, is the carrier of culture and values by which we perceive ourselves and our place in the world, colonisation by imposing upon the colonised a particular value-system it succeeded in denigrating the colonised's cultural values.⁷²

⁶⁹ Albert Memmi makes a strong case in this regard. His central argument is that colonialism was mainly about economics. See his treatise *The Colonizer and the Colonised*, [1957], 1967, pp. 1-18.

⁷⁰ wa Thiong'o, *Writers in Politics*, 7; Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, New Edition (New York: New York University Press, 2000) 32-33; see also V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 2.

⁷¹ McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 18.

⁷² Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo, *Decolonising the Mind: The politics of language in African Literature* (Oxford: James Curry, 1986), 16. See also McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 18.

Therefore, postcolonial inquiry as wa Thiong'o articulates, brings to the fore the questions of language and their importance in answering the question of identity and being.⁷³

The second important aspect of postcolonialism is not just its contestation of colonial domination but also in neo-colonialism and the legacies of colonialism.⁷⁴

Rather than place colonialism securely in the past or suggesting a continuous line from that past into our present, postcolonialism contends that colonial values and attitudes did not disappear with the acquisition of national independence. The past colonial experiences still cast their shadows over our own present.⁷⁵ The experience of the colonial situation outlived the attainment of formal independence.

Postcolonialism begins from the perspective that postcolonial reality is framed by active legacies of colonialism, by the institutional infrastructures inherited from colonial power by elite groups, or appropriated by later generations of elites.⁷⁶ In biblical studies' area of theory, the structure and culture of the colonial society are evident in the tendency to omit colonialism, racism, and ideologies of repression. Through postcolonialism, we are not only able to challenge such tendencies, but also see colonialism and decolonisation as not separate phases in history but as cultural processes in dialectical relationship with each other which brings me to the third aspect of postcolonialism.

Postcolonial criticism ultimate's goal is to offer an alternative intellectual inquiry and interpretation on the past and present encounters with both the colonial

⁷³ wa Thiong'o, *Writers in Politics*, xiii.

⁷⁴ Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 16; McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 5-10.

⁷⁵ Mugambi gives classic examples of how African "ecclesial identity" continues to be impeded in the world arena; how ecumenical unity at the local and international level is denied through denominational identity sponsored from metropolitan centres in Europe and America; and religious and cultural identities continue to be denied as social foundation of African Christianity. J. N. K. Mugambi and Johannes A. Smit, eds., *Text and Context in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2004), 7-8.

⁷⁶ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 27.

and present global encounters of unequals.⁷⁷ As an academic venture, postcolonial theory interrogates biblical texts as well as interpretation of these texts for colonial intentions and tendencies. In a clearer way, it investigates and exposes the link between knowledge and power in textual production where the dialectical relationship between language and power is fundamental and far-reaching.⁷⁸

To bring the essentials of postcolonialism as a style of inquiry to bear, I will use several leading voices to inform this perspective. The first among these theorists is psychologist Frantz Fanon and his works *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*. Drawing upon his experience as a psychoanalyst, Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* examined the psychological effects of colonialism. To start with, Fanon observes that the colonial relationships evolved in a hostile world which was racially divided - a Manichaeistic world.⁷⁹ It was a world divided into compartments where the African remained in a servile situation. Fanon was also concerned with the psychological toll on the individual who because of the colour of the skin, was rendered peculiar and became an object of derision.⁸⁰ The individual as a colonial subject had his or her identity revised by a group that saw him or her as inferior. In the evolving colonial relationship, the coloniser defined and represented the colonised. As such, study of the colonial situation reveals the power of description and of naming (through language) where colonialism is seen as not only holding captive people's imaginations but also alienating them from their real self.

⁷⁷ I follow Spivak who sees neo-colonial situation as largely economic rather than territorial particularly in the post-Soviet era where discourse has shifted into "the dynamics of financialization of the globe". Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 3.

⁷⁸ Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Bible*, 92.

⁷⁹ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 40.

⁸⁰ Drawing from his own experience, Fanon saw himself not as a human subject, but as an object, an aberration. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* [*Peau noire, masques blancs*, translated from the French by Richard Philcox], (New York: Grove Press, (1952) 2008), 89-119; See also McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 20.

Identity, in this case is something that the coloniser makes of the colonised, committing a violence that splits the colonised very sense of self.⁸¹ It colonises the mind; dislocating and distorting the psyche of the colonised.⁸² Therefore, in the process of identity formation, the colonised subjects are forced to internalise the self as the “other” and to hold a belief in their own inferiority.⁸³ The traumatic effect of this internalisation leads to many colonised subject’s attempt to escape as far as they can from themselves and embrace the “civilised” ideals of the colonisers.⁸⁴ The colonised become imitators who mimic everything European, rather than becoming creators. Although Fanon was greatly influenced by Marxism, he did not see use of Marxist ideas as empty rhetoric. His project aimed at bringing awareness to the colonised about the positive possibility of existence; enabling them to choose action or passivity with respect to the real source of conflict.⁸⁵ What Fanon’s psychoanalysis reveals to us is that the relationship between language and power is fundamental and far-reaching. This research will try to understand the role that biblical language plays in this relationship.

The second important voices are that of Edward Said, *Orientalism*⁸⁶ and that of Gayatri C. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”⁸⁷ *Orientalism* articulates

⁸¹ Gayatri C. Spivak refers to this violence as “epistemic violence” i.e. that which constitute colonial subject as “Other”. See Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” and Homi Bhabha, “Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition”, in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A reader* (Harlow, England: Pearson Education, 1994), 76, 114. See also McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 20.

⁸² Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 122-123.

⁸³ See in particular Frantz Fanon’s critique of psychological consequences of French colonisation in *Black Skin, White Masks*.

⁸⁴ Force of assimilation leads ultimately to alienation from one’s own reality and being; alienation produces self-hatred. It requires defiant will, “violent affirmation” of one’s own consciousness. Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 89-90.

⁸⁵ Fanon named this source as the colonial socio-economic structure. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 80.

⁸⁶ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguins Book, 1978)

⁸⁷ Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, 66-111.

postcolonialism as a reading strategy.⁸⁸ It helps detect first the asymmetrical oppositions underpinning geography of the colony mostly, landscape where one is seen negatively while the positive one identifies the civilising presence of the colonisers.⁸⁹ Secondly, it helps figure out various representations of the colonial subject as the *other*: as one who threatens the *Pax Britannica* or as a domesticated obedient servant of the empire. The individual is represented as an atom or an object of fun in a vast collectivity designated as an undifferentiated type called the African.⁹⁰

Spivak is equally helpful in her analysis of the seemingly innocent and objective western intellectual representations of the “Other”. She is suspicious of the “the first-world intellectual” who masquerades as “the absent nonrepresenter who lets the oppressed speak for themselves”.⁹¹ Spivak’s contention is that while such a representation may seem to portray the intellectual as transparent, it masks the intellectual’s construction of the subaltern. By arguing that the establishment of the “ethnocentric Subject” is not “a program for the Subject” but “a program for the benevolent *Western* intellectual”, Spivak shows that texts are never innocent.⁹² She therefore decries any quick attempt to recover the “voice” of the subaltern because the colonial power was so pervasive that it obliterated in toto the colonised voice.

Both Spivak and Said help us to make not only the connection between the production of knowledge and the exercise of power but also to discuss historical and epistemological processes. They allow us to see how power works through language, literature, culture and the institutions which regulates people’s daily lives. Moreover,

⁸⁸ Mudimbe argues that when dealing with western textual production as well as colonial ones we ought to acknowledge that “discourses have not only sociohistorical origins but also epistemological contexts”, Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, ix.

⁸⁹ See McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 57-66.

⁹⁰ According to Said, by such abstraction, what Orientalism achieves is its power of generalisation in which it converts instances of a civilisation into ideal bearers of its values, ideas, and positions, consequently transforming the *Other* into common cultural currency. Said, *Orientalism*, 252.

⁹¹ Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, 87.

⁹² The italic is her emphasis. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 87.

because of the interrelatedness and overlapping histories that go beyond the colonisation period, both Said and Spivak recognise the potentiality that is there between the “Centres” and the “Margins”. From this understanding has emerged a reading practise that studies and analyses texts from the metropolitans and the margins simultaneously.⁹³ This strategy recognises that beyond claims of the primacy of the West with its totalising discourses, there is another perspective outside the colonial representations.⁹⁴ The world which Western narratives tried to domesticate, speak and act against, testifies of its diversity and differences, agenda, priorities, and history.⁹⁵

Critics of Fanon, Spivak and Said observe that colonial representations were more volatile than the three assume. Colonial assumptions and strategies of representations are usually ambivalent than resolute in their aims. This brings me to Homi Bhabha’s and Albert Memmi’s readings of the colonial representations of colonial subjects as ambivalent where on one hand such discourses attempt to reduce the colonised seemingly *otherness* while at the same time maintaining this otherness in relation to the colonisers.⁹⁶ In other words, the colonial discourses were never successful in producing stable and fixed identities.⁹⁷ Bhabha’s and Memmi’s work reveal the anxiety that the representation has on the colonised as one who has the potential of subversion, a less civil role but a harmful one that threatens the colonisers’ stability.⁹⁸ The point the two make is that the colonised is represented as ambivalent, praised and commanded, disciplined and elided yet audible. His presence

⁹³ Edward Said described this as “contrapuntal reading”. See *Culture and Imperialism*, 19-74.

⁹⁴ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 33.

⁹⁵ Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Bible*, 94-95.

⁹⁶ See Bhabha, “Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition”, 112-123; *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, [1994], 2004); See also Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, [1957], 1965.

⁹⁷ Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, xvii; See also Loomba, 2005, p. 92.

⁹⁸ See Said, *Orientalism*, 249-251; McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 62.

is vital. In addition, Bhabha (in particular) argues that the colonised mimicry is a menace and mocks the coloniser opening the possibility of resistance.

What critics like Fanon, Said, Spivak and Bhabha reveal to us is that, in relation to textual production, postcolonialism is interested in the primacy of language in the development of systems of linguistic prescriptions. The importance of language analysis is to recover an inner perspective on a subject, particularly, voices that have been deemed not worthy of social consideration. The aim of such an analysis is to understand how knowledge is formed and produced through discursive practices and representations. Language has to be understood also in terms of power and control, because of its use as a tool of domination and as a means of constructing of identity. For this reason, postcolonialism affirms the worthiness of “ordinary people” and their cultures. It elaborates “a politics of ‘the subaltern’”.⁹⁹ It stands for empowering the poor and disadvantaged, for tolerance of difference and diversity, and refuses to impose alienating ways of thinking on them. Sympathies and interests of postcolonialism are in a general sense focused on those at the margins of society whose cultural identity has been dislocated or left uncertain by forces of colonisation and global capitalism. It is for this reason that the idea of resistance is close to the hearts of postcolonial critics. The idea of resistance reveals that the colonised were not a passive crowd dancing to the drumming of the masters. Some talked back.

Postcolonial critics also help us to appreciate that postcolonial theory is not only a reading strategy but also a practice.¹⁰⁰ It contests social and economic disparities as well as subordination of Africans’ intellect and religious knowledge. Since colonialism is not only an attitude of the mind but also a “system”, Kenyan biblical hermeneutics should not only aim at exposing and dislodging colonial

⁹⁹ Young, *Postcolonialism*, 6.

¹⁰⁰ Young, *Postcolonialism*, 4-8.

attitudes but should also aim at decolonisation. This involves the decolonisation of consciousness from totalising colonial cultural values. In essence decolonisation has to proceed to decolonising the mind, inner life and society.¹⁰¹ For this to happen, biblical hermeneutics has to recognise that decolonisation is a historical process and cannot become intelligible unless we make conscious decision to discern the movements which give it historical form and content. It must fully embrace historical consciousness as a method of engagement.

1.2.3b Historical Consciousness

Postcolonial critics hold that words, if critically analysed, reveal not only the individual speaker but also a socially determined historical consciousness.¹⁰² Since this research is on the use of biblical language and since many biblical teachings raise significant problems for contemporary Christians, several comments on the need for historical consciousness as a method are appropriate now.¹⁰³ There is no task of engaging biblical hermeneutics in Kenya which can lead to understanding Christianity without discussing European Christian mission and colonialism as external factors. African Christians and their European counterparts are intertwined whether their interaction occurred in Church, in sisal plantations, in missionaries' homes where they served as servants or in the battlefield fighting side by side an enemy only understood

¹⁰¹ McLeod identifies three distinct periods of decolonisation: the loss of American colonies and declaration of American independence in the late eighteenth century; demand for political autonomy and creation of British dominions in areas settled by large number of Europeans who violently displace or destroyed indigenous people of the land conquered such as Canada (1867), Australia (1900), New Zealand (1907) and South Africa (1909); Indigenous anti-colonial nationalism and military struggles for independence right after the Second World War (McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 8-9). Césaire believed that decolonisation was particularly important to black people since they were “doubly proletarianized and alienate” first as workers and as blacks. Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 94.

¹⁰² Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 37.

¹⁰³ A lively discussion in regard to hermeneutics, language, culture and theology has been going on for a while, particularly within the postmodern school of thought. Key voices in this regard include John Milbank, *The Word Made Stranger: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997); Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A model for Theological Interpretation* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998); Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology: Challenges in Contemporary Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000); Graham Ward, “Introduction: ‘Where We Stand’ in *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).

by the European master. Biblical hermeneutics in Kenya is as such historical in that it engages colonialism and neo-colonialism and reflects upon the basic condition of life in which people live.

Historical consciousness reminds us that the ‘world of scripture’ is not a clear and readily definable territory.¹⁰⁴ Instead, as Rowan Williams testifies, it is a world “in which meanings are discovered and recovered in action and encounter.”¹⁰⁵ This means that scripturally informed imagination is complex in terms of engagement with the text itself and the reality in which such an engagement happens. If we agree with Williams that the Bible is itself a history of the re-reading of texts, then we must be willing to view it as a text “that has generated an enormous family of contrapuntal elaborations, variations, even inversions”.¹⁰⁶ Stephen Fowl is also emphatic on the need for biblical interpreters to be vigilant while paying attention to the particular, the contingent and the historical in our engagement with the texts of the Bible.¹⁰⁷ Postcolonial theorists on their part, accept that people’s reading of the Bible is framed by their history and culture.¹⁰⁸

I believe historical consciousness is important in that it will help me pay attention to historical developments, changes, and circumstances that led to the establishment of the Bible as foundational in shaping the African thought and religious consciousness. Historical consciousness also helps us to recognise that the message of the Bible affects not only the religious level but also the social, cultural, political, and economic levels of human existence. Such a consciousness also reorients conceptually perspectives of knowledge and needs in order to develop ideas

¹⁰⁴ Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 30.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 30.

¹⁰⁷ See, in particular, chapter three on “Vigilant Communities and Virtuous Readers”. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, 62-96.

¹⁰⁸ Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 3; McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 15.

of “a political practice” which is morally committed to transforming conditions of exploitation and poverty affecting those in the margins of society.¹⁰⁹

The awareness of the African’s embeddedness in historical processes suggests that colonialism could not succeed in toto in incorporating all individuals in the superstructure created. At a practical level colonialism was dependent upon the “natives” for access not only to the land but also their knowledge and culture.¹¹⁰ This involved constant negotiation with or/and even incorporation of indigenous ideas. I believe this is why Bhabha has observed that mimicry was not an act of “straightforward homage”.¹¹¹ Instead, the colonised would use mimicry as a way of eluding control. Imitation and reproduction of knowledge rendered a complete replication of the “original” impossible. It created room for “hybridity”, ambivalence and to a certain degree opened space for subversion. By mimicking Christian messages, the Africans would contest claims to legitimacy and orthodoxy leading to the growth of a tradition of resistance.¹¹² This brings me to the other tool that I intend to focus on in developing a new approach to biblical hermeneutics in Kenya: *allusion*.¹¹³

1.2.3b¹ Allusion

Sugirtharajah identifies several ways in which allusion works in hermeneutical adjustments.¹¹⁴ In biblical interpretation allusion creates intimate feelings and heightened communication between author and himself, reader and the author, reader and the text, and between reader and the interpretive community. The author by

¹⁰⁹ Young, *Postcolonialism*, 4-5, 6; McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 38.

¹¹⁰ See Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 60-62.

¹¹¹ Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 121-131.

¹¹² The 1940s and 1950s saw the publication of volumes of songs, poems and prose through Mau-Mau writing and publishing industry.

¹¹³ For further discussion on allusion, see Prof. R. S. Sugirtharajah’s book *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹¹⁴ Sugirtharajah draws on the theoretical concepts elucidated by Steven Marx in *Shakespeare and the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

considerable use of the biblical material and characters identifies himself with the biblical personalities in order to establish a spatial and metaphysical link. Through allusion the reader is prompted to connect the differences and similarities between the author and biblical narratives. Secondly, allusion subverts “the original meaning of an activated text by trying it in a new context”.¹¹⁵ Finally, through use of allusion an author or a speaker would be using or echoing a “memorable phrase” as an authoritative text to serve as evidence to support a given point or support an argument.

Allusion will be found in the way Christian leaders in Europe related to the Bible quite differently from the way missionaries in mission fields used it. Most of the missionaries who worked close to the natives quoted freely from the Bible and used the text as the basis of their mission. On the other hand, important missionary figures and Mission leaders such Rev. J. H. Oldham and Rev. H. D. Hooper¹¹⁶ among others kept the Bible at an intellectual distance. One can hardly find any biblical texts, quotations or references in the discourses formulated for and about the African from this class of intellectuals. Christianity was more than the Bible. It encompassed the already developed dogmatic and theological propositions which operated under the historical and philosophical tutelage of western tradition. This understanding of Christianity while keeping the Bible “at an arm length” made the text more or less a cultural icon whose symbolism was powerfully used but its content largely ignored. Allusion will help us glean linguistic and biblical ideas used to shape discursive formulations from texts written by these intellectuals.

¹¹⁵ Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 80.

¹¹⁶ Rev. Hooper was a son of an Anglican missionary who had served among the pioneers of mission work in Gikūyū country. He followed his father’s footsteps to work as a missionary in Gikūyū country. Hooper left East Africa in 1926 to serve as CMS African Mission Secretary Desk in London. He accompanied CMS General Secretary on his visit in 1937, and went out again for the Jubilee celebrations at CMS old station in 1956 during the Mau-Mau Crisis.

Nonetheless, interaction with the texts was not monolithic. Africans themselves engaged with the texts as these texts became available in their vernacular. I will use allusion not only from the point of view of the intellectuals but from the Africans' perspective. In this manner, Sugirtharajah is most helpful. I will be testing his argument that even semi-literates or illiterates had a measure of control of the texts and activated them in purposeful ways. In this case, just like the African freed slave Olaudah Equiano,¹¹⁷ Africans through allusion weaved a tapestry of stories that interwove with biblical phrases, words and echoes in order to invoke a "hermeneutical chord" not only to their hearers or readers but also to themselves.

Lastly, if we accept historical consciousness as a valid method of interrogation, then we must also accept that a postcolonial approach to biblical hermeneutics does not exempt formerly colonised peoples from criticism. Stephen Fowl has persuasively shown why biblical hermeneutics need to enter into a life of "vigilant self-reflection".¹¹⁸ There is need for the African investigator to safeguard, for example, from continual worship and veneration of the past which in most cases leads to insularity and provincialism. Likewise, oppositional efforts if not checked can easily lead to, separatism, nativism, reductive nationalism and uncritical dogma. The "rhetoric of blame" and "politics of confrontation and hostility" has tended to encourage mediocrity in which "we are all taught to venerate our nations and admire our traditions" and pursue "interests with toughness and in disregard for other societies."¹¹⁹ It requires new and imaginative re-conceptions of society and culture which avoids the old orthodoxies and injustices such as tribalism which continue to

¹¹⁷Most importantly see Chapter 3 of Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 74-109.

¹¹⁸Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, 78-83; See also Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology*, especially chapter one on "Theological Integrity" and chapter three on "The Judgement of the World", 3-15 and 29-43.

¹¹⁹Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 19.

promote fracturing of societies, separation of communities, greed, bloody conflict and “uninteresting assertions of minor ethnic or group particularity.”¹²⁰

1.2.4 Limitations of a Multi-disciplinary Approach

The multidisciplinary approach proposed in this study has its advantages. The approach has allowed me to experience theoretical innovations and principles of other disciplines. Exploring areas of collaboration in these different but related disciplines has also enabled me to enter into dialogue with them. Such a dialogue has broadened my understanding of the human connections, structures and systems. It has also provided me with adequate background research to determine how discourses affect people as well as an expanded view of the world as provided from different frames of reference.

Nevertheless, the multi-disciplinary approach has its own limitations. One of the most frustrating experiences was recording historical events while remaining faithful to biblical research. This at times, led to confusion of my role in regard to theory and practice. The material gathered from various disciplines was overwhelming and I did not have enough time to adequately consider it all. The approach likewise required rigorous engagement between disciplines and since numerous disciplines were involved, chances of misunderstanding or misrepresenting principles from these areas were high. Lack of integration between disciplines coupled with the traditional attitudes that favour professional separation and dominance over others, were equally frustrating.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 21.

¹²¹ In the process of my application for entry into PhD in New Testament, many professors believed and told me out rightly that my research cannot fit within “biblical scholarship” – rather, it belongs to historical and cultural studies.

CHAPTER 2: BIBLE AND COLONIAL IDENTITIES: COLONIAL CONSTRUCTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND MARGINALITY

*“Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present.”*¹²²

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, using postcolonial theory, I will explore at length what I wish to refer to as identifiable colonial principles of legitimation upon which the colonial reading(s) of the Bible and interpretation(s) took form. The overall argument is to show how such principles of legitimation used biblical language within the totalising acts of construction and representation of the Africans in general and the Agĩkũyũ in particular. These totalising acts assumed the silence of the Africans. I hope to link this argument with the larger claim that biblical language was used as a powerful organising tool in historical development of Christian mission and colonialism in Kenya; consequently laying the foundation on which the Bible was to be introduced and transmitted. The operating assumption was that issues of morality, doctrine and practice were straightforwardly determined by biblical interpretation.

The principles laid out below, I will argue, were grounded on a specific colonial hermeneutical paradigm. By this I refer to the offering of the Bible as simply the Word of God, stable and normative. This paradigm, informed a particular, stable, coherent, and normative way of interpreting the Bible. The reading and interpretation of the Bible followed the larger historicist idea of time as a progressive and ordered whole. The obvious goal of such a monistic view is to secure stability and orthodoxy. Associated with this determinate viewpoint, was the colonial Church’s effort to introduce the Bible selectively and sparingly. The readings and interpretations that emerged from this situation were simple, straight forward, forceful but highly

¹²² Homi Bhabha, “Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition” in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 1994), 121.

contextualised. Most of the biblical homilies and interpretation that we encounter were usually one-verse sermons that overlooked the entire passages but were interpreted to suit the constructed opposites. In colonial Kenya, for example, none, including the new class of African evangelists, catechists and pastors, were trained in the transmission and translation of the Bible from its “original” Hebrew or Greek manuscripts to the canonised text. In addition, the history of varied interpretive approaches to the Bible remained unknown.

The other issue that I hope to make clear in this chapter is that the foundational interpretative colonial practices that followed assumed the presentation of the Christian Gospel and the Bible to the Africans as an innocent, noble and transparent response to Christ’s call for the Great Commission.¹²³ Hinging its authority from scriptural references such Matthew 16:13-20, 28:18-20 and the Macedonian call of Acts 16:6-10, the colonial Church believed it had the mandate to translate, to interpret and to disseminate the meaning(s) of the Bible.¹²⁴ The assumption was that the colonial Church could appropriate and interpret the Bible objectively without being influenced by historical events around which mission took place. It exonerated biblical interpretation from any entanglements with power and political sphere. This separation of spheres would offer representations as apolitical images to be parsed and analysed in light of biblical texts.

¹²³ Dr. John Arthur of Church of Scotland Mission (C.M.S) in a letter dated 20th March, 1907 while mentioning about the gold rush in Kenya and its implication to both White and Black together, saw missionaries’ work as “natural fulfilling Christ’s command to evangelise all nations”, Dr. John Arthur’s Papers in MS Gen. 762. 1-42 (1907) University of Edinburgh. See also Horace R. A. Philp, *A New Day in Kenya* (London: World Dominion Press, 1936); Roland Oliver, *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* (London: Longmans, 1952); Zablon Nthamburi, *From Mission to Church: A Handbook of Christianity in East Africa* (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1991), 7, 26-28.

¹²⁴ Dr. John Arthur in his appeal for more missionaries from his home country, wrote that Africa was calling unto the people of Scotland “Come over and help us”. Arthur called Scotland to give more of its men in the footsteps of Livingstone, Moffat, Mackay, Stewart and Scott, to help in evangelising the expanse land of Africa in the vision of Dr. Krapf and now Dr. Scott – establishing of stations between Gikūyū country and Abyssinia. See Dr. Arthur’s letter to Dr. McMurtrie the Convener of Foreign Missions Committee Church of Scotland of 12th November 1907 in Arthur’s papers, MS Gen. 762. 37a, (1907), University of Edinburgh.

Nonetheless, the paradigm obscured recognition of the determinative influence that missionaries' interests, questions and assumptions played on their interpretation of the Bible. Contexts, as Lamin Sanneh reminds us, are "constructed strategies".¹²⁵ Context is never passive but comes with preconceptions and biases, ready to contest whatever claims it encounters. At the heart of the emerging colonial hermeneutics lay the power to narrate and power to block other narratives from forming and emerging.¹²⁶ David Jobling amplifies this perspective in his proposition about 'systems'. According to Jobling, human systems and in particular the complex system found in "western culture", are built on arbitrary but well established certainties which become near-impregnable defences against alternative ways of being, doing, and thinking.¹²⁷ The crucial point that I take from Jobling's argument is that colonialism as a 'system' had in itself a mechanism that helped "exclude in order to maintain itself as a system".¹²⁸

The ability to choose and decide how the Bible was to be introduced to the Africans points to the postcolonial concept of discourse. Such a concept understands the production of knowledge as not innocent but profoundly connected to the operations of power.¹²⁹ This expanded definition of power helps us see how colonial hermeneutics functioned by generating biblical as well as hermeneutical structures that promoted binary opposition as well as creation of racial boundaries and colonial

¹²⁵ Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity: The Gospel beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 5.

¹²⁶ See Edward Said on how discourses form and inform culture and imperialism in Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), xiii-9.

¹²⁷ Gerald West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Contexts*, 2nd ed (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), 152 where Gerald West quotes from David Jobling's unpublished paper "Introduction", (Sheffield University: Sheffield, 1987.)

¹²⁸ Jobling's argument is that deconstruction is only possible from within the system using the tools that the system offers because of the inability to escape from the system. West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation*, 152.

¹²⁹ See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Penguins Book, 1978, Reprinted with a new Preface 2003), 1-110; see also Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 42.

marginality.¹³⁰ For example, long before the arrival of the complete translation of Gĩkũyũ New Testament, John was the only Gospel available for both the pioneering missionaries and emerging African Christians.¹³¹ John which was the earliest text of the Bible translated into Gĩkũyũ, had been translated by Rev. A. W. McGregor of Church Mission Society (C.M.S.) and published by British and Foreign Bible Society.¹³² Since the issue of translation is very crucial to my discussion, I will discuss it in greater length in chapter 4. However, I need to mention that selection of John as the first Gospel introduced was not an arbitrary one. John 1, for example, defines reality in Manichean terms. The importance of John's dichotomisation of reality is further elaborated below.

The promotion of binary opposites as we shall see later in the chapter served as an oversimplification of the African identity.¹³³ From this oversimplification emerged a Manichean vision that not only physically delimited the African but also declared him an "animist." According to Rev. J. N. Ogilvie,¹³⁴ the African as an animist surrounded himself with a world of spirits "unknown, unseen, but real and powerful."¹³⁵ He lived and moved and had his being in an atmosphere of "fear." The

¹³⁰ Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 4-5.

¹³¹ Dr. Crawford (one of the earliest Anglican missionaries in Gĩkũyũ country) had at his disposal the gospel of John as the only tentative translation to introduce the Gospel to Africans. E. May Crawford, *By the Equator's Snowy Peak: A Record of Medical Missionary Work and Travel in British East Africa* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1913), 71. See also letter by Dr. John W. Arthur to Dr. McMurtrie the Convener of Foreign Missions Committee Church of Scotland of 12th November 1907, John Arthur papers in MS Gen. 762/37a, University of Edinburgh Special Collection (1907).

¹³² John's Gospel had been translated by Rev. A. W. Macgregor in 1903 and revised by Mr. Barlow. BSA/E3/3/253/1 (Kikuyu 1 March 1909-June 1915), BFBS Archives (University of Cambridge); U.K.L.C. minutes of June 7th, 1909, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers), University of Edinburgh Special Collection; See also A. R. Barlow "Story of the Kikuyu Bible", *Kikuyu News*, no. 196 (June 1951), 1161; United Kikuyu Language Committee (U.K.L.C.) Minutes 6/4/1908 -15/8/1933, in Barlow papers University of Edinburgh Special Collection, Gen. 1786/5 1a and 1b.

¹³³ See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin Books, 1963), 190.

¹³⁴ Rev. J. N. Ogilvie served as the moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1918 and also as the convener, of the Church of Scotland Foreign Mission Committee. In his opinion, civilisation without Christianity was no civilisation. His book *Our Empire's Debt to Missions: The Duff Missionary Lecture, 1923* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923) was an apologia of the Mission service to the Empire.

¹³⁵ Ogilvie, *Our Empire's Debt to Missions*, 144.

vision of the world in which the “animist” religiousness found its roots was “extremely dark” and his soul as well an enemy.¹³⁶ Such a religion, offered the human soul nothing to stimulate, nothing to cause the human to reach “upward”, nothing to offer consolation in sorrow or help in times of great need, nothing to inspire to “worthiness of life”, and nothing to cheer “in the hour of death.”¹³⁷ The “animist” lacked the “calm deep certainty” and “nobility” of the Europeans.¹³⁸ As a result, salvation could not be received until the Africans were pacified¹³⁹ and rehabilitated.¹⁴⁰ The whole of the African life had to be saturated with the word of God and a war cry rung “Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel!”... “The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation.”¹⁴¹ Missionaries like Marion Stevenson¹⁴² realised that, what at home had often sounded unreal to her, “that the Master’s words were true, ‘I come not to bring peace but a sword.’”¹⁴³

What this example offers in the first place is that the production of binary opposites creates an image of Africans as well as constructing a European self that

¹³⁶ Ogilvie, *Our Empire’s Debt to Missions*, 144.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 146.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*.

¹³⁹ Colonel R. Meinertzhagen offers insight into the real meaning and purpose of “native pacification” as told in his *Kenya Diary 1902-1906* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1957) *Kenya Diary 1902-1906*, 1957).

¹⁴⁰ Dr. Steward (the pioneer of Church of Scotland Mission in Kenya in 1891) could not accomplish his desire to establish mission in Gĩkũyũ land because the colonial government had declared the “tribe” as “unsettled”. In Tumulumu (then referred to as Kenia) it was not until 1908 when the missionaries were allowed to cross the Tana River into the district as it was also considered “unsettled”. Scott, the Rev. Dr Henry E., *The Kikuyu Mission (British East Africa)*, 1910, 4, 22. Loomba refers to such structuring as political vision of reality. See Loomba, *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism*, 45.

¹⁴¹ The Rev. Dr. John W. Arthur’s Lecture, “East Africa in Transition: Alexander Duff Memorial Lecture” (Edinburgh: The Trustees of the Duff Missionary Lectureship, 1942), 33.

¹⁴² Marion Stevenson was one of the earliest Church of Scotland Mission missionaries in Gĩkũyũ country and contemporary of Dr. John Arthur and A. Ruffell Barlow. She began her mission work in Gĩkũyũ from 1907 and was first stationed at Thogoto before moving to C.S.M. Tumu-Tumu. John Arthur’s papers, University of Edinburgh Special Collection, MS Gen. 762. 1-42, (1907); Mrs. Henry E. Scott, *A Saint in Kenya: A life of Marion Scott Stevenson* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1932).

¹⁴³ Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 108. See also Dr. Arthur’s letter dated 31st March, 1907 in John Arthur papers, University of Edinburgh Special Collection, MS Gen. 762., 1-42, (1907).

portrays everything else as “Other”.¹⁴⁴ Related to this point is the designation of reality as struggle between light and darkness (as in John’s Gospel) which became the colonial hermeneutical starting point. Reality thus defined, hermeneutics became a battle field where good wrestled with evil; the struggle for the light to overcome darkness.

The binary division discussed above, however, is not as simple as it may appear. On its face value, as Mudimbe observes in reference to Africa, the dichotomisation of reality implies an evolution by passage from the paradigmatic opposition of under development to that of development; from savagery to civilisation.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, Mudimbe aptly concluded that this oversimplification ignores a structural mode inherited from colonialism. Between the colonial binary opposites there is “the intermediate, a diffused space in which social and economic events define the extent of marginality”.¹⁴⁶ In other words, colonial structures created the intermediated space of marginality which not only became a site of oppression but also a site in which Africans had to face interpretative challenge of the social change.¹⁴⁷ The dichotomy also exposes the area of ambivalence of colonial hermeneutics as well as the unresolved contradiction in race, class and culture as evidence offered below will show. In order for colonisation to legitimise itself, it had

¹⁴⁴ Chinua Achebe defined it as a Western psychological predisposition which sets up Africa “as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe’s own state of spiritual grace will be manifest.” In this case, Africa is a carrier to which the West unloads its physical and moral deformities so that it can go “forward, erect and immaculate.” Chinua Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays 1965-1987* (New York: Heinemann, 1988), 2, 12. See also Loomba’s discussion on colonial and postcolonial identities, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 91-153.

¹⁴⁵ Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 4.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Robin Horton, in his intellectualist theory of “African Conversion” interprets this liminal space as the occasion in which Africans had to cognitively grapple with the changing social and cultural landscape. Rather than abandon the interpretive challenge of social change, Africans remolded and developed it. See Horton, Robin, “African Conversion” in *Africa*, Vol. 41, no. 2 (April 1971), 85-108; “On the Rationality of Conversion” Part I and II in *Africa*, Vol. 45, no. 3 (1975) pp. 219-235; 373-398.

to constantly negotiate with the people it sought to control creating what Bhabha refers to as “the liminal problem of colonial identity and its vicissitudes”.¹⁴⁸

Equally important is postcolonial critique of both the colonial transmission of the Bible as well as the assumed innocence and transparency in the translation and presentation of the Christian message of salvation to the non-western world.

Postcolonial critics¹⁴⁹ have ably argued that the colonial biblical hermeneutics just like other literary discourses did not only have sociohistorical origins but also “epistemological contexts”.¹⁵⁰ They have argued that the use of the Bible is framed by the history, social and cultural locations and commitments of those seeking to engage the Bible. Therefore, it is important to examine the social and historical conditions within which specific representations are generated.¹⁵¹ Study of colonial principles of legitimation demonstrates these points further.

2.2 Colonial Principles of Legitimation

Using the insights from postcolonial criticism, I will examine specific colonial marks and how they employed biblical language in the creation of colonial identities as well as the representation of colonial subjects. I will do this by discussing a sermon

¹⁴⁸ See Bhabha, Homi, “Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition” in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 1994), 117; See also Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 47-50.

¹⁴⁹ See R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of reading the Bible and Doing Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2003); *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Itumeleng J. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989); “Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa: The Use of the Bible,” in Normann K. Gottwald and Richard A. Horsley, eds., *Bible and liberation: political and Social Hermeneutics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993); Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 2000; *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, 2001; “Reading for Decolonization,” in *Semeia: An Experimental Journal for biblical criticism. Postcolonialism and Scriptural Reading Vol. 75*, (1996), 37-59; Fernando F. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins*, 2000; Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, eds. *Reading from this Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in United States*. Vol. 1, 1995.

¹⁵⁰ See Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, ix.

¹⁵¹ Loomba insists that study of colonial discourse ought to lead us towards a fuller understanding of colonial institutions rather than direct us away from them. Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 84-85.

preached by Dr. John Arthur¹⁵² at All Saints, Nairobi, on 12th August 1928. The sermon text was Revelation 11:15, “The Kingdoms of this world are become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ; and He shall reign forever and ever.” The sermon aimed at “the crystallisation of the thoughts of the missionaries as to their special function in the life of a country such as this [Kenya].”¹⁵³ The sermon begins by Arthur asserting, rather wilfully, that during his 22 years as a missionary in the colony, he had “been in close touch with one of the most progressive of the tribes of Kenya, knowing their life fairly intimately” and had “watched their progress out of dark heathenism into a very quickly advancing state of civilisation”.¹⁵⁴ Secondly, he stood at the privileged position of living near Nairobi which was “the center of the influences of the life” of the colony. This gave him “unique opportunities of observing the wonderful growth of the immigrant races of this country, [g]overnmentally, politically, and commercially, and also of the intelligent and progressive African peoples, materially, spiritually, and race-consciously.”¹⁵⁵

From this privileged position, Arthur elaborated the distinctive colonial rule as a god-sent blessing where “the Union Jack, emblem of our Empire’s life, flies over this country as symbols of good government, peace, and...of freedom of individual right and will”.¹⁵⁶ The settlers’ role is reported as similar and complementary in its influences of trade. But most importantly, Arthur continued, is the missionary who

¹⁵² Dr. John W. Arthur studied medicine at the Glasgow University, and according to his testimony, in 1903 he entered to his graduation and 3 years in various hospitals and training centres, including Tropical Medicine in London earning him an M. D. degree. The Church of Scotland dispatched him as a medical missionary in the Gikūyū country where he arrived in 1907. John W. Arthur took mission work as the head of the Church of Scotland Mission (C.M.S.) in Gikūyū country after death of Dr. Henry E. Scott in 1911. He was ordained to the ministry in 1915 by the Presbytery of Glasgow. See “The Rev. J. W. Arthur, O.B.E., M.D., F.R.G.S”, Kikuyu News, no. 138 (December 1936), 2. See also *The Cupar Rotary Lecture*, Edinburgh University Special collection, Gen 763 59a (1st March 1939).

¹⁵³ Dr. John W. Arthur - Sermon Preached at All Saints, Nairobi, 12th August 1928, John Arthur’s Papers, Gen 762, 162.

¹⁵⁴ John Arthur’s Papers, Gen 762, 162.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

served as “a messenger of the ‘Good News’ of God, as revealed in His only Son Jesus Christ the Lord and Savior of mankind”.¹⁵⁷ The missionary in the colony was equally important for his role “as an interpreter of the thoughts and aims first of his own fellow-countrymen to the African, and secondly of the African to the European.”¹⁵⁸ The missionary, therefore, served an intermediary role “between races... knowing, as European, his own people in their highest and best thoughts and intentions, and as a missionary, having acquired knowledge of and sympathy with the thoughts and aspirations of African peoples.”¹⁵⁹

The sermon emphasised the centrality of the missionary to the advancement of the “African peoples”. Arthur argued that even though “the African of Yesterday” had God in his thought (God of mountains just as the God of Israelites), it was “a distant unseen somewhat-feared Great Power”, which played an influence upon the thoughts and hearts of the people. The African was helpless under the influence of the

real dominating force of this life... animism ... dark occults of black and white magic, the evil eye, circumcision rites, the cruelties of heathenism, the horrors of tribal warfare, the sufferings of epidemic disease and famine, the drunkenness of the old men and the sensuousness of Youth... the weird fascinating sound of the ‘mugoyu’ or ‘gicukia’ dance... a psychic atmosphere of natural setting and forces, sensuous actions of their movements, unclean songs, and evil results.¹⁶⁰

Accordingly, missionaries introduced “the third great seed of influence” which was intensely disturbing in its effects,

[C]apable of producing the finest fruits of Christian character, and yet also no less, in the unregenerate heart, of enabling the worst fruits of heathenism to be intensified by imposing those of civilisation upon them without the control of Christ as King in the heart.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ John Arthur’s Papers, Gen 762, 162.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ John Arthur’s Papers, Gen 763, 60j.

¹⁶¹ John Arthur’s Papers, Gen 762, 162.

For these reasons, the missionary played a superior role which had great influence in the enlightenment of the African mind and right development of the African body while serving as a preacher of true and right race-consciousness, whose implications was a right race-relationship in “the great brotherhood of nations”.¹⁶² His main purpose remained as that of teaching, encouraging and guiding the African,

to develop his own life in the channels of God’s great gifts to him in his African characteristics, and to produce an African Christian life which will add its rich stores of grace to the sum of human moralities and attachments, and the betterment of the world’s life and prosperity.¹⁶³

In his service to the African, the missionary was to remember that the Africans were the, “most lovable creatures on God’s earth” who in “their chocolate-brown colourings” were often pictures of the utmost physical grace. The African young male was praised for “wonderful ease of movement, great speed, coupled with beautiful rhythmic control”; great courage, and fearlessness. Arthur expressed a favourable judgment on the African woman for her wonderful faithfulness, untiring energy, and constant stream of sacrifice. Old men were said to uphold graceful dignity and natural bearing. They were praised for their powers of logic and oratory – a “fitting proofs of an intelligence, which awaits the light of life to purify and enhance it”.¹⁶⁴ In general, the sermon commended the African for his sunny nature, his love of joke, and his cheerfulness.

The importance of this sermon cannot be overemphasised. In the first place, the scripture is quoted and stands out as an authoritative witness to the Truth to which it testifies. The truth is seen as so obvious that the text is left unexplained and hardly does the sermon go back to it. This is a hermeneutical paradigm that assumed the Bible to be God’s Word and therefore eternal, unchanging, and normative for life. The

¹⁶² John Arthur’s Papers, Gen 762, 162.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

Bible stood as a stable and safe text containing absolute truths to be mined and applied in any given situation. In such a paradigm, entry to the text is only through allusion as an interpretive key. For example, the missionary and mission activities are implicitly identified with the act of transforming “the Kingdoms of this world” to the “Kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ” whose dominion is forever. By establishing this spatial and metaphysical link, the sermon solidifies the missionary’s unquestionable authority.

Secondly, although the overarching theme is “the missionary”, it is evident that the subject of the sermon is the Agĩkũyũ (as colonial subjects), for whom Dr. Arthur laboured. In the sermon, Arthur used the generic term “African” indicating that he was using the Agĩkũyũ as an entry point to discuss Africa. This, as we shall continue seeing, was not uncommon. Missionaries who served among specific communities made sweeping claims and generalisations about Africa and Africans. Such generalisations as implied in the sermon represented Africa as without history until colonisation. The conclusion is that African peoples slumbered on until awakened by the coming of the European civilisation. Although, such colonial “novel” narratives about Africans were prevalent in Kenya, they were not fundamentally original. V. Y. Mudimbe has observed that colonial discourses were constructed under already existing “well circumscribed and established” narratives.¹⁶⁵ Thirdly, the sermon serves as an uncritical endorsement of colonialism.

2.2.1 Dichotomisation of Reality

The first evident principle of legitimation in Arthur’s sermon is what Sugirtharajah refers to as “constructive pairings”.¹⁶⁶ This refers to the creation of

¹⁶⁵ Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 13.

¹⁶⁶ Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*. ;Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 40-41; Mudimbe refers to it as “paradigmatic oppositions”, Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 4; See also Said, *Orientalism*, 1-110.

binary opposites such as Christian/savage; civilised/barbaric; light/darkness; modern/tradition; written and printed/oral among others. Colonial hermeneutics drew clear lines demarcating that which is holy and unclean; good and evil; light and darkness; European and African. In Arthur's sermon, this construction is at the heart of his observation of how fast "one of the most progressive of the tribes of Kenya" had progressed "out of dark heathenism into a very quickly advancing state of civilisation". Arthur's sermon fits in the colonial structure of opposites, which authoritatively claimed Africans' incapability to rescue themselves from "savagery" and "darkness". The mission of the colonial church is here seen as a "duty and privilege" to help Africans spiritually, intellectually and materially.

The basis of this privileged claim is an idea or a creation that has a history, a tradition of thought and a vocabulary based on the knowledge of the African. According to Arthur, his close contact with the Africans made him claim "knowing their life fairly intimately".¹⁶⁷ Intimate knowledge of the Africans makes their management easy and profitable. It also made the missionary suitably qualified to interpret "thoughts and aspirations of African peoples".¹⁶⁸ This identifiable notion led postcolonial critic Edward Said in *Orientalism*¹⁶⁹ to point out that to have knowledge of "a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it."¹⁷⁰ In essence, knowledge gives power to imagine and give form to the colonial "reality". Arthur's sermon gives us an example where biblical reading and interpretation are used to make statements about the African, authorise views about him, describe and represent him, by teaching him,

¹⁶⁷ John Arthur's Papers, Gen 762, 162.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Said classifies *Orientalism* in three distinct but interdependent categories: First as an academic discipline that is perpetuated in both doctrines and theses about the Orient and the Oriental; secondly, as a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Oriental" and "the Occidental"; finally, as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient in order to dominate, restructure, and have authority over the Orient. Said, *Orientalism*, 2-3.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

and ruling over him. The colonial hermeneutical style becomes a way of dominating, restructuring and having authority over the African through “encroachment”, “inculcation” and “displacement”.¹⁷¹ This kind of knowledge rests on several other factors.

First, it rests on the Africans’ perceived inability to articulate their thoughts. For example, the inability to conceptualise God other than as “a distant unseen somewhat feared Great Power” legitimises missionary’s self-assigned role of a teacher, encourager and guide. This point was well articulated by Arthur’s colleague, Arthur Ruffell Barlow who concluded that,

[N]atives have no conscious philosophy of life. The great Ascent of Man through this life to a higher existence they wot not of. Their horizon is bounded almost entirely by their immediate animal needs. Yet they have an extraordinarily strong belief in spiritual influences. This inchoate, unformed faith we must change into true, rational, practical religion. We are bound to pass on to them the revelation of the Divine which has been given us and which, whether through inspired philosophy or the light of Christianity, has given us the ideals after which we strive, has put purpose into life, and which calls us to service and sacrifice...it would be fatal to give these native peoples education without Christianity. Their present traditional restraints and undeveloped spiritual beliefs broken down by contact with civilisation and by purely secular knowledge, their outlook on life would become entirely materialistic and no-moral. If we are to expect them understand and accept our code of ethics and share in our ideals and aspirations, which is ultimately essential to the success of our cooperation, we must point them to the Source and Reason of all that is true and noble – God Himself.¹⁷²

Barlow’s legitimation of the civilising mission hinges on what Memmi referred to as the colonialist’s devotion to “a systematic devaluation of the colonized.”¹⁷³ The perpetual abasement of the colonised, while it explains the colonised’s penury, serves at the same time as an over-evaluation of the missionaries’ role as teachers who

¹⁷¹ Sugirtharajah offers these three as different marks but for the sake of clarifying Agikūyū encounter with the Gospel, I wish to put them together under same umbrella. See Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 63-66. See also Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

¹⁷² Arthur Ruffell Barlow, “The Native Question: Not altogether from the European standpoint”, Barlow Papers, University of Edinburgh Special Collection, Gen. 1786 – 23a (1922).

¹⁷³ Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 66.

articulated that which the African could not articulate on his own. The missionary comes as a representative of the Africans and creator of knowledge of the true God.

The second factor, which builds on the first one, can be better understood in what Mudimbe refers to as “classification of beings and societies”.¹⁷⁴ This is given in Arthur’s sermon as the African’s helplessness due to “the real dominating forces...animism” and “cruelties of heathenism”.¹⁷⁵ Classification of Africans as animists is not an arbitrary one. As a hermeneutical key it built on Edward B. Tylor’s invention.¹⁷⁶ Animism, as developed by Tylor signified “the sum total of pagan philosophy and religion... ‘a belief in souls and other spirits as the cause of the savage’s own life and of the events of the surrounding world.’”¹⁷⁷ As a conceptual tool, “animism” portrayed the Africans’ need of redemption not because they were sinners like any other human being when confronted by the redeeming message of salvation, but because of their animistic nature which according to Arthur’s sermon insinuates danger. The idea follows Hegelian view of Africa as representing the world of “Nature” in its raw state, as opposed to that of culture or “Spirit”.¹⁷⁸ In addition, “the unregenerate heart” of the animist was capable of producing “the worst fruits of

¹⁷⁴ Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 6.

¹⁷⁵ John Arthur’s Papers, Gen 762, 162.

¹⁷⁶ The term in Tylor’s perspective characterised “tribes” very low in the scale of humanity, then ascending deeply modified in its transmission of evolution. But from the first to the last it preserved an unbroken continuity, until it reached the “high modern culture.” See Tylor, *Vol. I*, 1891, p.425.

¹⁷⁷ Tylor’s own conclusion was that Animism in its fullest development included the belief in souls and in a future state, in controlling deities and subordinates spirits resulting in some form of active worship. See Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom, Vols. I & II*, 3rd ed. (London: John Murray, 1891), 427. See also Rev. Leonard J. Beecher, “The Presentation of the Gospel Committed to Our Trust to Animists”, CMS/GN/A5/1/17, University of Birmingham Special Collections.

¹⁷⁸ Such a thought concluded that evolution marked movement from “Nature” to “Culture”. See also Introduction to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956, reissued 2004), 93-96. See also J. M. Ita, “Frobenius, Senghor and the Image of Africa” in Robin Horton and Ruth Finnegan, eds., *Modes of Thoughts: Essays on Thinking in Western and Non-Western Societies* (London: Faber & Faber, 1973), 315; Ali A. Mazrui “Cultural Amnesia, Cultural Nostalgia and False Memory: Africa’s Identity Crisis Revisited” in *African Philosophy, Vol. 13, No. 2*, (2000), 87-98.

heathenism” particularly when civilisation is imposed upon Africans “without the control of Christ as King in the heart”.¹⁷⁹

The claim that animism had a pernicious effect on both the Africans and the civilising mission reinforced stereotypical reading of the Bible. For example, Marion Stevenson (a contemporary of Arthur) wrote that coming into contact with Agĩkũyũ particularly during the season for dances and initiation ceremonies left new comers with a “sense of wrestling – not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers of evil” which would overwhelm them as they listened at dawn to “the weird shouts and cries”.¹⁸⁰ Darkness that ruled Africa was further dramatised by Blakeslee while commenting on the cruelty of disposing of the dying. She had this to say:

The darkness of the night enveloped me, and my thoughts were troubled within. A lump rose in my throat. The sense of men and women living on the ridges all about, whose eyes were blinded to the light of love and human kindness, stifled me. I could see the fires and hear the songs in a minor key rising from hundreds of villages on the surrounding hills and valleys. Uncounted numbers of men, women, and children were there. Their hearts had not been touched or illuminated by the love of God or the Light of the world. A cruel, ruthless power reigned over them. Like some monster, it barred the entrance of the light of truth, reason, kindness, shutting them in to live with darkness – and did not the psalm say that “the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty”? But above the darkness of the night, the stars were shining.¹⁸¹

In order to make the Agĩkũyũ rise above their “present environment”, Rev. Henry Scott one of the earliest missionaries in Gĩkũyũ country, declared the focus had to be not just in “book learning” but in elevating “the whole man.”¹⁸² The African was to be trained to aspire to “a new and higher life.”¹⁸³ The ultimate goal remained to offer the African “a faith of so high quality that its appeal may dominate his interest

¹⁷⁹ John Arthur’s Papers, Gen 762, 162.

¹⁸⁰ Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 64

¹⁸¹ Blakeslee was recounting her experience at Gĩthumu in 1921 to 1922. H. Virginia Blakeslee, *Beyond the Kikuyu Curtain* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1956), 153.

¹⁸² Rev. Dr Henry E. Scott, *The Kikuyu Mission (British East Africa)* (1910), 13, 14.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

in material prosperity, and may purify his ideals and inspire him to realize them.”¹⁸⁴

In understanding animism in this sense, I think Arthur and other colonial hermeneuts enacted the disciplining power of colonialism in which the African had to be subservient to the will of the colonisers. In other word, the reading and interpretation of the Bible served to domesticate the African.

Arthur’s use of animism also reveals a certain level of anxiety that threatens to destabilise the claim to the civilising mission. On one level, the civilising mission (as seen above) appears to reduce seeming otherness through appropriate application of the Gospel. However, at another level such a discourse appears to be more ambivalent than resolute in its claim. The African is represented as not only ready to contest the missionaries’ authority but also threatens disobedience. Therefore, African otherness is maintained in claims such as the one Arthur makes about civilisation “without the control of Christ as King in the heart”.¹⁸⁵ The work to regenerate the “unregenerate heart” faced enormous challenge from the more potent “new paganism of the Western world” than “the old paganism of the past”.¹⁸⁶ The former was a darker, menacing and dangerous enemy in the name of “new heathendom” born of encroaching materialism and selfish individualism which originated in contact with a civilisation that many missionaries thought had generally ignored God. Indeed, the speed with which Africans adopted western education and religion surprised and even threatened the very existence of the missionaries.¹⁸⁷

The colonial subject, to follow, Homi Bhabha, is here presented as not only potentially able to subvert colonial order but also as good at mimicking.¹⁸⁸ Although

¹⁸⁴ Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 67.

¹⁸⁵ John Arthur’s Papers, Gen 762, 162.

¹⁸⁶ Letter from Rev. R. G. M. Calderwood, *Kikuyu News*, no. 191 (March 1950), 1061-1063.

¹⁸⁷ Handsley Douglas Hooper, *Africa in the Making* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, 1922), 14.

¹⁸⁸ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, ix-27.

this point will be discussed at great length in the next chapter, I need to point out that this kind of representation reveals a hidden anxiety that the proselytised African has the potential to backslide into another less civil and dangerous role. Such a possibility threatens the missionaries' very existence. Secularism, greed for money and land and power, an "imitation of the worst side of European civilisation", left the "inner life of the Church" spiritually lacking.¹⁸⁹ African Darkness (as it came to be referred to) mutated into "new paganism" in the form of independency, materialism and eventually Mau-Mau. To put it more theologically, the African past and present was dominated by prince of darkness. Consequently, the increasingly problem of quality, corporately and individually, urgently needed "the saving, transforming knowledge of a personal Christ." The demand was for a church filled "with power and making it mighty regenerating force among the people."¹⁹⁰ In Christ alone was "a sure foundation for a new and nobler form of society" to be found.¹⁹¹

The African's potential to subvert order is further pronounced by Arthur when he concludes that the missionary is preacher of true and right race-consciousness.¹⁹²

This can be best understood in light of what Arthur wrote for another occasion:

To-day Africans are scattered abroad...and young Africans are coming into contact with all kinds of forces –good and bad. They are in touch with Europeans, Indians, and other races; their outlook is being widened...Problems and difficulties lie ahead because of the Europeans, Indians, Arabs, and Africans in Kenya – the problem of race and inter-racial relationships. We must help Africans to take their proper place and prepare them for such leadership as may come to them...There will be greater

¹⁸⁹ Rev R. G. M. Calderwood, "Extracts from Annual Reports for 1941", *Kikuyu News*, no.160 (June 1942), 456.

¹⁹⁰ Calderwood, "Extracts from Annual Reports for 1941", 456. See also Arthur Ruffell Barlow, "Extracts from Annual Reports to the General Assembly", *Kikuyu News*, no. 152 (June 1940), 321.

¹⁹¹ Maina wa Kĩnyattĩ describing this final phase said, "the pulpit and the confession box were expertly used to propagate a bigoted imperialist culture among our people that was obsessed with the prayer books, the bible and other religious fanaticism." Maina wa Kĩnyattĩ, ed., *Thunder from the Mountains: Mau Mau Patriotic Songs* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1980), 1; Compare with Blakeslee, *Beyond the Kikuyu Curtain*, 203; Scott, *The Kikuyu Mission*, 13-14.

¹⁹² John Arthur's Papers, Gen 762, 162.

opportunities for men and women missionaries to be real co-helpers with the Africans in Kenya for the formation of the new life which is bound to come.¹⁹³

The possibility of subversion was not only compounded by racial consciousness but also by the demobilisation of the returning African World War II veterans.¹⁹⁴ War-weary returnees who were never compensated equally as their white counterparts were increasingly becoming a cause for concern.¹⁹⁵ Political consciousness had hit its highest note even among men with whom missionaries had laboured in the Gospel for many years. Increasing unrest in Gĩkũyũ country was seen as the retaliation from the powers of darkness resisting the penetration of Gospel light.¹⁹⁶ Blakeslee reported that “so strong was the spirit of nationalism abroad in their land that few Agikuyu were unaffected by it”.¹⁹⁷

In conclusion of this part, I have been able to detect first the binary oppositions underpinning colonial biblical hermeneutics where the African is seen negatively while identifying as positive the civilising presence of the colonisers. Secondly, I have been able to show the various representations of the colonial subject as the *other*: as one who is a threat not only to himself but also the mission of the Church. This demanded domestication of the Africans into obedient servitude. I have also shown that the seemingly innocent and objective use of the biblical text in the representations of the “Other” is not as transparent as it appears. It masks the construction of the Africans in which colonialism takes upon itself the power of describing, naming, defining, and representing the colonised. The construction of

¹⁹³ Rev. Dr. John W. Arthur, “Annual Meeting”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 164 (June 1943), 532.

¹⁹⁴ Rev. Dr. John W. Arthur, “Sergeant Nigel Gray Leakey, V.C: African Chaplains” and quoting Major Doig, Senior Chaplain to Scottish East African troops, *Kikuyu News*, no. 174 (December 1945), 706; Extracts from Annual Reports for 1946, *Kikuyu News*, no. 180 (June 1947), 809; See also Rev. R. G. M. Calderwood, “Post-War Plans”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 171 (March 1945), 658, 667.

¹⁹⁵ Rev. R. G. M. Calderwood, “Council and Synod, 1946”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 177 (September 1946), 771.

¹⁹⁶ See Ogilvie, *Our Empire's Debt to Missions*, 184. See also Blakeslee, *Beyond the Kikuyu Curtain*, 226-227, 229; Dr. A. C. Irvine, “Muthambe”, *Kikuyu News* (March 1934), 21.

¹⁹⁷ Blakeslee, *Beyond the Kikuyu Curtain*, 229.

binary opposites offered an expanded hermeneutical vocabulary in which reality was defined with the underlying assumption that through appropriate biblical teachings, it was possible for the African to move from the former state of being to a Christian consciousness. Subsequently the African was expected to make one huge leap of faith from the spiritual state of non-being to a Christian state of being, ignoring the hermeneutical and structural modes of colonialism which in essence defined the African's future.

2.2.2 Semblance and Differentiation

The second principle of legitimation can be discerned in how animism is applied. What makes "animism" a powerful hermeneutical tool is that positively, it affirmed African human semblances with other mortals in their religious quest. The Africans like any other human beings on planet Earth had a religion¹⁹⁸ and "God in his thought"¹⁹⁹. The affirmed human semblance, to follow Mudimbe, reduces and neutralises all differences into the sameness signified by European norms.²⁰⁰ On the second level, "animism" helped articulate distinctions and separations between the colonised and the coloniser. Tylor had termed animism to refer to "the ground work of the Philosophy of Religion from that of savages up to that of civilized men."²⁰¹ He laboured to show that on the scale of humanity and animism's evolution, "tribes" of "savages" were at the lowest level. Although all humanity was interconnected in the process of this evolution, animism was "deeply modified in its transmission." What differentiated animists from "higher faiths" was the "moral element" of religion

¹⁹⁸ Tylor as well belaboured the point that even in the narrowest definition of religion as "the belief in Spiritual Beings", very few "savage" people would disqualify from having some kind of religious ideas no matter how rudimentary such a belief system was. See Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 424.

¹⁹⁹ John Arthur's Papers, Gen 762, 162.

²⁰⁰ Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 8.

²⁰¹ Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 426.

barely present in the lower cultures.²⁰² In comparison, the animist religious views were informed by “a crude childlike natural philosophy” while “higher faiths” were guided by “the law of righteousness and of holiness, the inspiration of duty and of love.”²⁰³

Tylor’s theory drew a clear distinction between those who had full revelation of God and those who though generally with a rudimentary religious consciousness could not conceptualise Christian religious ideas without outside help. In other words, it helped create “cultural distance”.²⁰⁴ The relationship that this understanding envisions is a relationship of power and domination. The colonised would no longer speak for himself nor represent his presence, emotions and history. Europe would, from a position of strength and superiority, speak for and represent the Africans. By naming the African’s “primitiveness” or “disorder”, Europe would on the other hand offer means or methods of its “regeneration.”²⁰⁵ Nonetheless, as Memmi posited, the coloniser never planned to remake the colonised in his own image. If this was allowed, it would destroy “the principle of privileges” that colonialism offered the coloniser.²⁰⁶ The distance between the coloniser and the colonised is never great enough. Memmi’s articulation becomes clearer when we consider a paper titled “The Presentation of the Gospel Committed to our Trust to Animists” presented in one of the C.M.S. annual conferences in Kenya by Rev. Leonard J. Beecher.²⁰⁷

²⁰² Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 426- 427.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 361.

²⁰⁴ Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 9.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁰⁶ Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 69.

²⁰⁷ Rev. Leonard J. Beecher was an Anglican minister serving with C.M.S. in Kenya. He had served as a curate in a London parish preparatory before going to East Africa as a missionary. He served as the headmaster of Alliance High School, (the only high school in Gikūyū country) owned jointly by missionary societies in Gikūyū country. He later became part of the United Kikuyu Language Committee, produced his one Gikūyū-English dictionary, and was the chair of what became known as the infamous Beecher Education policy, and in later years appointed the Bishop of Mombasa. See L. S. B. Leakey, *White African* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1937), 7, 26.

Beecher built on Tylor's assertions discussed above and used them to explore the theme of the conference which came from Matthew 28:16 "fellowship in Gospel" and based on Paul's vision in Acts 27:23-24: "There stood by me that night the Angel of God, whose I am and whom I serve".²⁰⁸ In the document, "pagan" Africans are compared to the "educated philosophers of Greece." In spite of similarities drawn from Paul's texts, the African remained the "illiterate pagan" as compared to the "educated Greeks." Nonetheless, similarities in the mode of approach typical of Paul's methods of evangelism with uneducated pagans had to start with the pagans' own conceptions and bidding them to accept the good tidings which Paul and Barnabas brought.²⁰⁹ In Paul's view, both the "uneducated pagan hearers" and the "educated philosophers of Greece" deliberately ignored God's revelation and held "down the truth in unrighteousness... knowing God, they glorified him not as God... and changed the glory of the incorruptible God... they exchanged the truth of God for a lie".²¹⁰ In the same light, African pagans were to leave "their vain things" and turn to "the living God" who through creation "left not himself without witness".

Lacking any biblical evidence on what might have taken place after Paul's disputation in Athens, Beecher summoned support from extra-biblical material to offer credence to his claim that Paul's mission to the educated Greeks was a success. In the first place, Beecher presented Paul's method as superior to that of his contemporaries such as Apollonius of Tyana, who, while visiting Athens at about the same time as Paul, made side attack on the ribaldry of life in Athens. Paul on the other hand avoided such attacks and was also careful not to attack "on the superficial

²⁰⁸ The paper was initially to be presented the Missionaries' Conference by Canon Harry Leakey but due to his involvement in the translation work, Canon Beecher was handed the mantle to do so. See Rev. Leonard J. Beecher, "The Presentation of the Gospel Committed to Our Trust to Animists", CMS/GN/A5/1/17; see also Annual Report of CMS at Limuru January 4-7 1938, CMS Africa 1880/1949 in CMS/GX/A5/4, University of Birmingham Special Collections (1930-1938).

²⁰⁹ Acts 14:15ff.

²¹⁰ Romans 1:18ff as quoted by Beecher. Translation version used is not give.

manifestations of an imperfect understanding of the nature of God.”²¹¹ Thus taking what the “philosophers” knew of God as the “unknown God”, Paul said “what ye worship in ignorance, this set I forth unto you”.²¹² From the testimony of Eusebius, Beecher concluded that “God used and blessed his method of approach, for Dionysius, one of the council of the Areopagus itself, was converted” and later became the first bishop of Athens.²¹³ Damaris, “one of the fashionable educated courtesans” together with her entourage were as well converted.

Beecher concluded that “it’s very like Athens in parts of pagan Africa today – ‘Africa’s deus incertus and Athens’ ‘unknown God’.”²¹⁴ Paul’s speech thus provides the legitimate basis for mission work among the Africans. God is not circumscribed in a geographical ambient. God is acknowledged by all people everywhere. The African as such had a general revelation of God though distorted. The missionaries’ work was to “prepare the way for Christ’s revelation of God by commencing with what the African already has, - an awareness of God”.²¹⁵ Missionaries’ task was to teach the African “the great truths” concerning the nature of God, whom the African was already dimly aware but so heavily veiled. The vague idea of God had to be replaced with “a more intimate and definite knowledge of the Deity and Divine purpose.”²¹⁶ While the awareness of a deity was insufficient, the “African’s religious predisposition” would as well provide the needed basis for a new form of evangelism. The African negative fear of God would become a good source of hermeneutics

²¹¹ Beecher, “The Gospel Committed to Our Trust”, 9.

²¹² Quoted from Acts 18:16ff (Version used not given.)

²¹³ Beecher, “The Gospel Committed to Our Trust”, 9.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

²¹⁶ Hooper, *Africa in the Making*, 54.

successfully redefined “in terms of new experiences of God, until finally ‘perfect love casts out fear’”.²¹⁷

This approach was not without its advantage. It introduced the need for comparative approach in biblical interpretation and anticipated “inculturation”. The new construct offered in Beecher’s lecture grudgingly acknowledged the “striking parallels between the Hebrew Old Testament and African lore.” It came as awakening “to the tremendous fact the same God and Father has, after all, been working in their history too, so that Jesus may come to them also as a fulfiller and not as a foreigner”.²¹⁸ Because of this connection, Beecher recommended fuller study of the Old Testament with African pastors and pastors-to-be, catechists, and teachers.²¹⁹

The comparison, however, ends with the idea of general revelation. The carriers of the divine mandate owe their “lamp of culture” to the Greeks and Romans which Beecher referred to as the “light of our civilisation today”. One cannot miss the differentiation though implicit yet subtly affirmed. The Greeks and Romans may have been lacking in religious and ethical concepts, but their intellect and inventiveness were beyond comparison to the heathen African. It is in light of this magnificent inheritance that the Old Testament became important. What the Greeks and Romans could not offer in matters of religious and ethical concepts, the Jews as recorded in the Old Testament provided and it became infused in Western civilisation. From the Jewish “perfect text book,” Europeans did not only learn about “God’s dealings with His chosen people” but also “God’s way of dealing with human needs.”²²⁰

In contrast, the African notion of God was flawed. God as understood by the Agĩkũyũ and African in general was “the counterfeit of truth” who was nothing but

²¹⁷ 1 John 4:18.

²¹⁸ As quoted from T. Cullen Young, *African Ways and Wisdom* (London: U.S.C.L, 1937), 23.

²¹⁹ Beecher, “The Gospel Committed to Our Trust”, 11.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

“an angry, opposing force, always prepared to war against the weal of the tribe unless suitably propitiated.”²²¹ God was a deity to be “feared than loved.”²²² This understanding was as well expanded by offering theological explanation to African religious deficiency as given by Beecher, who wrote,

while he (African) believes in the fundamentally spiritual nature of life, in the continuity of existence between this world and the next, and vaguely, . . . in the existence of God, yet there has come into his life a counterfeit of the truth, manifested in the rites and observances which fill his life, in the belief in the efficacy of magic, and we must be convinced that the author of this counterfeit which so heavily overlays the truth is none other than the devil.²²³

Theology of the Devil incarnate in African rites and beliefs reinforced the urgent need for a new reading and interpreting strategy. The missionaries were facing a replica of what Paul had years before stated that “our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places”.²²⁴

Beecher’s explanation offers evidence as to why in Gĩkũyũ country, for example, Matthew 16: 13-28 would be used to validate and justify the colonial Church’s unquestionable authority on cultural, moral and religious ideas that it imposed on the Africans. For example, the United Kikuyu Language Committee translated ἄδης as used in its genitive form ἄδου in Matthew 16:18 to refer to “of Hades” as *kũndũ kwa Ngoma* (abode of Spirits).²²⁵ In this translation, rather than follow its Hebraic understanding (i.e. *the world below*), ἄδης is taken to refer to African religions, cultures and values. Although this shall be fully discussed in

²²¹ Beecher, “The Gospel Committed to Our Trust”, 7; Hooper, *Africa in the Making*, 36.

²²² This contrary to Stanley Kiama insistence that the missionaries should remember that the Agĩkũyũ had long recognised the existence of God. See Stanley Kiama, *Miikarire ya Agikuyu* (1937), 29ff.

²²³ Beecher, “The Gospel Committed to Our Trust”, 6.

²²⁴ Quoted by Beecher from Ephesians Vi, 12 (Bible translation version not given.)

²²⁵ Agĩkũyũ believed that the spirits of their ancestors hovered around in the air or sky. See Matthew 16:18 in B.F.B.S., *Kĩrĩkanĩro Kĩrĩa Kĩerũ Kĩa Jesu Kristo Ūrĩa Mwathani witũ o na Mũhonokia Witũ* (London: B.F.B.S, 1926) as well as U.K.L.C. minutes of September 25th, Barlow’s papers, University of Edinburgh Special Collection, Gen. 1785/7, (1914).

chapter 4, I must say that the translation here was an intentional misrepresentation of the term *kūndū kwa Ngoma*. If we bear in mind that missionaries synonymously used *Ngoma* to refer to demons,²²⁶ then the word that represented abode of ancestral spirits was negatively used to condemn one of the important Agĩkũyũ religious tenets as demonic which in modern currency refers to devil worship. The translation reinforces the colonial understanding of differences as standards of absolute facts.

Just like in the construction of binary opposites, the colonial representation that unites through similitude and eventually articulating distinctions and separations show that representation of the African was not stable and fixed. However, understanding of binary opposition and differentiations would be incomplete without understanding what Loomba refers to as “the dialectic between self and other”,²²⁷ which brings me to the third principle of legitimisation in colonial hermeneutics.

2.2.3 Metaphysical obligation

The third principle of legitimation that we discern in Arthur’s sermon is the missionaries’ self-understanding of Christian missions to lands beyond Europe as divinely mandated. It builds on the European self-conception and the Bible to inform the colonial attitudes towards Africans.²²⁸ In Kenya, the Bible would serve a pivotal role in constructing a cultural authority for the colonial Church, both in the metropolis and the colony. When Dr. Arthur asserts in the sermon that missionaries introduced “the third great seed of influence”, Arthur was replicating what was already held as true that “the Expansion of England” was part of the “Expansion of the Kingdom of Christ” – The Empire of Britain and the Empire of Christ.²²⁹ His scriptural choice of Revelation 11:15, as discussed elsewhere, alluded to this fact. As such, the Bible and

²²⁶ See chapter four on translation.

²²⁷ Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 45.

²²⁸ Loomba sees literature as serving the role of mediation between the real and imaginary, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 63.

²²⁹ Ogilvie, *Our Empire’s Debt to Missions*, 2-3.

European Christianity became the unassailable components that would inform the spirit and style of accomplishing the divine obligation.²³⁰

The claim to metaphysical obligation was amplified by Rev. J. N. Ogilvie of the Church of Scotland who believed in Christian Missions' double role as a moral agency that served as "the Empire's Conscience" and as the main agency in the civilising mission among "child-races" of the empire.²³¹ Like Arthur, Ogilvie found support for his position in the Bible:

The Kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard-seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; which indeed is the least of all seeds but when it is grown it becometh the greatest among herbs, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.²³²

Ogilvie found the parable of mustard seed analogous to "Christian Imperialism and a Christian commercialism."²³³ The assumption in this allusion is that the missionary, colonist, and the colonialist worked toward the same goal. The symbolism in the mustard-seed and the branching tree meant that mission work to the "child-peoples" was not strictly a spiritual enterprise whose aim was to "rescue the souls of men from sin" and obedience to Christ's command to preach the gospel to all. According to Ogilvie the command "to preach the gospel" was more comprehensive. It included all of the natural branches of "civilising activities."²³⁴ Its driving force was understood to be the "internal pressure of its inner Christian 'élan' an impulse which is but expression of a Christian principles of life moving within."²³⁵ In other words congruency between civilisation and Christianity was unavoidable for it was a natural consequence of Christian mission. This may explain why missionaries working in Kenya interpreted the doctrine of "the principle of trusteeship" in Article 22 of the

²³⁰ Ibid., 1, 7. See also Hugh Gunn, ed., *The British Empire: Makers of the Empire* (1924), 296-297.

²³¹ Ogilvie, *Our Empire's Debt to Missions*, 58ff.

²³² Ibid., 59. No scriptural reference is given but the quote comes from Matthew 13:31-32.

²³³ Ibid., 57.

²³⁴ Ibid., 61.

²³⁵ A. J. Macdonald, *Trade Politics and Christianity in Africa and the East*, (1916), 53.

Covenant of the League of Nations²³⁶ as clearly supporting the metaphysical obligation.²³⁷ But for the principle to become meaningful in its application, it was argued that the British government in Africa had to be established on “righteous, sound and enduring foundations.”²³⁸

This same understanding made Rev. Hooper declare that as British East Africa became a colony, he would endeavour, in correspondence and united action with Anglican Bishop of Mombasa and all the Missions, to see that the colony was

high toned, religious, and that its name and influence in the foreshadowing of an African Empire make for righteousness...the power of broad Christian testimony and working force of the Evangel of our Lord. Our east is not merely the lovely bit of hill and wood, with a touch of lake and native villages hidden in the bush. It is the estate of our Lord’s claim on the Protectorate, and the bidding of our Lord to His Colonists and His African Tribes to thank Him for His mercies and yield him their love. And yet the dignity of the Church is not comprised by its position here. The estate is worthy and its work effective. The very villages which stud its acres, which in no other way could be secured than by the temporal possession of them, are worth a Church’s Mission, and their education and Christianisation is a full reward... We do not need to defend the Industrial principle. It has been proved up to be hilt.²³⁹

There was no doubt in the CMS African Secretary’s mind about missionary’s mandate.²⁴⁰ In addition, *Pax Britannica* was understood as an act of divine will.

²³⁶ The Covenant read in part “To those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the States which formerly governed them, and which are inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, there should be applied the principle that the wellbeing and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilization, and the securities for the performance of this trust should be embodied in this Covenant... the tutelage of such peoples should be entrusted to advanced nations who, by reason of their resources, their experience, or their geographical position, can best undertake this responsibility and who are will to accept it, and that this tutelage should be exercised by them as Mandatories on behalf of the League.” For the whole Covenant see Fredrick D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (London: William Blackwood and sons, 1923), 62-63.

²³⁷ Competition for control of the enormous economic storehouse of Africa led to the Berlin Act of 1885 in which principles were laid down to guide the controlling Powers in Africa with the international sanction.

²³⁸ The paper argued that “in the covenant of the League of Nations new public and International recognition has been given to the principle that the well being and development of subject people is a sacred trust of Civilisation and an undertaking has been given by the signatory powers to secure just treatment of the native inhabitants in their territories.” University of Birmingham Special Collection *Missionary Societies and African Labour*, CMS/ G/Y/ A5/1/21-23, 8; A5/2 (1920-1933).

²³⁹ Dr. McMurtrie, “Notes on History of Kikuyu Mission” Extracts from F.M.C. Minutes in Barlow’s Papers, University of Edinburgh Special Collection, Gen. 1786/46, 13.

²⁴⁰ Arthur Ruffell Barlow, “The Native Question: Not altogether from the European standpoint” in Barlow’s Papers, Gen. 1786 – 23a (1922).

According to Sir Charles Eliot²⁴¹ one of the pioneering administrators in Kenya colony, Europeans were to use the secured peace, security and prosperity as the basis for progress through patient and practical philanthropy, and by a tolerant missionary enterprise working in accordance with Christ's command, "Into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house.'"²⁴²

The missionaries' interpretation of the Church and its mission found its way in most African converts of both the pioneering and colonial church days.²⁴³ One such African Christian who is very instrumental in this research is the late Very Rev. Charles Mũhoro Kareri.²⁴⁴ Mũhoro's work is important to me because he was not only the first African to inherit leadership of the post-colonial Presbyterian movement in East Africa but also for his instrumental work in Bible translation to Gĩkũyũ language.²⁴⁵ Mũhoro represents a class of African elites who uncritically accepted and embraced in whole the missionaries' interpretation of Matthew 16: 13-28 in light of the metaphysical obligation to Christianise and civilise.

Expressing his self-understanding and interpretation of the Church Mũhoro wrote that,

We sing that the root of the church is 'our Lord'. He's the one who started it. He said, 'You are Peter, and upon this rock I will built my Church.' Matthew 16:18. Our Lord was pleased by Peter's confession that Christ was the son of the living God. It was Peter's faith that was the rock. Like Peter, we are saved

²⁴¹ See Eliot, 1905. Eliot was the Commissioner of the East Africa Protectorate from January 1901 until June 1904 when he was forced to resign unceremoniously. He gave some account of attractions and advantages which East Africa offered both in climate and products, as a field for European colonisation. East Africa Protectorate, though somewhat varied in scenery and character, according to Eliot was on the whole a white man's country.

²⁴² J. W. Gregory, *The Great Rift Valley: Being the Narrative of a Journey to Mount Kenya and Lake Baringo with some Account of the Geology, Natural History, Anthropology, and Future Prospects of British East Africa* (London: John Murray, 1896), 267; See also Harry H. Johnson, *A History of the Colonization of Africa by Alien Races* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1899), 147.

²⁴³ L. S. B. Leakey, *Kenya: Contrasts and Problems* (London: Methuen and Company Limited, 1936), 95-96.

²⁴⁴ Born in 1898 Mũhoro witnessed the establishment of mission work deep in Kikuyu area (the Tumutumu Church of Scotland Mission was established near his home.) He was later to become the first African moderator of the now merged Presbyterian Church of East Africa.

²⁴⁵ Mũhoro translated the Psalm singlehandedly although as we shall see later his role was subordinated to that of the European translators.

by our faith that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. He is the savior of whoever trusts in him. In the Synoptic gospels, Jesus mentioned the Church twice. The first we have we've just referred to. The second is in Matthew 18:18, where we read how the church was empowered by Jesus to bind and loosen those who sin...In Luke 9:1-6 we read how he sent his apostles by giving them power and authority to preach and do miracles. When they came back, he then sent seventy other people to go and preach and heal the sick. In Luke 10:17-20, we see that these people came back happy, having known that their names were written in heaven. From that time there were more and more believers. After Jesus was crucified and resurrected, he sent them on the biggest mission: 'Go and make disciples of all men baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:1-20.)'²⁴⁶

This text will be given further consideration in my final chapter. But in the mean time some comments will suffice.

In the first place Mũhoro places himself in the context of the larger church. He used "we" which is a Gĩkũyũ linguistic way of locating the individual within the larger community. Secondly he quotes from a hymn as the basis of his hermeneutical discussion in which his understanding of the Church is lifted up.²⁴⁷ This is very typical of Mũgĩkũyũ²⁴⁸ since Agĩkũyũ are known to love songs. Those who became Christians used songs and hymns liberally as hermeneutical resources. Peter's confession is connected to individual faith rather than to the community which is also a mark of the evolving individualised believers. Mũhoro then developed interpretation premised on personal salvation. This self-understanding of the Church and its divine mandate, as we shall see later in our discussion, influenced Mũhoro and other African Christian elites in the way they interacted with African dissenters, Revivalists, Mau-Mau and Church councils. The post-colonial Presbyterian Church under Mũhoro's

²⁴⁶ Charles Muhoro Kareri, *The Life of Charles Muhoro Kareri*, Edited with an introduction by Derek R. Peterson and translated by Joseph Kariũki Mũriũthi (University of Wisconsin-Madison: African Studies Program, 2003), 88.

²⁴⁷ The hymn alluded here is *The Church's One Foundation* by Samuel John Stone (1839-1900) in *Lyra Fidelium; Twelve Hymns of the Twelve Articles of the Apostle's Creed* (London: Messrs. Parker and Co., 1866) quoted from http://www.cyberhymnal.org/bio/s/t/o/stone_sj.htm.

²⁴⁸ This is the singular form for Gĩkũyũ.

leadership did not shy away from this interpretation and would use it in all policy formulations most of which were replica of the colonial manual.

Before concluding this section I need to make several other observations. First, reference to “divine right” was necessary to legitimise “statutory difference” between the colonised and the coloniser.²⁴⁹ This is evident in the fact that in Kenya, the “sacred trust of Civilization” remained true only when it served the interests of the White settlers and the colonial government as in the case of Native Land Trust Ordinance.²⁵⁰ In addition, the early colonial land policy failed to honour moral commitment to the annexation principle.²⁵¹ Instead it quickly created “in Africa a class of land proprietors” with anybody in the colony belonging to this class, so long as “*he or she was not an African.*”²⁵² McGregor Ross, one of the fair-minded Britons living in Kenya at the time, equated the system to the biblical annexation of Naboth’s Vineyard, which consequently created an underclass of landless majority.²⁵³ Up until 1926, when the first translation of the Gĩkũyũ New Testament was published, the Africans in Kenya had had no legal right to their lands.²⁵⁴

Secondly, missionaries stood at a privileged position of power which definitely influenced the missionary authoritative approach to biblical interpretation and teachings. Missionaries did not only see Christianity as an essential component of colonial culture but they also believed that Christianity was its very foundation. The

²⁴⁹ Hugh Gunn, ed., *The British Empire: Makers of the Empire* (1924), 31.

²⁵⁰ A case in point is the “Memorandum on Native Policy in East Africa by Sir Edward Northey: Governor October 21 1919”. This document saw the creation of “purely Native areas” divided into provinces or districts; the creation of post of Chief Commissioner of the Native Affairs Department and the creation of the European Settlements under Resident Magistrates. The memorandum also empowered Government to force people into labor and increase rate of tax. See also Eliot, pp. 103-104, where Sir Charles Eliot declared Kenya a Whiteman’s country.

²⁵¹ The principle required that in countries acquired by conquest or cession, private property, whether of individuals or communities, existing at the time of cession or conquest, was to be respected. Fredrick D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (London: William Blackwood and sons, 1923. Lugard, 1923), 288.

²⁵² W. McGregor Ross, *Kenya from Within: A Short Political History* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.), 55. Italics by the author, Mr. Ross. Ross, *Kenya from Within*, 65-66.

²⁵³ Ross, *Kenya from Within*, 51.

²⁵⁴ Ross, *Kenya from Within*, 41-55.

issue of feasibility about dissent from the autocratic approach would only come later due the helplessness that the Africans felt.

My third observation is in regard to the contradictory moral positions taken by the Colonial Church, which survived throughout the history of mission work in Kenya.²⁵⁵ Obvious moral and ethical deviations evident in colonial policies such as the unproductive Native Land Trust Ordinance which saw servile conditions put in place by the government never moved the church to action. The colonial Church did not consider it unrighteous to lay unjust burdens on African shoulders as a duty of spending their lives in modern industry while making it crime to break a contract of employment.²⁵⁶ The immoral ordinance required colonial magistrates to “encourage” labour migration through “moral suasion”. They were expected to use African chiefs to force Africans by all means possible to work for Europeans.²⁵⁷ With full support from missionaries the colonial government required that the able-bodied male population leave the reserve to work in the settled areas. Africans were frequently fined, flogged or jailed for “idling”, desertion and avoidance.²⁵⁸ Taxation also worked as a forceful deterrent to the development of land, which the Africans had right to occupy. Amazingly, missionaries failed to speak or act against settlers’ indulgence in severe punishments and unjust refusal to pay African labourers. One settler is reported to have boasted publicly, “five minutes after I start working with these Kikúyus, I’m

²⁵⁵ See as an example the case of Bishop Weston as quoted by Ross from a letter written by the then Rt. Rev. Frank Weston, Bishop of Zanzibar, to the Editor of the *East African Standard* (April 15th, 1921); see Ross, *Kenya from Within*, 89.

²⁵⁶ Hugh Savittee to C. Litlington on August 22 1920.

²⁵⁷ The *Times* reported that as late as October 1926, the Kenyan Government had succumbed to the will of the settlers. Ross quoting from the *East African standard*, March 14th, 1925: see Ross, *Kenya from Within*, 112.

²⁵⁸ John W. Cell, ed., *By Kenya Possessed: The Correspondence of Norman Leys and J. H. Oldham 1918-1926* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), 92-93. See also Leys’ chapter on “Black and White” in Norman Leys, *Kenya* (London: Leonard & Virginia Woolf, 2nd edition, 1925), 159ff.

raving like a Dutchman... I sjambocked the nigger till my arm ached.”²⁵⁹ No bishop, priest or reverend ever preached against colonialism while many preached against African paganism, nationalism and particularly violently against Mau-Mau.²⁶⁰ This fact exposes the conflicting social, racial and ideological interests in the Mission Church, which brings me to my next point.

2.2.4 Stereotyping: Racial Categorisation

If there is one single idea that would most reinforce the construction of colonial identities in Kenya, it is the “common-sense” idea about black people (and more so Africans). I follow Loomba who sees stereotyping not as simple ignorance or lack of ‘real’ knowledge but as a reduction of images and ideas to a simple and manageable form.²⁶¹ Stereotyping the Africans did not only serve as a method of processing information but also reinforced the dialectic of self and other.

Postcolonialism identifies racism as one of the marks of representations whose constructions was based on observable features.²⁶² Though colonisers differed in their interaction with the colonised thus producing variable racial discourses and identities, we can discern distinguishable linguistic and conceptual racial presuppositions that gave form to colonial hermeneutics. In Arthur’s sermon racism is introduced in two ways: first, Arthur introduced a split identity of the Africans who had all the traits of savagery but yet had some lovable qualities. Secondly, contact between the

²⁵⁹ See also how a proposed coup d’état see almost destroyed the Kenya colony and missionaries’ reaction to it. In Barlow Papers, University of Edinburgh, Gen. 1786/27, 32/a.

²⁶⁰ See University of Birmingham Special Collection, CMS/ G/Y/ A5/1/21-23 and A5/2 (December 16 1932). For example on military conscription, in May 23 1932 according to Rev. W. A. Pitt Pitts churches in Kenya took up the issue who included the C.M.S bishop of Mombasa, Dean Wright, Pitts, Mr. Calderwood (for Dr. Arthur) took the matter to the governor arguing that the conscription into force at present would be unwise for several reasons: the effect it was bound to have on the natives and the facts that it is useless to throw dust in their eyes by telling them that this Force is armed Force to defend us against Somali land; especially in view of the fact of the find of gold in Kavirondo it seems a bad moment to do anything that is going to increase the feeling of hostility between us and the natives. See also a letter sent by Dr. Norman Leys to the Secretary of Commission on October 28 1927.

²⁶¹ See Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 55.

²⁶² Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 96.

“immigrant races” and “intelligent and progressive African peoples” was likely to produce racial misunderstanding, making the missionary the best suited to bring in true and right race-consciousness.²⁶³

Colonial stereotyping, in the Kenya colony began by first bringing together as closely as possible people who resembled each other.²⁶⁴ These are people who thought each other as sharing common values, history, culture, race and heritage. This homogenising approach of racial identity was not unique in any way since as discussed by Rev. Oldham, the “doctrines of racial domination” had already taken foothold in Europe and America.²⁶⁵ Doctrines on racial superiority were propagated through books, works of fiction, drama and the press.²⁶⁶ In these texts, exploitation and domination of the “backward races” were exalted as virtuous.

Secondly, colonial stereotyping helped generate discourse on primitivism which defined the racial “other” although representations were almost always ambivalent and contradictory.²⁶⁷ For example, the Agĩkũyũ disposition was said to be “naturally cheerful: Merry, loquacious, and laughter-loving soon forgetting their troubles and lacking the spirit of vindictiveness”.²⁶⁸ They were said to have “a great sense of justice”, “shrewd enough in matters of business” but “wanting in the ever-present greediness”. The same was repeated of him that as “by nature extraordinary honest; bright and intelligent, trustful and truthful in contact with one European”, but

²⁶³ Dr. John W. Arthur’s Papers, Edinburgh University Special Collection, Gen 762 134-165 (162).

²⁶⁴ Leys, *Kenya*, 237-238.

²⁶⁵ J. H. Oldham, *Christianity and the Race Problem* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1924, reprint 1969), 6.

²⁶⁶ Writers such as Madison Grant (*The Passing of the Great Race*), Dr Lothrop Stoddard (*Rising Tide of Colour*) and C. C. Josey (*Race and National Solidarity*) rallied the Nordic race postulating that the white race faced extinction unless the race reasserted “the pride of race and the right of merit to rule”. Oldham, *Christianity and the Race Problem*, 10.

²⁶⁷ Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 94.

²⁶⁸ William Scoresby Routledge and Katherine Routledge, *1859-1939 With a prehistoric people: the Akikũyu of British East Africa: being some account of the method of life and mode of thought found existent amongst a nation on its first contact with European civilisation* (London: Edward Arnold, 1910), 23; see also “Notes on J. W. Arthur” by Mr. R. Barlow in Barlow Papers, Gen. 1786 – 49a (1907).

became “stupid and unreliable, tricky, and treacherous to a degree, in the hands of another”.²⁶⁹ Boyes stated that the Agĩkũyũ, compared to the other Africans “are remarkably changeable, and their temper can never be relied upon...they are both fickle and treacherous”.²⁷⁰ This example shows that by emphasising alterity, colonial stereotyping made it easy for the justification of representation and civilising the Africans.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o identifies three distinctive forms of racism in colonial Kenya: racism of cultural diplomacy, the racism of contempt, and racism of sympathy.²⁷¹ In the first instance, racism of cultural diplomacy lay far more in method than in content and mainly experienced in colonial schools. In their work, African students were confronted with white images of the world through “the best and the most refined tradition in European culture and thought” such as Shakespeare, Sophocles, Goethe, Balzac, Tolstoy, George Eliot, Yeats, Brecht among others.²⁷² Reading from such great tradition, African students would encounter reality as defined by Europeans and rooted in race, culture and class. These writers also served as cultural diplomats. Favourable identification with these writers meant favourable view of the countries that produced them. At the height of Mau-Mau uprising during which time even school children lost their loved one, mission schools such as Alliance High School were declared island of peace. In this particular school, the dramatic society put on “a very respectable ‘Julius Ceaser’”.²⁷³ Despite the trouble in the land,

²⁶⁹ “Notes on J. W. Arthur” by Mr. R. Barlow in Barlow Papers, Gen. 1786 – 49a (1907).

²⁷⁰ John Boyes, *King of the Wa-Kikuyu: A True Story of Travel and Adventure in Africa* (London: Methuen (1912), [Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1968]), 96; Mudimbe argues that commentaries on the Africans’ indolence, their unbridled passions, and their cruelty or mental retardation” were already in existence before they became the standard to define the African. See Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 13.

²⁷¹ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Writers in Politics: A Re-engagement with Issues of Literature and Society* (Oxford: James Curry, 1997 revised and enlarged edition), 10-17.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁷³ E. Carey Francis, “Kenya’s Problems as Seen by a Schoolmaster in Kikuyu Country” in *African Affairs*, Vol. 54, No. 216 (July 1955), 196.

the school's principal confidently declared that "our chief contribution to the emergency is to go on trying to produce the right kind of men, ... 'strong in body and mind and character' who will go out in the Name and with the power of Christ to serve their fellows faithfully."²⁷⁴

The racism of contempt closely followed evidence of Social Darwinism and popularised through fictional books such as Rider Haggard's *King Solomon Mines*; works of Elspeth Huxley, especially, *The Red Strangers* and *A Thing to Love*; Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* to mention but a few. In this case evolution, conquest, and difference became signs of hermeneutical, theological, biological, and anthropological destiny. Accordingly, things and beings were assigned both their natural place and social mission.²⁷⁵ This theory which was accepted by most colonial administrators and colonists concluded that the superiority of Whites was biological and total. As "a mark of progress" the stronger exploited the weaker. Progress was perceived as the result of a grim struggle in which, according to nature's inexorable law, the weak species had to give way to the strong. Consequently the process of dispossessing the weaker peoples by the stronger was accepted as inevitable.²⁷⁶ Almost all settlers and some missionaries in Kenya believed in the truism of Social

²⁷⁴ Francis, "Kenya's Problems", 196.

²⁷⁵ Darwinism was amplified by Social Darwinists who claimed that competition among individuals, groups, nations or ideas serve as a catalyst to social evolution in human societies. See Mudimbe on 'African Genesis', *The Invention of Africa*, 16-23. See also Said, *Orientalism*, 206; Oldham, *Christianity and the Race Problem*, 95; Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 57.

²⁷⁶ For a much wider discussion on this issue see Oldham, *Christianity and the Race Problem*, 94ff and particularly on Friedrich Naumann's idea of lessons from history; Paul Rohrbach on the rights on natives in regard to land and property; Wilfrid Scawen Blunt on the rights of "savage peoples" and Graham Wallas' indictment of Christianity in his book *Human Nature in Politics* (Oldham, *Christianity and the Race Problem*, 95f.) The theory received support from French philosopher and anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl whom in his theoretical conclusions on "Primitive Mentality" defined African as an anthropological problem. His theoretical work on Africans and other non-Western races can be read in his two books *Primitive Mentality*, 1923 and *How Natives Think*, 1926.

Darwinism and any relationship with the African was formed under basis of this theory.²⁷⁷

The last group comprises those driven by racism of sympathy. Missionaries, who accepted the biblical ideal of common creation, exemplified what wa Thiong'o refers to as "the racism of paternalistic sympathy".²⁷⁸ The anthropological basis of this understanding came from Genesis that interpreted human beings as created in the image of and likeness of God. However, while the Genesis account's emphasis is on the dignity and sacredness of the human person having intellect, freewill, and the power of self-determination; the African did not fit in such a definition because of his inferiority traced in his cultural deficiency and not because of biological differences as claimed by others. Many of those who took this position acknowledged cultural differences between the civilised mind and the primitive mind but at same token saw hope of redeeming the African through the Gospel. Consequently, it was believed that the African could be reclaimed for God through proper Christian teachings. Those who followed this school of thought regarded Africans including proselytised African as a child-race and believed in paternalism as a way of whipping the child into adulthood through obedience and submission.

For example, the Right Rev. Weston Bishop of Zanzibar²⁷⁹, in his article "White Man and Black" proposed three main attitudes that missionaries could adopt towards the Africans in East Africa: To count Africans as hardly human; keep

²⁷⁷ See J. C. Carothers, *The Psychology of Mau Mau* (Nairobi: The Government Printer, 1954); Elspeth Huxley, *The Flame Trees of Thika: Memories of an African Childhood* (London: The Reprint Society, 1959), Sir Harry H. Johnston, *A History of the Colonization of Africa by Alien Races* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1899) and *Livingstone and the Exploration of Central Africa (The World's Great Explorers and Exploration series* (London: George Philip & Son, 1891); Sir Philip Mitchell, *African Afterthoughts* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1954); , C. T. Stoneham, *Mau-Mau* (London: Museum press limited, 1953) and *Out of Barbarism* (London: Museum press limited, 1955); and Christopher Wilson, *Before the Dawn in Kenya* (Nairobi: The English Press Ltd., 1952).

²⁷⁸ wa Thiong'o, *Writers in Politics*, 13.

²⁷⁹ Bishop Weston was among the three Anglican Bishops that oversaw ecclesiastical administration in the British Protectorate in East Africa. The others were Bishop of Mombasa and Bishop of Kampala.

Africans in perpetual servitude; or see in African one of the child-races, the ‘little brothers’ of the human family.²⁸⁰ The Bishop recommended that the last attitude was that which “all Christians and all who really know and care for the native must adopt.” He considered the other two as wrong socially, politically and morally which no Christian and no sane citizen could defend. Weston continued to say that “We are ‘big brothers’ to the child-races, who need ‘nursery discipline’ even while in physical power they excel us and in spiritual capacity are no whit behind the average European.”²⁸¹ Although, the African though a child had “reached that high level of social duty and of the ‘common life’ to which our more earnest politicians are now exhorting us”, he still was “non-moral” and conforming “to the code of his tribe”. For this reason, the Bishop demanded that Africans be treated “as human beings whose place in the human family is the nursery.”²⁸²

Weston’s point was amplified by Rev. Hooper who posed that early contacts with the outside world yielded nothing, as Africa still lagged behind with its mysteries and darkness. For the missionaries, physical difficulties in accessing “negro Africa” were not in its terrain, dense forests, fever-stricken swamps and swollen rivers, dusty plains, diseases and death.²⁸³ What was insurmountable to the colonial missionaries “was the silence of the people” which became the chief obstacle to “Africa’s unveiling.”²⁸⁴ In Hooper’s estimation, Africa, in any of intelligible terms of social expression or institutional government never spoke. The African race remained “undiscovered and its soul unfound” until the new wave of colonial mission

²⁸⁰ Reprinted from pamphlet “Doings in East Africa” (May, 1918), University of Birmingham Special Collection, CMS/Acc./262/Z 4/2.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ According to Hooper Negro Africa referred to the rest of Africa apart from north and north-east Africa. See Handsley Douglas Hooper, *Africa in the Making* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, 1922), 4.

²⁸⁴ Hooper, *Africa in the Making*, 7.

endeavours.²⁸⁵ Hooper reaffirming Bishop Weston designation of Africans as a “child-race”, unequivocally told his fellow citizens that

The African is an afterthought in the family of races. He is the world’s latest-born lying in the cradle of racial consciousness, and still lingering on the threshold of savage nonentity. His elder brothers of Asia, Europe and America have not yet accustomed themselves to think of his corporate existence, nor are they yet prepared to acknowledge his dawning personality. The native races of America and the aborigines of Australia proved to be still-born babes, but the black race is a lusty infant, growing rapidly in bulk and mental perception.²⁸⁶

The ideas expressed by Hooper do not represent the idiosyncratic whims of an individual missionary, but rather a body of opinion in Europe which had been authoritatively systematised by Hegel in *The Philosophy of History*. Africa, which is not even discussed in the main body of *The Philosophy of History*, is summarily dismissed from consideration in the introduction but not before labelling it as the continent with no history.²⁸⁷ While arguing that the principle of Universality is what that naturally accompanied Western ideas, Hegel pointed out that in Africa consciousness had not attained to the realisation of any substantial objective existence and therefore, the Africans would never be able to stand alone.²⁸⁸

In addition to racism of sympathy, racial stereotypes reinforced the position of cultural intolerance taken by the arriving missionaries in East Africa. In my opinion, it forms the hermeneutical basis of Rev. Beecher’s rhetorical question posed to his fellow missionaries: “How, then, to present the Gospel committed to our trust to the peoples of pagan Africa?”²⁸⁹ Answering his own question, Beecher expanded and intensified contradiction between racial difference and the biblical notion of common

²⁸⁵ Ibid., footnote (as a quote from E.G. Murphy, *The Basis of Ascendancy*), 7.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 22.

²⁸⁷ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956, reissued 2004), 91-99. Compare with Johnston, *Livingstone and the Exploration of Central Africa*, 25, 28, 31 and *A History of the Colonization of Africa by Alien Races*, 4-5, 101-102; See also *The Universities’ Mission to Central Africa: Atlas* (London: Office of the Universities’ Mission to Central Africa, 1903), 15; Leakey, *White African*, 251-2.

²⁸⁸ Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 93.

²⁸⁹ Beecher, 4.

human ancestry.²⁹⁰ In the first instance, he argued that there was fundamental incompatibility of the old and new modes of religious ideas as the Bible declares that “Neither do men put new wine into old wine-skins; else the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins perish; but they put new wine into fresh wine-skins, and both are preserved”.²⁹¹ Incorporation of any specific aspect of African culture in the “new synthesis” without deep examination of its basis in African beliefs would result in difficulties. Therefore, deeper analysis of “pagan creeds” would prove to the investigator beyond any shadow of doubt that Christian belief and African belief differ radically and inescapably. As such, missionaries, though tempted to be sentimentally attached to pagan social and moral values, must be ruthless in the case of religion. Consequently, the inferior religion must cede to Christianity!²⁹²

2.3 Conclusion

I have attempted to show in this chapter the interconnection and correlation of colonial reading(s) of the Bible and interpretation(s) in colonial Kenya to the discourses on human subject, culture and race. I have attempted to show through the various principles of legitimation that what colonial discourses commonly circulated about Africans was not “truth” but representations.²⁹³ The colonial Church in the act of representing colonial subjects stood as the objective and neutral arbitrator. The church stood out both as an existential and a moral reality. Beecher’s document discussed above, advocated for hermeneutics that defined Mission Church as the best church type entrusted with the “deposit of truth” to propagate, interpret and urge in and out of season God’s law. Most importantly however, is the assumption that the

²⁹⁰ Loomba, *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism*, 101.

²⁹¹ Matthew 9:17, as quoted by Rev. Beecher (Translation version not given.)

²⁹² See D. Westermann, *Africa and Christianity* (Oxford: O.U.P, 1937), 94 and T. Cullen Young, *African Ways and Wisdom* (London: U.S.C.L, 1937), 121-122 for detailed discussion on pagan creeds and the role of the missionaries.

²⁹³ See Said, *Orientalism*, 21.

Bible stood as a stable and safe text containing absolutes whose consequent assumption was a particular, stable, coherent, and normative way of interpreting the Bible. Through simplistic, partial and highly selective use of biblical texts, the texts would be read as though they were written with the Africans in mind.

The ideas on representation and insights on binary opposites and colonial depersonalisation, important as they are, remain incomplete without Homi Bhabha's observations that colonial discourses remained more ambivalent than resolute in aims. They were largely contradictory and a careful analysis of the "reality" they pretended to represent reveals instability and anxieties. Though they succeeded in causing displacement and disjunctions to the colonial subjects, colonial discourses did not succeed in totalising experience. This is the point that I will explore in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: LOCATION OF CULTURE IN THE COLONIAL HERMENEUTICS: AMBIVALENCE, MIMICRY, AND HYBRIDITY

Kikuyu
A Torch that flings a brave, triumphant light
Down the dark aisles and pathways of the Night,
And Dole, and Dread, and Darkness puts to
flight:
- Kikuyu!
A Tree, God-rooted, casting gracious shade,
With flower and fruit that shall not fail nor
fade,
For life is there awakened and new-made:
- Kikuyu!
A pure perennial Spring that never dries
But ministers to all necessities,
And body, soul, and spirit sanctifies:
- Kikuyu!
A little Temple in the wilderness,
Where God dwells in His grace and tenderness,
All seeking souls to help and cheer and bless:
*Kikuyu!*²⁹⁴

3.1 Introduction

Biblical language and interpretation in colonial Kenya, though used preponderantly to exercise controlling influence and to highlight African otherness, also inspired “stubborn confrontation and a crossing over in discussion, borrowing back and forth, debate” which opened the possibility of alternative use of biblical language.²⁹⁵ Postcolonial theory helps us see that even those discourses which tend to totalise reality are not always sure about the reality they attempt to totalise. Even though colonisation aimed at dominating and restructuring the colonised’s view of reality, it was not in itself immune to the restructuring power of decolonisation.²⁹⁶ As McLeod observes, there are moments where colonial assumptions meet alternative

²⁹⁴ The poem was written by John Oxenham to celebrate the completion of the magnificent “Church of the Torch” located at Kikuyu in Kenya the mission centre for the Church of Scotland Mission (C.S.M). See foreword in Rev. Charles W. Hutcheson and Rev. W. B. Stevenson, eds., *Kikuyu: 1898-1923 Semi-Jubilee Book of the Church of Scotland Mission Kenya Colony* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1923); see also Rev. John W. Arthur, “The Late John Oxenham”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 155 (March 1941), 378.

²⁹⁵ Said articulates how this became possible within the colonial context. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 34.

²⁹⁶ Loomba, *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism*, 22.

views that throw their authority into question.²⁹⁷ Likewise, although the aims, nature and reliability of biblical interpretation in Kenya (in particular Gĩkũyũ country), may never have been independent from the consciousness and will of the colonial discourse that assumed its own dominance and superiority, its development was not monolithic. As my analysis will illustrate, the process of replicating the Bible and its teachings in colonial Kenya was a complex one. The context in which the Bible was reproduced could not allow exact replication of intended meanings.²⁹⁸ This fact shows that biblical interpretation, just like texts, rarely embodies one view.²⁹⁹ In this chapter I will be offering three main arguments which relate to each other at various levels of colonial contacts.

The first claim, which follows Memmi's and Bhabha's proposition, is that the cross-overs and the borrowing back and forth in colonial contexts became possible through the "concept of 'fixity'" in the construction of otherness.³⁰⁰ Such a concept is reinforced by stereotype which serves as its major discursive strategy and produces a process of ambivalence in the colonial representation of the colonised subjects. The discourse of colonialism remained ambivalent from the simultaneous attempt to reduce the colonised otherness while still maintaining the cultural gap between the colonised and the colonisers. In the Christian circles, on one hand as I shall show later in the chapter, biblical language was used effectively to universalise Christian reality and identity as colonialism attempted to domesticate the Africans through the

²⁹⁷ McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 51.

²⁹⁸ I owe this idea to Loomba who articulately shows that replication of colonial literature produced ripple effects which the colonisers could not control. Loomba, *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism*, 62-90.

²⁹⁹ McLeod points out that texts will, in most cases bring into play several different points of views, without always deciding which is the true or most appropriate one. McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 51.

³⁰⁰ Bhabha argues that fixity as a sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism connotes rigidity and unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition. For further insights on Bhabha's argument see, Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 1-131. See also Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 1-76. See also McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* 51-57, and 63.

civilising mission. On the other hand, biblical language was used to fix the colonised as a group that remained strange and other who had to remain under the watchful hermeneutical eyes of colonialism. For this reason, colonialism without seeing any contradiction would focus on the mission of civilising its “others” while also fixing the colonised into what Loomba refers to as “perpetual otherness”.³⁰¹

In the civilising mission the Bible is used to fully exploit the African latent potentialities in order to create a Westernised native in religion, morals, manners, and in intellect. However, since in their desire for quick progress Africans developed a tendency to mimic the European without acquiring fully the desired European values, the native had to be guarded against any policy that would poison and distort the African potentialities.³⁰² In other words, to follow Bhabha, the African remained “a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.”³⁰³ Needless to say that, as a rule, the coloniser must never admit that the colonised is really different from the coloniser as this would undercut the legitimacy of colonisation.³⁰⁴ Yet still, the fact that European values can be imitated or reproduced leaves the possibility for subversion.³⁰⁵ I will offer evidence and discussion in chapters 5 and 6 about Homi Bhabha’s suggestion that simple acts like mimicry was not an act of straightforward homage to colonialism but a way of eluding control.³⁰⁶

My second claim that I will be making in this chapter is that the colonisers’ experience and even that of the Africans which they represented testified to the diversity and differences present in the colonial world. Since the African context, just

³⁰¹ Loomba, *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism*, 145.

³⁰² Handsley Douglas Hooper, *Leading Strings: Native Development & Missionary Education in Kenya Colony* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1921), 7.

³⁰³ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 122. Memmi makes the same point when he argues that though the colonizer, particularly the one “who refuses”, has complete faith in the genius of all peoples, he still admits to “a fundamental difference between the colonized and himself.” Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 25, 40.

³⁰⁴ McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 53.

³⁰⁵ Loomba, *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism*, 78.

³⁰⁶ See Bhabha’s chapter 4, *The Location of Culture*, 121-131.

as the coloniser's one, was a world with its own agendas, priorities, and history, it was not possible to develop unitary and pure forms of hermeneutics and beliefs. As Said suggested cultural forms are "hybrid, mixed, impure".³⁰⁷ Therefore, hermeneutics and Christian beliefs that evolved out of the colonial situation could not be anything but hybrid, mixed and impure. Since hybridity as understood in postcolonialism is never total or complete, it remains perpetually in motion, pursuing errant and unpredictable course, open to change and inscription.³⁰⁸ Hybridity offers alternatives of interpreting reality without the exclusionary, fixed, and binary notions of reality based on culture, race, ethnicity, gender or even national identity. Further, while hybridity helps articulate state of being, social problems and contradictions, it offers no immediate solution in the first instance. To follow Robert Young, it offers challenge rather than solution while allowing people to interpret the new spaces with relevant meanings of their own in dialogical encounters.³⁰⁹

The third claim that I make in this chapter is that, due to the ambivalences, anxieties and contradictions as well as the hybrid nature of colonial discourses, the colonial situation offered an "in-between" space where other possibilities in interpretation became feasible. This point is elaborated further by Bhabha who has eloquently argued that the "'in between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself."³¹⁰ The "in-between" space opens the possibility of negotiations. In the moment of historical transformation it becomes almost impossible to achieve "an

³⁰⁷ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 15.

³⁰⁸ McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 219.

³⁰⁹ Young, *Postcolonialism*, 74.

³¹⁰ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2.

originary identity or a 'received' tradition".³¹¹ An interrogatory interstice is opened between the act of representation and the presence of the community itself where cultural values, community interests and experiences are negotiated. This is captured well by Renée Green as quoted in Bhabha, where she uses the metaphor of the attic, the boiler room, and the stairwell to make associations with the colonial binary polarities. In this case the stairwell becomes a "liminal space" to symbolise interactions between upper and lower, heaven and hell, higher and lower, black and white.³¹² Thus the liminal space "prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities."³¹³ By investigating the "middle passage", as it were, of colonial culture and experience, it reveals to us that though this process led to displacement and disjunctions, it was never able to create a totalising experience.³¹⁴

Memmi goes further and gives us an adequate argument explaining how the interstices come to be as a result of economic and social colonial encounters. First, the coloniser becomes aware that in the colonial encounter, he is the privileged one who enjoys exorbitant rights while the colonised bears the burden of enormous obligations.³¹⁵ This awareness brings to light the fact that the coloniser is doubly unjust in that as a coloniser he "is a privileged being and an illegitimately privileged one; that is, a usurper."³¹⁶ Memmi continued,

Accepting the reality of being a colonizer means agreeing to be a nonlegitimate privileged person, that is, a usurper. To be sure, a usurper claims his place and, if need be, will defend it by every means at his disposal. This amounts to saying that at the very time of his triumph, he admits that what triumphs in him is an image which he condemns. His true victory will therefore never be upon him: now he need only record it in the laws and morals. For this he would have to convince the others, if not himself.³¹⁷

³¹¹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 3.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 5.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

³¹⁵ Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 7

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

The situation leaves the coloniser with two options: either give up his privileges or do away with the colonised altogether. This choice reveals yet another disturbing reality - the coloniser's consciousness of the colonised's presence. The colonial encounter makes real that which to the coloniser belonged to the realms of imaginations as discovered in travelogues, missionaries' journals, documentaries, books and even the theatre. The existence of the colonised is no longer "a simple component of geographical or historical décor".³¹⁸

In this encounter, the coloniser discovers that the colonised is part of who he is. It is this realisation of colonial relationship, privilege and usurpation that determine the coloniser's historic role which is of a group whose values and way of life are sovereign.³¹⁹ According to Memmi, the growing habits of privilege, the illegitimacy and the constant gaze of the usurped render colonialism ambivalent and in many occasions contradictory. To maintain his legitimacy, the coloniser first attempts to demonstrate his meritorious role as a civiliser. Such a legitimation also demands that the coloniser extol his virtues while at the same time downgrading the colonised. Ironically, as Memmi demonstrated, the performative act that leaves the colonised downtrodden while the coloniser triumphs confirms the coloniser's guilt and establishes his self-condemnation.³²⁰ It is in this "liminal space" of guilt and self-condemnation that comes the "enigmatic questioning" which disturbs any unified notion of history and every unitary concept of the coloniser's values.³²¹

In the remaining pages, using the three claims laid above I will attempt to show how colonial ambivalence within the historical development of colonial reading and interpretation of the Bible encouraged mimicry and helped create an "in-between"

³¹⁸ Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 7.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

³²¹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 60-61.

space that hybridised hermeneutics, culture and experience. The colonial actualities opened up the possibility of alternative way of encountering the Bible, even resistance. To help in this analysis, I will consider Social and Christian anthropology that emerged as an internal critique of the missionary hermeneutics; the 1913 Kikuyu Conference and eventually the blending and application of African and European aesthetics used in the architectural work in the Church of the Torch building. In so doing, I hope to achieve several things. The first thing is to authenticate the “histories of exploitation” and the “evolution of strategies of resistance”.³²² Secondly, I hope to neutralise the binary polarities that colonial situation created by revealing the interdependency of both the colonisers and colonised histories and narratives as well as the overlap, a borrowing back and forth. Instead of seeing colonial discourses and hermeneutics as meta-narratives that claim a total form of generality, I hope to show that there can be no final discursive closure of the theoretical.³²³

On their part the formerly colonised would deploy cultural hybridity of their interstice conditions in order to translate, interpret and re-inscribe the colonial imagined self. What emerges from this scenario is not a continuum of the past or present. It is an encounter with newness which is not only ready to contest but also innovatively interrupts the former and present acts of representation. In the liminal space of colonial displacement and social discrimination one is able to hear the silenced voices and make visible the colonial invisibles.

3.2 The Bible, Literacy, Colonial Ambivalence and Anxieties

3.2.1 The Bible as the literacy primer

Colonial construction of the African otherness oscillates between two contradictory positions of identity. On the one hand, the African who is in most cases

³²² Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 9.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 45.

considered strange and other is represented as “essentially outside Western culture and civilisation”.³²⁴ On the other hand, through the performative acts of civilising, the African is brought inside Western epistemology through the construction of Africanists’ discourses about the Africans.³²⁵ The construction of African otherness that splits the African as simultaneously inside and outside Western knowledge can be discerned in the history of Christian development in Kenya. Those who introduced Christianity laboured to domesticate the Africans, as already discussed, in order to abolish “otherness” by claiming a universal understanding found in the biblical metaphor of the body and Johannine concept of “they all be one”.³²⁶ By the same token, the understanding was designed to first assert the authority of the Bible, and through the Bible the authority of Western culture and civilisation.

Although the following points shall be discussed at length in chapter 5, I need to point out here that from the early days, the Bible became the authoritative literacy primer used in catechetical classes and mission schools.³²⁷ One could not draw a line between the evolution of a new faith and the development of the intellect. At schools and church, Bible lessons were prepared on the parables, on the miracles, and from a harmony of the Gospels, all taken from “Oxford Helps”.³²⁸ In other words, it is through the Bible that the Africans first came into contact with the literary world. It was the only available text which introduced the African to alphabets, sentence structuring and writing. The Bible as introduced was not just a book; it was the *Ibũku rĩa Ngai* (God’s Book.) In it lay the mysteries of the unknown world. To know the Bible was to know the mysteries behind the white man. Simply taken and read, the

³²⁴ McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 52.

³²⁵ Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 16-23.

³²⁶ “Federation of mission in British East Africa” paper by W. Chadwick on June 17, 1913.

³²⁷ E. N. Wanyoike, *An African Pastor* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1974), 29; Obadiah Kariuki, *A Bishop Facing Mount Kenya: An Autobiography, 1902-1978* (Nairobi: Uzima Press Limited, 1985), 19; Kareri, *The Life of Charles Muhoro Kareri*, 25-26.

³²⁸ Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 119.

Bible was “an object of strange power”³²⁹ and its content was the Truth which could not be questioned. As I shall show in chapter 5 and 6, the African learnt to revere it and take good care of it. He read, recited and remembered the things of the Bible.

At school it was important that students of the Bible learnt its truths since they would equally be sent to preach to bring their heathen brothers and sisters to the Light. An example of those who received such training was Petro Mũgo, the first African evangelist of Church of Scotland Mission to an out-district distinctly not at first evangelised by any European.³³⁰ Marion Stevenson speaking adoringly of him said that as a lad of twenty years of age,

It was a strange adventure for a young warrior. Not in paint and feathers and with shield and spear and arrogant bearing was he to sally forth as an enemy, working himself up to a lust to kill, but with the meekness of a quiet spirit and in the armour of God to carry a message of peace and love. It was an unforgettable experience to see him standing up before the congregation, straight and slender as a dart – a black Sir Galahad – his face shining with light and purpose. He was as yet only a catechumen, still waiting for the Church’s outward seal of baptism, but of his devotion to Christ none could doubt, who looked on him that day.³³¹

Mũgo’s devotion to the new mission was not in question. His meekness and the armour of God made him qualified as a messenger of peace. However, even as the Church was willing to send him out, he had not received the “Church’s outward seal of baptism”.³³² To make Mũgo and others effective in their new “warriorship”, they needed the most effective weapon of trade - The Word. This made urgent the need for an education policy grounded on the Bible. Such a policy was understood to be the fulfilment of Jesus’ declaration that, “I have come that they might have life and that

³²⁹ West, “African Biblical Hermeneutics and Bible Translation”, 5.

³³⁰ Kareri, *The Life of Charles Muhoro Kareri*, 10.

³³¹ Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 131.

³³² As it shall be explicated later, one remained a catechumen for not less than two years and had to satisfy the missionaries of their acquired knowledge and commitment. Mũgo mission to Tumutumu lasted only until there was a missionary resident in the area.

they might have it more abundantly.”³³³ As a result, education became an integral part of Christian missions whose vision saw the education centre not as “establishment for the imparting of information, nor a training ground for clerks and artisans for industrial groups” but first and foremost “a centre at which young African may learn how to translate the spirit of Christ into terms of practical service for Africa”.³³⁴ According to Rev. A. J. Hopkins, the purpose of education was not to seek doctrinal allegiance but the simplicity of the gospel which “Jesus gave Himself for us”. Education was supposed to help students interpret Christianity as “simply doing what Jesus did.”³³⁵ The simple notion that Jesus spent his life seeking to do selfless acts of service was to be the foundation on which to build a “new Africa”.³³⁶ In the process of interpretation African students had to learn to contextualise the universal and express Jesus not as a foreign figure speaking incomprehensible jargon but “a Christ made flesh ... the eternal changeless Christ Whose feet the African will fall and cry *MY LORD AND MY GOD*.”³³⁷

Hopkins’ interpretation of John’s words demonstrates two things. First, that through the right interpretation the domestication of the African would make it possible for a new Africa that received, mimicked and contextualised the civilising mission. Secondly, the use of the Bible as literacy primer in the formulation of an education policy whose primary role was to proselytise, would facilitate the construction of new epistemology, gnosis and moral knowledge in the new Africa.³³⁸ Biblically based education as the foundation of morality, intellect, experience and culture sought to accomplish the implementation of the fundamental Christian truths

³³³ A. J. Hopkins, *Trail Blazers and Road Makers: A Brief History of East Africa Mission of the United Methodist Church* (London: United Methodist Publishing House, 1928), 123.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 124.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 128.

³³⁸ Cell, *By Kenya Possessed*, 111.

as “abiding foundations of the highest morality”.³³⁹ What this reveals is that mission education and biblical interpretation were an integral part of the civilising mission and therefore inseparable in lessening the cultural distance between the coloniser and the colonised. However, colonialism also maintains cultural distance through the stereotyping of the Africans as strange and other; therefore outside Western culture and civilisation.

3.2.2 Possibility of an African Knowledge and Gnosis

In the missionaries’ discourse the element of splitting that casts the African as sliding ambivalently between the positions of semblance and differences finds theoretical cognisance in the Scottish missionary Rev. James W. C. Dougall’s³⁴⁰ rereading and interpretation of the theory of “Primitive Mentality” by the French philosopher and anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl.³⁴¹ Dougall impressively reread, expanded and applied the theory in the formulation of education policy in colonial Kenya.³⁴² He understood Lévy-Bruhl’s work as the first to attempt to unveil the complexity in understanding the African mentality which had eluded many.³⁴³ Dougall found in Lévy-Bruhl’s theory a systematised explanation which coherently and in a convincing way articulated the difference between the African and Western

³³⁹ Macdonald, *Trade Politics and Christianity in Africa and the East*, 53-55.

³⁴⁰ Rev. James W. C. Dougall first travelled to East Africa in 1924 as the secretary of the Phelps Stokes Commission – a Commission invited by the colonial Government to investigate and make recommendations on the educational policy for African students. He became the first Principal of the Jeanes School in Gikūyū country which was founded by the colonial Government with the aid of grants from Carnegie Corporation for the training of “Jeanes’ teachers” as replica of teachers in “negro schools in the Southern States”. In 1932, Dougall became the Educational Adviser to the Protestant Missions in Kenya, Uganda and the then Upper Nile. In 1936 he was appointed as the Secretary of the Conference of British Missionary Societies. See Rev. Dr. John W. Arthur, “Rev. J. W. C. Dougall”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 137, (September 1936), 5-6.

³⁴¹ Lévy-Bruhl’s theoretical work on Africans and other non-Western races can be read in his two books *Primitive Mentality* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1923) and *How Natives Think* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1926).

³⁴² James W. C. Dougall, “Characteristics of African Thought”, *Africa*, Vol. 5 no. 3, (July 1932), 249-265.

³⁴³ Dougall, “Characteristics of African Thought”, 250.

cultures. Accordingly, the application of the theory could help frame hermeneutics, education and colonial policies and modes of dealing with Africans.

Dougall's conclusions are important because he was able to lay the framework in which the Bible would become central in the establishment of an education policy largely accepted by the colonial government. Dougall concluded that,

The success of African education depends upon its power to provide for the deeper emotional energies their necessary freedom and expression, both through aesthetic and artistic channels such as games, dancing, singing, arts, and handicrafts, and through a religious faith which will 'draw to itself the whole current of the emotional life and release it in a flood of spontaneous and joyful activities'.³⁴⁴

This statement is in line with the thesis question that Dougall was trying to answer.

He first posed whether Africans could assimilate Western civilisation by not "merely accepting its scientific discoveries and inventions, but making its intellectual assumptions and methods really their own".³⁴⁵ In other words, to what extent was the African different and would such difference affect the Africans ability to adapt to Western civilisation? Dougall believed that the answer to the question lay in Lévy-Bruhl's theory. In Dougall's analysis and my reading of Lévy-Bruhl's work on "Primitive Mentality", I draw several important conclusions.

In its face value, Lévy-Bruhl's proposition may be located within the already existing discourses that assumed the primacy and even the complete centrality of the Western discursive and philosophical formulations. His theory on the "Primitive mentality" is as totalising in its form as any other anthropological discourse. Its attitudes and gestures fix the primitive mind as both strange and different from the Western mind. Lévy-Bruhl's theory, like all colonial discourses, represents the colonised or natives not as individuals but collectively in which case "the individual

³⁴⁴ Dougall, "Characteristics of African Thought", 265.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 249.

mind is dominated by collective mental images”.³⁴⁶ The gulf between the primitive and Western mind, Lévy-Bruhl argued could not be reduced through the theory of animism and human semblance as first proposed by Tylor and supported by the British anthropological school.³⁴⁷ He challenged the English school of anthropology for “perpetually trying to show the relation between ‘savage’ and ‘civilized’ mentality and to *explain* it” and as such arriving at the general hypothesis of “animism”.³⁴⁸

According to Lévy-Bruhl the explanation offered by the English school was in itself an imposition which went against the empirical data available. In his opinion, the British school of thought failed to ask the right question: i.e. “Do the collective representations of the communities in question arise out of higher mental functions identical with our own, or must they be referred to a mentality which differs from ours to an extent yet to be determined?”³⁴⁹ He therefore, disagreed with the English anthropologists who had concluded that the primitive used mental curiosity (which Taylor referred to as “reasonable inference”) to seek understanding the causes of events. For Lévy-Bruhl, “myths, funeral rites, agrarian practices and the exercise of magic” did not appear to originate in the desire for a rational explanation. Instead, they were “the primitives’ response to collective needs and sentiments” which were “profound and mighty and of compulsive force”.³⁵⁰ Lévy-Bruhl proposed to use the same accumulated data so that “by a positive study of collective representations we

³⁴⁶ According to Lévy-Bruhl the laws in collective representations cannot be discovered by studying the “white, adult, and civilized individual” See Lévy-Bruhl, *Primitive Mentality*, 6-7 and Dougall, “Characteristics of African Thought”, 251.

³⁴⁷ Lévy-Bruhl coordinated and systematised representations (such as mana, totem, magic and religious symbols among others) using data collected by anthropologists as well as ethnologists. In particular, the work of E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1871 was helpful in its analysis of institutions, customs, group-ideas, and languages of the “primitive” races. He also used psychological analysis in order to show the importance of the emotional and the motor elements of mental life in general and extending to the intellectual life. Following Auguste Comte dictum: ‘Humanity is not to be defined through man, but on the contrary, man through humanity’, Lévy-Bruhl aimed at showing that “the highest mental functions remain unintelligible as long as they are studied from the individual alone” (Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 15.) Lévy-Bruhl was in particular critical of James Frazer’s the *Golden Bough*.

³⁴⁸ Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 17.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

may arrive by degrees at a knowledge of the laws which govern them and thus obtain a more correct interpretation of the mentality of primitive peoples, and even of our own”.³⁵¹

The theory likewise builds on binary opposites and is categorical in its claim that the primitive peoples’ mental outlook is radically different from that of “civilised man”. One way that the primitive mind is different is that it is pre-logical, mystical, and insensible to contradiction.³⁵² As such, Lévy-Bruhl asserted, Primitives lacked the mental habit which would encourage abstract thought and reasoning.³⁵³ Instead, “collective representations” impose themselves onto the individual’s mind becoming a sort of “article of faith” rather than a product of reason. The individual can hardly raise the question “why?” or “how?” since the primitive mind is predominated by the group representations. The native becomes so muddled by intense emotions as a result such that he is incapable of any disinterested contemplation which is the faculty of intellectual desire.³⁵⁴ For Lévy-Bruhl, rather than follow Taylor’s dictum that “spirits are personified causes”, anthropology should seek to account for the place held by spirits in the collective representations of the primitives.³⁵⁵

When probed further, Lévy-Bruhl’s theory (despite its totalising attitudes and frame of reference) reveals instability and ambivalence. The first evidence of instability, which we can glean through Dougall’s “principle of interpretation”, is that

³⁵¹ Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 25.

³⁵² By prelogical Lévy-Bruhl did not mean to assert that such a mentality constitutes a kind of antecedent stage, in point of time, to the birth of logical thought. Lévy-Bruhl did not believe that “undeveloped peoples” are capable in that kind of logical evolution.

³⁵³ Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 29.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁵⁵ Lévy-Bruhl argument is that Taylor’s animism theory followed the English “philosophy of associationism” of his day and the theory of evolution as propounded by Herbert Spencer. Taylor and his followers saw “the expression of the most comprehensive philosophical synthesis: and expression which could at the same time be adapted to any class of natural phenomena... a guiding line in scientific research. It could be applied to the history of the solar system as easily as to the genesis of organic matter, or that of the intellectual life”. By extension, the same could be applied in social phenomena. Herbert Spencer would use this theory to explain the theory of animism in mentality of primitives based on the associationistic philosophy. Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 26.

even though Lévy-Bruhl understood the primitive mind as remaining pre-logical and indisposed to discursive thought or reasoning, the mental images or collective representations in the primitive thought operate under a certain principle – “Law of Participation”.³⁵⁶ By referring to the principle as the “Law of Participation” Lévy-Bruhl meant the “connexion believed to exist between two things which are regarded as partially identical or as having a direct influence on one another although there is no spatial contact nor intelligible casual relation between them”.³⁵⁷ The primitive mind, by assuming the law of participation, did not find the need of investigating the causes of physical phenomena since the mystical connection offered sufficient cause. Everything that happens is due to occult forces where illness and death are associated not with the “natural” but as the result of magic.

In acknowledging that primitive thought operated under certain rules, Lévy-Bruhl was admitting existence of a form of knowledge that guides primitive thought. He does not deny the existence of the desire for an explanation in primitive thought. As a matter of fact he concluded that “like so many other potentialities which will be realized later when the social group develops, this curiosity is latent, and it may possibly be already manifest to a slight extent in the mental functioning of such peoples.”³⁵⁸ Interestingly too, Lévy-Bruhl’s understanding of “collective representations” builds on the idea of universality and commonality of certain human features.³⁵⁹ As Dougall observed, by allowing some common feature in civilised and non-civilised mentality, Lévy-Bruhl’s theory could not entirely reject the possibility that what is disclosed as primitive mentality may also be an element in civilised

³⁵⁶ Lévy-Bruhl, *Primitive Mentality*, 55. See also Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 78.

³⁵⁷ Lévy-Bruhl, *Primitive Mentality*, 29, 78.

³⁵⁸ Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 25.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

communities.³⁶⁰ Such a slippage opens an “in-between” space that allows lessening any cultural or intellectual gap between the civilised and primitive mentality.

Dougall’s second observation is that Lévy-Bruhl was not categorical in the fact that the Primitives are completely indifferent to objective realities. Even though the primitive mind is indifferent to the discursive operations of thought, of reasoning, and reflection, the same natives “show themselves...observant, wise, skilful, clever, even subtle, when an object interests them, especially when it is a case of obtaining something they very much desire”.³⁶¹ This characteristic offered the opportunity to gradually dissolve and decompose “the primitive syntheses, the preconnections of the collective representations” when “experience and logical claims win their way against the law of participation.”³⁶²

Apart from the few admissions set above, Lévy-Bruhl’s theory assumed an absolute and fundamental difference between pre-logical and civilised mentality. It made total the distinction between primitive and Western mind yet leaving the possibility of transformation in a chronological evolution, the first primitive and only as a forerunner of the civilised mentality. In an attempt to subdue the radical otherness of the colonised that Lévy-Bruhl’s theory postulated, Rev. Dougall used evidence from psychology and psychoanalysis to argue first that the features which characterise primitive mentality are also located in the European mental life.³⁶³ Dougall based his argument on the study of normal European children by Jean Piaget of Geneva and on the writings on psychoanalysis mainly by Ernest Jones. In the first instance, the study of the European child’s developmental stages revealed that the children’s unconscious mental life began by confusing words with things. For this reason the child would see

³⁶⁰ Dougall, “Characteristics of African Thought”, 252.

³⁶¹ Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, 30.

³⁶² Lévy-Bruhl, *Primitive Mentality*, 109.

³⁶³ Dougall, “Characteristics of African Thought”, 252.

inanimate things as endowed with human characteristics and conscious motives. Since the child is unconscious of his/her own subjectivity as well as the personal quality of his/her feeling, the child projects the whole content of his/her consciousness onto reality. Therefore, to the child, the material world appeared as possessing feeling and will. In other words, “the children showed inherent tendency to animistic and magical conceptions.”³⁶⁴ Applied to Lévy-Bruhl’s theory of the primitive mentality, Piaget’s technique revealed a striking resemblances between the unconscious mental life of the European child and that of the prelogical mentality.³⁶⁵ In both cases, the “constant assimilation of external processes to schemas arising from internal experience gives rise to the feeling of participation” and consequently, the root of magical ideas and animistic beliefs.³⁶⁶

In the second instance, the Freudian universal unconscious subsumes all particularities. According to Dougall, it is in the “omnipotence of thought” that psychical causation is felt to be more real than the physical.³⁶⁷ Dr. Ernest Jones’ psychoanalysis of a European adult had concluded that the unconscious, where all mental functioning originates, places excessive belief in the value and significance of psychical processes in general. Consequently, the unconscious overestimation of the power of thought leads to a tendency to ascribe external happenings to spiritual forces while depreciating the significance of physical factors. The unconscious, according to Jones ignores moral standards and follows its own logic which follows emotions rather than reason. For this reason it lacks the well-known characteristics of logical thought and ignores direct contradiction. The importance of this discovery is the persistence of the child’s mind (in its original and unchanged form) in adult life

³⁶⁴ Dougall, “Characteristics of African Thought”, 253.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

meaning that “the adult civilised man” has two modes of thinking, the conscious and the unconscious which makes psychoanalysts take very seriously and apply literally the saying “the child is the father of the man”.³⁶⁸ In essence, the conclusion is that the influence of the unconscious which is prelogical, egocentric, magical and animistic, is never superseded or eliminated by the logical conscious system. However, experience and education alters the unconscious forms but the control of the unconscious by the logical system remains imperfect through life.³⁶⁹ When applied to the primitive mentality it is not hard to see what differentiates it from “the civilised man”. According to Dougall, this difference is analogous to the difference between the European children and adults.

As such, it means Lévy-Bruhl is right in his conclusion that the primitive mind is pre-logical, mystical, and insensible to contradiction because it is governed by the law of participation. Nonetheless, when analysed using Piaget’s study and psychoanalysis, Lévy-Bruhl’s theory can only be meaningful if it accepts that the features of the unconscious mind is common to all humanity as revealed by psychoanalysts and as describe as pre-logical, mystical, ignoring contradiction, and insensible to limitation of time and space. Dougall’s conclusion is reinforced by the fact that Lévy-Bruhl admitted the possibility that the conscious thinking never entirely supersede prelogical thought which is precisely the contention of psychoanalysts; that the child’s mind persists in adult life and that control of the unconscious by the conscious remains imperfect even in “the adult civilised man”.

The rereading of Lévy-Bruhl is further reinforced by the observable facts that “in the native environment we find in the most striking evidence of man’s reason,

³⁶⁸ Dougall, “Characteristics of African Thought”, 254.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

observation, and thought applied to practical problems”.³⁷⁰ For these reasons Dougall contended that “it is impossible, therefore, to assert an absolute separation between the mind of primitive peoples and our own”.³⁷¹ He saw the difference as fundamentally social; a social phenomenon in which individuals are trained or become accustomed to use their mental powers under the influence of different social systems of organisation and belief. The social milieu in which the African lived limited the potential to cultivate the conscious and failed to assist him to reach a truly objective knowledge of reality. Instead it reinforced the mental attitudes and assumptions which are the essence of the unconscious.

Therefore, despite “the presence of magical ideas and irrational conceptions of nature”, the Africans like Europeans, argued and made deductions from commonly accepted premises.³⁷² The fact that the African is capable of logical thought, inference, and speculation, opens up the “liminal space” in which the African could “attain to the most civilized standards and the most purely logical modes of thought”.³⁷³ The African could learn to acquire “the white man’s skill” and achieve higher education and professional training. Such a view opens the possibility of assimilation through mimicry. But before this could happen, those charged with the civilising mission must first be aware that the African conscious thought is easily modified by emotions, the unconscious factors. The unconscious factors that govern interpretation of experience, according to Dougall, were influenced by the “logic of conscious reason” which remains in dialectical tension with the “logic of the emotions”.³⁷⁴ When the former failed to reinforce the latter, the conclusions are irrational and illogical. Like children the Africans act largely from feeling and habit,

³⁷⁰ Dougall, “Characteristics of African Thought”, 256.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 257.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 256.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 256.

³⁷⁴ Dougall, “Characteristics of African Thought”, 263-264.

but can be surprisingly logical! Once this fact is understood, it is easy to explain “the supposed deficiency of the African in concentration, reason and logic”.³⁷⁵ In other words, the malleable quality of the Africans is double edged. On the one edge, it can assimilate easily through parroting and mimicry. On the other edge, it mutates into something else with the potency of degeneration or subversion. As a consequence of his conclusions, Dougall called for serious study of the African’s social institutions through social anthropology. Secondly, he proposed an education policy that not only understood education “as an intellectual process” but also one that canalise or sublimate “the emotional energies of the unconscious.”³⁷⁶

Lévy-Bruhl’s work and Dougall’s rereading of the same are apt examples of the performative acts of narrowing of “otherness” while at the same time fixing the African as different. Both point to the fact that colonial discourses split colonial subjects between contrary positions. Out of this logic, to follow Edward Said, two situations emerge.³⁷⁷ One closely follows the nineteenth century logic where colonial politics, aesthetics, spirituality and even epistemology were seen as inevitable and an avoidable. In this case, colonialism has the power of representing and speaking for the silent African majority. This vision also assumes non-existence of or it simply eliminates other non-Western alternatives. The second situation, which still assumed that Western tutelage over the Africans was a given and could still not imagine an alternative other than colonialism, allowed the possibility of a vision of regenerated Africa. It allows the possibility of future process of fusion, synthesis and even intermixture in both hermeneutics and beliefs.

³⁷⁵ Dougall, “Characteristics of African Thought”, 260.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ See in particular chapter one on “Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories” in Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 1-72.

Dougall's rereading of Lévy-Bruhl also shows that colonial situation does not allow a master narrative about the colonised or any unitary approach. People and cultures do not flow unimpeded and unchanged in any encounter. What this means is that there is no single process in social production. Instead, social production or even conferring of civil status involves a history of contested relations at all levels of societal change. The contested space in this case was in the modern interpretation of what constitutes Christian values, and the site of assimilation as well as resistance to the forces of historical changes within the colonial society. Because of these interactions, the knowledge which emerged remained fluid and shifting in order to incorporate new elements. The spontaneous nature of such knowledge meant that it could not be fixed but remained flexible borrowing back and forth from both the traditional as well as colonial milieus. Both the illiterate proselytes and *Athomi* in colonial Kenya (as we shall see in the later chapters) would unashamedly utilise and hybridise the religious as well as profane orature of the defunct traditional world of yesteryears, transforming it to meet the demands of modernity. Linguistically, they would employ African dialects, idioms and forms but also inflect them with running allusions and borrowing from acquired English and Swahili. Christian anthropology envisioned hybridisation in an attempt to answer the hermeneutical question posed albeit scriptural quotation, "But what does it profit him, we do well to ask, if he gain the whole of this world and, without Christ, forfeit his very soul?"³⁷⁸

³⁷⁸ Beecher, "The Kikuyu", 4. There were occasions when the anthropologists and other scientists accused the missionaries for not paying regard to the religious heritage of the Africans. See John M. Graham and Ralph Piddington, *Anthropology and The Future of Missions* (Aberdeen: The University Press, 1940), Pamphlet, 5. See also J. Huxley, *Africa View* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1931), 329; L. S. B. Leakey, *Kenya: Contrasts and Problems* (London: Methuen and Company Limited, 1936), 151.

3.3 Cultural Doubt and Liminal Space

It is Christian anthropologists John M. Graham and Ralph Piddington who offered the most beneficial insights under the universal idea of “the brotherhood of man and the sense of human fellowship which lie at the core of Christian teaching”³⁷⁹ and “those five daunting words, ‘They shall be one flock’”.³⁸⁰ The hermeneutical possibility of achieving Johannine exhortation that they be of “one flock” was offered through the use of Professor Malinowski’s³⁸¹ theorem of “culture contact” as hermeneutical beginning point.³⁸² “Cultural contact” in Malinowski’s work referred to the colonial contact with the surviving elements of pre-European native culture. The “zero point” of culture contact had to begin with the actively surviving elements of native culture, which had to be sharply differentiated from the “original culture” that felt the impact of European civilisation.³⁸³ These included the surviving traditions and institutions of the extinct indigenous warfare; the existing memories of past greatness and military traditions; and the “native magico-religious beliefs and practices” which co-existed with Christian “conversion”.³⁸⁴ Anthropological insights revealed that the former pagan religious significance that permeated the African’s whole life was not completely lost.³⁸⁵ Rev. Father Temples would later express same cultural doubt

³⁷⁹ These two represented social anthropology whose methodology followed a functional approach. Anthropology by the 1930’s added two important features: i.e., painstaking investigation in the field by an observer trained to be alert not only to the complexities of primitive customs but also to the intervention of his own bias; secondly, the theory of functionalism (Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown) which made cultural relativism an explicit assumption. See Graham, *Anthropology*, 5.

³⁸⁰ Graham, *Anthropology*, 6 quoting from Cullen Young’s article in *Africa*, Vol. III, p.215.

³⁸¹ Professor Malinowski was a social anthropologist and the intellectual force behind the functional school of social anthropology. Malinowski served as Jomo Kenyatta’s teacher and friend and wrote a foreword to Kenyatta’s work *Facing Mount Kenya*. Reference to Kenyatta’s work will be made later.

³⁸² Graham and Piddington borrowed from Malinowski’s introductory essay “The Anthropology of Changing African Cultures” in *Methods of Study of Culture Contact in Africa*: International Institute of African Languages and Cultures.)

³⁸³ Graham, *Anthropology*, 7.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁸⁵ The revived interest in anthropology looked at the African cultural milieu as myriad admixture of religion, common consciousness, ancestral worship, and savagery all interwoven to an organized whole in which the African found meaning. Leakey, *Kenya: Contrasts and Problems*, 86; see also Beecher, “The Gospel Committed to Our Trust”, 5.

about imagined African backwardness in his much acclaimed work *Bantu Philosophy*.³⁸⁶ Anthropological insights produced a colonised individual who as a social reality was entirely knowable and visible.³⁸⁷

Graham and Piddington suggested hybridity because “culture contact” was partial and whatever fragments of European civilisation brought were distorted or remoulded in the process. Christianity, for example, became almost unrecognisable in the presence of the Colour Bar, while “education” given to the “natives” without facilities for the attainment in adult life of the social and economic status for which it was a preparation would be disastrous. Further, the native rites cherished as a symbolic protest against European encroachment anticipated unnecessary friction as a result of the development of African sects, “fanatical” religious movements, susceptibility to communism and other forms of “neo-pagan” propaganda, and the adoption of Islam.³⁸⁸ In addition, since the native culture was dynamic and a living organism, contact with European civilisation, produced spontaneous developments, often influenced by collateral agencies of change distinct from the main current of official European influence. For these reasons, the two argued for the re-orientation of Bible reading and native education where schools and churches should serve the integrative role rather than being merely a disruptive force.

3.3.1 Hybridity and Anxious Repetition

Hybridity almost always threatened the civilising mission. Consequently, stereotyping of the Africans never ceased in order to control the colonised subjects who were thought to be always in motion, sliding ambivalently between two opposing poles of similitude and difference.³⁸⁹ In Kenya it was always argued that Western

³⁸⁶ Temples, *Bantu Philosophy*, 13.

³⁸⁷ Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 7.

³⁸⁸ Graham, *Anthropology*, 7ff.

³⁸⁹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 57-93.

civilisation had resorted to a widespread absorption of material aspects of the “tribal” life consequently leading to divorce of religion from life.³⁹⁰ ‘Sacraments of simple folk’ that previously mediated grace were nothing more now than ‘empty shells’.³⁹¹ In this regard, Rev. Hooper declared,

Animism is dead or dying. Western trade and knowledge would kill it without the assistance of the missionary. The old social fabric is shattered, and with it the old restraints and moral sanctions, such as they were. If Africa were to be left now, the last state would be worse than the first.³⁹²

Sixteen years later, Leonard J. Beecher took it up from where Hooper had left to argue,

if this were true sixteen years ago, how much more so is it true today? The coming of a new civilisation to Africa has opened to the African doors of vast social and commercial opportunity. But what does it profit him, we do well to ask, if he gain the whole of this world and, without Christ, forfeit his very soul? (Mk. Viii, 36.)³⁹³

Both Hooper’s and Beecher’s concern reveal deep-seated anxiety due to their inability to fix the elusive colonial subject; hence “anxious repetition” of the old stereotype about the Africans “without Christ”. The repetition of colonial stereotype worked as an attempt to secure the colonised in a fixed position while at the same time acknowledging that such an endeavour would never succeed.³⁹⁴

Rev. Beecher held to the fundamental incompatibility of the old and new modes of religious ideas. African religious ideas and practices were considered diabolical and could have no place in the Christian church.³⁹⁵ Therefore, he could

³⁹⁰ See Rev. L. J. Beecher, “The Kikuyu,” (The Peoples of Kenya – no. 9), 14. In this booklet, Beecher argued religion in Africa was losing its functional role (as described by the anthropologists) with the coming of Western civilization.

³⁹¹ See Beecher, “The Kikuyu”, 14.

³⁹² Hooper, *Africa in the Making*, 10; see also Rev. W.J.W. Rampley on October 10, 1926 in “Kabare-Rev. W.J. Rampley ’26- ’28”, CMS/G/3/X/A/5/9, (University of Birmingham Special Collection).

³⁹³ Beecher, “The Kikuyu”, 4.

³⁹⁴ McLeod gives us an expanded understanding of how and why stereotypes were frequently repeated in an anxious an imperfect manner in the attempt to secure the colonised subject in the discourse of colonialism. See McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 53.

³⁹⁵ Beecher quoting from G. B. Shaw, *The Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for God* (London: Constable, 1932), 60.

hardly accept the anthropological insights offered without the necessary hermeneutical modifications. For this reason Rev. Beecher proposed that,

The very fundamental nature of the African's creed demands that we should re-habilitate the universe with all the spiritual forces of God. He and He alone is the Lord of all good life and our presentation of Him must be such that He enters into every phase of human activity so that the religion of the Cross permeates every phase of human activity as surely as did the pagan faith of old.³⁹⁶

He argued that while most African Christians had relinquished paganism, they could not detach from the "animistic" force which held them captive. Animism no longer operated as the

dead hand of the past that controls the use and disposal of the property in the hands of the living", rather it was "a living force... a pattern of thought and behaviour, which, by emphasising the communal bonds which unite the living clan with the dead, ensures each loyal member of the clan a continuity of existence in the clan heaven."³⁹⁷

While this force³⁹⁸ bore some resemblance to "the henotheism of ancient Jewry", it differed in that it was independent of any personal relationship with God. The power of the departed held sway in the African life more than God did. Thus the need for a new hermeneutical strategy which would reintroduce the "real" God so that,

once the pagan comes to recognise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as the God and Father of all, as Lord of all Power and Might without whom nothing is strong and nothing holy, then the saints on earth and the saints in heaven become linked together in a living, holy Church, excelling as day does night the old and imperfect image of pagan animism.³⁹⁹

For this to be accomplished, the African had to see first "the relations of Christians one with another as an outworking of the faith which profess in 'one Catholic and Apostolic Church'". Otherwise the result would be an increase of the lamentable state of affairs marked by "a return to a wholesale separatist form of Church Government

³⁹⁶ Beecher, "The Gospel Committed to Our Trust", 5.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ Beecher referred to it as the 'law of mortmain'; See also Temples analysis of what he called "Vital Force" in *Bantu Philosophy*.

³⁹⁹ Beecher, "The Gospel Committed to Our Trust", 5.

reminiscent of clan separatism in animistic religious ideals.”⁴⁰⁰ A hermeneutical approach demanded also that the African grasped Jesus as “a Living Reality.”⁴⁰¹ New methods must present the Agĩkũyũ not “with a static system of orthodoxy” but “a true knowledge and love of God.” The African had to be fully immersed in “Learning Christ” that “ye put away...the old man; ...and that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new”.⁴⁰² According to Beecher putting on the “new man” demanded that Africans accept “Him as a personal Saviour”. The Gospel which God had committed to the missionaries’ trust had to strike the hearers with the same convicting power that brought the words of conviction from the lips of the centurion who stood by the Cross in Mark 15:39.⁴⁰³

What I have tried so far is to show that Christian anthropology helped acknowledge that the Africans had autonomy of their own that could reinstate and reclaim what colonialism had claimed as its own. Bhabha’s concept of fixity and Memmi’s idea of ambivalence, though representing the Africans as enmeshed in contradictory polarities of semblance and difference, opened the interrogatory interstices where the perceived silent African contests the discourse of colonialism. In silence, the Africans testified to the diversity and differences that the discourse of colonialism tended to assume. As Edward Said observed, the testimony opened the possibility of inscription, interpretation and expansion of areas of engagement including the most contested self-understanding.⁴⁰⁴ The interstice was further widened in the colonial attempt to establish a united native church.

⁴⁰⁰ Beecher, “The Gospel Committed to Our Trust”, 6.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁰² Quotation is from Ephesians 4:20ff (Version not given.)

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁰⁴ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 34.

3.4 The Founding of Colonial Hermeneutics: Kikuyu Conference, Double Vision, and Mimicry

The main work of narration, interpretation and application of biblical language and hermeneutics in colonial Kenya was made real through the proposed idea of a “United Native Church” which was floating around as early as 1908.⁴⁰⁵ It is in the 1913 Kikuyu Conference that colonial hermeneutics built on the discourse of colonialism was fully accomplished. On the one hand, the Conference proposed that under certain conditions of domination and control the African could be progressively reformed. But on the other hand, it displayed separation denying the Africans the capacities of self-determination, independence and self-actualisation. Yet still, its ambivalence and anxieties opened the possibilities of alternative engagement with the Bible in which mimicry represented ironic compromise.⁴⁰⁶ Bhabha posits that mimicry in the colonial situation “emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge.”⁴⁰⁷ Through mimicry colonial hermeneutics hoped for a reformed and recognisable “Other”. Mimicry as a colonial strategy seeks to reform, discipline and regulate the colonised. However, mimicry remains ambivalent as it is also determined to put to check non-Western alternatives.

3.4.1 Homogeneity

The first organising principle of colonial hermeneutics as attested in the Kikuyu Conference is the establishment of a homogenous approach to the civilising mission built on Johannine words that “they all be one”⁴⁰⁸ and reinforced by the text

⁴⁰⁵ Rev. Dr Henry E. Scott, *The Kikuyu Mission (British East Africa)* (1910), 22-23; See also The Rev. Dr. John W. Arthur’s Lecture, “East Africa in Transition: Alexander Duff Memorial Lecture” (Edinburgh: The Trustees of the Duff Missionary Lectureship, 1942), 20.

⁴⁰⁶ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 122.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ See paper by W. Chadwick, “Federation of mission in British East Africa”, June 17, 1913.

“A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another, as I loved you”.⁴⁰⁹

In agreeing to join hands for the sake of the united church, it was argued that the societies were following the purpose of God so that God’s “Name might be declared throughout all the earth” (Romans 9:17). The Church did not occur only within a given historical context but it has always been “part of the Eternal world breaking into history”.⁴¹⁰ Consequently, the colonial church had no choice but make society more Christian because the calling of God stood sure and unchanging – Romans 9:17, 11, 16.⁴¹¹ Hermeneutics would be used to articulate a unified notion of history and unitary concept of social virtues such as historical rationality, the autonomy of individual consciousness and cultural cohesion.

In response to God’s calling and at the initiative of Henry Scott (Scottish missionary) together with Rev. J.J Willis (C.M.S), in June 1909 a conference of local missionaries was summoned in Nairobi. In this conference missionaries considered “the establishment of a united, self-governing, self-supporting and self-extending African Church” united in fundamental faith, a united Church which would be free from the “trammels of denominational differences”.⁴¹² With diverse yet divided mission societies in Gikūyū,⁴¹³ Rev. Henry E. Scott (the pioneer of the effort) could not see any practical way other than the concerted effort of the societies to bring about

⁴⁰⁹ Rev. Dr. John W. Arthur, “The Late Very Rev. Norman Maclean”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 199 (March 1952), 1216.

⁴¹⁰ CMS/AFG 35/49 Afg AP4 (University of Birmingham Archives), 5.

⁴¹¹ See “Our society in the calling of God: Being an inquiry submitted to the committee of CMS by the secretaries in February, 1945. CMS/AFG 35/49 Afg AP4 (University of Birmingham Archives), 5.

⁴¹² Dr John W. Arthur –Box 763, University of Edinburgh, Special Collection, (Consulted on February 4th, 2008), 48a; see also CMS/ G/Y/AFE 1/1 1913 (The University of Birmingham, Special Collection). See also J. J. Wills, “The Kikuyu Conference” in *Towards a United Church* (Edinburgh House Press, 1947), 24.

⁴¹³ Mission societies operating in Gikūyū country at the time included: Church Missionary Society, Church of Scotland Mission, American Baptists, American Quakers, United Methodists, German Lutherans, Swedish Mission, and Seventh Day Adventists, and the Roman Catholic Church though not included in the venture.

“a union of all the branches of Christ’s Church”.⁴¹⁴ In June 1913, championed by Dr. John Arthur and Bishop J. J. Willis Bishop of Uganda, missions in Kenya gathered for the second time for the purpose of setting in motion the proposed Scheme of Federation of Missionary Societies working in British East Africa, following in the footsteps of the Church of India.⁴¹⁵ The Kikuyu Conference, as it came to be known, aimed at bringing the various Protestant missionary societies working in East Africa in closer harmony and co-operation. They were to formulate a definite and systematic plan for the purpose of adopting common lines along which the young native churches were to be developed.⁴¹⁶ The symbolic sign that this endeavour sought was to offer autonomy, stability, integrity and unity.

3.4.2 The Word of God

The second organising principle was loyalty to “the Holy Scriptures as supreme rule of Faith and Practice” and in particular the belief in the absolute authority of Holy Scripture as the Word of God. This principle gave mandate to the participating societies, “to see that the Word of God is purely preached within its bound, the sacraments duly administered, and discipline maintained.”⁴¹⁷ The first strategic function of this hermeneutical principle was to normalise multiple beliefs and contradictions already existing within the mission field. Secondly, it sought to

⁴¹⁴ Scott, *The Kikuyu Mission*, 24.

⁴¹⁵ Sixty missionaries were in attendance representing the different Protestant missionary societies working in the then British East Africa. The meeting was held at the headquarter of the Church of Scotland Mission located at Kikuyu. Also in attendance were Government officials, settlers and John Ainsworth as the Colonial Governor’s representative. See J. J. Willis, Bishop of Uganda, “The Kikuyu Conference: A Study in Christian Unity” (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1913), 3. See a paper on the federation of mission in British East Africa by W. Chadwick on June 17, 1913 and in attendance were about 60 missionaries CMS/G/Y/AFE 1/1 1913 (University of Birmingham, special collection).

⁴¹⁶ Each Mission Society joining the Federation was to remain autonomous within its own sphere. Individual Mission would pledge to begin to develop the Native Church along agreed lines. Within each district the Native Church was to be organised under parochial and district councils. Willis, “The Kikuyu Conference”; See also Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 176.

⁴¹⁷ Willis, “The Kikuyu Conference”, 2.

create space through which, and with the help of knowledge produced, surveillance of the Africans would be exercised.

3.4.3 Linguistic Control and Mission Comity

The third organising principle that I identify in the emerging hermeneutics and articulated in the Kikuyu Conference is linguistic control. As a rule, the process of signification and representation started with the assumption that the African had to be transformed by the religious and cultural truths enshrined in colonial texts.⁴¹⁸ Both the Conference and actual geographical space collaborated to produce the linguistic ambition of achieving common policy in regard to language problems, unification of natives' dialects, translations submitted to one centre, common method of spelling, the same names for God, for Spirit, for Soul, and the like.⁴¹⁹ The mission societies pledged to use every means available to "prepare the mind of the native Christians for realising this goal."⁴²⁰ Geographical articulation led to the formation of the United Kikuyu Language Committee (U.K.L.C.) which oversaw the harmonisation of Gĩkũyũ dialects and the translation of the Bible into Gĩkũyũ.⁴²¹

The geographical model also offered a technical explanation of the political actuality of the Union sought. This was achieved in the so-called principle of

⁴¹⁸ By colonial texts I refer to the Bible, Christian education materials, policies and even missionaries' verbal texts. Africans who had been proselytised and wished to be accepted as members of the evolving Church were required to undergo a course of instruction and probation for baptism of not less than two years. Admission to the Catechumenate was to be by public profession. No African Christian from another district was to be enrolled as a Church member without producing a leaving certificate or letter from his or her former Church. A joint course of instruction for the "Native Ministry" was drawn and set to be taken in four stages: Junior Preacher, Senior Preacher, District Preacher, and Minister. The course was to take ten years with an unspecified additional period of study and of practical work before one qualified for the candidacy of a full time minister.

⁴¹⁹ Report of United Conference of Missionary Society (no. 17): Printed Pamphlets on Kenya and Kikuyu and Gospel of St. Mark (1906-63), Barlow Papers Gen 1786/ 12 (University of Edinburgh Special Collection).

⁴²⁰ Willis, "The Kikuyu Conference", 2.

⁴²¹ Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 183.

“Mission Comity”.⁴²² The principle recognised denominational differences that the first hermeneutical principle was attempting to homogenise the ethnic diversity in areas represented by the mission societies.⁴²³ Protestant Christianity had established itself in Kenya through representatives of different denominations and was present throughout the Protectorate (especially in the neighbourhood of the railway line), with the Church of England having the strongest position. “Mission Comity” declared that all Societies were to mutually respect one another’s spheres.⁴²⁴

In a classic stereotyping of the African, the Conference represented the African as always in motion. For example, the African pagan was represented as an alien presence that interrupted or hindered historical progress. Paganism/animism as found in East Africa was said to be of a unique kind. Bishop Wills wrote, “East Africa is still emphatically a pagan country; and the paganism of Africa may perhaps be described by the one word – malleable.” It possessed no literature and had no fixed creed. Adherents of this “Paganism” were said to be “primitive tribes, without cohesion, and without influence”.⁴²⁵ East African paganism was an invertebrate and weak religion and its followers abandoned it for “the first strong leader” that crossed their path.⁴²⁶ Essentially, the African soul and mind were a *tabula rasa* “plastic and ready to the hand of the maker with the main question being: ‘In what mould shall it be cast?’”⁴²⁷ Protestant Christianity, as a result of this malleability stood threatened by the possibility of “dissensions between *native* Christians” as well as the emergence of a “united Mohammedanism, a united Roman Catholicism” against a Protestant

⁴²² This referred to the delimitation of spheres among the missionary societies in East Africa where tracts of physical space with community therein mostly in “tribal lines” were allocated by the colonial Government to Missions. Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 126-127.

⁴²³ The Conference had European representatives from all over the colony where each mission represented specific ethnic group(s).

⁴²⁴ In case of local disputes regarding borders to such “sphere of influence” between Missionary Societies and Churches, a Court of Arbitration was formed.

⁴²⁵ Willis, “The Kikuyu Conference”, 6f.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 7.

“Christianity represented by a dozen widely differing types, mutually independent, if not mutually opposed.”⁴²⁸ The African who is “almost the same, but not quite” threatens the civilising mission. On his part, the coloniser is caught between the desire for moral and religious reforms and the dread of African subversion.

It follows then, as stated by Memmi, that whenever a coloniser states that the colonised is a weakling and malleable, in essence what is being declared is that the colonised’s deficiency requires protection.⁴²⁹ First, it means that for his own good, the colonised must be excluded from the managerial functions and that the heavy responsibilities be reserved only to the coloniser. Secondly, it legitimises ecclesial legislation and severity in order to protect the colonised against himself. Hermeneutics must also play its rightful role to confer civil status to the colonial subjects.⁴³⁰ To this end Mission societies were encouraged to use similar forms and usages of public worship; intervisitation on the part of Church members; common attitude towards “heathen customs”; common Church discipline; common course of instruction to catechumens and native ministers; and systematic Bible study.⁴³¹

3.4.4 Ambivalence

The performative act of constructing a unitary whole reveals something deeper, complex and contradictory which cannot be contained in fixed terms. I want to suggest that the Kikuyu Conference reveals the anxiety of the coloniser disturbed by “the shadow of colonized man” who threatens to breach laid boundaries and

⁴²⁸ Willis, “The Kikuyu Conference”, 7-8

⁴²⁹ Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 82.

⁴³⁰ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 61.

⁴³¹ The other principle recognised a common membership between the Missions in the Federation in which there would be regular administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. In matters of public worship, a common form and elaborate liturgy were adopted in order to encourage “an intelligent and hearty worship and would give a sense of unity among the young congregations”. It included the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Apostles Creed, a prayer for the King and Governors, the Chiefs and people, and a prayer for deliverance from the “evil customs of the country”.

mimics the coloniser from a distance.⁴³² The cultural difference that an attempt for unitary historical progress may have aimed at disintegrates as it confronts the “Other”. Instead of unifying, it splits the self and other in which case none of the two can stand without the other. So far we have not met a native who speaks apart from his representation (Indeed no African was present in the Kikuyu Conference). But this absence does not mean that the colonised presence is absent in the consciousness of coloniser. The colonial subject speaks, and is seen from where it is not.⁴³³ When we consider the aftermath of the Kikuyu Conference, it is not difficult to conclude that colonial authority represented by mission societies undermined itself by its inability to replicate its own self perfectly well. The menace of mimicry as Bhabha indicates “is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority.”⁴³⁴

When put under the scrutiny of postcolonialism, the process of signification and the historical event of representation loses control of its performative role. It reveals that, as agents of a particular branch of Christianity, mission societies were primarily concerned with making of Presbyterians or Methodists or Baptists or Anglicans out of the people of their particular mission field. The 1913 conference received a world-wide notoriety in Church circles and in the Press throughout the world on account of disapproval voiced by the Anglican Bishop of Zanzibar Dr. Frank Weston, because of the participation by Bishop Peel and Bishop Willis in an ecumenical Communion service held at the close of the Conference. At the end of the Kikuyu conference administration of the Lord’s Supper had taken place at which Anglican Bishop J. J. Willis presided. Dr John Arthur, overwhelmed by the act of

⁴³² See Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 62-63.

⁴³³ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 67.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

celebrating communion presided over by an Anglican Bishop, wrote a lengthy letter to a Scottish paper boasting about it.⁴³⁵

Dr. Arthur's statement triggered the ensuing controversy which revolved around the Anglican belief of the historic episcopacy. Episcopacy within the Anglican union was interpreted as of divine origin and that it gave the Episcopate possession of full membership in the Visible Church. Bishop Frank Weston on his part thought of the conference which he had refused to attend as subversive to the Anglican Communion and constitution. He wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury accusing his colleagues, Bishop Peel of Mombasa, and Bishop J. J. Willis of Uganda of heresy. The action of Bishop Weston threatened to split the Church of England with the Bishop of Durham reported as supporting "wholeheartedly" the two bishops accused by Weston, while the Bishop of Oxford threatened to resign if Bishop Willis and Bishop Peel won their case.⁴³⁶

As the Kikuyu controversy set in motion a foray of intellectual debates that put Kikuyu squarely on the international scene, Marion Stevenson decried denominational rivalry as the antithesis of 1 John 1:3. She wrote,

The very air of Africa seems to breed distrust and suspicion, and as the lack of fellowship among Christians destroyed their testimony long ago and gave Mohammedanism its chance, so to-day mutual distrust and suspicion between black and white is hindering the spread of the Gospel among the Kikuyu. It is even poisoning the relations between missionary and fellow-missionary. From personal experience I can say that when, being in fellowship with one another and with our common Lord and Saviour, we, like St John, make it the great aim of our daily life to bring those others into fellowship with us and with

⁴³⁵ This prompted C.M.S General Committee Dec. 9, 1913 where the relationship between Church of England and the churches in communion with the church to non-Episcopal churches was discussed. One minister of the Church of Scotland demanded that all the Kikuyu missionaries be withdrawn and "men of God sent out in their places." Philp, *A New Day in Kenya*, 36.

⁴³⁶ Bishop Weston's accusation and proposal saw the Consultative Committee of Lambeth discussing the accused for partaking communion with non-Episcopalians. The controversy went on unabated and only the outbreak of World War I in August 1914 quietened it. Rejecting the proposed Federation, Bishop Frank Weston, suggested in its place a "Central Missionary Council of Episcopal and Non-Episcopal Churches in East Africa". See Philp, *A New Day in Kenya*, 37. "Central Missionary Council of Episcopal and Non-Episcopal Churches in East Africa", CMS/Acc/523/Z/4/3 (March 10th 1914), University of Birmingham Archives.

Him, those foolish feelings of superiority and inferiority, which are the root of most of this mutual distrust, disappear.⁴³⁷

Stevenson's lamentation was taken up and discussed in a series of the so-called Kikuyu Tracts.⁴³⁸ The point of the series was to give "help towards clear thinking on the larger questions which lie behind" the Kikuyu controversy.

3.4.5 The Ethereal and Colonial Actualities

The first thing we note is the abstraction of hermeneutics from the colonial actualities. The colonial actualities of denominational rivalry, economics, politics, race, class, and history were not given any thought as interpretation of the Kikuyu controversy moved to the ethereal with the desire for universality of God's Law. For example, the Right Rev. C. F. D'Arcy (Bishop of Down), offering his interpretation of the Johannine concept of unity in a tract titled "What is the Church", suggested that Christ's intention was to create and propagate a society founded on the "principle of discipleship" as the main role of Christian community covenanted with God and found in world mission. Accordingly, divisions and competition among the Christian churches threatened and weakened the cause of Christ. Bishop D'Arcy declared that a church divided was a source of fatal weakness, more so in the mission field where unity of purpose was of utmost importance. This "blessed company of all faithful people" who love Christ make Christ "manifest in all the ministries of love, in the salvation and uplifting of humanity."⁴³⁹

Bishop D'Arcy embraced the discourse of colonialism by encouraging the warring societies to enter into dialogue with one another in order for the Church to enter into full possession of that spiritual heritage which is for the Church in Christ

⁴³⁷ Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 308.

⁴³⁸ CMS/Acc/523/Z/4/1-7; *Kikuyu Tracts* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1914).

⁴³⁹ Right Rev. C. F. D'Arcy (Bishop of Down), "What is the Church", *Kikuyu Tracts*, 8.

attained in the organic life.⁴⁴⁰ His principle of interpenetration, however, assumed that such an organic unity is only possible within the Western organic world and world of consciousness. Such an abstraction also failed to recognise that the Kikuyu Conference symbolised a hermeneutics whose goal was to persuade and influence people to view reality from a specific angle. As hermeneutics those present at the Conference came from a particular class, race and nation. The controversy also attests to the fact that biblical interpretation is a conscious act of men and women in society. It shapes people's attitude of life both at the individual and the community level.

Dwelling on the same theme of unity, H. C. G. Moule (Bishop of Durham) carried Bishop D'Arcy's proposal a step further in the tract titled "That They all may be One."⁴⁴¹ Moule laid his emphasis on what he referred to as the "golden paragraph of the great Prayer" in John 17:21, 22, 23,

The glory which Thou hast given Me I have given them, that they may be one even as We are one, I in them and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected into one, that the world may recognize that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them as Thou didst love Me.⁴⁴²

The words as quoted revealed, however faintly, what Christ thought of unity. Unity in Christ's mind had a quality of its kind and a cause.⁴⁴³ This unity began in the realm of "the ideal" found in the intent of Christ. Christ's intention was received by individual Christian's in whom it produced a deepened and amplified individual life which is fully operative in "its noblest ideal." However, that "ideal characteristic" never terminated in itself or the individual. It had to exist and grow for others. This is because "man is developed on purpose that he may cohere."⁴⁴⁴ The effecting cause that Christ demanded for unity was in the realisation of "the living and loving

⁴⁴⁰ D'Arcy, "What is the Church", 6.

⁴⁴¹ H. C. G., Moule, (Bishop of Durham), "That They all may be One", *Kikuyu Tracts*.

⁴⁴² Italics are not mine.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 3-4.

unification of His disciples” with Christ’s prevailing intercession as the backbone of this unity.⁴⁴⁵ Moule defined “Unity” as the “Power Upon the World” which originated in God and “generated within the inner life.” Because of its character, unity transcends “all questions of order and even of ordinance” because it belonged to the heavenly order.⁴⁴⁶ In other words, Bishop Moule was making sacred a cultural model by giving it a divine seal.⁴⁴⁷ In the performative acts of forming and transforming both the individual and social authority, the church was participating in the process of moving history towards a unitary whole in which projected social virtues were its teleological expression.⁴⁴⁸

Eugene Stock on the other hand, in “The Church in the Mission Field” was more candid and realistic. He wrote, “Our differences are real differences, and must find expression”.⁴⁴⁹ Stock rendered colonial presence as ambivalent because of the colonial Church’s double inscription. On the one hand, the church was the “Visible Church Catholic” (i.e. the Church Catholic with its external Creeds and Sacraments and Ministries) and while on the other it stood for the “Church” in the higher spiritual sense, which is referred to in the Anglican Prayer Book as “the mystical Body of Christ, which is the blessed company of all faithful people.” The former was far from ideal being a mixed body comprising all who profess and call themselves Christians. This was represented in the church that is seen in the Book of Acts whose commencement was at the Day of Pentecost marking the beginning of missionary enterprise. It is this visible church that preached the Word and to which people responded with the help of the Holy Spirit. Though human, it was also divine since it had received the “Historic sacraments; Historic Canon of Scripture; and Historic

⁴⁴⁵ Moule, (Bishop of Durham), “That They all may be One”, 4-5.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 5-6.

⁴⁴⁷ Moule, “That They all may be One”, 6-7.

⁴⁴⁸ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 61.

⁴⁴⁹ Eugene Stock, “The Church in the Mission Field”, *Kikuyu Tracts*, 8.

Creeds”. Even though denominational rivalry and competition are marks of the “Visible Church Catholic”, Stock reminded missionaries of the higher calling of proselytisation.⁴⁵⁰

It is this double vision that re-inscribes sovereignty through the visible sign of authority which normalises and marginalises at the same time. In the first place, biblical appropriation and justification for the proposed unity which was partial and selective, desired closer fellowship, fuller co-operation, and eventual organic union⁴⁵¹ of Christian churches into “the Christian Church” as a worldwide endeavour.⁴⁵² Yet its interpretation set in place a far reaching policy that sought insurmountable power and control. The hermeneutical commitment made absolute and therefore the unquestionable authority of the Bible as the Word of God. This in itself set in motion a policy of a rigid hermeneutics and ecclesiasticism that excluded the Africans and rejected others on the basis of orthodoxy. As a result the colonial church became the supreme authority in interpreting scriptures, doctrine, and morality and legislating against “tribal” customs.

But the Kikuyu controversy reveals something else also: uncertainty.

Missionaries could not escape from dealing with tensions, conflicts and contradictions of a community in the process of becoming something else other than what they

⁴⁵⁰ The formation of a Christian Council took place in 1943 embracing all the Mission Churches except the Roman Catholic Church which had rejected all co-operations. It was not until February 1937 that for the first time in its history, the Kenya Missionary Council included three Africans who included Chief Magugu, an ex-pupil of Alliance High School, representing the Gospel Missionary Society; Mr. Cege of the Church Missionary Society; and Mr. Stanley Kiama from Tumutumu. “Extracts from Annual Reports for 1943: The Kenya Christian Council”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 168 (June 1944), 581; “February Meeting 1937”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 139 (March 1937), 4; CMS/G/Y/AFE 1/1 and CMS/G/Y/AFE 1/3, The University of Birmingham, Special collection.

⁴⁵¹ By organic unity, Palmer clarified the distinction between uniformity and organic union in which organic union referred to “some institutional connection...among the different Christian bodies, government, creed or worship”. See Frederic Palmer, “A Crisis in the Church of England”, *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 7, no.2 (April 1914), 243.

⁴⁵² For the impact of this worldwide movement see E. Albert Cook, “Church Union and the Minimum Creed” in *The Biblical World*, Vol. 44, no. 4 (October 1914), 239-247; Palmer, “A Crisis in the Church of England”, 237.

are.⁴⁵³ The Conference and others that followed could not replicate a perfect model of the Johannine command of unity. As a consequence, colonialism rendered itself ambivalent. In addition, the native who remains present even though invisible is inadvertently allowed a form of subversion as a result of “a slippage, a gap, between what is said and what is heard.”⁴⁵⁴ Eventually, the discursive conditions of dominance are turned into the grounds of intervention that also entertains a hybridity of authority.⁴⁵⁵

3.5 Hybridity and the Aesthetics

The process of hybridisation and ambivalence were also captured in the use of art and architecture as tools to make biblical connections and interpretation. The process of replication of the Bible and biblical language is a complex one. It is never complete or perfect because the context in which it is produced does not allow the original to be replicated. Such is the case of a poem written by John Oxenham to celebrate the accomplishments of the Church of Scotland Mission in Gĩkũyũ country which leaves the possibility of translation or transformation acquired knowledge into something else other than the preconceived. The poem read,

The Church of the Torch
God, our Father, said:
“LET THERE BE LIGHT!”

⁴⁵³ Despite the appeals from the Bishops, missions hardened their denominational differences. Loyalties to overseas churches to which individual missionaries were messengers and representatives were irreconcilable to the notion of a united church. On its part African Inland Mission took the extreme position on the absoluteness of the authority of the Holy Scriptures. The Anglicans focused on the idea of combination with other Anglican dioceses in the formation of an East African Province. The Scottish Mission sought more autonomy from the Church of Scotland. When the Conference met again in 1918, it could no longer take up the previously desired position. The idea of “Federation” was replaced by an “Alliance” of Missionary Societies in British East Africa which became the successor of the defunct 1913 Kikuyu Conference and predecessor of the National Christian Council. A Constitution of this Alliance was formally signed on 26th July, 1918 but not without a protest from Bishop Weston against its signature by the C.M.S. bishops and missionaries. At the time only four Missions signed the Alliance constitution. Alliance College at Kikuyu (later High School) was a direct outcome of this Alliance (opened in 1924 with Mr. George Grieve as its Principal.) See Dr John W. Arthur –Box 763, 48a, University of Edinburgh, Special Collection; CMS/G/Y A5/1/1-6, The University of Birmingham, Special collection; Willis, “The Kikuyu Conference”, 28. See also *Kikuyu News*, No. 14, 1.

⁴⁵⁴ Loomba, *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism*, 78.

⁴⁵⁵ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 160.

And there was Light.
Christ, our Brother, said:
“I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD!”
* * * *

Church of the Torch, let your clear flame
God’s all-embracing LOVE proclaim!
Here FAITH and HOPE with LOVE unite
To speed His Word, “Let there be Light!”
And win this land for TRUTH and RIGHT.
“LET THERE BE LIGHT!”
“LET THERE BE LIGHT!”⁴⁵⁶

The poem celebrates the completion of a Presbyterian Church building in Gikūyū country referred to as “the Church of the Torch in Darkness, Kikuyu”. The Church (“a thing of beauty and faith”) became a physical sign to “stand in the centre of...the new Africa, to be to them the symbol of the ‘Immanuel’ – ‘God with us’ – dwelling in their midst and fashioning their lives.”⁴⁵⁷ It is intriguing that out of the many suggestions given at various Kirk sessions, the name “The Church of the Torch in Darkness” was adopted.⁴⁵⁸ The Africans were prevailed upon by the missionaries in accepting this name because even though they were living,

Very close to the eternal verities of the Gospel. There was not one of them who had not ‘sat in darkness and in the shadow of death.’ To them all, Christ had come preaching good tidings, proclaiming liberty to the captives of heathen superstition, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound by the chains of heathen sin.⁴⁵⁹

As such the building was to be to the Gikūyū Christian a reminder and “symbol of the Gospel of Christ enlightening his darkness amid the sin and superstition of African

⁴⁵⁶ Rev. Dr. John W. Arthur, “The Late John Oxenham”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 155 (March 1941), 379; See also Rev. R. G. M. Calderwood, “The Dedication of the Church of the Torch at the Church of Scotland Mission, Kikuyu, Kenya”, Saturday, 9th September, 1933.

⁴⁵⁷ The Rev. Dr. John W. Arthur’s Lecture, “East Africa in Transition: Alexander Duff Memorial Lecture” (Edinburgh: The Trustees of the Duff Missionary Lectureship, 1942), 35; see also John W. Arthur, “The Church of The Torch” (Kikuyu: The Church of Scotland Mission Kenya, 1933), 8.

⁴⁵⁸ Among the suggested names included “The Church of St. Mark” (commemorating the founder of the Church of Christ in Africa); “The Church of St. Andrew” (patron saint of Scotland); “The Church of St. Paul” (After apostle Paul); “The Church of All Saints” (to commemorate not only the missionaries who had died in the field but also Africans such as Danieli, Petro and Stephano who were the first to be baptised on Christmas day of 1908); “The Church of Light” (as a thanksgiving to God for what God had done for the African); “The Church of the Morning Star,” John W. Arthur, “The Scottish Mission in Kenya Colony,” 14.

⁴⁵⁹ Arthur, “The Scottish Mission in Kenya Colony,” 14.

life.”⁴⁶⁰ Unlike the previous buildings, this particular Church would “claim to be symbolic of the permanence and facility of undisturbed worship which should characterise the House of God.”⁴⁶¹

The poem in the first place asserts the authority of the Bible. It as well asserts European culture. It creates a cultural gulf between the colonisers and the colonised. But even in the desire to create this cultural distance, the hermeneutics cannot fully contain the “other”. The African “darkness amid the sin and superstition of African life” must also be understood contrapuntally “the symbol of the ‘Immanuel’ – ‘God with us’ – dwelling in their midst and fashioning their lives.”⁴⁶² Such a hermeneutics leaves, though inadvertently, the conceptual potential for change and innovation where “TRUTH and RIGHT” may be reinvented. While colonial hermeneutics as already discussed in chapter one at one level indicate an unbridgeable gap between Europeans and Africans, the poem as well as other readings of the Bible assume that the latter can be transformed by the truths enshrined in the Bible and other colonial texts. Such is the case of Parmenas Gĩthendũ Mockerie who used the biblical text to claim a moral challenge towards a missionary who acted contrary to the teaching of the Bible. He wrote

On the boat we were well treated by the European passengers except by a missionary who had been in Kikuyu for sixteen years and was going to Italy for furlough. We had a little quarrel with him when he told us to stand up when a European was strolling on the deck beside us. We told him we were not acquainted with some of the passengers, and if we stood up whenever a European was passing we should get tired before we got to our destination. At this reply he became very angry and began to rail against African societies, how they collect funds and organise themselves and become independent of missionaries. Next morning, when I found he refrained from speaking to me, I reminded him of the Biblical phrase ‘Let not the sun go down upon your anger.’ From this time onwards we were friendly until we left the boat.⁴⁶³

⁴⁶⁰ Arthur, “The Church of the Torch”, 4.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

⁴⁶² Arthur, “The Church of the Torch”, 8.

⁴⁶³ Mockerie and Kenyatta were on their way to London for they had been appointed to represent the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA) and the Kikuyu People before the Parliamentary Joint Select

Mockerie mimics the missionaries' use of the biblical text in order to contest the missionary's behaviour as well as legitimacy in biblical interpretation. We can also glean a wider pattern here. Mockerie was one of the Africans from Kahuhia (Fort Hall) a hotbed of Gikūyū nationalism. Many of the nationalists from this area were *Athomi* from Church Missionary Society (C.M.S) Kahuhia where Rev. H. D. Hooper had served and encouraged liberty and freedom.⁴⁶⁴

Beside what is captured in the poem quoted above, we witness the ambivalent structure of the work of art and its continual reference to the horizon of the African culture, while adding more weight to the church's importance. Rather than just present African cultural context as an adversarial cutting edge of the emerging colonial hermeneutics, art opens up another frontier of hermeneutics in which the silenced masses speak. To understand this, let me consider the symbols included in the new church building already referred to as the "Church of the Torch". These included a "Torch" to lighten the darkness of the African "bush". Intertwined with the "Torch" was a "Burning Bush" and the St. Andrew's Cross "emblematic of the union between the African Church of Kikuyu with the Mother 'Church of Scotland,' which sent to her the light."⁴⁶⁵ It also symbolised the co-operation between white and black, "nearly perfect as human imagination, skill and labour could make it... a monument of inspiration, guidance and help by the white man, coupled with the patience, industry

Committee on Closer Union in East Africa, which was sitting in London. They departed on 28th April 1931. Parmenas Githendū Mockerie, *An African Speaks for his People* (London: Hogarth Press, 1934), 12, 15-16. Mockerie later became a colonial chief. (See CMS archives Unofficial Papers/Acc/85/F/1-4, University of Birmingham, Special Collection.

⁴⁶⁴ From letters written in Gikūyū by Hooper's former students, we learn of the sway that Hooper had on these African Christians whose respect towards him was never hidden. They desired to maintain their relationship with him even though he was no longer with them. They took the earliest possible opportunity to update him on issues and constantly sought his advice before venturing into taking action on such issues. See Rev. H. D. Hooper letters in Kikuyu 1925 -31, CMS/Unofficial Papers/Acc/85/F/5 (part), University of Birmingham, Special Collection.

⁴⁶⁵ Arthur, "The Church of the Torch", 4.

and skill of the black man.”⁴⁶⁶ By intertwining the “‘Burning Bush’ and the St. Andrew’s Cross” the art reinforced the evangelical certitude which also suggests an antagonistic cultural tradition.

It is the series of six stained-glass windows inserted in the clerestory and transept of the Church that saw European representation of the theme of Light versus Darkness given its African equivalence.⁴⁶⁷ One of the Windows pictured a Gĩkũyũ warrior holding the Torch accompanied by the words “The Light shineth in Darkness.” Under the heading of “LOVE” was Mount Kenya, a lion and serpent, with edging of maize leaves and cobs, together with the Burning Bush, and a little picture of the old Kikuyu Church.

On the other window were the word “FAITH” and the words ‘Emanuel God with Us’ both written in Kikuyu. Christ was portrayed as a young carpenter with wood, axe, saw, and a plane. The image of Christ the carpenter was juxtaposed to an African mason and labourer, “all teaching the lesson of the dignity of labour.”⁴⁶⁸ At the top of this window was the Star of Bethlehem and below was a Gĩkũyũ girl with the edge of a hut and a group of girls learning to read. A third window headed “HOPE” had a St Andrew’s Cross inscribed with the words “He was tempted in all points like as we are.” This window portrayed Christ in Temptation with the flat stones, the mountain, lighting and stars, and the “sheep and the goats” representing

⁴⁶⁶ Arthur, “East Africa in Transition”, 35-36.

⁴⁶⁷ Mr. James Ballantine of Edinburgh had been approached to design a three-light window in the south transept of the Church of the Torch in Memory of Mr A. L. Bruce, one of the founders of the Chartered Company and of the Scottish Mission in East Africa. The Pictures were to portray the spiritual truth in artistic form and also be readily understood by the Africans who would learn from them. The central theme was to portray the Torch as the symbol of Light leading the Kikuyu out of their darkness. In the windows the place of the Church School, Industry and Hospital were also to have their parts. Rev. Dr. John W. Arthur “Mr. James Ballantine, F.S.A.”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 154 (December 1940), 364-365.

⁴⁶⁸ This element of education where the Africans had to first understand “the gospel of the carpenter before they could appreciate the gospel of the preacher” had been proposed earlier by A. J. Hopkins. The African had to be taught about the Christ who is a carpenter or apprentice since such an education was to train “artisans for absorption into commerce” but not commercialise Africans. Missionaries were in Africa to Christianise them. See A. J. Hopkins, *Trail Blazers and Road Makers: A Brief History of East Africa Mission of the United Methodist Church* (London: United Methodist Publishing House, 1928), 131-132.

African's temptation to worldly wealth. The edging of this window was maize leaves and cobs and a Cape chestnut tree. At the bottom of it was a picture of a young 'warrior,' with a dispensary scene depicting a Kikuyu hospital dresser attending the sick, and in the background the hospital.⁴⁶⁹

In addition, Ephesians 6's "whole armour of God" was represented in art form. The symbols used were those known to the Gĩkũyũ "as the old-time weapons of inter-tribal warfare, now happily discarded."⁴⁷⁰ They all symbolised "the Heavenly Armour." The various symbols - the Helmet, the Breastplate, Shield, Shoes, and Sword - were represented by the Gĩkũyũ equivalents.⁴⁷¹ With all the symbolism, these stained glasses were dedicated to God so that "by their beauty rejoice the hearts of those who view them, and by their symbolism of the whole Armour of God teach many the power of Almighty God to deliver from sin and overcome the forces of evil."⁴⁷² The "Gospel message" as rendered through evangelism, education, industrial training and hospital work, was portrayed in "simple symbolism understandable to the African mind".⁴⁷³

The process of translation of the Christian message through the aesthetic, to follow Bhabha, opens up another contentious political and cultural site at the heart of colonial representation. Here the Word of God is destabilised by the use of indigenous signs.⁴⁷⁴ In the very practice of signification the language of the coloniser becomes hybrid. The very cultural symbols that symbolised darkness, death and destruction are

⁴⁶⁹ Arthur, "Mr. James Ballantine, F.S.A.", 365

⁴⁷⁰ "Put on the Whole Armour of God", *Kikuyu News*, no. 131 (March 1935), 6; See also, "The Church of the Torch: Dedication of Six Windows", *Kikuyu News*, no. 137 (September 1936), 12ff.

⁴⁷¹ Gĩkũyũ warrior pictured as standing in an attitude of prayer protected by traditional shields while two spears are shown striking the shield; Gĩkũyũ ostrich feathered battle headdress representing the helmet; Gĩkũyũ cloth gathered together by the Gĩkũyũ beaded belt; Gĩkũyũ sandals with thongs of leather passing over the foot; Gĩkũyũ sword crossed with its scabbard in the form a St. Andrew's Cross. See, "Put on the Whole Armour of God", 6-12.

⁴⁷² "The Church of the Torch: Dedication of Six Windows", *Kikuyu News*, no. 137 (September 1936), 12-13.

⁴⁷³ Arthur, "Mr. James Ballantine, F.S.A.", 365

⁴⁷⁴ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 49.

hereby adopted to reinforce the Word. In doing so, the colonial church accepts the African though not as equals, with his ambivalence and contradictions. While it is clear that the hermeneutical goal of the building is to dominate the cultural space in order to produce moment of differentiation, the articulation process marks, a shifting which also reveals cultural uncertainty, ambivalence. It suggests that colonisers' culture is not unitary or simply dualistic. It further reveals what Bhabha refers to as "positive aesthetic and political values" ascribed to cultures with tyrannical histories of domination.⁴⁷⁵

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that colonial hermeneutics aimed at creating a specific social environment in terms of morality, aesthetic, behaviour, and faith through history, reason and power and grounded on the conviction that God desires for the cultural and spiritual conversion of the Africans. Hermeneutics aimed at establishing first the universality of God's law. Therefore the hermeneut was not to enter into dialogue with the pagan but instead impose the law of God. However, colonial hermeneutics could not replicate the perfect law of God. Through language, space and temporality hermeneuts encountered the colonial "other" who could not be fixed within a stable discourse of colonialism. Due to the ambivalences, anxieties and contradictions as well as the hybrid nature of colonial discourses, colonial situation offered an "in-between" space which provided the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood, innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation as well as the possibility of negotiations. Psychology, psychoanalysis, and anthropology opened further the interrogatory interstices between the acts of representation and the presence of the colonised community where hermeneutics, cultural values, and experiences were

⁴⁷⁵ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 52.

negotiated and hybridised. But if the Kikuyu Conference succeeded in asserting colonial authority and power over the Africans through religious and education policy, it is in Bible translation that such a program became an irreversible venture.

CHAPTER 4: THE GĪKŪYŪ BIBLE TRANSLATION: THE COLONIAL FACTOR

*“There is now a Bible on the highest point of the British dominion in Africa.”*⁴⁷⁶

4.1 Introduction

If language is the most important and effective tool of communicating the Christian message of conversion and Christian doctrines, then the act of translation is the transforming principle at the heart of any linguistic or literary activity. The primary objective of this chapter is to analyse the act of Bible translation and its effectiveness in shaping and enhancing the discourse of colonialism and the discourse of resistance. Relate to this first objective, using postcolonial theory, I seek to show that Bible translation in the colonial set up, though in most cases defended as a neutral, legitimate and benevolent act of redemption, disguises the colonial power situation.⁴⁷⁷ For example, even though the mutual dependence inherent in Bible translation is apparent as one peruses missionaries’ documents and journals, colonialism did not acknowledge this mutual dependence. Instead, it asserted that the missionary-translators were the ones doing translation. Natives were consulted on word meanings but not on how the translation was produced. In addition, nothing would serve as an important and an effective tool in the breaking dawn of the proselytising mission project more than the vernacular translation of the Bible.

⁴⁷⁶ These words were declared on November 28th 1928 by Rev. Leonard J. Beecher who triumphantly announced that East Africa was now a region completely under the authority of the Christian Bible, a colony in the heavenly Kingdom. This symbolic achievement was made possible by Mr. W. J. W. Roome of the British and Foreign Bible Society accompanied by his son and a member of the African Inland Mission, who climbed Kibo, the highest point of the two peaks of Mount Kilimanjaro and deposited a copy of the Bible safely enclosed in an iron chest. Pastor Reusch of the Lutheran Mission hoped to ascend later and carry the Bible to the very summit, over 19000 feet above sea level. CMS/G X A 5/10 (26th November, 1928), University of Birmingham (Special Collection).

⁴⁷⁷ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 155-178; Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society under Early Spanish Rule* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); Willis Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, Practice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 135-216; Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 230-340.

According to Ogilvie the use of vernacular in colonial Kenya would serve several purposes.⁴⁷⁸ First, the ability to read the simple Gospel was to precede “the opening of the mind, among people where it has been immemorially stunted and closed.”⁴⁷⁹ Therefore, the act of reading was to serve as the key to the new order of knowledge and gnosis.⁴⁸⁰ I may also add that the vernacular was best suited for the “opening of the mind” since few understood English at the time. Secondly, in the colonial hierarchical order of things, the written word reigned superior over the oral literature/spoken word. As such the need to provide the written Word in the people’s own tongue was a necessity since “speech is at best a fleeting thing, while writing is permanent”.⁴⁸¹ Finally, translation took place within the framework of missionary practice in which case the translated Word served as a clear testimony to “peoples who through all the ages have sat in darkness, light at long last has come, and a new Earth as well as a new Heaven is beginning to appear.”⁴⁸²

4.1.1 Translation as a Complex Activity

Although, postcolonial theory has implicated Bible translation as acting as the mediating agency between colonisation and Christian conversion, the act of translation was a complex activity and therefore not to be understood as a straight forward enterprise.⁴⁸³ To begin with, translation, as evidence will show below, was not immune to the ambivalence and contradictions of the discourse of colonialism.

⁴⁷⁸ See Ogilvie, *Our Empire’s Debt to Missions*, 62-65. This was equally true of the colonial government mode of communication where government instructions were given in the vernacular. However, after 1949 (right before the Mau-Mau uprising) the vernacular became subordinated to the English language. At the time of Kenya’s independence in 1963 English had become the language of instruction in upper primary schools, high schools and colleges. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Writers in Politics: A Re-engagement with Issues of Literature and Society* (Oxford: James Curry, Revised edition, 1997), 61.

⁴⁷⁹ Ogilvie, *Our Empire’s Debt to Missions*, 63

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴⁸³ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 156; See also Rafael’s second preface in *Contracting Colonialism*, xvii-xix.

Like in the colonial discourse, translation betrays instability and change. My analysis will show that by choosing to translate the Bible into the vernacular languages such as the Gĩkũyũ language, the colonial church flung wide open the interrogatory interstices where hermeneutics, doctrines, culture, and power could be negotiated, contested and hybridised. In this chapter I endeavour to draw the connections between translation acts of instability and the African assimilation, awakening, empowerment, questioning and resistance.

The other issue that adds complexity in the translation process is the translators' claim to fidelity to the source texts in order to authenticate the translated text.⁴⁸⁴ The idea of true fidelity implies that translators can achieve perfect replication of the English Bible as the source text.⁴⁸⁵ This assumption can be noticed as one reads, for example, the original translations of the Gĩkũyũ New Testament.⁴⁸⁶ All of the translated versions have no introduction, editorial or translators comments, margin notes, preface or foreword. The versions including reprints and re-editions left no hint about the translators or about the translation process. The translator is completely invisible and it is implied that the text one is reading is an exact translation of the original.

The explanation given for the decision to offer the translation without notes or comments is that the British and Foreign Bible Society sought to maintain inter-

⁴⁸⁴ See Arthur Ruffell's short account on the difficulties encountered in Bible translation. "Language Report, 1943", *Kikuyu News*, No. 169 (September 1944), 605.

⁴⁸⁵ The Gĩkũyũ Bible translators chose to use "The Revised Version" of the English Bible as their source text. A. Ruffell Barlow, "Progress of Kikuyu Old Testament", *Kikuyu News*, no. 190 (December 1949), 1053; Mr. A. Ruffell Barlow to Rev. Dr. Kilgour editorial Superintendent, BSA/E3/3/253/2, *Kikuyu* 2 (March 29th 1919), BFBS archives University of Cambridge; Letter by Mr. A. Ruffell Barlow to the Editor Superintendent of BFBS as reply in a letter dated, BSA/E3/3/253/2, *Kikuyu* 2 (February 20th 1919), BFBS archives.

⁴⁸⁶ B.F.B.S. *Kĩrĩkanĩro Kĩrĩa Kĩerũ Kĩa Jesu Kristo Ũrĩa Mwathani witũ o na Mũhonokia Witũ* (London: B.F.B.S., 1926 edition and 1936 edition).

confessional links with all denominations in order to avoid hermeneutical conflicts.⁴⁸⁷ But beside the principle of maintaining inter-confessional links, the act of rendering the translators invisible also assumes that it is possible for translators to arrive objectively at a perfect replication of the original text and therefore making it unnecessary for the translator's comments or explanations as to why certain words or phrases in the translated text are chosen over the others. Such an assumption is misleading and ignores the subjective as well as partisan elements of the translators. The activity of translation as Willis Barnstone observes is not "a predictable, objective, and repeatable exercise but a venture into variations...an art of differences."⁴⁸⁸ It is hardly possible to come to a perfect translation because no two languages or cultures are the same.

4.1.2 Translation as a Second-Level Interpretation

In the act of translating the Bible, the translator attempts to recreate in the mind of another that which was put in writing from someone else's mind living years past. That which existed at first orally was then transmitted through language which had its simultaneous interrelated layers of sound, writing, style, grammar and meaning. The very existence of different languages is indicative of the fact that change is unavoidable in the act of translation. The notion of change as a key element in translation is alluded to in the Latin *translatio* (translation) which points to the activity of carrying meaning from one language across to another.⁴⁸⁹ Robert J. C. Young has persuasively argued that translation takes "a kind of metaphorical

⁴⁸⁷ This was actually included in the original "Laws and Regulations" of the British and Foreign Bible Society founded in 1804 which read in part that the "sole object" of the Society "shall be to encourage a wider circulation of the Holy Scriptures.... without Note or Comment" (Quoted in William A. Smalley, *Translation as Mission: Bible Translation in the Modern Missionary Movement* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1991), 62, 64.)

⁴⁸⁸ Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation*, 20.

⁴⁸⁹ See further discussion in Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation*, 15-17.

displacement of a text from one language to another.”⁴⁹⁰ What this points to is that perfect replication can only be achieved if there is no change but mere repetition.⁴⁹¹ In addition, there can be no identical transference because translation also involves mental activity through reading of the written text. Consequently, what one has read is transformed into another written text making translation an act of interpretation.⁴⁹² Translation is for this reason an interpretive reading of the source text, “a hermeneutical process...performed in order to come up with the most complete understanding of the source text for the purpose of determining the target text.”⁴⁹³ After reading and understanding the source text, the translator embarks in a form of “second-level interpretation” to search for “equivalent target meanings” – an activity which takes place in the mind more than lingering on the pages of the source text.⁴⁹⁴

It is in this “second-level interpretation” that appears in a translation as the translator’s understanding of the source text. The second-level of interpretation, as I shall demonstrate in pages below, transforms the initial reading of the source text to more powerful and authoritative thought that finds its way as the translated text. Since it is never possible for a translation to be an exact one-to-one transference from one language to another because no two languages are the same, translation can only be seen as “an approximation of the original.”⁴⁹⁵ It follows then that the process of approximation transforms the translator into an author who is both an “inventor and director of the text”.⁴⁹⁶ The “reader-author” creates not only meaning of the source text but also makes translational choices in an attempt to make the text accessible to the targeted readers. In the colonial situation, it is in this act of transformation that the

⁴⁹⁰ Young, *Postcolonialism*, 138.

⁴⁹¹ Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation*, 16.

⁴⁹² Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament*, 77; Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation*, 7.

⁴⁹³ Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation*, 21.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁹⁵ Smalley, *Translation as Mission*, 3.

⁴⁹⁶ Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation*, 22.

indigenous “original” (oral literature) is devalued as the colonial copy is overtly valued becoming more powerful.⁴⁹⁷ Yet even in such a situation, some aspects of the indigenous culture remain untranslatable.⁴⁹⁸ What all this means is that the technical activity of translating a text from one language into another is always culturally and historically specific.⁴⁹⁹ The translated Gĩkũyũ New Testament as I shall show reveals the translators’ cultural and linguistic undertones which were also closely related to the socio-political activity of the world in which translation took place.⁵⁰⁰

4.2 A Summary of the Evolution of the Gĩkũyũ Bible

To begin with I will lay out in a general way the early evolution of the Christian Bible in Kenya and how it relates to the Gĩkũyũ translation. Then more specifically I will deal with the evolution of the Gĩkũyũ Bible focusing on the translation of Gĩkũyũ New Testament its objective, process and issues in the translation process as well as the effect it had in the colonial situation.

4.2.1 The Early Bible Translation in Kenya

Rev. Dr. J. Ludwig Krapf⁵⁰¹ was the first European to do any Bible translation in Kenya.⁵⁰² The pioneering British Colonial administrator and historian Sir H. H. Johnston⁵⁰³, however, did not mention in his much acclaimed work Dr. Krapf or

⁴⁹⁷ See below my discussion of how translation devalues the traditional oral culture.

⁴⁹⁸ Young, *Postcolonialism*, 138f.

⁴⁹⁹ Young, *Postcolonialism*, 138; Gosnell L. O. R. Yorke and Peter M. Renju, *Bible Translation & African Languages* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2004), i-iv.

⁵⁰⁰ For geo-political factors in translation, see Young, *Postcolonialism*, 138. See also wa Thiong’o powerful analysis on the role of literature in subduing the emotions, the imagination and the consciousness of the colonised as part of the economic exploitation and political oppression. wa Thiong’o, *Writers in Politics*, 8-11.

⁵⁰¹ Dr. Ludwig Krapf was a young German who was enlisted by the Anglican Church Mission Society to begin Mission exploration in East and Central Africa. His first missionary journey was to Abyssinia in the company of Blumhardt in February 1837, having studied Latin, Greek and Hebrew in Grammar school and just before this missionary journey he studied Ethiopic and Amharic. He first arrived in East Africa in March 1844. Krapf, *Travels, Researches, and the Missionary Labours*, 132-134.

⁵⁰² CMS/C/A5/O/16/1-165 also CMS/5/O/16/160/F, University of Birmingham; See also Krapf, *Travels, Researches, and the Missionary Labours*, 127.

⁵⁰³ Sir H. H. Johnston served as a Consul for Southern Nigeria, for Portuguese East Africa, as Commissioner in British Central Africa, Consul-General in Tunis and Special Commissioner for Uganda. *The Universities’ Mission to Central Africa: Atlas* (Office of the Universities’ Mission to

Krapf's mission partner Rebmann⁵⁰⁴ as the pioneering translators. Instead he credited it to Bishop Steere.⁵⁰⁵ It is most likely that Krapf's nationality and his involvement mentioned in a letter to the American Oriental Society alluding to a territorial dispute⁵⁰⁶ may have played a role.⁵⁰⁷ Bishop Steere did, however, contribute to the initial translation work by becoming the first to note the differences in the Swahili dialects spoken in Mombasa and Zanzibar.⁵⁰⁸ Nonetheless, I believe Krapf was the first European to study Swahili and to reduce the language into writing.⁵⁰⁹

Three main factors influenced Krapf's translation work.⁵¹⁰ First, he envisioned a "chain of missionary stations" along the banks of the Nile from Alexandria to

Central Africa: London, 1903), 7; see A. Werner, "The Languages of Africa", *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 12, no. 46 (January 1913), 122-123; CMS/C/A5/O/16/1-165 also CMS/5/O/16/160/F, University of Birmingham.

⁵⁰⁴ Mr. Rebman arrived in Mombasa as the second missionary in June 1846. While still in England Rebman made a transcript from Krapf's original translations and learned by heart during the long voyage of 140 days from London so that "on his arrival he became soon proficient in the knowledge of the country." Mr. Rebman is said to have built on Krapf's dictionary for his Kiswahili and Kinika-English dictionary which he commenced in autumn of 1846. Mr. Erhardt joined their Rabbai Mission in 1849. CMS/C/A5/O/16/1-165 also CMS/5/O/16/160/F, University of Birmingham.

⁵⁰⁵ Bishop Steere had taken over from Bishop Tozer whom the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford had sent as a missionary Bishop to the Maganga "tribes" on the river Zambezi. Sir Johnston concluded that "Dr Steere's patient study of East African languages enabled him to produce grammars and vocabularies of the Kiswahili, which remain the standard text-books of that language to this day".

⁵⁰⁶ Dr. Krapf had offered information to Mr. De Belligny, French Consul regarding the coast between Pangani river and the islet of Tanga which the Consul had learned belonged to the inland rulers rather than as claimed under the authority of the Imam of Muscat whose residence was at Zanzibar. The information given did not please the British Consul Major Hamerton who supported the Imam and reported the matter to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs in London. Krapf was threatened with deportation if he continued to provide such information on the Imam's "countries." J. Ludwig Krapf, "Letter from Rev. Dr. J. L. Krapf", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 4 (1854), 449-455.

⁵⁰⁷ Bishop Steere was British while Dr. Krapf and his colleague Rebmann were Germans. For a better view on the depth and clearness of how nationalism intertwined matters of research and publication in studies on African languages, see W. A. Crabtree, "The Systematic Study of African Languages" in *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 12, no. 46 (January 1913), 180-183.

⁵⁰⁸ Reference here is to Mombasa Swahili. At the time there were two forms of Swahili, the Mombasa dialect mostly spoken along the Kenya coast and Zanzibar Swahili spoken in the Island and Tanganyika (modern Tanzania.) CMS/C/A5/O/16/1-165 also CMS/5/O/16/160/F, University of Birmingham.

⁵⁰⁹ Krapf's contestation received credible support from W. W. Greenough in his introductory remarks to Krapf's work "Three Chapters of Genesis Translated into the Sooahelee Language" presented to the American Oriental Society. Krapf's work as the first scientific study of Swahili received endorsement eighty years later through K. Roehl. J. Ludwig Krapf, "Three Chapters of Genesis Translated into the Sooahelee Language" With an Introduction by W.W. Greenough, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1847), 264; K. E. Roehl, "The Linguistic Situation in East Africa", *Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 3, no.2 (April 1930), 197.

⁵¹⁰ All of his translations were sent to C.M.S Secretary Mr. Coates at London for the purpose of helping "the missionaries who would soon be sent to join the East African Mission." His first work was a four-

“Gondas”, the capital of *Abessinia* (Ethiopia). In his estimation, such a chain of missionary activities would be scriptural fulfilment to a promise in Psalm 68:31 ‘Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God’.⁵¹¹ To enable Christian missionaries to respond when the appeal came, Krapf translated the whole of the New Testament into Swahili, and compiled a grammar and dictionary of the language. He as well translated Karl Barth’s ‘Bible Stories’ and compiled an English-Swahili dictionary.⁵¹² Secondly, Krapf had heard of rumours about a “Galla” people who were said to be “Christian after the form of the Coptic Church in Egypt”.⁵¹³ Although he had not met these people, Krapf considered them a nation “destined by Providence after their conversion to Christianity to attain importance and fulfil the mission which Heaven has pointed out to the Germans in Europe.”⁵¹⁴ He feared that if “Gallas” were not gathered into the Christian Church, they would fall to Islam which would form a strong bulwark against introduction of Christianity and “true morality” in Africa.⁵¹⁵ To this end he forecast the elevation of a black bishop and black clergy of the Protestant Church as a necessity in the civilization of Africa.⁵¹⁶ In this case translation is seen as response to an ethnocentric understanding of the fulfilment of a divine mandate and a buffer to Islamic expansion.

Finally, translation of the Bible would bring to the Africans the true knowledge of God that Europe had acquired through which material progress was guaranteed. In a conversation between Krapf and the mother of King Sahela Selassie

column dictionary which included English, Swahili, Suaheli, “Kinika” and Kikamba but finding his scope too comprehensive he later dropped Kikamba. It is not known whether Mr. Wakefield, the missionary of the Methodist Society at Ribe, to whom Dr. Krapf in 1860 had given a copy of his dictionary in four manuscript volumes, had enriched the work. CMS/C/A5/O/16/1-165 also CMS/5/O/16/160/F, University of Birmingham.

⁵¹¹ *The Universities’ Mission to Central Africa*, 13.

⁵¹² These were completed in 1948. Krapf, *Travels, Researches, and the Missionary Labours*, 188.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

as they exchanged goods, Senama asked Krapf how the Europeans “had come to be able to invent and manufacture such wonderful things?” To which Krapf retorted that God had promised in “His Word not only spiritual but temporal rewards to those who obeyed His commandments; that the English, Germans and Europeans in general, had once been as rude and ignorant as the Gallas, but after their acceptance of the Gospel God had given them with science and arts wondrous blessings of an earthly kind.”⁵¹⁷ He predicted that completion of the Suez Canal would bring with it the weakening of Islam, subjugation of East African heathenism by Christianity and its civilisation, the end of the slave trade and finally immigration of thousands of European emigrants “when America, Australia, and Tasmania cease to attract them”.⁵¹⁸

It is the prospect of such material prosperity and evolution of new human relations that made Krapf to make haste in the translation project. Translation would afford the evolving community a hope of Christianity, civilisation and “brotherhood” of men as it were.⁵¹⁹ Krapf’s translation became the basis of later translation work on the Swahili Bible and formed the watershed of the Bible translation in Kenya including work in Gĩkũyũ language to which I now turn my attention.⁵²⁰ But before I do so, I need to mention that the methods that Krapf (who did not have the power and prestige of the colonial state behind him) used in the pre-colonial era, contrast significantly with later colonial missionaries. The exclusion of Krapf by Bishop Steere reflects the fact that Krapf did not fit the colonial translation paradigm, with its

⁵¹⁷ Krapf, *Travels, Researches, and the Missionary Labours*, 89.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁵²⁰ By 1935, about twenty one languages in Kenya possessed some portion of Scripture. Two of these (Swahili and Giriama) had the whole Bible, while Luo, Gĩkũyũ, Pokomo, Kamba and Taita Sagalla had the New Testament. The Waswahili possessed a whole Bible since 1914. The first Giriama scripture was Luke’s Gospel translated by Rev. W. E. Taylor and published, with Mombasa Swahili version in parallel columns, in 1892.

focus on building colonial power and domination and not recognising the need to focus on the emergence of Africa.

4.2.2 Translation work in Gĩkũyũ

Work in Gĩkũyũ language owes its origin from Dr. Karl Peter who was the first European to transverse Gĩkũyũ Country in 1883. Von Hohnel who travelled with Count Teleki in 1887 noted down half a dozen words and phrases in Gĩkũyũ.⁵²¹ However, it is the Rev. A. W. McGregor, the first Church Mission Society missionary, who started systematic work on the language at Kabete in 1900. As already mentioned, his Gĩkũyũ translation of John was published by the British and Foreign Bible Society and served for several years as the only available Gospel in the mission field. His English-Gĩkũyũ vocabulary was published in 1904 by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.).⁵²² Arthur Ruffell Barlow⁵²³ a Church of Scotland Mission layman is the other important person in the process of translating the Gĩkũyũ Bible. “Bwana Barlow” as fondly remembered by his peers and African Christians “possessed of no academic qualifications” but had a “good school education, and with intellectual and other gifts.”⁵²⁴ He is said to have picked up the Gĩkũyũ language unaided by grammar or school teacher. Barlow started noting words

⁵²¹ Kikuyu-English A to Ī, Dictionary Seminar on 13.1.58: Notes on the Kikuyu Dictionary, Barlow Papers Gen 1785/1 (University of Edinburgh Special Collection).

⁵²² Rev. McGregor’s Vocabulary and *A Grammar of the Gĩkũyũ Language* (London, 1905) followed the orthography developed by the Royal Geographic Society of Great Britain. This was an orthography that had been adapted in regard to the spelling of African geographical names and transliteration of African dialects. His Vocabulary was published as A. W. McGregor, “The orthography of African names and languages” in *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 2, no. 8 (July 1903), 456-459; A. W. McGregor, *English-Kikuyu Vocabulary* (London: S.P.C.K., 1904).

⁵²³ Barlow’s work is said to have begun in 1903 as a seventeen year old lad. His first contacts with Gĩkũyũ were through a farming venture to sell potatoes to Transvaal under the workmanship of his uncle Dr. Ruffell Scott. After his uncle went on furlough in March 1906, Barlow (who now lived by himself fourteen miles away in the Gĩkũyũ country) took his first service using the Gĩkũyũ language and in the same week took over charge of the “school”. By the time of the publication of his Grammar in 1914, Barlow had been a resident in the then British East Africa for ten years. In his desire to learn as much Gĩkũyũ as he could, Barlow on January 23rd 1906 mistakenly entered the “closed District” of Nyeri which almost led to his deportation. Gen. 1786/48, Barlow’s Papers; Rev. Dr. John W. Arthur, “Arthur Ruffelle Barlow”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 159 (March 1942), 445-446.

⁵²⁴ Dr. H. R. A. Philp, “Bwana Barlow”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 159 (March 1942), 450; Arthur, “Arthur Ruffelle Barlow”, 445.

in 1903 and his first edition of Mark's Gospel in Gĩkũyũ was published by the National Bible Society of Scotland in 1909.⁵²⁵ Other translation works in Gĩkũyũ included Roman Catholic work which proceeded on separate lines.⁵²⁶ Roman Catholic initial publication was a handbook of Gĩkũyũ by the Rev. Father Hemery in 1902 published by the Catholic Mission in Nairobi.⁵²⁷ The Italian Fathers at Nyeri also developed printing and a newspaper in a different script without diacritical marks.⁵²⁸ Above all other translators it is Barlow and Rev. Harry Leakey⁵²⁹ who did the bulk of translation. By the end of February 1941 Canon Leakey had done the lion's share of translation of the Old Testament in Gĩkũyũ.⁵³⁰ Barlow is credited with the Gĩkũyũ New Testament. Before 1907 he had actually attempted the translation of some of the Psalms as well as other "odd pieces of translation for mission use."⁵³¹ All teaching and preaching before this period was done in Swahili.⁵³²

4.2.3 The United Kikuyu Language Committee (U.K.L.C.)

⁵²⁵ By 1945, the dictionary had reached letter "m" and later on continued by A.R. Barlow as a compiler who approached Longmans. This had to be postponed because of further work owing to New Testament. Barlow Papers Gen 1785/1; United Kikuyu Language Committee (U.K.L.C.) Minutes 6/4/1908 -15/8/1933, Gen. 1786/5 1a and 1b, (Barlow papers); U.K.L.C. minutes of April 6th, 1909, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers); U.K.L.C. minutes of October 3rd, 1910, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁵²⁶ Other Protestant mission works included that of Hildegard Hinde, *Vocabularies of the Kamba and Gĩkũyũ Languages* (Cambridge University Press, 1904); and E. Henderson, *Easy Kikuyu Lessons* (Nairobi: The Times, n.d.).

⁵²⁷ Père Hemery, *Gĩkũyũ Vocabulary and Phrase-Book* (1902).

⁵²⁸ One of the important works that came out of this printing press was Father C. Cagnolo *Agĩkũyũ: Their Customs, Traditions and Folklore* (English translation) (Nyeri: Agĩkũyũ in the Mission Printing School, 1933).

⁵²⁹ Rev. Canon Harry Leakey served in Gĩkũyũ (Kabete for 38 years) – coming to Kabete station in 1902 (though the station had been started in 1899.) He retired from active service in 1933. He was joined by Barlow to form a partnership in the translation of the Bible and other literature. Canon Leakey spent most of his last seven years following his retirement in Limuru engaged in translation work.

⁵³⁰ Rev. R. G.M. Calderwood, "Extracts from the Annual Reports for 1940", *Kikuyu News*, no. 156 (June 1941) 396.

⁵³¹ By May 1907 Advantage had been taken of Barlow's knowledge of Gĩkũyũ. He translated a school Primer, Book of Daily Services, 16 hymns, Shorter Catechism, Matthew's Gospel, a portion of John, the first 31 verses of Mark, 60 psalms, and the first chapter of 'Peep of Day'. Dr. Ruffell Scott, Report to the General Assembly, May 1907 p. 27, as collected by Dr. McMurtrie in Barlow Papers, Gen. 1786/46; see also Barlow's Papers, Gen. 1786/48; Dr. W. M. Brown, "The New Grammar", *Kikuyu News*, no 200 (June 1952), 1233.

⁵³² A. Ruffell Barlow, "Some Early Memories", *Kikuyu News*, no. 186 (December 1948), 935.

To facilitate and consolidate translation of the Gĩkũyũ Bible⁵³³ the United Kikuyu Language Committee was formally constituted in 1912 representing various Protestant Missionary Societies in Gĩkũyũ country for the purpose of a united action in translation.⁵³⁴ Some of the efforts had started about four years earlier under the guidance of Henry E. Scott to form a small Translation Committee which served as a consultancy for how best to render certain scriptural terms in Gĩkũyũ.⁵³⁵ The objectives of U.K.L.C. included in the first place the desire to secure as rapidly as possible a uniform translation of the Bible and other literature.⁵³⁶ According to Marion Stevenson, the Committee's main work included the need to reduce the Gĩkũyũ language to writing; give the Holy Scriptures to Gĩkũyũ people in their own language and to produce other literature.⁵³⁷ Besides promoting Bible translation, U.K.L.C. also offered the platform to discuss linguistic questions and difficulties.

In order to secure an early translation and publication of the Scriptures, the New Testament first and later the Old Testament, various members of the Committee

⁵³³ Rev. J. E. Hamshire in Church Missionary Review (January 1909), 30, noted that due to "the great population of the Gĩkũyũ tribe. A complete Bible in their tongue might well be justified." BSA/E3/3/253/1, Kikuyu 1 (March 1909-June 1915), BFBS Archives (University of Cambridge); see also letter by Editor Superintendent of BFBS to the Rev. Harry Leakey, BSA/E3/3/253/2 Kikuyu 2 (July 24th 1915), BFBS archives.

⁵³⁴ Those appointed to represent their missions in the committee included Rev. C. E. Hurlburt (director AIM), Rev. L. H. Downing (AIM), Rev. W. P. Knapp (AIM), Dr. J. E. Henderson (AIM), Mr. O. H. Scouten (AIM), Rev. H. Leakey (CMS), Dr. T. W. W. Crawford (CMS), Mr. A. W. McGregor (CMS), Rev. Dr. H. E. Scott (CSM) and Mr. A. R. Barlow (CSM) with Rev. Leakey taking the chairmanship of the Committee. The composition of the translating committee was to have two members appointed by each co-operating Society who would serve in the committee for a year. For one to qualify as a member of U.K.L.C. she or he had to have special knowledge of the Gĩkũyũ language. When considered necessary and advisable the committee requested the Societies to send an extra member. Occasionally the committee welcomed assistance of others whose knowledge of Gĩkũyũ or of original Scripture languages would help. See letters to Rev. R. Kilgour (Editor Superintendent BFBS) by O. H. Scouten dated February 3, 1909 and April 28 1909. BSA/E3/3/253/1 (Kikuyu 1 March 1909-June 1915), BFBS Archives. See also A. Ruffell Barlow, "Story of the Gĩkũyũ Bible", *Kikuyu News*, no. 196 (June 1951), 1160.

⁵³⁵ Before then translation was an individual effort. The British and Foreign Bible Society and Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge were among the first to be informed of the formation of Gĩkũyũ Language Committee. U.K.L.C. minutes of January 28th, 1909, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁵³⁶ United Gĩkũyũ Language Committee (U.K.L.C.) Minutes 6/4/1908 -15/8/1933, Gen. 1786/5 1a and 1b, (Barlow papers).

⁵³⁷ Marion Stevenson, "The Kikuyu Language Committee", BSA/E3/3/253/1, Kikuyu 1, (March 1909-June 1915), BFBS Archives.

were assigned books for translation (each was given six months to submit his/her translation of the portion assigned.)⁵³⁸ Where the translator of the Bible found great difficulty in the use of any term laid down by U.K.L.C., such a translator was allowed to use another, on condition that such sentences or words were given separately as alternative readings, and the remaining members of the translation Committee would have the right to accept or reject them.⁵³⁹ To avoid future duplication in translation the secretaries of various Societies were asked to keep the Secretary of the Language Committee informed concerning any translation work which was being done or was about to be undertaken.⁵⁴⁰ U.K.L.C. chose to use “the Revised Version” as the source text in translation.⁵⁴¹ As a result, in 1926 the first Gikūyū New Testament was published by an inter-mission team of translators and on 14th March 1926 the first copy was laid on the Communion table during the ordination service of the first five African ministers of Church of Scotland Mission.⁵⁴² By 1935, the supply of Gikūyū

⁵³⁸ John’s Gospel had been translated by Rev. A. W. Macgregor in 1903 and revised by Mr. Barlow; Mark by Mr. Barlow in 1909; Philippians by a member of African Inland Mission in 1912; the uniform renderings of the parallel passages in the Gospels was done in 1914 by Canon H. Leakey (C.M.S), Dr. Henderson (Gospel Mission), Mr. Barlow and Stefano (Rev. Leakey’s Gikūyū assessor); Matthew was completed in 1914 by Canon Leakey; Rev. Leakey also translated the Epistles of John; Luke in 1918 first by Dr. Henderson, Mr. O. H. Scouten but completed by Canon Leakey; Rev. F. H. McKenrick asked to undertake the translation of the Acts of the Apostles. The first single volume of the four Gospels and Acts was published in 1920 with new translations of Mark and John by Mr. Barlow and Acts translated by an A.I.M missionary but revised by Canon Leakey. U.K.L.C. minutes of June 7th, 1909, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers). See also Barlow, “Story of the Kikuyu Bible”, 1161. United Kikuyu Language Committee (U.K.L.C.) Minutes 6/4/1908 -15/8/1933, Gen. 1786/5 1a and 1b, (Barlow papers).

⁵³⁹ U.K.L.C. minutes of August 13th and 14th, 1913, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁵⁴⁰ Dr. T.W.W. Crawford and A. Ruffell Barlow had their own translated version of Gikūyū Catechism which was submitted to the Committee for criticism, correction and possible amalgamation of the two for use by the different Mission societies. U.K.L.C. minutes of January 28th, 1909, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁵⁴¹ Among the translators only Rev. Harry Leakey (C.M.S.) and Rev. Lee H. Downing (A.I.M.) who had knowledge of Greek language. Barlow used as reference the *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* (1886 and 1890 editions) commentaries that dealt with the particular books assigned to him to translate. The volume on Revelation by Simcox and “the Century Bible series” on the same were recommended to him too. A. Ruffell Barlow, “Progress of Kikuyu Old Testament”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 190 (December 1949), 1053; Mr. A. Ruffell Barlow to Rev. Dr. Kilgour editorial Superintendent, BSA/E3/3/253/2, Kikuyu 2 (March 29th 1919) BFBS archives; Letter by Mr. A. Ruffell Barlow to the Editor Superintendent of BFBS as reply in a letter dated, February 20th 1919, BSA/E3/3/253/2 (Kikuyu 2), BFBS archives.

⁵⁴² A. Ruffell Barlow, “Language Work Notes”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 136 (June 1936), 19.

New Testaments had run out, and a reprint was decided upon.⁵⁴³ This offered the opportunity to correction, alteration and revision resulting in the second edition of the Gĩkũyũ New Testament issued in 1936.⁵⁴⁴ This edition had to go through yet another revision starting with “retranslation” of the Epistle to the Romans, resulting in the Gĩkũyũ New Testament and the Psalms.⁵⁴⁵

Leakey translated the books of Exodus, Numbers, and Joshua through Ruth and intensively revised Barlow’s translation of the Book of Job and Proverbs as well as Psalms in final draft.⁵⁴⁶ Barlow together with his “African co-operator, Charles Muhoro” completed the translation of the Psalms into Gĩkũyũ in 1934.⁵⁴⁷ Although the final work of the translation of the Psalms into the Gĩkũyũ language was credited to Barlow, it is Mũhoro Kareri who had single-handedly translated the Psalms which he later revised with the help of Barlow.⁵⁴⁸ Barlow also with the collaboration of Rev. L. J. Beecher completed the translation of the book of Proverbs, Song of Songs and

⁵⁴³ By end of 1945 Mr. Scott Dickson one of the missionaries in Kenya estimating that only over 100,000 copies of the Bible could satisfy the need. A. Ruffell Barlow, “Note on Translation Work, 1948”, *Kikuyu News*, no.187 (June 1949), 972; “Staff Notes: Translation Work”, *Kikuyu News*, no.174 (December 1945), 707.

⁵⁴⁴ Ruffell Barlow and Canon Harry Leakey were assigned the revision with Barlow undertaking the final reading of all the proofs. A. Ruffell Barlow, “Language Work Notes”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 136 (June 1936), 19; see also BFBS resolution under point 5. *Gĩkũyũ* E.S.C. minis. April 8th 1936 p. 3; BSA/E3/3/253/4, Kikuyu 4, BFBS archives.

⁵⁴⁵ The “final” revision was done in 1944. Barlow also lamented that Bible revision had been slowed down by two other pieces of language work started in 1944. The first of these was the compilation of a short English-Gĩkũyũ Vocabulary at the instance of the C.M.S. Book Shop in Nairobi in a different form than the one committed to Barlow earlier by the United Gĩkũyũ Language Committee. The second extra work was the translation into Gĩkũyũ for the local Government of a ‘Guide and Instruction to Native Tribunals in Nyeri District’. These Tribunals were official courts set up by the Colonial Administration in place of the old African councils of Elders collectively known as *Kiama* entrusted with the hearing of cases under the Penal Code and various Ordinances connected with African law and custom. A. Ruffell Barlow, “Language Work, 1944”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 173, 693-694.

⁵⁴⁶ A. Ruffell Barlow, “Language Work”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 132 (June 1932), 16; See also Mrs Beecher of C.M.S re-read her late father’s MSS. While her husband Archdeacon Beecher was working on most of the Prophets. Barlow, “Language Work, 1944”, 693.

⁵⁴⁷ Barlow, “Language Work”, 16.

⁵⁴⁸ Kareri, *The Life of Charles Muhoro Kareri*, 51- 53.

Lamentations. He also revised Ecclesiastes. Rev. Calderwood (C.S.M.) translated the books Jonah and Amos while Beecher worked on the Prophets.⁵⁴⁹

4.3 The Colonial Situation and Issues of Translation

After this brief history of the evolution of the Gĩkũyũ Bible, I will now analyse and discuss some important points in the act of translation and transmission of the Bible into Gĩkũyũ language in colonial Kenya. The fact that the Gĩkũyũ New Testament had to be reedited several times within a span of ten years shows the tentativeness of the whole translation process. The same tentativeness would equally affect the publication of the Old Testament in its entirety due to “technical” delays.⁵⁵⁰ The indeterminate nature of the translated Gĩkũyũ Bible invokes an instability as well as an ambivalence that indicate not just internal contradictions but also dynamics of resistance. Translation, as Barnstone has observed, “entails a complexity of ever-changing sense found in new signs with their own lexical code.”⁵⁵¹ Therefore, the mimetic assumptions of a literal translation cannot hold when we consider translation of the Gĩkũyũ Bible. Difference and hybridity rather than perfect replication of the Bible into the targeted Gĩkũyũ text are the hall marks of the Gĩkũyũ New Testament.

4.3.1 Translation as hegemonic and assimilative: the Gĩkũyũ

Orthography

Following the Hegelian notion of Africa as moving slowly from nature to culture, and with the idea of a United Native Church still fresh and its difficulties

⁵⁴⁹ Rev. Calderwood (CSM) also wrote a Gĩkũyũ Commentary on Mark’s Gospel which was expected to be used by African Bible students. *Kikuyu News*, no. 182 (December 1947), 854; A. Ruffell Barlow, “Language Work Notes”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 136 (June 1936), 19.

⁵⁵⁰ The Old Testament was not published until 1951. Rev R. G. M. Calderwood, “Extracts from Annual Reports for 1941”, *Kikuyu News*, no.160 (June 1942), 468; A. Ruffell Barlow, “Translation and Language Work, 1942”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 164 (June 1943), 529-530; Editor, “Report for 1936 as Presented to the General Assembly on 21st May 1937”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 140 (June 1937), 51-52; *Kikuyu News*, no. 176 (June 1946), 739; A. Ruffell Barlow, “Note on Translation Work, 1948”, *Kikuyu News*, no.187 (June 1949), 972.

⁵⁵¹ Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation*, 18.

discussed in the previous chapter notwithstanding, missionaries desired a united front to tackle language problems. There are several factors that made this desirable.

4.3.1a Common Language and Civilisation

In the first place, a common form of language was seen as the gateway to progress and civilisation.⁵⁵² The idea was premised on the claim that it required a European to teach Africans the structure and idiomatic beauties of their own mother tongue, and how best to select and developed its finest features.⁵⁵³ In order for the African mind and soul to reach their highest development, much fuller teaching in the best of their vernaculars was needed.⁵⁵⁴ Therefore, a common policy in regard to the language problems would hasten unification of natives' dialects, make submission of the translations into one centre possible, and afford common method of spelling, the same name for God, for Spirit, for Soul, among others.⁵⁵⁵ This vision justified the U.K.L.C.'s action to first order, harmonise, and standardise the Gĩkũyũ language through uniform mode of spelling.

4.3.1b Unification of Language in East and Central Africa

Homogenisation of native dialects followed the broader colonial strategy of a fast forward in the linguistic evolution by merging all of the regional dialects into one common language. The strategic focus was to gradually introduce the African students to a "main" language chosen as most suitable. For example, K. E. Roehl, having concluded that Swahili was the future lingua franca of East and Central Africa, proposed and recommended Swahili as the ultimate language to which all translations

⁵⁵² Sugirtharajah sees this as one the strategies of colonialism. See Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 158.

⁵⁵³ Canon F. Rowling, "The Mother Tongue for African Readers", *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 38, no. 150 (January 1939), 133.

⁵⁵⁴ Rowling, "The Mother Tongue for African Readers", 134.

⁵⁵⁵ Report of United Conference of Missionary Society (no. 17): Printed Pamphlets on Kenya and Kikuyu and Gospel of St. Mark (1906-63), Barlow Papers Gen 1786/ 12.

in East Africa should aspire.⁵⁵⁶ There was no need to spend much time on the small or medium-sized languages which had no prospect of exercising influence outside their own sphere.⁵⁵⁷ It was hoped that by targeting languages dominant in different areas translation of the Bible would eventually quicken the assimilation of the smaller language groups in one common linguistic region.⁵⁵⁸ But for pure scientific reasons the “small tribal languages” threatened by extinction and assimilation were to be thoroughly studied and recorded without delay.⁵⁵⁹ Such a study would be beneficial to the scientific world in that it would help correct some prevalent linguistic errors in this respect.⁵⁶⁰ Translation offered material (data) on which African languages were (for the first time) subjected to systematic and scientific study. Although the Gĩkũyũ language, because of its considerable local importance, needed to have all of the kindred dialects united into one literary language, Roehl was pessimistic of its survival as a language because of its exposure to the “assimilative power of Swahili”.⁵⁶¹ A united orthography in Gĩkũyũ country was to play a decisive role towards a projected unified language in East and Central Africa.⁵⁶²

4.3.1c Translation as a tool for Colonisation

The act of translation served yet another colonial strategy. Barlow gave a very clear view as to why learning Gĩkũyũ and translating the text was of paramount

⁵⁵⁶ Roehl, “The Linguistic Situation in East Africa”, 191-202.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., 192-193.

⁵⁵⁹ Roehl also recommended purification of Swahili, in particular purging it of Arabic loan words.

⁵⁶⁰ Such errors might have led to the formation of ‘pidgin’ or ‘trade’ languages such as ‘coast English’, ‘Creole French’, ‘Kitchen Kafir’. Max Müller had earlier indicated that “dialects which had “never produced any literature at all, the jargons of savage tribes, the clicks of the Hottentots, and the vocal modulations of the Indo-Chinese, are as important, nay, for the solutions of some of our problems, more important, than the poetry of Homer or the prose of Cicero.” A. Werner would years later add that “the unwritten... primitive languages... which the last generation, or the last but one, went to look upon as barbarous jargons, not worth the attention of scholars” remained of great philological importance. Werner, “The Languages of Africa”, 120-121; Crabtree, “The Systematic Study of African Languages”, 181-183; See also American Mission Committee at Natal “Plan for Effecting a Uniform Orthography of the South-African Dialects”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 2 (1851), 332.

⁵⁶¹ Roehl, “The Linguistic Situation in East Africa”, 194-195.

⁵⁶² Rowling, “The Mother Tongue for African Readers”, 137-138; Ibid., Roehl, 191-202.

importance. The “ability to converse with the people in their own tongue” was in itself a great means of “inducing sympathy and mutual understanding between the native and his white master which it becomes more and more necessary to foster as the tide of immigration of Europeans into the British East Africa rises.”⁵⁶³ In essence translation was to offer the linguistic bridge needed in order to serve the larger colonial mission.⁵⁶⁴ Barlow’s idea was not without precedent. It had already been debated and its importance highlighted in South Africa in the quest for a united approach to the “Hottentots and Bushmen” languages of South Africa.⁵⁶⁵ Colonisation was not going to follow the old ways of the Romans who were never troubled by difficulties which “barbarians” faced in understanding Latin or Greek. Modern habits of thoughts demanded that either those colonised learn the language of the coloniser or the colonisers learn “alien speech” if “right rule” was to be possible.⁵⁶⁶

4.3.1.1 Invention of a New Gĩkũyũ Orthography

Before any of the above became reality, U.K.L.C. in Gĩkũyũ country had to deal with problems presented by the language at the local level. The first problem that U.K.L.C. had to confront was the deficiency of the English vowels⁵⁶⁷ and alphabet in rendering the spoken Gĩkũyũ language into writing. The need for a new orthography became apparent, for example, when the missionaries learnt that they had been singing rather ‘lustily’ “You are being strangled by Jesus, you are being strangled by

⁵⁶³ A. Ruffell Barlow, *Tentative Studies in Kikuyu Grammar and Idiom* (Edinburgh: S.P.C.K. & Foreign Mission Committee of the Church of Scotland, 1914), 1946 edition, Preface.

⁵⁶⁴ The United Kikuyu Language Committee orthography was adopted by the colonial government as the “official orthography for the Kikuyu Language.” Barlow Papers, Gen 1786/6 no. 71.

⁵⁶⁵ These were summarised in an article of March 6th 1850, sent by American missionaries serving in South Africa to the American Oriental Society. American Mission Committee at Natal “Plan for Effecting a Uniform Orthography of the South-African Dialects”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 2 (1851), 330-334.

⁵⁶⁶ Werner, “The Languages of Africa”, 121.

⁵⁶⁷ The Royal Geographical Society had adopted a system whose vowels had their German or Italian sounds, while in most parts the consonants followed English interpretation. See for a full explanation of this system in “The orthography of African names and languages”, *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 2, no. 8 (July 1903), 456-459.

Jesus” when using *ũgwiitwo nĩ Jesu* (proper Gĩkũyũ *ũgũitwo*) under the impression they were singing “You are called by Jesus” (*Ũgwiitwo nĩ Jesu*).⁵⁶⁸ Marion Stevenson recorded also a case where a Gĩkũyũ boy was astonished “over the fact that in Jerusalem there had been a great kettle with five eyes, into which, when it was boiling, sick people were put”. Apparently, this was in reference to an amazing translation rendering of the Pool of Bethesda in John 5:1-9.⁵⁶⁹ This rather comical discovery made it desirable for the missionaries to increase the number of vowels rather than stick to the English vowels. McGregor had already attempted to deal with the problem in his translations.⁵⁷⁰

To overcome this problem of orthography, the language committee unilaterally decided on a new spelling, additional vowels and their pronunciation.⁵⁷¹ U.K.L.C. adopted two elastic vowels *ĩ* and *ũ* to be used as short and long bringing the total of vowels accepted to seven - *a, e, i, ĩ, o, u, ũ*.⁵⁷² The committee also changed most of the vowel letters and some consonants; thus *chalia* became *caria* (seek); *ochio* became *ũciu* (that one – as in reference to a person), and so on. The use of “y” as in *Ky-ambu* or *ry-twa* was replaced by “ĩ” thus *Kĩambu* (name of a district in Gĩkũyũ country) and *rĩtwa* (name).⁵⁷³ The use of *ũ* or *u*, or *w*, remained problematic and was left open. For example both *kwenda* and *kũenda* (to love) would be

⁵⁶⁸ Possible reference here may be to the Gĩkũyũ translation of the hymnal “Stand up, stand up for Jesus”. Marion Stevenson, “The Kikuyu Language Committee”, 116; BSA/E3/3/253/1, Kikuyu 1, (March 1909-June 1915), BFBS Archives.

⁵⁶⁹ Marion Stevenson, “The Kikuyu Language Committee”, 116.

⁵⁷⁰ To justify his use of different vowels he gave as an example the word *mai* (which could be used for both “water” and “dung”). He proposed *mae* (water) and *mai* (dung). Another example given was *thura* (which could also be used in either “choose” or “reject”); in this case he proposed *thura* (choose) and *thora* (reject).

⁵⁷¹ Marion Stevenson, “The Kikuyu Language Committee”, 116.

⁵⁷² Canon Harry Leakey (C.M.S.) is said have been largely instrumental in introducing the form of Gĩkũyũ spelling with diacritical marks. U.K.L.C. minutes of May 27th, 1908, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers); John W. Arthur “The Late Canon Harry Leakey”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 152 (June 1940), 348.

⁵⁷³ United Kikuyu Language Committee (U.K.L.C.) Minutes 6/4/1908 -15/8/1933, Gen. 1786/5 1a and 1b, (Barlow papers).

acceptable.⁵⁷⁴ In the case of combinations of vowels, when the phonetic spelling differed from that of derivation, the former was to be given the preference in writing the language. For example: ‘He came out’ would be spelt ‘*Oimire*’, not ‘*Aumire*’; and ‘He is’ would be written ‘E’ not ‘Ai’.⁵⁷⁵ The Committee also agreed that two vowels should be written together where the sound required it as in *athiire* (he went) and *aathire* (he commanded.)⁵⁷⁶

The other concern that U.K.L.C. had to deal with was the various dialects of the Gĩkũyũ language. The southern Gĩkũyũ spoke a slightly different dialect from northern Gĩkũyũ.⁵⁷⁷ Because of the diverse dialects several quite different orthographies had emerged with missionaries of various societies using different orthographies depending on their area of operation.⁵⁷⁸ U.K.L.C. made it a matter of importance to reduce these dialects into a united orthography. Uniform orthography meant a given character or letter having one and the same value ascribed to it. It also signified that a given sound which was common to all the dialects were to be represented uniformly and universally by one and the same character in all said dialects. There was also concern in regard to “independent and varying translations” produced such as the African Inland Mission who seemed eager to begin work on translation. Indeed John E. Henderson is said to have already started on the work.⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁴ U.K.L.C. minutes of August 13th and 14th, 1913, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁵⁷⁵ U.K.L.C. minutes of March 17th-18th, 1909, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁵⁷⁶ U.K.L.C. minutes of June 7th, 1909, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁵⁷⁷ The southern districts of Kĩambu and Fort Hall comprised of Kambũ mission under the American Gospel Mission Society (G.M.S.); Kĩjabe mission under African Inland Mission, Kikuyu mission under Church of Scotland Mission (C.S.M.); Kabete mission, Weithaga mission, and Kahuhia mission all under Church Mission Society (C.M.S.). In the northern district of Nyeri, there was Tumutumu mission under C.S.M as well as Chuka and Chogoria in Meru. The Methodist mission was located in Imenti and in Embu, Kĩrangari mission came under C.M.S. One of the serious mistakes made by missionaries was to assume Kĩmerũ and Embu languages were part of Gĩkũyũ dialects and thus bundling them together under Gĩkũyũ language.

⁵⁷⁸ Leakey, *Kenya*, 151.

⁵⁷⁹ Mr. Henderson of A.I.M. had translated Luke, Acts, I and II Corinthian and Galatians. See letter from Rev. F. Baylis (C.M.S. in a letter dated September 23rd 1908. This was observed by Rev. F. Baylis in the Minutes of September 9th 1909, 89, BSA/E3/3/253/1, Kikuyu 1, (March 1909-June 1915), BFBS Archives.

U.K.L.C. argued that “with the boon of a uniform version, natives from every district could understand and take part in the worship of God”.⁵⁸⁰ Standardisation of Gĩkũyũ orthography was duly approved and gazetted by the colonial Government to be used not only in the Bible translation but also in translation of any other literature.⁵⁸¹

What is apparent in the resolutions introduced to standardise and unify the Gĩkũyũ language is that translation, in the first place, was a hegemonic process that facilitated the domestication as well as homogenisation of the language through the predetermined process of cooption and expansion of the linguistic tools. Since the Africans were not consulted or involved in the decision process, it was also an obvious imposition. But it is the fascination with the Gĩkũyũ language that opened the possibility of adaptation and assimilation. William B. Stevenson⁵⁸² had cautioned European learners not to suppose that they were dealing with a “very simple language” which could be spoken and learned easily. In his estimation, Gĩkũyũ constructions and inflections were “as logical and complex as those of a modern European language” and care had to be taken in its translation.⁵⁸³

Similar sentiments were echoed by John W. Arthur who in retrospect wrote that Gĩkũyũ language was an extraordinarily complicated Bantu language both in its construction and abundant idioms as well as proverbs.⁵⁸⁴ Marion Stevenson, commenting on the laborious task of “copying out of all the proper names of the

⁵⁸⁰ Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 137.

⁵⁸¹ The government would later try to introduce a new orthography. However, literate Africans conversant with the new orthography were very critical of its introduction and asked the Government to reconsider the matter. At the time Barlow overruled the Africans and recommended that “the adaptation of the new orthography would appear to be the only satisfactory way of arriving at uniformity in the writing of language.” This did not stop the Africans from seeking their voice to be heard. The new orthography was overwhelmingly rejected by Gĩkũyũ people. Barlow, “Language Work”, 16; BFBS resolution of 7th December 1934 p. 59 under point 5. *Gĩkũyũ* E.S.C. minis. November 8th 1933, see also E.S.C. mins., 52, BSA/E3/3/253/4, Kikuyu 4, (7th February 1935), BFBS archives; See also U.K.L.C. minutes of January 27th and 28th, 1914, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁵⁸² Prof. Stevenson was a brother to Marion Stevenson, a linguist and professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at the University of Glasgow. He was responsible of the grammatical phraseology of the Gĩkũyũ Grammar. See Barlow, *Tentative Studies*, Foreword.

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁴ Arthur, “Arthur Ruffelle Barlow”, 446

Bible, and adapting some seven hundred and fifty of them to Gĩkũyũ pronunciation and spelling”, expressed her concern on the act of rendering English idioms into Gĩkũyũ while ignoring Gĩkũyũ idiomatic expressions.⁵⁸⁵ Stevenson’s concerns prompted U.K.L.C. to direct those collecting such vocabularies to include remarks upon the people, their character, customs, relations as well as a general ethnographic value if it had a bearing in the subject of translation. Although European translators extended their own hegemony over the entire Gĩkũyũ community through translation, it is the power to assimilate and adopt (as discussed in chapter five and six) that would offer Africans the opportunity to mimic, engage, contest and even resist.

4.3.2 Translation as cultural imperialism: Ambivalence and Hybridity

Translation assumed certain inalienable cultural assumptions in the linguistic and literary activities. By reducing the Gĩkũyũ language into the written form, colonialism named and constituted the Gĩkũyũ language into a linguistic system whose coherence came through the grammatical grid of the Western linguistic system.⁵⁸⁶ The process as I have already shown reduced the Gĩkũyũ language into a suave uniformity that the translators could control. In the process the translators would have the ability and authority to purge the language of any undesirable elements. For example, U.K.L.C categorised some Gĩkũyũ words as acceptable to use in the Christian context and others as having vastly different meaning from the intended purpose.⁵⁸⁷ Barlow referred to this point as the problematic of “poverty of the native language in some directions and its richness in others”.⁵⁸⁸ For example,

⁵⁸⁵ Letter by Marion Stevenson to Dr. Kilgour dated November 14th 1912. BSA/E3/3/253/1, BFBS Archives; Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 245; See also U.K.L.C. minutes of January 27th and 28th, 1914, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁵⁸⁶ A good case in point is Barlow’s, *Tentative Studies in Gĩkũyũ Grammar and Idiom*, 1914.

⁵⁸⁷ Marion Stevenson is said to have collected some two hundred such words, and, after going over them with Mr Barlow, wrote down what they would convey to the natives in their district. This list was typed and sent to the other Missions, in order that they might add what the words meant in part of the country. Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 244.

⁵⁸⁸ “Language Report, 1943”, *Kikuyu News*, No. 169 (September 1944), 606.

while Gĩkũyũ *Ngai*⁵⁸⁹ was adopted for “God”, the term still needed to be purged of its indigenous meaning in order to render the meaning of “our Father all powerful, All-holy, all-wise, all-loving”.⁵⁹⁰ Barlow offered the best explanation as to why the term had to be adopted while at the same time exorcising its indigenous meaning. He stated that belief in God (“*Ngai*”) and *Ngai*’s existence compared to the biblical God in several ways. The term was universally admitted. *Ngai* possessed of transcendent power as the Lord of nature and source of life and increase. *Ngai*’s bounty and goodwill was as well recognised.⁵⁹¹ Like in the Jewish worldview *Ngai* was seen as a celestial being dwelling on mountain tops, invisible, immortal and conceived of as glorious (“Mwene-nyaga”). *Ngai* existed prior to beginnings of the “tribes” and was the disposer of events and arbiter of fate. *Ngai* was admitted to overrule humans’ actions, decide their fate and decreed the time of death. Like the Old Testament God, *Ngai* was a lawgiver establishing customs and interested to some degree in human affairs. *Ngai* communicated through dreams and gave prophetic utterances and of commands to the community through certain mediums. Invocation of *Ngai* and sacrifice to *Ngai* was believed to be an acknowledgment of God’s pre-eminence and power.⁵⁹²

⁵⁸⁹ The following terms had been considered before finally agreeing on *Ngai* as the best translation for God. Those considered included God = *Mũrungu*, Jehovah = *Yahua*, Adopted *baba* as being used as *father* in *our father* when addressing God (U.K.L.C. minutes of May 22nd and 27th, 1908, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers); Jehovah = taken as *Yehoba*; (U.K.L.C. minutes of June 17th, 1908, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers); God – *Ngai*, Jehovah – *Yehoba*, (U.K.L.C. minutes of June 7th, 1909, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁵⁹⁰ See Barlow’s notes on “Points of Comparison and Contrast between Kikuyu Religious Beliefs and Customs and Christianity” in “Conditions of Life and Religion in which the Missionary works in Africa Today”, Gen. 1786/2/21, Barlow Papers; Marion Stevenson, “The Gĩkũyũ Language Committee”, 117; Hopley equated the Kikuyu *Ngai* to the old Hebrew concept of Yahweh, though the idea was very vague and practically subconscious. C. W. Hopley, *Bantu Beliefs and Magic: With Particular Reference to the Kikuyu and Akamba Tribes of Kenya Colony; Together with some Reflections on East Africa After War* (London: H. F. & G. Witherby, 1922), 36.

⁵⁹¹ Shown by such oaths as “*Ngai ĩro ‘thũra!*” and such a blessing as “*Ũroheo nĩ Ngai!*”

⁵⁹² “Conditions of Life and Religion in which the Missionary works in Africa Today”, Gen. 1786/2/21, Barlow Papers.

However, on points of contrast Barlow argued there was general ignorance of the nature of God. *Ngai* was said to be unknown and remote and spoken of as though impersonal.⁵⁹³ Unlike Old Testament God *Ngai* was not a “jealous God” for *Ngai* permitted worship of other beings (“Ngoma”) as well as *Ngai-self*. *Ngai* rarely concerned *Ngai-self* with human affairs. *Ngai* remained aloof and was an object more of awe than of love and reverence. *Ngai* presence was undesired for *Ngai* was feared to bring misfortune. *Ngai* was amoral and did not take cognisance of human conduct and was as well as indifferent to infringement of moral codes. Although the Agĩkũyũ acknowledged that they were the “children of *Ngai*” they evinced a very inadequate conception of *Ngai* as their Father who never offered any revelation.⁵⁹⁴ Above all, Agĩkũyũ religious beliefs and practices were dependent upon oral transmission of tradition and therefore undependable. Communications claimed to be received from *Ngai* by Agĩkũyũ prophets or mediums were of doubtful authenticity and lacking in religious purpose. The translators as such accepted the term *Ngai* on the condition that teachings and preaching would be intensified in order to draw the distinction between *Ngai* of the Bible and Gĩkũyũ’s *Ngai*.

Falling in the same class as *Ngai* was the term *kũriũka*⁵⁹⁵ translated to refer to rising from the dead. This word did not carry the same meaning in its original use. Since the Gĩkũyũ did not have “resurrection” in mind when using the term, the reference was to one who having been very ill and put out in the bush to die somehow survived and returned home to live. Such a person was said to have *kũriũka*.

What these two examples reveal is that the translators had the power to choose and prescribe what they thought good for the Africans and what to dismiss.

Translators’ choice to retain a Gĩkũyũ concept for God also constrained the

⁵⁹³ Gen. 1786/2/21, Barlow Papers.

⁵⁹⁴ Gen. 1786/2/21, Barlow Papers.

⁵⁹⁵ See its first consideration in U.K.L.C. minutes of April 6th, 1909, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

universalising assumptions and totalising impulses in the translation process.⁵⁹⁶ More importantly, the process of Bible translation into African dialects, as Lamin Sanneh argues, afforded more than anything else the “indigenous discovery” of Christianity.⁵⁹⁷ In this light, translation can be understood as an act of reducing differences and bridging the cultural gulf.⁵⁹⁸ Sanneh posits that by translating the Bible into local languages and indigenous terminologies, the process opened the way for “indigenous innovation and motivation in the religious life.”⁵⁹⁹

4.3.3 Translation as Interpretation: Untranslatability of religious terminologies

I have already argued that translation is more than the simple transference of meaning from one language to another since it involves mental activities. Barnstone has convincingly argued that when a translator reads the source text, he or she commits into memory what has been read to be recalled when the translator commits to writing what he read.⁶⁰⁰ But before the writing happens, the translator will look for lexical equivalence of the source text in the targeted language – in our case Gĩkũyũ language. If the target language lacks convincing lexical equivalence, the translator will either borrow from elsewhere or create his own lexicon. Since all this happens simultaneously, the translator is in essence engaged in the hermeneutical process as an important act of translation. Once the new lexical equivalence is determined the translator resorts to writing his reading of the source texts. If we take this as a correct way of seeing translation, then I can argue that translation became a tactful and a shrewd way of introducing new religious concepts into the Gĩkũyũ language.

⁵⁹⁶ Such ambivalence is captured by Rafael in his discussion on native vernaculars and colonial-Christian order. See Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism*, 21.

⁵⁹⁷ In recasting the site, Sanneh gives priority to ‘indigenous response and local appropriation’ over and against missionary transmission and direction. Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity*, 10.

⁵⁹⁸ Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism*, 210ff.

⁵⁹⁹ Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity*, 10.

⁶⁰⁰ Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation*, 20-24.

Gĩkũyũ translators, through the reader-author strategy laid above, argued that it was difficult finding words to express abstract ideas such spirit, grace, eternity, and communion which were said to be non-existent in the Gĩkũyũ language.⁶⁰¹ The Gĩkũyũ equivalents for “Spirit”⁶⁰² were dismissed as unintelligible.⁶⁰³ This is in spite of the fact that there were some translators who believed that even though Africans languages may have been limited when it came to translating philosophical subjects, the Bantu vocabulary tended to be “larger than that of the average European language”.⁶⁰⁴ In order to overcome the difficulty in rendering religious terms not found in the Gĩkũyũ language, the Language Committee ruled that such words should be adopted directly from Swahili. This rule was referred to as “Gikuyuization”⁶⁰⁵ of the untranslatable words. As a rule all Biblical proper names had to be “Gikuyuized”. Gikuyuizing of the untranslatable terms meant direct adaptation of Swahili words or phrases from the Swahili version of the New Testament into Gĩkũyũ to fill in the linguistic gap.⁶⁰⁶ Since the translator believed that the Swahili Bible had closely followed the Greek version and that the use of Swahili Biblical proper names would induce a sense of familiarity to the reader,⁶⁰⁷ “Gikuyuizing” would serve as

⁶⁰¹ Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 244.

⁶⁰² Suggested words for “Spirit” included *Kĩruru* (Shadow), (U.K.L.C. minutes of May 27th, 1908, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers), University of Edinburgh Special Collection); *Kĩiruru, roho* (shadow or spirit), (U.K.L.C. minutes of June 7th, 1909, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers), University of Edinburgh Special Collection); Spirit = *Roho Mũtheru* (Holy Spirit), (U.K.L.C. minutes of March 17th -18th, 1909, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers), University of Edinburgh Special Collection); *Roho* (Spirit), (in general sense, good or bad) but the various Greek words translated by spirit in Revised Version was to be translated according to the discretion of translator by *ndaimono* (demon), *Ngoma* (phantom, apparition, ghost, departed spirit), *Ngoma*, qualified by *thũku* or *njũru*, evil spirit), (U.K.L.C. minutes of July 12th, 1916, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁶⁰³ Marion Stevenson, “The Gĩkũyũ Language Committee”, 117.

⁶⁰⁴ Doke here was quoting from G. P. Lestrade work on “European Influences upon the Development of Bantu Language and Literature” in *Western Civilization and the Natives of South Africa* (1934.) See C. M. Doke, “The Basis of Bantu Literature,” *Africa*, 18:4 (1948), 285.

⁶⁰⁵ U.K.L.C. minutes of April 6th, 1909, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁶⁰⁶ Marion Stevenson and others laboriously copied out and adapted some seven hundred and fifty of the proper names of the Bible to Kikuyu pronunciation and spelling. Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 245; See also U.K.L.C. minutes of June 15th, 1912, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁶⁰⁷ U.K.L.C. minutes of June 7th, 1909, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers); Letter by O. H. Scouten to Rev. R. Kilgour of BFBS on June 22nd 1909. BSA/E3/3/253/1; See also Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 130.

preparation towards unification of British East Africa bound together by a standardised Swahili.⁶⁰⁸ Examples of words that were “Gikuyuized” included “Temple” which was rendered as “*Hekaru*”;⁶⁰⁹ “Priest” as “*Mũkohani*”; “Pentecost” as “*Mbentekote*”;⁶¹⁰ “Sacrament” as “*Sakramento*”;⁶¹¹ Baptism as “*Ūbatithania*” (distributive); “*Ūbatithio*” (in single instance); and “*kūbatithania*” (to baptise);⁶¹² “Catechism” as “*Katekithima*”⁶¹³ or “*Katekisimo*”⁶¹⁴; Church (body of elect) as “*Ikanisa*”, (ma);⁶¹⁵ “Cross” as “*Mūsalaba*”;⁶¹⁶ and “Wine” as “*Devei*”⁶¹⁷ among others. The rule was revised later with emphasis that foreign words including Swahili ones introduced into Gĩkũyũ were to be transliterated.⁶¹⁸ As a result of this new revision, most of the words given above and others as well were all transliterated. A good case in point is “Satan”, rendered in Swahili as “*Cetani*” and transliterated as “*Shaitani*”.⁶¹⁹

Nonetheless, certain words retained their Hebraic or Greek forms because they were thought to have no exact equivalences in Gĩkũyũ. The translators argued that in order to retain the “purity” of the ideas that these words conveyed the words had to retain their original form. In order to justify this argument Barlow unequivocally pointed out that Gĩkũyũ translators faced the problem of reconciling “Hebrew forms

⁶⁰⁸ K. Roehl suggested that Swahili as a language had an extraordinary vitality and unique adaptability to the mental world of African people that it qualified to become the lingua franca of the region. Roehl, “The Linguistic Situation in East Africa”, 199; see also U.K.L.C. minutes of June 7th, 1909, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers); Letter by O. H. Scouten to Rev. R. Kilgour of BFBS on June 22nd 1909, BSA/E3/3/253/1; See also Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 130.

⁶⁰⁹ U.K.L.C. minutes of June 17th, 1908, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹¹ Ibid.

⁶¹² U.K.L.C. minutes of June 17th, 1908, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁶¹³ Ibid.

⁶¹⁴ U.K.L.C. minutes of June 7th, 1909, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁶¹⁵ U.K.L.C. minutes of March 17th-18th, 1909, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁶¹⁶ March 17th-18th, 1909, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers.)

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

⁶¹⁸ U.K.L.C. minutes of January 27th and 28th, 1914, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁶¹⁹ U.K.L.C. minutes of June 17th, 1908, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers); See also Blakeslee, *Beyond the Kikuyu Curtain*, 41.

of thought and expression with Gikūyū speech idioms and ways of thinking”.⁶²⁰ While the Gikūyū modes of expression “fit in surprisingly well”, Barlow argued that there existed “a great gulf” between these thoughts and the Hebrew mind.⁶²¹ What made it more difficult is that “Gikūyū mentality at its present stage of development, taken at its average, has but little understanding of anything that is not straightforwardly prosaic and literal.”⁶²² Even though the poetic character of the Gikūyū mind was evident in their “traditional songs”, Barlow concluded that “the Gikūyū mind is cast in a mould which is anything but poetical.”⁶²³ For the translator, for example, the problem was how to render Old Testament “highly poetical literature” in “a form of speech accustomed almost entirely to expressing the prosaic and ordinary”.⁶²⁴ I find it difficult to reconcile how the Gikūyū language could on one hand have constructions and inflections that were “as logical and complex as those of a modern European language”⁶²⁵ and on the other the mind that produced it as unimaginative and literal. Rafael argues that such a notion is indicative of the intrinsic superiority of some languages in the conveyance of the word of God.⁶²⁶ However, as Rafael has observed the “very untranslatability of Christian signs” presented the possibility of dodging the full weight of the translators’ intentions where the same word could be reread in different ways by native converts.⁶²⁷

Behind the view of untranslatability is the fact of difference within and between languages.⁶²⁸ This notion helps reiterate that perfect translatability is

⁶²⁰ “Language Report, 1943”, *Kikuyu News*, No. 169 (September 1944), 606.

⁶²¹ Ibid.

⁶²² Ibid.

⁶²³ “Language Report, 1943”, 606.

⁶²⁴ Ibid.

⁶²⁵ Barlow, *Tentative Studies*, Foreword. Prof. Stevenson, a brother to Marion Stevenson (one of the earliest missionaries in Gikūyū country), and professor of Hebrew and Old Testament, was responsible of the grammatical phraseology of the Gikūyū Grammar.

⁶²⁶ Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism*, 29.

⁶²⁷ Ibid., 117.

⁶²⁸ Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation*, 42.

impossible. It is this reality that frustrated translators most. Barlow for example, could not hide his frustrations over the many problems “connected in the endeavour to arrive at a clear idea of the first writer’s meaning”.⁶²⁹ Barlow wrote further that “one is often embarrassed by the grammatical meticulousness of the language or by the numerous possibilities presented for one’s choice. I once tabulated no fewer than twenty-six ways of rendering ‘But a faithful man who can find?’ (Prov. xx. 6), each with some difference in grammatical construction, or in emphasis, or in its ‘way of putting it’!”⁶³⁰ At such moments of exasperation, biblical commentators offered little help because they were greatly at variance both in their expert opinions as to the right reading of the Hebrew or Greek and as to the sense it was originally intended to convey.⁶³¹ Barlow was again at a loss when it came to such translation as of 1 John 2, 12-14, “I write unto you” (present), “I have written unto you” (perfect) or “I wrote”.⁶³² In the first instance, the present would be referring to the present Epistle, while in the perfect it would be referring to either previous Epistle or John’s Gospel. However, the perfect in English is considered non-committal and covered only hypotheses. On the other hand the perfect in Gikūyū according to Barlow would “only refer to what precedes in the present.” Because of perceived linguistic and ambiguity of the text as well as doctrinal interests Barlow rendered the verse in question as “I wrote” in reference to or alluding to the Gospel. He argued that there was no suitable alternative in Gikūyū.⁶³³ To resolve this problem, the translators had to discover a

⁶²⁹ Barlow had been requested by the Bible Society’s Translations Superintendent to give a short account of the difficulties encountered in Bible translation. “Language Report, 1943”, 605.

⁶³⁰ “Language Report, 1943”, 606.

⁶³¹ Ibid., 605.

⁶³² Letter by Mr. A. Ruffell Barlow to the Editor Superintendent of BFBS as reply in a letter dated, February 20th 1919, BSA/E3/3/253/2.

⁶³³ Ibid.

“*via media*, avoiding with regret one or another attractively definite rendering, in order to preserve the indefiniteness of the original while yet making good sense”.⁶³⁴

4.3.4 Translation as Scriptural Imperialism: Denominational and nationality rivalry

The other major difficulty to be overcome through U.K.L.C. was denominational and nationality rivalry caused by conflicting values, prejudices and religious convictions. The problem had emerged during the uncoordinated private translations of scriptures by the pioneering missionaries. The first Gospel to be translated in Gĩkũyũ was the book of John translated by McGregor (C.M.S.) published by the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1903. The Church of Scotland Mission independently of the others through the National Bible Society of Scotland had a few years later published their own version of Mark’s gospel which had been translated by Barlow. This move was interpreted by the British and Foreign Bible Society as antagonistic and through a series of correspondences the latter sought clarification as to why this had been allowed to happen.⁶³⁵ The matter was laid to rest with the formation of the united language committee.

A more serious problem arose when the African Inland Mission not to be overtaken by the rest requested the American Bible Society in 1912 to help in the publication of Luke’s Gospel.⁶³⁶ The Americans had plans through Rev. William Porter Knapp⁶³⁷ (a member of the united language committee) to go on and have their

⁶³⁴ “Language Report, 1943”, 605.

⁶³⁵ For a span of several years the matter was discussed through a chain of correspondences between Rev. Dr. R. Kilgour of the Editorial Superintendent of British and Foreign Bible Society (himself a retired missionary of Church of Scotland Mission Society) and Rev. R. H. Falconer of National Bible Society of Scotland, BSA/E3/3/253/1, BFBS Archives.

⁶³⁶ Letter by John Fox of American Bible Society to Rev. Dr. R. Kilgour of BFBS dated March 8th 1912. See also the latter’s reply, March 19th 1912, BSA/E3/3/253/1, BFBS Archives.

⁶³⁷ Rev. William Porter Knapp simply known as “Bwana Knapp” arrived in 1899 and was joined by Dr. John E. Henderson a British Baptist born in Jamaica in 1901. They both resided in Kambui in South Gĩkũyũ country as missionaries of the American Gospel Missionary Society (G.M.S.) G.M.S. was an American missionary society composed of the Baptists and revivalists and a direct product of the

own translation of Luke. This importuned a sharp rebuke from Dr. Kilgour, Editorial Superintendent of the British and Foreign Bible Society. Kilgour reminded John Fox of the American Bible Society that the BFBS was the only Society which had a department which dealt solely with editorial questions.⁶³⁸ Its plan was for the “unification of translational work in East Africa upon a scientific and far-seeing basis”.⁶³⁹ Entry of other Bible Societies in the field would complicate matters in terms of publication, circulation and distribution. Kilgour went as far as terming the American action “an unfriendly act.”⁶⁴⁰ The Americans on the other hand claimed liberty to translate and publish the Gospel of Luke as a right just as the Scots had done with Mark and the English had with John. They also claimed that they had had their Gikũyũ version of Luke in circulation for at least six months as a tentative version used in the A.I.M. sphere of influence.

The B.F.B.S. was relentless and invoked missionary comity that it alleged gave it the monopoly of translating and publishing scripture in Kenya.⁶⁴¹ Kilgour dismissed the question of nationality that the Americans were raising as a non-issue. More so, the B.F.B.S. argued, the absurdity of the whole thing was when the Agikũyũ would be forced to go to different Bible societies for different Gospels and the difficulty this would create when the whole New Testament came to be published.⁶⁴²

Moody and Sankey revival in America of the 1870’s and 80’s. G.M.S. missionaries behind this movement were Rev. T.N. Krieger and his wife, Rev. W. P. Knapp and his wife Myrtle Ingersoll, and Margaret Wheeler. The Kriegers arrived in Kenya in 1895 and had close links to African Inland Mission. G.M.S. later affiliated itself with an eventual merger with the Church of Scotland Mission. Wanyoike, *An African Pastor*, 22.

⁶³⁸ Letters by Rev. Dr. R. Kilgour of BFBS to John Fox of American Bible Society to dated June 1st & 25th 1912, See the latter’s reply, June 12th 1912, BSA/E3/3/253/1, BFBS Archives.

⁶³⁹ Letter by Rev. Dr. R. Kilgour of BFBS to Rev. R. H. Falconer of National Bible Society of Scotland, dated Jul 15th 1912, BSA/E3/3/253/1, BFBS Archives.

⁶⁴⁰ The question of nationality of those involved in translating John and Mark was brought to bear and the Americans were claiming liberty in matters of translation. Letter by Rev. Dr. R. Kilgour of BFBS to John Fox of American Bible Society to dated June 25th 1912, See latter’s reply of July 4th 1912, BSA/E3/3/253/1, BFBS Archives.

⁶⁴¹ Letters by Rev. Dr. R. Kilgour of BFBS to John Fox of American Bible Society to dated July 17th 1912. BSA/E3/3/253/1, BFBS Archives.

⁶⁴² Ibid.

With all kinds of arm twisting and accusations the B.F.B.S left the Americans in a very awkward situation. Instead the A.I.M. established their own publishing house at Kijabe through which most of its translations and other publications were done.⁶⁴³ Consequently, the U.K.L.C. decided not to have Dr. Henderson do any more translation work.⁶⁴⁴ In addition, the Committee ruled that any book of the Bible for general publication was to be submitted to the Language Committee for criticism. No editorial approval by the B.F.B.S. would be received for any translation that did not go through the Translation Committee.⁶⁴⁵ In like manner, none could be accepted by any of the contributory Societies until it had been passed by the U.K.L.C.⁶⁴⁶

4.4 The Colonial Situation and Translation as an “In-between” Space

Though colonial translation played a significant role in the domination of the Africans, it could not gain absolute control either in language or culture. On their part, the colonised translated themselves into the dominant culture by way of accommodation and mimicry.⁶⁴⁷ Through such acts of appropriation, translation opened up the possibility of invoking equally forceful acts of questioning, resistance and even reverse racism.⁶⁴⁸ When positively appropriated, translation took a new form: creolisation.⁶⁴⁹ Creolisation used in the Caribbean context of the term “Creole”,

⁶⁴³ Rev. Garrioch of Church of Scotland helped in proof-reading Matthew and Luke. Letter by John T. Garrioch (former Hon. Secretary of the United Kikuyu Language Committee) to Dr. Kilgour, August 17th 1915. BSA/E3/3/253/2, BFBS archives.

⁶⁴⁴ Letter by Dr. John W. Arthur to Dr. Kilgour Editor Superintendent of BFBS, July 26th 1916, BSA/E3/3/253/2, BFBS archives. Matthew (Leakey) and Luke (Henderson) were published in 1915 and Mark (Barlow) followed in 1917. Barlow also did the revision of John’s Gospel.

⁶⁴⁵ Letters by Rev. A. W. McGregor to the Superintendent of B.F.B.S on February 10th 1909 and the latter’s reply to Rev. A.W. McGregor dated March 20th, 1909, BSA/E3/3/253/1, BFBS Archives.

⁶⁴⁶ All translations of the Books of the Bible passed by the U. K. L.C. had to bear the words, “This translation has been passed by the United Kikuyu Language Committee”. By doing so nobody else could come up with a translation and claim its authenticity. In a great measure as we shall see later, this bye-law curtailed any African initiative to come up with an acceptable translation. United Kikuyu Language Committee (U.K.L.C.) Minutes 6/4/1908 -15/8/1933, Gen. 1786/5 1a and 1b, (Barlow papers). This bye-law was revised and confirmed in the U.K.L.C. minutes of June 15th, 1912, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁶⁴⁷ See Bhabha’s chapter five “Sly Civility”, in Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 132-144.

⁶⁴⁸ wa Thiong’o, *Writers in Politics*, 18-25.

⁶⁴⁹ The term “creolisation” is borrowed from the Caribbean “Creole”.

refers to translation as “displacement, the carrying over and transformation of the dominant culture into new identities that take on material elements from the culture of their new location.”⁶⁵⁰ In the postcolonial concept, translation is viewed as “a space of re-empowerment”.⁶⁵¹ Viewed this way, cultural interactions transformed the colonised from the passive victims of translation to active translators who recognise that they were in charge of their destiny. As such translation became a performative act of decolonisation.

4.4.1 Africans’ Role in Translation: Awakening, Questioning and Resistance

One thing that is apparent by now is that Africans’ role in the translation process, though crucial, was never given attention and in most cases was glossed over in missionaries’ reports.⁶⁵² Although the European translators claimed entitlement to the authorial power to translate drawing benefits from and depending on the Africans’ efforts, they refused the autonomy or independence of African translators. It is to be remembered that one of the by-laws of U.K.L.C. stated that all translations of the books of the Bible passed by the U. K. L.C. had to bear the words, “This translation has been passed by the United Kikuyu Language Committee”.⁶⁵³ The idea was to safeguard against any party apart from the U.K.L.C. from carrying out translation work.⁶⁵⁴ Since only European missionaries appointed by their mission societies formed the membership of the translating committee, it went without saying that Africans could only participate as observers, assessors, or assistants. The by-laws

⁶⁵⁰ Young, *Postcolonialism*, 142.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid.

⁶⁵² Individual missionaries used Africans as assessors or assistants. Missionaries had the liberty as translators to dismiss their assessors at will. For example Barlow discharged Reuben who had been his assistant and “well of Gikūyū, my critic, and research worker for more than eight years” in order to have New Year’s gift of “a fresh mind” to “irrigate the linguistic field” even though Reuben had been “trained so well as he had in his employer’s ways and wants”. Barlow, “language Work, 1944”, 693.

⁶⁵³ See footnote no. 169 above.

⁶⁵⁴ U.K.L.C. minutes of June 15th, 1912, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

curtailed Africans' initiatives from coming up with any acceptable translation.⁶⁵⁵

Africans' opinions on translations were almost always relegated to a second place in the translation process. The individual missionary's decision on the subject matter was the one brought forward to the Language Committee for criticism and approval. Yet European translators remained handicapped without the help of their African "assessors". Barlow, for example, relied heavily on the Mission teachers and students as well as elders from various districts.⁶⁵⁶ These men and women would be asked to write on specific subjects and Barlow would later edit them. Harry Leakey likewise had in his employment Stefano⁶⁵⁷ who accompanied him to England on furlough in order to "have someone who spoke Gĩkũyũ on his first furlough in England" to keep up his knowledge of the language.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁵ This was the general understanding with the exception of a few Africans who were involved in the early works of translation. In 1895 Johana Gona (an African catechist) made a version of Matthew's Gospel in Giriya which was revised by Rev. D. A. Hooper (C.M.S.) and Rev. Taylor and published by the British and Foreign Bible Society. Another African to work as a translator was Abdullah who worked with Rev. F. Würtz of the Neukirchen Mission to translate Mark's Gospel in Galla and published in 1894 by the British and Foreign Bible Society. John Otieno worked together with Mr. A. Morrison (a magistrate in Nairobi) to translate one of the Luo versions of Mark's Gospel. Horace R. A. Philp, *A New Day in Kenya* (London: World Dominion Press, 1936), 176-181.

⁶⁵⁶ Authorities used by Barlow included Robinson Kimani on Proverbs, Kahahu wa Wang'ati on Gĩkũyũ; Muthũku wa Mwĩthiga (mbari-ya-Kĩnoo) on Songs; William Waweru (Mahiga) on killing of "Mũrogi". Rev. Benjamin Githieya; Esau Karanja (Mahiga) on Inheritance of widows and story on "Executing of thief or Wizard"; Joshua Matenjwa of Kikuyu teacher in the mission on "ũhoro wa Ngoma"; Together with Arthur Wang'ondũ of Kikuyu; Stanely Kahahu – Junior school teacher at Kikuyu; Paulo Kahehia (Kikuyu) on Sacrifice; Kahahu wa Wang'ati (Kikuyu) on "Ndahĩkanio"; Nathan Ngũgĩ (Kikuyu) on Songs (Mũthũngũcĩ, gĩcukia); Jakobo Kairanja, junior teacher in Kikuyu on *ũrigiti* and on "Recent History". Kairanja also wrote about European military suppression and also about "the Itũka Ceremonies" with the assistance of Nathan Ngũgĩ. Douglas Mũchoki (Kikuyu) on Songs (Mũgoiyo, Ngũcũ); Simon Nguru; Tabitha N.; Asafu Mũigai on buying and selling. See Gĩkũyũ Various notes, e.t.c, vol. I, Gen. 1785/6 and vol. II, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁶⁵⁷ Stefano might be the "freed slave" (mentioned elsewhere) at the East African coast who was always thought to be a Masaai; but when opportunity came to take him to the new mission station at Kabete, he proved to be Kikuyu, and as such, a most valuable help in Gĩkũyũ. See Crabtree, "The Systematic Study of African Languages", 185.

⁶⁵⁸ Stefano had returned an excellent English speaker and became chief assistant to Rev. Leakey in all his work on language. Stefano later took a job as chief interpreter at the High Court in Nairobi. In 1910 on another furlough Rev. Leakey took Ishmael Ithongo with hope that the government take him and release Stefano whom he wanted in order to continue assisting in translation work. Others Africans included Paul Kahahu and Matthew Njoroge. L.S.B. Leakey, *White African* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1937), 14 and 26; see also letter to Rev. Leonard Beecher (then Bishop of Mombasa) by Mr. Benson dated May 18th, 1956. Gen. 1785/1, (Barlow papers).

4.4.1a Charles Mūhoru Kareri

Translation, however, captivated the Africans' imagination and creativity. One of the Africans who played pivotal role in the translation of the Bible to Gĩkũyũ language despite the discriminatory by-law was Charles Mūhoru Kareri. Highly intelligent and well capable of carrying out translation work on his own, Kareri translated most of the *Psalms* by himself using Swahili and English Bibles.⁶⁵⁹ In retrospect, Kareri wrote, "I would translate about six or ten *Psalms*, then I would sit down and read them with Barlow to agree about how the words would follow one another. After reading and correcting the *Psalms* I had translated, I would be left to work on the others alone."⁶⁶⁰ He travelled all over Gĩkũyũ country collecting words and evaluating how such words were used in different Gĩkũyũ dialects. Kareri aimed at collecting and using "archaic words" which he feared would be lost if not preserved in written form.⁶⁶¹ In his opinion, though some of these words were difficult to most readers, he would rather people use a dictionary than lose the original Gĩkũyũ. Kareri strongly felt that it was his responsibility to preserve the words for the benefit of the community.⁶⁶² Kareri saw himself as a man with a mission. Nonetheless, without proper training in translation work, the encouragement and further opportunities, Kareri found comfort in leaving the work to the man he highly exalted when he wrote: "In 1934, I realized that Barlow knew Gikuyu better than me".⁶⁶³

⁶⁵⁹ Kareri, *The Life of Charles Muhoro Kareri*, 52.

⁶⁶⁰ Even though he was doing what missionaries like Barlow were doing, Kareri saw himself as an assessor. Barlow on the other hand referred to him as his "African co-operator". Kareri, *The Life of Charles Muhoro Kareri*, 52. See also "Language Work", *Kikuyu News*, no. 132 (June 1932), 16.

⁶⁶¹ Kareri, *The Life of Charles Muhoro Kareri*, 52.

⁶⁶² There were times when he would spend a day together with Barlow arguing over certain Gĩkũyũ words as they polished and added more into the language. He also translated invectives for Mr. Barlow. Most of his work found its way not only in the Bible but also in Barlow's dictionary and Benson's dictionary mentioned elsewhere. Kareri, *The Life of Charles Muhoro Kareri*, 52.

⁶⁶³ Bildad Kaggia likewise talked of Barlow as "a Scot...a famous Kikuyu linguist for whom I had great admiration...the only *mzungu* I heard speak with the proper Kikuyu intonations." Bildad Kaggia, *Roots of Freedom 1921-1963: The Autobiography of Bildad Kaggia* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1975), 51; Kareri, *The Life of Charles Muhoro Kareri*, 52.

4.4.1b The African Christian Language Conference

Another example of African awakening occurring through Bible translation is an African Christian language conference summoned by the U.K.L.C. in Nairobi and held on January 8th, 1910 in order to help the European translators test some of the words they had accumulated.⁶⁶⁴ Barlow and Leakey were to be present and report their findings to the U.K.L.C.⁶⁶⁵ The purpose of the conference was to have Gĩkũyũ words studied and discussed.⁶⁶⁶ Most remarkably, some Africans brought to the attention of the conference that the word *Mũkohani*⁶⁶⁷ (already introduced from the Kiswahili stem *-kuhani*) was objectionable as a word to represent “priest” owing to the existence of the word *Mũkuuhani* (a fornicator) already in Gĩkũyũ. Considerable time was spent in examining other possible words to express the “sacrificial priest” of the Bible. Finally it was unanimously decided among the Africans that *Mũhakithia Ngai* was the best rendering for one whose main occupation was to officiate at sacrifices.⁶⁶⁸ Nevertheless, Barlow and Leakey rejected the Africans’ recommendation for “priest” – *Mũhakithia Ngai* arguing that it was not the accurate

⁶⁶⁴ Unlike in the Europeans meetings for the Language Committee where names of members present were entered and apologies included, the names of the Gĩkũyũ present in the African language conference were not given. Those in attendance were merely referred to as “natives present”.

⁶⁶⁵ Lists of words decided upon by the Committee were first sent to all Missions in Gĩkũyũ country asking them to go over them carefully at each station. Each station was also expected to send at least one or two African representatives to the conference. U.K.L.C. minutes of January 8th, 1910, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁶⁶⁶ Some of the important words adopted as a result of the conference included *Ndumĩrĩri* and *Ūhoro mwega* to refer to “a succinct, specific message” as with John the Baptist while *Ngumo* should be used to refer to “merely fame or reputation”. Also adapted was *Mũhianano* “likeness, representations”, but only of concrete things; *Thimo* for “proverb”, suitable for parable where meaning is concealed while *Ngerekano* (a clearing up, disclosure of a saying) would be suitable for the parable of the sower. It was also concluded that *thimo* could be used as an explanation of parable by Christ to his disciple. *Rĩathani* (singular), *Maathani* (Plural) was unanimously decided upon as a word which could best translate “the Ten Commandments” as covering both the affirmative and negative commands. U.K.L.C. minutes of January 8th, 1910, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁶⁶⁷ Words for the Priest, Prophet, Rabbi and Preacher had be evaluated and vetted in different Committee’s meetings. Here are some of the words tested and evaluated *Preacher* = *mĩrutani*, *mũũmbũria*, *mũhubiri* (Swahili), *mũhunja*; *Priest* = *Mũkohani* (Swahili); *Prophet* = *mĩraguri*, *mũndũ wa nyama ya mbũri*; (these were considered in U.K.L.C. minutes of June 17th, 1908, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers). Rabbi or teacher – *murutani*; Master – *mumenyeria*, *murutani*, *Mwene*; Preacher – *murutani*, *muumburia*, *muhubiri*, *muhunja*; (These were also addressed in U.K.L.C. minutes of April 6th, 1909, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁶⁶⁸ U.K.L.C. minutes of January 8th, 1910, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

rendering of the term “priest”.⁶⁶⁹ Eventually, U.K.L.C., following the recommendation of the two European translators, unilaterally dropped *Mũkohani* and *Mũruti igongona* replacing it with a new word introduced into the Gĩkũyũ lexicon *Muthĩĩri Ngai* or *Muthĩĩri wa Ngai* for priest. U.K.L.C. also opted to use *Munabii* (singular) and *A-nabii* (plural) for “prophet” - a Swahili word transliterated into Gĩkũyũ.⁶⁷⁰

4.4.1c Bildad Kaggia

Bildad Kaggia⁶⁷¹, unlike other African assessors and assistants, directly questioned and openly opposed the unilateral decisions missionaries took in translating certain words in the Gĩkũyũ New Testament and other existing translated portions of the Old Testament. He was greatly surprised after reading translated Gĩkũyũ version of the New Testament to discover a number of translation mistakes.⁶⁷²

Kaggia wrote,

I found so many that I made a complete amendment of the Kikuyu New Testament. I did it with great enthusiasm. I remembered that the Bible text is not the original one. The present version was a result of scholars’ doctoring! It would not be a wonder if the Anglican European-Kikuyu linguists doctored their version further, I thought. It was time to prepare in Kikuyu the right version, just as it is read in Britain and without the missionaries’ mistranslations.⁶⁷³

⁶⁶⁹ U.K.L.C. minutes of October 3rd, 1910, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁶⁷⁰ U.K.L.C. minutes of September 25th, 1914, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁶⁷¹ Bildad Kaggia, born in 1922, was one of the founding fathers of the Nation of Kenya. He was one of the famous *Kapenguria Six* freedom fighters (Himself, Jomo Kenyatta, Achieng Oneko, Kũng’ũ Karũmba, Paul Ngei and Fred Kubai) who were detained by the colonial government during the struggle for independence in Kenya. He was known for his courage, radicalism and adherence to truth. After school in 1939 he worked in the District Commissioner’s office in Fort Hall. He had been baptised and brought up an Anglican, in the Church Missionary Society. He also served as a World War II serviceman in army who was quickly got his promotion to a Staff-Sergeant and finally Quartermaster-Sergeant. After his return to Kenya in 1946 from the war, he became a trade union activist, and rose rapidly to become leader of the Labour Trade Union of East Africa. He also started a newsletter *Inooro ria Gikuyu* (Whetstone Of Gikuyu). Bildad Kaggia died on March 7 2005.

⁶⁷² Kaggia, *Roots of Freedom*, 48.

⁶⁷³ Ibid.

To understand Kaggia's position, it is important to retrace where his conviction about "scholars' doctoring" the Bible came from. During his career as a soldier during World War II, Kaggia had the opportunity of visiting Jerusalem. His two trips to Jerusalem while on military leave and one on military training as a Christian group Bible study leader left an indelible mark in him. It also widened his biblical perspective, from naivety to realism.⁶⁷⁴ During the second visit he wrote:

I was not the 'simple Kaggia' thinking of heavenly Jerusalem.⁶⁷⁵ Now I intended to find out the truth. A strange question had arisen in my mind. Why had the Europeans, who were arrogant and more civilized than the Jews in Palestine, accepted a Jew as their God? Did they teach the Bible in England the way they taught it to us? Or was it only when they Christianized the 'heathen African' that this was their attitude?⁶⁷⁶

The conversation with an official of the museum in Jerusalem left him reeling. It is here he learnt for the first time that the Gospels were a reconstruction of "scholars" which took many years before the New Testament could be completed. Kaggia continued, "This knowledge shook my belief that the Bible was the inspired word of God. It dawned on me that the 'scholars' had constructed the writings in their own way. They had used their knowledge, elaborating, exaggerating and adding as they wished to make the story sweet and convincing."⁶⁷⁷ Armed with this knowledge and with the glaring translation errors, Kaggia decided to retranslate the Gĩkũyũ New Testament.

During his official posting in Britain, Kaggia took his complete revision of the translated Gĩkũyũ version to the offices of the B.F.B.S. which had published the Gĩkũyũ New Testament and met with G. Cowan, the publishing superintendent.

⁶⁷⁴ Kaggia, *Roots of Freedom*, 38-39.

⁶⁷⁵ On his first visit to Jerusalem he was greatly disappointed and disillusioned when his "vision of Jerusalem" in Palestine as a "golden Jerusalem" in heaven was shattered by the "real Jerusalem" he saw on his visit. "The heavenly Jerusalem" was always more real to him than "the Jerusalem which existed in Palestine." He was so startled to believe what he was seeing in relationship to the Jerusalem he was so sure of going to after his death, *Ibid.*, 28.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

Kaggia wanted his revisions published (this was quite naïve but revolutionary.) His visit to the London office coincided with John W. Arthur's furlough in Scotland. At the time, Arthur was the chairman of U.K.L.C. After being convinced that there were serious translation mistakes that needed attention, Cowan is said to have desired an urgent review. Cowan arranged for an appointment for Kaggia to meet with Arthur in Cowan's office. Though John Arthur had not translated any of the New Testament books, to Kaggia's satisfaction, he spoke Gĩkũyũ, unlike G. Cowan who knew nothing about the language. After "two full days" of argument with Arthur, the missionary finally agreed that Kaggia's "amended New Testament" should be forwarded for consideration to the U.K.L.C.⁶⁷⁸

Some of the examples that Kaggia cited as having been wrongly translated included first the contentious rendering of the term "prophet", which had already been discussed in the African Language Conference mentioned above. The Gĩkũyũ version now read *mũnabii*,⁶⁷⁹ a word which Kaggia said was borrowed from Swahili, *nabii*. Kaggia was aware of the fact that loaning words from other languages enriches a language. He pointed out, "I was not against borrowing new words, as borrowing enriches a language, but I was very much against borrowing a word when there was a suitable Kikuyu word."⁶⁸⁰ There was already in Gĩkũyũ a suitable word *mũrathi* for prophet. As such Kaggia argued there was no reason to use a Swahili word which the Gĩkũyũ would not understand.

Arthur's objection to Kaggia's proposal was on two fronts. First, the original meaning of *mũrathi* was "a heathen false prophet". Second, there was no difference between *mũrathi* and *mũndũ-mũgo* (medicine man or witchdoctor). Kaggia challenged

⁶⁷⁸ Kaggia, *Roots of Freedom*, 50.

⁶⁷⁹ See examples of this in Matthew 1:22, 16:14, Luke 2:36 (in reference to Anna the prophetess), 4:24; John 4:19; Hebrews 1:1 in B.F.B.S., *Kĩrĩkanĩro Kĩrĩa Kĩerũ Kĩa Jesu Kristo Ũrĩa Mwathani witũ o na Mũhonokia Witũ* (London: B.F.B.S., 1926).

⁶⁸⁰ Kaggia, *Roots of Freedom*, 49.

Arthur's conclusion arguing that in Israel there were both false and true prophets and the term prophet was used for both only with added adjective. Logically, he postulated Agĩkũyũ knew that there were two kinds of *mũrathi*, a true one who was accepted as speaking on behalf of *Ngai* and the pretender who if found out was immediately punished by death. Kaggia also categorically denied Arthur's sweeping generalisation. The *mũrathi* was distinctively different from *mũndũ-mũgo*. *Mũrathi*, Kaggia argued, had free access to *Ngai* while *mũndũ-mũgo* used witchcraft and information gathered from the 'client'. Kaggia wondered why the Jews and the Arabs did not invent new words for God or prophet when they learnt of the 'new' god but continued using the old ones. He pointed out that missionaries, in like manner, did not stop the use of the Gĩkũyũ *Ngai* or *Mwene Nyaga* despite the "heathen" origin of the two terms. He denounced as a double standard for the missionaries to reject other Gĩkũyũ words that were as valid as *Ngai*.⁶⁸¹

Kaggia also challenged the use of the word *ngoma* for "devil" which he saw as "a gross mistranslation" for the Agĩkũyũ term *ngoma* referred to ancestral spirits which Agĩkũyũ revered. *Ngoma* acted according to the behaviour of the living community. If the living did annoy the spirits, evil was assured to befall not only on the family that aggrieved such a spirit but the community as well. But after appeasing the spirits either by sprinkling beer or slaughtering, normalcy was restored. In using the term *Ngoma* for "Devil", Kaggia postulated, the translation implied "evil spirits". In Arthur's opinion, the worship given to "*Ngoma*" went against the first of the Ten Commandments. "*Ngoma*" monopolised attention and took a more prominent place than God in the life of the people. Such worship (of "*Ngoma*"), therefore, was unnecessary, wrong and insulting to God. Christianity taught direct access to God and

⁶⁸¹ Kaggia, *Roots of Freedom*, 50.

the worship of God alone.⁶⁸² However, for Kaggia there was “nothing evil about the spirit of one’s mother or father.”⁶⁸³

Kaggia’s observation is important because U.K.L.C. translated ἄδης as used in its genitive form ἄδου in Matthew 16:18 to refer to “of Hades” as *kündũ kwa Ngoma* (abode of Spirits).⁶⁸⁴ However, in verse 23 where Peter is rebuke by Jesus and pointedly referred to as σατανᾶ, U.K.L.C. rendered that translation as *Shaitani* (a Gĩkũyũ transliteration of Swahili *Cetani*). It begs the question, since there was no Gĩkũyũ equivalence for “Devil” or “Satan” or “Demon” (as evident in the rendering of Matthew 16:18), why would the missionaries liberally apply Gĩkũyũ terms when it came to the evil aspect of demonic or satanic manifestations or demonic abode? I am of the opinion that this was intentional misrepresentation of the term *kündũ kwa Ngoma*. It is an example of the colonial ideological model that delighted in categorising Africans’ religious and cultural tenets in demonic terms. The best translation of “Hades” would have to use the expression given by S. Njũgũna “*gũthiĩ na mĩriinĩ ya mĩkongoe*” (i.e. lest they become lost in the “bowels of the earth {lit., go down to the roots of the mythical “*mikongoe*” trees}).⁶⁸⁵

The other translation text that Kaggia challenged was the Gĩkũyũ rendering of Galatians 6:6. The English text read “Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.” The Gĩkũyũ translation of the verse was:

⁶⁸² See also “Conditions of Life and Religion in which the Missionary works in Africa Today” in Gen. 1786/2/21 (Barlow Papers); Boyes, *King of the Wa-Kikuyu*, 156 (footnote 1.)

⁶⁸³ Kaggia, *Roots of Freedom*, 49; See also Stanley Kĩama Gathĩgĩra, *Mĩikarĩre ya Agĩkũyũ* (Nairobi: C.M.S. Bookshop, 1937), 30-34.

⁶⁸⁴ See Matthew 16:18 in *Kĩrĩkanĩro Kĩrĩa Kĩerũ Kĩa Jesu Kristo Ūrĩa Mwathani witũ o na Mũhonokia Witũ* (London: B.F.B.S, 1926) as well as U.K.L.C. minutes of September 25th, 1914, Gen. 1785/7, (Barlow papers).

⁶⁸⁵ Njũgũna used the expression to caution the Agĩkũyũ about the possibility of losing their old ways of speech and thus warned that their speech or way of expression may be lost in the “bowels of the earth” or “Hades”. See S. Njuguna wa Karucha, “Mahinda ma Agikuyu”, *Muigwithania wa Andu na Bururi wa Gikuyu*, Vol. 1, no. 6 (October 1928), 10. Translation follows Barlow’s English translation of *Muigwithania wa Andu na Bururi wa Gikuyu*, Vol. 1, no. 6 (October 1928), 11 for Criminal Investigation Department (No. C.I.D. P.2/4/B/98), Kenya National Archives, *Mwigwithania*, DC/MKS. 10 B/13/1, shelf 1485, Box 11.

“Nariri, niwega mundu uria ukurutwo uhoro wa Ngai agayagire mumuruti *indo ciake ciothe Njega.*”⁶⁸⁶ Kaggia’s English rendition of the missionaries’ Gĩkũyũ version given above was “*let him that is taught the word of God give his teacher all his good things!*”⁶⁸⁷ The problem with the translation according to Kaggia was that many Gĩkũyũ Christians took it literally and had been acting so. They interpreted it to mean that they were expected to give all their good things to the Church because God had commanded them to do so. The poor gave everything they had to the Church. Kaggia added that the Agĩkũyũ Christians would sometimes give everything leaving themselves without enough money for food or pay school fees for their children.

What made the U.K.L.C. translation awkward, according to Kaggia, was that the Gĩkũyũ translation did not follow the Swahili version. The Swahili version read, “Mwanafunzi na amshirikishe Mfunzi *wake katika mema yote.*”⁶⁸⁸ Its English equivalent being “Let the student or disciple share or co-operate with the teacher in *all good things.*”⁶⁸⁹ A further difficulty was that “good things” in Swahili did not imply goats, cattle, sheep or money, but “good matters” whereas in Kikuyu *indo* referred to material things. The hermeneutical danger of such a mistranslation is nowhere else better captured than in Kaggia’s observation that such a translation always served the colonial larger mission. Kaggia wrote,

the missionaries had taught the Kikuyu, with the help of mistranslations of the Bible, that the African being taught the world of God must *give all his good*

⁶⁸⁶ Kaggia, *Roots of Freedom*, 48-49. U.K.L.C. translation reads “Na rĩrĩ, nĩ wega mũndũ ũrĩa ũkũrutwo Ũhoro wa Ngai agayagĩre mũmũruti indo ciake ciothe njega”. *Kĩrikanĩro Kĩrĩa Kĩerũ kĩa jesu Kristo*, 429. There was no change in the revised edition of 1936.

⁶⁸⁷ The italics are mine.

⁶⁸⁸ The italics are Kaggia’s. Kaggia’s translation follows B.F.B.S. *Kitabu cha Agano Jipya la Bwana na Mwokozi wetu Yesu Kristo: Kimefasirika katika Maneno ya Kiyunani*, London: B.F.B.S., 1921, Wagalatia 6:6. The verse in the Swahili version published 1913 reads “Aliyefundishwa ashiriki nae afundishae katika yote yaliyo mema”, B.F.B.S. *Kitabu cha Agano Jipya la Bwana na Mwokozi wetu Yesu Kristo: Kimefasirika katika Maneno ya Kiyunani*, London: B.F.B.S., 1913, Wagalatia 6:6. But it reads “Lakini mwenyi kufundishwa lile neon na amgawie mfunzi mema yote, aliyo nayo!”, Wuerttemberg. *Agano Jipya la Bwana na Mwokozi wetu Yesu Kristo: Katika Msemo wa Kiswaheli cha Bara*, Stuttgart: Wuerttemberg, 1930, Wagalatia 6:6.

⁶⁸⁹ Kaggia, *Roots of Freedom*, 49.

things to the teacher, who is the white missionary. So the Kikuyu works all his life for the church, often at the expense of his health and his children's education...the greatest bondage the African suffers is the *mzungu's* religion.⁶⁹⁰

Kaggia concluded that the African's greatest enemy was foreign religious beliefs from which he had to be liberated before the African could accept "new ideas about the injustices of British administration".⁶⁹¹ Liberation could not occur with God remaining on the side of the "colonialists as the whole church preached against the African way of life. God had to be brought to our side. The African had to understand that God supported our cause and the *mzungu* was in the wrong."⁶⁹² It is not known whether Kaggia's translation was ever considered by U.K.L.C. but we know that his religious convictions and political consciousness led him to direct confrontation with the colonial government.⁶⁹³

4.4.1d Jomo Kenyatta

The final case that I want to consider is a curious citation in Jomo Kenyatta's⁶⁹⁴ book *Facing Mount Kenya* in regard to Psalms 68:31.⁶⁹⁵ Kenyatta in his quotation followed a different orthography than the one used by missionaries. His

⁶⁹⁰ Kaggia, *Roots of Freedom*, 56.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid.

⁶⁹² Ibid.

⁶⁹³ Ibid. 73.

⁶⁹⁴ Jomo Kenyatta was an enigma. He was a product of the Church of Scotland Mission where he started as a 'laddie' in Gikūyū Mission working for Mr. W. O. Tait as "house boy" before taking employment with his carpentry teacher John Cook who left the mission to start his own business in Nairobi. His master, we learn, used to call him 'John Chinaman' "because of his oblique eyes." He later took employment with the same man as water-meters reader. He was among the founders of the first Kikuyu newsletter *Mūiguithania* and he became its editor and secretary to Kikuyu Central Association. He left Kenya in 1929 to represent the Kikuyu Central Association in London. After his return he stayed for a while only to leave for London again in 1930 where he stayed until 1946. By then he had studied under Professor Malinowski (professor of social anthropology at University of London) under whose direction he wrote his classic book *Facing Mount Kenya* published in 1938. He was among the first African intellectuals to form the Pan-African Federation and was elected its President, with Kwame Nkrumah as Secretary, and is said to have chaired its congress in Manchester in 1945. He was later to become the first president of the Republic of Kenya after the demise of colonialism. See Editor, "Forgotten Conflicts", *Kikuyu News*, no. 145 (September 1938), 175-176; "Jomo Kenyatta-Enigma", *Kikuyu News*, no. 202 (February 1953), 1290.

⁶⁹⁵ Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 275.

knowledge on Gĩkũyũ language is indisputable.⁶⁹⁶ It is known that Jomo Kenyatta played a pivotal role in collaborating with Liliás E. Armstrong in producing the phonetic and tonal structure of the Gĩkũyũ language.⁶⁹⁷ Missionaries though grudgingly always recognised Kenyatta’s work.⁶⁹⁸ Much of Kenyatta’s work will be considered later in my analysis of *Mũiguithania*. Psalm 68:31 in Kenyatta’s book reads, “*Ngatha cia Othamaki ikoima borori wa Afrika, Mbari ya Abaci ne ikirie kwambararia moko igoro hare Mwene-Nyaga*”. Kenyatta’s English translation reads “Princes shall come out of Africa, Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands to God”.⁶⁹⁹ The second part of Kenyatta’s translation follows Ludwig Krapf’s English translation rendered ‘Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God’.⁷⁰⁰ The U.K.L.C. Gĩkũyũ translation of Psalms 68:31 reads *Kũrĩ makang’ũ magoka moimĩte Misiri; Ethiopia nakuo nĩgũkahiũha kwarĩra Ngai moko*.⁷⁰¹ The variance in this translation with the U.K.L.C. rendition of the same is interesting and raises several questions.

Why would Kenyatta not follow the gazetted Gĩkũyũ orthography, given the fact that his publication came more than ten years after the Gĩkũyũ New Testament? Assuming that he had knowledge of the Gĩkũyũ translation of the book of Psalms published two years before his book, why did he decide not to follow U.K.L.C. rendition of the verse in question? The possibility is that Kenyatta had a copy of English translation as well as the Swahili text. The 1914 Swahili edition of the Psalm

⁶⁹⁶ See as an example Kenyatta’s translation of Lamentation in Appendix I at the end of this Dissertation.

⁶⁹⁷ Jomo Kenyatta was under the employment of the Department of Phonetics, University College, London from 1935-1937 where he worked under the supervision of the phonetician and lecturer Liliás Armstrong. Liliás E. Armstrong, *The Phonetic and Tonal Structure of Kikuyu* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), v-vi.; see also “Jomo Kenyatta-Enigma”, 1290.

⁶⁹⁸ Jomo Kenyatta in a letter to Rev. H. D. Hooper dated 27th March 1930 in CMS G/3/X/A/5/17 (University of Birmingham Special Collection.)

⁶⁹⁹ Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 275.

⁷⁰⁰ *The Universities’ Mission to Central Africa*, 13.

⁷⁰¹ *Thaburi* (London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1936), 77.

in question read *Masheki watakuja toka Misri: Kushi itahimiza mikono yake kwa Muungu* (Leaders will come from Egypt: Cush shall stretch its hands to God).⁷⁰² The 1904 Swahili translation is more dramatic, *Wakwasi waja zao kutoka Misiri, Afarika nae yuampelekea mikono Mwenyiezi Mngu kwa haraka* (Princes come from Egypt: Africa stretches out her hands in haste towards God).⁷⁰³ Another Swahili version rendered “Princes” as *Wakuu wa Misri* (leaders or administrators of Egypt) and Ethiopia as *watu weusi* (Black or dark skinned people) and *watakaoviinua mikono yao kumwelekea Mungu* (shall stretch out their hands towards God) seems to be more appropriately rendered than all others.⁷⁰⁴ The Swahili version that Kenyatta is most likely to have followed brings out racial element as an empowerment. It closely follows Krapf’s idea of Ethiopia being the launching pad and a leader in mission work to the rest of East and Central Africa.

Kenyatta’s point in translating the verse was to elaborate how the African Christian Independent movement *Watu wa Mngu* (also known as *Arathi*) expressed their nationalistic feelings in support of the African way of life against the new cultural and religious heritage being introduced by the missionaries. In the verse, the *Arathi* found their hermeneutical empowerment for *Mwene-Nyaga* (Owner of Brightness – God; this is the best Gikũyũ rendering of the divinity) had given them power to interpret biblical texts. As such to mark this empowerment they would stretch out their arms in the sky while praying.⁷⁰⁵ The stretching out of hands is as in one receiving a blessing or power from on high. It is an act of empowering. However,

⁷⁰² B.F.B.S., *Mсахafu Mtakatifu wa Muungu: Mwenyi Agano la Kale Limefasirika Katika Lugha ya Zamani* (London: B.F.B.S., 1914), Zaburi 68:31.

⁷⁰³ B.F.B.S., *Hivyo Ndivyo Vyuho Vitano vya Zaburi: Vimeletwa Kisawahili maneno yakwe yamelinganishwa na Matamko ya Asili* (London: B.F.B.S., 1904), Zaburi 68:31.

⁷⁰⁴ Privilegierte Württembergische Bibelanstalt, *Biblia ndio Maandiko Matakatiifu yote ya Agano la Kale nayo ya Agano Jipya katika msemu wa Kiswahili* (Stuttgart: Wuerltemberg, 1937), Mashangilio 68:32.

⁷⁰⁵ Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 275 and 276.

the U.K.L.C. translation uses an unfamiliar word for “Princes” (*makang’ũ*) and in *Ethiopia nakuo nĩgũkahũha kwarĩra Ngai moko*, the idea of stretching out as in worship is lost in this translation. The idea here is not of stretching arms as in worship or praise but stretching out towards the front as one who is humbly receiving from a benefactor. The best analogy is of one who stretches out his hand in order to beg or as a sign of submission and obedience. It dilutes the element of political or spiritual patronage that Kenyatta wished to portray. The nationalistic idea would not be captured in U.K.L.C.

4.5 Conclusion

The thrust of this chapter has been to reveal the multifaceted nature of Bible translation in the colonial setting. In the first place, even though colonial translators claimed fidelity to the original-source text as the hall mark that authenticated their translation of the Gĩkũyũ New Testament, the untranslatability of some of the biblical concepts into Gĩkũyũ, adaptation and assimilation of native terms and concepts such as *Ngai* among others, attested otherwise. Nonetheless, the act of translation confirms my thesis that colonialism was never able to fix the African identities and representations into stable discourses due to its ambivalence and contradictions which is apparent if we accept translation as an act of interpretation, thus leaving room for hybridisation. Yet this did not stop the U.K.L.C. from attempting to take absolute control in what was being translated and how such translations were to take shape purging the Gĩkũyũ language all of undesirable religious or cultural ideas hidden in words and thoughts.⁷⁰⁶

Translation also offered Africans a key entry into the new order and opened the possibility of subversion. In both Kaggia’s and Kenyatta’s translation, one can

⁷⁰⁶ Although the U.K.L.C. had every desire and intent to monopolise the translation process, it never succeeded. As earlier intimated, the A.I.M. established their own printing house while the Roman Catholic translations remained independent of the Protestant translations.

sense political imagination and creativity. The hawk-eyed Kaggia would use his knowledge to expose and challenge any claim to the innocence of the translated text. There is some degree of similarity between Kaggia's thoughts and those of Krapf in terms of their views that African Christians should assume their rightful place before God. Neither Kaggia nor Krapf was operating within the colonial missionary-translator mindset, even though one was African and one European. Kenyatta as well proved that there were other alternatives in translating biblical texts that would be more empowering against missionaries' humiliating and disparaging translations. As I shall show in the next two chapters, imagination and innovation took centre stage once the Africans had the Bible translated in a language that they clearly understood. It offered them the ability to utilise the resources they had as ordinary readers and the opportunity to employ them accordingly.⁷⁰⁷

⁷⁰⁷ Gerald West has suggested that "ordinary readers" do have "reading strategies" and cultural specific resources to help towards such strategies. See Gerald West "Local is Lekker, but Ubuntu is Best: Indigenous Reading Resources from a South African Perspective" in R.S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Vernacular Hermeneutics: The Bible and Postcolonialism*, 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 37-51.

CHAPTER 5: THE TRANSLATED TEXTS AND THE TYPES OF READING: THE ROLE OF COMMON SENSE HERMENEUTICS

“A running river cannot be dammed for ever without breaking its bounds.”⁷⁰⁸

5.1 Introduction

In the last three chapters I have been making the argument that despite the hegemonic nature of the discourses of colonialism in their representation and construction of African identities, the ambivalence and colonial contradictions made those discourses unstable and thus made it hard for colonialism to fix the Africans in stable identities. Kenyan colonial experiences testify to Edward Said’s words that “no matter how apparently complete the dominance of an ideology or social system, there are always going to be parts of social experience that it does not cover and control.”⁷⁰⁹ Out of these parts, liminal spaces are opened which not only make negotiations and hybridisation possible but they also become conducive for impetuses or signs of decolonisation which come mainly as self-consciousness or dialectical opposition.

Said in his critique of imperial literature convincingly showed that besides colonial/postcolonial cultural and ideological representations exists also another tradition out of which a theory of resistance is born testifying to the diversity and difference of the non-European world.⁷¹⁰ Said’s explication of imperial writings is also true of biblical interpretation in Kenya where the interstices became sites for new discourses of resistance from the emerging African intelligentsia (*Athomi*) challenging the colonial hermeneutics. While colonial hermeneutics presumed permanent primacy of the colonial power, emerging movements of dissidence and resistance shattered this colonial assumption. The hermeneutical liminal space that the colonial situation created provided the opportunity for transformation. This allowed the *Athomi* to

⁷⁰⁸ Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, xviii.

⁷⁰⁹ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 289.

⁷¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

question, resist and even produce destabilising and unsettling effects on the colonial situation.⁷¹¹

5.1.1. Common Sense Hermeneutics

In this chapter I explore how dissenting voices from African Christians formed and shaped “oppositional discursive practise” marking the beginning of alternative hermeneutics.⁷¹² This chapter and the next one will show how African Christians took every opportunity to lay out hermeneutical strategies of collaboration and contestations. In the moments of awakening and through acts of defining their identity both as individuals and as a society, the Africans (in this case, Agĩkũyũ) used “common sense”⁷¹³ hermeneutics first as an assimilative tool and secondly as a means of articulating their cultural difference. Several reasons made this active participation possible. First, as already argued in the previous chapters, while the colonial regime in Kenya differentiated between races and ethnic groups, it simultaneously incorporated them all within the same general system.⁷¹⁴ Even though the ideological achievement of such incorporation was to create hegemony, it also occasioned room for negotiations.⁷¹⁵ Second, the ambivalence and contradictions of the discourse of colonialism expanded the possibilities for assimilation, questioning and resistance. Third, with the translated Bible now available in a language the Agĩkũyũ could comprehend, the Bible was no longer viewed as a given text. Instead it took new

⁷¹¹ I follow Norman Leys’ understanding of “colonial situation” in East Africa as social cataclysm. See Cell, *By Kenya Possessed*, 25.)

⁷¹² Sugirtharajah has identified various types of reading within the colonial contexts among these types is the “dissident” reading strategy and practice. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 44-71.

⁷¹³ By using “common sense” hermeneutics, I follow Gerald West’s specific use of ordinary African ‘non-scholars’ (both literate and non-literate) readings of the Bible as constitutive of African biblical scholarship. See West, “African Biblical Hermeneutics and Bible Translation”, 11-16.

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁷¹⁵ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 30-41.

status – *Ibuku rĩa Ngai* (the Book of God).⁷¹⁶ In some sense, this status was almost magical. Gerald West has accurately pointed out that from the very earliest encounters of the Africans with the Bible, the Bible came to be perceived as a potentially useful “object of strange power”.⁷¹⁷

The Bible, together with other translated Christian texts remained central in sharpening and expanding the Agĩkũyũ religious, moral and political imaginations. The common sense hermeneuts, in their act of interpretation, came to the Bible with the two sets of interests that Gerald West has identified as “interpretative interests and life interests”.⁷¹⁸ As they encountered the Bible, they would identify specific dimensions of the texts that were of interest to them as interpreters. On the other hand the conditions both in the Reserve and in the city which were mainly those of deprivation, poverty, poor housing, surveillance, brutality and racism, became the main concerns and commitments that motivated the Africans to come to the Bible for answers. The common sense hermeneutics that the Agĩkũyũ proselytes developed was simple, literalistic, and highly selective.

5.1.2 Bible as the Word of God

Most common sense hermeneuts mimicked the colonial hermeneutical method, which was mainly informed by the covenant drawn by the Bible League.⁷¹⁹ The League emphasised the infallibility of the Bible as the Word of God and accepted as true popularly held beliefs that the actual authors of books of the Bible were those whose names tradition gave such as Moses and the Pentateuch; David and the Psalms;

⁷¹⁶ S.P.C.K, “Maurio na Metikio” (A Catechism of Christian Doctrine in the Gĩkũyũ Language), 1911, questions number 3 and 4, 5; see also Wanyoike, *An African Pastor*, 68.

⁷¹⁷ When the Bible was first introduced among oral peoples such as Agĩkũyũ, it was received as one of the many objects of power that colonialism brought such as guns, the compass, and the watch among others. See West, “African Biblical Hermeneutics and Bible Translation”, 5; See also Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 74-109.

⁷¹⁸ West, “African Biblical Hermeneutics and Bible Translation”, 6-7.

⁷¹⁹ The covenant was signed by 150 Christian bodies. Interestingly, the Church Mission Society and Church of Scotland Mission were not signatories to it but most missionaries in Kenya embraced its content in toto. See CMS/G/A/AX/24, University of Birmingham.

and that Isaiah wrote the Book of Isaiah in its entirety. The Bible League also called for mission societies not to appoint or retain on their preaching or teaching staff those who did not accept the veracity and divine authority of the Bible and its inerrancy.⁷²⁰ The group wanted those appointed to serve at home or abroad subscribe to the aforesaid covenant and hold with conviction evangelical interpretation.

In Kenya, the fear of liberal questioning of the Bible was expressed by many missionaries, such as C.M.S. Rev. R. Pitts Pittway who urged the Anglican Church to give assurance that no teaching would be given at the only Divinity School which would be contradictory to or cause doubt concerning the scriptures.⁷²¹ This came after a long and virulent exchange between Pittway and Archdeacon W. E. Owen⁷²² with Pittway accusing the latter of “lacking in unswerving loyalty to the supreme Authority of the Word of God”.⁷²³ Owen dismissed much of the Old Testament as teachings of holy men written and recorded when their hearts were still in darkness.⁷²⁴ He also rejected the sacrificial doctrine of the Atonement as well as the resurrection of Jesus Christ in his physical body.⁷²⁵ Owen’s use of “higher criticism” caused great anxiety in missionary circles.⁷²⁶ There was a widespread apprehension that dissemination of

⁷²⁰ CMS/G/A/AX/24.

⁷²¹ Letter by Rev. R. Pitts Pittway to Rev. H. Douglas Hooper, CMS African Mission secretary date April 14th 1949, CMS/AF 35/59 G3 A5/e6-9, University of Birmingham Archives.

⁷²² Walter Edwin Owen (1879-1945), the son of John Simpson Owen was born in 1879 in Belfast. He received his theological training at Islington Theological College. He intended for business profession, but in 1901 Owen offered himself as a missionary to the Church Missionary Society. He was accepted as a missionary in 1904 and ordained as a deacon in 1904 by the Bishop of London (he had a short curacy at St. John's, Reading) and was ordained as a priest in 1905 by the Bishop of Uganda. He served in Uganda starting as rural Dean of Budu until 1915 when he succeeded Walter Chadwick as the Archdeacon of Kavirondo in Kenya. Owen had his residence at Maseno in Kisumu where he identified with the life and aspirations of the peoples of Nyanza. Archdeacon Owen together with John Arthur, Harry Leakey, and Ruffell Barlow (all missionaries in Kenya) also served as chaplains to the British Army against the Germans during the German East Africa Campaign in 1916. He died in 1945, CMS/G/Y A5/1/21-23, A5/2, A5/2 (1920-1933), A5/2 (1936-1943); CMS Acc 83; G3 X A 5/21 (University of Birmingham).

⁷²³ CMS/G/Y A5/1/21-23 A5/2; G/Y/A5/2 (1936-1943).

⁷²⁴ Owen’s sermon preached on Good Friday and Easter Sunday and published in the Maseno School Old Boy’s Magazine on In June 17 1942. See CMS/Acc 83; See also Letter from Rev. Owen to Rev. Pittway June 3, 1942, CMS/G/Y A5/1/21-23; CMS/G/Y/A5/2 (1936-1943.)

⁷²⁵ Ibid.

⁷²⁶ Martin Capon’s Memo: “Future of the CMS Divinity School”, CMS/AF/35/59/ G3/A5/e6-9.

such views would “poison” the Africans by challenging the fundamental anchoring of colonial mission to the Bible.⁷²⁷ It is in this context that the common sense hermeneutics originated. This chapter also identifies two major tools that the ordinary African Bible readers employed: Allusion and Interpretative resources.

5.1.2a Use of Allusion

The hermeneutical method most commonly employed by the Agĩkũyũ readers was allusion.⁷²⁸ According to Sugirtharajah, in biblical interpretation, allusion aims at creating intimate feelings as well as heightening communication between the reader and the author, the reader and the text, and between the reader and the interpretive community. The reader, by considerable use of the biblical materials, identifies herself with the biblical personalities and portrays such characters in such a way that establishes a real connection between the reader and the biblical characters. Through allusion the reader is prompted to connect the differences and similarities between his own history and biblical narratives. Secondly, Sugirtharajah says that allusion may subvert “the original meaning of an activated text by trying it in a new context”.⁷²⁹ In this sense, the reader takes biblical texts or verses from their contexts and strategically juxtaposes the texts to his/her “life interests” in order to underscore an argument. Finally, through use of allusion a reader echoes a “memorable phrase” as an authoritative text to serve as evidence to support a claim.

5.1.2b Interpretative Resources

Besides the use of allusions, the Agĩkũyũ hermeneuts also employed common African dramatic expressions as “interpretative resources”.⁷³⁰ Central to these dramatic expressions were songs, dances, occasional mime, and use of proverbs and

⁷²⁷ CMS/G/A/AX/17.

⁷²⁸ Sugirtharajah draws on the theoretical concepts elucidated by Steven Marx in *Shakespeare and the Bible*. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 74-109.

⁷²⁹ Ibid.

⁷³⁰ West, “African Biblical Hermeneutics”, 14.

poetry, which Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o has persuasively argued should be classified under the African theatre.⁷³¹ Whatever forms the African participation in interpretation took it did offer alternative ways of exploring and reading the Bible.

5.2 Reading Strategies

To help delineate some of the reading strategies the Africans in the Gĩkũyũ country undertook, I follow Vincent Wimbush and Sugirtharajah in their introductions to the major types of reading the Bible.⁷³² In this chapter, I identify two main reading strategies: Reading and interpreting the Bible for conversion experience and reading the Bible as a road map to nation-building.

5.2.1 Reading and Interpreting the Bible for Conversion Experience

The first reading strategy that we discern is from the first generation African proselytes. Their hermeneutics accepted the colonial logic that offered colonisation and conversion experience as the only available agencies for the transformation of the indigenous society. According to this colonial logic, Christian conversion meant cultural and socio-political regeneration, economic progress and spiritual salvation.⁷³³ The new talk about Christian conversion and social progress came as a normative discourse already given and fixed.⁷³⁴ This meant that exchange of values, meanings and priorities could not be collaborative or dialogical. The first generation proselytes had only one choice, to accept the conversion model as presented.⁷³⁵ Nonetheless, as argued in the first three chapters, the colonial encounters offered innovative sites for collaboration and contestation where the ideas of self and of the new society were

⁷³¹ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind*, 34-62.

⁷³² Vincent L. Wimbush, “The Bible and African Americans: An Outline of an Interpretive History” in Cain Hope Felder’s *Stony the Road we Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 81-97; Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 44-71 and *The Bible and the Third World*, 74-109.

⁷³³ Mudimbe refers to such a logic as “the authority of the truth”. See Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 47.

⁷³⁴ Ibid.

⁷³⁵ Ibid., 48.

negotiated.⁷³⁶ What appeared as having been pre-given and fixed, could not escape hybridisation in the moments of historical transformation. The fluidity of the exchange opened “in-between” spaces where the African cultural elements defiantly re-inscribed themselves through the very hermeneutical process that attempted to trample them. This is evident in the several colonial hermeneutical strategies discussed here below.

5.2.1a Storytelling

First of the hermeneutic strategies was to use the translated Gĩkũyũ Bible as a resource for *storytelling*. It ought to be remembered that in the Gĩkũyũ country, the first encounter with the Bible and the gospel message was oral. The first potential Christians heard rather than read the text. We witness this in the baptism ceremony of an old man named Muleu⁷³⁷ in November 1907. Muleu was the second Mũgĩkũyũ to be baptised by C.S.M. missionaries since their arrival in Gĩkũyũ country.⁷³⁸ He had made a deathbed wish to be baptised after confessing his belief in Christ.⁷³⁹ As Muleu lay dying of cancer, Waitito⁷⁴⁰ read aloud John 8:1–17. It is intriguing why this text was chosen for such an occasion since Dr. Arthur who presided over the ceremony did not make any exposition. Instead, he prayed that Muleu’s sons and their wives might all come to Christ. I am of the opinion that Arthur, in allowing the Word to be

⁷³⁶ See in particular chapter in Wanyoike, *An African Pastor*, 64-108; See also Nyambura J. Njoroge, *Kĩama Kĩa Ngo: An African Christian Feminist Ethic* (Accra: Legon Theological Studies Series, 2000), 5-57.

⁷³⁷ I am of the opinion that the correct rendering of this name is Mũrũu but for the sake of consistency I follow missionaries’ rendering. Muleu became the first Presbyterian Gĩkũyũ Christian to receive a Christian burial (Scott, 1932, p. 83.)

⁷³⁸ The first baptism was of Karanja on 14th October 1907 conducted by Rev. Dr. Ruffell Scott who desired to baptise “his old boy” before Dr. Scott died. At his death bed, in front of his nephew, Mr. A. Ruffell Barlow and Dr. Arthur, Rev. Dr. Scott baptised his first convert of the Kikuyu mission. See Dr. John W. Arthur’s letter to Dr. McMurtrie of November 12th, 1907 and on Rev. Dr. Scott’s burial November 17th, 1907 in John Arthur Papers, MS Gen. 762/ 33a (1907), University of Edinburgh, Special Collection.

⁷³⁹ Since there was no ordained minister available, Arthur decided to administer the sacrament of baptism in the presence of Muleu’s sons, Mr. A. Ruffell Barlow and Miss Marion Stevenson. John Arthur Papers, MS Gen. 762. 1-42 (1907), University of Edinburgh. See also Scott, 1932, p. 83.

⁷⁴⁰ Waitito (one of Muleu’s sons) at the time Waitito was serving the missionaries in Kikuyu Mission and had had the opportunity of learning to read the Bible.

read and heard, expected those present to receive it as a story worthy listening. I want to suggest here that Africans present were likely to pick on this practice. Several of the Africans that we encounter later use the Bible in exactly the same way as Arthur. The idea of the Bible as stories (now presented in the Gikũyũ language) appealed to the African sensibility.⁷⁴¹

Biblical stories were illustrated from many points of view by stories from Gikũyũ life. Use of pictures sometimes incomprehensible served to reinforce the spoken word.⁷⁴² For example, Dr. Irvine mentioned how important it was for him to use pictures under the light of a portable lantern as he narrated the story of the life of Christ and pictures of lions in telling the story of Daniel.⁷⁴³ The pictures served as conduit through which the idea of Christ and “main facts of Bible story and doctrine,” were engraved upon the Africans’ memories.⁷⁴⁴ As the Biblical stories replaced *ng’ano* (folklores), new horizons of progress were envisioned where the colonial present was envisaged as a complete break with the past and as a bonding with the future. To inaugurate the new journey into the promised future, the mission church first targeted young boys and girls.⁷⁴⁵ The innocent and uncontaminated children replaced the expert indigenous storytellers as the mission church used them to reach out to others. Once baptised these boys and girls were immediately enlisted to go out into villages to tell the Bible stories they had learnt.⁷⁴⁶ On arrival they would ask a

⁷⁴¹ The Old Testament, for example, was presented as *Mohoro ma Tene* (Old time stories).

⁷⁴² Crawford, *By the Equator’s Snowy Peak*, 141; Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 70.

⁷⁴³ Dr A. C. Irvine, “Visiting at Chogoria”, *Kikuyu News*, No. 127, (March 1934), 19; See also Dr. John A. Arthur, “The Campaign at Kikuyu, Kenya: Sunday, 2nd, to Wednesday, 19th December 1934”, *Kikuyu News*, No. 131 (March, 1935), 2-3.

⁷⁴⁴ Blakeslee, *Beyond the Kikuyu Curtain*, 46; See also Hutcheson, *Kikuyu: 1898-1923 Semi-Jubilee Book*, 52-53.

⁷⁴⁵ These were mainly young boys who served missionaries as porters, gun or camera carriers, cooks, laundry and cleaning girls, gardeners among others. See letters by Gideon Mũgo Kagĩka and Silas N. Karimũ to Hooper in Rev. H. D. Hooper letters in Kikuyu 1925 -31, Unofficial Papers: CMS/Acc./85/F/5 (part), University of Birmingham; See also Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 314.

⁷⁴⁶ Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 68-69, 118.

house owner to gather neighbours around a bonfire to listen to *Ūhoro wa Ngai* (the Story or things of God).⁷⁴⁷

The colonial strategy in the use of the Bible as a resource for storytelling fitted within the discourse of colonialism. Like the indigenous folklore, *Ūhoro wa Ngai* had a pedagogical role. Its goal was to create spatial distance between the proselytised and their indigenous community. The Africans, as already demonstrated, were expected to sever ties with their past never to return. Those who wished to become followers of Jesus were given the opportunity to make open confession of faith and a public declaration to sever ties from “all evil customs of the tribe”.⁷⁴⁸ The confession was followed by the symbolic washing at the stream to symbolise the washing away of the unclean African life. Stevenson gives a glimpse into the importance of the symbolic washing:

straight and clean and brown in the deep pool of the stream, their faces showing a greyish pallor that, in the African, betokens emotion ...we two white women realised in it, that we were witnessing something in the nature of a sacrament in this laying aside of the old things; and, in this washing, a baptism that had kinship with a far-off Judean scene.⁷⁴⁹

After the washing ceremony the converts were adorned in clean clothes. Having thus shed off all that mark of the old Gikũyũ life, converts parted ways with their community.⁷⁵⁰

In other instances, baptism by immersion also served as a symbol of physical separation. It followed the biblical symbolism of baptism as death to the old life of sin, and the rising again to a new life in Christ. A classic example is that of the Gospel

⁷⁴⁷ *Kikuyu News*, no. 9, 7 and 45; no. 11, 4; Wanyoike, *An African Pastor*, 29.

⁷⁴⁸ Crawford, 1913, p.82; Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 104, 209.

⁷⁴⁹ Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 107.

⁷⁵⁰ Blakeslee, *Beyond the Kikuyu Curtain*, 60. See also Crawford, *By the Equator's Snowy Peak*, 170-171.

Missionary Society (G.M.S.) first converts.⁷⁵¹ This was done in front of a large crowd of onlookers at a local river where by accident or design, the missionaries stood on one bank of the stream and the crowd on the other, and the converts waded through the river to be baptised and joined the missionaries on the other side thus emphasising the idea of separation between the old life and the new.⁷⁵² The idea behind the hermeneutical strategy after winning individuals through biblical stories, and the dramatisation of the washing as separation marked the first epistemological shift marking the embryonic development of the future Christian Church in Africa.⁷⁵³ The young African Christians were taught to regard themselves as the visible manifestation of a universal and eternal community that could not be sanctioned by the traditional norms.

Nonetheless, through the power of storytelling, colonial hermeneutics, though arbitrary, laid the ground work in which the Bible offered a forum for negotiations. The Bible as a text full of stories of heroes and heroines, pathos and victory, sorrow and joy, sojourn and fulfilment, could not be controlled within the colonial strictures. The biblical world became a world the African could identify with, a world from which they could draw strength and into which they could retreat, and most importantly a world which they could manipulate in order to find meaning and

⁷⁵¹ Those baptised at Kambui by Rev. Knapp were six including Wanyoike Kamawe (Wanyoike, *An African Pastor*, 64-65.) In December of 1908, eight catechumens stepped down into the stream, where the Rev. E. W Crawford (Dr. Crawford's brother-in-law) received them and immersed them. At the close of the "service, clad in clean white garments, they formed into a procession to return to the station", Crawford, *By the Equator's Snowy Peak*, 113.

⁷⁵² Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 118.

⁷⁵³ Interview with Rev. Dr. Kĩmani wa Gĩthieya, in Atlanta Georgia on 26th January 2007. For further discussion on development of new concept of community in which traditional head of the *Mbarĩ* was no longer the authority figure since Christ was its organic head. Francis Kĩmani Gĩthieya, *The Freedom of the Spirit: African Indigenous Churches in Kenya* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 35.

affirmation.⁷⁵⁴ The interstice created by these narratives, became “the place from which *something begins its presencing*”.⁷⁵⁵

5.2.1b The Bible as a Moral Text

The second hermeneutic strategy that sought to awaken and sustain desire for the *Ūhoro wa Ngai* focused on the use of the Bible as a moral text which was reinforced through the catechetical school, pedagogy and church discipline. The use of the translated catechism, the primer (*Karirikania*⁷⁵⁶) and the articulation of ecclesial discipline as hermeneutical resources were not dissimilar to the ambulant as well as ambivalent discourse of colonialism. In the first place, the two texts expanded Gĩkũyũ vocabulary as well as serving as catalyst to self-consciousness and political imagination.⁷⁵⁷ Through these texts, for example, the Agĩkũyũ learnt Christian concepts such as nature of creation, human soul, human being, holiness and righteousness, sin and salvation and God as the creator. While introducing new concepts of God it also expanded the existing knowledge of God.⁷⁵⁸ The pedagogic goal of the catechetical instructions was to develop mind and character rather than to impart information.⁷⁵⁹ These instructions also aimed at cleansing, rehabilitating and indoctrinating the African mind.⁷⁶⁰

On the other hand, through the evolving ecclesiology and church discipline, the colonial church became the judicial and forgiving agent of Christ to those it had

⁷⁵⁴ Barlow, “Notes on Points of Comparison and Contrast”, C.O.S Kikuyu Mission 1909-1923, Gen 1786 1-61, Barlow Papers. See also Hutcheson, *Kikuyu: 1898-1923 Semi-Jubilee Book*, 52-53. Compare with Wimbush, “The Bible and African Americans”, 83.

⁷⁵⁵ Italics are Bhabha’s. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 7.

⁷⁵⁶ *Karirikania: Kabuku ga Kuririkania Andu Maundu* (reminder) (Tumu Tumu school, 1924). Kareri posited that *Karirikania* was part of advanced instructions at school, Kareri, *The Life of Charles Muhoro Kareri*, 24-25.

⁷⁵⁷ See Crawford, *By the Equator’s Snowy Peak*, 82-84; Kareri, *The Life of Charles Muhoro Kareri*, 26; “Maurio na Metikio” (A Catechism of Christian Doctrine in the Gĩkũyũ Language) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1911).

⁷⁵⁸ “Maurio na Metikio”, questions number 3 and 4, 5; questions 11, 12 and 19, 6; questions 21, 22, 26, and 27, 7; questions 30, 33, 8; questions 38-60, 10.

⁷⁵⁹ Hutcheson, *Kikuyu: 1898-1923 Semi-Jubilee Book*, 56-59.

⁷⁶⁰ Blakeslee, *Beyond the Kikuyu Curtain*, 207.

incorporated.⁷⁶¹ The church legislated and adjudicated in all matters regarding cultural issues, marriage, family relationships, worship, customs and morals.⁷⁶² Religion from now on took a personal dimension in which specific thoughts, intentions and actions were targeted.⁷⁶³ The words of Jesus in Matthew 18:18: ‘Truly I say unto you, whatever you bind here on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loosen here on earth will be loosened in heaven’ were interpreted to refer to the authority the church had over every dimension of people’s life.⁷⁶⁴ Those who failed to adhere to the church’s authority faced eternal damnation for when they died they would be “thrown into the fire of *Johanum*”.⁷⁶⁵ God’s verdict was sure as given in John 3:19: “light has come into the world but the people loved the dark more than the light for their deeds were evil.”⁷⁶⁶

5.2.1c The Bible as an Awakener and an Enabler

Beyond the displacement and dislocation as well as the artificial boundaries set by the colonial church, lay a range of other possibilities that provided a foundational frame for cultural and national identity within the emerging Gĩkũyũ consciousness. For example, the primer and catechism helped sharpen the Africans’ political imagination, though inadvertently. The most empowering of all was what was written in the primer about the Gĩkũyũ country. The primer announced, “God has given the Gikuyu a good country that lacks neither food nor water or forests. It is

⁷⁶¹ After 1929 the church settled to an institutional parish system. Dr. John W. Arthur, “Ordination of Ministers at Kikuyu and Tumutumu, Kenya”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 134 (December 1935), 10; A. Ruffell Barlow, “Extracts from Annual Report to the General Assembly”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 144 (June 1938), 149-150

⁷⁶² See Wanyoike for a detailed analysis on cultural issues that the colonial church legislated against. Wanyoike, *An African Pastor*, 64-108.

⁷⁶³ John W. Arthur, “East Africa in Transition: Alexander Duff Memorial Lecture”, 18; Rev. R. A. Philp, “The 1939-40 Ordination Course”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 149 (September 1939), 259; Arthur, “The Campaign at Kikuyu, Kenya”, 1; Dr. A. C. Irvine, “Muthambe”, *Kikuyu News*, No. 127 (March 1934), 20.

⁷⁶⁴ Kareri, *The Life of Charles Muhoro Kareri*, 18.

⁷⁶⁵ *Ibid.* Italic is mine.

⁷⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

therefore good for the Gikuyu to praise God, for He has been very generous to them”.⁷⁶⁷ Karirikania affirmed what the Agĩkũyũ already knew and believed that their land was an unalienable patrimony given to them by God.⁷⁶⁸ Definitely, at a time when the ancestral land of the Agĩkũyũ and other communities were being taken and placed under the Crown Government, such a declaration would feed on the *Athomi*’s political imagination. It nursed Africans’ self-conscious and nurtured desire for independency.

In addition, the Africans would draw inferences from the Christian ideals taught in catechism such as the idea of loving others because all are equal in the eyes of God.⁷⁶⁹ Such teachings encouraged inquiry and questioning, particularly when it appeared to be contradicted by colonial reality. Liberal ideas also came as empowerment. Marion Stevenson, for example, responding to the questions by her female students about what they should teach little girls about the role of women in Christianity, said,

teach them of the humble women of the Bible, of Mary the mother of Jesus, and the other women who ministered to Him – how they were the last at the Cross, the first at the Tomb, the first to see the Risen Christ, the first to be commissioned to ‘tell the others.’ The special message that those women of the Bible had for Gĩkũyũ women and girls was that their duty was to be first too; they must not lag behind the men who were taking a stand on the side of Jesus. It was such men they would marry, and either drag down or help up. The future lay with them and with their children.⁷⁷⁰

Such words would definitely be empowering to the young listeners who were not sure about their role in society. With their mental horizon expanded Agĩkũyũ women proactively engaged their new found faith to inform and interrogate cultural issues

⁷⁶⁷ Dr. John Arthur referred to the Gĩkũyũ country as “This lovely healthy country of Kikuyu, glorious mountain and river scenery, wonderful forests and soil”. See Arthur Papers Gen 763 60j, University of Edinburgh; See also *Karirikania*, 6.

⁷⁶⁸ Arthur, “East Africa in Transition”, 21.

⁷⁶⁹ “Maurio na Metikio”, questions 69 and 70, 13.

⁷⁷⁰ Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 101.

that affected them as demonstrated by Nyambura Njoroge.⁷⁷¹ Political imagination fanned new ideas and new ways of understanding the Agĩkũyũ ethic and moral principle of unity and nation building.

5.2.2 Reading the Bible as a Road Map to Nation-Building

The basic foundation of this approach was through mimicking the Europeans who had used the Bible to validate colonisation. Europeans as already discussed saw themselves as God's people and the Bible serving as "cultural image-reflector".⁷⁷² The Africans quickly associated the Bible with power and easily adopted it to not only serve their self-interests but also for self-affirmation. Bhabha has argued that any work of culture should not encounter with "newness" as part of the continuum of past and present. Instead it should create "a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation."⁷⁷³ Such an approach in biblical hermeneutics, gives new meaning to the colonial encounters. The newness produced in the process of historical transformation reveals active insurgent acts taking place within the liminal space of colonial transformation.

5.2.2a The Bible and the Gĩkũyũ nationalism – Harry Thuku

In Harry Thuku⁷⁷⁴ we encounter an African who was pivotal in the new era of hermeneutical questioning developed and revolving around the Gĩkũyũ nationalism. He was part of the youthful group referred to by Blakeslee as "young aristocracy of

⁷⁷¹ Njoroge, *Kĩama Kĩa Ngo*, 5-57.

⁷⁷² Wimbush, "The Bible and African Americans", 84.

⁷⁷³ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 10.

⁷⁷⁴ Harry Thuku epitomises the history of resistance in Kenya. He was born in 1895 and started as Rev. W. P. Knapp's herd boy. He later joined his age-mate Wanyoike wa Kamae as mission students. Thuku as a youth professed conversion to Christianity and received training in a Gospel Mission Society (G.M.S.) located at Kambui in Kiambu district. His independent mind led him to Nairobi and elsewhere in the colony from a very young age and at the age of sixteen he was jailed for serving as an accomplice in forging Rev. Knapp's signature. On June 7th, 1921, Thuku together with Tairara, Waiganjo, Mugekenyi, Job Muchuchu, Ishmael Mungai and others formed the Young Kikuyu Association which was different from Kikuyu Association formed earlier under the direction of Mr. A. Ruffell Barlow and Dr. Arthur. On July 1st, 1921, in order to accommodate all Kenyans they changed the name to East African Association (EAA). See Harry Thuku, *Harry Thuku: An autobiography* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1970), particularly Chapter 2-4; See also the "*Chronology of Harry Thuku's Movement*", Gen. 1786/26/a & b, Barlow Papers.

Kikuyuland, who had stepped out of darkness to walk in the light” who had started questioning and doubting missionaries’ genuineness.⁷⁷⁵ In Blakeslee’s opinion, although these young men⁷⁷⁶ were progressive and stood their ground “against the age-long spiritual, mental, and moral darkness”, they were unable to resist the “new dangers in the political unrest”. This is because “they were not sufficiently mature either in years or in the knowledge of God to discern the form of the prince of darkness when he masqueraded as an angel of light in a costume which was set off with many accessories of genuine value.”⁷⁷⁷

However, careful study of Thuku and the ensuing drama reveals an undercurrent (not experienced before) that was seeking an ideological basis of a wider unity and resistance against colonial humiliations. The basis of this quest, to recall Edward Said’s insight, could be found in “the rediscovery and repatriation of what had been suppressed in the native’s past by the process of imperialism.”⁷⁷⁸ But this rediscovery and repatriation was not a mere retrieval of the “dead hand” of the past. The recovery hybridised the Agĩkũyũ cultural forms with forms already established or influenced by the culture of the coloniser. The moment of historical transformation formed a hybrid cultural space as a site where the inscription of the signs of cultural memory and biblical knowledge coalesced. This fact is evident in Thuku’s extraordinary capacity to organise offense against oppression and against the authority of appointed colonial chiefs.

⁷⁷⁵ Blakeslee, *Beyond the Kikuyu Curtain*, 156.

⁷⁷⁶ Gakaara mentioned some of the younger men such as Harry Thuku, Johana Kunyiha, Hezekia Mundia, Jesii Kariuki, Joseph Kang’ethe, Abdalla Tairara, James Beuttah, Job Mucucu, James Njoroge, Johana Karanja and Mwalimu Hamisi. See Gakaara wa Wanjaũ, *Agĩkũyũ Mau Mau na Wĩyathi* (Karatina: Gakaara Book Service, 1971), 35-37.

⁷⁷⁷ Blakeslee, *Beyond the Kikuyu Curtain*, 159-160; Arthur, “East Africa in Transition” 21; Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 123.

⁷⁷⁸ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 253.

By 1915, Thuku's political and racial consciousness had budded and he began efforts to raise consciousness among Africans about forced labour especially that of young girls. He also dealt with other issues such as compensation of the World War I African veterans, *Kipande* and wages issues as well as the use of *Kiboko* (rhino whip) by settlers on African workers. In one of the issues of his newly launched Swahili newsletter *Tangazo*, Thuku lashed at European missionaries whom he accused of being too acquiescent with the government and the settlers.⁷⁷⁹ He dismissed the Kiambu colonial chiefs as *majudasi* (Judases).⁷⁸⁰ The fact that Thuku employed the word Judas to disparage the colonial chiefs as traitors shows that biblical texts (long before the translation of the Gĩkũyũ New Testament) helped inform and shape the Agĩkũyũ political imagination. By echoing this memorable term, Thuku was employing allusion in order to support his claim that the chiefs were traitors not only against Thuku himself but also against the women whom he was fighting for. Thuku expected the community to rally against the colonial chiefs.

Immediately after Harry Thuku's detention without trial⁷⁸¹, spontaneous protests in the form of songs sprang out all over the Gĩkũyũ Reserve in praise of him.⁷⁸² I need to note here as I continue that songs in the Gĩkũyũ community played very important role in forming and retrieving cultural memories. Boyes (one of the

⁷⁷⁹ On August 5th on a letter to other leaders Filipu (official secretary of Kikuyu Association) is reported by Barlow to have castigated Harry Thuku for attacking Canon Burns, Dr. Jones, D.C Kiambu and others. Filipu is said to have called Thuku a man of "two tongues" as he was now turning against the missionaries whom he had earlier described as the natives' best friends. See "*Chronology of Harry Thuku's Movement*"; See also Ross, *Kenya from Within*, 235.

⁷⁸⁰ He was mainly unhappy with Chiefs Filipu, Kinyanjui, Koinange, Njonjo, and Waweru. Barlow cited *Tangazo* issue of 7.2.1922. See the "*Chronology of Harry Thuku's Movement*" in Barlow Papers Gen. 1786/26/a & b. University of Edinburgh (Special Collection).

⁷⁸¹ On March 14th 1922, Thuku was arrested and his arrest sparked a riot in Nairobi where police opened fire leaving dozens dead. That prompted strong words of protest from Marcus Garvey to Lloyd George (British Prime Minister). About fifty members of his association were arrested, while Thuku, Waiganjo and Mugenyeki were deported to Kismayu. Harry Thuku was sent to detention from 1922-1930.

⁷⁸² Dr. Arthur dismissed the songs as morally bad, because the words and bodily actions incited to passion, and resulting invariably in *ũũmbani* (fornication). See Dr. John Arthur's letter dated 17th November 1922 to the Chief Native Commissioner, Gen 762/99-120/ (1921-1925), 104a, John Arthur's Papers.

earliest travellers in the Gĩkũyũ country) noted the importance of singing in the life of the Agĩkũyũ saying,

the Kikuyu are a very musical people, singing wherever they go, and the warriors would come to the dances in a body, singing as they marched along, and keeping as perfect time and step as a regiment of trained soldiers... the Kikuyu seem to have more varieties of dances than any natives I know, and are, on the whole, a light-hearted race, singing all day long.⁷⁸³

He also recorded that the Gĩkũyũ country had

a class of strolling minstrels, resembling more than anything the old troubadours of the Middle Ages... a privileged class, travelling from place to place and extemporising songs about local events and people – not always without a strong tinge of sarcasm, which no one dared to resent.⁷⁸⁴

Therefore, in producing songs in praise of Thuku and songs that depreciated colonial chiefs, the women were employing an important hermeneutical tool to interpret the event as well as communicate their political opinion. The main song, quoted in part here below, was sung by women only and its theme alluded to Thuku's use of the biblical term *majudasi*. It was performed in the *Kĩharo* (open space) where freedom and self-expression thrived.

Let me consider part of the song as quoted and translated by Dr. Arthur.

...“Filipu, Koinange, Kinyanjui, Josia (Each mentioned in turn)
Aromakoguo
Nio matwarithirie Munene wa Nyacing'a
(tondu) Nyacing'a ituire Kahawa-ini”...⁷⁸⁵

“Filipu, Koinange, Kinyanjui, Josia”, according to Arthur refers to the names of the four Gĩkũyũ colonial chiefs serving part of the Gĩkũyũ country in Kĩambu district.⁷⁸⁶

From this verse we see an empowered group of women who fearlessly questioned the colonial authority. The Agĩkũyũ held the chiefs responsible for the deportation of Harry Thuku. “Aromakoguo” which in Gĩkũyũ prose should read “aromaka uguo” is

⁷⁸³ Boyes, *King of the Wa-Kikuyu*, 88-89.

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁵ Dr. John Arthur's letter dated 17th November 1922 to the Chief Native Commissioner (104a).

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid.

translated “let him be surprised or be afraid”. By using the singular form “aro” (let him) the verse holds individual chiefs accountable. The idea is further backed by “nio matwarithirie” which translate as “it is they who have caused to be taken away.”⁷⁸⁷ In addition, the Gĩkũyũ tense “ro” is mainly used either as a form of blessing or a curse. In the song, the sense of the tense as used and as described by Arthur was the same one used in “kũroga” (to bewitch), and “would convey the meaning of harm probably death; thus its meaning is that these men may die.”⁷⁸⁸ It therefore alludes to the New Testament condemnation of Judas whom Thuku used against the chiefs. The singers did not mention Harry Thuku by name. Instead they referred to him as “Munene wa Nyacing’a” which is translated as “the chief or great one of the girls”.⁷⁸⁹ “Nyacing’a” according to Arthur is the name the girls had given themselves and is used in this sense as a collective noun i.e. “these girls”. The logic behind “Munene wa Nyacing’a” was to disguise the political message in the song which had since then been proscribed by the colonial government. Finally, “ituire kahawa-ini” is rendered “who live in the coffee”.⁷⁹⁰ According to Arthur these two sentences are connected and thus can be rendered “because they live in the coffee” or else “who live in the coffee”. This line of protest alludes to the labour policy of 1920-1921 which forced girls to go out and work in the European coffee farms. Thuku was instrumental in getting the colonial “new Home orders” which stopped female labour in European coffee farms. In the Thuku crisis, the Agĩkũyũ women invaded the public space *Kĩharo*, to immortalise Thuku as a symbol of defiance and independency. He became the rallying point that united the Agĩkũyũ in the cause against colonialism as evident in the next example.

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁹ “Munene” may be translated as “the chief” but can also be translated as “leader”. “wa Nyacing’a” refers to “of the girls”.

⁷⁹⁰ Arthur’s letter dated 17th November 1922 to the Chief Native Commissioner (104a).

5.2.2b Allusion as a Hermeneutical Resource - Gideon Mũgo Kagĩka

The Thuku crisis reveals also that the Agĩkũyũ proselytes consciously used the Bible to innovatively refigure their past and interrupt the discourse of colonialism. For example, Gideon Mũgo Kagĩka⁷⁹¹, using allusion as a hermeneutical resource, wrote and printed a Swahili prayer of protest titled “*Maombi ya Kumuobea Kiongozi chetu Bwana Harry Thuku na Wazee Watuongozae pamoja Nae*” (Prayer for our Leader Harry Thuku together with other Leading Elders).⁷⁹² The prayer was used at a meeting attended by about 25,000 people organised by Christians and non-Christians of Fort Hall to seek divine intervention on Thuku’s behalf.⁷⁹³ The prayer read,

Harry Thuku our Leader...and his associate elders have been chosen by the Almighty God to be our leaders. They have been chosen for us now and not in the past, but because it is now that we are feeling the slavery which we did not have before the coming of the Europeans to East Africa. Remember too that the Lord God was able to rescue the children of Israel from slavery under Pharaoh. God has not gone away on a journey and he is not going on one now. It is to Him we should pray for he is our master. And we also believe that before God there is no difference between whites and blacks; we are all human beings – equal in the sight of God.

Let us remember that Goliath was not able to hurt David even though David was only a child. Nor could King Saul do him any harm, because David was anointed by our God. Let us remember that the Europeans and we ourselves find no shame in praying for our King George; and therefore you should feel no shame in praying for our leader and his associates. Read also the following passages: Ephesians 6: 18-19; Philippians 4:6-7; Colossians 4:2-3; James 5:16-17; Ephesians 5:17-18.⁷⁹⁴

In this prayer of protest, the Agĩkũyũ community takes new meaning. The *Athomi* who had by now adapted to the new reality confidently claimed the Christian identity as their own. But in this accommodation, rather than sever links with the old Gĩkũyũ,

⁷⁹¹ Kagĩka was a leader both in the Church, Local Native Council (Fort Hall) and K.C.A., see letter dated 18/2/1928 sent to Rev. Hooper; Letter dated 27th June, 1930 from Gideon H. Mũgo Kagĩka a teacher at out-school Gatheru (1929-1930), C.M.S Kahuhia. It during his tenure in K. C.A. that Kenyatta together with Parmenas Gĩthendũ were sent from this Church with the assistance of local missionary Rev. Green to attend Sir Hilton Young Commission on 14/2/1928. Rev. H. D. Hooper letters in Kikuyu 1925 -31, Unofficial Papers, CMS/Acc./85/F/5 (part).

⁷⁹² For this prayer, see the translated document VIII, Thuku, *Harry Thuku*, 85 and the Swahili version, 86.

⁷⁹³ Thuku, *Harry Thuku*, 85-86.

⁷⁹⁴ The English version quoted above is not an exact translation of the Swahili one quoted in part in the Appendix II.

they creatively expanded and even invented a new understanding of their community based on their colonial experience and their interaction with the Bible. Therefore, there was no difficulty in interpreting the new Agĩkũyũ community in light of the Hebrews' captivity under the Egyptian Pharaoh. The Agĩkũyũ took the place of the vulnerable Israel under the mighty Egypt. The Europeans were equated to Pharaoh, Goliath, and King Saul of Israel. Like David who was the anointed of God, they could not be harmed by Goliath or King Saul. The God of Israel is acknowledged and affirmed as the same God whom the Agĩkũyũ God knew long before the coming of the Europeans.

We also glean from the prayer the oppositional character of the evolving Agĩkũyũ hermeneutics. For example, the Pauline understanding of God was incorporated to the new definition of God in order to question colonial racial stereotyping. Before God there is no difference between whites and blacks. The Agĩkũyũ, like all other human beings were equal in the sight of God. Kagĩka's exhortation to the Agĩkũyũ to be diligent in prayers for the leaders betrays another motif. The prayer signals a profound appropriation of mimicry as both "resemblance and menace" as Bhabha would put it.⁷⁹⁵ Kagĩka's capacity and willingness to adapt to the colonial reality, even though aware that that reality was dominated by the colonisers, reflects ability to compromise and will to survive. On the one hand, he declared that God had ordained Thuku and other elders to lead the Agĩkũyũ out of oppression. On the other hand, he unashamedly pointed to the Africans' acceptance of the British King whom they always prayed for. But even in such an "ironic compromise" Kagĩka directed his readers and listeners to scriptural references appealing to them not to be ashamed to pray for the Agĩkũyũ leaders whom God had

⁷⁹⁵ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 123.

anointed. The idea of mimicry as a hermeneutical tool to elude control found meaning in the full blown Agĩkũyũ nationalism expressed in the clitoridectomy crisis.⁷⁹⁶

5.2.2c A Hermeneutical Crisis: Clitoridectomy

Charting one's cultural territory, as Edward Said projected, preceded the recovery of geographical territory in the process of decolonisation.⁷⁹⁷ However, at the heart of the cultural effort to decolonise is one's awareness of his or her belonging to a subject people.⁷⁹⁸ At the core of the ensuing female circumcision drama was not just an assertion of the Agĩkũyũ identity but also an awareness of a suppressed history capable of development, growth and maturity. The controversy of clitoridectomy clearly marked the awakening of the Agĩkũyũ conscious of themselves as prisoners in their own land. In fact, Ndũng'ũ rightly observed that the controversy "was the occasion rather than the cause of the crisis of 1929."⁷⁹⁹ The crisis also reveals that with the translated Gĩkũyũ New Testament securely in the hands of *Athomi*, colonialism could no longer monitor or control interpretation as well as other areas of cultural contacts. Instead, interpretation was broadened by the freeing of the Agĩkũyũ individual and collective consciousness and imagination as they sought answers to the crisis from biblical texts. Interpretation catalysed the re-discovery of the essentials of the pre-colonial self. This recovery birthed the Agĩkũyũ nationalism.⁸⁰⁰ I will begin by briefly discussing the female controversy before considering the hermeneutical issues that Africans considered important.

⁷⁹⁶ Circumcision for both boys and girls was one of the cardinal rituals of initiation among the Agĩkũyũ in pre-colonial and colonial periods. See Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 130-154.

⁷⁹⁷ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 252.

⁷⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 258.

⁷⁹⁹ John Ndũng'ũ argued that the issue of female circumcision helped clarify the need for freedom and independency both in religion and education. See J. B. Ndũng'ũ, "Gituamba and Kikuyu Independency in Church and School" in *Ngano* edited by McIntosh (Nairobi, 1969), 133.

⁸⁰⁰ See letter by Dr. John W. Arthur to Rev. H. Douglas Hooper written on 17th November, 1929 titled "The Crisis at Kikuyu" in CMS G/3/X/A/5/17 (University of Birmingham.)

The circumcision issue precipitated into a crisis when the Church of Scotland Mission in Gĩkũyũ country issued a memorandum demanding that all of their followers and those who wished their children to attend mission schools to pledge that they would not in any way practise or support clitoridectomy.⁸⁰¹ John Arthur, in company of several elders from the Kikuyu mission centre, traversed the Gĩkũyũ country demanding that all Christians under C.S.M. jurisdiction append their *kĩrore*⁸⁰² on the memorandum.⁸⁰³ After appending one's signature, each Christian was expected to make a solemn oath with the right hand upraised vowing never to practise clitoridectomy and also declaring his/her separation from the Kikuyu Central Association (K.C.A.)⁸⁰⁴ until that association ceased its anti-church campaign.⁸⁰⁵ By including K.C.A. in the clitoridectomy ban, the issue ended up being a test of loyalty for African Christians either to the missionaries or to the nationalist cause represented by the K.C.A. This is evident in many of the Christians who refused to append their

⁸⁰¹ See also the "Memorandum prepared by The Kikuyu Mission Council on Female Circumcision" 1st December 1931, Kikuyu in Dr. John W. Arthur Box 763 8a-8k, University of Edinburgh.

⁸⁰² The term is the Gĩkũyũ transliteration of the Swahili *Kidole* for "finger" but in the ensuing controversy stood for "fingerprint". The crisis was christened *Kĩrore* because of its notoriety.

⁸⁰³ Arthur was accompanied by Samsoni, Samweli, Ernest and Priscilla. He also had the backing of Canon Leakey (C.M.S.) and Rev. Knapp (A.I.M). See "A safari through the Kikuyu country" (24th-31st September 1929) and "The crisis at Kikuyu – John Arthur" (November 17, 1929), CMS/GX A 5/17; See also Barlow's letter on June 6th, 1930 to Her Grace The Duchess of Atholl, M.P., House of Commons, Westminster, Church of Scotland Mission, Nyeri, E. Africa (Reports, 1910-12 and circular letters), Gen. 1786/2/8a, Barlow's Paper. See also "Memorandum prepared by The Kikuyu Mission Council on Female Circumcision" 1st December 1931.

⁸⁰⁴ Kikuyu Central Association was formed to offer a forum through which the Agĩkũyũ would champion their cause. K.C.A. demanded fundamental political, social as well as economic change although it remained more reformist than revolutionary. For example on the question of Africans representation as proposed by the Hilton Young Commission, Agĩkũyũ intelligentsia was categorical that the leaders had no other choice but consider and meditate in their hearts the seriousness or implication of this proposal. In their words "*gitigunaga muthiomero*" (it benefits not him who is spoken to in a foreign language or it benefits not him is passive as the foreigner dictates the terms of their existence.) Representation by foreigners was unacceptable and something practical had to be done in order to reverse this situation. Johnstone Kenyatta, "Itwiro ria Athuri Acio Maari Guku" (Report of the Hilton Young Commission), *Muigwithania wa Andu na Bururi wa Gikuyu*, Vol. 1, no. 9 (February 1929), 15.

⁸⁰⁵ Arthur argued that K.C.A., though guarded in its action and words, was in his opinion "anti-government, anti-mission, anti-church, and anti-European generally." See also "The Crisis at Kikuyu" in CMS G/3/X/A/5/17.

kĩrore even though C.S.M. had been teaching against female mutilation for many years before the crisis.⁸⁰⁶

For example, Dedan Mũgo (C.S.M. teacher and an elder), refused to take the oath, insisting that it would be a betrayal of his nation if he took a vow not against the female circumcision, but against the K.C.A.⁸⁰⁷ Other elders in Arthur's Kirk Session refused to append their *kĩrore* and a great many defiantly said "I shall remain a Kikuyu. I shall continue to circumcise".⁸⁰⁸ Many of the individuals argued that they were not willing to allow the ban to separate them from K.C.A. whose influence in matters of local politics and welfare was evident.⁸⁰⁹ As a result, the communicants and other mission adherents who refused to make public or written denunciation of clitoridectomy and any political affiliation with the K.C.A. were excommunicated and their children refused entry to Mission schools. Teachers and evangelists lost their jobs. Having been cast out, they were depicted as unenlightened and bound to the past and as having rejected the enlightened way. Those loyal were honoured and considered clear-minded. The opposition climaxed with the *Mũthĩrĩgũ*⁸¹⁰ which so quickly transformed to become literally the word of the people articulating their underlying political feelings.

⁸⁰⁶ Female circumcision in Church of Scotland Mission sphere of influence had been prohibited to Christians by the local Church laws in Thogoto 1916 and at Tumutumu in 1920. Silas N. Karimu traced the origin of the debate within the Church Mission Society back from the first Christian meeting on 3rd January 1923 when the issue was debated at length and later on 4th February 1923 in a church setting during a conference summoned to discuss the issue. Karimu indicated that there was a general consensus (in form of a covenant) apart from some few doubters that all Christians should work towards discouragement and finally eradication of clitoridectomy among the community. Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 279; see also Barlow's letter on June 6th, 1930 to Her Grace The Duchess of Atholl, Barlow Papers; See also letter dated 1st August 1927 by Silas N. Karimu addressed to African Christians and copied to Rev. Hooper. CMS/Acc./85/F/5 (part).

⁸⁰⁷ "The Crisis at Kikuyu" in CMS G/3/X/A/5/17.

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁹ Arthur, "Memorandum".

⁸¹⁰ This was a song composed to express the political feelings of the moment and used pejoratively against the *Kĩrore* adherents. It was first sung at C.M.S. College at Kabete by students who had picked the tune from Mombasa. It later spread all over the Gikũyũ with singers and composer liberally changing words and content to suit the local demand. The song became a rallying call for both cultural and political resistance.

On their part, missionaries such as Barlow saw the inability of the African Christians to stand firm on the issue as coming from “the influence of political agitators whose object was to undermine and destroy the authority of the Mission and of the Church.”⁸¹¹ In Nyeri town, which Marion Stevenson described as “a hotbed of political agitation”, Christians who refused to take the oath were accused of following blindly the “politically-minded men” who had abandoned all evangelistic effort “and were heading straight for a rupture with the Church”.⁸¹² However, the Church Mission Society (C.M.S.) interpreted the crisis differently. It reacted strongly against Arthur’s decision to confront the K.C.A. Hooper accused Arthur of showing himself to be a bad judge of the Agĩkũyũ. According to Hooper, Arthur was attempting to stamp out the K.C.A. by an ecclesiastical procedure.⁸¹³ He equated Arthur’s action as the use of “the lever of political repression to secure a moral end” and as mainly vindictive against the K.C.A.⁸¹⁴ The K.C.A had been unequivocal in its opposition against Arthur as the representative of “African interest” in the Colonial Legislative council.⁸¹⁵ The K.C.A. leaders were so dissatisfied with Arthur’s advocacy of Agĩkũyũ interests that they decided in 1929 to bypass him and deal directly with the Governor as well as the Imperial Secretary of State, leaving Dr. Arthur a bitter person.⁸¹⁶ After this brief summary of the clitoridectomy saga, I propose to draw several points.

⁸¹¹ Reports, 1910-12 and circular letters, Barlow Papers, Gen. 1786/2 1-18, University of Edinburgh.

⁸¹² Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 274; See also *Kenya 1898 – 1948: The Jubilee Book of the Church of Scotland Mission Kenya Colony*, 23; Blakeslee, *Beyond the Kikuyu Curtain*, 187.

⁸¹³ “Circumcision Schools”, CMS/AF/35/49Afg/R/1.

⁸¹⁴ Rev. Hooper to Bishop of Mombasa dated January 15 1930, CMS/AF/35/49Afg/R/1. Agĩkũyũ staunchest backers such as Commander Wedgwood, Mr. McGregor Ross and Dr. Norman Leys had earlier written to K.C.A. leadership strongly reprobating female circumcision urging the members to recognise that its continuance as a plank in their platform could only alienate the sympathy they desired to retain. See “Circumcision Schools”.

⁸¹⁵ As a result of the female circumcision controversy the Govern of the colony asked Arthur to resign from the executive legislative council. “The Crisis at Kikuyu” in CMS G/3/X/A/5/17.

⁸¹⁶ *Ibid.*

The response of the African Christians who are the focus of this chapter was varied and at times antagonistic to those who did not support their position. I have identified three major responses to the crisis. First, there was the pro-mission group which basically agreed with the missionaries' judicial approach. They argued that according to the Bible the giving of the circumcision as a mark of the covenant was for the male only. In addition, they rejected clitoridectomy on the basis of their Christian enlightenment and consideration of "the bad customs that are counted as sins by the Biblical teachings."⁸¹⁷ The group considered itself "a new nation" emerging from the old Gĩkũyũ and now completely under "Biblical control" and the Gospel.⁸¹⁸ For this group, Christianity meant a complete break with the past in order to build the "new nation" of the Agĩkũyũ.

The next group was made up of moderates who rejected clitoridectomy but did not find it necessary to alienate themselves from the dissenting Agĩkũyũ. For example, Silas N. Karimũ, reading from 1 Corinthians 3: 16-17, argued that personal responsibility and self-mastery over one's body was paramount in helping individuals make their decision on the issue.⁸¹⁹ He argued that since the body belonged to Jesus Christ, the Agĩkũyũ Christians were to think carefully about the welfare of the young girls who were equally servants of Jesus Christ. Karimũ rejected clitoridectomy because of the pain and suffering it inflicted upon the innocent. He equated clitoridectomy to *ũkombo* (slavery) and a shameful practise that humiliated girls.⁸²⁰ In

⁸¹⁷ They listed such customs as evil ways which included Departed Spirits' worship; Sacrifices to Departed Spirits; Tribal markings or piercing of body (like ears); Polygamy; Witch doctors and their business; Charms; Leaving the dead body in the open air; Tribal dances that led both man and woman to be under power of lewdness. See "The Opinions of Kyambu Kikuyu Natives on Female Circumcision", 12th September 1929, Gen. 1786/2 8e, Barlow Papers.

⁸¹⁸ The petition was written at Canon Leakey's station (CMS) with "trusted African leaders" as representatives from the four Mission in Kikuyu land i.e. CSM, CMS, GMS and AIM; together with Dr. Arthur, Canon Leakey, Barlow and Rev. Knapp. See "The Opinions of Kyambu Kikuyu Natives on Female Circumcision".

⁸¹⁹ Silas N. Karimu, CMS/Acc./85/F/5 (part).

⁸²⁰ Ibid.

his opinion, the practice could not be morally justified and it was irreconcilable with the Christian faith. Wanjirũ wa Kĩnyua⁸²¹ on her part argued that the controversy on clitoridectomy was a non-issue since it did not answer to the question of salvation. What mattered in her opinion was one's relationship with Jesus Christ.⁸²² She further argued that the matter should be left to the Church for through it God's will would be known. She saw the controversy as a sideshow and a distraction greatly hampering unity which Agĩkũyũ urgently needed. Gideon Mũgo Kagĩka on his part said that the reaction of C.S.M. and A.I.M. was unnecessary since clitoridectomy's days were numbered in the Gĩkũyũ country.⁸²³

The third group came to be referred to as *Aregi* (dissenters) because of their opposition to the new loyalty rule. They held that they could not take the oath of loyalty since they did not find any biblical justification for the ban on clitoridectomy. L. S. B. Leakey, with great clarity, analysed the hermeneutical issues that this group raised. The first problem as given by Leakey was in the New Testament Gĩkũyũ translation of Mary mother of Jesus (Matthew 1:23, and Luke 1:27) as *mũirĩtu* which in Gĩkũyũ specifically referred to an unmarried girl who had been initiated and operated upon.⁸²⁴ Leakey noted that many could not understand how “after having been taught for years that the Mother of Jesus was *Mũirĩtu Mariamu*”, the missionaries could suddenly turn around and demand that all Christians must give up anything to do with clitoridectomy.⁸²⁵ Most Agĩkũyũ who read the Gĩkũyũ New Testament without anyone exegeting what Virgin Mary referred to found in this

⁸²¹ Wanjikũ was the first woman to have her letter to *Mũiguithania* published. See Wanjirũ wa Kĩnyua letter to the editor in, *Mũiguithania wa Andu na Bururi wa Gikuyu*, Vol. 1, no. 12 (May 1929), 7, 8.

⁸²² Ibid.

⁸²³ Letter dated 30th March 1930, Unofficial Papers, CMS/Acc./85/F/5 (part).

⁸²⁴ Those circumcised were also allowed to perform certain restricted forms of intercourse referred to as *ũmbani* and *nguĩko*. L. S. B. Leakey, “The Kikuyu Problem of the Initiation of Girls”, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 61 (Jan.-Jun., 1931), 277- 280.

⁸²⁵ According to Leakey, in their oral teaching, although not in translations, the Virgin Mary was described as *mũirĩtu mũtheru* (a clean *mũirĩtu*, i.e. a girl who had never had sexual intercourse). Ibid., p. 279.

translation a biblical justification for clitoridectomy. Likewise, in Galatians 6:15 which reads “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation”, the word used to translated “circumcision” in Gĩkũyũ was *I-rua*.⁸²⁶ The term applied to the ceremony of initiation for both sexes. The word in its broadest sense included the preparation for initiation, the ceremonies and dances which took place during the final few days, and the actual physical operation on the genital organs for both boys and girls. In its narrower sense the term referred to the actual operation.⁸²⁷ The *Aregi* posed the question that if according to the Bible it did not matter whether one practises *I-rua* or not, why then were they being forced to take the oath of loyalty? In the *Aregi*’s opinion, the ban was a perversion of true Christianity.⁸²⁸

Several hermeneutical issues arise from the discussion above. First, all three groups selectively chose biblical texts which they then redacted in order to justify their position on clitoridectomy. This kind of approach became the classic way in which Agĩkũyũ Christians read and interpreted biblical texts. As common sense hermeneuts, Agĩkũyũ proselytes in their encounters with the translated Bible would identify specific dimensions of the texts that fitted within their “interpretative interests and life interests”. Second, as in the case of *Aregi* discussed above, anti-colonial hermeneutics did not shy from mimicking both Western and biblical ideas which they freely hybridised by juxtaposing what they borrowed with the indigenous ideas. They would read these ideas through their own interpretative lens and even use them to challenge colonial hegemony. Finally, the clitoridectomy crisis became foundational in the establishment of hermeneutics that formulated expressions and emotions of

⁸²⁶ Leakey, “The Kikuyu Problem of the Initiation of Girls”, 277; See also Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 132-138.

⁸²⁷ Ibid.

⁸²⁸ Blakeslee, *Beyond the Kikuyu Curtain*, 187.

pride and defiance that became the backbone of Gĩkũyũ nationalism. Neither *kĩrore* hostility, nor the colonial church's stand on clitoridectomy drove the *Aregi* away from Christianity. Most *Aregi* still considered themselves Christians, and Christianity remained important to them. With their dismissal from mission churches and schools as well as their desire to recover or rehabilitate their cultural identity, the *Aregi* sought independency both in religion and education.

5.2.2d Independency

The Church Independent movement in Kenya is a good example of Edward Said's idea of resistance as an alternative way of conceiving history rather than just being merely a reaction to colonialism.⁸²⁹ This is not the occasion to give detailed historical analyses on the development of Independent hermeneutics and resistance. But for the sake of clarity, I will highlight some of the important points that will help understand how the movement came to be. The idea of independence as already intimated did not start with the Africans. Krapf for example had envisioned an African Independent church long before colonialism was a settled case.⁸³⁰ In colonial Kenya, however, the original motif of independency was not religious. According to Rev. Daudi Maina wa Kĩragũ⁸³¹, questioning began because many Agĩkũyũ resented mission education.⁸³² Younger men desirous of better education argued that religious motif should not be the basis of liberal education as missionaries had insisted. Parmenas Gĩthendũ⁸³³ dismissed missionary education as only concerned with ideals

⁸²⁹ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 260.

⁸³⁰ Rev. A. J. Hopkins (Methodist Missionary) like Krapf desired an Independent movement of the African people which would "naturalize Christianity in Africa." Hopkins, *Trail Blazers and Road Makers*, 127, 133, 142-143.

⁸³¹ Rev. Daudi Maina Kĩragũ was one of the first ministers to be ordained as Independent priest and is credited to have written, *Kĩrĩa Gĩatũmire Independent Īgĩe* ('The Beginnings of Independence'). He subsequently became a leader of the Independent Church in Murang'a, and to some extent Nyeri and Embu. He died in May 1969.

⁸³² Daudi Maina wa Kĩragũ, *Kĩrĩa Gĩatũmire Independent Īgĩe* (Nairobi: Regal Press Ltd, 1963)

⁸³³ Parmenas Gĩthendũ Mockerie and Jomo Kenyatta were appointed to represent the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA) and the Kikuyu People "before the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Closer

that had little practical reference to the problems of the time.⁸³⁴ Those who questioned mission-based education were the first to break away from the mission-controlled schools leading to the establishment of Kikuyu Independent Schools Association (K.I.S.A.).⁸³⁵

However, while it is true that independency's original purpose was in education, its religious importance cannot be underestimated.⁸³⁶ Gĩcaru maintained that the fundamental principle behind independency was the colonial moral ambiguity and contradictions.⁸³⁷ He wrote that white Christians preached "Love thy neighbour as thyself" but practised "I will ignore Biblical platitudes as to the equality of men... the African is fundamentally inferior".⁸³⁸ As a result people were disillusioned and discontented.⁸³⁹ The ultimate breaking point was precipitated by the Independents need for "padres" to baptise their children and perform other religious functions. The leaders of Independent schools did not have the knowledge or resources to undertake clergy training. Confident that the Anglican Bishop of Mombasa would not deny them the right to have "padres", they requested him to allow them have three men that they

Union in East Africa, which was sitting in London." They departed on 28th April 1931. Even after travelling miles across the ocean, the Joint Select Committee could not hear from any more witnesses on the East African problems. The committee had listened to nine Africans who were all Government appointees. However, they submitted the K.C.A.'s memorandum which was never included in the published official Blue Book.

⁸³⁴ Mockerie, *An African Speaks for his People*, 61.

⁸³⁵ K.I.S.A later split and beside it was formed the Kikuyu Karĩng'a Educational Association (K.K.E.A.) Mr. H. S. Scott, formerly Director of Education in Kenya in the monograph by Oxford University Press entitled "Some Aspects of education in Tropical Africa" noted the emergence of *independent schools* in 1935 who at the time had roughly 40 to 50 independent schools and about 2500 pupils. The existence and continuance of "new movement towards the establishment of some form of independent Church" was a source of great anxiety. Editor, "The Significance of the Present Hour in our Kenya Mission", *Kikuyu News*, no. 137 (September 1936), 2f; Rev. J. H. Duncan, "A Week-end Safari", *Kikuyu News*, no. 138 (December 1936), 15.

⁸³⁶ Ndungu says that in 1935 there had been 34 Independent schools in existence with a total of 2,518 pupils, increasing to 3,984 in 1936. Ndung'ũ, "Gituamba and Kikuyu Independency", 137.

⁸³⁷ Muga Gĩcaru, *Land of Sunshine: Scenes of Life in Kenya before Mau Mau* (London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd., 1958), 108-109.

⁸³⁸ Gĩcaru was here quoting E.C. Grogan, member of the Kenya Parliament, in his book *From Cape to Cairo*.

⁸³⁹ Gĩcaru, *Land of Sunshine*, 112.

had chosen go to C.M.S.'s divinity school in Mombasa.⁸⁴⁰ In addition, as the three were being prepared for ordination, the Independents wanted the C.M.S. to offer temporary services of a minister to baptise until their own men were ready.⁸⁴¹ Missionaries on their part pressured the group to state clearly if they desired to join the Church of England or form a new Church. But wa Kīragū was unequivocal that their desire was for independency since their “old European helpers had cast them off.”⁸⁴² They preferred to have their church and “wished their candidates, after ordination, to be under the control of their own committee, and not of the Bishop, or the C.M.S.”⁸⁴³

The Mission Churches flatly rejected the Independents' proposal and request. The Mission Committee justified their action by arguing that in accepting the Independents' proposal, missionaries would be going against the spirit of unity. They concluded that they would be the last to encourage division while missionaries were working hard towards the unity of the Church in order to form one United Church of Kenya. Instead, the Mission committee advised them to return to the fold of the Mission churches if their plea was to be considered.⁸⁴⁴ The Independents for their part interpreted this rejection as dishonourable and failure for the part of the missionaries to recognise their part of responsibility to “*Mūtūmbi*” (our Creator). In their opinion, missionaries abandoned their responsibility to God and to the Independents even though like Peter in John 21:15-19 they were admonished by Christ to be feeding

⁸⁴⁰ Their request written to the Bishop of Mombasa was dated 5th July 1933. The three men that had been chosen were Mr. Daudi Maina wa Kīragū (Fort Hall), Mr. Stephano Wahīra wa Rūgara (Nyeri), and Mr. Elija Kībachia (Kīambu). It was followed by a joint meeting held on October 13th, 1933 at Kahuhia C.M.S centre under the chair of the Anglican Bishop of Mombasa and Secretary Rev. R. G. M. Calderwood (C.S.M.) The delegation of the Independent Schools Committee included Daudi Maina, (pres.) Justus Kang'ethe, (sec.), Nahashon Njoroge, Petero Kībaka, and Hezekia Gacui. Min. 15, “Minutes of a conference on Missionary Co-operation which met at Kahuhia (C.M.S.) from Friday 13th October to May 16th October 1933”, John W. Arthur Box 763 8a-8k.

⁸⁴¹ Ibid., Min. 17.

⁸⁴² This was in reference to the clitoridectomy crisis.

⁸⁴³ Ibid., Min. 16 and Min. 18.

⁸⁴⁴ wa Kīragū, *Kīrīa Gīatūmire Independent ĩgĩe*, 4-9.

“*tũgundu twa Mwathani*” (Lord’s lambs.)⁸⁴⁵ Instead of following Christ’s command, the Mission churches had abandoned the lambs leaving them at the mercy of the scorching sun.⁸⁴⁶

After the failed attempt to secure assistance in matters of training and temporary leadership, the Kikuyu Independent Schools Association and Churches turned to the South African Rev. Dr. Daniel William Alexander for help.⁸⁴⁷

Archbishop Alexander started his “Seminary”⁸⁴⁸ in earnest despite dissent from Kikuyu Independent Schools Association (K.I.S.A.) for his unilateral pact⁸⁴⁹ with Kikuyu Karĩng’a⁸⁵⁰ to have an extra student included in the original list of six. The arrival of the Archbishop in Kenya was not received kindly by the missionaries. The Protestant missionaries also began to falsely allege that the Independents were anti-Christian.⁸⁵¹ It was said that Independents were unlike the “bearers of the true Gospel light”, since they “had become close accomplices in forwarding the master strategy of

⁸⁴⁵ wa Kĩragũ, *Kĩrĩa Gĩatũmire Independent ĩgĩe*, 6.

⁸⁴⁶ Mockerie, *An African Speaks for his People*, 35, 47 and 53. See also wa Kĩragũ, *Kĩrĩa Gĩatũmire Independent ĩgĩe*, 6.

⁸⁴⁷ Bishop Alexander was born on December 25th, 1882. He was consecrated Bishop on September 11 1927. In his diary the entry for the day read “Greatest day of my life. Consecrated Bishop and later became the Archbishop and Primate of African Orthodox Church of South Africa. This was not the first visit to Kenya for in his diary Archbishop Alexander recorded passing through Kenya in October 1931 on his way to Uganda to meet Reader Sparta the founder and organiser of the African Orthodox Church in Uganda. Sparta had requested assistance from the Archbishop after reading in *The Negro World* the sermon of the Right Rev. George Alexander McGuire. According to Gakaara wa Wanjaũ, it is during the Archbishop’s return from Uganda that he first met James Beattah who introduced him to the K.I.S.A leadership, wa Wanjaũ, *Agĩkũyũ Mau Mau na Wĩyathi*, 61); See also Bishop Daniel William Alexander “Family Records: 1880-1968”, RG 005 Box 1 Folders 1, 13, 14 (African Orthodox Church Records 1880-1974, Emory University).

⁸⁴⁸ The “Seminary” work started in earnest on December 17th, 1935 until June 27th 1937. The first six students at the seminary included Mr. Daudi Maina wa Kĩragũ (Fort Hall), Mr. Stephano Wahĩra wa Rũgara (Nyeri), Mr. Elija Kĩbachia (Kĩambu), Mr. Jasan Mũhungi wa Makara (Fort Hall), Mr. Harrison Gacũkia wa Kĩmanga (Kiambu) and Mr. Adnajer (Nyeri) he was later replaced by Mr. Philip Kiande wa Magũ. The text books used by Alexander’s students included *History of the Bible*, *Bible with Apocrypha*, *Prayers from Orthodox Churches*, *Koran*, *Catholic Students*, *Chrysostom on the Priesthood*, *The Epistle of St. Ignatius*, *The Religion of Mankind*, *Consecration of the Church of the Torch (Kikuyu)*, *Orthodox Grosses* and *Catechism*. wa Kĩragũ, *Kĩrĩa Gĩatũmire Independent ĩgĩe*, 9-13.

⁸⁴⁹ The Archbishop had made a secret pact with the rival group Kikuyu Karĩng’a to add Mr. Arthur Gatũng’ũ whose character and integrity as leader was put in question by the rest.

⁸⁵⁰ This was a more militant off-shoot of the K.I.S.A.

⁸⁵¹ Blakeslee, *Beyond the Kikuyu Curtain*, 183; See also Dr. John W. Arthur, “C.C.R.R.”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 139 (March 1937), 14. (C.C.R.R. stood for the Christian Council on Racial Relations).

the prince of darkness.”⁸⁵² The colonial government in like manner made attempts to stall Independents’ religious activities on the advice of the Missions.⁸⁵³

Nevertheless, the Independents were in no doubt about their identity as Christians. They believed that the church that they had formed was part of the Church that was formed on the day of the Pentecost. To the group, Pentecost meant all “mĩhĩrĩga” (clans or races or people including Africans) of the world, who were represented on the day the Spirit came.⁸⁵⁴ The word “Church” which for them meant *kĩhoero* (place of worship) was in existence long before the coming of the missionaries. *Ngai* built his *kĩhoero* long before the Europeans could put claim to this institution because “*Ngai ti wa mũhĩrĩga wa Athũngũ*” (God does not belong to the “clan” of Europeans.)⁸⁵⁵ I am of the opinion, however, that Archbishop Alexander is the one who gave shape and form not only to the Independents’ hermeneutical development but also the ideological hope that the Independent Schools and Churches as part of the Agĩkũyũ nationalistic movement so much needed.⁸⁵⁶ In order to appreciate the role that Alexander played under very difficult, almost insurmountable circumstances, it is important to consider his hermeneutical and theological understanding of mission.

In the first place, Archbishop Alexander’s hermeneutics was geared towards a new way of conceiving history and Christian mission. Alexander who was formally trained in the Anglican Church in South Africa resigned in 1914. On October 6th 1924 he organised the African Orthodox Church in South Africa and was consecrated its

⁸⁵² Blakeslee, *Beyond the Kikuyu Curtain*, 183.

⁸⁵³ While in Kenya, Archbishop Alexander’s movements were closely followed by the colonial Criminal Investigation Department (C.I.D.), and his meetings were reported directly to the C.I.D. headquarters (see Kenya National Archives PC/CP/8/7/3 no. 30a); See also Gĩcaru, *Land of Sunshine*, 79.

⁸⁵⁴ wa Kĩragũ, *Kĩrĩa Gĩatũmire Independent ĩgĩe*, 1.

⁸⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸⁵⁶ Gĩcaru, *Land of Sunshine*, 79.

Bishop in Boston by the Right Rev. George Alexander McGuire.⁸⁵⁷ Of his consecration he wrote,

it has of times been written in books dealing with the subject of Churches not under the direct supervision of White people that, we who have organised spiritual work amongst our people, are men who have broken away from some European Church through being disciplined for some breach of Church law, and taken away some of the adherents.⁸⁵⁸

In defence of his action, he wrote that he had organised the African Orthodox Church in South Africa because of “the unchristian spirit” exhibited in many so-called Christian Churches, restricting Christians of African descent to inferior positions in the Church of God, and segregating them into separate congregations because of colour. He declared that “ALL men should spiritually be free to serve God to the utmost of the individual’s ability.”⁸⁵⁹ This understanding motivated him to travel to Kenya even though he had no knowledge of the language of the people and knew little of their mode of life. With the confidence that the inhabitants of Kenya were Africans he accepted the invitation.

Secondly, his hermeneutics alluded to Pan-Africanism⁸⁶⁰ and the black consciousness.⁸⁶¹ In a sermon titled “the Harvest is Great: But Labourers are few – The Problem of Africa”⁸⁶² the Archbishop wrote that fulfilling the command “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all Nations, teach them” was not the

⁸⁵⁷ Alexander “Family Records: 1880-1968”, A.O.C (1880-1974)/RG 005 Box 2 Folder 3 (Emory University.)

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁰ Kwame Appiah credits Alexander Crummell and Edward Wilmot Blyden for intellectual articulation of the Pan-African ideology. But he attaches the intellectual and the practical foundations of Pan-Africanism to W. E. B. Du Bois and Leopold Senghor as the exponent of negritude. See Appiah, *In my Father’s House*, 3-46; Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 85-97, 98, 132-133; and Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 276-277.

⁸⁶¹ Archbishop Alexander’s idea of “Blackness” and its positive attributes around which all black people of the world could rally was inspired by sermons that his mentor Rev. George Alexander McGuire preached in 1924 among which included, “What hast thou in thy hand? And he said, a rod!” in reference to God’s question to Moses, out of the burning bush, in the land of Midian. The third sermon was based on the Ethiopian Eunuch whom Philip had baptised titled “He went on His Way Rejoicing.”⁸⁶¹ See the “Personal papers of Daniel William Alexander – Unpublished works,” A.O.C (1931-1966)/RG 005 Box 2 Folder 4.

⁸⁶² Ibid.

prerogative of the whites. In his opinion Africans too had received “the benefit of the command” and were as well responsible “for the uplift of our brethren just as the Whiteman.” He posed, “has not St. Paul said, ‘and how shall they preach unless they be sent? Neither doth any man take the honour to himself; but he that is called of God as person.’”⁸⁶³ The “grace of vocation” to the Archbishop was the new thought given by God to inspire black people with greater zeal to labour among “those unknown brothers for whom they will in future be responsible.”⁸⁶⁴ Thus enlightened and inflamed, the Africans like himself, had received power as the early church on the day of Pentecost. They were free and proud of the new being that they had become.

Because of the shared experience of oppression all people of African descent needed to come together to fulfil Patriarch McGuire’s vision of “a Catholic Church governed by Africans for Africans the world over, and especially in the motherland.”⁸⁶⁵ According to Alexander, before 1921, none among the Africans had ventured to form a part of “the Catholic Church for his Race” since they had not received “valid orders because the Episcopate was fast bound with fetters of iron”.⁸⁶⁶ This changed, however, with the Patriarch’s success as “the first of his Race” to bring “to the view of the African a new perspective of his right to govern himself spiritually.”⁸⁶⁷

Another aspect of his hermeneutical commitment focused on racial stereotyping.⁸⁶⁸ Just like in Kenya, he felt the South Africans who gave their “supreme Sacrifice” by giving the “most precious gift that they had, their lives” for the sake of the world humanity, their sacrifice did not stop “avarice and distrust”

⁸⁶³ “Personal papers of Daniel William Alexander”.

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁸ See his comments on the 15th anniversary of the Carrier Corp Commemoration service of those who had served and died during World War I and II. A.O.C (1931-1966)/RG 005 Box 2 Folder 4.

against the “coloured folk” as “a despised Race”.⁸⁶⁹ But by their deeds of heroism Africans like the rest of the soldiers left “on the pages of history however meagre it may be an imperishable record which their country dare not ignore” so noble, so loyal and so honourable.⁸⁷⁰ I cannot imagine the Archbishop interacting with the Agĩkũyũ without revisiting the issue which had remained in their mind since the days of Thuku.⁸⁷¹ Alexander saw it as immoral for the Europeans to refuse to embrace a system of mutual trust and understanding and accept that the Africans were part of the inhabitants of the earth.⁸⁷² He demanded that the African be given equal opportunity for self-realisation based not on the colour of the skin but on their capacity as human beings.⁸⁷³ He added, “God made all men in His image... We can all be brothers in Christ, without being brothers-in-law.”⁸⁷⁴

It is with that sort of thinking that, after a year and half in training, six Agĩkũyũ were ordained by the Archbishop Alexander.⁸⁷⁵ The ordination brought with it the first focused attempt to organise and restructure the Independent movement as a Church starting with the convention held on September 3rd 1937 at Ngangarĩithi, in Nyeri.⁸⁷⁶ This was followed by a declaration of independence from European control both in education and religious work.⁸⁷⁷ The Independent Church of Gakarara under the leadership of the Rev. Daudi Maina wa Kĩragũ became a mission Church. From

⁸⁶⁹ RG 005 Box 2 Folder 4.

⁸⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁷¹ During the World War I the number of Africans in Kenya alone who died was estimated to be 50000 carriers or higher. Arthur, “East Africa in Transition”, 20.

⁸⁷² RG 005 Box 2 Folder 4.

⁸⁷³ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁵ See also entries in the Archbishop’s diary in Bishop Daniel William Alexander “Family Records: 1880-1968”. A.O.C. (1880-1974)/RG 005 Box 1 Folders 1, 13, 14.

⁸⁷⁶ The desire was to have a united Independent movement from the start but the Kikuyu Karĩng’u under Rev. Arthur Gatũng’u declared its independence from the rest unequivocally declared they were not part of Kikuyu Independent Schools and formally set African Independent Pentecostal Church of Kenya.

⁸⁷⁷ wa Kĩragũ, *Kĩrĩa Gĩatũmire Independent ĩgĩe*, 17-18.

then on, wa Kīragū started ordaining his own ministers, and establishing churches in Central Province, the Rift Valley, Nairobi and Mombasa.⁸⁷⁸

5.2.2e Mūiguithania: Jomo Kenyatta and Agīkūyū Nationalism

The other individual who in my opinion was equally pivotal in shaping the thinking of the dissenting Agīkūyū was Jomo Kenyatta. As intimated earlier, the emerging elites like Kenyatta were never able to transform the Gīkūyū nationalism beyond ethnic provincialism which was the result of a separatist and even chauvinist conception of a nation. Kenyatta's hermeneutics was equally elitist envisioning assimilation as the best path to the colonial economic and political progress. Nonetheless, Kenyatta did articulate what Said refers to as the "restorative vision" of a community suffering from the humiliating shackles of colonialism.⁸⁷⁹

The hermeneutical commitments that I address in this section (in part represented by Kenyatta) can be gleaned in a newsletter titled *Mūiguithania*. Through *Mūiguithania*, we experience the power of *Athomi*'s appropriation of the written word to augment their oral literature in their hermeneutical awakening. Indeed, the publication of the complete Gīkūyū New Testament augmented an already established tradition of writing in form of newsletters, pamphlets as well as letters expressing the evolving *Athomi*'s religious, cultural as well as political opinions.⁸⁸⁰ *Mūiguithania* was a newsletter written in Gīkūyū which Kenyatta together with other members of K.C.A. launched.⁸⁸¹ The term *Mūiguithania* conjures up the Gīkūyū image of a

⁸⁷⁸ On the work and mission that Rev. Daudi Maina wa Kīragū accomplished, see wa Kīragū, *Kīrīa Gīatūmire Independent īgīe*, 19-26.

⁸⁷⁹ See Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 266.

⁸⁸⁰ Kenyatta's editorial comments in *Muiguithania wa Andu na Bururi wa Gikuyu*, Vol. 1, no. 3 (July 1928).

⁸⁸¹ Jomo Kenyatta spelt *Mūiguithania* as *Muigwithania*. The first issue appeared in May of 1928 and the monthly newsletter remained in operation until the beginning of 1930 when it was proscribed by the Colonial Government. It had a wide circulation, dealing with Gīkūyū customs and proverbs, and bringing in some world news, as well as local politics. See "Muranagia Kae wi Muthungu Niki? Andu Airu na Mawira Mao" (Why do you ask, Are You a Whiteman? Black people and their Occupations, *Muigwithania wa Andu na Bururi wa Gikuyu*, Vol. 1, no. 4 (August 1928), 9; Letter by Dr. John W.

mediator or unifier and the biblical image of Jesus as the Mediator. Rev. A. W. McGregor (C.M.S.) the earliest Protestant missionary to start collecting Gĩkũyũ words entered the term “*mugwithania*” for “mediator” and “*kuigwithania*” in reference to “mediate, to” in his published *English-Kikuyu Vocabulary*.⁸⁸² The term was also used in several instances in the earliest Gĩkũyũ New Testament to translate Jesus Christ as the “mediator” (*Mũiguithania*) and “mediate” (*iguithania*). These examples can be found in Galatians 3:19, 20; 1Timothy 2:5; and Hebrews 8:6, 9:15, 2:24.⁸⁸³ According to Barlow, the term “*mũigwithania*” could refer to either “Newsbearer” or “Unifier” (he who brings harmony, unity, agreement.)⁸⁸⁴

Kenyatta defined “*Muigwithania*” as “*muhunjia wa kuhunjiria andu a bururi wa Agikuyu maundu ma buriri wao, na gutetera ndereti iria njagiruru*” i.e., preacher to the nation of Agĩkũyũ about affairs of their land (country), and advocates for just causes (or acceptable models/methods/modes of agitation.⁸⁸⁵ By using *Mũiguithania* and equating it to the Christian use of *Mũhunjia* (the “sent” one), Kenyatta subverted the meaning of *Mũhunjia*. In actual fact he robbed the missionaries’ exclusive claim to this office and applied it to serve as the source and path of knowledge and news.⁸⁸⁶ Kagĩka developed further Kenyatta’s hermeneutical position by radically connecting the Gĩkũyũ “unifier” to the archetype “*Mũiguithania ũrĩa mũnene*” (the great Mediator) who is Jesus Christ.⁸⁸⁷ He argued that it was in the cause of unity that the

Arthur to Rev. H. Douglas Hooper written on 17th November, 1929 from the Church of Scotland Mission Kikuyu titled “The Crisis at Kikuyu” in CMS G/3/X/A/5/17; See also Arthur, “Jomo Kenyatta-Enigma”, 1290.

⁸⁸² McGregor, *English-Kikuyu Vocabulary*, 109.

⁸⁸³ *Kĩrĩkanĩro Kĩrĩa Kĩerũ Kĩa Jesu Kristo Ũrĩa Mwathani witũ o na Mũhonokia Witũ*.

⁸⁸⁴ See the Criminal Investigation Department translated copy of “Muigwithania” dated 10th August 1928. (no. C.I.D. P.2/4/B/21), *Mwigwithania*, DC/MKS. 10 B/13/1, shelf 1485, Box11, Kenya National Archives.

⁸⁸⁵ I owe this translation to Charles Ng’ang’a Wairia of Gĩthũngũri, Kĩambu (currently residing in North Carolina, United States of America.)

⁸⁸⁶ Johnstone Kenyatta, “Ndereti Cia Muthondeki”, *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 2 (June 1928), 2.

⁸⁸⁷ G. H. M. Kagika, “Uiguano wa Mutigaire” (Unity in the Common Ancestor), *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 3, (July 1928), 10-11.

Son of God came into the world to save Agĩkũyũ as recorded in Hebrews 12:24 and 9:15.⁸⁸⁸ This interpretation made Barlow conclude that the object of *Mũiguithania*'s publication was to unify Agĩkũyũ.⁸⁸⁹

Launching of *Mũiguithania* was a symbolic gesture reminding Africans that they had every right to “free development and expression”. The issues discussed in the newsletter revolved around the themes such as virtues of hard work, unity, wisdom, moral uprightness, and self-control and self-mastery as given in Proverbs 6:9; 19:15; 16:31; 16:19.⁸⁹⁰ *Mũiguithania* is replete with Gĩkũyũ proverbs, poetry and stories that Kenyatta and others used as hermeneutical resources which offered the impetus needed to bring the community together. Kenyatta, in particular, took every opportunity to prod his contemporaries to embrace unity, hard work, diligence, self-worth and accountability.⁸⁹¹ For example, in order to inculcate moral and ethical appropriateness of unity Kenyatta repeatedly used a Gĩkũyũ proverb “*Urutagwo Mwiruti*” i.e. work is accomplished by self-help or learning is best acquired when one teaches himself. The proverb served as a commentary as well as a viable tool to communicate the appropriateness of “*ũiguano*” (unity or togetherness).⁸⁹²

In the ongoing debate on *Mũiguithania*, the issue of land also became the rallying point for unity. Kenyatta and others drew illumination from the religious phenomenology of the Biblical world in order to expand the quest for and the restoration of their geographical identity.⁸⁹³ Using overtly biblical language, Kenyatta reminded the community that land was an immemorial inheritance.⁸⁹⁴ The community

⁸⁸⁸ Kagika, “Uiguano wa Mutigaire” (Unity in the Common Ancestor), 10-11.

⁸⁸⁹ See Barlow, DC/MKS. 10 B/13/1, shelf 1485, Box11.

⁸⁹⁰ *Weririkanie* (Call to Remembrance), Muigwithania, July 1928, Vol. 1, no. 3 p.11.

⁸⁹¹ See N. M. Reuben, “Urutagwo Mwiruti”, *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 6 (October 1928), 11.

⁸⁹² Kenyatta, “Ndereti Cia Muthondeki”, 1.

⁸⁹³ See insights on the “Heritagist reading” of the Bible, Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 58.

⁸⁹⁴ Kenyatta, “Ndereti Cia Muthondeki”, 1; H. M. Gichuiri in his letter to the editor, in *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 2 (June 1928), 3. See also Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 21.

had received this inheritance from the old Gĩkũyũ *Mũgai* (Divider, benefactor or creator) whose name by now had been modified to refer to the Christian “*Mwathani Ngai witu*” (our Lord God).⁸⁹⁵ Through the land, it was argued, the Agĩkũyũ kept contact with ancestral spirits (who lay buried in and nursed by the soil) and on which they wholly depended for the satisfaction of their material needs of life, spiritual and mental contentment. As such, the land was the most sacred thing and any bidding oath had to be sworn by it.⁸⁹⁶ In addition since God the creator gave and named the land as the “*Bururi wa Gikuyu*” (Gĩkũyũ Country or nation) and making the Agĩkũyũ the bona fide owners of the land, the community had the moral authority to demand it back from the Europeans.⁸⁹⁷ The “*bururi*” (nation/country) was also considered greater and more important than the individual.⁸⁹⁸ For this reason Africans had no reason to be apathetic or half-hearted in the call to serve the cause for fighting for land rights.⁸⁹⁹ The Agĩkũyũ leaders invoked the curse of Ahab to remind and warn that even the strongest colonists, however powerful, who wished to continue to take away *ithaka* (land), could not escape God’s judgement as with Ahab when he took away Naboth’s vineyard.⁹⁰⁰ The aim of this hermeneutic strategy was to reclaim, rename and eventually re-inhabit the land.

We also witness the creation of new myths that not only served to establish authenticity to the reclamation of geographical identity but also to subvert the idea of a nation as provided in colonial history. In the process of myth-making, commentators used allusion in order to establish link between the Agĩkũyũ and biblical figures.

⁸⁹⁵ J. H. Waithaka, “Ndumiriri”, *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 3 (July 1928), 4.

⁸⁹⁶ Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 21.

⁸⁹⁷ Johnstone Kenyatta’s letter writing from London to the editor in, *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 11 (April 1929), 5.

⁸⁹⁸ Kenyatta, *Ndereti Cia Muthondeki*, 2.

⁸⁹⁹ See the editor’s comment on this quotation in, *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 4 (August 1928), 15.

⁹⁰⁰ See the translated piece from the “Standard” of 16th June 1928, “Uria Kenya Igaikara Thutha” (The Future of Kenya) *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 3 (July 1928), 7.

Allusion mainly served to counter religious and denominational rivalry that bogged down the community leaving the “*Ageni*” (foreigners) or “*Oki*” (new comers) to take advantage of the rivalry. Such was the case with those who had accepted the colonial discourse that the K.C.A. and its leadership were “*aremi*” (insubordinates or disobedient or stubborn), “*etei*” (boastful) and “*Ibuku riao niria maheni*” (their book or newsletter glories in lies).⁹⁰¹ In Job Mũchuchu’s rebuttal, those who were falsely accused were exhorted to take courage in Joseph of the Bible who though wrongly accused by Pharaoh’s wife and thrown into prison, did not stop from doing just and good deeds. Mũchuchu urged them to remember that because of Joseph’s perseverance, Pharaoh took him out of prison and made him a leader who later delivered his own kinsmen from famine. If they ignored their accusers and work diligently from their good works would precede praise in the same manner Joseph was praised by his race.⁹⁰² Daudi G. Ndegwa on his part challenged the *Athomi* to remember the words of James 4:17 “to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is a sin.”⁹⁰³ These words were combined with John 3:20-21; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22; and Ephesians 4:2-3. To reinforce the new found metaphysical connection with biblical narratives the Gĩkũyũ proverbs such as “*ita itari ndundu ihuragwo na njuguma imwe*” (for the raiding party/army which does not take council together is overcome with a single knobkerrie) and “*Ngari ihitagwo ni mundu naa muru wa nyina*” (a leopard is brought to bay by a man and his brother) were used.⁹⁰⁴

Kenyatta also, through allusion, used the Bible to link the K.C.A to the more congenial Gĩkũyũ national origin. Basing his argument on Galatians 6:2, the vow to

⁹⁰¹ See G.C. Job Muchuchu letter to the editor in, *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 9 (February 1929), 6.

⁹⁰² Ibid.

⁹⁰³ See Daudi Gethanda Ndegwa in his letter to the editor, *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 9 (February 1929), p.5.

⁹⁰⁴ See letter to the editor by George K. Ndegwa in *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 4 (August 1928), 10. See also Letter to the editor by Paulo K. Karanja, “Mari Ndundu Matiuraga” (Those of one mind (take counsel together) do not come to destruction (perish), *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 4 (August 1928), 11.

“pray and work”, Kenyatta maintained that the Kikuyu Central Association was committed to the Christian virtues of prayer and hard work in order to fight for the welfare of the Agĩkũyũ. Using the parable of a field covered with weed and “*chong’e*” (a kind of weed with prickly seeds and encroaching couch-grass), Kenyatta appealed to those with “*tochio twa irema; na hio ciaitugota, ...geka na rurenda*” (little cultivating knives, and bush clearing knives and fire sticks) so that they could till, shake out and burn rubbish in order to clear the field of unity for the seed (Gĩkũyũ nation) to flourish.⁹⁰⁵ Kenyatta appealed to the community leaders⁹⁰⁶ to do as Moses did when he saw that the people of his nation were being mistreated for they lacked a leader.⁹⁰⁷ Moses chose wise leaders from among his people.⁹⁰⁸

In Kenyatta’s opinion, best leadership would rouse the country into “*ũthingu*” (righteousness or goodness.)⁹⁰⁹ However, in order for this to happen, he argued that well educated Africans were urgently needed.⁹¹⁰ Colonial changes demanded that people acquire wealth through “*uugi na uhoreri*” (Knowledge/wisdom and gentleness/peaceful ways.)⁹¹¹ In his “*Marebeta ma Muigwithania*”⁹¹² (another powerful hermeneutical resource), Kenyatta urged that appropriate mental foundation would be the source of good deeds, strong will, and moral uprightness.⁹¹³ Daudi G. Ndegwa responding to Kenyatta’s exhortation pointed his readers to John 15:13-14,

⁹⁰⁵ Johnstone Kenyatta, “Ndumeriri ya Muigwithania kuri Atongoria na Aruti wira wa Miceni ciothe iri thiini wa Bururi wa Gikuyu” (A Message from Muigwithania to the Leaders and Workers of allthe Missions which are the Gikuyu Country, *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 4 (August 1928), 2.

⁹⁰⁶ Kenyatta was here referring to the progressive African colonial appointees and K.C.A. leadership.

⁹⁰⁷ Johnstone Kenyatta, “Ni Tuiguaneni Tutugirie Gikuyu” (Let us agree among ourselves and exalt the Kikuyu), *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 7 (November 1928), 1-3.

⁹⁰⁸ Johnstone Kenyatta, “Itwiro ria Athuri Acio Maari Guku” (Report of the Hilton Young Commission), *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 9 (February 1929), 15.

⁹⁰⁹ Karanja, “Mari Ndundu Matiuraga”, 11.

⁹¹⁰ “Kuririkanwo gwa Chief Karuri wa Gakure” (In Memory of Chief Karuri wa Gakure), *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 3 (July 1928), 9.

⁹¹¹ See *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 10 (March 1929), 1-2; See also “Igai Muhuthia thi Twiteithie” (Have done with Trifling; let us go in for Self-help), *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 8 (December 1928), 1.

⁹¹² Barlow renders this title as “Stanzas of the “Newsbearer”, but I think the correct rendering is “poetry” or “Rhymes”. Johnstone Kenyatta, “Marebeta ma Muigwithania”, *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 3 (July 1928), 3.

⁹¹³ Ibid.

Genesis 4:4-12 and Matthew 27:3-5 so that they could remember that “*ūrimū* (foolishness or ignorance), *ūgūta* (laziness), *ūthayo* (sloth), envy and conceit would not be healthy for the growth of the nation.”⁹¹⁴

We also witness another opposition character of *Mūigwithania*’s hermeneutics. Despite the essentialist tendencies in the *Athomi*’s interpretation, their interpretation of a nation is based on a cultural construct that enabled the Agĩkũyũ as a colonised community to assert their autonomy.⁹¹⁵ A case in point is the debate in *Mūigwithania* concerning adoption of European names at the expense of African names.⁹¹⁶ Kenyatta pointed his readers to Hebrews 11:24-25 which portrays Moses as having refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter.⁹¹⁷ He interpreted Moses’ refusal as motivated by the desire to save his nation and people. In the same manner Gĩkũyũ as a nation would survive and be extolled among other nations if all realised the importance of culture, language, and moral values.⁹¹⁸ Taking Kenyatta’s cue, S. Njũgũna who was gravely concerned that the community was losing their old ways of speech warned that their speech or way of expression may “*guthii na miriini ya mikongoe*” i.e. lest they become lost in the “bowels of the earth {lit., go down to the roots of the mythical “*mikongoe*” trees}.”⁹¹⁹ In his opinion language was as important as the new mode of worship introduced in the country.

Perhaps the most important of all the discussions, is Kagĩka’s interpretation of the meaning of the Church and his assertion that the *Mūiguithania* was better

⁹¹⁴ Daudi G. Ndegwa in his letter to the editor titled “Guteithia Uthini” (Eradicate Poverty) in *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 12 (May 1929), 15-16.

⁹¹⁵ See Loomba’s two forms of nationalism i.e. nationalism as a political movement and nationalism as a cultural construct that enables the colonized to posit autonomy, Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 159-160.

⁹¹⁶ See in particular Gideon M. Kagika (C.M.S. Kahuhia) point of view in rebuttal “Rumia-i Maritwa ma Muhiriga”, *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 7 (November 1928), ii.

⁹¹⁷ “Ni Tuiguaneni Tutugirie Gikuyu” (Let us agree among ourselves and exalt the Kikuyu), *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 7 (November 1928), 1-3.

⁹¹⁸ Ibid.

⁹¹⁹ See S. Njuguna wa Karucha, “Mahinda ma Agikuyu”, *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 6 (October 1928), 10.

qualified to unify, inform and enlighten readers among the *Kanitha* (Church) and K.C.A.⁹²⁰ In his discussion, he legitimised the members of K.C.A as members of *Kanitha wa Gĩkũyũ* (Church of the *Gĩkũyũ*) who had equally received the gospel of Jesus.⁹²¹ He saw K.C.A. as a child belonging to the church of Jesus Christ.⁹²² Since they were part of the Christian Church, K.C.A according to Kagĩka was not established to stultify or vitiate the work of the Christian churches.

Secondly, motivated by God’s love, K.C.A. had endeavoured to offer education to all in Gĩkũyũ Country just as the mission church had done. *Kanitha* was seen as *Kiugũ kia Ng’ombe* (Cattle Boma) in which case *Ng’ombe* (cattle) represented Gĩkũyũ.⁹²³ *Kanitha* was a boma *thĩĩnĩ wa mwĩrĩ wa Kristo Jesũ* (in the body of Christ Jesus.)⁹²⁴ Paraphrasing Paul in Ephesians 5:29, 33 and 1 Corinthians 12:14-28, Kagĩka postulated that there is no person who hates parts of his body. On the contrary he gives the members food that they may suffice and be healthy that they be able to do good works without envy or malice. In radical interpretation of the texts quoted above Kagĩka concluded that *Kanitha nĩ mwĩrĩ wothe na Gĩkũyũ nĩ kĩĩga gĩa Kanitha wa Kristo* (The Church is the whole body, and Gĩkũyũ community was a member of the Church of Christ).⁹²⁵ Unity was paramount in order for the proper functioning of Gĩkũyũ community. This could only be possible if they repented and return to their father, Gĩkũyũ; not as traditionalists but as Christians. The repentance and return was compared to the “*kahee*” (boy) who repented before his father and the father received

⁹²⁰ See G. H. Mũgo Kagĩka letter to the editor in titled “Kwonia Kihoto”, *Muigwithania*, Vol. II no. 1 (June 1929), 7-8.

⁹²¹ Ibid.

⁹²² Undated letter Gideon Mugo Kagika to Hooper, in Rev. H. D. Hooper letters in Kikuyu 1925 -31, Unofficial Papers, CMS/Acc./85/F/5 (part).

⁹²³ Kagĩka, “Kwonia Kihoto”, 7.

⁹²⁴ Ibid.

⁹²⁵ Kagĩka, “Kwonia Kihoto”, 7.

him back with great joy (Luka 15:11-18.)⁹²⁶ On this understanding Agĩkũyũ ought also to remember that “*kinya kiri itina nikio kiigaga*” (the gourd with a bottom is able to stand up of itself).⁹²⁷

5.3 Conclusion

The common sense hermeneutics articulated in this chapter encapsulate many of the qualities of postcolonial theory. In the first place it challenged the colonial position that only tutored or civilised mind could conceptually read and engage in meaningful hermeneutics. It shows that ordinary readers can also engage in meaningful and liberating hermeneutics. Related to this point is the use of ordinary and cultural tools as well as allusions as valid methods of interpretations. By invoking complex cultural codes through proverbs, *marebeta* and homilies, Africans were able to articulate their vision, contradictions and ambivalence of the colonial situation. These forms carried with them political messages, economic terms as well moral requirements in order to overcome the challenges the community faced. *Mũiguithania* in particular stood on the contested space between the colonial interpretation of orthodox gnosis, and the African traditional responses and resistance to colonial epistemology. *Mũiguithania* provided forms of identification to which many could spontaneously respond. Its hermeneutics infused both traditional and western elements. The hybridity which missionaries dismissed as syncreticism became a distinctive mark of the evolving hermeneutics.⁹²⁸

⁹²⁶ Paulo K. Karanja, “Mari Ndundu Maturaga” (Those of one mind (take counsel together) do not come to destruction (perish), *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 4 (August 1928), 11. See also See M. Njega letter to the editor in *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 11(April 1929), 9-10.

⁹²⁷ J. H. Waithaka, “Ndimiriri”, *Muigwithania*, Vol. 1, no. 3 (July 1928), 4.

⁹²⁸ On the use of the term hybridity as a contested term yet powerful useful in Postcolonialism see Young, *Postcolonialism*, 76-79.

The hermeneutics of anti-colonial nationalism, to follow Loomba, was more than mere imitation of the West.⁹²⁹ It attempted to create its own domain within the colonial society. The Agĩkũyũ as the hardest hit community by the impact of the new culture in colonial Kenya had to adjust and seek adequate ground on which to stand. While colonialism was squarely responsible for inventing the “nation” of Kenya and therefore staking its claim to the material sphere of the economy, statecraft, science and technology, the Agĩkũyũ nationalism claimed control of the spiritual and inner domain of culture with the ultimate goal of regain control of the physical space. Through the language of African theatre, the dissenting Agĩkũyũ created alternative hermeneutical notion of liberty, freedom and human dignity. Their common sense hermeneutics helped them regain their belief in themselves giving voice to the people’s collective identity and history.

However, the inability for the common sense hermeneutics to move beyond the essentials of the Gĩkũyũ nationalism exposed it to nativism which in essence as Anthony Appiah has ably argued is derivative of the discourse of colonialism.⁹³⁰ The Gĩkũyũ nationalism led to frozen rigidity which pushed out the white colonialists only to replace them with African elites who replicated the old colonial order. In fact, Kenyatta’s colonial struggles become mere political rhetoric when juxtaposed with post-colonial economic disparities and social injustices that engulfed the newly independent Kenya. This example serves as a warning to any provincial reading of the Bible that ends up promoting nativism. This kind of provincialism made the likes of Kenyatta acquiescent in humiliating and oppressive indigenous cultural elements such

⁹²⁹ Loomba, *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism*, 160.

⁹³⁰ Appiah, *In My Father’s House*, 47-72.

as clitoridectomy and other misogynistic tendencies.⁹³¹ It equally upheld separatist binary opposition. While nativism through the common sense hermeneutics offered an alternative way of viewing history, it was not the only alternative. Other individuals such as Bildad Kaggia offered yet another hermeneutical alternative which is the concern for the next chapter.

⁹³¹ In the Gikūyū country, men were uncomfortable with women leaving the Reserve to go and work in the city for the fear that their “seeds” would be scattered abroad. Such influential figures like Kenyatta would use colonial chiefs and Kiama to curtail movement and/or women entrepreneurship.

CHAPTER 6: RESISTANCE AS A DISCURSIVE PRACTICE

*“Better to dwell in Freedoms Hall, with a cold, damp floor, and a mouldering wall.
Than bow the head and bend the knee,
In the proudest Palace of Slavery.”⁹³²*

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have shown how through interpretation, the Bible was expected by European missionaries to act upon indigenous culture, morals and social life. In this sense the encounter between the Bible and Africans was supposed to move only in one direction. In such an encounter the Bible remained the subject while the Africans were the object. But I have also shown that the process did not work as planned. After accepting the Bible as the Word of God, the Africans in their own ways began interpreting and constructing meanings of the Bible. Africans were no longer acted upon but they emerged as actors in their interpretative efforts. The Bible, rather than remain the subject, became the object upon which Africans acted. In this chapter, I expand the latter idea to include what has been identified in postcolonial biblical studies as subversive readings.⁹³³ As part of the “oppositional category”⁹³⁴, individuals in this group rejected mission-oriented biblical perspectives and interpretations. They not only negotiated with the Bible but they also relativised it and modified it with astounding creativity. From their positions of subordination and weakness, these individuals self-consciously re-read and reinterpreted the Bible in order to establish their own meaning(s).

⁹³² Quoted by Archbishop Daniel William Alexander of the African Orthodox Church in South Africa in his written sermon in “Personal papers of Daniel William Alexander – Unpublished works”, RG 005 Box 2 Folder 4, African Orthodox Church Records 1931-1966 (Emory University, Atlanta.)

⁹³³ See Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 43-73 and *The Bible and the Third World*, 74-109.

⁹³⁴ This term is used by Sugirtharajah to refer to hermeneutical implications of Third World vernacular hermeneutics which have challenged the status quo in the form of Eurocentricity, modernity and internationalism. See Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 2001, 177.

6.2 Subversive Readings

Bildad Kaggia whom we have already encountered epitomised this category. I will also discuss the role of the *Arathi* also called *Akūrinū* in the new discursive practise. The *Arathi* claimed to have received esoteric knowledge that empowered them to read and interpret the Bible even though most of them were illiterate or semi-illiterate. The final part of the chapter will analyse the radical reading by those who participated in the organisation and the execution of the Mau-Mau uprising. Individuals in this category, with uncanny creativity, used the Bible to produce subversive literature that ignored conventional Christian interpretative rules and worldviews. By raising the Mau-Mau use of the Bible, I am trying to bring to the table other areas of interactions that conventional biblical hermeneutics would not accept as valid. Consequently, I argue that in postcolonial Africa such interactions cannot be wished away but that further research is needed.

6.2.1a Bildad Kaggia: Demystification of the “Ūhoro wa Ngai”

Bildad Kaggia’s hermeneutics represents radical and revolutionary resistance that sought complete breakaway from colonial hermeneutics. Through Kaggia, we are able to see in a very clear way, that travel outside the confines of the missionary-controlled environment opened up new ways of engaging with the Bible that had not been experienced before. Unlike the Independents as well as the first generation *Athomi*, Kaggia went beyond the ideological legacy of missionary forms of colonialism and Christianity. Three things made Kaggia different from all others that I have discussed so far. First, he took the Bible seriously and he struggled with the apparent discrepancies that he encountered as he read the Bible. Second, Kaggia directed his interpretation to the ordinary poor rural dwellers and exploited city workers while seeking to dislodge colonial hermeneutics. Third, he read the text in a

way that unsettled the “orthodox” approach to the Bible. I have identified four main methods that Kaggia employed in his encounter with the Bible. These methods cannot be separated from each other but for the sake of clarity, I have chosen to deal with them separately.

In the first place, as a young student, Kaggia would, to the embarrassment and irritation of his teachers, corner them with hermeneutical as well as exegetical questions that none was willing to answer. At a time when the Bible was a given and none was expected to question its claim, Kaggia, with unsettling clarity wrote,

I was interested in religious studies, especially in the Old Testament. My study of the Old Testament raised many questions in my mind...For example, the book of Genesis relates the story of Cain’s sin and punishment. Adam had only two sons, Cain and Abel, it says. Cain slew his brother Abel and as a result he was cast out ‘from the presence of the Lord’ and went to live in the land of Nod on the east of Eden. There he took a wife and bore children...If Adam was the first man on earth, then at the time of Cain’s expulsion from Eden, there must have been only Adam and Eve and their two sons on the whole of the earth. How then could Cain get a wife in the land of Nod? Either there were other people before Adam, or it is not true that Cain married when he went to live at Nod.⁹³⁵

Kaggia was asking a question which any critical seminarian student would ask.

However Kaggia had not heard about Julius Wellhausen’s documentary theory, and hence the question was asked by a supposedly untutored mind.⁹³⁶ Since Kaggia’s teachers could not give answers to his questions, they either told him to shut up or to go read his Bible well. When the matter was reported to the school committee made up of a Church minister and elders, the committee recommended his expulsion from the school. It was only the pleading of his English teacher that saved him but not without a strict warning to “mend” his ways.⁹³⁷ He was also reminded that the Bible was to be accepted as it is without any question or criticism. This experience scared

⁹³⁵ Kaggia, *Roots of Freedom 1921-1963*, 1975, 12.

⁹³⁶ African students were not expected to have developed mentally enough to engage conceptually. *Roots of Freedom 1921-1963*, 12.

⁹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

him. After a year in submissive resignation, he lost interest in Bible lessons and concentrated on other subjects.

Kaggia had begun wading through uncharted waters, where the Bible as a literary text was for the first time in Gikūyū country (and possibly in Kenya) put into serious questioning. In questioning textual discrepancies, Kaggia problematised the Bible in a way that anticipated later African biblical scholars such as Mosala and Mofokeng who argue that the Bible in Africa has served as both “a problem and a solution”.⁹³⁸ In this sense, his probing anticipated the postcolonial challenges where the oppression and victimisation of the Africans was not just coming from the ideologies of those who interpreted the texts but also ideologies intrinsic to the Bible.⁹³⁹ Later in his life, Kaggia’s two trips to Jerusalem while serving as a soldier during the Second World War totally transformed his perspective on the Bible.⁹⁴⁰ Conversation with an official of the museum in Jerusalem discussed in chapter four planted enough hermeneutical suspicion that left him less enthusiastic about the Bible. The knowledge that the Bible as it currently stood was the work of “scholars” and that the original text is not known apart from fragments was mindboggling.⁹⁴¹ It left him with less conviction about the truth he had gone to Jerusalem to learn about.⁹⁴² With his enthusiasm gone, his focus shifted elsewhere. From then on, he immersed himself in studying through correspondence, journalism, trade unionism and political science.

The second way in which Kaggia used the Bible was to engage it with his experience within the ecclesiastical context. Several years after his school experience

⁹³⁸ See Gerald West’s analysis on the works of Mosala and Mofokeng, *Mapping African Biblical Interpretation*, 91-94.

⁹³⁹ *Mapping African Biblical Interpretation*, 84.

⁹⁴⁰ *Roots of Freedom 1921-1963*, 38-39.

⁹⁴¹ I have discussed how he acquired this knowledge on the chapter in “translation”.

⁹⁴² Kaggia had volunteered to assist the military chaplain in teaching a Bible class during his free time. It is through Bible classes that he made his first visit to Jerusalem for a course for church leaders. *Roots of Freedom 1921-1963*, 39.

Kaggia's interest in the Bible was rekindled when a group of Ugandan revivalists visited his school to preach. The Ugandans seemed not to be as submissive to authority as their Kenyan counterparts.⁹⁴³ The revivalists did not shy away from criticising teachings of the Anglican Church an anathema in Kaggia's CMS backyard. Through them, Kaggia also learnt that being a member of a church, or being baptised or even confirmed by the bishop whom they all feared was not enough. The revivalists dared say also that to be a bishop or a pastor did not necessarily make one a Christian. When the Ugandans left, Kaggia resumed his Bible studies but kept his questions to himself. Though he could not raise questions in the classroom, he could do so in the "Sunday afternoon open-air assemblies". Nonetheless, his difficulties with the passage previously discussed were never resolved. The "new Rwanda group"⁹⁴⁴ could not provide answers either.⁹⁴⁵ But after his encounter with the Ugandan group, Kaggia began using the Bible to question the Mission Societies' claim to authoritative interpretation of the Bible, the Church doctrines and disciplinary rules.

He challenged what he came to refer to as "churchism" in the form of racial discrimination in the church and catechetical requirements for Africans before baptism. Kaggia based his objection to catechetical requirements on Paul's teachings that people should be baptised after believing and not after passing examinations as demanded by the mission churches.⁹⁴⁶ Using Hebrews 12:1 'Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race

⁹⁴³ Opcit, *Roots of Freedom 1921-1963*, 13.

⁹⁴⁴ This group later became the East African Revival movement discussed at length in the next chapter.

⁹⁴⁵ *Roots of Freedom 1921-1963*, 14.

⁹⁴⁶ Slater, *The Trial of Jomo Kenyatta*, 1955, 193.

that is set before us'; Kaggia attacked 'churchism' as false Christianity.⁹⁴⁷ He identified "churchism" with the "weight" and "sin" which the Hebrew writer talked about.

Kaggia's position on "churchism" later received a boost from workers in Newcastle and the free expressions of non-conformist Assemblies of God with whom he associated during his stay in England.⁹⁴⁸ The Assemblies of God derided established church formality. They believed that clergymen were not necessarily godly or holy. Kaggia also became consciously aware of the many Christian movements and denominations which practiced Christianity differently from what Africans had been taught in Kenya.⁹⁴⁹ In Kaggia's estimation, this knowledge and experience not only shattered his Christian innocence but also sharpened his capacity to distinguish scriptural authority and missionaries' doctrinal influence. He confessed that it was in England that he realised that many of the practices in the Christian churches in Kenya had no biblical support.⁹⁵⁰ In this encounter, we witness ambivalence in the way Kaggia used the Bible. On the one hand, Kaggia seems to question the Bible's message as well as its authorial claim. On the other, he embraced it as long as it was useful in attacking and challenging missionaries' interpretations. As we shall see below, the ambivalent engagement with the Bible became foundational as Africans negotiated with it.

Kaggia's hermeneutics became more radical and aimed at attacking mission-oriented Christianity.⁹⁵¹ He assumed a new role in which, as he put it,

before converting people to my kind of Christianity, the objective of myself and my followers was to destroy the hypocritical 'synagogue Christianity' of

⁹⁴⁷ *Roots of Freedom 1921-1963*, 13.

⁹⁴⁸ It is in their gatherings that Kaggia acquired the art of public speaking. See Opcit, *Roots of Freedom 1921-1963*, 44-52.

⁹⁴⁹ *The Trial of Jomo Kenyatta*, 1955, 192.

⁹⁵⁰ *The Trial of Jomo Kenyatta*, 45.

⁹⁵¹ Slater, *The Trial of Jomo Kenyatta*, 192.

the established church. We compared the clergy and the whole hierarchy of the '*mzungu* church' to the Pharisees of old, those who outwardly professed godliness but were ungodly inside. Like Jesus, I changed the emphasis from 'converting the heathen' to 'demolishing the citadel of ungodly formality and hypocrisy'.⁹⁵²

The Bishop and the clergy, in Kaggia's estimation, were not God's servants and their hands were defiled. Consequently their sacraments were unholy and unacceptable like Cain's sacrifice.⁹⁵³ He summarised his mission goal as that of breaking the missionary influence. The foreign church had to be destroyed and

the new way of life must be African, where Africans can stand on their rights, where they cannot be discriminated against...I wanted to demonstrate that an African was not inferior to a European in any way, that our capabilities equalled those of Europeans. Liberation of the mind was to pave way for liberation from colonial government.⁹⁵⁴

He felt that a people-driven ministry was the best option for Kenyans.⁹⁵⁵

Kaggia insisted that mission-oriented education was a colonial government arm for recruiting labour. It aimed at turning Africans into "obedient servants of the white government."⁹⁵⁶ Kaggia also thought that God needed to be liberated because,

The greatest bondage the African suffers is the *mzungu's* religion, I decided. Africans must be liberated from foreign religious beliefs before they could accept new ideas about the injustices of British Administration, and before they could think of removing those injustices. For the present God was on the side of the colonialists as the whole church preached against the African way of life. God had to be brought to our side. The African had to understand that God supported our cause and the *mzungu* was in the wrong.⁹⁵⁷

He returned to Africa after the war to convert Africans from the *mzungu's* religion. To this end, Kaggia made the decision to leave the Anglican Church.⁹⁵⁸ After the rupture,

⁹⁵² *Roots of Freedom 1921-1963*, 1975, 70.

⁹⁵³ *Opcit, Roots of Freedom 1921-1963*, 70 and 72.

⁹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, pp.73-74.

⁹⁵⁵ To set an example, Kaggia officiated his own wedding on 12 January 1947 which was quite unconventional and not presided over by a priest or pastor.

⁹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 56.

⁹⁵⁸ This was in 1946, the same year Kenyatta returned from England.

he used people's "houses and market places" as his "church".⁹⁵⁹ He started his own Christian crusade which came to be referred to as *Dini ya Kaggia* (Kaggia's sect).⁹⁶⁰ Kaggia's radical interpretation and application of the scriptures led him into a collision course with the missionaries and the government.⁹⁶¹

The third way in which Kaggia uniquely engaged with the Bible is evident in the way he processed and interpreted the Bible in light of his experience within the colonial socio-political context. This processing and interpretation is evident in his court testimony at the Kapenguria court of law.⁹⁶² When asked by the magistrate, how he could reconcile his religious convictions with his position in politics, Kaggia replied that "Jesus Christ himself was always fighting for the rights of his people by every peaceful means or way and he stood for the rights of human kind and as a Christian I stand for the rights of my people."⁹⁶³ Kaggia said that he could not accept missionaries' teaching that powers and government were ordained by God. He said that he abhorred biblical teachings that made Africans to look upon any disobedience or revolt against the white government as sin against God.⁹⁶⁴ He elaborated that his political activities were informed by Jesus Christ and Mahatma Gandhi whom he considered as the two very good examples of Christianity.⁹⁶⁵

⁹⁵⁹ Kaggia had great following from Fort Hall, Kiambu and Embu where members turned their houses into new churches. *Roots of Freedom 1921-1963*, 69.

⁹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 56-57, 69.

⁹⁶¹ In October 1946, he had his meetings interrupted at will with police intervening. He was convicted and jailed several times for holding a public meeting without applying for a licence as was required of all Africans. He was later to be tried and detained together with Jomo Kenyatta and others in the infamous Kapenguria trial. Severally, he was invited by the colonial church to negotiate on condition that he accepted the colonial church leadership and stopped his criticism of the clergy. *Roots of Freedom 1921-1963*, 70-71, 74.

⁹⁶² Kaggia was one of the famous *Kapenguria Six* freedom fighters (Himself, Jomo Kenyatta, Achieng Oneko, Kūng'ũ Karūmba, Paul Ngei and Fred Kubai) who were detained by the colonial government during the struggle for independence in Kenya. He was known for his courage, radicalism and adherence to truth. The notorious Kapenguria trial is recorded in Montague Slater's book *The Trial of Jomo Kenyatta* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1955).

⁹⁶³ *The Trial of Jomo Kenyatta*, 194.

⁹⁶⁴ *Roots of Freedom 1921-1963*, 56.

⁹⁶⁵ *The Trial of Jomo Kenyatta*, 194.

In another instance, the magistrate sought for clarification from Kaggia's statement that "Jesus Christ himself was always fighting for the rights of his people in every peaceful means or way and he stood for the rights of human kind." The magistrate wanted to know where in the scriptures Kaggia got authority for "rights of human kind".⁹⁶⁶ Kaggia replied that he got his scriptural authority from the fact that,

Whatever [Jesus] believed or knew was right, he stood on that and would not be shaken. His disciples took his example. What they knew was right they did. For instance He believed it was the right of mankind to worship in the way they like, but it was forbidden in some cases, but he stood on that and preached as His right and the right of human kind.⁹⁶⁷

Having not been satisfied by Kaggia's reply, the magistrate prodded "Don't you think he also pointed out the duties of humanity as well?" the magistrate continued: "I put it to you that Jesus Christ stood more for the duties of humanity and human kind. He advocated and pointed out the duties of mankind rather than telling them what their rights are." Kaggia emphatically replied that Jesus stood for both: duties and rights.⁹⁶⁸

This exchange reveals several things. First, Kaggia like many other Kenyans of his time had grown quite confident in what they believed and no intimidation could destroy that self-confidence. Secondly, Kaggia's hermeneutical skills had tremendously improved. He embraced Jesus Christ as revealed in the text but also interpreted Christ's teaching in light of his African experience. While the magistrate wanted to impose upon Kaggia Jesus who was only concerned about morality and human responsibility, Kaggia on the other hand embraced Jesus Christ who was as well concerned with issues of justice, morality as well as spirituality. In this sense, Kaggia transcended the understanding of biblical interpretation as a religious matter for the Christian community and drew significant socio-political implications for the African people in general.

⁹⁶⁶ *The Trial of Jomo Kenyatta*, 197.

⁹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 197.

⁹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 197.

Finally, Kaggia's serious and critical engagement with the Bible made him discover various translation mistakes in the Gĩkũyũ New Testament as discussed in chapter four.⁹⁶⁹ In his opinion, mistranslation was a deliberate work by European-Gĩkũyũ linguists willing to doctor the Gĩkũyũ version in order to keep the community under bondage.⁹⁷⁰ As such he took up the question of mistranslation with the British and Foreign Bible Society in London.⁹⁷¹ In pointing out the translation anomalies, Kaggia, whether consciously or unconsciously, was bringing to bear the contention that biblical translation and interpretation are not simply religious acts. Instead, his contestation exposed the fact these actions are never divorced from the issues of power and control. In this regard, he connected the act of translation to the larger aims of colonialism and exploitation.

In this section, I have shown that Kaggia's hermeneutics of resistance emerged from apparent discrepancies in the Bible, missionaries' translation blunders and colonial experiences. His travel abroad during the Second World War expanded his hermeneutical horizon as well as his political consciousness.⁹⁷² I have also shown through Kaggia that the daunting obstacles which organised Christianity faced in Europe in the form of spiritual indifference of the European civilisation likewise contributed to Kaggia's disillusionment. Africans who travelled to Europe discovered that colonial "mechanistic" religious acts were not the panacea for religious and moral

⁹⁶⁹ *Roots of Freedom 1921-1963*, 48.

⁹⁷⁰ *Roots of Freedom 1921-1963*, 48.

⁹⁷¹ *The Trial of Jomo Kenyatta*, 193.

⁹⁷² During this period he had contact with a Black American from whom Kaggia learnt about the experience of slavery. Besides, to meet a well educated and qualified black medical doctor was more than he could imagine. Through interactions and conversation with this American black man as well as self-reflection, "consciousness of colour discrimination" crystallised in Kaggia's mind. From then on he began reading "political and revolutionary books". The idea of working hand in hand with European soldiers and sometimes supervising them also helped demystify the aura created by the Kenyan European community. His experience during his stay with English families that he met in Britain while still serving in the military was also transformational. While in Britain, he lived with members of a family that toiled in the coal mines whose struggles for survival were similar to struggling Africans in rural Kenya. *Roots of Freedom 1921-1963*, 45 and *The Trial of Jomo Kenyatta*, 192.

difficulties facing humanity as they had been taught in mission schools and churches. Most of them like Kaggia returned home disillusioned and bitter. They were exposed to a Europe which had divorced religion from politics, economics and science.⁹⁷³ These factors eventually led to Kaggia's radical hermeneutical rediscovery.

6.2.1b Arathi⁹⁷⁴: The Esoteric Dimension of Resistance Hermeneutics

Another dimension of the resistance hermeneutics can be found in the so-called *Arathi*. The founding of *Arathi* was mainly influenced by the experience of material poverty and other forms of oppression within the Gĩkũyũ Reserve and among the Agĩkũyũ squatters working in the White Settlements (commonly referred to as the White Highlands and the Rift Valley). According to Gĩcaru, *Arathi* sprang up because “their followers were people who despaired of ever being able to improve their position in life”.⁹⁷⁵ They looked upon Christ as their hope and the Messiah who would guide them “here and now in their present day-to-day business in the present world”.⁹⁷⁶ To this group the country was in such chaos that only the messiah would restore order and happiness. They called for “non-participation in any church work under the leadership of the white man who, they contended, preached poverty and humility yet wax fat and arrogant.”⁹⁷⁷ They refused to regard the European as a superior being. They would not stand or take off their hats when a European passed by as was required. Further, they did not want to imitate anything practised in

⁹⁷³ This fact is betrayed in the fact that many missionaries in Kenya yearned for the day when “the Church and State (so divorced in Western lands in what are often common tasks) may be so interrelated as together to help forward all African development.” The Rev. Dr. John W. Arthur's Lecture, “East Africa in Transition: Alexander Duff Memorial Lecture.” Edinburgh: The Trustees of the Duff Missionary Lectureship, 1942, p. 31.

⁹⁷⁴ Kenyatta referred to them as both *Watu wa Mngu* (people of God) and *Arathi* (Prophets or seers), *Facing Mount Kenya*, 273.

⁹⁷⁵ Muga Gĩcaru, *Land of Sunshine: Scenes of Life in Kenya before Mau Mau* (London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd., 1958), 109.

⁹⁷⁶ *Land of Sunshine*, 1958, 110.

⁹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

mission-oriented churches. For these reasons, they turned to the Bible for all teachings as well as for liturgical practices.⁹⁷⁸

The main characteristic of this group is their total rejection of the boundaries of the colonial Christianity. While the Independents tried to find ways to negotiate and even dialogue with colonial Christianity, this group advocated complete separation. They had no trust whatsoever of colonial intentions. According to Kenyatta, the *Arathi* claimed to be holy men who had direct communication with God.⁹⁷⁹ For example, Joseph Ng'ang'a was reported to have heard on two occasions, while drunk and another time working in the settler's farm, to leave everything and become a *Mūrathi* (singular for *Arathi*).⁹⁸⁰ Secondly they read and studied the Bible while in seclusion (mainly in caves and forests). They used Psalm 68:31⁹⁸¹ as authorial evidence of their claim that they were the chosen people of God to give and interpret God's message to God's people since they belonged to "the lost tribes of Israel."⁹⁸²

Mwaūra posits that they were also taught how to pray and to interpret scriptures with the aid of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁸³ The *Arathi* read Hebrews 8:10-13, Acts 2:17, 1:8; Joel 2:28; Jeremiah 31:33-35 and Levitical laws arguing that the missionaries overlooked the importance of the Holy Spirit and manifestation in dreams, visions and prophecy. In this connection, the *Arathi* claimed that missionaries offered wrong interpretations of the Bible in order to mislead the Africans. As prophets and with the direct help from the Holy Spirit, they traversed Gikūyū country

⁹⁷⁸ Nahashon Ndūng'ū, "The Bible in an African Independent Church" in Hannah W. Kīnoti and John M. Waliggo, eds., *The Bible in African Christianity: Essays in Biblical Theology* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1997), 61-62.

⁹⁷⁹ *Facing Mount Kenya*, 273.

⁹⁸⁰ P. Njeri Mwaūra, *The Akūrinū Churches: A Study of the History and Some of the Basic Beliefs of the Holy Ghost Church of East Africa 1926-1980* (unpublished Master of Arts Thesis. University of Nairobi, 1984), 58-59.

⁹⁸¹ See my discussion on Kenyatta's translation of this verse in chapter 4.

⁹⁸² *Facing Mount Kenya*, 275.

⁹⁸³ *Ibid*, 59.

in groups and on foot providing the “correct” interpretation. They believed that their call as a Church had come from God at a time when spiritual “dryness” and material distress was evident in the Rift Valley and Gĩkũyũ land. They also emphasised the miracles performed by Jesus, especially the raising of the dead and the healing of the sick.⁹⁸⁴

They combined such interpretations with the indigenous beliefs and practices such as ancestral worship and polygamy. The latter was upheld mainly because the *Ibuku rĩa Ngai* (Book of God), particularly the Old Testament sanctioned and condoned polygamy.⁹⁸⁵ They emphasised that several leading personages of the Bible including Solomon, David, and Jacob though polygamous were never condemned by God, but instead the Bible praises them for their good deeds.⁹⁸⁶ As such, men who converted to Christianity rejected European names and instead took baptismal names from biblical characters who practised polygamy believing that by doing so, they would be pleasing their creator.⁹⁸⁷ The missionaries’ demand for monogamy was viewed as an imposition and misinterpretation of the Bible and as a colonial strategy to stall the Gĩkũyũ population growth.⁹⁸⁸

Emphasis on the Holy Spirit and possession by the spirit would lead the *Arathi* to frenzy and trembling. They would roar like ‘The Lion of Judah’ and the frenzy session of their worship would be followed by their anthem:

“What will it be?
When the King comes?
What will it be when he comes, when he comes?
What will it be when the King comes?”

⁹⁸⁴ *Facing Mount Kenya*, p. 276.

⁹⁸⁵ See Kanyoro’s analysis of the modern day difficulty of translating Old Testament term polygamy to fit in within the post-colonial/postmodern African context. Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, “Interpreting Old Testament Polygamy through African Eyes” in Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, eds., *The Will to Rise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), 87-100.

⁹⁸⁶ *Facing Mount Kenya*, 276.

⁹⁸⁷ *Facing Mount Kenya*, 272.

⁹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 276.

Let us lift our eyes to Heaven
Where the Master is due on earth for the harvest
The harvest of his good people...⁹⁸⁹

In most of the quarrels that would arise between the *Arathi* and the Authorities they argued that they were now subjects to the Holy Spirit first. Submission to the State was secondary. They argued that the Holy Spirit was paramount but the State was not. According to Kenyatta, the *Arathi* rejected material possession as worldly wealth which they did not need since God had chosen them to preach the gospel and not to accumulate wealth.⁹⁹⁰ They were persecuted by both the government who found their preaching subversive and the missionaries dismissed them as lunatics practising misguided faith.⁹⁹¹ Ng'ang'a's brand of militant preaching led into fatal confrontation with the authorities.⁹⁹² The three who died in this tragic encounter became martyrs in Akūrinū circles.

The first thing to note is that although the *Arathi* rejected the beliefs and practices of the colonial churches, they embraced the Bible as a source of their teachings and practices. The *Arathi* drew a clear distinction between mission Christianity and the Bible. Their encounter was not with Christianity but with the Bible. As such, relying wholly on the help of the Holy Spirit, the *Arathi* secluded themselves in caves on mountains to read and study the Bible. In biblical hermeneutics, it points to the caution already given by Gerald West that African

⁹⁸⁹ *Land of Sunshine*, p. 110; see also *Facing Mount Kenya*, 274.

⁹⁹⁰ *Facing Mount Kenya*, 274.

⁹⁹¹ "The 'Watu wa Mungu' appear to be the same sect as those which were troublesome in 1930 and 1931 in the Kiambu and Fort Hall District. They were known as prophets and used to roar like lions and bark like dogs...they were believed to entertain anti-government feelings. They were obviously under some kind of hysteria and were followed by young girls with whom they had free love relationship" (letter from PC central to DCs in Kiambu and Fort Hall. KNA DC/KBU/3/2.

⁹⁹² The death of the first three founders of the movement was at the hands of the colonial police hands. How they met their death is unclear but according to the police report, the shooting of the three was in self-defence (The East African Standard; report of magisterial enquiry on the Ndarugu Forest Affray, 20th February, 1934.) It is important to note that they continued to be harassed by the colonial government around Kiambu and Fort Hall area until they relocated to Meru in 1936. *The Akūrinū Churches*, 67.

biblical hermeneuts must not always assume that the reception of Christianity and the reception of the Bible in Africa always amount to the same thing.⁹⁹³ Both processes are distinct though related.

The second thing to note is the claim to personal freedom to read and interpret the Bible. Under the guidance of the Spirit each *Mūrathi* could read and interpret the Bible. Through songs, prayers, sermons, prophecies and testimonies, individual interpretations could be rehearsed before others. There are two main characteristics to the kind of resistance reading that developed from this group. One, as already intimated, their reading was highly selective. There were certain parts of the Bible that were considered important while others were simply ignored. Second, as Wimbush has noted of the early use of the Bible in the African American community, the *Arathi* came to see the Bible as representing “a virtual language-world” that they could enter and manipulate in light of their socio-political and cultural experiences.⁹⁹⁴ But the Bible was also used to meet personal problems such as healing. At other times it would be used to invoke awe and power. They claimed knowledge that was given by the Holy Spirit exclusively to them as “holy” prophets and that that knowledge was absolute and legitimate.

6.2.1c Mau-Mau and Detainees: Guerrilla Hermeneutics

The final form of reading and interpretation that I consider next is by those who joined the war for independency, notoriously referred to as the Mau-Mau. The Mau-Mau uprising is one of the most extensively researched phenomena.⁹⁹⁵ Space cannot allow me to enter into a detailed analysis of the Mau-Mau. Therefore, I will

⁹⁹³ *Mapping African Biblical Interpretation*, 85.

⁹⁹⁴ *The Bible and African Americans*, 86.

⁹⁹⁵ The list is enormous and cannot be reproduced here. Two most recent researches have added new insights into the Mau-Mau debate i.e. David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005) and Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya*, (Henry Holt and Co., 2005).

limit myself to points relevant to my overall discussion. The term Mau-Mau is controversial both in origin and use. Rev. Calderwood of the Scottish Mission, for example, ascribed the unrest in the Kenya colony to “the growth of a secret African Society called ‘Mau-Mau’ ... fostering criminal activities designed to overturn the Government and drive out the white man and the Christian Church.”⁹⁹⁶ In this research, I use the term to refer to an armed revolt against the British colonialism in Kenya.⁹⁹⁷ Equally violent was the Kenyan colonial government’s military counter programme.⁹⁹⁸ The revolt came into the open when the State of Emergency was declared on October 20, 1952 by the Colonial Governor Sir Evelyn Baring following the assassination of a loyal colonial chief Kũng’ũ Warũhiũ.⁹⁹⁹ The fighting continued until sometime in 1956 when the declared leader of the movement, Dedan Kĩmathi, was captured and the rebellion brutally suppressed.¹⁰⁰⁰

Though the Mau-Mau movement’s main agenda was the overthrow of colonial structures through the power of machetes and guns, the study of the Mau-Mau war reveals that the clash was also a battle of minds. The colonial counter programme of mass detention, villagisation and rehabilitation will be discussed in the next chapter. In this section, I discuss the hermeneutical responses from the fighters and detainees who challenged the Christian message that did not question colonialism and the continued denial to the Africans right to land and self-governance. Consequently, the

⁹⁹⁶ “Secret Societies in Kenya” by Rev. R. G. M. Calderwood, (Kikuyu News, no. 201, October 1952), 1244-1245.

⁹⁹⁷ Many who fought were poor peasants, landless labourers and workers, see Tabitha Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau-Mau* (1987) and Wunyabari Maloba, *Mau-Mau and Kenya: An analysis of a Peasant Revolt* (1993).

⁹⁹⁸ *Imperial Reckoning*, 48-50.

⁹⁹⁹ Stern Measures were also taken to curb Mau-Mau after the Lari massacre (blamed on Mau-Mau) on November 24th 1952 and the Kenya Government assumed powers to punish the Gĩkũyũ community in an effort to stamp out the anti-white Mau-Mau Society. Associated Press, November 25, 1952, Nairobi, Kenya.

¹⁰⁰⁰ On November 13th 1956 Colonial Secretary Alan Lennox-Boyd announced in the House of Commons that British military operations in Kenya had ended. The New York Times. November 14, 1956.

period saw tremendous growth of creative literature from literate Africans that subverted the Christian message. The kind of literature targeted what the group saw as the deceptive teachings and religious hypocrisy which reflected the close links among the Government, missionaries and settlers.¹⁰⁰¹ Most slighted was the colonial demand for morality and politeness and that the Africans learn to live as peaceful citizens.

Karari Njama¹⁰⁰² in his recollection wrote about how missionaries eloquently talked against discrimination because all people are equal in God's eye regardless of colour, race and creed. Karari remembered that as students, they were taught the biblical truth "Thou shall love thy neighbour as thyself" as the greatest commandment of Christ. But in practice, they came to note that the African was not welcomed in the European midst.¹⁰⁰³ Africans likewise deplored the use of the Bible in a way that encouraged division among the various denominations. Karari wrote that he could not understand how a child could not attend a school about a mile from his home but must attend another one eight miles away because his parents were christened in the denomination which owned the latter school.¹⁰⁰⁴

In addition, Karari struggled with the Old Testament's support of violence for the Hebrew people to conquer other people. Most perturbing was the fact that such advocacy was hinged on the fact that those to be conquered were to be brought to

¹⁰⁰¹ Karari recounted about compulsory attendance for both students and staff, to the morning and evening prayers. They would receive sacraments from priests every Sunday and students would teach Sunday school in churches around Alliance High School. Donald L. Barnett & Karari Njama. *Mau-Mau from Within: Autobiography and Analysis of Kenya's Peasant Revolt* (New York: Modern Reader Paperbacks, 1966), 100.

¹⁰⁰² Karari Njama was one of the few Africans with secondary education who joined the guerillas in the forest. He had attended C.S.M. Alliance Secondary school up to second year before dropping to join the freedom movement. According to his testimony, he became the secretary to the freedom fighters' Kenya Defence Council formed during the famous Mwathe meeting on 16-20 August 1953 under the chairmanship of Dedan Kĩmathi. After the formation of the Kenya Defence Council, recording of written minutes and lists of freedom fighters began. *Mau-Mau from Within*, 261.

¹⁰⁰³ *Ibid*, 100, 133.

¹⁰⁰⁴ See *Mau-Mau from Within*, 101. To ask a question was to risk expulsion or excommunication. Curiosity about the exclusion from Holy Communion of some who supported women circumcision and questions about Europeans silence on colour bar saw Gĩcaru and his friends denied entrance into membership of C.S.M. where they were labelled *aregi* – those who have refused to obey the laws of the Church. *Land of Sunshine*, 76-78.

submission because they believed in other gods. In this regard, Karari wrote “these wars were supposedly led by Mighty God to smash other nations. I thought this was contrary to the idea of God’s peace and mercy.”¹⁰⁰⁵ He equally wondered why it was demanded that the Africans should abandon their religion which had similar understanding like that of the Hebrew people. While Karari confessed that he could not abandon the church completely because there were things that he valued and treasure, he remained critical of its dogmas and practice.

In spite of the suspicion and sometime open hostility towards the Bible, we note Karari’s unfailing effort to freely quote from the Bible in order to exhort freedom fighters. Let us first consider Karari’s reading of Lamentations 5:1-9 and Ecclesiastes 4:1-3 four days after he joined the freedom fighters in the Aberdares forest. The book of Lamentations, particularly chapter five, remained very popular among the Agĩkũyũ. Kenyatta, as intimated in chapter four, made his own translation of chapter five.¹⁰⁰⁶ The prayer of lament resonated with the Agĩkũyũ’s colonial experience. From Karari’s reading of the two texts above, we see that the Africans were keen observers of how missionaries used biblical texts¹⁰⁰⁷, which they (Africans) replicated as needed. In Karari’s case, the texts are read to attentive listeners. There is no exposition given but the reader expected the listeners to understand what was being read as an obvious truth. For example, after reading the scriptures to the fighters Karari spoke saying “I have just read two verses to you in Kikuyu Language which I am sure that you have all understood. The first was the lamentations of the prophet Jeremiah of Israel for his people. Did you find it to be true with us today? “Yes, quite true,” replied the mob. “This wood is sold to us and if we don’t buy, it would only rot

¹⁰⁰⁵ Barnett, *Mau-Mau from Within*, 101.

¹⁰⁰⁶ See appendix I.

¹⁰⁰⁷ See my discussion in chapter four.

here,” said one person. “We die for our own food,” said another. “So you agree with the prophesy of Jeremiah?” Yes, we do!” They replied.¹⁰⁰⁸

Karari in this instance used allusion in his interpretation of the texts expecting his listeners to identify with the biblical material as well as the biblical personalities in order to establish a spatial and metaphysical link.¹⁰⁰⁹ Through allusion the listeners were prompted to connect the similarities between their experiences and the stories narrated in the Bible. Fighters were exhorted not to worry because of what had become of them as victims of colonialism. Like the Israelites they had heard strange news never seen or heard before. Karari reminded them that they had now witnessed what the Israelites went through. Their suffering was not new. It had happened to many other races and nations. Karari intimated

It is History and History repeats itself. It is our turn now. All you have to do is persevere and fight bravely. There is no playing with either the arrow or gun. Whenever you pull the trigger or release the arrow from the string, you cannot stop it by any means from hitting the object you aimed at. This means that we have started our fight for Land and Freedom; whether you like it or not, whether you surrender or not, our aim must at last be achieved by either you or your children. My countrymen, the question is ‘Are you ready to fight till we get our Land and Freedom or are you going to leave the fight for your young children?’¹⁰¹⁰

Karari was at this point using the Bible, which he sometimes dismissed, to recover and revitalise that which colonialism had damaged: self determination and will to power.

Kĩbicho contended that in addition to this use of the Bible, freedom fighters used indigenous wisdom to reinforce the message. Most important to the fighters was

¹⁰⁰⁸ *Mau-Mau from Within*, 184.

¹⁰⁰⁹ *The Bible and the Third World*, 79.

¹⁰¹⁰ Karari used his Bible which he carried in his satchel. His other favourites were Matthew 5: 1-6 and Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 all these were seen as prophesies which would be fulfilled. Barnett, *Mau-Mau from Within*, pp. 185, 367-368.

the idea of truth and justice in any dispute.¹⁰¹¹ They understood Ngai is the God of justice and always on the side of the just. Thus *Kĩhoto nĩkĩo kĩoma* (truth or reason alone stands and endures.) *Kĩhoto kĩringaga rũĩ rũiyũru* (Reason or justice crosses a flooding river, i.e., it will come out victoriously and unscathed across the worst torrents, currents or chaos or troubles).¹⁰¹² As victims of colonialism, the Agĩkũyũ seemed not to be held accountable by the same wisdom when it came to the demand for their rights. In their view there was nothing contradictory in a morality that exhorted the victim to use any means possible to regain his or her place in society.

It is within this self-understanding as articulated by Karari that the Bible, mainly the Old Testament and Gospels, were interwoven with traditional beliefs and concepts. Jesus was accepted as a great *Mũrathi* and a man of God. Karari, for example, confessed that though he believed he was a Christian, he could accept Jesus as a great teacher and prophet but not necessarily the son of God.¹⁰¹³ Kĩbicho argued that the freedom fighters' concept of Jesus was shaped by the story they heard about Jesus whom they understood to be a pure and perfect man; man of great wisdom; one who feared God; generous; compassionate; courageous and committed to justice and service to his people. Such qualities, Kĩbicho posited, were greatly admired and honoured in Gĩkũyũ traditional society.¹⁰¹⁴ Hybridisation of this kind is also evident in the event that followed the Mwathe meeting.

The meeting is recorded as having ended with a moving prayer by Dedan Kĩmathi which he concluded by leading the group in saying the Christian's Lord's

¹⁰¹¹ Samuel Gakuhi Kĩbicho, *The Kikuyu conception of God: its continuity into the Christian era and the question it raises for the Christian idea of revelation* (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, 1972,) 31.

¹⁰¹² *The Kikuyu conception of God*, 57-58.

¹⁰¹³ *Mau-Mau from Within*, 101.

¹⁰¹⁴ *The Kikuyu conception of God*, 200.

Prayer and Gikūyū incantation of *Thaai, Thathaiya Ngai, Thai*.¹⁰¹⁵ This was followed by the commissioning of the just formed Kenya Defence Council with Karari reading from Revelation 22: 12-14. Karari equated the giving of military ranks to various fighters to the scriptural words “to give every man according as his work shall be”.¹⁰¹⁶ Dedan Kĩmathi closed the meeting with the words,

You are my warriors and disciples, followers and pupils. When Jesus parted with his disciples, he sent them to teach and preach to all nations and baptized them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The same message I convey unto you all. Go all over Kenya (raising high his walking stick in his right hand) and preach to all African people and baptise them in the name of Gikuyu and Mumbi and of our soil. If you die for the soil that will never perish, our future generations which will use that same soil you die for... Work hard and pray! Goodbye all!¹⁰¹⁷

On another occasion Kĩmathi is said to have used the words of Jesus to exhort the fighters saying: “Ye are the light of the world... Let your light shine unto all”. He quipped, that the young freedom fighters were like “the young stars” shining for the country since the colonial government had taken away and detained their “sun, Jomo Kenyatta, and the moon, all the other political leaders – and even all the big stars”.¹⁰¹⁸ Europeanised Christianity was rejected while the magical and religious beliefs of the past were supplemented by Christianity.

6.3 Language as a “figural ploy”¹⁰¹⁹:

Another dimension of the emerging dissents can be found in the Athomi’s use of their literary skills. In the emerging subversive literature, African heroes like Kimathi and Kenyatta replaced biblical characters such as Moses and Jesus. Songs were also used to record historical events; entertain; encourage and rally people to be vigilant; giving them hope; and to protest. Through these songs we sense tremendous

¹⁰¹⁵ This took place on 16-20 August 1953 (Where the Kenya Defence Council was formed for the Movement and extensive work on Library began). *Mau-Mau from Within*, 261.

¹⁰¹⁶ *Mau-Mau from Within*, 263-264.

¹⁰¹⁷ *Mau-Mau from Within*, 263-264.

¹⁰¹⁸ *Ibid*, 307-308.

¹⁰¹⁹ *Contracting Colonialism*, 62.

trust in Ngai. The importance of this kind of literature cannot be underestimated. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o reminds us, that in the struggle for decolonisation, culture becomes the site of intense struggle. The struggle is waged at "the level of culture, values, feelings and attitude" where the colonised by rejecting the culture of the coloniser "create their own songs, poems, dances, narratives and sayings which embody a structure of values diametrically opposed to that of the oppressing race, nation and class."¹⁰²⁰ In most cases, the colonised, as in the case of Mau-Mau, took the songs and hymns of the colonisers and gave them an entirely different emphasis, interpretation and meaning.

I follow Rafael to argue that individuals such as Gakaara wa Wanjaũ wrote songs that mimicked Christian hymns and the Apostles' Creed as ploy in order to placate the colonial censor and criminal investigations. The Agĩkũyũ writers, by substituting words in the original with new words, they intended to fool the colonial censor, criminal investigators and colonial missionaries. They would be fooled to believe that singers or those reciting the creed were enthusiastic Christians. Secondly, by using commonly known tunes and creeds, the songs and their contents were easily committed to memory. Once committed to memory they would be easily and spontaneously retrieved for appropriate occasions. As such, the message of subversion could be passed in front of the colonial administrators and missionaries without being detected. Famous Mau-Mau songs using the melodies of popular Christian hymns conveyed the ideology of the movement. There was increasingly loss of faith in constitutional action, and the idea of multiracial society was discarded. Reference to traditional symbols became important. The Agĩkũyũ saw themselves as a beloved community who lived in direct relationship with God. They were God's People, doing

¹⁰²⁰*Writers in Politics*, 20.

God's will. Those opposing them were God's enemy. The Agĩkũyũ realised that institutions were not working either due to restrictions by the government or missionaries' subversion. Their hope of representations was seen through Kenyatta and others to British government. Let me briefly consider the song of Kĩmathi quoted below as an example:

The song of Kĩmathi:

1. When Kĩmathi ascended
Into the mountain alone
He asked for strength and courage
To defeat the white man.
2. He said that we should tread
The paths that he trod
That we should follow his steps
And drink from this cup.
3. If you drink from the cup of courage
The cup I have drunk myself
A cup of pain and of sorrow
A cup of tears and of death.
4. We are tormented because we are black
We are not like the White men
We have not received their advantages
But our God goes before us.
5. Do not waver for being exiled
Or to be detained
Or to lose all your belongings
Still God goes before us.
6. Even when our hearts are troubled
Jomo will never desert us
For God never abandoned him
Far in Kapenguria.
7. Clothe yourselves with his endurance
In tribulation or death
Knowing that you belong
To the kingdom of Gĩkũyũ and Mũmbi.
8. We pray thee, O God to give us strength
The White men to return to their homes
Because a fruitless tree
Is never planted in a garden.

From the song of Kĩmathi we note that the Bible's authority was still taken for granted and thus its images and personalities can be seen here legitimising a reverse discourse. Therefore, the song of Kĩmathi with its biblical allusions and overtones locates salvation in the freedom fighter not Jesus. In the song Kĩmathi takes the place of Moses ascending to the Mount Sinai mountain of God to receive the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19 and 20). Like Moses, Kĩmathi ascends Mount Kenya (known then as Kĩrĩnyaga, referring to the mountain as the mountain of brightness). Ngai in the traditional Gĩkũyũ was thought to dwell at the top of this mountain.¹⁰²¹ Request for "strength and courage to defeat the Whiteman" replaces the Ten Commandment. The verse also alludes to Jesus Christ's ascension to Mount of Olives (Luke 22:39-44) where in anguish he received strength and courage to face his death. The charge of Kĩmathi in the second and the third stanzas to the fighters alludes to Mark 10:35-40. In this text the sons of Zebedee (James and John) made a strange request. The willingness of the two disciples to drink from the cup of suffering and death, is transferred to the freedom fighters. It indicates their willingness to suffer. The stanzas also allude to Lamentations 5 (discussed above) which points to the suffering experienced in Gĩkũyũ country. The song summarises their grievances, as well as the history of Mau-Mau and the sufferings in detention camps. The song also assigned to Kenyatta the role of Moses leading his people to the promised land. Soon they accorded him the status of Messiah and saviour.¹⁰²² Ngai was emphasised and the community was reminded how God has always blessed the community. The Gĩkũyũ myth of origin was reinvigorated.

¹⁰²¹ *Facing Mount Kenya*, 234.

¹⁰²² Mũgo R. Gatheru, *Child of Two Worlds: A Kikuyu Story* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 105-108.

The other example to consider is *the Creed of Gĩkũyũ and Mũmbi* quoted below.

“Witikio wa Gikuyu na Mumbi”

Ni njitikitie Ngai ithe Mwene hinya wothe, Mumbi wa Iguru na Thi, na ngetikia Gikuyu na Mumbi aciari aitu, aria aagaiire bururi uyu, makinyariirwo hingo ya Cege na Waiyaki ni mbari ya Nyakeru, magitunywo wathani na ithaka ciao, magituuwo tumbutumbu, maciara maa ni mahingukire maitho, makiarahuka magicokia aciari aao iti-ini.

Na ningi ni njitikitie magongoona matheru ma Gikuyu na Mumbi, na ngetikia utongoria wa Kenyatta na Mbiyu na uiguano wa Mwangi na Irungu, nayo mihiriga kenda muiyuru, nakio Gikuyu gitagathira.

Thaai Thaithaiya Ngai Thaai.”¹⁰²³

The Creed of Gĩkũyũ and Mũmbi:

I believe in *Ngai* the Almighty, Creator of the Heaven and Earth, and I believe in Gĩkũyũ and Mũmbi our progenitors, who bequeathed to us this country/nation, they were persecuted during the reign of Cege and Waiyaki by the White people clan, their freedom and land were taken away, they were reduced to dust/nothing, with profound awakening, their progenies arose to restore their progenitors’ lost glory.

I also believe in the Gĩkũyũ’s and Mũmbi’s holy sacrifices, and I believe in the leadership of Kenyatta and Mbiyũ and the unity of Mwangi and Irũngũ, and the ten clans [of Gĩkũyũ] and in the Gĩkũyũ eternal.

Worship, worship, *Ngai*, worship.¹⁰²⁴

wa Wanjaũ modelled the *Creed of Gikuyu and Mumbi* on the Apostle’s Creed, integrating his literary work and biblical language with anticolonial politics.

According to wa Wanjaũ the purpose of the creed was to awaken and unite the Gĩkũyũ community. He aimed at enlightening and informing his constituents upon the aims and strategies put in place to keep the African in poverty, self-hatred, and slavery.¹⁰²⁵ wa Wanjaũ argued that education and religious instructions were subtly intended to make the African submissive to the power of the *Athũngũ*. They were taught to imitate the Europeans in order to be accepted as civilised. Obedience to Europeans and Authority came to be accepted as a mark of conversion. One would also not be a fully fledged Christian unless they took up English names like Moses or

¹⁰²³ Gakaara wa Wanjaũ, *Agĩkũyũ Mau Mau na Wĩyathi* (Karatina: Gakaara Book Service, 1971), 187.

¹⁰²⁴ My translation.

¹⁰²⁵ *Agĩkũyũ Mau Mau na Wĩyathi*, 2.

Mary. Africans were reminded that desire for material wealth as well as participation in cultural things was wrong and a submission to the kingdom of *Caitani* or *ngoma*. But all of this only made the African *ngombo njugogi* (semi-literate slave).¹⁰²⁶ The creed served a clarion call to the community to awake and unite.

In this new interpretation, land was seen from the Gĩkũyũ community vantage point. It was considered a sacred gift from the mythical progeny of the community (Gĩkũyũ and Mũmbi.) Fighting for the land was interpreted from a moral-religious aspect. The secular objectives of the freedom fighters were seen as sanctioned and legitimised by *Ngai*. In songs and prayers their cause and struggle were just and right. In every prayer they repeated the dictum “*Ngai, twahotwo nĩwe wahotwo*” (*Ngai*, our loss is your loss.) The moral force in the songs, prayers, Bible exhortation was that through deception the Europeans stole Gĩkũyũ land. But since *Ngai* is just and powerful, right would prevail over might. Action had to be taken and not passively wait for God’s intervention because they believed “*Ngai ateithagia wĩteithĩtie*” (*Ngai*’s help comes only when men and women take action.) These precepts gave the freedom fighters the moral impetus to challenge the powers of colonialism and they believed with all their hearts and minds that right would prevail over might.

6.5 Potential Hermeneutical Optic

Although, the colonial Church dismissed the Mau-Mau movement as a “new heathen religion based on the worship of politicians”, and the emerging literature as “blasphemous parodies”¹⁰²⁷, I want to suggest an alternative view in light of the discourse of resistance. To equate Mau-Mau as a spiritual rather than a political movement was itself scandalous and reveals how deeply the Christian mission embodied the colonial structures. As a matter of facts, the colonial church’s

¹⁰²⁶ *Agĩkũyũ Mau Mau na Wĩyathi*, 34.

¹⁰²⁷ *Opcit*, Calderwood, p. 1245.

indictment of Agĩkũyũ’s interpretation of reality as atavistic was not original. Closer analysis shows that missionaries’ hermeneutical responses to Mau-Mau followed Dr. L.S.B. Leakey’s anthropological interpretation (see my critique on Leakey in the next chapter).¹⁰²⁸ Putting into good use his vast knowledge of the Agĩkũyũ, Leakey came to the conclusion that Mau-Mau was not so much a guerrilla movement but as a pseudo-religious organisation that was atavistic in nature. He wrote,

knowing full well that the Kikuyu are basically a religious people, and that there were tens of thousands who had ceased to believe in the religion of their forefathers, but who had also not become genuine churchmen, Mau-Mau leaders decided as part of the organization of the movement to give it a ‘religious’ trend; to set up a religion which was a very strange blend of pseudo-Christianity and utter paganism.¹⁰²⁹

Having given the Mau-Mau movement new meaning Leakey believed to have a grasp of the power behind it. He argued that in the “new religion”, the oathing ceremony formed only a small part, but religion was the force which turned thousands of peace-loving Agĩkũyũ into murderous fanatics.¹⁰³⁰ Besides calling people to return to the religion of ages past, Leakey asserted that Mau-Mau intended to destroy Christianity.¹⁰³¹ Therefore, Leakey concluded, with a vast majority of those won over to Mau-Mau being people who had nominally accepted Christian religion but knew nothing about traditional religion, it was easy for leaders of the movement to present Mau-Mau in Christian garb. Consequently, a creed was drawn based upon the Apostles’ Creed, and hymns altered to “hideous parodies” of the Christian equivalent.¹⁰³² Just like the Christian creed, it was to be learnt by heart and people were exhorted to have faith in it. The creed affirmed faith in Almighty God, “but also

¹⁰²⁸ L.S.B. Leakey, *Defeating Mau-Mau* (London; Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1954); See also L.S.B. Leakey, *Mau-Mau and the Kikuyu* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1952).

¹⁰²⁹ *Defeating Mau-Mau*, 40.

¹⁰³⁰ *Ibid*, 26.

¹⁰³¹ *Ibid.*,29.

¹⁰³² More of this creed will be discussed in the next chapter under Gakaara wa Wanjaũ.

in His supposedly chosen leaders of the tribe, the leader of Mau-Mau, with Jomo Kenyatta taking the place of Christ.”¹⁰³³

However, if we accept Sanneh’s definition of translation as going “beyond the narrow, technical bounds of textual work”¹⁰³⁴ and as including “a profound theological sense”¹⁰³⁵, we must also be willing to acknowledge that the Mau-Mau fighters were not merely using “bestial” desire to revert to old ways and revulsion of the new as claimed. Translation, as Sanneh argues, meant “a fundamental concession to the vernacular, and an inevitable weakening of the forces of uniformity and centralization.”¹⁰³⁶ Instead, the language of the Bible offered the resource to revitalise both the biblical message and the Agĩkũyũ indigenous milieu. The process of translation of the Christian message through the aesthetic, as already discussed, opens up another contentious political and cultural site at the heart of colonial representation.¹⁰³⁷ Here the Word of God is destabilised by the use of indigenous signs. In the very practice of signification the language of the coloniser becomes hybrid. Rather than seeing the use of the Bible or biblical language as offensive in the way it was used, I believe the Agĩkũyũ hermeneutical sensibilities served to heighten the oppositional and moral value of resistance. Rooting themselves in popular tradition of songs and poetry, they adapted the Bible, religious songs and the Apostles Creed for political protest. They created a “powerful oral literature” that rejected colonial interpretation of reality.¹⁰³⁸ Colonial Christianity had always abstracted spiritual reality from earthly struggles. Mau-Mau used the same Christian songs and

¹⁰³³ How was this different from the songs sung every morning such as “God bless the King and Queen” and the pledge of allegiance to the empire which the young minds were expected to recite every morning beside prayers for the government? *Defeating Mau-Mau*, 47; *Building Kenya’s Future*, 27.

¹⁰³⁴ *Translating the Message*, 3.

¹⁰³⁵ *African Biblical Hermeneutics*, 17.

¹⁰³⁶ *Translating the Message*, 53.

¹⁰³⁷ *The Location of Culture*, 49.

¹⁰³⁸ *Writers in Politics*, 20.

even the Bible, and interpreted them in light of the aspirations of their struggles. Christian hymns and biblical messages were turned into songs and prose of actual political engagement.¹⁰³⁹

The kind of interaction with the Bible discussed above, for example, inspired postcolonial Timothy Wangusa (a Uganda poet) to use Psalm 23 to satirise the postcolonial state of Uganda:

Psalm 23 (King James Version)

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me
beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of
righteousness for his name's sake
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of
death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;
thy rod and staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine
enemies: thou annointest my head with oil;
my cup runneth over. 5
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my
life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
for ever.

Psalm 23, Part II

The state is my shepherd, I shall not want; it makes me to
lie down in a subsidized house.
It leads me into political tranquility; it restores my faith in a
lucrative future.
It leads me into paths of loans and pensions, for its
international reputation's sake.
Yea, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow
of Kivvulu I will fear no *Kondos*;
For the State is with me, its tanks and guns comfort me.
It preserves for me a bank account, in the presence of
devaluation;
It fills my pocket with allowances, my salary overflows.
Surely increments and promotion shall follow me all the
days of my life;
And I shall dwell in senior staff quarters for ever.¹⁰⁴⁰

¹⁰³⁹ Ibid., 21.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Timothy Wangusa, "Psalm 23 (King James Version)", "Psalm 23, Part II" in Jonathan Kariara and Ellen Kitonga, eds., *An Introduction to East African Poetry* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1976), 66-67.

Wangusa used biblical text to transform the role and function of literature in postcolonial Africa. In the poem the relationship between the state and the speaker takes an ironic twist. Reading Wangusa's poem and comparing it with the Mau-Mau literature raises several questions. Is it right to use the Bible as a source for this kind of literature? Does the use of the Bible in this way lessen or heighten the moral or spiritual values of the original? In my opinion, such a use "defines a people in terms of actors and not the acted upon."¹⁰⁴¹ By retelling biblical stories and transforming the Bible of the dominant race, Mau-Mau writers were asking the community to reflect upon their actual socio-political and economic realities. Hymns were subverted to inspire, empower, and encourage group solidarity and commitment to the Mau-Mau cause.

Ironically, while the freedom fighters remained determined to carve out their own hermeneutical niche independent of the mission-oriented Bible reading and interpretations, they used rules and forms provided by the colonial paradigm to inform their interpretations. Even though the Bible was introduced to the Africans by mission Christianity, all of the groups and individuals whether found among *Arathi* or Mau-Mau wholly embraced the Bible as *Ibuku rĩa Ngai*. Edward Said referred to such an irony as "partial tragedy of resistance" to which the colonised must to a certain degree work to recover forms already established or at least influenced or infiltrated by the colonial culture.¹⁰⁴²

However, the encounter of the freedom fighters with the Bible reveals something else. It betrays what Gerald West has referred to as the Bible's "ambiguous presence" in Africa¹⁰⁴³. In this case, the Africans on one hand accepted the Bible as an "object of great power" which became potentially useful, particularly when they were

¹⁰⁴¹ *Writers in Politics*, 22.

¹⁰⁴² *Culture and Imperialism*, 253.

¹⁰⁴³ *African Biblical Hermeneutics and Bible Translation*, 5.

able to control and manipulate it. As evident with Kaggia and in the song of Kĩmathi, the Bible's authority was still taken for granted and thus its images and personalities were used to legitimise a reverse discourse. Yet on the other hand it was viewed suspiciously, partly because of some of its content but mainly because of how it had been used by the mission church to control and oppress. Individuals like Kaggia, as such, did not shy from questioning the authority of the Bible. The latter point raises an important principle of interpretation.

That is, hermeneutics has to go beyond mere dissent by anticipating triumphant and true liberation not as passive victims of oppression but as active agents in history. Gerald West observes that such a reading strategy enables "ordinary readers" to understand that the Bible as it stands in its final form may not be the last word.¹⁰⁴⁴ In chapter eight, I argue that careful literary reading of biblical texts may help detect suppressed emphasises and voices. It also helps the ordinary reader to understand that apart from the ideological forms and contents of biblical texts, the Bible can also be used to support or reinforce ideologies with devastating consequences. Thus, the reader needs to be empowered to know that what one reads and how the biblical text is interpreted and applied make all the difference. In Kaggia's case he did detect that winners may sometime use their power to re-write and manipulate biblical texts to achieve certain goals.

6.6 Conclusion

The examples of Kaggia, *Arathi*, and Mau-Mau reflect changes in conceptualisation, perception, and evaluation of situations, actions and roles. They reveal the African as a rational human being who cognitively restructures socio-political reality through actions: in this case imaginative biblical hermeneutics.

¹⁰⁴⁴ West, *African Biblical Hermeneutics*, 20.

Africans who had embraced Christianity raised sharp contextual questions and commitments as their point of entry to salvation history as experienced in the encounter with the gospel.

In addition, the examples show that the critical principle of interpretation “lies not in the Bible itself, but in the community of women and men who read the Bible and who through their dialogical imagination appropriate it for their own liberation.”¹⁰⁴⁵ In this case, rather than seeing the encounter with the Bible as a one way encounter where the Bible acts as stable and fixed text whose truth is self-evident, this principle reverse this encounter.

The encounter with the text also reveals that such an encounter does not happen in a vacuum. Instead, it involves active participation in the historical process of transformation from within a particular social location. The Africans met with the Bible within distinctive reality, religious-cultural and socio-political experiences. These experiences generated particular questions which influenced their hermeneutics. However, I will show in the next chapter that when control and surveillance persist, such hermeneutics slides into ambiguity and hides behind multi-faceted expressions.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Kwok Pui-Lan, “Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World” in Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel, eds., *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, revised and expanded edition, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), 286.

CHAPTER 7: THE BIBLE, COLONIAL IDEOLOGICAL DISTORTIONS AND THE REVIVAL OPTION

“Mwĩrĩrei Ũthamaki wa Ĩgũrũ nĩũ Kuherĩirie!”¹⁰⁴⁶

7.1 Introduction

I have maintained the argument that even though missionaries offered their reading of the Bible as objective and detached from the colonial realities, a reality check offers a grim picture. It suffices to add that throughout the colonial period, missionaries like both the tutored and untutored Africans, uncritically read, interpreted, and applied biblical texts. Secondly, missionaries’ readings appeared to disregard the role of social structures, politics, and other colonial experiences in shaping interpretations. They either ignored or were unconscious about the role of colonialism, racism and of ideologies of oppression in determining how the Bible was read and interpreted in colonial Kenya. Yet on a practical level, missionaries remained engaged within the colonial structures of power and did not hide their disdain for anti-colonial resistances and ideologies of liberation.

Yet still, the claim that the presentation of the Christian Gospel and the Bible to the Africans was an innocent, noble and transparent response to Christ’s call for the Great Commission runs aground when we consider how the Bible was applied during the Mau-Mau insurrection and the colonial counter-insurrection programmes. This chapter reiterates my earlier assertion that for biblical hermeneutics to remain relevant in post-colonial Kenya, it cannot ignore the impact of expansionism, domination, and imperialism in defining biblical hermeneutics. In using the term hermeneutics, I continue to follow my earlier proffered definition to specifically refer to the analysis of the readers of the Bible that takes seriously into consideration the reality of the

¹⁰⁴⁶ “Repent for the Kingdom of God is at Hand” – a rally call by the East African Revival Movement at the height of Mau-Mau insurgency and government counter-insurgency. Rev. Dr. Jason Nyaga, interviewed on January 1st, 2007 and May 28th, 2007.

empire, of imperialism and colonialism, not just within biblical texts but also within the context of colonial, postcolonial and neo-colonial world.

Having, in the last two chapters, analysed how the Agĩkũyũ appropriated the Bible to serve their interpretative interests and life interests, I wish to turn my attention to the ensuing period right after the declaration of the Emergency law. This period witnessed a new appropriation of the Bible where the Bible was turned into a propaganda tool whose aim was to control the religious, socio-political and cultural environment hoping to change Agĩkũyũ's values, their world outlook, and self-definition. Through the government sponsored rehabilitation program, we are taken full cycle back to the beginnings; to the basics of colonial appropriation of the Bible and its place in the civilising mission. The principles already discussed in chapter 2 are once again played out in the open; mastered, repeated and finally given an apocalyptic twist. In this case, one enters the text with a "violent apocalyptic longing for the destruction of evil."¹⁰⁴⁷ At the very centre of this encounter is a space where knowledge is destroyed and invented with the Bible offering the basic ingredients for the transformation envisioned. The transformation was reinforced by the colonial stereotype of the natives fixed at oscillating boundaries between barbarism and civility.

The colonial encounters espoused in the following pages attest to Mosala's assertion that "the Bible is a thoroughly political document" not just because of its content but also of the way it has been applied to meet political needs.¹⁰⁴⁸ In the end the political imagination, independency, innovation and the creative way in which

¹⁰⁴⁷ Erin Runions, "Desiring War: Apocalypse, Commodity Fetish, and the End of History" in Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*, 112.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Itumeleng J. Mosala, "The Implications of the Text of Esther for African Women's Struggle for Liberation in South Africa" in Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*, 135.

Agĩkũyũ appropriated the Bible as so far witnessed were muted; schooling most of the Agĩkũyũ into a set pattern of thinking that encouraged docility and submissiveness.

But, even while the disproportionate influence of the colonial church as a cultural forum is not in question, the scenario changes if we accept Bhabha's invitation to take the cultural and historical hybridity of the postcolonial world as the paradigmatic place of departure.¹⁰⁴⁹ Such a scenario is witnessed in the colonial church's co-option of the Revival group¹⁰⁵⁰ into its programme against those thought to be anti-church. If we take such incorporation as an important trajectory into the future of the use of the Bible, it inevitably forces us to rethink the logic of causality and determinacy. This is because the Revival group, though co-opted, remained ambivalent, and appropriated the Bible in their own way independent of the missionaries' influence. I will begin by giving a brief description of the rehabilitation programme and villagisation as employed by the government upon the Agĩkũyũ community to suppress Mau-Mau, before addressing the hermeneutical importance of the programme.

7.2 Detention and Villagisation

Detention and villagisation marked the beginning of rehabilitation.¹⁰⁵¹ The programme led to the rounding up of thousands of men and women who were thrown into detention camps and settlement schemes while the rest of the Agĩkũyũ

¹⁰⁴⁹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 31.

¹⁰⁵⁰ See my discussion about the East African Revival group in the second half of this chapter.

¹⁰⁵¹ A committee on Emergency Detention Camps was formed to advise both the Colony Governor and Imperial Colonial Secretary. Members Mr. R.D Fairn (Prison Commissioner –chair); Sir George Beresford; Canon T.F.C Bewes (Church Mission Society); and Lt. Col. J.R.L. Rumsey (representative of the colonial Secretary of State), “to advise on the future administration of the four main Emergency detention Camps (Hola, Aguthi, Manyani and Athi River) and in particular on the arrangements for the systematic inspection and the investigation of complaints by detainees. *Report of the committee on Emergency Detention Camps* (Special Supplement of Kenya Gazette of 1st September 1959, CMS/Unofficial Papers/Accession/212/F/12/16, 1959, University of Birmingham), 1.

community was herded into government controlled villages.¹⁰⁵² These were easily guarded, prison-like villages, located near roads and grouped around Home Guard and police posts. Similar operations were carried out on the European farms and plantations in the Rift Valley followed by the repatriation of Agĩkũyũ from these areas and other parts of the colony to the Gĩkũyũ Reserve. Those rounded up into villages spent most of their days in forced labour digging trenches around the villages and along the forest fringe of Mt. Kenya and Aberdares cutting off the fighting army from the villagers.¹⁰⁵³ The Emergency law on the other hand, restricted movement mostly of the Agĩkũyũ and made it hard for anyone to get employment.¹⁰⁵⁴

7.2.1 Purpose of Detention Camps

The purpose of the detention camps was to “review, de-oathing, rehabilitation and release” individuals who fulfilled all of the conditions laid out.¹⁰⁵⁵ To win such a release, each detainee had to prove beyond shadow of doubt that he was to live hereafter as a loyal and law-abiding member of the population capable of “earning an honest livelihood”.¹⁰⁵⁶ The individual was to renounce violence as a means of

¹⁰⁵² After the capture of General China (Warũhiũ Itote) on January 15 1954 other events followed with the launching of Operation Anvil on April 24 1954. With well over 25,000 soldiers and police the colonial government intended to crush resistance in Nairobi and cut off the flow of recruits and supplies into the forest. This saw the rounding up of over 100,000 people of which 70,000 Agĩkũyũ, Embu and Merũ were segregated and sent by train to various concentration or detention camps all over the country. Their dependents, relatives, wives and children were driven to the Gĩkũyũ Reserve. Barlow gave the number of those held incommunicado by the end of 1954 as 56,000. By 1955 there were 53000 detainees in 40 camps, 16000 Mau-Mau convicts and 10000 Kĩama Kĩa Mũingĩ (KKK). Manyani detention camp alone was expanded at the cost of a million pounds to become “the world’s largest gaol” with a staff of 1000 African warders and 130 European officers. See article by A. R. Barlow, “Mau-Mau: The Cold War”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 207 (October 1954), 1407. See also *Report of the committee on Emergency Detention Camps*, 1.

¹⁰⁵³ The trenches were planted with barbed wires, sharpened sticks, and mines with police and military camps built close by.

¹⁰⁵⁴ On May 29th 1953 Kenya Colonial Government sealed off the Colony's Central Kenya, including all of the Gĩkũyũ Reserve as well as the Merũ and Embu districts, except for travel on certain main roads and railroads. No one was supposed to enter the area or leave it without special permission from the district commissioners. See report by Albion Ross to the *The New York Times*, May 30, 1953.

¹⁰⁵⁵ *Report of the committee on Emergency Detention Camps*, 5.

¹⁰⁵⁶ The Secretary of State in September 1954 and later the Governor in January 1955 upheld that no “irreconcilables” would be allowed to return to areas where “loyal Kikuyu live”. Those who agreed to denounce Mau-Mau ceased to be irreconcilable and were eligible for release. *Report of the committee on Emergency Detention Camps*, 5.

enforcing political change. A system of camp classification and procedure referred to as “pipeline” was constructed, whereby a detainee progressed from *Black* ‘hardcore’ (Z.1), through the intermediate *Grey* stage (Y.1), to a *White* stage (Y.2) where, subject to his or her record and opinion in his district, he could be released to an open camp in his location, and finally, to his village.¹⁰⁵⁷ In special camps beside obligation to hard labour, detainees brought in from holding camps were interrogated and lectured not only by screening teams made up of Africans loyal to the government but also by co-operative detainees who had already renounced their allegiance to Mau-Mau.

7.2.2 Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation meant different things to different groups. It meant “re-education” through methods and techniques of formal instruction and training. To others it meant touching the “conscience” of the African with a hope of having people take “personal responsibility” to their actions. Most importantly to the Colonial Church, rehabilitation took on a deeper religious meaning. For the sake of discussion I have identified three dimensions of missionaries’ understanding of rehabilitation in which biblical interpretation took form as the church sought to meet the demands of its evangelistic vision. First, the process of rehabilitation in the colonial church circles was understood as a “cold war” or as “psychological war” which was in essence “the battle to win back the hearts and wills of the deluded and debased”.¹⁰⁵⁸ By employing “tactics of terror and psychological warfare”, to use Maloba’s words, both the government and the church hoped to modify behaviour “toward a predetermined goal:

¹⁰⁵⁷ Those who qualified for “mercy” were eventually sent to work camps in their home district where they received further interrogation by members of his village committee and continued with hard labour. But if the detainee’s “previous black record” was unacceptable or his home district was still in “unsettled state” the detainee would not be released but sent back down the ‘pipeline’ designated as ‘temporary unacceptable’. Ibid., 3.

¹⁰⁵⁸ See A. Ruffell Barlow, “Mau-Mau: The Cold War”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 207 (October 1954), 1406.

to produce loyal, law abiding subjects of the Crown”.¹⁰⁵⁹ Second, through the rehabilitation programme the colonial church aimed at breaking “group” mentality and replacing it with the individualised “personality” ready to make a confession as way of accepting guilt and personal responsibility.¹⁰⁶⁰ Third, the concept of rehabilitation became the abstract representation of the gospel through pain and propaganda promising cleansing in the blood of Jesus and an eschatological hope.

7.2.3 Involvement of Colonial Churches

The Government rehabilitation programme and villagisation received full blessing and support from the colonial church with missionaries actively serving as intelligence agents to the colonial government.¹⁰⁶¹ Protestant Missions, the Christian Council of Kenya and the Roman Catholic Church offered tremendous assistance to the government. The colonial churches accepted and praised rehabilitation and villagisation as “a measure that is revolutionary and one that is bound greatly to affect the lives of the people and the work of the Church amongst them.”¹⁰⁶² It was even suggested that the events were the work of “a just and righteous God who

¹⁰⁵⁹Wunyabari O. Maloba, *Mau Mau and Kenya: An analysis of a Peasant Revolt* (Oxford: James Currey, 1993), 139.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Adelphoi, *His Kingdom in Kenya*, 99. Cf. Lévy-Bruhl, *Primitive Mentality*, 408.

¹⁰⁶¹ Mr. A. Ruffell Barlow (C.S.M. missionary) at the time served under the payroll of the government in the department of the Information Services as the translator and interpreter of Mau-Mau documents and any other material that threatened the government. His role was that of “scrutinising for seditious material of African Newspapers”, aiding military by supplying Gikūyū equivalents in messages and translating propaganda the military wished to broadcast. See Barlow, “Mau-Mau: The Cold War”, 1406-1409; and *Kikuyu News*, no. 208 (February 1955), 1423. Canon Rampley (C.M.S. missionary) who referred to himself as the ‘oldest Johnian in the African field’, for he had been in the country since 1913 and retired in 1948 from CMS active services was equally deeply involved in government subversive work against Mau-Mau. See his letter dated September 16, 1957 (CMS Unofficial Papers/ACC/5/C/1, University of Birmingham.) Canon T.F.C. Bewes (C.M.S.) was appointed as a member of the Committee on Emergency Detention Camps. *Report of the committee on Emergency Detention Camps*, 1. See also Rev. Calderwood report to the “Kikuyu Annual Meeting”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 206 (June 1954), 1375.

¹⁰⁶² The Editor, “Foreword”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 208 (February 1955), 1415-1416. See also Miss I. Montgomery, “Village Settlements”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 208 (February 1955), 1424-1426.

watches over the world” and who may have chosen to chastise the Agĩkũyũ, mainly Independents, for trying “to keep Christian worship without Christian morals.”¹⁰⁶³

Right before the emergency was announced, the Presbyterian Church of East Africa’s Synod¹⁰⁶⁴ had issued a directive to all its congregations on the subject of Mau-Mau.¹⁰⁶⁵ The Synod of the P.C.E.A. denounced the Mau-Mau movement as “contrary to the Word of God, a hindrance to the just settlement of legitimate political grievances, and likely to undermine the better race relations on which alone true development can be based.”¹⁰⁶⁶ Under the threat of excommunication the church warned its members against involvement in the movement for its “unchristian” activities that hindered “achievement of just rights of the African people.”¹⁰⁶⁷ Yet it was not without acknowledgement of the real causes.¹⁰⁶⁸ The Church reserved the power to receive those who proved penitent as it had been “commissioned to proclaim the forgiveness of Christ.”¹⁰⁶⁹ The Church saw itself as the main Christian agency in European farms, Home Guard out posts, rehabilitation and detention camps, villages and Gĩkũyũ townships to serve among people who felt “as never before a great vacuum and the need of a saviour.”¹⁰⁷⁰ In addition, the government was seen as “firm yet forgiving” partner who freely granted release to such men and women after they

¹⁰⁶³ See F. G. Welch in his article “Great Changes in Gĩthũngũri”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 206 (June 1954), 1382; Church of Scotland Mission, *Building Kenya’s Future* (Edinburgh: Church of Scotland Foreign Mission Committee, 1954), 16.

¹⁰⁶⁴ The Church Mission Society posted a statement in support of ‘Operation Hammer’ and welcomed it as a new step in plans to defeat Mau-Mau. *Kenya – Time for Action* (January 14, 1955, CMS/Unofficial Papers/CMS/ACC/ 262/Z/3/1-11, University of Birmingham), 2.

¹⁰⁶⁵ “Political Unrest”, Kenya National Archives PC/CP/8/7/3 no.79, Shelf 1210.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Rev. R. G. M. Calderwood, “Secret Societies in Kenya” *Kikuyu News*, no. 201(October 1952), 1245.

¹⁰⁶⁷ “Political Unrest” (KNA/PC/CP/8/7/3 no.79a Shelf 1210).

¹⁰⁶⁸ Calderwood, “Secret Societies in Kenya”, 1246.

¹⁰⁶⁹ “Political Unrest”, (KNA/PC/CP/8/7/3 no.79a Shelf 1210).

¹⁰⁷⁰ Church of Scotland Mission, *Building Kenya’s Future*, 9.

had fully made confession, and over a period had evidenced “the truest signs of a change of heart and outlook.”¹⁰⁷¹

7.2.4 Independent Churches and Schools Banned

On its part the independent church leadership was accused of harbouring the Mau-Mau insurgents.¹⁰⁷² The leaders were consequently thrown into detention while others were exiled. Their churches were condemned to be centres of Mau-Mau meetings and were thus closed and the Independent churches and schools banned. The mission churches became beneficiaries of the Government ban on all Independent Schools and Churches.¹⁰⁷³ Followers of these churches were left with no churches and to avoid fatal confrontation with the colonial military and the harsh oppression by government appointed chiefs (who were mostly protestant), they started joining the mission churches. In detention camps, with the swelling numbers of detainees, the scenario presented “a unique opportunity...for Gospel witness and the Protestant churches were not slow to take advantage of the unparalleled opportunity.”¹⁰⁷⁴

7.3 Role of the Bible

In the brief account above, I have highlighted several points regarding the inception of the detention and villagisation programme which led to the entire Gĩkũyũ community living as a community on siege. I have also shown the colonial churches’ position in the whole drama. I turn my attention to the colonial biblical justification for the government action and the churches involvement in the evolving rehabilitation programme. But before considering the role of the Bible, it is my opinion that the psycho-analytical discourse formed the basis on which the colonial hermeneutics found meaning.

¹⁰⁷¹ K. N. Phillips, *From Mau-Mau to Christ* (Nairobi: Stirling Tract Enterprise, 1958), 24-25.

¹⁰⁷² Welch, *Great Changes in Gĩthũngũri*, 1382.

¹⁰⁷³ Welch, *Great Changes in Gĩthũngũri*, 1382.

¹⁰⁷⁴ *From Mau-Mau to Christ*, 23.

7.3.1 Role of Psychoanalysis: Dr. J. C. Carothers and the Psychology of Mau-Mau

Apart from Leakey whom I have discussed in the previous chapter, the second individual whose work played a significant role in giving form to the interpretation of the Bible in light of Mau-Mau crisis and the need to rehabilitate the Africans was Dr. J. C. Carothers.¹⁰⁷⁵ The Government believed that due to Carothers's vast experience in Africa coupled with his knowledge of psychology and psychiatry, he was the right person to shed light on the Mau-Mau and point the way to immediate and long term solutions to the problem. Carothers preliminary conclusion was that there were no fundamental differences between Africans and Europeans. Even where there were thought to exist some intrinsic differences, these were undiscoverable. However, manifest differences that existed between the Europeans and Africans were generally as a result of experience of environmental factors which included climatic, infective, nutritional and cultural factors.¹⁰⁷⁶

But essential to the understanding of the Mau-Mau psychology, according to Carothers were the cultural factors. Certain common cultural characteristics of the Africans, discoverable in all pre-literate societies, conditioned "their mentality as adults on characteristic lines" in ways which were "strange to modern western Europeans."¹⁰⁷⁷ Such cultural characters, which developed gradually in the course of many centuries or thousands of years, essentially built on "meticulous rules" developed to curtail the animal-like desires in the pre-literate "man".¹⁰⁷⁸ These "socially integrative" rules, whose origins and meanings are lost in "the shadows of

¹⁰⁷⁵ Dr. J. C. Carothers had worked as a medical officer and Psychiatrist in charge in one and only mental institution in Kenya, at Mathari Mental Hospital, Nairobi. His final report was given under the title *The Psychology of Mau-Mau* (Nairobi: The Government Printer), 1954.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Carothers, *The Psychology of Mau-Mau*, 2.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Ibid.

antiquity”, are empirically and coercively presented to the individual from infancy onwards. The rules stifled “Africa natural curiosity” since their explanations was on “magical and animistic lines.”¹⁰⁷⁹ The “animistic explanation” were said to be “too facile” and “too final” in such a way that they curtailed innate human urge to speculate. The rules left the African “individual” lacking in personal integration and largely lacking in reflection, foresight and responsibility and at the mercies of “traditional rules”.¹⁰⁸⁰ Lack of conscious personal integration made the African fail to understand that neither the good nor the bad is absolute. Since the outer world impinged more on the African consciousness (usually so in terms of misfortune), then the world as well as the “outsiders” were essentially malevolent. In such a context, God whose “good and loving...personification of an orderly protecting principle is something rather abstract and remote.”¹⁰⁸¹

In a life which was “cheap and full of fear” violence and sacrifices became a familiar experience even in the lives of children. As such “African attitude to life” and behaviour patterns were inspired by a background shaped by the hierarchy of “power” divided into “the dangerously powerful” and “the wholly powerless”.¹⁰⁸² In essence, what Carothers was saying is that since the Africans in Kenya had not developed a personal mental integration, they could not (indeed they lacked the capacity to) assess and reconcile elements of the past, present, and future in a way that “one’s immediate desires” could be “subjugated to one’s long-term interests.” The result of such a lack in personal synthesis was violent and unconstrained behaviour pattern.

Beside the African’s underdeveloped individualism delineated above, Carothers added that the Agĩkũyũ were doubly underdeveloped because of their

¹⁰⁷⁹ Carothers, *The Psychology of Mau-Mau*, 2.

¹⁰⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁰⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸² *Ibid.*

“forest psychology”.¹⁰⁸³ Their closeness to the forests served as “protective and supportive” buffer zones. This closeness to the forest made them live “relatively isolated lives” where the “voice of the group is less insistent” and prone to “secretiveness, to suspicions and to scheming.”¹⁰⁸⁴ Carothers’s point is very clear, the African subject, more so the Agĩkũyũ is not individuated. Albert Memmi identified this type of colonial depersonalisation of the colonised as “the mark of the plural”.¹⁰⁸⁵ The colonised were never characterised “in an individual manner” but only as “anonymous collectivity (‘they are this.’ They are all the same.’).”¹⁰⁸⁶

Carothers concluded that the “indigenous cultural modes” never faded and would largely permeate the lives of people who may seemingly appear to be “detrIALIZED”.¹⁰⁸⁷ He equated the nature of things at the height of Mau-Mau, to a community made up of doubly underdeveloped individuals who could not cope with the demands of civilisation. With the coming of the Europeans the “whole cultural machinery” quickly collapsed.¹⁰⁸⁸ The rapidity of these changes left the Agĩkũyũ in “transitional state”.¹⁰⁸⁹ However, the cultural collapse did not mean the demise of the “magical and animistic principles”. The codes of manners and a morality enforced by supernatural ‘wills’ and a remote conception of a God remained firmly intact.¹⁰⁹⁰ Thus even with the alien influence and the training, the modern African grew up as before but “without building up a personal integrated and critical approach to life” and lacking the “sense of personal security that previously derived from the secure

¹⁰⁸³ Carothers, *The Psychology of Mau-Mau*, 4.

¹⁰⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸⁵ Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 85.

¹⁰⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸⁷ See also The Revd. Placide Temples, *Bantu Philosophy*. Translated into English from *La Philosophie Bantoue* by The Revd. Colin King, (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1959), 17-18.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Carothers pointed that the speed in which this happened depended on whether the communities were pastoral or agriculturists.

¹⁰⁸⁹ *The Psychology of Mau-Mau*, 6.

¹⁰⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

and positive convictions of his elders.”¹⁰⁹¹ While “his ‘magic’ modes of thought” persisted, the old constraints and faith were lost.¹⁰⁹²

Now with his sense of “adversity of a malevolent world” lost, Carothers added, transference of thought occurred. Still lacking the capacity to synthesis information and recognise that “the fault may lie in him”, the African quickly identified the lost world of evil spirits with the “Europeans and lay all his troubles at the latter’s door.”¹⁰⁹³ To compensate the increased anxiety, Carothers hypothesised that the Agĩkũyũ reacted in three varied but related ways. The first discernible way, according to Carothers, was for the Agĩkũyũ to atavistically seek out the “dead hand” of the past. The second way in which the community reacted was to produce “some new solution” – in this case Mau-Mau. Thirdly, other individuals of the Agĩkũyũ adopted “something satisfactory” to themselves from the alien culture in this case the Christian Revival movement arising as an urge to “achieve equality with Europeans” in a fast changing world.¹⁰⁹⁴

While Carothers’s *The Psychology of Mau-Mau*, may have served other colonial needs as pointed out by Loomba,¹⁰⁹⁵ I am of the opinion that this work became foundational in shaping the evangelistic hermeneutics needed by the colonial church to reform the wayward Africans. Carothers work was the first in the Kenya colony to pathologise Africans’ resistance as an aspect of underdeveloped individualism.¹⁰⁹⁶

¹⁰⁹¹ Carothers, *The Psychology of Mau-Mau*, 7.

¹⁰⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹³ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰⁹⁵ For Loomba, the writings on the African Psychology and psychiatry served the need to define Africans as fundamentally different from the Europeans. Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 119.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 120.

7.3.2 The Bible as the Word of God: The Basis of Rehabilitation

Following Carothers conclusions, missionaries concluded that the Agĩkũyũ had striven in fifty short years to master the intricate problems of European modern age.¹⁰⁹⁷ To this end the Agĩkũyũ had come to the limit of their mental capacity leading to mental breakdown on a nation scale. Following Jung's observation in his book *The Collective Unconscious*, Adelphoi interpreted the perceived mental break down as a psychotic departure from the rational and implied escape from an impossible situation.¹⁰⁹⁸ Having adopted Dr. Leakey and Dr. Carothers theses, the Colonial Church concluded that Mau-Mau oaths and all its psychological conditioning made the partaker of the oaths "outcast, so degenerate that he could never conceive himself as redeemable."¹⁰⁹⁹ "Every decent sentiment" had been completely destroyed thus leaving the followers to become "new and dreadful creatures in Mau-Mau" delighting in murder and cruelty.¹¹⁰⁰ The new enemy was more dangerous than "materialism" and "paganism", one that demanded "a vision to realise that the answer is the Lord's promise to make a new creature of the very worst."¹¹⁰¹ "The Lord Christ" was the only "answer to Kenya's problems".

The hermeneutical principle of the Bible as the Word of God and the Word of Truth found its place as the beginning point of bringing back sanity.¹¹⁰² Mau-Mau was said to be "an evil" with "surprising echo from a very recent savage past."¹¹⁰³ It involved retrogression to the known ways and familiar customs of bygone days. Therefore, to respond to the kind of atavism evident in Mau-Mau, missionaries

¹⁰⁹⁷ Adelphoi, *His Kingdom in Kenya*, 101.

¹⁰⁹⁸ *His Kingdom in Kenya*, 101; See also T. F. C. Bewes. *Kikuyu Conflict: Mau-Mau and the Christian Witness* (London: The Highway Press, 1953), 36-40.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Church of Scotland Mission, *Building Kenya's Future*, 14-15.

¹¹⁰⁰ Rev. Dr. A. Clive Irvine, "Kianganuru, 1954", *Kikuyu News*, no. 207 (October 1954), 1409.

¹¹⁰¹ Irvine, "Kianganuru, 1954", 1410.

¹¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰³ "Mau-Mau: What is it? What lies behind it? How does it affect Church and Mission in Kenya? What can we do about it?" *CMS Membership Bulletin Special Issue*, December 1952, (CMS/ACC/296 F 3-6, University of Birmingham), 6.

likewise required a reaching back to the foundations of the “civilising mission” principle as legitimising missionaries’ presence in colonial Kenya.¹¹⁰⁴ The harking back offered the opportunity to repeat and remind the colonised that missionaries had every right to read and interpret the Bible for the sake of the colonised.¹¹⁰⁵ In the process of harking back into the mission pioneering past, the Bible is brought to bear. At this point, the Bible is lifted with all clarity that it is the Word of God and the Word of truth. The Word must not only light up the retrieved past but it must also light up the immediate situation. The principle of the Bible as the Word of God and the Word of Truth would also reflect and transmit the colonial vision.¹¹⁰⁶ As a result, the scriptures fittingly served, on one hand, the purpose of naming and demonising the Mau-Mau and the Agĩkũyũ. On the other hand the Bible was used to justify and legitimise colonial programme of rehabilitation.

Once the Mau-Mau activities became public the colonial church declared it “a spiritual evil” that had to be fought “with spiritual weapons” of Ephesians 6:12.¹¹⁰⁷ The Christian Council of Kenya made it clear that the struggle was one, “not between African and European, but between the forces of good and evil... a spiritual movement...of the devil and therefore fundamentally anti-Christian.”¹¹⁰⁸ As such missionaries argued that they could not cave in to the demands of Gĩkũyũ “gangsterism” since,

a madman cannot be held responsible for their actions, but he cannot be allowed to murder at will; we hold no brief for the criminals who have worked upon the minds of their countrymen, aiming to produce just brutal frenzy from which we now all suffer” for “education without faith in God is poison.”¹¹⁰⁹

¹¹⁰⁴ “Mau-Mau: What is it?” 6.

¹¹⁰⁵ Calderwood, “Secret Societies in Kenya”, 1245; Editor, “Mau-Mau”, 1286.

¹¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁰⁹ *His Kingdom in Kenya*, 103.

Mau-Mau also expressed something very deeply entrenched in many of the Agĩkũyũ. It went deeper than anti-European feeling, deeper than a sense of grievances. It was a spiritual movement, “albeit of the devil”. It was made up of non-Christian and semi-Christians not “prepared to pay the price of putting off the works of darkness and walking in the light”.¹¹¹⁰ Mau-Mau adherents were said to envy “the emotional release and joy of the Revival Christians” but instead sought “fulfilment in a fellowship of hatred and darkness on patriotic lines of returning to Kikuyu customs and witchcraft”.¹¹¹¹ Mau-Mau was a “Satanic cult” and “a moral and spiritual evil born in the lowest hell” which could only be conquered by spiritual weapons.¹¹¹² Nationalism was said to be “the mischief wrought in secret by the Devil himself, the advance of Evolution amongst the species.”¹¹¹³ It was likened to a disease which had suddenly assumed epidemic proportions.¹¹¹⁴ Therefore, the Church was to respond “to the challenge of apostasy and persecution with a more vigorous evangelism and uncompromising witness.”¹¹¹⁵

Commenting on Mau-Mau a year after its inception, Bishop Walter Carey, described it as “a horror of great darkness” represented in “Kenyatta: a very powerful man gone wrong, so that he gets near an incarnation of the spirit, the personal spirit, of evil.”¹¹¹⁶ The battle of Titians that faced the colonial churches was now than ever before between “the personal powerful impact of goodness” and equally personal the “mysterious awful power of evil”. The power of evil was declared to be “full-grown”

¹¹¹⁰ “Mau-Mau: What is it?” 11-12.

¹¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹¹² K. N. Phillips, *From Mau-Mau to Christ* (Nairobi: Stirling Tract Enterprise, 1958), 6; Bewes, *Kikuyu Conflict*, 20-27; See reports from “Home and Field Notes”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 206 (June 1954), 1393.

¹¹¹³ Canon Rampley (the self-confessed C.M.S. missionary of his involvement with colonial secret services on Mau-Mau) dismissed the African political leadership as made up of nominal Christian and political agitators influenced. Rampley’s letter dated September 16, 1957 (CMS/Unofficial Papers/ACC/5/C/1, University of Birmingham); See *His Kingdom in Kenya*, 107.

¹¹¹⁴ “Mau-Mau: What is it?” 6.

¹¹¹⁵ Calderwood, “Secret Societies in Kenya”, 1246.

¹¹¹⁶ Carey, *Crisis in Kenya: Christian Common Sense on Mau Mau and the Colour-Bar*, 38.

and one could feel its presence as personally as something “vile, rejoicing in iniquity, hating God, loathing Christ, a deadly enemy to all goodness and innocence and beauty.”¹¹¹⁷ Anyone who could not feel its force was “just blind, blind, blind” and needed the help of “St. Paul or even Kipling” who personally knew this powerful force of evil.¹¹¹⁸

In juxtaposing Paul and Rudyard Kipling¹¹¹⁹, Carey was doing more than highlighting “Christian Common Sense”. Carey was reinforcing the colonial dialectic of self and other as well as heightening binary opposites. If colonised people are irrational, Europeans are rational; if Africans are barbaric, Europe is the civilisation. In his commentary Carey portrayed Kenyatta as one who had, though tragically, left his “accustomed place” of barbarity only to return with vengeance.¹¹²⁰ He reminded his readers that the colonial churches’ effort to bring light into the darkest place of the world was not over yet. Indeed, it needed both the insights of Paul and Kipling to bring it to bear. Carey’s appeal also reinforced colonial stereotyping and representation of colonial subjects as “unalterably alien”.¹¹²¹ As discussed elsewhere, it is in this act of “othering” that became the basis on which mission societies made commitment to co-operate with the colonial government in order to fend off Mau-

¹¹¹⁷ Carey, *Crisis in Kenya*, 38-39.

¹¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹¹⁹ Rudyard Kipling most notable work of fiction was *Kim*, which compares to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*.

¹¹²⁰ See how this fits in what Achebe referred to as western psychological disposition in Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments*, 5.

¹¹²¹ Caroline Elkins observes that the Mau-Mau uprising “ushered in a critical change in the settlers’ already racist hierarchical segregation of humanity. There was a shift in language and belief, from simple white supremacy to one that was overtly eliminationist”. The accepted orthodoxy characterised the Mau-Mau and later the entire community as ‘bestial’, ‘filthy’, ‘evil’, ‘vermin’, ‘animals’, ‘barbarians’, ‘cunning’, ‘blood thirsty’, ‘greedy enemies of peace’, ‘extremely vile and violent’, “the horned shadow of the Devil himself” and had to be eliminated at all costs. The Mau-Mau adherents were not part of the human continuum. They were considered lower than the wild animals that roamed the colony. “The Mau-Mau look” was the description given to “devil-like eyes and sinister and sullen expressions” of the fighters and hardcore Mau-Mau . On the other hand Government forces were referred to as security forces, defenders of peace, peace restorers, Home Guards and Loyalists. Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*, 48-49, 50, 67; See also my discussion in chapter 2 on stereotyping as a powerful colonial construct; see also Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 86, 92-95.

Mau influence “so that the just rights of all may be secured for the future, and the Kingdom of God may be set forward.”¹¹²² I am of the opinion, however, that the hermeneutical principle that saw the Bible as the Word of God and the Word of Truth and as the answer to the Mau-Mau problem, rendered impotent the idea of the “civilising mission” as a progressive, ordered whole. This is because, by using the Word of God in collusion with the colonial programmes intended to break the African’s body and mind, missionaries participated in what Bhabha terms as the “act of epistemic violence” that transgressed their own “frame of reference” and disturbed their civilising vision.¹¹²³ Any reading and interpretation of the Bible from this point of reference is anything else but objective.

7.3.3 The Bible as the Manual for Life

The second hermeneutical principle was to hold the Bible as the instruction manual through which the deluded Africans would be “led back to the right path of sanity and commonsense.”¹¹²⁴ As such one entered the Bible for answers to the crisis. Hebrew 7:25 was taken as the basis of reform with the dictum that “religion must not be taught, but convincingly *lived*”.¹¹²⁵ The new community was to be rebuilt “on sound” New Testament lines while practising Luke 10:27 in the social and economic arena.¹¹²⁶ The principle, just like the first one, disregarded missionaries’ cultural and political biases as readers and interpreters of the manual. Missionaries’ involvement in the rehabilitation programme was not just as Christians but also as members of the

¹¹²² “Mau-Mau”, 1286.

¹¹²³ Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 60.

¹¹²⁴ Barlow was here quoting George Dennis a former missionary at Tumutumu serving now a staff at the Athi River camp which housed “the original Mau-Mau internees.” Dennis had given a lecture at the Presbyterian St. Andrew’s Church, Nairobi where he highlighted on the methods and experiences on how to deal best with the young Agĩkũyũ arrested and against whom definite charges of crime had been “proven.” See Barlow, “Mau-Mau: The Cold War”, 1408.

¹¹²⁵ The editor in his article “A Christian Approach to Rehabilitation” and quoting from the ‘East African Standard’ of 28th September 1956, *Kikuyu News*, no. 211 (February 1956), 8; See also “Mau-Mau: The Cold War”, 1409.

¹¹²⁶ Barnett, *Mau Mau from Within*, 100 and 133.

privileged ruling class that was ready to defend at all cost its hold on power, its status quo and the integrity of the British Empire. This did not, however, stop the colonial churches from assuming the role of rebuilding the old waste places using ideas of Jesus Christ taken as “the most dynamic, devastating and positively constructive ideas in the world.”¹¹²⁷

7.3.4 The Universality of Biblical Messages

The third hermeneutical principle was to read and interpret the Word as valid at all times and applicable in all situations. Reading and interpretation were based on the principle that all people were equal in God’s eyes and from the maxim that all are “sinners”, whether sin was of the Mau-Mau variety or not. Paul’s message to the Romans in Roman 3:23; 6:23 that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,” and “the wage of sin is death” served this need.¹¹²⁸ The hope was to stimulate confessions and repentance. Through Christian propaganda both the Church and the government hoped to convince all that “a Christian confession and a Christian ‘cleansing’” was the beginning to “recovery of conscience, heart and will” which opened up “a new life for the lost and hopeless.”¹¹²⁹ It was added that *Jesu* precious blood could cleanse away every sin. *Jesu* commanded all to come to repentance, to trust in him, to receive Him as personal Saviour and Lord.¹¹³⁰ When closely analysed, however, the concept of universalisation reveals a Western criteria of evaluation which condemned that which is local and particular (in this case, elements of resistance) while that which passed as universalism though equated to biblical values were in actual fact the colonisers’ cultural values.

¹¹²⁷ “Family papers”, Mr. Harvey Cantrell’s Diary – section 5, May 9 1953 (CMS/Acc.15 F1 1953, University of Birmingham).

¹¹²⁸ Phillips, *From Mau-Mau to Christ*, 50.

¹¹²⁹ *Building Kenya’s Future*, 15.

¹¹³⁰ Phillips, *From Mau-Mau to Christ*, 50.

7.3.5 Apocalyptic Vision:

The fourth hermeneutical principle was to use the Bible to conjure in the convict's mind images of an apocalyptic vision of future life in the colony and the violent apocalyptic vision of destruction of evil. The Church triumphantly charged "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation."¹¹³¹ It was the accepted time to declare "Christ, the Hope of the World."¹¹³² The evangelistic goal of biblical readings and interpretations used was to reclaim the Africans from the grasp of "Satan" and reintroduce them to the "true" Gospel.¹¹³³ Therefore, it was demanded that the Africans confess in order to lift their "load of guilt" leaving "the door open for a further step on the way to recovery."¹¹³⁴ In addition to confession, the goal was also to lead detainees to salvation, forgiveness for coldness, and backsliding.¹¹³⁵ The detainee had to know that if he or she qualified for release, "he would have a future to look forward to and that he would be reabsorbed in his community, or, if necessary, resettled elsewhere".¹¹³⁶

Those willing to confess their connection with Mau-Mau had to broadcast their statements of confession to the whole camp through the loudspeaker system giving their names and renouncing Mau-Mau.¹¹³⁷ They had to publicly renounce all association with "the evil", denounce it, and then "cooperate in the reclamation of

¹¹³¹ *Building Kenya's Future*, 16.

¹¹³² *Ibid.*

¹¹³³ Adelphoi, *His Kingdom in Kenya*, 99; Church of Scotland Mission, *Building Kenya's Future*, 16; See also the Editor, "Foreword", *Kikuyu News*, no. 208 (February 1955), 1415-1416; Miss I. Montgomery, "Village Settlements", *Kikuyu News*, no. 208 (February 1955), 1424-1426; Barlow, "Mau-Mau: The Cold War", 1406.

¹¹³⁴ Those who confessed and renounced the movement were moved to other cells where they could not be "contaminated" but were made to believe that such a move was for the sake of "their protection" thus their fellow countrymen and detainees became their enemies to be avoided. *Building Kenya's Future*, 14.

¹¹³⁵ Phillips, *From Mau-Mau to Christ*, 28; Josiah Mwangi Kariuki, *Mau-Mau Detainee: The account by a Kenyan African of his experiences in detention camps 1953-1960* (Oxford University Press, Nairobi, 1963), 68.

¹¹³⁶ *Report of the committee on Emergency Detention Camps*, 5.

¹¹³⁷ Such meeting ran up to four hours. *From Mau-Mau to Christ*, 30.

their neighbours in detention.”¹¹³⁸ The Church had to “test the sincerity of such repentance” as it stood “on the Gospel assurance that forgiveness is offered in Christ to the least, the last and the worst.”¹¹³⁹ Then those who sought restoration were readmitted in a public service after a period of catechetical instructions.¹¹⁴⁰ “Converted in Jesus” became the norm. Those “converted” claimed that they had fully surrendered to Jesus after realising that if they “had died before renouncing Mau-Mau it would have been eternal loss. Now if they die, they would go to be with Jesus, for He had saved them.”¹¹⁴¹ D.M. Miller summarised it as an, “epic story of the power of the Gospel transforming Mau-Mau hearts and bringing about a new creation so complete as to disqualify old ways and reconstruct a new man, born again of the Spirit of God.”¹¹⁴² Those who left the concentration camps came out with one thing to confess: “I leave Manyani with the gift of eternal life”; “I praise the Lord very, very much for bringing me into detention”; “Manyani has been gain to me”. In essence, Manyani became the place for salvation. The “converted” individuals returned to their villages politically passive, as loyalists and as spiritual heroes.

The new identification succeeded in producing an image of identity where the colonial subject assumed that image. Those who wanted to become the “Converted ones” had to accept the colonisers’ invitation to the identity of the “saved, and consequently... brother in Christ.”¹¹⁴³ To exist, the African had to respond to this call. By doing so the colonial church successfully used the scriptures to naturalise colonial propaganda which now passed as true conversion. Anthony Appiah eloquently captures such a transformation when he says that “ideologies succeed to the extent

¹¹³⁸ *Building Kenya’s Future*, 15.

¹¹³⁹ *Building Kenya’s Future*, 16.

¹¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴¹ *From Mau-Mau to Christ*, 30.

¹¹⁴² He was formerly General Secretary of the Africa Inland Mission, London in his foreword to *From Mau-Mau to Christ*, 4, 31.

¹¹⁴³ *From Mau-Mau to Christ*, 62.

that they are invisible, in the moment that their network of assumptions passes beneath consciousness; genuine victories are won without a shot being fired.”¹¹⁴⁴ But even in this moment of invitation there still remains the “unsaved” that still needs “the Saviour.”¹¹⁴⁵ These were the “hardcore” and “politically subversive, and spiritually defunct” who remained “intensely introspective, morbidly bound up with their own condition, and with little incentive to make them out of themselves.”¹¹⁴⁶

7.3.6 Strategies: Free Bibles, Direct and Indirect Persuasions

To make rehabilitation possible, it required united efforts of the Government and the Christian Churches.¹¹⁴⁷ It was particularly thought important to engage experienced Church ministers and evangelists in every camp.¹¹⁴⁸ Other strategies included bombarding the “convicts” through camps’ broadcasting system which amplified the message of salvation and “Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life”.¹¹⁴⁹ Hymns and Gospel records were frequently played in the vernacular¹¹⁵⁰ which were played followed by “a direct Gospel talk, prayer, the distribution of Scriptures and

¹¹⁴⁴ Appiah, *In my Father's House*, 60.

¹¹⁴⁵ *From Mau-Mau to Christ*, 62.

¹¹⁴⁶ The hard-cored referred to those who were still “deeply imbedded in Mau-Mau and strongly determined that nothing shall move them or their fellows into any admission of guilt or any cooperation with the Government.” The committee on Emergency Detention Camps recommended that “skilled psychiatric treatment, and that a Christian psychiatrist, with a knowledge of the Kikuyu language and a background of the people, should be brought to help.” *From Mau-Mau to Christ*, 75; *Report of the committee on Emergency Detention Camps*, 10-11; “Home and Field Notes”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 208 (February 1955), 1437.

¹¹⁴⁷ Financial effort was undertaken to solicit funds worldwide through the British Council of Churches and the Conference of Missionary Societies. Through this effort, over £50,000 was collected to enable the churches in Kenya play the much need role of “spiritual rehabilitation.” *Building Kenya's Future*, 14.

¹¹⁴⁸ These included Father Ryan of Roman Catholic and Rev. David Livingstone of the Methodist mission, Rev. Mũtarō Njoga and Rev. Geoffrey Ngarĩ as the Presbyterian African ministers posted to detention camps along with a number of evangelists. The Christian Council of Kenya had resident chaplains in as many detention camps as it was possible. The Revival Movement was interpreted as “the nucleus” of “a lay movement of evangelism”. *Building Kenya's Future*, 9-11; *Report of the committee on Emergency Detention Camps*, 10-11; “Home and Field Notes”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 208 (February 1955), 1437.

¹¹⁴⁹ *From Mau-Mau to Christ*, 34.

¹¹⁵⁰ The work mainly by Miss Joy Ridderhof of the Gospel Recording Inc. together with others produced a set of Gospel records in Kikuyu and Meru languages, and 17000 of these arrived in Nairobi at the height of the Emergency to be played in the detention and work camps over the Colony, as well as in the villages. Such songs included “nothing but the Blood of Jesus”. *From Mau-Mau to Christ*, p. 45.

Gospel literature”.¹¹⁵¹ Bibles, Scripture booklets and tracts (in Gĩkũyũ, Swahili, and English) were made available by the British and Foreign Bible Society and the Scripture Gift Mission.¹¹⁵² Phillips recorded that everywhere in the camps one could see Gĩkũyũ Bibles or New Testaments. Bibles lay “on men’s blankets, on the office tables, all over the hospital, and being carried round in detainees’ hands... waiting in the Outpatients’ Department, and even when squatting on the ground, in rows of five’s, waiting to be counted, just before the evening’s lock-up.”¹¹⁵³ In addition, preaching method through illustrations used humorous incident or story or “just a simple, childish story.”¹¹⁵⁴ Anti-Mau-Mau skits were played repeatedly on Radio and by the Mobile units. wa Thiong’o observed that radio drama were always made with the African as a clown. The drama of the mindless clown’s main goal was to make Africans “laugh at their own stupidity and simplicity”.¹¹⁵⁵

The story was the same in the villages. Everywhere missionaries travelled they reported large numbers of children in Sunday school, and an ever growing adult congregation gathering to hear “the Word of life”.¹¹⁵⁶ Mobile Units were put in place with vans fitted with public address equipment with a lay evangelist and a driver. For example in “New life in Kenya”, Rudolph Cribb discussed at length the importance of the “Spiritual commando force” which first went into action in February 1954 under the banner “The Church on the Wheels”.¹¹⁵⁷ Through loud speakers, they broadcasted

¹¹⁵¹ Phillips, *From Mau-Mau to Christ*, 46.

¹¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 41.

¹¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹¹⁵⁴ *From Mau-Mau to Christ*, 40; Mr. Harvey Cantrell’s Diary (Section 14), June 17, 1954 (CMS/Acc. 15 F1, University of Birmingham)..

¹¹⁵⁵ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Oxford: James Currey, 1986), 38-39.

¹¹⁵⁶ Lorna A. Bowden – Letter to friends abroad, CMS Weithaga (CMS/ACC/296 F 3-6, July 1954, University of Birmingham).

¹¹⁵⁷ This was a 3 ton Ford Van for the Church Missionary Society Mobile unit. It had the bold, black lettering across the cream-painted sides of the van reading “Maisha Mapya Katika Kristo” (New Life in Christ!). The Colonial Kenyan Government had made a grant of £3,750 for the mobile units “in recognition of the courage and loyalty of Kikuyu Christians during the Emergency.” Publication of

well known hymns, prayers and scriptures from the Gĩkũyũ New Testament and the gramophone playing records. Sermons preached were on one theme “The two ways, of Good and Evil, facing men today.” “Church on the Wheels” aimed at reaching “isolated groups in the bush, Home Guard posts, Chief’s camps or labouring “gangs” on community development because people had “lost all contact with Christianity.”¹¹⁵⁸ With a “multi-racial team working” on these vans and eating together, they aimed at recreating “a Christian community among the Kikuyu in the bush.”¹¹⁵⁹

By the middle of 1956 political expression on the national level had virtually disappeared among the Agĩkũyũ.¹¹⁶⁰ This was also followed by the destruction of the community’s social and economic foundations.¹¹⁶¹ The customary mode of life was severely damaged by emergency regulations, removal of nearly more than half of the male population and villagisation. Sickness and malnutrition among the children multiplied.¹¹⁶² Charges of bribery and corruption were said to be rampant among village leaders (majority of whom were loyal Christians). They could withhold or pass information to the colonial authorities as to who was “really” cooperative or not. They also made recommendations on who should be allowed to return to village life.¹¹⁶³

booklets such as Calvary Love, ‘New Life in Christ, ‘The Happy Home’, copies of John’s Gospel and other pamphlets were also used in order to saturate the mind with the things of God. Miss M. I Montgomery, “Village Work”, *Kikuyu News*, no 213 (July 1956, pp. 29-31; CMS/Acc. 262 Z3/ 12, University of Birmingham).

¹¹⁵⁸ CMS/Acc. 262 Z3/ 12, University of Birmingham.

¹¹⁵⁹ CMS/Acc. 262 Z3/ 12; The Editor, “The Christian Approach to Rehabilitation”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 211 (February 1956), 9.

¹¹⁶⁰ Rev. R. Macpherson, “Annual Report for 1955 (Extracts): Our World in Kenya”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 213 (July 1956), 39.

¹¹⁶¹ Dr. Mary I. Shannon had been asked by the Christian Council of Kenya together with Miss R. Truesdell of the African Inland Mission to make a tour of Gĩkũyũ villages, to find out all they could about the conditions, especially in regard to women and children, and make recommendations about how best a Christian Council’s “Women’s Team” could set to work. Dr. Shannon gave the proportion of women to men living in the villages as: in Nyeri (7 to 1), in Fort Hall and Embu (3 or 4 to 1.) Dr. Mary I. Shannon, “The Changing Face of Kenya”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 210 (October 1955), 1483.

¹¹⁶² Macpherson, “Our World in Kenya”, 39.

¹¹⁶³ Lorna A. Bowden – Letter to friends abroad, CMS Weithaga (CMS/ACC/296 F 3-6, July 1954, University of Birmingham).

7.3.7 Signs of Dissidence Discourse

The dangerous path that Emergency and detention laws took caused discomfort in some missionary quarters. The wide range of atrocities carried out by British soldiers and African forces against the Agĩkũyũ were widely reported.¹¹⁶⁴ Dissidence discourse, although located within and co-opted by the colonial system, subverted the very system from within. In a general way, as Sugirtharajah observes, this type of oppositional hermeneutics ameliorated colonialism as well as tempering its predatory intentions.¹¹⁶⁵ Even though its main agenda may not have been to overturn and overrun colonialism (as a matter of fact the dissenting voices fully embraced colonialism), “in its own innocuous way it caused unsettlement, dislocation, and placed a question mark over territorial and cultural expansion.”¹¹⁶⁶

For example, D.D. O’Brien attacked the religious campaign as a “religious war” where missionaries were spreading “Christianity at the point of the Bayonet.”¹¹⁶⁷ Further, Rev. David Steel, Moderator of the Church of Scotland in Kenya called for the formation of a judicial commission of experts in constitutional law to pronounce on the legality of much of our Emergency legislation and the other orders in the colonial War Council, “many which may be without the framework of constitutional law, and giving the appearance of legality for practices not only unjust in the eyes of God, but illegal by the accepted law of man”.¹¹⁶⁸ He remarked that the Church itself was not guiltless; having remained silent too long in public (though repeated representations had been made to Government in private). He added “the Church dare

¹¹⁶⁴ In January of 1953, Canon T.F.C Bewes, the Africa Secretary of CMS (having worked in Gĩkũyũ country and for twenty years) visited to investigate and report on the needs of the church in Gĩkũyũ to the Archbishop of Canterbury. See *Kenya – Time for Action*, January 14, 1955 (CMS/Unofficial Papers/CMS/ACC. 262 Z 3/ 1-11, University of Birmingham), 1-2.

¹¹⁶⁵ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Bible Interpretation*, 44.

¹¹⁶⁶ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Bible Interpretation*, 44.

¹¹⁶⁷ D.D. O’Brien later denied that his letter implied the latter phrase. CMS/Acc. 262 Z3/ 12, University of Birmingham.

¹¹⁶⁸ News Paper Cutting (the source of the news paper cutting not available), January 14, 1955 (CMS/Unofficial Papers/CMS/ACC. 262 Z 3/ 1-11, University of Birmingham), 3.

not, and will not, stand aside when Christian Principles are abrogated and when our great traditions of government, based on those principles, are being violated and shamed”.¹¹⁶⁹

The Christian Council of Kenya likewise lamented that “the demoralising effect on loyal Kikuyu and others of indiscriminate retaliation and a failure to maintain strictly the rule of law, may well have already prejudiced the future of a multi-racial community in Kenya”.¹¹⁷⁰ The provost of Nairobi in the same manner, quoting Kenya European elected members nine-point policy statement (second clause), demanded action in order to promote the Christian ethics “right down into the arena of politics, and applying it without distinction to black and white and brown alike, without fear or favour... an essential part of the Christian ethic to maintain law and order by lawful means.”¹¹⁷¹ He continued, “If in suppressing rebellion, we ourselves break the law, what respect can we expect? How can we ask others to do what we do not? And what has become of the highfalutin talk of Christian ethics?”¹¹⁷²

The three individuals discussed above raised new questions which put the credibility of the colonial church’s claims on hermeneutics. The colonial church’s ideas of geographical possession, legitimacy and redemption disguised the colonial power situation. It also failed to respond objectively in its interpretation of biblical understanding of Christian mission. The three also exposed the biases and contradictions in the colonial hermeneutics disguised in the civilising mission and colonial stereotyping. Such hermeneutics ignored the fact that human beings are involved in multiple relationships with God, neighbour, world, and self. Consequently, colonial hermeneutics lacked the moral grounding to bring to bear the

¹¹⁶⁹ News Paper Cutting , (January 14, 1955), 3.

¹¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹¹⁷¹ see also *His Kingdom in Kenya*, 118.

¹¹⁷² News Paper Cutting , (January 14, 1955), 3; *His Kingdom in Kenya*, 118.

idea of justice based on human dignity and human sacredness, suffering, conflict and power. Another point that needs attention is the rehabilitation's ultimate goal of reforming the Africans to return to the innocence of the pre-resistance days. This stance ignores the facts of history. Just as the Africans could not return to the inglorious or glorious pre-colonial days, in the same manner it was no longer possible to return to the glorious pioneering days. Both the Africans and the missionaries were intricately woven together within the processes of subversion and resistance. Each formed and transformed the other. There was no way rehabilitation was to remain a one way course. This is a fact that becomes clear when we consider the Revival movement. Missionaries' ethnocentric approach to the Bible largely informed the Revivalists biblical interpretation through assimilation and mimicry, but the Revivalists equally rejected some of the principles that informed colonial hermeneutics.

7.4 The Revival: Origins

The Revival Movement was a group united by a common perspective on how all Christians should interpret and apply the teachings of the Bible. The group maintained an ecumenical stature drawing its members from all the Mission-founded churches in the Kenya colony. During its early days, due to severe opposition from the Mission churches discussed below, the movement almost became a sprinter group like the other African Independent or Indigenous churches. But as the Revalists won many of the mission-trained clergy such as the Anglican Bishop Obadiah Kariũki and elders to their fold, they vowed to maintain their membership in their respective churches - a phenomenon not witnessed before in the Kenyan Colony.¹¹⁷³ In most

¹¹⁷³ Obadiah Kariuki, *A Bishop Facing Mount Kenya: An Autobiography, 1902-1978* (Translated from the Kikuyu by George Mathu), (Nairobi: Uzima Press Limited, 1985), 49; Archdeacon Owen of Kavirondo also talked about the Revivalists' influence, CMS/G/Y A5/1/21-23; CMS/G/Y/A5/2 (1936-

occasions, the Revivalists identified themselves with fellow members of the group rather than with their ethnic kin and kith. The missionaries also came to accept and interpret the group as “the nucleus” of “a lay movement of evangelism” in colonial Kenya.¹¹⁷⁴

In this section, there are two main things that interest me about the Revivalists as conscious members of a new social and religious group that identified itself differently from the rest so far discussed.¹¹⁷⁵ The first is the complex relationship developed between missionaries and the Revivalists in the days of Mau-Mau. The second thing is their hermeneutical view of the Bible and of the world which they lived in. At one point the Revivalists evoke the principle of interpretation where the Bible was taken literally as the Word of God but at another they refused to engage in the kind of interpretation that colonialism was inviting them to embrace. The Revival movement attests to the fact that colonialism could not succeed in controlling how the Bible was read and interpreted even after witnessing the massive cultural take-over in detention camps and villages. As ordinary readers, the revivalists expanded the idea of common sense hermeneutics.

The Revival Movement in Kenya was an offshoot of the *Balokole*¹¹⁷⁶ Revival in Uganda. The *Balokole* movement was first founded by Simeoni Nsibambi who later partnered with Dr. Joe Church (C.M.S. missionary doctor at Gahini Ruanda Mission centre).¹¹⁷⁷ The first manifestation of the Revival as a large scale movement

1943) University of Birmingham; Rev. R. Macpherson, “East African Revival”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 193 (September 1950), 1108-1109.

¹¹⁷⁴ *Building Kenya's Future*, 9-11; *Report of the committee on Emergency Detention Camps*, 10-11; “Home and Field Notes”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 208 (February 1955), 1437.

¹¹⁷⁵ See in particular the *Kikuyu News* for the year 1942 and 1943 for contribution in World War II of the African clergy including Muhoro, Ayubu Kinyua and William Njoroge; see also “Chaplaincy Work for African Troops”, *Kikuyu News*, No. 167 (March 1944), 566-568.

¹¹⁷⁶ *Balokole* is a Luganda term meaning “the Saved People”. Kevin Ward, “‘Tukutendereza Yesu’: The *Balokole* Revival in Uganda”, in Zablon Nthamburi, *From Mission to Church: A Handbook of Christianity in East Africa*, (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1991), 113.

¹¹⁷⁷ “‘Tukutendereza Yesu’”, 114-116.

was in 1933 at Gahini in Rwanda at a convention organised during Christmas and New Year. Blasio Kigozi (Nsibambi's younger brother) preached at the convention sparking the fires of Revival which spread into Uganda (1935) and later into the Kenya colony (1936).¹¹⁷⁸ Bishop Obadiah Kariũki mentions that he entered theological college in 1936 as the revival was sweeping through Kenya.¹¹⁷⁹

7.4.1 The Revival and the Missionaries

In the days of Mau-Mau and its aftermath, the Revival movement came to represent what missionaries saw as “a faithful remnant; a Church purged and revived ... a small but a wonderful fellowship”.¹¹⁸⁰ Missionaries interpreted the Mau-Mau debacle as divinely designed so that God could use “the wrath of men” to cleanse and purify the Church.¹¹⁸¹ As attendance in mission churches dwindled, it was reported that a chapter in the history of the Gĩkũyũ Church was closing, but not in defeat. Many anti-colonial Agĩkũyũ were leaving “the Church” to join various religious “movements” or “sects” which had sprung up.¹¹⁸² The revivalists remained the only group “loyal to its Lord and Saviour ... demonstrating a quality of living which authenticates the truth of the Gospel”.¹¹⁸³ The hope of the colonial church now rested in this “small strong nucleus, a noble army of martyrs, proven in the fire, unshaken and unshakable, to build up the Kikuyu Church of the future.”¹¹⁸⁴ Through the Revival movement God was “calling out and separating unto Himself a united African

¹¹⁷⁸ “Tukutendereza Yesu”, 114-116.

¹¹⁷⁹ Kariuki, *A Bishop Facing Mount Kenya*, 49; Archdeacon Owen of Kavirondo also talked about the influence of the Balokole, CMS/G/Y A5/1/21-23; CMS/G/Y/A5/2 (1936-1943) University of Birmingham.

¹¹⁸⁰ *Revival News Vol. 2* No. 4, 1955 (published by the Ruanda Mission CMS), 10, CMS/ACC/296 F 3-6, University of Birmingham.

¹¹⁸¹ “Mau-Mau: What is it?” 2.

¹¹⁸² “Kenya Colony Mission – General Report by the Secretary to Council”, 884; *Kikuyu News*, no. 180 (June 1947), 812-813.

¹¹⁸³ “Mau-Mau: What is it?”, 11; See also *Kikuyu News*, no. 180 (June 1947), 812-813.

¹¹⁸⁴ *His Kingdom in Kenya*, 102.

Church for His own praise and glory.”¹¹⁸⁵ In it was the possibility of the translation of the Gospel into the indigenous African sensibilities.¹¹⁸⁶

7.4.1a Opposition to the Revival Movement in the Colonial Churches

The relationship between the revalists and the mission churches remained ambiguous from the group’s inception in Kenya right until after the Emergency was declared. Rev. R. Macpherson pointed out that the early attitude towards the movement was one full of mistrust mixed with fear.¹¹⁸⁷ The revivalists were seen by the mission-oriented African church leaders as emotional and unbalanced, demoniacs, and degenerate.¹¹⁸⁸ Some compared them to the people referred to in 2 Timothy 3:6 as holding “captive of ‘silly women’”.¹¹⁸⁹ By November 1948 Macpherson reported that the mission church could not agree on how to deal or what to do with the revivalists also referred to as “Ruandaites”.¹¹⁹⁰ According to Bishop Obadiah Kariũki (one of the earliest revivalists in Gĩkũyũ), opposition against the movement started because of their emphasis on salvation through Jesus Christ and the blood which was thought to go “against the existing rules for the propagation of the gospel.”¹¹⁹¹ They were

¹¹⁸⁵ See reports from Mr. E. Carey Francis, Dr. A. C. Irvine, and Dr. Blakeslee of the African Inland Mission Kijabe who was leaving Kijabe for U.S.A on retirement in their article “A Memorable Wedding Occasion”, *Kikuyu News* no. 206 (June 1954), 1389.

¹¹⁸⁶ T.F.C. Bewes, “The Christian Revival in Kenya”, (World Dominion, 34, [2], 1956), 110-114.

¹¹⁸⁷ Macpherson “, East African Revival”, 1107-1113.

¹¹⁸⁸ “East African Revival”, 1108.

¹¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹⁰ In the newly formed Presbyterian Synod, for example, Chogoria elders remained pro the movement while those from Tumutumu were said to be anti the movement with some pressing for suspension of known Ruandaites. Those from Kĩambu and the then Chania Presbyteries “sat on the fence.” However, by October 1949 there had a great “shift of opinion” with Chania and Chogoria advocating for the movement, Kiambu and Rift Valley counselling freedom for the movement, while Tumutumu though not without cleavage of opinion among its members present in the Synod Executive, maintained opposition. “East African Revival”, 1108-1109; Rev. Charles Mũhoro Kareri reporting for *Kikuyu News* for the first time as the “Church Leader” compared the Church in his area with “the Church in Laodicea” for lack devotion as witnessed in the Revival movement. Elders had to be encouraged and even ordered to embrace revival. Rev. Charles M. Kareri, “Extracts from Annual Reports for 1948: Tumutumu Church,” *Kikuyu News*, no. 189 (September 1949), 1022.

¹¹⁹¹ Bishop Obadiah Kariũki defined it as a generational fight pitting “older or original converts” and “senior members of the Church’s hierarchy” against “the Revivalists” mostly young Christians. *A Bishop Facing Mount Kenya*, 53.

forbidden to hold meetings inside church buildings and had to find new places for fellowship meetings and worship, mainly under the shade of any large tree.¹¹⁹²

On their part, missionaries, while longing for some kind of revival in the mission churches, were opposed to the particular manifestation of revival among the revivalists. They were particularly uncomfortable with the revivalists' hypercritical stance against the clergy and its dependency on doctrines rather than the Bible. The revivalists' element of separatism also worried the mission churches.¹¹⁹³ Yet missionaries embraced the revivalists for their show of "much devotion to duty and energetic service".¹¹⁹⁴ The revivalists' courage to stand against the principles of Mau-Mau inspired admiration from the missionaries. In *Building Kenya's Future*¹¹⁹⁵ the colonial church celebrated and honoured "martyrs".¹¹⁹⁶

Despite the missionaries' honour to the movement, the revivalists were caught in "a cleft stick", as Bishop Kariũki put it.¹¹⁹⁷ The revivalists' refusal to be engaged in "the world" bore the blunt force of the Mau-Mau and from the colonial forces. In

¹¹⁹² *A Bishop Facing Mount Kenya*, 54.

¹¹⁹³ Rev. Calderwood made mention of fanatical sects which had arisen referring to them as a "parody of Christianity". Some of these were suppressed by the Government and the chiefs as "subversive of good order." "Kenya Colony Mission – General Report by the Secretary to Council", Extracts from Annual Reports for 1947, *Kikuyu News*, no. 184 (June 1948), 884; See also Mr. Cecil Smith's (Secretary of Mission in Nairobi) letter dated June 24 1942 to the General Secretary complaining about Archdeacon Owen's modernistic views and how they could promote division in a colony where the 'seeds' of the Ruanda movement had been sown in various part of the mission, CMS/G/Y/A5/2 (1936-1943), University of Birmingham.

¹¹⁹⁴ "Kenya Colony Mission – General Report by the Secretary to Council", 884; See Dr. W. M. Brown, "Extracts from Annual Reports for 1948: Tumutumu General Report, 1948," *Kikuyu News*, no. 189 (September 1949), 1021.

¹¹⁹⁵ This was a booklet published and issued by the Church of Scotland Mission in Kenya immediately after the visit to Kenya the then General Secretary of the Foreign Mission Committee of Church of Scotland Rev. Dr. J. W. C. Dougall.

¹¹⁹⁶ A new Church named 'Martyrs' Church' emerged as a commemoration of about 100 hundred Presbyterians who had been killed by members of the Mau-Mau freedom fighters. The new church building served also as a new initiative (though extremely late) to "meet the needs of the urban African, the new proletariat employed in trade and commerce, on which European and Indian capital depends entirely, for the supply of labour." *Building Kenya's Future*, 6-8. It is disputable, however, if these Christians died as martyrs in the right sense of the word – because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Questions linger if the African Christians were killed because of their "love and loyalty" to Jesus Christ; or were most of them killed out personal vendetta; or because they were thought to be informers or collaborators?

¹¹⁹⁷ *A Bishop Facing Mount Kenya*, 63.

most part, the Revival Christians stood alone in their opposition to Mau-Mau.¹¹⁹⁸ Some refused to take the Mau-Mau oath of unity. Bishop Kariūki wrote that with the coming of Mau-Mau, “the courage the Revival brethren had shown in defending our spiritual principles at the height of the Revival movement, with the attendant harassment by the conservative elements in the church, now had to face its hardest test.”¹¹⁹⁹ At the time anyone confessing the Christian faith could suffer death at the hands of freedom fighters, particularly if suspected to be an informer or collaborator. Kariūki added that the situation worsened when European missionaries who had been running churches and pastorates before the Mau-Mau disturbances, were moved out of the “hotspots” leaving the Africans to defend the faith with courage and even with their lives.¹²⁰⁰ In addition, the revivalists were considered an embarrassment for their pacifism in times when absolute loyalty was demanded.¹²⁰¹ The revivalists’ pacifism was seen as one of their general weaknesses. They refused to carry weapons when serving as Home Guards. In the eyes of the colonial authorities, no African, not even a revivalist, was above suspicion.

7.4.2 The Revival Experience: Brethren Hermeneutics

The Revival movement followed traditional Biblical literalism and wholly depended on the Holy Spirit for illumination and interpretation. They had “a great keenness for Bible teaching”.¹²⁰² We can glean from a sermon by Revivalist Leonard Chege the pattern that a typical sermon followed.¹²⁰³ The sermon in discussion was taken from John 1:4, ‘In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.’ Chege dealt with the verse somewhat as follows: - “Have you got that life? Is the life of Christ in

¹¹⁹⁸ *A Bishop Facing Mount Kenya*, 24.

¹¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹²⁰¹ See Dr. A. C. Irvine’s article “Letter from Dr. A. C. Irvine, Chogoria Whit-Sunday, 5th June 1954”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 207 (October 1954), 1402.

¹²⁰² Rev. Dr. A. C. Irvine, “Revival in Kenya”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 189 (September 1949), 1017.

¹²⁰³ Dr A. C. Irvine, “Chogoria Days”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 161 (September 1942), 477.

you? Are you sure you have it? If you have it, how is it you go on slandering people? How can the life of Christ slander?”¹²⁰⁴

The first thing we note from this “sermon” is that the preacher selectively chose a specific part of the Bible while ignoring other parts. Miss Mowat followed a similar format in one of her addresses.¹²⁰⁵ At one such occasion she preached from 1 John 3:16 aiming to teach the “unsaved” about the challenges of a Christian as well as self-sacrifice and service.¹²⁰⁶ Those who accepted the message like Rahabu “told how the Lord had blessed her from 1 John 1:9, and how she was finding liberty day by day in obedience. Another spoke of 1 John 3, and still another from 2 Cor. 5:17.¹²⁰⁷ The second thing we note is that the interpreter of the scripture chosen, dealt with the text pre-critically.¹²⁰⁸ The text is taken literally as a source of inspiration for learning and affirmation. Thirdly, as Wimbush says of the African slaves in American, the revivalist’s reading given above reflects a “hermeneutic characterized by looseness, even playfulness, vis-à-vis the bible texts themselves”.¹²⁰⁹ In this case, Chege’s interpretation is not just controlled by the words of the text but also by the issues of life and death, of salvation and judgment of the broken life and self.¹²¹⁰ Apart from these examples of the revalists’ interpretative moves, I have also identified other important resources and readings of the Bible that revalists employed as ordinary hermeneuts. But before I discuss these resources and readings, I need to discuss one more point.

¹²⁰⁴ Chogoria Days”, 477; “Movement of the Spirit”, 486.

¹²⁰⁵ Miss Mowat was a C.S.M. missionary who succeeded Miss Marion Stevenson as a “Parish Sister”. She was not released from her other engagements until 1942 when the Mission Council set her free from other assignments to work and guide the Revival movement. See *Kikuyu News*, No. 162 (December 1942), 485.

¹²⁰⁶ “Movement of the Spirit”, 487.

¹²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰⁸ Gerald West uses the term “pre-critical” to refer to a reading by a reader of the Bible who does not have the technical training of a biblical scholar. West, *The Academy of the Poor*, 73-74.

¹²⁰⁹ Wimbush, “The Bible and African Americans”, 88.

¹²¹⁰ *The Wind Blow in Africa*, in unofficial Papers/CMS/ACC./262/Z/3/1-11, University of Birmingham.

In this section, I am suggesting that the reading of biblical texts witnessed in Chege's sermon discussed above, should be seen in light of Carothers' pejorative conclusion that from deep within, the revivalists had to deal with what Bhabha refers to as the "struggle of psychic representation and social reality."¹²¹¹ In this case the interpretation of the text came as a psychic compensation of "a battlefield, on which the Powers of Light and Darkness" were at war, "with little hope of happiness in this world".¹²¹² While I cannot accept Carothers' hypothesis at its face value, in my opinion, there is an element of possibility in Carothers' estimation. That is to say that the Revival movement, though based on "genuine religious awe and genuine conviction" and arising within the framework of "orthodox Christianity", supplied "the people's dire emotional, spiritual and social needs."¹²¹³ In other words, the revivalists' reading of the Bible represents another side of the common sense hermeneutics of a subordinated group. I am inclined to agree with James Scott, as utilised by Gerald West, when he argues that a careful analysis of the discourse of resistance reveals a "hidden transcript" rarely taken into account when analysing theories of hegemony.¹²¹⁴

"The hidden transcript" as defined by James Scott, refers to "the speech acts" and other practices (usually spoken behind the back of the dominant), through which a subordinated group critiques the powerful group that has denigrated and dominated them.¹²¹⁵ This discourse, according to Scott, takes place in "a restricted 'public' or

¹²¹¹ Bhabha does not use this phrase in the same manner I am using it here. He is lifting Frantz Fanon's importance and his contribution to the intellectual world as one who articulated the uncertain interstices of historical change; the ambivalence between race and sexuality; and the unresolved contradiction between culture and class. Bhabha, "Remembering Fanon", 113.

¹²¹² *The Psychology of Mau-Mau*, 11.

¹²¹³ *The Psychology of Mau-Mau*, 10-11.

¹²¹⁴ See James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) as used in West, *The Academy of the Poor*, 24-29.

¹²¹⁵ *The Academy of the Poor*, 25.

social circle that excludes...certain specified others.”¹²¹⁶ The “public” place becomes a “partial refuge” from the humiliations of domination and a place where the dominated establish their dignity. The primary objective of such a script is survival through which the subordinated group creates a “discourse of dignity, of negation, and of justice.”¹²¹⁷ In this safe social site, rather than take up guns or openly defy the powers that be, the subordinated group acts out forms of resistance and defiance which would not have been possible in “power-laden encounters with the dominant.”¹²¹⁸ “The hidden transcript” therefore acts as a barrier and a veil which the dominant cannot penetrate. In the eyes of the dominant, the subordinated portrays an image of submission and compliance. “The public transcript” positively misleads the dominant who most likely will never know the true feelings and the whole story about power relations. If this analysis is correct, then it is possible to understand why the revivalists evoked the principle of interpretation where the Bible was taken as the Word of God while at the same time they utilised resources and readings that did not embrace the kind of interpretation that colonialism was inviting them to embrace.

7.4.2a Ecumenical and Mass Conventions

One of the unique resources of the Revival movement was ecumenical mass conventions not witnessed before in the mission churches. The Revival with all its sincere engagement with the colonial church reaffirmed the spiritual responsibility of the laity in the church (not to mention its anti-clericalism.) Chege’s sermon quoted above, for example, betrays a revivalists’ claim to individual freedom in the interpretation of the Bible. In the revivalists’ opinion, the spread of the Gospel no longer needed missionaries’ sanctioning or the Church’s authority. They belittled and denied validity of any other conversion experience apart from the one that came as a

¹²¹⁶ *The Academy of the Poor*, 25.

¹²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

result of the revivalist preaching. They slighted the ordained ministry and the efficacy of sacraments.¹²¹⁹

As ordinary church members the revivalists were on fire to carry the message everywhere.¹²²⁰ With the lack of confidence in the church leadership, they organised, funded and led their own mass conventions.¹²²¹ In these conventions, the Revival group leaders, discussed and with the “help” from the Holy Spirit chose a special biblical text as the theme of the convention.¹²²² For example, the 1944 convention’s theme drawn from Romans 13:11-12, pointed to the “need for being ready for the coming of the Lord and a call to Christians to awake from sleep and put on the whole armour of God that they may stand in this evil day.”¹²²³ The Kabete Convention¹²²⁴ called all in the Kenya colony to “come now, and let us reason together, said the Lord” (Isaiah 1: 17) combined with the Lord’s invitation in Matthew 2: 28.¹²²⁵ The group’s leadership was also responsible for choosing as many as four or five speakers invited from other parts of the colony and even from other colonies to give short addresses which were interspersed with fervent prayer for the blessing of God at each session.¹²²⁶ In every convention new hymns were produced drawing content and meanings from the theme text and were sung in companies of young people.¹²²⁷

¹²¹⁹ Kariuki, *A Bishop Facing Mount Kenya*, 49; CMS/G/Y A5/1/21-23; CMS/G/Y/A5/2 (1936-1943); CMS/ACC/296 F 3-6; Bewes, “The Christian Revival in Kenya”, 110-114; Macpherson, “East African Revival”, 1107-1113.

¹²²⁰ “Chogoria Days: Excerpts from our Diaries”, 193.

¹²²¹ Rev. R. G. M. Calderwood, “Convention at Alliance High School”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 146 (December 1938), 194; “Chogoria Days: Excerpts from our Diaries”, 192.

¹²²² See *The Wind Blow in Africa*, unofficial Papers/CMS/ACC./262/Z/3/1-11, University of Birmingham.

¹²²³ “Extracts from Miss Mowat’s Diary”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 169 (September 1944), 613

¹²²⁴ The Kabete Convention was held on the 30th August to 5th September 1949 Kabete, in Kĩambu.

¹²²⁵ In this convention, the Rev. Solomon Ndambi of Tumutumu is said to have confessed as one who fought against the movement and had been a part of the delegation sent to Chogoria by the Presbytery to investigate and to counsel the Kirk Session against ‘Ūruanda’. The Kabete Convention was attended by a number of Europeans many of them missionaries, South African visitors and the Governor of the Colony addressed the gathering on Sunday. Miss Mowat, “The Challenge of Revival”, *Kikuyu News*, no. 190 (December 1949), 1044-45.

¹²²⁶ “Extracts from Miss Mowat’s Diary”, 612- 613.

¹²²⁷ “Extracts from Miss Mowat’s Diary”, 613.

In addition, the revivalists' sense of fellowship went beyond their ethnic identity and family. This understanding would later put them into direct confrontation with the Mau-Mau nationalists who expected all of the Agĩkũyũ to act together on matters affecting their common welfare. The conventions, such as the Kabete one, were major ecumenical gatherings with people coming from all parts of Kenya including Mombasa, Kisumu and Marsabit as well as Tanganyika.¹²²⁸ During the Mau-Mau crisis the Revival group radicalised the apocalyptic meaning of its calling as the new community. Where the colonial church aimed at breaking the "group mentality" and any communal participation in the act of interpretation, the revivalists upheld the place of the individual in relation to the appropriation of the Bible but also incorporated communal participation in these mass conventions which became integral part of the Revival. Nothing needed come between man and God and nothing needed come between revivalists. A genuine revivalist is the one who had "the zeal for fellowship".¹²²⁹ They revived the old African handshake for those who were in fellowship and referred to each other as brothers and sisters. After their worship services they would gather in a wide circle for testimonies. It is here that the newly converted became known to the others. The "circle" also formed the basis of the explosion revival and "release from sin and new spiritual power."¹²³⁰

In these conventions, the revivalists came to hear more than read the word. Those listening to the "sermons", which according to Dr. Irvine were always spiced with an African's knowledge of "African village life and its temptations", would remember and retell what they had heard for many days after the conventions were

¹²²⁸ The first major ecumenical revival convention occurred on August 25-28, 1948 at Kĩgaari, Runyenjes with approximately 2000 Africans and 5 Europeans in attendance. See *The Wind Blow in Africa*, unofficial Papers/CMS/ACC./262/Z/3/1-11, University of Birmingham.

¹²²⁹ "Revival in Kenya", 1017

¹²³⁰ "Samuel Mbũgua Mũgaru", 1083.

over.¹²³¹ Therefore, the acts of reading, hearing, remembering, retelling and even singing the stories of the Bible in the context of these ecumenical conventions, became communal acts where every revivalist was an active participant. Miss Mowat, for example, described one of such ecumenical gatherings as “an unforgettable experience to all who had the privilege of being present and of witnessing the mighty acts of the Holy Spirit.”¹²³² The organisation of the mass conventions, their ecumenical nature, and the selection of guiding texts among others attest to an embodied hermeneutical process in which the revivalists as ordinary indigenous readers were also predisposed to “a general critical consciousness” as they appropriated the Bible.¹²³³

7.4.2b The Blood of Christ as a “Hidden Transcript”

Another, characteristic that I identify as a hallmark showing that something fundamentally different was taking place in the way the revivalists were reading the Bible as ordinary readers, was their distinct hermeneutics (though unwritten) which emphasised on conversion through the washing by the blood of Jesus and an assurance that one is ‘saved’ by Jesus Christ in a personal way.¹²³⁴ The revivalists couched their hermeneutical starting point from Matthew 26:28 and Hebrew 9-10 with particular emphasis on 9:22.¹²³⁵ Every reading of the text had to ultimately bear witness to the “true” salvation as coming only through the washing by the blood of Christ, the blood that he shed on Calvary.¹²³⁶

¹²³¹ Chogoria Days”, 477; “Movement of the Spirit”, 486.

¹²³² “The Challenge of Revival” 1044-45.

¹²³³ I follow Gerald West who argues that even though ordinary readers read the Bible “pre-critically”, they still read with “a critical consciousness”. West, *The Academy of the Poor*, 73-74.

¹²³⁴ J. Mbaya, *A Critical Assessment of Revival Movement in the North Imenti Division of Meru District* (Religious Studies Occasional Paper No. 245, Kampala: Makerere University, 1974), 1.

¹²³⁵ “Revival News from Chogoria,” 1066.

¹²³⁶ “Movement of the Spirit – Extracts from Miss Mowart’s Diary, 482 and 486.

While this interpretation resembles the classic idea of atonement as articulated by most fundamentalists and evangelicals worldwide, the revivalists understanding of “The Blood” was almost magical giving it its own reality other than the Christ they professed. The idea of being “washed in the Blood” was epitomised and committed to memory through the Luganda hymn *Tukutendereza Yesu* (Glory, glory to the lamb or we praise you Jesus) which became the theme song of the revivalists in East Africa. Perhaps the efficacy of the sacrificial blood of the lamb or goat within the indigenous religious beliefs resonated well with the revivalists’ understanding of the blood of Jesus Christ.¹²³⁷ One thing which is clear to me in this type of reading and interpretation is that the revivalists, as pre-critical ordinary readers, were predisposed to reading the Bible thematically.

In addition, when interpreted in light of James Scott’s “hidden transcript” another picture emerges. This picture is better understood in light of the Mau-Mau crisis. I have already intimated elsewhere in this chapter, that the missionaries frowned at the Revival group’s pacificism which was interpreted as its main weakness. But according to John Gatũ, the revivalists saw it differently. Many of the revivalists who refused to take the Mau-Mau oath of unity did so saying, “Having taken the blood of Jesus, I cannot take any other blood.”¹²³⁸ The theme of the blood of Jesus takes new meaning in this interpretation. In the “public” arena the discourse helped shield the revivalists from the Mau-Mau oath-taking activities and from accusation by the colonial government that they were complacent to Mau-Mau activities. In their own Christian experience, they chose not to support Mau-Mau not because of the general attitudes levied by the Europeans, but because of the conviction that war was wrong and not supportable biblically. However, as a “hidden

¹²³⁷ See Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 231-232, 254-256; Hopley, *Bantu Beliefs and Magic*, 22-34, 40.

¹²³⁸ John G. Gatũ, *Joyfully Christian Truly Christian* (Nairobi: Acton, 2006), 42.

transcript”, it served as a commentary against colonial “churchism” which demanded that one had to meet certain catechetical requirements and pass examinations before one could be baptised or be accepted into the “body” of Christ.¹²³⁹ According to the revivalists, it is only the blood of Jesus which was needed for one to become a Christian and for one to join the Christian church.¹²⁴⁰ In their eyes, the Bible was not the Word of God unless interpreted via “the precious Blood of the Lamb” which cleanse those who hear it and believe. The Bible in this case, to follow Gerald West, is taken metaphorically as “a symbol than a text”.¹²⁴¹ The Bible as a symbol of power and authority gives the revivalists a new identity. The “precious Blood of the Lamb” transforms the revivalists to assume this new identity long denied by the mission church.

Although the revivalists’ reading was predisposed to follow specific themes as argued above, such a reading was not innocent. Any reading, just like in the colonial circles, was predetermined and expected to produce specific results: mainly confession. Every text read and interpreted had to produce a sense of guilt towards God for offences against his love towards others. The songs, sermons and testimonies given served as indirect or veiled commentaries on social situation or personal behaviours. Sin was specifically defined as those moral failures based on Mark 7: 21-22.¹²⁴² Sin was also associated with certain outward habits such as alcoholism, smoking, tobacco snuffing, all types of dancing foreign or African, wearing beards (men) and ornaments for women, adultery, and theft among others. All those who

¹²³⁹ *A Bishop Facing Mount Kenya*, 53-54; “Kenya Colony Mission – General Report by the Secretary to Council, Extracts from Annual Reports for 1947”, 884; CMS/G/Y/A5/2 (1936-1943); Kareri, “Extracts from Annual Reports for 1948: Tumutumu Church”, 1022; Brown, “Extracts from Annual Reports for 1948: Tumutumu General Report, 1948,” , 1021; East African Revival”, 1108-1113.

¹²⁴⁰ East African Revival”, 1108-1109.

¹²⁴¹ West, *The Academy of the Poor*, 78.

¹²⁴² “Samuel Mbũgwa Mũgaru” by Rev. R. Macpherson, (Kikuyu News, no. 192, June 1950), 1082-3; (Kikuyu News Issue No. 162 December 1942), 485-491.

struggled with personal issues were directed to 1 John 1:9.¹²⁴³ After any individual accepted to convert, the revivalists broke into spontaneous songs, testimonies and prayers.¹²⁴⁴ Confession involved “strong emotion, with tears”.¹²⁴⁵

7.4.2c Hermeneutics of Reconciliation

A notable characteristic of the revivalists as a group was its egalitarianism which witnessed radical interpretation of the Bible in a way that relativised the problem of race and colour bar. It was the only group in colonial Kenya that can be said to have been above ethnic politics.¹²⁴⁶ Those who converted to become revivalists confessed the sin of “hatred and resentment” of white people. Many sought European missionaries in private “to apologise for having had bitter feelings about white people”.¹²⁴⁷ Missionaries referred to the Revival movement as the only movement that was able to offer “the only key to the problem of inter-racial suspicion and hate.”¹²⁴⁸

Theirs was a hermeneutics of reconciliation. The revivalists’ use of the Bible emphasised texts that referred to acceptance tolerance and love for one’s neighbour as opposed to an emphasis on texts that focused on conflict. For example, one a revivalist confessed his or her “dislike of the white race”, the revivalists would invoke Paul’s words in Galatians 3:28 with the emphasis that they were “All one in

¹²⁴³ “Mission Council and Church Synod” by Rev. R. G. M. Calderwood, (Kikuyu News, no. 163, March 1943), 503.

¹²⁴⁴ *The Winds Blow in Africa*, Unofficial Papers/CMS/ACC./262/Z/3/1-11; Extracts from Annual Reports for 1946”, Kikuyu News, no. 180, June 1947, 815.

¹²⁴⁵ “Revival in Kenya”, by Rev. Dr. A. C. Irvine, Kikuyu News, no. 189, September 1949, 1017; Kariuki, *A Bishop Facing Mount Kenya*, 1985, 49; See also “Chogoria Days: Excerpts from our Diaries” by Dr. A. C. Irvine, Kikuyu News, no. 146, December 1938, 192.

¹²⁴⁶ Henry Okullu, *Church and Politics in East Africa* (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1974), 43.

¹²⁴⁷ *The Winds Blow in Africa*; “Revival News from Chogoria,” 1068.

¹²⁴⁸ “Mau-Mau,” by the Editor, (Kikuyu News, no. 202, February 1953), 1287; The race relations among the clergy who were part of the Revival remained tense. See *A Bishop Facing Mount Kenya*, 62, 77-78; See also “The Day of Pentecost” by Rev. R. G. M. Calderwood, (Kikuyu News, no. 193, September 1950), 1118.

Christ”.¹²⁴⁹ They referred to Europeans as “their brothers that come from Europe”. They argued that only the Truth revealed in Christ could free men and women ushering in peace and harmony between individuals and races.¹²⁵⁰ While such an interpretation revitalised hermeneutics it did not obliterate social status and even racial identification.

7.4.2d Political Consciousness

Another important characteristic of the revivalists’ hermeneutics was its lack of political consciousness. The immediate future of the country was nothing to them as compared to the impending divine judgment on the ungodly and non-believers. Even as missionaries acknowledged that colonial Kenya remained “a land of conflict and political unrest” where “subversive influences” were said to be at work, the revivalists remained aloof to the political situation.¹²⁵¹ Although many of them ignored the growth of strong nationalism among many Africans, some like the Anglican Bishop Kariũki remained ambivalent in their attitude towards the land usurped by white settlers.¹²⁵²

In my opinion, even with the revivalists’ political aloofness, the movement still played a political role. By focussing so narrowly on spiritual and eschatological hopes, the revivalists diverted attention from the economic, socio-political realities and other social ills that had polarised the colony. In doing so, the revivalists played into the hands of the colonisers by stressing only human wickedness and spiritual redemption. Emphasis on personal morality at the expense of systemic injustices

¹²⁴⁹ Extracts from Annual Reports for 1946”, (Kikuyu News, no. 180, June 1947), 815.

¹²⁵⁰ , Extracts from Annual Reports for 1946”, 815.

¹²⁵¹ , Extracts from Annual Reports for 1946”, 815; *The Winds Blow in Africa*, Unofficial Papers/CMS/ACC./262/Z/3/1-11, University of Birmingham.

¹²⁵² Kariũki and his family suffered personal tragedy which he associated with the loss of their ancestral land to the colonists. As such he remained sympathetic to those fighting for the land. *A Bishop Facing Mount Kenya*, 14, 77-78; see also *The Winds Blow in Africa*.

offered no incentive to social, economic or political reforms which the colony direly needed.

7.5 Post-Mau-Mau/Post-Mission Hermeneutics

One characteristic of the revivalists hermeneutics that was carried over into the post-mission was equivalent to what Gerald West refers to as the “powerful presence of the ‘re-membered text’ as it permeates the life of the community.”¹²⁵³ This refers to a scenario where even the illiterate had considerable exposure to biblical texts. All readers accumulated mental database of Bible verses and passages, and then the reader freely and playfully quoted from the database saved in the memory when giving a testimony; to support or reject any issue at hand. In this section, we meet Rev. John Gatũ (a revivalist),¹²⁵⁴ one of the emerging younger African clergy, who sought to create a ‘Witnessing Church’ in colonial Kenya for he held as true the words of the Bible which say that, ‘For when they shall say Peace and Safety; then sudden destruction cometh.’¹²⁵⁵

Gatũ is here quoting spontaneously a verse from the Bible to urge for “new drive” to create the witnessing church that he envisioned. Such a reading in the first place as witnessed is based on the assumption that the Bible is a self contained narrative. Although Gatũ followed the same way of retrieving scriptures from memory he would do so with the sophistication of a theologian to link the quoted scripture with issues at hand. Let me consider three other examples from two of Gatũ’s articles or speeches and one from his interview with Njeri Kang’ethe of *African Files*.

¹²⁵³ West, *The Academy of the Poor*, 82.

¹²⁵⁴ Rev. John Gatũ was among the postcolonial Church leaders who formed and shaped the young Africanised Church. He later became the Secretary General and consequently moderator of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (P.C.E.A.).

¹²⁵⁵ Rev. John Gatũ, *Kambui Thanksgiving Day*, (Kikuyu News, no. 214, November 1956), 66.

To begin with, let me briefly consider his moratorium on missionaries titled “Missionary, Go Home” which he delivered at *Mission Festival ’71* (a gathering of the Reformed Church in America in Milwaukee, Wisconsin).¹²⁵⁶ The basic argument was the withdrawal of foreign missionaries from many parts of the Third World in order to allow churches find “their own identity”.¹²⁵⁷ He called for withdrawal “in order to allow a period of not less than five years for each side to rethink and formulate” a policy for future relationships.¹²⁵⁸ In his opinion, the continuation of the missionary movement in the developing countries hindered the realisation of selfhood of the church. To underscore his point Gatũ said that “Africa has money and personnel, and until we have produced the two loaves and five fishes, our Lord continues to say ‘Give ye them something to eat’”.¹²⁵⁹ The scripture is used here to reinforce his advocacy for the appointment of natives into high ecclesiastical and administrative positions as the panacea to postcolonial Kenya milliard of problems.

The second example is drawn from Gatũ’s paper title “Rationale for Self-Reliance”.¹²⁶⁰ The paper served as a review of his moratorium discussed above. In the paper, Gatũ linked lack of self-sufficiency whether in food production or in church mission to cultic dependency on the West.¹²⁶¹ The “friends overseas” believed that the “young churches” in Africa could not reach self-sufficiency because of “being poor,

¹²⁵⁶ John Gatũ, “Missionary Go Home,” *IDOC/International Documentation*, Dossier 9, 1974, 70-72. The speech was first published in *The Church Herald*, November 1971 (a publication of the Reformed Church in America. At the time, Gatũ was the General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa. For a discussion of the call for a moratorium in mission see *IDOC/International Documentation*, Dossier 9, 1974, 46-69. Those participating in the discussion included Gerald H. Anderson, Ogbu Uke Kalu, Ruben Lores, Sr. Caridad C. Guidote, and Musembe Kasiera.

¹²⁵⁷ “Missionary Go Home,” 70.

¹²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵⁹ “Missionary Go Home,” 71.

¹²⁶⁰ John Gatũ, “Rationale for Self-Reliance” (Limuru, Kenya, May 1996), <http://www.wmausa.org/page.aspx?id=83845>. The paper was presented at a consultation forum on self-reliance of the churches in Africa held at Limuru, Kenya.

¹²⁶¹ “Rationale for Self-Reliance”.

small, and weak.”¹²⁶² This prompted Gatũ to quote extensively the story of the Church in Macedonia which Paul wrote about in 2 Cor. 8: 1-5. In Gatũ’s understanding of Paul’s writing, McGavran’s sentiments of Africa’s poverty and weaknesses negate the principle of “God’s grace” evident in text quoted. If the Africans were to accept such a position, then they could no longer depend on God whom the Macedonians trusted but “wait for Americans to come and cross our frontiers”.¹²⁶³ For Gatũ, self-sufficiency meant having faith in “God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who gave us all, including his own Son to die for our sins in whom wealth and riches are his!”¹²⁶⁴ Gatũ also accused the church in Africa for failing to give the kind of leadership that Paul talked about regarding the church in Macedonia. Rather than take McGavran’s advice, the church in Africa had to begin to take charge, organise themselves into frontier missionary societies, raise funds on their own and personnel to “reach the frontiers of Europe and America where church membership is declining”.¹²⁶⁵

Gatũ has no doubt that Africa has enough “practicing Christians”. However, he contends that it will take these practicing believers more than “American, European or even Korean money”.¹²⁶⁶ To underscore how the break from foreign dependency is to occur he directs his listeners to the story of Peter finding the coin in the fish’s mouth (which he quotes in entirety) in Matthew 17: 24-26. He interpreted it in light of the temple daily services which according to “Exodus 30:13, each Jew over

¹²⁶² John Gatũ is here quoting Dr. Donald McGavran an advocate for mission outreach, “Rationale for Self-Reliance”.

¹²⁶³ Ibid.

¹²⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁶⁵ “Rationale for Self-Reliance”.

¹²⁶⁶ Ibid.

20 years of age paid a tax, which was roughly equivalent to two days' pay of an ordinary person.”¹²⁶⁷ Gatū adds other possibilities of interpreting this text. First,

In the early world, some colonizing and conquering powers made their subjects pay taxes not for the welfare of the peasants, but for the upkeep of the King's household. Jesus may have been saying, that just as God is the King of Israel to whom Israel must pay their taxes, we are the new Israel and therefore we must pay our taxes, as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.¹²⁶⁸

Second, Gatū hypothesised that when an ancient king imposed taxes on his subjects, the King did not impose it on his household or family.¹²⁶⁹ Therefore, the tax that Jesus was talking about may not have referred to the “Priests' stipend only but rather for the total service in the temple, which was the house of God.”¹²⁷⁰ Although Jesus was the Son of God he may as well had been arguing that the support to the services of his Father's house was not because of what the law said but “because of a higher duty lest we should offend them, that is, so that we may not put a scandal to the public or cause a stumbling block in someone's way.”¹²⁷¹ Interpreted in light of his discussion, Gatū continued, African Christians must not only pay their church dues because of what others would say, but they must do it as exemplary act of duty. As such Jesus was saying to Peter, “go back to your old trade in the sea, and there you will make your own living as well as for others.”¹²⁷² Gatū suggested further that Christians ought to see their professions and careers as “the mouth of the fish where resources for church work is actually kept.”¹²⁷³

The third possible meaning of the text is to be understood in light of Jesus' summon to Simon Peter and others to “fishers of men”. In Gatū's estimation, Jesus

¹²⁶⁷ “Rationale for Self-Reliance”.

¹²⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹²⁷¹ Ibid.

¹²⁷² “Rationale for Self-Reliance”.

¹²⁷³ Ibid.

saw the world as a big sea with a lot “of fish”, a familiar scene to the disciples.¹²⁷⁴ He accused the Church of having stopped, “‘going out’ like in the command of our Lord ‘Go ye. . .’” and had become “a Church of ‘Come ye. . .’”¹²⁷⁵ Gatũ was reiterating his 1970’s moratorium that African church leadership had no choice but accept the challenge of self-reliance in order to undo the yoke of dependence.¹²⁷⁶ The leadership needed to learn the lesson of a proverb from Burkina Faso that says, *as long as you sleep on someone else’s mat, you will never sleep easy.*¹²⁷⁷ My main point in this section is not in the content of the discussion but in the way scriptural texts are employed by a revivalist who retrieves scriptures from memory in order to articulate even complex issues such as the future of mission work in the world.¹²⁷⁸

7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that the Bible in colonial Kenya was almost always read to or within particular communities. The second interpretive procedure identified is the capacity to draw links between the Bible and colonial ideologies as well as the revivalists’ inductive readings. Both groups took the Bible as revealing a system of commands and promises which are given by God to direct human affairs as the world moves towards a teleological climax. While colonial hermeneutics aimed at breaking communal mentality in order to capture the colonial vision, the revivalists as ordinary readers, portray a perspective that has concern for communal participation. However, the revivalists could not witness to the radical reading behind biblical texts as attempted in Kaggia. Yet still, in the revivalists’ readings we again see that the forces of colonialism and conquest do not have the final word. The postcolonial story

¹²⁷⁴ “Rationale for Self-Reliance”.

¹²⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁷⁸ See also “Can African Traditional Values be Revived? Interview with the Very Reverend Dr. John G. Gatũ”, <http://www.africafiles.org/article.asp?ID=19903>.

continues with the ordinary readers negotiating, modifying, relativising and even resisting the Bible. The way ahead remains open to possibilities particularly if we are willing to read the Bible with the ordinary readers in order to re-member what colonialism has dismembered. This brings me to the final chapter where I explore the question of meaning, implication and relevance of this research.

CHAPTER 8: PATIENCE OF HERMENEUTICS: TOWARDS AN ORDINARY AFRICAN READERS' HERMENEUTICS

“A person must know where they stand in order to know in what directions they proceed. A clarity of destiny and of direction to it are dependent on a knowledge of where one is!”¹²⁷⁹

8.1 Introduction

In the last seven chapters I have traced several reading strategies and reading resources that informed the Africans as ordinary readers in their initial and subsequent encounters with the Bible. Out of this analysis several points have become clear in regard to the primary role played by the Bible in the articulation of disproportionate sites of colonial discourses and power. I have been able to identify the modern African biblical reading(s) and interpretation(s) as products of the colonial evangelical discourses of different kinds. I have also been able to show that these readings and interpretations, despite the colonial hegemonic positioning, were reciprocal.

In addition, the African Christians under very difficult circumstances hybridised their readings of biblical texts through retrieval and incorporation of the defunct pre-colonial past. The hybridised readings and interpretations created interstices that became sites for assimilation, questioning and resistance. The in-between sites offered opportunities to contest the colonial interventionist and triumphant claim to a homogenous reading, interpretation and application of biblical messages. Out of these interstices we witness diverse readings of biblical texts from within the different political and religious contexts. Nevertheless, as one critically considers these diverse readings and interpretations, one becomes acutely aware of the hermeneutical challenges posed by the transcription of colonial evangelical discourses into the pre-critical common sense hermeneutics so far discussed.

¹²⁷⁹ Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo, *Writers in Politics* (Oxford: James Currey, 1997), 32.

8.2 The Limitations of “Pre-Critical”¹²⁸⁰ Common Sense Hermeneutics

In spite of the fact that many of the Africans portrayed in this research as ordinary readers raised sharp contextual questions and commitments as they encountered the Bible through their lived experiences, very little effort was made to move beyond the evangelical and mostly pre-critical understanding of the Scriptures. Ironically, whether the pre-critical interpretations were part of the historical and progressive development of the universal or products of Africans’ own interactions with the Bible, the African ordinary readers owed their dependency on the Bible to the structures and forms laid down by the very system that many intently sought to subvert. In other words, through the hybridisation process, colonial evangelical ideas were transcribed into the developing readings and interpretations. This paradox points to one of the challenges that African biblical scholars face as they develop an African hermeneutic theory that addresses ordinary readers’ hermeneutical needs.

Such is the case that Bishop John Henry Okullu¹²⁸¹ eloquently talked about when he wrote,

Many East African Christians are still living in the past, believing that the world is neatly divided into right and wrong, whereas today the choice, more often than not, is between two evils. For example is it right to support the cause of guerrilla fighters or to consign millions of black people in Rhodesia to perpetual inferiority? Some Christians even refuse to discuss such questions and say they will pray. But prayer which is not turned into action is like the priest who found a man who had been struck by thieves and passed by the other side, most probably praying in his heart that someone else would come and deal with it.¹²⁸²

¹²⁸⁰ I continue to follow Gerald West’s use of the term to indicate that ordinary readers are not trained in the critical modes of reading that characterise formal biblical scholarship. See West, *The Academy of the Poor*, 73-74; West, “Mapping African Biblical Interpretation”, 87-88; West, “African Biblical Hermeneutics and Bible Translation”, 6-29.

¹²⁸¹ Dr. John Henry Okullu (1929-1999) was a bishop of the Anglican Church in Kenya (ACK.) He was an outspoken critic of the post-colonial Kenyan government in his sermons and publications. He was a champion for justice, human rights and advocated for a multi-party system of governance. The Kenyan Press dubbed him “the outspoken prelate.” He served in various capacities as a member of the World Council of Churches as well as the All Africa Conference of Churches.

¹²⁸² Okullu, *Church and Politics in East Africa*, 5.

While the “Rhodesian” quest for freedom and independence is long settled, Okullu’s hermeneutical concern does highlight the dangers of a pre-critical reading that condones injustices or discourages revolt against oppressive and discriminatory practices while promoting attitudes of resignation and complacency. It is for the same reason that Okullu disavowed Christians’ reading of Romans 13:1, ‘every person must submit to the supreme authority’ as a legitimisation for rulers “to demand more than their fair share and Christians are apt to become too subservient – thus preventing a healthy and balanced relationship between Church and State.”¹²⁸³

The problem with the pre-critical readings that Okullu addressed is that such readings build on the same logic used more than a hundred years ago upon proselytised Africans in seeing the Bible as the unquestionable Word of God. Such logic accepts that the Bible is universally applicable to any given situation and cannot be an object of criticism.¹²⁸⁴ In this case, the Word of God is taken to be above history, culture, economics, or politics and the only appropriate response to the Bible is obedience. The work of the hermeneut according to this understanding is to reveal God’s Word.

There are two main factors that have emerged in this research as being foundational in shaping the post-colonial, evangelical and pre-critical readings and interpretations that Okullu writes about. These include: the use of the Bible as literacy and pedagogical tool; and oversimplification of Bible reading and knowledge.

8.2.1 The Bible and Literacy

In colonial Kenya, those who went to school had to begin reading biblical passages as they took their first baby steps towards literacy. The use of the Bible as a

¹²⁸³ *Church and Politics in East Africa*, 7.

¹²⁸⁴ John Mbiti does not only claim this universality but also refers to the Bible as the “neutral and ecumenical authority” for the profession of the Christian faith. See Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, 13.

literacy primer ultimately nurtured Christians to approach it literally and pre-critically. In addition, students were discouraged from asking disturbing questionings and sometimes such questionings were brutally suppressed as I have previously shown. In the mean time, the missionaries' evangelical discourses emerged as the dominant discourses though with little success in suppressing Africans' subversive interests in the interpretation of the Bible. The subversive elements continually demanded some form of response to material exploitation, racism, and colonialism. But as colonial powers exerted more surveillance and control as discussed in chapter 7, Africans became increasingly ambiguous in their response to the reading and interpretation of the Bible. All in all, many Africans accepted the Bible as the unquestionable Word of God and as a manual for "right" living.

Musimbi Kanyoro, through her own experience in a Bible study group at her village in Bware (western Kenya), gives an example of how this kind of pre-critical engagement with the Bible has been appropriated in post-colonial Kenya.¹²⁸⁵ Kanyoro narrates the story of a woman whose teenage daughter, a student at a local school, had been impregnated by her teacher. The mother was disturbed because an elderly man had now approached the family with an offer to marry their "disgraced" daughter as the culture demanded.¹²⁸⁶ She needed help and advice from her peers in the Bible study group. Kanyoro presented some suggestions to the group such as suing the teacher responsible for the pregnancy. However, she reports that all of her proposals were unanimously rejected. To Kanyoro's great surprise, one woman pointed out that

¹²⁸⁵ R. A Musimbi Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2002), 5-9.

¹²⁸⁶ Although, it was not her daughter's wish to get married at a tender age, she felt trapped since she was not the only decision maker in this matter. It involved her clan (extended family.) According to their culture, every girl must get married and the clan had decided that getting married to this elderly man was the only right decision. If she did not get married, she would be a laughing stock and a disgrace to the family (although the family was already dishonoured by their daughter's pregnancy outside marriage.)

biblical Ruth had actually married an older man. After reading from the Bible the story of Ruth, the group reasoned that it was not a bad idea for the girl in question to get married to the older man. Kanyoro writes, “[h]ere, I was hearing women affirm and justify a reading of the text of Ruth that has potential harm to women and girls.”¹²⁸⁷ She rightly observes that the group was using the Bible to validate a cultural practice that “redeems” a “disgraced” daughter.

Kanyoro rightly asks, “what if both the biblical cultures and the culture in question have inherent injustices in them?”¹²⁸⁸ Should we receive them as the truth even when the claim is questionable? While such a question raises further concerns about the authority of the Bible, the women about whom Kanyoro writes were not ready to debate the authority of the Bible let alone the authority of culture. This example highlights how many Kenyan Christians hold the Bible in awe as the word of God. When they read it, they hear the message as if it was specifically written for them. It is this kind of reading that prompted Kanyoro to urge biblical hermeneutics in Africa to take seriously the analysis of culture and its impact on biblical hermeneutics.

8.2.2 Oversimplification of Bible reading and Knowledge

The second factor that this research has identified as the bedrock of pre-critical engagement with the Bible can be located in missionaries’ biblical interpretations which tended to oversimplify knowledge and hence reality. Missionaries’ reading of the Bible sought to spiritually uplift the degenerated African soul. It espoused a simple, partial and yet highly selective reading of biblical texts which would be read as though they were written with the Africans in mind. Africans were expected to seek the spiritual reign of God while trusting that God would provide for physical reality. This interpretation implied that no concerted human efforts needed to take

¹²⁸⁷ Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics*, 6.

¹²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

place to change the reality of Africans' physical deprivation and exploitation. Such readings, like any other colonial discourse, did not give people the confidence in their abilities and the capacities to overcome obstacles. Instead, it tended to make people feel their inadequacies, their weakness and their incapacities in the face of reality and their inability to do anything about conditions governing their lives. The use of the Bible in this sense demanded nothing much from the ordinary Africans apart from passivity, gratitude and admiration of their colonisers as the interpreters of the Word. Yet it cannot be denied that such interpretations acquired their meaning within a traumatic colonial scenario of cultural and racial contestations.

8.3 Envisioning New Horizon: the Scholarly and the Ordinary Reader

The acceptance of the Bible as the unquestionable Word of God is problematic since it negates different preoccupations and contexts of the Bible as well as those of the interpreter. In Okullu's estimation,

Men and women are saved and liberated for the bodily as well as the spiritual service of their fellow men. God is not a God of souls only, but of the body as well. There is no department of life which he does not enter. A true Christian is the one who is truly in the world without being of the world, who is truly 'holy' and truly 'worldly'.¹²⁸⁹

That is to say, biblical interpretation (scholarly or otherwise) should not be insulated from the historical exigencies and tragedies of Frantz Fanon's wretched of the earth. In post-colonial Africa, as Okullu reminds us, ordinary readers must not shy away from questioning biblical texts particularly when such texts legitimise oppressive hermeneutics. It is necessary for the ordinary readers to make conscious effort to move beyond any literal or pre-critical understanding of the Scriptures.

Luckily, we do not have to seek beyond the horizon for a starting point in developing a hermeneutic theory that accepts ordinary readers as capable hermeneuts

¹²⁸⁹ *Church and Politics in East Africa*, 5-6.

while challenging them to move beyond pre-critical reading. Even though the factors discussed above may have encouraged docility and complacency, from Bildad Kaggia and others as discussed in chapters 6 and 7, we witness an indigenous attempt to engage their community in the process of demystifying seemingly original and authoritative colonial knowledge and reality. In their rejection of the interventionist history of translation and reading of the Bible, we learn that ordinary readers can indeed redeem and challenge themselves to imagine new horizons, new beginnings and a new interpretation of their collective self-image. As the study of the Agĩkũyũ has shown, ordinary African readers used the available resources to actively and creatively engage biblical texts in the moment of colonial transformation. These individuals immersed themselves into history as players, actors and creators. Their resistance tradition saw tremendous growth in creative literature in form of patriotic songs, poems, newsletters and plays that encouraged people to bolder and higher resolves in all their struggles to free the human spirit from the manacles of oppression.

The scholarly and the ordinary hermeneuts can use this honourable past as an invitation to action and a basis for hope which takes place in the concrete historical struggle of humanity. It is exciting to imagine a space where the trained biblical hermeneut meets with the ordinary hermeneut not for the former to represent the latter but to enter into a dialogical discursive exchange. In such a scenario the ordinary reader is no longer taken to be a passive receptor of the text but an active and creative contributor in the interpretive process.¹²⁹⁰ When the perspectives of the ordinary readers are included in biblical interpretation they can bring new meaning and impact

¹²⁹⁰ See also Robert J. Schreier, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), chapter 3, wa Thiong'o, *Writers in Politics*, 6, Henry Okullu, *Quest for Justice* (Kisumu: Shalom, 1997), Mercy A. Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 12.

to the academy and the ecclesial arenas. This calls for a paradigm shift in the way biblical hermeneutics is carried in Africa, where the academy comes to terms with the role of ordinary readers as capable hermeneuts whose contribution in biblical studies must be taken seriously. This approach, as I see it, introduces us to an exciting and usually neglected moment as we recognise the relation of practice and theory. If we accept this as the paradigmatic place of departure, the trained biblical hermeneut must seek a commitment to a theoretical perspective that refuses to draw any theoretical or epistemological distance between the intellectual (biblical scholar) and the pre-critical reader.

Nlenanya Onwu observes that biblical interpretation has for years remained hooked to its Enlightenment origins which marked the beginning of modern biblical interpretation.¹²⁹¹ From this period onwards, formal reason was elevated and biblical documents could now be scientifically studied and understood as any other set of documents from antiquity.¹²⁹² As a result, biblical scholarship shifted attention to the historical setting of the texts, writers of these documents, and role and function of the biblical materials in their original contexts before analysing their religious value as well as theological appropriation.¹²⁹³

The “scientific paradigm” set critical methods upon which sound biblical interpretation is to be based. Interpretation has to be adduced based upon textual evidence and set standard values.¹²⁹⁴ Groups living outside that value system are expected to appropriate the interpretative norms that the “Academy and the guild of

¹²⁹¹ Onwu, C. Nlenanya, “The Hermeneutical Model: The Dilemma of the African Theologian”, *African Theological Journal*, Volume 14, 3, (1985), 145.

¹²⁹² Onwu, “The Hermeneutical Model”, 146.

¹²⁹³ Onwu, “The Hermeneutical Model”, 146.

¹²⁹⁴ Patte, *Ethics of Biblical Interpretation*, 17.

biblical scholars” has established.¹²⁹⁵ Brian Blount adds that besides this restrictive perspective, Western New Testament scholarship maintains that “the thematic structure and content of the New Testament materials discourage social and political interpretation.”¹²⁹⁶ Instead, the focus has been on the believer’s individual, spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ which has been considered to be the key textual theme.

But according to Gerald West, the focus is now shifting in biblical studies and hermeneutics from the quest for the origins and text production (i.e. source) and from the text preservation and mediation (i.e. message) to the reception and interpretation of the Bible (i.e. receptor).¹²⁹⁷ The shift moves us away from the “Enlightenment scientific paradigm” which has long assumed that texts like the world are stable and objective realities ready to reveal their meaning to the “unbiased observer” who using appropriate methods can access such realities.¹²⁹⁸ With the shift from the scientific paradigm, the image of a “decontextualized and non-ideological” scientific reader is slowly being replaced with one of a “contextualized and ideological” reader.¹²⁹⁹

The paradigmatic shift envisioned here requires the trained biblical hermeneut to renegotiate the understanding of theory and practice, and in particular, redefine the term “meaning” as used in biblical hermeneutics.

8.3.1 Meaning

Accepting ordinary readers as capable hermeneuts points to the fact that biblical text is important not just because the meaning is located in its historical or literary context, but also because the text’s meaning is relevant to the reader’s present

¹²⁹⁵ Patte, *Ethics of Biblical Interpretation*, 17; Brian K. Blount, *Cultural Interpretation: Reorienting New Testament Criticism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 3.

¹²⁹⁶ Blount, *Cultural Interpretation*, 5.

¹²⁹⁷ See Gerald West for a brief summary in the developments and major shifts in the field of hermeneutics. West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading*, 21-46.

¹²⁹⁸ The first shift emerged offering the historical-critical approaches such as textual criticism, source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism and tradition criticism whose main focus was/is the relationship between the text and the source.

¹²⁹⁹ Segovia, *Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies*, 34-35.

circumstance.¹³⁰⁰ According to Sandra M. Schneiders, the objective in biblical interpretation is to arrive at an understanding of the meaning of the text.¹³⁰¹ Schneiders argues that a reader encounter the text either for *information* (to be intellectually enlightened) or in view of *transformation* (to be personally converted). Therefore, depending on the objective(s) of reading biblical texts, through interpretation, readers arrive at a specific meaning of the event that they encounter in and outside the text.¹³⁰²

8.3.1a Context and Meaning

Interpretation remains incomplete when it removes the interpreter from history. Meaning is found when the interpreter meets with the text in his/her own context. Rudolf Bultmann in his existential interpretation of the Bible attempted a hermeneutical theory that took meaning, biblical texts and language seriously. While acknowledging the need for the Bible to be interpreted in such a way that it speaks as the Word of God, Bultmann proposed that “demythologization” of the Bible would

¹³⁰⁰ See also For in-depth coverage of this, see Paul Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* edit with an introduction by Lewis S. Mudge. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980; Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation* edited by John B. Thompson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. 2nd rev. ed. Translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum, 1993. E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967. Hans-Georg Gadamer on the same level as Ricoeur argued that truth could not reside in the reader’s attempt to get back to the author’s meaning, for this ideal cannot be realised because every interpreter has a new and different knowledge of the text in the reader’s own historical moment. This is grounded on our pre-understanding that prejudice in interpretation cannot be avoided. However, we must grasp the whole of a work and not just its parts. This pre-understanding comes from us not from the text since the text is indeterminate in meaning. The meaning of the text goes beyond the author. Thus, the subject matter and not the author becomes the determiner of the meaning. Yet meaning of the text is not wholly the result of the interpreter’s perspective neither is it that of the original historical situation of the text. It is instead a “fusion of horizons” as the third alternative. E. D. Hirsch affirmed that meaning of a literary work is determined by the author’s intention. Verbal meaning is whatever someone’s has willed to convey by a particular sequence of words and which can be shared by means of linguistic signs. The author’s truth-intention provides the only genuinely discriminating norm for asserting valid or true interpretations from invalid and false ones. Therefore, hermeneutics is to make clear the texts verbal meaning and not its significance. Meaning is thus found represented by the text and the linguistic signs represented what another meant to say. Significance in contrast names a relationship between that meaning and a person, concept, situation, or any other possible number of theories. Therefore, meaning of the text cannot change but must be determinate- thus giving a fix norm to judge whether a passage was being interpreted correctly.

¹³⁰¹ Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 13.

¹³⁰² See Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 13, 18.

help understand what constitutes authentic human existence that is expressed in the Bible through mythological language of the Bible.¹³⁰³ For the New Testament proclamation to retain its validity, Bultmann argued, the only option left is to demythologise it.¹³⁰⁴ Since language cannot be applied appropriately if symbols and terminology are foreign, Bultmann further argued that there is need to translate and interpret. This is because the language of God is mythical and cannot make any sense to the modern scientific mind.¹³⁰⁵ Nonetheless, the attempt to resolve the conflicts between biblical myths and the scientific conception of the world through demythologisation is self-defeating. As Mugambi states, demythologisation runs counter to the reality of religion as a pillar of culture because, “Myth is indispensable in cultural construction of reality.”¹³⁰⁶

Nevertheless, Bultmann’s acknowledgment that context specifically affects one’s interpretation of the language of the text is important. Meaning, as Bultmann contends, is found when the interpreter encounters the texts through the relationship in the interpreter’s life experience expressed in the text. Dialectical engagement between the existential situation of the reader and the language of the text is possible when it remains focused on the question about the truth of human existence. The analysis seeks to understand the actual historical existence of human beings, “who

¹³⁰³ Rudolf Bultmann defined mythology as “the use of imagery to express the otherworldly in terms of this world and the divine in terms of human life, the other side in terms of this side. For instance, divine transcendence is expressed as spatial distance.” The real purpose of myths is thus to express the human understanding of their identity concerning their spatial place in the world which they live in. For this reason the old myth must be replaced by new myth. Rudolf Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology”, in Hans Werner Bartsch, ed. *Kerygma and Myth I*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1953, 1961), 10.

¹³⁰⁴ He said that the “world picture of the New Testament is a mythical world picture”, in which history is “moved and guided by supernatural powers” towards an eschatological consummation. Therefore, Bultmann added, “We can only completely accept the mythical world picture or completely rejected.” Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology*, 1 and 9.

¹³⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁰⁶ Kinoti, *The Bible in African Christianity*, 75.

exists only in a context of life with ‘others’, and thus in encounters.”¹³⁰⁷ A

Bultmannian insistence on existentialist interpretation locates today’s interpretation in the modern experience of human existence, which is contextual but only existentially operative. However, Brian Blount faults Bultmann’s existentialism in the sense that any program of demythologisation, while benefiting from existentialism, must also be politically and socially aware.¹³⁰⁸

Schneiders amplifies Blount’s argument when she suggests that since meaning is “an event constituted by the dialect between sense and reference,” meaning happens.¹³⁰⁹ Subsequently words which are written or recorded in order to capture meaning in a permanent form so that it can later be reappropriated give rise to “new event” of meaning that is not necessary identical but related to the original event. What this means then is that meaning is constituted by the dialectic of what the text says (sense of the text) and its referent (what it is that the text speaks about.) Schneiders asserts that the referent can also be the world of the reader. For such a reading, meaning is no longer abstract but is that which has an existential significance. It is safe then to conclude that cultural assumptions and presuppositions of a specific community derive and appropriate meaning from the text differently from any other interpretation of that same text.

8.3.1b Plurality of Interpretative Interests

As seen above, readership creates scenarios but since such a readership constantly changes, the text must be constantly renegotiated. The diverse readings of the text from within the different political and religious contexts as attested in this

¹³⁰⁷ Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology*, 88.

¹³⁰⁸ Brian K. Blount, *Cultural Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 35.

¹³⁰⁹ Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 15.

study show that texts can carry more than a single and steady meaning.¹³¹⁰ People of different socio-political as well as cultural settings will likely interpret texts differently. This understanding opens the possibilities of other interpretations of the biblical texts. Since contexts are ever changing, then “a text, as written speech event, thus does not have a single, closed meaning, but a ‘meaning potential’, or more appropriately in a functional framework, ‘behavior potential.’”¹³¹¹ The idea of ‘meaning potential’ points to the same awareness of the plurality of interpretative interests.

In the end, when plurality of interpretative interests is taken into account, it opens the possibility of an ordinary reader interpretive method. Blount has adequately shown that the New Testament interpretation has been unfairly restricted to the dominant circles. Such a restrictive perspective finds its grounding in the “scientifically” correct and “normative method of biblical interpretation because of its foundation in historical-critical and literary models” which represents itself as the only accurate measure of biblical interpretation.¹³¹² What this translates to is that if anyone wants to interpret biblical texts “correctly and faithfully”, one has to adjust accordingly to the values and perspective of the dominant group. But other scholarly perspectives such as feminism, liberation theology and postcolonial criticism have shown that what passes as “the perspective of science” is not only bias but also socially and linguistically restrictive and therefore, ideological.¹³¹³ Such a restrictive perspective has mainly created an artificial “boundary between biblical interpretation

¹³¹⁰ Daniel Patte, *Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: A Reevaluation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 37-71; Sugirtharajah, *Troublesome Texts*, 32-33; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Remembering the Past in Creating the Future: Historical-Critical Scholarship and Feminist Biblical Interpretation” in Adela Yarbro Collins, ed., *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 43-63. Compare this to what Stephen Fowl refers to as “determinate interpretation. See Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation*, 32-61. See also Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, 19-20.

¹³¹¹ Blount, *Cultural Interpretation*, 15.

¹³¹² Blount, *Cultural Interpretation*, 3.

¹³¹³ Ibid.

in local communities and biblical interpretation in the academy.”¹³¹⁴ Blount contends that people in different social locations use different linguistic forms.¹³¹⁵ This means that language is only meaningful when functioning within its social context. The cultural background of the interpreter serves as one of the social contexts in which the potential meaning of the text is actualised. As such people from different sociolinguistic backgrounds will interpret the same texts in radically different ways.¹³¹⁶

8.3.1c The Bible as the Word of God

Stephen Fowl acknowledges that hermeneuts pursue very different and perhaps incompatible “interpretive aims” related to the interpretation of specific texts.¹³¹⁷ As such, the interpretive community determines the need to interpret and inform specific scriptural texts without having to fit under a single “determinate” theory of interpretation. If this is true, then the expression that the Bible is the Word of God needs to be further explained and expanded. The expression “word of God” according to Schneiders refers to “intelligible divine speech, to language or discourse attributed to God.”¹³¹⁸ Schneiders adds that the phrase cannot be on every occasion taken literally. This is because language is a human phenomenon and that the Bible was written using human language. Biblical language consists of human words, which are limited and require interpretation. For these reasons, Schneiders concludes, the expression “word of God” is a metaphor that gives meaning to that which language is

¹³¹⁴ Gerald West, ed., *Reading Other-wise: Socially Engaged Biblical Scholars Reading with Their Local Communities* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 1.

¹³¹⁵ Blount, *Cultural Interpretation*, 4.

¹³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹³¹⁷ Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, 58.

¹³¹⁸ Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 27.

limited to ascribe to.¹³¹⁹ The Bible as a metaphor contains a whole complex of meaning. Words are symbolic of what is divinely revealed.

The scripture witnesses to revelation but not merely as a record of past revelatory experiences.¹³²⁰ This is to say that the Bible is the medium through which God graciously reveals God self to those who read the scripture in faith. Schneiders asserts, then, that language is not the object of our knowing but the medium of our encounter with the real.¹³²¹ God's self-disclosure was through human language. Through the written words, God invites us to enter into God's self-disclosure, where we meet the divine only symbolically. This encounter can only be understood in the act of interpretation; we find meaning through reading the text through this act. The claim by Schneiders that the Bible as the Word of God is only true when taken symbolically allows flexibility in the interpretation of the scripture. Revelation does not end with the Bible. This is because, symbolically speaking, it reveals and conceals at the same time. The Bible is only normative in the sense that it is a primary source and locus of experience of God upon which we begin to do hermeneutics.

What this means, at least in my opinion, is more than the symbolical meaning the Bible may bring. While the Bible remains "a source of revelatory truth"¹³²² it also remains problematic because of its omissions, silences and traces of subordination and domination. Therefore, a hermeneutic of engagement espoused here, does not only remain accountable "to present communities of faith and struggle, by accepting that the Bible is a significant text for them", but also it offers "continuity with the past poor and marginalized communities of faith and struggle, by not abandoning their

¹³¹⁹ Schneiders is careful in her definition of metaphor. She argues that a genuine metaphor is not merely a rhetorical device but as a semantic instrument of new meaning. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 29, 32.

¹³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹³²¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹³²² Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 30.

traces in the Bible.”¹³²³ Such an approach demands a detailed historical and sociological reconstruction of the society behind the text of the Bible. However, it is not enough to probe the context and social realities of early Christian origins. It must also attempt to ask what the reading of the reconstructed text mean to the poor and marginalised of our present days. It must be read contrapuntally with the historical struggles such as the one articulated in this research against colonialism and exploitation.

8.3.1d The Power Dynamics in Interpretation

Another concession that the scholarly reader will have to make is to acknowledge that dominant groups too often present their interpretations as correct and scientific. It is worth recognising that every form of interpretation is political since power and interpretation go together. One’s spatial and social location in life determines the perspective structures and gives focus to an interpreter’s work. All interpretation bears the bias of the interpreters.¹³²⁴ Graham Ward in his article “Where we Stand” adds that our thinking and our cultural/historical context are profoundly related.¹³²⁵ What this means, then, is that when determinative interpretations are formulated, some perspectives become more important than others and hence dominant. The dominant group not only controls the interpretive norms but also determines the kind of life mandated by those kinds of norms. The dominant interpretative perspectives in an unbalanced power structure dominate and devalue other forms of interpretations; they silence certain voices while legitimising others.

¹³²³ West, *The Academy for the Poor*”, 48; See also Itumeleng J. Mosala, “Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa: The Use of the Bible” in Norman K. Gottwald and Richard A. Horsley, eds. *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books/SPCK, 1993), 54-56; See also Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*, 41-42; West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading*, 138-139.

¹³²⁴ Kanyoro argues that the semantic value of symbols and words is culturally determined- Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics*, 9.

¹³²⁵ Graham Ward, “Introduction: ‘Where We Stand’” in *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).

This is because interpretation involves not only our cognitive capacity but also deep forms of human emotions by which we make certain judgments. Therefore, a socially engaged hermeneut must not be ignorant of the larger historical, political and even social context of both the text and the reader.¹³²⁶ When we situate the text as well as the reader in their cultural, historical, and ideological realities, we are able to draw attention to the cultural and ideological presuppositions not only inherent in the text but also the preunderstanding that a reader brings into the text.¹³²⁷ It is therefore plausible to accept the fact that both scholarly readers and the ordinary readers with respect to biblical interpretation are “involved in the act of reading and thus, constitute a community of readers within their particular sociocultural realm, even if they work from different standpoints and perspectives.”¹³²⁸

8.3.2 Postcolonial Criticism and the Ordinary Reader

Postcolonial criticism has added an important perspective in the changing attitudes of reference where the “otherness of others” is recognised and respected.¹³²⁹ As a theory, it takes seriously the understanding that biblical texts can actively shape and transform the perceptions, understanding, and actions of readers and the reading community. The theory has challenged colonial and neo-colonial tendencies not only in the Western academy but also in the so-called Third World institutions of learning

¹³²⁶ See West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading*, 61ff; Daniel Patte, *Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: A Reevaluation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 37-71; Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 157-179; Elisabeth Fiorenza Schüssler, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983).

¹³²⁷ Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 29-36, 56. West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading*, 128.

¹³²⁸ Eric Anum, “Ye Ma Wo Mo! African Hermeneuts, You Have Spoken At Last: Reflections on *Semeia* 73 (1996)” in Gerald West, *Reading Other-wise*, 11.

¹³²⁹ Segovia, “Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies”, 37; Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Bible*, 92; Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 31; See also Patte, *Ethics of Biblical Interpretation*, 25.

where privileged middle-class scholars continue to argue that they are the voices of the voiceless.¹³³⁰

8.4 Framework of Commitments

The main thrust of the paradigmatic shift in theory and practice espoused in this research is that there should be no subordination of the ordinary readers to the trained biblical hermeneuts. Instead, the socially engaged biblical hermeneuts are invited to engage the ordinary readers in Gerald West's "framework of commitments" which include: critical thinking and critical reading of the Bible; reading the Bible from the experienced reality of societal margins; and reading communally with each other.¹³³¹ These commitments recognise women and men as conscious being who are willing to learn, teach and transform each other.

8.4.1 Commitment to Critical thinking and Read the Bible Critically

It is important for the ordinary readers to be aware that biblical texts are not "innocent and transparent." Critical reading empowers the ordinary readers in order to engage in critical and meaningful analysis of the texts and their contexts. Critical reading, to follow Gerald West, "provide resources for a hermeneutic of engagement, connecting ordinary poor and marginalized 'readers' with the 'dangerous memories' and the 'subjugated knowledges' of those who have struggled for survival, liberation, and life in and behind the biblical text".¹³³² Brian K. Blount in his sociolinguistic model has ably argued that "meaning" of any biblical text resides within the set parameters of a particular text's language.¹³³³ However, for us to appreciate the full potentiality of the meaning of language, Blount argues, we ought to include the interpersonal category in our interpretation.

¹³³⁰ Juan Luis Segundo, *Signs of the Times: Theological Reflections*, tr. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 71.

¹³³¹ West, *The Academy of the Poor*, 5.

¹³³² West, *The Academy of the Poor*, 48. See also Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 30-36.

¹³³³ Blount, *Cultural Interpretation*, 11.

The hermeneut needs to seek how language is used and understand the correspondence between the internal makeup of the language and its functions. Such an approach alerts us to the fact that language is social and that meaning in language must be determined as much from its social context as from its internal structure. What Blount is proposing here is not possible in a pre-critical reading. In order for the ordinary readers to interact effectively with the language of the text they will need different interpretive strategies. In this case the socially engaged scholar must be willing to offer his or her skills and training which ordinary readers do not possess. Such skills should be made available to the ordinary readers without the scholar seeking to dominate. It is a commitment to make accessible all available resources both local and other critical resources offered in biblical scholarship.

Such a commitment articulates a people's collective consciousness and seeks social transformation through the Bible reading process.¹³³⁴ As Postcolonial criticism has shown, it is important for the ordinary readers to take seriously the reality of imperial tradition of the West and the use of the Bible to justify empire-building which has always been accompanied by a prominent socio-religious dimension. The ordinary reader should be able to draw a link between knowledge and power in textual production where the dialectical relationship between language and power is fundamental and far-reaching.¹³³⁵ Such is the case with, some of the Africans ordinary readers discussed elsewhere who even with the overwhelming religious and colonial socio-political realities, did not accept biblical interpretations of the colonisers with

¹³³⁴ West, *The Academy of the Poor*, 6; Mosala, "The Implications of the Text of Esther for African Women's Struggle for Liberation in South Africa", 138.

¹³³⁵ Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Bible*, 92.

“absolute and undisturbed passivity”.¹³³⁶ In this research we have encountered ordinary readers who actively and creatively engaged with biblical texts.¹³³⁷

Most important, however, is for the ordinary reader to be empowered to interrogate biblical texts for colonial intentions and tendencies. In this case, the untrained reader gains from the methodological insights of historical-critical methods which “have pointed out that early Christian writings are not at all objective, factual transcripts but pastorally engaged writings.”¹³³⁸ That is to say, Christians in antiquity, selected, redacted, and reformulated their sources and materials to reflect their theological intentions and objectives. Such is the case of Matthew 16: 13-28 which as we saw in previous chapters was used to validate and justify colonial Church’s unquestionable authority on the cultural, the moral and religious ideas that it imposed on the Africans.

Some of the questions that are worth considering, for example in considering Matthew 16: 13-23 are: Is the missionaries’ interpretation like the one discussed in this research the basic meaning of Matthew 16:13-20? Does this qualify the colonial Church’s claim to be the authentic interpreter of the biblical, juridical and dogmatic matters in regard to emerging Christianity in Africa? Were the colonial Church’s self-understanding, experience, and actualisation of Matthean revelation justified? How did it happen that Peter (a member of his contemporary underclass) took such an exalted position in the colonial church as well as in its hermeneutics? How is this to be interpreted in light of the foundational Christian experience of the early church? Shouldn’t Peter’s confession and Christ’s subsequent declaration be understood in light of Matthew 16: 22-23? If we take *σκάνδαλον* to be the key to the

¹³³⁶ Segovia, “Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies”, 40; West, “Mapping African Biblical Interpretation”, 83-89.

¹³³⁷ Gerald West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context*, Second edition (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 23.

¹³³⁸ Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 49.

understanding of Peter's confession, how would this affect the interpretation of the text in question and Matthew's narrative in general?

I want to pose and give an example of how a trained biblical hermeneut can enrich a scholarly-ordinary reader critical engagement of the Bible. In this example, I use a postcolonial approach to Matthew 16:13-23 in order to show how the expansion of moral imagination, cultural production, collective memory and literary imagination of New Testament Christians may have been shaped by the socio-political situations of their days and how such a reading may impact our interpretation today.¹³³⁹ Through historical-criticism we are able to discern the fact that "divine revelation is articulated in historically limited and culturally conditioned human language."¹³⁴⁰ The borrowings back and forth in the antiquity render the Matthean passage hybrid and for this reason many possibilities in regard to its interpretation. Further, the narrative as offered in Matthew is highly selective. Matthew chooses what to include and not to include. Even where political and social realities are obvious, Matthew glosses over such realities for the sake of religious motivation.

8.4.1a An Example: a Postcolonial Consideration of Matthew

16:13-23

Critical Analysis:

The pericope begins with the dispute between Jesus and the Pharisees and Sadducees. The latter two groups demand from Jesus a sign. We are not told why they make this demand. The Disciples are warned to be aware of the "leaven/yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees" which in this case represents "teaching" (Mark adds "the yeast of Herod", Mark 8:15). The chapter concludes with the call to discipleship and

¹³³⁹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 5.

¹³⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 13.

offers an apocalyptic vision. The disciples are urged to deny themselves and carry their cross and follow Jesus. In the text in question, Matthew includes Peter's confession (Matthew 16: 16c-19) which both Mark and Luke omit. If we accept that Matthew followed Mark in the composition of the narrative (i.e. Markan priority, in which case Mark 8: 27-30 is the source for Matthew 16: 13-16b, 20), then it is possible to conclude that Matthew also had access to a non-Markan source that included Peter's confession.¹³⁴¹

Verse 13 locates the setting of the scene at “τὰ μέρη Καισαρείας τῆς Φιλίππου” i.e. part (of the whole) of (the larger) Caesarea Philippi, which had been divided into various administrative districts (cf. Mark 8:27). According to Bauer this was a city at the foot of Mt. Hermon, once known as *Paneas*.¹³⁴² It was rebuilt by Philip the Tetrarch who named it in honour of Tiberius Ceaser and thus became important to the Roman Empire. Matthew 4:15 refers to the area as “Galilee of the Gentiles” which may indicate that the area was under the control of non-Jews (cf. Matthew 15:21). Although Matthew may have been concerned with a geographical designation of area rather than its ethnic make-up, the location as Warren Carter observes, underlines the issue of sovereignty.¹³⁴³ The city and its surrounding area attracted a lot of imperial interests. Therefore, at the time of Jesus' visit and ministry, the entire area was under the control of the Romans and graced by the blessings and

¹³⁴¹ The Markan priority has been accepted by most biblical scholars as the most plausible explanation of the Synoptic problem. This is to say that Mark was written first and that Matthew and Luke followed Mark in the composition of their narratives. While it is evident that all of the three Synoptic Gospel writers (Mark, Matthew and Luke) borrowed from one another at some stage of writing, it is also clear that a much more complex phenomenon exists due to the striking and often minute differences evident in the three Synoptics. This has led biblical scholars to hypothesise about the existence of another source “Q” (*Quelle*, i.e. source) which Mark did not have access to but was accessible to Matthew and Luke. It has also been added that Matthew and Luke each has distinctive material gathered from other hypothetical sources designated “M” and “L” respectively.

¹³⁴² Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Second Edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 396.

¹³⁴³ Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), 332.

the divine presence of the Roman Emperor.¹³⁴⁴ Despite Matthew's disinterest in the colonial presence and its social implications to the Christian movement, he leaves clues about the colonial presence. Even though the text points the reader to the general purposes of the Gospel,¹³⁴⁵ Matthew still allows us a glimpse to what the text chooses to be silent about. Some scholars have interpreted this pericope as an attempt by the early Christian community to "define itself over against, a developing Pharisaic tradition within Judaism."¹³⁴⁶ By glossing over the colonial political structures and contexts, Matthew was inadvertently making a political statement that the allegiance to the emerging new Christian community (just as its Jewish counterpart) was not to the Emperor but to another, greater authority.

The pericope begins with Jesus posing a question to his disciples regarding what "οἱ ἄνθρωποι" consider to be "τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου". No clue is given as to the reason behind the question neither are we told who "οἱ ἄνθρωποι" refers to. It is most likely however that reference here is to "the people of the land" whom the Pharisees despised and referred to as sinners for their failure to observe tithes and purity regulations.¹³⁴⁷ Jesus' question compares to the question John the Baptist posed to Jesus in Matthew 11: 2-6. The question might also be pointing back to the warning about "τῆς ζύμης τῶν Φαρισαίων καὶ Σαδουκαίων" in verse 11. It could also be a telling question aimed at revealing Jesus' identity (thus Jesus intends to lead the

¹³⁴⁴ According to Warren Carter, King Herod built a marble temple in this city in honour of Augustus. Agrippa, after Philip, enlarged the city further and renamed it Neronias in honour of the emperor Nero. Titus visited the city after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. throwing Jewish captives to the wild beasts or forcing them to fight and kill each other. Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 332.

¹³⁴⁵ Luke Timothy Johnson sees two main purposes for the composition of Matthew: 1. Catechetical – in which case Matthew provides instructions for missionaries, discipline in the community, and teachings of forms of piety that anticipated later "church orders". 2. Liturgical: of use in worship or even "a form of homiletic expansion of Mark". Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, Revised Edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 190-191.

¹³⁴⁶ Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament*, 191.

¹³⁴⁷ The first-century Judaism was politically and theologically divided into sects which included tax collectors, Zealots, Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and the rest of Jewish populace referred to as "the people of the land". Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament*, 47.

disciples to the answer that is already obvious to him). But why use the term “τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου”? Was Jesus not aware of his exalted position as “ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ”? The verse may also suggest possible anxiety where Jesus is seeking assurance that at least his disciples understood his significance.

In verse 14, the answer which comes from all disciples shows varied and almost confused understanding of “τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου”. Yet, they all point to a prophet of a kind. The Matthean framework at this point subordinates “οἱ ἄνθρωποι”. The disciples’ response alludes to the “οἱ ἄνθρωποι” ignorance or lack in knowledge. It compares to the Pharisees’ and the Sadducees’ cynical attitude. Matthew contrasts the reaction of the people to Jesus with that of the disciples. The “οἱ ἄνθρωποι” have no voice of their own. It is the disciples who speak on their behalf. Matthew thus presents “οἱ ἄνθρωποι” as secondary to the disciples and thus insignificant in the evolution of the Christian community. Such a framework allows interpreters to view “οἱ ἄνθρωποι” as historically and culturally marginal while the disciples are portrayed as the favoured ones who receive revelation, power and authority. Yet even as Matthew presents “οἱ ἄνθρωποι” as marginal and thus as not active participants in the salvation history, it does not mean that “οἱ ἄνθρωποι” are actually absent from the historical process and biblical revelation.

The emphasis in verse 15 “ὕμεις... λέγετε” indicates that Jesus is pointedly interested in the disciples’ understanding. Peter’s response in verse 16 is individual, unlike the disciples’ response in verse 14. Peter side-steps the use of “τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου”. Instead he declares Jesus “ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος”. There is nothing new or special about this declaration which has no parallel in Mark’s

account. The disciples in 14:33 had already declared him “θεοῦ υἱὸς” (cf. 26:63; 27:40, 43, 54). Throughout the gospel of Matthew Jesus is offered as the Son of God. Jesus, according to Matthew 1:23 makes God present because he is God’s son. It compares with Matthew 3:17 where God declares him “my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” However, it is the first time that a disciple used “ὁ χριστὸς”. But still in using “ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος”, Peter appropriated a phrase that was commonly used to honour and to glorify emperors. According to Warren Carter, this phrase recognised the emperors’ identity as “agents of the gods’ will and power expressed through Rome’s rule”.¹³⁴⁸ Although for a different purpose, Matthew shows Peter as willing to syncretise and hybridise the honourable title of Jesus probably to “contest and challenge” claims of emperors’ sovereignty and agency.

Jesus declares Peter in verse 17 “μακάριος” i.e. blessed or happy, because of the revelation. The fact that this revelation comes to “Σίμων Βαριωνᾶ” (which in this case is the Aramaic rendering of Simon son of Jonah), it compares to “σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα”. According to Max Zerwick, the phrase “σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα” is the Hebraic notion “signifying man in his weakness” denoting “the unaided powers of frail human nature.”¹³⁴⁹ This verse indicates then that the revelation did not come at the moment of Peter’s strength and triumph, but at his weakest point. Unlike the Pharisees and the Sadducees who demand a sign from heaven, Peter receives the sign from “ὁ πατήρ ... ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς” without soliciting it. Ulrich Luz convincingly argues that Matthew may have authored verse 17 contrary to the claim of a Semitic origin.¹³⁵⁰ If

¹³⁴⁸ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 333.

¹³⁴⁹ Max Zerwick S. J., *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, unabridged 5th Revised Edition (Rome: E.P.I.B., 1996), 52.

¹³⁵⁰ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 355-356, 361-362.

Luz is right, then it shows that Matthew was aware of Peter's vulnerability as a human being. To Matthew, Peter was not the exalted leader of the Church but one who is representative.

In verse 18, “Πέτρος” compares with John 1:42 where Jesus is said to have given Peter a new name “σὺ εἶ Σίμων ὁ υἱὸς Ἰωάννου, σὺ κληθήσῃ Κηφᾶς”. It is also difficult to verify what reference is to “Τῆ πέτρα”. Ulrich Luz sees the use of “Πέτρος” and “πέτρα” as wordplay where the Greek plays with various meanings of the same root word.¹³⁵¹ He continues to say that since “Πέτρος” did not exist as a pre-Christian Greek personal name, it ought to be translated as “λίθος” (stone), while “πέτρα” translates to “rock”.¹³⁵² “Οἰκοδομήσω” refers to the building that Jesus will undertake (cf. 1 Peter 2:5 and Ephesians 2:20). Thus Peter appears to be the foundational rock on which the church as a building is to be built.¹³⁵³ “Τὴν ἐκκλησίαν” refers to a regularly convened assembly which in the New Testament may refer to a congregation gathered for worship or a local Christian community or universal Church.¹³⁵⁴ The church denotes the small assembly in a private house (Roman 16:5; Philemon 2), the Christian congregation of particular towns and cities (1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1), the church universal (Eph. 1:22; 3:21).

Yet still the term ἐκκλησία, is a compounded use of ἐκ, *out of*, and καλεῖν, *to call*, or *summon*. The term was first used to denote an assembly of the citizens of a Greek community, summoned together, by a crier, for the transaction of business

¹³⁵¹ Ibid., footnote 2 in 354.

¹³⁵² Ibid., 358-359.

¹³⁵³ Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 357.

¹³⁵⁴ Zerwick, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, 52. See also definition of ἐκκλησία in Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 240-241.

pertaining to public welfare.¹³⁵⁵ “τὴν ἐκκλησίαν” was also used in the political arena to denote “the ‘duly summoned’ civic and political assembly of citizens in Greek cities which along with a council expressed the will of the assembled people.”¹³⁵⁶ It stood for political, social and cultural assembly which gathered to “reinforce and administer the status quo under Roman control.”¹³⁵⁷ When used in Matthew 16:18 we might want to define it in reference to 1 Peter 2: 5, 9 – “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation” and “a spiritual house”. In this case Roman 1:7 κλητοῖ ἁγίοι, “called to be holy ones/saints” might be a better rendering for the church as a house. Its use in the Septuagint referred to “the congregation of the people of Israel” translated from the Hebrew לְקָהָל. The idea connotes an assembly of free citizens who understood their legal rights and power.¹³⁵⁸ Thus in using the verb καλεῖν, it denotes that the assembly was legally called as compared to Acts 29:39: ἐν τῇ ἐννόμῳ ἐκκλησίᾳ, which adds to the idea of a group of people summoned for the purpose of deliberating in legal conclave.¹³⁵⁹ This is another example of hybridisation to offer a “counter society with its alternative commitment and practices.”¹³⁶⁰

If this reading is correct, then the pericope offers us what Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza envisions as a possible historical source reflecting a much more multifaceted early Christian situation fraught with tensions and not as a historically accurate record of God’s will in which Jesus instituted the church, ordained Peter and the other

¹³⁵⁵ Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 176.

¹³⁵⁶ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 335.

¹³⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁵⁸ Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 176.

¹³⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁶⁰ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 335.

disciples as the institution's authorised leadership.¹³⁶¹ According to Ulrich Luz, “μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν” is most likely not the language of Jesus but “a creation by a Greek-speaking church” which existed already alongside the Jewish synagogues.¹³⁶² Luz writes that verse 18 most likely comes from a time when it became important to the Christian community to look back to the time of the apostles as the foundation laying time for the Church.¹³⁶³ Because of its new-found meaning, the community was bound to face conflict and threat.

For “πύλαι ᾗδου” compare with Wisdom of Solomon 16:13 (gates of Hades), Job 38:17 (gates of death or gates of deep darkness) and Psalm 9:13, 14 (gates of death cf. gates of daughters of Zion). According to Bauer, *Hades* originally referred to (as a proper noun) the “name of god of the underworld”.¹³⁶⁴ In the Greek myth, *Hades* (a brother to Zeus) and also known as Pluto or “Zeus of the Underworld” presided over a subterranean realm that housed the dead.¹³⁶⁵ In the New Testament it refers to the *underworld* as the place of the dead (Acts 2:27, 32 cf. Psalm 15:10; Eccl. 9:10; Luke 16:23; Rev. 6:8; 20:14.) The *underworld* is accessible by gates which can be opened and have people conducted in and out safely. According to Rev. 1:18 the gates are locked. In Matthew the picture created is one of conflict where the church seems to be on the offensive arousing counter attack but the church remains a fortress.

According to Luz there is “no evidence in contemporary Judaism for the image of opening the kingdom of God”.¹³⁶⁶ It only appears in Matthew who frequently refers to “entering the kingdom of heaven”. The fact the New Testament

¹³⁶¹ Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 41-60, 68.

¹³⁶² Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 358.

¹³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 359.

¹³⁶⁴ Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 16-17.

¹³⁶⁵ Stephen L. Harris, *The New Testament: A Student's Introduction*, Fifth Edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006), 49-51.

¹³⁶⁶ Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 356-357.

writer at this point in verse 19 relies again on a borrowed idea renders the pericope hybrid. Like the magicians of antiquity and the son of Zeus the Church holds the κλεις τοῦ ἁδου/ἁιδου.¹³⁶⁷ It is entrusted with the responsibility of admitting those rescued from the power of the enemy.¹³⁶⁸ The notion of “τῆς βασιλείας” again relies on borrowed notion of kingly power in verses 27-28. Christians gave it its meaning to refer to the royal reign or kingdom of God. As an eschatological concept, it begun to appear in the prophets and elaborated in the apocalyptic passages such as Micah 4:7f; Psalm 102:19, 144: 11-13; Daniel 3:54; 4:3. In the first century Judaism Exodus 19:6 gave Israel the grounding as “kingdom of priests and holy nation”. Jesus also taught about the heavenly origin and the nature of the kingdom. Jesus shared the symbol βασιλεία (kingdom or empire) which evoked the expectation of the restoration of the Davidic reign over Israel and the demise of Roman colonialism. It also evoked an apocalyptic vision of a universal kingdom of cosmological dimensions. It is not clear from the text what it is that Peter is given authority over. It is also not clear whether the authority is to exclude or include people in the Christian community or whether it is to interpret and teaching what God’s will/law forbids or permits.¹³⁶⁹ What is clear though is that Peter is given the key so that “ὁ ἐὰν δήσης ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται δεδεμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς” and “ὁ ἐὰν λύσης ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται λελυμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.” It is debatable as to what is to be bound and loose. Peter is the man who is given the keys to unlock and lock not the church but heaven.¹³⁷⁰

¹³⁶⁷ Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 17.

¹³⁶⁸ Zerwick, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, 53.

¹³⁶⁹ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 336.

¹³⁷⁰ Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 357.

It is my contention that Peter's confession must be understood in light of his counsel and consequent rebuke from Jesus. The meaning of this text must be interpreted in the context of Jesus' rebuke and the use of the term σκάνδαλον. Jesus declaration to Peter in Matthew 16:13-28 must be understood in light of Matthean use of Σκάνδαλον (Matthew 16:23; 18:7), Σκάνδαλίση (Matthew 18:6), and Σκάνδαλίζει (Matthew 18:8). Matthew heightens the enormity of “ὕπαγε ὀπίσω μου σατανᾶ σκάνδαλον ἐστὶ ἐμοῦ” in verse 23 with Peter's denial of Jesus in Matthew 26:69-75. When Peter heard of Jesus' anticipated suffering in verses 20-21, he took Jesus aside saying “Ἰλεώς σοι, κύριε” i.e. “God forbid, Lord!” In response Jesus accused him of scandalising Jesus i.e. Peter was a “stumbling block”. The contrast with 16:16 is stark. Peter takes the role of “σατανᾶ” (Satan), whose intention is to distract Jesus from accomplishing God's will. Like the Pharisees and Sadducees at the beginning of the chapter, Peter “ὅτι οὐ φρονεῖς τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀλλὰ τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων” i.e. he has set his mind not on the things of God but on the things of *men* (human beings).

Issues of Interpretation:

The first issue that is clear from the pericope considered above is that of neutrality. Matthew is quite clear about his purpose in editing, redacting and authoring the pericope. He selectively chose what to include in his writing. He ignores and omits to a large extent the social and political structures as well as the colonial experiences of his time. He lifts his readers to the level of the ethereal and surreal from which the new “nation”/”kingdom”/”community” operates while he maintains silence on the issues of life, culture, politics and society. This opens the possibility of historical critical hermeneutics to conclude that reading of the texts has to be context

specific. Even though the New Testament writings were mainly written for religious purposes¹³⁷¹ it is not possible to divorce them from their socio-political as well as cultural milieu. As Sugirtharajah observes, Jesus undertook his work and ministry at a time when Galilee was under imperial occupation.¹³⁷² The influence of *Pax Romana*, political subjugation of people by Rome, Graeco-Roman social and cultural influences, and territorial colonisation must have had tremendous impact on Jesus' movement and subsequent Christian community.

Formerly colonised communities need to make sense of the New Testament silence on these issues since such issues must have affected the poor and the disadvantaged of colonial society in antiquity more than the writers of the New Testament texts. Hermeneuts must be willing to probe further why it is that Jesus who did not spare local profiteers and those with vested interests (who openly colluded with the empire) desisted from getting into direct confrontation or resistance against the colonial power. If the New Testament writings, as Fiorenza articulates, are to be understood not as “abstract, timeless theological ideas or norms” but as “faith responses to concrete historical situations”,¹³⁷³ then African hermeneuts should not shy from reconstructing early Christian origin and the impact colonialism had on the group as it struggled with its unique existence. This will not only demand moving beyond the New Testament writings as we know them but also imaginative engagement with the Canon itself.

The pericope likewise suppresses the voices of “the people of the land” and demonises the Pharisees and the Sadducees while it accords special status to Peter and the disciples. Luz has convincingly argued that the pericope was a harking back to the

¹³⁷¹ Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament*, 2-16; Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 16.

¹³⁷² Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 86.

¹³⁷³ Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 33.

time of the apostles when the Christian community was seeking a “unitary vision” of the gospel. In other words, the work of a unifying vision that disregarded “the people of the land” and condemned Jewish leadership was the work of interpreters. The silence or suppression of certain voices in the New Testament opens the possibility of interpreting biblical texts from the position of power, strength and might such as we witnessed in colonial Kenya even though Peter’s position is clearly that one of weakness. Mosala aptly concludes that the

real reason the dominant groups in the society are able to claim to be grounded in the best tradition of Christianity and at the same time to be part of the structures and societal process that alienate and impoverish others is that that accommodation happened in the formation of the biblical texts themselves.¹³⁷⁴

Behind the Matthean text in consideration there is a reality of which the text does not speak about.¹³⁷⁵

The third issue can be understood in light of verse 17 - a commission of Peter as representative of the Church.¹³⁷⁶ In this case, the pericope is projected as a document with a missional thrust in which modern missionary enterprises could build on. In essence, the Bible provides “critical language to judge other people’s cultures and texts.”¹³⁷⁷ However, the missionary motif to which the modern missionary ascribes to was not part of Jesus’ language in the pericope, if we take Luz’s claim seriously that Matthew 16:17 was authored by Matthew himself and that the rest of Peter’s confession was the work of Christians who desired a complete break from Judaism in order to build a unique community with a unitary vision. Matthew 16: 18-19 was not written with Africans or other indigenous people in mind neither was it written for the triumphalistic nineteenth century missionaries.

¹³⁷⁴ Mosala, “Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa”, 91.

¹³⁷⁵ Fiorenza argues that the focus behind the text is necessary because biblical texts which are heavily androcentric, contains “silences” which offer clues to the egalitarian reality of the early Christian movement. Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 30-36.

¹³⁷⁶ Donald A. Hagne, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 204-207.

¹³⁷⁷ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, 97.

The fourth issue is that of purity. As this research has shown, one of the colonial church's works was to guard the Christian message and the Bible from being tarnished by indigenous texts (in this case oral literature and culture.) The modern exegete faces the same parameters set to safeguard against such impurities. The Bible is seen as containing a single, pure and authentic truth. Jesus is seen as having left a blueprint for the Christian Church from which every exegete or hermeneut must seek out the "orthodox", "apostolic" truth and tradition from which the "true church" is founded. Nonetheless, there is no single way of conceptualising early Christian origins. There is no single approach or explanation that can adequately grasp the complexity of the New Testament writings. The work of the pericope discussed above shows that such an ideological construct of the early Christian beginnings is an ideal one rather than a real one. Matthew allowed various voices in the pericope to hybridise and even syncretise ideas and idioms of the emerging Christian community with those of "pagan" Rome and of Judaism.

To acknowledge this process is to accept that there was a human process involved in the rereading of the Old Testament, Greek and Roman ideas and idioms and then applying them to Jesus. This does not mean that there is any fraud or deception involved but it points to what Luke Timothy Johnson has stated as the involvement of "the human impulse to interpret transforming experiences in the light of the available symbols."¹³⁷⁸ In addition, scholars as we have seen consider the pericope to be a direct product of a "counter society" that sought to distance itself from the existing Judaism of Palestine and of the Diaspora.

It is my contention that when the trained hermeneuts commit themselves to read the Bible critically with the ordinary readers, such an engagement offers the

¹³⁷⁸ Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament*, 3.

ordinary readers the opportunity to interrogate texts and interpretations. As they engage the text together, both the scholarly reader and the ordinary reader, raise new questions concerning the historical and literary contexts of biblical texts, expanding “the moral imagination of the interpretive process.”¹³⁷⁹ The expansion of moral imagination includes analysis of how cultural production, collective memory and literary imagination of communities in the Bible may have been shaped by the socio-political domination of successive empires.¹³⁸⁰

Yet still, the socially engaged scholar must be willing to learn from the poor and marginalised for while they may not possess academic credentials, they have knowledge and experiences that scholars do not possess.

8.4.2 A Commitment to Read from the Experienced Reality of Societal Margins

Gerald West proposes that biblical scholars need to recast their engagement with the text where the interest should be solidly grounded on the “effects of communication” rather than “mechanics” that standardise or prescribe readings that do not fit the specific circumstances of the contemporary reader.¹³⁸¹ This requires a commitment to read the Bible from the experienced reality of the community of struggle.¹³⁸² It is a commitment to include “the interpretative perspectives of the societal margins”.¹³⁸³ These perspectives include ordinary readers’ “language, categories of concepts, needs, questions, interests and resources”.¹³⁸⁴

¹³⁷⁹ Kwok Pui-Lan, “Making the Connections: Postcolonial Studies and Feminist Biblical Interpretation” in R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 46.

¹³⁸⁰ The empires include Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome.

¹³⁸¹ West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading*, 61.

¹³⁸² *Ibid.*, 68-69.

¹³⁸³ Blount, *Cultural Interpretation*, 3.

¹³⁸⁴ West, *The Academy of the Poor*, 5.

One point that this research has shown beyond any shadow of doubt is that colonial Christianity at all levels of its operation and the Bible reading thereof were ideologically distorted and principally served the status quo.¹³⁸⁵ This was contrary to the colonial church's claim to the presentation of the Christian Gospel and the Bible to the Africans as an innocent, noble and transparent response to Christ's call for the Great Commission. Nonetheless, to accept the commitment to reading the Bible from the experienced reality of societal margins requires an acknowledgement of the general demise of the ideology of objectivity. It requires some form of conversion from claims of impartiality, objectivity, neutrality, and value-free reading of biblical texts.¹³⁸⁶ The commitment challenges assumptions that there can be an objective observer and an objective object to which scientific investigation is used.¹³⁸⁷

Such a commitment is in part represented in liberation, black theology and postcolonial criticism, which for the last several decades have sought for an "epistemological break"; a commitment to the poor; and "accountability to and solidarity with the conquered living and dead."¹³⁸⁸ Rather than be preoccupied with questions of religiosity, canonical status, historicity and purpose of biblical texts, liberation and black theology as well as postcolonial criticism have been committed to the task of serving the cause of liberation.¹³⁸⁹ In this case, hermeneutics must take sides, particularly accepting the "preferential option for the poor".¹³⁹⁰ Liberation and

¹³⁸⁵ Juan Luis Segundo makes the same case about Christian theology in Latin America see his book *Signs of the Times: Theological Reflections*, tr. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993).

¹³⁸⁶ *The Academy of the Poor*, 16.

¹³⁸⁷ West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading*, 25.

¹³⁸⁸ West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading*, 90; See also James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, New Rev. ed. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997); Dwight N. Hopkins, ed., *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James H. Cone's Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1999); Juan Luis Segundo *Signs of the Times: Theological Reflections*, tr. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993) and *Faith and Ideologies* (New York: Orbis Books, 1984).

¹³⁸⁹ Mosala, "The Implications of the Text of Esther", 137.

¹³⁹⁰ The term "preferential option for the poor" originated from liberation theology first developed in Latin America. This option is based on the biblical texts in both Old and New Testament. In the Old

black theology as well as postcolonial criticism have invited “socially engaged scholars” (to use Gerald West’s term) to become engaged in the perspective of the poor and oppressed in relationship to justice.¹³⁹¹ Taking sides with the poor means going beyond the traditional notion of justice as, “give to each what is due.” Biblical hermeneutics should go beyond the quest for determining what is “due.”

If we first consider the realities of injustices (which come in form of colonialism, sexism, ethnicity, racism, economic oppression, political repression among others), then our starting point will no longer be giving to each what is due but to correct injustices. What is “due” is not due in the abstract but in the concrete. If justice begins with the correction of injustices, then the most important tools for understanding justice will be the stories of injustice as experienced by the victims of injustice. Those who bear the blunt forces of injustices are usually the societal margins. In this case justice takes a narrative form because it is the stories of injustices as experienced by the victims that count. However, liberation hermeneutics in its option for the poor does not go far enough. This is because it subordinates the categories and contributions of the poor’s experience to the terms of the intellectuals trained in social sciences.¹³⁹² According to liberation hermeneutics, the role of the biblical scholar is to empathise and be in solidarity with the poor while his or her critical function of seeking ideological hegemony remains supreme. The critical function, aims at developing forms of critical consciousness that awaken the poor and marginalised while at the same time helping to break the poor’s culture of silence and complacency.

Testament God hears the cry of the poor; God will protect poor people even when no one else would protect them; God defends the poor against the rich. In the New Testament, Jesus identifies with all victims of marginalization, poverty and injustice (cf. Philippians 2:4-11 and Luke 4:18-21).

¹³⁹¹ Karen Lebacqz, “Implications for a Theory of Justice” in Wayne G. Boulton, Thomas D. Kennedy, and Allen Verhey, eds., *From Christ to the World: Introductory Reading in Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 254-260.

¹³⁹² West, *Academy of the Poor*, 20.

I have shown elsewhere in this dissertation that the colonised, for example, were not as complacent as it may appear.¹³⁹³ Following Homi Bhabha I have argued that even such simple acts as mimicry was not an act of straightforward homage to colonialism but a way of eluding control.¹³⁹⁴ In order to forebear their despair and work through their anxieties and alienations towards life the colonised developed what Bhabha refers to as “culture of survival” while living “in-between cultural traditions and revealing hybrid forms of life and art that do not have a prior existence within the discrete world of any single culture or language”.¹³⁹⁵ In this state the colonised claimed a right to narrate, right to “difference in equality”. Thus, though unacknowledged or unheralded or ignored, they became part of the dialogue. They would encounter themselves in “a double movement...once a stranger, and then as a friend.”¹³⁹⁶ Due to the ambivalences, anxieties and contradictions as well as the hybrid nature of colonial discourses, colonial situation offered an “in-between” space which provided the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood, innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation as well as the possibility of negotiations.¹³⁹⁷ Simply put, the poor and the marginalised enter the interstices created, develop their own language of survival and the terms of any negotiation are always contested.

An example of a covert but active language of resistance to a seemingly silent and complacent poor was captured by C.M.S. missionary Rev. H. D Hooper several decades ago. Hooper quoted from a song sung in vernacular by rickshaw boys¹³⁹⁸ to enliven their European passengers who were clueless to the content of the song. The

¹³⁹³ See mainly chapters three, four, five, six and seven.

¹³⁹⁴ See Bhabha’s chapter 4, “Of Mimicry and Man” in *Location of Culture*, 121-131.

¹³⁹⁵ *Location of Culture*, xiii.

¹³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, xxv.

¹³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹³⁹⁸ Rickshaw, according to Hooper, was a common means of locomotion in Nairobi where Africans offered themselves for hire.

song quoted below bore pungent references to the Europeans and the colonial government:

Great and wise and wonderful is the European,
He came into our land with his wisdom and his might
He made wars cease.
He causes our fields to bring forth plenty
And our flocks to increase.
He gives us great riches, and then –
He takes them all away again in taxes.
Great and wise and wonderful is the European.¹³⁹⁹

The time frame within which this song was popular among Africans was during the already discussed period when Africans were experiencing great awakening to racial and social barriers that were handicapping and proving an obstacle to African advancement. The song is a good example showing that there is usually no silence to break or a language to create when it comes to engaging the poor and marginalised.

8.4.3 Commitment to read the Bible Communally with Each Other

Kwok Pui-Lan contends that biblical interpretation, for those living in the margins,¹⁴⁰⁰ is not just a religious matter but has significant social and political ramifications.¹⁴⁰¹ This is because there is no area of the lives of those in the margins that is not affected by the way society is organised and by the whole operation and mechanism of power. Pui-Lan's claim brings me to my last point of consideration. There must be a commitment to read the Bible communally "with" each other where power relations are acknowledged and equalised as far as it is possible. Speaking "with" the common or ordinary reader of the Bible should be differentiated from the liberation theologians' efforts to act as creators of "critical consciousness" in order to

¹³⁹⁹ Rev. H. D. Hooper, "The Emergence of a distinctive community", Hooper Papers: Letters to H. D. Hooper in Kenya 1916-1925 (CMS/G/3/P/Acc./85/F/4, University of Birmingham), 33.

¹⁴⁰⁰ The use of the term "margin" follows Sugirtharajah's notion of margin as a centre for critical reflection and clarification rather than a site opposed to the centre or a state of peripherality. R. S. Sugirtharajah ed., *Voices from the Margin*, 2.

¹⁴⁰¹ Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel, eds. *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside* (Maryknoll, New York, 2003), 276.

help to “break ‘the culture of silence’ created by the accommodation of the poor and marginalized to the logic of domination.”¹⁴⁰²

One thing that is for sure in the kind of decolonisation of biblical hermeneutics envisioned here is to make an effort in “problematizing” the notion that as scholars we can ‘listen to’ or ‘speak for’/‘speak on behalf of’ the poor and marginalised. As biblical scholars we need to pay attention to what Gerald West has articulately referred to as potential problems where scholars “either romanticize and idealize the contribution of the poor and marginalized or they minimize and rationalize the contributions of these communities and sectors.”¹⁴⁰³ In the first instance to assume that we can ‘listen to’ presupposes one whose voice speaks as a “wholly self-knowing subject free from ideology”.¹⁴⁰⁴ On the other hand, ‘speaking for’ denies the subject status of the poor and marginalised. The latter argument as West observes is dangerously seductive because when the intellectual takes the position of “the absent nonrepresenter” his/her role in “selectively constructing the subjectivity of the Other in the process of re-presenting them is hidden.”¹⁴⁰⁵ Decolonisation has to move beyond “speaking for” to “positionality as participating subjects” and enter into a “speaking with”.¹⁴⁰⁶

As this research has shown, ordinary people are equal to the challenges that confront them. Through the study of the Agĩkũyũ and their colonial encounter with the Bible, I have been able to show that the meaning of the text is produced by mutual interaction between the reader and the text. In addition, biblical interpretation is thoroughly social and a product of the emotional, the imaginative and the intellectual

¹⁴⁰² West, *The Academy of the Poor*, 21.

¹⁴⁰³ Gerald West “Local is Lekker, but Ubuntu is Best: Indigenous Reading Resources from a South African Perspective”, in R.S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Vernacular Hermeneutics: The Bible and Postcolonialism*, 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 41.

¹⁴⁰⁴ West, “Local is Lekker, but Ubuntu is Best”, 41.

¹⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 41.

¹⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

activity of a community. Therefore, reading with the marginalised should always aim at bringing people together, to discuss, propose and receive directions.¹⁴⁰⁷ They should be able to speak, express themselves freely, and to put forth new ideas. Such an act as Fanon put forward, is liturgical.¹⁴⁰⁸ It is a privileged occasion given to people to listen and to speak. The “brain increases in its participation and the eye discovers a landscape more and more in keeping with human dignity”.¹⁴⁰⁹ In the end hermeneutics raises the level of thought. It opens people’s mind as well as awakening them.

A reading with the ordinary readers also acknowledges that readers because of their particular social, cultural and religious location perceive specific meanings in the text. The articulation of the particular and the contingent historical and social reality of the readers problematise further the contested terrains in biblical hermeneutics. It also expands our imagination and creativity as we come to terms with out interconnected subjectivities whether as an ordinary reader or as an intellectual. This is why I want to propose the metaphor *Sokoni*¹⁴¹⁰ as the starting point in which both the “ordinary” readers and socially engaged scholars can engage the Bible through the language of the African theatre and storytelling as hermeneutical tools.

8.4.3a At the market place: Sokoni

There is great value in reconstructing Kenyan reality that defines the individual as meaningful only in relation to others. This realisation that human existence is incomplete without relationships ought to guide biblical interpretation in the Kenyan context. In my view, then, *Sokoni* provides the most appropriate space within which participation in biblical hermeneutics can take place. *Sokoni* is not

¹⁴⁰⁷ See Frantz Fanon theory of education in “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness”, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 119-165.

¹⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.157.

¹⁴¹⁰ This is the Kiswahili word, which literally means “at the marketplace.”

ideological but is a real place; it is not a building but a place full of people drawn together to participate in the life of the community. In Kenya, every village has its own *Soko* (Market.) *Sokoni* is a common ground where the community meets to exchanges goods through trade and as well as sharing information. Here, the old and the young meet, the seller and the buyer meet. Here, life abounds and people are happy not because of what they have but because of what they give and receive as a community. It is the lifeline of the community.

At the Kenyan *Soko* women and men have their personhood established because they control their own economic resources and claim their status in the community. These people are the food growers, processors and distributors. At *Sokoni*, people come to celebrate life and resources. It is at *Sokoni* where young people go to hang out with their friends. Lovers meet here. The administrators as well as the politicians come to meet their constituents at the marketplace. *Sokoni* is unlike the church, which is exclusively the space for Christians. At the marketplace capitalists, thieves, carjackers, Christians, men, women and children rub shoulders. At the marketplace, people share news, gossips, and hopes. It is at the marketplaces that the Christians, Muslims as well as Traditionalists compete to proselytise the market goers. At *Sokoni*, people come to lament, to find consolation, meaning, and to find fulfilment of their existence.

I am proposing that the model of the traditional Kenyan market should inform the attempt for hermeneutics with the poor. The marketplace provides space within which participation is possible. It symbolises the totality of community life and space. It is the place of dialogue with the past and future where new ideas are born. People come from different locations and through interaction with each other build relationships. It is the arena through which theoretical discourse becomes historical

events, which touches people's hearts and transforms their understanding of the world. It is where the righteous and unholy meet. They find consolation, meaning and fulfilment. It is a real event in the real lives of people called into critical dialogue with one another.

8.4.3b The language of the African theatre

The African theatre is another powerful tool that can be employed in reading communally with the poor and marginalised. Theatre in the African village is not a modern phenomenon as wa Thiong'o has adequately shown. Drama has its origin in human struggles against nature and against fellow humans.¹⁴¹¹ In Kenya it is as old as the Kenyan community. Through rites and ceremonies to bless the tools used for cultivation and planting, ceremonies to celebrate life and victories as well as initiation rituals, Kenyans re-enacted their own experiences of life and nature. wa Thiong'o asserts that, "the real language of the African theatre is to be found in the struggles of the oppressed, for it is out of those struggles that a new Africa is being born."¹⁴¹² A good example is the Gĩkũyũ revolutionary *Ituĩka* cultural festival¹⁴¹³ enacted every

¹⁴¹¹ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, 36.

¹⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁴¹³ *Ituĩka* was first recorded by Routledge as a secret society connected with snake worship – it was a ceremony only discussed by elders of the same age – younger grade would not be allowed into the knowledge of this ceremony. Hopley, who refuted Routledge's association of the ceremony with snake worship, considered the ceremony as a final initiation in which only the qualified elders were allowed to attend. There is disagreement on the period when the last *Ituĩka* was held. Hopley suggests the end of the great famine of 1898-9 while Routledge records 2nd September 1903 as the date when the last ceremony was held. According to Hopley, this ceremony took place when all members of the current *rika* were circumcised. The decision as to the time or date of the ceremony, the senior elders (*Athuri a Kياما*) would make the final decision. This council consisted of eight senior most elders. The principal elder of each village was expected to attend. It was a kind of handing over ceremony in which the senior elders instructed their juniors in the customs of the community. The ceremony was held every twenty-five years to mark the handing over of power from one generation to another. The ceremony was celebrated through feasting, dancing, and singing over a period of six months. This ceremony was always re-enacted in a dramatic procession. According to Kenyatta, the last known attempt of the ceremony and a change of generation was set to take place in 1925 but with the initial preparation, the *Ituĩka* ceremonial dances and songs were declared illegal and seditious by the Colonial Government. W. Scoresby Routledge and Katherine Routledge, *With a prehistoric people: the Akikũyu of British East Africa: being some account of the method of life and mode of thought found existent amongst a nation on its first contact with European civilisation* (London: Edward Arnold, 1910), 237-238; C. W. Hopley, *Bantu Beliefs and Magic: With Particular Reference to the Kikuyu and Akamba Tribes of Kenya Colony; Together with some Reflections on East Africa After War* (London: H. F. & G.

twenty-five years both as a ceremony transferring power from one generation to the other and as a communal renewal of their commitment to a struggle against tyrants as their ancestors the *Iregi*¹⁴¹⁴ generation had done.

In theatre, as wa Thiong'o asserts, we settle the question of language, audience and show the unity and continuity of the struggle.¹⁴¹⁵ This is because people make theatre. The people's life is the very essence of the African theatre. Through the theatre, we capture the African soul through dances and songs as integral part of the conversation. Communicating the Bible through the African theatre reconnects people with that tradition of resistance. The theatre becomes a continuation of the Christian conversation and action. The study of the Agĩkũyũ's encounter with the Bible has shown that the community was able to keep alive their culture and history through a revolutionary culture of courage and patriotic heroism through theatre. Most importantly, despite the sustained colonial efforts to reconfigure the Africans through biblical language, the poor and marginalised Africans were able to incorporate the language of the African theatre with their new experiences as Christians. They did not only use the African language of theatre as a means of communication but also as a carrier of their culture and history.¹⁴¹⁶ The African theatre served them as "the collective memory bank" of their experience in history and as an important agent in

Wetherby, 1922), 77ff; Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1938), 186-230; See also a letter by Silas N. Karimu sent to Rev. H. D. Hooper and dated November 22nd, 1927 in Unofficial Papers/CMS/Acc./85/F/5 (part), The Special Collection, University of Birmingham.

¹⁴¹⁴ Iregi was a generation of revolutionary rebels who overthrew the corrupt dictatorial regime of Gĩkũyũ. They then established a ruling council of elders and the procedure of handing over power, an event commemorated in the *Itũika* festival of music, dance, poetry and theatre. Kenyatta says that in order to prevent any tendency of return to despotism, the change and election of new government was set out on a rotational system of generations i.e. Mwangi and Maina/Irũngũ. Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya*, 186-230.

¹⁴¹⁵ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, 44.

¹⁴¹⁶ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, 13.

forming collective and individual image of the self.¹⁴¹⁷ Therefore, there is a great need for biblical studies to reconnect with the broken roots of the African theatre.

8.4.3c Story Telling and Pedagogy

In addition, reading out biblical texts could easily become a new version of the traditional art of storytelling. After receiving the Bible message, the people should have the capacity to react and interpret it. One of the best ways of doing this is through retelling in their own words what they have heard and experienced. This is enhanced when they do it in a group setting so that they can exchange and discuss their experiences. Biblical hermeneutics through storytelling should focus on human freedom as the capacity to surpass the given and look at things as if they could be otherwise. When the poor and the marginalised in Kenya read the biblical texts, they read them as if they provide simple details of actual historical events. But as I have argued before, the socially engaged biblical scholars must be willing to reconstruct the socio-historical origins of the Christian movement in antiquity. The goal of such a reconstruction should not only bring out the pedagogical value of biblical message(s), but also it should make the hermeneutical connection between the experience of the antiquity struggling people's daily life and the experience of the poor and the marginalised of our time. When such stories are told, they should aim at keeping the community together and ensure their survival. The goal of such a notion is to help Christians to see themselves becoming different from what they have been. Stories told in light of the Christian gospel ought to instil beliefs that they, as the people of God, have the capacity to accomplish what they choose to do.

This relates to the African human experience and structures, which yield an integrated understanding of the value of life. That which contains the essence of life

¹⁴¹⁷ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, 15.

comprehends the totality of human experience. It is in the experience that we live in the moral universe as beings nurtured by the web of life-giving and life-sustaining relationships. These relationships nourished through family and extended families in order to guarantee social and cultural continuity. Stories ought to be the basis of telling the way we feel about the world, society, children, families, what enrages us, and what makes us happy and how we experience God. Through storytelling, we can make connections between faith and action. Stories challenge; they help rediscover and rename the truth that has been hidden or revealed.

CHAPTER 9: GENERAL CONCLUSION

This study has been able to identify the interconnection and correlation of colonial reading(s) of the Bible and interpretation(s) in colonial Kenya to the discourses on human subject, culture and race. A postcolonial analysis reveals that what colonial discourses commonly circulated about Africans was not “truth” but representations. The colonial Church in the act of representing colonial subjects almost always stood as the objective and neutral arbitrator. The colonial church saw itself as divinely entrusted with the “deposit of truth” (i.e. the Bible) to propagate and interpret God’s law. The Bible stood as a stable and safe text containing absolutes whose consequent assumption was a particular, stable, coherent, and normative way of interpreting the Bible. Colonial Bible reading and interpretation, aimed at establishing first the universality of God’s law. Through simplistic, partial and highly selective use of biblical texts, the texts would be read as though they were written with the Africans in mind. However, the hermeneut was not to enter into dialogue with the African pagan but instead impose the law of God. Colonial hermeneutics convinced that God desired for the cultural and spiritual conversion of the Africans, it intended to create a specific social environment in terms of morality, aesthetic, behaviour, and faith.

Nonetheless, a postcolonial perspective also shows that colonial discourses remained more ambivalent than resolute in aims. They were largely contradictory and a careful analysis of the “reality” they pretended to represent reveals instability and anxieties. Though biblical reading and interpretation succeeded in causing displacement and disjunctions to the colonial subjects, colonial hermeneutics could not replicate the perfect law of God. Through language, space and temporality hermeneuts encountered the colonial “other” who could not be fixed within a stable

discourse of colonialism. Due to the ambivalences, anxieties and contradictions as well as the hybrid nature of colonial discourses, colonial situation offered an “in-between” space which provided the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood, innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation as well as the possibility of negotiations. Psychology, psychoanalysis, and social anthropology opened further the interrogatory interstices between the acts of representation and the presence of the colonised community where hermeneutics, cultural values, and experiences were negotiated and hybridised.

Further, a postcolonial analysis of the act of Bible translation confirms my thesis that colonialism was never able to fix the African identities and representations into stable discourses due to its ambivalence and contradictions. This becomes apparent if we accept translation as an act of interpretation. Even though colonial translators claimed fidelity to the original-source text as the hall mark that authenticated their translation of the Gikūyū New Testament, the untranslatability of some of the biblical concepts into Gikūyū, adaptation and assimilation of native terms and concepts such as *Ngai* among others, attested otherwise. Translation also offered Africans a key entry into the new order and opened the possibility of subversion. Evidence has been offered to show that political imagination and creativity informed Africans’ translations of scriptural texts, such as that of Kagia and Kenyatta. Africans used their imaginations to expose and challenge any claim to the innocence of the translated text.

The Africans’ translations and the work of some missionaries such as Ludwig Krapf who did not operate within the colonial missionary-translator mindset, points to the possibility of alternative translations of biblical texts that would be more empowering against missionaries’ humiliating and disparaging translations. In

addition, imagination and innovation took centre stage once the Africans had the Bible translated in a language that they clearly understood. It offered them the ability to utilise the resources they had as ordinary readers and creating the opportunity for a common sense hermeneutics.

The common sense hermeneutics that emerged encapsulate many of the qualities of postcolonial theory. In the first place it challenged the colonial position that only tutored or civilised mind could conceptually read and engage in meaningful hermeneutics. It shows that ordinary readers can also engage in meaningful and liberating hermeneutics. By invoking complex cultural codes through proverbs, *marebeta* and homilies, Africans represented in this study as ordinary readers were able to articulate their vision, the contradictions and ambivalence of the colonial situation. Besides using ordinary cultural tools, they employed allusion as a valid method of interpretations to create for themselves political messages, economic terms and moral requirements in order to overcome the challenges the community faced. Hybridity, which missionaries dismissed as syncreticism, also became a distinctive mark of the evolving common sense hermeneutics. For example, *Mũiguithania* in particular stood on the contested space between the colonial interpretation of orthodox gnosis, and the African traditional responses and resistance to colonial epistemology. *Mũiguithania*'s hermeneutics infused both traditional and western elements. Through this newsletter, the Agĩkũyũ nationalism claimed control of the spiritual and inner domain of culture with the ultimate goal of regain control of the physical space. In addition to allusion and hybridity, the dissenting Agĩkũyũ employed the language of African theatre to create alternative hermeneutical notion of liberty, freedom and human dignity. Their common sense hermeneutics helped them regain their belief in themselves. It also gave voice to the people's collective identity and history.

However, the study has also shown that the inability for the common sense hermeneutics to move beyond the essentials of the Gīkūyū nationalism exposed it to nativism. The Gīkūyū nationalism or nationalistic consciousness led to frozen rigidity which pushed out the white colonialists only to replace them with African elites who replicated the old colonial order. This example serves as a warning to any provincial reading of the Bible that ends up promoting nativism. Nonetheless, beyond this provincialism, we witness African Christians who were bold enough to raise sharp contextual questions and commitments as their point of entry to salvation history as experienced in the encounter with the gospel.

In the end, this study has shown that the critical principle of interpretation lies not in the Bible itself, but in the community of readers willing to cultivate dialogical imagination for their own liberation. In this case, rather than seeing the encounter with the Bible as a one way encounter where the Bible acts as stable and fixed text whose truth is self-evident, this principle reverse this encounter. The encounter with the text also reveals that such an encounter does not happen in a vacuum. Instead, it involves active participation in the historical process of transformation from within a particular social location. The Africans met with the Bible within distinctive reality, religious-cultural and socio-political experiences. These experiences generated particular questions which influenced their hermeneutics. However, when control and surveillance persist, such hermeneutics betrays ambiguous and varied expression.

The postcolonial story continues with the ordinary readers negotiating, modifying, relativising and even resisting the Bible. The way ahead remains open to possibilities particularly if we are willing to read the Bible with the ordinary readers in order to re-member what colonialism has dismembered. This is why I have proposed an African hermeneutic theory that accepts both scholarly readers and the

ordinary readers with respect to biblical interpretation as involved in the act of reading constituting a community of readers within their particular sociocultural milieu. It calls the socially engaged scholars to commit to read the Bible from the experienced reality of societal margins; read communally with each other; and to read critically. The metaphor *Sokoni* (at the marketplace) is proposed as the starting point in which both the “ordinary” readers and socially engaged scholars can engage the Bible through the language of the African theatre and storytelling as hermeneutical tools.

APPENDIX I

Lamentation 5:1¹⁴¹⁸

Ni Twambe Tukaere Ngai Atuhotithie:

Ngai ririkana maundu maria
mothe matucothereirie, rora
wone
irumi iria turarumwo nacio.
Wone ati igai riitu rihetwo
ageni,
ona nyumba ciitu, itwitwo cia
nduriri ingi.

Tutwikite ngoria ta tukwireirwo
ni maithe maitu, Atuciari
mahana
ta makwireirwo ni arume ao,
Mae maitu tuguraga na mbeca,
nacio ngu ciitui nikwendaerio
twendagirio.

Area matumiritetie
matwirigiceirie
ningo, rora wone ndungata
nicio
nene kuri ithwi, twonoga
irio ciitu na thena; gekeno kia
ngoro ni kihuku, na mathako
maitu matwikite kirero.

Ngai witu wee uikaraga mindi
na mindi; Geikaro geaku kia
riri
ni kia agu na agu;
Ukuriganirwo
ni ithwi hingo ciothe niki, na
ugaturekia matuku maiga
ugwo?
Twerekere twikinyire nawe,
utwike mutirima witu.

Let us first cry unto God to enable us:
Lamentations 5:1

O God, remember all the things
which we face; look and see the
insults with which we are
insulted. See how that our
inheritance is given to other
people.

We have become orphans as
though our fathers were dead.
Our mothers are as though
bereaved of their men. We buy
our water with money, and our
firewood is sold to us.

Those that pursue us are about
our necks; look and see how
that servants are greater than
us; we obtain our food with
difficulty, the joy of our hearts
has become barren, and our
games have turned to
mourning.

Our God, you who abide
forever; your throne is for
generation to generation, why
do you always forget us and
abandon us for so long? Turn to
us that we may walk with you,
you being our staff.

¹⁴¹⁸ The fact that the word used for
Lamentation is a Swahili one - Maomboleo
5:1, indicates that this was not available in
Kikuyu but Swahili. See *Ni Twambe Tukaere
Ngai Atuhotithie*, "Muigwithania wa Andu na
Bururi wa Gikuyu" August 1928, Vol. 1, no. 4
pg 4.

APPENDIX II

“Maombi ya Kumuomba Kiongozi chetu Bwana Harry Thuku na Wazee Watuongozae pamoja Nae” (Prayer for our Leader Harry Thuku together with other Leading Elders)

“Bwana Harry Thuku...na wazee wakwe wametuliwa ni Mwenyenzi M’ngu wetu kuwa viongozi vyetu kwa mambo ya sasa ya utumwa ambao hatukuwa nao zamani ya Wazungu hawajaja katika inti hii yetu ya East Africa. Tena Kumbukeni ya kwamba Mwenyenzi M’ngu aliyewatoa wana wa Israeli katika nyumba ya utumwa wa m’taume Farao, hakusafiri walla hatasafiri tungali nae hatta sasa nae ndie tuombae tena ndie M’ngu wetu, tena twaamini kama mbele za Mwenyenzi M’ngu wetu hakuna tafauti ya weupe walla ya weusi, wana-Adamu wote ni sawa-bi-sawa mbele zakwe Jehova Mwenyenzi M’ngu wetu aliye hai.

Tena kumbukeni ya kwamba Goliathu hakuweza kumudhuru Daudi alipokuwa motto Daudi, walla alipokuwa mkubwa Daudi pia Saulo hakuweza kumdhuru, maana Daudi alikuwa mteule wa Jehova Mwenyenzi M’ngu wetu. Tena Kumbukeni yakwamba Wazungu na swiswi pamoja hatuoni haya kumuomba M’faame wetu George, na vivyo hivyo msione haya kumuomba kiongozi chetu na walio tini yakwe. Someni katika vyo hivi vitakavyotajwa hapa tini milango yakwe na vifungo vyakwe:- Waefeso 6:18-19; Wafilipi 4: 6-7; Wakolosai 4:2-3; Jakubu 5:16-17; Waefeso 5:17-18.”

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