

Joseph W. Kamenju

**TRANSFORMATION OF KIKUYU TRADITIONAL
ARCHITECTURE**

Case study of homesteads in lower Mukurwe-ini, Nyeri, Kenya

*Dedicated to the living memory of
Biriri, wa Nyogoro na Nyagukia*

Kanya gatune ni mwamukaniro
Kikuyu saying

We shall not cease from exploration. And the end of all
our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know
the place for the first time.

T. S. Eliot

It's a poor sort of memory that only works backward.
Lewis Carroll

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¹ In Kikuyuland and I believe in the rest of the country, in the quiet dead of the night at around 2 am a plane is clearly heard crossing the skies and folk still yet up at that hour say to each other, “its time to go to sleep. That is the milk deliverly plane bound for Cairo.” The second and final milk deliverly plane to Cairo passes at around 3 am when only witches, wizards and architecture students are up.

ABSTRACT

Looking at the present through the perspective of the past is not a new idea. The purpose of history is always to point at the utility of accumulated knowledge over time and our task in the present is to use that knowledge in a creative way. As Rumi points out,

This world and yonder world are incessantly giving birth:
every cause is a mother, its effect the child.

When the effect is born, it too becomes a cause and gives
birth to wondrous effects.

These causes are generation on generation, but it needs a
very well lighted eye to see the links in their chain.²

This thesis brings together the diverse documentation of Kikuyu traditional architecture written within a span of approximately one hundred years from 1910 to the present. In doing so the thesis is not merely reproducing the documentation but has thrown “a well lighted eye” in order to demonstrate the links in the chain. The analysis of Kikuyu traditional dwelling environment is taken apart and for the first time the principles underlying its design and construction are extracted. I hope that this important step from mere documentation to analysis will inspire similar studies in other rich architectural environments here in Africa. I have in mind such examples as the Ndebele of South Africa and the Northern Kenya tribes like the Turkana and Samburu. The principles underlying these built environments need to be extracted so that they can inspire new architecture in Africa in a creative way. Because it is ideas and principles rather objects and things that endure and are easily transmitted, this kind of analysis will encourage African architects and designers to go beyond mere form referencing and look into the deeper and enduring African science. The thesis argues that architectural anthropology, because of its multi-disciplinary nature is the kind of vehicle that can bring this kind of deeper understanding of African traditional architecture to the practice of modern architecture.

The thesis traces the transformation of Kikuyu traditional architecture from its contact with the forces of civilization to the present. It argues that the transformative forces of the 3Cs that were coined and set in motion by David Livingstone, that is, Christianity, Civilization and Commerce are demonstrable in the way they impacted and transformed Kikuyu traditional architecture. The thesis touches on the volatile period of 1952-58 in Kikuyu history and shows

² As quoted in the frontispiece by (Fromm, 2002)

how the events of that period impacted on the transformation of the entire Kikuyu countryside.

In a case study of homesteads in the lower Mukurwe-ini region of Nyeri County of Kenya the author illustrates some of the current construction and living patterns in rural Kikuyu homesteads and demonstrates through analysis that it is the principles underlying this architecture that are the key to understanding the process of transformation. The complexity of deceptively simple environments which were uncovered by Anita Larsson in her study of Botswana traditional homesteads in the 80^s will be shown to be similar to the Mukurwe-ini homesteads. The various homesteads studied are on the surface very different, but when the principles underlying the transformations are analyzed, they will be seen to share a common denominator. A lot of work still needs to be done in the documentation and analysis of the architecture of the various cultures in Africa before commonalities can be drawn and presented as “Principles of African Traditional Architecture” This thesis has made the realization of that dream a little closer.

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1.0.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1.0 STUDY BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE .

The Kikuyu people are one of the forty two tribes in Kenya, and traditionally inhabited the Central Kenya region around and about the foot of Mt. Kenya, the snow capped second highest mountain in Africa at 17,040 ft above sea level. This area is referred to as Kikuyuland by Muriuki (1974), who has discussed the history of the Kikuyu before 1900. He gives a detailed historical description of the structure of Kikuyu society before the coming of the Europeans including how they migrated and settled into the forested area between Mt. Kenya and the Aberdares mountain range.

As noted by Amerlinck (2001.5), ethnological research has generated a huge corpus of analytical and empirical architectural data that is useful towards developing an architectural theory. The first major ethnographic study of the Kikuyu that describes their architecture was by the couple Scoresby and Katherine Routledge who documented the Northern Kikuyu of Nyeri. (Routledge, 1910). This study contains a description of the Kikuyu homestead as they found it at around 1900. Katherine who made friends with the Kikuyu women was able to document to some degree the inner workings of the homestead and how the Kikuyu envisioned and used space while her husband occupied himself with documenting the material, technical and constructive methods. She was also able to make some fine watercolor renderings of the homesteads as her husband carefully cataloged and photographed the material culture. His collection and documentation of Kikuyu iron-making is unequalled to date and is housed at the British Museum. An important part of Katherine's work was the documentation of several homesteads and the listing of the various occupants thus being able to compare various social configurations that formed a Kikuyu homestead as at 1910. The overall documentation was well supported by good photographs. The camera at that time had just begun being used by these early pioneering researchers and we have therefore an authentic record of the appearance of the architecture to go with their descriptive text.

The other major primary ethnographic study was by Father C. Cagnolo of the Consolata Mission which was headquartered in Nyeri from the early part of the Twentieth Century (Cagnolo, 1933). Father Cagnolo did his studies of the

Kikuyu of Nyeri from around 1902 to 1935. His book *The Akikuyu: Their Customs Traditions and Folklore* provides a snapshot of life of the Kikuyu before the coming of the British to Kenya and their subsequent transformation through Christianization. It details the efforts of the Missionaries to win over the Kikuyu to Christianity, an effort that was later documented separately in a work, *Conquest for Christ in Kenya* (Mathew, 1952). Conquest for Christ as the name suggests, was the winning over of the Kikuyu from traditional religious practices to the Christian faith, a battle for the hearts and minds of the Kikuyu that resulted in what Mathew calls, “a revolution in conception and things”. These ‘things’ included the architecture for traditional architecture is culturally embedded in dynamic interrelationships that comprise the “human ecology”.

Another important work documenting Kikuyu traditional life is an anthropological study, *Facing Mt. Kenya* by Jomo Kenyatta who was the first President of the Republic of Kenya. This was Kenyatta’s published thesis done under the supervision of anthropologist Malinowski in 1935 (Kenyatta, 1965). It was then an important alternative view from that of Cagnolo and the two took quite antagonistic positions in the description and interpretation of the meanings behind some of the traditions of the Kikuyu. In many instances Cagnolo would let his interpretations and religious polemics interfere with his description of the practices themselves thus harming the anthropological work. In many ways these two works can be compared to East African poet Okot p’Bitek’s *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol* (p’Bitek, 1989). In the songs, Lawino like Kenyatta takes a defensive stand for tradition while her so-called ‘educated’ husband Ocol, like Cagnolo takes the other uncompromising stand for ‘modernity’. Just to pick one example as an illustration of the grandstanding Kenyatta writes that “The Gikuyu have clear ideas as to the nature of diseases and the treatment required in various cases.” (Kenyatta, 1965:280) Cagnolo on the same subject writes, that to combat diseases, “the Kikuyu native possesses nothing but a gross and ignorant empiricism, exploited as he is by sorcerers, wizards and diviners and quacks similar to those who practiced in Western Europe in olden days.” (Cagnolo, 1933:131)

Similarly, Lawino sings,

“You think of the pleasures
Of the girls
Dancing before their lovers,
Then you look at the teacher
Barking meaninglessly
Like a yellow monkey.” (p’Bitek, 1989:76)

While Ocol replies,

“What is Africa to me?
Diseased with a chronic illness
Choking with black ignorance,
Chained to the rock
Of poverty.” (p'Bitek, 1989:125)

Lawino and Ocol's antagonistic positions are of course exaggerated literally characterizations meant to clarify the duality of modernity and tradition in Africa. Kenyatta has been hailed as a leading authority on the Kikuyu traditions and practices and is cited in many academic studies touching on the Kikuyu while Cagnolo has some of the best illustrations and photographs on the Kikuyu at the beginning of the Twentieth Century. Some of the photographs are obviously arranged set pieces but they nevertheless reveal the architecture and background scenes in their true state at that time. These photographs can reveal certain things that are important in reconstructing the traditional Kikuyu dwelling. The material itself has a richness and authenticity of its own beyond the missionary notions of Cagnolo and the patriotic and nationalistic stance of Kenyatta.

In 2006, Kenyan priest, Father Wambugu, recognizing the strengths in the Cagnolo material and that it suffered from the biased notions of the author, republished it with editorial footnotes. The major editing of the material however, was the removal of Father Cagnolo's paternalistic language that bordered on naked racism. Thus for the Cagnolo citation above on combating disease he writes “The Agikuyu possessed no modern medical kits or drugs.” - an editing that not only removes the Cagnolo material from its traditional genre of colonial writing with its own linguistic charm but actually distorts the observations of the ethnologist (Wambugu, 2006). Wambugu in numerous instances like the one cited fails to communicate the authentic documentation of life of the Kikuyu in the rich narrative and eyes of an early Catholic missionary. The first major work on Kikuyu culture in Kikuyu language by a distinguished Kikuyu elder, describes Kikuyu customs and practices is a small book that tackles the material in a more detailed and sober manner. It describes the making of a Kikuyu homestead, how the main dwelling is constructed and gives a definition of “home” as distinguished from “house” according to Kikuyu traditions (Gathigira, 1934). His is the only detailed discussion of the concept of home in the Kikuyu literature reviewed. Kabetu, (1947), the other renowned elder writing on Kikuyu customs in Kikuyu language does not touch on the architecture and neither does Gakaara wa Wanjau even though Gakaara was such a prolific writer of Kikuyu traditions in the Kikuyu language. Leakey, (2007), goes furthest in the description of both the cultural practices and the house. Republished in 2007 by his son, Richard, Louis Leakey's three volume treatise is a monument to Kikuyu studies. The renowned anthropologist

was born and bred among the Kikuyu and was fluent in the language. He also went through the requisite rites and ceremonies of being born and becoming a Kikuyu finally joining the Kikuyu Council of Elders. This was no mean feat for a *Mzungu*, (white man) and accounts for his more sensitive handling of the Kikuyu customs and traditions quite unlike his conversion enthusiast, Cagnolo. He started his research on Kikuyu culture as far back as 1926, but it was not until 1977 that the material was published. Being an anthropologist, he takes the house as an artifact, or object in the same way he describes the other cultural objects. Because of the accuracy of description of the parts and pieces of the house, we have here an opportunity of comparing the objective findings of a renowned anthropologist with the more subjective Cagnolo and Kenyatta and the material from Routledge not to mention the sober elucidation of a Kikuyu elder, Gathigira. By such a reading it is possible to come up with a clearer picture of Kikuyu traditional architecture. Such a presentation of traditional Kikuyu architecture in Kenya has not yet been compiled from multiple sources nor given the depth of analysis it requires for its fuller understanding.

The Bomas of Kenya, a national and government owned cultural institution mandated to archiving cultural material in the form of architecture, music and dance, as part of their mandate to preserve material culture and present it to the public, used original research by interviewing old men to reconstruct the Kikuyu homestead. The Bomas of Kenya homestead was built in 1974 and is still in existence drawing both local and foreign tourists. It follows very closely the layout and construction details of Leakey. The Kenya National Museum homestead was demolished when the new wing was built in 2008. The Museum homestead had however been documented in a booklet guide, Mirara (2001). Andersen (1977), presents an outline of African traditional architecture in Kenya and in a section on Kikuyu traditional architecture relies solely on the Bomas of Kenya homestead for both the photographs and the drawings. Anyamba (1994) take the Leakey material as well as the Andersen material and produced drawings from them with details that gave it a more architectural feel.

Denyer (1978) and Oliver (1976) both carried overview studies of the continent's traditional architecture but neither of them made mention of the Kikuyu architecture, understandable given the range and scope of African architecture. Kenyan Nobel laureate Professor Wangari Maathai's memoirs *Unbowed*, Maathai (2006) has a good description of her polygamous father's rural homestead in which she grew up and this also adds light into the subject.

Kikuyu traditional architecture can thus be defined and discussed through bringing material from all these sources and comparing them. The knowledge gap that is crying out for resolution is the bringing together of all the architectural information into a single authoritative document that draws from the existing rich archival information. These disparate studies would have to be put together in a manner that reads as a single document and not just a throwing

of the pieces together. The study of how that traditional architecture transforms and becomes what we are able to see today would then anchor and integrate it with contemporary thinking and issues.

Transformation according to Merriam Webster is about a change from one thing into another. It is a process thing - a timeline thing. A study of transformation requires that we look at changes that occur within a specified timeline because as Zuniga proposes, architecture or the built environment is *an experiential continuum* that is embedded in the “complex web of social life” within which it exists (Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2001). A line is but a series of points as the Sufi explain when they distinguish between spiritual states and spiritual stations. Stations are the developmental levels, *maqam* within the continuous line of spiritual consciousness, *haal* (Bakhtiar, 1997). The difficulty in studying architectural transformation according to Gauthier “is how to identify corresponding variables among the multitude involved, *which have a direct relationship between specific social practices and the produced forms*” (Moshi 2009: 17) (italics mine). Thus the objective studies by Leakey and others of specific objects existing in a specific point in time are embedded within the continuum of the social web. Merely understanding the web of life itself is not easy especially for an architect trained to see objects from a narrow point of view. Identifying and extracting these variables that were at play in Kikuyu traditional architecture and their relationship to the derived forms is but one of the objectives of this study. Studying the architecture as an experiential continuum, (*haal*), means that at certain points within the timeline we may pause for a detailed objective analysis. Where and how these pauses, (*maqams*), happen is what distinguishes one study from another. The material objectively remains the same.

The timeline itself is not of our making but the choices as to where to throw the spotlight is ours. As we are guided primarily by archival material especially in the beginning of the timeline where oral firsthand accounts are not available to the researcher, the beginnings are set by what archival information exists and what primary writers have chosen as the beginning. Most of them, begin their narrative “With a prehistoric people” – Routledge (1910); “*Before the dawn in Kenya*” – Wilson (1952); “*Before the white man in Kenya*” – Wilson, etc. Recorded so-called ‘History’, as Thiong’o (1987) notes, begins for Africa, with the colonial experience. This is what brought about the sudden transformation of living conditions from the ‘primitive simplicity’ before the dawn to the modern ‘complexity’ and ‘modernity’ of the present. The meaning of these terms in quotes is therefore still a Lawino and Ocol battleground.

As the timeline progresses, the literature grows to the point where the choice of literature determines the direction and thrust of the thesis. The structure is less troublesome as there are events within the timeline that break it into well recognizable parts and have been used by others who have written similar

narratives in other fields like politics, history, religion etc. The classical division of the Kenya historical timeline which corresponds roughly to the Kikuyu transformational timeline has been to discuss 1. Before the dawn, 2. Dawn to 1952 declaration of emergency, 3. 1952-1963 struggle for independence and 4., The post colonial period. One has in mind such books as Were (1984) and Bailey (1993).

For the Kikuyu, the dawn to 1952 period is particularly important in the understanding of the transformations as this was the period the colonial government and missionaries having accepted the credo of pioneer explorer and missionary, David Livingstone stepped up the civilizing mission in Kikuyuland. David Livingstone, (1813-1873) who came to Africa during the time of the slave trade believed that the development of a 'legitimate' commerce in Africa, coupled with Christianization and civilization were the means of destroying the slave trade. He coined the three Cs – Christianity, Civilization and Commerce as the means to this end (Nkomanzana, 1998). The three Cs however were not restricted to the areas affected by the slave trade but became the subsequent engines for change all over sub-Saharan Africa including among the Kikuyu. It is not difficult to see how architecture was intimately connected to these transforming forces because “The standard of civilization and industry among a people is easily judged from their style of housebuilding” (Cagnolo, 1933:53). Others like Wilson also saw this connection and wrote,

“The evidence ... confirms the judgment based on the African grass hut: his clothing (if any) of skins, his simple weapons and ornaments, the primitive nature of his agriculture, almost unchanged during countless generations, all these are evidence of his state of stagnation” (Wilson, 1952: 14).

To trace the effect of the three Cs on what was called ‘the primitive grass hut’ must then become a major part of our attempt at understanding the transformation of Kikuyu traditional architecture.

The scope of the three Cs was wide as Nkomanzana puts it:

“Agricultural development and enhanced trade would help to produce conditions in which Christianity would spread. Such developments would lead to literacy and thus to printing, to new technologies in Africa, to roads and transport, to new forms civil organization and good government - that is, to civilization in Africa” (Nkomanzana, 1998).

It is no wonder then that architectural transformation is closely woven as we are going to see to the politics, the land, education, health and commerce. Huxley (1960) records this transformation of the totality of landscape into literally ‘a new earth’, the title of her book is a phrase that is taken from the Bible when St John describes a vision of a new heaven and a new earth (Society,

2004: Rev 21). The vernacular architecture that emerges out of the traditional setting and still continues to change is part of the complex web of life that the people in rural Mukurwe-ini and the rest of the rural Kikuyu dwell in and which form the field work of this thesis.

In tracing the effects of the three Cs on the architectural transformation, we find that the component of education played a large part in the Christianization as well as the ‘civilization’ of the so-called heathen. Mathew (1952) offers a good snapshot of the Christianization process in Northern Kikuyuland, through the documentation of a process he rightly called, the ‘Conquest for Christ’ through mainly education, health and catechism. Baur notes that

“The old world of agriculture and craftsmanship came to be identified with backwardness and “bush” life, in contrast with the new world of towns, machines, clerks, teachers and salaries, thus enabling one to wear clothes, to sleep under an iron sheet roof and buy European commodities” (Baur, 2009:372)

Thus it can be seen that the three Cs were all delicately intertwined and education in new architectural ways was part of that education. The coming of Western medicine side by side with Christianity morphed in the hands of the secular colonizing government into the teaching of health and hygiene focusing on the tackling of tropical diseases. We therefore see the early books on tropical hygiene and school nature studies for Africans discussing home hygiene or what was called in education, Home Science. Books like Blacklock (1935), Francis (1933) and Sanderson (1932), discussed the merits and demerits of the traditional hut and showed through profuse illustrations the methods needed for its transformation. This was because the transformation of the house was seen as central in “getting rid of dirt” and thus illnesses (Francis 1933). Among the Kikuyu, the most famous teaching book on home hygiene and science was by Mary Holding, *Utheru Thiini wa Mucii*, Holding (1949), later translated into English as *Cleanliness in the Home*, Holding, (1951). This book and its cousins, *Maundu ma Mucii*, ‘About the Home’, Sadler (1960) and Koeune (1952) *The African Housewife in her Home*, focused on the role of the woman in the transformation of the home environment in keeping with the thinking at the time that the woman’s main training was to be in the three Bs of Baby, Bath and Broom. Teaching in handcrafts, the building sciences, the layout of the farm, the transformation of farming techniques fell on the man as proposed in *The Book of Civilization* Paterson (1934). The new and transformed homestead is proposed by Paterson and others and described in detail by Huxley (1960). In following the transformations after independence in 1963, we are able to see in the field work in Mukurwe-ini the sort of transformations that are taking place and how they connect to the transformative forces set in motion by the colonizers.

1.1.0 The Terms Traditional and Vernacular

Tradition, according to the 3rd Edition of Webster's unabridged dictionary is the process of handing down information, opinions, beliefs, and customs mainly by word of mouth or by example: transmission of knowledge and institutions through successive generations with or without written instruction. It is therefore a 'line of continuity and development'. Continuity suggests a set of attributes that are transmitted while development introduces the idea of change and innovation. "Tradition is fluid, it is always being reconstituted. Tradition is about change" (Sarup, 1996) To quote Waterson, "Tradition, like history, is something that is continually being recreated and remodeled in the present, even [though] it is represented as fixed and unchanging . ." (Crouch & Johnson, 2001:3). It is the dynamic *process* by which knowledge passes from generation to generation. It is not static; it is developmental.

In architecture, Noble posits that "the word *traditional* refers both to procedures and material objects that have become accepted as the norm in a society, and whose elements are passed from generation to generation, usually orally..." (Noble, 2007:xii). The vernacular however according to Lwamayanga is a complex term and is not easily defined though he concludes that processes and not static objects are the key to its understanding. This is in line with current thinking in the field where "In line with ideas prevalent in the contemporary fields of anthropology, cultural geography, history and archaeology, these studies have increasingly stressed the dynamic and processual nature of tradition." (Lwamayanga, 2008)

The vernacular attempts to define a common architecture of a people. According to Oliver (2003) they are buildings which have not been professionally designed. They are "buildings of the people", by the people but not for the people "accommodating the values, economies and ways of life of the cultures that produce them". It can be said that the traditional is what is embodied in the transmission process while vernacular is the language used in the development of the traditions. "The terms traditional and vernacular meet where vernacular goes back to its Latin meaning as "things that are homemade, homespun, home-grown, not destined for the marketplace, but are for home use only" (Bourdier, 1989:40)

"The terms vernacular, regional, indigenous, and traditional are often used interchangeably but they have to be dealt with here with a degree of care particularly in the current era of globalization. Today, there are many vernacular forms that are not indigenous to a particular region or even place-bound. There are also vernacular forms that emerge in the crucible of specific building traditions but that quickly move outside of these traditions. Indeed in today's world, tradition can no longer be thought of as the static legacy of a past that is handed down from one generation to

another. Instead it is and must be always understood as a dynamic project for the reinterpretation of this past in light of the needs of a current present and a future” (Heath, 2009:xiii)

Crouch & Johnson (2001:2) write, “Traditional architecture *is* local history” and new buildings draw on ‘gene pools’ or what may be called ‘architectural memes’ combining them and mutating in ways that are ever new and yet related to tradition. This kind of architecture is thus alive and palpating - ever changing and can be compared to a biological organism with a genetic code. It is therefore an organic architecture, producing a “living house” in contrast to what Le Corbusier would call “a machine to live in.” When traditions are seen as creative processes rather than static and unchanging dogmas, people are able to reinterpret them and incorporate them into their contemporary discourses. This removes the heated conflict and uncompromising stances of Lawino and Ocol where Lawino declares that “the pumpkin in the old homestead must not be uprooted!” and Ocol’s dismissive retort, “To hell with your pumpkins and your old homesteads. To hell with the husks of old traditions and meaningless customs” (p’Bitek, 1989:41,126)

These two terms, “vernacular” and “traditional” are not properly synonymous. In essence they both refer to architecture whose traditions and skills change little and are handed down by local tradesmen and artisans without the involvement of professional architects and engineers - an architecture “of the people, and by the people, but not for the people” (Oliver, 2003:14)

Crouch & Johnson make a distinction between popular “everyday” vernacular architecture and monumental vernacular. “Monumental buildings include palaces, many religious buildings, and some governmental buildings and are usually expensive, large, durable, and weighted with symbolism; columns, obelisks, and other structures whose only function is memorializing are also monumental architecture. Vernacular buildings include houses, markets, schools, depots, and other structures of everyday life, often with their own symbolism” (Crouch & Johnson, 2001).

The everyday architecture is usually refereed as domestic or housing. See Boudier, Larson and Oliver. Amos Rapoport uses the terms ‘Monuments’ and ‘Folk’ to distinguish the two modes of cultural expression.

“We may say that monuments - buildings of the grand design tradition-are built to impress either the populace with the power of the patron, or the peer group of designers and cognoscenti with the cleverness of the designer and good taste of the patron. The folk tradition, on the other hand, is the direct and unself-conscious translation into physical form of a culture, its needs and values- as well as the desires, dreams, and passions of a people” (Rapoport, 1969:2)

Heath (2009) discusses what he calls the vernacular impulse as being driven by a collective rather than individual idiosyncratic impulses and therefore distinguishes what he calls idiosyncratic forms from vernacular forms that are collective cultural expressions. He argues that vernacular forms must go through a regional filter and that the resultant forms are therefore products of geographical and cultural influences. When external influences are also blended into the melting pot they undergo a process of cultural weathering or a hybridized local expression. This is because “Culture is transmitted geographically as well as chronologically, in space as well as in time, by contagion as well as by repetition,” (Bourdier, 1989:59). In this way the term regionalism then comes into play in the discussion of vernacular architecture. In architecture regionalism has been the term used in describing an architecture derived from a response to the contextual forces of society, culture and, climate.

In summary it would be safe to say that *vernacular architecture* is the process of assimilation and blending of architectural values from both internal and external influences into a distinctive living architectural tradition of a specific culture and locale, whereas *traditional architecture* is the process of transmission of largely the internal contents of a cultural heritage through mutation and adaptation into a distinctive living architectural tradition. It is therefore a question of degree of assimilation of external influences and thus the definitions remains pretty much two sides of the same coin. In the post-modern world of multiculturalism ushered in by the industrial revolution, it is debatable whether a traditional architecture based on the processes of internal contents exists anywhere any more but distinct vernaculars shaped by tradition, social-cultural, economic and environmental factors. In both cases architecture is seen both as process and product, both as the ideas that drive the culture and their manifestation. Tradition is the spirit of the age or zeitgeist while the vernacular is the product of the zeitgeist. The vernacular is the language of tradition.

In Mukurwe-ini it will be seen that various aspects of traditional architecture of the Kikuyu have been handed down and continue to manifest themselves in the vernacular architecture though in a transformed state while other aspects of the architecture have been inserted from various sources principally from European civilization and the modern industrial economy. The manner in which these transformations have come about and their resultant vernacular architecture is the subject of this thesis.

The study of vernacular architecture explains “how buildings emerge and are sustained through cultural processes” (Vellinga, 2006:e-book). Asquith argues that in this way vernacular architecture research has filled the biggest vacuum in architectural theory and education: *the lack of laboratory conditions which has prevented the discipline from deriving valid and verified knowledge from cases and field studies*. This has brought the practice of architecture closer to a science and legitimized professional intervention in the eyes of a world

guided more and more by the scientific paradigm. Vernacular architecture according to Asquith has now become “a mainstream academic activity using processes of objective analysis and evaluation” There is no better laboratory than that of time as the distillation of what is essential and necessary takes place through a process of negotiation. This traditional wisdom is what comes down and is scientifically transmitted through cultural practices – what Wanjohi calls traditional ‘logic’ or *Kihooto* world view among the Kikuyu (Wanjohi, 2008).

In terms of efficient resource management and sustainable living we need look no further than traditional living environments. By understanding the principles of traditional sustainable living environments we are able to formulate new ways of tackling the sustainability problems of today. While some of the allusions to tradition by architects have been merely superficial and external form referencing, the learning from traditional knowledge systems and principles has produced what Oliver calls “the recovery of much accumulated wisdom.” He argues that the vanishing knowledge of traditional architecture is not merely collected for curiosity’s sake and for museums but is key to solving the contemporary issues of housing, urbanization and resources management (Oliver, 2003:17).

A theory of architecture will be meaningful to the practice of modern architecture if it is anchored in the framework of tradition. This kind of theory will “remind architects, planners and engineers of the cultural embodiment of architecture, helping them to increase their understanding of local economies, values and practices and the bearing these have on pressing issues like resources management, technology transfer, conservation, planning regulations and building standards” (Vellinga, 2006:e-book)

1.3.0 Dynamics of Transformation of Vernacular Architecture

Since the process of transformation is one of transmission, interpretation, negotiation and adaptation of traditional knowledge, skills and experience, we are interested in understanding what is being negotiated, transmitted and interpreted. We are interested in answering questions such as why certain traditional characteristics endure and others fade away. Why certain processes are discarded and others adopted. In short we are interested in the ‘what’ and the ‘why’ of these transformations. Many of the ‘what’ questions are answered in the Larsson study of the transformation of Tswana homesteads and this thesis uncovers the same in Kikuyu traditional architecture but also takes the tentative step of answering some of the ‘whys’ in Mukurwe-ini, Nyeri.

The Heath model of the dynamics that are at play in the transformation of the vernacular architecture can be used as an explanatory model for the changes that are studied in Mukurwe-ini. (fig 1.1) The popular traditional round forms as existed in the traditional homestead prior to 1952 will be presented from archival sources and the constants that have sifted down to the present will be identified.

In this way the continuity and changes identified in the Kikuyu architecture of Mukurwe-ini can be understood. In New Gourn, Hassan Fathy had tried to distil the principles of the traditional architecture and incorporate them in the new settlement. Part of the failure of New Gourn as a settlement can be attributed to the difference between transplanted forms done through professional involvement in the distillation process as an academic exercise and vernacular forms derived through the society's natural process of distillation. New Gourn was the former while what is happening in Mukurwe-ini today is the latter. The use of new technologies and especially sun dried bricks in Mukurwe-ini has been a long process of experimentation and distillation through trial and error and the resultant forms are still part of the process of dynamic change.

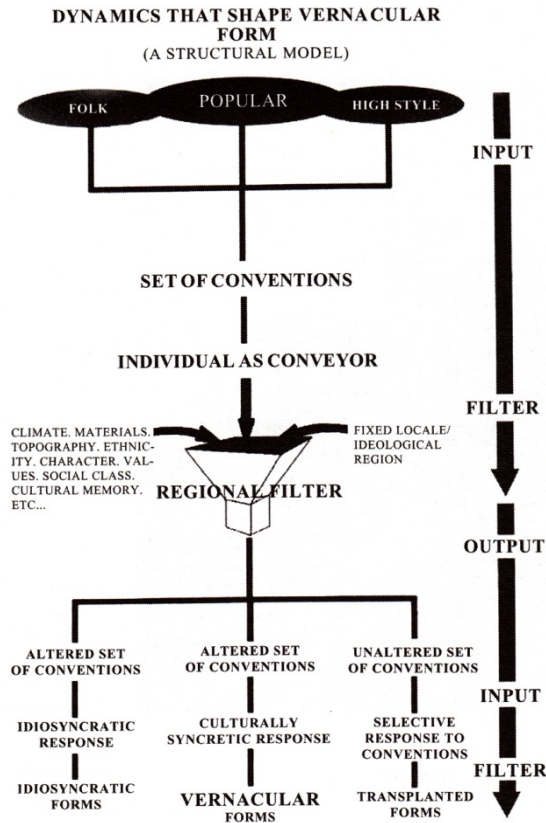


Fig. 1.1 Dynamics that shape vernacular form. (Source: Heath, 2009)

The “long accepted way” of constructing buildings according to Noble (2007), constitutes an architectural tradition but progress within the timeline may not necessarily be towards better or more advanced buildings. Noble urges that “Traditional and modern buildings are often seen as opposites, with the former associated with simple, underdeveloped building methods that result in poor houses with a short lifespan. Modern housing, on the other hand, often mean houses built in durable materials with modern conveniences such as piped water, sewerage disposal and electricity. “The concept of traditional housing in reality is more complex” urges Noble and seeming simplicity does not necessarily mean simplistic but like the Japanese tea room may be “unimpressive in appearance” while being “the result of profound artistic forethought” (Okakuro, 1993:57). In the same way Kikuyu traditional architecture and the Mukurwe-ini homesteads will be shown to be deceptively simple yet very profound. Traditional Kenyan architecture that includes that of the Kikuyu has been variously documented as in Anyamba (1994), but the complexities inherent in the total human habitat and architectural insights for example in the advanced structural methods employed by the Kikuyu and the complex external spaces have never been analysed. It is possible that like the Japanese tea room, they present themselves as too simple.

In tracing the transformation of Kikuyu traditional architecture, “the long accepted way” and its transmission meets with a unique distinguishing attribute which makes the Kikuyu transformational timeline worthy of documentation and study. This is because the Kikuyu were singularly involved in the massive villagization program that happened in Kenya between 1952 and 1958 by the colonial British administration. The entire Kikuyu settlement pattern underwent a major upheaval when the colonial government after declaring a state of emergency in Kenya in 1952, undertook the drastic step of relocating all the Kikuyu in Central Province from their homes into hilltop fortified villages. The existing homesteads were burned to the ground and the return to the homesteads after 1958 produced entirely new settlement patterns and house forms as will be shown. This is the first time a study of transformation of Kikuyu traditional architecture includes this watershed moment in the timeline. I believe that the discussion of the resultant typologies and their subsequent transformations into the vernacular we see today is a major contribution of this thesis. The post 1958 subsequent transformations are studied in a field study of homesteads in the Mukurwe-ini area of Nyeri District, the same general area that Routledge documented in 1910 and Cagnolo in 1935 and from where Stanley Kiama Gathigira also wrote about in 1934.

1.4.0 The Research Strategy and structure

1.4.1 The Objectives of the Research.

1. To bring the scattered archival information of Kikuyu traditional architecture under one roof through the use of data available in diverse sources and formats and in so doing to produce an authoritative source of Kikuyu traditional architecture.
2. To trace the development and transformation of Kikuyu traditional architecture from its contact with the forces of modernity and in so doing arrive at an explanatory thesis of the nature of the current domestic architecture in the lower Mukurwe-ini region.
3. To bring out the salient features of the architecture that are relevant to an architect dealing with issues of traditional and modern architecture.

1.4.2 Significance of the Study

As has been stated in the introductory discussion, this thesis engages in the discussion of the place of the vernacular in contemporary architectural discourse and argues for an architectural anthropological approach in the practice of modern architecture that draws and is anchored in tradition. The strengthening of interdisciplinarity in order to solve better the difficult issues confronting the complex societal needs of a fast developing culture like Kenya will result in better informed interventions by practitioners. A popular Kenyan saying in connection with modern urbanites is that “You can remove a man from the village but you cannot remove the village from the man”. In a fast urbanizing society like Kenya today, the new urbanites carry much of their cultural practices and ideas into the cities and since they usually relinquish their leading role in the process of housing delivery to professionals, it is relevant for the professionals to understand the roots of their clients’ needs.

The compilation of the scattered archival material relating to Kikuyu traditional architecture is in itself a major contribution and will be useful to cultural organizations, especially in the tourist sector and in the education and museum fields. Individuals and organizations who would like to use cultural references for their own architecture like Allan Donovan and Ngugi wa Thiong’o have done will also have an authoritative reference point. Finally this thesis touches on a most significant period of the transformation of Kikuyu architectural landscape – the 1952-58 period. The presentation of this material is bound to elicit considerable interest not just in planning and architecture but even in other fields.

1.4.3 Limitations of the study

The study findings and their replicability are limited by the fact that they deal with a single culture and architects today are catering for a broad multicultural urban population. However, the study is enriched by this focus on a single culture as it has then been possible to go deep. It will be necessary to compare this material with others from other cultures in order to extract commonalities. The author has in mind such studies as Larsson (1984) study of Tswana housing in Botswana, Rukwaro (1997) thesis on the Maasai of Kenya, Lwamayanga's (2008) thesis of the people of the Kagera region in Tanzania and the study of the transformation of the rural dwelling compounds in Tanzania by Moshia (2005). The more work there is from different regions and cultures, the more comprehensive will be our understanding of the issues of transformation and translation and the more relevant and successful will be our interventions in the shaping of modern built environments.

The study of Mukurwe-ini was necessary in order to go deep in a single area rather than a spread out discussion of the entire region of the Kikuyu. The benefits derived by depth rather than breadth were overwhelming. Whereas there are slight differences and nuances in the way each region of the Kikuyu has developed, these differences were not considered significant enough to invalidate the findings in Mukurwe-ini and the findings apply for most of the rural Kikuyu population. The major difference in the regional architecture has in fact to do with proximity from major urban centers and cities and the commercial activity that this entails. The architecture of Limuru and Kikuyu and most of Kiambu has been impacted more heavily by their proximity to Nairobi than the architecture of Mukurwe-ini but again this was not found to be sufficient reason to complicate the study with issues of urbanization of the rural architecture which I consider an important topic better discussed on its own just as is equally important to understand the ruralization of the urban environment.

Anita Larsson took nearly ten years documenting the transformation of the Tswana homesteads and her study can be said to have covered more ground and uncovered more than this study of Mukurwe-ini whose field work has spanned two years. This is a short time to get to understand the people and area of study and can be considered a major limitation of this study. However, the researcher has grown up in this environment and understands the issues from growing up with them first-hand. The study therefore may not have suffered as much from the issue of time allocated to it. I also have been interested in the material for a much longer time. As far back as 2002, I presented a paper in Nairobi entitled *The Kikuyu Kiondo Kosmology* where he discussed the complex symbolic meaning embedded in the Kikuyu Kiondo. I also have been teaching at the University of Nairobi School of Architecture for more than twenty years, mainly in the field of architectural theory and history. It is out of a feeling that African traditional cultural issues in architecture are not getting the attention they deserve

in the training of architects that this thesis was born. The author also has managed a blog, “Gikuyu Architecture”³ since 2008 that has engaged the public in the discussion of the relevance of our architectural and cultural heritage.

1.4.4 Choice of case study area

When I started this thesis in August 2008, I went to Oslo and came back to Nairobi in December of the same year. Between January 2009 and August 2009 before going back to Oslo, I determined to answer only one question. Where could I centre the living vernacular study? Having satisfied myself that the study of transformation of traditional architecture would lead to a study of a living vernacular in its current form, I determined to do a reconnaissance pilot study in order to come up with a plan on how to study this living vernacular. I realized that the Kikuyu traditional architecture in its original form as described by Cagnolo (1933) and Leakey (2007) was not available for study anywhere in a living form other than in their museum form at the Bomas of Kenya and cultural centers like Riuki. I also knew from oral history and from readings that the 1952 state of emergency wiped out all the existing traditional homesteads in Central Province and that the new homesteads that came up from 1958 onwards were on a practically new slate after the land consolidation exercise. I realized that the proper retelling of the story of Kikuyu traditional architecture hinged on the explanation of the dramatic events that followed this watershed moment in Kikuyu history and that the vernacular that emerged must be linked closely to this event.

Everywhere I went in central Province, the story always started in the same way. “We moved here in 1959 after having been in such and such village. Prior to that our grandparents or great grandparents lived around such and such a place of the land of such and such clan”

I travelled widely using my network of friends and relatives in the various regions within traditional Kikuyuland. In Kirinyaga I visited two homesteads and their neighbours and then went to Tetu where my sister is married. I visited Karatina area and Othaya area next to Mukurwe-ini. In all the places visited, there was a commonality in the way the homestead is laid out. It is always near the access road. You come into a usually bare earth open space, *Nja*, around which are various structures. There is always a main house, an external kitchen and animal shelters. There are seats in the *Nja* where visitors are welcomed usually under a tree. There are sanitary facilities well removed from the *Nja*. The *Nja* is indisputably the centre of the homestead in configuration and in activity pattern. I realized that since all these characteristics seem common, and that all the homesteads look different, taking any homestead from Kirinyaga, Murang’a, or Kiambu would still find these same characteristics. I therefore decided to look

³ <http://mukuyu.wordpress.com>

for something else that distinguishes the homes. It turned out that the technology used in the making of the walls was a good distinguishing characteristic. There were houses done in the original mud and wattle style and smeared with cow dung and ashes which all looked somehow older. There were houses done in off-cut wood or sawn timbers which seemed of indeterminate age, houses in dressed stone that looked much newer and lastly houses with sun-dried mud blocks with various kinds of finishes that looked of a later style. The material used in the making of the main house also seemed to co-relate closely with income levels of the households. In Kiambu, timber and stone was prevalent with few houses in mud and non in sun dried blocks a pattern seen in most other areas visited. Two areas stood out in having the widest spectrum of styles present together in the same area and those were in Lower Murang'a and lower Nyeri or Mukurwe-ini. In Mukurwe-ini, the 1958 typologies were in abundance and it was therefore easy to tell the comprehensive story of the development of typologies and technologies here or in Murang'a. Being my home, Mukurwe-ini presented itself as the better option because of contacts and the need to have a friendly study group that would allow me into their private lives like bedrooms. My own home in Ndia-ini would have been okay except that there was the question of too much familiarity and emotion that could possibly blind my objectivity. Ndia-ini also lacked a well established tradition of sundried blocks which is fast developing a fascinating style in lower Mukurwe-ini. An area ten kilometers further from home and having the entire range of styles presented itself. This place, Mihuti, in lower Mukurwe-ini was perfect for me and I had enough contacts who could accept me and who were eager to show me around without being too familiar.

Within Mihuti itself, it was not even necessary to take a very wide area. Taking Mihuti Centre which stands on a former Mau-Mau village, an area of two or three kilometers radius gives you so many configurations of homesteads that all you have to do is choose according to the various styles defined by technology. Several homesteads having the various typologies of 1958 were included and then several homesteads that showed the various solutions and characteristics of the area, In total a detailed study of about fifteen homesteads was undertaken though only ten have been included in the monograph. It was assumed that there is a common story binding Mukurwe-ini architecture with the wider Kikuyu architecture and that there is also a particular story specific to Mukurwe-ini and Mihuti and this has come out of this study.

1.4.5 Methodology

The Archival Information

I first came across the Father Cagnolo's book, (Cagnolo, 1933) as a small boy growing up with Mwalimu Francis Mwangi's library and seeing the pictures became very interested in finding out more about Kikuyu traditions. I was

fascinated by the attire of the people in those pictures who were said to be my ancestors. After completing a bachelor's degree in architecture I began to develop a deeper interest in Kikuyu culture. As far back as 1986 I acquired a copy of Gathigira's *Mikarire ya Agikuyu* (1935) and began my own collection inspired by my father's calling it Kamenju Series A. Around this time I developed my Gikuyu reading skills by reading a monthly *Gikuyu na Mumbi magazine* published then by Gakaara Press in Karatina. Series A has since then steadily grown to a modest Kikuyu library. Mwalimu Francis Mwangi was a teacher and schoolmaster from Ndia-ini who began teaching at Tumu-tumu in 1935 and who brought up his children in a Christian anti traditional manner. His copy of Elpheth Huxley's 1939 novel, *Red Strangers* had at the back a series of black and white photographs of traditional Kikuyu life which brought out vividly the homestead. The book was presented to him "with many thanks for all your help in teaching me Kikuyu" by a Jean Clark Wilson in April 1940. Two photographs in particular were of special interest to this study as they showed 'Family Dinner Round the Hearth: Old Style' and 'Family Dinner around the Table: New style'. (Fig. 4.44) These photographs suggested the central theme of the study – transformation. It is a contrast that echoes p'Bitek's 1989 epic, *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol*. Some of the photographs if not all were taken around Nyeri Consolata Mission area as the form of Githuri hill is visible in one of the photographs. I realized that it was possible to derive a great deal of information from a careful reading of these early photographs Mwalimu Francis Mwangi's collection also included Part 1 of *The Book of Civilization*, (Paterson, 1934). After registering for my PhD in the Oslo School of Architecture the AHO Library was able to get on loan using the inter-Library network, Part Two of *The Book of Civilization* which deals with transformations in the economic front. The library staff was also able to track down some very rare books dealing with the hygiene and gender aspects of the transformation of the traditional house through colonial efforts like *Cleanliness in the Home* (Holding, 1951). Many of these were originally in Mwalimu Mwangi's library but were unfortunately lost a long time ago. I was also able to acquire using my PhD book allowance, Leakey (2007) three volume box set in its new edition, and for an arm and a leg, Routledge (1910) volume *With a Prehistoric People* from antique booksellers in London who deal with rare collections.

The Leakey books are no longer available in the University of Nairobi Library or in any of the other local Universities and neither is Routledge's book which is available for view only at the National Archives, Nairobi. The Library of the British Institute of East Africa in Nairobi was most helpful. Not only does it have a copy of Routledge's book but it also has lots of literature relating to the Kenya history and especially for this thesis, covering the Mau-Mau villagization program.

The Department of Architecture of the University of Nairobi and the Kenya National Library services turned out a blank as far as literature on the Kikuyu traditional architecture is concerned. Even Anyamba (1994), is unavailable though Professor Tom Anyamba is the current Dean of the School of the Built Environment at the University of Nairobi.

Books in the Kikuyu Language like Gathigira (1935), Williamson (1958), and Kago (1958) which describe Kikuyu traditional architecture are unavailable in most local Libraries though Kago (1958) is still in print and available in some Nairobi bookshops. The largest bookshop in Nairobi, “Inama Bookshop” with branches in almost every downtown street, and major towns sometimes turned up a surprising gem as it is an incredibly rich bookshop. *Inama* is Kikuyu for “bend down”, as the books are displayed on street pavements and one has to bend or squat in order to search its database. Many of the books in the Kamenju Series, have been collected over time from Inama Bookshop and combined with the Mwangi collection were the main source of all the Kikuyu literature cited.

The Nyeri Consolata mission was most helpful and it is there at the convent that I unearthed *Conquest for Christ in Kenya*, Mathew (1952), the title clarifying in my mind one of the transformative pillars of David Livingstone.

The Field Work

The study of homestead environments presents a difficulty in definition and delineation of the extent of a homestead and by what term it will be referred. The terms, housing, dwellings, homestead, are often used interchangeably and yet there are certain distinctions. The distinction between House and home among the Kikuyu will be dealt with in more detail in a later chapter.

“The notion of dwelling does not assume that the physical unit of a house defines the experience of home. Houses are commodities produced and marketed in many contemporary societies for financial profit within particular economic and technological constraints” (Lawrence, 1995).

Because of this, Anita Larsson’s (1984) description of Tswana dwellings in Botswana as ‘Rural Housing’ is somehow deficient and does not capture the entire dynamics of traditional African dwellings. “All houses are dwellings; but all dwellings are not houses. To dwell is to make one's abode: to live in, or at, or on, or about a place” (Oliver, 2003). Dwellings incorporate the intangibles that are not easily measurable and even delineating the extent of dwelling may be a challenge. The homestead however is slightly different and may be defined with the little fences or markers which sometimes are very subtle but they are there and are known and understood as delineators. These little fences though not necessarily having anything to do with ownership come much closer to defining what is being referred to in Mukurwe-ini as homesteads as opposed to the more amorphous term, dwelling. In Kikuyu the difference between homestead and

dwelling is in the intonation of the *kwa* and *kwa*a respectively as *kwa* Njuthubu with definite boundaries and *kwa*a Njuthubu with indefinite borders and an indefinite number of *aaa*'s. In this thesis, the more definite *kwa* with one *a* has been chosen for study over the less definite *kwa*a. *Kwa* means Joseph's own place while *kwa*a is a more collective feel as for lands held eg. by a sub-clan.

The analytical tools used in the homesteads were taken from Roderick Lawrence's discourse on the methodology of "Deciphering Home" (Lawrence, 1995). He lists them as:

1. What are the units of analysis?
Who actually resides in the dwelling? The idea of domicile.
This was expanded to incorporate not just humans but whatever animal life was in domicile.
2. How does one delimit the subject of study.
What conceptual, material, and behavioral boundaries relate to the definition of home?
This was adapted to mean the various tangible and intangible structures that define the homestead.
3. What characteristics are common to the homes and daily lives of people in a specific locality? Given that the concept of home transcends the material culture of housing units, larger built environments and domestic activities, it is necessary to identify and study both the tangible and intangible constituents of interpersonal relationships.
This was adapted to mean the social interactions of the people with the spaces.
4. How does one account for consensual meanings and uses as well as individual differences?
This was taken to mean the diverse points of view and subjective meanings found in the study group
5. How can a temporal perspective be applied?
It is necessary to complete an historical analysis of extant residential environments by field work and the study of documents, as well as the study of domestic and daily life, human ideals and values.
This was adapted as is and the environments were all studied within the concept of an evolving time span and connecting to the links in the great chain of being.

The multi dimensional nature of home "transcends quantitative, measurable dimensions and includes qualitative subjective ones, it is a complex, ambiguous concept that generates contention". It is "a complex subject which cannot be studied adequately by applying traditional academic theories or methods that

rarely transcend disciplinary boundaries or sectorial approaches” (Lawrence, 1995)

As has been stated, all the field work was done in Kikuyu country and most of the interviews were in the Kikuyu language of which the author is fluent in. The language used with most of the youth however was like, “*taimagini akinikatia without shame mzee ari o haha. Tamaka!!*” - a new fangled Kikuyu which is a mix of Kikuyu, English and sometimes Kiswahili, and described by Wanjau G. wa (1998) as the colonial cock still crowing in one’s head. A variant of it in the urban context it is called *Sheng* and can be very complex. English was in some rare occasions also used.

I was introduced to Mihuti area by my brother Edward Gicinga who had links with the villages in Mukurwe-ini through his preaching work as an elder of the PCEA church. Lydia Ngira, who is their cousin and married in that area became the principle informant and took me around introducing me to her neighbors who include my elementary school teacher, Nyaga wa Mwai. A formal visit was made to the local Chief and the research explained to him. He is used to dealing with all manner of researchers who come on and off from Nairobi and he had no problem with the research. Once word spread that the Chief knew and was behind the research, the villagers were more cooperative. They were able to entertain me in their homesteads and let me do my sketches and photographs. The villagers are not very happy with someone measuring their compounds and I could see in the first homesteads that the measuring tape caused a lot of tension and so gave it up. I began drawing up the compounds through estimations but later acquired a laser distance meter that was less intrusive. As I kept coming back into the homesteads and bringing the villagers copies of the photographs I had taken, they became more open and less and less suspicious. At the end of the study, I can safely say that I have made very many good friends in the homesteads studied and even beyond, and have a very good picture of how the homesteads are built and lived in.

In the countryside, the people are very suspicious of anyone who travels alone and they also say, ‘*mundu umwe ndeheragirwo njira*’, or ‘no one moves aside for a lone traveler’. The principle informant, Mrs. Ngira could not always accompany me after the initial introductions as she had a home and other affairs to manage. The idea of just moving around, ‘*mururo*’, and doing ‘nothing’ the whole day, is not appealing to rural people. I therefore made sure that I travelled with one or two other companions. Sometimes I used the students on attachment at Wajee Nature Camp as companions and this was very effective. I was particularly happy to have the companionship of a young female student as this removed any fear of my sitting down with people’s wives and daughters in their kitchens and living rooms while their men were away. As a lone ranger, this would have been inappropriate and even dangerous. Other times, the use of the local motor bike taxi men as assistants was necessary and they were very

obliging so long as they were paid for their time. Being on good terms with the young men motor bikers is absolutely essential not only for information and companionship but also because they are the real security regime in the rural areas rather than the police and the administration.

The decision not to present the work in mechanical drawings but rather in a freehand style was very deliberate. I was impressed by Larson (1988) and the way she was able to present the Tswana homesteads. I saw that her drawings communicated a quality of the hand-made architecture that somehow gets lost with the finesse of the technical drawings. Since I did all the field sketches myself and only used assistants as plops and as companions, I was able to have a feel of the material which is not possible from research assistants that are sent to the field and who then bring the data to the researcher for interpretation.

Interviews

They say in Kikuyu that *'mundu mugi ndari muhere wa uhoro'*, meaning literally that a clever person is easy to instruct but also suggesting that a clever person need not be told everything. They say this to mean that one has to be observant and not necessarily ask needless questions – *ta mwarimu*, like a teacher. For this reason it was necessary to sit down with the respondents and learn to observe and not merely ask pre-determined questions structured in a strict questionnaire. A list covering the household characteristics and the important points to be covered in each interview was in my pocket notebook and after the bio data of the homestead had been discussed, the discussion was allowed to flow freely occasionally steering it to cover all the points in the list. An illustration of a stupid question was when I was taken by the main informant in the study area to a homestead. It was during the mid morning and since there was no lockable gate like in many homesteads in the area we entered without appointment. It was during the initial days of the study before I made a telephone list of all the respondents. Once I had their telephone numbers, I could always arrange an interview at a convenient time. On this particular occasion, the informant said,

“Let us go back; they are not in”.

I hesitated and asked, “Well, they may be down in the coffee area or in the garden. How do you know they are not in?”

She replied without insult, “Are you a fool? Can't you see the cows?”

I replied, “No; honestly I don't see, though I see the cows.”

At this point with loving patience, she explained to me that the feeding trough was empty and since the cows were hungry and their noses were facing the gate towards the road, this meant that the people were in that direction for if they were down in the cultivated garden (almost always below the homestead), the cows would be expectantly facing that way for that is where the feed would come from. I was raised in a farm and I had forgotten due to all these years of

schooling to read the signs in a rural homestead. I promised myself to be more careful in my questions, talk less and listen more to the animals, the trees, the shrubs, and the children for they all had much to tell. I have lost count of the number of times I have been called a fool or asked *kai utari na maitho?* ‘have you no eyes?’

I was sometimes invited for supper in a homestead and while waiting for the food to cook and be served at around 8.30 to 9 PM the discussions brought back memories of my childhood and the stories that needed to be told. After dinner I would be escorted by the man of the house to Wajee camp and in the moonlight could see the settlement pattern defined by pinpoints of light. As Lwamayanga 2008:39 observes, “The vernacular built environment is full of hidden processes, which are difficult to know without penetrating the daily life of a given community.” For this reason it was necessary to become part of the community in order to experience the Mukurwe-ini gestalt that unfolded to me in what Capra (2000) calls ‘participatory consciousnesses’.

1.4.6 Structure of the Monograph

The study is divided into six chapters. Chapter one introduces the literature and terms underpinning this work. The second chapter introduces the Kikuyu people, their customs, practices and habitat. The third chapter is a presentation of Kikuyu traditional architecture that is compiled from multiple sources. The first important source is the archival material available from ethnography and anthropology. The second is from architectural historians and architects like Tom Anyamba and Kaj Andersen. A third source is from literally sources like *Frame Trees of Thika*, and *Red Strangers* by Huxley, recollections of childhood in the *Memoirs of Wangari Maathai*, *Unbowed* and other books. The last is from oral tradition from men and women like Dr. Njoroge of Riuki Cultural Centre and Kikuyu elders in Mukurwe-ini and Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga in Murang’a. Chapter four discusses transformation of Kikuyu traditional architecture and chapter five presents the situation today in lower Mukurwe-ini, Nyeri. Chapter six summarizes the transformation steps observed. A glossary of Kikuyu terms is included together with the bibliography.

2.0.0 THE KIKUYU

This chapter is a short introduction to the Kikuyu, their habitat, customs, beliefs and practices.

2.1.0 KENYA

Kenya is a country of 569,200 km² that lies on the East coast of Africa facing the Indian Ocean between 4°.32' N and 4°.30' S in latitude between 34° E and 41°.50' E. The equator cuts it roughly in the middle. It is bordered by Sudan and Ethiopia to the North, the Indian Ocean and Somalia to the East, the United Republic of Tanzania to the South and Uganda to the West.

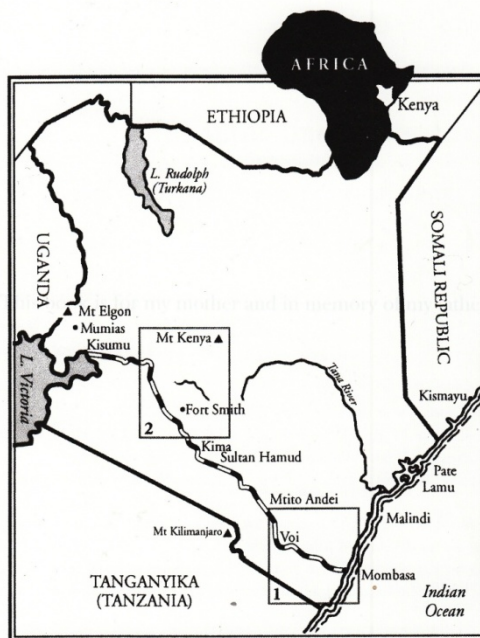


Fig. 3-1 Location of Kikuyu District (2) at around the completion of the railway
(Source: Sullivan, 2006)

2.2.0 Geography of Kikuyuland

The Kikuyu tribe is one of the 42 tribes with a population of 6,622,576 or 17.2% of the total Kenyan population (KNBS, 2009). The name Kikuyu is the English form of the name, *Gikuyu* which goes for the tribe and the language (Muriuki, 1974). Others e.g. (Cagnolo, 1933), use the name Akikuyu to refer to the tribe and Kikuyu to refer to the language. Kikuyuland, (Fig 2.2), as a locale is defined by the traditional settlement of the Kikuyu before 1900 and is roughly defined by the mountains Mt Kenya, to the North, the Aberdares Mountain ranges, to the west, Ngong Hills, to the South and the Ol Donyo Sabuk, to the South East (Muriuki, 1974). Because these people believed that God’s abode was in the mountains these four formed eco-spiritual markers that were indelibly fixed in the Kikuyu psyche⁴ (Huxley, 1960). Traditional Kikuyu ritual prayer is always directed at these shrines in turn although Mt Kenya was revered as God’s main abode. (Kenyatta, 1965)

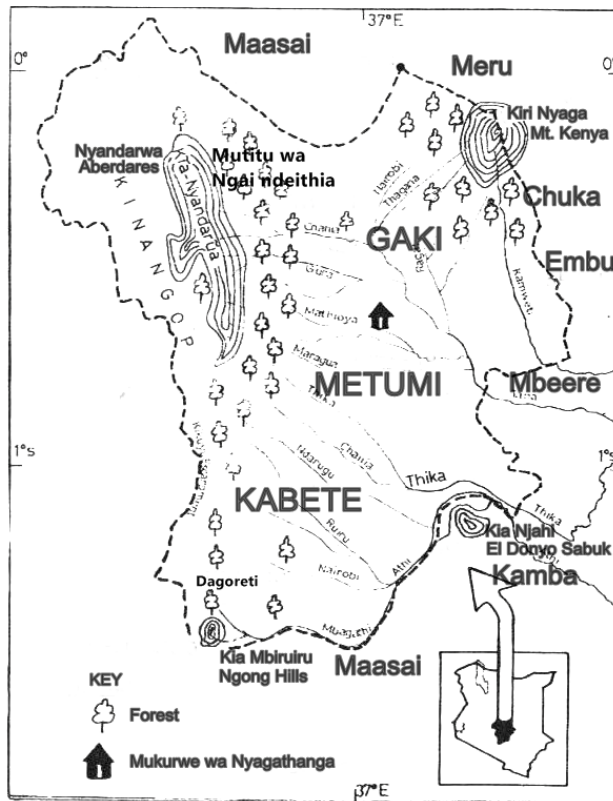


Fig 2.2 Approximate mental map of Kikuyuland before 1900 (Source: Author, 2010)

⁴ “One can understand a little of the Kikuyu feeling towards their mountain: it dominates every ridge and valley, wherever you look it is there, mighty and magnificent.” p. 246

These ritual markers united the Kikuyu with the Maasai to the South and North and the Kamba to the South East and the proto-Kikuyu cousins, Ndia, Gicugu, Mbeere and Embu to the East. According to (Thuku, 200?)⁵, the markers were points of resolution and unity unlike the modern markers between Districts and Counties which seem more as emphasizing divisions.

Kikuyuland is a high V shaped plateau of between 1000 meters to 2,500 meters above sea level. The Eastern side of the V rises to the snow capped Mt. Kenya for an altitude of 5,600 meters. The Western flank of the V is longer with a length of 160 km. rising more gently along the Eastern escarpment 4,300 meters, (Muriuki, 1974). The plateau is drained by two rivers the Tana and the Athi Rivers and their numerous tributaries which slice up the slopes creating natural boundaries and eco-markers.

What may be termed traditional Kikuyuland is roughly what forms Central Province today, one of the eight current administrative Provinces in Kenya with a population of 4,383,743 meaning that 2,238,833 (KNBS, 2009) or about a third, constitute the Kikuyu Diaspora outside Central Province living mainly in Nairobi, Rift Valley and Coast Provinces. The Province as an administrative entity is also predominantly but not solely a Kikuyu geographical entity any more.

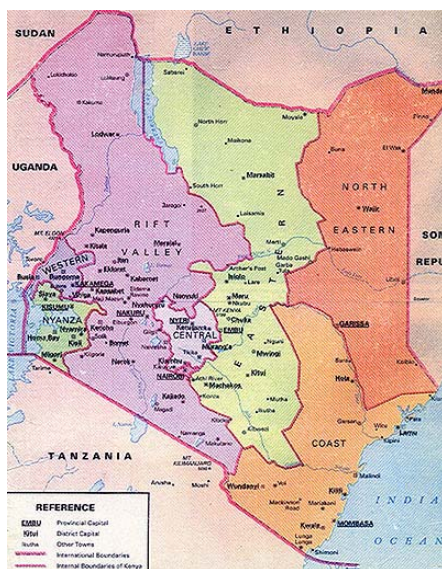


Fig. 2.3 Administrative map of Kenya showing the current provincial boundaries. The Central Province followed approximately traditional Kikuyuland.

(Source: http://www.en.kenemb.ru/about_common.htm)

⁵ Undated publication. Many books published in backstreet publishers sometimes fail to provide a date as is the case with this one acquired from Inama Bookshop of Nairobi. They are not catalogued by the Kenya National Libraries and neither do they have an ISBN.

2.3.0 The Climate of Central Kenya

Central Province receives moderate rainfall from 1000 mm per annum in the lowlands to 1750mm per annum in the highlands. The traditional Kikuyu year had four main climatic seasons and two main agricultural activity or planting seasons. The first planting season coincided with the long rains season between March and July when they planted a black bean *Njahi* (*Dolichos lablab*) thus it was named the *Njahi* season. Today the main crop planted in this season is maize and subsequently it is called the maize season. This was followed by a chilly cold season, *gathano* between July and August. The temperatures in July/August can fall as low as 2° Celsius in Nyeri and this part of the *gathano* season was referred to as “rotting birds”, *Mworia Nyoni*, as birds purportedly die of cold in their nests. Though actual precipitation in this season is very low, in the higher parts of the plateau like Nyeri, people generally huddle in front of a fire because the cold combines with a mist and an almost perpetual drizzle and wetness. The third climatic season, the short rains happen between September and December and was also the second planting season, the millet season, *Kimera kia mwere*. (*Pennisetum glaucum*) The fourth climatic season January to March was called *Themithu*. This was the season all the millet harvest was finalized. With the millet in and the weather superb and no major work the opportunity presented itself for the major ceremonies and celebrations. Circumcision ceremonies with their accompanying song and dance were normally held in this season though it was also possible for girls to be circumcised after the *Njahi* harvest. (Gathigira, 1934:69)

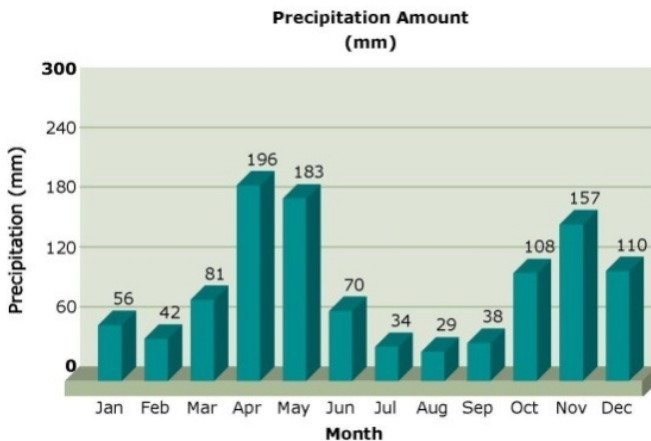


Fig. 2.4 Annual average precipitation for Nyeri Station. (Source: Kenya Metrological Dpt. 2009)

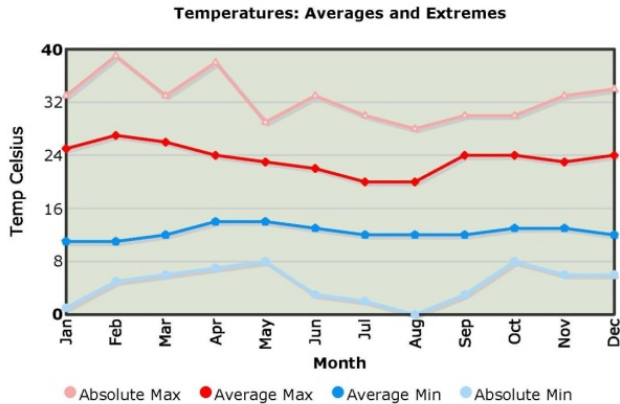


Fig. 2.4 Annual average temperatures for Nyeri Station. (Source: Kenya Metrological Dpt. 2009)

2.4.0 Origins of the Kikuyu

The Kikuyu are a Bantu race and their migration movements and subsequent settlement in Kikuyuland is documented as part of the wider Bantu migrations into East Africa from Central Africa but historians are still sketchy on actual origins.

“The migrations of the Meru and related groups probably began at the coast, but some of the speakers of Kikuyu, Embu and Kamba probably moved north from the Taita hills. However, we cannot be sure as our knowledge is still incomplete. Some writers have suggested that about 1300 the Chuka came up from the Tana river and were the first to arrive in the Mount Kenya area. They were followed by the Embu, about 1425. The last group, the Kikuyu, seem to have arrived in Murang'a by the middle of the sixteenth century and in Kiambu by the end of the seventeenth century.” (Were, 1984:71)

Muriuki, (1974) maps the Kikuyu entry into the Kikuyuland plateau from the South East following the course of the river Tana and at Ithanga (near current Sagana), there parting ways with the Gicugu, and proceeding up the now Sagana river up to a point in Gatari, Muranga called *Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga*. From here, which is considered the central point of dispersal of the Kikuyu into the rest of the Plateau, a group went North and another South while another remained. Because of the nature of the drainage which is determined by the slope of the Aberdares Ranges and Mt Kenya, the various moving bands of settlers would occupy the ranges of the rivers as they moved further North or South of the Central dispersal point. Those who moved to the South kept moving until they came to the area of Kabete and could move no more South as the area was

settled by the Kaputie Maasai. The settlement to the North reached as far as Nyeri plains which were the Laikipia Maasai Southern reach. To the South East beyond the *Ol Donyo Sabuk*, were the beginnings of the dry poor agricultural plains where the Kamba inhabited. The Kikuyu did not seem to have settled beyond Thika in this direction by the time the Huxleys were moving there in the early 1900's.

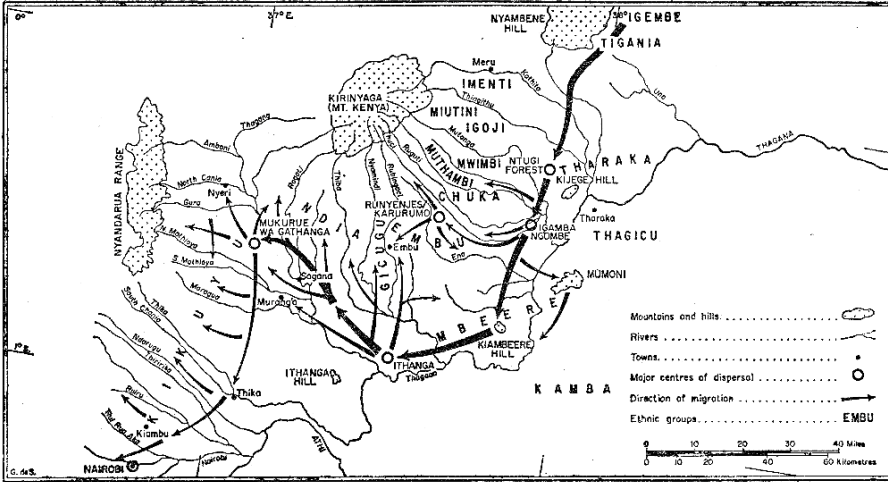


Fig 2.5 The Migration of Mt. Kenya Peoples. (Source: Muriuki 1974:50)

Were (1984), suggests that settlements did not happen at once but seem to have come in several waves and from quite different sources. The Plateau was forested with Equatorial forest from both the Aberdares Range and Mt. Kenya that thinned as the land sloped to the South East plains. This forest was originally occupied by two groups according to Muriuki (1984). The first group were tall hunters called the Athi who occupied the forest and from whom the Kikuyu negotiated farming rights in the forest. The second group was a short hunter gatherer type, the Gumba who seems to have been assimilated. By the 17th Century the Kikuyu had settled into the area as loosely three groupings, the Northern Kikuyu, Gaki, now Nyeri shared Ruarai river with the middle group Metumi, now Muranga who shared the Thika river (Chania) as a ritual marker with the Southern Kikuyu, Kabete, now Kiambu. (See fig. 2.6)

2.5.0 Kikuyu Mythology and Cosmology

The history of a people in order to be meaningful and enduring is usually reduced to a myth. According to Campbell (2007) unless a historical event is mythologized it cannot become a source of inspiration and thus an engine for a tribe's survival,

“An occurrence needs to be liberated, as it were, from the confines of a specific period and brought into the lives of contemporary worshipers, or it will remain a unique, unrepeatable event, or even historical freak that cannot really touch the lives of others. We do not know what actually happened when the people of Israel escaped from Egypt and crossed the Sea of Reeds, because the story has been written as a myth” (Armstrong, 2006:111)

Thus the Kikuyu myth of origin serves to simplify, codify and create a mind map or cosmology out of the physical maps of their wonderings, “formulating and rendering an image of the complex universe that is simple and comprehensible to all.” (Campbell, 2007:220). This can then easily be handed down from generation to generation being used to shape individuals and the cause of the tribe.

The myth itself is well known to every Kikuyu. Much like most myths, the popular version by Kenyatta starts, “In the beginning of things ...” God, *Mugai* or *Ngai*, who is the divider of all took the first man, *Gikuyu* to His abode atop Mt Kenya where he showed him the fertile land below and told him that it was all his. What God showed was the space - defined like the Kikuyu traditional four legged stool - by the four high points that defined Kikuyuland. These were, God's Abode, Mt Kenya, Kiri Nyaga (The mountain of light), the Aberdares, *Nyandarwa*, (the sleeping hides of God), the Ol-donyo Sabuk, *Kia Njahi* (the mountain of hyacinth beans) and the Ngong Hills, *Kia Mbiruiru* (the black spotted mountain). According to Kenyatta God said, “within these walls, your sons and daughters shall multiply, enjoying at the same time the beauty of the country and the fruits thereof..” (Kenyatta, 1966:3). *Ngai* then directed *Gikuyu* to go and settle at a grove of fig trees, *Mukuyu*, (*Ficus sycomorus*). This place has traditionally been identified as *Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga* near Muranga, approximately at the centre of the four pillars (Kenyatta, 1965:5). This is the mythical centre of the four corner world of the Kikuyu, their Axis Mundi with the mythical tree, *Mukuyu*, linking man to God.

According to the myth, as told by Gakaara (1998), when the first Kikuyu man, *Gikuyu*, arrived at the place he found a woman Mumbi waiting for him and the two got married. The union produced ten daughters but no sons. *Gikuyu* then prayed to God facing Mt. Kenya and making burnt sacrifices at the giant *Mukuyu* tree. God answered by sending nine young men who married each of the daughters. The last one, Wamuyu was too young to marry and remained with her

parents when the others later went each their way to establish what were subsequently to become the social organizational pillars of the tribe, the ten Kikuyu clans, *Mihiriga*. Each clan to date bears the name of the founding daughter of that clan. Wamuyu though unmarried did bear children whose clan is named after her. Though the clans are ten numerically, they are always mentioned as ‘nine full’, *kenda muiyuru*. This is due to the belief among the Kikuyu that to number exactly is to omen a thing’s finality. Thus if you were to ask a Kikuyu how many herd of cattle he has, or how many children, he hesitates to give an exact number as this would mean he is satisfied with that number and thus will get no more. He also believes that this may result in their demise (Wanjau, 1998:11). Strict Kikuyus like Gathigira (1934), and Gakaara (1998) refuse to number the list of clans while others like Kago (1954), still superstitious even after becoming a devoted Christian, lists the numbers up to nine and then uses an asterisk for the last clan. Following this precedence below is the unnumbered list of the ‘nine full’ clans. The order in which they were born is unclear except that the last was the well known *Wamuyu* or *Warigia*.⁶ Most of them had multiple names depending on region but it seems the prefix *wa* indicates the principal name. This profusion of multiple names is what caused Routledge to list 13 names but most Kikuyu authorities now agree on the names below.

- Wanjiru, mother of Anjiru
- Wambui, mother of Ambui
- Wanjiku, mother of Agaciku
- Waceera or Njeri mother of the clan Aceera
- Wangari, mother of Angari or Aithekahuno
- Wakiuru or Wambura mother of Akiuru or Ambura or Ethaga
- Wangeci or Waithira, mother of Angeci or Aithirandu
- Wairimu or Gathigia, mother of Airimu or Agathigia
- Wangui or Waithiegeni, mother of Angui or Aithiegeni
- Wamuyu or Warigia or (Wanjugu) mother of Aicakamuyu

Each side of the V shaped Kikuyu plateau is corrugated by streams and rivers that run from the two water towers, Mt. Kenya and the Aberdares. To the people settling on these slopes the mind map consisted of the ridges, *mbaris*, the rivers, and the movement of the sun from the mountain of light to God’s sleeping hides. From the point of view of a homestead built on the slopes, up was the top of the valley and down was the bottom of valley. The East was towards Mt. Kenya and was *Irathiro*, (Rising sun). *Ithuiro* was ‘setting sun’ or West, *Ruguru*. The direction of the stream was *Itherero*, which also meant ‘going down’ and thus West. The sky, *matui-ini*, was the dome supported by the four

⁶ The order given above was arrived at after long consultations with elders engaged in a research they call, “Returning the river to its course”

sacred mountains symbolically represented in the four legged traditional Kikuyu stool. Maathai (2010) develops her model for the future of Africa by using the symbol of the “three legged African stool” but it should be understood that unlike many African tribes who made the stool three legged, the Kikuyu made a clear distinction between the woman’s four-legged *Giturua*, that was used in the *Nyumba* and the man’s *Njung’ua*, a three or four-legged smaller affair which could be carried about by the man. This Kikuyu cosmology of the circle on a square impacted heavily on their conception and development of space as will be seen in Chapter 3.

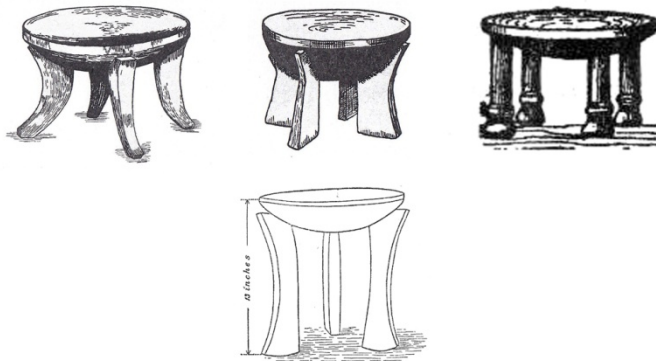


Fig. 2.8 Top: Three examples of Kikuyu traditional stools (source: Beecher, 1950:16 & Cagnolo 1933) Below: Kamba traditional stool (source: Hobley, 1971)

2.6.0 Family and Social Structure

The Kikuyu were polygamous and although the original ten clans are named after a ten daughters of Mumbi giving speculation that there might have been a time the society was a matriarchy, this had faded into a myth⁷ and the political organization was at the turn of the 19th Century a patriarchy, the man being the head of a family with several wives each having her own separate hut and granary.

Every Kikuyu belongs to one of the ten clans. When a man marries a woman from a different clan, the offspring will belong to the clan of the man although the woman continues to be associated with to her father’s clan and its practices. All the members issuing from a man’s union with one or more wives become members of the same *Mucii* which literally means homestead. In a polygamous homestead, each wife was a *githaku* or her “side” consisting of an area defined by her daily operations outside her hut. The *githaku* not only meant a physical space but also a social unit. Each woman’s children in a polygamous

⁷ Kenyatta 1965 Kenyatta gives an elaborate myth of “How women stopped to rule over the men”. P 8-10

arrangement belonged to her *githaku*, (Wanjau, 1998:18). All the offspring of the several brothers and step brothers will belong to a *nyumba* of their patriarch. This *nyumba* or “house of” was usually named after the grandfather patriarch of that house for *nyumba* literally means house. Beyond first cousins, and other further removed extended families are what constitutes the *mbari* or sub-clan. This can be a very big affair and the *mbari* settled all along a ridge with a river or stream separating it from the *mbari* across the river (Muriuki, 1974:59). This does not mean that some members could not go and settle elsewhere. They always did, but always referred to their ‘real’ home as where the main *mbari* was located. *Mbari* literally means side and the Kikuyus say the “people of that side”, or that *mbari*. Very many *mbaris* are what constitute a clan, *muhiriga*.

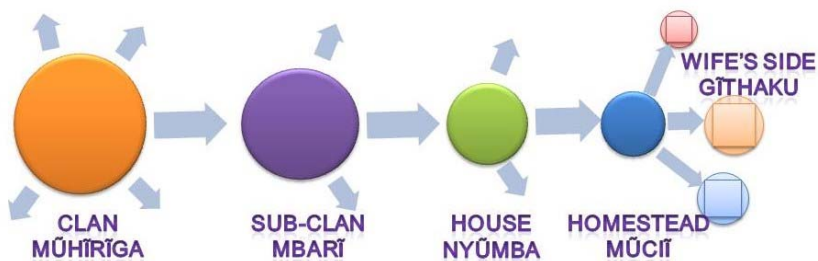


Fig 2.9 Kikuyu Social Structure. (Source: Author, 2011)

The homestead of a man whether polygamous or not stood as a distinct entity that could be termed the basic planning unit. Whether several homesteads belonging to a sub clan or house were built close together for security purposes, or it stood apart, a homestead could always be identified as the definite planning unit.

Since this *Mucii* literally translates as “Home”, the term homestead is then the proper description of this organizational unit as is understood among the Kikuyu. It is very well illustrated by Wangari Maathai in her autobiography.

“My father had four wives, including one he married after I was born. My mother was the second wife. At the time I was living in Nakuru, there were about ten children in my father’s household. All of us, the wives and the children and my father, lived in a single compound, a typical Kikuyu homestead. Our homestead covered a large open space and included several houses and a big courtyard with a fence and gate surrounding it. My father had his own hut, called a *thingira*, which was one large, round room constructed of mud and wood and covered by a sloped grass-thatched roof. Here he ate, slept, and received guests, including strangers,

who were not supposed to go beyond the *thingira* without permission from the man of the house. I would sometimes take food from my mother to my father in his hut, but as a girl I would not be expected to stay. This was the realm of men, boys and male visitors. Each of my father's wives had her own house, called a *nyumba*, similarly constructed but with several compartments. This was the realm of the woman, the children, and female visitors and relatives" (Maathai, 2006:16).

From Maathai's description and others like Thiong'o (2010) it is possible to get a snapshot of what she calls a 'typical Kikuyu homestead'. If a man had say ten or more wives, which was not uncommon, the entire settlement could look like a village and was called an *ituura* or village. When several, independent homesteads were built close to each other for security reasons, they would likewise be called an *ituura* or village but a closer look would reveal that they constituted wholes of individual compounds or homesteads and yet possessing a social interaction that was quite strong.

Community life among the Kikuyu revolved around the village, a term that is also used for the settlement on a ridge of several independent homesteads closely linked by a network of paths and usually associated with a particular sub-clan, *mbari*. During the months of January and February after the harvest when it was dry and cool, the people held communal dancing and singing over the territory. These dances were organized by villages though several villages could come together for a major dance or competition for instance the "initiated singers" competition of enigmatic poetry, *gicandi*, (Pick, 1973). The people dressed for the songs and they took place mainly in the evenings just before twilight when there was moonlight. They were arranged according to ages and sex. Young girls would participate in the 'one bone' dance, *ihindi rimwe*. Young boys who had not yet been circumcised held their *Nguru*, the young men and women held the *Kibata* and *Gicukia*, while there was an older men only *mugoiyo* and an older women only *Ndumo* and *Gitiro* (Wambugu, 2006:179-182). These dances showed an extremely sophisticated level of spatial order and organization which has not been studied adequately. In the *Gicukia* for instance the dancing around the Mukuyu tree of origin seems to reflect mandala formations found in other cultural groups all over Africa and Asia. One cannot fail to see the complexity of the formations though their meaning may be obscure.

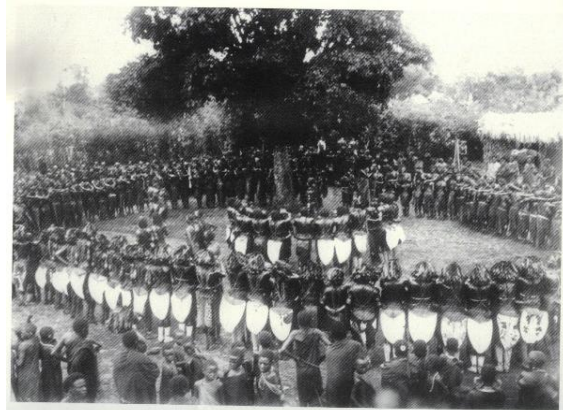


Fig. 2.10 Kikuyu Dances. The *gicukia* dance for young men performed round a Mukuyu tree. (Source: Cagnolo 1933)

In most evenings, children huddled near the fire in the woman's hut listening to folk tales and this constituted a form of education. The day was spent either working in the fields, collecting firewood and for the boys, rearing goats and generally playing. Women took the bulk of the work in the fields helped by girls.

Boys play consisted of shooting and hunting birds with slings made of string and pieces of leather. Another game, 'spearing the hoop', *kuratha mbara*, was a form of amusement for the expression of the beginnings of sexual passion as well as developing the idea of the circle and the point. One boy would throw the hoop while his mate tried to throw a sharpened stake through it while mentioning the name of the girl of his dreams. If he speared her, it meant there was hope while missing meant she would spurn him. Girls could amuse themselves with body form exercises like the dance of 'one bone', *ihindi rimwe*, gyrating on one leg as the world rotates on its axis. Another game by girls was with round ball seeds of the Sodom Apple, *Ndongu*, (*solanum incanum*), the size of marbles. There were many other games also specific to regions.

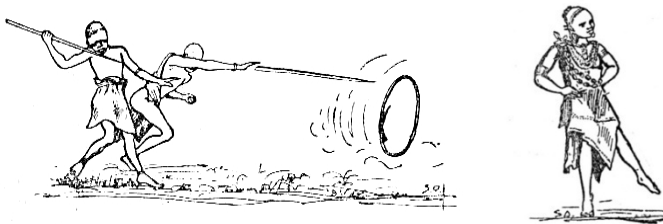


Fig 2.11 Various youth amusement activities. (Source: Wambugu 2006)

Left: Boys putting a point to a circle and right the one bone dance by girls.

2.7.0 The Economy.

The Kikuyu were agriculturalists and also kept sheep and goats and for the well off, a humped breed of cattle. Goats were a form of currency and so practically every Kikuyu man kept a herd of goats. A woman always kept a fattened ram in an enclosure, *gicegu* inside her hut. The cattle were grazed together with the goats during the day by the young men and boys and they were taken out in the morning to where good grazing could be found and brought back into the homestead in the evening. The cattle were housed in a fenced enclosure, *kiugu* near the man's hut and inside the main fence surrounding the homestead. The goats and sheep were distributed among the huts in the compound for the night (Routledge, 1910).

As mentioned earlier, there were two planting seasons, the *njahi* season and the *mwere* season. The *njahi* once planted required to be weeded by the women and once ready, they were harvested, shelled and stored in the granary. The millet on the other hand required a lot of vigilance after it flowered as birds could also feed on it. Therefore a platform, *gitara*, in the millet field was constructed and it was the boys' and girls' task to scare away the birds from this platform from very early in the morning to late evening using slings and shouts. This task only came to an end after the millet was harvested, and stored in the granaries.

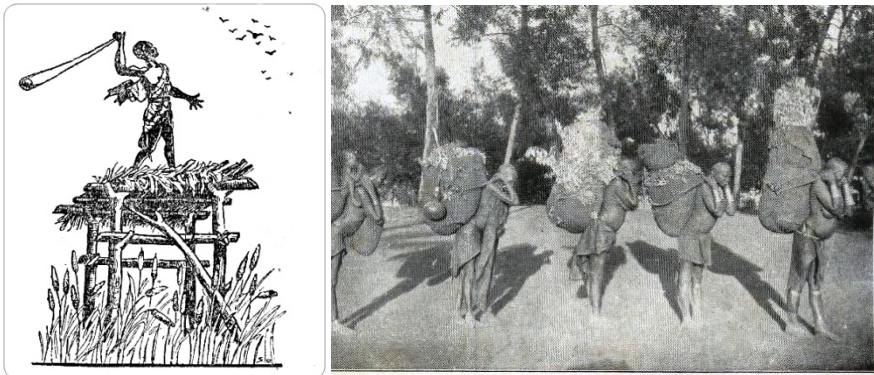


Fig. 2:12 The caring and harvesting of millet. (Source: Cagnolo 1933)

Left: A platform built for scaring birds and the harvest

Right: Girls coming home with a harvest of millet.

“The Kikuyu diet was mainly a vegetable one with millet, bananas, sweet potatoes and beans being especially important.” (Taylor, 1970). Millet and sorghum were ground into a flour which was used to make porridge or gruel, the principle breakfast. Maize and pigeon peas, *njugu*, and/or hyacinth beans, *njahi*,

and other legumes were first boiled in a large pot for several hours. Green plantain bananas, and various green vegetables preferably pumpkin leaves or stinging nettle or a whole range of leafy greens growing in uncultivated farm land left fallow were added later and these let to cook for half to three quarters of an hour. The excess stock was then drained and the pot removed from the fire and the stuff mixed thoroughly with a stick prepared for this purpose, *muiko*, and served as half round cakes on a calabash. This was the main meal and what was known as food, *irio*. Sweet potatoes, yams, arrowroot and cassava were second class foods which were used to break the monotony of real food. Roasted sweet potatoes and roasted maize were snacks. The main meal was always the evening meal. During the day, those working in the fields or herding would carry the previous night's leftovers for their lunch. They would also carry cold fermented porridge in small gourds. For fruits, ripe bananas were the principle fruits and a woman always kept some in her private store. Wild fruits and berries were gathered from the forest. Blackberries, *ndare*, and, *mbiru* were favorites while there were all manner of fruit trees in the forest, most famous being the giant yellow mulberry, *mwituya*. Young boys tending cattle in the field roasted anything from teaks, locusts, and birds eggs but would make sure not to mention this at home. The Kikuyu also kept hives in the forest and harvested honey from time to time whose main purpose was the making of beer. Beer could also be made with sugarcane though honey produced the premium beer. The sugarcane was also chewed straight from the cane as a snack. The occasional meat from a sacrificial goat was a luxury as "meat was not regarded strictly as food" (Leakey, 2007:270). There were prescribed ways of cutting up the meat and cooking it and even eating it. Certain parts could only be boiled and certain parts could only be roasted. The head for example was divided with each part eaten according to its meaning. Thus the tongue could only be eaten by the men who were meant to talk and be listened to. Women, *atumia*, a word derived from 'keeping silence' ate the cheeks, and girls, so that they could listen ate the ears etc.

Water was drawn from the nearest stream or river of which there was one at the bottom of every inhabited ridge. If there was no stream at the bottom of a ridge, that ridge was never settled and was used for farming and people would walk to the farms but live where a stream was near. The stream or river was also used for taking baths and for the animals though cattle usually drank nearest to where they happened to be grazing.

The land was communally owned at sub-clan level, *mbari*, though a man had de-facto ownership of his piece through having bought it or having acquired it by first rights of 'breaking the forest' or inheritance. Breaking the forest was not an easy thing as there were complicated negotiations, agreements and payments to be made with the original hunters occupying the forest, the Dorobo and Athi. The land was therefore most of the time acquired by a sub-clan group, *mbari* and therefore was owned collectively. The cultivation of the land however

was an individual thing and depended more on acumen and numbers, as a family with more members could cultivate more land. An individual however could not dispose of his piece at will without the authority of the sub-clan elders or *muramati* (guardian), (Muriuki, 1974:75). “The cultivation of the sub-clan holding was the clearest means of retaining land tenure rights.” In the event that land fell fallow for too long due to non use by *mbari* members new tenants were sought in order for the land not to revert to forest. Where a temporary tenant was allowed to build a homestead in such land, he was called a *muthami* (Cotula, 2004:22)

The demarcation of the land between different *mbari* followed natural markers like “rivers, valley or ravines” and where this was not possible special trees markers, *itoka*, were planted with a lot of ceremony and it was considered a very grave taboo to uproot one of these markers. The system also applied for the various pieces, *thanju* belonging to members of the same *mbari* however no permanent markers were fixed between these and there were no fences as such. The only fence that really mattered was the one surrounding the homestead or village for security purposes. Goats and cattle could graze anywhere so long as they were kept away from the crops. Firewood could be gathered anywhere it could be found irrespective of who owned the land.

Certain trees like the *muratina*, used for making beer were owned by the sub-clan and the sacred groves and trees were also communally owned and maintained. No one could claim ownership of a sacred grove or forest or *muratina* tree. A man who had no land inherited from his father, could failing to acquire the land from the forest as ‘first rights’, rent a piece from another person who had more. This type of arrangement between a landowner and a tenant, *muhoi*, ensured there were no ‘landless’ people as the land borrowed could even be passed on from father to son and furthermore, “they paid nothing for the use of the land apart from offering an occasional gift for example of beer, at the appropriate times” (Muriuki, 1974:75).

The Kikuyu practiced a system of shifting cultivation where a piece of land was left to lie fallow sometimes for a number of years in order for it to recover while the family cultivated another piece of land. This was done for the annual crops and the perennial crops like cassava and yams would be left in the land left behind. They also practiced crop rotation so that the little pieces of land with each crop could be quite scattered but ownership was never disputed and each family knew its pieces of land.

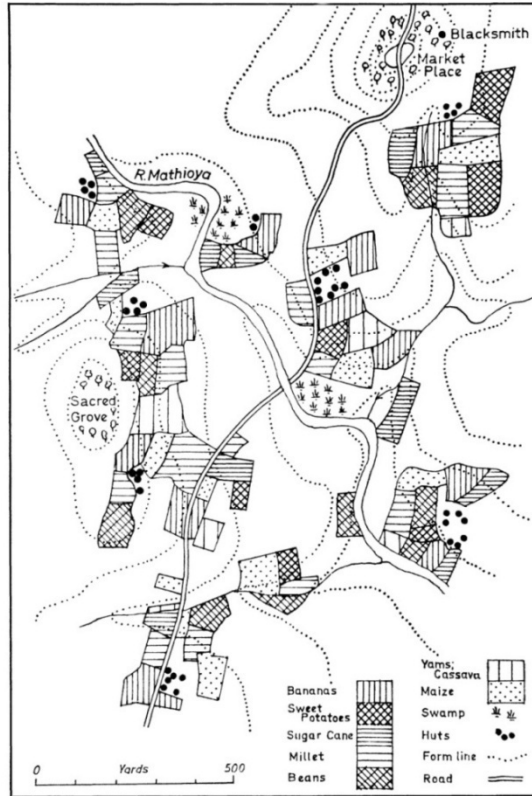


Fig 2.13 Land use pattern in Kikuyuland circa 1902 (Source: Taylor, 1970)

The Kikuyu made pottery and the pots were the only cooking implements used in the house. The soil in Muranga and lower Mukurwe-ini is particularly good for the making of pottery. Not everybody made pots and there were professionals who sold their wares for sale to the others just like there were blacksmiths who produced the iron tools like spears, machetes, jewelry, and all manner of thing like cow bells, music jiggles and many other products. A smith occupied a high status in society and it was taboo to cause one to bleed. The smith guild was protected and one required undergoing certain ceremonies to be inducted. They worked in a special area removed from the rest of the people and a visit to the smith in his workshop entailed following prescribed rules of behavior while within the area of the smithy (Gathigira, 1934:80).

Every mature woman could make a basket, *kiondo* as she walked, or sat or waited for the food to cook etc. These baskets were used to carry all manner of things and ranged in size from modest handbags to huge sack like bags, *nyamikwa* for carrying things from the farm to the house and for going to the market. The *kiondo* was made from the back of the *mugiyo*, (*Triumfetta tomentosa*), which had to be chewed first and then made into thin corded strings

by rolling two strands between the palm and the thigh, the same method used to make the thin corded hair pieces today. It made a tough basket that could withstand a lot of weight. In the beginning of the Twentieth Century after the British introduced the sisal plant whose strands were extracted in a less cumbersome method and could take coloring better, it quickly replaced the *mugiyo*. The strap was made from the hide of a cow and the colours from different leaves and barks of certain trees. A close relative of the *kiondo* is the tray, *gitaruru*, which was used for all manner of things as a tray of food during preparation and also as a tray for the food after preparation. The *gitaruru* was also used for winnowing. It was made from thin stripes of the stem of the *mugiyo* which were held tightly into a spiral by the bark of the same *mugiyo*. Sizes varied according to need and some were as small as 6 inches in diameter. The *gitaruru* proper was about two feet in diameter and was smeared with cow dung on both sides. A small one was called a *gatiti* or *gitti*.

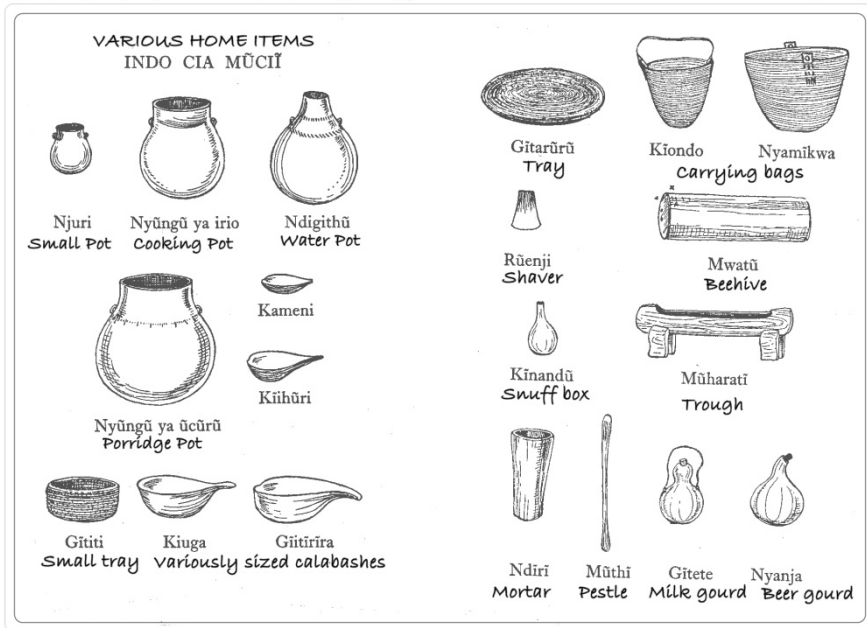


Fig 2.14 Various items found in a Kikuyu home. (Source: Kago 1954)

Water was stored in a narrow necked pot called a *ndigithu* and it could also be used to fetch water from the river. Small girls could fetch water from the river using smaller gourds. The gourds and their half split derivatives, the calabashes, constituted the main implements for eating and drinking. Most homesteads had a gourd plant growing somewhere within the compound and this plant produced most of the utensils necessary in a home. A long thin one of between one and two feet was used to store and ferment milk. Very tiny ones the size of a middle

finger were used as tobacco containers. Adult Kikuyu used powdered tobacco as snuff but some also used to chew tobacco leaves.



Fig 2.15 Various loads carried by Kikuyu women. (Source: Rigamonti, 2001)

Top left: Produce from farm in a large hand woven basket, *nyamikwa*.

Top right: Carrying water from the river with a narrow necked pot, *ndigithu*, in a special harness and the child on top.

Bottom left: Usual way of carrying a baby. The child's leather harness, *ngoi* is usually covered over by the woman's garment, *nguo*, also in leather so that the child was kept warm and was in direct skin contact with the the mother.

Bottom right: Carrying a banana home for food while making a *kiondo*.

2.8.0 Political Organization

The Kikuyu had a government composed of several councils of elders, *njama*. Two of the most important ones were the military Council of War, *Njama ya ita* made up of the leaders of the various fighting units and, and the civic Tribal Council, *Njama ya bururi*, made up of the revered elders from each clan. The Council of War was a loose alliance of each of the geographical areas' main war chiefs, *athamaki* (Muriuki, 1974:131). These *Athamaki* war chiefs derived their allegiance and power from having proved themselves in the art of war against the Maasai and/or against each other and by extension having accumulated a lot of wealth from these military campaigns (Kenya, 1966)⁸. To be a *muthamaki* in the council of war was only one of such *athamaki* in other fields like judicial *athamaki*, or ceremonial rites *athamaki* etc. though it was possible for a powerful individual to emerge who combined several if not all the offices. "As *athamaki* in the warrior corps they wielded a lot of power" (Muriuki, 1974:132). The fighting regiments were organized around the age-set system derived from the circumcision rites. Every two to three years a group of young boys who were circumcised together formed an age-set and from these sets the warrior regiments were formed. Several age set warriors were grouped together to form a regiment. The leaders of each regiment reported directly to the *muthamaki* of the jurisdiction and to the war council.

The Civic Tribal Council of elders was however the one involved in the actual governance of the tribe through judicial and various other lower councils all the way down to the family council, *ndundu ya mucii* or *mwaki*, literally referencing to the fireplace within the woman's hut in the homestead. The Civic Clan councils were involved in judicial and civic matters like resolving land disputes, dealing with criminals etc. which the lower councils had failed to resolve, of which was very rare. Very few cases ever ended up at the Clan Council. The only way the author could understand all these seemingly complicated council *njamas*, *athamaki* and *ndundus* as described by Muriuki and others was to simply diagrammatize them. (fig. 2:16)

⁸ The story or legend of Wangombe wa Ihura as told by Kenya gives an interesting snapshot of the lives and times of these war chiefs. pp. 27-59

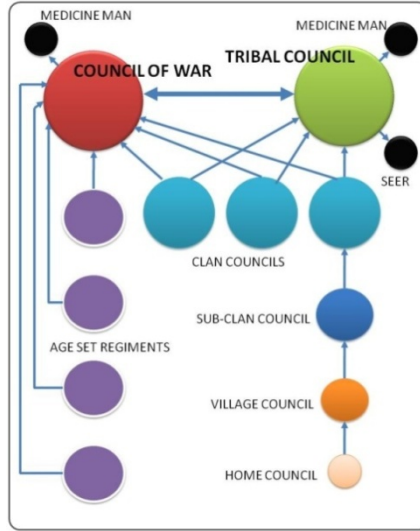


Fig 2.16 Structure of two of the important Kikuyu councils, njama (Source: Author, 2011)

The tribal council's main work was a spiritual steering of the tribe through religious ceremonies and rites as well as all civic governance. The military council's work was simply the maintenance of a standing army. The councils consulted each other and some individuals belonged to several councils. To become a member of the tribal council did not merely require age, but involved intricate ceremonies of initiation in various levels of eldership. These initiation procedures were structured into various grades with fewer and fewer members in the higher grades. Thus there were elders of one goat, of two goats, and of three goats (Muriuki, 1974:127). Certain ceremonies could only be performed by elders of such and such grade etc. The Kikuyu had no ceremonial leader or king and when the various recognized clan elders came together to form the tribal council, *Njama ya Bururi* they had no head but operated through consensus though they occasionally consulted a medicine man or seer or gave ear to the wisdom of a revered elder or oratorical genius (Muriuki, 1974:132). The war council had its own medicine man. The ruling councils of each era had a name which lasted for several generations until there was a handing over, *ituika*, of one generation to a new set of rulers with a new ideology. Each ruling generations is named after the outstanding characteristic of each though some names seem to be difficult to decipher. For instance the *Ndemi* generation belonged to the people who penetrated and cut down the primal forest, thus *Ndemi* or Cutters. The *Cuma* generation before that belonged to the people who discovered the science of smelting iron and thus was named *Cuma* or 'iron generation.'



Fig 2.16 A Kikuyu tribunal in session. (Source: Cagnolo 1933)

2.9.0 Circumcision of Boys and Girls

So much of the Kikuyu traditional social and political order was anchored in the circumcision ceremonies that it is hardly possible to understand the Kikuyu social structure without an examination of these rituals. “It is important to note that the moral code of the tribe is bound up with this custom and that it symbolizes the unification of the whole tribal organization. This is the principle reason why *irua* play such an important part in the life of the Gikuyu people” (Kenyatta, 1965:129). As described in the preceding section, the Kikuyu form of government was structured using the circumcision age set system as a foundation. Circumcision was also used for the encoding of historical timeline as each initiation set was given a name corresponding to the significant event of that year. Scholars like Lambert 1956,⁹ and Muriuki 1974, have examined the complicated system of social and political ordering system of the Kikuyu that arose out of these initiation sets. Briefly, there was a marking of the calendar based on the initiation age sets held each year. Then there was the regiment warrior sets which were basically formed from several boy circumcision sets. The initiation of boys was held using another kind of rhythm as opposed to the uninterrupted initiation of girls. It consisted of three or four continuous year forming a set and then a gap year where no boys were circumcised. Three or more circumcision sets were needed to form a regiment set. Several regiment sets went into forming a generation set, or ruling set. The ruling generation sets passed leadership from one to the next through a break, *ituika* ceremony held at tribal level. It is through tracing these generation, regiment, and initiation sets that Muriuki was able to propose a timeline of the history of the Kikuyu since 1500.

⁹ Probably one of the best documentation of the age set system and political organization of the Kikuyu upon which Muriuki built his monumental “History of the Kikuyu”

RULING GENERATIONS	REGIMENT (ARMY) SETS	
	METUMI (<i>Murang'a</i>) KABETE (<i>Kiambu</i>)	GAKI (<i>Nyeri</i>)
Maina 1862-97 ± 5	1885-93 Mutung'u 1872-80 Njenga	1884-8 Ndung'u/ Ndirangu 1870-74 Ndiritu/Ngunjiri 1856-60 Manguca
Iregi 1827-61 ± 10	1859-67 Mbugua 1846-54 Mungai 1833-41 Gitau	1842-6 King'ori
Ndemi 1792-1826 ± 15	1820-8 Kang'ethe 1807-15 Wainaina 1794-1802 Njoroge	1828-32 Ndirangu 1814-18 Ndigirigi 1800-4 Ndiang'ui
Mathathi 1757-91 ± 20	1781-9 Ng'ang'a 1769-77 Kinyanjui 1756-64 Njuguna	1786-90 Thiuri 1772-6 Ngithitu 1758-62 Matu 1744-8 Tatua 1730-34 Thuita
Ciira 1722-56 ± 25	1743-51 Kinuthia 1730-38 Karanja	
Cuma 1687-1721 ± 30	1717-25 Kimani 1704-12 Kamau 1691-9 Kiamuhia	
Manduti 1652-86 ± 35	1678-86 Cege 1665-73 ? Kiarri 1651-9 ? Mbironde	
? Agu 1617-51 ± 40		
? Tene 1582-1616 ± 45		
? Mamba 1547-81 ± 50		
? Manjiri 1512-46 ± 55		

Fig. 2.18 The Generation and Regiment (Army) sets. (Source: Muriuki, 1974)

Kikuyu sense of morality and behavior, gender relations were also intricately intertwined with the rite of circumcision and among the various rites of passage from one age level into the other it was considered the most central in Kikuyu consciousness.

Today in most of Kikuyuland, only the circumcision of boys remain and it serves to mark the point where a boy 'grows up', *kugimara* and stops sleeping in the main house and moves into a 'cube', a tiny square room that is a carryover of the traditional young men's *thingira*.

2.10.0 Religion

According to Kenyatta (1965) the Kikuyu believed in a supreme God who - they called *Ngai*. *Ngai* lived in the mountains and his favorite abode was Mt. Kenya. Because the mountain peak has a brilliant patch of white snow, *nyaga*, he was often referred to as *Mwene Nyaga*, or possessor of brilliance. *Ngai* sometimes came down to view his creation, and he would make stops at his other three principle mountains, the Aberdares Range, the Ngong Hills, and the El Donyo Sabuk. He could also rest in big sacred trees, like the fig tree, *Mugumo*

and the *Mukuyu*. God never deals with individuals as he did with the first man and to get his favor, prayers were made to him in a communal fashion led by the elders who made sacrifices to him. The preferred sacrifice was a goat killed and roasted under one of the sacred fig trees. These trees were big and old and usually at hilltops so they stood out prominently in the Kikuyu landscape as the mobile telecommunication towers do today.

The spirits of the ancestors could also be prayed to and sacrifices were usually done in two ways. The first was to get blessings from benevolent spirits of the ancestors and the second was to ward off the action of malevolent spirits. The conflict between good and evil was a continuous state of existence and every Kikuyu wore charms in the form of beads or such to ward off evil spirits or to bring good luck. These charms were blessed by a medicine man, *Mundu Mugo* or the smith who fashioned them. The medicine man was consulted on all manner of things especially illnesses and he would prescribe herbal medicines or perform certain magical rituals. The medicine-man, *Mundu Mugo*, was a different personality and profession from the Seer, *Murathi (Muraguri)*. The medicine-man was a doctor who used magical secrets and paraphernalia and could be compared to a modern medical doctor. A seer, *Muraguri* on the other hand was a prophet or shaman, who foretold the fortunes in the future by his ability to communicate with ancestors and God. A seer was consulted on the propitious times for certain actions like going to war or performing certain rituals. These seers were few in the tribe and were held at a much higher level in society than regular medicine-men who were everywhere in every ridge. Kenyatta gives an example of a famous seer as *Cege wa Kibiru* who prophesied the coming of the white man. The choice of a site for a homestead was made by the prospective builder of the homestead and he would usually consult a medicine-man on the appropriateness of the site and in the lack of prosperity later at a site, it was assumed that the place was not properly diagnosed or purified.

The moral ethic and code of behavior of the Kikuyu was however not governed by fear of a God or the action of spirits but by a system of taboo. There was a long list of dos' and don'ts called *thahu* or abominables and lesser *mugiro* or prohibitions. There was a prescribed cause of action for undoing the expected ill-effects of breaking any one of the taboos. Many of them required a certain purification procedure sometimes by a medicine-man depending on the severity of the taboo broken and usually involved the sacrifice of a goat. Because of the heavy cost both emotional and economic of breaking taboos, behavior was thus controlled. These taboos for all manner of things may seem to us today as dealing with trivial matters but each prohibition was grounded in sound reasoning with the people's protection in mind. For instance it was *thahu* for a child to fall off its mothers back and the punishment required purification ceremonies to the mother and child. It is obvious that such an 'abominable thing', or *thahu* was similar to the stringent specifications that are set out for the

manufacture and sale of baby carriages today. Another *thahu* was, ‘it is *thahu*, for a lizard to fall into the fireplace in a hut’. The remedy for this *thahu* was for the entire hut to be demolished and a new one built. It looks like it was a drastic step to take to remedy a small matter but when considered more closely it turns out to have been anchored in sound reasoning. The fact that a lizard had found its way into the grass thatch was evidence that there were so many insects in the grass as to attract the lizards, so the argument went; and if there were insects, it meant that the smoke was not curing the grass enough to keep away insects and thus the grass must be rotting. Such a roof could not be trusted and had to be demolished at once before it fell on the occupants resulting in a greater tragedy. There were many taboos like these associated with the house and the homestead but many of them are not documented and are still in oral tradition form.

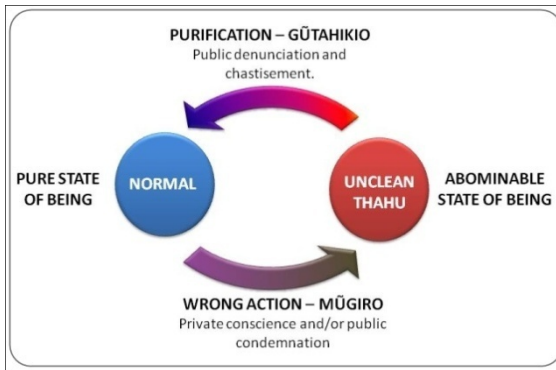


Fig 2.19 System of *thahu* morality enforcement (Source: Author, 2011)



Fig. 2.20 A ‘sin vomiting’ procedure conducted by a medicineman. (Source: Rigamonti, 2002)

Breaking a prohibition, *mugiro* results in an unclean state of abomination, *thahu* which is removed through chastisement and sometimes involves a vomiting out ritual by the offender, *gutahikio*. This vomiting out ritual returns the offender back into the pure state of being.

Because a person dying inside the hut rendered it unclean, and the hut had to be burned down, when a person was believed to be close to death he was taken out and built a small shelter in the bush where he could be cared for till he died. Sometimes a person recovered and came back after the healing though he had to go through purification before acceptance back into the village or homestead. If he died inside the hut, his body had to be removed before the hut was burned down and since it was taboo to handle a dead body, a hole was broken in the back wall of the hut so that hyenas can enter and remove the body. Alternatively, a person who was untouchable by the *thahu* of a dead body was found and paid to remove the body.

A list of all the taboos and prohibitions is a tall order to compile but a sampling of the rules and regulations governing just the homestead and the house from Leakey and others is hereby given to illustrate the importance of the taboo system in the day-to-day maintenance of a Kikuyu homestead. There were several levels of severity of the prohibitions and while some were merely bad form, others required purifications by a *Mundu Mugo*. These were equivalent to modern building By-laws.

1. It was forbidden for a hut to have two doors.
2. It was taboo to lean a spear up against the roof of a hut. All spears had to be either stuck in the ground, or leaned against the fence or under the eaves. There was no penalty for breaking this taboo, but it was never done. Under no circumstance is a spear allowed inside the hut of a woman.
3. The door is a sliding one and is not hinged and it must always be opened on the side that a man's father and grandfather opened it. If a person opens it on the wrong side he must go out again, shut the door, and re-enter correctly: otherwise he may not eat any food in the hut.
4. No one may close the door other than the owner of the hut. A visitor may open the door to enter, but closing the door must be left to the woman or her sons.
5. A husband may not shut the door of his hut save on his wedding night.
6. When entering a hut, a person had to pass and enter the kitchen space on the side of the fattening ram's pen, *gicegu*.
7. You may not keep standing inside a hut. If you do not want to sit then you must go and stand outside.
8. It is taboo for young boys and girls to swing with the door lintel. They are wishing the death of their parents.
9. It was taboo for a man to sleep on the side by the outer wall of his wife's bed.

10. It was taboo to start moving a woman's hut to a new site while she was menstruating.
11. It was taboo for a fire in a hut to go out at any time when beer was being brewed in that hut, or when any special ceremony or sacrifice was taking place in that hut or in connection with it.
12. In no circumstances might all the fires in a homestead be allowed to go out together. For the purposes of this rule the subsidiary homestead of a married son attached to his father's homestead counted as part of the main homestead.
13. If a cooking pot cracked while food was being cooked in it, that food might not be eaten except by women past childbearing.
14. If a woman was preparing castor oil from castor oil berries, and during the process of heating them over the fire, she either let them boil over or dry up in the pot, a purification ceremony and sacrifice was essential.
15. Should anyone in anger or drunkenness pluck thatch from any hut in a homestead, a sacrifice and purification would be essential to avoid disaster.
16. In a woman's *Nyumba*, the head end of her bed was towards the *thegi* and the foot end towards the *kweru*. The head end of the girls' bed was towards the *gicegu* and the fool; end towards the *thegi* (see Fig. 3.13). It was taboo for anyone to sleep in these beds except with their head at the head end of the bed.
17. A circumcised man may not under any circumstance approach the side of his mother's side of the kitchen or touch her bed.
18. Young unmarried girls who are circumcised may not sit on the *Kweru* side of the kitchen but must sit on their bed side. All grown men had to sit on the *Ruri* side of the hut.
19. There is only one fireplace in a hut consisting of three stones. In the event of a temporary secondary fireplace being created by the addition of a two more stones, the head of the family may eat food from that secondary fireplace.
20. If the fire drying rack above the fireplace, (*itara*) breaks and falls, a sacrifice must be done to replace it.
21. It was prohibited to pass food through a crack in the wall of a hut. Such food had to be taken out and brought in through the door before it could be eaten.
22. It is not permitted to pass food over the fireplace to a person on the other side, nor can food be taken around a pole. Food passed over the door may not be eaten by the head of the family.
23. If anyone deliberately broke a cooking pot or a gourd in a homestead, the purification ceremonies and sacrifices involved the slaughter of seven goats and sheep,
24. If a man or woman fell down within their own homestead, purification and sacrifice were necessary.
25. If a bedstead broke when someone was sleeping in it, purification was required of the person.

26. No one might touch or approach the garbage dump (*kiara*) of a homestead other than the members of that homestead. If they did so, purification would be necessary.
27. If anyone, other than a child that had not been "born a second time," or a very sick person, defecated within a hut or in the courtyard, a purification ceremony was essential.
28. It was taboo to come into contact with the menstrual blood of any other person (something which could happen easily in a hut), and purification was necessary if this happened. (There were certain minor exceptions).
29. In certain circumstances huts were pulled down and either left to rot or the materials stacked for future use; these circumstances were linked with death and divorce respectively.
30. It was taboo for any person including a child to die inside a hut. In the event of such an occurrence purification of all the inhabitants of the hut was necessary and the hut demolished.
31. If the child's harness, *ngoi* was accidentally left outside overnight it must be beaten with a leather strap in the morning being asked, "where did you sleep?"
32. If the owner of a homestead cut himself and drew blood either while in the homestead or when he was out in the fields, he had to sacrifice a goat or sheep for purification.
33. If a hyena should enter a village or homestead and dung either in the open clearing of the entrance; area (*thome*) or in any courtyard (*Nja*), ceremonial purification was essential.
34. If a hyena should enter a hut, a purification ceremony must be performed.
35. If a jackal barked in the entrance area or in the courtyard of a homestead, a ceremonial purification was necessary.
36. Should any beast—calf, goat, or sheep—suck or lick any part of a human in a homestead, that animal had to be sacrificed for a purification ceremony at the village of a relation-in-law.
37. Should a toad, frog, or lizard fall or jump into the fire in the hearth of a hut, a purification ceremony was essential.
38. If an owl hooted near a homestead, or worse still, perched on any hut or granary, purification was necessary.
39. If a snake was killed within the confines of a homestead, a purification ceremony had to take place,
40. It was taboo to kill a bird called (*Cossypha* or Robin chat) within the confines of the homestead.
41. If a kite, when flying over a homestead, let its droppings fall on any person, that person had to be purified, the manner of purification depending upon the sex of the person involved.

2.11.0 Manners and Code of Conduct.

Manners relate to etiquette and good form while taboo and ritual uncleanliness relate to the prohibitions and codes. Good form or manners usually refers to relationships between the sexes and between age groups. “There are rules of propriety concerning precedence when eating, seating down and speaking” (Cagnolo, 1933:204). When in the *Nja* or the *Nyumba*, women will normally sit in a way that does not expose their thighs to passersby. The boys and girls will not share sleeping quarters unless they are very young children and a circumcised young man cannot sleep in his mother’s *Nyumba*. When a young woman marries she has to have her own *Nyumba* and cannot share it with another married woman. Many rules encoded in taboo were also related to conduct, for instance, it was taboo to pass under a support for a banana tree. This was also a subtle reminder not to pass in front of a seated old man. A young woman may not look directly at an elderly man but must look the other way when passing him or when he is addressing her. All this impacted heavily on the seating arrangements inside the house. It was taboo to go over someone else feet just as it was improper to keep standing inside a house.

2.12.0 Kikuyu Medicine and Treatment of Diseases

The treatment of common ailments like stomach pains, flu, headaches, sores etc. was practiced among the Kikuyu by herbalists using natural herbal remedies. Herbalists used barks, roots leaves and other natural products from the forest as a source of their medicines and most men and women had a working knowledge of the cures. Herbal medicine as a science was shared in the community although certain people became more knowledgeable than others and were consulted as professional herbalists or a medicine-man of a lower category. The practice of professional herbal medicine as a craft, *ugo* was widespread but its professionals were “not taken to be of high standing in native estimation” like the Medicine man proper (Wambugu, 2006:132). Gathigira (1934) calls such a *mundu-mugo* a ‘*mundu-mugo* of the granary divining gourd’, *mugo wa muano wa ikumbi*. In comparison, the more powerful ‘*mundu-mugo* of the *Nyumba* divining gourd’, *mugo wa muano wa nyumba*, a consecrated diviner priest who used his knowledge to get to the bottom of the problem (Gathigira, 1934:60). “According to them diseases must be cured at the root instead of wasting time studying the effects, one must first find out the causes: when these have been dealt with the effects will disappear of themselves.” (Wambugu, 2006:132). The causes of disease were either 1. The infringement of taboo, *thahu*; 2. The eating of oneself up or conscience; *kwiriyania*. 3. The effects of evil spirits or curses by enemies. (Gathigira, 1934:59). The first was treated through questioning the patient by the *mundu-mugo* and if the taboo infringement was known, a specific procedure for reversing the effects of the taboo was undertaken. This was the vomiting out of the taboo. If the cause of the problem was the second, there was

very little the *mundu-mugo* could do as the patient was the power behind the problem. In the third case the *mundu-mugo* set out his divination paraphernalia and through casting beads from his divination gourd and studying the way they arranged themselves, he was able to find out who or what spirit was vexing the patient and what was to be done to placate the spirit or neutralize the curse. The *mundu-mugo* occupied a high position in Kikuyu society and was consulted by all and sundry including the high and mighty. Every War Council had a *mundu-mugo* behind it.



Fig 2.21 Various methods of disease diagnosis (Source: Cagnolo, 1933)

Left: By reading the beads cast from the divination gourd

Right: From the observation of a dying goat

In all these ceremonies and in music and dance the focusing of the group into a centre of a circle is what is most striking as opposed to the modern linear and frontal singing of a group from a dais or stage to an audience. In traditional organization, the performers were also the audience. The doctor consulting a patient today is the same sort of relationship as a stage/audience relationship in drama and dance.

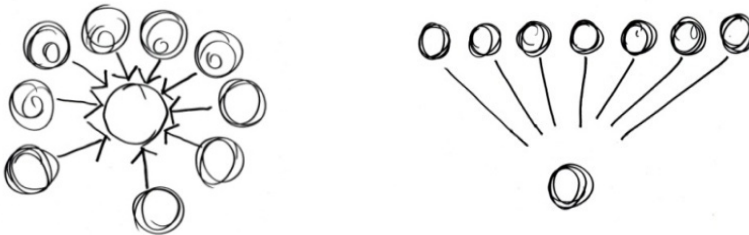


Fig. 2:22 Relationship diagrams (Source: Author, 2012)

Left: Relationship of dancers to tree (Fig 2:10) or the diagnostics of a goat as in fig. 2:20

Right: Relationship of a modern teacher to his students or choir to their conductor.

3.0.0 KIKUYU TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE

This chapter is a presentation of the traditional Kikuyu architecture from the various archival sources. An attempt is made to analyze the material architecturally beyond a mere presentation of the record. An analysis of the structure, space use in the homestead and inside the woman's house, *Nyumba*, is also presented here. Special attention is given to the courtyard and its use. The structure, geometry, form and construction are also given a detailed analysis. The social dimension of the architecture is given in a simple narrative devoid of technical and academic jargon that will be comprehensible to non-architects who are also interested in this area.

3.1.0 FORTIFICATIONS, *KIHINGO*

The Kikuyu relationship with their Maasai neighbors was a love-hate relationship. There were mutual raids into each other's territory for livestock and women. There were also mutual cultural influences between the Kikuyu and Maasai especially among the Northern and Southern frontiers of Kikuyuland. It is along these frontiers that gated communities or "fortified villages" – several homesteads built close together for security purposes - were to be found. The shared security was mainly between closely related homesteads of the same clan although this was not a strict rule.



Fig 3.1 Hillside settlement pattern. (Source: Routledge 1910)

"Kikuyu is a sea of hills and vales, and it is the custom of the natives to build their groups of huts with the protective enclosure high up on the sides of slopes" – (Marsh, 1961)

The Southern Kikuyu of Kabete were more vulnerable to attack from the Maasai and therefore their villages were better fortified than their Northern neighbors. It is said that the name Kiambu is derived from *kia-mbu* meaning the place of screams. As we move further North into Nyeri the homesteads begin to be further apart and less fortified. Within the fortified village there was a notable specific planning pattern in how homesteads grew and extended - something unknown in the Northern Kikuyu of Muranga and Nyeri. This pattern among the

Southern Kikuyu was documented by Leakey (2007). A fortified village meant that people could move about between the homesteads even at night without fear of attack from raiders or animals. It also meant that within a fortified village, the social functions like dances during fair moonlit nights were possible and this enhanced the social interaction.

The fortification was of a live hedge of thorny creepers such as *mutanda mbogo*, (*Pterolobium stellatum*), all around the homesteads while also leaving the original forest intact beyond the fence. Only one entry into the *Ituura* was made and this was strongly fortified with growing branches of trees like the *Mikoigo* and *Mikungugu* twisted into a narrow tunnel that one had to almost crawl under in order to enter the open path into the individual homesteads (Muriuki, 1974).

The gates were always secured after all the livestock had been driven in and warriors within the village organized a security detail. During the day it was usual to see children acting as sentries near the gate and any suspicious character approaching the gate was quickly reported. Entry into an individual homestead within a fortified village had no elaborate gates but the row of granaries at the entry signified entry into the homestead proper. If instead of being part of a village the homestead stood alone, the gate to it was fortified similarly. Just inside the gate was a wide area where visitors were usually met and led into the homestead. This area was called *thome*. The gate was called *kihingo*, a term also for the entire fortification. Routledge (1910) gives details of pits hidden near entrances to the fortified villages which were fitted with sharpened spikes corroborating Muriuki's observation that they were "similar to the Emergency villages built during the Mau-Mau war" (Muriuki, 1974:122).

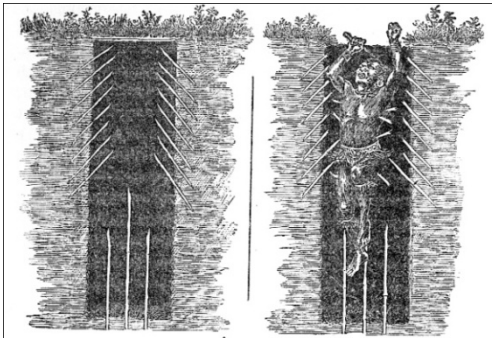


Fig 3.2 Fortifications Hidden war pits dug near entrance to deter intruders. (Source: Routledge 1910)

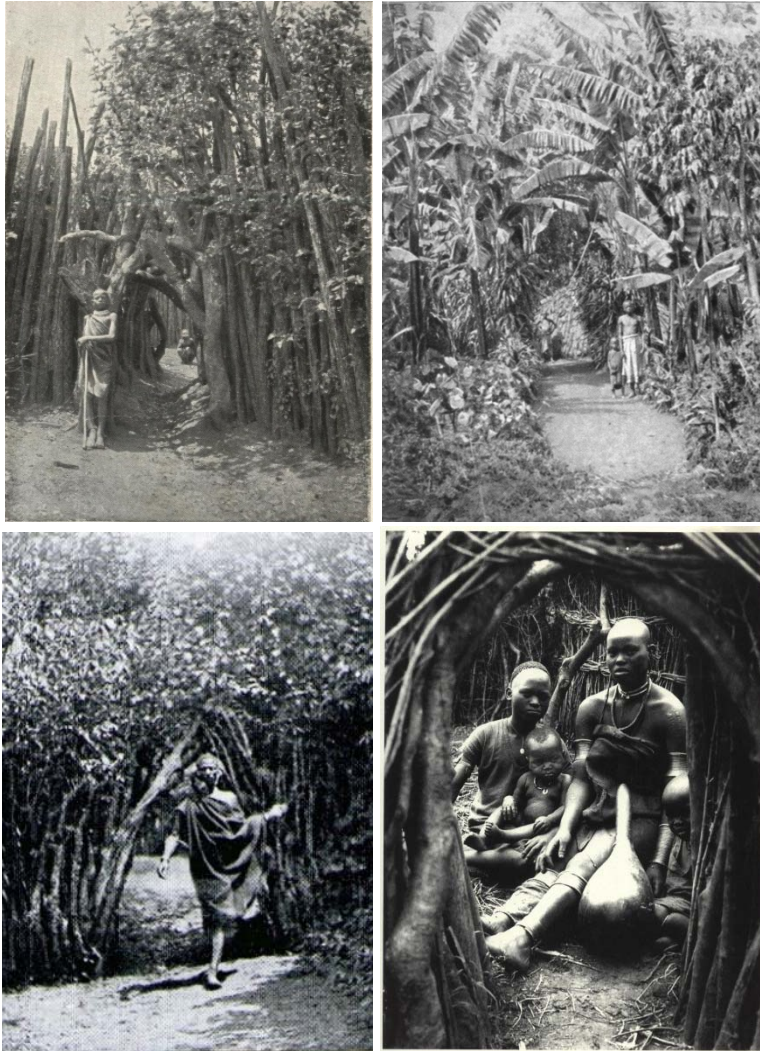


Fig 3.3 Homestead entrances. The great variety of solutions is the most striking thing making every entrance to a homestead unique. (Source above: Cagnolo, 1933, Bottom left: Routledge, 1910, Bottom right: Rigamonti, 2001)

3.2.0 THE TERMS, NYUMBA, THINGIRA AND MUCII

An unmarried man may build a ‘house’. The English word ‘house’ to the Kikuyu mind refers to any building, but ‘house’, *nyumba*, in the context of a Kikuyu home is “that which was built for a specific married woman as no two married women ever shared a house.”¹⁰ The man’s habitation is a *thingira* and is properly what the word ‘hut’ conjures and it is improper to refer to the woman’s house as ‘the woman’s hut’ as it is not properly a hut. To get out of the quandary, the woman’s house can be referred always in the way it is understood in the Kikuyu mind, *Nyumba*, as a proper capitalized name in order to differentiate it from a generic *nyumba*, ‘building’. The man’s hut can be distinguished from any hut by calling it a man’s hut, or *thingira* which however can never be capitalized as a proper name as there are many types of *thingiras*. A *thingira* is any hut for the exclusive use by the male gender. In discussing general ideas common to all huts like setting out a circle etc., the general term hut or house can be used.

Gathigira also raises an important point in Kikuyu architecture that needs clarification in order to navigate between the terms, house and home. He uses the term *mucii*, home for the homestead and the term *nyumba*, which in its proper translation within the home means the specific house of the woman. He suggests that only in the existence of a *Nyumba* does a homestead become a home, *mucii*. The man’s hut however is a *thingira*, a house which nevertheless is never a home in the absence of a woman. In fact it is very common to hear among the Kikuyu in reference to a senior bachelor, *ndari micii*, ‘he has no home’, though the man may have a huge mansion. The word homestead and home do not therefore refer to the same thing as an unmarried man may have a homestead but not a home. Anyamba (1994) recognizes this distinction though without the foregoing explanation. Gathigira’s says, “A home is that which has a woman and a man...” By this he suggests that an unmarried single lady may not lay claim to having a home in the same way a senior bachelor cannot. This is probably because in the traditional society that Gathigira was writing about, it was unheard of for single ladies to establish a home. Home as Benjamin (1999) posits is a complex subject that incorporates many intangibles and metaphysical dimensions and may be very difficult to delineate with a boundary. People say, *gwtu mucii ni Gakindu*, or ‘my home is Gakindu’ but Gakindu is a very large place. A house is a tangible material thing. A home is a complex system of ideas and meanings.

¹⁰ (Gathigira, 1934: 6) *Mucii ni uria uri mutumia na muthuri, amu gutiri mwanake uri mucii wake, ni undu mundu agiaga na mucii o aahikania kana aahikio. Mundu aahikania nirio aakagira muhiki wake nyumba, tondu gutiri atimia eri matuuraga nyumba imwe.* – A home is that which has a woman and a man, for an unmarried man has no home of his own and one gets a home when he marries or is married. A man when he marries is when he builds his new wife a house for no two married women share a house.

3.3.0 ESTABLISHMENT OF THE HOMESTEAD

A new homestead was established when a couple got married or when people moved to a new site. A woman once married must begin her married life in her own house, *Nyumba* (Gathigira, 1934). So the building of the *Nyumba* was the first priority of a new couple and for a couple moving to a new site and is what makes it a home. Once a man has selected a site, he will first consult a medicine-man on the appropriateness of building there and will not proceed if the medicine-man warns against the site but will look for another site. Leakey (2007) describes the method of this consultation. The man took three or four sticks each representing a desired site to a diviner priest. The priest cast his beads and did a reading in order to tell whether human blood had ever been shed on the proposed site or whether there were ancestral graves or other hindrances. The priests then choose one of the sticks representing the desirable site (Leakey, 2007:132).

3.4.0 PREPARATIONS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NYUMBA

After the go-ahead by the medicine-man the man began with a few of his friends to prepare the materials for the structure, mainly the wall planks, the posts and the rafters. These were carefully selected in the forest. A tree would be inspected very carefully before it was cut down for the structural posts and could not be cut if it had a bird's nest. Two posts in particular that went to define the doorway were specially prepared from the *muthakwa* tree, (*Vernonia auriculifera*). The rest were from the *muhugu* (*Brachylaena huillensis*), *muthaiti* (*Ocotea Usambarensis*), *muna* (*Aningeria adolfi-friendericii*), or *mutarakwa* (*Juniperus procera*), depending on which was readily available. Great care was taken in the preparation of the materials that nobody got hurt and shed a drop of blood as this would have brought *thahu* to the house. This initial careful preparation of building materials by the man himself "was called *kwiarakira mwako* (to start building for himself), and until a man had thus initiated the work himself he had no right to *gutumana* (to call upon his friends to assist him)" (Leakey, 2007:137).

When the man was satisfied that he had enough materials for the *Nyumba*, a day was set for its construction and he would announce and invite all his friends to the big day. His mother, - not the new wife – would also invite all the women she could from the village to come help with food and thatch for the *Nyumba*. On the appointed day each woman would come with a load of grass thatch. Very early in the morning as when 'Mara went to throw his mother away'¹¹, the men started off to collect the remaining materials, mainly the rafters,

¹¹ *Riria Mara ateire nyina*, (When Mara went to throw away his mother)– Very early in the morning when young men took the cattle to the licks because they wanted to be there and done before the Maasai brought their cattle from the plains. It is told that Mara who did not want his ailing mother to die in the *Nyumba* as this would require

the ties and all the creepers and tying strings required to complete the *Nyumba*. They also collected the inner poles and make the planks for the interior partitions. They then all congregated at the site with all the material ready. A house must be constructed within one day and it would be a bad omen if it was not.

The men began by clearing the site and leveling it making sufficient space for the *Nyumba* and other structures that go into defining a homestead. This was the *kiairo* or *kia* which was then sprinkled with the cold fermented millet gruel, *githambio*, (not the cooked variety, *ucuru*). Others would purify the site using a mixture of beer and honey. Once the site had been purified the entry and gate was determined and set out. “The position of the *thome* (entrance pathway) depended entirely upon the custom that prevailed in the family to which the man belonged. Some families always had the *thome* facing east, others faced it to the west, and others faced it to Mount Kenya or one of the other sacred mountains” (Leakey, 2007:132). A large almost circular space was marked out in the centre which was to be an open space, *Nja*, where all the other structures revolved. With the marking of the *Nja* the circle of the *Nyumba* was marked out either using a string with a peg at the center of the circle or simply by eye and marked with the toe of the foot. “The diameter of the circle varied according to the wishes of the man who was having the *Nyumba* built, but was seldom less than 15 ft and seldom more than 20 ft” (Leakey, 2007:140). The *Nyumba* had to be directly opposite the entrance and opening into the *Nja*, and near the entrance to one side was the man’s *thingira*. As you enter into the courtyard the granary of the first wife, *nyakiambi* was on one side facing her *Nyumba*. Sometimes they were two granaries forming a sort of gateway into the courtyard.

3.5.0 WALL CONSTRUCTION.

There were three different ways of constructing walls and the house types were known by these wall types. There was a brushwood wall construction referred to as *Nyumba ya rutwago*. The second was a hewn planks construction known as *Nyumba ya mihirigo*. The third one was a house made of poles and wickerwork lattice of young saplings and filled with mud known as *Nyumba ya ndoro* (Williamson 1953:1). In all other respects beside the wall construction all *Nyumba* internal layouts and roof construction were the same. The wall planks were hewn from split logs and were about 6 feet in height. They were hewn with cutting machetes of iron, *hiu*, not the sword, *njora*. Because the planks construction was an expensive affair, not many people could afford it, and most dwellings were constructed of brushwood and later, mud.

its destruction, took her to the forest and laid her on a path where the cattle would pass and they trampled her to death. Not only did he get rid of his mother but he also got paid by the herdsmen for killing his mother. The time is before twilight which would make it around 4 am. It is still a popular idiom for that early morning.

3.5.1 Construction of a Planks Wall.

Along the marked circle for the *Nyumba*, a small trench of about one foot deep and six inches wide was dug. The two door posts were then positioned about two feet apart facing the *Nja* and taking into account the prevailing wind. The planks were then stood on end all around the trench and the trench refilled with soil inside and outside making sure there were no gaps in between. It took 60 – 80 planks for a medium sized hut and up to 100 for a big hut (Leakey, 2007:139). The top of the planks were then connected firmly together using creepers made into a ring one on the inside and another on the outside. The inner poles were at the same time being set in place by another group of men and the structure was then ready to take the roof. After the roof was finished, the women filled any gaps that were visible between the planks with cow dung. The cow dung protected the planks from insects but could sometimes fall off leaving a yawning gap. These gaps had to be filled immediately to prevent draught. Stories abound of things and even people moving in and out of the gaps. A folk tale entitled “The story of *Kiariki* and *Kigiyo*” tells of an illicit relationship that developed and was nurtured through a gap in the *mihirigo* (Gecaga, 1963:11). That could be why there developed certain prohibitions or taboos, *thahu*, to do with the gaps. If it was a mud walled construction, the thatch was placed before the mud was in-filled into the wall structure.



Fig 3.4 Examples of two types of wall constructions.

Left: The planks wall construction at Bomas of Kenya (Source: Andersen 1977)

Right: a brushwood wall behind the group consulting a medicine-man (Source: Cagnolo 1933)

3.5.2 Construction of a Brushwood Wall

The circle for the brushwood construction and the placement of the doorway were done in the same way as for the planks construction except that instead of the planks an inner circle of thin saplings of about 1 inch diameter and another inner circle of similar saplings were placed at intervals of about 4 inches and the gap between the inner set of poles and the outer ring was filled with

brushwood pressed firmly in place leaving no gaps. The top of the wall was finished like the planks wall by holding the inner and outer poles tightly with creepers. Sometimes the brushwood could be later concealed with mud and cow dung making a gap free wall. The rest of the construction was the same as the planks wall hut

3.5.3 Construction of a Mud Wall.



Fig 3.5 Examples of mud wall constructions.

Left: An early mud wall supported with uprights only. (Source: Huxley 1939)

Right: Later mud wall construction at Riuki Cultural Centre using horizontal flexible wattle rods with nails (Source: Author, 2003)

This type of construction seems to be the more recent of the wall types with the oldest being the brushwood wall followed by the planks wall. A study of fig. 3.5 by Huxley (1939) shows the vertical poles supporting the mud without the longitudinal rods. This type of mud wall construction was documented by Routledge. “The walls are filled in with fine wattling, smaller uprights being introduced between the main uprights as required. When the hut has been completed this wall is daubed with clay” (Routledge, 1910).

In the latter system of supporting the mud, longitudinal rods were used to form a lattice. After the circle was marked, holes of a depth of up the elbow were dug all around the circle at about 18 inches apart. The vertical poles were then connected like a grid with horizontal flexible thin rods, at intervals of about a foot both inside and outside. They were tied firmly to the poles by using the bark of the *mugiyo* or any other tough but flexible bark. The gap thus created, *kirigo*, was filled with fresh mud prepared in a pit nearby. Once the mud was in place until no timber could be seen the women clawed it with their fingers to create groves that would later take the cow dung and ashes mixture that would be the final finish. This latter finish was put in place after several days when the mud had completely dried and gaps created by the drying mud had been filled. Later nails were used to fix the horizontal rods to the vertical posts. The construction

of the roof and the interior layout was the same as for the planks construction. This kind of construction is still visible in Mukurwe-ini and the details are shown in fig. 5.78

3.6.0 ROOF CONSTRUCTION

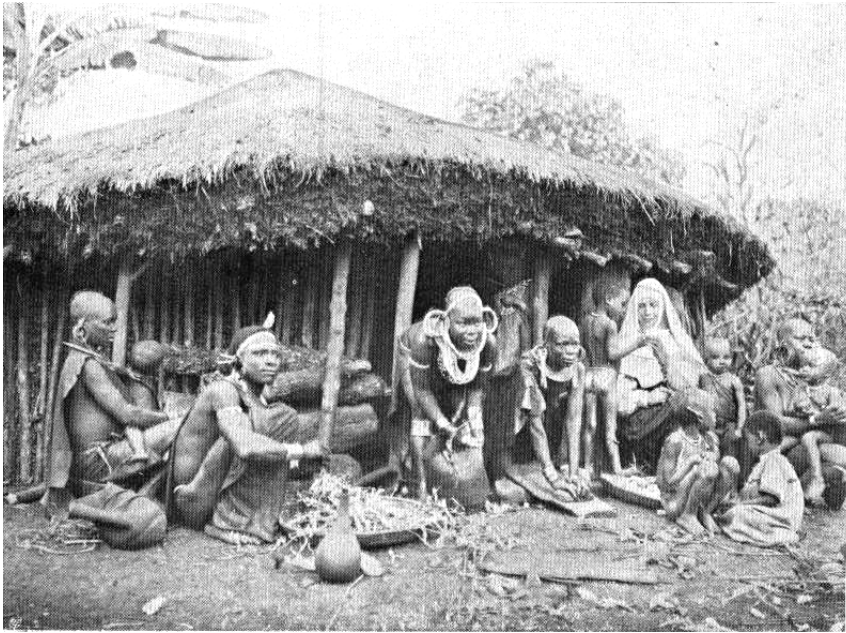


Fig. 3.6 A missionary visiting with a family in front of their *Nyumba*. (Source: Cagnolo, 1933)

Roofs varied greatly in thickness. This is explained by the fact that as the *Nyumba* grew older more grass kept on being added on top of the old grass just before the rainy season, so that it was a fairly easy way of also telling the age of a house. I have been informed that thicknesses of more than one foot were not uncommon.

Fig. 3.6 above is a roof of a *Nyumba* at the beginning of the Twentieth Century in Kikuyuland. Whether the supporting wall was made of brushwood like in the picture or whether they were planks or mud construction, the roofs were constructed in the same way. The main construction issue that the above picture raises is just how such a heavy roof could have been supported by such thin rafters - visible under the thatch - of 1.5-2 inches diameter. The Kikuyu did not construct trusses and most importantly, there was no central pole because the fire had to be at the centre and other spatial requirements that we will see later. The internal diameter of the inside excluding the overhang porch could vary

between 15 and 20 feet depending on the wishes of the owner (Leakey, 2007). The rafters also had to bear the weight of 3-5 women who did the thatching. It is therefore important to understand the structural mechanism involved.

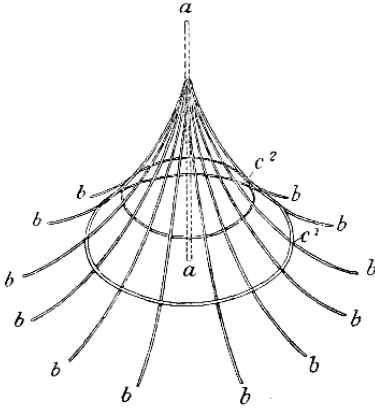


Fig 3.7 Cone construction with hoops
(Source: Routledge, 1910)

First we must understand how a cone is constructed. The easiest way to construct a cone is to have all the rafters of exactly equal lengths starting from a circle meet at the centre. The meeting point at the apex of the rafters can be to an apex pole, or they are tied to each other while being supported temporarily with an upright pole. Since they cannot all fit at a point you will have to make do with at least four of them and then construct a hoop tied firmly to the four main rafters at a lower point to take more rafters of again equal length. Another hoop to take even more rafters lower down may be required as the diameter of the cone gets larger and larger. These hoops when tightly tied to the rafters also stiffen the cone preventing it from collapsing by taking most of the outward thrust exerted on the circular wall. The circular wall is also finished at the top with a hoop making the wall act as a uniform cylinder, a very strong structure. The fixing of each rafter to a wall plate hoop has to be perfectly firm to prevent slipping. The central pole assisting the rafters' connection to each other at the apex can then be removed as the cone is self-supporting.

The Kikuyu used eight primary rafters, *miratho*, as the main structure for the cone and two hoops, *mbara* on the underside of the rafters. An unspecified number of secondary filler rafters, *mitiriro*, went to reduce the spacing. As a provision for the attachment of the thatch, flexible rods were now tied horizontally on the upper side of the primary and secondary rafters at intervals of about 18 inches so as to form a grid upon which the thatch was to be placed. Routledge (1910) was the first to document the two hoops though he gave no indication in his drawing that all the rafters could not all meet at the apex (Fig. 3.8). These rods and the hoops were made from stems of the creepers *mutanda mbogo*, (*Scutia myrtina*), *mugukuma*, (*Keetia gueinzi*) or thin branches of the

mukuyu, (*Ficus sycomorus*) (Leakey, 2007:143). The rafters were made from the *muyuyu*, (*Chaetacme aristata*), *muhethu*, (*Treama orientalis*) or *mutundu*, (*Neoboutania macrocalyx*) (Leakey, 2007:139).

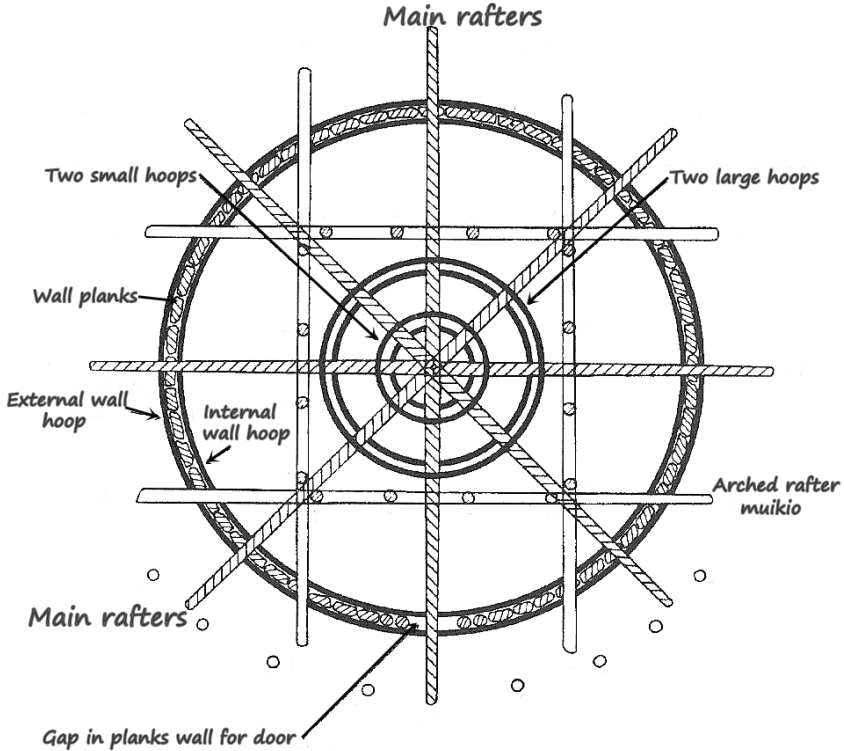


Fig 3.8 Roof construction. (Source: Author 2011 after Leakey 2007)

Construction drawing by Leakey showing the strengthening hoops for the wall cylinder and the cone. The columns forming the square support the rafters internally. The rafters at mid-point of the square are supported internally by the arched rafters, *miikio*.

All this presupposes very strong and heavy rafters and as has been observed, they were actually very thin roughly 35-75mm in diameter. These would have collapsed through bending even without the splaying and so there was another support system supplementing the hoops.

The first four of the main trusses, *miratho* were supported by a set of four twin columns forming a perfect square inside the circle. This square is the key to understanding the space layout of the *Nyumba*. (Fig. 3.8,13) It is also the key to the structure. Eight more columns, two on each side of the square were fixed to support the other four main rafters. Here an interesting thing happened. The

columns on each side of the square are evenly spaced and yet the rafter is falling at the centre of the side of the square. An arched flexible rafter (most of them were green and still flexible) was made flying from one corner of the square to the next. At the top of the arch the secondary rafter was supported. This innovative arched rafter was called *muikio*, (a thrown).

All over Africa, these kinds of innovative structures are still very prevalent but are fast being replaced by unimaginative expensive structures. A lot can be learnt from these traditional engineers and craftsmen.

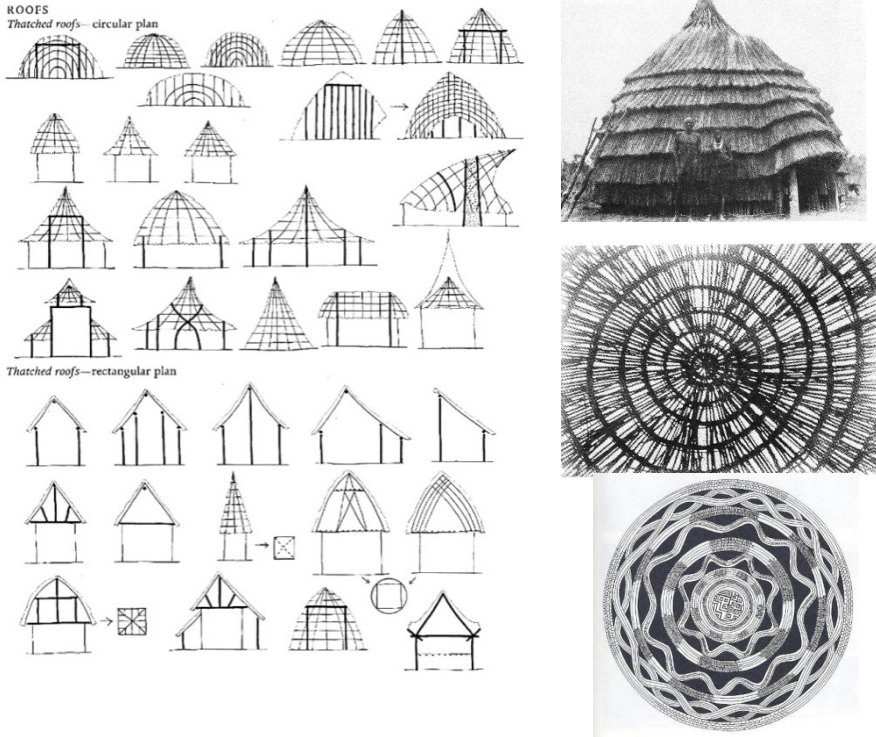


Fig. 3.9 Roof support systems from various parts of Africa.

Top Right: A Teso house in Uganda showing the use of the hoop for both support and shape of the cone. The form is arrived at through a careful adjustment of the diameter of the various hoops.

Bottom Right: The underside of a Fulani cone showing complex manipulation of the hoops (Source: Denyer, 1978)

Architects and modern cultural artists who make paintings with traditional scenes usually draw the Kikuyu Nyumba as nice geometrically perfect and straight lined cones whereas they looked like organically well worn and fitting hats or as Huxley (1960) more accurately likened them to - mushrooms (Fig 3.11). The roof slope was not a straight line either. The slight rise of the roof at the wall level and the dip between the inner pole and the apex can be explained by the fact that the thin and flexible rafters are held down firmly at the eaves end and the substantial distance between the inner poles and the apex. Of note is that the roof slope was very low at approximately 30-40 degrees according to Routledge (1910). Another point that is usually missed in the various descriptions of these structures is the fact that ground line of the floor was not an even straight horizontal line. The splash of the water from the roof combined with the almost daily sweeping of the bare earth compound eroded the compound level and the daily sweeping of the inside also eroded the inner level leaving a plinth that was high and dry. The daily traffic of goats also did much to add to the erosion. At the threshold of the *Nyumba*, it was necessary to take a step down of 6 inches to one foot and this simple level difference created a much bigger roof clearance on the inside. Even though one had to bend almost double at the door as described so graphically by Cagnolo and others, one was able to straighten up when inside. As a youth I used to take milk to my older mother, *maitu mukuru*, and I remember these details in her traditional Nyumba. What is unforgettable is the powerful distinctive aroma of the thatch and the smooth shiny blackness and darkness pressing in on the fireplace making it a place of awe. The extent of the plinth was marked by the drops of water from the roof. This area also received the soil from the daily sweeping of the *Nja* and the ashes from the fireplaces and therefore grew higher than the inside and *Nja* level.

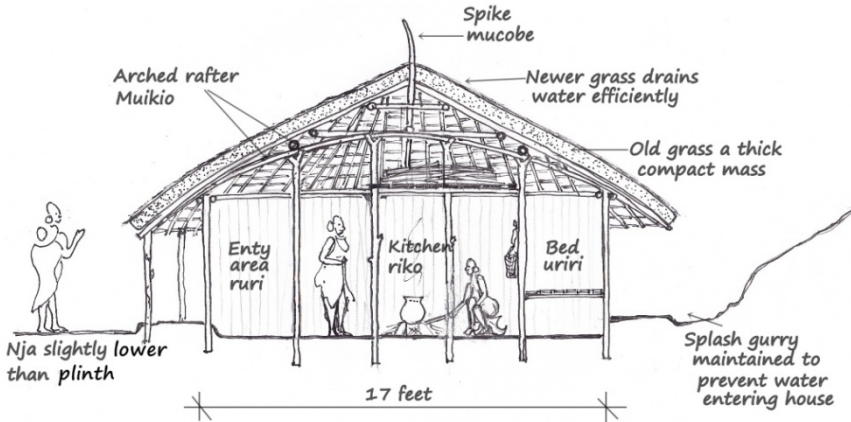


Fig. 3.10 Section through Kikuyu *Nyumba* showing the changes in levels. (Source: Author, 2011)



Fig. 3.11 Kikuyu homestead (Source: Routledge, 1910)

Water color rendering by Catherine Routledge. Note the low roof and deep overhang leaves the wall well sheltered from the elements.

3.6.1 Thatching the Roof

The placement of the roof covering was done strictly by the women after the men had finished the structural part of it. Several of them climbed the roof and laid layers of bracken fern, *Ruthiru*, (*Pteridium aquilinum*) in order to create a firm bed on which to lay the grass (Leakey, 2007:143). Without the fern the grass after it gets dry and brittle would begin to litter the ground. This bed of bracken fern makes an impenetrable layer for the grass. Fern after it dries and collects the smoke does not flake off but remains in place. The leaf structure of fern has wonderful structural properties. Today the ignorance of this simple precaution has baffled builders of thatched roofed huts popular in Kenyan hotels and they resort to using a layer of polythene sheeting and wire mesh. This causes the grass to rot as it is not aired. With the fern, the grass is cured by the smoke going through the fern and does not keep moisture as is the case with polythene. I did a small experiment with fern in my hotel room in Mukurwe-ini. In the room was a stand for holding the luggage with gaps of about 100mm between the straps. Laying a layer of fern made a surprisingly strong bed for my fruits due to the structural properties of the fern. Dry banana leaves were also used where no fern was available. But the bananas disadvantage is that it does not allow the smoke to go through it very well so it was rarely used except in temporary shelters like those for the circumcision rites.



Fig. 3.12 Experiments with the fern. (Source: Author, 2009)

Set of pictures of the simple experiment performed to test the structural properties of the fern in providing a smooth layer for the grass above the rafters. After it dries and gets blackened by the smoke, the fern forms a permanent support for the brittle grass and nothing drops from the roof into the ground. The fern was readily available from some bushes outside the hotel room.

After the bed of fern or banana leaves was laid the women sometimes as many as five working from different sides opened the bundles of grass handed to them by those below and began laying the grass starting from the lower part of the roof and going all the way to the apex where two of them finished the roof by tying the top bundles to a spike, *mucobe*, that had been sharpened and fixed by the men at the meeting of the rafters below. The most popular type of grass was the long *nyaragita*, (*Hyparrhenia rufa*), a brown tufted grass that grows to over two meters high and that grew wild in most of Kikuyuland failing which, a riverside reed, *ithanji*, (*Cyperus immensus*), was used (Leakey, 2007:143).

After the thatching was over the women joined the rest in finishing off the mud walls while the men did the final touches of the interior. The whole group then took the well deserved feast. The door meanwhile was made by another group or could also have been done earlier. It could also have been bought ready made from the market.

The whole group then dispersed leaving the new owner with a few of his friends to fix the door and light the inaugural fire. He would bring his bride several days later or if he already had a wife living in a previous *Nyumba* which had burnt down or been abandoned would bring her that same night for “no hut

once erected could be left empty, even for a single night” (Leakey, 2007:154). In the meantime, fire for a new *Nyumba* was started by the age old method of drilling a stick into another or by bringing in the embers from an external fire but never from another hut. A banana was roasted with the new fire and “some millet and water sprinkled over the ground as a further offering to the spirits” (Leakey, 2007:155). The official inauguration of a new *Nyumba* or homestead in the case a new home was a big affair that touched on the whole village with religious ceremonies. It took place days or weeks later after several things had been put in place. Before the inauguration, a fence would have been constructed and the *Nja* well defined plus the woman would have with the help of her friends, polished the walls with a fine finish of cow dung and ashes. She would get the ashes for this from her mother in law as a token of her love.

In the case of the inauguration of a single hut within the homestead, the affair was much smaller and concerned only the immediate family and not the whole village. If this homestead was for a bride, the man would not immediately build his *thingira*, but would live with his new wife until she gave birth to her first born upon which the man was obliged to build his *thingira*. The construction of the *thingira* was done in exactly the same way as the *Nyumba* except that it would be smaller and with a different interior arrangement as it would not have all the internal support columns.

3.7.0 The Interior of the Nyumba.

The *Nyumba*, was the main house within the homestead and is the one that has attracted the attention of all scholars. One thing that all the studies of the *Nyumba* agree upon is that the internal layout of the fixed elements was always the same. The internal diameter varied from around 15 to 20 feet as Leakey describes and anything less, fails to accommodate the elements as so required.

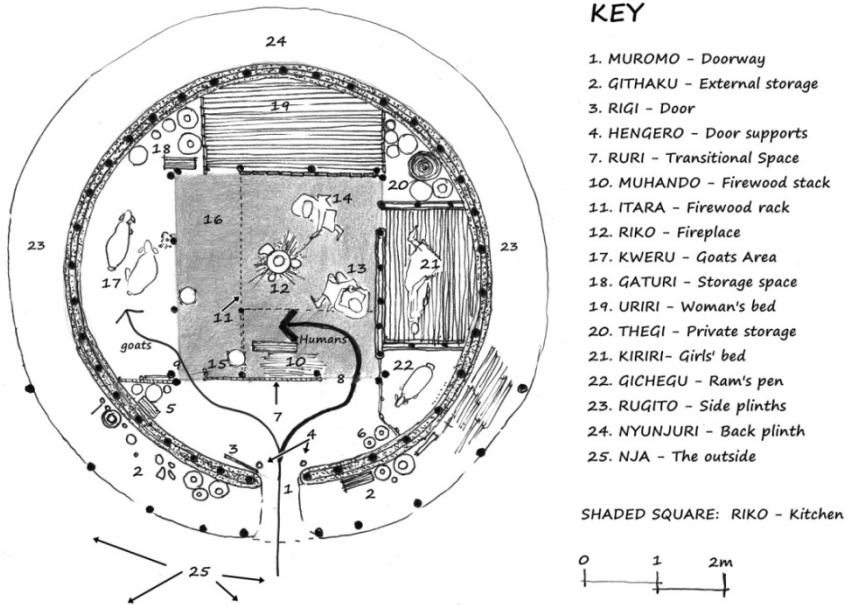


Fig. 3.13 The internal layout of the Nyumba. (source: Author, 2011)
A synthesis of the available archival and oral literature.

3.7.1 DOORWAY, Muromo. (1)

The width of the door was about two feet and its location took into consideration its direct connection to the courtyard space, *Nja*, and the prevailing wind. It was never placed facing directly the incoming wind. The two special posts marking the doorway were always placed first before the rest in the posts in the circle. As one approached the doorway, it was and still is required to make an announcement through asking loudly, “*Nuu mwene guku?*”, or “Whose place is this?” or some such utterance. If only children were in, they would reply, “There is no one” or “She is not here.” If the owner was not in, the visitor would never cross the threshold, but would either talk to the child from outside or go away. In case the owner was in, then she would answer, “Is it the daughter of so and so? And what brings you here?” Then the visitor would step in.

3.7.2 DEFINED SPACES UNDER FRONT OVERHUNG - Githaku (2)

The overhang grass in the front part of the *Nyumba* was usually supported by posts at its edges defining a space that has variously been called an entrance porch but was more used as a storage of the things used in food preparation in the *Nja*. These included the mortar and pestle, the grinding stones, the firewood, large stones, and broken pots and even extra cooking stones. Things which seemed useless but could not be thrown away were also placed here in a place

called *kibaca*. (Williamson, 1953:131). It is well to note that the supports for the overhang were only in the front and did not go all round like in a Luhya house. The roof was a perfect cone and did not have any elaborations at the entry other than the supports.

3.7.3 THE DOOR – Rigi. (3)

This was a sliding door made of the thin stems, of *muugu wa nyakamwe*, *munyati* and *ruhuruhuro* (Leakey, 2007:144) The method of construction was the same as that for the construction of the granary wall which will be described later. The door of the man's *thingira* was never shut except when one of the wives was spending the night there. This means that it was a signal that was easily read by the other wives and homestead occupants.



Fig 3.14 The door of the Nyumba – Being taken to the home of the purchaser by the craftsman who made it. (Source: Routledge 1910)

3.7.4 DOOR SUPPORTS – Hengero (4)

These were two inner posts just inside the main door posts that held the door. It was merely slid in between the two sets of posts. No one was allowed to close the door of another man's hut.

3.7.5 TRANSITIONAL SPACE – Ruri (5/6/7)

This space acted like an entrance lobby and transitional space where a woman unloaded her carrying basket or water as she could not enter the inner space still carrying anything on her back. On the left of it according to Williamson (1953) was placed a barrel that stored a variety of things (farming implements, according to Cagnolo1(1933). This storage corner was called *gaturwa-ini* or tools repository. On the right was a long necked pot, *ndigithu* for storing water that found a nook next to the goat pen. The screen that divided the lobby space from the main kitchen space was made of planks and was also called *ruri* a case of object and space bearing the same name. It had two entrances, one on the left and one to the right. All published sources agree that to enter the main

space, one always turned right towards the ram's pen and the goats would enter their area through the left side, 7. It was absolutely prohibited to enter the hut through the left side and this was for the entry and exit of the goats and would sometimes be closed with a movable screen similar to the door (Williamson 1953:130).

3.7.6 FIREWOOD STACK - Muhando (10)

A stack of firewood would always be here and the girl, who would be nearest it and would be the one minding it. If it ran low, she had to go outside and replenish it from the stack outside. As the stack outside got finished or ran low, it was time to go to the forest the following day. Only on very rare occasions would the wood in the drying rack above the fire be allowed to be used. This wood was valued for helping the wet wood in rainy seasons to burn (Williamson 1953:131).

3.7.7 THE FIREWOOD RACK – Itara (11)

This wood drying rack was also a useful device for preventing sparks from the fire from reaching the grass. It was laid with planks supported by two beams spanning the sides of the square. Sometimes there was a column on the goats' side supporting one corner of the rack. This free standing column support for the rack has often been referred to erroneously as the centre post. There was no central post in the Kikuyu *Nyumba*

3.7.8 THE HEARTH AND THE KITCHEN. Riko (12)

Riko as a space was the area defined by the square formed by the internal columns supporting the roof. As an object it meant the fireplace. The fireplace was made of three stones and was approximately at the centre of the space. It was made with three stones two of which were big stones, a mother and a daughter. The mother stone was on the woman's side and the daughter stone was on the girls' side. These two were fixed by digging them in (Leakey, 2007:146). The third and smallest stone was the boy on the entrance side and could be moved depending on the size of pot in use. If the one in charge of the cooking – nearest the mother's bed, wanted to adjust the position of a pot while it was on the fire, she asked the cook's assistant, a girl appointed to that office, to move the stone while she lifted and shifted the pot slightly in a very delicate operation. I have done it with my sister acting as assistant.

This fireplace was fed with dry wood from the stack on all three sides although mainly from the cook's assistant side. The assistant also adjusted through verbal instructions from the mother, the amount of heat required or the control of smoke. She also had to fetch water when the pot seemed to dry out. In case of a secondary pot two temporary stones were introduced. The secondary pot was always smaller than the primary one and the man of the house could not

be served food from this secondary fireplace. Before going to sleep the biggest log was covered with ashes and left smothering the whole night. In the morning it restarted a new fire. In case it went out a new fire was restarted with embers borrowed from a neighbor's house within the homestead and carried with a piece of broken pot. It was taboo for fire to go out in all the huts in a homestead.

The woman would normally sit on a low four legged stool opposite the right opening so she had a commanding position as one entered the main space defined by the square. As it was considered rude to keep standing inside a house the person looked for a stool on the left side. Again because it was considered rude to go over someone's feet the people naturally arranged themselves as they came in. The children as they came in the evening earliest according to age, the youngest would be nearest her mother and so on. The man would come in last and would sit in his usual stool (15) near the goats' entrance. While the food was cooking, the woman would turn and tell stories to the children. The children normally squatted, sat, or slept directly on the floor without stools. The older the child the farther away he or she positioned himself from the mother. A woman visitor who is very close would sit right next to the lady of the house as the assistant must always have freedom of movement. Generally the older girls would just stay inside their enclosed bed space. All other visitors had to sit on the log in front of the firewood stack.

The *riko* was used mainly in the evenings as a family circle where stories and legends were told and retold for the benefit of the young ones. The young ones especially, to while away the time, engaged in endless mind games called riddles, *ndai* meant "to foster intelligence and memory" (Pick, 1973:25). One person proposes a riddle e.g. "My house with one pole". Whoever provided the answer which in this case is, "a mushroom" posed the next riddle and so forth. If everybody is stumped, they have to give the poser of the riddle whatever he or she asks for – merely as a game. Sometimes on a warm moonlit night all this would happen around an outside fire while the mother remained inside cooking.

3.7.9 THE FOUR SIDES OF THE KITCHEN, Mihirito (Sing.,Mwihirito) (13-16)

The term *mwihirito* refers to each side of the three stone hearth as well as to the four sides of the square. The square of the kitchen, *riko* defined the sitting arrangement. The girls' side was the laughter side, or *mitheko*, (Kago, 1954:42), (13). The woman's side was called the "tongue clicking side", *itheng'ukiro*, (14), or *ing'urikiro* "place of irritation" (Mirara, 2001:16). It was called *itheng'ukiro* because this was the one place where the woman was unreachable and she could click her tongue as she pleased to the man. He could do nothing as to reach her he would have to go over the fire or past the children, an abominable thing. The woman would also be constantly harassed from her right by the children thus the term "place of irritation". Meanwhile the girls would be snickering and laughing,

on their “laughter side” unreachable especially when inside their bed space. The side next to the goats was called the *Kweru* side, or *mwihirito wa kweru* and was for the boys and children, (16). The door side or *mwihirito wa muromo* was where the man and visitors sat. (15). A log would be placed here for the benefit of visitors to sit on.

3.7.10 THE WHITE PLACE - GOATS AREA – Kweru (17)

Kweru was the space beyond the exposed columns on the left as one entered and was where sheep and goats spent the night. If there were young uncircumcised boys who were too old to sleep with their mother, they would sleep here with the goats. The reason for calling it *kweru* was perhaps because it was normally swept clean of all the goat droppings each day and ashes spread over the ground to dry the place and remove the smell. Because of the ashes it always looked white and thus it acquired the name “white place”, *kweru*. The purpose of having goats sleep in the room was also to disinfect the house with their urine and droppings. “Their presence thus in the hut is of the greatest value, as the alkali in their urine prevents the ingress of the burrowing flea or jigger. Where no goats are present as in the case of very poor people, the children and sick persons may be seen with their fingers and toes dropping off in the consequence of the jiggers in their hands and feet” (Routledge 1910:47).

3.6.11 FOOD STORAGE SPACE – Gaturi (18)

This corner space between the woman’s sleeping space and the ‘white place’ was called *gaturi* and the spare stools were placed here. Cooked food was also stored in a barrel with a lid to prevent rats from reaching the food. The space was also used for storing other paraphernalia like bags and trays. The most notable thing about this space was that between it and the white place is where women gave birth. When a woman neared her full term in a pregnancy, a midwife was called to stay with her and on the day of delivery, a cow hide was spread in this area and assisted by other women, the midwife delivered the baby. No other person including children and men were allowed inside the *Nyumba* during this operation and the it was out of bounds to all except the midwives and assistants for four days in case of a girl and five days in case of a boy (Leakey, 2007)

3.6.12 WOMAN’S SLEEPING SPACE – Uiri (19)

This was the space directly opposite the entrance between the square and the circle. It was about four feet wide and six feet in length and was enclosed with plank partitions that reached up to the level of the wood drying rack. According to Leakey, the woman’s bed was always enclosed with a planks partition but the girls’ space, *kiriri* could be mud plastered (Leakey, 2007:145). There is no indication as to the reasoning behind this. Leakey describes the bed

itself as raised at a level of about 18 inches and sloping slightly higher on the head side towards the store, *thegi*. The floor of the bed was made of small branches, *miaro* closely laid to form a flat surface or else it would be made with planks. On the planks or *miaro*, was laid blacken fern and a large quantity of the soft leaves of the *mugio*. On this was laid a mat made from the stems of dry banana leaves, *kibari* or the hide of a bull, *ndarwa*. The entry into the space was through a small window near the feet of the bed. The woman always slept with the youngest child closest to her and the oldest near the wall covering herself with the soft leather of her clothes, *nguo*. In case the man visited her, when she had one or two very small children, he would always sleep on the fire side of the bed. As the children got older, most men would wait for the woman in the *thingira*. The walls of the bed were also used for the storage of her precious jewelry used for the dances and special ceremonies. People did not have spare clothes to store as new ones were made when the old ones were too torn as to be indecent and were thrown away or used as bedding.

3.7.13 THE WOMAN'S PRIVATE STORE – *Thegi* (20)

At the corner joining the woman's bed and the girls' bed was a storage space. This storage space unlike the *gaturi* was the woman's holy of holies and here she would keep her precious items like honey, fat, fermented milk and her main cooking utensils. Every woman had about four or five pots of different sizes. She also would keep her other treasured items in hanging bags on the wall. No one, other than grown daughters were permitted to enter this private space.

3.7.14 THE GREAT BED. *Kiriri*¹² (21)

The 'great bed' was constructed like the woman's bed. Older unmarried girls who were not assisting in the cooking would spend their time here in the evenings. The foot of the bed was always towards the store and the head towards the ram's pen. Unlike the woman's space which was always partitioned with planks, the girls' space was usually walled with mud and plastered with cow dung. The floor of the bed was raised just like the woman's bed and made in the same way. Entry into it was through a small window at the foot of the bed.

¹² The word *kiriri* means a big bed but a more accurate translation is great rather than big. As it was completely enclosed and even had a plastered wall between it and the *riko* it was a room rather than a bed.



Fig 3.15 The square kitchen area showing the entry opening into the girls' 'great bed' and the private store at corner. (Source: Leakey 2007)

3.7.15 THE RAM FATTENING PEN – Gicegu (22)

In all descriptions of the *Nyumba* there is always a ram's pen, *gicegu* nearest the entrance. The ram was preferred by the woman while the man preferred the he-goat for his *thingira*. The floor of the pen was usually raised and done like the bed with small sticks close together but leaving enough gaps for the droppings to go through. When the woman had spent the day in the fields, she would always come home in the evening with green feed for the ram. If potatoes or bananas were to be added to the boiling *irio*, the assistant would prepare them and give the peelings to the ram. One of its favorite delicacies was the excess stock drained from the *irio* pot before the food was mashed. The pen had no entrance and the ram never went out but lived its entire life inside the pen. When it got famously big and fat, it would be used as the principle animal in a ceremony befitting its importance like being the *ngoima* of a marriage ceremony. Usually when it was brought out to be killed for a ceremony, people would gather to admire it in the *Nja*. It would almost be half blind from never having been in bright light and there are legends of rams so fat that they would be cooled by pouring water on them. For this reason, the fatness of the ram was used as a measure of the woman's diligence. The fat from this ram belonged to the woman and was considered precious as it was used to soften the leather clothes as well as for mixing with honey as a delicacy. It was also used in the making of tobacco snuff. Every woman had a quantity of the fat hidden in her private store in a container, *kinandu*.

3.7.16 THE SIDE AND BACK OVERHANGS – Rugito, Nyunjuri (23/24)

The area covered by the grass overhang on the outside was marked by the erosion of the drops of water and was thus slightly raised creating a defined space. The front part of the plinth, *githaku*, was more defined with the external columns more elaborate in function as well. The plinth on either side was *rugito* while the back was the *nyunjuri* and these were no column supporting the *rugito* and *nyunjuri* overhangs.

3.7.17 THE EXTERNAL COURTYARD – Nja (25)

Most of the food preparation before the evening turned dark and most of the daytime cooking and sitting would happen in the external space to one side of the entrance of the *Nyumba*. This was understandable as the *Nyumba* was dark and was used mainly in the evenings after twilight. People were usually forced inside by the dark or by incremental weather as during the cold *gathano* season. As will be explained in more detail, the pounding and grinding and peeling of the food before it was cooked was all done in the *Nja* and the implements stored in the covered porch.

3.7.18 Geometry of the Nyumba.

When we look at the plan of the *Nyumba*, we see that the roof structure forces an internal geometry of a square within a circle. Why the circle is necessary in the first place may be explained from the roofing material used which renders itself best when formed into a cone. The circle also is the most efficient geometrical shape in its ratio of perimeter to area, and important point in the efficient use of material. The cylinder too is the strongest structure to take the outward thrust from the heavy cone.

Huxley suggests that there was superstition involved in making a circular hut and swore that the Kikuyu “would give anything not to use a straight line” (Huxley E., 1998:49). It is obvious that the square within the circle was very well articulated so that it was not for lack of knowhow that the hut was circular, therefore there were other reasons as Huxley rightly imagined. As has been shown, there were strong technological reasons. Other reasons were, economic and cosmological and obscure religious reasons not easy to decode of which we can only give a reasoned guess. As far as economy is concerned it has been shown that the circle gives the most area for circumference and important consideration. Organic furniture and built-in beds all make the space use all the more logical. The only piece of loose furniture in the *Nyumba* was the woman’s stool, *giturwa*. Several smaller stools, *tuturwa* were available and could be placed near the *gaturi* corner (18)

Within the square, was the family circle and at its centre was the fire of three stones and a round pot on it. The point coming right on top of the feminine pot on the fire could be seen in relation to the spike, *mucobe*, at the apex of the

roof which is essentially a masculine symbol. This is borne out by the fact that the pot, *nyungu* also represented the womb of the woman and the spike was always broken when the man died. The spike therefore was definitely a phallic symbol and was not necessary structural. It is also possible that the square, circle and point may have had other meanings not verbalized or articulated in speech and will require a more thorough decoding.

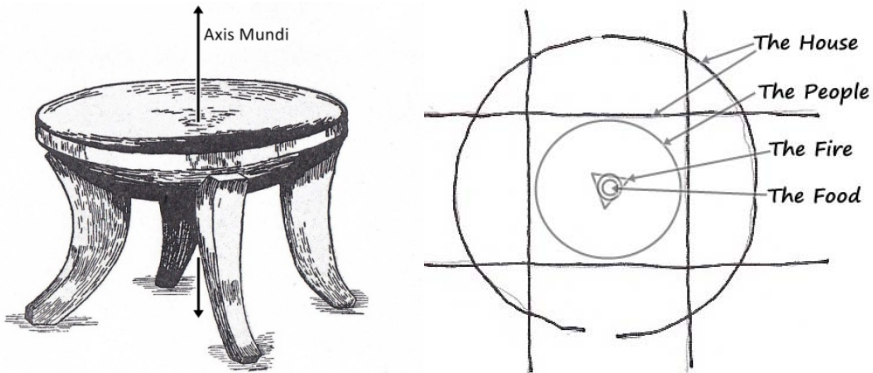


Fig. 3.16 The Point, Circle and Square in the Nyumba.

Left: The various geometries in the plan of the Nyumba. (Source: Author, 2011)

Right: The traditional woman's stool, *Giturwa* as circle on a square (Source: Author, 2012)

“The scheme is thus simple; first the fireplace, then the circle in which people may sit, then the outer apartments” (Kenyatta, 1965:81). By apartments, Kenyatta meant the spaces defined inside the outer circle by the square. “African architecture and design, especially in the rural areas, was rooted in the religious, political, economic and social conceptions of the populace” and “they symbolized not only man’s relationship to his fellow man and to the cosmos but man’s adaptation to the natural environment” (Hull, 1972:188). It is possible then that the overall form was also connected at least in the sub-consciousness of the Kikuyu, to the form of Mt. Kenya and their cosmic understanding of their world as supported by the four pillars of the sacred mountains. *Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga*, the Kikuyu point of origin is located roughly at the centre of the square formed by the four mountains and not surprisingly we find a sacred tree there linking heaven and earth, the Axis Mundi. Kenyatta’s title, ‘Facing Mt. Kenya’ is but one example of this strong connection with the mountains and especially Mt. Kenya while modern cultural painters like Wanjeri in their

idealized paintings demonstrate very well the connection between the form of the Kikuyu *Nyumba* and the mountain. The traditional four-legged stool is indicative that the square within a circle was an important mandala to the Kikuyu. The stool being carved from a single log meant that the circles formed by the growth rings culminated to a point at the centre. This was the Axis Mundi that was so well articulated in the *gichukia* dance as well as the spike terminating the cone (Fig. 2.10).

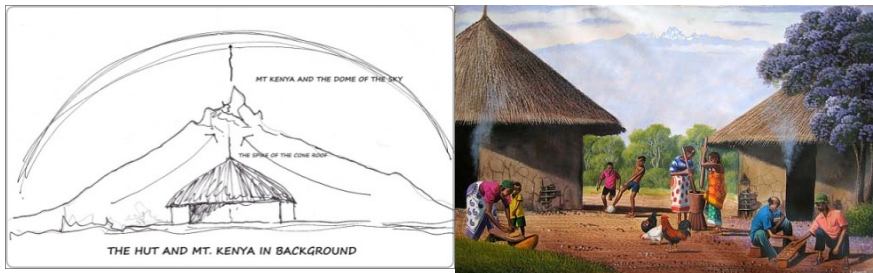


Fig 3.17 Left: The geometry of Mt. Kenya. (Source: left - Author, 2011)

Right: Kikuyu homestead by artist Wanjeri. (Source:

http://www.insideafricanart.com/Artists%20Main%20Pages/Wanjeri_Jane.htm

The space use also relates to geometry very well. It has been shown that African use of geometry reaches a sophistication that is not immediately apparent (Zaslavsky, 1999). Once the square is inserted in the circle, the definition of the spaces follows nearly exactly the areas thus defined. Thus the square defines exactly the area referred to as the kitchen, or *riko*. The kitchen square has four sides, *miihirito* (sing. *Mwihirito*). The nearest the door is the visitors *mwhirito* and this is the men sector, moving clockwise the second sector of the square is the children's *mwhirito* followed by the tongue clicking side of the woman and the laughter side of the girls. Thus the woman's irritation is opposite the man's sternness and the girl's laughter is opposite the children's joy. Since the boys slept with the goats, and the girls on the opposite side and since the man sat on the entrance side of the square opposite the woman, it is possible to divide the square diagonally along a feminine and masculine axis.

The left over spaces at the corners are also used. On the left as you enter would be storage for such things as farming implements and so forth. Moving clockwise the other storage was for cooked food and the next was for precious things and cooking implements and the last would be taken by the ram and water storage.

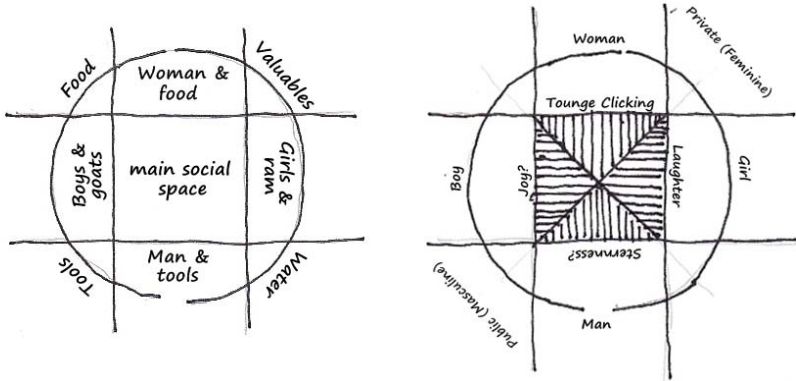


Fig 3.18 Geometry and Space (Source: Author, 2011)

3.7.19 Privacy of the Nyumba

The square defined the main family private space from the outside public to the entrance foyer semi public space, each of these spaces being defined from the other by a doorway. The privacy gradient within the square builds up clockwise with the most public area for visitors to the laughter side of the girls. The spaces between the square and the circle built up their privacy gradient also in a clockwise manner starting from foyer, moving on to the goats, the woman's bed and the most private the girls bed and the holy of holies.

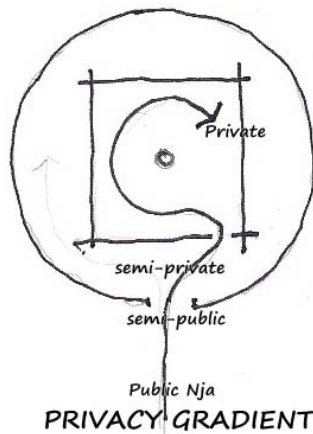


Fig. 3.19 Privacy Gradients (Source: Author, 2011)

3.8.0 The Man's Hut – Thingira

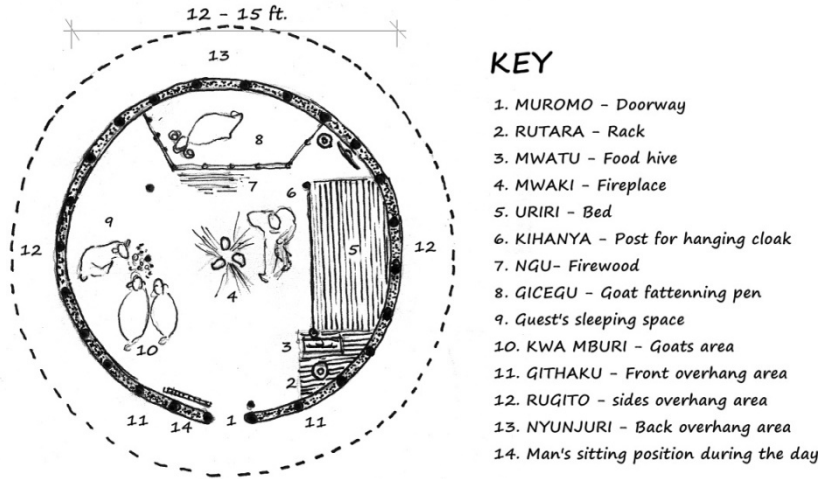


Fig. 3.20 Layout of a man's *Thingira*. (Source: Author, 2011)

From of existing archival and oral literature sources.

“The woman’s hut was the cradle of the family traditions...” (Kenyatta, 1965:81), and it looms over the homestead both in physical size and psychologically. The other two major structures, the man’s *thingira* and the granary, do not therefore attract as much attention to scholars and have not been documented as well as the *Nyumba*. In many cases a mere footnote indicating that the *thingira* was smaller and did not have internal divisions is all that is given. Leakey, whose description includes drawings of the *Nyumba* is the most comprehensive and agrees with Williamson’s older description and diagrams. Other sources either confirm or borrow from these two. Like the *Nyumba* which can only comfortably accommodate everything if it is between 15 and 20 feet, the *thingira* could ideally not have been less than 12 feet in order to accommodate everything described and anything beyond 15 feet would have been superfluous.

Like all Kikuyu huts there was only one door which would normally face the courtyard but not directly. If there were young circumcised but unmarried men, with their own *thingira* it would never open into the courtyard but would be located nearest the gate. If the young man was married and wished to be part of his father’s extended homestead, his *thingira* and his wife’s *Nyumba* would be behind his mother’s *Nyumba*. There were no partitions inside the *thingira* and as

you enter, you would find a raised platform on your right that was the bed of the man constructed and spread just like the woman's bed only devoid of screens. Nearest the door to the head of the bed was placed on a platform a barrel where the food for the man was placed for his convenience in case he was not in. Directly opposite the door was a goat fattening pen constructed in the same manner as in the *Nyumba*. On the left was left open for goats and sometimes a visitor's bed. At the centre was a fireplace of three stones and it could sometimes be borrowed by the woman to cook an extra pot in the evening. On such an occasion she would sit in the *thingira* and tend the pot while a daughter tended her main fire and sat proudly at her mother's position. Other times she would join the man in his *thingira* when he had visitors (Kenyatta, 1965:81). There was no firewood rack above the fire except a small rack over the doorway where the man kept saline earth for his goats.

Several posts within the space but on the man's side, *kihanya* would be used to hang his cloak, *githii* and leather bag (Mirara, 2001:13). He would also keep his weapons, bow and arrow, spear and shield near him at the foot of his bed.

Young men's *thingiras* were arranged with sleeping beds on all three sides save the entrance and without a fattening pen (Leakey, 2007:148). Sometimes several young men from neighboring homesteads could share a *thingira* until they married and each established his own homestead. There was usually no fire in the young men's *thingira*.

During the day in the heat, the man seated on a stool would shelter under the shadow of the overhang just outside his door to the left or right. His walking stick would be beside him and if he entered the hut he would go in and leave his walking stick next to the stool. If he left the compound he would carry the stick with him and sometimes even the stool. It was therefore easy for anyone to tell whether the man was in or away merely by the presence or absence of the walking stick and stool.

Sometimes a young couple used the *Nyumba* for conjugal purposes but this would later become impractical and undesirable as the children grew older and then the function shifted to the *thingira* more so if he had many wives.

When and why men began to live separately in a *thingira* is not on record, but it is an unwritten rule that a man cannot enter the *Nyumba* before all the children and animals have entered and everything has settled nicely. The *thingira* may have started as a warm space to kill the time while as they say, "the chickens go in"¹³ and while waiting for the food to cook rather than waiting out in the cold or in the sometimes very noisy *Nyumba* exactly the function bars and clubs perform today. It could then have developed into a fully fledged habitation

¹³ A saying which is used to indicate the ungodliness of the hour for a man to enter the *Nyumba* in the evenings. The order of entry seems to be, Chickens, Children, Goats, Young women and boys, Mother, Father.

where he stayed permanently and entertained his friends. His presence in the woman's hut however remained with a symbolic stool which he rarely used.

3.9.0 The Granary, *Ikumbi*

Every married woman had at least one granary or as many as her industry demanded and they were usually built at the entrance into the courtyard in the order in which the women were married. The first wife's granary, *nyakiambi*¹⁴ meaning the first was always built nearest the entrance into the courtyard and sometimes two of them on each side of the entry into the courtyard. The rest followed in the chronological order in which the women were married. Because sometimes due to site constraints, they were closely packed together, in a large homestead they would constitute a confusing forest as an entry and thus the saying when you escort someone out of the homestead, "*Reke ngumagarie ndukorire makumbi-ini*" or, "let me escort you so you won't get lost amidst the granaries" (Mirara, 2001:18) The granaries were for the storage of the harvested grain, mainly millet, *njahi*, beans and maize. Unprocessed gourds, unused cooking pots, unused carrying bags and all manner of small things were also stored here. The main objective of this structure was the provision a dump proof environment for the store of grain and for this it was well suited because it was raised from the ground and had enough air movement on the side walls as well as a rain proof thatched cone roof.

The making of the granary container was by several methods all using vegetable material and weaving them into a large porous basket about two meters wide and about one and a half meters high. The work of weaving and building a granary was a man's work and the woman only did the thatching. In the woven type the weaving was much like that of the *kiondo* basket with weft and warp but instead of string the granary uses a hurdle-work of thin flexible rods of the *mukigi* bush (*Lantana camara*) and other suitable species depending on locality (Leakey, 2007:153). The top was finished as a dome or left open with a removable lid of the same hurdle-work (Mirara, 2001:19). The bottom was made of a circle of the same hurdle-work fixed to fit the floor of the cylinder and the two connected together.

¹⁴ The name *Nyakiambi* meaning the first refers both to the subject, the first wife and her main objects like the *Nyumba* and the granary. The granary is called *ikumbi* and her granary was called *ikumbi ria nyakiambi*, 'Nyakiambi's granary' or simply *nyakiambi*.



Fig 3.21 Constructing a granary. (Source: Rigamonti 2001)

The hurdlework wall of the granary basket at the height where the curvature is being contemplated. The opening will be at the left hand of the man inside.

The platform on which the basket was placed was usually constructed and supported on four stout forked sticks or stones (Leakey, 2007:152). The sticks were from *murema muthua*, (*Dononaea angustifolia*) which literally means 'termites proof'. The four sticks or stones were placed on the corners of a square just slightly outside the circle of the basket. The four supports were called *mihando ya ikumbi*. On these were placed two strong beams, *miganda* of the same *murema muthua* on top of which were placed a further set of poles *mwariro* of the same tree. The basket was then lifted and placed on top of this platform which was barely 18 inches high. All around the basket wall were then placed posts of the *Mukungugu*, (*Commiphora emini*) which because of its vegetative properties was hoped it would take root and hold firm the basket. The *mikungugu* were firmly ringed together at the top to the basket to form a rigid structure. The structure was then ready for the placement of the roof.

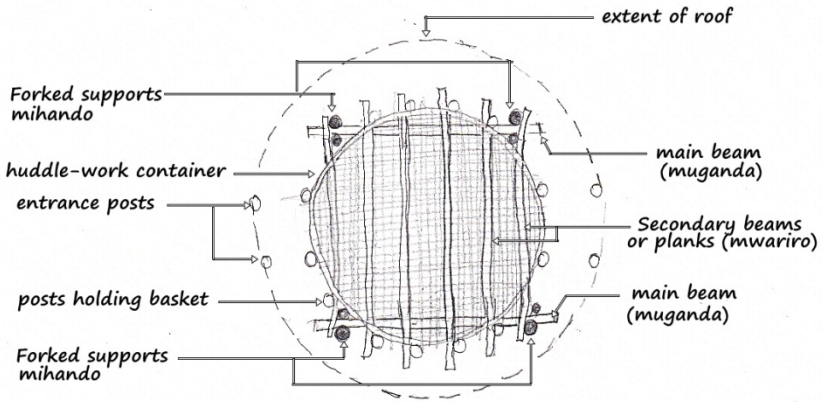


Fig. 3.22 The Granary Stand (Source: Author, 2011)

The roof of the granary unlike that of the *Nyumba* was constructed on the ground and lifted on top of the framework and wickerwork container. As in the construction of the roof of the *Nyumba*, the cone was arrived at through the use of hoops. These hoops were tied firmly on to four main rafter saplings which were stood on a post. Once the hoops had been tied firmly on the inside and outside more saplings were added radially until a firm cone was arrived at. This was then roofed with thatch by a woman and then lifted onto the structure and tied firmly on the upright posts of the *mikungugu*.



Fig. 3:23 Construction of a granary roof. (Source: Rigamonti 2001)



Fig 3.24 Finished granary in use. (Source: Mathew, 1952)

3.10.0 Animal Shelters.

Other than sheep and goats which have been mentioned in the discussion of the huts, the only other domesticated animals were cattle. The Kikuyu did not have dogs or cats or chickens (Routledge, 1910:24). “The Akikuyu give as their reason for not keeping fowls, that the crowing of the cocks would betray the whereabouts of their homesteads to raiding parties” (Routledge, 1910:50). The cattle were kept in a palisaded area, *kiugu*, near the entrance and next to the man’s *thingira* so that he had a clear view of them as they came in the evening from grazing. “The flocks are counted every morning and every evening as a matter of routine” (Routledge, 1910:46). The palisade was constructed of interweaving live and dead branches and thorns so that no hyena could enter. It had a gate which was closed from the inside when all the animals were in and the person doing this, usually a boy, would exit into the *Nja* through a small opening, *ruthui*, which was also used to bring the small calves into the huts for the night. The cattle were never allowed into the *Nja*. Their manure and urine was mixed with ashes and used to smear the sides of the hut walls into a rough off white plaster finish. In some areas where chalk was available, it would be added to make the plaster whiter.

3.11.0 The Layout of the Homestead and Functions.

At this point, having discussed all the disparate built units within the homestead, it is now possible to fully describe the layout and how everything fitted together?

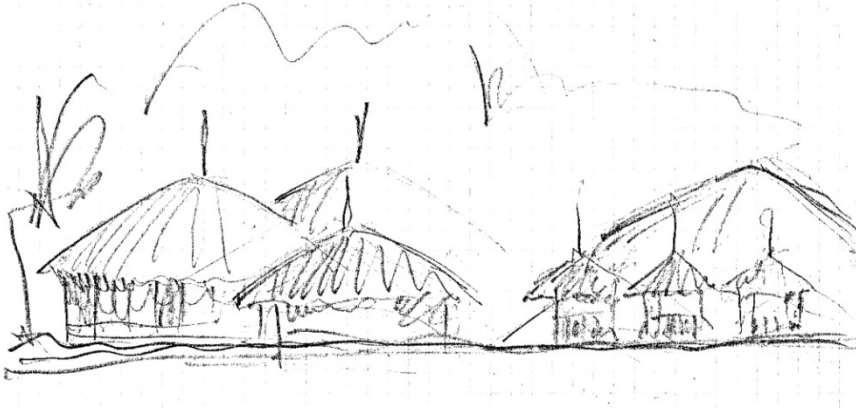


Fig. 3.25 Sketch of a Typical Homestead (Source: Author, 2011)

Anybody familiar with Kikuyu customs upon entering a typical homestead as fig 3.26 above would immediately make certain conclusions about the occupants.

Because there are three big *Nyumbas* with porches, it signals that there are three married women in the compound and the husband of two of them is the one who lives in the small forth hut to the immediate left. The number of married women can also be deduced from the number of granaries at the entrance since each woman always built one granary but this would not be conclusive as some had more than one granary. The number of wives can be deduced from the number of *Nyumbas* with porches towards the open space, *Nja* and with a spike on top of the cone. One would also be able to deduce that the man's mother, a widow lives in the compound in the hut on the right. This is because the spike at the top of the roof has been removed. This is always done when the husband dies. Were her husband alive, its access would not be from her son's courtyard. The mother's *Nyumba* will also not have its door opening into the *Nja*, her access, but not the door having been changed after her husband's death. The senior wife's *Nyumba* is always the one directly opposite the entry and that means the *Nyumba* to the extreme left must belong to the second wife. The ages of the *Nyumbas* are also easy to decipher from an observation of the grass thatch.

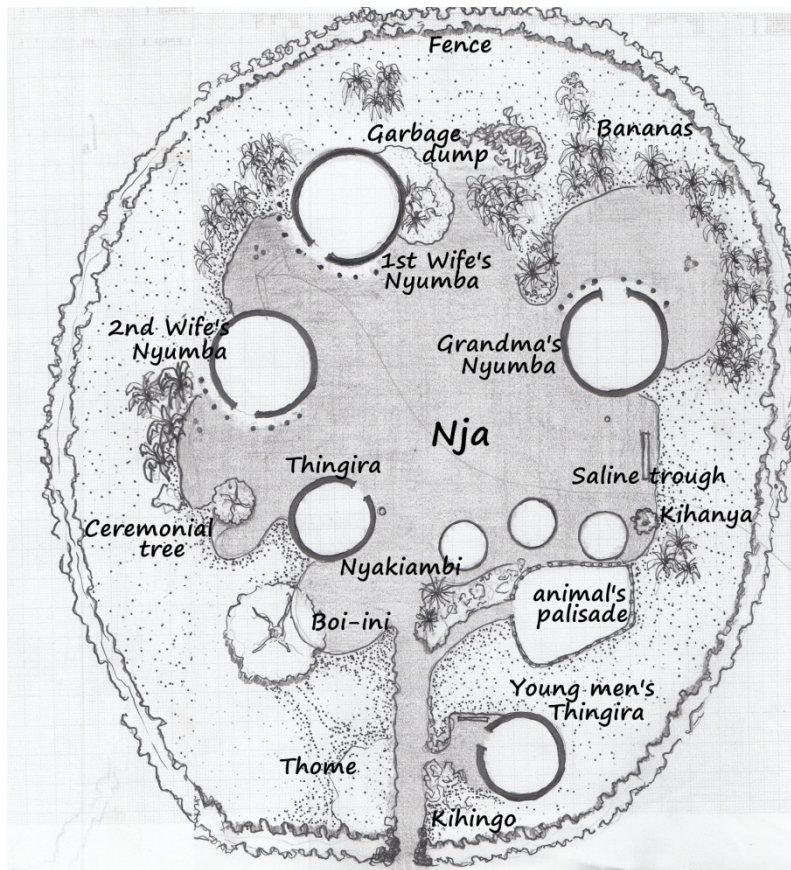


Fig. 3.26 Typical homestead of a man with two wives and a widowed mother (Source: Author, 2011)

As you entered a typical Kikuyu homestead past the first wife's granary, *nyakiambi*, you entered into an open space swept and devoid of any grass as nothing could survive the daily heavy traffic by people and goats and playing children. This open space was what held all the elements together and was called the *Nja*. It is capitalized like the *Nyumba* as the word also means generically 'outside' but as a proper noun it denotes specifically the external courtyard in the homestead.

The *Nja* was kept as bare earth and swept every day and sometimes more than once. The grass and planting surrounding the bare earth are kept in check through a daily negotiation with the plants using a broom. If a pumpkin is encroaching into this space it is turned or supported by a small hedge which in

time defines specific areas within this open space. An area for external cooking for each *Nyumba* was defined with these small nuances while also taking into account the prevailing wind. The security of the children playing in the *Nja* was also taken into consideration in positioning this fireplace. A woman therefore had a defined external space which opened into the shared *Nja*. This was her *githaku* and is where she entertained her guests. Because the four legged stools are easy to move around, people moved within this space depending on whether shadow or sunshine was required.

The man however entertained his men friends in a space near the entrance to the homestead but inside the main gate, *thome*, and next to his hut, *thingira*. This space was called *boi-ini*. Men visitors rarely ventured into the *Nja*. Seated at his usual place in the evenings with a fire, he could see the animals being brought into the kraal by the young men taking pride in his wealth. Circumcised unmarried young men of the homestead would build a *thingira*, similar to that of their father but nearer the main gate. A young man's *thingira* was usually shared even with other young men from other homesteads. This is where they entertained their young friends with some privacy from their junior uncircumcised brothers and the women of the homestead. Once they got married they usually moved out to establish a new homestead, though the arrangement was different when a village shared the same security fence. Then he would establish his new homestead behind his mother's *Nyumba*. This arrangement was not used by the Muranga and Nyeri people where security was not a major issue and the son preferred to establish his homestead as a separate entity. The whole was surrounded by a fence as described earlier.

In one corner of the *Nja*, was a trough from which goats could lick a salty soil called *munyu* and which people could buy from the market. Near the salt trough was a forked small tree *kihanya*, from which hang sweet potato vines and other goat feed. When the cattle came in for the night a gate into the kraal was secured from the inside and the young man performing this would let the goats and young calves into the *Nja* through a small gate. At night all the goats, sheep and young calves were herded into a *thingira* and depending on their number they could be distributed between all the women's *Nyumba* where they spent the night as "every hut has its own quota of goats" (Routledge, 1910:47)

The *Nja* was also used for drying millet or any other foodstuffs and for the preparation of the food before cooking. The mortar and pestle of each of the women would be stored in under the eaves. When any of the women wanted to use the mortar and pestle she would ask her neighbor, *muiruwe*, to help her. It was unusual for the mortar and pestle to be used by one woman. Two made symmetry and rhythm in the pounding of the grain as the saying goes, *mucugia umwe ndaiganagia*. 'One pounding alone cannot get enough'

The other important implement that was usually on the side of the *Nyumba* was the grinding stone which was used to make flour for porridge.

Porridge made from the millet never ran out except in times of extreme famine. Every woman would entertain her guests with the cold fermented variety which was kept cool inside the house. In the morning, the hot fermented variety was the usual breakfast.



Fig. 3.27 Activities in the *Nja*

Left: Using the mortar and pestle (Source: Author, 2011)

Right: Using the grinding stone (Source: Cagnolo 1933)

Everything was neatly stored after use either back into the granary or under the eaves or inside the *Nyumba*. It was taboo for a man or woman to trip and fall in the *Nja*, and such an eventuality would have required purification. Thus the *Nja* was usually kept clean and tidy and as one moved from one space to another there was no danger of tripping even in the dark because of this taboo.

“I have never been in a hut, and rarely in a homestead, which was not clean and orderly, the presence of the goats, which are taken into the *Nyumbas* at night, necessitating regular sweeping. The same usually applies to the bare ground of the homesteads inside the enclosure, which is as a rule swept up and kept neat in a way which shames the camping-ground of most Europeans” (Routledge, 1910:118).

Dangerous things like snakes and rats could also be seen clearly if they invaded this space. The one bird that was part of the *Nja* and enjoyed the leftover seeds was the Robin, *Kanyoni ka Nja* or ‘Bird of the *Nja*’. It was considered a good omen for the robins to feed peacefully in the *Nja*. The name for the human female species in Kikuyu is *Mundu wa Nja*, or ‘Person of the *Nja*’ named like the *Kanyoni ka Nja*. The *Nja* is the woman’s realm and she rules it undisputedly – in

partnership with the robin. The two of them engaged in a strange communion and secrecy which is profusely recorded in folklore¹⁵.

Behind the inner fence of the *Nja*, was a place planted with bananas and this is where people would relieve themselves. The children often relieved themselves near or in the rubbish heap, *kiara* and it was taboo for strangers to approach or throw anything into the family trash heap.

Somewhere within the compound at its establishment was buried a pot of beer and honey being a perpetual offering to the ancestors. Only the head of the homestead knew where this spot was.

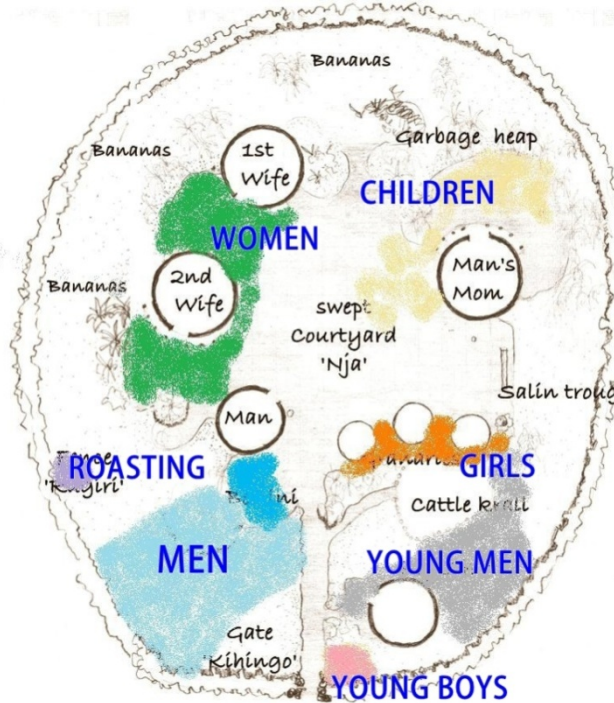


Fig 3.28 Homestead layout during a social function. (Source: Author, 2011)

During a social event, like a pre-marriage negotiation ceremony in the homestead, the visitors would divide themselves into the various zones. All the middle aged men and age-mates of the master of the homestead would find a place to sit just inside the *thome*. The slaughtering of the goats of which a function is incomplete without, would have happened very early in the morning probably in the very tree that provides shade to the *boi-ini* but the roasting would happen a bit inside the bushy area with the meat placed on banana leaves and

¹⁵ If for instance the baby was laid somewhere while the woman worked, it was the express duty of the bird to take care of it and warn the woman if any danger approached. If the relationship between the woman and the bird was God forbid, sore for any reason, the bird could pluck out the baby's eyes.

covered with the same. The man in charge of the roasting would have several young men under him learning the process as slaughtering and carving a goat is a science. The master of ceremonies of the function and his closest aides would be at the *boi-ini* proper.

All the married women would congregate around the main houses with the cooking happening in the little niches normally used by each woman. Extra fireplaces would be erected in these places. A few days before the function, the lady of the house pertaining to the event would have called her co-wives and close friends in order to organize for enough firewood and water for the event. All the firewood would be stacked along the walls. The small children feeling left out and the *Nja* not available for serious play would invade their grandma's *githaku* and some of the older ones would venture as far as the gate. The young women would hide under the low roofs of the granaries and only peep and answer when summoned in a loud voice by one of the women. The young men would remain on their side near their *thingira* although some would drift as far as the granaries. The old lady would keep to her place occasionally making the rounds and greeting the guests. At no time would everybody come together as one group as is done today.

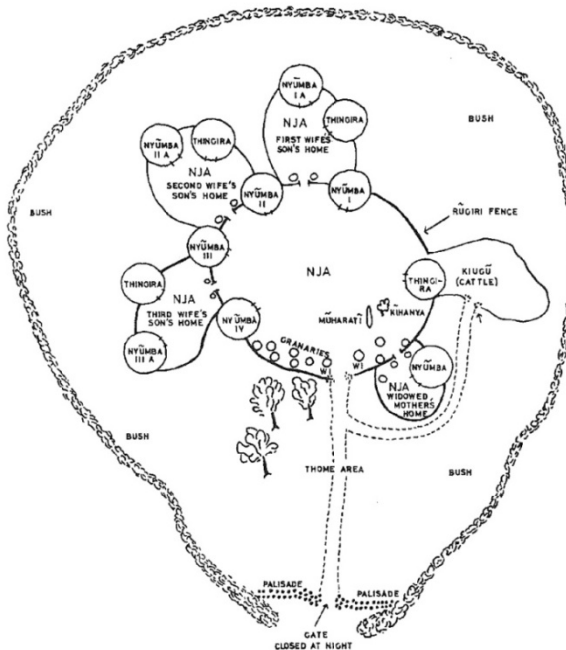
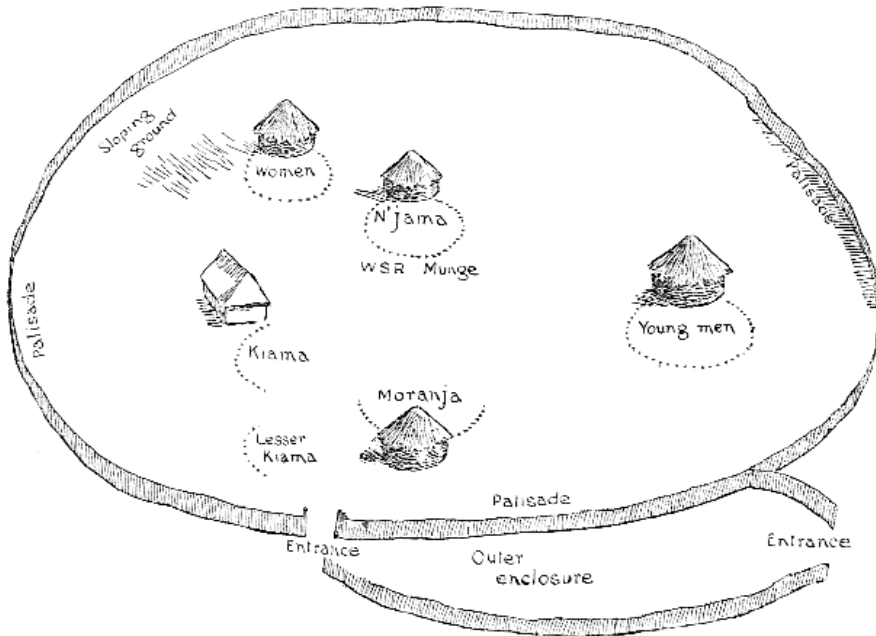


Fig. 3.29 Growth of a Homestead. (Source: Leakey, 2007)

How a homestead of a man with three wives grew when the sons do not move out to establish their own homesteads elsewhere.

3.12.0 Temporary Shelters, Ithunu

Boys' circumcision shelters, feast shelters, dance arena decoration shelters and sick people's shelters were among the generally temporal structures which were called *ithunu*. (sing. *githunu*) They were constructed very simply with sticks and leaves on top or even quite elaborately in rectilinear pitched roofs. The sides could be left open or with grass walls. Routledge (1910) records one elaborate "drinking party given in honor of my husband." She made a sketch of the drinking party and the temporary rectangular structure where the council of elders sat. Her Husband, W. S. R. and the host Munge sat in front of a *thingira* facing the elders. She was also able to observe that all the guests arranged themselves according to age and rank and according to sex.



A DRINKING PARTY SEATED ACCORDING TO OFFICIAL RANK.

Fig. 3.30 Sitting arrangement in a homestead during a drinking party (Source, Routledge, 1910)



Fig. 3.31 Drinking party with the temporary structure in the background. (Source: Rigamonti, 2002)

When a person was very sick and it was felt he/she was near death, he/she was removed from the *Nyumba* and taken near the forest and placed in a temporary shelter, *githunu*. The relatives kept vigil until the sick died or recovered. In case of recovery a purification ceremony was performed to allow the person back into the homestead. This was done because it was taboo to touch a dead body. If he died he was simply left for the hyenas to dispose of the body. Because of this, the first missionaries visited several of these sick bays with their healing medicines in order to minister to the sick and dying.



Fig. 3.32 Two Consolata Missionary Sisters attending to a sick woman in her *githunu* as another woman keeps vigil. (Source: Rigamonti, 2001)



Fig. 3.33 Illustration showing early forms of *Ithunu* as dwellings. (Source: Williamson, 1953)



Fig. 3.34 Newly circumcised young men living in seclusion in makeshift shelters, *ithunu*. (Source: Rigamonti, 2001)

4.0.0 TRANSFORMATION OF KIKUYU TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE

This chapter traces as chronologically as possible the transformations of Kikuyu Traditional architecture described in chapter three and attempts to uncover the forces behind the transformations. It shows how Livingstone's 3Cs under the work of the early Christian missionaries, government officials in the departments of education, health, agriculture and the settler community were instrumental in bringing forth the changes in Kikuyu traditional architecture through a revolution in the conception and making of things.

4.1 0 CONTACTS WITH THE MAASAI

The Kikuyu-Maasai cultural fusion is "deep and extensive" with some Kikuyu sub-clans, *mbari* tracing their origin from the Maasai (Muriuki, 1974:98). Dressing and especially the warrior hair styles and similarities in heraldry are the most obvious manifestations of this mutual influence but it also goes much deeper into shared linguistic and religious beliefs and practices. It has already been pointed out that the hostilities that existed between the Maasai and the Kikuyu resulted in the concept of fortified villages. As far as other influences on housing construction are concerned, there is a distinct similarity in the construction of the earlier Kikuyu brushwood wall and mud wall with their Maasai counterparts and a clear divergence in the construction of the roofs. The divergence in the roofs has to do with the difference in precipitation between the two zones. Whereas the Nyika plateau dry conditions of the Maasai habitat can do with flat mud roofs, the wet highland conditions of the Kikuyu demand a slopping roof. It is beyond the scope of this study to delve into what are the influences that impact on the two tribes' architecture then and now. A reading of Rukwaro's 1997 PhD thesis on Maasai architecture will reveal some of the similarities today, partly because some of the forces of change impacting on both are similar.

4.2.0 CONTACTS WITH THE KAMBA AND COASTAL TRADE

The Kamba occupied the lower Athi plains on the East and South East of the Kikuyu plateau. This was a much drier area prone to draught and the Kamba were dependent on their Kikuyu Bantu cousins for food in times of famine in the plains. There were also intermarriages between The Kamba and the Kikuyu especially along the eastern border “though this was on a smaller scale in comparison to the Maasai-Kikuyu intermarriages” (Muriuki, 1974:107). The Kamba were the chief contacts with the Arab coast and the main source of the principle item of trade, ivory. “By the early nineteenth century, when the coastal elephant population had largely been destroyed, the Kamba, farther inland, became the principal providers of ivory for export” (Were, 1984:90).

The Kikuyu and the Maasai exchanged the ivory to the Kamba for goats and “cowrie shells, beads salt and cloth.” The Kamba retained the position of middlemen in this lucrative trade until around 1870 when their influence in the trade began to wane. The Arab traders had by then established trade routes into the interior and began to deal with the Kikuyu directly at Ngong also known as Ngongo Bagas” (Muriuki, 1974:104). Thus by the time the earliest European explorers arrived in Kikuyuland the Kikuyu had had contact with the Coastal civilization through some of their young men who had undertaken the journey to the coast and back and through the artifacts. The trade routes had also become established so that the Railway merely followed the trade route up to Ngongo Bagas, where they established their camp that was to grow into the City of Nairobi.

4.3.0 THE EARLY EXPLORERS AND THE ARRIVAL OF BRITISH RULE.

The Kikuyu seer, Cege wa Kibiru (or Mugo wa Kibiru), had stated that there would come a people from the East who would look like butterflies and that they would come with sticks that spate fire and an iron snake that belched fire that would travel from the waters in the East to the waters in the West. Further he had said that children will be born who will have no ears for the Kikuyu customs but will only listen to outsiders as they will plug their ears (earphones?). He made other such prophecies including that Lake Naivasha would one day be planted bananas by the Kikuyu. “Although it may be difficult to assess the significance of these prophecies” according to Muriuki (1974), we can take the broad view that Cege wa Kibiru predicted a transformative force that were to sweep Kikuyuland with the coming of the white race. This was no doubt what happened and continues to happen.

“The course of Kikuyu history was radically altered by the momentous events that took place in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. By the

mid-nineteenth century, only a handful of Kikuyu had managed to reach the coast, while others had had a glimpse of the outside world by coming across the white man and the Swahili nearer home in the Kamba villages. This trend of increasing contact with the outside world was one of the chief features of the second half of the nineteenth century and culminated in the colonization of the Kikuyu country by the white man” (Muriuki, 1974:136).

As is going to be argued in this thesis, the transformative forces that were set in motion by this contact were to lead to changes in the architecture and it is these changes that began to break the prevailing status quo before 1900 that are of interest to us.

The great changes that were to transform not just the Kikuyu but the whole of Africa and what was to be referred to as the new world had their origin in European trans world trade that saw the European continent establish trade links with the Far East and the Americas and their subsequent settlement and colonial adventures. This was largely because of great advances in science and technology in Europe that also needed raw materials and markets. The two oceanic trades, the ancient Indian Ocean triangular trade between India, Africa and the Arabian Peninsula in the Indian Ocean and the younger triangular trade between West Africa, the Americas and Europe were dismantled so that the new traders could replace them. This done through the anti-slavery movement, the colonization of the territories began to take place. As has been argued, the three pillars upon which the anti slavery movement achieved their ends were Livingstone’s 3 C^s – Christianity, Civilization and Commerce. These three, each handled by different players were the instruments of transformation of not just the Kikuyu but other traditional societies. Were (1984) summarizes in a chart the various players and their motivations in East Africa in the figure below.

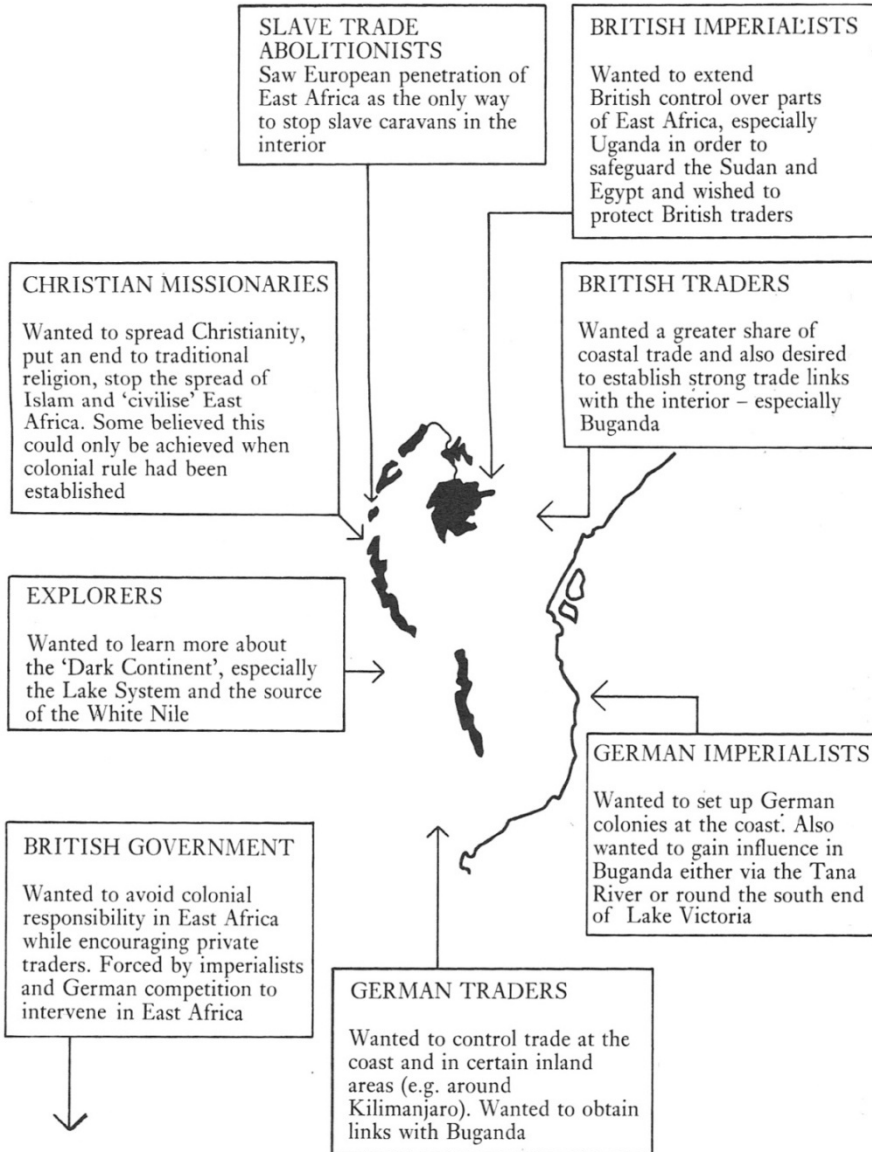


Fig 4.1 The variety of motives behind the East African conquest. (Source: Were, 1984)

Because the Germans in East Africa concentrated their efforts in Tanzania, Kenya was the sole preserve of the British except in the matter of religion as the Roman Catholic Church was active side by side with their protestant Church of England and Church of Scotland among others. After the partition of Africa of 1886 by the European powers, the Kenya and Uganda region came under the British sphere of influence, thereafter known as the British East Africa Protectorate. “Uganda contained the headwaters of the Nile, of strategic importance to the British, and in Buganda it possessed a burgeoning Christian community. According to Tignor (1976) “if Uganda was to be controlled and supplied, the British needed to occupy Kenya” and the construction of the Kenya-Uganda railway connecting the Indian Ocean port of Mombasa with the Buganda was of first importance for ease of movement of staff and materials. The Imperial British East African Company, IBEA, a largely private company was formed to administer this region which was then known as the British East African Protectorate. This was roughly the shape of Kenya and Uganda combined and it was only much later in 1920 that the name Kenya was used for the new Colony and Protectorate of Kenya under the British Colonial Office.

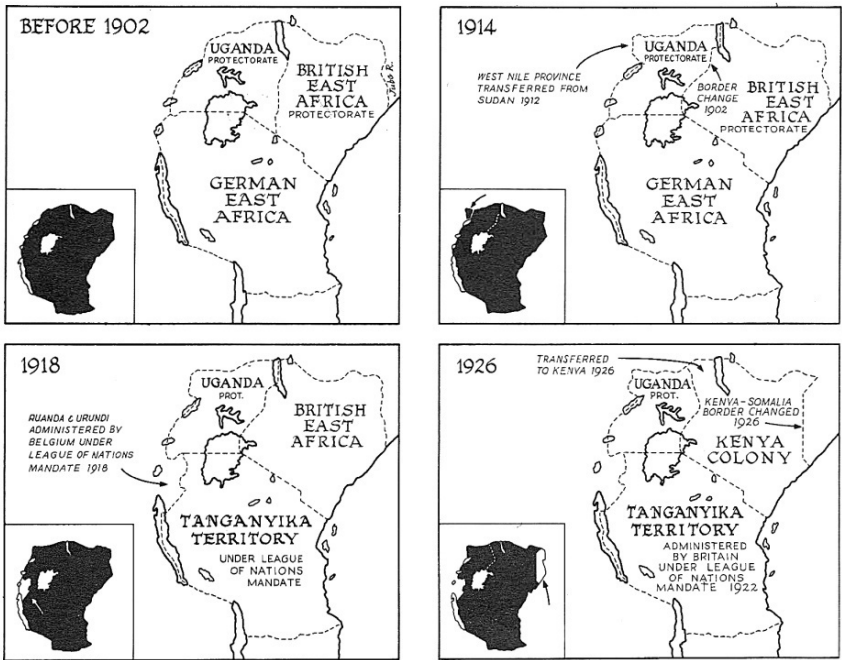


Fig 4.2 Changes in East Africa boundaries between 1902-1926. (Source: Were, 1984)

The first administrative centre, Fort Smith near Kabete was built in 1892 by Captain Smith of the IBEA. By 1897 the Southern Kikuyu economy was expanding rapidly to meet the economic opportunities presented by the caravan trade and the new railway that had just reached Nairobi in 1899. Francis Hall founded a government station, Fort Hall, at Mbiriri (current day Murang'a). This was because this area was more capable of providing ample quantities of cheap food whose demand kept on increasing beyond the capacity of the Kabete area. "By 1902 Fort Hall was effectively the epicenter or focus for the British colonial control of Kikuyuland and by 1904-5 the Kikuyu of Tetu and Mathira had also effectively come under control" (Rogers, 1979).

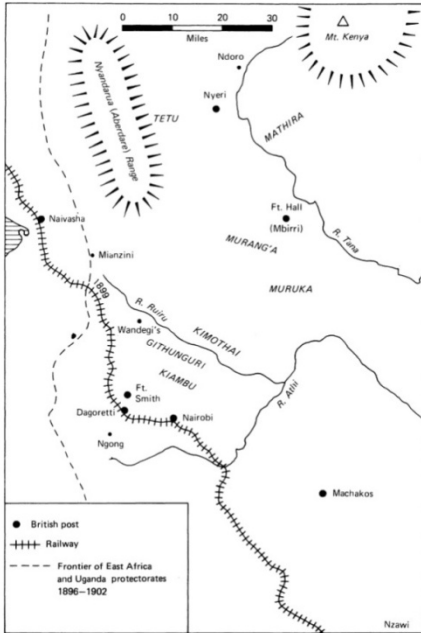


Fig 4.3 Kikuyu Country, 1890-1905 showing location of Fort Hall (Mbiriri)
(Source: Rogers, 1979)

Between 1890-1902, the IBEA extended its control into the Kikuyu Plateau through what was to be referred to as the pacification of the Kikuyu. The initial violent clashes between the Kabete Kikuyu and Fort Smith were met with punitive expeditions into the Kikuyu villages which were burnt and livestock confiscated. "There were instances of considerable loss of life" (Tignor, 1976:21). These kinds of expeditions which were numerous slowly broke down the resistance. This period of pacification also saw the Kikuyu suffer various other tragedies that further reduced the capacity for resist and paved way to the settlement of unoccupied Kikuyu land by white settlers. Between 1894 and 1899 there were intermittent invasions by locusts which caused extensive damage to the crops and a serious famine and outbreak of smallpox followed. There are estimates of between 50 and 95% mortality in the Kabete and Muranga regions

with many moving to seek refuge among their relatives to the North (Muriuki, 1974). By the end of 1904, the various forts were under the commissioners appointed by the Colonial office of the East African Protectorate and they had made an all out effort to bring Kikuyuland under Pax Britannica.

“As the British took over East Africa, many officials were struck by the possibilities its elevated regions offered for European settlement. Lugard, Johnston and others extolled the exhilarating climate and pictured vast empty lands awaiting development. The construction of a costly railway from Mombasa to Lake Victoria put additional pressure on the British government to devise means by which the East Africa Protectorate could pay for its administration and the railway. Many thought that sponsoring European immigration and relying on immigrant farmers to develop the countries resources was the answer” (Tignor, 1976:22).

In 1896 Francis Hall welcomed three European families to settle around Fort Smith and amongst the Kikuyu in the ‘vacant uncultivated land’. But it was not until 1901-1904 under a scheme formulated by High Commissioner Charles Elliot to attract settlers that a substantial number began to settle. After World War I the Colonial Office undertook to increase the number by settling a group of ex-soldiers all over Laikipia, Trans Nzoia, and Northern Nyeri.

This increased the settler population. The newcomers introduced into Kikuyuland and the rest of the country a new system of human-land relations where one person cultivated large tracts using wage labor. Previously labor obligations were tied to the family and the more members a family had the more it could cultivate. Because the new settlers were also using new methods of cultivation and conserving the soil, new crops and animals, new methods of communications and disposal of the produce through sales to far off places their system of land economics called for large tracts of land in the region of hundreds of acres. The government therefore stepped in and declared large areas of what was to be known as the white highlands and officially alienated them from “native reserves”. Those native families who were settled in the alienated lands were simply pushed away or became squatters and sources of cheap labor for the European farms.

The crops introduced by the new settlers were principally, coffee, sisal, maize, wheat and dairy farming all of which depended on African labor. Although there seemed to be ample labor in the villages for the settlers, the conversion of the African into a wage earner required again the intervention of the government. In 1901 the government in order to help its new settlers imposed a tax on every hut and required by 1910 that it be paid in rupees not in kind. “Those persons unable to raise money through the sale of their agricultural or pastoral surpluses were often forced into the labor market in search of wages” and the only source of the money was of course the settler (Tignor, 1976:8). As

there was no serious local administration to help in the enforcement of this tax, the government turned its attention to building and strengthening its power within the local government. The way they went about this was through the appointment of chiefs who were held responsible for the collection of tax and for enforcing government laws. Because the Kikuyu traditional system of government was composed of various levels of council of elders, *njama*, without a clear head, the government resulted to elevating by fiat the most prominent individuals. Muriuki suggests that these traditional prominent individuals or warriors, *athamaki* were merely specialized in particular fields thus there were '*athamaki a cira*' or judicial kingpins or '*athamaki a kirira*' or rites kingpins etc. These artificial 'chiefs' were given enormous powers through the native authority ordinances of 1902 and 1912 and there were cases of gross abuse of power. "In the chiefs the government had perfect tools for meeting settler demands: A chief proved his loyalty by the success with which he recruited labor, and anyone who refused to pay the hut tax, or to be recruited for work on the farms, was either flogged or fined a goat" (Muriuki, 1974:177).

Elsewhere the government divided Kenya into a number of provinces which in turn were divided into districts and the districts into locations. "Provinces and districts were under the jurisdiction of British officials, the provincial commissioners, district commissioners, district officers and assistant district officers. The locations were the responsibility of the chiefs" (Tignor, 1976:42).

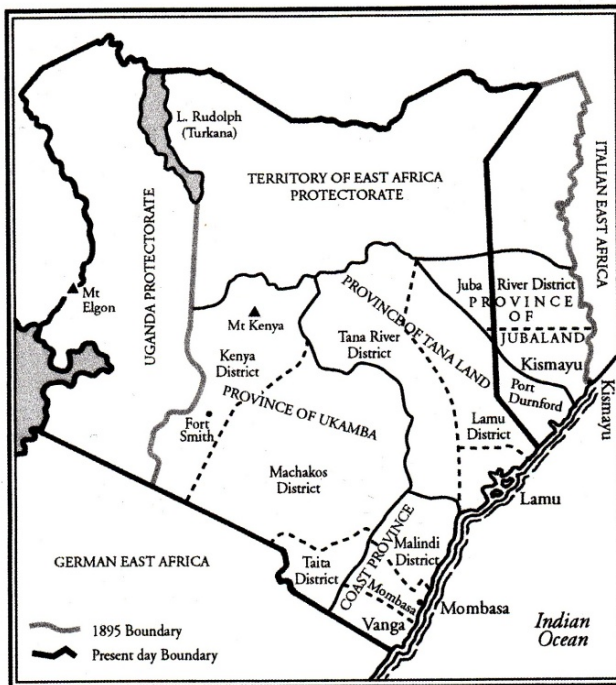


Fig 4.4 1895 map of administrative provinces and districts with present Kenya outline superimposed.
(Source: Sullivan 2006)

4.4 THE MISSIONARY INFLUENCE

One of the direct consequences of the building of the railway was the influx of Christian missionaries into the interior. Before 1890, there was little missionary activity in the Kenyan highlands but before the World War I there were already seven missions at work among the Kikuyu, Kamba and Maasai (Tignor, 1976:113).

The first mission station in Kikuyuland was the Church of Scotland Mission station, a 3,000 acre site at Thogoto, just outside of Nairobi. “Watson arrived at Kikuyu on 11th September 1898, which must be regarded as the real birthday of the Kenyan Mission” (Calderwood, 1948:10). The CSM had taken over the unsuccessful work of the East African Scottish Mission in Kibwezi at the Indian Ocean Coast near Mombasa. The Scottish missionaries were finding the Coastal climate inhospitable and the people not receptive to their message. On moving to Thogoto in 1896 they opened two other Centers, one in Tumu-Tumu, Nyeri and the other one in Chogoria Meru. The Thogoto mission coming at the height of a serious famine and disease outbreak among the Southern Kikuyu “attracted hundreds of sick and hungry” - a windfall for the missionaries (Muriuki, 1974:178). “The CSM believed in centralizing its missionary and educational activities and allowing the influence of large stations to radiate from the countryside” (Tignor, 1976:113). However, among the Missions inside Kikuyuland the most prominent and influential especially in the Nyeri area were the Consolata Fathers of which we will give a more detailed narrative. This is because their “Conquest for Christ”¹⁶ was very well documented and they also undertook anthropological studies which have become invaluable to researchers.

4.4.1 The work of the Consolata Missionaries

The Instituto Missioni Consolata was formed in September 1900 in Turin, with Canon Guissepe Allamano as its first Superior. The Institute’s mission was the propagation of the faith in the South of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) region, as the Italian government was already involved in the territorial acquisition of the horn of Africa. The basic philosophy motivating the Fathers was the *Propaganda Fide* or Propaganda of the Faith which took its inspiration from the biblical command “Go ye therefore teach ye all the nations” (Mathew, 1952:11). They were guided by this divine imperative to win souls for Christ, “with no other reward but that promised by the Divine Savior – to the salvation, education and civilization of these people” (Cagnolo, 1933:267).

On arrival in Mombasa in June 1902 they immediately set off for Nairobi in a caravan and on arrival in Nairobi were hosted for a few days by the Holy Ghost Fathers. The Consolata Fathers were interested in working in the interior

¹⁶ Title of the commemorative handbook produced in 1952 by the Instituto Missioni Consolata in celebration of 50 years in Kenya.

with the natives and were advised by the Holy Ghost Fathers to go to the homestead of Karuri wa Gakure in Muranga as he was a well known man of influence and in good terms with the Commissioner of Fort Hall, Dr. Hinde. As they climbed up the Aberdares Range, they could not hide their joy and excitement at the scene of their future labour. Father Perlo wrote in his journal,

“on the octave of our Lady of Consolata, (June 28), at 4-30 in the morning, I had the holy, unspeakable, joy of offering up the first holy mass said in this wilderness. I consecrated to the Holy virgin the poor souls of this country, beseeching her to plead with her Divine Son, so that in the not too distant future, we may leap an abundant harvest for eternity. Civilization is on the match! Its first glimmerings fascinate the wide eyed natives who are friendly enough.” (Mathew, 1952:23).

The Consolata Fathers under Father Perlo set up their first mission station near Karuri’s homestead at Tuthu several Kilometers north of Fort Hall. In travelling from Naivasha to Tuthu the missionaries had to pass through the great forest on the Eastern slope of the Aberdares Range.

“The sight of such a forest fired their imagination, and they resolved to utilize such precious material in the interest of their apostolate. The lumber could be used in the building of schools and chapels, prefabricated houses for the missionaries and future neophytes” (Mathew, 1952:35).

The sight of the trees and the numerous streams of fresh water, the cool almost temperate climate convinced the pioneers that this was the right place to establish their mission. At Tuthu, the mission was quite close to the fast flowing Mathioya river and they immediately conceived of the idea to divert a trench upstream to a turbine that would run a sawmill. Having established a rudimentary school and a dispensary, they were determined to foster on.

According to Tebaldi (2001), Dr. Hinde was having a lot of difficulty even with the help of Karuri keeping the peace in the region with bands of warriors acting independently and compounded by the antics of a European adventurer and self proclaimed King of the Kikuyu, John Boyes. The missionaries were in Tuthu for only three months when Dr. Hinde recalled them to Fort Hall and they had to abandon their mission while Hinde brought the trouble under control. Hinde then offered the missionaries an option of settling near a new Northernmost Fort at a place called Nyeri where land was plentiful for agricultural purposes. The missionaries took up this offer and moved to a new station which was soon after granted a title for 1000 acres by the government. This mission at Mathari, just two kilometers North of Nyeri, became their headquarters from where other missions were established Othaya, Karima, Gaicanjiru and Gikondi.

Here in Mathari, Father Perlo an expert photographer set up his studio for the documentation of the Akikuyu which was to grow in time to a fully fledged printing press for use in the Propaganda Fide. A dispensary was also set up and an elementary school. To begin with, their little knowledge of the vernacular was a great handicap and they began in “the same way the builders of the Babel tower must have finished, talking in signs” (Cagnolo, 1933:271). Gradually they build up a working vocabulary and soon they divided the work into what they saw were the immediate challenges which they arrived at, at a conference held in Fort Hall in March 1904. It was decided that rather than a straightforward evangelical approach in the preaching of the Gospel, an integrated approach be adopted incorporating other activities as social welfare, medical care, agriculture and handicraft. Some of the main resolutions of the 1904 conference according to Mathew 1952, can be summarized as:

1. The development of a band of native young men who could spread the basics of the new teaching. These could be attracted among the workers in the mission farm and given an accelerated 40 day course that would enable them to be catechists in the villages.
2. The teaching of the three Rs, Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic to the young while introducing them to new concepts of hygiene, good manners, physical education through drills and games. This was to be balanced with a practical education in the crafts of carpentry and construction.
3. The free dispensing of medicines and healthcare to the native population.
4. Mass instruction of the new religion through visits to the villages and evangelization.
5. The understanding of a proper Kikuyu language and orthography by the missionary together with the customs of the Kikuyu in order to know best how to win them over.

Most of the available Fathers were divided in these various fields of labour and were joined by their counterparts, the Consolata Sisters who became more adept in the health field. To date the Sisters play the pivotal role in the administration of the Consolata Hospital in Mathari and the highly acclaimed Consolata Nursing School in the same place. The Consolata Sisters also run the Consolata Primary school and the Convent while the Fathers continue running the rest of the Mission, which includes among other facilities, the catechist college, the seminary, the printing press, and the workshop. Back then, the work of winning the hearts and minds of the Kikuyu was of first importance and this though slow was a task for which the Consolatas took very seriously and recorded carefully in registers. From July 1, 1902 to July 1, 1905 they had visited 37, 826 homesteads and done 70,912 medical treatments, 23, 237 of those being done in the homesteads. They had also had given 29,218 individuals religious

instruction not counting those given by the native catechists whom the fathers had trained. (Wambugu, 2006:270).

“The news of the Fathers’ work spread like a prairie fire. And hundreds of patients came from far and near, either to have their ailments treated, or to obtain medicine for a sick one at home. In such cases the fathers were in a quandary. Unlike the Kikuyu witchdoctors, they could ill-afford to throw the dice or to scrutinize the entrails of a dying goat in order to arrive at a proper diagnoses. Instead a series of questions were asked:

“Where is the patient?”

“He is at home and he has sent me to you for medicine.”

“Is he a man or a child?”

“It is my mother.”

“Where does she feel pain?”

“All over the body.” (mwere wothe)

“Does she have a head-ache?”

“Yes.”

“Does she have pain in the tummy?”

“Yes.”

“And what about her chest?”

“There are pains there too” (no ruo)

The distressed missionary would then look quite serious, deliberate for a few moments, then reach for a tablet of quinine, or aspirin, or a laxative, in the hope that, if such a remedy failed to effect a cure, at least it would not do any harm. Colourless tablets such as sublimate solutions for ulcers were not appreciated. Instead bright coloured medicines of the silver nitrate drops for conjunctivitis were highly prized as also were medicines with a tang” (Mathew, 1952:33).

Later the mission developed more ‘scientific’ methods of diagnosis and treatment with dental, X-ray maternal health and child care services all of which went into changing the Kikuyu attitudes to health and disease. This was reinforced as we are going to see later, by the education program of the missions and by the government programs aimed specifically at the improvement of the homesteads and the *Nyumba* in particular.

With this kind of phenomenal success in the area of medicine it was not long before the shift from treating the effects to fighting the causes was made. Just like the battle for the mind of the native was being won in the spiritual front by eradicating the forces of Satan through the burning of superstitious objects, the battle for the health of the native shifted into fighting the causes. In this the ethnographers in the field had the finger pointing to the filthy and unhygienic environment that the native lived in.

“The native has no idea of even the rudiments of hygiene: they have no idea of food value, their housing is unsanitary, both of which encourage disease, many of which become endemic” (Cagnolo, 1933:127).

This kind of assessment of the Kikuyu environment was to guide the school curriculum where hygiene in the home and nature study of the surrounding environment became increasingly important.

The description of the Kikuyu woman’s *Nyumba* by Father Cagnolo is a pointer that design of the *Nyumba* was to become a battleground for winning the war against ignorance and disease.

“The inside of a Kikuyu hut is not attractive. To gain an entrance, you must go almost on all fours in order not to strike your head against the cross-poles. There is no window, and the little light that finds its way through the door is obstructed by your body while you enter, so that when you begin to grope inside, you have no idea in what direction to advance. At first you probably stumble over a barrel of millet or a calabash lying near the entrance; then you may cling to the wicker-work which answers the purpose of the goats’ enclosure, but the ground is moist from the various inhabitants, and you are likely to slip up, which would cause general confusion among the miscellaneous contents of the hut. No matter how carefully you proceed, it is difficult to avoid striking your head against the trellis of twigs which is suspended a short distance above the fireplace to prevent the sparks setting fire to the thatched roof. When at last after devious maneuvers you have reached the fire, burning among the three stones which lie on the ground, you will find a few three-legged stools which serve as seats, and your eyes smarting with the smoke, still find it hard to distinguish one thing from another” (Cagnolo, 1933:55).

On the religious front the first Consolata mission chapel at Tuthu had been built in wattle-and-daub walls which were then plastered and whitewashed. The flooring was of rough planks and it had a ceiling covered with gauze.

“A small alter was set up, and over it was placed an attractive replica of Our Lady of Consolata framed in bamboo. It was no masterpiece, but it did serve to attract the natives who gazed upon it inquisitively. They would scrutinize the alter furnishings and then look at each other wonderingly. Without realizing it, these simple folk were getting their first object lesson in religion” (Mathew, 1952:33).

This kind of effect that the figure of Our Lady of Consolata produced among the villagers was used over and over again by carrying her image around the villages for shock and awe.



Fig 4.4 The figure of the virgin Mary being introduced to the villagers. (Source: Mathew, 1952)

Left: Our Lady of Consolata procession in the villages

Right: Our lady of Fatima on a visit to Kikuyuland

The Fathers took a hard view of magic and witchcraft and with their more powerful medicine were able to challenge the power of the traditional medicine-men. Many people turned in their traditional charms which were collected and burned by the Fathers. When a homestead was converted into the faith and the head of the household baptized, the spikes at the top of the grass thatched roofs were made into crosses thus offering a symbolic image of conquest similar to the cross hoisted on top of Mt. Kenya.



Fig 4.5 Right: The cross and the Papal flag hoisted on the Lenana peak of Mt Kenya by a party of the Consolata Fathers. Jan 31st 1933



Fig 4.5 A converted homestead with crosses at cone apexes. Crosses on roof apexes serving as a testament to the conquest for Christ. (Source: left: Mathew, 1952 right: Cagnolo, 1933)

From the start as far back as the 1904 conference in Fort Hall, “it was always understood that education is the best means to win over the hearts and minds of the Africans” (Mathew, 1952:122). Most other Missionaries stuck to the teaching of the three Rs, Reading, wRiting, and aRithmetic, but the Consolata missionaries decided from the start to be broader in their approach with courses in carpentry, masonry and building construction introduced in the curriculum. The first students tended to be older young men after circumcision age as the young boys and girls were engaged in the herding and general agricultural work. These *mambere*, (the firstlings) were to become very crucial in the transformation of the rural architecture later as *fundis*. The term *fundis* is of Swahili origin and is used in the villages to date for the trained mason or carpenter. These *fundis* took over the construction of the new type of houses as they were the ones with the know-how. But at that time in the early 1900s no Kikuyu, not even the chiefs had changed the form or construction methods of the traditional architecture. The Mission was working close with the government and these *fundis* received a government certificate with which they could present to an employer and so the early *fundis* went to be employed in the construction industry of the newly developing urban centers like Nyeri and Fort Hall and even as far as Nairobi. Some of them found employment with the Railways, the biggest employer then. *Fundis* were of cause exclusively of the male gender. The training of girls was of a different kind. For the girls, “emphasis was placed on such subjects as domestic science, care of the sick, child welfare, and physical and moral training” (Mathew, 1952:127). Educating the women was of course

not necessarily for the creation of a workforce but was seen as the main agent of transformation of the society from within as “it would prove highly beneficial later to them and their families. “Educate a woman and you educate a family.”” (Mathew, 1952:127).

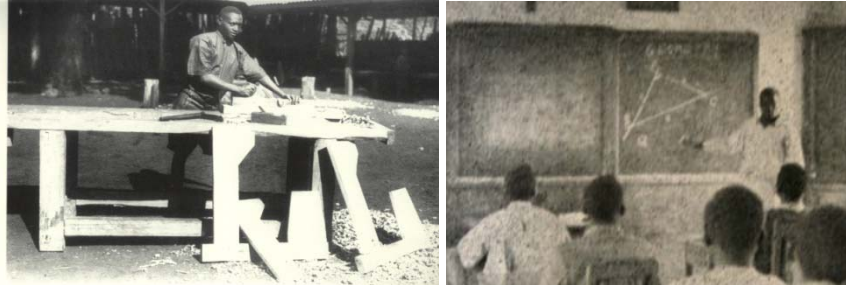


Fig 4.6 Studies in linear form making. (Source: Mathew, 1952)

Left: In the carpentry workshops at the Consolata mission school.

Right: The study of geometry in class.

4.4.2 A Revolution in the conception of things

An interesting feature of the education was the literal shedding of the old skin garments for the new uniforms which became a visible form of baptism that distinguished the *athomi*, ‘readers’, from the rest of the community. The clothing at first merely a sheet of American cotton knotted over the right shoulder just as the old skin garment, was later transformed into a dress, *matonyo*, for the girls and the shirt and shorts for the boys. This together with the physical education drills and parades made them bright and attractive. It is not for nothing that the Consolata Catholic Mission, CCM became known as *Cucu Curia Mwengu* – ‘Grandma Hung up your Mwengu.’ The *mwengu* being the front apron that girls wore together with the skirt, *muthuru*. It is not difficult to see that these drills and their strict formation in straight lines as opposed to the traditional dances in circles had a big impact in the students’ psyche. In the same way, the study of geometry and angles in class and in the workshops was changing the way they mentally constructed objects, “a revolution in conception and things” (Cagnolo, 1933:277).



Fig 4.7 Early pupils in uniform, lined up and in rapt attention. Left: Girls in dresses, *matonyo*. Right: A youthful class in white sheets uniform knotted in right shoulder and held with belt (Source: Mathew, 1952)

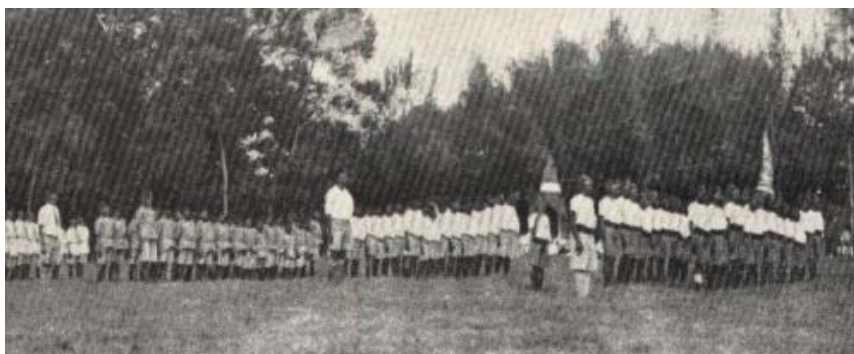


Fig 4.8 The physical education drill showing the strict linear formations in body relations. (Source: Left, Mathew, 1952)

4.4.3 Early Consolata Missionary architecture

In the beginning when the two cultures met, the construction of the missionary shelters used the labour and the materials that were available in the environment. The labourers being Kikuyu and the materials those found in the Kikuyu environment, the Kikuyu were surprised that the white man did not want to build as they did. Huxley records how this encounter happened when her father erected their first structure in a settler farm near Thika and the exchange between her father, Robin and Njombo, the Kikuyu in charge of the laborers. After Robin marked out a rectangular house with pegs, Njombo and his friends were incredulous and he said;

“We cannot build a house like that.”

“Why not?”

“It will fall down.”

Later after the Kikuyu agreed to go ahead and they began the construction using vegetable twine to tie the various elements together, it was Robin’s turn to be amazed; “Its roof was a major difficulty: the structure of rafters, purlins and a

ridge-beam was a total novelty and Robin's explanations got nowhere." Robin gave up arguing and let them proceed in the manner they knew how.

"The house will fall down without nails", Robin said.

"Those things, ... they are useful but it is wrong to put iron in a house." Njombo answered

"So Robin agreed to let them try, and they bound the poles together with twine in their customary fashion. The house was standing when we left the farm fifteen years later and never caused us any trouble, and the roof withstood many storms and gales" (Huxley, 1998:36-37).

The Consolata Fathers too used the local materials in their natural form at least until the sawmill arrived and some of their structures were quite an interesting blend between Kikuyu constructive techniques and Italian construction. A favorite wall construction was the Kikuyu granary *gikonjo* method which the Italians exploited to construct a huge (in the eyes of the Kikuyu) Church. They were also able to use banana bark for roofing, something the Kikuyu also used in temporary constructions.



Fig 4.9. Early Church built in traditional *gikonjo* style. (Source: Cagnolo, 1933)
The roof was beautifully done in banana bark.

Later with the acquisition of a block making machine the clay soil was used to make sun dried soil blocks which produced a more permanent wall when plastered in cement. The stone for the foundations was readily available and the Italians trained the first stone masons in the area. The buildings, some constructed using mud blocks at around 1920 in the mission are still standing to

date. The soil blocks were plastered on the outside and inside and given a whitewash.



Fig 4.10 Students in an early missionary construction class making mud blocks. (Source: Rigamonti, 2001)

It is not the intention of this thesis to offer an exact chronological timetable of when each of the new constructive techniques was introduced but to show these techniques and how they would later influence the Kikuyu architecture thus transforming it.

Most of the examples of this early Church architecture can only be glimpsed through photographs and several of the outstanding examples are shown below.



Fig 4.11 Examples of early Consolata Mission Architecture (Source: Mathew, 1952)
Top left: Merely titled: a primitive church in Kikuyuland. Grass thatch roofing of the 1900s
Top right: Church at Karima. Grass thatch roof and galvanized sheets façade. (Karima mission founded 1904)



Fig 4.12 Imposing Architecture

Left: Church at Nanyuki. Quarry stone walls and iron sheets roofing (1933)

Right: Church at Tetu. Front façade in molded galvanized sheets. (Tetu mission founded 1903)

4.5.0 THE COLONIAL GOVERNMENT'S INFLUENCE

The Colonial administration of government officials from the chief all the way up to the governor of the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya was in place by 1905 at least in most of Kikuyuland if not in the Northern and frontier districts.

“Colonization, however, would not have had such long-lasting effects if the confrontation between the rulers and the ruled had limited itself to a simple display of physical might. After conquest, a new element manifested itself, and this was to leave an indelible mark on the minds of the subjected people. The British administration’s declared *Laison d’être* after the period under discussion was that theirs was a civilizing mission to the erstwhile benighted Africans...” (Muriuki, 1974:177).

All these administrators had of course to find what they needed to do in the new colony and it was not long before they clarified their mandate, as Muriuki (1974) says, to be a ‘civilizing mission’ drawing inspiration from Livingstone’s 3Cs – Christianity, Civilization and Commerce. Christianity being firmly in the competent hands of the Missionaries, the government took on the main responsibility for the two remaining Cs

The main vehicle for the advancement of civilization was education. In 1911 the government created a Department of Education and two years later appointed J.R. Orr as the Director in the newly created Department of Education. Orr and his officials were not seeing eye to eye with the missionary ideas of educating the African and a lot of discussion went on as to the best method of educating the African. For instance in the area of women education, Orr “favored substituting what he called the three B’s for the three R’s: baby, bath and broom” (Tignor, 1976:205). Another official, Hopley, wrote that as much as it was

necessary to teach the three R's, of Reading wRiting and aRithmetic, which the missionaries emphasized, “the real focus in regard to the natives should be the instruction in the *“things that matter”*. He listed them as:

1. The improvement of character, the inculcation of discipline, obedience and honesty, right ideas of life and duty.
2. Training in the better use of the soil and the better care of domestic animals.
3. The improvement of home life and manner of living. Better houses, better ways of utilizing the raw materials at hand.
4. The care of life and health, the virtue of cleanliness, sanitation and pure water supply.
5. Training in the healthy employment of leisure time, healthy recreations.” (Hobley, 1923).

Blacklock summarized the general thrust of the discussion in the introduction of her small hygiene primer for children. She wrote,

“And yet in the Tropics we may still see a schoolboy, ignorant of the cause of malaria, clasping a book of Euclid close to his enlarged spleen; and may still hear a learned B.A. discoursing eloquently on the philosophy of John Stuart Mill while mosquitoes breed in the roof gutters of his house and rats scamper over the refuse heap in his yard”
(Blacklock, 1935:7).

Again the finger was pointing at the homestead environment and in particular the house and its construction and form. The idea of cleanliness was preached with as much vigor as the Missionaries preached the gospel of ‘the clean ghost’, *roho mutheru*, ‘the clean father’, *baba mutheru*, and ‘the clean Mary’ *Mariamumutheru*, for ‘cleanliness is next to Godliness’ a mantra that was repeated ad nauseam. The issues of tropical hygiene and medicine became infused into the school curriculum with nature study and the life cycles of mosquitoes, flies and tapeworms being taught in the schools.

This hygiene programs of getting to the root cause of the diseases and demystifying them freed diseases from superstition and probably contributed more in the erosion of the belief in witchcraft and of the confidence in the power traditional doctors and shamans than the gospel, that is “the substitution of causal principles for magical explanations” (Freire, 2005:14). The government’s efforts in the area of public health in the villages were implemented by the chiefs who could organize the whole village in great sweepings from one homestead to another driving out rats and burning refuse. The chiefs also saw to it that every homestead had a pit latrine. Up to about the 2nd World War, very few people had changed the house form from the round, grass thatched huts or had pit latrines. It is after the 2nd World War that a few people had enough cash to be able to change their homesteads. Till then only a few changes in artifacts, like cooking

utensils, tables, beds, and the folding chairs and these were in a few homes of the *athomi* and wage workers in Nairobi. It was after World War II that the government intensified its efforts with the Department of Public Health taking an aggressive stance towards changing the villages.

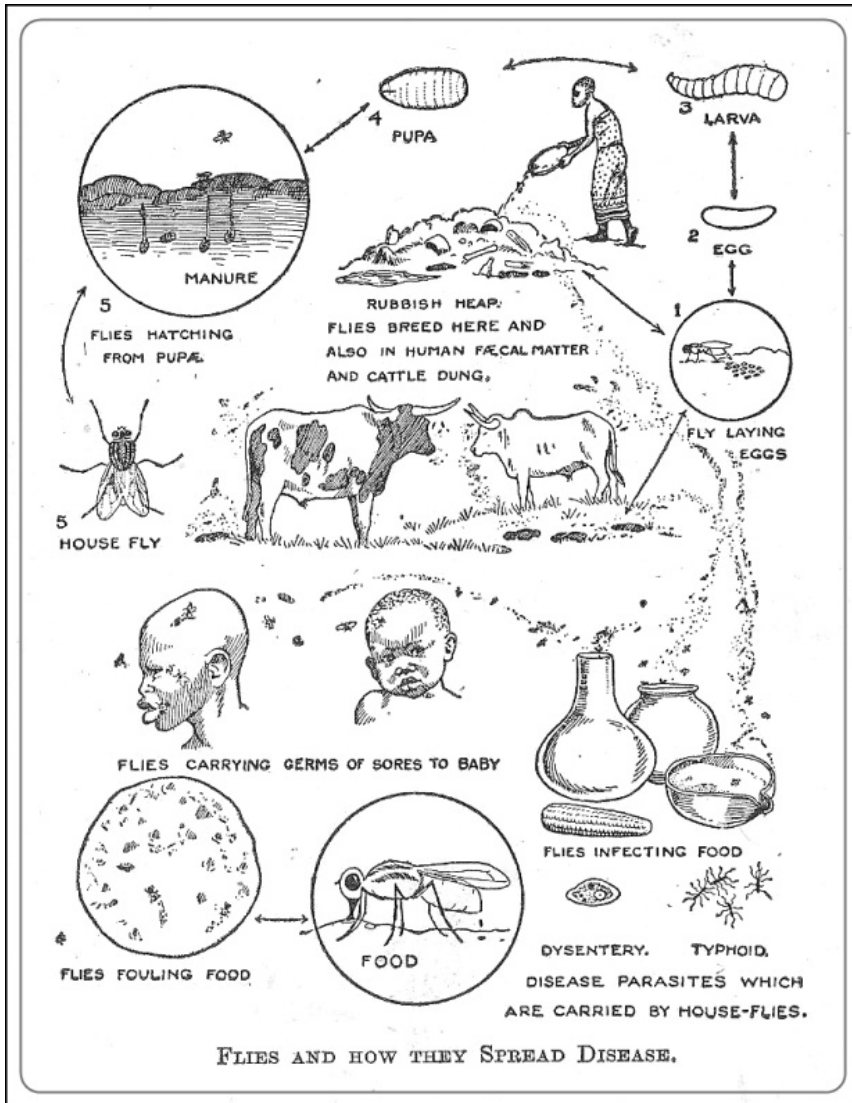


Fig 4:13 The life cycle of the fly within the homestead described. (Source: Sanderson, 1932)

Blacklock writes, "This is a picture of rats. Rats live in holes which they dig in the ground, or in clefts between stones and rocks. Some rats live inside

houses and shops and stores, in the thatch in the roof or under wood floors or even inside the walls” (Blacklock, 1935:15).

Fig 4. 14 “This is a picture of rats.”

(source: Blacklock, 1935)



As an illustration, she tells the story of a school age young man, Momo and how he got sick; “Mr. Kamara and his wife and children lived in a small house made of mud and thatched with palm leaves It was a small house with no windows and when the doors were shut it was dark inside. Very little fresh air came in, so that after some time the air in the house got hot and stuffy, which made you feel tired and not want to work. ... Insects crawled about the floor and bit them when they slept. ... Momo’s mother kept food in earthenware pots and calabashes but most of these pots had no lids and flies used to go inside and rest on the food and sometimes they fell in and drowned” (Blacklock, 1935:25).

She goes on about the refuse and its disposal, the lack of sanitary facilities and then in the end in a contrasting picture of ‘before and after’, she describes the scene of Momo’s new environment.

“In a few years the Kamaras had a very comfortable house, for Momo had learnt how to make windows, and he put two nice windows at each side of the house, he made a wooden table on which Mrs. Kamara now kept all the food vessels, and he made well-fitting lids for the pots so that flies could not get inside them. The house and compound now looked very different from what they had before. You remember the house had been dark when the doors were shut; now, even when the doors were shut, the windows still allowed light and air to pass in. There were beds for the family to sleep on instead of on mats lying on the ground. They had clean water to drink and there was no badly-smelling refuse heap in the compound where ants and flies and rats lived, since all the refuse was burnt every day in the new burner. But the best improvement of all was that there were now no mosquitoes since all the water-containing pools, holes and tins had been removed” (Blacklock, 1935:43).

Not surprisingly Momo transformed from a sickly boy to a strong and healthy man. This ‘before and after’ method of presenting the two scenarios was used over and over again until the message was driven home. The ‘before and after’ method has been used very successfully in marketing and has been used for a long time to market skin lightening creams to African women.

Another book on Hygiene “written in simple English for African schools” and edited by Carey Francis¹⁷ aimed at shifting from merely describing symptoms into providing practical solutions. Some of the practical solutions illustrated are reproduced here.

LATRINES.	
Why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flies carry dysentery, diarrhoea, typhoid, and other diseases from excreta to food. • Worms.—The eggs or young worms are in excreta. They may be eaten by animals or get into our food or water. • Water supply may be fouled by excreta. • Keep the village clean. • Smell.
How ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A deep pit 18 or 20 feet deep. (Most flies will not go down. Those that do go down will not come up.) • Strong sticks across the top. • If possible a concrete top (Sh. 1/-), as this can easily be kept clean. • A roof to keep out rain and make it comfortable. • Walls and bushes to make it private.
Where ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About 40 yards from houses. Not too near, because of smells and flies. Not too far, or people will not use it at night. • Never near the water supply.
N.B.—A latrine is no use unless people use it.	

Box 4.1 Principles for the construction and use of pit latrines. (Source: Francis, 1933)

¹⁷ Carey Francis was a well known schoolmaster and teacher of mathematics at the prestigious Alliance of Missions School in Thogoto just outside Nairobi that trained many of the early Readers who went on to be leaders in many spheres of Kenyan life. “He was not just a teacher, he was an institution. He made us what we are.” – former student.

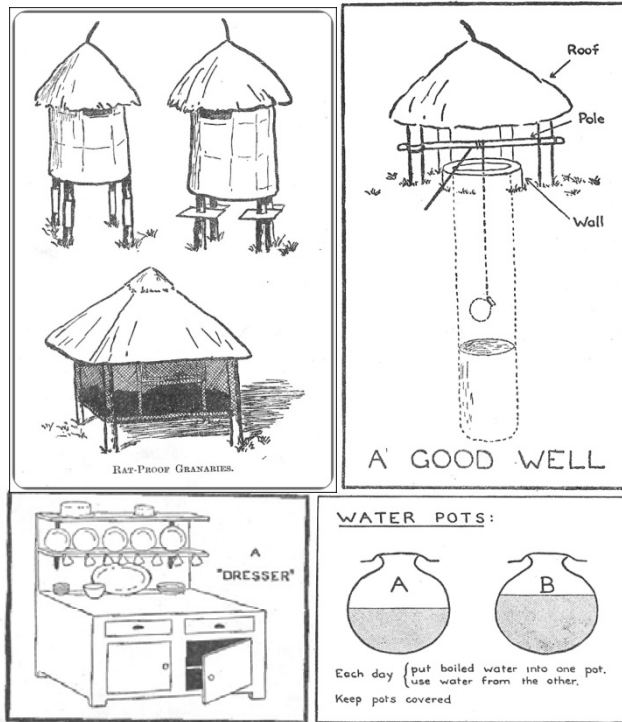


Fig 4.15 Various proposed improvements for a cleaner healthier home. (Source: Francis, 1933)

Top left: An improved granary with metal plates to prevent rats from climbing in and with chicken wire instead of the woven traditional *gikonjo*. Chicken wire (mesh wire) was called thus as it was used to construct early chicken coops. It is still known by that name.

Top Right: A good well.

Bottom left: This was normally called a cupboard, *kabati* or *ndiroo*, and there were many designs as they became very popular.

Bottom right: Drinking of boiled water and its storage.

In housing design, many academic studies were being made before World War II to rid the hut of smoke and to bring light into the room. The studies were being spearheaded in special institutes dedicated to tropical hygiene mainly in Britain. The impact of these studies was mainly in institutional buildings like schoolrooms and had to wait till new structures were needed and were never imposed on existing domestic structures.

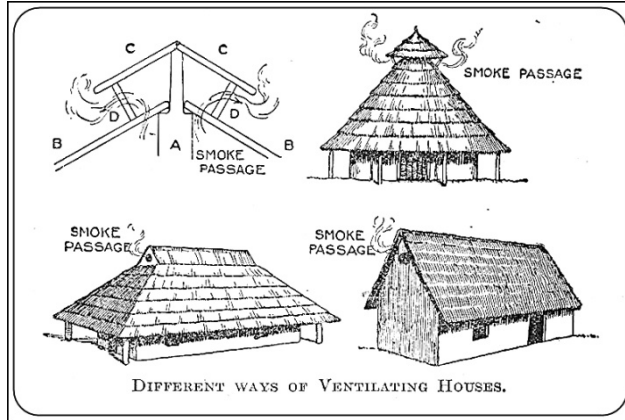


Fig 4.16 Proposed different ways of ventilating houses. (Source: Sanderson, 1932)

These transformative forces were also beginning to target and cater for the needs of specific communities like the Kikuyu by using the vernacular language and thus getting more readers and easier acceptance. One of the most famous books in Kikuyu was *Utheru thiini wa Mucii*, 'Cleanliness in the Home' Holding (1951), and school primers like Williamson (1953), *Uugi wa Bururi Witu*, 'The Knowledge of Our Country'. Almost all the school primers were infused with this language and doctrine that 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness'. In *Utheru thiini wa Mucii* Kikuyu housewives were told that "If I were asked to give a woman one rule which should be the foundation of all her work in the home I would say, *A good wife practices cleanliness*" Holding (1951). The gender roles in the home were sharply defined. In many of these books the woman was specifically targeted as the main agent of change in the household. It is also instructive that many of those hands on books were written by women. The missionaries had stated unequivocally, "Educate a woman and you educate a family" (Mathew, 1952). Koeune, 1961 went furthest in her teachings to the new African housewife. First published in 1952 and translated into the Kikuyu as *Wira wa Mutumia wa Mucii*, it taught the educated Kikuyu housewife on matters ranging from child rearing, cooking, ironing clothes and laying the table. In its brief address to the man, it gave a set of rules for the laying out of the new homestead thus:

1. The house itself must be near the middle of your ground, because that is the most important building and you want to get at the other buildings with as little walking about as possible.
2. The housewife spends a great deal of time in her kitchen and therefore she must have the kitchen near the house and also have a path between the two buildings.
3. The latrine must be at least 20 ft. from the house and kitchen otherwise if you are not very careful flies may contaminate your food.
4. If you are fortunate enough to be able to dig a well in your compound, it must be dug in such a position that the water cannot be contaminated by the latrine.
5. The chicken and goat hut must be far enough away from the dwelling-house and kitchen, so as not to bring flies and other household pests.
6. The vegetable plot must be near enough to the house so as to be really easy for the housewife to obtain vegetables from it quickly. It would be a good plan to have it near the well, so that in the dry season water can be carried to it easily.

Box 4.2 Principles for the layout of new homesteads. Source: (Koeune, 1961)

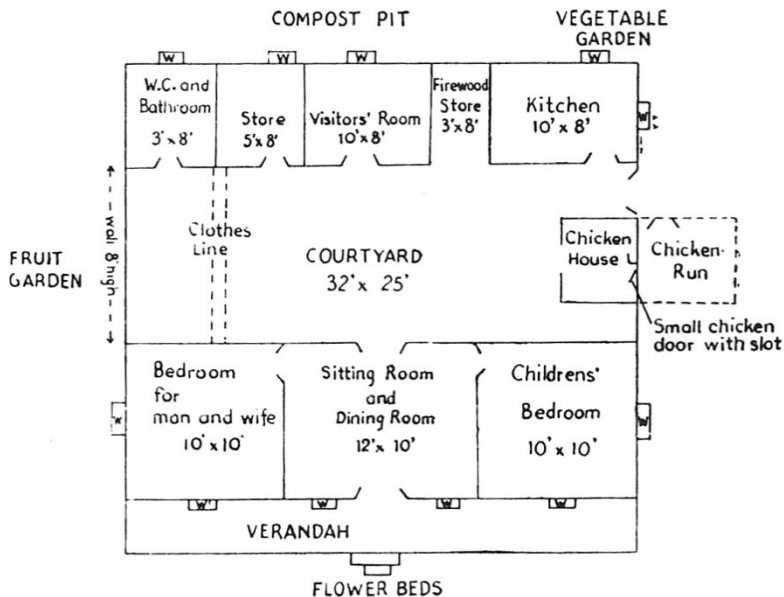
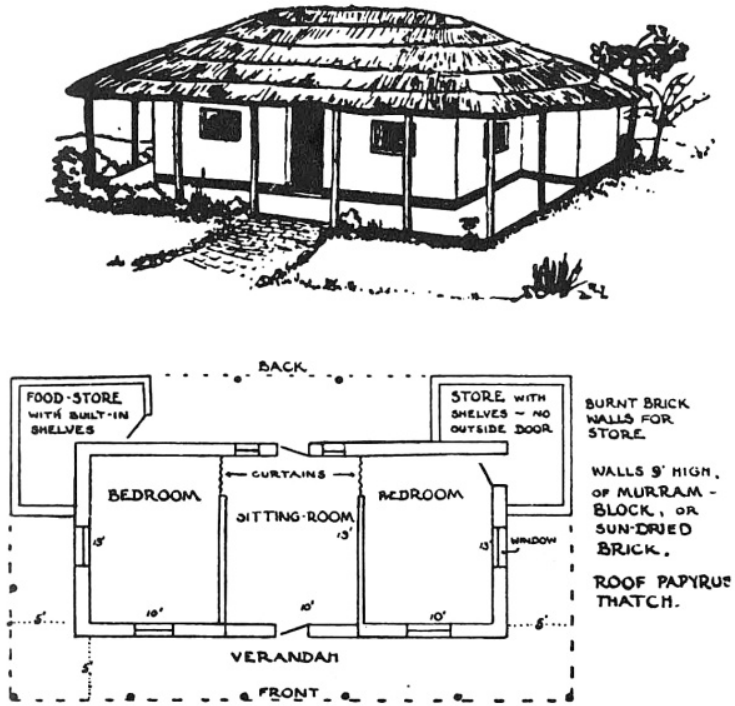


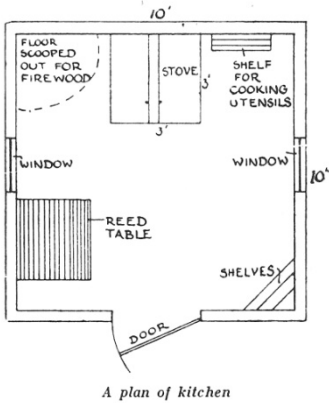
Fig. 4.17 Suggested plan of the model homestead. (Source: Koeune, 1961)



A three-roomed house

Fig. 4.18 Proposed three roomed improved house. (Source: Koeune, 1961)

The proposal called for a mud block wall with a thatched roof either using grass or papyrus.



A plan of kitchen

Fig. 4.19 Left: Proposed plan of new type of kitchen. (Source: Koeune, 1961)

Vents were also proposed in the roof to eliminate smoke. (Fig. 4.18)



Fig. 4.20 Proposed roof vents. (Source: Koeune, 1961)

The issues of ventilation were also discussed and she proposed the introduction of windows as well as the introduction of vents at the roof for the elimination of smoke, though she had a strange explanation for the lack of windows in the traditional *Nyumba*.

“You all know how the old African homes have no windows because in the old days a man was afraid to have any openings in his house in case enemies should spear him whilst he slept, or wild animals attack him. Now some of the fear has gone but still many people do not realize how important it is to have fresh air coming into a house and openings for the impure air to go out.” (Koeune, 1961:12)

Williamson’s Standard Four Kikuyu Primer, in a chapter, *Nyumba cia Andu Airu Matuku Maya*, ‘African Houses Today’, proposed that the traditional homestead, which he described in another chapter, could be re-arranged into a series of huts of independent rooms rather than a unitary building. These huts could also have windows and higher walls. For those who could afford it he also proposed a bungalow with a porch and several rooms inside as well as the use of a table room with flowers and cutlery.

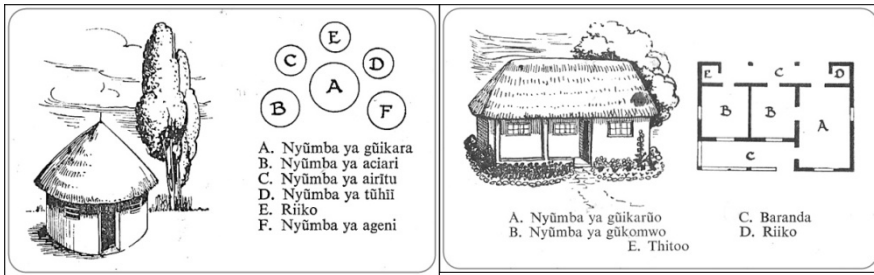


Fig. 4.21 Proposals of changes in housing layout and form. (Williamson, 1953)

Left: proposal for changes in the layout of the homestead. A: Living house, B: Parents house, C: Girls’ house, D: Boys’ house, E: Kitchen, F: Visitors’ house. Note that the proposed hut has windows and a higher wall but retains the shape and construction materials.

Right: Proposal for the construction of a single building. A: House for living, B: House for sleeping, C: Verandah, D: Kitchen, E: Store. Note that the term *nyumba*, building is used to describe the rooms as the term *rumu* for room was yet unknown, so Williamson used the known term, *nyumba* to convey the concept. He also discussed the use of alternative materials for the roof such as the use of *debe* sheets. The *debe* is a Swahili word for the twenty litres tin rectangular box-like can that was used to import petrol and paraffin in those days. These box-like cans were split open and sold as roofing sheets. Williamson proposed this as a solution to the constant maintenance that the grass thatch required.

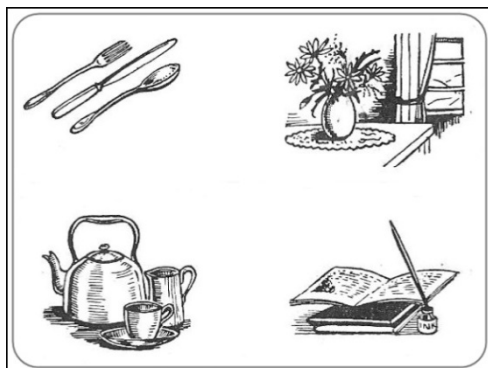


Fig. 4.22 Some modern elements making their appearance inside the house. They are explained more comprehensively in Koeune, 1961. (Source: Williamson, 1953)

From the start, the British administration had declared that theirs was a ‘civilizing mission’ and its efforts were mainly focused in the field of education and health, mind and body, whereas the missionaries had the soul as their main concern. The government’s efforts can thus only be properly understood and studied “against this overall background of the ‘civilizing mission’” (Muriuki, 1974:178). The “rich glowing colours of the dawn” heralded a “new epoch for the Kikuyu race, the laying of secure foundations of a new civilization,…” (Calderwood, 1948:45).

The Book of Civilization, Paterson (1934), “A Book for Africans” was written for Africans who could read and write and who were seen as the catalysts for change in their communities. Paterson, the then Director of Medical services in the Kenyan Colony headed a team of agriculture, education, forestry and medical departments who were involved mainly with the Kikuyu but whose target audience was all of the African people. The examples used in *The Book of Civilization* were therefore drawn from their studies of the Kikuyu and so were the illustrations by Margaret Trowell. The book was meant to go beyond mere teaching to a conversion through the use of the ‘before and after’ scenarios and the shaming method with the use of very strong and paternalistic language against the old ways. The book has entire chapters on clean villages, clean homes and the furniture in the home, as well as other chapters dealing with gardens and outhouses. It also had an index of comprehensive working drawings for the proposed architectural changes, and the proposed layout of a ‘Better Farm’. The better farm was the key to unlocking the final Commerce pillar of transformative three Cs – Christianity, Civilization and Commerce. The principles of the ‘Better Farm’ will be discussed shortly.



Fig 4.23 The merits of an improved environment illustrated. (Source Paterson, 1934)
Left: A “Before and After” scenarios illustrated. Many goats vs. one good daily cow.
Right: The educated reader, *muthomi* reading the book of civilization to his neighbors outside his home. The Kikuyu have a saying, *wa maitho ti wa ruthiomi* or ‘a demonstration is worth more than words.’ And the farm was the visible illustration.

In describing the Kikuyu traditional *Nyumba*, Paterson minces no words and leaves no room for negotiation. She is prescriptive where Williamson is dialogic probably because Williamson was collaborating in his book with a Kikuyu, Ruthuku.

“If your house is to be clean there must be light in the house. If there is no light in a house how can you see the dirt! Therefore you must have windows in your house to let in the light, and to have windows you must have high walls. You must have high walls and large windows, not little windows, but *large* windows. Is there any light in the small round huts that many of the Kikuyu and the Jaluo and the Akamba and nearly all the people of this country still build? There is not. Are all these huts clean? You know that they are not. These huts are small and dark and dirty and full of smoke which hurts the children’s eyes; and the huts smell, they smell badly. Are these huts good places for men to live in? Could a man with clean clothes or a clean skin go into one and come out clean? You know that he could not; he would come out dirty. Are there rats in these

huts? You know that there are many rats in these huts, they eat the food of the people, and they eat their blankets and their leather straps, and sometimes they eat the people's toes. And then the rats get sick and die, and the fleas leave the rats and bite you, and give you the sickness which killed the rats, and you people die of the sickness, the sickness that is called plague. Why are these rats in your huts? There are rats in your huts because rats like dark and dirty houses; the rat is a thief and he likes darkness, and there are many rats in your houses because your houses are dark and dirty. Your houses are good houses for rats, but they are not good houses for men or women or children to live in. You build houses for the rats, that is what you do, and so long as you build huts which are small and dark and dirty and better for rats to live in than for man, then so long will rats live with you in your houses and share your food. Hyenas and rats like darkness and dirt. If you are men why do you build a house which is as dark and small as the hole the hyenas lives in and which smells as badly? You must build better houses. You must build high walls and you must have large windows and you must tell this to all the people. In this book there is a picture of the inside of a house of the kind that many of the people of this country live in. How can a man or a woman or a child be healthy in a house of this kind? You must build better houses. Below the picture of the bad room there is a picture of a good room, and at other places in the book there are plans of good houses, but all have high walls and windows. You may please yourselves which kind of house you build, but you must have high walls and you must have windows. ... If you are men, why do you build a house which is as dark and as small as the hole the hyaena lives in and which smells as badly? You must build better houses. You must build high walls and you must have large windows ” (Paterson, 1934:21-22).

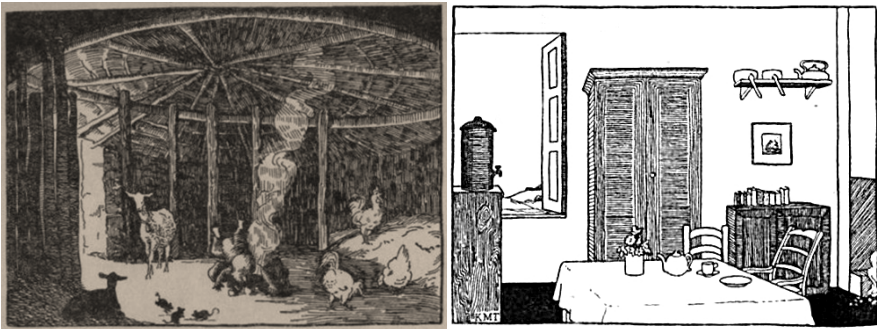


Fig. 4.24 The ‘before and after’ scenarios here used to great effect. (Source: Paterson, 1934)

Note the dark hut on the left and the lighter room on right. Like Williamson, she also includes table flowers.

Paterson repeats over and over again in the book on the necessity of high walls and the infusion of light into the house. A wall, she suggests, of nine or ten feet is necessary with holes for permanent ventilation, the holes being stopped with wire gauze to prevent mosquitoes from entering. She talks about the colour of the walls and that they must be white so that one can see a fly and anything crawling on it. She talks of the necessity of completely forgetting the past. According to her, there was nothing useful there and the Kikuyu must look for solutions elsewhere. She proposes that the Kikuyu build a rectangular house rather than a round one.

“I think that the best kind of house to build is the oblong house with three rooms. I think that this is the best kind of house because it gives you a living-room and a room for your children which is quite separate from your room. And it is easy to roof a house like this” (Paterson, 1934:23).

The kitchen is to have a chimney and cooking should be on a stove and not on three stones. The cooking pans should be shiny and easy to clean and put in a cupboard. I think the best way to present her proposals is to just let her illustrations speak for themselves for the book was meant to utilize the visuals in a more forceful way than text.



Fig. 4.25 The 3B's - Baby, Bath and Broom - proposed for the African woman - (Source: Paterson, 1934)

Paterson presents her version of the ten commandments of improved houses as:

- (1) *You should build a house with high walls and windows.* If you can you should build a house with three rooms. A room to live in and eat in. A room for yourself and your wife to sleep in. A room for your children to sleep in.
- (2) You should have a *large* window in each room to let in light.
- (3) You should have little openings at the top of the walls in each room *which must, never be closed*, to let in fresh air for you to breathe at night.
- (4) You should build *high* walls in order that you may have *large* windows and in order that you may walk about easily in your house like a man.
- (5) You should have ceilings in your rooms in order that dirt and insects may not fall into your food or into your beds. And the ceilings must be white.
- (6) You *should* make the inside of the walls of the rooms of your house *white* in order that you can see dirt at once and in order that a small lamp will give much light. And you should make the walls white outside as well if you can do so.
- (7) You should not cook in your house because the smoke will dirty your house and hurt your children's eyes. Therefore you must have a kitchen outside.
- (8) You should not keep goats and calves or hens in your house because goats and hens smell and will dirty your house.
- (9) Therefore you should have a goat house and a calf house outside.
- (10) You should not keep grain in your house because it is not good for the grain, and because if you keep grain in your house rats will come into your house. Therefore you must have a grain store outside.

Box 4.3 The ten thou shalls and thou shalt nots for a clean and healthy house and homestead. These were the precursors of the colonial building by-laws still in place today (Source: Paterson, 1934:25)

And casting her eyes on Mt Kenya for inspiration just as the ancient Kikuyu seers had done before her, Paterson describes a future where she sees as in a prophetic vision, Kikuyuland and all of Africa;

“And so in our minds we may make a picture of Africa very different from that which we know - a picture of Africa parceled out into small farms of well-tilled arable and well-fenced grazing, and on each farm

there is a good water supply, and a homestead where the folk are healthy, and clean, and well fed. And through the land run good shaded roads and every here and there a prosperous village with shops and a savings bank, and a post office and co-operative buying and selling societies and a school and playing fields, and a village hall. And there is no waste land anywhere except perhaps where the slope of the soil is such that even grazing does not pay, and trees will not grow. Some Africans have seen that picture in their mind's eye. ... Need the picture remain no more than a mere picture in the mind's eye?" (Paterson A. , 1934).



Fig 4.26 Kikuyuland seen as in a vision. (Source: Paterson, 1934)

This was probably inspired or meant to evoke St. John's vision in the Bible. "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." – Revelation 21:1-2 (King James Version) It shows a synthesis by Paterson of the two Cs of Christianity and Civilization.

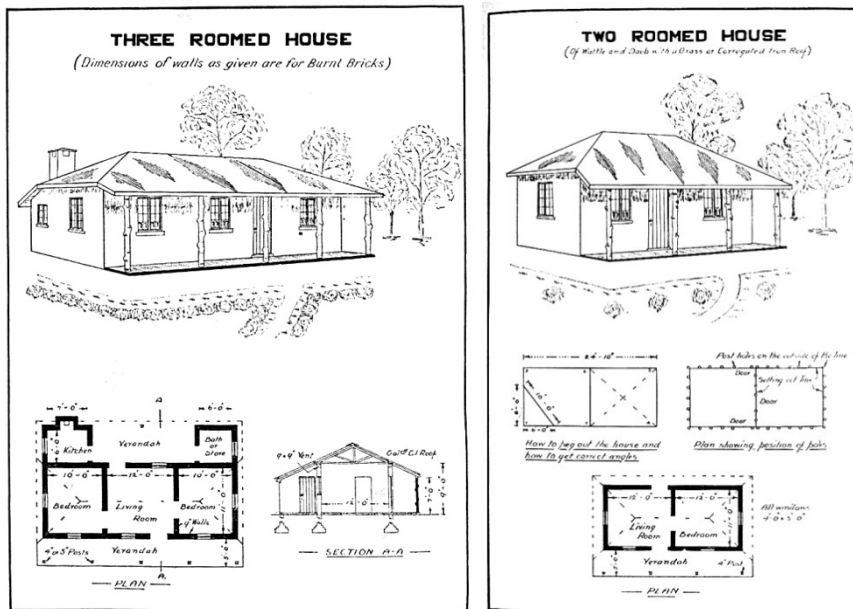


Fig. 4.27 Proposed building plans for a healthy house. (Source: Paterson, 1934)
 Left: A two roomed house and on right a three roomed house with kitchen and store.

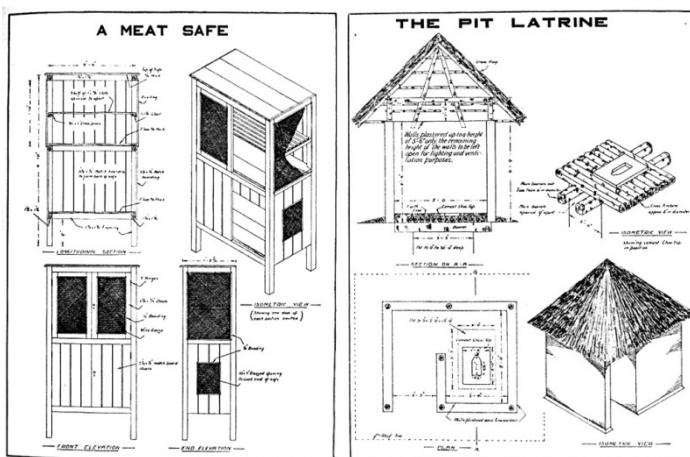


Fig. 4.28 Construction drawings for proposed various elements in the home. (Source: Paterson, 1934)
 Left: Drawings for a meat safe and right for a pit latrine.

4.6.0 THE SETTLER FARMING ESTATES

When the Kenya Uganda Railway reached Lake Victoria, the Foreign Office began to encourage European settlement in the Kenyan Highlands in order to find a way of making the railway pay for itself. By then there were only about 30 settlers and the new Commissioner of the Protectorate, Charles Eliot began to actively campaign and encourage willing farmers to take up land. Back then there was no land office and the procedure was that “you drew a sketch plan of a river and a tree, and whatever struck your fancy, and you drew a square around the particular bit of land and sent that in for approval” (Muriuki, 1974:173).

In 1902 the Crown Lands Ordinance was passed which allowed the government to lease land which was unoccupied. It happened that at around this time the Kikuyu had just suffered a series of misfortunes which included famine and disease that saw their numbers drastically reduced especially in large parts of Kiambu and the Kabete region. Because of this, many *Mbari* lost their lands to the new settlers. “By the end of 1905 over a million acres of Kikuyu land had been leased or sold to the settlers by the authorities” (Bailey, 1993:13).

In 1915 the Crown Lands Ordinance officially demarcated what was to be Crown Land and what was to be Native Reserves. All the people who were inside the Crown Land, (Settler Farms), were either allowed to stay on the land as official squatters or had to relocate to the Native Reserves. The squatters became a source of cheap labour in the Settler farms. The politics behind all this was pretty heated and is still a subject of debate to date but our purpose must be to see the contribution of the settler community in the transformation process of the architecture. The resultant land dwelling relationship changes that occurred in this period had to do with densification of the settlement pattern and the resulting loss of tree cover and soil erosion. Out of this the government instituted programs of encouraging the Kikuyu to reduce the numbers of their livestock and the teaching of soil conservation through village meetings, *baraza's* organized by chiefs.

As their incomes increased, the settlers in their large farms of coffee and sisal began building villages for their workers as this encouraged a permanent supply of assured labor. These farm villages were laid out in pure geometrical order where the huts were lined up in straight lines. The form of the hut remained circular and included two windows. The wall was eight feet high and the cone had a steeper pitch of 60°. It was a replica of Williamson's proposed improved hut shown in fig. 4.19.

The roofing material remained grass thatch but the walls were built with mud blocks in some cases stabilized with grass, plastered and painted white with chalk. The floor was a cement screed on stone circular foundations. A few of these huts dating as far back as 1945 are still in use by some of the farms but

most of their grass thatched roofs have been replaced with *debes* and corrugated iron sheets. Because of the difficulty of maintaining the grass thatch, it was replaced with corrugated iron sheets but forcing the 8ft by 4 ft sheets to make a cone proved difficult and expensive so that a square, hexagonal or octagonal roof was constructed over the circular plan. It was found that the *debe* flat sheets could be easily cut into two feet by two feet lengths and these constructed a cone easily. It was therefore clear that to construct a house with sheets, one had better start with a square or rectangular plan, but the settlers continued to construct round huts for the workers as they considered them African.

Inside the hut there were no columns or divisions like in the traditional *Nyumba* but the workers divided the spaces using curtains. The replacement of the grass with iron sheets has only happened very recently through the efforts of the Ministry of Labor which has forced the farm owners to change from what they call a dehumanizing environment. According to the Ministry of Labor officials, housing workers in grass roofed huts amounts to a mistreatment of workers and it is now considered a human rights violation. As can be seen from the pictures which were taken by the author in some of the villages, not all the farms abide by this rule.



Fig. 4.29 Former Settler Coffee Estate Workers' Housing in Thika. (Source: Author, 2010)

Left: Thatched cone roofs on circular plan, together with octagonal pyramids of GCI roofs on circular plans

Right: A coffee estate village in Thika build in the early 1940's but now in serious disrepair



Fig 4.30 More Former Settler Coffee Estates Workers Housing in Thika (Source: Author, 2010)

Left: A well maintained and newly roofed double-hut meeting human rights standards.

Right: Small 4 ft x4 ft temporary structure for an external kitchen.

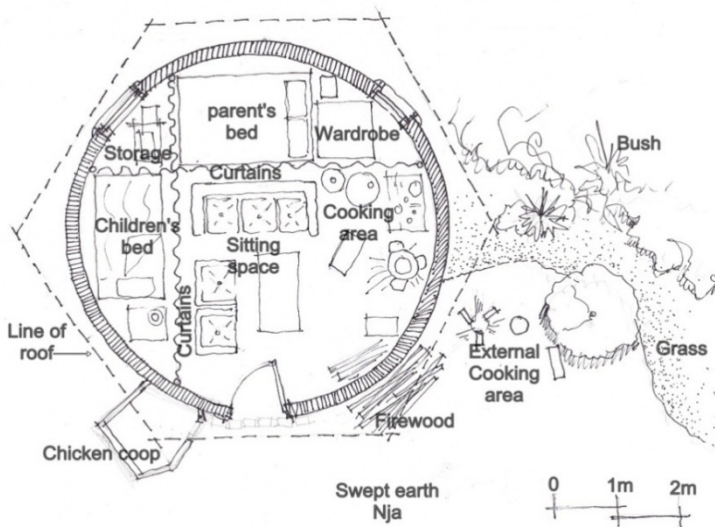


Fig. 4.31 Plan of a 6 metre diameter coffee estates workers' hut in Thika. (Source: Author, 2010)

The windows are firmly boarded for security and never opened and it seems the last time they were opened was in the time of Noah. The hut is dark inside although when there are visitors in the sitting area the light from the door is sufficient. Most of the day the workers are in the estates working and the spaces are only used in the evening. Food preparation before it is cooked is done outside as the cooking area space inside is very tight. The cooking aluminium pot can be watched by someone seated at the formal seating area. In most of the huts

there is also an open fire outside on one side not directly in front of the entrance. Guests are also entertained outside on stools. Rarely would a guest be invited inside except in extreme weather. Inside, the sitting area becomes the centre with the cooking area relegated to a corner. The next stage of transformation will see the kitchen space pushed outside altogether and a structure built over the temporary external fireplace. In fact there is one woman in this coffee estate who has done just that contrary to company regulations. She has built a temporary 4 x 4 feet kitchen next to her hut (Fig. 4.27). Of course since it is not secured she has to take the utensils and pots into her hut before going to sleep every night and leave only the stones and the firewood in the kitchen. This is a popular solution with the poorest even in the countryside.



Fig. 4.32 Coffee estates workers housing in Thika. (Source: Author, 2010)

Top Left: Cone roof of flat *debe* sheets on circular plan.

Top right: One of the 4 meter circular huts roofed with a square pyramid of galvanized corrugated iron sheets, GCI

Bottom left: One of the medium 5 meter diameter huts roofed with a hexagonal pyramid of GCI sheets

Bottom right: One truss supports the 6 more rafters needed to support an octagonal pyramid roof over a 6 meter diameter cylinder.

A consequence of the 8 ft high wall was that while does not have to bend in order to enter the hut, because the overhung is sometimes a mere two feet, the lower part of the wall becomes discolored from the roof runoff and splash. When the wall was built in mud without the cement plaster, it became heavily eroded and required constant maintenance. Even when it is plastered, it is always the lower part of the wall that is destroyed first (Fig.4.28). The hut also became very hot even with the added height and window due to the loss of the grass thatch. The heat generated inside this little hut by the iron roof is a worse human rights violation and the workers prefer a grassed thatch roof.

The geometry for the pyramidal roof was a throwback to the Kikuyu hut as the square and octagonal pyramids were derived from the four and eight primary rafters respectively which the Kikuyu had similarly derived from the inner square defining the kitchen (Fig. 3.14).

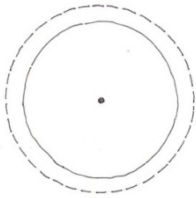


Fig. 4.33 Cone roof on circular plan. (Source: Author, 2011)

The cone roof either in grass thatch or flat debe sheets is derived from a point in the centre that recalls the spike, *muratho*, at the apex of the cone. For the hexagonal pyramid it would be necessary to derive it from a central isosceles triangle that in the Kikuyu hut would have been the three stones of the hearth. This was an excellent accommodation between the too much cutting of the octagons roofing sheets and a comfortable fit between the roof shape and the plan. In this dialogue between roof and plan, the plan was to later yield its rigid position by giving up the circle and becoming a square and rectangle.

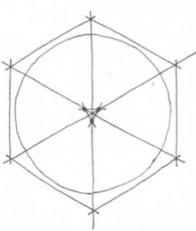


Fig. 4.34 Hexagonal pyramid roof on circular plan. (Source: Author, 2011)

Setting out the hexagonal pyramid by starting with a triangle that brings memories of the three stone hearth, *riko*, in the traditional *Nyumba*.

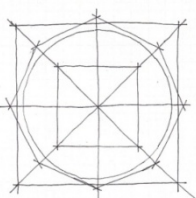


Fig. 4.35 Square or octagonal pyramidal roof on a circular plan. (Source: Author, 2011)

In much the same way as the Kikuyu roofed the circle by starting with eight primary rafters, here the circle is roofed with pyramids of four or eight rafters. These can be set out with a square inside the circle, the same square which in the traditional hut defined the kitchen area, *riko*, and helped in setting up the roof.

4.7.0 THE 1954-1958 VILLAGIZATION PROGRAM

The loss of Kikuyu land to the settler community had devastating and profound effects in Kikuyuland. “They were to have an increasingly difficult time sustaining themselves, particularly as their population began to recover from its earlier losses with the introduction of Western medicine and subsequent declining mortality” (Elkins, 2005:14). Since the Kikuyu practiced shifting cultivation, by 1930’s the land available began to feel the pressure through loss of productivity. The number of landless grew and

“by the end of the second decade of White settlement 25 per cent of the Kikuyu population was living permanently on White farms and many others made their living as migrant labourers. Many Africans who had been landholders became squatters on White farms when their lands were expropriated” (Bailey, 1993:15).

Many unemployed youths flocked the towns especially Nairobi. The land problem, coupled with unemployment and the condition of squatters in the European farms among other grievances were to result in a growing resistance from the tribes in the white highlands especially the Kikuyu. By the end of the First World War, there was growing discontent in the reserves and in the squatter settlements and “by the 1920s the conditions were set which were to give rise to the Mau-Mau rebellion in the 1950s. The most burning issue was the expropriation of African land by the White settlers” (Bailey 1993:18). The Mau-Mau was the armed organization which swore through oathing ceremonies to free Kenya from the yoke of colonialism through all means possible including violence. The Rise of Mau-Mau as a serious threat to the security of Kikuyuland saw a state of emergency being declared in October 1952. The emergency powers gave the government an opportunity to silence political groups that had arisen from the early 1920’s from the growing number of young mission educated Africans agitating for the political rights of the Africans. These political groups which were having much influence in Kikuyuland and Nairobi were branded as fronts for the Mau-Mau and their leaders arrested and detained.

The war between the colonial forces and the Mau-Mau has been a subject of political scientists and historians, but has not been studied adequately on its effects in the areas of architecture and human settlements. The repercussions of the 1952-58 emergency period on the settlement pattern and the transformations of the Kikuyu homestead layout and constructive methods has yet to be explored adequately.

The Mau-Mau guerillas were operating from the Aberdares and Mt. Kenya forests and getting food from neighboring villages either by force or through willing support. The Government in order to cut this supply line decided in 1954 on a drastic measure of forced villagization, holding everybody in

fortified villages where the Mau-Mau could not enter and the villagers could not contact the Mau-Mau. All the traditional homesteads dotting the Kikuyu landscape were suddenly wiped off the map and a new order established which saw everybody housed in “protected collective villages” as the British Government called them (Elkins, 2005:240) though they can only be correctly referred to as concentration camps. (Kinyatti 2010:203)

“By the end of 1955, less than eighteen months after the measure's introduction, 1,050 899 Kikuyu were removed from their scattered homesteads throughout Central Province and herded into 804 villages, consisting of some 230,000 huts” (Elkins, 2005:235).

In 1952, Britain had used such tactics to suppress communist guerrillas in Malaysia by effectively cutting off their supply lines and so it was a tested strategy. In a massive military operation all the homesteads in the reserves were torched and the people herded into the hilltops, especially where there was already a school, a shopping centre or a chief's camp. Many people lost their valuables in the hurried exercise.

“All the homes and cattle *bomas* in our area were wiped out in a matter of hours. When I saw the smoke in the next ridge I started burying pots and other items under the floor, and I bundled my children and took what I could” (Elkins, 2005:238).

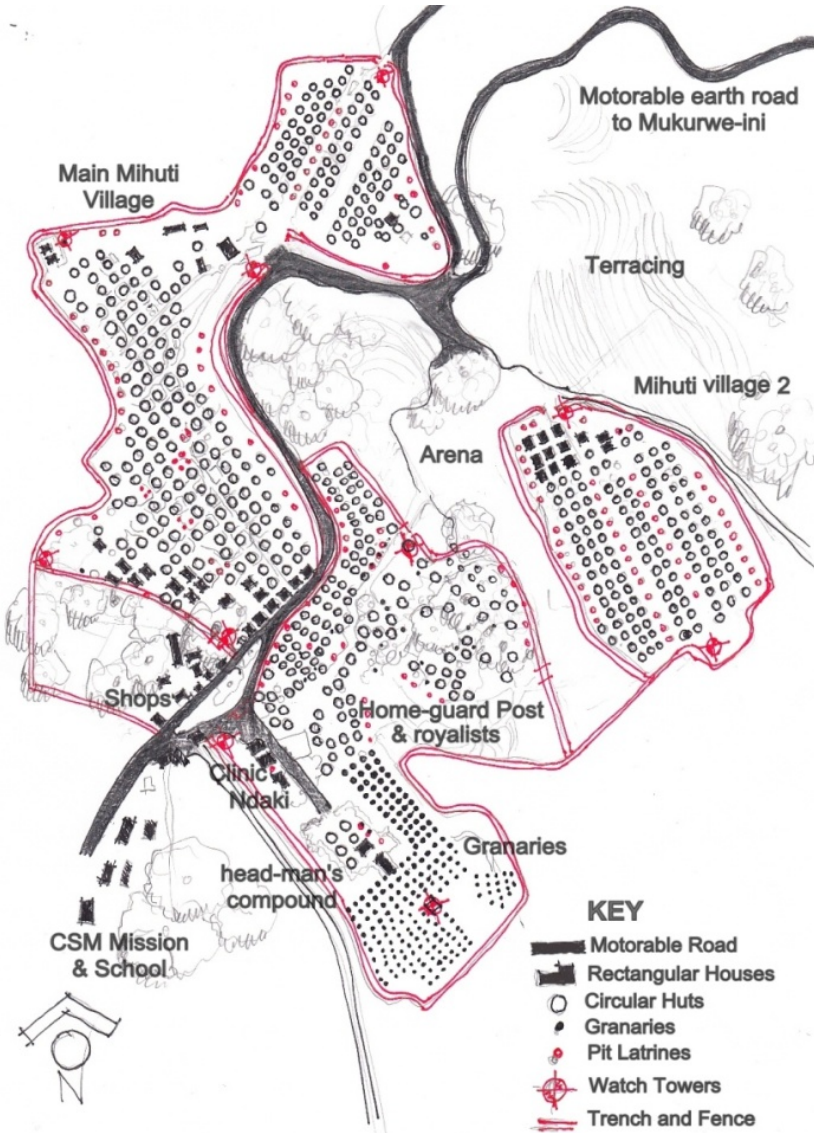
The construction of the fortified villages was done mainly by women as most of the men had by then either fled into the forests to join the guerillas or were in detention camps. The huts were set out in rigid straight lines with just enough space for the grass roofs not to touch in case of fire. To begin with there was nothing at all and they slept in makeshift refugee camps and very early in the morning they were aroused, taken to the forest where they cut down the building materials. The huts were built collectively one by one and were laid out like the workers villages in the settler farms. The difference was that in these villages they used mud and wattle and not mud blocks. They were also required to put in a window and were not allowed to subdivide the inside into the traditional spaces, neither was there a screen in the entry space. One simply entered into a single space of 10 or 12 of feet diameter. Once a unit was finished, several families moved in and shared the hut until their own could be constructed. Finally each family was accommodated in its own hut. A family here was defined as a married woman with children. The men did not count as they were very few and only old and infirm at that. These could live with any of their wives' huts if polygamous. All other men were either in detention, in the service of the government or missions or in the forest with the guerillas.

Each woman was also allowed to have a granary and all the granaries were built in one section of the village. All the goats likewise were built huts in a

separate section which housed the animals though most of the cattle had been confiscated by the government. No goats were allowed in the living section of the village. In some villages those who had missionary education, *Athomi*, build their houses in a separate section and were allowed, if one could afford it, to build rectangular houses with debe sheets for roofing but the main criteria of division was royalty so that there was a separate section for royalists, whether educated or not and a separate more secured section for the rest, *aregi*. In many of the villages, the specifications were different with the royalists' section having more space in between the huts. The other main section which was removed from the rest was the one housing the home-guards. This section was heavily guarded and also comprised of the chief or Head-man's compound and other favored government and Mission employees. The home-guards were mainly from other tribes as well as local Kikuyus who were royal to the government and were employed to police the villages. Most of them were armed with spears and whips thus they were called, *kamatimu* from spear, *itimu*. The British soldiers, who were very few and did not live in the villages donned rifles and were all called John, *Njoni*. They usually spent their time driving around from village to village inspecting and giving orders to the chiefs who in turn instructed the *kamatimu*. The chief's camp was usually in the homeguard camp but most villages were headed by a Head-man as a Chief had an entire Location with several villages in his Jurisdiction.

Once all the huts were completed, the women were then ordered to dig a moat all around each section of the village. In some villages there was only one trench encircling all the sections. First there was a fence of barbed wire all round and then, on the outside a trench of about ten feet deep and fifteen feet wide filled with thick sharpened sticks, *nyambo*, pointing outwards so that no one could climb in. The villages had only one or two entrances and one had to pass a security gate and say where one was going before being allowed out or in. There were also watch towers so that it was not possible to say you were going to the granary and then sneak into the forest. "A routine of forced communal labour" was then instituted and the women would be woken up with a siren, *king'oor*, and taken to the area where they would work for the day (Elkins, 2005:241). They usually made anti-erosion benches on the steep hillsides and in some cases big projects like canals and dams.

"From the air, Emergency villages look like rows of straw-coloured helma pegs stuck in a green board, each cluster filmed by a soft haze of smoke. They are depressingly basic and symmetrical" (Huxley, 1960:255)



MAP OF MIHUTI VILLAGES IN 1956

From Survey of Kenya Aerial Photo 1956

Fig. 4.36 Layout map of Mihuti Fortified Villages showing the various sections.
 (Source: Author, 2011 - from Survey of Kenya Aerial Photos of 1956,)

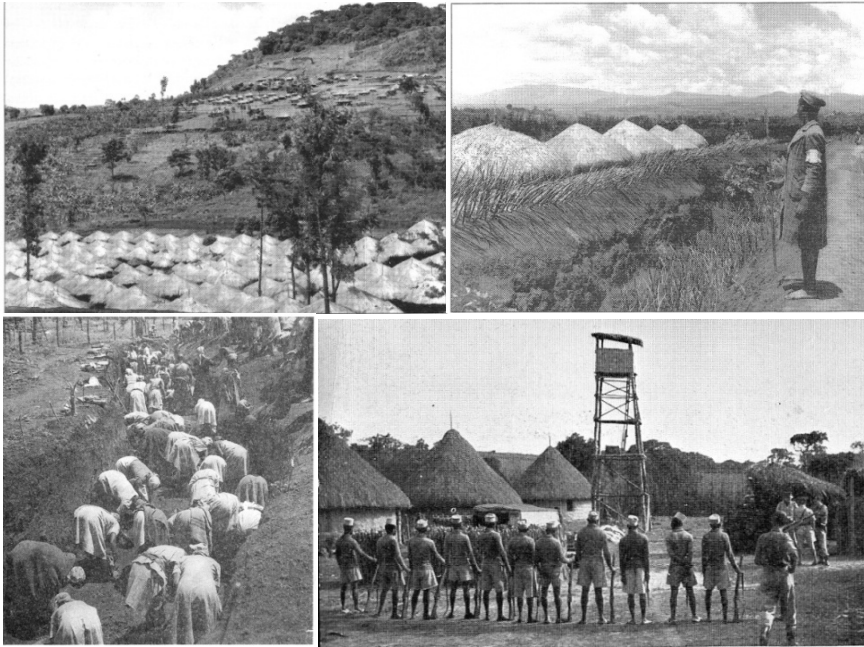


Fig. 4.37 State of Emergency Fortified Villages in Central Kenya 1954-58

Top Left: Fortified Villages in Nyeri showing the more spacious royalist village in the hillside. (Source: Elkins, 2005)

Top Right: Fortified Villages behind a moat with home-guard in an army greatcoat guarding on the outside with a spear. (Source: Elkins, 2005)

Bottom Left: Women digging a moat around the Village (Source: Bailey, 1993)

Bottom Right: Homeguards outside their Post with watch tower. (Source: Roberts, 1954)

In all the villages was a ‘village square’, *kihara*, where everybody congregated when summoned with the siren. The administrators used this meeting ground for public interrogations, or screenings, for spreading anti Mau-Mau propaganda and even public floggings of those deemed to be Mau-Mau sympathizers (Elkins, 2005:248). It was soon obvious to the government officials that the village square meeting or *baraza*, was an ideal setup for proselytizing and public teaching of ideas of all kinds especially in health and hygiene. There were constant inspections and supervised sweepings of the villages but nevertheless diseases broke out due to the congestion and the poor sanitation facilities in especially water and drainage.

“The overcrowded huts were incubators for tuberculosis, typhoid, pneumonia, and whooping cough – just a few of the diseases that swept

through the villages. Malnutrition also manifested itself in the form of scurvy, kwashiorkor and pellagra. Diarrhea too was endemic especially among the children” (Elkins, 2005:262).

By the end of 1957 the government had all but subdued the Mau-Mau with the execution and arrest of many of their leaders as the villagization program had reduced the matter to “one of hunting down the terrorist gangs” (Huxley, 1960:238). The “Pipeline”, as the system of getting the men from the reserves into faraway detention camps was called, was now in reverse and men were being pumped back to the villages. The government had meanwhile been implementing a program that would have far reaching consequences on the subsequent settlement pattern of Kikuyuland and the whole country at large. The essence of this program was the consolidation of fragmentally individual holdings into single family owned farms with legal title deeds issued by the government thereby dismantling the traditional land ownership pattern. The men arrived back in the middle of this hectic exercise and in 1958 the dismantling the villages began and families began to settle back into new individual holdings.

4.8.0 LAND REFORM AND THE RETURN INTO HOMESTEADS

4.8.1 The Swynnerton Plan.

Villagization was closely linked with land tenure reform, particularly the consolidation of fragmented holdings not because they were going on simultaneously but because they were synergetic. Huxley doubts that people would have taken kindly to having their homesteads become someone else’s farm were it not for the fact that the consolidation exercise was happening on a somewhat clean slate (Huxley, 1960:240).

Land fragmentation was the result of Kikuyu farming techniques as illustrated in chapter two where a family owned little parches of communally held land. There were recorded cases where one man in Fort Hall had 108 fragments while the average in Nyeri was 8 fragments to a man (Huxley, 1960:239). The matter was made more serious by the restriction of the Kikuyu to their native reserves so that they could not increase their acreage. Added to this was the rapidly increasing population growth thanks to the cleanliness and hygiene campaigns by the missionaries and the government and it can be seen that the problem had become severe. The other thing was that the fragments were scattered sometimes as far as 8 km apart. “The smallest fragment on record was a single banana plant. Yet a wife had to walk five miles to tend this one small plot” (Huxley, 1960:232).

This state of affairs was far from what the government officials would have liked in their mission to transform the Kikuyu countryside as proposed by

Paterson's civilizing team. The plan began from "the premise that Africans were destructive and ineffective custodians of their own land. Colonial official assumed that Africans needed agricultural experts to show them how to cultivate and herd efficiently, despite the fact that they had successfully managed their land and livestock for centuries before the British arrived" (Elkins, 2005:126). Some researchers like Cotula et al (2004), argue that fragmentation was an adaptive land use strategy designed to cope with a complex ecology like Muranga ensuring food security by spreading over several eco-zones, but the government at that time was working on other ideas based on a comprehensive strategy aimed at developing commerce in African farming. The East African Royal Commission of 1953-55 stated:

"Land policy must be directed towards the removal of those conditions which will prevent the available land from being effectively utilized, and equally towards the creation of conditions which will facilitate the application of technical knowledge, labour and capital in proportions suitable over the long period to the generation of maximum income. In our view it is essential for the productive use of land and the growth of a healthy and profitable agriculture that the choice of the manner in which land is used should be exercised freely by the recognized entity. What may be called individual rights of land tenure must replace the tribal controls which now exist" (Commission, 1955:394)

The Swynnerton Plan thus proposed that "the African ... be provided with such security of tenure an indefeasible title as will encourage him to invest his labour and profits into the development of his farm and as will enable him to offer as security against financial credits" (Inukai, 2007). The impulse for the plan was the need to develop the African farm into a modern economic unit that was profitable. Since the major thrust of the Swynnerton plan was "introduction of better farming techniques to those who obtained land titles" (Inukai, 2007), it can be seen that creation of what was referred to as 'The Better Farm' was of utmost importance. Agricultural officers worked tirelessly on the mathematics of the Better Farms and almost every officer had his pet project. So much so that the District commissioner in Nyeri issued a directive at the height of the consolidation exercise that read in part,

"Consolidation takes priority over all other work. It is most important that this point be understood as it has been found that some officers will try to maintain their pet schemes" (Huxley, 1960:239).

The consolidation exercise itself was a matter of gathering up the fragments, measuring them and rounding them off into one unit. The idea at first was to reject consolidation of anything less than 4 acres but the government succumbed to pressure and agreed to issue even these. The exercise happened

when many of the men were in detention and it was the women who represented the family interests in the adjudication committees. Once everyone's pieces had been gathered up, a 5% was deducted in all of them to go into community services like roads, schools and factories. The groups were then arranged roughly in sub-clans and each sub-clan as approximately as possible allocated their individual pieces in the general area where they used to reside. The area of the protected village with its moat was left as the space for the schools, dispensaries, churches, shopping centers and other social amenities. "After demarcation came the planting of the hedges, and the holdings were registered. ... The first issue of these permanent titles began in Kiambu on 15th Oct 1959" (Huxley, 1960:240).

One direct result of land consolidation was the rendering of all the Kikuyu traditional land tenants, *ahoi* as landless. Swynnerton however saw this as no big deal and casting his eye on the European farm and its landless workers envisaged the same for the new African farmer. He explained,

"If half of Nyeri District had twelve-acre holdings, the farmers would need to employ something of the order of 51,000 labourers. That is based on the experience of planned farms" (Huxley, 1960:241).

According to Swynnerton, the economic use of the land in the most profitable manner was what mattered, not ownership and were everybody to cooperate and work, the unemployment problem would vanish. These mechanical calculations by Swynnerton however did not factor in the traditional spiritual aspects of land and the thirst for it that had gripped the Kikuyu population as a whole. The Kikuyu land problem still runs deep despite numerous initiatives by the post-colonial government but this is beyond the scope of this thesis.

4.8.2 Planned farms

Of David Livingstone's three Cs, Christianity, Civilization and Commerce it was the introduction of modern commerce into Kikuyu farming methods that held the key to providing the tangible means of transformation while the other two Cs provided the will. Commerce was the body while Civilization and Christianity were the mind and soul respectively.

Under the Swynnerton Plan the major strategies for intervention were:

- Replacement of customary tenure by a system under which everyone so entitled obtains a consolidated holding of economic size;
- Provision to the farmers of farm plans . . . ;
- Close supervision and advice, continued over a long period to enable the farmers to understand the farm plans . . . ;
- Provision of loans to the farmers [11, p. 505] (Inukai, 2007)

Huxley writes that she visited one of the “planned farms” in Tetu, Nyeri and was quite impressed – “an eight acre Better Farm planned according to the book” (Huxley, 1960:246). The book of course was Paterson’s *The Book of Civilization*’ where the Better Farm was illustrated. For farmers in the Nyeri region, the Wambugu Farmers Training Centre in Nyeri was the teaching ground for the practical application of the principles of the Better Farm. “Wambugu is one of the outstanding farm institutes. Here men and women take their courses separately, a hundreds at a time” (Huxley, 1960:248). These were one, two, or three week courses where the farmers were taught such things as pig husbandry, poultry farming, the raising of improved animal stock, coffee farming and for women, child care, and domestic sciences.

“I did not want my husband to get rid of the old cows’, the wife of a Better Farmer said to me, as we admired four Guernseys her husband had bought, ‘then I went to Wambugu and that persuaded me” (Huxley, 1960:248).

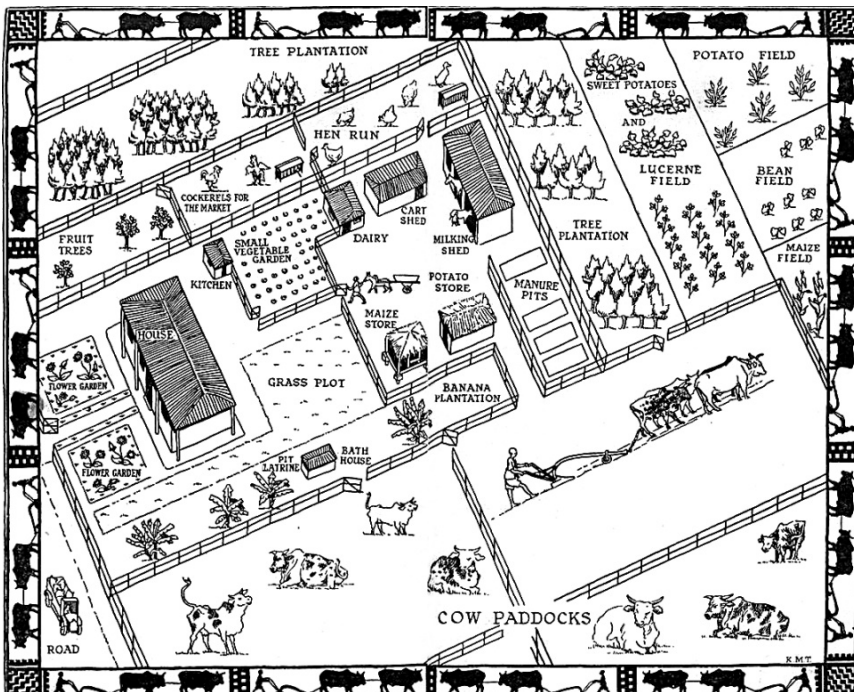


Fig. 4.38 Illustration of a planned ‘Better Farm’. (Source: Paterson, 1934)

The Paterson template was used as inspiration in the planning of individual farms. The first people to benefit from this exercise were those who had the means to implement the proposals, chiefs, teachers and employees of the

government like clerks etc. The rest planned their farms from observing these model farms and from the government extension officers.

The idea of keeping up with the Joneses and learning new ways of living from the more developed farms was encouraged by the extension workers and by the educators. The book of *Civilization Part II* had a chapter explaining “the business of exchange – the use of money” (Paterson A. R., 1935:13). Williamson (1953) illustrates this new monetary society by a story in Kikuyu of a certain farmer who visited his neighbor and was impressed by his neighbor’s modern things like a paraffin lamp and a padlock and wanted to have the same. His neighbor told him that he bought them after selling one of his bulls on the advice of the veterinary officer and advised his friend to do the same. The story is a fictionalized narrative of actual events as they happened all over the newly reconfigured countryside. The idea of banking the remainder of the money with the Post Office is also handled in the story. Thus the Kikuyu were educated into what Baudrillard (2005) has called “the phenomenology of consumption”, described by Richards as “a set of values, a set of purposeful procedures for producing consumption.”



Fig. 4.39 The farmer and his son buying household items from an Indian shop.

“All the things in the shop came from other parts of Kenya and abroad and are brought by ships.” Cege shown here checking the shopkeeper’s calculations for his father. They ended up buying aluminum cooking pots, soap, sugar, a Diez paraffin lamp, a panga, a jembe and a necklace for Cege’s sister of which she was the happiest. (Source: Williamson, 1953:44)

The rural transformation between the 1958 consolidation exercise and the 1964 independence from colonial rule was to say the least, quite dramatic. The

farmers coming back to the new consolidated farms were starting from scratch. They were given plans by the health department for the building of their houses though they were never forced into it. Huxley quotes a government directive (internal memo) to field officers,

“no success can be expected if the farmer is made to do anything against his will. Often it is necessary for a field or a house to be put in the wrong place owing to a whim of the African farmer – i.e. “grandfather died here”, or “the spirits of my ancestors says no food must be planted in this area.” This we come across all the time. If we act against these customs we may be sure of failure. Farm plans and farm layouts are essentially voluntary and at all costs must remain that way” (Huxley, 1960:244).

In most of Central Province, most farms however small were able to accommodate a cash crop - either tea or coffee, an area for grazing, an area for cultivating crops like maize and beans, an area with bananas and the homestead area. This unit was referred to as a *shamba*, a term borrowed from the Swahili. The agricultural officers helped with advice in the layout of each *shamba* individually and also through collective meetings, *barazas*.



Fig. 4.40 Countryside in Nyeri area with houses and fields. Circa 1965-85 (Source: <http://www.researchgate.net/>)

For these farmers with two or three acre farms the plan had to be much watered down version of the better farm plan. In fig 4.38, we see young coffee 2—3 year old planted in the plot on the left and 1 year old trees on new terraced slope on the farm on the right. A young improved artificial insemination, (AI) calf can be seen in the foreground. Most farmers as they could not afford the planned houses put up the traditional round huts, but with a window and without the internal divisions characteristic of the traditional *Nyumba*.

The way they disseminated information was through public *barazas* which were like training seminars whose attendance by at least one adult member of the family was compulsory. When the meeting for *ngirigaca*, ‘agriculture’ was announced in the evening by a village crier, the people congregated at the assigned time in the village arena, now an open ground at the shopping centre. The agricultural officer after being introduced by the sub-chief would speak like:

“In my inspections of your farms I have found that some of you have still not done the proper terracing of the coffee and I have a list of those who will not be allowed to sell their coffee come harvest season unless they comply and do proper benches. The veterinary officer is going to talk to you about the wisdom of investing in one good cow instead of a herd of useless goats. Tomorrow I will be touring such and such an area and I want the people of that ridge to meet at so and so’s homestead. I want to give a practical demonstration because many of you have not gone to Wambugu. There are still many of you who have not dug pit latrines and I have given the chief permission to fine all those without them. It is a scandal that some of you do not see the need for a latrine. etc. etc.”

In this way transformation took place in the individual *shambas* supervised and directed mainly by government officers. At independence and shortly after, this policy continued. The veterinary and agricultural officers could also be called into a farm at any time for a consultation which they gave freely. Later with the formation of the co-operatives to handle the growing amount of coffee, tea and milk output by the small farmers, the officers were attached to a coffee or tea factory. As a young boy I used to steal into these meetings and sit next to my mother. The teachings appealed to me more than the seemingly meaningless 1, 2 - this is my shoe, 3,4 - shut the door we got in elementary school.

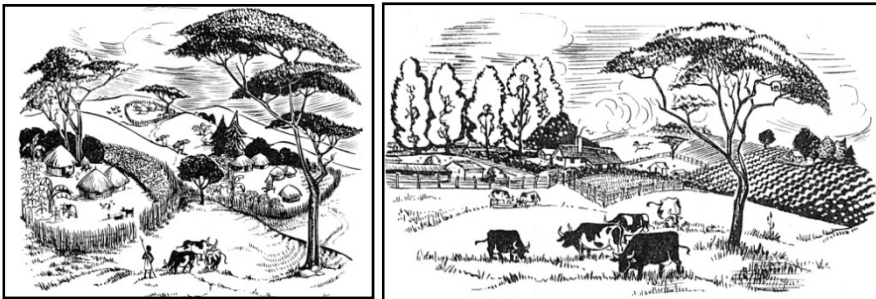


Fig. 4.41 Before and after. The old scattered homesteads contrasted beside the ‘better farms’ (Source: Marsh, 1961)

4.8.3 Settlement Planning after 1958

The settlement plan before villagization was characterized by scattered homesteads each surrounded by a fence, and connected to each other with footpaths. Now the primary rule was that each *shamba* had to touch an access road. These access roads were 20 feet wide and were meant to be accessible by vehicle. Due to the nature of the topography in most of Kikuyuland which looks like a huge galvanized iron sheet sloping slightly from the Aberdares and Mt Kenya, the access roads were laid out lengthwise along the ridges and the *shambas* stretching from the top of the ridge to the river or stream. Where this distance was too long, a second road below would cut lengthwise parallel to the top road. All the homesteads were built at the highest point of each *shamba* with the cultivation below. A steep road from the hill to the river at regular intervals assured access to the river for those at the top of the ridge.

Normally all the *shambas* were fenced either with a live fence or where funds were available a barbed wire fence with poles. The roadside fence was better kept and had a gate, *thome*. Where the road was used for public transport, the various stops of the vehicle could be identified with a landmark or the owner of the homestead nearest like I will alight at 'Karigu-ini' or 'ha Wirithoni' (at the banana grove or at the Wilsons). Some of these roadside markers have gone on to become modern markets and towns, like Kabati, or Saba-saba.

One serious consequence of this new settlement pattern was that despite the efforts of the agricultural officers, some people after subsequent subdivisions inevitably got pieces of land on very steep slopes where previously no house would have been built. In such cases the leveling of an area for a new house results in huge exposed embankment walls cut on the upper side of the house. Since in some cases no retaining mechanisms are employed, it has come about that these embankments have broken during heavy rains and in some parts of Mukurwei-ini and Muranga whole families have been buried alive.

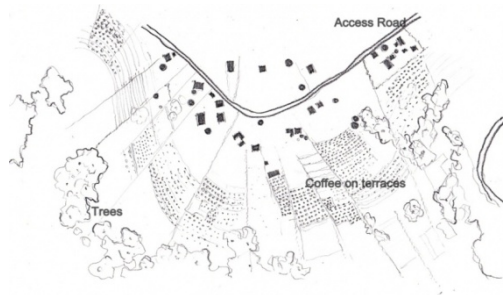


Fig. 4.42 A section of access road in Mihuti, Mukurwe-ini showing settlement pattern in 1965. (Source: Author, 2011 from Survey of Kenya Aerial Photos 1988)

Coffee was the main cash crop in this area and had to be terraced to go with the contours of the land, a job that required the assistance of the Agricultural officers in setting out. All the homesteads were built next to the road.

4.8.4 Building Typologies

The people when they left the fortified villages were given three house type plans to choose from. These were referred to as ‘Health Plans’, *nyumba ya heothi*, and given names according to the shape of the letter they resembled. There was an L plan, a U plan and a T plan of which the L proved the most popular. Some of these ‘Health Plan’ houses build in 1958-59 period are still in use today and we will see some examples of existing ones in the next chapter. I have been unable to get any archival blueprint of these plans and have drawn the plans from measured drawings of existing 1958 houses, and from descriptions by villagers. Those who could not afford to build these *Heothi* houses roofed with debe sheets or corrugated iron roofs were allowed to build the traditional circular huts as it was assumed that they would give up the roundavels once their incomes from cash crop farming improved.

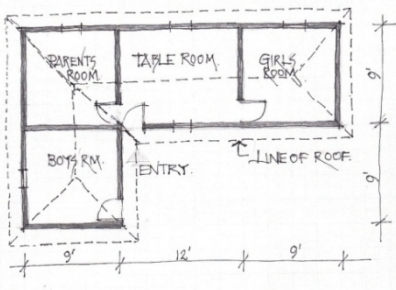


Fig. 4.43 L TYPE House (Source: Author, 2011)

In most cases the girls room had an external door and acted as the kitchen while the girls slept in the table room whose door to the outside was walled up and used for the kitchen.

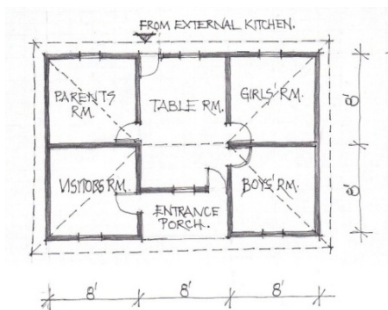


Fig. 4.44 U TYPE House (Source: Author, 2011)

This type was for the slight well off in the community and it usually had a kitchen outside. The type of materials for the floor, the walls and the windows placed the owner in a certain class in the community

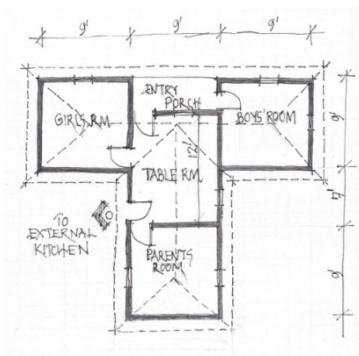


Fig. 4.45 T TYPE House (Source: Author, 2011)

This was the least popular type.

The construction of these houses was taken over by professionals as there were trusses to be constructed, doors with hinges and complicated locks and a whole range of new things which were learned only in trade schools. In every location were several *fundis* who were on hire any time one wanted a house constructed. The first thing he asked a prospective client was “which type do you want - L, U or T?” He then ‘measured’ the house and told the owner how much it would cost in all the new things that had to be bought and then he did the construction helped by an apprentice or two. The walling if it was in mud was left to the women to finish. He only put up the structure and the roof plus all the doors and windows. Some people could afford a timber off-cut walling and a cement plaster floor while others could even afford timber casements with glass panes. Very few houses were done in stone. A few of these houses are still in existence and will be the subject of the next chapter. For people who could not afford a *fundi* they copied their neighbours plans and put it up somehow or other as they say, ‘*wa maitho ti wa ruthiomi*’, meaning that what one sees with his own eyes can be understood. On the whole the house construction moved from being a communal affair to an individualized affair, from a collective responsibility to a personal matter.

The three typologies offered were usually subject to modifications but most people built them exactly as proposed by the *Heothi*. In the village where I grew up in Mukurwei-ini, approximately 65% of the villagers choose the L type, which was the cheapest while about 30% choose the U type and about 5% the T type. Most people left the fortified villages in 1960 and the transformation from the roundavel to the *Heothi* plans did not happen overnight. It took a space of thirty years for the last round grass thatched huts to disappear completely in most areas in Nyeri. The other thing of note is that many people, especially the poorer with the L type did not build an external kitchen right away but used one of the rooms as a kitchen with a hearth of three stones contrary to the recommendations of the *Heothi*. Also in the kitchen was brought back the ram fattening pen or sometimes a young calf which could not sleep outside as many cattle *bomas* had no roof.

The term ‘table room’, *metha-ini*, was used to describe what is currently called the sitting room. In many Kikuyu homes it is still called the table room. There was sometimes a table with wooden folding chairs but it was rare for the table to be used as a dining table where the family gathered as shown by Huxley (fig 41) neither did flowers ever make an appearance there. Sometimes it was used by the young people as a study in the evening when waiting for the food to be ready. Calendars and framed pictures were also hung on the wall and usually it was the mother and father in a black and white studio photograph and the children as babies.



Fig. 4.46 Before and After contrasted. (Source: (Huxley E., 1939)

Left: Family dinner old style

Right: Family dinner new style

Elspheth Huxley had been an eye-witness to this transformation since her childhood days when her father and his first Kikuyu workers had struggled to put up a rectangular building in the Thika bushes of his new farm. Now she could not conceal her elation when she cast her eyes back to meet Paterson's who had cast hers forward. In a moment of inspiration, she recorded the transformation of the Kikuyu countryside.

“In the last three years, this countryside has been transformed. Every hillside is terraced; almost every field lies on the contour; gullies are sealed; coffee trees stand like soldiers on parade, pruned and mulched. Butter-yellow cattle graze on emerald pastures; blue-shirted children swarm in the innumerable schools. Gone are the mushroom huts lurking behind groves of bananas, the higgledy-piggledy *shambas*, the goat-browsed aromatic bush.

Gone too are the moated guard-posts, the high watch-towers, the armed patrols, the barbed-wire barricades of only five years ago. What had become, I asked, of those deep moats bristling with pointed stakes, like a mouthful of wicked fangs? Stripped of the stakes, many of them had been used to grow bananas. Swords into ploughshares, knives into pruning-hooks, moats into banana-trenches” (Huxley, 1960:249)

Like Paterson had made the connection between Civilization and Christianity, here Huxley links all of Livingstone's 3Cs in the same vein. The title of her book, *A New Earth*, is meant to evoke St John's vision of a new Heaven and a new earth already mentioned by Paterson but she goes further for the turning of “swords into ploughshares” is a reference from prophet Isaiah. “and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” – Isaiah 2:4

4.9.0 THE POST COLONIAL EXPERIENCE

When Kenya became a republic in 1964, most of the government officers in the field remained in their positions. The chiefs especially were crucial in maintaining continuity and the development agenda in the rural areas. The new Government set out its agenda in 1966 with Sessional Paper No 10 on African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya (Kenya, 1965). In this document, Swynnerton et al's ideas of private ownership of the forces of production were reaffirmed, quite in contrast to neighboring Tanzania where collectivization and Villagization was being introduced.

In Kenya rural development programs were initiated and were seen as the agents for poverty alleviation and development mainly through the cooperative movement, thus the government rallying call *Harambee*¹⁸, 'Let us pull together'. This was done, just like the Swynnerton Plan proposed, through close supervision by agricultural extension officers. The government also with the Sessional paper strengthened the Cooperative movement and through it many small scale farmers were able to access credit to improve their farms. (Harbeson, 1966). Access to coffee and tea factories was improved with the main access roads being made all-weather roads. With time some of these have been tarmarked. Most farmers would use their cash crop as security for loans with which they improved livestock breed and housing. A consequence of this and the land consolidation was that livestock had to be restricted to each *shamba* and could not be grazed in the communal lands any more. This caused farmers to reduce the number of stock and improve their breed. Farmers in four to six acre plots would generally keep 2 to three AI improved cows. The agricultural extension officers again came forward with plans for new cattle sheds, *bomas*, which were called 'zero grazing units'. Most farmers have adapted these plans in their farms with some constructing them with exactitude. Farmers were also helped with similar plans for pig pens, chicken and goat houses. Communal cattle dips were also constructed using the cooperative spirit, the Government providing the expertise and plans while the villagers provided the labour and financing.

¹⁸ The Republic of Kenya's official motto on its Coat of Arms and Seal. Harambee is Swahili for 'Let us pull together'

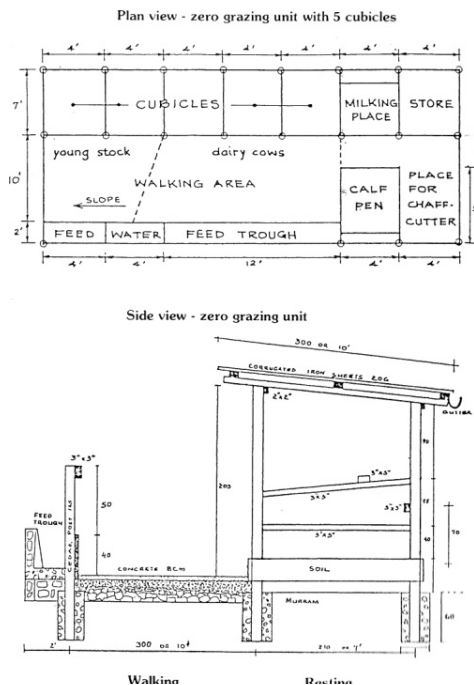


Fig. 4.47 Cattle Zero Grazing Unit

Left: Construction details of a zero grazing unit. (Source: Republic of Kenya, Ministry of Livestock Development, Dairy Development Project – undated brochure)

Right: Examples of zero grazing units in Mukurwe-ini, Nyeri. (Source: Author, 2009)

The government instituted another program aimed at the improvement of the rural areas, The District Focus for Rural Development in 1982 (Ngari, 1991). This plan saw a shift in emphasis of most government institutions in re-orienting their top down planning and development models inherited from the colonial administration to a more participatory approach. The District Development Committees were a direct result of this shift in policy. A case in point was the National Housing Corporation which through citing the District Focus Strategy produced a document in 1986 entitled “Rural Housing Type Plans” in recognition that “rural areas have no access to the necessary architectural services.” to make them “a better and more attractive place to live and work in” (Kipsanai, 1986:2&3). The National Housing Corporation is a parastatal organization set up by an Act of Parliament (Cap. 117 of 1953 as amended subsequently in 1967, 1968 and 1972) as the main implementing agency in housing by the government. Prior to the 1986 document the agency’s main focus had been the urban sector.

The main difference of the NHC plans with the earlier Better Home Plans, was that the NHC proposed to bring the sanitary facilities of the toilet and bath into the house. The external kitchen was also meant to be done away with. In my field work for this thesis and in my general studies of the Nyeri rural district I have not come across an exact NHC plan built according to the specifications, adaptations are numerous or one without an external kitchen. Even though with the advent of piped water in some areas as recent as the early 1980's, it is possible to find the sanitary facilities incorporated inside the house, there is always an external toilet and sometimes an external bathroom. The toilet inside the house seems to be restricted solely for the inhabitants of the house and is rarely if ever used by guests. The external kitchen in most cases continues to be the main kitchen and the internal kitchen for small things like warming tea or milk.

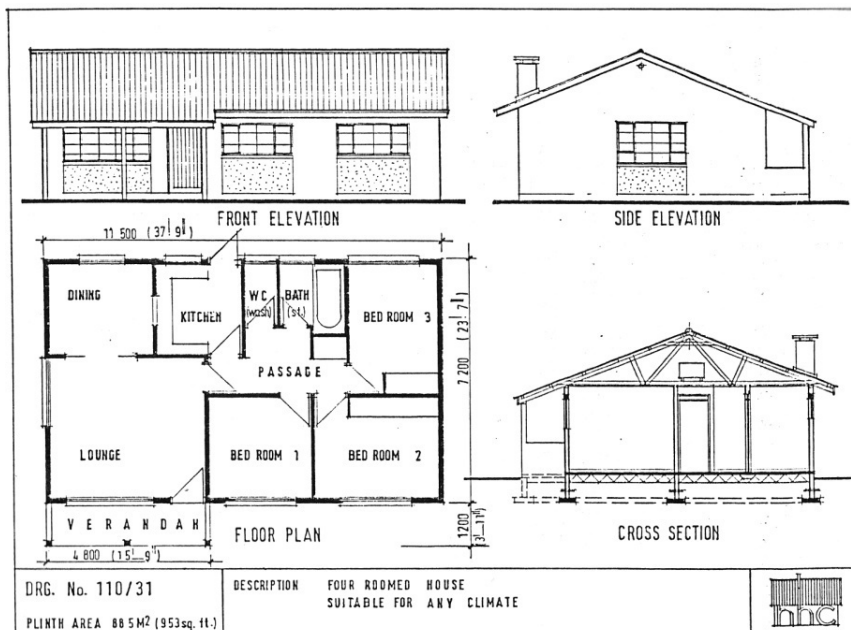


Fig 4.48 National Housing Corporation, NHC rural housing type plan for a three bedroom house. (Source: Kipsanai, 1986)

Apart from the NHC plans there are now many young artisans who have been trained in technical institutes and polytechnics and who provide plans for the rural folk. These new professionals are no longer referred to as *fundis* but as engineers. Most of them have set up shop in local villages and shopping centers and produce modern furniture, steel window casement and doors and others are on call as builder engineers.

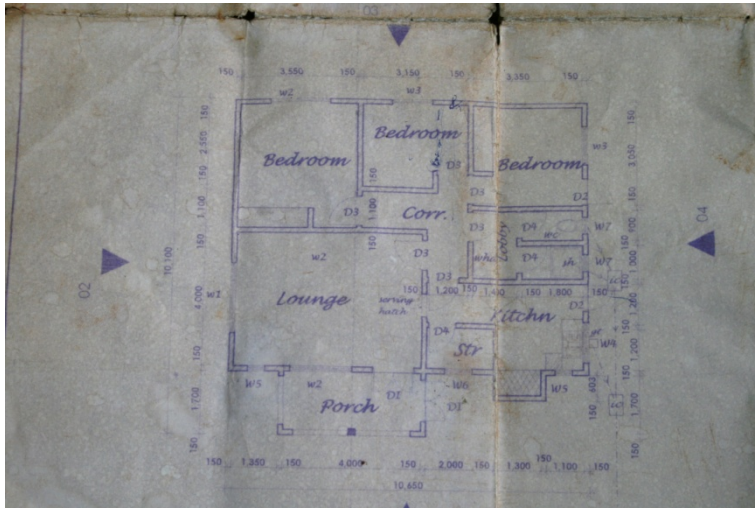


Fig. 4.49 Example of plans by ‘engineers’ in Mukurwe-ini Nyeri. (Source: Author, 2009)
 New terms like Lounge, Porch, Corridor, Pantry have been added to the lingua of housing and construction



Fig. 4.50 House under construction in Mukurwe-ini, Nyeri. (Source: Author, 2009)
Bottom Left: The new kitchen with stainless steel sink and cooking area with chimney
 Ceramic tiles and new types of finishes are also making their appearance.
Bottom right: Overhead cupboards for the kitchen and store.

The owner of the house, (fig. 4.48), a teacher in a secondary school in Mukurwe-ini, has built on a quarter acre plot which he has bought from a local farmer and this was approved by the local Land Board and he has applied for a title. He is also able to borrow money from his teacher’s cooperative society to enable him to finish the house. He reckons that he has used according to his calculations, about 2 million Kenya shillings but he is very pleased with the result. Asked how he came up with the plan, he answered that he approached an engineer as he wanted something modern and he explained to the engineer what

to put in the plan. He said that he had seen houses of his friends in Nairobi and elsewhere which had been build with a plan and he liked them and has incorporated diverse ideas. The plan from an engineer cost him a cool Ksh. Ten thousand.

The house is thus a synthesis of many ideas from many eras and places. A bit of NHC ideas and a bit of the better house plans, a bit of tradition and a bit of modernity. It is a product of pick and choose, an ala carte menu rather than the fixed menu of the NHC or the traditional *Nyumba*. Many people in rural Nyeri build this way.



Fig 4.51 Modern rural house in Mukurwe-ini and external pit latrine right. (Source: Author, 2009)

Asked about the external pit latrine and bath, he explained that it was for visitors and he took me to the lower side of the plot where he showed me that he was able to accommodate two rooms under the house due to the slope, though they were not in the plan. These two rooms are already being occupied, one by his son, and the other by the caretaker. That is why the boys have been provided with the sanitary facilities so that they don't have to use the main house. The two daughters will have a room in the main house next to the parent's room.

Water from the access road is connected through a meter to the Mukurwe-ini water project, a Government initiative managed by the Ministry of Water. Electricity from the same access road will be connected through a meter by the Kenya Power and Lighting Company. The access is part of the ongoing Government's Rural Electrification Program.

Asked whether he was aware of the new Government's appropriate building and technology centre just a few kilometers that is promoting the Hydraform interlocking blocks he answered that he was quite aware of it and had visited the place. The Ministry people were also eager for him to try them but he bulked because his wife did not trust them and because he did not see any cost savings. He also said they were aesthetically poor. The Appropriate Technology

Centre we were discussing was built just a year ago by the ministry of Housing to promote the Hydraform technology. The centre's buildings were under construction when I visited and were using the technology. Mukurwe-ini is a good place for the technology to be really tested as there are many other solutions to compete with as we shall see in the next chapter. At this moment, it is too early to comment on its performance as it is yet to be tried.



Fig. 4.52 Appropriate Building Technology Centre in Mukurwe-ini, Nyeri. (Source: Author, 2009)

Top left: Ministry of Housing signboard showing their vision and mission

Top right: The administration building under construction.

Bottom left: The production shed.

Bottom right: The wall of the administration building showing the interlocking blocks

4.10.0 RETROSPECTION AND INTROSPECTION

4.10.1 Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga in Murang'a

“Many years later, as Colonel Aureliano Buendia faced the firing squad, he was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice” (Márquez, 1970:1). In a single introductory sentence, Colombian Nobel laureate in literature, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, is able to draw a timeline that spans past present and future. In many ways the transformation of Kikuyu traditional architecture through the last one hundred years mirrors that of mythical Macondo in Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. It would also be impossible to discuss transformation of Kikuyu architecture at this point without going back to the distant past when Gikuyu and Mumbi according to myth, established their homestead at Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga in Murang’a and to see how it looks like today and what possible directions it may take in the future.

Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga, may be just myth but it still holds a certain attraction to many Kikuyus. The last time the environmentalist and Nobel laureate, Wangari Maathai visited the place, she talked of the need to reaffirm the place in Kikuyu consciousness as a way of getting in touch with the natural environment. Politicians have been trying to associate themselves with the place and many traditional religious figures perform ceremonies there from time to time. The place has been under the stewardship of Murang’a County Council and the Kenya National Museums. In 1985 the Murang’a County Council planned to turn the place into a cultural centre where they envisaged tourists both local and foreign visiting and staying in a tourist class hotel while they learned about Kikuyu culture and history. The design by Conarch Associates architectural firm from Nairobi was conceived complete with a swimming pool and a classy restaurant, conference rooms and cottage accommodation rooms. The project immediately received criticism and resistance from local Kikuyu elders as being uninspired. The Council went ahead with the construction and the elders went to court where an injunction was placed on the construction. Construction stopped in 1990 when the project was 75% complete. Since then the project has gone into serious decay due to vandalism and it is now an unfinished white elephant.

The site is located at the top of a ridge or hill and as one approaches it from the access road all one can see is a large blue gate painted with some shields and a sign, Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga, the origin of the Kikuyu people, and declaring that it is a hallowed place, *handu hatheru*. On entering, there is an open space and directly ahead what looks like a modern NHC stone house with corrugated iron sheets. On the left are two round mud and wattle huts roofed with corrugated iron sheet cones and some semblance of reeds, *ithanji*, (*Cyperus immensus*) on top of the sheets. On the right is a cement plastered circular hut of about three meters diameter with a cone roof of rusty flat metal sheets. Beyond

the hut on the right is a huge half finished two storey modern construction in reinforced concrete and stone which because of the slope, is accessed with steps that go down to the lower floor. Still in the central space you are aware of a huge tree to the left far end. Down the steep slope to your right are several round huts all built in stone and plastered and roofed with cones done with flat sheets that remind you of *debe* sheets.

By then you will have been joined by two approximately 55 - 60 yr old men and you will introduce yourself with the usual niceties. You will be given a very quick introduction to the place, that the NHC looking house was indeed the office and residence of the curator officer in charge of the place and that the two huts represent Gikuyu's *thingira* and Mumbi's *Nyumba*. The unfinished building will be brushed off and the ten huts will be explained as representing each of the ten Kikuyu clans. All in all it would be a wonderful place to see when finished and all the computers and tourist officers and staff in the hotel and proposed swimming pool are functional.

One gets the feeling that conceptually, it would be difficult to place the hotel and its boarding and lodging within the myth. As one turns to the technology it is possible to see the challenges of roofing the cone in a modern context while retaining a high wall and short eaves. The problems of scale seem to cry out for resolution unlike the comfortable traditional scale in Katherine's drawings (fig. 3.11). In the two traditional huts, the issues seem to centre on maintenance and authenticity. Other important issues beyond the building shell crying out for resolution are the all important *Nja*, the fences, the animal shelters, gates and even the food and clothing of the exhibits whether alive or on dummies.

The feeling one gets at Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga is that there is still a lot of potential for improvement of the presentation of Kikuyu traditional architecture in that forlorn and ill-conceived project. In my visit to the Norwegian Folk Museum in Oslo, I was impressed with the care with which each of the traditional building typologies has been reproduced with authenticity in mind. Potters and weavers dressed in traditional attire demonstrate their crafts amidst some of the key memes of Norwegian traditional culture. The smell of the traditional hut where fire had been lit inside for long is very strong and leaves a strong impression on the mind. The materials used are also as near as possible to the actual traditional materials.

Because cultural tourism is a growing industry with hotels in urban centers offering snippets of traditional culture, it would be worthwhile for a place like Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga to offer the lead in such an important project and for other cultures with equally rich heritages among the 42 Kenyan tribes to also do the same. Already there are many international tour agents who offer it as an itinerary in the genres of cultural tourism and eco-tourism (AfriChoice!, 1999-2012)



Fig. 4.53 Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga in Murang'a (Source: Author, 2009)

Top left: The gate, *thome*

Top Right: The 'traditional' Hut, *thingira*.

Bottom Left: The ten, hotel accommodation huts representing the ten Kikuyu clans. Notice the splashing of mud on the lower part of wall because of problems of scale.

Bottom right: The unfinished main administration building of the cultural centre.

4.10.2 Riuki Cultural Centre in Kiambu

Riuki Cultural Centre has been in existence since 1986 and is one of the more successful Kikuyu cultural centers offering visits to tourists. It is privately owned and operated by Dr. Kinuthia Njoroge. It is situated 31 km from Nairobi near the small town of Ikinu past Kiambu. It offers educational tours of a Kikuyu homestead which has been reproduced with more care and authenticity than those at Mukurwe. At Riuki one is also exposed to more things like live performances of traditional music, traditional food and beer and story-telling sessions. (Victoriasafaris, 2011). Again the problems of maintaining a traditional construction especially in roofing are apparent. Because of lack of the fern, and the know-how of grass roofing technique and maintenance, Riuki like many others have resulted to using plastic sheeting below the grass to prevent it from leaking. Chicken wire is also used to create the structure that was previously so well performed by the fern. The problems of termites and other insects are also

apparent for huts and granaries not used or lived in. Another problem for the hut that is lived in at Riuki is the use of paraffin as a fuel for the cooking stove because the plastic sheeting prevents the fumes from dissipating easily. The resultant trapped smell is not very pleasant. The various huts are connected to each other not by a *Nja* or courtyard, but by swept earth pathways. The rest of the external spaces are an undefined wilderness of Kikuyu grass.

Like at Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga, Riuki's neighbors have moved on and are resolving contemporary issues. Riuki's immediate neighbor has a three bed-roomed stone house on a one acre plot with electricity and cooking gas. She uses a system of biogas production from her zero grazed cows and the gas is connected through pipes to her internal kitchen. Her small one acre *shamba* is a study in modern sustainable organic farming. Her *Nja* is also a picture of complexity unlike the rather colourless wilderness of the educational centre that is Riuki. The centre is popular with school educational parties and foreign tourists and like Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga would benefit greatly from an informed development.



Fig. 4.54 Riuki Cultural Centre (Source: Author, 2004)

Top left: A traditional huts of mud and wattle connected with paths.

Top right: The roof showing the plastic sheeting below the thatch.

Bottom left: The undefined vast expanse of grass lawn. The performance hall is next to a large mango tree.

Bottom right: A granary in disrepair due to termites and weather.

4.10.3 Ngugi wa Thiong'o's House in Limuru

Professor Ngugi wa Thiong'o is one of the prominent Kikuyu authors. He has been at the fore of the debate in Africa of what he calls the colonization of the mind that has resulted, among other things in the use of the English, French and other European languages in favor of local languages. He has to his credit a long list of books articles and lectures on the subject of language and literature, and its place in the restoration and revitalization of Africa, or what is referred to as African Renaissance. His novels and plays are among the finest in Africa and being Kikuyu are a wealth of information on Kikuyu culture and transformation.

Ngugi was born in 1938 in Limuru of Kiambu District. Because this area was near the edge of the Southern Kikuyu settlement and near the First British camp, Fort Smith, the area was the first to be settled by British settlers. "The Kenya of his birth and youth was a British settler colony (1895-1963). As an adolescent, he lived through the Mau-Mau War of Independence (1952-1962)" (Thiong'o, 2012). Born of peasant farmers, he attended school in the mission school of Manguu and later joined the Alliance High School and Makerere University where he studied English Literature. He went on to teach at the University of Nairobi and was instrumental in changes that saw the Department renamed from Department of English Literature to Department of Literature. (Thiong'o, 2012). Many of his writings are anchored on the transformational forces that have shaped the Kikuyu from the moment of their contact with the British to the present.

In 1977, together with villagers in his rural home near Limuru, he established the Kamirithu Educational and Cultural Center, Limuru, an open air theatre, with actors from the workers and peasants of the village. Here, together with a colleague, Ngugi wa Mirii, he wrote and directed a play, *Ngahika Ndenda, 'I Will Marry When I Want'*. Buses of University students and villagers from far and wide came to watch the play. It was considered highly critical of the post colonial government's handling of the repercussions of land consolidation as well as being seen as politically inflammatory and Ngugi was arrested and detained for over a year in Kamiti Maximum security Prison. The Educational Centre was razed to the ground by Government forces. He lost his teaching job at the University and after release went back to Kamirithu where he completed building a house and wrote, his prison memoirs, *'Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary'* and his Kikuyu classic novel *Caitani Mutharabai-ini, 'Devil on the Cross'*. The novel, which was read in Kikuyu rural homes around the fire like traditional storytelling, was a thinly veiled critique of Kenya's elite and political class that thrives side by side with the slum and village peasantry. With rumors circulating that this time the government was out to eliminate him, he fled the country for Britain and later USA where he has been in self-exile since.

His House in Kamirithu was designed by architect George Nyanja and was an attempt at a restatement of the Kikuyu traditional homestead in modern

terms. The brief for the architect was challenging. “In a nutshell, it was to accommodate a professor of literature who wanted the benefits of modern technology in a house that reflected his need of ‘moving the centre’ from a Eurocentric to an Afro centric design that was in line with his ideology of ‘decolonizing the mind’”¹⁹. In fact we can take that the inspiration for the house to have been a search for “a revitalization of Africa, while pursuing a renaissance of African architecture as a necessary step in the restoration of African wholeness” – to paraphrase the introduction to his book, *‘Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance’* by substituting literature with architecture (Thiong'o, 2012) It was in short an attempt to cast his academic writings and rural activism literally in stone.

There were to be two bedrooms, a sitting room with dining and a study, a kitchen and a store. Nyanja, who had been trained in the Department of Architecture at the University of Nairobi had never been confronted with such a problem before and in the architecture school had never learnt Kikuyu, or Luo or Kamba architecture. He had spent most of his time in the school studying European architecture and European building technology and could tell you everything about a Gothic Cathedral, from the details of its cruciform plan, rose windows, to its interesting structure of flying buttresses. But he had never heard of the Kikuyu flying arched beam, *muikio*, that was an integral part of the system of 8 rafters and 12 columns roof support.

The result was that while he was able to provide a cone roof with reinforced concrete finished with bituminous felt shingles, the inside has a flat concrete ceiling. The fitting of modern ready-made furniture into circular forms was also problematic and would have worked better if customized. Other than the idea of a cone roof and circular plan, there was little else that could be seen as a link to the past especially in the area of materials, technology and scale. All in all, the house was a major “revolution in the conception of things”.

With Ngugi forced to flee the country in 1982, the house was left under the care of his wife who died several years later. The house was then taken over by Ngugi’s nephew for caretaking since an uninhabited house would just have gone to ruin very fast. The house still suffers from maintenance problems which would not be the case were Ngugi inhabiting it. The caretaker nephew has an external kitchen which his wife uses and the professors’ old books and few items are locked in one of the rooms. He also has an external pit latrine although the western type WC and shower inside the house still works when there is water. Ngugi is now able to visit Kenya with the new political dispensation, but is not able to go back to his old house but rather sleeps in a hotel. One of the reasons for this is security. The house is also not in a state that would accommodate him now. Sometimes there is no running water, the toilets are not very clean and so

¹⁹ From a discussion with Nyanja, 2000

on. Another reason for staying away could be that since he is now remarried and is usually accompanied by his new wife, it would be culturally inappropriate to take her to sleep in his former wife's house.

From the foregoing it is apparent that there are clients anxious to build homes inspired by tradition and that architects trained in a heavily leaning western curriculum are ill equipped to serve such clients. It would benefit the architectural profession in Kenya greatly if architectural anthropology was infused in the curriculum of the architectural schools.



Fig. 4.55 Ngugi wa Thiong'o House in Limuru (Source: Author, 2009)

Top left: Felt shingles are beginning to leak so plastic sheet placed on the cone to right

Top right: Steel casement windows fitted to circular wall. Note the browning of the wall near the ground from the difficulty of fixing gutters on a round fascia board, no gutters were fixed. The scale of the cone on cylinder which requires very sensitive handling in order not to look like a rocket about to shoot upwards was like in Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga, a dismal failure.

Bottom left: The external Kitchen

Bottom right: The services of water, and sanitation to the back side of the house.

5.0.0 Mukurwe-ini Homesteads Today

5.0.1 INTRODUCTION TO MUKURWE-INI

Nyeri County of Central Province has a population of 660,000 (KNBS, 2009) of which Mukurwe-ini is one of the seven of its administrative Divisions. Nyeri, Muranga, Maragua, Thika and Kiambu are roughly the area described as traditional Kikuyuland. Post colonial migration and settlement of the Diaspora has been to the Western flank of the Aberdares, Nyandarua, Nakuru and Njoro within the Great Rift Valley and to the North, Kieni within Nyeri and Rumuruti in Laikipia County. Migration has also been to Nairobi and other urban centers in Kenya and beyond the borders of Kenya.

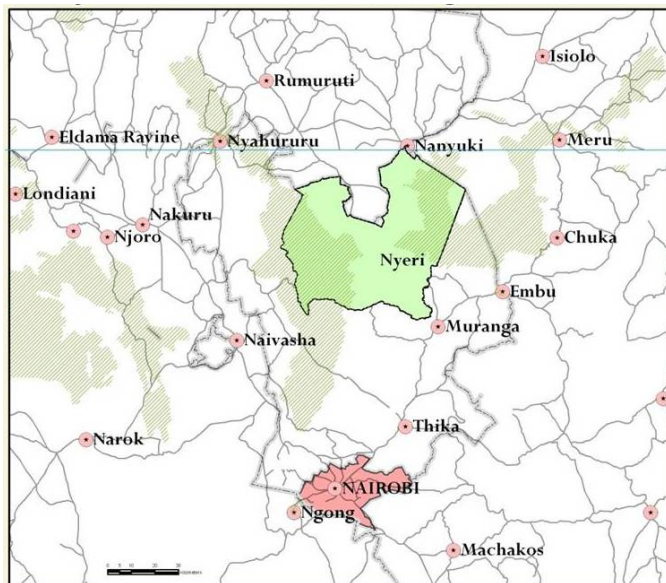


Fig. 5.1 Nyeri District and surrounding areas. (Source: DURP, University of Nairobi, 2008)



Fig. 5.2 Central Province. (Source: Nyeri Provincial Headquarters survey office - undated)

The main occupation in Central Province is smallholder subsistence farming and cash crops being coffee, tea, dairy farming, some manufacturing especially in Nyeri and Karatina of the level of soft drink bottling, bakeries,

printing etc. together with small and medium scale enterprises in most of the commercial centers.

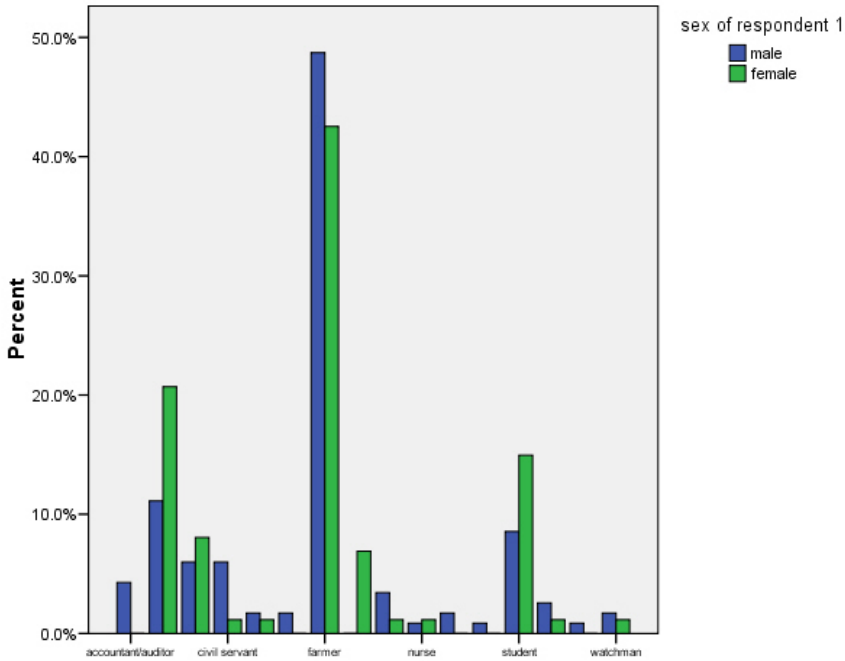


Fig. 5.3 Main occupations of Nyeri people (DURP, University of Nairobi, 2008)

Mukurwe-ini is the Sothern Western part of Nyeri County and lowest in altitude but its climate is varied as it is long and narrow with the Northwestern tip franking the Aberdares being the highest and coolest while the lowest South-Western tip being the driest. The soil is a deep red volcanic type which becomes almost purple towards the lower Mukurwe-ini, a soil that is was traditionally used to make clay pots. The best Kikuyu pots were from lower Mukurwe-ini and Murang'a but with the low demand for earthenware pots today, the making of the pots is now restricted to Murang'a. Mukurwe-ini shares its border with Othaya Division to the East, Tetu and Mathira Divisions to the North, Murang'a County to the South and Kirinyaga County to the East. The Gura and Sagana (Thagana) rivers are the northern borders while Murang'a to the South shares the Mugono river with Mukurwe-ini Northern border.

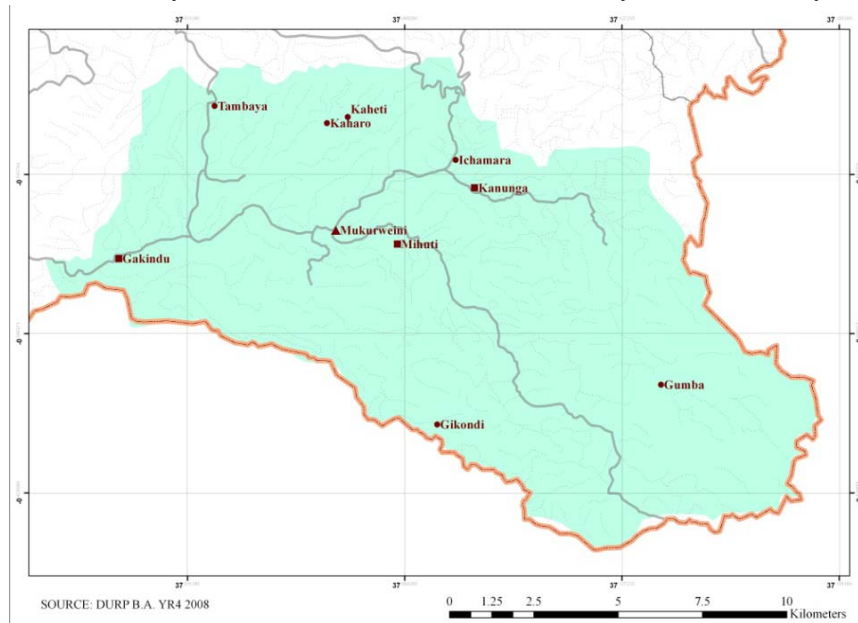


Fig. 5.4 Nyeri District main centers. (DURP, University of Nairobi, 2008)

Mukurwe-*ini* is usually confused with Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga in Murang'a but the one in Murang'a does not have the *-ini* after the name *mukurwe* a local tree. Many names of places in Nyeri have this *-ini* after them which means 'at' or 'in', thus Mukurwe-*ini* means at the *mukurwe* tree, and Mugumo-*ini* at the *mugumo* tree but this is not a definite rule of naming a place as you can have a place named Kagumo, for a small *mugumo* tree or Nduma, 'place of darkness' and not Nduma-*ini*, 'in the darkness'. Other names apart from tree places are, Gathukumundu, 'the tree stump that is shaped like a man', or Mutwewathi, 'the head of the earth', Gathungururu, the 'Swallow' and other such interesting names.

From Nairobi Mukurwe-*ini* is best approached from the all weather tarmac road from Muranga. One branches off to your left before reaching Sagana in a new tarmac road that now makes Mukurwe-*ini* have an all weather Tarmac road along the length of its sausage shape making a hot dog. The major Towns in Nyeri County are Nyeri (pop. ---) which is the administrative centre and

Karatina, (pop. ---), which is famous for boasting to having the largest open air market in East and Central Africa. Mukurwe-ini is the administrative center of the Division with a Law Courts, a Police Station, a District Officer, and Officers manning the various offices of only a few of the major ministries like Health and Agriculture. A 144 bed hospital is also located here as is a new Dairy processing plant and a new Appropriate Technology Centre by the Ministry of Housing. Mukurwe-ini Centre also has the largest arena in the division built during the forced labour villagization program of 1952-58. This arena is today used for school sports competitions and agricultural shows and political rallies. The market centre which is apart from the administration centre and the Hospital has three banks, a petrol station, and many small shops planned around an open air produce market. One can send e-mail and surf the internet at several Cyber Cafes. The main commercial activities seem to be small hotels, bars, mobile airtime shops, and grocery stores. There is also a newer street with furniture and steel workshops and one or two mortal cycle and car repair garages. The Muhito Presbyterian Church, heir to the Church of Scotland Mission looms large in the Centre and its activities and that of the Catholic Church impacts heavily on the lives of locals. These two are however facing challenges from the newer Pentecostal churches which are making inroads to their traditional followings. A ceramics industry centre in lower Mukurwe-ini has recently been launched by



the local member of Parliament, Kabando wa Kabando.

Fig. 5.5 Mukurwe-ini Main centres. Source (DURP, University of Nairobi, 2008)

Transport to Karatina and Nyeri is available at approximately 20 minute intervals by minibus and to Nairobi at about half hour to two or three hour intervals depending on the time of day. The local connections are mainly by walking and by motor bikes manned by young men.

Mukurwe-ini Administrative District also doubles up as the political Constituency of Mukurwe-ini and the political and administrative arms work together. The political structure of the Constituency Development Committees seem to be more participatory than the top down civic administration. According to the Mukurwe-ini Constituency Strategic Plan for up to 2030, the vision is “to transform the constituency into a middle income one and through improved income to better the lives of the people” (Kabando, 2009). A higher income is thus equated to an improved standard of life. This is in line with Kenya’s Vision 2030, another Book of Civilization, which anchors the development of the country on three pillars,

- a) The economic pillar aims at improving the prosperity of all Kenyans through an economic transformation program covering all the regions of Kenya and aiming at achieving an average Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate of 10 % per annum for the next 18 years.
- b) The social pillar seeks to create and build a just and cohesive society with social equity in a clean and secure environment. This quest is the basis of transformation of our society in seven key social sectors: Education and Training; Health; Water and Sanitation; the Environment; Housing and Urbanization; as well as in Gender, Youth, Sports and Culture, Equity and Poverty Eradication. It also makes special provisions for Kenyans with various disabilities.
- c) The political pillar aims at realizing a democratic political system that nurtures issue-based politics, respects the rule of law, and protects all the rights and freedoms of every individual in the Kenyan society. The political pillar envisions a country with a democratic system reflecting the aspirations and expectations of its people (NESC, 2007).

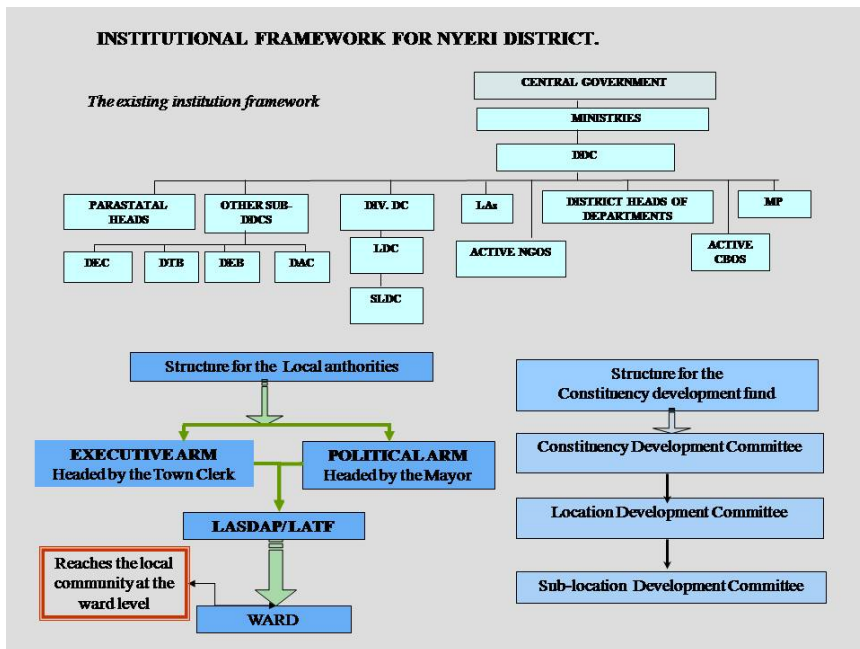


Fig. 5.6 Institutional Framework of Nyeri District. (Source: DURP, University of Nairobi, 2008) Put simply there are three main institutional pillars, The Central Government, The Local Government, and the community committees, *ndundu*.



Fig. 5.7 Mukurwe-ini Divisional administration Centre (Source: Author, 2009)

Top left: The old Mukurwe-ini divisional law courts

Top Right: The galvanized iron roundavel developed by the Ministry of Public Works shortly after independence and possibly referencing the African traditional hut here used as a government office. It was popular as housing for administration policemen and is still in use as such all over the country.

Bottom left: Offices in Mukurwe-ini built before independence with brick from Mweru in Lower Mukurwe-ini.

Bottom Right: Mukurwe-ini Nyayo Division Hospital Nyayo wards.



Fig. 5.8 Mukurwe-ini Commercial Centre. (Source: Author, 2009)

Top Left: The PCEA Muhito Presbytery looming over Mukurwe-ini Centre

Top Right: A commercial Street in Mukurwe-ini Centre

Bottom Left: Various modes of transport in Mukurwe-ini

Bottom Right: Sofa sets outside a furniture workshop in Mukurwe-ini Centre

5.0.2 Mihuti Shopping Centre

Three Kilometers south of Mukurwe-ini along the newly tarmacked Mihuti road that connects with the Sagana Muranga road is a small market Centre called Mihuti. (named after the *muhuti* tree prevalent in that area, '*Erythrina abyssinica*'). Like most small market centers in the Central Province area it is located on the site of a former Mau-Mau village. When everybody vacated the villages and went to their new consolidated farms, the area of the village was left as Government Land for such communal facilities as schools, churches, administration centers, clinics, coffee and tea factories and the market. The market was the defining element and usually took a central square with the shops all around it. These centers were thus called Mihuti Market, Giathugu Market, Gakindu Market etc.

There is nothing distinctive in Mihuti Market and its only claim to fame was that it had one of the first modern boarding and lodging facilities in Mukurwe-ini for Nairobi people who had not yet build a house in their father's homestead when visiting home in the weekends. Apart from this 'Kwa Roma' of

1970s fame, the only other distinctive thing is the great Mugumo tree that the ancients used for sacrifices. These trees marked the hilltops and today stand next to the mobile telephone towers which have become the new geo-locators. On the site of the former Emergency Village, is the nationally distinguished South Tetu Girls High School. Otherwise, there are all the facilities for a local shopping centre. Several hotels, bars, grocery stores, a private clinic, hardware shops, animal feed shops, butcheries, a milk collection centre and services like tailoring, metal workshops, wood workshops, a computer college with two students, etc.



Fig. 5.9 Shops in Mihuti Market Centre. (Source: Author, 2009)

5.0.3 Mihuti Homesteads

All the homesteads studied were in a single walking distance area from Mihuti market centre. Two kilometers further south along the Mihuti road is Wajee Nature Camp, an excellent accommodation facility and bird sanctuary managed by the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya. It has a quiet atmosphere for repose and contemplation and I made it my base while visiting the homesteads nearby. My cousin's homestead, Mama Kimotho, was located along the road midway between the centre and Wajee Camp and I became quite familiar with the homes of her neighbors as she described them to me. I was eager to see all the various types of buildings and I soon realized that every single homestead was different. The only thing that was common was that they used a set of technologies that could be categorized. It soon became apparent that the technology used was also a rough guide to the level of income of the families and I therefore decided to take a representative sample of all the technologies in use in that area. After

travelling throughout the Lower Mukurwe-ini area, it became apparent that in any small area of say of a two kilometer radius, it was possible to find all the technologies. The other important criteria were finding out how the homesteads solved the difficult topography problems of the steep slopes. Again all the different solutions can be found within any two kilometer distance. I therefore decided to study in detail, the area between Wajee Camp and Mihuti Centre. I was guest at some of the homesteads till late evenings listening to stories over a three stone hearth and then taking a walk in the pitch dark to the camp. The stars are so clear and I could try to locate some of the areas in Mukurwe-ini like my home by the pin points of light from mobile telephone towers and shopping center lights.



Fig. 5.10 Typical Settlement Pattern in rural Mukurwe-ini. (Source: Survey of Kenya, Nairobi)

Left: Mihuti area in 1964 showing at top left corner the last of the huts in the Mau-Mau village. And newly demarcated land at centre with homesteads as near the access roads as possible.

Right: Same area today with South Tetu Girls High School occupying former Village space and same access road in the middle now heavily populated.

The homesteads are all usually built next to the access road and because everyone has to have access to the road, the sub-divisions have resulted in an average of one acre strips sometimes as narrow as ten meters. All the different configurations and technologies can be studied within a mere one kilometer length of access road.

The topography of the area like most of Mukurwe-ini and Muranga is very steep with slopes at 15-30° being the norm and some people today building on steeper slopes of 45° due to the diminishing options. The normal way they deal with this is to flatten through cut and fill what is known as a *kiea*, meaning a

flat space of width of 10-12 metres for the building and the *Nja*. It is usually accessed from above with the lower part below the homestead being left for the animals and crops. Because the embankment above the house is sometimes very high as much as 10 meters, there have been unfortunate incidents of the whole upper part breaking and burying the entire house with sometimes loss of life. The infilled part is also unstable and sometimes slips causing cracks in the house. For this reason the *kiea* is usually made many months before the construction of the house to stabilise the filled lower part. The main house is always built of the firmer upper side of the *kiea* and the kitchen and other structures on the filled part. In the event of a homestead, usually a son's, being built below another on the slope; the danger is even more as was seen in early May of 2012 when a landslide covered an entire house resulting in one mortality and several injuries. It is also unfortunate that some *kieas* are done with an embankment at 90° instead of slopping it slightly, *kingaaro*, thus increasing the risk of a landslide.



Fig 5.11 House buried by a collapsed embankment. This house a few kilometers from study area of Mihuti resulted in one death in May 2012. (Source: Author, 2012)

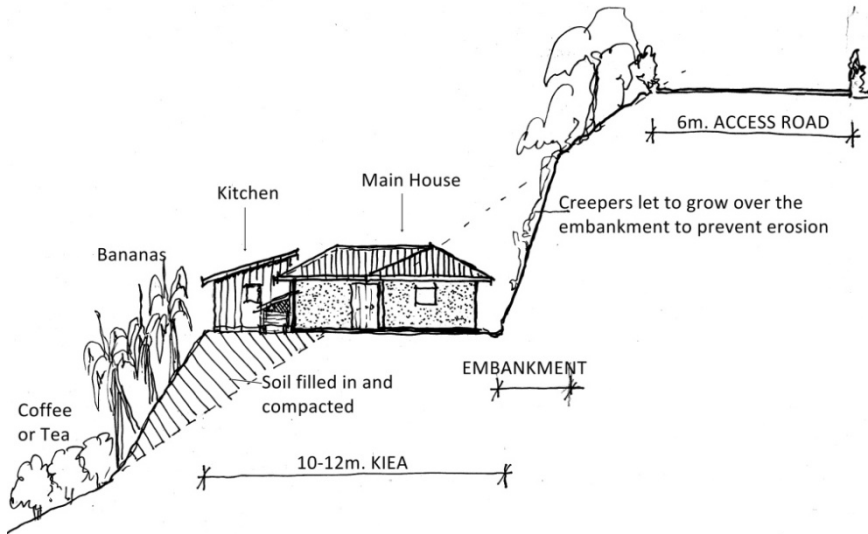


Fig. 5.12 Typical homestead on a 30° slope next to an access road. (Source: Author, 2012)

5.0.4 Wajee Nature Camp

Wajee Camp is entered from the main tarmac road linking Murang'a and Mukurwe-ini. It is a bird sanctuary managed by the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya.

The History of Wajee Camp is inextricably bound with the history of Mihuti Presbyterian Church of East Africa, PCEA, which was the child of the Church of Scotland Mission at Tumu-tumu near Karatina. The Tumu-tumu hill is clearly visible from Mihuti. Tumu-tumu was the Protestant epicenter of the missionaries comparable to the Consolata Catholic enterprise at Nyeri Hill, Mathari. The Church of Scotland Mission arrived at Tumu-tumu in 1909 (Tignor, 1976:112) and is today the PCEA church has been and continues to be a major institution and force for change in the lives of the rural people here.

At around 1912 a youth by the name Gakunju, a son of Gathigi of the Gachuhi's, *Githaku*, belonging to the Irewa Mbari of the Agathigia Clan, set off with some colleagues for Nairobi in search of work. Back then, such an ID would have identified him to a specific location and place as the Mbaris were the geo-locators. He was employed in a hotel near the current Kenya National Museum. By hotel, the picture that comes to mind may be of the current hotels like the Norfolk or Hilton, but hotel, as in Kikuyu, *mukawa*, especially in the rural context generally mean a place with a few benches and tables that sell tea and mandazi and sometimes food. It is called a *mukawa* from *muka wa awa*, or 'my father's wife' (Mugia, 1979:21). It is the commercial equivalent of the traditional hospitality one would get from any of his father's wives or married

woman generally. It is the place men sit talking over this and that as the traditional man's area for talking shop, *boi-ini* and *thingira*, are no more. The bar is an extension of this idea.

Gakunju started attending evening class at the Church Missionary Society with Bwana Baji but interrupted all this to go home in 1914 for the all-important traditional rite of passage, the circumcision ceremony. Having learnt the basics of the alphabet, he started calling himself *wa G* or 'son of G', for Gikunju, and the name stuck to him as the Kikuyu say, *ritwa ni mbukio*, or a name is what one is since "it is our ancestors who gave us our names but it is our virtues that stick to us" (Barra, 1960).

Once circumcised, he heard there was a similar mission in Tumu-tumu and he went there to join the class of 'seekers', *acaria*. He was part of the British forces in World War 1 that fought the Germans in Tanganyika, now Tanzania. He came back from the war in 1918 and returned to school till 1926 when he was certified as having undergone the 'injection' apprenticeship school, *githeco kia miaka itatu*. He went to Nanyuki with colleagues looking for work unsuccessfully therefore came back home to Mukurwe-ini. He was then called to Tumu-tumu to take up a teaching job and he accepted. He was sent to Tambaya, still in Mukurwe-ini and there he started teaching the ABCs and the Christian faith.

The Mission in Tumu-tumu took a slightly different approach from the Consolata Mission in Nyeri. At Tumu-tumu the young students were given the 3Rs for five years and older students for three years. After mastering the 3Rs students could take an 'injection', *githeco*, apprenticeship course in,

1. Preaching, *uhunjia*
2. Nursing, *uthondekani*
3. Carpentry, *bundi wa mbau*
4. Masonry, *bundi wa mahiga*

In 1914-1918 a plague broke out in much of the countryside and many people died. The *athomi*, readers in Tumu-tumu pleaded with the mission to send healers into the villages and a Jason Kibutu was sent to Mihuti to treat the villagers. Others say he was sent to treat long-term feet sores, *ironda cia ndira*, that were prevalent in the region. He would go as an itinerant preacher and healer, injecting and binding sores. He was followed by several young men among them, Simon Mwai, and Newton Karumba. In 1920 a small school began with these followers at the site of the current South Tetu Girls High School and more teachers came from Tumu-tumu to teach the letters, construction, farming and religion.

It was around this time that Kikuyu nationalism began its fight-back against what they saw as an erosion of Kikuyu traditional values by the missionaries and the government. "The 1920s saw the rise of the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), which was to become the most important resistance

organization of the 1920s and 1930s” (Bailey, 1993:26). The effects of the nationalistic fervor were felt in Mihuti with the nascent group at the school being chased away by the villagers. Without a place to go the *athomi* at Tumu-tumu led by Wa-G offered to give their land for the school and the school moved to Wa-Gs land. He was sent to Mihuti to head the school within a very hostile environment.

In 1926 he moved to Nyamacaki in Nyeri and was ordained as an elder of the PCEA and in 1929 he went to St Paul’s Theological College where he was ordained as a Reverend Minister of the PCEA in 1935. He was one of the 3 first African ordained Ministers from the Tumu-tumu Mission.

After a brief sojourn in Kangaita he joined the forces of World War 1 and came back as a warrant officer. He served as a Minister in several churches including his home Mihuti where he build with his war proceeds in 1941 a stone rectangular house with 5 rooms, a cement floor, and corrugated iron sheets for a roof, the first of its kind by an African in Mukurwe-ini. In 1946 he was appointed as a Councilor into the African District Council where he served up to independence in 1964. It is while serving at the ADC that he set out to transform his farm into a ‘Better Farm’, with Grade cows and when Africans were allowed to start growing coffee in 1949 he was among the first to plant the new cash crop. He was elected chairman of the Mukurwe-ini Farmers Cooperative Society. At that time there was only one factory at Ruarai serving Othaya and Muranga. In 1951 coffee planting became widespread and more factories were built. Wa-G was elected the first Chairman of the powerful Nyeri District Cooperative Union in 1954. In 1958 he was one of the chief advisors in the land consolidation program in Nyeri District. In 1959 he was appointed vice chairman of Mukurwe-ini Land Control Board a post he retained until 1985 when he became unable to attend the meetings. He was instrumental in the development of cattle dips, the teaching of the science of soil erosion and conservation, and many other projects in education and health. In 1969 he retired as a Minister of the PCEA Mihuti Parish but continued serving in many of the church committees including the main Kirk Session until he was unable to attend and had to use messengers. It is thus easy to see the institutional structures that were at play in Mukurwe-ini in the life of Wa-G.

In 1923 as a young man while on his first teaching post at Tambaya he met a young woman, Mumbi wa Kuniya who later joined the class of seekers in Tumu-tumu and in December 1925 they were married. The union produced 4 girls and 6 boys. Wa- G died in 1986 and was buried in his home, now Wajee Camp.

As is quite apparent from the history of Wa-G, that his wife Loise was pretty much in full charge of the home and the upbringing of the children as Wa-G served the community mostly away from home. This is very frequently the case in traditional Kikuyu homes and women have traditionally managed the

homes without the men. The small book, *Wira wa Mutumia wa Mucit*²⁰ (S.P.C.K., 19--) which women like Loise read taught them how to keep the house clean, how to entertain guests and generally how to be modern. Loise was also involved in community affairs and the spread of these ideas to the other church convertees. She was very instrumental in setting up of the Mihuti Women's Guild of the PCEA. The Women's Guild movement was started by the Church of Scotland Mission as a fightback and protection of the *athomi* women who were under heavy attack from the traditional Kikuyu nationalist movements of the 1920s and 30s. The main bone of contention between the traditionalists and the *athomi* was the traditional Kikuyu rite of passage for women, the circumcision and its attendant ceremonies, *mambura*. The Church was against the circumcision ceremonies and the *athomi* women were barred from going through it. Ngugi wa Thiong'o chronicles this epic struggle in his novel, *The River Between*. Though a work of fiction, the events chronicled were very real and lives of people like Loise and Wa-G were the inspiration for the characters in the book. The *athomi* women in Mihuti and indeed Mukurwe-ini looked up to Loise for direction and guidance in the making of the new home while the men fought it out in the arena. They looked at her new implements, like her tea kettle, her cups, her cupboard, her brass pots, *thaburia cia ruthuku*, and her chairs and beds and wanted the same for themselves. Loise, through the Woman's Guild Movement contributed heavily in the transformation of the home in Mukurwe-ini. The movement is still a major transformative force and influence in the lives of rural women in Mukurwe-ini. Loise was 'called' (as they say in the Woman's Guild) in 1991 and was buried facing Tumu-tumu hill beside her husband.

After the passing of Loise, the sons of Wa-G who were living in Nairobi and elsewhere decided that their home should become part of living history and the only way to do so was to turn it into a sort of museum. The twenty two acre piece of land had turned wild anyway with Loise unable to manage the 'Better Farm' in her advanced age. There were a few chickens and a cow and some two or so acres under cultivation. The rest were bushes and trees. One of the son's decided to turn ten acres of it that included their mother's house into a cultural centre that includes a typical traditional Kikuyu Homestead. He envisaged tourist campers coming to use the place as a camping site so they made provisions for a restaurant. He built rest rooms in the traditional Kikuyu round form and showers and toilet facilities. He also bought a number of tents and build a traditional homestead. They named the place Wajee Nature Camp. Business was not so good and the place has gone into decay. In 2009, the performance hall, hardly ever used, collapsed. The Kikuyu homestead has all but succumbed to termites and it is not a nice thing to show visitors as the traditional dwelling place of the Kikuyu. The original edifice by Wa-G in stone is used as a tourist cottage and

²⁰ The work of the woman in the home (undated publication)

stands in contrast with the new office built in sun-dried mud blocks and finished in the new style popular with the locals.

In 2009, the son signed an agreement with the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya and they have taken over the management of the enterprise and are marketing it as a bird sanctuary which it truly is. It boasts as habitat for the rare Hinde's Babbler (*Turdoides hindei*), an endangered species .

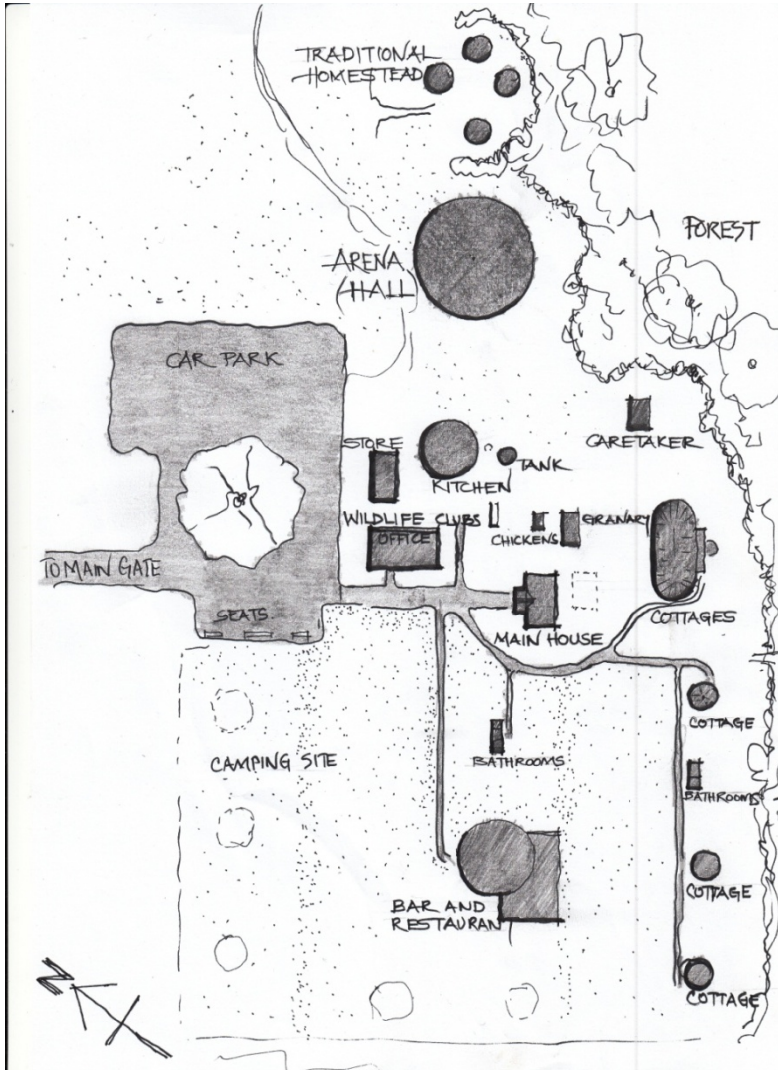


Fig. 5.13 Layout of Wajee Nature Camp. (Source: Author, 2012)



Fig. 5.14 Wajee Nature Camp, Mukurwe-ini. (Source: Author, 2009)

Top left: The main house built by Wa-G in 1948. The front porch and the white paint on the dressed stone wall is a later addition otherwise the house is pretty much as built including the timber framed glass windows. Wa G's son Mburu informed me that the stones were not joined together with cement but with a thin layer of clay soil of the area.

Top Right: The reception and office built by Wildlife Clubs of Kenya. The walls are in 6x9x12 inches sun-dried mud blocks plastered and decorated to look like a stone building from afar. It has a cement screed floor and steel casement windows assembled locally and roofed with GCI sheets.

Bottom left: The round cottages made in traditional mud and wattle walls finished in cement plaster and whitewashed. The tiny windows are in timber boards

Bottom right: The main restaurant area done in a circular fashion with Makuti roofing. Makuti roofing style is a Indian Ocean coast import using palm leaves. The makuti roofing is very popular in tourist country hotels and gives a place the traditional 'African' feel.

5.0.5 HOMESTEAD 1

Homestead Characteristics.

- 5 acre farm with a modified 1958 U type main house.
- Son of the late Rev. Wa-G and an elder of the PCEA
- 75 yrs old Mr. and Mrs. Mburu, *nyina wa Wa-G* or Mama Wa-G
- A 41 yr old unmarried daughter
- Winnie, a granddaughter, of about 22 who has finished form four, been to Nairobi working in a hair salon and now back to live in village.
- Winnie's 10 year old brother attending elementary school at Mihuti Primary School.
- Rest of Mburu's children no longer living in homestead.
- Water connection but no electricity. Solar lamp.
- 1 cow, several rabbits and a cat.

Introduction

Fig. 5.15 What is visible of the Mburus' homestead from the road. (Source: Author, 2009)

James Mburu Gakunju is the second son and fifth born of Loise and the Rev. Wa-G. He lives on a five acre farm opposite the Gate of Wajee Camp. When I met him in 2009, he was living with his wife, an unmarried daughter, granddaughter and grandson. The granddaughter married in 2010 and moved to the Karatina area to establish her home.

The Mburu's moved here in 1958 after land consolidation and he built a 4 roomed modified U type 'Heothi house'. He was then working as a field officer in the Public Health Department of Nyeri and part of his work was to advise farmers on the principles of the 'Heothi house' and the 'Better Farm'. The house stands today as was built in 1958 with only a few signs of termite infestation and a homely ageing. The plan called for a six roomed house and he meant to extend it in time but raising 3 daughters and 3 boys and seeing them up to college saw him keep postponing the extension till it was not necessary any more.

He also had to build other structures as a house by itself is not enough to make a home. The two roomed external kitchen was built also in offcut timbers

shortly after moving in. The granary and water tank were built in 1964 and the store in 1970. The young men used to sleep in the room next to the kitchen. The big tree which provides shade to the Nja was planted in 1975. There is one cow in the Zero-grazing unit below the house.



Fig. 5.16 Sectional elevations of Mburu's Place. (Source: Author, 2010)

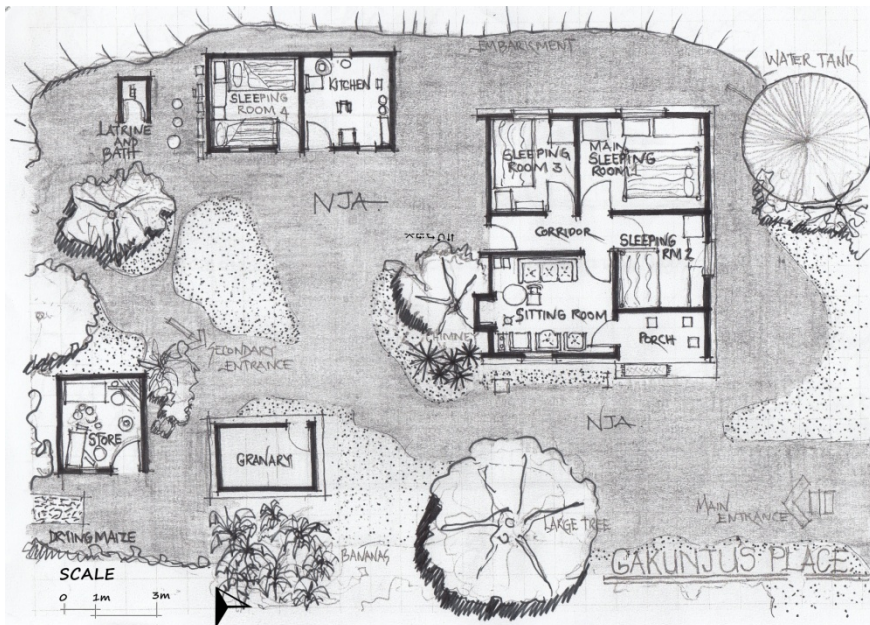


Fig. 5.17 Layout plan of Mburu's place. (Source: Author, 2010)

As in many homes here there is not a definite gate and people seem to have no security concerns. All too often you enter a compound and there is no one about and the house is not locked. Almost all homes have one entrance from the main road. Another way of entering a homestead is to approach it from below, from the *shamba* side climbing up through the coffee terraces and reaching the top of the *shamba* where the homestead is usually built. When someone says, “I am going down”, *ndathii kianda*, it means he or she is going to the *shamba*. I entered Mburu’s place from the road side and found him seated on a stool in his slippers at the porch as we had made an appointment. The gumboots were near the door on a sisal sack mat near the mud scrapper. If you came in and found the slippers instead of the gumboots you would know he was down in the *shamba*. If you found the gumboots only without the slippers, he would be inside or about the homestead and if you found both sleepers and boots, then he was nowhere near. This is reminiscent of the stool and walking stick placed outside the traditional man’s *thingira* as signs.



Fig. 5.18 The porch area of the house where the Mzee sits. In many ways it is similar to what Ghaidan (1975) documented in Swahili dwellings. (Source: Author, 2009)

I was accompanied by my younger brother and Mburu entered the table room and brought two stools and we sat at the porch area. It is actually a very comfortable place. You might expect that we would be taken round and introduced to the rest of the people including Mama Wa-G but these people are never in a hurry. Because he knew my family and especially my father, there

were no long introductions and I introduced the topic of my research. When he heard everything, he was quite ecstatic and asked me many questions. It is after a long discussion that Winnie, the granddaughter pretending to have an errand near the tree came to spy who it was and was asked by her father to come greet some visitors. This was a sign that we were important visitors who will be made tea. So she greets us demurely and disappears to report the matter to her grandmother. They prepare the tea and she brings two more stools where she will place the vacuum flask and cups. She glances at her grandfather as she also casts a quick glance at the foot of the tree indicating her preference and her grandfather nods. The communication between grandpa and girl is very subtle. She brings the kettle and cups and sets them on the stools and with a tiny nod of her head indicates that that is all. Mr. Mburu invites us to the tea with a gesture and we carry our stools to the base of the tree. As we continue talking Mrs. Mburu comes out of the kitchen as if she was walking to the store and comments, “so you have visitors?” He tells her, “These are people you know. They are Mary’s sons, Mary of Francis from Gakindu.” She comes and greets us by hand and then adds matter-of-factly. “You were given tea by Winnie? Feel at home.” She then disappears after hearing we are not going to stay long.

The Main House

Mr. Mburu then takes us into the table room and shows us everything. I tell him I will take pictures and he has no problem. I ‘like’ Wa-Gs 1961 portrait on the ‘wall’ taken by the Singh Bros. in Nyeri and Mburu’s old black and white photos of him and Mama Wa-G when they were a young couple. I see a recent graduation color photo of him and he tells me he recently graduated with a diploma in theology from St Paul’s theological college. The 2010 calendar of the PCEA hangs on the wall. The coffee table was bought in 1960 and is a nested type. The sofas are the 1970 wooden arms style with red resin and have flowery removable covers by Winnie’s mother. His books are in one corner and I can see his reading is very current on GM crops and organic farming. He believes the Kikuyu saying, ‘*mugi ni mutare*’ meaning that a clever person has had instruction. Another important item is the Panasonic radio better known as “the talking guard”, *kanya ka uhoru*. He listens to the local news and the BBC Africa Service.



Fig. 5.19 *Kanya ka uhoru*, The talking guard.

(Source: Author, 2009)

An indispensable item in every rural home and is the modern village crier or bearer of news.

The Dietz lantern is here too as it is in every rural home with the glass strengthened with a copper wire mesh by local craftsmen. Everything has that worn and used look that make them look like very valuable antiques. A warmth that is difficult explain.

Fig. 5. 20 The Diez Paraffin Lamp. (Source: Author, 2009)

The main light source at night. If there are school children in the home, it is their homework light. Poorer families use the hand lantern with an open flame made by local Jua Kali craftsmen. Recently Mr. Mburu has acquired a solar powered lamp.



The table room had a fireplace. He tells me that it was never quite finished so has never been used. The timber off-cut walls have packing carton on the inside. The windows are 450 mm. wide and 600mm high flooding the room with light. They are timber frames with glass and the locks characteristic of the early 50s and have the old latch. They also have the iron 2 inch grid security grill. Painted sky blue they must have been very classy then. The ceiling is with papyrus reed matting. The entire house though at one time full of even more youthful vitality still retains a liveliness that is tangible. A house is a living thing with all its cobwebs, wrinkles and smells. It is a living palpitating organism that is the dwelling place not just of man but of other organisms like spiders, flies and bacteria. It is an ecosystem in itself and as Callahan (2002) observes, “we humans, like all organisms, live embedded in ecological communities” This is a difficult concept to understand for those who believe the biomedical model of war against all bacteria and germs from the home environment and the elimination through chemical means of 99.9% of household germs. In these rural homes it is still possible to see healthy children eating dirt and communing with germs.

From the corridor one accesses the three bedrooms, one used by the ten year old boy and another by his grandparents. The other room is used as a junk store as no one sleeps there anymore. Behind the door to the kitchen is a nook for the farm implements just like the Kikuyu used to have. The little nook where implements were stored *Gaturwa-ini* is equivalent to this nook. The floor is a cement screed and very clean.

Fig. 5.21 Farm Tools Corner. (Source: Author, 2009)
The new Gaturua-ini



The Main house Construction

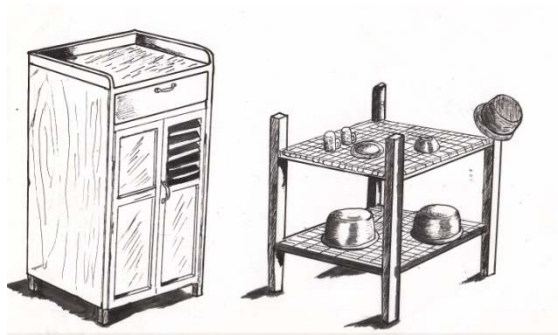
The construction of the timber wall using off-cuts is simple. The house is set out with 125mm diameter cedar posts dug about 400 mm into the ground to a height of 2400. They are joined together at the floor level, the window level and at the wall plate level with 50x100mm cypress tree sawn timbers to make a strong framework. 150 – 200 mm cedar off-cuts are nailed on to the 50x 100 framework with 150 mm nails. The bottom 450 mm. part of the offcuts and posts is brushed with engine oil to preserve them from termites. The floor is then covered with loose stones to for a width of 100 mm and then given a cement screed finish. All around the house a cemented plinth of about 450 mm wide is left on the outside. With time termites begin to find their way up the wall from the posts and they have to be deterred from time to time with a fresh application of oil.

The roof is still the original 1958, 32 gauge corrugated iron sheets on simple cypress sawn timber trusses. The ceiling in the table room is made with papyrus nailed on the truss. All around are half round gutters collecting the rain water into a large stone tank at the entrance corner of the house. In 2011, Mr. Mburu brought in piped water from the Mukurwe-ini-Othaya Water Project and had it connected to the tank. A meter is put before the tank and he will have to pay on a monthly basis to the Mukurwe-ini water company.

Mama Wa-G's Kitchen

In the kitchen, Mama Wa-G had made herself scarce. This is a large kitchen as rural kitchens go being ten by ten feet. Like most of the rural kitchens, it has a bare earth floor swept to a clean finish that easily absorbs any water. If too much water is spilled accidentally while cleaning a knife or folk, some ashes from the open fire are sprinkled and swept leaving a shiny finish. The main washing of the utensils happen at a designated place outside and the aluminum

pans and other utensils are put in a rack to dry. The cupboard which is an essential item in all rural kitchens is at a corner. It is the modern traditional store, *thegi*, or woman's private store which is never entered without permission. These days there are two of them. The holy of holies which is kept in the woman's bedroom and contains her secret store, *karungu-bi* (from cooling bay) and the smaller affair in the kitchen that holds the salt, milk and small things like spices for short time use.



The Fig 5.22 The *Kabati* (from cupboard) and utensils drying rack. (Source: Mwangi, 2010)

Winnie, who is the assistant when her grandma or mother is cooking, brings in water when more is needed, splits and brings firewood. She is also the link between the kitchen and the table room. The seats have that shiny polished look that comes with constant wear and so is everything here including the door handles.

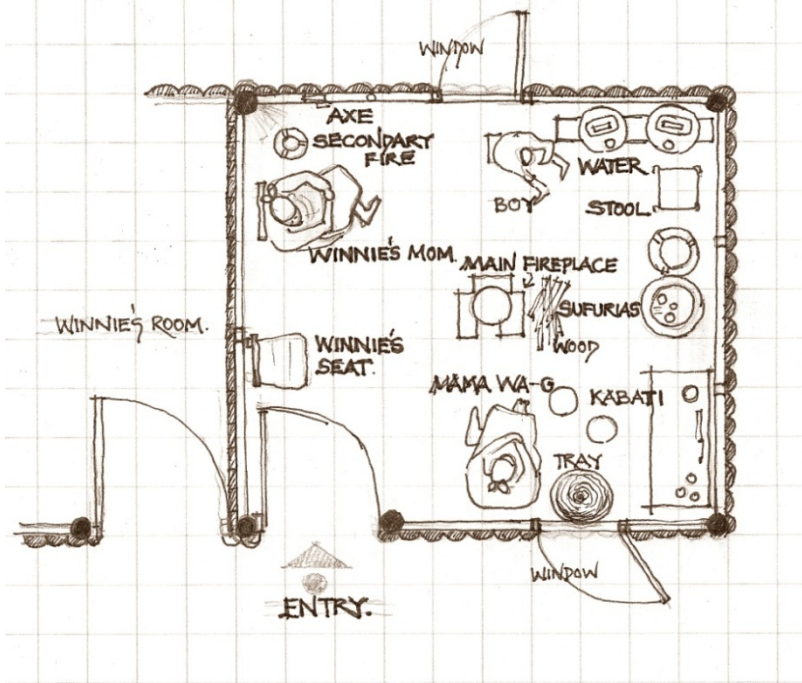


Fig. 5.23 Mama Wa G's Kitchen (Source: Author, 2010)

The proper working of all Kikuyu rural kitchens hinges on the triangle formed by the fire, the main cook and the cupboard, *kabati*. This is called *njugirio ya mutumia*, 'the woman's swinging place'. She swivels herself pivoted on her low seat without having to stand and lifts the pots from the fire and things like salt and milk from the *kabati* and places the pots on her right away from the traffic of children, visitors and the assistant. She also takes great care that in her swinging her thighs are not exposed to visitors. A lack of knowledge of the science of this swinging has resulted in young mothers occasioning serious burns to their young when a child comes running from outside straight into the just boiled milk or porridge. This is traditional knowledge that comes down from the arrangement of the *riko* in the traditional *Nyumba*. This working triangle is taught and enforced to all assistants with vehemence. The rest of the arrangement falls in place respecting the requirements of this triangle. The cook's seat is never used by others except when another person has been allowed to take over the cooking. The crucial elements that support this triangle are the water containers, the firewood, the children's area, the cook's assistant and positioning of visitors. The cooking *sufurias*, pans, and the *chapati* pan are hung on nails on the wall and being black like the wall sort of disappear. When there are visitors in the evening which is rare for women do not generally visit each other at night,

Winnie relinquishes her seat and ducks next door to her room, just as traditionally girls jumped into the great bed, *kiriri*. Extra firewood is stored on the plinth behind Winnie's room and it is also her job to split wood with the axe which is kept in a corner.



Fig. 5.24 Winnie in the main cook's seat.
(Source: Author, 2009)

It should be noted that the fireplace still has three stones but the stones are now rectilinear dressed quarry stone arranged orthogonally rather than the traditional triangle. This is to save wood and there are many types of 'improved' fuel saving fireplaces introduced to the villages by many NGOs. One of the more successful ones was introduced by the Green Belt Movement in its tree planting and fuel conservation rural initiatives.

Because of the two windows placed by the recommendation of the *Heothi* plan, this kitchen's smoke is not uncomfortable to the eyes at all. Unlike the main house which is now showing signs of termite infestation this one has become better with age and the inside is oily black which no termite can touch. The original GCI roofing sheets of 1959 have also this oily black soot underneath and have not one single leak. Once this oily smoke treatment is started, it cannot be stopped and lack of use of the kitchen for a few months causes it to dry, flake off, and the complete disintegration of the GCI. Grass thatch disintegration and collapse takes even less time.



Fig. 5.25 The oily blackness in the kitchen.
Notice the cooking *sufurias* storage on nails on the wall. (Source: Author, 2009)

Winnie's Room

This room next to the kitchen was originally used by the boys while growing up but by 2009 Winnie and her mother shared it and although right next to the kitchen it has a completely different feel. It had a feminine touch in both colour and smell that was very unlike the kitchen just next. It is the difference between smell and fragrance. Having stayed in Nairobi Githurai after her form four schooling Winnie believe life here is much better and quieter and without hassles, *hakuna cha kusubua*. On her wall is a 'like' of Fair and Lovely and pictures of models in beautiful hair. Two fresh leaves of the Aloe Vera plant are placed near a Nice and Lovely jar. Her attire which includes the 'pedal pusher' jeans is the typical way girls dress today. They wear ex-European fashions which they buy second hand, *mitumba*.

Traditionally Kikuyu girls were not averse to showing off their endowments until marriage and it was the Missionaries who enforced the new moral code of dress for young men and women. Huxley (1998) noted how a group of men and women settlers were embarrassed in front of young Kikuyu men, who "smelt powerfully and richly, though not unpleasantly of rancid fat and red earth, wore short leather cloaks which failed to hide their genitals ... the girls with nothing on but very small triangles of leather and string of beads, and whose breasts were still half-formed and therefore firm and in the right position" (Huxley, 1998:116). In rural Kikuyu today, girls are shedding off the 1920s Missionary code of the long dress and again showing off their rich endowments. The *Kanga*, or *Lesso*, a brightly colored length of cloth remains the main working garment for rural women and it has 101 ways of tying (Hanby, 1984). Several years ago it would have been a scandal for Winnie to move up and about the *Nja* without a *Lesso*. Her mother and grandma always wear the *lesso* while working about the house. Winnie has since got married and moved out.

Mama Wa-G's Nja

The homestead is built on a gentle slope and therefore has a substantial *Nja*. From the road nothing happening in the *Nja* can be seen due to the small fence and the positioning of the elements. Mama Wa-G uses the *Nja* for food preparation, drying of cereals and stuff from the *shamba*. There are drying lines and a place where utensils are washed. The utensils are then placed on the raised cantilevered floor of the granary to dry.



Fig. 5.26 Mama Wa-G's Nja. (Source: Author, 2011)

Left: The proper way girls like Winnie are taught to sit while working. The *lesso* also protects the dress from being messed up by the work.

Right: The clothes drying and wet part of the Nja is tucked away from the traffic.

On one side of the raised level of the granary is where the boy has built a cage for his rabbits which he feeds after school. There is a whetting stone to sharpen knives and *pangas* before one sets off to the garden and a scrapper to scrape mud from the boots and shoes just before one enters the main house. The place has many types of flowers and at any time there is colour and the sound of bees harvesting pollen. In fact in the room next to the store, Mburu keeps bees. The *Nja* is clearly divided between the men zone around the porch and the women's zone in the rest of the *Nja*. During a function men do not go beyond their zone but some of them enter the table room.

During a function like the wedding preparations for Winnie, the men remain at Mburu's side of the *Nja*, while the women use Mama Wa-G's side in a strict division. The meat roasting is done near the cow shed, where the men had also made a temporary urinal.

5.0.6 HOMESTEAD 2

Homestead Characteristics.

- Middle aged couple with a 5 roomed stone house and external off-cut timbers Kitchen
- Have 6 girls and two boys. Last boy in high school and the rest either married or working in Nairobi and Nyeri.
- Subsistence farmers with two dairy cows and several chickens
- Mrs. Ngira is my cousin and was my main informant in the area. She introduced me to many of the homesteads and is a wealth of information.
- No water or electricity connection.
- Two dairy cows, chickens and cat.

Mr. Ngira and his younger brother and unmarried sister shared out the 2.7 acre farm when their father passed on in 1976 and they each got 0.9 acres. He married Lydia Ngima in 1975 and started the family in the two rooms that now serve as a kitchen and room for the youngest boy. At that time he was working as an official in one of the local coffee factories and his wife would also get casual employment from time to time but mainly worked in the small farm next to her house. His little salary went to pay for the school fees of the children and such things as clothing and other items that had to be bought. The subsistence farming in the small lot has 50 banana grooves, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, maize, beans, yams, cassava and vegetables. There are several avocado trees, tree tomatoes and passion fruit. With this kind of farming, which is typical for such small farms, she says they were able to feed the family and have never gone hungry. They also planted 130 coffee trees which brought in a small income to help pay school fees. On the benches build to check the soil erosion are planted Napier grass for the cows and one goat. The goat was recently killed by prowling animals at night, probably wild dogs.

One room served as a bedroom for the parents and the small children while the other room served as a bedroom for the older girls. There was a tiny external kitchen next to the house. The kitchen was constructed of makeshift materials. Mrs. Ngira told me when I asked her of how they managed to fit into two rooms then, “We have come from far”, and also reminded me of the Kikuyu saying *Ngunguni ireragira ruku-ini* meaning “the bedbug rears its young in a crack”.

These days she has a 2,300 litres water tank which fills up during the rainy season but only serves her for three months after the rains. She buys water from a neighbor who has a connection from the Mukurwe-ini water company at Ksh. 5 per 20 litre container and carries it home with a wheelbarrow. For fuel she uses the Diez Paraffin lamp in the main house and a *Jua Kali*, (local craftsmen)

paraffin burner, *kagwatira*. She spends about Ksh. 300 on paraffin each month and about Ksh.400 when the boy is at home. For firewood like most of her neighbors she uses the branches of the Mukima trees, (*Grevillea robusta*) which she has planted in the small farm. This tree is periodically trimmed of its branches and they re-grow. Because it does not affect the crops or coffee in any way, it has become the tree of choice for fuel production. It was popularized in Kikuyuland in the early 80s by the Green Belt Movement as a way of checking deforestation. It also is the tree of choice in the area for providing sawn timber for construction.

In 1990 they took a loan from the Farmers Cooperative bank of Ksh. 75,000/= (seventy five thousand). They had for several years been buying materials bit by bit and storing them. Mrs. Ngira had a relative who taught building construction at Kimathi Institute of Technology in Nyeri and he organized to have his students construct the Ngira house as part of the practical training of his students. He brought them to the site and within one month, the house was finished. The Ngira's are very proud of their house and consider it a model house built to the right specifications.

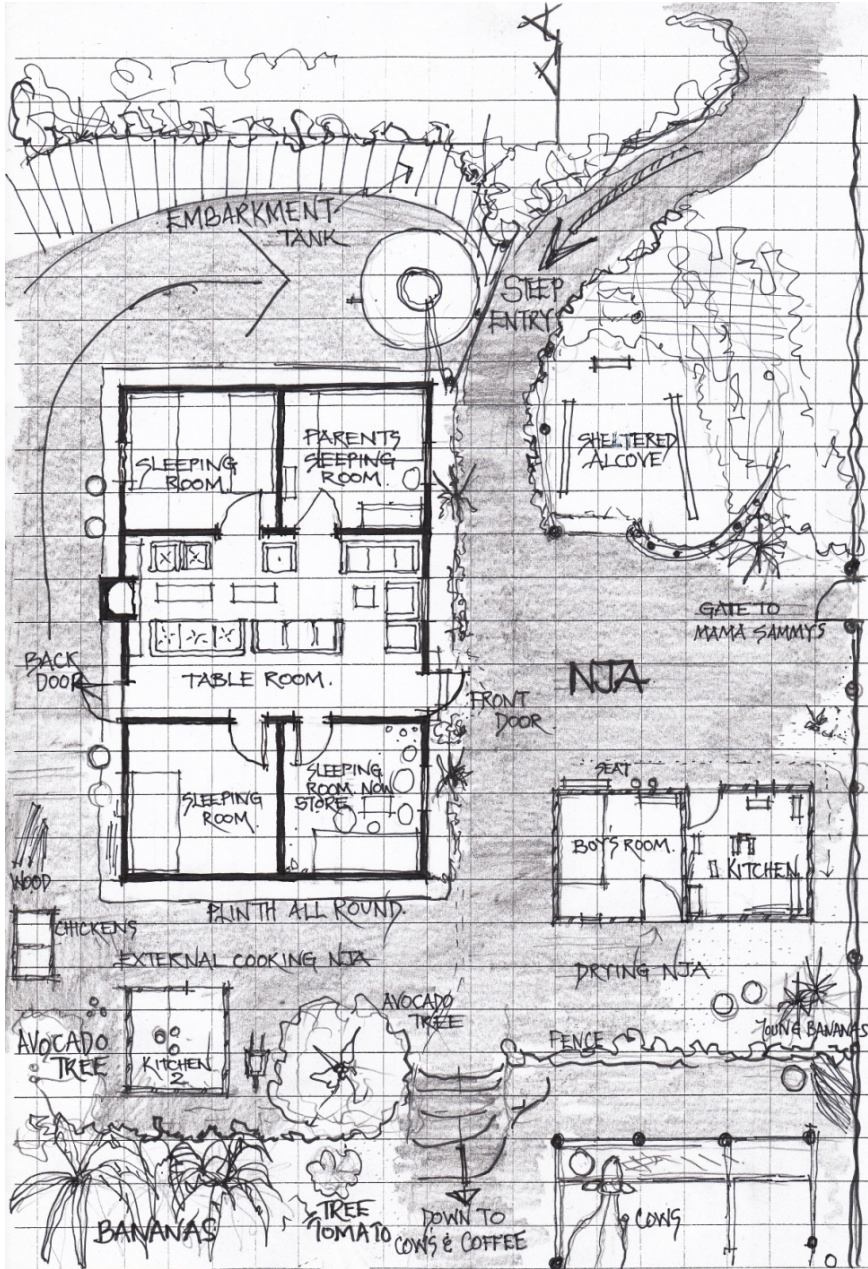


Fig. 5.27 The Ngiras Homestead layout. (Source: Author, 2012)

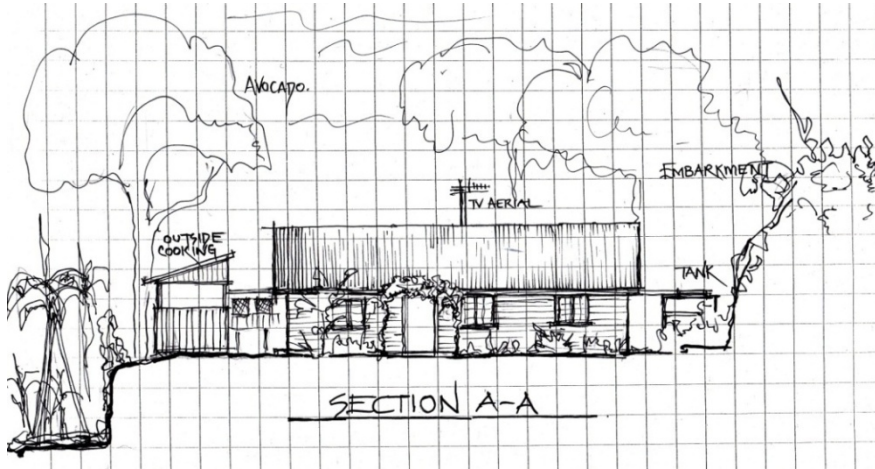


Fig. 5.28 Section through the Ngira's Homestead showing the steep slope. (Source: Author, 2012)

The entry to the homestead is from Mihuti Road and one winds through a footpath that is a real challenge especially when one has to bring in goods with a wheelbarrow and also when it is wet. The main thing in the *Nja* is the sheltered alcove where Mr. or Mrs. Ngira meets with their visitors. A discussion can go on even when the lady is in the kitchen and moving up and about in the compound while the guest is stationed at the alcove. She has a clear ringing voice that can travel a great distance yet it is calm and non-shouting. Other plants are also used to define the entrance to the main house and also the splash area from the roof runoff.



Fig. 5.29 Use of planting to define space 1. (Source: Author, 2009)

The entry into the main house requires that one bends low, an idea reminiscent of the entry to the traditional *Nyumba*.

Right: The sheltered alcove in the *Nja*. The level at which live plants are used to define space is a good indicator of the engagement of the dwellers in a homestead. Those who dwell are able to engage fully with plants.

The operating principle of the triangle in her kitchen is exactly like mama Wa-G's but the triangle is differently positioned within the space. In the beginning of 2012, the old kitchen was demolished and she moved into the 5x5feet external kitchen at the back. The plan is to build a new mud block kitchen with a chimney on the footprint of the old one.

The young man in form three high school lives in the room next to the kitchen but unlike in the case of Winnie, his door is accessed from the opposite side of the Kitchen entrance. His room is however a riot of European football icons and models cut out of magazines. These are not only decorative, but seal up the gaps in the off-cut walls in order to keep it warm in cold weather. The wall is first screened off with plastic sack material, the same material used for drying coffee and other produce in the *Nja*. He also makes a ceiling out of the same material and then covers it up with decorative pictures of the football and wrestling icons.

The chicken coops are behind the main house towards the pit latrine and bath. They are made of left over pieces of timber and sticks and roofed with the any piece of leftover iron sheets. One can even borrow from a neighbor when visiting and seeing a piece of sheeting; "Why don't you give me this piece of sheeting? My chickens are being rained on." More often than not it will be given. The construction of the chicken coop is done by the father or the boy. The same thing applies to the construction of the pit latrine though this is sometimes constructed by a *fundi* for hire. Everyone is however required to be handy with a hammer and a saw which are items in every home. The digging of the pit is done by professional diggers who do it manually up to about 30 feet. They are paid for the digging per foot and the top of the pit is then covered with a concrete floor. The bathroom is build next to the toilet so that the water is drained into the pit.



Fig. 5.30 Outhouses. (Source: Author, 2009)

Left: The events kitchen and chickens at far end. The wheelbarrow is parked under the tree.

Right: The pit latrine and bathroom both with a cement floor.

Just below the avocado tree is what looks like a garbage dump. It is just small things like old charcoal remains that can tell you that it is a garbage dump. There is surprisingly little garbage in all the homes that I have visited. Most things like plastic bags, bottle tops, plastic bottles and paper are recycled. Paper is used to light fire, while bottle tops are used as nail caps in construction. The list of creative use of so-called garbage is endless and would require a thesis by itself.

Because they have never put a ceiling, the house gets quite hot during the day and most of the living happens outside. The timber house is cooler because it lets in air through the cracks. The inside walls are decorated with calendars and framed family pictures as well as sayings of the wise. The small 14 inch colour TV is powered by a battery which is charged at Mukurwe-ini centre when it discharges. It is placed in a lockable cabinet within the wall unit which also stores the main utensils for the table. Eating is done usually in the kitchen or on a seat just outside the kitchen while holding the plate. There is no dining table and one places the plate on the coffee table after finishing. The boy will usually take his plate with him to his room and will share with whichever friend has come to visit him.



Fig. 5.31 The Ngiras sitting room. (Source: Author, 2012)

Just below the TV set and cassette player is the battery on a stool and behind it a light green curtain hiding the fireplace. These sitting room fireplaces are never used though they are always built in the new houses.



Fig. 5.32 The Zero-grazing shed for two cows. (Source: Author, 2009)

Observation of the cow waiting to be fed will tell you in which direction the owner is.

The homestead has a connecting door to Mr. Ngira's sister's place which also connects to her other brother's place. It is common practice that siblings' homesteads are connected with small gates. Sometimes no gates or fences are put between brothers' homes.

5.0.7 HOMESTEAD 3.

Homestead Characteristics

- Sister and neighbor to Mr. Ngira and with connecting pedestrian gates to both brothers on each side of her.
- Middle aged spinster living with her unmarried 25 year old son in a 1960 L type off-cut timbers house with a cement floor and corrugated iron roof.
- Does subsistence farming on 0.57 acre farm and 100 coffee trees as cash crop
- Keeps two dairy cows and a few chickens.
- No water or electricity connection



Fig. 5.33 Mama Sammy's House. (Source: Author, 2012)

Typical L type 1959/60 timber off-cut house. The lower version had mud and wattle walls while the upper version had glass timber framed windows. The other version was to have it in sawn timbers with stops at the gaps.

Mama Sammy inherited the house when her mother passed away in 1998. She is a typical peasant farmer living in much the same way as her sister in law only she has had less financial pressures. In her compound, you will find some coffee beans drying in the yard, and at the corner of the yard building stones arranged for a future building project. The old tank has become broken and unusable beyond repair and she has sold it off to a local dealer of scrap metal who goes scavenging in homes. She intends to buy a plastic *Kentank* before the next rains if funds allow.

The house was constructed along the lines of the original 1958 'better house plans' which were recommended by the government health department. They could be done with mud, off-cut timber walls or even stone. This was the most popular typology and is still the most prevalent. The ground was either rammed earth or cement screed floor depending on affordability. This particular one has a cement screed floor and the walls were made of *Mitarakwa* off-cuts. *Mutarakwa*, (*Juniperus procera*), was a popular tree for building construction as it is very resistant to termite attack. It was readily available from the slopes of the Aberdares and Mt Kenya forests and is today very rare and expensive. After squaring the logs at the timber saw mills, the off-cuts were sold off cheaply for walling. The lower two feet are preserved with used engine oil sold at a local motor garage. It is heated and applied while hot with a brush. The timber in Mama Sammy's house is still very well preserved to date. The granary, also built around that time is also very well preserved.

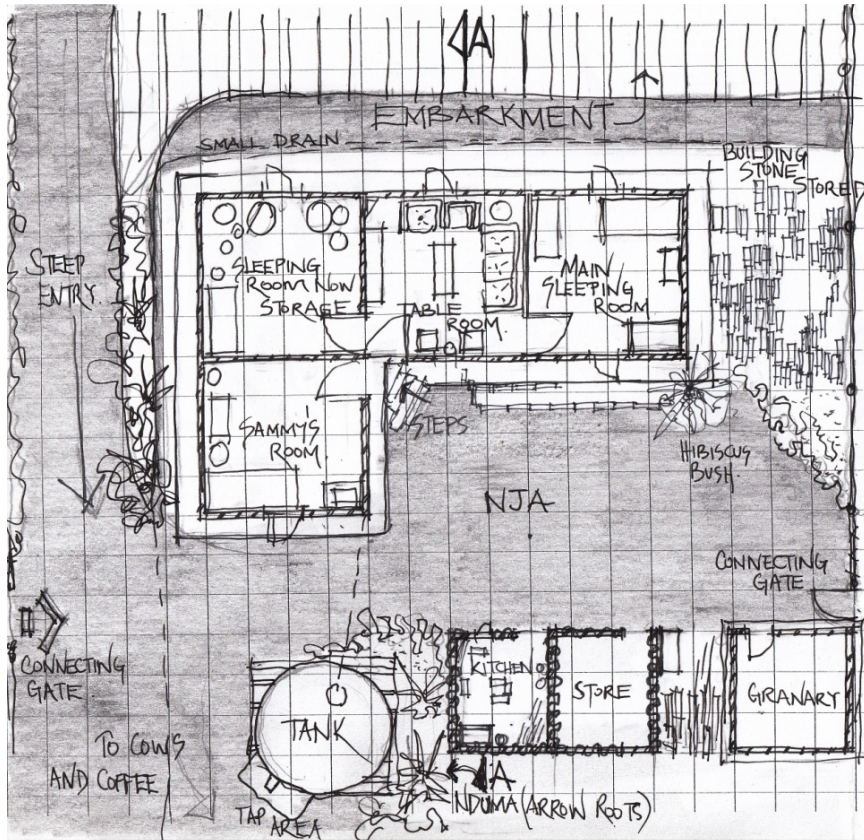


Fig. 5.34 Layout of Mama Sammy's Place (Source: Author, 2012)

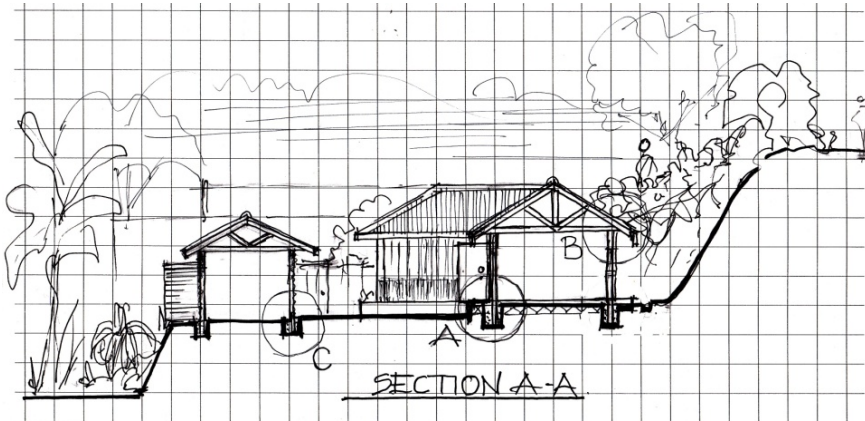


Fig. 5.35 Section through Mama Sammy's Place. (Source: Author, 2009)

The back of the house where there is a steep embankment is maintained free of soil accumulating due to rain. During the rains it is necessary to ensure the flow of runoff so that it does not enter the house.

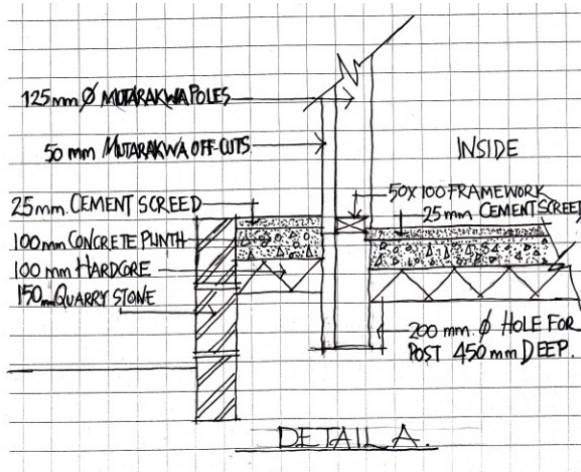
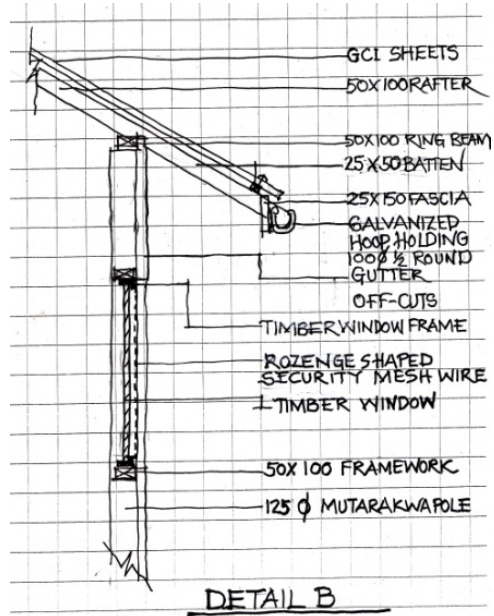


Fig. 5.36 Detail of floor and wall. (Source: Author, 2012)

Fig. 5.37 Detail of Roof and window

The window even when in timber has a ironwork mesh, the same used to make gates and the meat roasting grill. This one was a lozenge shape and was stronger. It means nobody can put his hand through the window when the timber window is open during the day and the people are in the shamba. The windows are small usually 450mm wide and 600mm high.



It is trendy for the inside of most timber and mud houses to be decorated with curtained shades to keep off the dust and Mama Sammy has used the lace curtains with religious pictures, calendars and framed pictures and sayings just as in Mrs. Ngira's. The young man's room is decorated with newspapers and pictures of European football icons as well as models. He also has a radio.

Mama Sammy's Nja is a typical beaten earth floor that because of its age has now eroded and the house is protected with a small retaining wall of around 450mm height. Often she will be drying coffee beans, maize etc. on plastic sheets or on a traditional *Gitaruru* tray which is an indispensable item in these rural homes.

Mama Sammy's Kitchen works in the same way as her sister in law's and Mama Wa-G's. Her's however, is walled and roofed with corrugated iron sheets.

5.0.8 HOMESTEAD 4.

Household Characteristics

- Brother to Mr. Ngira and Mama Sammy.
- Young couple married in 1994 and living at man's place of work outside the District
- Family on the move but with spiritual centre at 'home'
- Eldest girl a form 2 in High school boarding while 2 younger boys in primary boarding school and joining parents during holidays. Last born two weeks old.
- T type stone bungalow with no external kitchen. And 4 external rooms in mud blocks for rent.
- No animals
- Electricity and water connection.

Dr. Maingi the last born of five in what is referred to as *Mbari ya Kamotho* or the Kamothos. He has the last of the three 0.9 acre farm which also carries the graves of their mother and father. He is a civil servant nutritionist doctor working in different hospitals as he is transferred. Currently he is working in Loitokitok general hospital.

The wife and children follow the father to every new station he is posted and they change schools if they are not in boarding school. Being away for most of the time, the family does very little farming and they have invested in the *Mikima* trees, (*Grevillea robusta*), which will one day be sold for construction timber. Dr. Maingi has recently invested in converting the little shamba into a traditional medicinal trees and fodder centre which is donating free seedlings to schools and other organizations. He calls it 'Green Farm Developers' The family decided to invest in a permanent place where they can call home in 1997, they decided to build a house at the 0.9 acre home in Mihuti. Where their people are, is what is referred to as home, whether those people are living or dead. It does not matter whether there is no house. It is home. The stone T type house was built in 1997 and the extension in 2010. Maingi's sister and neighbor keeps an eye on the place and the whole family visits the home over the school

holidays.



Fig. 5.38 The Kimothos. (Source: Author, 2012)

Mama Sammy's Place in the fore with Dr. Maingi's place beyond. Note the steep embankment planted with Napier grass to prevent erosion.

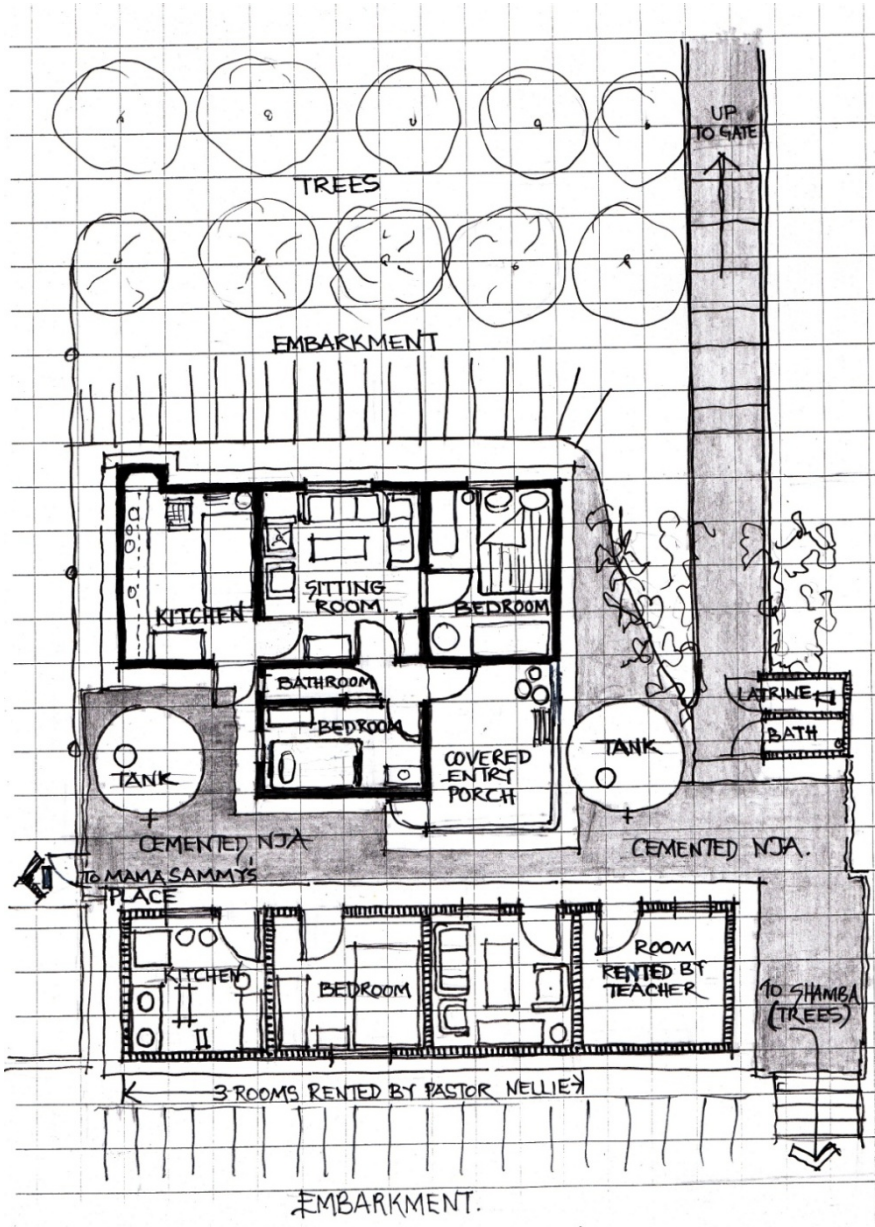


Fig. 5.39 Plan of Dr Maingi's Homestead. (Source: Author, 2012)

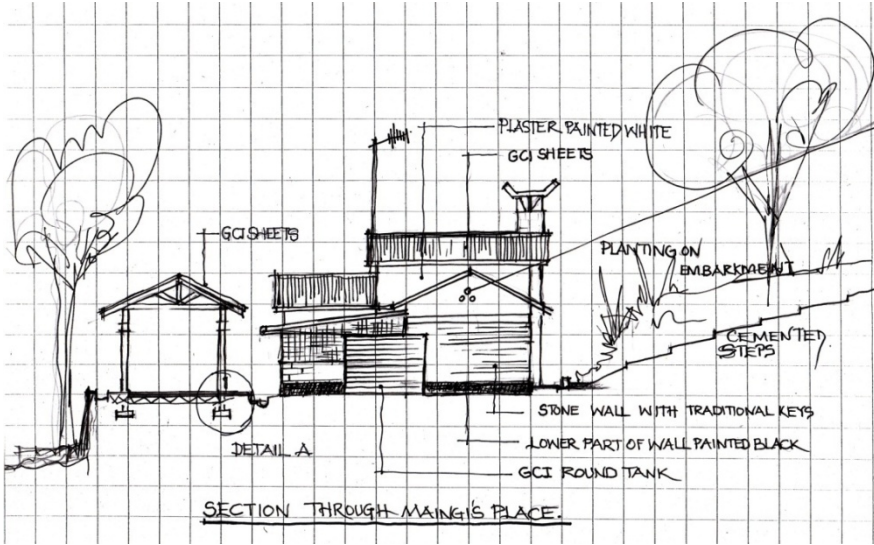


Fig.5.40 Section through Dr. Maingi's homestead (Source: Author, 2012)

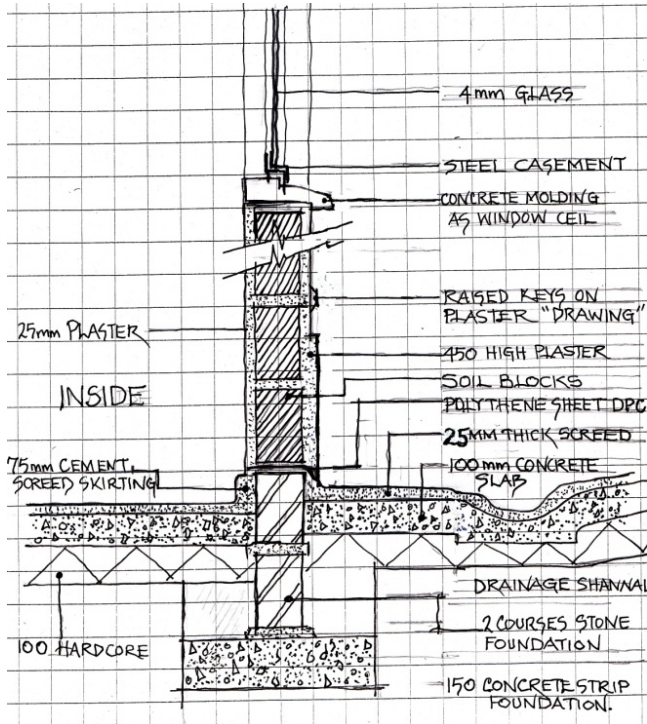


Fig. 5.41 Detail A. (Source: Author, 2012)

Left: Construction of mud block wall.

In 2010, the four external rooms were added each with its own external door and he put out word that they were for rent. One room was taken by a lady teacher in Mihuti while the other three were taken by the pastor of a new evangelical Church that was started recently in Mihuti. The pastor and her husband had fallen on hard times and had no house to return to when the husband lost his job in Nairobi, so they decided to return home but without a house, they found a room to rent behind one of the shops in Mihuti Centre. The lady, Pastor Nellie, then started a makeshift Church that met in the open air in the Mihuti Market and within a short time she had a sizable following, mainly young people dissatisfied with the conservative ways of the PCEA. On hearing of the three rooms, a kilometer from Mihuti Centre and accessed from the tarmac road, they grabbed the chance and are now comfortable in their rented three rooms. The Church has recently build a temporary structure in corrugated sheets and they have also bought 100 plastic seats and a few tables. It is a far cry from the imposing PCEA Mihuti Parish which feels omnipresent in local residents' lives.

Pastor Nellie's rented house is constructed with mud blocks and then given a cement plaster on the outside. The cement plaster is then put 'keys' to look like stonework. This is the newest trend in constructing walls and the process of decorating the blocks is known locally as '*gucora maturubari*' - to draw the blocks. The inside is plastered and painted to one's ability. Part of the popularity of this type of construction is the low startup cost and the ability to keep improving the construction as time goes. Maingi's house is an example of how the soil blocks have become accepted as the most logical way to build weighing in the issues of aesthetics, cost and durability for he had done the earlier house in stone. This trend is confirmed in many other homesteads I visited. It will be remembered that the newest construction at Wajee Camp, the office of the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya is also in the 'drawn' blocks. The important thing is the making of a good foundation with two courses of stone on a concrete strip foundation and the tying of the walls with a reinforced concrete ring beam. Once the wall has been plastered on the inside and outside, the inside is painted while the externals are 'drawn' to make them look like stone. The lower part of the wall up to about two feet above the plinth is given a black or brown oil based paint to make it easy to protect from the unsightly muddy splash from the rain. Another important detail is the construction of a concrete window ceil often also painted with the same red oxide paint of the floor cement screed.

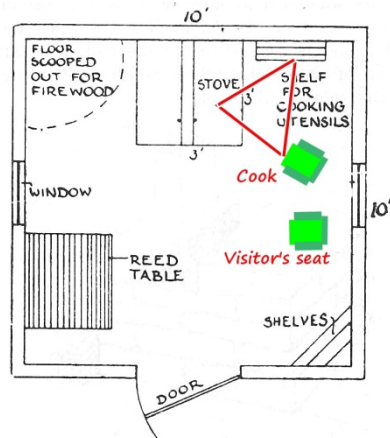
Mrs. Maingi's kitchen is the modern type built within the wall with a chimney and it is smokeless. She uses a higher chair with arms which is what is replacing the low 250 mm high kitchen seat. Her working triangle however obeys the traditional triangle and though the arm chair is cumbersome when swinging as the bottom swiveled best on a round stool. This kind of kitchen is almost to the letter what Koeune (1952) proposed.



Fig. 5.42 Mrs. Maingi in her Kitchen (Source: Author, 2012)

Most of these new kitchens with fireplaces set into the wall and a chimney are free of smoke as Koeune 1952 proposed. though they still use firewood. Paraffin, gas and charcoal stoves are also used in these kitchens.

Fig. 5.43 Working triangle in Koeune's proposal works in the same way as Mrs. Maingi's kitchen. (Source: Author, 2012)



Mrs. Maingi's external open space has been cemented and is kept clean by washing it with water rather than the traditional sweeping. From the road, her entry is also done with concrete steps. This is because traditionally, the steep incline was very slippery during the rains and sometimes resulted in accidents. Those who can afford it now lay building stones or cement the steps like Mrs. Maingi's. The form of the main house with its dynamic and busy roof form is influenced by peri-urban Thika Road architecture which is familiar to Dr. Maingi. Neighbors criticize it for being overly wasteful and especially for the

solution of the sitting room which looks double-storey but is not. Because of the cementing of the entire *Nja* and the lack of intimate dialogue with the planting, the homestead unlike the Ngira's has an urban feel to it and one senses the lack of vitality and warmth that is evident at the Ngiras and other daily-lived environments.

The house has a water connection from the Othaya-Mukurwe-ini water project and also connected to the Kenya Power and Lighting's Mukurwe-ini Rural Electrification Program.



Fig. 5.44 Method of handling slope (Source: Author, 2009)

Left: quarry stone steps at Mama Sammy's and right, cemented steps at the Maingis

5.0.9 HOMESTEAD 5.

Homestead Characteristics

- Middle aged couple living in a 1970 off-cut Timber L Type house roofed in GCI sheets and cement floor. They are a few homesteads away from the Kamothos.
- Two young unmarried daughters, one with a 13 year old boy in school at the Mihuti Primary school
- Married son in a separate T type house with a 9 year old son. Wife operates a salon along the Mihuti road near Wajee camp.
- Married daughter living away in her own home.
- Two cows, 15 chickens and a cat.
- Water and electricity connection.

This is a typical L type house and is also on a very steep slope making the external space very tight. The son and the animals have to build below the father's house because of the narrowness of the overall *shamba* and the slope gets even steeper. To get from the upper main house to the son's house or the cow shed requires careful maneuvering especially during the rains. Ultimately they will have to invest in proper concrete steps as others have done on such a site.



Fig. 5.45 The Gitata Homestead as seen from the road. (Source: Author, 2012)

The first girl Peris is married in Nakuru and the second helps her parents with the chores around the home and especially cooking. She has a young 9 year old son who schools at the Mihuti Primary School. The third girl, Mary does tailoring in the house by order. She does the sewing in her room. She is also a freelance artist and draws advertising signs for the local shops. In her free time she does her own uncommissioned art pieces which she sells as wall hangings in homes. The father is a former manager at the Mukurwe-ini Cooperative Farmers

Society but has been a full time farmer for quite some time now. He keeps chickens and a dairy cow. He is a diploma graduate in theology at St Paul's Theological College, Kikuyu. Mrs. Gitata is a housewife and active in local church affairs.

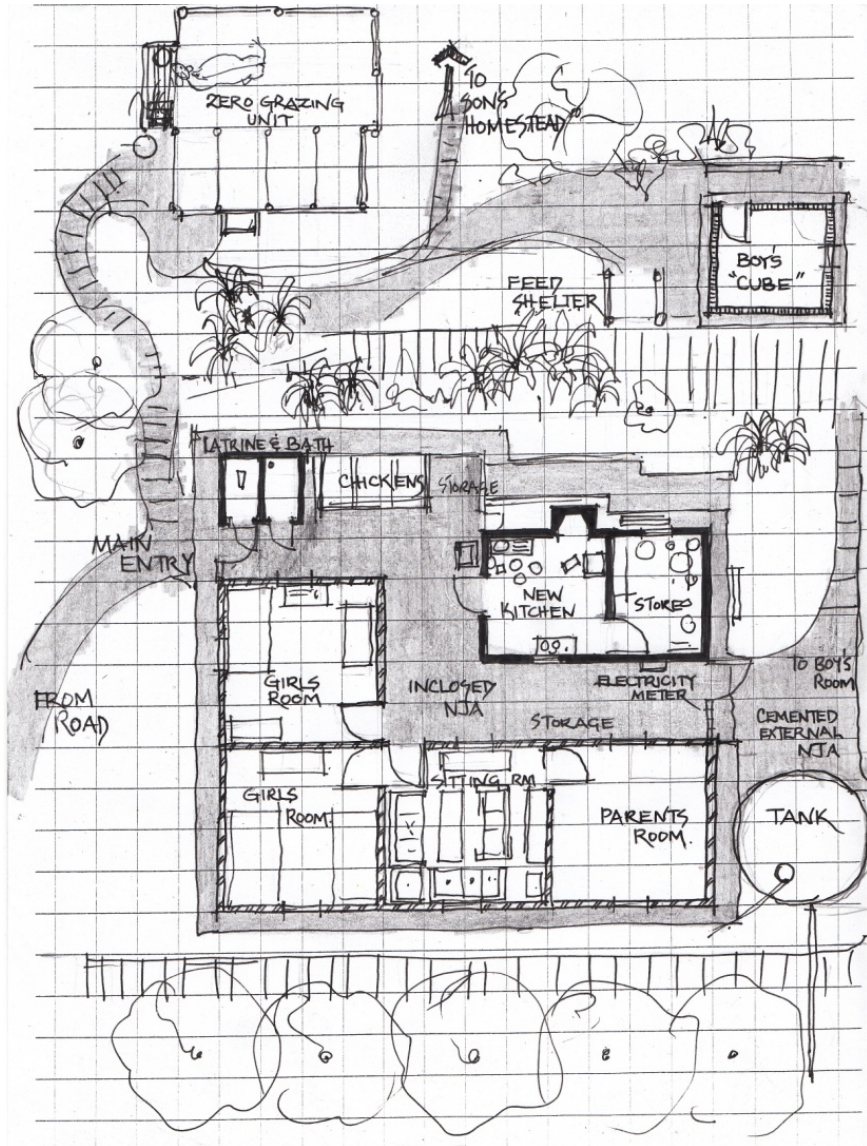


Fig. 5.46 Plan of Mr. Gitata's Homestead.(Source: Author, 2012)

The timber walled kitchen built with the house in 1970 was replaced with a stone walled one in 2010 when the young boy's room, (cube) was built. The boy has now moved into his cube and is yet to put his personal stamp to it. The Kitchen is the Koeune type that is now in favor where the cooking space is in one wall is within a fireplace with a chimney. This makes the person cooking sit sideways in relation to the visitors on her left while the working triangle is to her right. For conversation she has to literally lift her chair and turn it unlike the pivoted smooth movement of the traditional chair. These new type of kitchens are also usually equipped with a stainless steel sink and running water. The rack for drying utensils is built to one corner just as Koeune proposed and the rest of the space is used as storage for various foodstuffs. The cupboard for milk and tea leaves, etc. is still next to the cook. The main plates and glasses are in a display wall unit in the living room. Food is served in the kitchen and brought to each person in a plate. Tea is brought in a vacuum flask and served in cups from the wall unit. Another cupboard holding Mrs. Gitata's precious items is in her bedroom.

When the new kitchen was built, the little external space was cemented and the chicken area built along one wall next to the new toilet and bath. Because it is cemented, it is easy to clean the chicken area, which is done every morning by one of the girls. The cementing on the other side towards the old pit latrine and tank area was also done together with cemented steps to the young boy's cube.

James, Baba Wachira, the oldest son's homestead is a simple three roomed affair typical of a young man who has married and moved out of the cube. Normally, a young man does not marry into the cube built for him by his father but works hard to build a new house. He is a local *fundi*, or 'engineer' trained in carpentry and masonry at the Kimathi Institute of Technology, Nyeri. When the road started being tarmacked, he got a job with the road construction company and has built the house a year ago out of the earnings. The wife is also doing well at a local salon near Wajee's entrance as she is considered very good with modern hairstyles. He built the house himself using his spare time and also takes contracts to build for other home builders locally. He was also the builder of his father's new kitchen. When he is consulted, he provides the client with plans. The plans and all the details are usually in his head and not necessarily drawn out. The client merely mentions the number of rooms he wants and what materials he wants for the walls and a house like so and so's. His main priority now is to save for a kitchen for his wife as she is in a GCI sheets 5x6 feet temporary affair. He also wants to plaster the mud blocks and draw them.

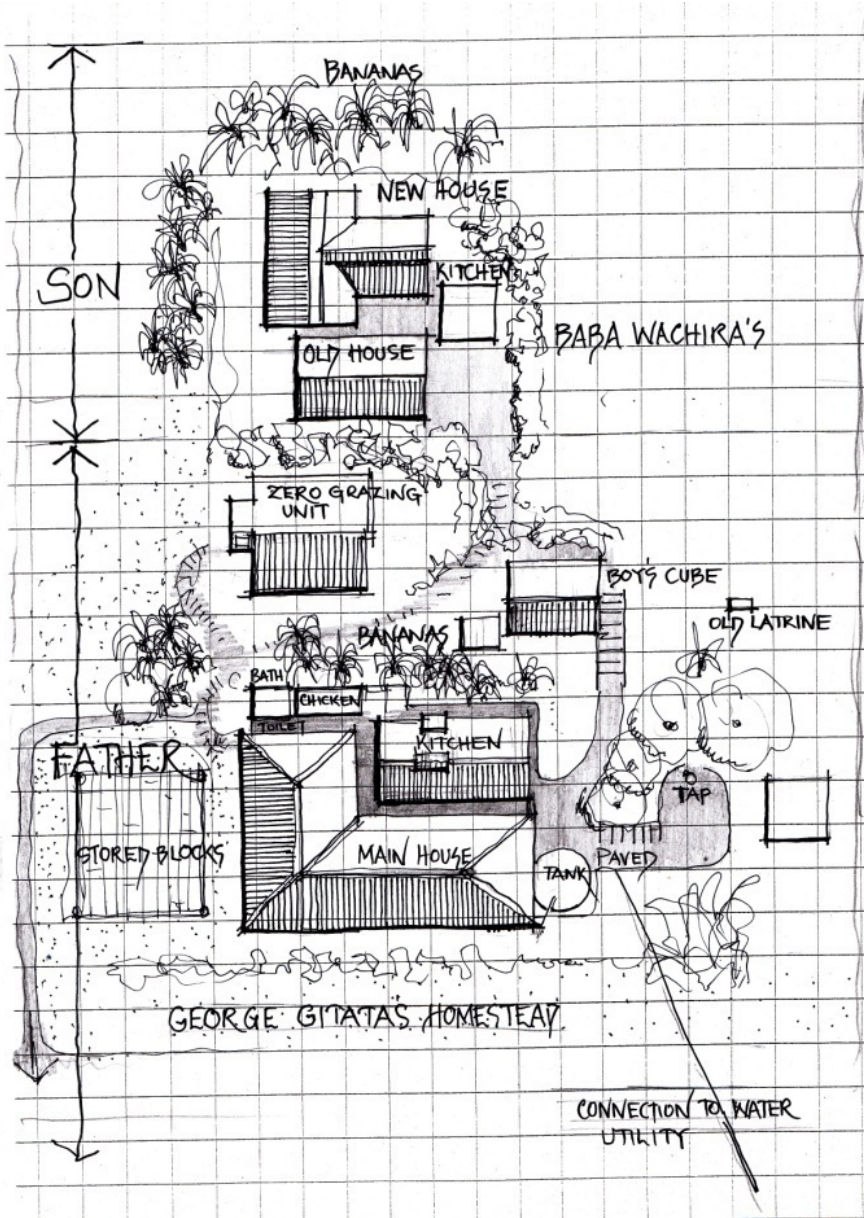


Fig. 5.47 Layout of George Gitata's homestead (Source: Author, 2012)

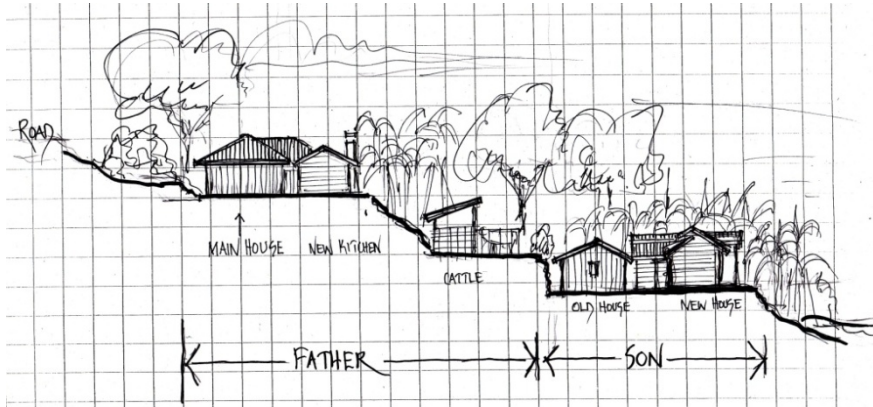


Fig 5.48 Section showing relationship of the father and son homesteads. (Source: Author, 2012)



Fig. 5.49 Baba Wachira's Homestead. (Source: Author, 2012)
The tiny 4x5 feet kitchen is visible to the right.

5.0.10 HOMESTEAD 6

Homestead Characteristics

- Homesteads 5,6,7 are brothers like Homestead 2,3,4
- Retired Commandant of Police with his wife in a stone bungalow and external stone kitchen.
- Clearest example of temporaneous development which is a distinguishing characteristic in all homesteads.
- Old L type 1980 timber house being demolished and a four roomed mud block house under construction.
- Last born girl in Form 4 High School and lives with parents during holidays.
- Keeps two dairy cows, several chickens, a couple of goats, a cat as well as doing subsistence farming.

The Churchils got married in 1976 while he was working in Nairobi and after discussing the future together decided that the wife live in the rural home and for the man to support her financially with remittances every month. Their union produced 6 boys and 2 girls. One of the girls is already married and the other in High school. One of the sons has married and established his home just below his father's. The rest are in Nairobi and Nyeri.



Fig 5.50 The Churchill's homestead seen from above. His son and brother's homesteads are glimpsed beyond through the vegetation. (Source: Author, 2009)

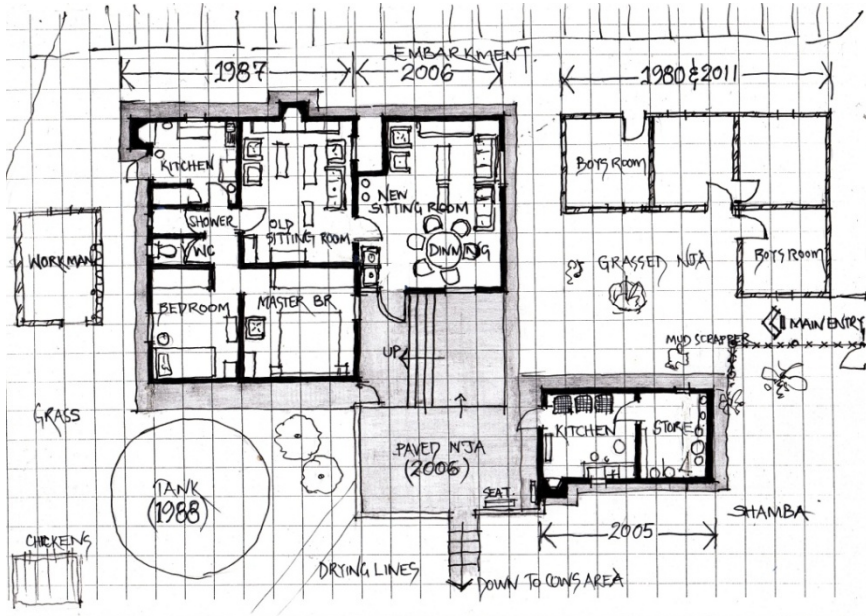


Fig. 5.51 Mr. and Mrs. Churchils' Homestead (Source: Author, 2012)

The Churchil's homestead illustrates the principle of incremental building and renewal that is a characteristic feature of these rural homesteads. They say in Kikuyu, '*Ndiambaga na magua*' meaning that the bee does not start with the making of the whole comb but slowly builds it to a formidable construction inside the hive. This captures well Mr. Churchil's experience in building his home. The bee collecting nectar from various stations afar and bringing it home to the queen bee is also a good description of the Churchil's. The Churchil's build the first 4 roomed house in 1980 in timber off-cuts and a beaten earth floor. In 1987 the stone house was built with 3 bedrooms and the wife and girls moved into it while the boys remained in the timber house. The first stone tank was built in 1988. In 2005 A new kitchen in stone was built to replace the timber off-cuts kitchen and an extension to the main house was built adding a new seating and dining room. The *Nja* was also cemented and defined with a low wall making it look like the Tswana *Nja* - Lolwapa (Larsson, 1984). In 2007, the entrance road was made motorable and a mild steel gate was added. In 2011, the old timber house was demolished and a new one in sun-dried blocks erected on the footprint of the old. The animal shelters were also build sequentially and upgraded to the current Ministry standard animal shelters. Mr. Churchill used to visit his family every few months and on his annual leave. The wife used to visit him more often and spend a weekend at his police quarters before returning home to the children. This is a very common arrangement with rural couples where the man is living in

the city. Today this kind of arrangement is looked down upon by young couples and the lady usually stays with the man at his work place.

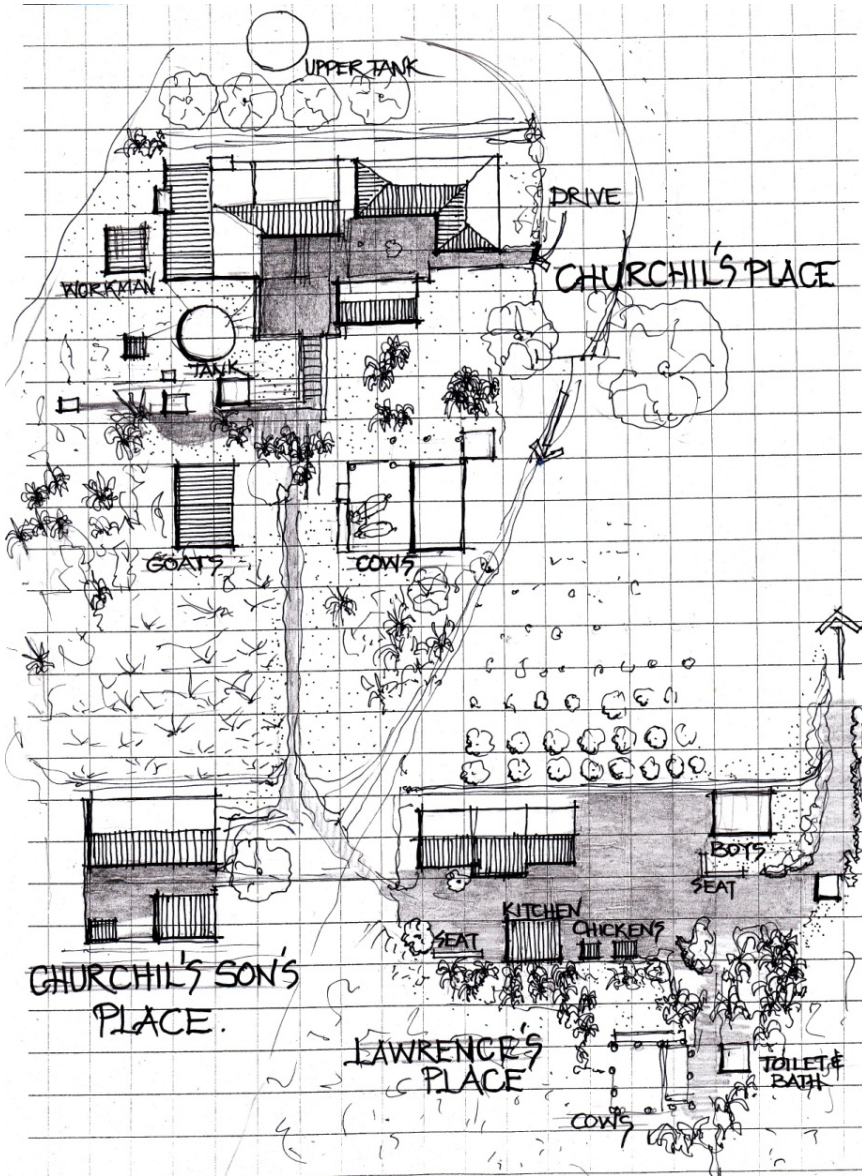


Fig. 5.52 Layout of Churchill's Homestead showing relationship with son's and brother's homestead. (Source: Author, 2012)

The inside of the Churchill's seating room is furnished tastefully with modern sofa sets and an eight seater dining table. The walls are decorated with framed family pictures and pictures and decorations of his police career. A notable picture is of the police commandant in a function with the President Mwai Kibaki and late Internal Security Minister Michuki. The old sitting room is now Mr. Churchill's private sitting room as Mrs. Churchill sometimes hosts many church guests as a leader in the local Woman's Guild movement. She has an NHC type kitchen in the main house having a table-top gas cooker and the main outside kitchen which is the Koeune type build into the wall with a chimney. Sometimes she uses main house NHC kitchen when she wants something fast but she prefers the wood fire in the main kitchen. Her seat is an arm chair the height of a normal dining chair at around 450mm and is the new preferred height for the cook's seat.



Fig. 5.53 Use of the Mukima tree (*Grevillea robusta*) in construction. (Source: Author, 2009)

Left: Used here in the furniture of the Gitata's by local craftsmen.

Right: Used in T&G ceiling and given a clear varnish

There is no homestead without a pit latrine and Churchill's is no exception. Visitors will never use the internal toilet and will always be directed to the pit latrine.



Fig. 5.54 Control of levels in the paved Nja (Source: Author, 2009)

Left: View of main Nja very like the Tswana Lolwapa.

Right: View from animal's area showing steps to pit latrine, and bathroom.

5.0.11 HOMESTEAD 7

Homestead Characteristics

- Younger married brother to Charles Gitata living with his wife in a 3 roomed timber house with beaten earth floor and large beaten earth *Nja*.
- Subsistence farmer on 2 acre of land
- 5 boys and 6 girls.
- Last boy in Form 3 living in 'cube' and girl in form 3 living in main house room.
- 1 married son living in his late grandmother's granary 50 meters from the compound
- 1 unmarried son in new 3 roomed mud block unplastered house at his grandma's former homestead.

Description of the Homestead

The land slopes steeply from the road and then flattens out below like a seat, therefore Mr. Gichimu decided not to locate his homestead near the road as is customary. This caused his homestead to benefit from a substantial *Nja* and it feels very comfortable. When I was speaking to him for the first time we sat at the *Nja* seats and the form 1 girl came out to sweep the *Nja*. The *Nja* was very clean and I wondered what she was sweeping and then I realized it was a clever pretence to eavesdrop the conversation her dad was having with the stranger.

The inside of the sitting room and *Nja* was nothing special and everything seemed like it was meant to be where it was. The girl's room showed signs of a serious scholar. Many a professor including the Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai studied in just such a room and with such a lamp. This is the *Jua Kali lamp*, *kagwatira* that is also used in almost all external kitchens. It is held by the cook's assistant when a close scrutiny of something in the kitchen is needed. Literally the name means 'the small hold-for-me.' For the poorer homesteads the Diez lamp is used for the table room and the *kagwatira* to light the other rooms



Fig. 5.55 The Kagwatira lamp (Source: Author, 2009)

This particular one is made from an old insecticide spray can.

Fig. 5.56 Right: Girl's unpretentious study room. (Source: Author, 2009)



Fig. 5.57 The Gichimus *Nja*. (Source: Author, 2009)

Young girl sweeping the *Nja* and boy's 'cube' at far end

Fig. 5.58 The Gichimus *Nja* 2. (Source: Author, 2009)

Mr. Gichimu sitting in the *Nja* with a research assistant. The kitchen is to their right.





Fig. 5.59 Woman carrying water from the river. (Source: Author, 2009)

The Gichimus do not have a water connection or electricity and they get the water from the storage tank but since it is small it quickly runs out a week or two after the rains. They fetch water in the traditional way from the river and transport it on twenty liter plastic containers either in the traditional way a woman carried loads on her back or if it is a man, he carries the container on his shoulder. The lid of the container is sometimes the traditional banana stopper, mukoro. The *Kasuku* she is holding with her right hand is used to fill the container. Today the plastic *Kasuku* has replaced the traditional half round calabash, *kameni* for this purpose and even in the marketplace where it is used as a measure.



Fig. 5.60 The plastic water containers. (Source: Author, 2009)

They are stored next to the kitchen in the same way the traditional *ndigithu* was placed next to the ram fattening pen in the Nyumba.

The Old Granary

When the Gitatas' mother passed on several years ago, her house which had been one of those mud and wattle L types of 1959 was left without an occupant and it soon fell into serious disrepair. Recently it was demolished and the materials used by one of the unmarried sons of Gichimu to build a three roomed house. The old homestead is now a heap of earth and will soon be the best banana patch. The other son has occupied the granary with a young wife and has built the makeshift 4 feet by 4 feet external kitchens that do not even have a door. The utensils are carried into the granary/house every evening. The old

woven granary nestled in the banana groves looks like it is in a world of its own far from the rest of the world. It is like what (Bachelard, 1994) calls a nest house; “old, warm and cozy”. It’s the perfect love nest for a young couple.



Fig. 5.61 Grandma’s granary now in use as a house. (Source: Author, 2009)

The insides are lined with packing carton material and decorated with newspapers and calendars.



Fig. 5.62 The makeshift 4 feet by 4 feet kitchen. (Source: Author, 2009)

5.0.12 HOMESTEAD 8

Homestead Characteristics.

- 75 year old retired headmaster with wife also a retired teacher on a 2 acre farm with a constantly transforming main house. Along the same road between the Kamothos and the Gitatas.
- Modern goat farmer who has pioneered the new German breed of milking goats to the area and teaches others on the methods of its rearing.
- Drives an old pick-up car.
- Cow belongs to Mrs. Nyaga
- One Doberman dog and a cat
- Water and electricity connection.

The Homestead

Mr. Nyaga, and his brother grew up with their father in a shop in Mihuti shopping centre after their mother died when they were quite young, his father having owned a shop. His father Mwai was one of the boys who first accepted Christianity in Mihuti area and as a Christian was one of the first people in the area to build a rectangular house. Mr. Nyaga’s older sister, Thibora, (Zipporah) is married several kilometers away joined us by mobile phone. She is lucid and still remembers seeing as a young girl, the papyrus roofing, (*marura*), being prepared for the house and she believes it was built between 1933 to 1935. Mr. Nyaga drew a sketch for me of the house they grew up in. It had an external rectangular kitchen at the back and a two roomed rectangular house in front that was used by his father as a traditional man’s abode, *thingira*. Goats were housed in a round hut next to the main house. All the units were walled in mud and wattle construction. Wattle, (*Acacia mearnii*), had been introduced into Kikuyuland near the beginning of the Twentieth Century as a cash crop, to produce bark used for tanning leather and it turned out that its posts and young saplings were ideal for the construction of mud walls. The *thingira*, and the kitchen were roofed with flat tin sheets made from used flattened 20 litre paraffin containers. The main house was roofed with papyrus, *marura*.

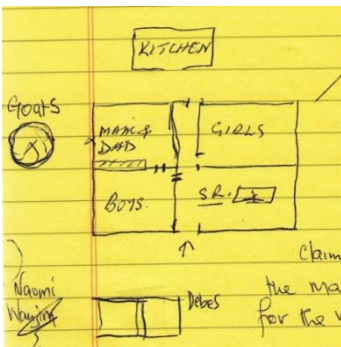


Fig 5.63 The Mwai’s at around 1935. (Source: Nyaga wa Mwai, 2010)

This house was a result of the campaign to separate the kitchen from the main house in order to eliminate smoke from the sleeping quarters. The removal of the goat was also a reaction to the forces of modernization as set forth in *The Book of Civilization*. According to Nyaga's description, it was built as per Williamson's proposal in Fig. 4.19

After the death of their mother in 1947, the family moved into another homestead when their father remarried. Mr. Nyaga could not remember much about his stepmother's homestead as he and his brother started living with their father in a room behind their father's shop at Mihuti. The first house was demolished when the second one was put up and this second one was moved to the emergency village in 1952.

In 1954 Mr. Nyaga started his teaching career and bought his first Philips radio in 1957. In 1959 he moved from the shop (His father and two sons were allowed to stay in the shop during the emergency) and built a three roomed mud and wattle house at the current site in 1960 around the time he got married. This was roofed with tin sheets and a rammed earth floor. The rest of the family moved back to the former site of the stepmother's house. Mr. and Mrs. Nyaga had 3 boys and 4 girls.

In 1977, the mud and wattle house was demolished to give way to a three roomed timber walled house with corrugated iron sheets. The floor was cement plastered. The tin sheets were used to roof the granary and a small external kitchen in mud and wattle. In 1986, the main house timber walls were removed and the same roof supported by sun-dried mud blocks. The internal wall was finished in cement plaster and white paint while the external wall was finished with a rough plaster spray painted a cinnamon colour. The floor was repaired and the embankment at the back of the house was retained with rough stonework. New steel casement windows were installed. It is at this time that the first goat house was built.



Fig. 5.64 Mr. Nyaga's Main House. (Source: Author, 2009) The walls are mud block with a rough spray plaster on the outside and painted a cinnamon color.

This picture was taken before the new wall separating the entrance path with the kitchen *Nja*. Mr. Nyaga's homestead is an example of dealing with a very difficult slope and to enter it from the main Mihuti road he has had to construct a motorable road for his pick-up. The gate has been moved recently to a point near the road and the pedestrian entrance is kept open till late evening when Mr. Nyaga himself closes it and opens it early in the morning for the young man who helps with the goats. The young man sleeps in another homestead.

In 2007, on retirement from teaching as a headmaster in Muthaiga primary school in Nairobi, Mr. Nyaga returned home and had an internal kitchen and bathroom added. The new kitchen was constructed in stone wall and finished on the outside in the same way as the sun-dried blocks so that no one could tell the difference. The road was redone so that the pick-up could be housed in a garage next to the external kitchen. And the goat area was expanded to accommodate up to thirty goats. He says that he did not want a lower standard of living after retirement and therefore the rural house was equipped with the modern facilities of internal shower and WC. as he had in Muthaiga. He believes he has a better life now than then.

Mrs. Nyaga continues to use the external kitchen which she prefers to the new kitchen. She says that cooking while standing is tiresome and that the new kitchen is cold. She also feels a sense of ownership of the kitchen area which she does not feel in the new kitchen. Probably if the new extension had been done connecting it to the old kitchen it might have worked better for her, but as it is she feels that she is intruding into her husband's zone. Nyaga usually sits on a chair next to the door of the main house and meets his colleagues there. There is a steady stream of men visitors especially those who come enquiring on goat farming. In 2010, Mr. Nyaga moved the granary to the area behind the tank and sealed off the women's zone with a screen wall so that Mrs. Nyaga and her visitors are not disturbed by the men visitors. This division also works well when there is a function in the home like Christmas when children and grandchildren can fill the place. All the children are married and living away in their own homes.

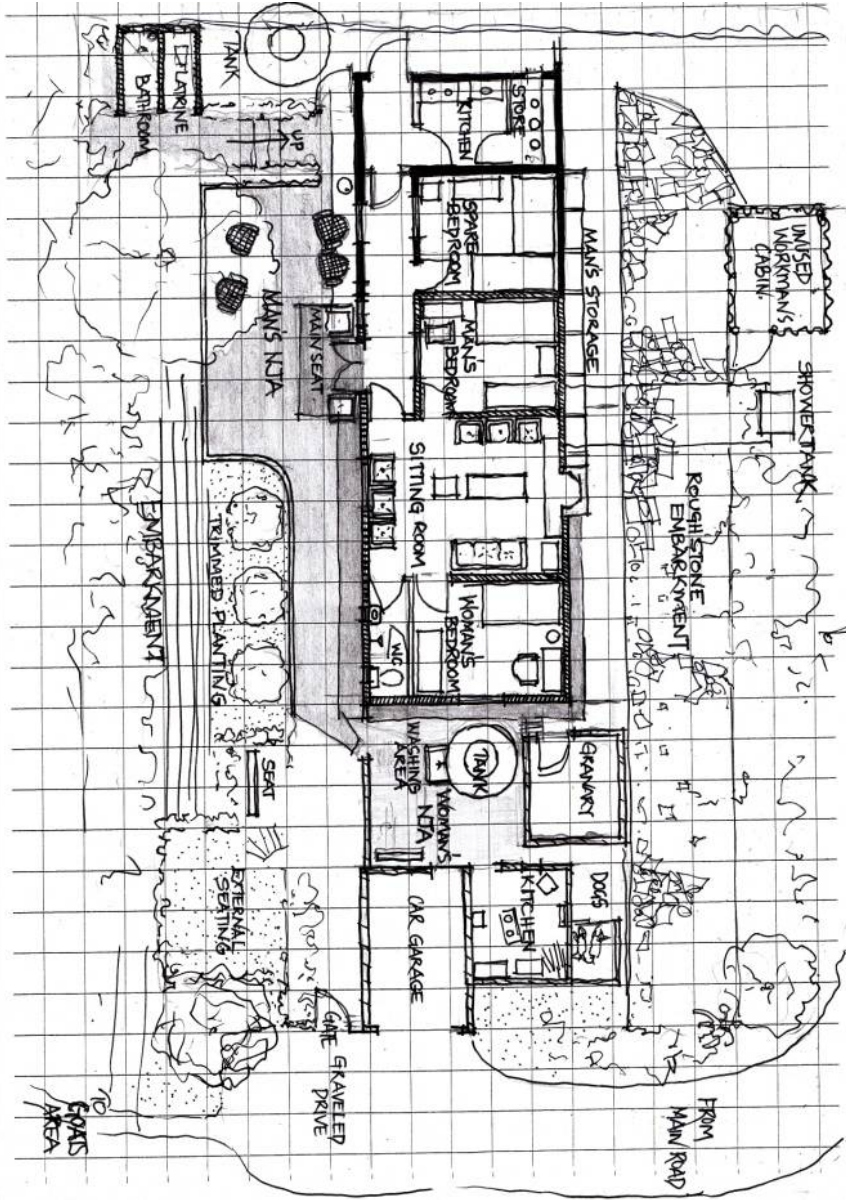


Fig. 5.65 Layout plan of the Nyagas' homestead. (Source: Author, 2009)

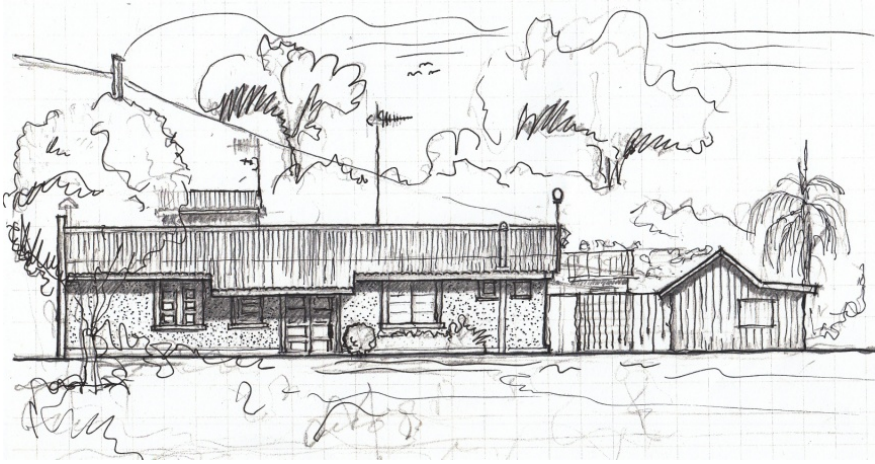


Fig. 5.66 Front elevation of the Nyagas homestead. (Source: Author, 2009)

The inside of the house also has this strict division with Mr. and Mrs. Nyaga having separate bedrooms. He explained to me that when couples reach a certain age and their bones are creaking, they need separate beds. He has his storage very well laid out behind the house and her storage in a granary inside her *Nja*. The four metal seats he had done for his *Nja* were inspired by the traditional *gikonjo* seats which are popular for external spaces especially in the bar and restaurants. He had the cushions made for them because they sometimes get cold and uncomfortable.



Fig. 5.67 Feeding time at the goathouse.

(Source: Author, 2009)

The floor of the walking area is paved with quarry stone while the sleeping areas has raised timber floors with gaps just enough to allow the droppings to pass through and leave the sleeping area absolutely clean.



Fig. 5.68 Construction of the goathouse.

(Source: Author, 2009)

Cornucopia of traditional and modern materials mirroring Mr. Nyaga's mind as a modern traditionalist.



Fig. 5.69 The man's seat (Source: Author, 2009)

Mr. Nyaga meeting with a visiting group of goat farmers and seated at his favorite armchair next to the door.



Fig. 5.70 Mr Nyaga's modern *gikonjo* seat in mild steel made by local craftsmen. (Source: Author, 2009)



Fig. 5.71 Popular traditional *gikonjo* seat made by local craftsmen. (Source: Author, 2009) This cute seat was a local interpretation of the *Mzungu*, (white man) dining chair. It began to appear in local hotels and homes in the early 50s.

| 5.0.13 HOMESTEAD 9

Homestead Characteristics

- Middle aged couple in a 1958 U + L Combo type about 200 m on the opposite side of the road from the Nyagas
- Mud and wattle construction with GCI roofing.
- sons and 5 daughters all living away except last daughter who is in High School
- Very mild slope.
- One cow, two goats and several chickens.
- No electricity or water connection



Fig. 5.72 U side of Mama Wangaris house. (Source: Author, 2009)

I visited Mama Wangari together with my contact person in the village one fine morning without appointment. I was surprised that there was no fence and no gate but I was to find out that my expectations and reality were two different things and I slowly learned to accept things as they are and not as I expect them to be. In this area of lower Mukurwe-ini, many homes have no gates and are simply walk-in affairs. The path to the house is what is defined.

Her husband has lived in Nairobi practically all his working life. She and her husband married in 1976 and he has worked in Nairobi since his youth. The

house was built by his father and that is where they grew up as 3 brothers and five girls. They moved into it from the village in 1960. The father died in 1980 and the mom in 2006.

The family has been a Nairobi family since 1976, living in Bahati estate and they had 3 sons and 5 daughters. The children are all now married except the last girl who is in Form 4. Nyina wa Wangari moved from Nairobi seven years ago to take care of her ailing mother in law and after her death in 2006, briefly went back to Nairobi. After several burglaries and then the collapse of the old lady's former kitchen, she realized that her mother's house was going to ruin and decided to come back and revive it. They have already have bought a number of sun dried mud blocks which are stored in the entrance porch of the house.

The U side has a front door to the table room at the recessed porch. There is also another door to the boys' room. Practically all visitors take the circuitous route to the back and announce from afar, "Who is here?" *Nuu uri guku?* Mama Wangari's house is a composite of the U and the L types. The short arm of the L at the back has her kitchen and opens into a *Nja* which was shared with the late mother's collapsed house. A room next to the kitchen holds the gardening things and plastic water containers and a portable chicken coop. She came out of the kitchen and after greetings, invited us as important guests to go round the way we came while she opens the porch door. Important guests like the Church Minister always use the porch door. We entered into a table room which obviously was not used much and she invited us to sit. From the kitchen side one enters the table room through the late old lady's bed space and the two rooms - one for the girl and the one near the main entrance being the mother's.

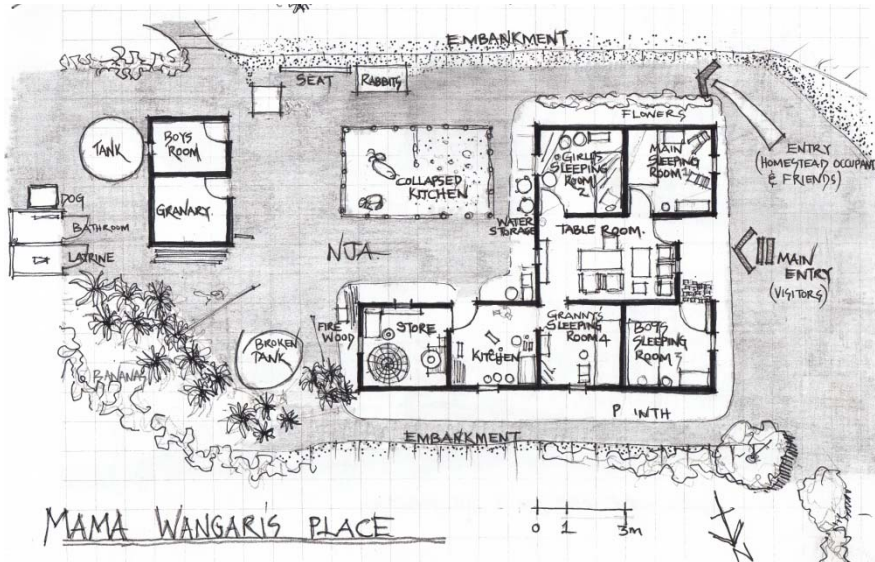


Fig.5.73 The Layout of Mama Wangari's place. (Source: Author, 2009)



Fig. 5.74 Elevations showing the handling of the slope. She is on one of the more gentle slopes. (Source: Author, 2009)

The main house is constructed in mud and wattle walls and finished with a cow dung and ash plaster while the roof is supported by sawn timber trusses and finished with GCI sheets. The floor is rammed earth and the doors and windows are in timber. As has been mentioned the wattle tree was introduced to Kikuyuland as a cash crop to produce bark for the tanning industry but quickly gained became the favorite for the construction of mud walled buildings. The one year old saplings are ideal for the cross members that actually hold the mud in place and could be turned into the round form as they are very flexible when freshly cut. Once they dry they become rigid and very strong holding the mud in place. Initially they were tied to the posts with their own bark which tightens as it dries making the joint very rigid. The saplings at the window are left in place providing a sort of burglar proofing. The windows of such houses are tiny at sometimes 1x1.5 feet and always opens to the inside. Usually the window is never actually opened and the rooms are dark.

The cow dung mixed with ash is a preservative from insects and fleas. A house that is regularly treated with this plaster never has fleas and spiders and the occupants are never infested with jiggers.



Fig. 5.75 Mud and wattle wall structure well exposed in collapsing wall. This is what happens to an unused mud house within a span of seven years. (Source: Author, 2009)

Fig. 5.76 Window showing the exposed wattle saplings.
(Source: Author, 2009)



Fig. 5.77 Inside Mama Wangari's house.

The great contrast in light between inside and outside gives a feeling of coolness to the house. (Source: Author, 2009)

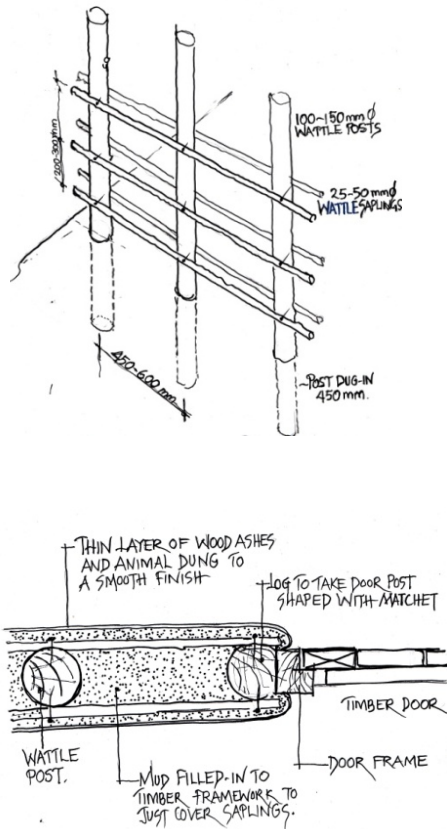


Fig. 5.78 Construction details of mud and wattle wall. (Source: Author, 2012)

6.0 Conclusions: observable trends and recommendations.

6.1.0 HOMESTEAD LAYOUT

It has been observed that the form of the *Nyumba* has transformed from the round to the rectangular form and the reasons for this have been discussed. Once the *Nyumba* became the “Main House” whether L, T or U, there seems to be certain things within the homestead that remained consistent while other things changed and others done away with. The *Nja* is still the central sun of the Kikuyu homestead and though shaped differently, it is still very much a gendered space and the men and women have their particular spaces though it seems the woman generally has the lion’s share of the *Nja* and the entire kitchen and its surroundings. The man is a secondary user of the *Nja* and more often than not, a small corner of the *Nja* is what is reserved to him. In trying to summarize the transformational steps taken, a look at homestead no. 6 or 8 which have a clear record of the transformations is representative of the general trends that have been observed. Homes are repositories of family memory and because Nyaga wa Mwai is a good story teller both orally and in built form, I have taken his home as an example of the transformations.

STAGE ONE: Nyaga wa Mwai’ Grandpa’s homestead. In the 1900s

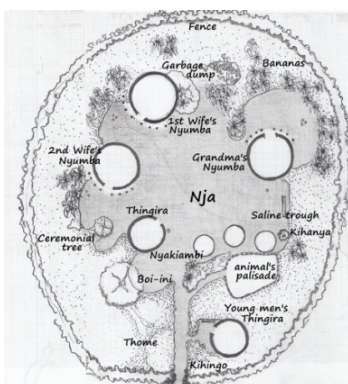


Fig 6.1 Traditional homestead as described in Chapter 3 (Source: Author, 2011)

Mr. Nyaga’s grandfather actually had two wives so his homestead could have closely resembled the one fully described in chapter two including the construction methods. As a young boy Mr Nyaga remembers this homestead and agrees with the descriptions documented here.

STAGE TWO: Nyaga wa Mwai’s father’s first homestead (1930)

Mwai, Nyaga’s father was one of the original Athomi who joined the Christian faith at its first contact with Mihuti. He was the boy who together with Newton Karumba were the first pupils of the first class held at around 1920 at the site of the current South Tetu Girls High School. Ten years later, and after having married he established one of the first homesteads which looked like the Williamson (1953) proposal (Fig. 4.19). The wall were in mud and wattle and roofed with papyrus reeds. The granary was the *gikonjo* type, square but roofed in thatch while the kitchen and his *thingira* were square and roofed in grass thatch. For the Nyumba, the simplicity of the old cosmic geometry with its clear centre fragmented into several spatial units without a clear centre.

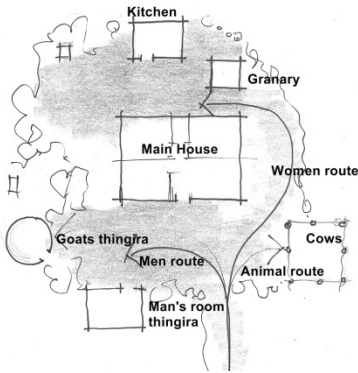


Fig. 6.2- Simon Mwai’s homestead in the mid 1930s. (Source: Author 2012)

The traditional *Nyumba* and homestead had been taken apart and reconstituted thus:

TRADITIONAL HOMESTEAD AND NYUMBA	MODERN HOMESTEAD AND MAIN HOUSE
Square kitchen, <i>riko</i>	External kitchen and table room
Woman’s bed, <i>uriri</i>	Parents bedroom
Girls’ Sleeping space, <i>kiriri</i>	Girls Bedroom
Boys in goats area, <i>kweru</i>	Boys Bedroom
Goats in goats area, <i>kweru</i> and <i>gicegu</i>	Goats external shelter
Corner storage, <i>gaturi-ini</i> , <i>thegi</i>	Storage Cupboards, and drawers
Man’s thingira	Parents bedroom.
Young men’s <i>thingira</i>	Cube
External granary, <i>ikumbi</i>	External granary
External space, <i>Nja</i>	External space, <i>Nja</i>
Cattle Boma, <i>kiugu</i>	Cattle Boma, <i>kiugu</i>
Nearby Bush	Pit Latrine
River	Bathroom

Table 6.1 Traditional Homestead Transformations. (Source: Author, 2012)

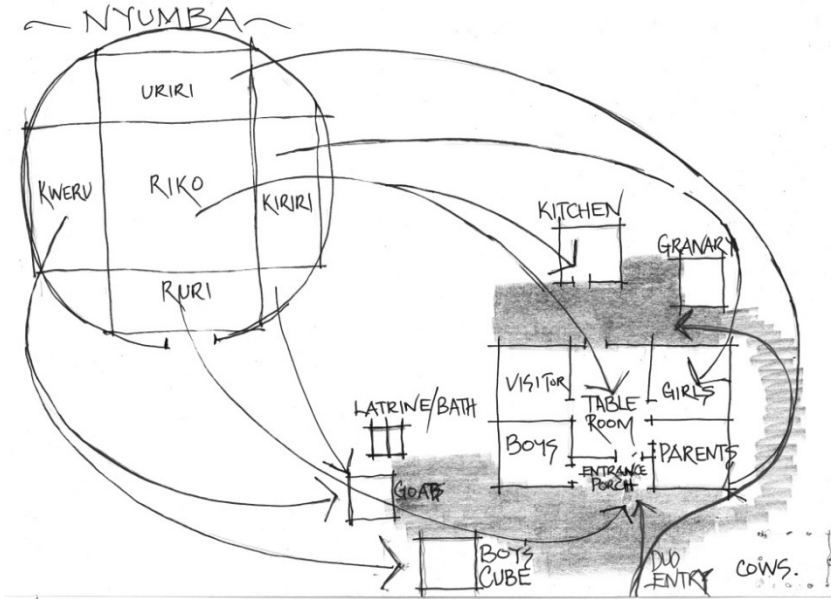


Fig. 6.3 How the cosmic clarity of the *Nyumba* and its environment fragmented into pieces. (Source: Author 2012)

STAGE THREE: Nyaga wa Mwai Homestead 1960

When Nyaga, Simon’s son built his house in 1960, the people were then leaving the Emergency villages and settling in the consolidated land. He built a three-roomed mud and wattle main house with an external kitchen in his present site. It was roofed with tin flat debe sheets as was the external kitchen. The floor was bare earth.

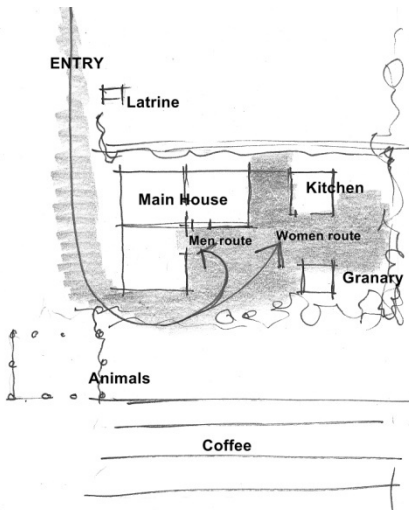


Fig. 6.4 Nyaga’s Homestead in the 1960s. (Source: Author, 2012)

STAGE FOUR: Nyaga's Homestead in 1977

In 1977 Mr. Nyaga demolished the mud and wattle L type and built I type 3 roomed timber framed structure with sawn timber walls. He says the main reason was for changing from mud and wattle to timber was dirt and he soon added a cement floor making the rooms cleaner. Because it had steel casement windows with glass and painted white walls on the inside it was bright and airy. A boy's cube was added above the house. Because of the steep slope, The *Nja* is the linear type but still of beaten earth. The various typologies and designs of the *Nja* are an interesting study which is beyond the scope of this thesis.

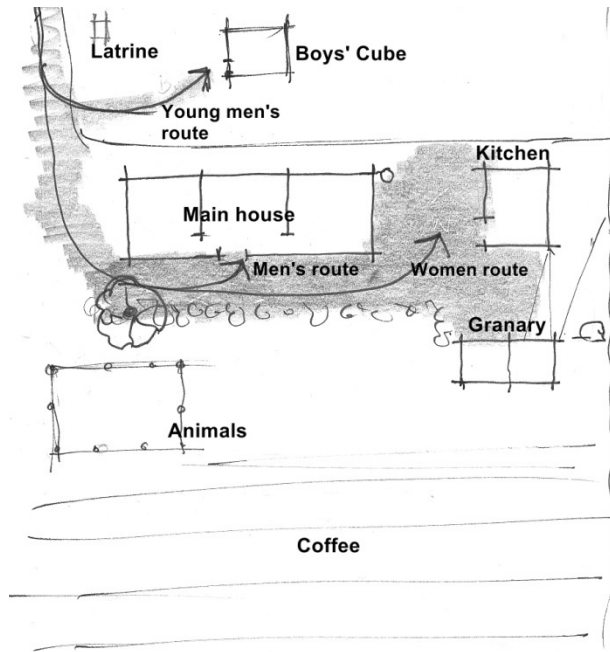


Fig. 6.5 Nyaga's homestead in the 70s. Sawn timber walls and GCI roof and cemented floor (Source: Author, 2012)

STAGE 5: Nyagas place in 2000s

In 1986, the main house timber walls were removed and replaced with sun dried mud blocks. The roof remained the same. The blocks were plastered and painted white on the inside while the outside was given a rough plaster finish and painted cinnamon. He gives the reasons for this as giving the house more warmth, better security and cleaner insides as he put in a cardboard ceiling which was also painted white. The timber walls despite being cleaner than the mud and wattle still let in a lot of dust. The steel casement windows were reused as were

the doors. A major change in the 1986 reconstruction was the change of the entry as he wanted a drive for his pickup. In 2007, another major improvement was the addition of one extra room, an internal kitchen and an internal shower and WC. These were built in stone walls and the roof continued from the previous. Once repainted, it looked perfectly like it was built together. Neither is it possible to tell where the mud blocks end and stones start. The *Nja* was also paved and electricity connected. His was the first homestead in the village to be connected and he paid to have it brought from Mihuti shopping centre, a distance of 500 meters. The cemented *Nja* is easier to clean and is becoming more and more popular. The goat area was also built in 2007. The idea of incremental growth and continuous development which is a major characteristic of the rural homestead is also clearly demonstrated by the Nyaga homestead. Within a rural homestead, something is always shifting and being remodeled continuously.

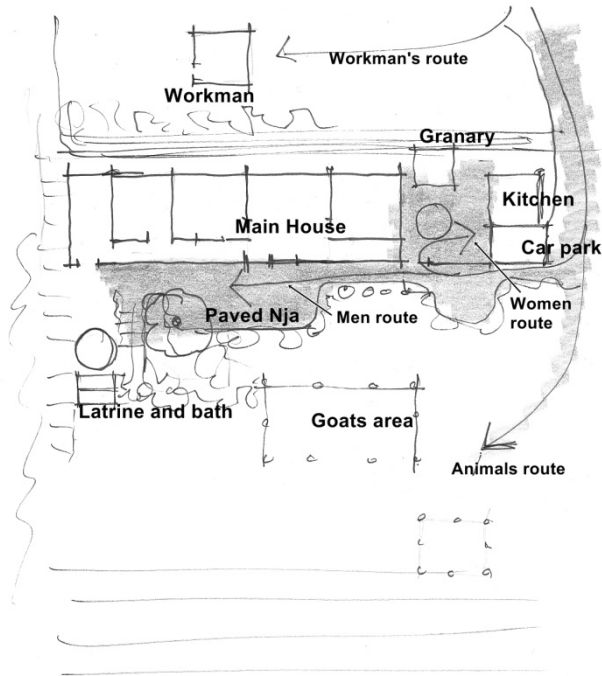


Fig. 6.6 Nyaga wa Mwai Homestead in the 2000s (Source: Author)

6.2.0 THE DEMISE OF THE GRANARY

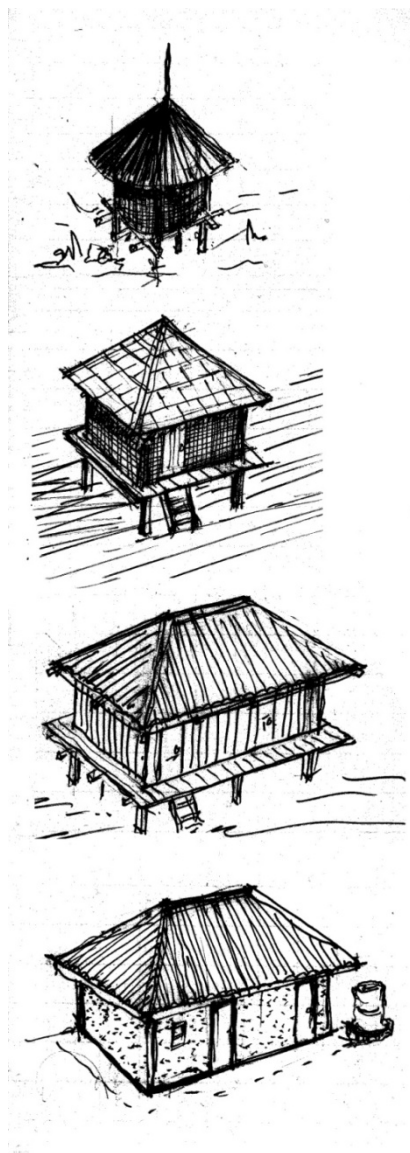


Fig.6.7 The demise of the granary. From a granary to store. (Source: Author, 2012)

STAGE 1

The traditional round basket weave, *gikonjo*, was made of the *mukigi* plant, (*Lantana camara*) prevalent in lower Mukurwe-ini. This was placed on a platform of logs and held on the sides with live *mukungugu* plants. (*Commiphora eminii*) It was roofed with a thatched cone and a spike at the apex.

STAGE 2

The traditional *gikonjo* wall construction was made as straight panels which were put together on an off-cuts raised floor. The stilts could be made of logs from any termite resistant tree like the *mutarakwa*, (*Juniperus procera*). The roofing at first was with *debe* flat sheets before GCI became the norm.

STAGE 3

The granary was bigger with sometimes an extra room and was made of off-cuts timbers and roofed with GCI sheets. Sometimes single quarry stones of about 2 feet high supported the timber platform. Some people use the space below to house chickens.

STAGE 4

The granary disappears and a room next to the external kitchen becomes the store, *Thitoo*. This store then holds all the farm implements, water storage vessels, sometimes chickens and other paraphernalia. Dry maize on the cob is stored on round pole beams at ceiling level. The granary, *Ikumbi*, is not built any more in modern homesteads.

6.3.0 THE KITCHEN

The kitchen, *riko*, even in a homestead where the man makes his presence felt, is still the woman's domain and most men will not even enter it. The women use it mainly with their daughters and the sons like their fathers, give it a wide berth. If they are circumcised they will rarely if ever enter it, but stay in their "cube" ..

The changes in diet over the last 100 years have had a significant impact on the type of implements in the kitchen as well and this has impacted on storage and work areas. The traditional fermented gruel made from sorghum and millet, *ucuru*, has largely been replaced with tea. This has meant that milk is now consumed fresh in the tea rather than in its fermented state. Honey and sugarcane juice, consumed traditionally in fermented beer have been replaced with white processed sugar and industrial beer that are produced elsewhere. Metal, glass and ceramic industrial plates and cooking pots have replaced the organic calabashes and earthenware pots. A selection of the elements found in the modern Kikuyu home are shown in the appendix 3.

The *gitaruru*, a traditional tray of many uses has survived probably because of its versatility. It is however used for such tasks as winnowing and not as a holder of the half round servings, *mataha*, of the traditional food, *irio*, described in page 45. Traditionally, "*nyungu ni ya ng'aragu ya thiku ithatu*" as the saying goes, meaning that the calabash servings, *mataha*, from one pot could keep the family for 3 days. The *mataha* were placed on a *gitaruru* which was made from the *Mugiyo* shrub. Thin strips of the soft branches were tied tightly together with the bark of the same shrub into a widening spiral tray of about two feet diameter. It was then smeared on both sides with a paste of cow dung. Because it was fibrous and the cow dung, it was very moisture hungry and when the *mataha* were placed on it the moisture was quickly sucked out of the food. Within hours, the food was as hard as a rock and could keep for three days without getting moldy. Today no woman will agree to place food on a cow dung smeared *gitaruru* as they have been educated by the students of *The Book of Civilization* that such traditional practices were unhygienic. In fact they are no longer smeared by the sellers in the market as the belief is that the cow dung is filth. On the contrary, it was a powerful preservative. The modern rural Kikuyu woman not having a fridge places her *irio* on a metallic tray for storage and within a few hours because of the steam, it is swimming in a slimy watery base. By the following day, it is moldy and smelly. If it is placed inside the cupboard, it becomes a stench. The *gitaruru* with food was usually placed on top of the granary basket below the roof where it was aired for several days and anybody could partake of it including travelers.

The transformation of the fireplace, *riko*, has been driven both by the need to get rid of germs, the smoke, the need to conserve fuelwood and the changes in

the nature of the fuel. The working triangle of the woman while cooking is still very much the same but this knowledge is also dying increasing the number of children in the burnt unit of the hospitals. The cupboard, *kabati*, has replaced the traditional store, *thegi*, and the form of the seats has kept changing. The fireplace position has kept shifting and it no longer holds everything within its orbit as a centre. This “moving the centre” is an apt metaphor for the shift from traditional to western habits or what people like Thiong’o (1993) in a book by that title call the *Cocacolonization* of the third world. Achebe called the phenomenal “Things fall apart” as he saw the clarity of the traditional ordering mechanisms seemingly fall apart and the systems “No longer at ease”

6.3.1 KITCHEN TRANSFORMATIONS

Stage 1: Traditional Kitchen, *Riko*

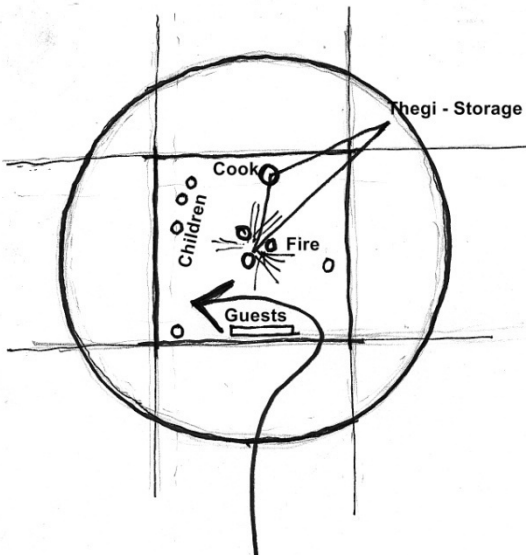


Fig. 6.8 The traditional riko.
(Source: Author, 2012)

The three-stone fireplace, *riko*, was at the centre of the square kitchen, *Riko*, which in turn was within the circle of the *Nyumba*. The cook sat on a four-legged stool and had to one side the storage, *thegi*. This completed her working triangle. The kitchen was the main family social space and in the evenings was full of children jovially telling and listening to stories and generally making noise. This kitchen typically had a beaten earth floor and a wood drying rack, *itara*. This kitchen is comprehensively discussed in chapter three of this thesis.

Stage 2: Typical external kitchen in timber, mud and wattle or mud blocks.

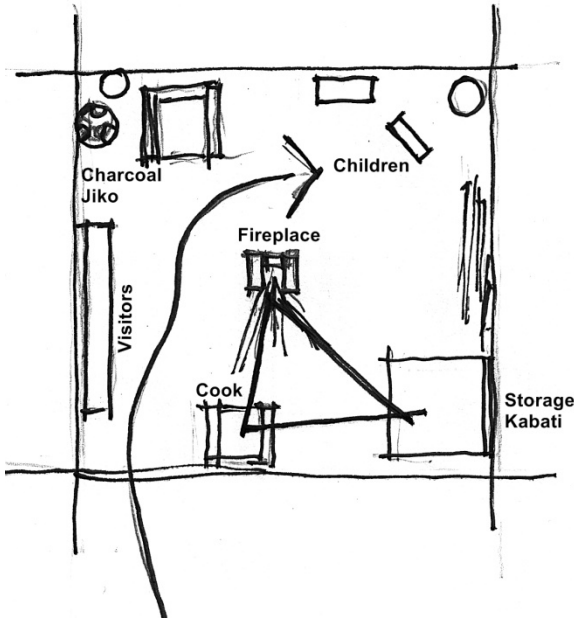


Fig. 6.9 the traditional kitchen stripped of its circular covering. (Source: Author, 2012)

This kitchen is usually a free standing structure on its own positioned in such a way that it creates a definite women zone within the homestead. All women visitors make a beeline to it and sensible men keep their distance. A man who approaches too familiarly is sometimes spattered with dirty or even hot water, ‘accidentally’. Many such ‘accidents’ when reported to the Chief or even the local police are usually dismissed as cases of drunkenness on the part of the man as the argument is that no sober man can endanger himself thus. A room sometimes attached to it serves as the grain storage or goat pen or for the grandma etc.

This kitchen began as a direct extract of the traditional square *riko* into a free standing square next to the main house. The three-stone fireplace has transformed into many forms through numerous experiments by the users in regard to fuel consumption, heat generation, and its focus within the social space. A more popular configuration of the stones is the three rectangular quarry stones arranged to have one opening facing the cook. The hand lantern, *kagwatira* is NEVER placed on top of the stones and this has become a modern prohibition or *thahu* for obvious reasons. The kitchen is usually eight feet by eight feet but can be as small as five or even four feet square. The position of the fireplace is still roughly in the centre though for the smaller kitchens it is usually positioned in a corner. The cook sits on a chair preferably with arms as she gets older, and her storage is a timber cabinet, *kabati* making her working triangle. Other people and

children still have the use of the kitchen as a social space though its supremacy is being eroded fast by the more enticing stories in the living room coming from the television set or radio. The floor is usually beaten earth and sometimes it is possible to still find a firewood drying rack, *itara* or a ram being fattened in one corner.

Stage 3: The chimney fireplace “Koeune” kitchen

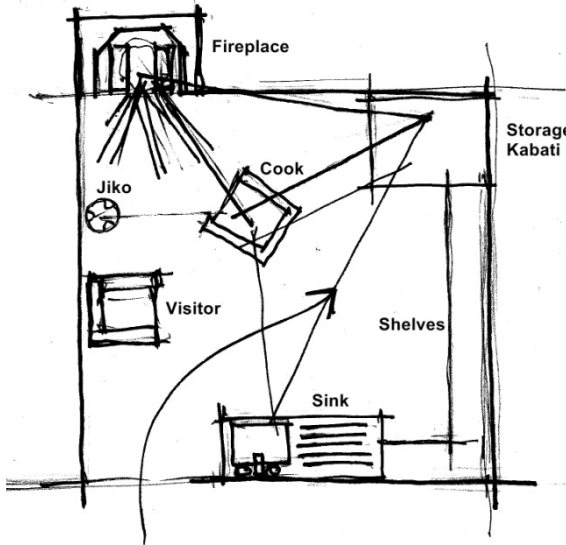


Fig. 6.10 The improved smokeless kitchen. (Source: Author, 2012)

This kitchen is still a free standing square outside the main house but can also have a store or room attached to it. It is either built with stone walls or sun-dried soil blocks and has a cemented floor. It usually has a sink with running water and sometimes electrical power. The main changes are that the fireplace now moves to one corner and the cook has the option of using firewood, a kerosene stove and a charcoal *jiko*. The charcoal *jiko* is lit outside and either brought inside the kitchen or left outside depending on the weather and other factors. The cook’s working triangle has now become extended to incorporate these new things and the result has been that the kitchen has little space for children and guests thus it has lost its role as the main social space. The cook is no longer at ease in regard to the children’s safety and therefore chases them away to the living room. There is now only one or sometimes two guest seats. This kitchen reminds one of the Koeune (1952) proposals. It is usually smoke free and has a cold antiseptic feel. The previous kitchens are much warmer, livelier and accommodative of children.

Stage 4: The Modern Kitchen

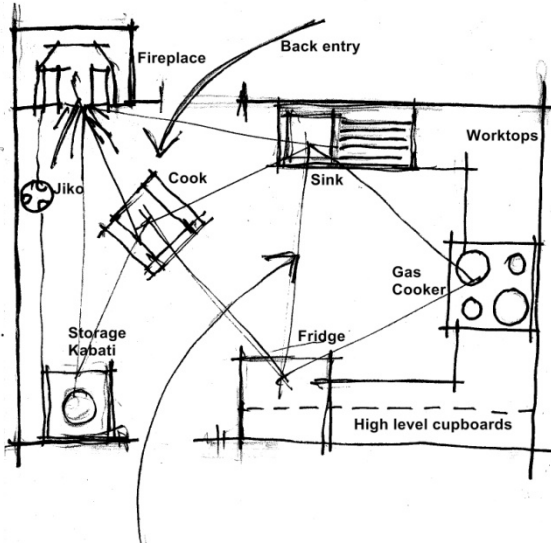


Fig. 6.11 The modern kitchen. (Source: Author, 2012)

The kitchen is now part of the main house and is a collection of several cooking areas and complex working triangles making it completely out of bounds for children as it is a dangerous minefield. The riko is now more rectangular than square and is actually a synthesis of several *rikos* or fireplaces. It has the chimney fireplace, a charcoal *jiko* near it, a gas cooker to one end and other cookers like paraffin stoves and even on occasion a microwave oven. The kitchen has an external door and more often than not there is an external kitchen with a traditional open fireplace. I was made to understand that because of social occasions, the main-house kitchen can never suffice and must always be supported by an external kitchen. This external kitchen often becomes the main kitchen. The modern rural kitchen is therefore several kitchens working together depending on the circumstances of the family.

The kitchen is now sometimes powered by electricity and there are gadgets like electric kettles and water dispensers – though the latter is usually in the living room. Because worktops have been provided, cooking has to be done while standing and this is usually the main dissatisfaction mentioned against the modern kitchen. A dining chair usually with arms is in the room for the cook to relax while food is cooking but because all work is done facing one wall or other, the kitchen is also criticized for its poor handling of the socialization function. Since the cook and her visitor or visitors cannot go into the sitting room as the children and husband are there, they end up reviving the external kitchen.

The battle for the hearts and minds of the rural soul is between the living room with its powerful mesmeric pull of global television, newspapers, radio and

internet and the traditional story telling environment of the kitchen embodying local knowledge and wisdom. It is the age-old search for the reconciliation of the masculine and feminine natures of the human soul. Ocol and Lawino.

6.4.0 TECHNOLOGY: FROM MUD AND WATTLE TO SUN-DRIED MUD BLOCKS

The process of making bricks in Mukurwe-ini dates back to the early days of the establishment of Mukurwe-ini Centre as a colonial chief's camp. Back in the 1920' the administration buildings were simple affairs in mud and wattle and roofed in grass. Around 1948 the government was more established and had began to put up more permanent structures. The area around Mweru near Mihuti had since time immemorial provided the people with the best cooking clay for pots. That low belt up to Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga had a type of clay that is almost pink or light purple. Further below that zone were the plains which were used as salt licks for the animals. At Mweru, during the state of Emergency in 1952-58 was a detention centre where the detainees produced bricks for the colonial administration as part of their labours. After independence in 1963 the centre was turned into Mweru Secondary School, and it still has the best examples of brickwork construction in Mukurwe-ini.

The first residential building in my study area to be constructed with blocks was in 1974. The owner decided to try making the bricks using a mold of 6x9x12 inches. They made a few and burned them and then put one of the blocks in water overnight to see if it would disintegrate. It didn't and he constructed a four roomed house which still stands to date. The foundation was done with two courses of the same burnt blocks. Few people ever followed his example and everyone else since then has used the sun-dried variety. Not every place has the soil to produce good sun-dried blocks and the process also is tedious and requires lots of water. There are therefore people and families that have made it a business to produce the blocks for sale to those who want o build with them. I visited several of these block making centers and saw the production in progress. One such centre is near the river, but many are high up and water has to be pumped up the hill using a portable diesel generator. A group of young men have come together and bought a generator and plastic pipes which they connect from the river to a distance of over 200 meters. They are hired by the block makers and even homesteaders who want a refill of their tanks.

The procedure itself is simple. In a pit the soil is mixed with water to a thick mud which is made consistent by stamping it thoroughly with bare feet. The mud is then placed by hand in a timber mold of 150x230x300mm., tapped with the hand and the mold lifted off. He then moves the mold to the next point without moving the mud block etc. The blocks are then left to dry in the sun until

they are hard enough to be lifted and arranged in a pile where they are built a shelter from the rain .



Fig. 6.12 The first fired blocks building in the study area built in 1974. (Source: Author 2009)

Fig. 6.13 Right: Brick making by a local entrepreneur. (Source: Author 2009)



Fig. 6.14 Temporary shelter, Githunu, for the blocks at the point of sale usually near the road. (Source: Author 2009)

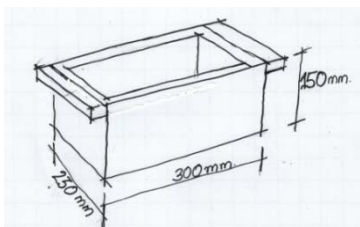


Fig. 6.15 The Mold (Source: Author 2012)

The popularity of mud blocks can be attributed partly to its low start-up cost and the ability of the structure to be improved in time. The mud and wattle wall has a higher start-up cost as the poles and nails and saplings are an added cost to the mud. Poorer families also make the mud blocks themselves in their free time thus cutting further the cost. The blocks are joined with mud or cement/sand plaster depending on affordability. The walls can be left unplastered for more than five years and require only minor repairs or they can be plastered with cement/sand plaster and “drawn” to the taste and affordability of the owner. The inside of the living rooms and bedrooms are screened with lace curtains because of the dust but the kitchen interior walls are not screened but left to acquire the smooth dark oily finish from the smoke.



Fig. 6.16 Small room for a kitchen build with mud blocks and trussed waiting for the GCI sheets.

The truss is laid directly on the wall without a wall plate and the lintel (below) is a 25x150 board. The foundation is made from the same sun-dried blocks. (Source: Author 2009)



The outside part of the wall is weathered by the rain and goats and children rubbing against it. Pregnant women are also known to eat pieces of the earth walls. It has a dry flat taste neither sweet, sour, bitter or anything. It's just so so. It has a powerful irresistible aroma especially when it rains. Children draw pictures and do their math on the wall with pieces of charcoal from the fireplace. The children end up looking like they have been face painted with the red clay - children of the soil.



Fig. 6.17 Permanent vents made from the 500gm *Kasuku*.

(Source: Author 2009)

The *Kasuku* is an empty plastic container previously holding any brand of hydrogenated cooking fat. It has a million and one uses.



Fig 6.18 Detail of a door frame with one course of blocks above it, The inside is screened with lace curtains to reduce the dust.

(Source: Author 2009)

Fig. 6.19 A more elaborate construction with the blocks joined with cement and on two courses of quarry stone foundation. The floor will be cemented while the roof will sit on a reinforced concrete lintel.
(Source: Author 2012)





Fig. 6.20 Mud blocks made to look like stonework with a fake reinforced concrete lintel. In time, depending on the stability of the foundation, big cracks sometimes appear giving the game away. (Source: Author 2009)



Fig. 6.21 The inside of an unplastered mud block wall with the unsightly wall screened off with sack curtains and pictures. (Source: Author 2009)



Fig. 6.22 A thoughtful finishing of the mud blocks protecting the critical areas with cement plaster. (Source: Author 2009)

As has been observed, one of the main challenges of putting up a building in Mukurwe-ini is the topography and because of the ever increasing population is causing the people to construct in very steep slopes. This has led to landslides and mortalities have been recorded. One of the reasons for the mortalities is the weakness of the walling in mud blocks which are joined with mud with no hoop irons or reinforcement to hold the courses together. It will be necessary for the civic administration and NGOs operating in these areas to sensitize people on the need for certain minimum precautions to be adhered to when constructing these rural homes. Chiefs have normally enforced certain minimum standards like the digging of pit latrines and can today still enforce some minimum by-laws.

1. The *kia* must be inspected by a chief and approved to ensure proper cutting, filling and consolidation.
2. The mud blocks walls must have a stone or concrete foundation in the same way a stone house is built
3. The blocks must be strengthened at alternate courses with hoop irons or barbed wire, *Segenge*.
4. There must be a reinforced concrete lintel over all the external and load bearing walls
5. There must be a wall plate well fixed onto the wall on which to firmly anchor the roof structure.
6. The wall corners must be finished with a cement plaster to minimize breakage
7. Rain water gutters must be well maintained

Such a list of do's and don'ts is what would evolve into by-laws in place of the traditional *thahu* that was so stringent but religiously followed, since today's Christianity does not deal with such practical matters as building construction. Colonialists like Paterson and Carey Francis had tried to come up with such regulations but the regulations somehow ended up as building codes for urban areas only though they had actually sprang from studies of mainly rural environments. It will be necessary for the County governments today to work out rural building By-Laws that are specific to local needs. This calls for a concerted effort on the part of schools of architecture and the built environment to focus research into the construction methods of the rural populations in order to understand what those minimum standards are for the various technologies in use. The Northern Kenya nomadic communities for example have highly developed systems of coping with the hot and arid environments which have so far been unstudied by architects and it will be necessary for academia and administrators to be educated into these systems in order for them to have a meaningful dialogue with these communities towards the management and improvement of their environments.



Fig 6.23 Sun shading devices in embodied architecture of the Northern Kenya pastoral tribes. (Source: Tomatis 1992)

Left: Sun shading device worn by a warrior of the Merille tribe in Northern Kenya
Right: Similar device as interpreted by a Samburu warrior of Northern Kenya

6.5.0 TRANSFORMATION OF THE THINGIRA

When the *Nyumba* transformed into a Main House with many rooms and a master bedroom, coupled with the shift from polygamy to monogamy, the inevitable result was the demise of the man's hut, *thingira*. Because the kitchen remained outside of this main house, the woman, together with the children were able to use the kitchen in the evenings while the man remained in the sitting room together with the radio. While the man listens to the gossip from the radio, the kitchen noise cannot reach him. The radio thus is a tool to shut off the noise, *korogoco na karagaca*, of the kitchen. With the kitchen slowly becoming a danger zone for children and their being forced into the sitting room the man has again lost ground and is forced out or into the bedroom. It has been suggested that the bar and the hotel, *mukawa* was the replacement for the external space just inside the gate, *boi-ini* where a man sat and held discussions with his friends before entering the *Nyumba* or his *thingira* for supper or sleep. There was usually a fire on chilly evenings and therefore it made sense to replace this with hot cups of tea. The hotel and the bar in rural shopping centres like Mihuti is still a very male domain. Politics and all manner of discussions are held there. Darts and Pool are sometimes provided by the bar owners as added attractions. Another popular spot is the barber shop where the game of draughts is usually provided. Men who usually spend too much time in these places are considered good for nothing by their spouses yet it seems they have nowhere else to go. In Mukurweini, men drinking to excess and coming home drunk and unable to eat supper or perform their conjugal duties has lately been in the news and some women have even beat up their men as a way of disciplining them.

When the author discussed this issue with the young men who ride on motorbikes and who are the most affected by this so-called 'drinking problem', some claimed that it was their deliberate family planning method as economic prospects in the ever diminishing strips of land are very poor. They claimed that the women just want children without a care of how they will be provided for. The battle of the sexes is ancient and has continued into the urban centres like Nairobi. I was made to understand that the huge SUVs popular with upper class men in Nairobi are the modern day *thingiras*. The SUV acts as a *thingira* on wheels moving from the house of one spouse the other without the women relating in any way. Thus the modern men are polygamous in fact while being monogamous in law. Court cases to do with inheritance of the SUV and other objects are legion when the various houses meet each other, sometimes for the first time when, after a life well lived, the SUV owner is promoted to higher glory.

The *thingira* has not disappeared, only transformed. Many men customize their offices as modern day *thingiras*, a place for entertaining their friends away from home and some even go as far as having a bed for an afternoon nap

installed there. The office with its own TV set and sofa becomes a place to while the time away from the noise at home. The master bedroom at home is actually not the man's but the woman's and should properly be called the mistress bedroom. The man in the bedroom is a visitor and everything is arranged and ordered by the woman. It is her realm, like in the *Nja* and kitchen and the man in many cases has a corner and is a visitor like in the days of the *Nyumba*. It would be worthwhile to pursue this line of enquiry further in order for designers to understand the roots of the modern dynamics of an African family in the city. It is impossible for architects to properly design houses for the modern African family when ignorant of the underlying dynamics.

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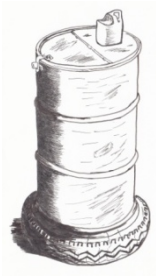
Appendix 1

ACRONYMS

3Bs	Baby Bath and Broom
3Cs	Christianity, Civilization and Commerce
3Rs	Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic
AHO	Arkitektur – og designhøgskolen i Oslo – Oslo School of architecture
BBC	British Broadcasting Cooperation
CCM	Consolata Catholic Mission
CMS	Church Missionary Society
CSM	Church of Scotland Mission
DC	District Commissioner
DDC	District Development Committee
DO	District Officer
DURP	Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Nairobi
GBM	Green Belt Movement
GCI	Galvanized Corrugated Iron
GM crops	Genetically Modified crops
IBEA	Imperial British East Africa Company
IT	Information Technology
KNBS	Kenya National Bureau of Statistics
KNM	Kenya National Museums
NESC	National Economic and Social Council of Kenya
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NHC	National Housing Cooperation
PCEA	Presbyterian Church of East Africa
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
SUV	Sports Utility Vehicle
TV	Television

Appendix 2

SOME HOUSEHOLD ELEMENTS IN MUKURWE-INI



150 litre Metal drum used for water storage externally collected from roof. The drums are bought from Jua Kali sellers who buy them from factories that had imported chemicals in them. Usually placed on a used tire or stones.



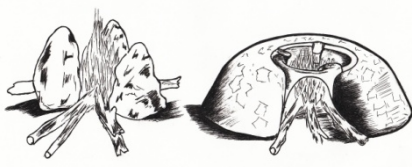
Concrete water drum made by local fundis. These range from modest 120 litres ones to huge 1000 litres affairs constructed in stone.



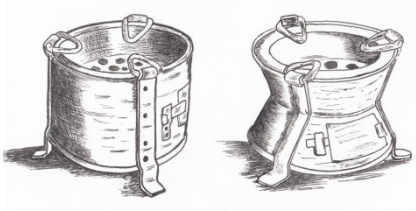
50 and 20 litre plastic containers. The twenty litres can be carried on a man's sholder or woman's back but the 50 requires a wheelbarrow.



17 litre plastic bucket and jerry can These carry water by hand from one part of the house to the other. Bucket is also used for washing clothes.



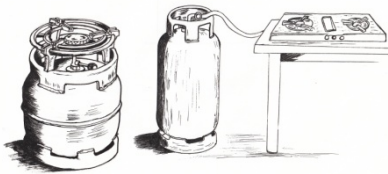
Traditional three stone fireplace still in use and its fuel saving alternative popularized by the Green Belt Movement



The Jua Kali Jiko and its fuel saving counterpart.



Paraffin stove



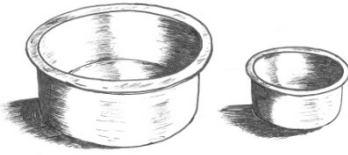
A Mecko gas cooker placed directly on a 1 and a half foot gas cylinder and a table top cooker connected to the canister by a rubber hose.



The traditional clay pot, *nyungu*, still used for cooking maize and beans githeri. Some people claim that the githeri can never taste good if cooked with the modern pans or with gas.



A Jua Kali aluminium alternative to the traditional nyungu that has become acceptable to some for cooking *githeri*



Aluminium sufurias. There is a specific one for each food. The one for boiling milk cannot be used to cook food. Neither can one make tea with one for food. They are usually scrubbed with ashes till they shine and are then put outside in the sun to dry



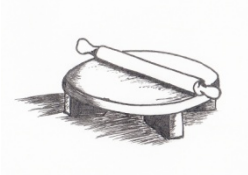
This one with a handle is for a gas or paraffin stove.



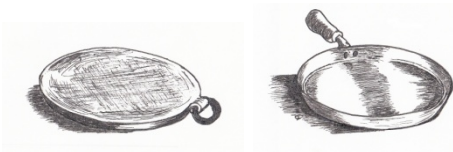
Jua Kali aluminium Ugali pot. Ugali is an almost everyday staple and therefore requires a more sturdy pot. This one by Jua Kali artisans does a better job than the muhindi sufurias. (factory made)



Aluminium kneading pan for the dough that makes chapati, another staple.



Rolling pin and seat for the making of chapati.



Heavy Jua Kali chapati pans. Before every home acquired a chapati pan, a village used to share one and it moved from one house to another depending on need. chapati used to be for Christmas only but are today eaten nearly every day thus the quality has gone down.



A set of hot pots for keeping food warm while serving guests is every rural woman's wish. These hot pots are the pride of rural women and they join chamas (Credit groups) in order that they can acquire a set.



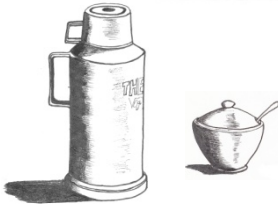
Plastic drinking water jug with plastic cup on right. On far right is a stainless steel drinking cup that satisfies more.



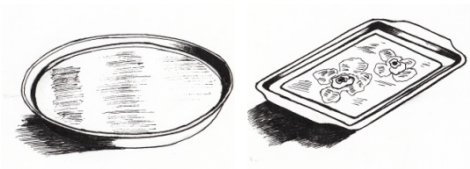
Jua Kali aluminium water jug has tastier and more satisfying water than the plastic jug.



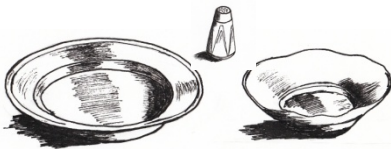
Tea kettle with ceramic cups has tastier tea than from a vaccum flask



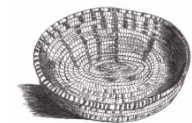
Vaccum flask for serving tea and a plastic sugar dish



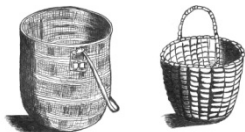
Aluminium and a melamine serving trays



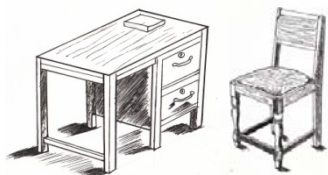
Melamine and plastic plates and a plastic salt shaker



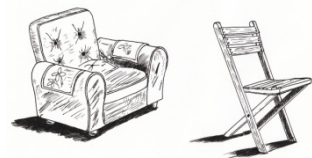
Traditional fibrous tray, gitaruru still very popular



Traditional hand woven basket, kiondo and a modern variety done fast fast.



Reading desk and padded chair



Padded sofa and foldable chair



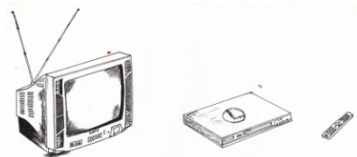
Various stools. Old traditional three legged stool is usually used when milking a cow.



Low kitchen seats made sturdy and firm with stability in mind



Wooden bed with foam mattress, blankets and a flowerly bed cover.



Modern electronic gargets

Appendix 3

PHOTO ALBUM







